

‘I’m ready, are you?’ A psychosocial exploration of what school readiness means to the parents
of children eligible for pupil premium.

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Abstract

This exploratory, psychosocial study looks at what it means to be 'school ready' to the parents of children eligible for Pupil Premium funding, in a mainstream inner London primary school.

Existing research exploring the topic of school readiness and transition to primary school remains predominantly in international territories. Furthermore, there is paucity of rich, qualitative accounts of parental views and experiences, despite the vital role parents play in supporting their child's education.

A psychoanalytically informed approach, Free Association Narrative Interviewing (FANI), was used to interview three participants twice. The interview data was analysed using Thematic Analysis. The five themes identified are discussed in relation to existing research and psychological theory. The implications for the Educational Psychology profession, as well as for schools and other professionals, have been explored. Limitations of the current study, and thoughts about future research are considered.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Chapter Overview

This chapter aims to contextualise the significance of a psychosocial exploration of what it means to be ‘school ready’ to the parents of primary school children, who are eligible for Pupil Premium (PP) funding by:

- Demonstrating the relevance of this research in national and local contexts;
- Conveying how the research relates to the educational psychology profession;
- Introducing the reader to the position of the researcher and;
- Establishing why a psychosocial approach is an appropriate one.

1.1 School Readiness & Transition

Transition into school is one of the first major events in a child’s life, (Hughes, 2015). Bronfenbrenner (1979) stated, ‘an ecological transition occurs whenever a person’s position in the ecological environment is altered as the result of a change in role, setting or both’, (p. 26). Transitions between home and school can be a source of difficulty for children and their families, (Salzberger-Wittenberg, Williams & Osborne, 1983; Davis, 2014; Hughes, 2015). Therefore, creating successful transition experiences is viewed as imperative for all children, particularly those in their early years. A psychoanalytic perspective emphasises the emotional impact of beginnings and endings, (Davis, 2014). Endings ‘confront us with the experience of loss’, (p. 139, Salzberger-Wittenberg et al., 1983). The pain and anxiety associated with loss in endings are rarely considered in this context. However, these experiences determine how the past

is retained and then used in the future, (Davis, 2014). A parental fantasy of ‘perfect preparation’ (Youell, 2006) can supersede the idea that ‘good enough’¹ preparation can support children in integrating good and bad experiences, enabling them to approach future transitions optimistically. Likewise, hope, fear and anxiety can all be associated with beginnings. The psychoanalytic tradition looks at the importance of inner stability and the extent to which an inner sense of security has developed, in relation to and in the absence of key adults, (Salzberger-Wittenberg et al., 1983). Upon starting school, decisions are made around a child’s adaptability to school culture, and how well they meet expectations held of them by individual teachers, the curriculum and state. We are happy when a child fits the ‘blue print for growth’ (Winnicott, 1986), but all children need help with transitions, (Curtis & Simons, 2008; Kennedy, Cameron & Green, 2012). Ofsted (2014) found that successful transitions were evident where providers developed a mutual understanding of what is expected in terms of children’s readiness during transition. This involved increasing parental understanding of what was expected in terms of school readiness and providing parents with information and guidance on how best to get their child ready, (Ofsted, 2014). However, challenges arise when there are disputes over how concepts such as ‘school readiness’ are used and defined.

1.1.1 Distinguishing Child Readiness from School Readiness

An important conceptual distinction is required between a child’s readiness for school, and a school’s readiness for children. The former, referred to by the Department for Education (DfE, 2011) as ‘transition readiness’, highlights within-child factors that mean children are equipped and prepared for school. Existing research has shown that whilst there are some similarities in the views held by teachers and parents, there are also significant differences. Many

¹ The idea of a ‘**good enough**’ parent comes from Winnicott (1953) who suggested the good enough mother begins with a complete adaptation to her infant’s needs. As time passes, this adaptation lessens, according to the infant’s growing ability to deal with ‘failures’. This failure to adapt to every need enables the child to adapt to external realities.

parents believe a child's readiness for school rests on their ability to acquire academic skills, such as reading, writing and maths, (Barbarin et al., 2008; Cinisomo, Fuligni, Ritchie, Howes & Karoly, 2008). Research collating teacher views highlights the value placed on children's social and emotional development, for which behaviour is most often used as a measure, (Lin, Lawrence & Gorrell, 2003; Cinisomo et al., 2008). For example, expectations for social adjustment are met through teacher observations of children conforming to rules, following instructions, and having respect for others, (Grace & Brandt, 2006). Developmental and cognitive neuropsychology research has focused on children's self-control and regulation (Yang & Lamb, 2014), executive function (Carlson, Moses & Claxton, 2004; Hughes & Ensor, 2005; Diamond, Barnett, Thomas & Munro, 2007), working memory (Gathercole, Pickering, Ambridge & Wearing, 2004), theory of mind (Carlson et al., 2004; Devine & Hughes, 2014), and language and communication skills (Piotrkowski, Bosko & Matthews 2000; Tomasello, 2005; Norbury et al., 2016). Parents and teachers share the view that being healthy, well nourished, and well rested is the most important aspect of readiness, (Cinisomo et al., 2008). This evidence sits within a consensual view that it is a complex interaction of factors, including home/family life, that truly equip children to begin school in the best way possible. The development of tools that incorporate these into a measure of school readiness, such as the Brief Early Skills and Support Index (Hughes, Daly, Foley, White, & Devine, 2015) are a reaction to more restricted tools, that failed to account for wider, ecological factors, (e.g. the Early Development Instrument, Janus & Offord, 2007).

A child readiness view places responsibility with the child to adapt to school culture, including the formal academic demands and complex social environments, with less support than they received at home, and with less time surrounded by significant adults, (Kennedy et al., 2012). Alternatively, school readiness refers to settings that are ready for the rich variety and diversity of experiences, strengths and needs, each unique child brings with them, (Kennedy et

al., 2012). Pianta, Cox, Taylor and Early (1999) define school readiness as the manner in which schools are 'ready' environments for the children and families making transitions. A school readiness view places greater responsibility with schools and teachers to prepare intellectually and emotionally nourishing environments, using their developmental and maturational knowledge, to meet children's needs at the group and individual level, (Augustinho, 1997). A growing drive to shift away from a within-child model and consider not how to make children ready for school, but how to make schools ready for children (Whitebread & Bingham, 2012), places emphasis on a community of adults that adapt to and accommodate children entering school, (Kennedy et al., 2012). The extent to which teacher-parent relationships are successful has emerged as an important school readiness factor, (Boland, 2011). At home, emotional preparation involves creating an environment that promotes learning, (Whitebread & Bingham, 2012). Combining the knowledge from both views acknowledges that preparation for school takes place at multiple levels: the child, home, and school (Cinisomo et al., 2008), all of which are interactive and inter-dependent.

1.1.2 Implications of 'Un-readiness'

Children's early adjustment and development is predictive of long-term outcomes (Hughes et al., 2015; Keating & Hertzmann, 1999). McClelland, Alcock, Piccinin, Rhea and Stallings (2013) reported links between pre-schooler's attention control, behaviour and key long-term outcomes, including academic achievement at age 25. Failure at the beginning of a school career may even result in children being regarded as having special educational needs, (Augustinho, 1997). The cost of inaction for children, families, communities and countries, raises the significance for local and central government. Worldwide evidence highlights persistent inequality in learning outcomes and educational achievement based on poverty, (Unicef, 2012).

Most early dropouts and school-repeaters are disadvantaged students, (OECD, 2014). The intersection of poverty with other factors, such as location and disability, creates multiple and complex barriers to school entry and learning for some, (Unicef, 2012).

School readiness has been linked with improved academic outcomes in primary and secondary school, both in terms of equality and performance, as well as positive social and behavioural competencies in adulthood, (Webster-Stratton, Reid & Stoolmiller, 2008). School readiness has attracted attention as a strategy for economic development. Approaches to economic growth and development consider human capital as key for sustained and viable development, the inception of which begins in the early years, (Unicef, 2012).

1.2 Early Years Education: Purpose & Design

Expectations of how and why children should be ready for school are indicative of tension within the sector of early years education, in relation to a widening conceptual divide, (Whitebread & Bingham, 2012). A discrepancy in how concepts like school readiness are understood and applied relates to divided views around the design and purpose of early years education. So far, school readiness has been used to drive improvements in children's learning and development, the quality of schools, and the participation of families and communities, (Unicef, 2012). Whilst all children, at all ages, are ready to learn and have been doing so since birth (Whitebread & Bingham, 2012), the significant question is not *whether* a child is ready to learn, but *what* a child is ready to learn, and how adults can best support the processes involved in learning. Psychologically, it makes much more sense to focus efforts and resources on changing contexts, as opposed to changing children, (Kennedy et al., 2012).

1.2.1 Preschool Experiences & School Starting Age

'If learning begins at birth, when should school begin?' (A.A. Milne, 1942)

Growing international interest in providing preschool education can be seen in countries that view an early start to school as an entitlement, (Swiniarski, 2007). Many countries view early, preschool education as a step towards the development of a learned and productive citizenry, (OECD, 1996). The view that 'earlier is better', in relation to children in the early years is arguably misguided and does not lead to improved outcomes in the long term, and can have harmful short and long-term consequences, (Whitebread & Bingham, 2012). Historically, preschools encouraged socialisation and prepared children for formal schooling, learning naturally and experientially through play. Wesley and Buysse (2003) argue preschool education today has become academically oriented and now resembles the first year of formal schooling.

In the UK, 1997 saw the Labour Party pass parliament provisions to guarantee universal education for all four year olds. This instigated the implementation of policy prioritising the development of integrated Children's Centres and a specialised Early Years curriculum, (Munn, van der Aalsvoort & Lauchlan, 2010). This lowered the age for admission into a Reception class, as the majority of parents, at this time, opted to send their four year olds to state schools, rather than keep them in private preschool. Swiniarski (2007) argues that this shift to accept younger children into primary school changed the climate for primary education. Now, although compulsory school starting age is the term after the child's fifth birthday (DfE, 2014a), the 'Flexible School Admissions for Summer-Born Children' confirms that the majority of children begin school at four years old, not five.

British children are among the youngest in Europe when they begin formal schooling. Of 37 European countries surveyed by Sharp, George, Sargent, O'Donnell, and Heron (2009), 31 had start dates of six years or later. Although it has been argued that starting school before the age of

six can contribute to the development of positive self-esteem, something that is necessary for learning at all ages (Swiniarski, 2007), differences lie in the expectations for teaching and learning for children of that age. Dutch children begin school at age four, but with a firmly play-based early years education, with ‘formal’ lessons beginning only at age six, (Munn et al., 2010). British children, by contrast, begin school at a young age, and, for the most part, have long, full school days (Yang & Lamb, 2014). They are required to undertake activities and tasks considered to be too formal for preschool and early years children, (Whitebread & Bingham, 2012).

1.3 The National Context

‘Too many children start school without the range of skills they need’ (Ofsted, 2014)

School readiness is firmly on the national agenda, as the UK government has, in recent years, put significant energy into understanding and measuring children’s readiness for school. Promoting early intervention programmes to ensure all children are ‘school ready’ at age five, has led to a focus on preschool experiences, and emphasis on how home background determines readiness for school, (Allen, 2011; Munro, 2011; DfE, 2011). The quality of a child’s early experience is viewed as vital for their future success. It is shaped by many interrelated factors, notably the effects of socioeconomic status, the impact of high-quality early education and care, and the influence of ‘good parenting’, (Ofsted, 2014). Allen (2011) makes brief reference to the role parents play in the earliest years, giving weight to what a parent does rather than who they are. Good practice in schools means strong partnerships with parents and carers are forged to develop the home learning environment, help them to improve their child’s progress and make a better start at school, (Ofsted, 2014). Current legislation emphasises the importance of working in partnership with parents, shifting towards a family and person-centred system, (SEND Code of Practice, 2015). This should be strengths and capabilities led, as opposed to deficit models

that might deem children not ready or even unsuitable for school.

Changes to the approach to teaching and learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) in 2011 reflect this drive to ensure children's readiness for school. For example, a focus on three 'prime' areas of learning in the EYFS is so that children are able and ready to learn at school, (DfE, 2011). A website was created (www.foundationyears.org.uk) to provide advice to ensure children's readiness for school (DfE, 2011). A 'progress check' at age two was introduced to ensure issues relating to learning and development are identified early.

There is an on-going debate around the psychometric testing of children's cognitive skills through use of a baseline assessment, (Hughes, 2015). First introduced in 1997, the baseline assessment was to measure how much 'value' would be added to a child's education by the end of Year 2. In 1999, Wandsworth Local Authority collated results for over 11,000 children assessed using the baseline assessment across the UK. This indicated significant variation associated with age, sex, length of preschool education, ethnic group, home language, and economic disadvantage. Children entitled to free school meals (FSM) and pupils for whom English is an additional language, tended to have lower attainment compared to their peers, (Strand, 1999). Although the assessment was dropped in 2002, another trial assessment ran in 2015. A psychological perspective might highlight that formal psychometric assessments do not capture skills or problems related to behaviour and emotion regulation. Both are recognised as key barriers to school readiness, (Hughes, 2015). A national steering group reacted strongly in 2013 with a view that assessing four year olds is 'too much too soon'², which led to policymakers admitting that the tests were inappropriate and unfair. However, the assessment remains freely available for use, maintaining the perception that readiness for school involves

² The '**Too Much Too Soon**' campaign was launched by the Save Childhood Movement in 2013, urging the use of developmentally appropriate and evidence-based policymaking for the early years; re-establishment of the early years as a unique stage in its own right, not merely a preparation for school; protection of young children's natural developmental rights and freedoms; prevention of baseline testing; and reinstatement of the vital role of play-based, learning in a developmentally appropriate Foundation Stage.

some assessment of the characteristics of individual children against standard expectations or desirable attributes, (Dockett & Perry, 2009).

Kennedy et al. (2012) argue that the government's priorities promote a within-child view of readiness, which suggests children are able to take advantage of the opportunities provided by schools. The use and validity of 'readiness' as a concept is questioned by many due to the political agenda it drives, (Kennedy et al., 2012; Whitebread & Bingham, 2012). Evidence suggesting that support for children in transition must also target environmental factors appears to have been absent in the minds of policymakers, (Kennedy et al., 2012). Norbury et al. (2016) argue curriculum targets for early years children are out of line with developmental expectations, further contributing to the argument that the lack of agreement upon what young children should be prepared for is potentially damaging, (Whitebread & Bingham, 2012). An early focus on formal teaching and learning, and streaming by ability, leads to persistent inequality, where early developmental differences are compounded by pedagogical practices, (Norbury et al., 2016).

1.3.1 Low-Income Children

Closing the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their peers remains a high priority in the UK, (Treadaway, 2014). The spotlight for children's readiness for school is most intense on those from low-income families. In 2014, Ofsted published a survey-based paper capturing how some early years providers have successfully ensured 'disadvantaged and vulnerable children are better prepared to start school' (p.1), measured by a 'Good Level of Development'³ (GLD) at the end of Reception, where the start of school is defined as Year 1. Children from poorer backgrounds are described as experiencing educational failure as early as four, suggesting strong associations between a child's social background and their readiness for

³ Children are defined as having reached a **Good Level of Development** at the end of the EYFS if they achieve at least the expected level in the three prime areas of learning (Communication and Language, Physical Development, Personal, Social and Emotional Development) and in the specific areas of Mathematics and Literacy.

school, (Ofsted, 2014). Upon entering Year 1, children from poorer backgrounds were reported to lack a firm foundation in communication, language, literacy and mathematic skills, (Ofsted, 2014). Whilst the government has clearly defined expectations of what children should achieve by the end of their EYFS, in 2013 only 50% of children, nationally, achieved GLD, (Ofsted, 2014). Children eligible for FSM came 19 percentage points behind their peers. The implications of which, are that too few children who start school behind their peers catch up by the time they leave education, (Field, 2010; Ofsted, 2014).

1.4 The Local Context

This piece of research took place in an inner London Local Authority (LA), where I was practising within an Educational Psychology Service (EPS) as a trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP). Based on a needs analysis, a 2015 service review paper outlined the vision for Children's Services, which included early intervention to give children the best start in life, and ensure children are ready for school. This sat within a wider political landscape of austerity, which led to the EPS becoming a fully traded service due to pressure on LAs to reduce costs to public services.

In 2015, 30% of children living within the LA were estimated to be living in poverty, according to the local HMRC measure. 24% of children in local primary schools were entitled to FSM, compared to 16% nationally. Whilst, the percentage of the Reception cohort with a GLD was 69%, compared with 66% nationally in 2015, there remained a gap between children from disadvantaged groups, including those in receipt of the Pupil Premium⁴ (PP) funding, and their

⁴ **Pupil Premium** is additional funding specifically intended to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils, to close the gaps between them and their peers, (DfE, 2014b). Children who are, or have within six years, been in receipt of FSM, children who are looked after by the local authority, and children whose parents serve in the armed forces are eligible for this funding. Whilst FSM has previously been used as an indicator of low income, as of September 2014, all infants (Reception to Year 2) have been provided with FSM, and therefore, for the purpose of identifying low-income parents, Pupil Premium was used instead.

more affluent peers. Therefore, the proposed targets for school improvement related to improved outcomes for disadvantaged children across the borough, through effective monitoring and targeted intervention.

1.5 A Role for Educational Psychologists

Rimm-Kaufmann, Pianta and Cox (2000), by researching transition and readiness, suggest that there are three key areas for which there are implications: policy, practice and research. Kennedy et al., (2012) add that EPs are well placed to promote systemic and ecological views within LAs.

A special early years edition of the Educational and Child Psychology journal, published in 2010 highlighted the multiple and valuable roles fulfilled by EPs in the UK. With their understanding of theories and research evidence in child development (HCPC, 2015), of play and its role in mental life, and their orientation to developmental theory rather than to curricular theory, EPs are well placed to support children, families and settings with regards to transition. Kennedy et al. (2012) emphasise the role of the EP with regard to transition practices in early years, ‘because of their expertise in adopting interactionist perspectives and applying problem-solving frameworks, educational and child psychologists can provide insight and support to parents, schools and other agencies to ensure that transitions in the early years are successful, smooth and exciting experiences for children’, (p. 28). EP contributions to the research field have the potential to help parents, teachers, and professionals to develop a deeper understanding of the emotional journey embarked upon during transition to school, (Kennedy et al., 2012). Notwithstanding, none of the papers submitted to the journal included discussions of intervention in disadvantaged populations, issues related to the early years curriculum or transition and school readiness (Munn et al., 2010), despite their political significance. With the

promotion of integration across health, education and social services in the SEND Code of Practice (2015), EPs can make a useful contribution to current research-based discussions around policy, practice and the impact of services, (Munn et al., 2010).

1.6 The Researcher's Position

The aim of this piece of research was to explore the meaning of school readiness to low-income parents, following their experiences of the transition to primary school, within an inner London LA. A psychosocial approach conceptualises research subjects as, simultaneously, products of their own, unique psychic worlds and a shared social world, (Gadd & Jefferson, 2007). Therefore, it was felt that a psychosocial approach would enable me to account for both the socio-cultural and individual psychological worlds of the participants', in how they shape the experiences and meanings given to school readiness, and in the context of their child starting school. This research also aimed to highlight implications for the EP profession, including the potential development of the role of EPs in the early years. Chapter 2 presents evidence of the importance of this research in a review of existing literature in the field.

My interest in this area began during my practice as an early years teacher. A dominant discourse amongst the community that perhaps the children were not quite ready for school, and could benefit from spending longer in preschool, meant the children I taught staggered their start depending on their date of birth. Each year, I found myself trying to persuade parents that, as an early years practitioner, my pedagogical approach was grounded in play-based, child-initiated learning. Play provides a central vehicle for learning, allowing children to imitate adult behaviours, practice motor skills, process emotional events, and develop their understanding of the surrounding world, (Whitebread & Bingham, 2012). Both free play and guided play are linked to social and academic development. Therefore, my view was that classroom practice

should be tailored to meet the needs of each individual child. As a TEP, I am now encountering requests to support individual children and families where there are concerns that the children are not ready for school.

Embarking on this research task, I wanted to explore how parents come to understand what it means for their child to be ‘school ready’, and if indeed there was any consideration or expectation of the school to adapt to a child’s needs. Furthermore, given my exposure to systemic and psychodynamic frameworks in my training, I wanted to ensure my approach to research would attend to the psychological, personal, and emotive world of parents, as well as their social and political context. Given that research from a psychosocial ontology looks at its subject from both a psychological and social perspective, it was therefore suited to this research. In terms of school readiness and transition, this meant taking into account the cultural expectations of children, the classroom and the wider political landscape. It also meant considering the internal world of parents and their children, in terms of what they brought to a situation from their own experiences, which affected how they perceived the world. I was interested in how the interaction between these internal and external factors affected how a dynamic was formed in the transition process. A psychosocial approach is an appropriate way to consider the interrelatedness of the social and individual psychological experiences of my research participants without emphasising the importance of one over the other. For this research, the psychosocial method of data collection provided rich narratives about parent’s experiences of preparing their child for school and the transition to school itself. Hollway and Jefferson (2013) discuss the usefulness of drawing on psychoanalytic theory to think about the psychosocial subject. Empirical research methods are closely associated with post-Kleinian, object relations theory and the tradition of individual interviews. The following section illustrates how psychoanalytic theory informed the methodology adopted in this research, as well as its place in EP practice.

1.6.1 Psychoanalytic Thinking in EP Practice

Psychoanalysis, in the context of this research, focuses on how the developmental issues faced by young children have the potential to pose considerable challenges to parents' experiences of parenting. Unresolved developmental issues and half-buried or forgotten traumatic experiences can be reawakened when parents are confronted with their child's difficulties, (Urwin, 2003). EPs are applied psychologists. However, there is little research evidence suggesting that EPs use psychoanalytic frameworks in practice, (Eloquin, 2016). By using psychoanalytic concepts, problems can become intelligible and brought under control, to provide an example of problem solving which can be useful in addressing any difficulties later on, or at least a good experience of professional help, (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000; Urwin, 2003). A method informed by psychoanalysis has the potential to provide 'an understanding of anxiety, psychic reality, phantasy, the impact of biographical experiences and the mutually constitutive nature of inner and outer worlds', (p. xv, Hollway & Jefferson, 2010). Hollway and Jefferson (2013) argue that the Free Association Narrative Interview (FANI) provides a practical measure through which to interview research subjects that are believed to be defended. FANI and the notion of defended subjects is explored in greater depth through the methodology chapter of this thesis.

1.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter provides an overview of the wider context within which this piece of research sits. A discussion of school readiness is intrinsically linked to that of transition. Parents, teachers, and disciplines including developmental and neuropsychology, emphasise a combination of inter-related factors, both within-child and systemic, that contribute to successful

transition experiences and readiness for school. Children and families identified as low-income continue to be a focus, both nationally and locally, particularly in regards to long-term outcomes and costs. Locally, practice in the early years and early intervention remain a priority for the LA and for the EPS. There is a focus on developing and strengthening relationships with early years providers, and improving outcomes for the vulnerable children and families they support. A gap in the EP role with regards to involvement in research has been highlighted; ensuring this piece of research poses relevance. The position of the researcher has been briefly introduced, and will be discussed further in the Methodology chapter of this thesis. Having provided an introduction to the phenomenon being studied through this piece of research, a critical literature review will now situate the study in existing UK-based literature.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

Chapter Overview

The aim of this literature review is to:

- Systematically explore the range and quality of existing literature, in relation to school readiness in the UK;
- Describe previous research findings to enhance understanding and clarify issues;
- Critically appraise relevant research; and
- Justify the aims of, and orient the present study, in light of previous research.

2.1 Literature Review Questions

This literature review sought to answer the following questions:

- What does existing research say about school readiness in the UK?
- What specifically does it tell us about the school readiness of low-income children?
- What methods have been used to explore school readiness in the UK?

2.2 Search Strategy

Three databases were selected to search for relevant papers: PsycINFO, PEP archive, and SocINDEX. PsycINFO is a commonly used database for psychology and other social sciences,

and was created by the reputable American Psychological Society. It stores international journals, and all notable British educational and psychological journals. As the focus of this study was on parents of children in the UK, within a British education system, this was felt to be an appropriate and useful database. PEP archive stores key psychoanalytic journals and was viewed as appropriate to the current study due to the psychoanalytic lens that has been adopted. SocINDEX is a sociology research database. It was selected on the basis that a psychosocial approach aims to transcend the split that often exists between psychology and sociology in research. In the initial searches, the Education Source database was used in addition, to ensure all literature conducted from an educational perspective would be included in the final review. No new returns resulted from this database search.

2.2.1 Search Terms

Pilot searches were conducted through EBSCO host to refine search terms and ensure the most appropriate and useful terms were used in the final search. The thesaurus function was used to identify all relevant terms. The Boolean operator “AND” was used between key terms. The truncation symbol (*) was used to allow for variations of the word e.g. “start*” for “starting” and “start” of school. The following key terms were used to identify literature specific to the study:

“transition” AND “school ready” or “school readiness”

“ready”, “begin*”, “start*”, “ent*” “prep*” “adjust*” AND “school”

“first” AND “year” AND “school” or “educat*”

To identify papers that related specifically to low-income groups, “low income” was used as a key term in addition to the above. The subject limiter function allowed me to isolate papers using the following subject terms: low-income level, socioeconomic status, demographic

characteristics, and at risk populations. Age was used as a limiter to select research related to relevant populations: preschool (2-5 years), school (6-12 years) and childhood (birth – 12 years).

2.2.2 Inclusion & Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion and exclusion criteria were established in advance of conducting the searches. This ensured the research papers returned would provide enough information around the phenomenon of interest. The criteria listed in Table 1 were applied to ensure all of the research reviewed was relevant and appropriate to the current study.

Table 1. Inclusion & Exclusion Criteria used to source Relevant Literature

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Language: published in English	Use of secondary data sources
Empirical papers	Position papers, editorials, book reviews
Peer reviewed	Papers with a focus on a specific/niche population e.g. SEN, in/outpatients
Research conducted within the UK only (due to specificity of educational system, perspectives on starting school, and age at which children start formal schooling)	Papers looking to measure or evaluate the efficacy of interventions e.g. questionnaires of school readiness, instruments measuring readiness
Literature that focuses on the transition to primary school (therefore samples of preschool children were included)	Literature that focuses on transitions at other educational phases e.g. to secondary school
Literature that focuses on low-income or low socioeconomic groups	Research published before January 1987 (prior to the introduction of the National Curriculum)

After eliminating studies conducted outside of the UK, 139 papers remained. 118 were excluded on the basis of the criteria listed above, upon reading abstracts. 10 were read and excluded for reasons related to their relevance or quality (see Appendix 1 for a full listing of all papers and reasons for exclusion). Once the searches had been conducted, having applied these criteria and removed duplicates, 11 articles remained. One article could not be sourced. The remaining 10 papers were used to answer the literature review questions.

2.2.3 Method of Critical Appraisal

All articles were screened for quality using an adapted version of Walsh and Downe's (2006) evaluation tool (see original in Appendix 2). This tool was selected due to the inclusion of reflexivity in the appraisal criteria. A number of the studies returned in the searches employed quantitative designs. Therefore, elements from Long, Godfrey, Randall, Brettle and Grant's (2002) evaluation tool for quantitative research studies were added (see original in Appendix 3). A summary of the critique of each paper can be found in Appendix 4.

2.3 Review Overview

School readiness literature within the UK is scarce, particularly from the perspective of EPs. The detailed search undertaken produced only 10 usable articles. The search process highlighted that the majority of research in this field is taking place overseas, particularly within the United States and Australia. Psychologists authored six of the papers included in the review (Turner-Cobb, Rixon & Jessop, 2008; Hughes & Ensor, 2011; Yang & Lamb, 2014; Norbury et al., 2016), two of which were written from the field of educational psychology (Mathieson & Banerjee, 2010; Kennedy et al., 2012). Two papers were written from psychoanalytic perspectives (Flynn, 1987; Marsh, 2012). The remaining two papers were written from other educational perspectives (Brooker, 2003; Darbyshire, Finn, Griggs & Ford, 2014). The literature

review revealed that parents, children and teachers have all participated, to varying degrees and using a range of methodologies, in school readiness research. Having described the processes involved in identifying the literature, I will now use the available papers to answer the literature review questions.

2.4 What does existing research say about school readiness in the UK?

2.4.1 Developmental Perspectives

Age featured as a variable in a number of studies included in this literature review (Hughes & Ensor, 2011; Yang & Lamb, 2014; Norbury et al., 2016), as an explicit focus or as a point of discussion in the context of their findings. The studies that employed quantitative designs endorse a developmental perspective in the context of young children in transition. Each study focuses on a particular area of development in their exploration of school readiness. These are discussed below.

Norbury et al. (2016) conducted a large-scale population survey to investigate the relationship between age, language competence and academic progress in the first year of school. They reported on the overrepresentation of the youngest children in clinical referrals, and sought to promote early intervention to reduce the number of children requiring specialist intervention in later life. The authors hypothesised a potential mismatch between the youngest children's language competency and the academic demands placed on them at school entry. Teachers were asked to complete two standardised questionnaires (Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) and Children's Communication Checklist). Curriculum-based assessments (statutory EYFS assessment data) were used to complement the questionnaires. Norbury et al. found the youngest children in the cohort to have immature and less advanced language and behaviour skills compared to their older peers, as reported by their teachers. These children were

most likely to be regarded by their teachers, as having significant behavioural difficulties, and least likely to achieve GLD. The authors concluded that the youngest children in a typical Reception cohort are ‘not ready’ to meet the academic and social demands of the classroom due to a mismatch between developmental competence and academic expectations in Reception. Norbury et al. suggest a reduction in the level of difficulty in academic practices could enable clinical resources to be used more effectively.

Mathieson and Banerjee (2010) investigated children’s preschool peer-play skills as an indicator of social-emotional competence. As social competence is widely regarded as a major indicator of school readiness, Mathieson and Banerjee (2010) used standardised questionnaires to examine parent-rated effortful control as predictive of positive, peer interactions. Their hypothesis was that children with a greater emotional understanding are more capable of engaging in socially competent peer play. They also tested the degree of convergence and divergence in parent and practitioner views of children’s positive and negative social behaviours. A positive relationship between children’s temperament, emotional understanding and their socially competent peer play was found. Good convergence was found between parent-practitioner views regarding children’s social competence. Parental views of children’s temperament were predictive of social competence in peer play in the preschool context. In contrast, a clear divergence was found in their views of children’s behaviour. This highlights the importance of context in understanding children’s behaviour. Surgency⁵ in children was associated with less social withdrawal, (Mathieson & Banerjee, 2010). The use of tools measuring personality factors can be linked to fixed views of ability and a predominantly within-child view. The approach to data collection is discussed in the second half of this review.

Hughes and Ensor (2011) focused specifically on executive function (EF). They examined the predictive relationship between EF growth, internalising and externalising

⁵ **Surgency** is a personality trait related to emotional reactivity, in which a person tends towards high levels of positive affect. It has been linked to extraversion in children.

behaviours, and children's self-perceived academic and social success. The authors hoped to document the average developmental gains between four and six years old, and individual differences in EF growth. Gains in EF, across transition, predicted teacher ratings of behaviours, as well as children's perceptions of their academic, but not social, competence. Rather than children's actual performance (cognitive and behavioural), growth in EF scores provided more insight into children's readiness to engage with school tasks. They made the following interpretations of their findings: children making rapid improvements in cognitive performance are likely to be actively engaged in schoolwork; engagement might explain why these children present with fewer behavioural difficulties; they speculate that children's self-esteem is likely to increase as they make cognitive progress; they propose that self-esteem mediates the relationship between EF gains and self-perceived academic competence; children's self-perceptions are likely to be a key aspect of psychological school readiness, particularly as children's views of themselves influence their behaviour, (Hughes & Ensor, 2011). Self-perception consistently affects later achievement. The authors suggest further research can complement existing findings around actual cognitive skill and performance. Hughes and Ensor recommend targeted intervention to assist gains in EF across the transition, with widespread benefits for behaviour, self-concepts and academic achievement.

Yang and Lamb (2014) also examined children's effortful control, as well as impulsivity (skills associated with self-regulation) in the context of their first year of school. They address Hughes and Ensor's (2011) suggestion that children's behavioural engagement and involvement can explain a reduction in behavioural difficulties. Data was gathered using a range of methods, including standardised questionnaires completed by children, parents, and teachers, and time-sampling observations. Yang and Lamb (2014) found a significant relationship between age and behavioural engagement/involvement, disadvantaging the youngest children at school entry. The

authors comment on how the beginning of school coincides with the beginnings of maturity in EF and cognitive control.

Overall, on the basis of their findings, these studies promote a developmental perspective of young children in transition, rather than a ‘one size fits all’ approach. They argue that applying the same rules, expectations and demands of children at school entry, regardless of age or developmental phase, makes little sense.

2.4.2 Impact of Transition

Turner-Cobb et al. (2008) investigated the developing physiological stress response system (cortisol production) in young children transitioning to formal school. Although early transitions are recognised across the literature as potentially stressful and taxing experiences, only Turner-Cobb et al. sought to directly investigate the impact of transition on young children. They viewed the transition as a naturalistic stressor, which all children experience. Therefore, their findings pose relevance to a wide population. They found a correlation between poorer effortful control and high morning cortisol across transition. They reported that these children experienced a more dramatic change in cortisol levels across their school day. Surgency and extraversion were associated with increased cortisol at transition. In addition, greater social isolation in the first six months of school in these children predicted higher cortisol at follow up. Turner-Cobb et al. recognise a limitation of their study lies within their interpretation of the term ‘transition’, which they have defined as an event, rather than a process. The data they collected exemplified the difficulty in defining the beginning of a school transition process, due to individual variation.

2.4.3 Family Influences

Kennedy et al. (2012) make brief reference to parent goals, expectations and aspirations as being integral to a supportive transition. Parents participated in papers written by Brooker (2003); Turner-Cobb et al. (2008); Mathieson and Banerjee (2010); Darbyshire et al. (2014); and Yang and Lamb (2014).

Brooker (2003) set out to explore differences in children's experiences of preparation for school. Analysis of home data, which included maternal education, paternal occupation and family reading habits, showed no links to children's relative success in the classroom. This defies conventional views regarding the impact of a child's home environment. However, these findings are read with caution, as Brooker does not provide explanation for how relationships were established in the data set.

In measuring children's cortisol levels, Turner-Cobb et al. (2008) were surprised by the finding that children's baseline measures, taken between four and six months prior to school transition, were significantly higher than following the adaptation to the school climate. An explanation they suggested for this was that other life events could influence the cortisol response, however, this was not supported by the data they collected from parents regarding important life events. The authors suggested that preschool attendance was a negative experience, which manifested in higher cortisol levels. Again, no correlation between the time spent in preschool care and cortisol indices was reported in support of this. They speculated that the children's anticipation of the school transition might reflect the impact of parental anticipation. They suggest that future research investigating the role and transmission of parental stress would be well placed.

The mothers interviewed by Brooker (2003) presented culturally regulated views of childhood and parenting. For example, white British (WB) mothers mostly believed their role in their child's preschool years was to be attentive to their child's enthusiasm and preferences

through play. Bedtime practices were important, as mothers wanted to enjoy a separate, adult existence. Brooker suggests these views of childhood shape children's expectations of school, teachers and the value of adults playing alongside them. Brooker discusses rules and practices within school that were more or less familiar to children of different backgrounds. For example, the expectation of children to help with domestic routines, such as tidying and washing up. Whilst WB children had experienced role-playing of adult responsibilities, Bangladeshi children had already begun to assume responsible roles prior to school entry, which impacted on their understanding of play and learning in the classroom.

Brooker explored parental views of intelligence and how children learn. Bangladeshi mother's emphasised the importance of listening over speaking and using language. One mother described spoken language as something children pick up naturally, by listening to adults. In contrast, WB mothers placed value on children's spoken language. All participants affirmed the importance of parental input, although conceptualisations of input differed. Brooker concludes that children from culturally diverse backgrounds, including those from working-class families, are frequently 'at odds' with school in their understanding of teaching and learning, and the roles adults and children can play. There is a suggestion that pedagogical practices can advantage children from certain backgrounds. Brooker suggests that families outside of mainstream culture, social class or ethnicity, would benefit from aspects of pedagogy being shared explicitly. This would allow better access to what teachers strive to offer them. The potential for the practitioner-parent relationship to be a protective factor is an area, which requires more thought and research, (Mathieson & Banerjee, 2010).

2.4.4 Teacher Views

Kennedy et al. (2012) promote the use of teacher views in developing an evidence-based approach to supporting transitions in the early years. Teachers participated in quantitative studies

by completing standardised questionnaires, (Turner-Cobb et al., 2008; Mathieson & Banerjee, 2010; Hughes & Ensor, 2011; Yang & Lamb, 2014; Norbury et al., 2016). Darbyshire et al. (2014) interviewed teachers and found that their perceptions of children on entry to school guide the approach to teaching and learning they adopted. In particular, they found that children regarded as ‘less ready’ were provided with a higher proportion of teaching from teaching assistants, and less teacher time. The authors suggested that, as a result, these children experienced less demanding learning. Incidentally, the ‘less ready’ children in the context of Darbyshire et al.’s study were those with a descriptive label e.g. FSM and special educational needs (SEN).

2.4.5 Psychoanalytic Perspectives: Oedipal Conflict

Flynn (1987) and Marsh (2012) employed psychoanalytic, specifically Kleinian, frameworks in their studies of children beginning school. Both papers speak to the simultaneous experiences of Oedipal conflicts⁶ and school entry. They stress the importance of symbolic play in allowing children to work through these conflicts.

Flynn (1987) reports on a single-case study of a child (‘Georgina’) preparing to start school. Flynn sought to illustrate the benefits of working through infantile conflicts, and how this enables a successful transition to school. Flynn examines the therapeutic relationship in making sense of Georgina’s experiences. Consistent with a psychoanalytic perspective, Flynn regards some of Georgina’s early experiences as a cause for her separation anxiety. For example, due to her mother’s unexpected illness and hospitalisation, Georgina was weaned and separated from her mother prematurely, at seven months. Flynn’s work with Georgina led to the hypothesis that she had not been allowed the opportunity to internalise a strong maternal object, which is viewed as necessary for children to separate successfully from primary caregivers. Flynn argues that, in

⁶ Melanie Klein (1952) suggested that early infantile preconceptions with a both exciting and terrifying parental couple are first fantasied as a combined figure. The infant must undergo some internal conflict to learn to integrate the good and bad parts of objects in the external world.

the case of Georgina, the allowance of time enabled her to work through these internal conflicts, move on from early Oedipal object relations⁷, and gain a degree of independence which allowed her to separate from her mother and begin school as ‘ready’. Conclusions drawn from the work with Georgina include the idea that overcoming early infantile fears and phantasies leads to emotional regulation and insight.

Marsh (2012) explored the experiences of children starting school, and the gender differences in Oedipal conflicts, in the context of the first year of school. In her observations of children in the classroom, Marsh suggested that children’s Oedipal development is greatly affected by the demands of beginning school. Marsh takes up an entirely binary view of gender in her writing, which is not necessarily reflective of current psychological thinking around gender identity. However, on the basis of her finding that gender differences are marked in the early years, with regards to how Oedipal conflicts are played out in the classroom context, Marsh argues that both maternal and paternal figures are needed in children’s early school lives. Marsh’s observations of children led her to suggest the idea of a ‘school ready state of mind’, which is to be reached before a child is able to manage the demands of school. Marsh (2012) suggests that a child’s capacity to manage a three-person relationship relates to their ability to manage and access school. For example, working through Oedipal issues allowed one of the children being observed to turn their attention to academic tasks.

2.4.6 Summary of the Literature Review Question: What does existing research say about school readiness in the UK?

The review of existing literature revealed a strong focus on children’s developmental attributes prior to and at school entry within the UK context. This has led researchers to conclude that, in a British context, there is a significant mismatch between children’s development and the

³ **Object Relations Theory** suggests that the way people relate to others and situations in their adult lives are shaped by infantile experiences of introjection of good, parental objects.

expectations held of them when they enter the school environment. Discrepancy between children's stage of development and the demands of school life was a prevalent theme in the literature. Children's language competency and engagement with learning was found to be significantly related to age. Children who demonstrated gains in skills and behaviours that are linked to executive function were found to be more able and ready to engage with formal, academic tasks. Links between language, behaviour, and cognitive skill and performance are intrinsically linked. Children who are more advanced in their development were then less likely to be identified as having behavioural difficulties at school entry. This was linked to increased positive interactions and relationships, and higher self-esteem. How children perceive themselves is likely to be a key aspect of psychological school readiness and later achievement. This review has, therefore, benefitted from critiquing papers that consider language, behaviour, cognition or social competence in isolation in the context of one another. In trying to answer the question, what does existing research say about school readiness in the UK, it is possible to conclude that the youngest children are currently disadvantaged by an educational system that deems them not ready for school compared to their older peers.

Opportunities to internalise good objects is seen to be necessary for young children to be able to separate successfully from their primary caregivers. Conclusions drawn from the psychoanalytic research papers suggest that children's Oedipal development is affected by the demands of entering school, and that being provided opportunities to overcome infantile fears and phantasies can lead to emotional regulation and insight, and a school readiness state of mind.

Very little research has focused on parental views and experiences in the context of transition and school readiness. That which has been done highlighted yet another mismatch, with regards to how those outside the cultural mainstream are disadvantaged by a school system and approach to teaching and learning that is both designed by and for a white British, middle-class child and family. This provides an important context for the current study, which seeks to

explore the experiences of parents who, because of their social class, may well be ‘outside the cultural mainstream’. The following section explores existing literature that relates to low-income groups.

2.5 What specifically does existing research tell us about the school readiness of low-income children?

Five papers discuss socioeconomic status in relation to school readiness to varying degrees. Just two of the papers focus specifically on children from disadvantaged groups (Brooker, 2003; Darbyshire et al., 2014). A number of papers have mixed samples, i.e. children from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds, and do not isolate low-income children in their findings (Mathieson & Banerjee, 2010; Hughes & Ensor, 2011; Norbury et al., 2016). A lack of focus on low-income children is intriguing in the UK context, given how much emphasis is placed on their un-readiness by policymakers, (Allen, 2011; DfE, 2011; Ofsted, 2014).

Hughes and Ensor (2011) gave priority to schools serving low-income areas when recruiting their sample (40% of the sample had a total family income below the national median, and 16% were living in poverty), however, no rationale is provided for this. The aims set out are not specific to a low-income sample, and the authors do not comment on or isolate this group in their results or discussion. Therefore, it is not possible to extract findings that are specific to the low-income group included in their sample. Similarly, Mathieson and Banerjee (2010) reported on the household income levels of their sample, which was predominantly between £20,000 and £50,000. 16% of their sample self-reported an income below £20,000, but the authors make no specific reference to this group in their aims or findings. Norbury et al. (2016) make one specific reference to children from low socioeconomic groups (10% of their total sample came from low-income households). They comment on consultations around flexible start dates for younger children, known internationally as ‘red-shirting’. The authors suggest that this would further

disadvantage already vulnerable families, who are unlikely to be able to afford to keep their children at home for longer periods of time. Kennedy et al. (2012) briefly refer to risk factors affecting school readiness. Prematurity and socioeconomic status combined was found to present the highest risk at school entry.

Two studies focused specifically on low-income groups. Dominant themes relate to a culture clash between home and school when low-income children enter formal education and the influence of beliefs on teaching and learning practices.

2.5.1 Belief Systems

Brooker's (2003) study was situated in a 'poor neighbourhood', however no further demographic data is provided for the sample (n=16), therefore Brooker's findings and conclusions are tentatively applied to low-income children. The case study families were regarded as vulnerable to financial and social crises, and the children were predicted relatively poor attainment on the basis of their socioeconomic status. In her ethnographic study, Brooker examined the fine-grained differences in children's experiences of preparation for, and the start of school. One explanation Brooker gives for the variation in children's experiences upon starting school is that parents held different ethnotheories, or cultural belief systems, related to their conceptions of childhood, intelligence and teaching practices.

Darbyshire et al. (2014) focus specifically on children from low socioeconomic backgrounds and recognise the range of barriers to learning they might experience on entry to primary school. The authors claim that parents included in their study experienced a sense that they 'do not belong' (p. 819), presenting a difficulty in seeing school as a place of relevance in their lives. Caution should be taken when drawing upon Darbyshire et al.'s findings as the authors provide no detail of their approach to data collection.

2.5.2 Pedagogical Practices

Brooker (2003) found there to be a clash of cultures between home and school with regards to how teaching and learning practices are taken up. Brooker suggests this further disadvantages certain groups on entry to school. Basil Bernstein's (1975) theory of visible and invisible pedagogy provides a useful framework for Brooker's findings. Brooker suggests that visible pedagogy is linked to school practices described as formal, which advantage children from certain backgrounds. Formal methods used in schools, she describes, are made explicit to children and parents. Invisible pedagogy relates to informal practices, which are implicit and hidden. By breaking the link between formality, visibility and explicitness, families from outside the 'cultural mainstream' may be more able to access the 'cultural goods' (p.127) teachers strive to offer. Whilst Brooker does not specify what is meant by formal and informal, one possible interpretation of this could be academic practices versus a play-based approach.

Darbyshire et al. (2014) similarly place a responsibility with the school system to address the link between poverty and educational failure, otherwise known as the attainment gap. Interviews with teachers revealed that they associated children obtaining FSM with low academic attainment. Darbyshire et al. report that teachers believe that, fundamental to this, are low levels of parental support. However, they suggest that the role of the school is to make learning meaningful to children from all social backgrounds, by embracing children's home culture as an essential starting point. Fundamental to the purpose of their study is an illustration of how use of the label FSM is insufficient, both in school practice and in research. It does not encapsulate the multiple vulnerabilities faced by this group of children.

2.5.3 Summary of the Literature Review Question: What specifically does existing research tell us about the school readiness of low-income children?

Whilst this review attempted to answer the above question, it is apparent that the depth and breadth of research into low-income groups is considerably lacking. Only two of the papers included in the review focused exclusively and explicitly on low-income children and families.

Children's experiences, upon starting school, was found to be varied. This was, in part, due to the different belief systems held by parents in relation to their conceptions of childhood and education. This section reinforced the hypothesis that formal teaching practices are made more explicit than those that are less formal, such as play for example, thus disadvantaging parents and children from less advantaged economic and educational backgrounds. Linked to this, it has been suggested that this same group of parents may struggle to see that they belong in a school community or context.

This part of the review highlighted a significant gap in the research, where little attempt has been made to explore the school readiness of children from a low socioeconomic background, using robust, empirical methods. The following section considers all papers in the context of the methodology used to conduct research into this area of study.

2.6 What methods have been used to explore school readiness in the UK?

To appropriately situate the current study and its methodology in the existing body of research, I will now explore the range of methods that have been used to collect and analyse data regarding children's school readiness and transition experiences in the UK.

2.6.1 Qualitative Methods

Five of the studies in this review used qualitative methodologies in exploration of children's school readiness (Flynn, 1987; Brooker, 2003; Kennedy et al., 2012; Marsh, 2012; Darbyshire et al., 2014). Case study designs have been adopted by all of the qualitative studies, however, they have each approached this differently to achieve very different aims.

Kennedy et al. (2012) promote the use of transition frameworks, following their implementation through a local case study. A case study design is appropriate, given the desire to inform practice in an LA. There is a focus on the theoretical models and evidence-base that underlies the proposed transition frameworks, as opposed to detailing the demographic information necessary to a case study.

Brooker (2003) and Darbyshire et al. (2014) use flexible research designs. It is difficult to consider Brooker's (2003) paper in isolation. Brooker presents one aspect of a larger ethnographic study that sought to uncover the fine-grained variations in daily experiences at home that contribute to differences in school achievement. The purpose of the study is in keeping with the ethnographic tradition, which calls for a detailed description, analysis and interpretation of the culture-sharing group, (Robson, 2011). Although Brooker (2003) alludes to teacher interviews, the details and findings of these are not provided in the paper. Extracts from two stages of parent interviews are used to support the claims made in the paper. In an exploration of different home preparation experiences, 16 children were also interviewed (8 WB, 8 Bangladeshi). No details of the method or analysis of findings are provided, although there is reference to the coding and ordering of emergent theories. It is difficult to identify any findings that were directly gained from interviewing the children themselves, although they likely inform the key themes that make up the theoretical model that is proposed. Conclusions have been drawn from multiple data sources (classroom observations, parent, teacher and child interviews, and assessment) suggesting that triangulation from multiple data sources has enabled Brooker to reach reasonable, justifiable judgements. The timespan over which Brooker's ethnographic study took place is vague, although it is possible to glean that the research may have taken place over the children's first year of school. Although 'mini-ethnographies' cut down the time span in which researchers are immersed in their cultural group, this creates tension with the requirement to develop an intimate understanding of the group. Unusually for an ethnographic approach,

Brooker looks at the cultural practices of two groups. The quality of the data is likely to have been compromised here, as the researcher in an ethnographic study typically immerses themselves in the culture of their research subjects. Brooker gains, to a degree, this insider perspective required of ethnographers. Active reflexive engagement with the subjective nature of the research design means there is a consideration of the impact of the researcher role and relationship with research subjects.

Darbyshire et al. (2014) conducted a teacher inquiry project across three urban primary schools in the north of England. They argue that case studies are better suited to school-based research, as opposed to systematic empirical-analytical methods, that view schools as mechanical input-output systems. However, the authors fail to provide details of their approach to data collection, sample size, and their approach to analysis. Therefore, their findings should be read with caution. In particular, they provide no evidence or detail of how the views of parents were gathered, and in what context they were given. It appears that sound bites from prior engagements with parents were used as data to reinforce the purpose and rationale behind the study. Research questions typically help to define and set the boundaries for a research project, as well as to provide direction and define success, (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Darbyshire et al. (2014) report an excessive number of research questions. An attempt to fit the priorities of three schools, which all differ significantly, into one case study is problematic, as it leaves the study unfocused and lacking a clear line of inquiry. The purpose of the study is appropriate to that of a case-study design, as the authors seek to explore experiences of local children, parents and teachers. Darbyshire et al. admit to being at an early stage in their inquiry, with many aspects incomplete or yet to take place. The reader must take this into context.

Flynn (1987) and Marsh (2012) write from psychoanalytic perspectives, in their role as psychotherapists. They bring a view that is different to those in education and other psychological fields, due to the clinical nature of their role. Flynn (1987) provides an in-depth

description of a single case study, of a child prior to and during the transition to school. The transferability of Flynn's account is limited as there is no description of the demographics of the child and family at the centre of the discussions. However, the richness of the data, and the time over which it took place, is of value to the paper as a whole.

By contrast, Marsh (2012) conducted psychoanalytic observations, using the Tavistock observational method (Bick, 1964), in a Reception classroom, over the children's first year in school. Marsh (2012) engaged in reflexive research process by recording process notes, she regards as 'free from interpretation' (p. 312), which informed psychoanalytic supervision. Marsh provides a helpful degree of transparency regarding her research process, which allow for her claims to be judged as reasonable and justifiable. Marsh's classroom observations focused on 'typically developing' Reception aged children; however, she does not explain by what means children were identified as typically developing. Both Marsh (2012) and Flynn (1987) achieve theoretical transferability through the richness and depth of the data collection, and the application of a theory that centralises unique, individual experience.

2.6.2 Quantitative Methods

Five studies used quantitative methods for the assessment of children's school readiness (Turner-Cobb et al., 2008; Mathieson & Banerjee, 2010; Hughes & Ensor, 2011; Yang & Lamb, 2014; Norbury et al., 2016). A variety of standardised tools were used to collect data, including questionnaires, checklists, and cognitive assessments. These tools ensure a degree of consistency across individual assessments. On this basis, and by conducting large-scale studies, authors of quantitative research seek generalisability as an outcome. For example, Norbury et al. (2016) conducted a large population study (n=7267 children) testing the hypothesis that a child's age is related to a teacher's reported language abilities. Similarly, Hughes and Ensor (2011) and Turner-Cobb et al. (2008) collected data from large, ethnically homogenous samples (n=191,

97% Caucasian; n=105, predominantly WB). By contrast, Yang and Lamb (2014) caution generalisation due to their small sample size (n=67 children). Mathieson and Banerjee (2010) collected data from a reasonable sample of preschool children (n=104). However, they isolated a subsample of 28 children and fail to disclose their inclusion criteria, limiting the generalisability of the reported findings.

2.6.2.1 Questionnaires & Checklists

All of the quantitative studies made use of standardised questionnaires or checklists, with parents, teachers or both. Three studies used Child Behaviour Questionnaires to gather parental views of child temperament, (Turner-Cobb et al., 2008; Mathieson & Banerjee, 2010; Yang & Lamb, 2014). Yang and Lamb (2014) specifically measured effortful control and impulsivity. Although Turner-Cobb et al. (2008) report good internal construct validity, this is for populations outside of the UK. The questionnaire has not been standardised on a UK population, hence its reliability and validity in a UK context is therefore limited. In addition, Turner-Cobb et al. asked teachers to complete the Child Adaptive Behaviour Inventory (CABI), as a means of measuring children's academic, social and behavioural competence. The CABI is designed for both parents and practitioners. However, the authors fail to provide a rationale for obtaining this data from teachers alone. Parental views may have enriched the findings, providing information about children's behaviour across contexts.

Three studies (Mathieson & Banerjee, 2010; Hughes & Ensor, 2011; Norbury et al., 2016) sought parental and teacher views using SDQs. Mathieson and Banerjee (2010) asked preschool practitioners to complete the questionnaire, as a measure of children's socio-behavioural and emotional characteristics. The authors report weak internal consistency, resulting in the removal of the items listed under the heading 'sharing'. Changing standardised tools in this way, compromises their reliability and validity. Norbury et al. (2016) asked teachers

to complete SDQs as a measure of children's behaviour. The rationale for their use of the questionnaire is as follows: SDQs are a well-validated measure of social, emotional and behavioural functioning, with good reliability, construct validity and with the capacity to identify clinically significant behavioural problems in children. They report a good degree of internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$). In conducting SDQs with teachers, Hughes and Ensor (2011) adopted a multi-method, multi-informant longitudinal design. This minimizes bias and inflated associations, maximizing the reliability of their findings.

Norbury et al. (2016) asked teachers to complete the Children's Communication Checklist-short. Teachers rated the frequency of specific behaviours on a four-point scale, with higher scores reflecting greater communication difficulties. A high degree of internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .95$) is reported. In addition, Norbury et al. gathered curriculum data, the EYFS Profile (EYFSP), to provide a richer view of children's attainment. The EYFSP is a statutory assessment of academic progress, completed by Reception teachers. The scores alone crudely describe children's attainment at the end of Reception as either 'emerging', 'expected' or 'exceeding'. Due to a reliance on quantitative scores, Norbury et al. do not account for the rich, detailed and descriptive accounts teachers provide alongside these scale points. Within the 'emerging' band, there is likely to be a high degree of variability that remains unrecognised. Another major limitation of the study, recognised by the authors, is that the tools used do not directly measure the key variables under study: language and behaviour. The relationship between language and behaviour is likely to be inflated due to bias within teachers to more readily notice children who present as disruptive in the classroom, (Norbury et al., 2016). The approach to data collection is practical for their large sample size and desire to produce generalizable results. Their methods provide a crude picture of the relationship between language and behavioural difficulties, limiting the internal validity of the study as a whole.

Questionnaire data can be regarded as artificial, with regards to the honesty and seriousness of participant responses, (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Predetermined questionnaire responses are subject to response bias. They force categorization and may falsely influence respondents. In categorizing, a rich source of data is lost. Norbury et al. (2016) highlight the possibility of bias in teachers reporting on children's behaviour in the classroom. Furthermore, questionnaire response rates are frequently low. A number of the studies relied on parents completing and returning questionnaires. Some describe the written information provided to parents at the recruitment stage (Turner-Cobb et al., 2008; Mathieson & Banerjee, 2010). It is likely that some parents, those with literacy difficulties or who speak English as an additional language for example, were alienated from the studies. The end sample may therefore, not be entirely representative.

2.6.2.2 Observations

Yang and Lamb (2014) used multiple sources of data to support their findings, including time-sampling classroom observations. Observations are naturalistic and done within the usual context. Therefore, they typically provide real life accounts in the real world (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Observational data is often criticised due to the impact the observer has on the observed. Yang and Lamb (2014) used observers to collect observational data but do not comment on the identity of the observers, or the limitations of data collected in this way.

2.6.2.3 Saliva Samples

Turner-Cobb et al. (2008) required parents to collect saliva samples in their study of changes in cortisol release before, during and after transition to primary school. The authors supported parents with the protocol of collecting samples, including providing information packs

detailing the procedure. However, the reliability of this procedure is compromised due to the absence of a control.

2.6.2.4 Child Assessments

The quantitative studies predominantly sought to assess children's skills, and therefore used a range of standardised assessment tools for data collection. Mathieson and Banerjee (2010) asked a subsample (n=28) of 2-3 year olds to complete adapted emotion recognition and prediction tasks. The children who participated in Yang and Lamb's (2014) study completed the School Liking-Avoidance Scale, which provided a measure of their receptiveness to school life. Hughes and Ensor (2011) used psychometric, cognitive assessments to directly assess children's skills associated with executive function (Day and Night Stroop test of Inhibitory Control; Working Memory sub-test of the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scales; Tower of London Planning Scales; British Picture Vocabulary Scale). Furthermore, Hughes and Ensor (2011) used Harter and Pike's (1984) Pictorial Scale to gather children's self-perceived academic and social competencies. Psychometric testing of children's cognitive skills is linked to debates around intelligence testing. They provide a snapshot of a child's performance and do not capture skills or problems related to behaviour and emotion regulation. In EP practice, behavioural observations made during assessments provide a thoughtful and accurate assessment of a child's functional skills. Furthermore, Hughes and Ensor (2011) administered these assessments during the transition period. Assessments can often be experienced as stressful, particularly in an unfamiliar context with unknown adults, but the authors fail to consider the possible impact of this on their participants, as well as the limitations this places on their assessment data.

2.6.3 Summary of the Literature Review Question: What methods have been used to explore school readiness in the UK?

A major strength of the quantitative studies, which reflects a weakness of the qualitative studies, relates to the rigour and transparency of the methodology. Whilst the qualitative studies provide real life accounts in the real world, the absence of rigour means findings must be read with caution. This literature review has highlighted a gap in the research, the inadequacy of the qualitative research and the absence of parental voice in the quantitative studies. The quantitative studies reported on the ethical approval process and seemed to show a greater awareness of other ethical dimensions. However, only Turner-Cobb et al. (2008) sought verbal consent from the children who participated in their study. As applied psychologists, gaining a child's consent is an important and respectful step. The ethical bounds of the studies that only sought parental consent could have been improved if consent was gained from children too. The quantitative studies were limited by their use of standardised measures and reliance on quantitative data alone, failing to address issues around meaning and experience. The recommendations for future research point to the need for qualitative studies to complement quantitative findings. Implications and recommendations lack thought due to the removed position of the researchers. For example, Norbury et al. (2016) suggest reducing the level of difficulty experienced by the youngest children, but make no specific comment on the practices they believe to be exacerbating age effects. This suggests there is a need for more input from applied, practitioner research.

2.7 Chapter Summary

This review set out to answer three questions that related to children's school readiness in a UK context. The literature predominantly focused on developmental attributes that led to the conclusion that older children are more school ready for a school environment that values and prioritises a formalised approach to teaching and learning in the early years. The youngest children are viewed as less school ready for a system that adopts a 'one size fits all' approach.

Researchers urge for more developmental and flexible perspectives to be adopted in the context of young children in transition, who should also be afforded opportunities to develop strong relationships with significant adults, in order to develop a positive sense of self that enables independence and the capacity to engage with academic tasks.

The review showed that the research exploring parental views and experiences is lacking both in its prevalence and quality. Parents involved in psychological research contributed to quantitative measures that required them to make judgements of their child's performance and behaviour. The research that adopted qualitative methods with a view to elicit rich data, lacked the rigour that a systematic method brings. Furthermore, no psychological enquiry into parent views and experience has yet taken place. Whilst most papers made some attempt to include samples considered to be low-income, the reporting on this data was lacking. Overall, this literature review illuminated gaps within the research, thus providing a strong rationale for the current study, discussed in the following section.

2.7.1 Rationale for the Current Study

With their knowledge of theory and familiarity with both research design and evidence-informed practice, EPs are well positioned to engage in practitioner research into early transitions. Furthermore, many EPs are engaged in casework related to supporting children and families in transition. Therefore, further research into this area is likely to be relevant and useful. Kennedy et al. (2012) suggest a particularly valuable contribution could be in supporting parents, teachers and children to develop a deeper understanding of the emotional journey involved in a child's first major transition. EPs can support more ecologically valid transitions at the LA level through research.

In their exploration of peer-play, Mathieson and Banerjee (2010) speak to the protective nature of good practitioner-parent relationships, recognising the significant role played by adults

sharing care for children in their early years. They suggest future research should pay greater attention to parental judgements of children's attributes. Attention to family and community experiences, as well as socioeconomic status would help to clarify the impact of a range of interacting factors, all of which affect a child's developing social competences, (Mathieson & Banerjee, 2010). Turner-Cobb et al. (2008) highlight their lack of data on parental stress experiences, and suggest that this might explain increased cortisol levels in children prior to school transition. This review asked what specifically is said about the school readiness of low-income children in the UK. It is clear that there is a dearth of literature that focuses on this group, despite a high profile in policy. The two studies that were specifically interested in the school readiness and transition experiences of children from low-income families, focused on parents. Based on the literature appraised, low-income parents are underrepresented in high quality research studies. As the current study focuses on this group, it is hoped that it will add to and complement the existing literature.

Mathieson and Banerjee (2010) emphasise the importance of selecting the correct methodology, specifically in studies where parents make up a participant group. The method of gaining parental views in research requires greater consideration. The general knowledge and understanding parents have of their child's behaviour is likely to be more useful and productive. In contrast, existing studies have focused on explicit judgements about negative and problematic behaviours. This literature review has highlighted a lack of high quality qualitative research studies exploring parental views into school readiness. Whilst the quantitative research appears to be more robust, the richness and depth of data acquired from parents is limited by the reliance on questionnaires and/or checklists.

Chapter 3. Methodology

Chapter Overview

This chapter aims to:

- Define the aims, research questions and purpose of this research;
- Describe the research design, ontological and epistemological position, and method;
- Describe and explain the procedures used to recruit participants and data collection;
- Describe the method of data analysis;
- Discuss ethical considerations.

3.1 Research Aims

The current study aims to explore the meaning of school readiness, and experiences of transition, for parents of children eligible for PP funding in an inner London authority. It is hoped that their subjective experiences during the crucial transition to formal education will be made more intelligible and visible through the research process. Knowledge and insight that is generated by the study may then give rise to the development of effective, considered practice and intervention amongst professionals supporting children and families in their early years. Chapters 1 and 2 highlighted concerns and consequences of ‘un-readiness’, including those relevant to central government and the LA in which this research took place. The findings of this research may inform practice and guidance around school readiness and transition in the early years, with particular sensitivity paid to vulnerable children and families.

3.2 Ontology & Epistemology

A researcher’s ontological position reflects how the researcher views the status of truth

and knowledge in the real world. Epistemology relates to how the researcher plans to acquire knowledge about that world. A theoretical lens can be applied to shape how that information is then viewed, according to a particular theory or framework.

3.2.1 Psychosocial Ontology

This research is based on a psychosocial ontology. Whilst psychosocial research has traditionally been aligned with a critical realist ontology as a means to describe a reality that is a product of one's own social world and a shared social world (Hollway, 2008), this view has since been revised. Hollway now discusses the potential for psychosocial ontology as a label for use without reference to critical realism, (Hollway, during a lecture entitled 'The place of psychoanalytically informed epistemology and ontology in psychosocial methods', at the Tavistock & Portman clinic in May 2015). This reflects development in the psychosocial approach, with a continual drive in the ontology to transcend the individual-social binary that dominates the research world.

In the current study, psychosocial ontology has been interpreted to mean that there are both social and psychological realities, which interact to impact on individuals, and, in turn, individuals shape social and psychological realities, (Hollway & Froggett, 2012; Salling Olesen, 2013; Weber, 2013). This interactive and intersubjective process is unique to each individual and their context. Hollway (2015) describes this as dynamic internal conflict - an inevitable feature of experience and subjectivity. A psychosocial ontology acknowledges that the interpretations made of a data set by the researcher are also unique, as researchers are participants themselves, (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009). Therefore, in this piece of research, I believe that my own psychic reality, social reality, and embodiment of these, has influenced the entire research process, including the relational experience of interviewing participants at the data collection phase.

3.2.2 Psychosocial Epistemology

A psychosocial ontology lends to a psychosocial epistemology (Hollway & Froggett, 2012; Hollway, 2015), which is the stance that has been applied in this research. Whilst both psychological and social worlds are explored, interpretations are not reduced to emphasise one over the other. Psychosocial epistemology is a model for noticing and thinking about the impact of participants on researchers, especially at periods of change or transition, when anxieties and unresolved issues are likely to be stirred up. Previous psychosocial studies have applied psychoanalytic concepts to illuminate issues around role, identity and experiences of social change, (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009). The impact of researcher on participants is focused on to provide another layer of data that gives insight into the real, lived experiences of those being studied. Given that transition lies at the heart of this research, psychosocial epistemology provides an appropriate means of exploring and obtaining knowledge. Furthermore, EP practice related to children's transitions focuses on both individual and systemic strengths and barriers, which is in keeping with the shared individual-social emphasis in a psychosocial approach to research.

Previous experiences of psychology and sociology in academia predispose me to interpret the impact of phenomena through a lens that considers societal, cultural and psychological factors as interactive in the search for insight into the experiences of individuals. Exposure to psychoanalytic and systems theory as frameworks for understanding phenomena throughout my training as an EP, influence the lens through which I interpret what I see and experience. The training I have received has prompted curiosity and interest into the real, lived experiences of individuals and how these are formed through psychosocial experiences. I therefore believe, that the individual narratives related to school readiness and transition presented by parents, are shaped by an interplay of influences, (Hollway & Froggett, 2012). Individual narratives of experience are uniquely constructed, as is the researcher's interpretation

of the meanings behind their articulation of their experience. Brinkmann and Kvale's (2015) perspective of 'inter-viewing' fits well with the epistemology adopted. They acknowledge that, through interaction between interviewer and interviewee, knowledge is co-constructed. It is then possible to come to *an* understanding of human experiences and the underlying processes and responses linked to these. This interdisciplinary nature of psychosocial methods is suited to a study that poses relevance to a range of professionals, often working as multidisciplinary teams.

3.3 Qualitative Research Methods

The method concerns the identification and recruitment of participants, the approach taken for data collection and for the analysis of data. As illustrated in Chapter 2, existing research conducted in the UK has, predominantly, applied either quantitative or mixed-methods designs, such as to explore fixed hypotheses related to developmental factors that have been found to positively correlate with successful transitions and academic outcomes at and beyond school entry. Bronfenbrenner (1977) criticised laboratory style experiments traditionally used in realist, positivist research, where empiricism is the driving theory of knowledge. Existing positivist research into school readiness is arguably constrained in the purpose it is able to serve, leaving no scope for 'verstehen' (understanding), description or problem response, (Cronbach, 1982). Robson (2011) argued a radically different approach to traditional quantitative approaches is required in the study of 'human consciousness and language, the interactions between people in social situations' given that 'both researcher and researched are human', (p. 17). Furthermore, quantitative methods do not deal with meanings or implications, (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). In contrast, qualitative methodologies are used as a way of gaining meaningful and in-depth insight into complex psychological and interpersonal processes (Elliot, 2011, Bottrill, Pistrang, Barker & Worrell, 2010). The existing qualitative studies, referred to in

Chapter 2, are firstly scarce, but also lack the focus and rigour associated with high-quality, defensible research. Therefore, a rigorous, qualitative methodology was applied in the current study, as a way of exploring the meaning of school readiness, and experiences of transition, that form the unique narratives held by low-income parents.

A major strength of qualitative approaches to psychological inquiry is that the methods are able to capture the lived experiences of research participants, (Povee & Roberts, 2014). They provide a means to a more exploratory approach; eliciting information about the process of change that other forms of data collection and analysis are not designed to pick up. The purpose of the current study is both exploratory and emancipatory (Section 3.6). The data I sought to answer my research questions (Section 3.5) was most likely to emerge through a qualitative means of data collection and analysis. Existing research gathering parental views has been done through use of questionnaires and surveys, which Hollway and Jefferson (2000) argue, serve a limited purpose and fail to address meaning. Given the gap in the research exploring parental views, a qualitative methodology was felt to be an important step in gaining an insight into their experiences without the restriction of predetermined hypotheses.

I will now describe the psychosocial method used for data collection, and illustrate why this approach was an appropriate one.

3.4 Psychosocial Research

Psychosocial approaches have emerged more prominently in social science research, where the preoccupation with language and cognition has begun to give way to an equal focus and interest into emotion and affect, (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009). Existing qualitative methods are arguably ‘too thin’ for psychology, (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). Psychosocial methods address the familiar split between the individual and society, and between psychology and sociology, as

unproductive and leading to unhelpful notions of interaction, (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000; Clarke & Hoggett, 2009). As very little of the existing research sought to obtain parents views and experiences, it was important to use a method that would provide rich and in-depth data to gain insight that is currently lacking.

Psychosocial methodology is informed by psychoanalytic theory. There is a focus on researching subjects that are both social and psychological, and constituted in and through social structures, (Frosh & Baraitser, 2008). Hollway and Jefferson (2000) place equal emphasis on the relationship between inner and outer worlds, arguing that one cannot be understood without the other, ‘the inner world [of the research subject] cannot be understood without knowledge of [their] experiences in the world, and whose experiences of the world cannot be understood without knowledge of the way in which their inner worlds allow them to experience the outer worlds’, (p. 4). By acknowledging this, the researcher is enabled to track the relationship between people’s ambiguous representations and their experiences, (Reichardt, 2014). The aim of a psychosocial method is to understand subjectivity through exploration of unconscious and conflicting forces rather than simply the conscious narrative presented in an interview (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000), by considering not only the manifest content of research data, but also what might underlie it, (Jervis, 2009, as cited in Clarke & Hoggett, 2009). Combining a theory of subjectivity with a methodology means that interpretations of the subjectivity expressed consciously and unconsciously in the interview process can be attended to.

A psychosocial researcher is personally involved in the analysis and interpretation of data. Although, this level of involvement gives rise to the risk of researcher bias affecting the conclusions reached in the research, Hollway and Jefferson (2000) critique the very notion of ‘bias’ in qualitative research, arguing that the researcher’s subjectivity should be used as a vehicle for data capture.

3.4.1 Psychoanalysis in Psychosocial Research

A psychosocial approach to research allows for the application of psychoanalytic theory, to further and deepen understanding of interpretations made of the data. Psychoanalysis is based on the idea that we have thoughts at the conscious and unconscious level. Jervis (2009) describes the complexity of individuals, whose relationships involve ideas and processes that are outside of their awareness, (as cited in Clarke & Hogget, 2009). In psychosocial research studies, psychoanalytic concepts have provided a way of addressing core issues within social sciences (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009), such as the nature of identity (Hollway, 2015) and the experiences of rapid social change for the powerless, (Barnes & Sullivan, 2002). The current study sought to explore the unique, subjective experiences of low-income parents, although the participant group ended up being solely mothers, for which I anticipated there would be discussion of roles and identity. A psychosocial approach allowed me to examine these internal experiences, in the context of the intersection with socioeconomic status. It was therefore felt that applying a psychoanalytic lens to a psychosocial study was a good fit for this piece of research. Psychoanalysis has so far emerged in the breach between individuals and society, and psychology and sociology, (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009).

Psychoanalysis provides a framework for attending to the unconscious communications (Klein, 1957) that permeate interactions. The psychosocial method accounts for the context within which these interactions take place, in terms of what and how participants choose to communicate. A version of reality can be constructed through psychoanalytic theory. Social and individual influences on participants' real, lived experiences are equally emphasised throughout. Reducing these to one 'truth' is not the purpose, nor is it conducive, in the search for reaching an informed position. This is better suited to a reductionist and positivist stance, one that is not taken in this research.

Frosh and Baraitser (2008) highlight a tension in using psychoanalytic theory to inform psychosocial research, particularly in interpreting the experiences of marginalised groups, given the critique of the Freudian origins as being misogynistic and classist, (Davis, 2014). Psychoanalysis has, traditionally, been criticised as too individualising, drawing on a doctor-patient model, where a certain truth can be acquired, with regard to human nature, in an interpretative practice that claims to know the subjects better than they know themselves, (Frosh & Baraitser, 2008). Some argue that only those trained formally as psychoanalysts are qualified to use psychoanalytic ideas in research, (Hoggett, Beedell, Jimenez, Mayo & Miller, 2010). Furthermore, some critics suggest psychoanalytic ideas are incompatible with research and should be restricted to clinical usage. In contrast, Hollway and Jefferson (2000) emphasise that the goal of clinical psychoanalysis is to increase the analysand's sense of psychological freedom, which is an emancipatory praxis, which lends to the emancipatory purpose behind this research. Furthermore, since I cannot access directly the experience of my participants, to do justice to the complexity of their narratives, an interpretative approach is necessary, (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). Psychoanalytic concepts enabled me to consider the unique life experiences of the parents I met with. I endorse the view presented by Hollway and Jefferson (2000) that psychoanalytic ideas and techniques, such as unconscious defences and free association, are applicable to understanding everyday relational interaction. This argument is rooted in beliefs of subjectivity. In recognising my own subjectivity, I am freed up to use it as a tool for obtaining the narratives of my research subjects. Precautions to achieve a good enough standard of objectivity have been integrated in the design. These include additional psychoanalytically informed supervision, keeping a research diary and field notes, and peer-checking during data analysis.

3.4.2 Defences against Anxiety

Psychoanalytic defences are distinct from how one might use 'defensive' to describe

everyday interactions. Defences form as ways of managing the anxieties provoked by difficult experiences of living and processing life, and the difficulty of managing our conscious and unconscious lives, (Bibby, 2010). At a conscious level, anxieties can be named and spoken about. Language and discourse have a rationalising influence. At the unconscious level, anxieties wield their power beyond this rationalisation, (Walkerdine, Lucey & Melody, 2001).

The psychoanalytic thinking around defences against anxiety allowed me to access, not only parents' spoken accounts through discourse, but also those residing in un-thought modes; unconscious, preconscious and embodied, (Hollway, 2015). Melanie Klein's (1952) Object Relations Theory has shaped the development of the psychosocial method, as a means of considering the interplay between the social and psychological. Klein (1952) believed that anxiety created in the context of threats to people's lives is defended against through unconscious processes. These defences influence people's actions and the stories they choose to tell. A Kleinian approach suggests defended subjects are forged through the unconscious defences against anxiety, which are intersubjective, coming into play between people, (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). The rational mind retains an ability to integrate both good and bad characteristics in objects of the external world, without this being compromised by defence mechanisms such as splitting, projection or other unconscious defences. Splitting is the polarisation of good and bad and is achieved through the unconscious projection (putting out into another) and introjection (taking in from others) of mental objects, (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000).

3.4.3 The Defended Subject & Defended Researcher

In psychosocial research, the term 'subject' is not used as in the tradition of experimental psychology, but in a philosophical sense, where 'subject' refers to the person, and how he or she is theorised, (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013). Frosh (2003) discusses the difficulties involved in

theorising the psychosocial ‘subject’, which can be described as the point at which inner and outer forces meet, ‘something that is constructed and yet constructing, a power-using subject which is also subject to power’, (p. 1564). Although this tension remains, Hollway and Jefferson (2000) discuss psychosocial subjects in terms of the social defences against anxiety, for which psychoanalysis provides a conceptual framework to make sense of data acquired in psychosocial research. Other qualitative, narrative approaches leave little space for the social defences elicited in research, by both the researcher and the researched, (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). In research, psychosocial subjects invest in the discourses that offer protection against anxiety and preserve identity, (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). The mind can unconsciously create defenses in the context of anxiety provoking experiences.

As discussed in Chapter 1, there is a widely held belief that children from low-income backgrounds are not ready or equipped for school in the UK. Therefore, a psychosocial method allows me to give equal emphasis to the psychological and social worlds of the parents by acknowledging the individual’s own psychological internal world, as well as the impact of their position in society, and how these interact to form their narrative. As argued by Frosh (2003), ‘the social is psychically invested and the psychological is socially formed, neither has an essence apart from the other’, (p. 1559).

Loshak (2003) reinforces the importance of working with and through the countertransference⁸, particularly in situations of difference. When faced with individual and family patterns that are distant or distinctive from one’s own, where there appears to be no shared language, it can become overwhelming and may block or prevent thinking. Loshak refers to ‘an unconscious assumption that cultural difference cannot be understood’ (p. 53) and that therefore the work will be of limited value. This can lead to stereotypical responses, the notion of

⁸ **Countertransference** is often discussed in the context of a therapeutic relationship, whereby the therapist is drawn into a pattern of behaviour, unconsciously transferring emotional data, in response to the client. Often this is in reaction to transference, a phenomenon that is the result of unconscious conflict, whereby feelings, desires, and expectations from the past are redirected and applied to the present.

a ‘culture clash’ for example, resulting in a dismissive attitude to the work, or a failure to engage. I was able to explore my responses, emotional experiences and possible blind spots in the context of supervision, (Section 3.8).

3.5 Research Questions

The questions being asked through this study are:

- What meaning do parents of children eligible for Pupil Premium funding give to the notion of ‘school readiness’?
- How do parents of children eligible for Pupil Premium funding experience the process of their child starting school?

3.6 Purpose

This study has both an exploratory and an emancipatory purpose.

3.6.1 Exploratory

As discussed in Chapter 2, at present there is a distinct lack of existing research that privileges parent voice, on the topic of school readiness. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to gain a rich picture of the subjective meanings parents of children eligible for PP give to the notion of school readiness. This involved investigation of how these parents experience their child starting school. For the LA, the purpose was to gain new insight into parental views and experiences, such as the challenges parents perceive at this early stage, the structures and support they have found to be useful, and what, if anything, was felt to be lacking. As shown in Chapters 1 and 2, the relationship between school readiness and future educational outcomes has

implications at an individual and wider level, which therefore suggests there is good reason for the LA to be vested in the scope and implications generated through this research.

The exploratory purpose was appropriate because I did not hold specific hypotheses about the narratives or themes that would emerge. Rather, my hypothesis rested on the belief that there are psychosocial processes related parental experiences that can be illuminated through the research process.

3.6.2 Emancipatory

I considered the possibility that participants might experience feelings of empowerment as a result of talking to me about their experiences. At the stage at which I met participants, I communicated how their participation and contribution to the research project had the potential to help other families, in similar circumstances, by providing insight for professionals working with schools and families. An emancipatory purpose also fits with the design of the study, as it is consistent with the psychoanalytic framework employed in psychosocial research (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000; Davis, 2014), formed on the basis that clinical psychoanalysis seeks to increase the analysand's sense of psychological freedom, (Wolfenstein, 1993).

3.7 Research Design

3.7.1 Participants

This research included a sample of three parents, whose children were eligible for PP and were in Year 1 of a mainstream primary school. Pupil Premium was used as an indicator of low-income parents, to aid in the identification of parents to be included in the sample. However, I did not intend to include parents of Looked After children or those serving in the armed forces, had they presented within the wider group. I aimed to recruit between three and six participants,

for both pragmatic and theoretical reasons (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). Each parent was interviewed twice, providing six interviews as data for analysis. The time between the first and second interviews ranged between six and 12 weeks. Participants were interviewed twice to provide an opportunity in the second interview to respond to their experiences of the first, and to gain a perspective of their thinking over time. The six interviews, which ranged in length from 27 minutes to 1 hour 9 minutes, were recorded and analysed.

3.7.1.1 Selection

I made the decision to conduct the research in a school where I was not working in role as a trainee EP, to create clarity and distinction around my role as a researcher, and to avoid meeting parents who I had, or could work with in another capacity.

Using data available to Children's Services, a local primary school was selected on the basis that it had a comparatively high number of children eligible for FSM, to increase the chances of successful recruitment. 35% of children attending were eligible for FSM, which is higher than the national average. The Head Teacher and Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) were then contacted to seek permission to conduct the research in the school. They were fully informed as to the purpose of the research, and the demands that would be made both of the school and the parents who agreed to participate. The Head Teacher agreed to enable the research to take place and the SENCo was then the main point of contact. The SENCo identified parents based on simple suitability criteria: parents of Year 1 children eligible for PP funding. The decision to select parents of Year 1 children was made to ensure enough time had passed for parents to experience the transition process in full. All of the children had attended Reception within the school prior to their transition to Year 1.

3.7.1.2 Recruitment

The participants were recruited as a convenience sample from a school in the LA in which I worked as a trainee EP. The SENCo initially identified six parents who met the criteria for inclusion in the study. The SENCo herself made the decision to exclude some parents from the study based on personal circumstances that she felt made them vulnerable to a degree that engaging in the research process would not be beneficial.

The SENCo initially introduced me to three parents as they dropped their children off at school, in order that I could briefly explain the details of my study. All three expressed interest in participating. I gave each parent an information sheet (Appendix 5) and consent form (Appendix 6) to take away and read in their own time. Participant 1 (Alex⁹) and participant 2 (Jessica) met with me shortly after our introduction for the first interviews. The third parent also agreed, but did not arrive to meet me at school on two prearranged occasions. Although I attempted to phone the parent, I could not make contact and finally left a message indicating that, if they still wished to participate, they could contact me directly or speak with the SENCo. I did not hear from this parent again. Following this, the SENCo approached two more parents on my behalf, who expressed that they were happy to be contacted by me. I spoke with both of these parents over the phone, again describing the study, interview process and that their participation was entirely voluntary. One parent agreed to meet with me, but the next day I was informed by the SENCo that the parent had changed their mind. The other parent agreed to meet me but did not attend two prearranged meeting times. As with the other parent who did not attend, I attempted to make contact and left the same message regarding their participation. I did not hear from this parent again.

⁹ All names of people and places are pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the participants.

I met participant 3 (Michelle), as she was collecting her child at the end of the school day. As with participants 1 and 2, the SENCo introduced me and I gave Michelle details about the research. Michelle agreed to participate and we agreed to meet later that week.

All three parents recruited were mothers to older children who had already transitioned to school. Alex and Michelle identified as white British/English, and Jessica as half British, half Ghanaian. Jessica's child had Cerebral Palsy and was supported through an Education, Health and Care plan (EHCP).

3.7.2 Data Collection

Participants were interviewed at the school in which their Year 1 child attended. For the first interview, participants were recommended to allow an hour for going through the consent form and participant information sheet, completing the interview and any debriefing. For the second interview participants were told that the interview was likely to be shorter than the first, and to allow 45 minutes. In practice the opposite was true, in that the second interviews were longer in all three cases. I have understood this to be a direct result of the relationship I had built up with the parents, who each expressed they were more comfortable in the second interview. I transcribed each of the first interviews before contacting participants to arrange their second interview.

3.7.2.1 Free Association Narrative Interviewing

The current study used the Free Association Narrative Interview (FANI) to design and conduct two biographical, semi-structured interviews. The FANI technique, developed by Hollway and Jefferson (2000), is based on the idea of free association, used in clinical

psychoanalysis. The SAGE Encyclopaedia of Social Science Research (Lewis-Beck, Bryman & Liao, 2004) recognises FANI as an approach that integrates a narrative emphasis with the psychoanalytic principle of free association. FANI has been developed as a tool for use in psychosocial research that applies a psychosocial ontology and epistemology.

Semi-structured interviews are commonly used in qualitative research (Robson, 2011), traditionally with a focus on key areas and questions predetermined by the researcher. The hope is that rich data will be produced as a result and, to some degree, semi-structured interviews allow participants to freely express their views in their own terms. Furthermore, the contextual and relational aspects of understanding others are valued, which is of high importance to the current study. The advantage of a semi-structured interview style lies in its flexibility. Semi-structured interviews are viewed as most appropriate in research studies where the interviewer is closely involved with the research process, (Robson & McCartan, 2016). However, because of this, a weighting is placed on the skill of the interviewer, as opposed to more structured approaches where predetermined questions can be adhered to as if to provide a script. Roulston, de Marrais and Lewis (2003) describe the challenges that novice interviewers are often presented with in conducting semi-structured interviews. For example, much of the information obtained may not necessarily relate to the researcher's topic, unanticipated and disconcerting events prior to and during interviews and unexpected participant behaviors, (Roulston, de Marrais & Lewis, 2003). Although these and other challenges resonate with my experience as a novice interviewer, the FANI approach provided a framework to reflect on and make sense of these challenges. Additionally, psychoanalysis is not only associated but also integrated into the method, which therefore meant it provided a good fit with the design of this study. Having discussed my decision to use FANI as an approach to data collection, I will now describe what the process entailed.

Participants were asked to share their narratives and encouraged to secure their accounts in actual events. The use of open questions allows the participant to tell a story that is less influenced by the direction of researcher questions. The participant is enabled to make choices, such as which story to tell, the manner in which it is told, the level of detail provided, points emphasised and the morals drawn, which reveal more than is suspected by the storyteller, (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). ‘Why’ questions were avoided as they are believed to elicit intellectualised and over-rationalised responses, (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000; Robson & McCartan, 2016). In FANI, participants have opportunities to engage in a largely uninterrupted flow of talk, where the researcher acts as an attentive listener, trying to understand what is being said. Use of free association means the participant is encouraged to say what comes to mind. The narratives that emerge are ‘structured not according to conscious logic, but according to unconscious logic/...the associations follow pathways defined by emotional motivations rather than rational intentions’, (p.34, Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). This approach to interviewing and research assumes that both researcher and researched are defended subjects. In a psychoanalytically informed framework, individuals unconsciously attempt to avoid or master anxiety. The FANI technique evidenced the participant’s anxieties, and their attempts to defend against them, as incoherencies within their stories, such as in the form of avoidances, contradictions and inconsistencies. These unconscious dynamics are acknowledged and become a focus of the research. Both researcher and researched are subject to projections and introjections of ideas and feelings coming from the other, (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). Freud (1915) suggested ‘the unconscious of one human being can react upon that of another without passing through the conscious’, (p. 194). It is important, therefore, that the researcher tracks these experiences, by keeping reflective field notes, which are then shared and explored during supervision. Table 2 details the initial, open questions that were used to elicit free association in

the initial FANI interviews. Prompting questions were designed to explore actual events in depth, adapted from Hollway and Jefferson's (2013) piloting of the FANI technique.

Table 2. Links between Interview Questions, Prompts & Research Questions

Research Question	Interview Questions	Exploratory Prompts
How do parents of children eligible for PP experience the process of their child starting school?	Tell me about [<i>child's name</i>] starting school?	Did your feelings about x change over time? What did you do when x happened? How did you feel when x happened?
What meaning do parents of children eligible for PP give to the notion of 'school readiness'?	Can you tell me about [<i>child's name</i>] readiness to start school?	What did [<i>relevant others</i>] do/think/feel when x happened? Tell me more about.../say a little more When you say x, what do you mean? You mentioned x, can you give examples? You started talking about x, have there been other times when x has happened? Echo (<i>in questioning manner</i>) end points of narratives

3.7.2.2 Data Capture Method

Interviews were audio recorded using the Voice Record application. The six completed recordings were then transcribed. As per the recommendation of Hollway and Jefferson (2000), I transcribed all interviews myself, and viewed this as a means of immersing myself in the data. Recordings were transcribed in ordinary speech patterns. All spoken words and sounds were

transcribed, including hesitations, false starts, pauses, emphasis, and cut off speech. In addition, I attempted to capture the intonation and expression used by the participants.

3.7.3 Data Analysis

The method used to analyse the interviews was thematic analysis. This enabled me to keep in mind the ‘whole’ person within the data, as codes and themes are intended to be ‘an accurate reflection of the content of the entire data set’, (p. 83, Braun & Clarke, 2006). Reflexive field notes (Section 3.8) were integrated into the software, using the ‘memo’ function in MAXQDA. This meant that thinking around the researcher-participant relationship and the unspoken parts of participants’ narratives were embedded in the data at the point of inductive coding.

3.7.3.1 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was the method used to analyse the data because it offers an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to analysing qualitative data, (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Furthermore, it enabled me to identify and analyse the most prevalent patterns of meaning in the dataset (Joffe, 2012), allowing for a systematic and transparent analysis. Thematic analysis is not bound to an epistemological or theoretical position (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and is therefore appropriately flexible as an approach to use with data obtained through a psychosocial method. Braun and Clarke (2006) note the active role of the researcher in the identification of patterns and themes in the data set. A thematic analysis therefore allowed me to extend my commitment to using my own subjectivity as a tool to the data analysis phase.

The thematic analysis was performed in a series of stages. Firstly, I became immersed in the data through transcription, which involved repeated listening to the audio recordings. I re-read transcripts and made notes around patterns of meaning in the data, ideas around how the

participants made sense of their experiences, assumptions they made, points of interest and issues that were of interest to me. I also kept reflexive notes throughout this process, regarding my emotional and psychological experiences and responses that continued beyond the interview encounter. I began to form a degree of familiarity with the data set that enabled me to notice things that were relevant to the research questions and the individual experiences. The interview transcripts were thought about as a whole, and in relation to elements of the participants' biographies.

The next stage of the thematic analysis was supported by the MAXQDA software programme (version 12.0) and involved drawing out inductive codes. To do this, and to ensure the codes were data driven, further reading and re-reading of the raw transcripts was done. At this stage, as many codes as possible were generated. As the codes began to emerge, they were then grouped into themes and subthemes through an iterative process of code-checking. Themes were identified based on their relevance to the research questions. This meant that, whilst frequency was considered in terms of weighting and significance, it did not alone determine the inclusion of codes and themes in the thematic analysis.

3.8 Reflexivity

Notions of reliability and validity are relevant in research with quantitative and mixed-methods. These have been replaced with more appropriate constructs that ensure qualitative research is credible and trustworthy, namely reflexivity.

Reflexivity is required of the psychosocial researcher, (Jervis, 2009, as cited in Clarke & Hoggett, 2009). In qualitative and ethnographic social science research, reflexivity can provide a rich source of data, particularly regarding the affective, performative and relational aspects of interviews with research subjects, (Elliot, Ryan & Hollway, 2012). Increasingly in qualitative

research, exploration of one's reflexivity is used for 'understanding data that are embodied, unspoken or unavailable to consciousness', (p. 1, Elliot et al., 2012).

I kept a research diary (Thomson, 2009), which included field and supervision notes. These were used to engage with researcher subjectivity, to enhance the productive use of reflexivity and to address the emotional work of the research, (Elliot et al., 2012). Field notes were produced through examination of the impact of participants on researcher, and vice versa, (Thomson, 2009). They act as a vehicle for reflection on the co-constructed accounts (Hollway, 2015), one's own subjective responses, what this means for the participant, and what this tells us about our own insights and blind spots, (Elliot, 2011). I made notes before and after each interview, and throughout the process of analysing the data. These provided a method through which I could reflect on my subjective responses to the data, and influenced what I learnt about the participants. They also provided evidence of how my blind spots and patterns of thinking affected the data, (Elliot, 2011; Elliott et al., 2012).

Supervision additional to research supervision was provided prior to data collection, before the initial FANI interviews. Supervision was sought following the first and prior to the second interviews, to inform the interview space and researcher-researched relationship in the second and final interview. Once all of the data had been collected, and the audio data had been transcribed, a final supervisory session was sought to inform the data analysis. The methodology of the supervision was psychoanalytic in its use of a bounded frame and of psychoanalytic forms of noticing oneself, of staying engaged emotionally as well as creating a reflective distance, (Elliot et al., 2012). I brought extracts from transcripts and field notes to discuss possible and alternative interpretations. Garfield, Reavey and Kotecha (2010) emphasise the need for clear boundaries in the supervisory relationship due to the different interpretations that a researcher and their supervisor make of material from FANI interviews. Therefore, the boundaries and limits of supervision were discussed at length, revisited throughout and agreed

through a psychological contract. My supervisor (an EP and research tutor) drew upon the psychoanalytic skill of maintaining a curious and reflective stance, whilst allowing oneself to be affected by the material. The purpose of supervision was to enhance the productive use of reflexivity in the research, (Elliot et al., 2012). Reflexivity is a way of understanding data that are unavailable to consciousness. Therefore, supervision provided a means through which I could attempt to access and engage with this subjectivity. Elliot et al., (2012) discuss the risk of ‘wild analysis’, which supervision was intended to guard against. The complexity of the dynamic between the participants and myself could be explored and seen from a different perspective, rather than just my own.

3.8.1 Credibility & Trustworthiness

Often there is pressure to produce findings in psychological research that are generalisable and objective. The dominance of quantitative approaches in research has meant that research is often judged as valid based on the standards set down for quantitative research, (Hollway, 2007; Yardley, 2011). Due to the psychosocial stance taken up in this study, I have made no such claims. As an in-depth, qualitative study, that pays attention to the uniqueness of the data that is produced, efforts were instead put into ensuring robustness and credibility, in order to achieve trustworthiness. To exemplify this, Yardley’s (2000; 2011) principles of validity in qualitative research are discussed.

3.8.2 Sensitivity to Context

Qualitative research has roots in sociology and anthropology, emphasising the importance of social context, and the impossibility of achieving an entirely neutral and objective position. For this study, a systematic exploration of relevant, empirical literature in the topic area

of interest was undertaken. The decision to only include research produced within the UK in this examination of the relevant literature was guided by the aim to attend to the unique context surrounding the participants; that is, the British education system, and a unique social structure that determines class and socioeconomic status. The literature included in Chapter 2 reflects the views, values and priorities that dominate this context. Furthermore, the historical, political and social context is detailed in Chapter 1 to situate the study.

At the planning phase, careful consideration was given to the context and circumstances that I would meet with participants. It was important to ensure a degree of sensitivity to their circumstances, socio-cultural contexts and expectations of meeting with me. In order that the participants could engage with and access the two-part interview process, it was important for them to feel comfortable in meeting with me. The interviews therefore took place on school premises and were arranged at times that were convenient for the parents who took part, often just after they dropped off or before collecting their children.

By design, the method of data collection was sensitive to needs of the participants, as it was consciously selected to avoid researcher bias being imposed through leading or closed questions. Some studies are limited by the demands they place on parents to produce explicit judgements about children's behaviour, instead of contributing the general knowledge they have about their child, which has built up over time, across multiple contexts, (Mathieson & Banerjee, 2010). I used open-ended questioning to actively encourage participants to engage in free association. Moreover, with prompting and active listening, participants were encouraged to explore their narrative in greater depth.

3.8.3 Commitment & Rigour

A thorough and systematic approach to data collection and analysis is outlined above. Hollway and Jefferson (2000) detail how the FANI approach was developed through pilot interviews, essentially providing dos and don'ts for prospective interviewers. These were consulted at the stage at which the interviews were being planned for, and heavily informed my use of questions and prompts.

Prior to meeting the participants, I anticipated that their narratives would be rich and complex. At the point of data collection and analysis this was confirmed. Therefore, the methods to both capture and interpret the data needed to preserve and honour the accounts being handed to me. Additionally, my aim was to provide new and different insights into the existing body of research around school readiness. I felt that my approach to collect and analyse data would be in service of this, particularly given that psychosocial methods are relatively new to EP research. Moreover, two distinct layers of analysis: thematic and psychosocial, were planned to capture the individual and socio-cultural data being spoken about. A psychosocial analysis allowed equal consideration of the individual and sociocultural contexts, which were then interpreted under psychological theory.

3.8.4 Coherence & Transparency

Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that authentic psychology is concerned with reflexivity on true psychological processes, such as thought and emotion, which is particularly fitting for this study. I have sought reflexivity in considering my influence on participants' actions during the research encounter, as well as my contribution to the co-constructed narratives during data collection and analysis. I recorded reflective field notes after each interview, and added to these

as thoughts and emotions emerged. These were used to track the influence my responses to the participants might be having on my interpretations. I also sought additional research supervision, to bring focus to my emotional and psychological experiences of the interview encounter, and in response to the interview material during data analysis. This offered a form of triangulation, which further validates the data, (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000).

3.8.5 Impact & Importance

Willig (2001) suggests that findings in a qualitative research study are relevant without meeting generalisability criteria because an experience that has been identified through qualitative research is known to exist in society. The application of findings produced in this study should be based on biography as well as demographics, i.e. to a group or population that are synergetic in these natures, as the degree of transferability is a direct function of the congruence between two contexts, (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I have attempted to support this through a detailed description of the phenomenon and context, which draws explicitly on patterns of cultural and social relationships. I collected contextual data (see Table 3) about the participants in order that the psychosocial interpretations I made were in consideration of each individual's unique context and narrative.

Table 3. Contextual Data obtained from Participants

Question	Response
Ethnicity/cultural background identified with	
First language, languages spoken	
Lived in the UK since	
Relationship status e.g. single, married, separated	
Number/age of all children	
Order of child in question	
Current living situation e.g. LA housing, privately renting	
Who lives in household	
Employment status	
Parent's age	
Sex of child	
DOB of child	
Anything else?	

I anticipated the interview data would have depth and richness and hoped that the findings would be transferable to a degree. Transferability refers to whether findings can be applied to other contexts, (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, I hoped that the findings would have some transferable value to similar contexts. For example, most early years settings and primary schools in the UK support low-income families through transition. The findings might therefore transfer for parents with a similar demographic in terms of socioeconomic status and region.

Most EPs support these settings with both individual and systemic practices that relate to children's transitions. I therefore hoped to provide theoretically relevant findings that can be of

use to the EP profession in their theoretical understanding of how low-income parents experience transition and make sense of school readiness. In addition, practical implications arise from the insight gained by paying close attention to parents' experiences of transition. This is particularly relevant to a climate where the expectation of working in partnership with parents is viewed as integral to children's success in education.

Psychosocial methods in EP research, and psychosocial ontology and epistemology, might bring about new and innovative ways of relating psychological and social theory to our understanding of the psychosocial processes that can be present during the process of transition.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

There were a number of important ethical considerations for this piece of research, due to the potential vulnerability of the participants, and the personal experiences being explored with them. Ethical approval was obtained from the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust Research Ethics Committee (Appendix 7). The study was sponsored and indemnified by the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust. Permission was sought and gained from the Principal Educational Psychologist in the LA in which I worked. Participants themselves were clearly informed about what the interviews would entail before they agreed to take part. They were provided with a participant information sheet (Appendix 5) and consent form (Appendix 6) at the point at which they expressed interest in participating. These were read through and discussed with the participants before proceeding with interviewing and recording. The information sheet was designed to be accessible, as well as to clearly outline the aims of the study, including what exactly would be required from participants. Included in this was their right to withdraw from the study, at any given point, without the need to provide a reason. The information sheet also explained how their research data, audio recordings and all written

information, would be handled and kept securely. The use of pseudonyms to protect identity was explained, both in the information sheet and again in person, prior to the first interview. In the information sheet, and again in person, I confirmed that the participants understood their involvement in the research was entirely voluntary, and that their participation would have no impact on the services they received in or out of school.

Consideration was given to the potential power imbalances that can exist or be perceived to exist between the researcher and the researched. Inherent to this was clarity around my role as a researcher, and not as the school EP, which was treated with high importance.

I ensured the interviews took place in a private space on school premises. The SENCo and administrative staff were made aware of the interviews, and were asked not to disturb them. The interviews were all conducted during school hours, with staff present in the building.

In consideration of the possible impact that involvement in the research might have on the emotional wellbeing of participants, I debriefed them at the end of each interview and offered further opportunities to talk with me, if they felt it would be helpful. Hollway and Jefferson (2000) emphasise the need for honesty, sympathy and respect in the interviewing space, in order to establish ethical interviewing. By actively listening, showing an attempt to understand and offering containment, I endeavoured to create this environment during the interviews. Whilst the possibility for participants to be 'harmed' from the research encounter was considered, Hollway and Jefferson (2000) argue containment and recognition mitigate the potential for this.

In my introduction to the study, prior to each first interview, I clearly explained the parameters of confidentiality that were possible within the study. Whilst any information the participants shared with me was confidential, if I became concerned that either they or others were at risk, the information would be shared with relevant, appropriate people, therefore breaking confidentiality. I was clear that if this were the case, I would discuss a plan with the participant, and involve them in decisions wherever possible.

As well as to allow participants enough time to experience the process of a transition, I wanted to ensure the interview process did not alter or impact on the transition period. Therefore, conducting the interviews post-transition, once the children had begun Year 1, was felt to be ethically sound.

Chapter 4. Findings

Chapter Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the findings by:

- Providing an overview of the themes identified through the data analysis, which was done using MAXQDA software to support a thematic analysis;
- Presenting each theme, using a thematic map, to illustrate the relationship between themes, their subthemes and codes;
- Describing themes, subthemes and codes in depth, supported and illuminated by extracts from the participants' accounts, which provide evidence for how the themes were identified.

Appendix 8 provides a table to show the relationship between themes, subthemes and codes. The full analysis has been provided electronically in Appendix 9 (see USB), which shows the relationship between themes, subthemes, codes and segmented text. Appendix 10 contains a participant transcript (see USB for all electronically). Thematic maps were created for each theme and subtheme, using a visual tool function of MAXQDA (MAXMaps).

4.1 The Researcher's Position in the Data Collection & Analysis

Given the psychosocial approach adopted in this study, I have acknowledged throughout how involved and intertwined the researcher becomes with the researched. A great deal of data was amassed through the interviews using a psychosocial method. Therefore, for pragmatic reasons, the following findings section prioritises the participant data that was borne out of the thematic analysis. In order to stay true to the psychosocial method and epistemology, I made

attempts to integrate my interpretations and emotional experiences into the analysis. A psychosocial stance sees the participant data and the researcher's interpretations of these as mutually implicated, as was the position taken in the current study. One way in which I achieved this was by continuing to record notes alongside the raw transcripts throughout the data analysis, which then informed the codes and themes that were developed. At the point of transcribing and again when re-reading transcripts, I continued to note down my emotional experiences in response to the data and the participants. At the point of coding, I used the memo function in MAXQDA to incorporate notes into the data set. In the following sections I have included some of the reflexive field notes that felt most pertinent to the data and my experience of interviewing the participants. The remainder of this chapter attempts to explore each theme and subtheme, with extracts from the raw transcripts to illustrate how these were formed. Some of the actual field notes that were written during data collection and analysis are included to provide the reader with some insight into the role of the psychosocial researcher. The FANI method provided a mechanism through which to consider not only the manifest content of the research data, but also what might underlie it, which is revealed through my field notes. In light of this, a second layer of psychoanalytic analysis would provide a both interesting and valuable follow up to this thesis.

4.2 Overview of Themes from Thematic Analysis

When describing their experiences related to their child starting school and their child's readiness for school, participant's responses can be grouped into five overarching themes, which were illuminated through the thematic analysis. Table 4 provides an overview of the relationship between themes and subthemes.

Table 4. The Relationship between Themes & Subthemes

Theme	Subtheme	
Change & Change Attribution	Change over time	
	Explanatory models	Teachers
		Facilitators
		Barriers
Within-Child Factors	Personal, social, emotional	
	Communication & language	
	Cognition & learning	
	Maturational views	
Motherhood & Identity	Hopes & fears for the future	
	Context	Individual
		Socio-political
	Role	Essential skills & tasks
		Striving to meet expectations
Beliefs about School & Learning	Decision-making	
	When does school begin?	
	Socialisation	
	Pedagogy	
Separation		

Theme 1: Change & Change Attribution

This theme encompasses participant's reflections on the changes noted following the transition to school, and the different models they drew upon to explain changes. These included their relationships with the school and school staff, and factors they identified as either facilitative or as barriers during the transition process.

Theme 2: Within-Child Factors

This theme captures all of the within-child skills and attributes participants identified as relating to school readiness, including skills they identified their children to have, be developing, or those they felt were lacking. The latter was a source of anxiety for the participants.

Theme 3: Motherhood & Identity

This theme encompasses all aspects of the 'self' that participants referred to and reflected on, which related to their ideas around their identity as parents and mothers. Included in this are past and present contextual factors that related to them as unique individuals, as well as the more social, relational and political influences.

Theme 4: Beliefs about School & Learning

This theme captures the interplay between participants' beliefs and experiences related to education. It includes reflections on their child's preschool experiences, how participants made sense of why and when children come to school, and their ideas around how children learn.

Theme 5: Separation

This theme encompasses the, mostly painful, reflections related to separating from their child during key transitional moments, including preschool and Reception.

4.3 Theme 1: Change & Change Attribution

A thematic map is provided in Figure 1.1 to illustrate the relationship between the theme of ‘change and change attribution’ and its two subthemes.

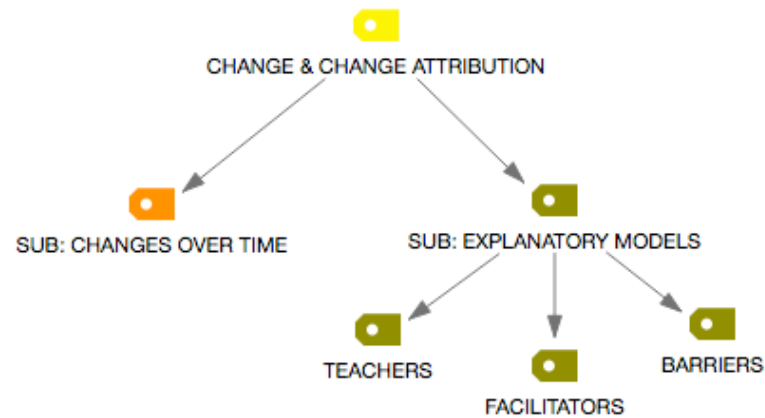


Figure 1.1 Thematic map for the theme: ‘Change & Change Attribution’

Participant’s reflections on the impact of starting school on their children were grouped into the subthemes; ‘change over time’ and ‘explanatory models: teachers, facilitators and barriers’.

4.3.1 Change over Time

A thematic map is provided in Figure 1.2 to illustrate the relationship between the subtheme ‘change over time’ and the categorised codes, under the ‘change and change attribution’ theme.

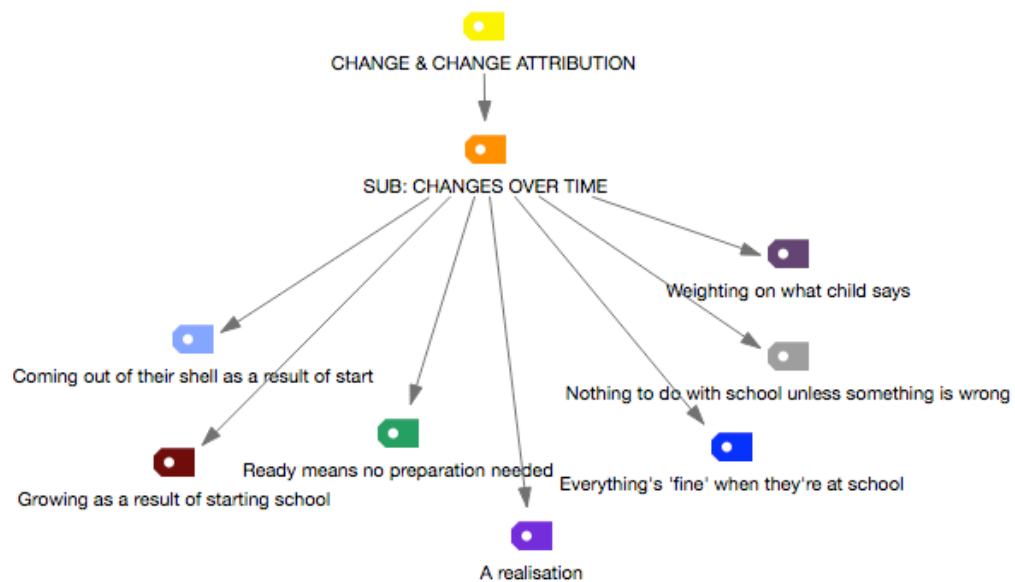


Figure 1.2 Thematic map for codes under the subtheme: 'Change over Time'

Participants used a 'before and after' frame when talking about the impact on their child of starting school. When reflecting on their child's readiness to start school, participants spoke about preparation as something that was only needed if there was an identified problem:

"Coz she was ready. I think if she was worried or scared, I would have the need to prepare her...// Coz when he was younger (points to son), coming from a Nursery, they went to his old school. His new school I should say. And took pictures of his teachers to show him, where he was going. Coz he didn't really like too much change when he was little. And they prepared a book for him. And they showed him, um, where he was going, what he was going to do, where he was going to have his lunch and who was the lunch lady. And, that helped him. So I think if Oreyah needed to be ready, then that would be a good thing," (Jessica, line 91)

Participants reflected on the period of time leading up to, and the point at which their children made the transition to formal school. Their descriptions of thought processes and their emotional states related to a dawning realisation that their child was growing up. The following extract from Alex suggests that a sense of loss was associated with this period of time:

"For me. (sigh) it's a realization that they're growing up. In all fairness [wavering voice] Yeh, so. I mean. For me, it's kind of like, 'oh my god, you know like, they're not babies. I don't have any little, little ones.' But yeh, but. I'm quite happy where I am at the moment," (Alex, line 86)

“Um, yeh it was quite, quite, not emotional, where I’d be getting upset, obviously. But kind of you know, in you know, when you lay there at night, ‘oh god. That’s it. This is real school now,” (Alex, line 94)

Participants also shared positive, hopeful observations they had made of their children, which they attributed to being a direct result of starting school:

“Um, but then she automatically got her place in Reception. And, she’s just been growing ever since,” (Jessica, line 7)

“But, yeh he’s kinda of er, he is coming out of his shell a little bit now. He’s definitely er, you know talking to the teachers more...” (Michelle, line 53)

Participants placed significant weighting on what their child said about school and their school experience, as a means of working out whether or not things were going well for their children in school. It seemed since they were not able to be present, this was an important way of gaining knowledge and insight:

“...as long as I know he’s happy, if I felt he was bullied, or he was coming home sayin’ things to me like ‘oh the teacher ignored me when I was tryin’ to tell her that I needed the toilet’ or this or that and things like that, then I would be very over protective like that,” (Michelle, line 37)

“And they’re coming home to you in the evening and they can tell you what’s happened for the day. So, you know, you just seem to be alright about it,” (Michelle, line 45)

“And she comes home and says, ‘Mum, my friends did this and this today’. It makes me more at ease. Which is a lot better,” (Jessica, line 38)

In the following extract Alex talks about how much more difficult it was to know how her daughter was settling in throughout her preschool experiences in her preverbal stage:

“So to me, I kind of, was like, oh what’s going on like, less likely to talk so much. When they’re, when they’re only two and a half, whereas as they get to three they start to tell you a little bit more about their day,” (Alex, line 74)

In addition to what their children told them, participants were also reassured that ‘everything is

fine' by comments made by class teachers regarding their child's development. The following extracts show how participants were reassured by staff with regards to their child's ability to settle post separation:

"I could come in and speak about it to the teacher. Um, there and then. But, um. But I know that I would, can leave her there and she'd be absolutely fine," (Alex, line 139)

"...when I came back, it, they said, 'oh no he's been alright, he's been alright,'" (Michelle, line 7)

4.3.2 Explanatory-models: Teachers, Facilitators & Barriers

A thematic map is provided in Figure 1.3 to illustrate the relationship between the subtheme 'explanatory-models' and the codes, under the 'change and change attribution' theme.

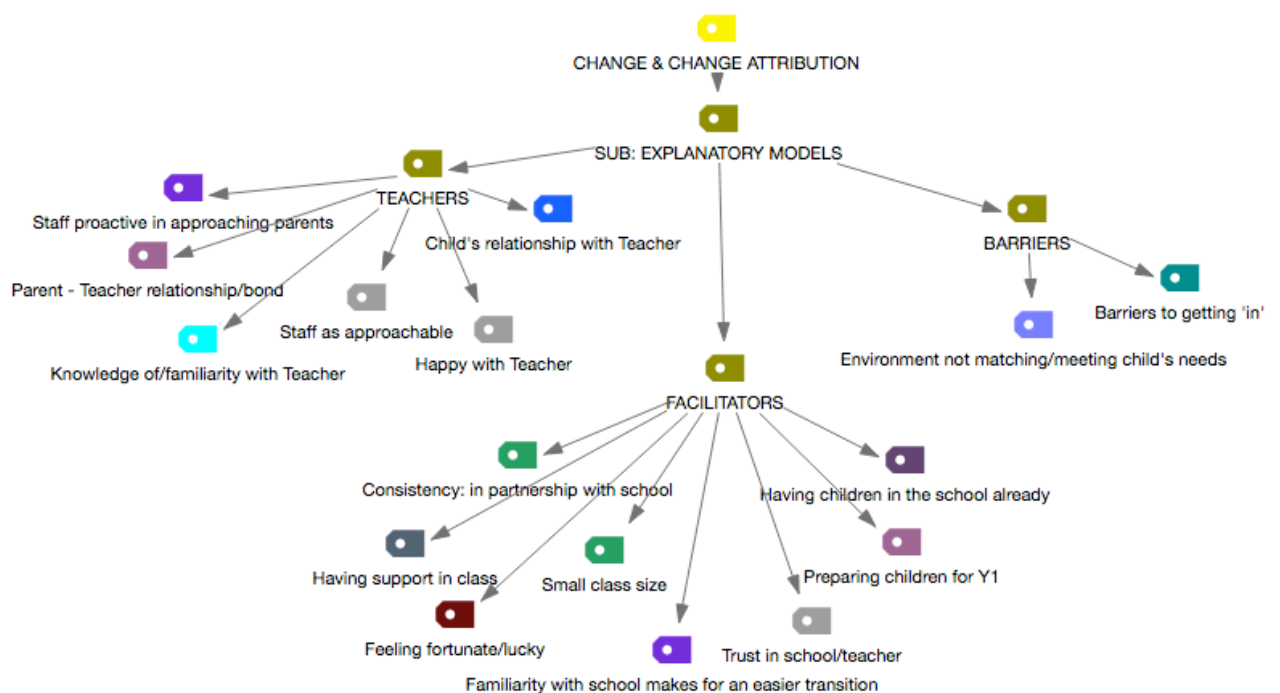


Figure 1.3 Thematic map for codes under the subtheme: 'Explanatory Models'

When reflecting on the transition experience, and the changes they noted in their children, participants drew upon explanatory models as a way of making sense and attributing causality. Participants spoke explicitly about factors relating specifically to the school itself that they regarded as either facilitators or barriers in the transition process. This resulted in three strands of the subtheme: ‘Teachers’, ‘Facilitators’, and ‘Barriers’.

4.3.2.1 Teachers

Participants spoke about, to varying degrees, the staff and teachers, in how they shaped the transition experience. Feeling happy or content with the class teacher was prioritised in participants’ narratives, and in some ways superseded other school-based factors:

“...it weren’t really a big deal to me. Coz, it’s just goin’ up a class. I think, as long as he’s got a nice teacher. That, you know, he feels he can, you know, he feels he can go to, you know I mean, then, you know, it’s not really a problem,” (Michelle, line 77)

Participants reflected positively on their child’s relationship with the class teacher. Their accounts suggested they were put at ease by this, and regarded it as confirmation that their child had made a successful transition.

“...They had a good bond I think it was, and a good friendship as well as a teacher-student relationship, and I think he was good for her. I think I got attached to him!” (Jessica, line 55)

“...he really likes them [teachers]. He loves his teachers. Or he has done so far. So he went from [teacher’s name] in Reception, and he loved [her], he always wanted to take her things and show her things, and, er, get her a little present...//And then he had to go to this, this new teacher. Which he’s in now....//But she was really nice, so he seemed to be alright,” (Michelle, line 70)

I noted the following reflections in my research diary:

Reflexive field note
(noted during interviews and then elaborated upon)

As she speaks about the relationship with class teacher, she turns and smiles. This was specifically when reflecting on her child's fondness for the class teacher. There was a sense of warmth, and I noticed myself smiling back, enjoying the moment with her.

At this point I'm aware of a propensity within myself to project my personal experiences into the interview space. I'm reminded of the emotional experience of being a teacher, who also enjoyed these same bonds that are being spoken about in such a precious way.

Figure 1.4 A Research Diary Extract

Furthermore, participants discussed their own relationship and bond with the class teacher.

Jessica was particularly explicit in the importance of her relationship with her child's teacher:

"For me, the parent-teacher relationship, like, so I'll come in, they'll have targets for Oreyah, I'll have the targets at home so we can work together, so it's consistent – what she does here, she does at home. So... I really want her to catch up. Maybe she's not going to catch up as fast but I don't want her to fall behind or... lose what she has learnt. So yeh. I've, like, I've done it with all the children anyway, teacher-relationship-bond," (Jessica, line 422)

Alex's satisfaction with the staff was derived from her observations of them as friendly and approachable. Alex seemed to experience this as reassuring:

"...they're friendly...so, you know, even if you're sitting in to, to the breakfast club, you know, and they see them, they're like, hello Jamie! And I like that," (Alex, line 450)

"...So I was pretty lucky that the teachers would approach me or I would approach them if there was anything," (Alex, line 139)

Jessica characterised this further through her observations of staff as respectful and understanding of children's individual needs:

"They're helpful. The staff here are friendly. The teachers are good. If the children want to say

something, then they do listen. Um, and when they need her to listen to them. They approach them properly, and, they're good with the children.

Researcher: "...when you say the teachers are good. What does that mean to you?"

"They've. There's a level of understanding. In the child and in the teacher. It's not, you're the teacher, you do this, you do that. Coz I'm the teacher. There's a level of respect between both them. If that makes sense," (Jessica, line 125)

The narratives shared by participants suggested that having prior knowledge of, or familiarity with, the class teacher before their child started school, was important and helpful in the transition process. Although participants made suggestions that this was helpful for their children, my interpretation was that it was also important to them, reinforced by the possessive language used:

"...[teacher], who Jamie's got this year, actually had [older child] for three years, it was only last year she had a break and went with another class. And then I'm, I'm very lucky, this is gonna be my fourth year of having the same teacher," (Alex, line 122)

"Yeh that helps. They always say each child, moving up to the next classroom, they show them their teacher. It really prepares them. Coz I know, before who we knew who we were getting, we never went in and saw, the teacher," (Jessica, line 107)

4.3.2.2 Facilitators

As with staff, participants spoke about a sense of familiarity with the school in general as supportive in the transition process. For each of them, their older children had previously made the same transition, or were currently attending the same primary school. In addition, Alex and Michelle had attended the same school as children. This was important to participants in helping them to feel secure in their choice to send their child, and allowed them to feel that they could trust the school:

"...I used to go to this school, um, so I'm quite familiar with the school, and you know, I had a good experience here so....I was quite trustworthy to bring him here. Um. It, it went well really," (Michelle, line 5)

“But I think I would’ve thought about it a lot more had I not had siblings because I don’t think she would’ve started in the April, that was just purely me coming to play group and being so... um, because I knew how stressed sh- like, how stressful it was, her being at the child minder, I kept coming in saying, um, is there going to be any places in April,” (Alex, line 517)

Participants expressed a sense of feeling lucky. They shared how having smaller than usual class sizes in Reception, and therefore increased support through higher child:adult ratios, was facilitative in the first year of school:

“But to be honest. Here, they did a fantastic job. I was very fortunate, they only had 14-15 children in each, in the Reception. So, obviously, for the children, they got a lot more support. Um. When it come to phonics, when it come to focused things. Um. So I was really really really happy, um,” (Alex, line 102)

4.3.2.3 Barriers

Less attention was given to explicitly recounting the barriers to successful, positive transition experiences in the narratives presented by participants. However, for Jessica the difficulties experienced at this time had a more lasting impression, and were linked to her daughter’s special educational needs:

“I was trying to work out money as well, if we’re having to put him into breakfast club and after school club so I can do two – because I couldn’t go to two different schools, because I was actually looking for other schools, um, mainstream schools so that she could get in, because I didn’t think she would get in here,” (Jessica, line 516)

Furthermore, observations of the learning environment were a concern to participants creating a degree of anxiety during the transition period. The following extract demonstrates Jessica’s perception that there was a mismatch between the environment and her child’s needs:

“Because she was equivalent to a 2 year old still. But coming into an environment for a 3 to 4 year old, so she was still putting things in her mouth. Because that’s how she was still learning, through mouth and touch. So I was scared that her safety in that way, may be a concern and stuff,” (Jessica, line 5)

4.4 Theme 2: Within-child Factors

A thematic map is provided in Figure 2.1 to illustrate the relationship between the theme of ‘within-child factors’ and its subthemes.

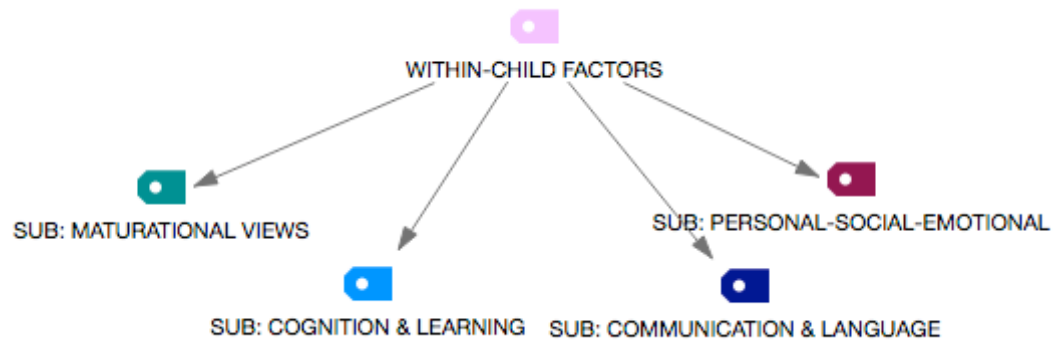


Figure 2.1 Thematic map for the theme: ‘Within-Child Factors’

In talking about their child’s readiness for school, participants spoke about a number of within-child skills or attributes that they perceived as important. These were grouped into four subthemes, ‘Personal, Social, Emotional’, ‘Communication and Language’, ‘Cognition and Learning’, and ‘Maturational Views’.

4.4.1 Personal, Social, Emotional

A thematic map is provided in Figure 2.2 to illustrate the relationship between the subtheme ‘personal, social, emotional’ and the codes, under the ‘within-child factors’ theme.

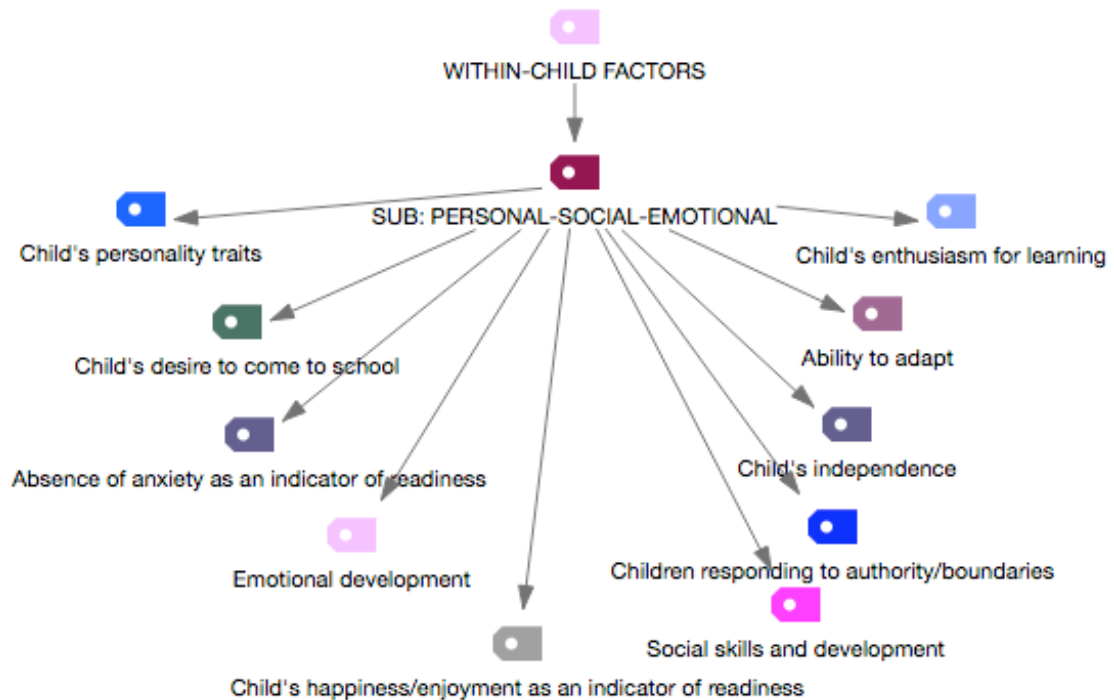


Figure 2.2 Thematic map for codes under the subtheme: 'Personal-Social-Emotional'

Participants shared some seemingly fixed ideas regarding their child's abilities, which was evident in how they attributed difficulties to personality factors. Participants felt that aspects of their child's personality equipped them for school, and meant they were school-ready. In addition, participants had drawn conclusions that difficulties experienced at transition were an inherent part of their child's personality:

"She doesn't get that... no, they don't want to cuddle, they don't want to play. And I know kids get like that, they get upset, but with her she just continues and then doesn't – until they – understand and she'll come back really upset... and then go back and try again [laugh]...//And that's – I know – that's her personality at the same time as well," (Jessica, line 260)

"He's very protective, he is protective of me, he's protective of his sister. I don't know whether that's just something in his personality..." (Michelle, line 43)

Participants regarded their child's attitude towards attending school, prior to and following the

transition, as an indicator of their readiness, as well as confirmation of a successful transition:

“...she didn’t, she didn’t have hours or prolonged time of saying I don’t want to go to school. It was never a case of that,” (Alex, line 72)

“She just, was happy. She was ready (laughs). Um, no anxiety. She was ready to learn,” (Jessica, line 11)

As I had met Michelle when she was dropping her son off in the classroom prior to our interview, she drew upon my observation as evidence that he was happy to go to school:

“You seen, he was quite happy to go in and go off,” (Michelle, line 143)

In some ways, the emphasis participants’ placed on their child’s enthusiasm seemed to be in service of convincing themselves that everything was in fact ‘ok’:

“Coz a lot of the children go to school full time when they’re 4 and a half, or something, but he went when he was 3. But ya know, it’s been good for him. Coz he, he really loves [short pause] to come now,” (Michelle, line 19)

Participants further justified these views by commenting on the absence of any concerns or anxiety in their children. Participants seemed to equate an absence of worry or anxiety with school readiness:

“You know, he doesn’t come home and say, he doesn’t come home with a worry. You know some kids come home and they might go in their room and you say, what’s the matter with you, he’s acting very strange. I would then, come and speak to the teacher. You know and say. I’m a bit worried about him. But, I haven’t really had any problems. He’s been, he’s alright,” (Michelle, line 70)

Participants spoke extensively about factors related to their child's emotional development. In particular, they shared their views regarding the emotional difficulties experienced by their children during the transition. Alex seemed to have a clear sense that her daughter needed to attend school in order to overcome the emotional difficulties, which were again viewed as inherent:

"But in regards to her, emotionally, um I'm not doing her no favours by keeping her at home," (Alex, line 48)

"It does kind of – when you go away you do kind of think, oh, like, oh, well... it is good to know whether it's right for children or whether they're emotionally ready to start," (Alex, line 607)

Participants focused on children's social development and interactions with others throughout. In particular, an anxiety about children not being where they should be, dominated their views regarding this aspect of development. For example, Michelle was preoccupied with her son's ability to share as being a significant problem, which she continued to speak about throughout the two interviews:

"The only thing I'd say about him is he's not very good at sharing. And I always thought, that when he came to Nursery, here, he would get out of that. Because my daughter got out of it, because she came to the school, I don't know she just got out of it, but, he still has a problem with sharing," (Michelle, line 43)

Whereas Jessica was concerned by the noticeable gap she perceived between her daughter and other children, fearing that it would only widen with age:

"As you get older you need to learn to interact with other people. Different abilities, different...um.... personalities. So interacting and learning, how people are, is a skill I think she needs to learn. But if she's not mixing with people, then she's not really gonna, she might struggle a bit," (Jessica, line 85)

Independence was a skill, in various capacities, that participants wanted to see in their children, and associated with readiness or being 'where they should be'. For Alex, independence related more to academic tasks:

“Well to be honest, she’s able to read and write independently, um. Anything you put in front of her she’s able to read and write,” (Alex, line 215)

Whereas for Jessica, independence was used more broadly, impacting upon a wider range of skills and with implications for her child’s overall well-being:

“It’s helped her. She is a independent child but... I guess because I, I do help her a bit more because she still can’t do things like her buttons and things like that, [inaudible] she couldn’t be in the playground or anything like that, but now she can. It’s just nice to see that, yeh, she’s not... going backwards, she’s always... progressing, going forward. Maybe at a slow pace, but she is progressing and that makes me happy...” (Jessica, line 542)

Michelle seemed to be working hard to instil independence in her child. She spoke about enabling her son to be independent with regards to toileting, in line with imposed expectations:

“I did get him out of nappies during the day at the time when he was starting... starting – yeh because that was it, they said he’s got to be out of nappies if he comes to nursery so I managed to get him out of nappies, um... so he was kind of on the level of everyone else really, apart from his speech,” (Michelle, line 224)

4.4.2 Communication & Language

A thematic map is provided in Figure 2.3 to illustrate the relationship between the subtheme ‘communication and language’ and the codes, under the ‘within-child factors’ theme.

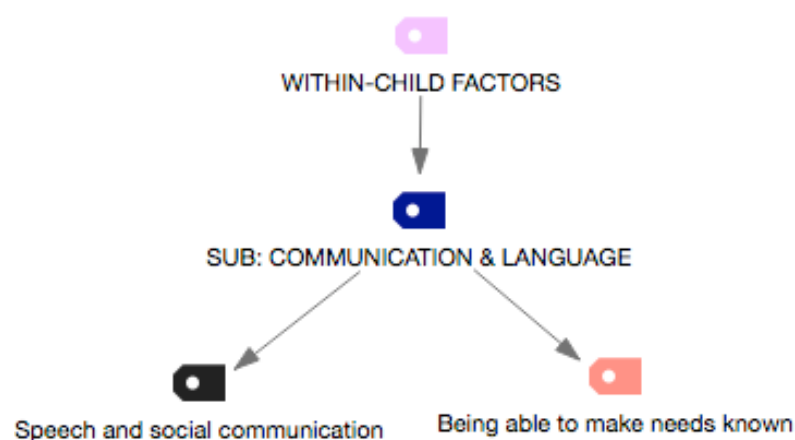


Figure 2.3 Thematic map for codes under the subtheme: ‘Communication & Language’

Participants spoke about their child’s speech, and their ability to communicate with others when entering the school environment. It seemed both that speech was a readiness-related concern, but also something that improved as a result of starting school:

“Because sometimes her speech and, her speech is getting a lot better but... her communication with them,” (Jessica, line 294)

“And he weren’t speakin’ that good. So I was gettin’ worried about that and I went to the speech therapist, I think, and er they said, you know, he should be alright, you know. When he starts school, when they start mixing with other children, they start learnin’ more. Coz I did used to talk to him a lot. But um. Yeh he was a bit slow on speakin’,” (Michelle, line 27)

Michelle worried about her child not being able to make his needs known in school:

“...So, I was alright then. Coz you know it’s when you think that they can’t speak, or, what I was more concerned about when he started here, was that he wouldn’t ask to go to the toilet. [Pause] And I was thinking, so when I came, I had to make sure he knew exactly where things were, so he would go by he’s self,” (Michelle, line 31)

4.4.3 Cognition & Learning

A thematic map is provided in Figure 2.4 to illustrate the relationship between the subtheme ‘cognition and learning’ and the codes, under the ‘within-child factors’ theme.

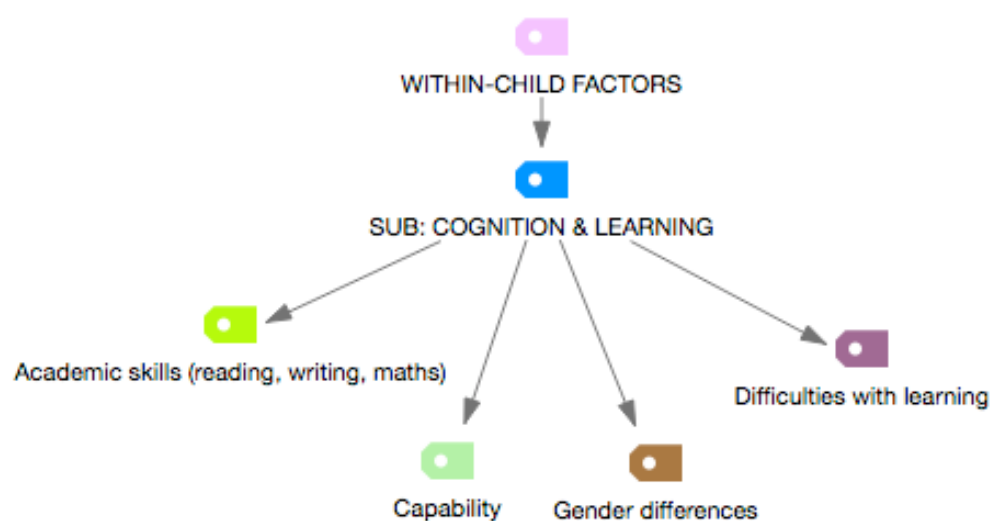


Figure 2.4 Thematic map for codes under the subtheme: ‘Cognition & Learning’

Participants made a number of comments about children's learning, which related specifically to aspects typically regarded as more formal and academic. All participants wanted their children to be engaging in more formal learning, and seemed to be relieved when there were observable gains in this area of learning and development:

"I had his parents evening and I said, I am a bit worried about him, I said he he is not, he doesn't wanna sit and read as much as she does, but lately he's been getting his pen and doin a lot of writing. Like in the morning, before school, he wants to get the paper and he wants to write a letter to his friend," (Michelle, line 53)

"They do do that in Reception but then they have... curriculum based stuff. I know they do have that in nursery but it's... it's play, but then there's... sit down time where you actually learn, and writing and stuff like that," (Jessica, line 482)

Participants were concerned by difficulties they perceived their children to have with regards to learning, and wanted to change or help the situation. Their concerns related to their child's capability to learn and improve:

"or he can't get it. Oh he gets embarrassed. Um... but you know, I don't know, maybe he might grow out of it, you know, so. You know, but I am looking in- I'm always looking into, uh, you know, things that might be able to help the wi- i- if they need help, so," (Michelle, line 220)

"On her part. Like. For me, I just still worry, is she, can she do it, can she not do it. She, it doesn't seemed to bother her, at all [laughs]. She be like [laughs] 'yeah I'm going'. She's very independent. On her own," (Jessica, line 18)

Michelle's concerns about her son showing less interest in formal learning activities, such as writing, were attributed to gender differences:

"But, at home, he he he don't wanna do much work. He wants to play all the time. Dunno whether that's just a boy thing, I don't know. But, he's not, he d...yeh, it's hard coz I don't know really sometimes what to even, pick out to do. I mean I go to the pound shop sometimes and get those books where you can do the maths, the extra maths, and we've started to do the times tables a bit. But when he gets it's right he's like 'uughhh I don't wanna hear it now!'" (Michelle, line 57)

4.4.4 Maturation views

A thematic map is provided in Figure 2.5 to illustrate the relationship between the subtheme ‘maturation views’ and the codes, under the ‘within-child factors’ theme.

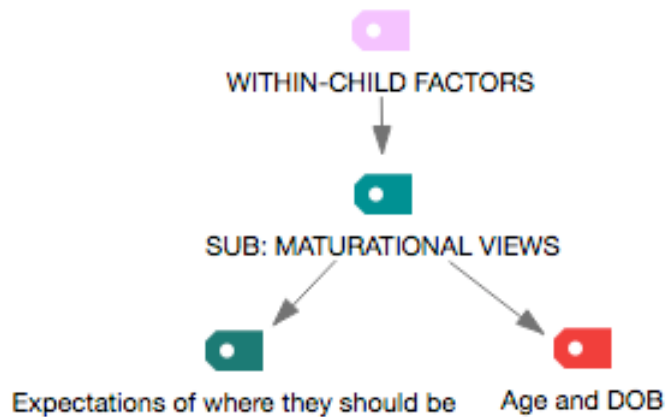


Figure 2.5 Thematic map for codes under the subtheme: ‘Maturation Views’

Participants shared views around their child’s readiness for school that related to the process of growing up, their child’s age, and how they compared to others with regards to age related expectations. They made a number of general references to age, such as how old children were when they began school, or that getting to a certain age was indicative of readiness:

“But, I don’t even know if he was ready to come here really. It was just something that I forced upon him. Because, at the age of 2 I just thought, well, ok we’ve been to all the playgroups now,” (Michelle, line 34)

“Yeh, just seeing how she’s grown. And with her end of year reports, she’s either come to age-equivalent or gone to two steps up from where she was. So she’s doing really good,” (Jessica, line 155)

Participants made some reference to the timing of making the first major transition. Michelle reflected on the start being ‘early’ for her child:

“I know that when they get to a certain age you’ve gotta let go a little bit anyway. So, there’s no point, you know, havin’ ‘em and thinking, ‘oh’, I want what’s best for him. So if it means him going to nursery early,” (Michelle, line 27)

Alex in particular spoke about the impact of the month in which a child is born, and how much time they are then able to spend in Nursery, which she felt had a long-lasting impact:

“I think – they – children... will benefit more by coming to – just socially – will benefit more by going to a nursery...//um, for a longer period of time than... you know, and I don’t know whether that comes in with the age thing of having this second child who was an August birthday, and he didn’t go into that setting and he – alth- yeh he did a, a year at nursery, um, but he didn’t have that little bit extra at nursery, and he out of all my children, even now, struggles,” (Alex, line 531)

Participants shared their concerns that their children should be meeting certain preconceived expectations, but that these were unknown to them as parents:

“All I worry about is that, if they’re not learnin’, or he’s not comin up to scratch. Which, you know, I don’t really know what they’re supposed to be, when, unless the teacher’s tell me sort of thing,” (Michelle, line 77)

“Coz I can see things, but as a professional, what she needs to know in school and where she should be at, I don’t know everything,” (Jessica, line 135)

4.5 Theme 3: Motherhood & Identity

A thematic map is provided in Figure 3.1 to illustrate the relationship between the theme of ‘motherhood and identity’ and its subthemes.

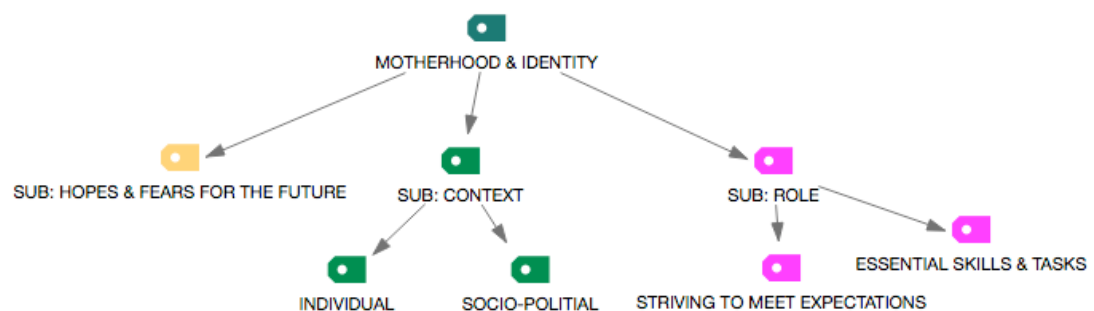


Figure 3.1 Thematic map for the theme: ‘Motherhood & Identity’

When talking about their child’s transition to school, participants’ narratives were littered with references to their constructions of motherhood, and how they had taken up various associated roles as a mother, parent and caregiver. Some insight was given to a life separate from their children, and the roles they associated with this. A range of inter-related factors, including their personal histories, past and current, and their socio-political position and context influenced their accounts. A preoccupation with the future appeared to hang over all participants, in various forms. These were grouped into the following subthemes: ‘Hopes and fears for the future’, ‘Context: Individual’, ‘Context: Socio-political’, ‘Role: Essential skills and tasks’, and ‘Role: Striving to meet expectations’.

4.5.1 Hopes & Fears for the Future

A thematic map is provided in Figure 3.2 to illustrate the relationship between the subtheme ‘hopes and fears for the future’ and the codes, under the ‘motherhood and identity’ theme.

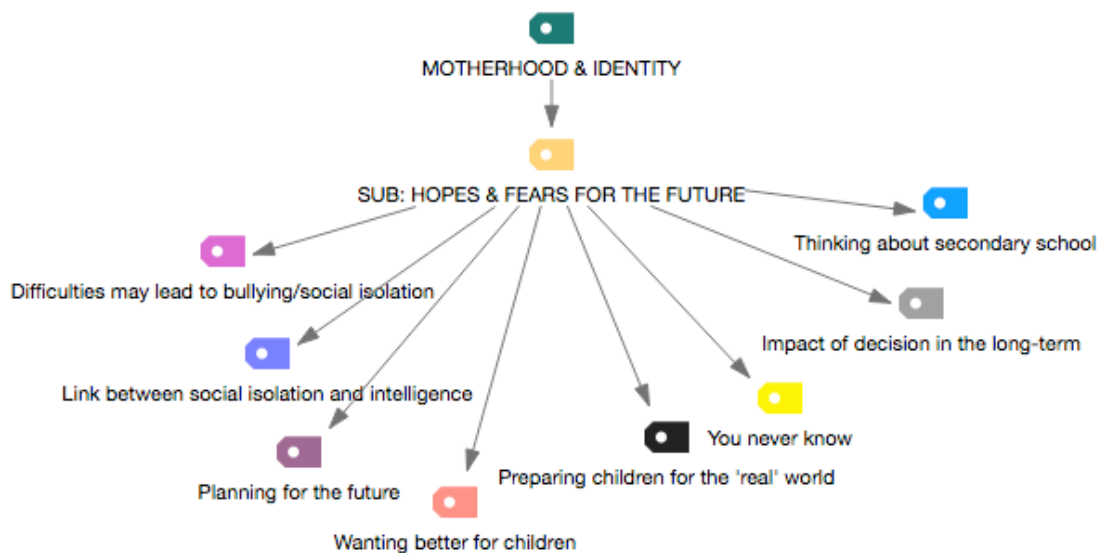


Figure 3.2 Thematic map for codes under the subtheme: ‘Hopes & Fears for the Future’

Participants worried about how problems they identified in their children at transition could become more problematic with age and as they progress through the education system. There was a focus on their children attending secondary school, and an anticipation that problems would manifest or grow at that point:

“but I – you know, it’s – it’s things that sort of, sort of happen, I haven’t had, I – I – I’m expecting to get it all in secondary school if I’m honest,” (Michelle, line 169)

“So that’s my worry, I think. And more so when she goes secondary school as well, as she starts getting older and they start getting cliquey and no one wants to be friends, I think that’s my worry,” (Jessica, line 290)

For Alex, concerns related more to choosing the right school for her children. She linked this to her previous experiences, with her older children, and reflected on a shift in her thinking:

“I’m just thinking, as long as they’re happy, I’ll worry about that when they get to year...//five and six,” (Alex, line 284)

Participants had an idea that the beginning of school, and how they supported their children at home, related to how equipped they would be for later life. References made to the ‘real world’ seemed to relate to a life beyond the home and their relationship:

“I think she needed to come to Nursery to, to socially, um, be ready for the real world,” (Alex, line 50)

“Coz she, the lady said it’s very good for communicating, coz if you’re all separated, it helps, she said it helps them to talk to people out in the real world and all this stuff,” (Michelle, line 61)

Participants’ anticipation of problems becoming more severe related mostly to their social status and relationships with peers:

“But – I’ve already thought about things and I’ve said, you know, because I went through bullying and stuff I said, oh, you know, maybe I’ll take her to school and collect her and things like that, and then part of me says, no, you’ve got to let her have – but, you know, it is difficult being a parent!” (Michelle, line 214)

“I do worry about her a lot. And now she’s getting older it’s made me think, well, what’s going to happen in secondary school when she gets there, and... I know that’s still a while away but... I’m starting to think more...//she’s in there now and girls can be a bit... catty... and boys and how it is and... I think that’s what’s made me start thinking about that. I shouldn’t because it’s still a while away, times change and things change,” (Jessica, line 602)

Jessica was particularly concerned that problems arising in secondary school could have a lasting and significant impact on her daughter’s personality:

“It bothers me, but then it doesn’t because it doesn’t bother her, she doesn’t know what they’re doing. But I see it so then I think oh, it’s ok right now because she’s not understanding, so I do try and talk to her. But then when she does start understanding will it start hurting her feelings, make her not be that bubbly person, and caring, that she is,” (Jessica, line 338)

Ultimately, participants hoped their children would have a better experience of school than they had. They shared an awareness of how their own anxieties could be ‘put on’ their children:

“I try not to get involved, so they was, they went off... but I don’t like to put my insecurities onto them,” (Jessica, line 356)

“Well, I’m not – I sh- I don’t really like to project, but I’m saying, you know, when I was in primary school I didn’t have any problems, it was when I started secondary school, that’s when, you know, all this peer pressure starts – whereas in primary it’s – it’s more fun, you know, it’s – it’s not – I never had any trouble in primary school,” (Michelle, line 170)

4.5.2 Context; ‘Individual’ & ‘Socio-political’

A thematic map is provided in Figure 3.3 to illustrate the relationship between the subtheme ‘context’ and the codes, under the ‘motherhood and identity’ theme.

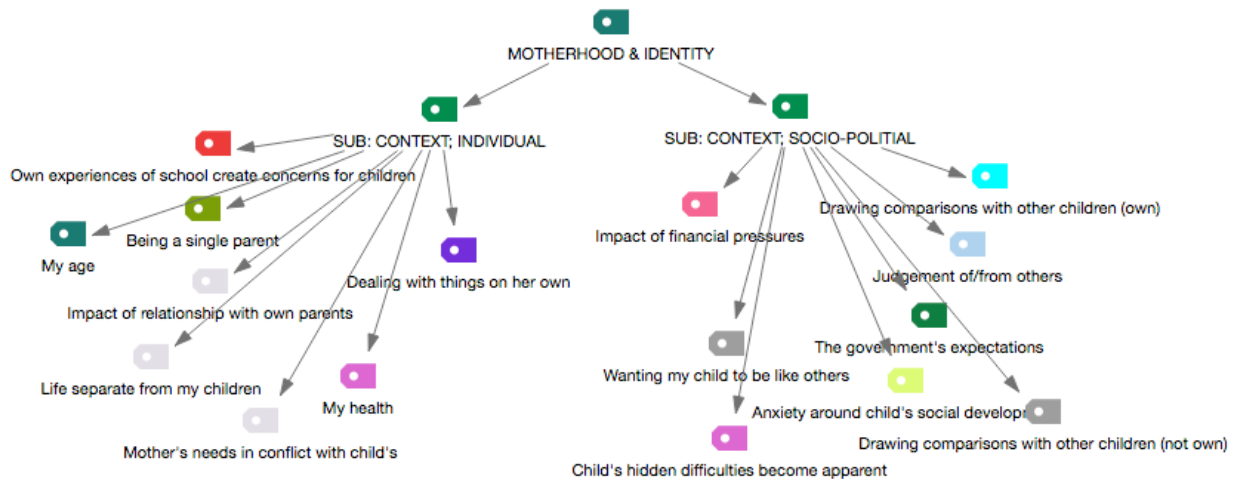


Figure 3.3 Thematic map for codes under the subtheme: 'Context'

Participants spoke about a range of personal, individual, and wider social or political factors that had an impact on how they constructed and took up their various roles. This resulted in two strands of the subtheme: 'Individual', and 'Socio-Political'.

4.5.2.1 Context: Individual

Participants seemed aware that their past had an impact on their approach to parenting, as well as how they thought about school. They talked about their own experiences of being in school, particularly with regards to friendships and relationships:

“Just fitting in, I don’t know, coz maybe I have issues from school, where I didn’t really associate with people, or have friends. So I don’t want that for my children. [voice became more timid] If that makes sense....so I worry about that. Fitting in, and making sure you have friends. [volume increased] I know that’s not important. That’s not why you come to school, but, it’s still not nice if she comes home saying, ‘I was by myself today’, I don’t...I want her to play and have fun...//I was just more of a loner. Didn’t really have friends to play with, out in the playground, that’s sort of thing. But I don’t...yeh [laughs uncomfortably])...//Yeh. Yeh. It wasn’t like bullying, but everyone had their groups. And I didn’t really have one. So. I think that’s the same with secondary school. It wasn’t until my Mum died. That’s when I started interacting more. With other people...” (Jessica, line 77)

Furthermore, Michelle, on a number of occasions, alluded to how her upbringing and experience of parenting was far from what she wanted for her children:

“Coz I weren’t taught a lot of good things when I was growing up with my Dad. But I’ve tried to do a lot different with my kids. They don’t live in fear, certainly,” (Michelle, line 61)

However, during the process of interviewing, on reflection, Michelle came to realise that in some ways she had fallen into similar patterns as those she had felt were an unhelpful part of being parented:

“they’ve got Sky in their rooms, she’s got, my daughters got an iPhone, an Apple Mac. You know, I try to give ‘em everything, but sometimes I think, that’s one thing that my family used to do to me, they used to try and buy me things, rather than actually spend a lot of time with me,” (Michelle, line 61)

Overwhelmingly, participants gave a strong sense that they had to deal with, and manage a whole range of challenges associated with supporting their child to begin school. Through their narratives they gave a sense of being alone, regardless of relationships they had:

“Nah, he didn’t really say much about it to be honest,” (Alex, line 368 in talking about her partner’s response to her child’s difficulties with separation)

“oh my God I did two years of crying every single day...” (Alex, line 452)

Both Jessica and Michelle had shared that they were single parents. For Michelle, there was an explicit link between managing difficulties alone and being a single parent. This felt significant in her narrative, as it related to how she felt others viewed her:

“So it is hard being a single parent. Even though, I’ve got my Mum, but my Mum don’t really, she just does the washing for us. So that takes a little bit off of it. So she does the washing coz she’s indoors all day. But she don’t really sit down and, and do any reading with ‘em. She’s got her telly on all day, and so when, when, and that’s the biggest room in the house,” (Michelle, line 63)

“Well... see this is the thing, it is hard for mums but you do have to be strong ...//if you’re weak the kids will walk over you, the men will walk over you, and that is just how it is in life. You’ve

got to be strong,” (Michelle, line 289)

There was a strong sense in the narratives presented by participants that this was an overwhelming time, with a lot to manage, which was compounded by the sense of feeling alone with everything:

“...Trying to juggle work, trying to juggle kids, trying to juggle everything. And there’s lots more stresses now in life,” (Alex, line 489)

In speaking about themselves in the context of supporting their child to start school, participants spoke, to varying degrees, about aspects of their life that were separate from their children. Some of these related to a past life they used to have:

“...see when I had Hattie, I had more money. So I used to pay for her to go private Nursery. I used to pay for her to go private Nursery in the gym when I used to go to the gym every morning, before I got unwell,” (Michelle, line 49)

Participants also shared reflections on the parts of their life they gained back as a result of their child starting school:

“For me, it’s kind of like, ‘oh my god, you know like, they’re not babies. I don’t have any little, little ones.’ But yeh, but. I’m quite happy where I am at the moment. (laughs)”

Researcher: “You’re happy where you are.”

“Yeah I don’t really need any babies, I’m not yeh. For me, it’s not yeh. I’m happy that, we’re like, where I am. I’m now working and stuff, which obviously I wasn’t able to do when Jamie was in Nursery. Um. Or so much with a childminder. As much. But yeh,” (Alex, line 86)

Participants discussed aspects of themselves, and their own difficulties, in the context of their child’s transition to school. They presented their accounts as if their needs were in conflict with their child’s. The following extract from Michelle’s interview refers to issues related to her health, and managing her child’s needs alongside earning an income:

“Before I had my own two children I was lookin’ after everyone else’s and you know I do love children but, because I’m ill and I get tired...it’s very hard, because they want me to be really

fun and it's like, I feel, I feel quite drained after going, seeing, see the thing is with me, I help a lot of people and that takes your energy," (Michelle, line 59)

4.5.2.2 Context: Socio-Political

Participants spoke about expectations held of them as parents, imposed by wider social and political systems. They seemed to have been stripped of power or authority, presenting a sense that someone else, the government, knows best:

"...I just think sometimes, you know, there's rules in life, these are the government's rules, they set out these rules and, you know, you – you kind of have to follow them. And if, if they think going to school at three and being separated from their parent at three is ok and that they're learning, I mean... I'm not going to argue with that," (Michelle, line 271)

"Some of her maths and some of her English, she was behind. And she's caught up. To age equivalent. Of what the government I think it says," (Jessica, line 157)

Michelle added that she felt she had forced her child to enter education too early, but because the government had funded places for two year olds, she felt they must know better than she did:

"Well, if they never told me that there was this government, putting this new thing for 2 year olds. I probably would have kept him with me for that extra year," (Michelle, line 48)

As one might expect, given the nature of the participant group, participants shared how the impact of financial constraints, which included making sacrifices, added to their cognitive load at the point of transition:

"I was trying to work out money as well, if we're having to put him into breakfast club and after school club so I can do two – because I couldn't go to two different schools, because I was actually looking for other schools, um, mainstream schools so that she could get in, because I didn't think she would get in here," (Jessica, line 516)

"You know it's very hard for single parents. People don't think it is. But it is. I mean don't get me wrong, I do think the government gives you enough money to live on. Which a lot of single parents don't think they do. But, I do. It's just that some people are extravagant, and they wanna smoke and they wanna drink and do this that and the other. But I don't do that, because if I did do that, my kids would hardly have anything. So...I give up all of that, 7 years ago. [pause] Um. And so, that's why they have all the things that they have. But you know, as a parent you do have to go without," (Michelle, line 65)

Participants shared a strong sense of wanting their children to fit in or be like others, and therefore constantly drew comparisons with other children, including their older children:

“But, I don’t know, he was just different to my daughter. She would just go off and play, and, she wouldn’t really worry where I am too much. But he was quite clingy. But I always used to do the same with her as with him really, I used to say...if I was going anywhere I’d say, ‘Alright I’m just going for five minutes, and I’ll be back in five minutes.’ [Breath in] Umm...but yeh, he was, he just, he, he he did not wanna leave me at all,” (Michelle, line 7)

“Yeah. She is like them. But in a way she’s not, ‘coz she just like (pause) still she’s a bit babyish on certain things,” (Jessica, line 23)

In some ways, observations of and making comparisons with other children offered participants a sense of reassurance:

“I see these other kids throwing tantrums on the floor, kicking their legs and doing all this kind of stuff, you know,” (Michelle, line 118)

Participants presented accounts of feeling judged by others, and a fear that their child’s difficulties, which might have once been hidden, would be seen:

“...i- it is probably putting a bit of fear into them which, maybe, uh – uh – professionals don’t really agree on, but it works for my kids, because they do know how to behave. I take them anywhere, they don’t embarrass me,” (Michelle, line 118)

“Because I don’t see it, even when I’m at home, there’s no worry when we’re at home, we’re just all a family, it doesn’t show. But it’s that, when she comes into school or if we’re out... because even the other day she just burst out into song... just, but she didn’t know the words but she was just singing, laaa – and people were looking at her and everything. But she was just happy and they, people were judging and they’re like, why’s that girl doing that, why’s she doing that, and I’m thinking well she’s just happy, I just think what is the problem? And I didn’t stop her, I didn’t shut her up because she was just happy,” (Jessica, line 304)

4.5.3 Role; ‘Essential Skills and Tasks’ & ‘Striving to Meet Expectations’

A thematic map is provided in Figure 3.4 to illustrate the relationship between the subtheme ‘role’ and the codes, under the ‘motherhood and identity’ theme.

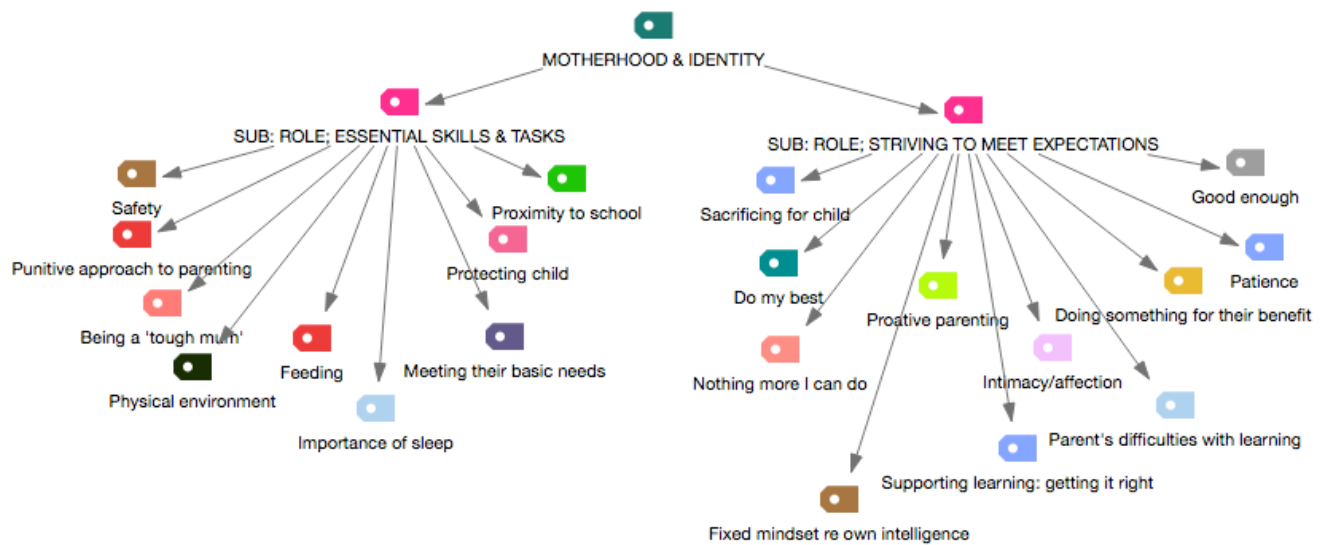


Figure 3.4 Thematic map for codes under the subtheme: 'Role'

The 'Context' subthemes linked to what participants said about the various roles they play. Participants talked about what they are able to offer their children, such as meeting more basic, primal needs, and the limits of what they could offer their children. It appeared that a distinction could be made between these two points, which coincided with the start of school. This resulted in two strands of the subtheme: 'Essential skills and tasks', and 'Striving to meet expectations'.

4.5.3.1 Role: Essential Skills & Tasks

Participants spoke about their role being predominantly related to meeting their child's more basic needs, including safety and protection, feeding and sleep:

"I didn't have, concerns where she would be worried to start, but my concerns was whether she was safe with her needs," (Jessica, line 3)

"...my children still had a 7 o'clock bed time, so, just they're ready for the next day. Personally, Jamie needs like 12 hours sleep. They all need 12 hour...well mine do have 12 hours sleep," (Alex, line 82)

The following extract illustrates where Michelle perceived the line to be between her role, what she could offer her child, and starting school:

“I think that children, when they get to the age they stop weeing the- they stop using nappies, they don’t need their dummy...//these are the government’s rules, they set out these rules and, you know, you – you kind of have to follow them. And if, if they think going to school at three and being separated from their parent at three is ok and that they’re learning, I mean... I’m not going to argue with that,” (Michelle, line 257)

Along with managing the demands discussed under the ‘Context’ subtheme, this seemed to have an impact on how participants took up their approach to parenting. They talked about needing to be strong or tough, which sometimes led to what seemed to be punitive parenting practices:

“...then when it’s time I say, get in that bed, if you get out of that bed you’re going to know about it! [laugh] Now, now people say oh, you know, they might not like that idea, but – it might sound like a threat or whatever, but – you know, they go in that room and they don’t come out, and they do go to sleep,” (Michelle, line 110)

“Um, I was quite upset to be honest. And then... then sometimes it would be, you know, if she was screaming I’d then become like, Jamie now stop, to the point of... not angry as in angry aggressive angry, just like, now Jamie stop,” (Alex, line 410)

4.5.3.2 Role: Striving to Meet Expectations

Other roles participants made reference to, seemed to extend beyond their expectations for motherhood. Participants communicated strongly that they had tried to do their best. Despite this, participants felt that what they could offer their children was sometimes not enough:

“So you know, there’s things that I’ve made changes to, that they’ve sort of taught me. Coz I weren’t taught a lot of good things when I was growing up with my Dad. But I’ve tried to do a lot different with my kids. They don’t live in fear, certainly. So you know I’ve tried to do the best I can and it is tiring, because even like when you try and do your best, they still want more,” (Michelle, line 61)

The participants gave a sense of reaching a point where what they could offer their child was no longer enough, which, again, coincided with their child’s entry into education:

“...she was at them stages where she should be, um and at home, there was nothing really more that I could be doing, by taking her to playgroups. Um, I think she needed to come to Nursery to, to socially, um, be ready for the real world,” (Alex, line 50)

Participants felt strongly that they wanted their children to go to school because they believed it was for their benefit. There was something in their narratives about ‘doing the right thing’. The following extract shows how Michelle felt that sending her child to Nursery early was in his best interests, but that the essential aspects of her role were still active:

“...if you are looking for their best interest these are the thin- it’s different, like I said, if I went to a nursery and he was screaming and he had a sore bum and he had cuts, there’s no way I’d take him, I’d be straight out there, what’s going on?” (Michelle, line 251)

An area in which participants strongly felt they were limited in their ability to support their child’s transition and experience of being in school, related to their own difficulties or anxieties with learning:

“But I don’t, I just find it very hard coz I never learnt much at school. And, and [pause] I did learn Maths, and you know English, but doing that homework that I don’t understand, it gets me, you know how I said my son grabs his head, it gets me frustrated. So I, I just, the little things with Harvey it’s alright, coz it’s simple things, but I can get quite frustrated, and then when I feel fru, I feel tired, it makes me tired when I feel frustrated,” (Michelle, line 61)

In supporting their children with the new forms of learning they were presented with in Reception, participants gave an impression of wanting to ‘get it right’:

“...because I’ve noticed that he doesn’t want to learn that much I’ve started to think, well, well what am I going to do about this? You know. Is there a maths class or some sort of class where I can – so I’m looking into that,” (Michelle, line 218)

“So it was just not th- the not knowing what was wrong and how we could help her. Now we’re doing... all the right things are in place for her now, so,” (Jessica, line 202)

Furthermore, for Michelle, the limits she perceived herself to have in supporting her child with learning were linked to fixed ideas around intelligence and ability. The following extract shows Michelle reflecting on being confronted by her child saying she was not very clever:

“And the thing is I haven’t got the ability – I’ve got to say that word, it is ability I’m sure – I haven’t got the ability to even want to get into it,” (Michelle, line 179)

4.6 Theme 4: Beliefs about School & Learning

A thematic map is provided in Figure 4.1 to illustrate the relationship between the theme of ‘beliefs about school and learning’ and its subthemes.

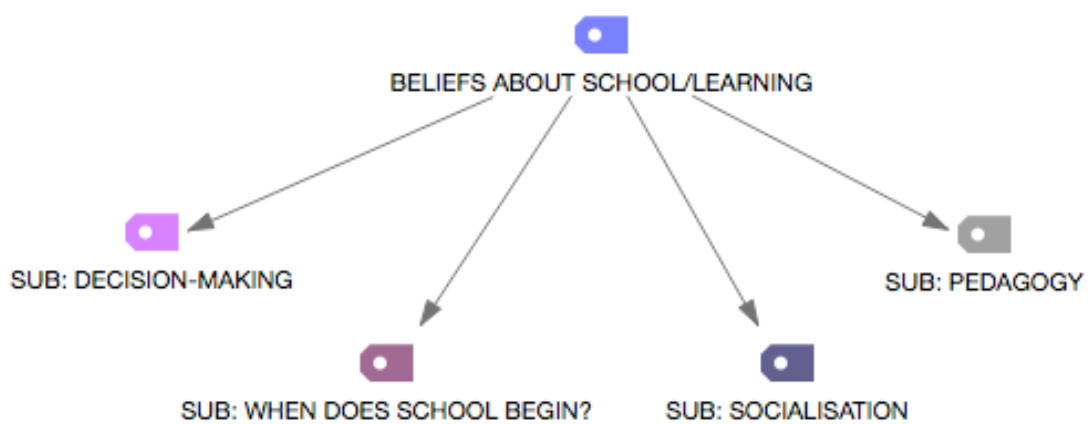


Figure 4.1 Thematic map for the theme: ‘Beliefs about School & Learning’

In talking about their experiences of their child starting school, participants spoke immediately about the first experience of transition. For all of them, this related to preschool experiences, including child-minders, private nurseries and state school nurseries. This related extensively to the first separation, and to their beliefs around why and what children go to school for, such as for socialisation. These were grouped into four subthemes: ‘Decision-making’, ‘When does school begin?’, ‘Socialisation’, and ‘Pedagogy’.

4.6.1 Decision-Making

A thematic map is provided in Figure 4.2 to illustrate the relationship between the subtheme

‘decision-making’ and the codes, under the ‘beliefs about school and learning’ theme.

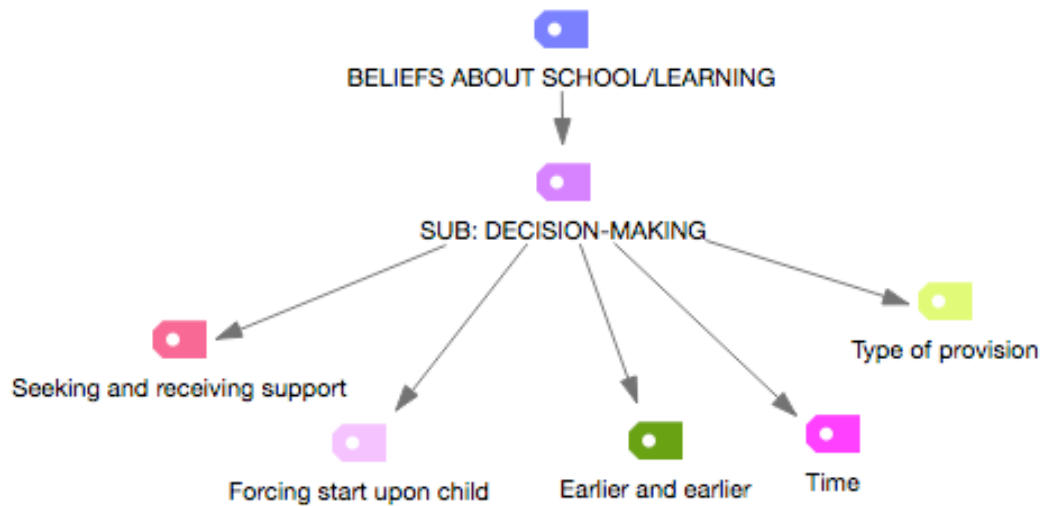


Figure 4.2 Thematic map for codes under the subtheme: ‘Decision-Making’

Participants spoke about the weight of their decisions prior to, and at school entry, with regards to the type of provision their child attended:

“But for Jamie, um, because she was very upset every day, it was a decision I was making whether, one, whether... I was want to see her upset every day or whether I was benefitting her by putting her into a child minder for her, for th-, for the long term,” (Alex, line 173)

Participants seemed to be searching for reassurance that they had made the right decision:

“It’s only just eased my anxieties, to show me, yeh it was the right decision. Coz I was told, maybe she might be better off in a school of disabilities. And I was like, no. I’ve always been told she should come to mainstream school. And it’s just reassuring now, that I did make the right decision. Going through that year, to try and get her into this school with her brothers and other children that are, um, at the ability of their age, and just seeing her learn from them, and grow. It just reassures me. I did do the right thing,” (Jessica, line 145)

4.6.2 When does School Begin?

A thematic map is provided in Figure 4.3 to illustrate the relationship between the subtheme ‘when does school begin?’ and the codes, under the ‘beliefs about school and learning’ theme.

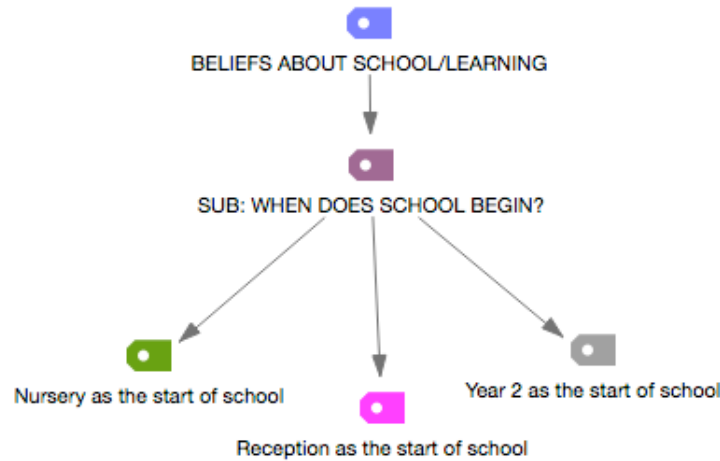


Figure 4.3 Thematic map for codes under the subtheme: ‘When Does School Begin?’

When participants spoke about their child starting school, they all began by describing pre-school experiences:

“...I think he’s started when he was just three, actually,” (Michelle, line 3)

“Well... when we was growing up I think it was kind of like five that we – that you went to nursery. You had no choice – to school – you had no choice but to go to school, it was five. Whereas nowadays, um... I think what it is, is there’s a lot of pressure with government with supporting these single parents, um [clears throat] so they’re trying to get their children back to school earlier, and... um... I th- um, I think some of it as well is because when they do go to school at five, a lot of them are dumb! So I don’t think they’re learning a lot by being at home with their mum. So the government recognizes that, as well as wanting these mums back to work. /...So he started... um, he started here when he was... wait, May, June, July, August, September – so he started here in September, just after his third birthday, so he was three and four months. So he started full time,” (Michelle, line 259)

“Um, from Nursery, she started, she was previously in the Nursery. She didn’t get in straight away because of her special needs. And the school didn’t have the support for her here. So that took about a year to get the support. But once she started, she enjoyed it. She was ready to start. I didn’t have, concerns where she would be worried to start, but my concerns was whether she was safe with her needs...” (Jessica, line 3)

“Oh she first started it, erm, started here in, she had turned three in the March, and she started here literally in the April after the Easter. Um...But before that she was with a child-minder. For a bit,” (Alex, line 6)

Each participant showed that they had different ideas about when they see the beginning of school. For Alex, more formal aspects of teaching and learning, which she had observed taking place in Year 2, defined the start of school:

“...maybe year two when they start to do the SATs.../and they start to do...it’s a lot more. Sitting down and not...” (Alex, line 537; 559)

Similarly, Jessica identified formal learning as an indicator of school beginning, but instead had observed this already taking place in Reception:

“Because that’s when you do reading and stuff with them and you do all that...// like, when it’s, where you have to sit down and do some learning, I think that’s Reception,” (Jessica, line 470)

Michelle’s responses related to the start of school being defined by children being in full-time education, which in her child’s case was Nursery:

“...so he started here in September, just after his third birthday, so he was three and four months. So he started full time...//well it is because he’s here all day,” (Michelle, line 258; 265)

4.6.3 Socialisation

A thematic map is provided in Figure 4.4 to illustrate the relationship between the subtheme ‘socialisation’ and the codes, under the ‘beliefs about school and learning’ theme.

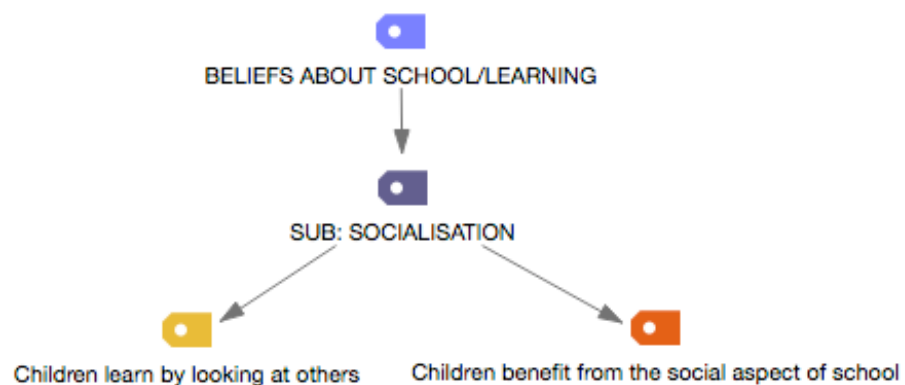


Figure 4.4 Thematic map for codes under the subtheme: ‘Socialisation’

Participants shared views around their belief that school provides a child with necessary socialisation. Where they perceived their child to have difficulties relating to their social development, there was a hope that starting school would bring about change. Readiness, in this context, was linked to an identified need:

“I just think for their whole play and their whole learning. I think they need to interact with other children of their age,” (Alex, line 32)

“I think she was ready as in she needed socially ready to go to school,” (Alex, line 48)

“Yeh. He was coz he was sort of gettin’ a bit hyper, where he...[long pause] He needed to be around other children, I think. I mean, when he was with me, we used to go to playgrounds, and that’s where I used to watch ‘im. I used to sit, and watch ‘im. And he’d go over to people,” (Michelle, line 42)

Participants also reflected on observations they had made of their child around the start of school, which led them to the conclusion that children learn from one another. They shared accounts of both positive and less desirable learning:

“I don’t know if he’s going to be like me but really he’s not interested in [formal learning] especially not at home, maybe in the classroom because he sees everyone doing it,” (Michelle, line 183)

“Oreyah learns from what goes on around her. So if she went to the... coz she’s not that far behind. She’s not disabled by her cerebral palsy as much as other children. I think if she went to there [special school], and there was other kids w....this is going to sound nasty, but worse off than she is. I think it would have taken her a step back, rather than forward like how she has done,” (Jessica, line 149)

4.6.4 Pedagogy

A thematic map is provided in Figure 4.5 to illustrate the relationship between the subtheme ‘pedagogy’ and the codes, under the ‘beliefs about school and learning’ theme.

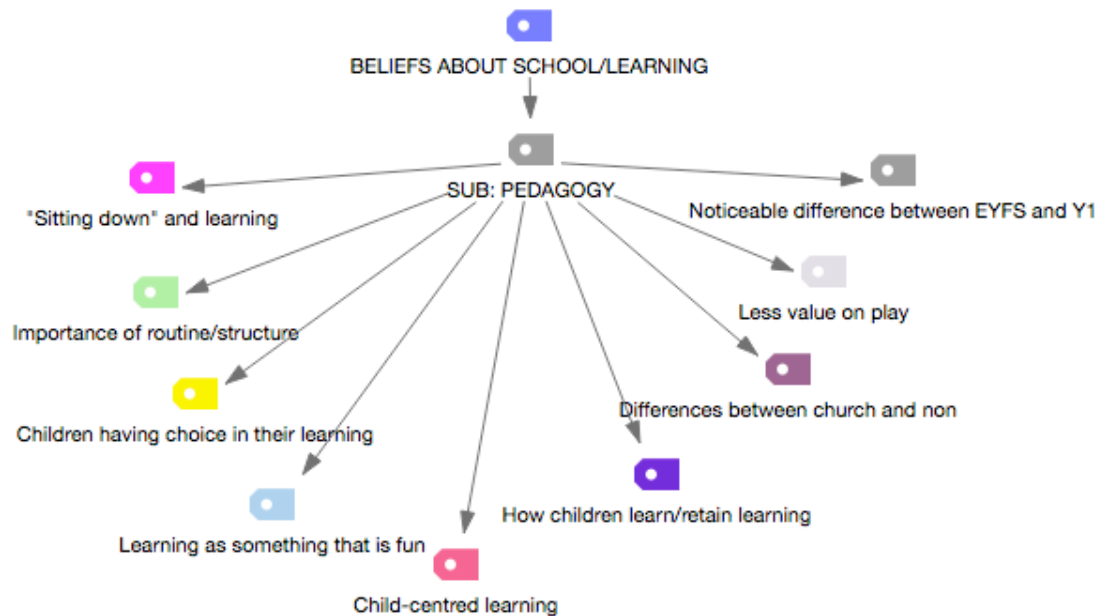


Figure 4.5 Thematic map for codes under the subtheme: 'Pedagogy'

Participants shared their thoughts about teaching and learning practices, in school and in the home. Participants made a clear distinction between play and learning. From their accounts, it seemed as though they were relieved when they observed their child engaging in more formal learning tasks, and frustrated by their child's insistence on continuing to play:

"But, at home, he he he don't wanna do much work. He wants to play all the time. Dunno whether that's just a boy thing, I don't know. But, he's not, he d...yeh, it's hard coz I don't know really sometimes what to even, pick out to do. I mean I go to the pound shop sometimes and get those books where you can do the maths, the extra maths, and we've started to do the times tables a bit. But when he gets it's right he's like 'uughhh I don't wanna hear it now!'" (Michelle, line 57)

From their reflections on transition, participants expressed an anticipation of the more formal aspects of learning, and that play was something they needed to wait to be over and done with:

"But now that she's actually in here – when she started school, doing proper l- not proper learning but... schoolwork with reading and writing, um – more so – I think that's school age," (Jessica, line 174)

It interested me that participants seemed to equate learning with sitting down:

“And... then it was this – this – this – this week was just about getting a photograph of when he was a baby and talking a little bit about... um... but he’s not really, he’s not really the sort of child that wants to sit down and talk about them things. He just thinks, oh, boring!” (Michelle, line 183)

Jessica’s beliefs about when school begins were also linked to ‘sitting down’ and learning:

“It’s just more free play there [Nursery]. They are being watched but they’re free to do what they want and explore. They do do that in Reception but then they have... curriculum-based stuff. I know they do have that in nursery but it’s... it’s play, but then there’s... sit down time where you actually learn, and writing and stuff like that,” (Jessica, line 482)

4.7 Theme 5: Separation

A thematic map is provided in Figure 5.1 to illustrate the relationship between the theme of ‘separation’ and its codes.

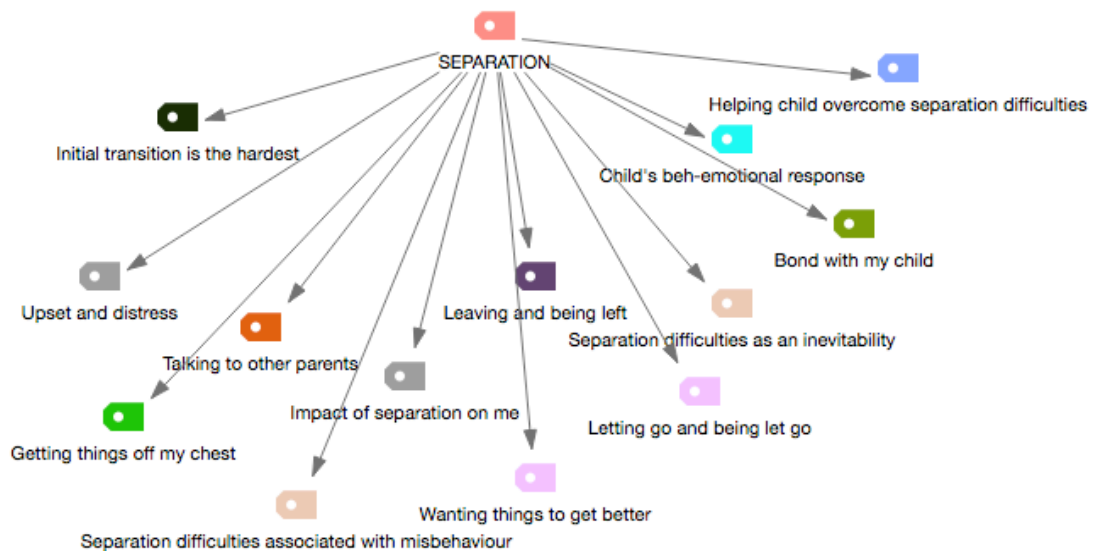


Figure 5.1 Thematic map for the theme: ‘Separation’

In talking about their child's readiness for school in the context of transition, participants spoke frequently about separation. These experiences were characterised by upsetting and distressing feelings:

"Yeh. Quite distressed coming in. To be honest, that was why I thought by settling her with a child minder first would help. But I think she just has that, where she just doesn't like to leave me," (Alex, line 18)

"I mean he did cry, he did, I think it was about 4 months he cried at the initial time of me taking him to Nursery," (Michelle, line 13)

Participants spoke in depth about the impact of these difficulties on themselves, which, they said, led them to seek advice or reassurance from others:

"Like, sometimes, I was stuck, kinda wait and just watch and see how she would go in. I couldn't leave the classroom, until I knew she was settled. But, now, I know she's going in, she's getting her whiteboard out, and sitting there. She's ready. And just today, I do go in and say 'oh give me a kiss', and I walked....walked out," (Jessica, line 121)

"...before she used to go with a child-minder, and she used to be really tearful. Until a point where it used to get me quite, quite upset," (Alex, line 56)

"...when she first doing it, it was just constantly on my mind, I'd go away and you know, I'd be at home or at work thinking oh God, like... and, and, and then you'd be talking about it to other parents like, oh God like, Jamie was, this morning was a nightmare and... oh God... You know," (Alex, line 354)

Participants described how they began to attribute their child's difficulties with separation to bad behaviour, possibly as a way of coping as well as understanding:

"Not one... moan. Um. But probably since... September, we've probably noticed October we probably had two occasions where she's not had a good going to bed time or... or wh- or be in the morning, where I've said that's it, I'm going to be speaking to [teacher], her class teacher. And she's, she's um. Coming to school upset...//But it works -...//- because she doesn't misbehave again," (Alex, line 326)

Participants spoke about separation difficulties as being an inevitable experience. It seemed that this was in service of normalising and rationalising their painful experiences. They linked this to

the bond they had with their child, and how this led or contributed to the difficulties during separation:

“Yeh, but I think a lot of kids are like that, because come on, you’ve had a baby, it’s with you every day up until three, and then you’re supposed to just depart from it with strangers. You know, it’s um... it is, it is a bit frightening for the child because, you know, much as you try take them playgroups and they see all these other people around them, they’re not – you’re there. So they’re not being taken away from them,” (Michelle, line 201)

It transpired through their accounts that it was the initial separation and transition, to pre-school care, which was experienced as the most painful or difficult:

“I mean he did cry, he did, I think it was about 4 months he cried at the initial time of me taking him to Nursery, not here, the first one when he was 2, and then, you know, when he came here, I think he was a bit more, he didn’t really cry as much, I think it stopped quite quick really,” (Michelle, line 13)

“...I’m getting. I’m more comfortable with her in...I’m finding it easier to just let go. And let her...be independent, be herself,” (Jessica, line 118)

“I thought about it a lot when she was with the child minder, thinking, please let her hurry up and start school so that this will get easier,” (Alex, line 76)

Participants’ accounts of this time were characterised by the idea that they were leaving their child. The dominant discourses used related to “letting go” and being “let go” by their child:

“You know. I never just left him and thought ‘oh what am I gonna do now’ and just go home and sit at home. It’s never been like that. So, I always occupied myself when I left him anyway. But I did always used to think, ‘is he alright’ you know. You know at school and stuff,” (Michelle, line 25)

“...so yeh, letting go, it is hard, with anything, but, you know, you you know that you’re doing the right thing. It’s different if you’re doing, you’re you’re letting go and you’re not doing the right thing, but you know, they gotta go to school, they gotta learn, you know they’re alright,” (Michelle, line 39)

“She....she’s just going in! She’s ready! And she just left me...And I’m like ‘ok bye...’ So yeh,” (Jessica, line 115)

“More difficult for me. But her. I don’t think it really made a difference. For her, it was exactly the same. Um. Process for her. She was being left,” (Alex, line 75)

The participant data has been presented in the form of the five themes that emerged through a thematic analysis. The following chapter provides a summary of the overall findings in response to the research questions.

Chapter 5. Discussion

Chapter Overview

This purpose of this chapter is to:

- Provide a summary of findings;
- Discuss the findings in terms of links with literature examined in Chapter 2, wider literature and psychological theory;
- Discuss implications for the Educational Psychology profession;
- Consider strengths and limitations of the current study, implications for future research and reflections on the research process;
- Share the process of dissemination to participants and stakeholders.

5.1 Summary of Findings

This research sought to answer two research questions using a free-association narrative interview technique with three low-income parents:

- What meaning do parents of children eligible for Pupil Premium funding give to the notion of ‘school readiness’?
- How do parents of children eligible for Pupil Premium funding experience the process of their child starting school?

A wide range of responses was generated in the interviews. This is reflected in the five themes that emerged through a thematic analysis of the interview data. The analysis revealed that parents spoke about a number of within-child factors that they associated with their child’s readiness for school. This included their child’s interest in, and engagement with, formal learning tasks, their independence, and ability to separate at transition. The analysis of interview

data highlighted the aspects of, and approaches to, teaching and learning that parents valued, in terms of how this fitted with their ideas of the ‘school-ready’ child. The experience of speaking about transition in the interview, caused parents to reflect on the numerous roles they identified with, including those they felt less able to take up. Their reflections on the changes they observed in their children following transition, illuminated their views of, and the meaning they attached to, school readiness.

The range of issues that emerged through the parent interviews will now be considered in the context of reviewed and wider literature. The assumption that both the researcher and researched are defended means that interpretations of experience and meaning will be made using psychological theory, including defences against anxiety.

5.2 Within-Child Readiness Factors

Parents spoke about a range of within-child factors that constituted school readiness for them. Problems or deficits became located within their children at the point of transition. For example, parents were concerned when their child presented with play skills they perceived to be immature, such as not being able to share. They discussed their child’s capacity for emotional regulation in the context of separation, and felt that the process of starting school would enable their children to somehow ‘get over’ any difficulties. These views complement the dominant approach taken to school readiness research that equates children’s readiness for school with specific developmental attributes, (Mathieson & Banerjee, 2010; Hughes & Ensor, 2011; Yang & Lamb, 2014; Norbury et al., 2016). However, the papers reviewed in Chapter 2 found that whilst some children are disadvantaged on entry to school, this is due to a mismatch in their developmental competence and the academic and social demands placed on them. The parents in this study did not express any views regarding the level of difficulty or demands of school life. Instead, parents related their child’s difficulties with personality traits. They regarded their

child's interest in learning, or lack thereof, as central to their personality. Michelle and Jessica shared views that their child's personality impacted on their engagement with learning. Michelle noted her son's disengagement with formal learning tasks and inability to share. Michelle revealed an unconscious fantasy that suggested negative personality traits and a limited 'ability' were transferred from her to her son genetically. Jessica felt that her daughters' enthusiasm and outgoing personality equipped her for school, primarily in regards to her ability to engage with teaching and learning. Alex put her daughters' difficulties with separation down to an emotional personality trait, "*she's like that/...it's just her*". A psychoanalytic perspective highlights how the parents moved between positions of blame in how they attributed children's difficulties with learning, social situations and separation. By attributing the cause to a difficulty within the child, neither they, nor their child had control over the difficulties. Parents therefore remained psychologically defended against feelings of inadequacy. This absence of self-blame could be seen as the parents employing a defensive mechanism of splitting and projection. The intolerable aspects of learning and separation processes were split off and projected into others. In doing so, parents protect themselves from being in the uncomfortable positions of uncertainty, ignorance or impotence. A similar pattern could be seen to emerge when parents reflected on supporting learning, discussed in Section 5.4.1. Klein believed all children are born with a desire to find out about the world, known as the 'epistemophilic instinct', (as cited in Waddell, 1998). Whitebread and Bingham (2012) reinforce the idea that all children of all ages are ready to learn, pointing out that it is more a question of the appropriateness of what and how children are learning. These ideas were not present in the views presented in parent narratives.

Parents commented on age to draw comparisons with other children, and share their concerns around meeting age-related expectations. Again, age became a factor through which problems could be located within the child. This linked to the judgements that have been, or could be made of them, at an individual (being observed by and observing other parents) and

societal (the government's offering of funding for younger children, perceived to be in response to the belief that single parents lack parenting capability) level. Parents felt that although problems could be hidden whilst their child was young, they would become more obvious with age. Bibby (2010) speaks to parental concern that their children are developing as they 'should' be, and whether or not they are keeping up with their peers. Klein's (1957) paranoid-schizoid position offers an interpretation of these experiences presented by parents. The paranoia could be seen to present as a fear of judgement, manifesting in feelings of persecution. Michelle commented on her approach to behaviour management, suggesting that, "...*professionals don't really agree on, but it works for my kids*". Jessica described painful encounters in which she and her daughter were subject to ridicule. It could be seen that, when dominated by the anxiety associated with a fear of persecution, the parts of themselves and their children perceived as not good, are split off. This could be seen in Michelle's suggestion that single parents make for 'dumb' children, "*when they do go to school at five, a lot of them are dumb! So I don't think they're learning a lot by being at home with their mum.*" Abdicating responsibility, by suggesting problems exist within the child, or starting school will make up for the shortcomings of their parents, forms the self-preservation that characterises the paranoid-schizoid position, (Waddell, 1998).

As well as their inner, psychological experiences, this drive towards likeness can also be understood through the social aspect of the ontology. A social psychology perspective highlights how parents' views were influenced by both the physical (the presence of other children and parents available for comparison) and the imagined or fantasised (the pressure of social norms and expectations). Foucault's (1975) Panopticon principle provides a useful metaphor by which to consider how parents experienced coming into a state of increased social visibility, through which objects in the external world; the government, school, and professionals, wield power over them. Singh and Clarke (2006) distinguish the power to act, and the power to define; the latter

relating to how parents attribute meaning to school readiness, influenced by a combination of internal psychological and external social forces. Foucault (1980) wrote about the existence of knowledge in everyday discourse, and the inseparable nature of knowledge and power. A dominant discourse, such as ‘the earlier children enter education the better’, is elevated by its status of ‘truth’, (Foucault, 1980). Through the psychosocial ontology, the social context, and internal fantasies of parents, are viewed as mutually implicated. This relates to their constructions of education, known in organisational psychology as the ‘primary task’. The primary task is understood differently by different individuals, and relates to their social and cultural position. Parents’ constructions of the primary task are discussed in Section 5.4.

5.2.1 Knowledge, Control & Power

The degree to which parents were in a position of authority, was compromised at an early stage. Parents discussed the pressure and weight of the decisions they had to make regarding their child’s education, ‘earlier and earlier’. The availability of government-funded places for two year olds suggested to parents that they should enrol their child into preschool care at a young age, not that they had the option should they wish to take it up, as highlighted by Michelle, *“if they never told me that there was this government, putting this new thing for 2 year olds. I probably would have kept him with me for that extra year.”*

Whilst some studies report that children who attend preschool perform better on assessments of reading and maths (Magnuson, Ruhm & Waldfogel, 2007), this remains a controversial area of debate within the UK context. Research of this nature has provoked the development of policies that promote the enrolment of children from disadvantaged families in preschool, pertaining to notions of narrowing the ‘school readiness gap’. The following extract from my research diary illustrates engagement with my own subjectivity, and how this influenced my thinking and decisions on this point.

Reflexive field note
(recorded during data analysis)

My preconceptions have been challenged by the finding that parents' feelings around their child's readiness led them to enter their child into education earlier, rather than hold them back. Prior to embarking on this research task, the parents I had come into contact with presented views and concerns that their child was not ready, leading to a desire to 'hold them back' a year. Although I'm conscious to avoid an overly reductionist stance, I note that the parents I came into contact with previously were predominantly middle class. In the interest of triangulation, this contributes to how I think about the interrelatedness of social class and power for the participants in this study.

Figure 6.1 A Research Diary Extract

Parents placed value on children's language and communication skills as an indicator of readiness. This is consistent with the views presented by mothers in Brooker's (2003) ethnographic study, who viewed spoken language as significant to children's preparation for school. The current study found that parents expected children to be able to make their needs known to adults on entry to school, and viewed speech as an important aspect of independence. They struggled when they were not able to rely on their child's verbal ability to find out about school, and were pleased and relieved to notice gains in their child's speech development on entry to school. Whilst Norbury et al. (2016) discussed children's language development on entry to school, they argued the demands and level of difficulty placed on children at school entry are too high, thus creating conditions in which children are not ready. This was not the

viewed shared by parents in the current study, who instead located the problem and responsibility within the child.

A psychoanalytic lens offers an interpretation of the finding, that parents placing significant value on children's communication skills was linked to their desire to have knowledge of school and their child's experience. In Bion's (1962a) extension of Klein's epistemophilic instinct, he suggested that, along with love and hate, the desire to know and acquire knowledge, is the most important element in the growth and development of the personality. However, the school transition thrust parents into a position where they were no longer knowing and in control. Efforts to gain some control, by seeking knowledge through their children provided reassurance. In doing so, their unmanageable feelings were temporarily relieved, mitigating the experience of helplessness, (Burgo, 2012). Furthermore, in joining the school system, parents moved in and out of the psychic boundary. Simpson and French (2001) discuss how 'being on the edge' of a society, community or organisation, provokes anxiety. The psychological defences employed are in aid of defending against recognition of the limits of one's knowledge.

5.3 Separation & Inevitability

As parents explored separation through the interview process, they settled on the view that difficulties were inevitable. They regarded this as a result of severing affectional ties, and due to the intensity of the bond formed when their children were at home. An interpretation of this is that they were immobilised by the inevitability of a difficulty they perceived to be out of their control. In contrast, some studies have found that both parents and teachers share the view that separating without difficulty is a key factor of readiness, (Wesley & Buysse, 2003). This inevitability spoken about by the parents in the current study can be considered in the context of

Object Relations Theory. Flynn (1987) and Marsh (2012) discuss the need for children to overcome Oedipal conflicts before they are able to turn their attention to the demands of the classroom. By age five, children are developmentally capable of internalising good parental objects, (Youell, 2006). However, if transition begins ‘earlier and earlier’, and children are confronted with the requirement to engage in formal learning tasks ‘earlier and earlier’, they are afforded less time and capacity to form attachments and internalise good objects. The development of these internal models provides the foundation for future relationships and self-concepts. Therefore, children are less likely to demonstrate the social competence (Mathieson & Banerjee, 2010), and learning-behaviours (Hughes & Ensor, 2011; Yang & Lamb, 2014), that formal schooling, society, and the parents in this study regard as important.

Waddell (1998) discusses the impact of premature separation. When combined with a defensive denial of the painful experience, they have the potential to lead to the development of maladaptive ways of coping with loss. However, the parents in this study were not in denial of pain. Rather, their responses were more indicative of suppression, which is regarded as an adaptive defence mechanism. Vaillant (2000) describes how, through suppression, the impact (of separation) on relationships, and the reality of the situation (beginning school) are accepted, and in some ways minimised. Bion (1962b) discussed how every move forward in development, entails an internal disruption and anxiety, temporarily throwing the personality into disarray, and back into a more chaotic state of mind, resembling Klein’s paranoid-schizoid position. Whilst Klein (1957) emphasised the negative aspects of the paranoid-schizoid position, and placed the depressive position at the heart of successful development, Bion saw the fragmentation and splitting in the paranoid position as a necessary aspect of human experience. This inner turbulence, Bion believed, is intrinsic to emotional growth. Although the parents were not explicitly applying psychological theory to their experiences, their views of inevitable difficulties are akin to Bion’s take on the oscillation between disintegration and re-integration.

Youell (2006) highlights how a child's fears when starting school are not dissimilar to their parents; will I/they be safe, will I/they make friends, will I/they be clever enough, what are they doing when I'm not there? All of which emerged through the interviews. These parallel experiences are likely to be linked to the strong attachments, which parents discussed as inevitably causing difficulty at separation. During the interviews, I noticed a patterned response in how parents recounted their attempts to console their children during transition. They switched from speaking directly to me, and instead averted their gaze and spoke as if to their children. Their accounts illustrate a capacity for reverie (Bion, 1962a), whereby they were able to take in and process the distress and apprehension experienced by their children.

5.4 Role: Independence & Dependency

Separation featured heavily across parents' narratives. They discussed the associated pain, which led them to adopt various ways of understanding their child's behaviour and strategies for coping. Their accounts of separation can be understood through a combination of psychoanalytic and attachment theory, as well as through the psychosocial ontology.

Parents spoke about a desire for children to be independent, which they linked with being able to manage and get over the difficulties associated with separation. This conflicts with what Winnicott (1965) wrote about how entering a new context and a new set of relationships, thrusts us back into positions of dependency. An inner conflict between a desire for independence and mourning dependency was present in parents' narratives.

Parents shared how they attempted to manage and support their child through separation difficulties, "*...one minute I'm upset but one minute, kind of, you have to be like, quite stern and like, no, you know, stop being silly.*" Alex's account resonates with Salzberger-Wittenberg et al.'s (1983) description of the child who is afraid of being abandoned and lost at school transition. Unmanageable feelings are located in a young, babyish and silly child who is not in

keeping with the school-child's view of themselves, as big, grown up and independent. These same ideas permeated parental narratives. Object Relations Theory would suggest that these difficult and unmanageable feelings exist in the dynamic between parents and children, as opposed to belonging solely to individuals.

Parents talked about needing to be tough in the face of managing their child's anxieties. My research found that parents took up a harsh, even punitive approach to manage their child's separation difficulties. In Hollway's (2015) psychosocial study of identity, new mothers were found to take drastic action at times of heightened anxiety. Salzberger-Wittenberg et al. (1983) also wrote about how ways of managing are often quick and forceful in the school context. Hollway (2015) suggests that this reflects the acuteness of an internal conflict. Taking up a 'tough' stance enabled parents to psychologically defend themselves, through an avoidance of identification with the child in turmoil.

In talking about their child's transition, parents mused around an existence separate from their child. Hollway (2015) suggested a child's protest against separation has consequences for the mother who 'wants something more' (p. 179). For Alex, this centred on employment. She was pleased to have gained this as a result of her child starting school. Michelle talked about the life she had before, where she was able to make space for her needs, such as by going to the gym. A psychosocial perspective identifies the binary discourse that is often used to describe the needs of mothers and their children, upholding the notion that mothers want separateness and the infant prevents this, (Hollway, 2015). This is reflected in the thematic analysis where I coded for "mothers needs in conflict with their child's". Feminist writers argue that a mother experiences her desire to relate to her child as her own desire. This resembles the love that makes them want to put their own needs and desires aside. Hollway references Baraitser (2009) and Kristeva (2005), who argue that the act of 'putting herself aside' (p. 176) to care for her child paradoxically fulfils her.

The context is important to consider when interpreting these experiences. Kristeva (2005) talks about mothers in modern society who experience a difficulty of managing the economic and personal costs of having children. A difficulty that was very much live and ‘in the room’ for the parents in this study. They made references, both explicit and implied, to their financial circumstances. Kristeva argues there is need to shift how society thinks about, and values parenting, ‘for the obvious reason that the human child is born “unfinished”, incapable of autonomy’. In the face of adversity, these parents demonstrated strength and resilience. Salzberger-Wittenberg et al. (1983) discuss how the extent to which one can manage a beginning, relates to, and depends upon, the balance between inner resources and external pressures. Erikson (1959), in writing about psychosocial development, discusses the experience of ‘developmental crises’. A crisis occurs when there is an ‘imbalance between the difficulty, the importance of the problem and the resources available to deal with it’, (Parkes, 1971). Vaillant (2000) discusses the adaptive nature of some defence mechanisms, which can be applied to these findings. Parents demonstrated a healthy suspicion, and appropriate sensitivity to threat or danger, in the context of separation and transition. Adaptive defences tend to be more available to the conscious mind than maladaptive defences, (Gould, 1997). This was apparent in how parents described safety and protection as essential to their parental role and function during the transition.

Salzberger-Wittenberg et al. (1983) discuss how new mothers and fathers need a support network. This support might extend to times of change and transition, since the parental role is uniquely and emotionally evocative, as feelings and concerns around developmental issues, such as dependency, control, autonomy, intimacy, sexuality, aggression, are reawakened, (Michaels & Goldberg, 1988). The mothers in this study presented narratives in which they seemed to be lone protagonists. It emerged in the interviews that the mothers felt alone in managing their child’s needs, particularly in the context of difficulties associated with separation. As recommended by

Hollway & Jefferson (2013), I used the following question to enrich the stories being told during the interview, ‘what did significant others say/think/do?’. However, the answers I received were brief and cut off. Winnicott (1960) notes how, in infancy, often the mother-baby dyad is unmodified by the presence of a third person. From a socio-cultural perspective, the presence of a third person is reduced further in the case of single or lone parents (Jessica and Michelle). It is possible that the experience of a third person was so rare, that difficulties in separating from their mother were exacerbated.

In the interest of reflexivity, I note my own positioning and identification with the parents in the study, as a woman and feminist. I experienced these mothers as fighters, and described them as such, during supervision. They were prepared to fight for their child’s right to an education. For Jessica, this related to ensuring her child secured a place in a mainstream school. This resonates with Kristeva’s (2005) description of courageous mothers who, ‘however worn down the mother of the disabled or troubled child may be, she remains a fighter’.

5.4.1 ‘Good Enough’

My finding, that the parents in the current study saw a distinction between the different roles they served, such as being able to meet their child’s basic needs versus being able to contribute to, and support their learning, links to Brooker’s (2003) finding that bedtime practices and sleep routines were important for the mothers who wanted a separate adult existence. This research found that parents viewed ensuring a safe environment as integral to their role at transition. However, notions of school as a safe place may have challenged this core aspect of their identity. Parkes (1971) drew upon Freud’s work on ‘Mourning and Melancholia’ to suggest that major changes force us to restructure our ways of looking at the world and our way of being in it. This requires effort, as old patterns of thought and activity may have to be abandoned, (Parkes, 1971). Different stages of parenthood are likely to stimulate an appraisal of deeply held

values and beliefs, (Michaels & Goldberg, 1988). Klein (1957) described life-long fluctuations between the depressive and paranoid-schizoid positions, which can be seen in how parents discussed their movement between various roles.

The parents presented a strong preoccupation with the future. This can be interpreted as an adaptive defence mechanism. The defense of anticipation reflects the capacity to perceive future danger affectively as well as cognitively, to master conflict in small steps. Anticipation relates to one's capacity to retain and bear the affective response to an unbearable future, (Vaillant, 2000).

My finding, that parents spoke about the dimensions and limits of the role, and in particular, trying to meet expectations, invokes Winnicott's (1953) concept of a 'good enough' parent. Bibby (2010), however, highlights a possible dissonance between society's idealisation of motherhood, and the blame placed on mothers for difficulties that emerge later. From a socio-political perspective, we might consider how looking after babies is devalued in Western society, (Didier Anzieu, 1990 as cited in Hollway, 2015). Psychoanalysis suggests our psychological fate is sealed early on. An infant who is nurtured and cared for presupposes that a mother devotes herself and suspends her social, intellectual and professional appetites until she can resume them again at an opportune moment. This resembles the finding that the parents made sacrifices and put their lives on hold for their children, which, in part, resumed once they began school. Hollway's (2015) psychosocial description of 'Arianna' presents a similar experience. In articulating some of the negative feelings about being a mother, she defies conventional discourses, which dictate that mothers should be only grateful and optimistic about their newfound role. The same pattern can be seen in the following extract from Michelle, *'It's hard, it is hard being a parent I'll tell ya. Sometimes, I honestly, if I knew how hard it was, I wouldn't of had children.'*

5.5 Primary Task in Educational Organisations

This research found that parents shared the belief that the task of the school, in part, relates to the socialisation of children. They identified social deficits in their children, which they had hoped school entry would resolve. Alex stressed a need for routine and to be around other children. Michelle felt that her son was ‘getting hyper’ and opportunities to be with other children would mitigate this. Jessica was intent on her daughter’s inclusion with a peer group of the same chronological age. These beliefs might reflect powerful fantasies, which relate to the primary task of the school as an educational institution. The primary task is defined as ‘the task the system must carry out in order to survive’ (Roberts, 1994), and to which all sub-systems must be aligned. Eloquin (2016) discusses the importance of clarity of the primary task in a school context to ensure the highest level of output. This is challenging in the management of human beings. Eloquin discusses the potential for conflict if different sub-systems construe their own primary tasks. A simplistic view which regards ‘to educate’ as the primary task of a school, is an insufficient reflection of the multi-dimensional role modern educational institutions play, (Bibby, 2010). Drawing on the seminal work of Menzies-Lyth (1960), knowledge, logical deduction and fantasy are thought to make up conceptions of the primary task of an institution. Fantasies influence the level of stress and anxiety experienced. The parents in my study held fantasies related to children ‘getting better’ once they start school, and that ‘everything is or will be fine’ once they are in. This can be understood as being linked to their constructions of childhood and the purpose of schooling. Bibby (2010) suggests negative constructions of children lead to beliefs that they are in need of control, supervision and socialisation. Despite all the children having had preschool experiences in group settings, parents retained powerful fantasies about school ‘making everything better’. Alex shared her desperation in the lead up to transition, “*please hurry up and... let’s hurry up and get a place, and I was very very lucky that in the March/...they offered her a place.*”

5.5.1 Learning Experiences & Learning through Experience

Parents who have participated in other studies exhibited a belief that children's first experiences with formal education should be more than academics, and that these experiences should introduce them to school, and promote learning through play, (Wesley & Buysse, 2003). In a similar vein, Brooker's (2003) interviews with white British mothers revealed their views on their role in being attentive and responsive to children's preferences in play. In contrast, my research found that parents viewed play as something that got in the way of learning at the point of transition. They were frustrated by their child's insistence on playing, and were pleased to see them engaging in formal, academic learning tasks, such as writing or learning times tables. They equated their child's interest in formal learning tasks with school readiness. By continuing to play, children challenged their parents' view that they were ready.

My finding that parents valued formal and academic practices over play fits well with Brooker's (2003) idea that some families, those outside the cultural mainstream, seem to be at odds with the school in their understanding of teaching and learning practices, and that some pedagogy advantages children from certain backgrounds. Bernstein's (1975) theoretical framework of visible-explicit and invisible-implicit pedagogy relates to the interplay of class and pedagogy.

In other studies, parents stressed the need for better communication, with a particular focus on expectations, what children need to learn, their progress, and how they can be involved, (Wesley & Buysse, 2003). It is arguable that without a shared vision of children's readiness, parents and teachers will encourage different skills, attitudes, and attributes (Piotrkowski et al., 2000), resulting in the clash of cultures (Kennedy et al., 2012), where children are essentially set up to fail. Salzberger-Wittenberg et al. (1983) discuss how the 'strangeness' of a situation is likely to increase stress. The further removed we are from the familiar, in a physical, mental and

emotional sense (Salzberger-Wittenberg et al., 1983), the more likely we have a negative and painful transition experience.

Play and playfulness are inherently exciting and precarious. Winnicott (1971) wrote that playfulness implies trust and anxiety can be both tolerated, and explored. Parents' dismissal of play connects with Bion's (1962b) description of a 'hatred' of having to learn by experience, and a lack of faith in the value or worth of learning in this way. Parents unconsciously employed splitting as a defence, where the denigration of play, as all bad, was associated with going backwards. Formal learning tasks, such as reading and writing were idealised as all good, and associated with development and 'moving forwards'. Raphael-Leff (2012), in a study of teenage parents, suggests that negative or deprived experiences of play in their own childhood can result in the projection of disowned aspects of themselves into play, making it a highly anxiety provoking experience. In psychoanalytically informed work, individuals are encouraged to notice things in themselves to avoid inadvertently passing unprocessed thoughts through projection or transference onto others. Parents in this study feared projecting their negative school and learning experiences onto their children, "*I don't want to put my negativity onto them and then...it's going to happen to them,*" (Jessica). This research has demonstrated the impact of negative school and learning experiences, and the role of these experiences in forming adult and parent identities.

Parents' undervaluing of play can also be understood as reflective of the socio-political context, and a consequence of the depreciation of play in our education system where the focus is on results, to get children reading and writing, and not on the process and experience of learning. Bibby (2010) suggests that a reduction in play relates to 'penetration of accountability'. We see this in the rising demands for testing children of an increasingly younger age, such as through the early years baseline assessment. Furthermore, Bibby (2010) wrote about how fantasies around society valuing certain kinds of knowledge over others, connect with the

primary task. Thoughts such as, ‘I wasn’t very good at learning so my children won’t be’, featured prominently in Michelle’s narrative, and were reflected in the wider data set under the codes “parents difficulties with learning”, “how children learn” and “supporting children with learning”. When confronted with new and difficult tasks, we are led to wonder if our abilities will be enough this time and in this situation, (Salzberger-Wittenberg et al., 1983). There is a suggestion in these kinds of fantasies, that the ability to take in and reproduce highly valued bodies of knowledge, is genetic (Bibby, 2010), illustrated by Michelle in the following extract, *“I haven’t got the ability to even want to get into it. Because my brain just cannot cope with it. Do you know what I mean? So whether that’s... um... something passed on, impatience, I don’t know what that is, but my parents weren’t very good at teaching me and I can honestly say I haven’t really been that good at teaching my kids, not when it comes to education, work-wise.”*

Children and parents visiting their new school and classroom see displays evidencing children’s achievements, and may form a belief that all that work was accomplished on entry, rather than taking months to learn, (Salzberger-Wittenberg et al., 1983). Bibby (2010) extends these ideas to suggest that these beliefs cover a desire not to know, not to have to learn. Parents’ reflected the view that learning involves risk, and can be dangerous, with potential for failure, due to its proximity to acts of love and hate, acceptance and rejection, (Bion, 1962b). Deflecting attention from the fact that all learning requires work and effort enabled parents to avoid the potential for rejection. Polarised views of learning seemed to give the parents short-term relief from their anxious and persecutory feelings. However, Michelle provided an account of why this was not a helpful strategy. She described how her negative learning experiences fed into the dynamic when supporting her son with homework. These parental anxieties may be unbearable in that they relate to their capacity to take up the primary caregiver role, (Bibby, 2010). At the unconscious level they can provoke questions such as, ‘is my child deficient because I am deficient? Have I, by being me, damaged my child? Can they be successful with me as a

parent?'. Jessica articulated this through her desire for her children to be different from, and better than, her.

5.5.2 Relationships

The nature of relationships, between children, teachers, parents, and the institution as a whole, influences the task of the school that relates to imparting knowledge and social skills, (Salzberger-Wittenberg et al., 1983). The parents valued their relationships with school staff and felt that this enabled a successful transition. Parents shared their need for reassurance and validation from teachers, to feel their child was settled and making adequate progress. Mathieson and Banerjee (2010) discuss the potential for the practitioner-parent relationship to be a protective factor. A child gains security from the knowledge that their teachers and parents work together and value each other, providing them with a base from which to explore, experiment and learn, (Salzberger-Wittenberg et al., 1983). This research reinforced these ideas in the finding under the 'Change and Change Attribution' theme, that teachers were identified as facilitators in the transition process. The ways in which parents described their encounters with teachers is akin to Bion's (1961) Container-Contained model. This describes a process of communication and influence whereby one entity holds, manages, comprehends and influences another. Salzberger-Wittenberg et al. (1983) suggest that holding environments, where containment is present, reduce the terror that is brought about by major transitions.

Parents imparted a degree of trust in the school and teacher. For Michelle and Alex, they reduced this to a sense of familiarity, having attended the same school themselves. However, at a societal level, Bibby (2010) highlights how teachers are handed the jobs others cannot do, such as to control, socialise, impart knowledge and turn children into responsible adults. Belfield and Garcia (2013) examined school readiness views of parents in the US and found, over a 14-year period, a heightened set of expectations for what parents viewed as essential for entry into

preschool. Despite this, their results indicated only modest changes in parent engagement and effort. Through the interaction of their psychological and social worlds, it is possible that parents internalised messages of impotence that exist in society, which in turn mobilized psychological defences against shame¹⁰. Burgo (2012) describes the experience of basic shame as ‘the awareness of an internal defect, felt at the deepest level of our being’ (p. 163). Because of this, it is possible that parents projected responsibility, through fantasies of idealisation, into the school and their child’s first teacher.

5.6 Implications for the Educational Psychology Profession

The findings from this research can be used to develop EP practice in early years settings and schools, at the individual, group and organisational level.

The current study found that parents held onto concerns about their child’s development until reassured by teachers. They felt either unable to access, or left to draw their own conclusions regarding, pedagogical practices. This contributed to their concept of the primary task. EPs supporting children and families in transition might facilitate or encourage discussions with parents about their own, and their child’s concept of the school, to access underlying beliefs, and work towards a shared view of the primary task. Through consultation, a core function EPs fulfil, there is the opportunity to bring schools and families together, for information sharing, and to discuss alternative views, whilst working in partnership to reach a shared aim, (HCPC, 2015).

The encroachment on play, in and beyond the early years, should be a concern to the EP profession. This research highlighted parents’ dismissive views of children’s play, suggesting a misunderstanding of its place and purpose in children’s education. EPs can work with schools

¹⁰ **Shame** is used to mean, ‘disappointed expectations’, (Burgo, 2012).

and families to not only share psychological theory, but also support play skills in parents. Video-Interactive Guidance, which many EPs are now being trained to deliver, is a highly effective, evidence-informed intervention that is particularly well placed in the context of facilitating play skills in parents with young children.

This research poses implications for the use of PP funding, which could be targeted more effectively, such as to support and strengthen relationships with vulnerable or ‘hard to reach’ parents. Central to the EP role is supporting schools to make evidence-informed decisions around the most appropriate and effective approach to intervention. This is particularly key in a political climate of cuts to school budgets, and making tough decisions about where to prioritise spending. This research revealed the depth and complexity of thought and concerns that school readiness and transition might elicit for parents. Therefore, PP funding might be used to buy in additional EP visits to offer reflective spaces, in which interpretations of experience can be made. This might provide opportunities to name and acknowledge anxieties, and learn from experience. Parents can be supported to draw upon their capabilities to manage a situation and test their fears against reality. EPs leading reflective parent groups prior to, at and beyond school transition have the potential to provide a both supportive and valuable space for learning, in which parents and staff can benefit from psychological and psychoanalytic interpretation.

A psychosocial method aims to make something that is difficult to think about or understand, more intelligible, in order that problem solving can take place, and solutions can emerge. This research has highlighted that psychoanalytic thinking has a place in EP practice. Pellegrini (2010) suggested that psychoanalytic frameworks enrich the quality of reflection in EP practice. The knowledge gained from this piece of research can inform how EPs think about the range of anxieties and concerns parents may be managing during school transition.

Furthermore, this research has reinforced the importance and centrality of supervision in EP practice. Psychoanalytically informed supervision played a significant role in how I came to

understand the participants, my own emotional responses, and the relationships throughout the study. Opportunities to engage in supervision, as supervisor and as supervisee, provide a platform from which learning can take place. EPs can gain from and expand upon their thinking and practice by incorporating psychoanalytic concepts, such as that of psychological defences anxiety, into the supervisory space.

5.6.1 Implications for the Local Authority

The findings can inform practice across Children's Services, by showing that priorities should be shared between supporting children to be ready for school, and schools to be ready for children. This research might support a shift in perspective of parenting and childhood away from the positivist approach of categorising children according to developmental expectations.

Local and central government promote parental employment by working to reduce the diverse needs and barriers experienced by parents returning to work. Locally, the LA hopes to increase the number of family friendly employment opportunities for parents with young children. This research showed that parents felt undervalued in their capacity to care for their children, and therefore prematurely entered their child into preschool care to return to work. Centralising parental voices provided valuable insight into their views on returning to work. Working towards a community psychologist role, EP led psychosocial research could shape support arrangements in order that parental employment is a positive, rewarding and worthwhile experience, rather than a burden which compromises parenthood.

5.7 Strengths & Limitations

5.7.1 FANI & Reflexivity

Applying a psychosocial approach to the data collection, allowed for an exploration of

interrelated individual psychological, and wider social perspectives, when participants talked about school readiness and transition. A strength of the current study lies in the reflexivity that is integral to the methodology. The following is an extract from my research diary, which illustrates my intention to work with the countertransference to manage the boundaries in the interview space.

Reflective note following psychosocial supervision:

Ethical dilemma in psychosocial research – using countertransference as a guiding tool:

Do subjects know what they are consenting to?
 Where do the boundaries really lie?
 As the interviewer, I am making choices/decisions about the path I take us down.
 As I am committing to using myself as a research tool, I will navigate these boundaries using the relational/affective components i.e. if something in me was truly uncomfortable, and I knew it was not just my feeling, perhaps that would be an indicator to move on/stop.

Figure 6.2 A Research Diary Extract

The use of the countertransference helped to ‘make sense’ of the vast amount of cognitive data amassed through the interviews. In combination with parents’ spoken narratives, it allowed for a richer, deeper thought process. Whilst I intended to explore my researcher role and the impact of my own psychosocial experiences on the co-constructed interview material, pragmatic timeframes meant that I was not able to explore this in as much depth and detail as originally planned. Instead, participant data was prioritised.

This study may be limited in the context of psychosocial methodology, and as ontological and epistemological position, these being in infancy, particularly in EP research. There is no ‘gold standard’ to which it can be compared as there is in established methodologies. As with all

qualitative research, there is a risk that participants selected the narratives they ‘thought’ I wanted to hear. Participants communicated their discomfort with being allowed to talk with so little interruption or input from me, as exemplified here by Jessica:

“...I’m one of them people, I get shy, like... you’re saying I’m not going to get the question wrong but sometimes I feel, am I saying the right thing or have I... misunderstood what you said,” (Jessica, line 558)

I attempted to overcome this by explaining the desire to capture their ideas, without the intrusion of questions that would inevitably convey my own views. Actively thinking about the context and dynamics within which the participants spoke, and paying attention to the unspoken aspects of the narratives, was also in service of overcoming this. Had there been the opportunity to conduct interviews over a longer time period, the relationships between the participants and myself may have enriched the data. With insight into the researcher-researched dynamic over time, and with the potential for less defended accounts of experience, insight might have been gained that was not possible in such a short time period.

Although the analysis of interview data presented a strong focus on a within-child view of school readiness, this is likely to have been influenced by the style of questioning. In keeping with the FANI approach, questions were used to help participants secure their narratives in actual, specific events. For example, ‘tell me about [child] readiness for school.’ In asking questions of this nature, a child-readiness discourse was introduced. Asking about the schools preparedness for their children might have resulted in different narratives emerging.

5.7.2 Selection & Inclusion

A limitation of this study could lie in the process of selecting participants. For practical and ethical reasons, the SENCo selected parents to include and also exclude from the study. The

SENCo shared, in some cases, her rationale. For example, she felt that older parents were more likely to engage with the research, and considered her own relationship with parents as a factor that would guarantee their engagement. It is possible that being selected by the SENCo, for these various reasons, may have influenced participants' narratives.

Additionally, I made the decision to have an inclusive ethos embedded in the research, and therefore did not exclude parents of EAL or SEN children, or parents with EAL and SEN themselves. This led to Jessica being included in the study. Jessica's child had an EHCP, for difficulties associated with Cerebral Palsy. Inevitably, much of what Jessica spoke about related to her child's additional needs, and the challenges she faced at the point of transition as a result of this. It was my belief that, in excluding these parents, my research would uphold a view that children with SEN are inherently 'not ready' for school, and that school readiness as a concept, lies entirely within a child, removing any responsibility or commitment to inclusive practice. Further research could explore exclusively parents of children with and without SEN, to answer research questions that are specifically tailored to their individual experiences.

5.8 Dissemination

Feedback has not yet been given to the participants. Through discussion it was agreed that I would contact them at the end of my research process, and offer the opportunity to discuss findings over the phone or face-to-face, depending on their preference. Sharing findings with participants will involve a discussion of the themes that emerged through the thematic analysis, and is planned for summer 2017.

The research will be presented through a team meeting, to the team of EPs working in the LA, as part of service development. This is planned to take place in September 2017, and will focus on considering how the findings can influence practice within the service and wider LA,

including relevant teams, such as Early Help and Portage.

In publishing the findings it is hoped that the wider EP profession can benefit from the insight that has been gained.

5.9 Reflections

Adopting a psychosocial approach in this research task has allowed me to explore this topic in a way that fits with my approach to practice. The work of an EP is psychosocial in nature, as the interrelatedness of individual and social worlds is integral to assessment, hypothesising and intervention in casework.

The analysis phase of this process was characterised by frustration, which emerged through the tension of trying to reduce participants' responses to themes. My experience of psychoanalytically informed supervision, through which I was able to consider the relational nature of interviewing, was a privilege. Throughout data collection I was aware of a drive within me to 'give' the participants something, both in a physical and psychological sense. This drive was elicited when listening to parents' accounts of struggle, and in the context of their financial and housing circumstances. Although I had opted not to offer a financial incentive at the beginning of my research task, I was conflicted throughout as to whether I should offer something in thanks instead. In supervision, I discussed my emotional experience of guilt, in that I felt I was taking and giving nothing back.

Reflexive note following psychosocial supervision:

My overwhelming feelings of guilt might be related to my own privilege. I wonder if this is also intertwined with my desire to rescue, save, ~~do~~ something to help.

In supervision it was difficult to find the words to describe people from a poorer background. There is something deeply uncomfortable here for me. I shared how I recently became aware of how I have shaped my professional experiences to work with low-income families (on my CV) – I feel a little embarrassed by this. [*How silly not to have noticed, and how naïve, arrogant to think you can change anything.*]

My feelings of being different to the families I'm interviewing makes me feel unworthy, like I will never be able to have a good enough relationship or know enough about their experiences to do anything worthwhile. This brings up my own experience of teaching and how I was so envious of my TAs ability to develop good relationships with low-income families.

I'm left with thoughts and worries around exploiting this group further, by taking from them, and not giving anything back. In contrast, by engaging in psychosocial research, I am giving myself, exposing myself. In some, maybe small way, I think this goes some way in addressing the power imbalance, slightly.

Figure 6.3 A Research Diary Extract

To end each interview I asked the participants to reflect on the research process and their experience of a psychosocial interview. Their responses were akin to Bion's (1962a) description of how thinking involves the dismantling of previous views and theories, allowing the formation of new ideas:

"...when you go away you do kind of think, oh, like, oh, well... it is good to know whether it's right for children or whether they're emotionally ready to start," (Alex, line 607)

"...probably just to make me think a little bit about, you know, um, education and what I could do to help with (Researcher: Mm.) You know, help with his learning a bit more, just to, you know, which is really probably to get some more books, activity books that he can – we can sit and do together. So even if we ain't got a game to play, if we sit and do some activity books together that will help him come along a bit more as well," (Michelle, line 315)

This relates to the emancipatory purpose, as stated in Chapter 3, suggesting participants experienced some sense of psychological freedom. This might also indicate that participants

found it useful to have an open, reflective space in which to explore their experiences. Providing parents with these opportunities could be helpful in facilitating relationships, as well as to empower and enable parents to take up their role with greater conviction. As a researcher, I have experienced first hand how intertwined the researcher becomes in the research process, in ways that can be thought about, and in ways that remain unknown. Hearing the participants explore their own ideas of being a 'good enough' parent, confronted me with my own experience of being a 'good enough' researcher and psychologist. This has been a crucial aspect of my research experience, one that I will take forward to any future research projects.

5.10 Future Research

This study used a psychosocial approach to explore what low-income parents talked about when asked about their child's school readiness and transition to primary school. As discussed under limitations, the current study employed a thematic analysis, which resulted in the reduction of data into themes. Additional psychoanalytic analysis and interpretation of results might increase the depth of understanding, and could take place as a follow up study. To further enhance this piece of research, psychoanalytic observations of parent, child and classroom interactions could provide an additional layer of information, and in the interest of triangulation, provide useful information across contexts.

Other recommendations for future research would be to undertake similar studies with a wider participant group, such as with fathers, and those considered 'hard to reach' and difficult to engage, both with the research and with schools. Exploration of the same topic with specific groups, such as parents of children with SEN, or parents with SEN themselves, could provide valuable insight into experience.

Further research exploring or evaluating the impact of the role of the EP in supporting children and families in transition would help to highlight effectiveness and ways of working.

5.11 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore the meaning low-income parents gave to the concept 'school readiness', in the context of their child's transition to school. The insight gained from this research can inform EP practice at multiple levels, and through the assessment and hypothesising phases of involvement, and in casework involving similar populations.

Three parents, all of whom were mothers to Year 1 children, were recruited to the study from a local primary school in an inner London authority. Participants were interviewed twice using a method that utilised free-association (FANI). This allowed participants to speak freely about a wide-range of anxieties, concerns, observations, curiosities and beliefs they had gathered over time, through the transition. The psychosocial ontology and epistemology was integral to the research. It allowed me to consider my participants in context, transcend binaries that are typical to traditional psychological inquiry, and account for my role as a researcher and as a defended subject. Psychosocial supervision informed the data collection and analysis phases. The relational dynamics were considered in the context of participants' narratives. Active use of psychoanalytic concepts that address unconscious communications, resulted in rich data. Kleinian thinking, including Object Relations Theory, and unconscious defences against anxiety, also informed the supervisory space, and thus the findings. The analysis began with the transcription of each interview. A thematic analysis involved inductive coding, through which five main themes emerged; Change and change attribution, Within-child views, Motherhood and Identity, Beliefs about school and learning, and Separation. The discussion made sense of these themes in relation to existing and wider literature, and psychological theory related to unconscious defences against anxiety. It became evident that a reductionist approach in

conceptualising school readiness is unhelpful and untenable. For the participants, school readiness was multi-dimensional, and culturally and contextually influenced over time. More so than I could have anticipated. A major strength of the study is the engagement with reflexivity, most profoundly at the data collection and analysis phase, which allowed me to challenge my own biases and assumptions, and think about the rich data being acquired.

Implications for practice relate to exploring parent's concept of the school as an educational organisation, in terms of its primary task. Consultation provides a means through which difference can safely be shared and thought about. I was personally drawn in by the devaluing of play in parents' narratives. EPs are well placed to share research and psychological insight related to children's play, in order to create a shift in thinking. Psychoanalytic frameworks offer a route through which to explore views such as these, and can enrich the depth of thinking and reflection in EP practice. Recommendations for future research are to undertake similar studies with vulnerable, 'hard to reach', parents. Exploring the views of fathers would be particularly insightful. Research that seeks to evaluate the role of the EP in casework around transition may be helpful, especially in a traded context.

This research has shown that the transition to school affects all family members and necessitates a restructuring of the family unit, (Parkes, 1971). Winnicott (as cited in Salzberger-Wittenberg et al., 1983) discussed a child's first, big transition, from the womb into the world. We know that these are helped when the mother introduces the world to the child in small doses. Perhaps the same is true for parents in transition.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Excluded Papers and Reasons for Exclusion – UK only

The search engines did not allow for geography to be used as a limiter, therefore, a large number of papers were returned in each search that were from overseas. This table serves to illustrate the basis on which papers from the UK were excluded, and therefore does not list all (non-UK) papers returned in the searches.

Title	Author	Journal	Year of Publication	Reason for Exclusion
Articles excluded at database search stage				
Negotiating time: The significance of timing in ending inpatient work.	Jones	Journal of Child Psychotherapy	2007	Inpatient sample
Review of Transition Toolkit: A Framework for Managing Change and Successful Transition Planning for Children and Young People with Autism Spectrum Conditions	Peel	Tizard Learning Disability Review	2007	Evaluation of intervention with ASD sample
Confidence in contact: A new perspective on promoting cross-group friendship among children and adolescents.	Turner & Cameron	Social Issues and Policy Review	2016	Focus on friendships, mixed sample included adolescents
An analysis of the first implementation and	Comiskey, O'Sullivan, Quirke,	Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies	2015	Evaluation of health promoting intervention in

impact of the World Health Organisation's health promoting school model within disadvantaged city schools in Ireland.	Wynne, Hollywood & McGilloway			Ireland
A helping hand? A study into an England-wide peer mentoring program to address bullying behavior.	Roach	Mentoring and Tutoring: Partnership in Learning	2014	Focus on peer mentoring and bullying
Doll Play narratives about starting school in children of socially anxious mothers, and their relation to subsequent child school-based anxiety.	Pass, Arteche, Cooper, Creswell, & Murray	Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology	2012	Focus on socially-anxious mother and school-based anxiety in children
Cortisol levels in response to starting school in children at increased risk for social phobia.	Russ, Herbert, Cooper, Gunnar, Goodyer, Croudace, & Murray	Psychoneuro-endocrinology	2012	Focus on children at risk of social phobia
Fostering a sense of belonging and community as children start a new school.	Saneho & Cline	Educational & Child Psychology	2012	Focus on children transferring to new schools
Investigating the impact of teenage mentors on pre-school children's development: A comparison using control groups.	Humphrey & Olivier	Children and Youth Services Review	2014	Evaluation of teenage mentoring program
Identifying the educational and	Dockrell & Lindsay	Educational and Child Psychology	2007	Focus on specific speech and language

social needs of children with specific speech and language difficulties on entry to secondary school.				difficulties in children transition to secondary school
An interacting subsystems approach to understanding and meeting the needs of children with acquired brain injury.	McCusker	Educational and Child Psychology	2005	Focus on children with brain injury
Violence in school: Risk, safety, and fear of crime.	Noaks & Noaks	Educational Psychology in Practice	2000	Paper relates to impact of violence in schools
Parental concerns, socioeconomic status, and the risk of autism spectrum conditions in a population-based study.	Sun, Allison, Auyeung & Baron-Cohen	Research in Developmental Disabilities	2014	Focus on children with ASD
Classroom-based cognitive behaviour therapy (FRIENDS): A cluster randomised controlled trial to Prevent Anxiety in Children through Education in Schools (PACES).	Stallard, Skryabina, Taylor & Phillips	The Lancet: Psychiatry	2014	RCT of CBT FRIENDS program
Adversity, emotional arousal, and problem behaviour in adolescence: The role of non-verbal cognitive ability as a resilience	Flouri, Hickey & Mavroveli	Child and Adolescent Mental Health	2010	Sample: adolescents

promoting factor.				
Childhood obesity and overweight prevalence trends in England: Evidence for growing socioeconomic disparities.	Stamatakis, Wardle & Cole	International Journal of Obesity	2010	Focus on childhood obesity
Infant nutrition and cognitive development in the first offspring of a national UK birth cohort.	Wadsworth, Rahimi-Foroushani, Hardy, Kuh & Richards	Developmental Medicine and Child Neurology	1998	Focus on breast-feeding
Chronic bullying victimization across school transitions: The role of genetic and environmental influences.	Bowes, Maughan, Ball & Shakoor	Development and Psychopathology	2013	Focus on bullying
Secondary school transition for children with special educational needs: A literature review.	Hughes, Banks & Terras	SEN and Secondary School Transition	2013	Literature review with focus on transition to secondary school for SEN children
Intervening to improve the transfer to secondary school.	Bloyce & Frederickson	Educational Psychology in Practice	2011	Focus on transition to secondary school
The impact of risk and resiliency factors on the adjustment of children after the transition from primary to secondary school.	Bailey & Baines	Educational and Child Psychology	2012	Focus on transition to secondary school
Chapter 3: Late childhood to early adolescence: Some transitional years.	<i>Not listed</i>	Language Learning	2012	Focus on later transitions
Assessing pupil	Rice,	British Journal of	2011	Focus on transition

concerns about transition to secondary school.	Frederickson & Seymour	Educational Psychology		to secondary school
Transition club: Facilitating learning, participation and psychological adjustment during the transition to secondary school.	Humphrey & Ainscow	European Journal of Psychology of Education	2006	Focus on transition to secondary school
Pupil mobility, attainment and progress in primary school.	Strand & Demie	British Educational Research Journal	2004	Focus on relationship between pupil mobility and attainment at end of KS2
Minding the child: The legacy of Barbara Dockar-Drysdale.	Reeves	Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties	2006	Focus on special residential school in Oxfordshire
The Rroma: Their history and education in Poland and the UK.	Kruczek-Steiger & Simmons	Educational Studies	2001	Focus on traveller populations, mixed Polish-UK sample
Cognitive styles in hearing impaired students.	Adams	Educational Psychology	2001	Focus on hearing impairment
Children with behavioural and emotional difficulties: Complex children, complex training for teachers.	Burnard & Yaxley	Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties	2000	Focus on teacher training and CPD
Research into demand for counselling and therapeutic provision in a group of primary schools.	Moore, Decker, Greenwood & Kirby	Educational Research	1993	Focus on counseling in schools
Integration of children with severe learning difficulties	Sloper & Tyler	Educational and Child Psychology	1992	Evaluation of study with children with severe learning

in mainstream schools: Evaluation of a pilot study.				difficulties
Emotional and motivational engagement at school transition: A qualitative stage-environment fit study.	Symmonds & Hargreaves	The Journal of Early Adolescence	2014	Sample: adolescence
Aspiring girls: Great expectations or impossible dreams?	Richards & Posnett	Educational Studies	2011	Focus on Year 6 girls' aspirations
A qualitative examination of parental experiences of the transition to mainstream secondary school for children with an autism spectrum disorder.	Tobin, Staunton, Mandy, Skuse, Hellriegel, Baykaner, Anderson & Murin	Educational and Child Psychology	2012	Focus on ASD children in transition to secondary school
Profiling depression in childhood and adolescence: The role of conduct problems.	Riglin, Thapar, Shelton, Langley, Frederickson & Rice	Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry	2016	Focus on depression in adolescence
Influences underlying family food choices in mothers from an economically disadvantaged community.	Hardcastle & Blake	Eating Behaviours	2016	Focus on preferences food choices made by disadvantaged mothers
Moving house for education in the pre-school years.	Hansen	British Educational Research Journal	2013	Focus on Millenium Cohort Study and house moves for education
When chefs adopt a school? An evaluation of a	Caraher	Appetite	2013	Evaluation of cooking intervention

cooking intervention in English primary schools.				
Enhanced thinking skills and the association between executive function and antisocial behaviour in children and adult offenders: Scope for intervention?	Brunton & Hartley	The Journal of Forensic Practice	2013	Focus on young offenders
Exceptional lexical skills but executive language deficits in school starters and young adults with Turners syndrome: Implications for X chromosome effects on brain function.	Temple & Shepherd	Brain and Language	2012	Focus on children and young adults with Turners syndrome
School-age prework experiences of young people with a history of specific language impairment.	Durkin, Fraser & Conti-Ramsden	The Journal of Special Education	2010	Focus on children with specific language impairment
The importance of teaching roles when introducing Personal Digital Assistants in a Year 6 classroom.	Hartnell-Young	Technology, Pedagogy and Education	2009	Focus on practice in Year 6 classrooms
Minding the mind: The effects and potential of a school-based meditation programme for mental health promotion.	Campion & Rocco	Advances in School Mental Health Promotion	2011	Evaluation of meditation programme
Energy intake and	Dodd,	Appetite	2008	Focus on overweight

appetite following exercise in lean and overweight girls.	Welsman & Armstrong			girls at 11yo
Developing a parenting skills- and-support intervention for mothers with eating disorders and pre-school children Part 1. Qualitative investigation of issues to include.	Bryant-Waugh, Turner, East & Gamble	European Eating Disorders Review	2007	Focus on support for mothers with eating disorders
Measuring the health and health behaviours of adolescents through cross-national survey research: Recent developments in the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study.	Roberts, Currie, Samdal, Currie, Smith & Maes	Journal of Public Health	2007	Evaluation of health behaviour study
Nutrition-related health promotion through an after-school project: The responses of children and their families.	Hyland, Stacy, Adamson & Moynihan	Social Science and Medicine	2006	Focus on nutrition, evaluation of an after-school project
'Stop it, it's bad for you and me': Experiences of and views on passive smoking among primary-school children in Liverpool.	Woods, Springett, Porcellato & Dugdill	Health Education Research	2005	Focus on impact of passive-smoking
Teaching to the test: Science or intuition?	Sturman	Educational Research	2003	Focus on assessment in Science

Cross-age peer tutoring in mathematics with seven- and 11-year-olds: Influence on mathematical vocabulary, strategic dialogue and self-concept.	Topping, Campbell, Douglas & Smith	Educational Research	2003	Sample: 7-11yo
Supporting language in schools: Evaluating an intervention for children with delayed language in the early school years.	Lee & Pring	Child Language Teaching and Therapy	2015	Evaluation of intervention for children with delayed language
Illuminating the 'boy problem' from children's and teachers' perspectives: A pilot study.	Hamilton & Jones	Education 3-13	2016	Focus on teachers' perceptions of boys
An evaluation of Fresh Start as a catch-up intervention: A trial conducted by teachers.	Gorrard, Siddiqui & Huat-See	Educational Studies	2016	Evaluation of catch-up intervention
Improving early reading skills for beginning readers using an online programme as supplementary instruction.	Tyler, Hughes, Beverley	European Journal of Psychology of Education	2015	Evaluation of online reading intervention
The health, education, and social care costs of school-aged children with active epilepsy: A population-based	Hunter, Reilly, Atkinson, Das, Gillberg, Chin, Scott, Neville & Morris	Epilepsia	2015	Focus on children with active epilepsy

study.				
The challenges of implementing group work in primary school classrooms and including pupils with special educational needs.	Baines, Blatchford & Webster	Education 3-13	2015	Focus on inclusion of SEN pupils in group work
Student absences and student absences: Impediments to quality teaching.	Wilson	The Urban Review	2014	School improvement project aimed at raising attainment
Parental provision and children's consumption of fruit and vegetables did not increase following the Food Dudes programme.	Upton, Taylor & Upton	Health Education	2013	Evaluation of nutrition programme
Change in physical self-perceptions across the transition to secondary school: Relationships with perceived teacher-emphasised achievement goals in physical education.	Spray, Warburton & Stebbings	Psychology of Sport and Exercise	2013	Focus on transition to secondary school
The long-term effects of families and educational provision on gifted children.	Freeman	Bases Intelectuales de la Excepcionalidad	2017	Focus on gifted children
Fathers' involvement and preschool children's behavior in stable single-mother families.	Flouri & Malmberg	Children and Youth Services Review	2012	Focus on child outcomes in families where fathers have never lived at home

Effects of a universal parenting program for highly adherent parents: A propensity score matching approach.	Eisner, Nagin, Ribeaud & Malti	Prevention Science	2012	Evaluation of parenting program
Supporting transition from primary to secondary school using the Protective Behaviours programme.	Choi	Educational and Child Psychology	2012	Focus on transition to secondary school
Setting by ability—Or is it? A quantitative study of determinants of set placement in English secondary schools.	Muijs & Dunne	Educational Research	2010	Focus on setting in schools
An investigation of the effects of breakfast cereals on alertness, cognitive function and other aspects of the reported well-being of children.	Smith	Nutritional Neuroscience	2010	Focus on nutrition (breakfast cereals)
Multi-disciplinary approaches to pupil behaviour in school—The role of evaluation in service delivery.	Hartnell	Educational Psychology in Practice	2010	Focus on children with multi-disciplinary involvement
Is the relationship between competence beliefs and test anxiety influenced by goal orientation?	Putwain & Daniels	Learning and Individual Differences	2010	Focus on test anxiety
Short-term memory, working memory, and	Bull, Epsy & Wiebe	Developmental Neuropsychology	2008	Focus on mathematical achievement at 7yo

executive functioning in preschoolers: Longitudinal predictors of mathematical achievement at age 7 years.				
Cyberbullying: Its nature and impact in secondary school pupils.	Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho, Fisher, Russell & Tippett	The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry	2008	Focus on cyberbullying in secondary school
The effectiveness of nurture groups on student progress: Evidence from a national research study.	Cooper & Whitebread	Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties	2007	Focus on effectiveness of nurture groups
Surveying the views of pupils attending supplementary schools in England.	Strand	Educational Research	2007	Focus on children attending extra schooling
The Assessment of Learner-Centered Practices Surveys: An English case study.	Crick & McCombs	Educational Research and Evaluation	2006	Focus on learner centred practice
Season of birth and childhood intelligence: Findings from the Aberdeen Children of the 1950s cohort study.	Lawlor, Clark, Ronalds & Leon	British Journal of Educational Psychology	2006	Original sample from 1950s
Nature, Nurture, and Perceptions of the Classroom Environment as They Relate to Teacher-Assessed Academic	Walker & Plomin	Educational Psychology	2006	Focus on nature vs nurture in 9yo twin-study

Achievement: A twin study of nine-year-olds.				
Phonological Awareness Intervention and the Acquisition of Literacy Skills in Children from Deprived Social Backgrounds.	Nancollis, Lawrie & Dodd	Language, Speech and Hearing Services in Schools	2005	Focus on effect of literacy and phonological awareness intervention
A Genetically Sensitive Investigation of the Effects of the School Environment and Socio-Economic Status on Academic Achievement in Seven-Year-Olds.	Walker, Petrill & Plomin	Educational Psychology	2005	Sample: 7yo
Use of ICT and its relationship with performance in examinations: A comparison of the ImpaCT2 project's research findings using pupil-level, school-level and multilevel modelling data.	Harrison, Lunzer, Tymms, Fitz-Gibbon, Restorick	Journal of Computer Assisted Learning	2004	Evaluation of ICT project
Physical activity cost of the school run: Impact on school children of being driven to school (EarlyBird 22).	Metcalf, Voss, Jeffery, Perkins & Wilkin	Primary Care	2004	Focus on children being driven to school
Language change in young Panjabi/English children:	Martin, Krishnamurthy, Bhardwaj & Charles	Child Language Teaching and Therapy	2003	Focus on language assessments for Punjabi-English children

implications for bilingual language assessment.				
Socioeconomic disparities in cancer-risk behaviors in adolescence: baseline results from the Health and Behaviour in Teenagers Study (HABITS).	Wardle, Jarvis, Steggle, Sutton, Williamson, Farrimond, Cartwright & Simon	Preventive Medicine	2003	Focus on adolescents and cancer-risk
Motivational trajectories for early language learning across the primary–secondary school transition.	Graham, Courtney, Tonkyn & Marinis	British Educational Research Journal	2016	Focus on transition to secondary school
Pilot study evaluating the impact of dialogic reading and shared reading at transition to primary school: Early literacy skills and parental attitudes.	Pillinger & Wood	Literacy	2014	Evaluation of reading intervention
A longitudinal study of psychological functioning and academic attainment at the transition to secondary school.	Riglin, Shelton, Frederickson & Rice	Journal of Adolescence	2013	Focus on transition to secondary school
Parental perspectives of students with autism spectrum disorders transitioning from primary to	Dillon & Underwood	Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities	2012	Focus on ASD children in transition to secondary school

secondary school in the United Kingdom.				
Assessing children's oral storytelling in their first year of school.	Riley & Burrell	International Journal of Early Years Education	2007	Focus on assessing children's oral storytelling
Toddlers' fine motor milestone achievement is associated with early touchscreen scrolling.	Bedford, de Urabain, Cheung, Karmiloff-Smith & Smith	Frontiers in Psychology	2016	Focus on toddlers and use of technology (touchscreens)
Trends in parent- and teacher-rated emotional, conduct and ADHD problems and their impact in prepubertal children in Great Britain: 1999–2008.	Sellers, Mauhan, Pickles, Thapar & Collishaw	The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry	2014	Focus on pre-pubertal children
Prevalence and correlates of screen time in youth: An international perspective.	Atkin, Sharp, Corder & van Sluijs	American Journal of Preventive Medicine	2014	Focus on relationship between screen time and mental health
Early parental physical punishment and emotional and behavioural outcomes in preschool children.	Scott, Lewsey, Thompson & Wilson	Child: Care, Health and Development	2013	Focus on physical punishment used by parents
Teacher and child talk in active learning and whole-class contexts: Some implications for children from economically less advantaged home backgrounds.	Martlew, Ellis, Stephen & Ellis	Literacy	2010	Focus on talk in the classroom

A study of class size effects in English school reception year classes.	Blatchford, Goldstein, Martin & Browne	British Educational Research Journal	2002	Focus on relationship between class size and achievement
Adolescents who acquire bacterial STDs have elevated risk of later testing positive for HIV.	London	<i>Not listed</i>	2014	Focus on sexual health in adolescence
Does working memory training lead to generalized improvements in children with low working memory? A randomized controlled trial.	Dunning, Holmes & Gathercole	Developmental Science	2013	RCT for working memory training
Children, internet and risk in comparative perspective.	Livingstone & Helsper	Journal of Children and Media	2012	Focus on children's use of the internet
A narrative literature review of the development of obesity in infancy and childhood.	Robinson, Yardy & Carter	Journal of Child Health Care	2012	Literature review related to obesity in infancy and childhood
Repeated exposure to socioeconomic disadvantage and health selection as life course pathways to mid-life depressive and anxiety disorders.	Stansfield, Clark, Rodgers, Caldwell & Power	Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology	2011	Focus on depression and anxiety in mid-life
Researching the first year of the National Singing Programme Sing Up in England: An initial impact evaluation.	Welch, Himonides, Saunders, Papageorgi, Rinta, Preti, Stewart, Lani & Hill	Psychomusicology	2011	Evaluation of the Sing Up programme
Relationship	Blair, Heron &	Pediatrics	2010	Focus on bed-

between bed sharing and breastfeeding: Longitudinal, population-based analysis.	Fleming			sharing and breast-feeding
Realizing the cognitive potential of children 5–7 with a mathematics focus: Post-test and long-term effects of a 2-year intervention.	Shayer & Adhami	British Journal of Educational Psychology	2010	Focus on mathematics intervention
Transforming readers: Teachers and children in the centre for literacy in primary education power of reading project.	O’Sullivan & McGonigle	Literacy	2010	Focus on reading project
From attachment to attainment: The impact of nurture groups on academic achievement.	MacKay, Reynolds & Kearney	Educational and Child Psychology	2010	Focus on impact of Nurture Groups
Associations between maternal older age, family environment and parent and child wellbeing in families using assisted reproductive techniques to conceive.	Bolvin, Rice, Hay, Harold, Lewis, van der Bree & Thapar	Social Science and Medicine	2009	Focus on assisted conception techniques
The first seven years at school.	Tymms, Jones, Albone & Henderson	Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability	2009	Focus on cumulative long-term impact of successive years of high quality provision in schools
Children playing	Harding,	Young Consumers	2009	Focus on children’s

and learning in an online environment: A review of previous research and an examination of six current web sites.	Szakacs & Parry			use of the internet
Review of Letting the outside in-- Developing teaching and learning beyond the classroom and Enhancing early years science.	Devereux	International Journal of Early Years Education	2010	Book review
Turning boys off? Listening to what five-year-olds say about reading.	Lever-Chain	Literacy	2008	Focus on children's views of reading
The genetic and environmental origins of learning abilities and disabilities in the early school years	Kovas, Haworth, Dale, Plomin, Weinberg, Thomson & Fischer	Monographs of the Society for research in Child Development	2007	Focus on ability and disability (abstract only)
Differences in risk factors for partial and no immunisation in the first year of life: Prospective cohort study.	Samad, Tate, Dezateux, Peckham, Butler & Bedford	British Medical Journal	2006	Focus on immunisation
Review of Play, learning and the early childhood curriculum	Duffy	International Journal of Early Years Education	2006	Book Review
Explaining the social gradient in smoking in pregnancy: Early life course accumulation and cross-sectional	Spencer	Social Science and Medicine	2006	Sample from 1985

clustering of social risk exposures in the 1958 British national cohort.				
Early years centres for pre-school children with primary language difficulties: What do they cost, and are they cost-effective?	Law, Dockrell, Castelnuovo, Williams, Seeff & Normand	International journal of language & communication disorders	2006	Focus on cost of early years centres for children with language difficulties
Evaluating the Effectiveness of an Early Years Language Intervention.	Bickford-Smith, Wijayatilake & Woods	Educational Psychology in Practice	2005	Evaluation of language intervention
The strength of children's knowledge of the role of root morphemes in the spelling of derived words.	Deacon & Bryant	The Journal of Child Language	2005	Focus on spelling in 7-9yo
The impact of parental psychiatric disorder on children: Avoiding stigma, improving care.	Ramchandani & Stein	British Medical Journal	2017	Focus on impact of parental psychiatric disorders
Drugs education at the transition from primary to secondary school: The pupils' views.	Cole	Educational Review	2000	Focus on transition to secondary school
Self-assessment in the primary school.	Towler & Broadfoot	Educational Review	1992	Focus on use of self-assessment in schools
The progress of pupils in their first school year across classes and educational	Tymms, Merrell & Wildy	British Educational Research Journal	2014	Sample: international

systems.				
Voices of young people with a history of specific language impairment (SLI) in the first year of post-16 education.	Palikara, Lindsay & Dockrell	International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders	2009	Focus on post-16 education and young people with specific language impairment
Articles that could not be sourced through alternate databases and search engines				
'We used to play in foundation, it was more funner': Investigating feelings about transition from foundation stage to year 1.	Fisher	An International Research Journal	2009	n/a
Articles read and excluded from literature review				
What we tell them is not what they hear: the importance of appropriate and effective communication to sustain parental engagement at transition points.	Davies, Tarr, & Ryan	International Journal about Parents in Education	2011	Focus on transition to secondary school
Measuring the foundations of school readiness: Introducing a new questionnaire for teachers—The Brief Early Skills and Support Index (BESSI).	Hughes, Daly, Foley, White, & Devine	British Journal of Educational Psychology	2015	Evaluation of school-readiness measurement tool
Parent-delivered compensatory	Ford, McDougall &	British Journal of Psychology	2009	Evaluation of parent intervention

education for children at risk of educational failure: Improving the academic and self-regulatory skills of a Sure Start preschool sample.	Evans			
International perspectives on progress, change and development in early childhood education and care, 1993 to 2013.	Coates	International Journal of Early Years Education	2013	Editorial
Starting school early in Britain: A model for universal preschool education.	Swiniarski	Early Childhood Education Journal	2007	Positioning paper
Starting school: The importance of parents' expectations.	Russell	Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs	2005	Focus on parents of disabled children
Predicting children's liking of school from their peer relationships.	Boulton, Don & Boulton	Social Psychology of Education	2011	Sample: 8-11yo
Progressing in Tandem: A Sure Start initiative for enhancing the role of parents in children's early education.	Ford, Evans & McDougal	Educational & Child Psychology	2003	Evaluation of intervention (linked to Sure Start initiative)
Impact of a play-based curriculum in the first two years of primary school: Literacy and numeracy outcomes	McGuinness, Sproule, Bojke, Trew & Walsh	British Educational Research Journal	2014	Focus on studying impact of a play-based curriculum in first two years of primary school in Northern Ireland

over seven years.				
School readiness and pedagogies of Competence and Performance: theorising the troubled relationship between early years and early years policy	Neaum	International Journal of Early Years Education	2016	Theoretical positioning paper regarding discourse in policy

Appendix 2. Walsh & Downe's (2006) Original Appraisal Tool for Qualitative Research

Stages	Essential criteria	Specific prompts
Scope and purpose	Clear statement of, and rationale for, research question/aims/purposes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarity of focus demonstrated • Explicit purpose given, such as descriptive/explanatory intent, theory building, hypothesis testing • Link between research and existing knowledge demonstrated
Design	Study thoroughly contextualised by existing literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of systematic approach to literature review, location of literature to contextualise the findings, or both
	Method/design apparent, and consistent with research intent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rationale given for use of qualitative design • Discussion of epistemological/ontological grounding • Rationale explored for specific qualitative method (e.g. ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology) • Discussion of why particular method chosen is most appropriate/sensitive/relevant for research question/aims • Setting appropriate
	Data collection strategy apparent and appropriate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were data collection methods appropriate for type of data required and for specific qualitative method? • Were they likely to capture the complexity/diversity of experience and illuminate context in sufficient detail? • Was triangulation of data sources used if appropriate?
Sampling strategy	Sample and sampling method appropriate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selection criteria detailed, and description of how sampling was undertaken • Justification for sampling strategy given • Thickness of description likely to be achieved from sampling • Any disparity between planned and actual sample explained
Analysis	Analytic approach appropriate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approach made explicit (e.g. Thematic distillation, constant comparative method, grounded theory) • Was it appropriate for the qualitative method chosen? • Was data managed by software package or by hand and why? • Discussion of how coding systems/conceptual frameworks evolved • How was context of data retained during analysis • Evidence that the subjective meanings of participants were portrayed • Evidence of more than one researcher involved in stages if appropriate to epistemological/theoretical stance • Did research participants have any involvement in analysis (e.g. member checking) • Evidence provided that data reached saturation or discussion/rationale if it did not • Evidence that deviant data was sought, or discussion/rationale if it was not
Interpretation	Context described and taken account of in interpretation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of social/physical and interpersonal contexts of data collection • Evidence that researcher spent time 'dwelling with the data', interrogating it for competing/alternative explanations of phenomena
	Clear audit trail given	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sufficient discussion of research processes such that others can follow 'decision trail'

Stages	Essential criteria	Specific prompts
Reflexivity	Data used to support interpretation Researcher reflexivity demonstrated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extensive use of field notes entries/verbatim interview quotes in discussion of findings • Clear exposition of how interpretation led to conclusions • Discussion of relationship between researcher and participants during fieldwork • Demonstration of researcher's influence on stages of research process • Evidence of self-awareness/insight • Documentation of effects of the research on researcher • Evidence of how problems/complications met were dealt with
Ethical dimensions	Demonstration of sensitivity to ethical concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethical committee approval granted • Clear commitment to integrity, honesty, transparency, equality and mutual respect in relationships with participants • Evidence of fair dealing with all research participants • Recording of dilemmas met and how resolved in relation to ethical issues • Documentation of how autonomy, consent, confidentiality, anonymity were managed
Relevance and transferability	Relevance and transferability evident	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sufficient evidence for typicality specificity to be assessed • Analysis interwoven with existing theories and other relevant explanatory literature drawn from similar settings and studies • Discussion of how explanatory propositions/emergent theory may fit other contexts • Limitations/weaknesses of study clearly outlined • Clearly resonates with other knowledge and experience • Results/conclusions obviously supported by evidence • Interpretation plausible and 'makes sense' • Provides new insights and increases understanding • Significance for current policy and practice outlined • Assessment of value/empowerment for participants • Outlines further directions for investigation • Comment on whether aims/purposes of research were achieved

Appendix 3. Long et al.'s (2002) Original Appraisal Tool for Quantitative Research

Review Area	Key Questions
(1) STUDY OVERVIEW	
Bibliographic Details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Author, title, source (publisher and place of publication), year
Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the aims of the study? • What are the aims of this paper?
Key Findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the key findings of the study?
Evaluative Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could the observed results have been brought about by something other than the intervention/care process? (Draw together evaluative comments on the study as a whole – strengths and weaknesses – and indicate further research work required, as appropriate, and possible theory, policy and practice implications)

Review Criteria	Key Questions
(2) STUDY, SETTING	
SAMPLE AND ETHICS	
The Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What type of study is this? • What was the intervention? • What was the comparison intervention? • Is there sufficient detail given of the nature of the intervention and the comparison intervention? • What is the relationship of the study to the area of the topic review?
Setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within what geographical and care setting was the study carried out?
Sample	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was the source population? • What were the inclusion criteria? • What were the exclusion criteria? • How was the sample selected? • If more than one group of subjects, how many groups were there, and how many people were in each group? • How were subjects allocated to the groups? • What was the size of the study sample? • Is the final sample of sufficient size to warrant the conclusions drawn? • Is information provided on loss to follow up? • Is the sample appropriate to the aims of the study? • What are the key sample characteristics? (i.e. in relation to the topic area being reviewed)
Ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was Ethical Committee approval obtained? • Was informed consent obtained from participants of the study? • Have ethical issues been adequately addressed?

Review Area	Key Questions
(3) GROUP COMPARABILITY	AND OUTCOME MEASUREMENT
Comparable Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If more than one group was analysed, were the groups comparable before the intervention? In what respects were they comparable and in what were they not? • How were important confounding variables controlled (e.g. matching, randomisation, in the analysis stage)? • Was this control adequate to justify the authors conclusions? • Were there other important confounding variables controlled for in the study design or analyses and what were they? • Did the authors take these into account in their interpretation of the findings?
Outcome Measurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What outcome criteria were used in the study? • What are the outcome measures used in the study? • Are the measures appropriate, given the outcome criteria? • What other (e.g. process, cost) measures are used in the study? • Are the measures well validated? • Are the measures of known responsive to change? • Whose perspective do the outcome measures address (professional, service, user, carer?) • Is there sufficient breath of perspective adopted in the outcome measures? • Are the outcome criteria useful/appropriate within routine practice? • Are the outcome measures useful/appropriate within routine practice?
Time Scale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was the length of follow-up? When was the data on the outcome measures collected? • Is this period of follow-up sufficiently long to warrant the conclusions drawn or to see the desired effects?

Review Area	Key Questions
(4) POLICY AND	PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS
Implications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what setting are the study findings generalisable? (Indicate if: the setting typical or representative of care settings and in what respects; and if the setting is atypical, is this likely to present a stronger or weaker test of the hypothesis?) • To what population are the study's findings generalisable? • Is the conclusion justified given the conduct of the study (e.g. sampling procedure; measures of outcome used and results achieved?) • What are the implications for policy? • What are the implications for service practice?
Other Comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What were the total number of references used in the study? • Are there any other noteworthy features of the study? • List other study references
Reviewer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name of reviewer • Review date

Appendix 4. A Critique of each Paper Included in the Literature Review

Kennedy et al. (2012) Transitions in the early years: Educational and child psychologists working to reduce the impact of school culture shock.		
	Yes/ No/Unclear	Comments
Design & Methodology		-Qualitative -Case study design
Sample & Sampling strategy		-Local case study relevant to purpose and position in local authority -Children transitioning from Nursery to Reception Southwark (inner London authority) -No specific demographics provided
World view & Theoretical positions		-Ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner) -Interactionist and Contextual -Attachment theory briefly alluded to (Written from perspective of Educational Psychologists)
Scope & Purpose		-Focus on transition to Reception -To position role of EP regarding transition and applying existing research in context -To argue evidence base in transition practices -Previous literature explored – reliant on US findings
Approach to Analysis		-No detail given; case-study design
Interpretation		-Some description of context; EP service in inner London Children’s Services, although description of demographics -Literature used as evidence base to support implementation of intervention
Key Findings/ Conclusions		-Promotes ecological view of readiness and transition -Distinguishes child from school readiness -Promotes use of transition frameworks (‘Ready Schools’) -Encourages the use of review systems and outcome monitoring
Reflexivity		
Ethical dimensions		None discussed
Relevance & transferability		-Specificity to local context -Evidence-informed stance is predominantly based on US literature

Norbury et al. (2016) Younger children experience lower levels of language competence and academic progress in the first year of school: Evidence from a population study.		
	Yes/ No/Unclear	Comments
Design & Methodology		-Quantitative -Large-scale population survey
Outcome Measurement		-Standardised questionnaires (Communication checklists, Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire) -Use of curriculum data (EYFS Profile)
Sample & Sampling strategy		-Schools across Surrey -7267 children (age 4;9 - 5;10) -Teachers completed measures
Comparable Groups (inc. control)		-Cohort divided into oldest, middle, youngest (according to month of birth)
World view & Theoretical positions		-Positivist/realist position
Scope & Purpose		-To investigate whether there is a mismatch between language competency and academic demands for the youngest children starting school. -To reduce need for specialist clinical services in later years for younger children.
Approach to Analysis		-Statistical analyses in Stata 12. -Binary logistics regression to investigate age as a predictor of teacher reported language difficulties. -Linear regression to investigate extent age predicts unique variance in academic attainment
Interpretation		-Context considered in interpretation of findings
Key Findings/ Conclusions		-Youngest children are not significantly disadvantaged prior to school entry -Youngest children most likely to have significant behaviour problems, and least likely to achieve Good Level of Development (GLD). -Youngest children have immature language and behaviour skills compared to older peers. -Youngest children 'not ready' to meet academic and social demands of the classroom. -There is a mismatch between developmental competence and academic expectations in Reception.
Reflexivity		-Presents alternative theoretical arguments at the beginning of the paper e.g. 'season of birth', 'red-shirting' -Limitations of measurement tools are reflected on
Ethical dimensions		Approved by University Ethics Committee
Implications & generalisability		-Large sample means greater transferability and possible generalizable findings. -Sample taken in Surrey – relatively more affluent than other parts of the UK
Time scale of measurement		-One time assessments only, no follow up

Darbyshire et al. (2014) An unsure start for young children in English urban primary schools.		
	Yes/ No/Unclear	Comments
Design & Methodology		-Qualitative -3 inter-linked teacher-inquiry projects (Action Research) -Case-study design -Interviews (<i>no detail given as to approach</i>) -Teacher and pupil questionnaires (<i>no detail given</i>) -Lesson observations (<i>no detail given as to approach</i>)
Sample & Sampling strategy		-Schools in the North of England in which the researchers work -Three urban primary schools in the North of England -Reception cohort and Year 5 class (rationale unclear) -Reception Teachers (interviews/questionnaires)
		-Pupils (questionnaires/interviews) -Parents are paraphrased but no reference to approach or context
World view & Theoretical positions		-Systemic; considers generational impact of educational failure
Scope & Purpose		-To highlight the multiple disadvantages and vulnerabilities of FSM children at school entry -To define and identify range of vulnerabilities faced by some children -To consider best approach to intervention
Approach to Analysis		-Contextual analysis of ACORN data (schools data available to LA) around SES -No details of analysis of interviews and questionnaires given
Interpretation		-Early stage of research, therefore only preliminary findings presented.
Key Findings/ Conclusions		-FSM and SEN as categorical labels are not sufficient in describing individual children -Teacher perceptions on entry guide approach to teaching and learning. -‘Less ready’ children have more TA/less Teacher time, therefore experience less demanding learning
Reflexivity		-Researcher’s positioning in schools not considered
Ethical dimensions		-None considered/presented -Paraphrasing of parents may have been done so without consent
Relevance & transferability		-Small scale research missing description of context limits transferability of findings -Early stage of research therefore details of findings and approach to analysis not given

Flynn (1987) Internal conflict and growth in a child preparing to start school.		
	Yes/ No/Unclear	Comments
Design & Methodology		-Qualitative -Single case study
Sample & Sampling strategy		-Clinical sample (single child in psychotherapy; 3y6mo)
		-No demographic information provided
World view & Theoretical positions		-Psychoanalytic: Kleinian (Object Relations Theory)
Scope & Purpose		-To explore and understand the internal conflict experienced by a child during transition to school -Aim to illustrate how working through infantile conflicts allowed child to make a successful transition from home to school
Approach to Analysis		-Psychoanalytic analysis through therapeutic relationship
Interpretation		-No description of the child and family in context is given, however, rich in-depth data acquired through therapeutic relation over time implies relevance of interpretations
Key Findings/ Conclusions		-Separation anxiety rooted in early experiences -Need for time to work through internal conflicts -Need for introjection of strong maternal object -Need to move on from early oedipal object relations to become independent -Overcoming early infantile fears/fantasies leads to emotional reg./insight -Use of symbolism as more complex for successful 'making sense'
Reflexivity		-High level of reflexivity due to close supervision (alluded to in dedications) -Author is aware of/makes use of the self throughout the analysis
Ethical dimensions		-Therapist received psychoanalytic supervision
Relevance & transferability		-Limited due to methodology and absence of detail of child/family demographics/in context -Theoretical transferability more likely

Marsh (2012) The Oedipal child starts school: Some thoughts about the difference in the experience of starting school for boys and girls at four years of age.		
	Yes/ No/Unclear	Comments
Design & Methodology		-Qualitative -Psychoanalytic observations over 1 year -Written process notes ' <i>free from interpretation</i> '
Sample & Sampling strategy		-1 Reception class (4 and 5yo) -No demographic information provided e.g. geographical location of school -No rationale for sample provided
World view & Theoretical positions		-Psychoanalytic (Kleinian, Object Relations Theory) -Reference made to theory of mind
Scope & Purpose		-To explore the experience of starting school for 4/5yo -To explore Oedipal development in the context of first year in school -To explore gender differences in Oedipal conflicts when starting school
Approach to Analysis		-Psychoanalytic observations were conducted and make use of the self through unconscious dynamics/communications
Interpretation		-No description of context given therefore difficult to assess relevance of interpretations -Some national context provided regarding gender differences in attainment -Interpretations are supported by observational data, and made sense of through psychoanalytic supervision (triangulation) -Binary view of gender
Key Findings/ Conclusions		-Children's Oedipal development is affected by the demands of starting school. -There is a need for both maternal and paternal figures in school life. -Gender differences are marked in the early years, with regards to how Oedipal conflicts are played out in the classroom context -Suggestion that there is a 'school ready state of mind' to be reached before a child is able to manage demands of school
Reflexivity		-Psychoanalytic supervision enables high level of reflexivity -Researcher examines impact of own relationship with children
Ethical dimensions		-Therapist received psychoanalytic supervision
Relevance & transferability		-Limited as no context/demographics of school catchment given -Theoretical transferability more likely

Yang & Lamb (2014) Factors Influencing Classroom Behavioural Engagement During the First Year at School		
	Yes/ No/Unclear	Comments
Design & Methodology		-Quantitative
Outcome Measurement		-Children's Behaviour Questionnaire used to measure effortful control and impulsivity -Child-Mother Attachment Security Questionnaire -Child Behaviour Rating Scale -Time sampling observations -Student-Teacher Relationship Scale -School Liking-Avoidance scale
Sample & Sampling strategy		-5 primary schools (South East, city of Cambridge) -67 children -Majority upper/middle class -No comment on Free School Meals/Pupil Premium/EAL/SEN/ethnicity etc. -Parents, Teachers and Children completed questionnaires
Comparable Groups (inc. control)		n/a
World view & Theoretical positions		-Positivist/realist -Developmental Psychology -Bio-psych-social model -Attachment theory
Scope & Purpose		-To examine effortful control and impulsivity (self-regulation) during the first year of school -To examine behavioural involvement and engagement in children during the first year of school
Approach to Analysis		-Descriptive analyses of predictor and outcome variables -Simple and multiple linear regression analyses -Bivariate correlations (use of SPSS.19)
Interpretation		-Context not considered in relation to findings
Key Findings/ Conclusions		-Child and contextual factors collectively affect behavioural engagement during the first year of school -Children begin school when executive function and cognitive control are just beginning to mature -4yo in UK begin long school days; age related to behavioural involvement and engagement
Reflexivity		-Observers were used, details absent
Ethical dimensions		-Gained university ethical approval -Parental consent gained -No detail of gaining consent from children
Implications & generalisability		-Small sample size for quantitative study – authors caution generalisation -Use of standardised questionnaires without comment on participant groups suitability -Predominantly middle-upper class sample
Time scale of measurement		-9 month study: began prior to school start, at enrollment, monthly after enrollment up until 7 months after start -No follow up

Brooker (2003) Learning how to learn: parental ethnotheories and young children's preparation for school.		
	Yes/ No/Unclear	Comments
Design & Methodology		-Qualitative -Interpretative case study located in one school (discussion of one aspect of findings from larger ethnography) -Observations -Questionnaire and Assessments (<i>no details given</i>) -Interviews
Sample & Sampling strategy		-16 four year olds and their parents (8 UK 'Anglo', 8 Bangladeshi) -"Poor neighbourhood in an English provincial town" -Children predicted to have relatively poor attainment based on vulnerability to financial and social crises
World view & Theoretical positions		-Risk and resilience -Symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1997), habitus (Bourdieu, 1980) -Psychoanalytic (unconsciously held beliefs)
Scope & Purpose		-To uncover fine grained variations in daily experiences at home, that contribute to differences in school achievement
Approach to Analysis		Not described/no details given of approach -'Explanations'
Interpretation		-Very specific to sample -Geographical location not provided -No details of approach to analysis therefore difficult to assess whether findings are justifiable
Key Findings/ Conclusions		-Families are at odds with the school in their understanding of teaching and learning, and the roles of adults and children -Pedagogy advantages children from certain backgrounds -One way of understanding variation in children's experiences is through cultural belief systems e.g. parental conceptions of intelligence and childhood
Reflexivity		-Highlights own relationship to participants; 'insider-outsider debate' (Merton, 1972), power relationships (Seller, 1994) -Field notes of conversations with participants were kept
Ethical dimensions		-Consent discussed in other linked papers
Relevance & transferability		-No claims to generality -Claims for relevance depend on the ways it explores and challenges theoretical positions, suggesting implications for practice

Mathieson & Banerjee (2010) Pre-school peer play: The beginnings of social competence.		
	Yes/ No/Unclear	Comments
Design & Methodology		-Quantitative
Outcome Measurement		-Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire, Child Behaviour Questionnaire, Penn Peer Interactive Play Scale, Emotion recognition and prediction tasks -Limitations of measures discussed -Some measures removed without rationale
Sampling strategy		-104 (18-49 months) children from 24 preschool settings in Croydon (outer London) -Predominantly White British (49%), 17% Black Caribbean, 12% Black African, 28% other. -Reported income levels; 16% income below 20,000 p/a - Parents (ratings of children's temperament) -Practitioners (questionnaires) -Possible that EAL/less literate parents were excluded from study (33% response rate via questionnaires), therefore sample not necessarily representative
Comparable Groups (inc. control)		-Sub-sample used for additional testing, no rationale given
World view & Theoretical positions		-Positivist/realist -Risk and resilience
Scope & Purpose		-Examine relationship between temperament, emotional understanding and socially competent peer play. -Examine degree of convergence between parent and practitioner perceptions of children's socio-behavioural functioning.
Approach to Analysis		-Correlational (regression analyses)
Interpretation		-Appropriate description of sample -33% return rate from parents, possibly due to accessibility of materials
Key Findings/ Conclusions		-Temperament and emotion understanding associated with more socially competent peer play -Social competence: good convergence between parent and practitioner views; Behavioural problems: divergence -Effortful control and self-regulation play key role in social competence -Extraversion predicted less disconnected peer interactions -Surgency associated with less social withdrawal
Reflexivity		-No consideration of impact of unfamiliar person on testing conditions with children -Methodology not consistent with a reflexive stance
Ethical dimensions		-Parental consent gained -Practitioners collected parent questionnaires -No evidence of child's consent (esp. for subsample)
Implications & generalisability		-Large sample and use of standardised questionnaire allows for some generalisation -Subsample (28) not described, limits generalisability
Time scale of measurement		-One time assessments only, no follow up

Hughes & Ensor (2011) Individual differences in growth in executive function across the transition to school predict externalizing and internalizing behaviours and self-perceived academic success at 6 years of age.		
	Yes/ No/Unclear	Comments
Design & Methodology		-Quantitative -Built on an existing latent variable analysis of executive function in children making the transition to school.
Outcome Measurement		-Cognitive assessments (Day/Night Stroop test of inhibitory control, Beads working memory sub-test of Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scales, Tower of London planning scales) and standardised measures used (British Picture Vocabulary Scale) with children -Teacher interviews to complete SDQs as ratings of emotional symptoms, hyperactivity, conduct/peer problems -Children's self-perceived academic and social competencies (Harter and Pike's 1984 Pictorial Scale)
Sample & Sampling strategy		-191 children (57% boys, 43% girls) in Cambridge schools -Priority given to schools serving low-income areas (no rationale given): family occupational and income data collected (16% living in poverty), maternal education data collected -Ethnically homogeneous (97% Caucasian)
Comparable Groups (inc. control)		-Other groups referred to as part of wider study
World view & Theoretical positions		-Positivist/realist -Developmental Neuropsychology
Scope & Purpose		-To document average developmental improvements (between age 4-6) and individual differences in executive function growth -To quantify gains in EF between ages 4 and 6yo. -Linked to predicting success in transition to school
Approach to Analysis		Analysis of the sample variance-covariance matrix (using MPlus5 and a maximum likelihood function)
Interpretation		-Adequate description of sample for context -Situated well in existing body of evidence
Key Findings/ Conclusions		-Variation in executive function slopes across transition predicted variation in problem-behaviour scales and children's self-report academic (not social) competence -Promote the value of adopting a developmental perspective regarding young children in transition due to variation in scores -Verbally less able children: greater gains in EF than peers
Reflexivity		-Not necessarily consistent with world view
Ethical dimensions		-Parental consent given -Cognitive assessments administered during transition period: no consideration of impact
Implications & generalisability		-Large, homogeneous sample suggests degree of generalisability
Time scale of measurement		-Measures at age 4 and 6yo

Turner-Cobb et al. (2008) A Prospective Study of Diurnal Cortisol Responses to the Social Experience of School Transition in Four-Year-Old Children: Anticipation, Exposure, and Adaptation		
	Yes/ No/Unclear	Comments
Design & Methodology		-Quantitative -Within participants, longitudinal, naturalistic design. -Repeated measures design
Outcome Measurement		-Child Behaviour Questionnaire (short-form) – (parents) -Child Adaptive Behaviour Inventory – (teachers) -Saliva samples – (collected by parents)
Sample & Sampling strategy		-105 4 year olds in South West England, 1 of their parents -Reception class teachers (rated social, behavioural and academic competence) -Parents (collected saliva samples and rated child temperament) -Predominantly white, British, middle class families -No further details regarding demographics of remaining families -Nature of study likely to have favoured more highly educated/literate, middle-class parents
Comparable Groups (inc. control)		n/a
World view & Theoretical positions		-Positivist/realist -Theory of allostasis (“stability through change”) applied to experience of transition and adaptation to first year of formal schooling -Within child (temperament and social adaptation) factors combined with systemic (preschool experience, life events) factors
Scope & Purpose		-To assess the influence of social experience and temperament on the developing physiological stress response system in young children transitioning to formal school.
Approach to Analysis		-Statistical (parametric and non parametric tests)
Interpretation		-Clear and transparent description of procedures and audit trail -Some consideration given to findings in context of a predominantly middle-class sample -Links made to larger study
Key Findings/ Conclusions		-School transition provides a naturalistic stressor -Increased cortisol from baseline to transition: not significant -Decreased cortisol from transition to follow up: significant -Poorer effortful control associated with higher morning, steeper diurnal slope of cortisol at transition -Surgency/extroversion associated with increased cortisol at transition - greater social isolation in first 6 months of school in these children predicted higher cortisol at follow up
Reflexivity		-Discussion demonstrates reflexivity in consideration of multiple interactive factors impacting on children’s experience, and high cortisol levels, prior to starting school.
Ethical dimensions		-Two levels of ethical approval achieved -Written consent from parents and teachers -Verbal consent from children -Permission from Head Teacher of school children

		transitioning to
Implications & generalisability		-Large sample size appropriate for quantitative study (comparable to others in similar field) -Caution representativeness of sample
Time scale of measurement		-Measures taken prior to, at and 12 months following school transition

Appendix 5. Information Sheet provided to Participants



Information for Parents

Thank you for volunteering to take part in my project! Please keep reading to find all the information you need.

What is the study about?

I'm interested in what parents think about the idea of children needing to be ready for school, and how this affects the experience of starting school.

For this part of the project, I would like to focus on the views of parents of children who receive free school meals.

By asking for your views, I hope to gain an understanding about what school readiness means to you. That information can then be used to help schools and other professionals work in closer partnership with children and families.

Why have I been asked to be involved in the study?

You have been randomly chosen from the Reception parent group, of children who receive free school meals, at xxx Primary School. I only have a short amount of time to do this project, so I can only interview a small number of parents.

What happens if I say yes to taking part?

If you take part, I will invite you to meet me for 2 interviews. Each one will last for no more than an hour. I will ask you some questions about your experiences of your child starting school and what being 'school ready' means to you. I will try my best to make sure the interviews are arranged at a time convenient for you.

Do I have to take part?

Your choice to take part is voluntary and is in no way linked to the service you or your family receives from the school or local authority.

I think your views are valuable, and I believe you can provide important information that may develop practice in schools and by other professionals working with children and families.

Data Protection & Anonymity

I am the only person who will have access to information about the parents who take part.

I will record the interviews so that I can listen to them and write them up. This is so that I can look closely at any themes that come up. Once I have written them up, no one will be able to link you to the research, and the recordings will be permanently deleted. All information gathered will be kept in agreement with the local authority's Data Protection Policy.

In the write up, I will change all details so that anyone reading will not know who you are, who your child is, or which school your child attends.

I am only interviewing a small group of parents. It is important that you get to say all that you would wish to say about your experience. It is unlikely but I will take every step possible to ensure your experiences do not identify you to anybody in my write up.

In line with normal safeguarding procedures, if any information shared suggests harm is being experienced, I have a duty of care to report this information.

Your Right to Withdraw

At any point before, during or after being interviewed, you have the right to withdraw yourself and the information you have shared. You will not need to say why. You also have the right not to answer any of the questions asked during the interview.

Once the interviews are written up, and no longer linked to you, you will not be able to withdraw information. I will let you know when this will be.

Sharing Findings

Outcomes from the study will be shared with professionals in the local authority, with the aim to improve services. I will write up the findings as part of a thesis. General outcomes will be shared with the parents who chose to take part on an individual basis.

Ethical Assurance

This study had received approval from the Ethics Committee at the Tavistock and Portman Trust (TREC).

If you have any concerns about the research, or other aspects of this project, please contact Louis Taussig, the Trust Quality Assurance Office ltaussig@tavi-port.nhs.uk at the Tavistock and Portman Trust.

Judith Mortell will supervise me and can be contacted at jmortell@tavi-port.nhs.uk.

Further Information

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. Below are the contact details to use if you choose to take part. Please don't send any personal information by email; we can make arrangements for that if we need to.

Email: rsoares@tavi-port.nhs.uk

Appendix 6. Consent Form provided to Participants



Consent Form

Researcher's Name: Rachel Soares

Topic of Study: Parent views of School Readiness

Please read and complete this form carefully. If you would like more information or do not understand, please ask me 😊

The study has been explained to me and I understand what is being asked of me.	YES NO (please circle)
I know that I can withdraw from this study at any time without having to give an explanation and this will not affect any services my family receives.	YES NO (please circle)
I understand all information about me will be treated in strict confidence and I will not be named in any written work. I know that a small number of people who know me may recognise my experiences in the write up, but Rachel will take every step possible to minimise the chance of this happening.	YES NO (please circle)
I understand all recorded and written information will be used only for research purposes and will be destroyed once the study has finished.	YES NO (please circle)
I understand that the findings of the study will be discussed with professionals within the local authority, with staff in the school, and will be written up as part of a research thesis.	YES NO (please circle)

I freely give my consent to take part in the **two interviews** for this study.

Name & Signature

Date

**Appendix 7. Confirmation of Ethical Approval from the Tavistock & Portman NHS Trust
Research Ethics Committee**

The Tavistock and Portman 
NHS Foundation Trust

Quality Assurance & Enhancement
Directorate of Education & Training
Tavistock Centre
120 Belsize Lane
London
NW3 5BA

Tel: 020 8938 2699
www.tavi-port.org

Rachel Soares

By Email

10 June 2016

Re: Research Ethics Application

Title: A psychosocial perspective on the meaning of 'school readiness' to low-income parents

Dear Rachel,

I am pleased to inform you that subject to formal ratification by the Trust Research Ethics Committee your research ethics application has been approved. This means you can proceed with your research.

If you have any further questions or require any clarification do not hesitate to contact me.

I am copying this communication to your supervisor.

May I take this opportunity of wishing you every success with your research.

Best regards,



Paru Jeram

Secretary to the Trust Research Degrees Subcommittee

T: 020 938 2699

E: pjeram@tavi-Port.nhs.uk

cc. Brian Davis, Course Lead

Appendix 8. Code System export from MAXQDA illustrating the Relationship between Themes, Subthemes and Codes

Code System	#
Code System	12
	18
Misc./Redundant	0
Something's wrong	7
SEN	15
Impact of technology	8
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Planning for the future	3
Difficulties may lead to bullying/social isolation	14
Thinking about secondary school	17
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You never know	1
Impact of decision in the long-term	4
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Dealing with things on her own	9
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Impact of relationship with own parents	7
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My health	12
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Impact of financial pressures	16
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Being a 'tough mum'	9
Physical environment	4
Safety	10
Feeding	3
Importance of sleep	4
Proximity to school	2
Protecting child	5
Meeting their basic needs	6
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SUB: CHANGES OVER TIME	0
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Ready means no preparation needed	4
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Everything's 'fine' when they're at school	19
Nothing to do with school unless something is wrong	5
Weighting on what child says	19
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Parent - Teacher relationship/bond	10
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Child's relationship with Teacher	11
Knowledge of/familiarity with Teacher	3
Staff proactive in approaching parents	1
SUB: EXPLANATORY MODELS; FACILITATORS	0
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Having support in class	6
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Familiarity with school makes for an easier transition	5
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Child's personality traits	16
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Absence of anxiety as an indicator of readiness	7
Emotional development	13
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Children responding to authority/boundaries	1
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SUB: DECISION-MAKING	0
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Earlier and earlier	5
Time	11
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SUB: SOCIALISATION	0
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Children benefit from the social aspect of school	20
SUB: PEDAGOGY	0
Importance of routine/structure	8
Child-centred learning	2
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**Appendix 9. Full Analysis export from MAXQDA showing the link between Themes
through to Segmented Text**

See attached USB

Appendix 10. Raw Transcripts produced following Individual Interview – (Alex only, see USB for all participants)

**‘Alex’ talking about ‘Jamie’
F.A.N.I INTERVIEW 1 (20.7.16)**

RESEARCHER: Ok Alex, so can you just tell me about Jamie starting school?

ALEX: Er, what in Nursery or...

RESEARCHER: Starting school. So when he first...

ALEX: Oh she first started it, erm, started here in, she had turned three in the March, and she started here literally in the April after the Easter. Um...

RESEARCHER: Ok.

ALEX: But before that she was with a child-minder. For a bit.

RESEARCHER: Ok. She was with a child minder, and then she started Nursery.

ALEX: Yeh. And then she came here in the April. She had turned three in the March. And then in the April of the Easter, she started [school].

RESEARCHER: Ok, so tell me a little bit about that time, when she first started.

ALEX: What, how she was feeling or how she was...

RESEARCHER: Yeh.

ALEX: Erm, (laughs) she was. She's quite clingy. She's the one out of all of them that's quite clingy. Erm, so she was always quite upset and distressed. And, in all fairness, up until about four months ago, she still would cry every day coming into school.

RESEARCHER: Ok.

ALEX: But when she's here she's fine.

RESEARCHER: Ok, but quite distressed...?

ALEX: Yeh. Quite distressed coming in. To be honest, that was why I thought by settling her with a child minder first would help. But I think she just has that, where she just doesn't like to leave me.

RESEARCHER: She doesn't like to leave you.

ALEX: Yeh. She's like that anyway. When we go anywhere, she doesn't like to leave me.

RESEARCHER: So tell me a little more about that, not liking to leave you.

ALEX: I think it's just coz I have em all, all the time. So they don't really go anywhere else. Erm. So. If I do go anywhere, like away or anything, she just doesn't, coz she's with me 24/7. Erm. I think it's just like a, not wanting to leave.

RESEARCHER: Yeh. And how about you? How does that make you feel?

ALEX: Erm. To be honest, I do get, I do feel upset. But I think sometimes you, you, you realise that they have to go to school. And you can't just molly-coddle them. And you know like, so, you do, their benefit, I know that when she's at school, she's absolutely fine.

RESEARCHER: She's absolutely fine when she's at school.

ALEX: Yeh. As soon as, literally, a few minutes after leaving, she's absolutely fine, so...and they realise you're coming back.

RESEARCHER: Ok. When you were saying, you have to realise they have to go school.

ALEX: Yeh.

RESEARCHER: Tell me a little bit more about that.

ALEX: Erm. Well to be honest I think it just helps them socially, when they're going to school, when they're in the right set up. Erm. And I think (long pause) You know, for some children, socially, they need to be with other children. They'll benefit with being with other children.

RESEARCHER: Can you say a little more about that?

ALEX: Erm. I just think for their whole play and their whole learning. I think they need to interact with other children of their age. So sometimes when, I mean I've always gone to playgroups. So when you're going to playgroups, sometimes that isn't enough. You know, one hour here, or going every single week, or it's not like school where they're coming every single day. To playgroup you could just turn up as and when like. If you wanted to go in at 10 o'clock and leave at half past, you could. But if you wanted to spend the whole two hours there you could.

RESEARCHER: When they're in the right set up at school. What did you mean by that?

ALEX: Erm. Just like. Having routine. Is a big factor. Coming in, erm, having some kind of structure. For them.

RESEARCHER: Mm. What do you mean by structure?

ALEX: Like, you know, set lunchtime, set story time, set reading times, set focused activities.

RESEARCHER: So a set lunchtime, set story time and focused activities. And, you said, something about, every single day?

ALEX: Yeh. I think it makes it, makes. Because I just think, that children do need routine. Otherwise they wouldn't have a bedtime. They have to have a routine.

RESEARCHER: So you...(Alex interrupts)

ALEX: Especially when they're that young. I think they need routine. I think as they get older you can be a bit more flexible, but I do think, when it, when it, when it comes to children of, up to, even up to 7 or 8, they still need a *pacific [specific] routine.

RESEARCHER: Ok. So if we can go back to when Jamie first started coming. You said she was quite clingy. Upset and distressed. What was that time like for you? How did that make you feel?

ALEX: Erm, yeh it did, it did make me upse...to be honest, at first I was think, 'oh what's going on?'

(Interview came to an end due to interruption from school staff)

F.A.N.I INTERVIEW: 1 (part 2; 9.9.16)

After reminding Alex of the relevant information, she said to me, 'can you just ask me questions, because I don't like just talking, I don't know if what I'm saying is right. So I'd rather you just ask me questions, otherwise I don't know if it's what you want or not.'

I explained to Alex that everything she has to say is of relevance and importance to me. And that the reason I wasn't asking her too many questions is because I want it to come from her, rather than framing her answers through my own lens. She reluctantly accepted my answer, seeming a little disappointed.

RESEARCHER: So, last time you spoke a little bit about Jamie being at Nursery, and that experience for you, and her coming to [school]. And you spoke a little bit about that time being quite difficult for her, with her being, you used the word clingy, and her being upset and distressed. Um, so I suppose I just wanted to ask you if you could tell me a little bit about Jamie's readiness to start school. How you felt about that?

ALEX: Um, to be honest, I think she was ready as in she needed socially ready to go to school. Um, I just think that she just finds it hard to *distatch [detach?] from myself. Um, and yeh, I just like she, she. (pause) I think she's ready because she needs to come to school because she's at the levels where she should be. But in regards to her, emotionally, um I'm not doing her no favours by keeping her at home.

RESEARCHER: Ok, say a little bit more about being at the right levels?

ALEX: Er, with regards to learning, um, she was, you know, with everything, all of her um, all of her stages. She was, as she was coming through the early years, like getting dressed, she was ready. Um, she was able to count, she was able to do her colours, so yeh, so she was at them stages where she should be, um and at home, there was nothing really more that I could be doing, by taking her to playgroups. Um, I think she needed to come to Nursery to, to socially, um, be ready for the real world.

RESEARCHER: So you felt she was ready to go to Nursery –

ALEX: Yeh.

RESEARCHER: And what about when she started school?

ALEX: She was exactly the same. Up until, um, I'd say February of Reception, from September to February, she still cried every single day. And in all fairness, yesterday she was a bit tearful. And that's in Year 1. So I just think it's her. Because I'm at home with them all the time. Well not at home, but you know, because they don't get passed to everybody at home, so I think for her it's just more, she wants to come to school, but then she doesn't want to be without me.

RESEARCHER: Tell me a little bit more about that time when she's tearful, and not wanting to leave you.

ALEX: To be honest, when she was little, I did, 'coz, before she used to go with a child-minder, and she used to be really tearful. Until a point where it used to get me quite, quite upset. And I would then ask advice, from like, other child-minders. And say look, do you think there's something up, as such. Um, which I knew that there wasn't something up, but I wanted just reassurance. Oh, you know, am I making the right decision, shall I change it from a child-minder and put her into a pre, pre-school, um, which I didn't, I left her with the child-minder. Um, and then when she came into Nursery. I kind of realised, it was nothing to do with the child-minder, and it was just her, just emotionally, being upset some days. Um, and, it did used to quite upset me. And, um. But by the time she go to Reception, I kind of knew she was ok the minute I left the classroom. So, it was a case of look, stop being silly, just, 'coz that's what happens. You get in the class and most children are absolutely fine.

RESEARCHER: And when you say, stop being silly, who are you saying that to, Jamie or yourself?

ALEX: No to Jamie. Like, stop being silly, you know I'm coming home to get, I'm coming back to get you, you know.

RESEARCHER: Ok, and has that changed over time?

ALEX: Um, well from the February, February/March, we didn't have any tears when we, when we came into school. Um, but then we had to try a couple of like rewards, or you know like, oh no you didn't cry today so, you know, we'll go past the shop, or, not to buy sweets, but to, you know, if I've promised her something, you know, if you're being behaving, you get up and you get dressed and, like on your own, then then, we'll go into the pound shop this evening and get some pens or pencils or whatever, just to try and...help her.

RESEARCHER: And did that make a difference?

ALEX: It did. Yeh. Definitely. Most definitely. Even now, sometimes if she's feeling a bit upset, I do say, well we'll go and get something for your pencil case, or, you know, or something for her.

RESEARCHER: Ok. So something...

ALEX: Like bribing really, almost (laughs).

RESEARCHER: Ok. And, you were saying, Jamie's come back to school this year...

ALEX: Yeh. She really wanted to come back. The whole holidays we bought a new pencil case set, coz you know, she's gone into Year 1. So she's. So she now knows she's going to be getting homework on a Friday, and she likes that idea, and at home she plays a lot of schools. Absolutely fine coming into school Tuesday...Wednesday...then yesterday morning, at home, she was really upset. Just. You know. Like. She'll (laughs) like. Because I have the six children, you know, if one of them just walked past and 'awww', you know just really, just, emotional. Um. But she did, she come up on her own. And I came up a couple minutes later. Because I had to run up to the car to get something. And she was in the classroom, she was sitting. But I could see that she was quite, still quite upset. So I did mention the teacher. And then she started to get a bit like. You know. I could see that she wanted to cry. But, yeh. I think it just now just depends on the morning. And I don't think it's anything to do with coming to school. I think it's just her, just how she is. Yeh.

RESEARCHER: Ok. So you talked about her emotionally. Say a little bit more about what you mean by that.

ALEX: Um, well, um, she's the youngest of six, so you know, she kind of, in so many words, gets her own way a lot more. Um, so, she does have more, tend to have more strops, or wants to be more clingy, or you know.

RESEARCHER: Because she's the youngest, you see more strops.

ALEX: Yeah. Definitely. Yeh.

RESEARCHER: Tell me a little bit about her, emotionally, and starting school. What that was like.

ALEX: Errr, emotionally, for her it was really upsetting. It was really upsetting for her. Really really upsetting. She erm used to get up in the night, come down and get into my bed. And be quite. She never mentioned, like, that she, ...she didn't, she didn't have hours or prolonged time of saying I don't want to go to school. It was never a case of that. It would always be, the previous night, would be like, 'Tomorrow I'm gonna be really good. I'm gonna...' But then by the time the next day come, we'd be discussing it, and then we'd get a stage further. It went from being crying in the morning, crying in the car, and then finally got to the stage of there was no crying in the morning, no crying in the car. But then, all the way, she'd be like 'I'm gonna, I'm not gonna cry, I'm not gonna cry.' And as soon as we'd get to school and she'd realise, she would get quite upset.

RESEARCHER: Ok. What did you do at that time?

ALEX: Erm, to be honest, I kind of by that time, knew that she'd be absolutely fine. The minute I left. And it was a case. And it is a case of, the minute I left, the the the classroom, um, within a couple of seconds, or a couple of minutes, she'd be absolutely fine. And be off playing and...yeh. So. I kind of by that time, I kind of knew that everything was going to be ok. So for me, I didn't, didn't find it that hard, in all fairness, I didn't really find it as hard when she went into Nursery as previously when she was with a child-minder, because obviously she was a lot younger. So to me, I kind of, was like, oh what's going on like, less likely to talk so much. When they're, when they're only two and a half, whereas as they get to three they start to tell you a little bit more about their day.

RESEARCHER: So it was more when she was with a child-minder, that was a difficult time?

ALEX: Yeh. More difficult for me. But her. I don't think it really made a difference. For her, it was exactly the same. Um. Process for her. She was being left. As in, yeh. But for me, it was so much more easier, dropping her into school than...than with the child-minder.

RESEARCHER: Can you say a little bit about that?

ALEX: I just think, when she was with a child-minder, I kind of didn't know, what you know, at school there's a routine. There's a routine every day, so every day they come in, they sit on the carpet, you know, they know when their lunch time is, they know when their snack time I...well, not really snack time coz they have snack times. But you know, when it's quiet time they've got to read a book, or focused exercises. Whereas with a child-minder, it's a little bit more...little bit

more flexible, as in, you know, oh today we're going to go to playgroup, or you know, today I've got a few bits, like, for a child-minder, I've got a couple bits to do, so I'm gonna do them bits and then we're gonna come home and have the afternoon at home. In the house. So it was a bit more, there's a lot more structure at school, than there is being with a child-minder where, within reason, a child-minder can as you say, ok, right, you know, I've got the gasman waiting today so we're going to have to stay indoors today. Whereas at school, it's not, it's a totally different, experience.

RESEARCHER: A different experience.

ALEX: Yeh.

RESEARCHER: And you spoke about routine and structure a few times. Last time as well. Say a bit more about what you mean by having a routine.

ALEX: To be honest, it, personally, for myself, because I have six children, they're all close in age. I had six under 10. So for me, routine is always been a big factor. Um. Set bedtimes. Same dinner times. Most days. And, unless there was something going on, I'd always keep everything the same. And I think children need a routine, um, and for me, regardless of whether it's a Saturday or Sunday. Um, my children still had a 7 o'clock bed time, so, just they're ready for the next day. Personally, Jamie needs like 12 hours sleep. They all need 12 hour...well mine do have 12 hours sleep.

RESEARCHER: And, is that something, you can work that into your routine.

ALEX: Yeh yeh yeh. Yeh because she by the time she'd come into school, nursery, she wasn't sleeping during the day. So I'm happy for them to, go down at 7 o'clock. And wake up at half 7 in the morning. That's not a problem for me.

RESEARCHER: Yeh. So, you spoke a bit about her experience of going to a childminder, and starting Nursery. Obviously Jamie's just finished her time in Reception. And she's started in Year 1. Can you say a little bit about that?

ALEX: For me. (sigh) it's a realization that they're growing up. In all fairness. (wavering voice) Yeh, so. I mean. For me, it's kind of like, 'oh my god, you know like, they're not babies. I don't have any little, little ones.' But yeh, but. I'm quite happy where I am at the moment. (laughs)

RESEARCHER: You're happy where you are.

ALEX: Yeah I don't really need any babies, I'm not yeh. For me, it's not yeh. I'm happy that, we're like, where I am. I'm now working and stuff, which obviously I wasn't able to do when Jamie was in Nursery. Um. Or so much with a childminder. As much. But yeh.

RESEARCHER: So the realization of her growing up.

ALEX: Yeh.

RESEARCHER: No longer a baby.

ALEX: Yeh exactly.

RESEARCHER: When she was coming to the end of Reception, what was that experience like, at that time for you.

ALEX: Um, yeh it was quite, quite, not emotional, where I'd be getting upset, obviously. But kind of you know, in you know, when you lay there at night, 'oh god. That's it. This is real school now.' Because before, I don't know Nursery and Reception is, more like the fun learning part of everything. And now it's the serious stuff. Um. And because I've just had one go out of Year 1, she's now gone into Year 2. So they're following each other, they're one after each other. So. Yeh.

RESEARCHER: So it is like real school now, it's serious stuff.

ALEX: Yeh. Yeh, it's more, I mean likewise for Jamie. She actually turned around the other day and said, yesterday I think it was, she said, she come home, she said, 'Mum. We don't have a snack table any more.' Because obviously now, they don't have just that, that, freedom or being able to go and get water and a, and, fruit as and when they like. You know. And that's what I had to explain to her. You know, no you have times when you have your fruit, erm. But now you only have your water, your bottle of water that you bring into school, you know, you're not able to go and. So that's the only thing for her, that she's sort of, more so, not a concern. As such. But just, a bit, like oh, like a realization, 'oh my god, like, there's no snack table?' Whereas you know, previously, all through the whole holidays, she could not wait to get back to school. She made the teacher a little booklet, she done it all by herself. Erm. She, she, erm, actually wrote in it, and wrote, erm, [teacher], I hope you're gonna be the best teacher. I did no help whatsoever. Did some pictures. Then you flipped over the next page and she, she actually wrote, erm, this is some of my best writing and wrote some of the children's names in her class. This is my best maths, and she just did some tiny little take aways. And adding. Just in the booklet. Just for [teacher] to have. So she'd already done that like leading up to coming into Year 1. So she's excited. Um. She really likes the idea of getting homework on a Friday. So, now she does. She might not by the time she gets to secondary school.

RESEARCHER: (Laugh) Ok. So you said she was excited to come back to school.

ALEX: Yeh, yeh.

RESEARCHER: And she'd been preparing by writing letters to her new teacher.

ALEX: Yeh yeh.

RESEARCHER: So at that time, when she's preparing. How was that for you?

ALEX: Um, I was pleased with where she'd come. But to be honest. Here, they did a fantastic job. I was very fortunate, they only had 14-15 children in each, in the Reception. So, obviously, for the children, they got a lot more support. Um. When it come to phonics, when it come to focused things. Um. So I was really really really happy, um. Where she was at. When she's, when she's now gone onto, into Year 1.

RESEARCHER: When you say, where she's at,

ALEX: Yeh like, with her writing, with her reading. And that. I mean, I, you could put anything in front of her, and she'd, she could read. Um. Obviously, phonics words, she's able to sound out any word that you put up, put in front, that's able to sound out, basically.

RESEARCHER: So you're pleased.

ALEX: Yeh, I'm very pleased.

RESEARCHER: And you said, something about, when she was in Reception, you were lucky because there was only 14-15 children, so she received more support. Can you say a little bit about that.

ALEX: Um yeh. Um, I just think it's, just because here, was just a bit undersubscribed, due to people moving. And people not being in the area. People being, being, pushed out of the borough. Erm. So we was very lucky, just to have only, only 14-15 children in Reception.

RESEARCHER: And, can you say, what is it about having 14 or 15 children that...

ALEX: Because you've obviously got, in each class you've still got a teacher, you've still got a TA, you still have... Here you're fortunate to have a specialist PE teacher, which I know now, has gone, But they 've replaced. A music teacher. So you still have all them people, um, all them teachers, still working with them, 15 children, um, in phonics groups I think they was very small phonics groups, um, instead of the likes of having 30 children, And 60 children across the year. And then only having 4 or 5 teachers to, to do phonics groups and...

RESEARCHER: So the small groups –

ALEX: Yeh. It was. Yeh. So I think they benefited from it. From.

RESEARCHER: Ok. And, just going back to when you were, realising Jamie was going into Year 1, and you said, 'this is serious stuff'.

ALEX: Yeah.

RESEARCHER: What did you mean by that?

ALEX: Um, just, with regards to like, now it's not, it's... obviously reception and nursery they learn a lot through play. They're able to come in to, to, the, um, classroom in the morning, and have um (*stumble/hesitation*) free time. Whereas now, when they go into, yeah, so, and it was only towards the end of the year, they started to prepare them for Year 1, by saying, 'ok we're not gonna do choosing time today, we're gonna get a book and sit on the carpet'. And start their day like that. So they kinda prepared them, as they got to the end of the year.

RESEARCHER: They prepared them –

ALEX: For, for Year 1. Yeah because now they not abl...they're not gonna go in and just, start playing with the water, or start doing a painting, because it's more, now about 'right ok, there's a teacher, and they have exactly what their gonna be doing during that day'. Right ok all the children are gonna be making papier mache, all the children, that's just an example, all the children are gonna be doing this, this similar maths, um, exercise, but just in four different ways of learning that same, instead of having a table over there that's just for painting, a table over there that's, that's got, I don't know, reading on it, like writing, a writing exercise. And then you've got a table over there that's got, um, a, maths, you know. So you've got different ones. Then you've got your wet play, your wet, or your sand or whatever. Whereas, when they're then going into Year 1, it's more, 'right ok, this morning we're gonna do maths' so all the tables are, are maths exercises, or today we're gonna do a writing exercise, so all the tables, they'll be different, different activities, but they'll all be around the same.

RESEARCHER: So all the children are doing the same thing.

ALEX: A similar, yeh, but it might be different... you know, they might be doing an English exerci...or a reading, or whatever they might be doing. But one might be doing it, right ok they got draw picture. The other one might be right ok we gotta do some writing about it, and then, the sam....you know, do you know, do you understand what I'm saying. Yeh ok.

RESEARCHER: You spoke a bit before about over the summer, Jamie feeling excited about coming to school. Writing a letter to her teacher. So can you tell me about the teacher?

ALEX: Oh to be honest, I was, lucky again. Um, [teacher], who Jamie's got this year, actually had [older child] for three years, it was only last year she had a break and went with another class. And then I'm, I'm very lucky, this is gonna be my fourth year of having the same teacher.

RESEARCHER: Fourth year having the same teacher –

ALEX: Yeah. Yeh. (Pause) So, coz, [older child] in year now, Year 4, but she had her in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2. So, and then Year 3 went into another one. So this year we've gone back to having. Having her. So, I'm very pleased about that. I was very happy. So it's a

teacher that I know. Or known. Yeh. And to be honest, it was the first teacher. Because I'd moved, moved my children from ano – from a previous school. In Reception. So the last 7 weeks, it was the first teacher when I came to [school] that, that one of my children had.

RESEARCHER: [Teacher]?

ALEX: Yeah [teacher] was the first teacher that [older child] had had.

RESEARCHER: So you know her, quite well.

ALEX: Yeah. Yeah.

RESEARCHER: And you feel lucky, and pleased about that.

ALEX: Yeah, yeah. Very.

(Alex had told me she needed to go at a certain time. At this point I noticed the time and realised it was approaching.)

RESEARCHER: Ok Alex, I'm just aware of the time. Do you need to go?

ALEX: Um, I'm ok for the next 5 minutes or so. It's fine.

RESEARCHER: Ok. So, we've spoken about a lot of things. Is there anything, just thinking about Jamie getting ready for school, being ready for school, and starting school. Is there anything that we haven't spoken about, or touched on, that actually you feel is quite important?

ALEX: Um...not really. I think we've covered. Coz I don't know what you're kind of, well I do know what you're looking for. But yeh.

RESEARCHER: And I suppose it's your experience of that time. And so, if there was anything you experienced at that time, that we haven't spoken about at all...

ALEX: No...I mean, to be honest, one, just one thing, that I was probably nervous of. Jamie's got a milk allergy. So for me, I was also quite lucky that. Although she has a milk allergy, all the kitchen staff are aware of that. I know that she's not gonna be given any food...that she, that she shouldn't be having. I ask them any questions to the teacher's or to the kitchen staff they'll give me any information about what she's eaten and stuff.

RESEARCHER: So you were quite nervous....

ALEX: Yeh it wasn't so much that I was nervous, it was more, um, one of my other children has anaphylactic shocks. Jamie's never had an anaphylactic shock. But, um. So I'm not worried about that. If there's some milk on the table when she touches it. I'm not worried about that

whatsoever. Whereas it was a different situation for my older child. Um. So it was just more so, for her, I didn't want her to come into school and have the option. She knows what she's allowed and what she's not allowed. But if they had something that was on the table in Nursery or Reception, um, and then she got bad symptoms of like, bad belly, or, you know, or a rash on her face. That was, it was quite worrying in that I could approach... I could come in and speak about it to the teacher. Um, there and then. But, um. But I know that I would, can leave her there and she'd be absolutely fine. Do you understand? So, if I had any concerns, if there was something on the table, I would say, 'oh you know Jamie's not allowed that today'. But then saying that, the school throughout the Nursery and the Reception, if they was doing any cooking would actually call me, or approach me in the morning and say 'look we're doing this today, is it ok for Jamie to have this or, we're got this instead'. So I was pretty lucky that the teachers would approach me or I would approach them if there was anything.

RESEARCHER: So you were lucky that they would approach you first –

ALEX: Yeh yeh.

RESEARCHER: That's great Alex. Is there anything else that you –

ALEX: No I'm fine.

'Alex'
F.A.N.I INTERVIEW 2 (7.12.16)

RESEARCHER: That should be recording now –

ALEX: Feel like I woke up with a bit of a cold today

RESEARCHER: Oh dear.

ALEX: a bit of a head cold

RESEARCHER: Yeh it's that time of year.

ALEX: I was out early yesterday at football, so like, we was out before 9

RESEARCHER: Mm.

ALEX: So I think that's why, you know, standing there in the cold.

RESEARCHER: Yeh. And it's that busy time of year, lots going on, rushing about

ALEX: Exactly.

RESEARCHER: weather's changed... Ok A---, so one of the things I wanted to ask you about first is, after our first interview, is there anything that you went away thinking, did you... you know, what, did you go away feeling anything, have you th- thought about -

ALEX: No -

RESEARCHER: - your interview at all?

ALEX: No, not really. Didn't really... no, no. Because I know that it's for your benefit really

RESEARCHER: OK.

ALEX: and it's not really... anything...

RESEARCHER: OK.

ALEX: - on my part, much.

RESEARCHER: Yeh. And, um... I suppose one of the things that I wanted to ask you was about, um, when I, when I first asked you about, um, Jamie's experience of starting school, um, you told me about your experience of her going to a nursery and going to a child-minder

ALEX: With the child minder.

RESEARCHER: Um... and that seemed like a really important time for you. And, um, I got the sense that, um, you had to make lots of decisions which felt quite big.

ALEX: Yeh.

RESEARCHER: Is that right?

ALEX: Yeh, no, um, it was more so – I mean, Jamie's the youngest of six, so... every child is totally different, so one child that might settle into nursery or settle into a child minder is actually totally different from the next child, even though you're raising them exactly the same way, emotionally they're still different children. Um. But for Jamie, um, because she was very upset every day, it was a decision I was making whether, one, whether... I was want to see her upset every day or whether I was benefitting her by putting her into a child-minder for her, for th-, for the long term.

RESEARCHER: Yeh. For the long term

ALEX: Yeh.

RESEARCHER: With the child-minder. Um, and you said, um, each of your children's totally different,

ALEX: Yeh!

RESEARCHER: Can you say a little bit more about that?

ALEX: Um, well the, the... older one, who's now 15, actually went to a nursery which we paid for, because um, me and Dad was both working and the time so, um, and she abs- it was absolutely fantastic for her, um. Then with my second child, he was an August birthday, so he didn't actually go into anything leading up to him starting mainstream nursery

RESEARCHER: OK.

ALEX: Um so he was very distressed when he went in. He, he's the youngest – he was always the youngest in the class, um, and then he... is epileptic as well, so he would find it hard to retain information, that would make it more difficult for him

RESEARCHER: Yeh.

ALEX: - as well. Um... and now he's got an um, a... statement at school, so he's totally different. Um, again went into, um he actually came here, um, before starting, um, [secondary school]

RESEARCHER: OK.

ALEX: - for seven months, just to settle him. And absolutely fine, not one issue coming into – into school. Um, [older child] who's going to be nine – this week actually –

RESEARCHER: Ah!

ALEX: she's - she... went over to [other primary school] for seven months before going onto [secondary school] as well. Um, absolutely fine, um, settled absolutely fine, didn't show any signs of distress, but just didn't speak to anybody, um... Still, even now, unless she knows you and feels comfortable, won't speak to anybody.

RESEARCHER: OK.

ALEX: Um... [older child] um, came here, just came here, um... and she'll talk to anybody. She was, when she first came, was quiet, um... it was more so when I was there, she would get upset, so if there was any like sta- stay and play she'd be upset then, more so, when I've gone she'd be fine.

RESEARCHER: Mm.

ALEX: Um. Yeh, and then Jamie, we spoke about Jamie.

RESEARCHER: Yeh. And you, you mentioned their, their birthdays and their ages –

ALEX: Yeh, that does make a big difference, a massive difference. When a child is, when a child is, um, an older age, um... so I've got two that were in December, so two that are coming up this week and next week, um, and that definitely does make a difference because you get a longer time in nursery.

RESEARCHER: OK.

ALEX: And that nursery setting – providing you put them in – you know, providing – likewise with them they came – so [older child] here did nearly two years in nursery. [Older child] again did from the January to the July and then a wh- another whole year in nursery

RESEARCHER: OK.

ALEX: um, whereas if you're an August birthday you only actually come in the September and then you leave again in the July, so it does make a difference when, with birthdays of

RESEARCHER: Yeh.

ALEX: of that.

RESEARCHER: And when... when is Jamie's birthday?

ALEX: March.

RESEARCHER: OK.

ALEX: March.

RESEARCHER: And do you think that's had an impact

ALEX: Um...

RESEARCHER: that's significant?

ALEX: I – do you know what, to be honest, I'm quite lucky here, it's very small classes, so I don't think it really shows. Um, because she's doing fantastic here, because of obviously they're practically getting one to four ratio teaching

RESEARCHER: Mm.

ALEX: with the TAs in the class.

RESEARCHER: Yeh. And you talked about that last time

ALEX: Yeh.

RESEARCHER: - there being a really small class -

ALEX: Yeh.

RESEARCHER: - and that being something you thought was really good and, um... you know, you said she's doing fantastic!

ALEX: Yeh, she is.

RESEARCHER: Yeh. What, what – what kind of things are you noticing, what kinds of things -

ALEX: Um...

RESEARCHER: - are you seeing?

ALEX: Well to be honest, she's able to read and write independently, um. Anything you put in front of her she's able to read and write.

RESEARCHER: Mm.

ALEX: She understands... they do, when they're doing focus activities it's a lot more small – smaller, so they're – it's going in a lot more, and staying in their brains -

RESEARCHER: OK.

ALEX: - for... she'll come home and say things to me like, you know, mum fishes don't hear! They don't have ears! You know, and she'll come home and say things about what's happened in -

RESEARCHER: Yeh.

ALEX: - school and she'll say, mum don't you think I'm a brainbox, I am! I'm really clever aren't I

RESEARCHER: (laugh)

ALEX: I'm a clever clogs!

RESEARCHER: Right.

ALEX: She - she uses that word all the time.

RESEARCHER: OK.

ALEX: So yeh.

RESEARCHER: And when she comes home and tells you those things that she's learnt at school -

ALEX: Yeh.

RESEARCHER: - I'm a clever clogs, um... how does that make you feel?

ALEX: Oh, very proud, very very proud.

RESEARCHER: Yeh.

ALEX: So... I mean to be honest I'm quite... with, with, with... this school, um, I can honestly say they're all doing fantastic. Um, even when [older child] was here, fan- absolutely fantastic – and I think it's the settings and the way they have the learning here.

RESEARCHER: Ok.

ALEX: It's a, you know, it's, it's a lot more, it's not... a- at a church it's very academic, very academic, there's not much free play. Whereas here there's a lot of free play, even though, even as you go up the years there'll be, it might have a excer- an activity, sorry, where they're doing a quiz. But it's all in learning. Whereas you wouldn't really get that as much at a church school.

RESEARCHER: OK.

ALEX: Also they're lots of incentives here, you know, like, I'm quite lucky and fortunate that [older child] just been on a ice skating trip – for having mojo points, or something, I don't quite understand that but yeh.

RESEARCHER: Like rewards?

ALEX: Yeh a reward system. For outstanding behaviour and outstanding learning -

RESEARCHER: OK.

ALEX: - so she's just done that last week, and... I'm quite fortunate they have like, you know, for [older child], she plays football so even though she's not quite in year five and six, she's only in year four, she's able to play in that... she's doing the Christmas carol thing... you know, so it is good

RESEARCHER: Mm.

ALEX: this setting is fantastic.

RESEARCHER: Yeh. You, you were talking about the difference between this school

ALEX: Yeh.

RESEARCHER: and a Church of England school?

ALEX: Yeh, or a church in general, church school, church school.

RESEARCHER: OK. Um, you know, we – we talked a little bit about you having to make decisions about where Jamie goes – to a nursery, to a child minder -

ALEX: Yeh.

RESEARCHER: - to which school she goes to, um... How did you come to make tho- those kinds decisions -

ALEX: Um

RESEARCHER: - around her?

ALEX: I just, to be honest, went by her, you know. Obviously with the child minder it was quite difficult because, um, because, I knew that she was only going to be there until she was three, um... also she happened to be her dad's mum's cousin, so that was another thing – so I kind of, so I left her there and... I tried to get a little bit of advice from people, like, oh what do you think?

RESEARCHER: Mm.

ALEX: What, do you think there's something up or she's fine -

RESEARCHER: Mm.

ALEX: - when I go? Because she was actually fine when I went, it was just the whole process of going was -

RESEARCHER: Yeh.

ALEX: - was quite traumatic. So I left her there. And then I made a decision not to put them into the feeder school, which is to my kids' secondary school, which is [school].

RESEARCHER: OK.

ALEX: Um... and I made that decision in the holidays, where they got places where there were schools and I then decided no, I'm not even going to bother -

RESEARCHER: OK?

ALEX: - because they're happy here.

RESEARCHER: OK. So you could see Jamie was happy -

ALEX: Yeh.

RESEARCHER: - here?

ALEX: And I like the teachers -

(cross speech)

ALEX: - I like the setting, I like... just, yeh.

RESEARCHER: Mm.

ALEX: So I just made them decisions on... them.

RESEARCHER: And, um, the decision to keep Jamie here

ALEX: Yep.

RESEARCHER: Um, is that something you made a decision by yourself? Or is that something you also asked for advice for?

ALEX: No, not so much with her because I had the other two – now –

RESEARCHER: OK.

ALEX: - in the setting, yeh but, yeh, I... I, um, I... kind of... I don't know, I think it's because you're thinking, oh, it's going onto a feeder secondary school, and I think, do you know what, by the time they get to the secondary school process it doesn't really matter. A lot of these schools are catchment, so unless you live two seconds away from a secondary school you just, it's just pot luck of what school you get into -

RESEARCHER: Yeh.

ALEX: - so I – I'm not thinking... that far ahead now. I'm just thinking about what they're like...

RESEARCHER: Yeh.

ALEX: as, as of when they're little, not so much when the big ones – because I have obviously the two groups – when the big ones were, I was thinking church school, church secondary school – whereas now I'm not thinking that

RESEARCHER: OK.

ALEX: I'm just thinking, as long as they're happy, I'll worry about that when they get to year -

RESEARCHER: Yeh.

ALEX: - five and six.

RESEARCHER: So your thinking's changed?

ALEX: Yeh, definitely.

RESEARCHER: OK.

ALEX: Definitely.

RESEARCHER: Ok. And... what do you think it is that changed your thinking around?

ALEX: Uh... the fact that the first child actually went to a church school and didn't get any church, um, secondary schools.

RESEARCHER: OK.

ALEX: Um...

RESEARCHER: OK.

ALEX: And... that... one of the church secondary schools was actually taking people that didn't even go to a church primary school, but lived within, within the – say a five minute distance of the school.

RESEARCHER: Yeh.

ALEX: So I just ha- I just changed my whole thinking of wha- do you know, what's got to – what's going to be is going to be, there's no point in having the pressure of secondary school, they're going to have their whole life of – of primary school, sorry – they're going to have their whole lives as pressures and...

RESEARCHER: Yeh. And you, you said um... something about, um, your decision was made by seeing how happy -

ALEX: Yeh.

RESEARCHER: - Jamie was -

ALEX: Yep.

RESEARCHER: - here, or is here, um. Can you say a little bit more about that?

ALEX: Umm – no, she’s just... happy. You know, like, she... with the teachers and that I think it’s really good relationships with the, with the teachers and -

RESEARCHER: OK.

ALEX: - and um, yeh, I just...

RESEARCHER: And um, when you say relationships with the teachers, what do you mean -

ALEX: Yeh.

RESEARCHER: - by that? Can you give me an example?

ALEX: That they’re – they’re friendly -

RESEARCHER: OK.

ALEX: - so, you know, even if you’re sitting in to, to the breakfast club, you know, and they see them, they’re like, hello Jamie! And I like that.

RESEARCHER: Yeh. OK. And, um... one of the things we talked about quite a lot last time we met was, um, Jamie being upset when you, when you leave -

ALEX: Yup.

RESEARCHER: - and the two of you separating, um. I got the impression that you’d given that a lot of thought and that had, you know that had been something that was important to -

ALEX: Yeh.

RESEARCHER: - you. Is that, is that true to say that?

ALEX: Yeh, um, yeh. She was very upset but now I’ve noticed that it only seems to be if she – because she’s quite... because she’s the last child she, at times she can be very, like, stubborn, very – at home, if you’re saying get dressed in the morning – so now I’ve noticed the only time she ever comes into school upset there is if she’s had a bad morning, and I’ve kind of said to her that’s it, I’m going to be speaking to the teacher today, so she’ll -

RESEARCHER: OK.

ALEX: - that’s the only time she’ll be upset.

RESEARCHER: OK. So you’ve noticed a pattern.

ALEX: Yeh. Yeh.

RESEARCHER: OK.

ALEX: She's not – she comes into school absolutely fine, happy as anything now.

RESEARCHER: OK.

ALEX: Not one... moan. Um. But probably since... September, we've probably noticed October we probably had two occasions where she's not had a good going to bed time or... or wh- or be in the morning, where I've said that's it, I'm going to be speaking to [teacher], her class teacher. And she's, she's um. Coming to school upset.

RESEARCHER: OK. And that's –

ALEX: But it works -

RESEARCHER: Yeh.

ALEX: - because she doesn't misbehave again.

RESEARCHER: OK.

ALEX: [*laugh*] [*cough*]

RESEARCHER: And that... seems... I'm just thinking back to our last interview and that seems quite different to -

ALEX: Definitely.

RESEARCHER: - what you were thinking -

ALEX: Yeh.

RESEARCHER: - before.

ALEX: Definite, definite.

RESEARCHER: Yeh?

ALEX: Definite. And it's quite strange because... now that she's not moaning and crying or being upset or... when she leaves me, um... I now can't really remember much about her – at the time I know that it was just every day and it was really stressful

RESEARCHER: Mm.

ALEX: but now I'm looking back and I'm thinking we don't really have any bad days... I can't... remember why it was so bad or what it was like to be so bad.

RESEARCHER: Ah that's interesting, isn't it.

ALEX: Yeh! It's strange, because it's like... she can't remember as well -

RESEARCHER: Yeh.

ALEX: - why she used to cry and moan, and now I'm thinking, oh my god, like... we're now passed that stage, why did I used to get so – so stressed about it all

RESEARCHER: Yeh.

ALEX: you know, walk away thinking oh God, you know.

RESEARCHER: But you can remember the, the kind of feelings

ALEX: Yeh.

RESEARCHER: that you had around it.

ALEX: Yeh

RESEARCHER: (*cross speech*) stressed.

ALEX: I do but now I'm – but, but, whereas when it, when she first doing it it was just constantly on my mind, I'd go away and you know, I'd be at home or at work thinking oh God, like... and, and, and then you'd be talking about it to other parents like, oh God like, Jamie was, this morning was a nightmare and... oh God... You know.

RESEARCHER: Yeh.

ALEX: Um. And then – you'd – you'd hear other people's experiences and say oh yeh, it'll be fine, or... you know... I remember actually going into work saying I- saying, because my sister in law works with me, her child's in nursery here, saying ah JAMIE was a nightmare this morning, screaming and stuff. Whereas now I don't talk about the kids going into school

RESEARCHER: Ok.

ALEX: because I don- you talk about the negatives but you don't talk about the positives as

RESEARCHER: Ok.

ALEX: such, as in...

RESEARCHER: When something's wrong.

ALEX: Yeh, I don't go into work and say oh, the kids went into school fine today. But whereas when they go in... stressed or upset you – you tend to come home and talk about it. Or, you know, when I'm talking to their dad – their dad about it

RESEARCHER: Yeh.

ALEX: I'll talk about it, whereas now I don't bother.

RESEARCHER: And how – when you, when you spoke to, um, Jamie's dad

ALEX: Yeh.

RESEARCHER: what did he think about it or... how did he make sense of it?

ALEX: Nah, he didn't really say much about it to be honest.

RESEARCHER: Ok.

ALEX: Not at all, really,

RESEARCHER: Yeh. And other people that you spoke to about it? What were their – what were their thoughts around it?

ALEX: Sometimes they'd say their children was the same, or...

RESEARCHER: Ok.

ALEX: You know. But to be honest I'm finding actually that I've got... it's more so the people that I'm associated with or I have friends with – I – because I was quite young when I had the three big ones

RESEARCHER: Mm.

ALEX: um, they, they don't have children as old as mine so they tend to have children that are Jamie's age or younger, that I speak to... so my sister in law, who has my nephew here, he's in, he's three in nursery, and my sister is here now at the school, so my three year old niece is here now in nursery as well, so... yeh, so everybody is kind of... their kids are younger so it's not like they're say- they can't say to me, oh it gets, it will get better, because they don't have

RESEARCHER: Mm.

ALEX: children of like seven or eight or nine

RESEARCHER: Mm.

ALEX: that have been through the same experiences.

RESEARCHER: Yeh. And you do have those older children.

ALEX: Yeh. Whereas now I'm saying to people, don't worry, it'll get better, it's fine!

RESEARCHER: Ok.

ALEX: (*cough*)

RESEARCHER: Ok. So, i- it's sounds like there are times when you've gone to other people for advice

ALEX: Yeh.

RESEARCHER: about what's happening, but also you give advice.

ALEX: Yeh. It's not so much that I'm asking people for advice, it's more... just getting it off my chest in the morning and saying, oh God! Like, you know, if I'm having a conversation with a friend or something – oh God, Jamie was a right nightmare today. You know, and then... whereas now if somebody says me to me, oh, like, my child was a nightmare, or my sis- my sister might come home the other- like last – on Friday my sister messaged and she said, oh, [child] weed herself at school today, that's really out of character in nursery

RESEARCHER: Mm.

ALEX: and it's like, oh maybe it's just one of them – you know sometimes they forget, so I just give that little bit of advice.

RESEARCHER: Ok.

ALEX: You know.

RESEARCHER: Ok. So it sounds like your – your thoughts around, um, Jamie getting upset, around that time when you

(*cross speech*)

ALEX: Yeh.

RESEARCHER: have changed

ALEX: Yeh!

RESEARCHER: quite a lot.

ALEX: Yeh, very much changed.

RESEARCHER: Yeh.

ALEX: Just changed because now... she's not upset and I know that it does get better and it does

RESEARCHER: Ok.

ALEX: get easier.

RESEARCHER: Yeh. And I know you said you find it difficult to remember

ALEX: Yeh.

RESEARCHER: that time now, um...

ALEX: Just because I'm not thinking about it every day

RESEARCHER: Yeh.

ALEX: whereas at that time, as soon as I dropped Jamie to school, um, it would be, you'd then be all day on your mind. And then even until you pick them up, and then in the evening when you're having the conversations with dad or whatever – she was a nightmare today, going into nursery, or... you know

RESEARCHER: Yeh. And... can you remember the kinds of feelings that you had at that time when you were dropping her off and having that experience every day?

ALEX: Um, I was quite upset to be honest. And then... then sometimes it would be, you know, if she was screaming I'd then become like, Jamie now stop, to the point of... not angry as in angry aggressive angry, just like, now Jamie stop.

RESEARCHER: Mm.

ALEX: But then – because you got to show them, you know, from different emotions throughout the whole process.

RESEARCHER: Ok. And, um... yeh, so you said upset. And then

ALEX: Yeh. Yeh.

(cross speech)

ALEX: Yeh, so one minute I'm upset but one minute, kind of, you have to be like, quite stern and like, no, you know, stop being silly.

RESEARCHER: Mm hm.

ALEX: There's nothing wrong at nursery, just... you know.

RESEARCHER: Yeh.

ALEX: Or then you try to distract them and say come on, show me this, da da... so it's all different emotions, you're trying to kind of... make it easier for them. And then it becomes draining as well.

RESEARCHER: Yeh. And... when you say draining, what – what do you mean by that?

ALEX: Just then because it's always on your mind, it's something that's always on your mind and then you're dreading it the next day, thinking oh God... because we'd go through a s-through a, a cycle of Jamie being really upset in the morning going to school, like, really stressful. Then she'd be fine, obviously, in the day so when I'd pick her up from school she'd be... ok. Um, then in the – in the evening we'd be talking about it, she'd be telling me tomorrow mum I'm not going to cry, she'd be telling me up until we got to the school gate, I'm not going to cry... and then as soon as we got into the school, so it was like that vicious cycle all day

RESEARCHER: Mm.

ALEX: that became quite draining. Because although, then – at home thinking about it during the day that she's not at home, then we're talking about it in the evening, and then in the morning saying we're not going to cry, we're not going to be upset, and then, we then – so it became draining in that sense

RESEARCHER: Mm hm.

ALEX: like... you know.

RESEARCHER: That cycle, you said

(cross speech)

ALEX: Yeh, just a cycle of

RESEARCHER: Yeh. And that – when Jamie's saying to you, I'm not going to cry, I'm not going to cry

ALEX: Yeh.

RESEARCHER: how does that feel for you? How did you experience that?

ALEX: Nah, it just felt like, oh, well done, like, we're not going to cry, you know, like, just to try and... yeh. I didn't – yeh... I don't know how I kind of felt, as in, a f... yeh, it's, I don't know. I just kind of was like, yeh ok, we're not going to cry, like... and just tried to get her through that, but

RESEARCHER: Yeh. *(clears throat)* And now, talking about that time and trying to remember it, how do you feel now talking about it?

ALEX: Fine.

RESEARCHER: Ok.

ALEX: Absolutely fine. Thinking, she's absolutely fine now so.

RESEARCHER: Ok. So quite different.

ALEX: Yeh.

RESEARCHER: Yeh? Ok. Um...

ALEX: And thinking it went on for such a long time, it was literally probably about two years of the same, probably I, there's probably only a handful of times where she did come into school and didn't cry.

RESEARCHER: Mm.

ALEX: So.

RESEARCHER: And that maybe is part of the, the draining

ALEX: Yeh.

RESEARCHER: element that you were talking about?

ALEX: Yeh, yeh, so I mean, and it literally was about two years, but I don't remember it being two years, but it was because she started when she was two, went into the two year

RESEARCHER: Mm.

ALEX: funding (*cough*) and then i- it went on until – she did it most of Reception.

RESEARCHER: Yeh.

ALEX: So, the whole of nursery, most of Reception, and now as I said it's just literally if she, if, if it's more so in the morning or in the evening if she's had a bad bed time or something and I've said that's it, I'm going to be speaking to [teacher] about your bed time, so yeh. (*cough*)

RESEARCHER: Mm. Ok. And... not being able to kind of really remember that, remember it being such a long time –

ALEX: I don't remember it – I do remember... but I don't remember it being such a long t- like now, looking back, thinking, oh my God I did two years of crying every single day. Whereas, you know

RESEARCHER: Yeh.

ALEX: at the time it didn't feel like it was, it didn't feel like it was (*inaudible*) it felt like it was... forever.

RESEARCHER: Yeh, ok. And, um, I suppose one of the things that you talked about last time was, um, the start of school being quite emotionally upsetting.

ALEX: Yeh.

RESEARCHER: Um... Can you say a little bit more about that? Was that because of the crying? Or other things?

ALEX: Yeh, yeh, just because of the crying, um, and that it was quite emotionally upsetting. What, for me or for Jamie?

RESEARCHER: O- or both?

ALEX: Um, yeh, just for both of us it was quite emotional... um. And that. But I think, I think as well, like, when I was talking about my whole mindset has changed. Like, whereas before when I had the – the older three it was very like, ah – questioning yourself, constantly questioning – oh my God, am I sending them to the right school, am I – whereas now... I don't question, I don't

question myself about... the school settings, or if something has happened at school, which... is very rare, like I would very unlikely to be

RESEARCHER: Mm.

ALEX: any issues in, in here.

RESEARCHER: Ok.

ALEX: Like, I don't think there's ever been... issues.

RESEARCHER: And you don't question yourself now.

ALEX: Yeh, I don't ever really question myself, I just kind of know that, that I made the right decision putting them here.

RESEARCHER: Ok.

ALEX: So yeh.

RESEARCHER: And do you know what's made that difference?

ALEX: I don't know whether it's because I'm older

RESEARCHER: Ok.

ALEX: than... you know, I was, I was 22 and had three children that were the others, you know, um, all within two and a half years of each other So whereas this time, you know, I was, I was 30 – well – 30 – yeh, and I had – I ha- well, I had six children under 10. So now it's just a whole different – although I say my patience has, has, I used to have a lot more patience then!

RESEARCHER: (*laugh*)

ALEX: But now I'm like (*laugh*) not as much patience now!

RESEARCHER: Goes down with each child! (*laugh*)

ALEX: Yeh, exactly! Yeh, the older ones used to be – but then I don't remember – I, I don't ever remember having to – I've never really been one that has to tell my children off, I like, I don't, you know, like they was never naughty. Whereas now, you know, I've got boys that are 14 and nearly 13 so you can imagine, like, every time I'm going up into the bedroom at like eight o'clock and they got the controller for the – for the Play Station, and you're like, right that's it – or you know, like, they, they hide each other's things so – yeh, my patience is now wearing thinner.

RESEARCHER: Ok.

ALEX: Definite.

RESEARCHER: (*laugh*) Um...

ALEX: And it does show because something that might have stressed me out with them, so then when the little ones do something that's not even – years ago, with them, I wouldn't have even thought but you know, like, what's this mess?! You know, like, why have you got the pens and paper out again?! You know like

RESEARCHER: Ok.

ALEX: whereas before I wouldn't have, with the older three. I would have been like, put that back

RESEARCHER: Ok.

ALEX: you know. So I think it's the patience. (*cough*) It's just growing.

RESEARCHER: Yeh.

ALEX: You're just – getting older, and

RESEARCHER: Yeh, yeh.

ALEX: Yeh. Trying to juggle work, trying to juggle kids, trying to juggle everything. And there's lots more stresses now in life. With

RESEARCHER: Ok.

ALEX: with – just in general, schools and

RESEARCHER: Yeh? Can you say a little

ALEX: work

RESEARCHER: bit more?

ALEX: no j- just general life is just a lot different, with like, even, even the panic – I mean I don't now have that worry, but with the process of coming into, into schools – am I going to pu- am I going to get the same school, or am I going to – you know, like, I just feel like some people that I know or have been around do the whole church process because they, it's, it's starting

from before their child's even born – right I'm going to church because I'm going to get my child baptized because I want to get them into this school and I want to – you know, so... whereas years ago it wasn't like that.

RESEARCHER: Mm. Ok.

ALEX: It wasn't – you're not – you're not thinking of schools and nurseries. Children before they're even one parents are already looking and thinking where am I going to – because they got this two year funding now – where am I going to put my child?

RESEARCHER: Yeh. So it's thinking of those things a

ALEX: Yeh your whole

RESEARCHER: lot earlier

ALEX: yeh, a lo- yeh so a lot of them thinking and stuff when it comes to schools and that is, is starting from – I know that years ago people did used to put their children's names down at three months old, but... now... yo- you're whole... process of everything is, oh I need to live here, I need to move closer to a school, I need to... you know, I know that from experience of people when I went to... they went to [secondary school], with the secondary school process, where parents actually moved closer to a school

RESEARCHER: Mm.

ALEX: because the whole... process have changed when it comes to nurseries and schools.

RESEARCHER: And that process with Jamie, of thinking about where she's going to go –

ALEX: I'm not even thinking about it

RESEARCHER: Ok.

ALEX: because I'm thinking, to be honest, you have [secondary school] that is – is a very up-and-coming school now

RESEARCHER: Mm.

ALEX: th- it- yeh.

RESEARCHER: And thinking about, um, her coming to school, when do you think that started for you, those kinds of thought processes?

ALEX: Um... to be honest, I didn't really – I think I did – I, I thought about it a lot when she was with the child minder, thinking, please let her hurry up and start school so that this will get easier. Um, but I kind of – because I had children already here, I kind of knew that it didn't really matter when I put her name down for nursery

RESEARCHER: Ok.

ALEX: she was always going to come here because I had the others... at the time I had three of them already here.

RESEARCHER: Ok.

ALEX: So it wasn't – with her it wasn't really... I just remember at that time of her being with the child minder thinking, please hurry up and... let's hurry up and get a place, and I was very very lucky that in the March she turned, er, three, and they offered her a place

RESEARCHER: Here?

ALEX: in – in – to – ready after the Easter, and I think at that time Easter was early that year so she literally the beginning of April started... here. Er. But I think I would've thought about it a lot more had I not had siblings because I don't think she would've started in the April, that was just purely me coming to play group and being so... um, because I knew how stressed sh- like, how stressful it was, her being at the child minder, I kept coming in saying, um, is there going to be any places in April, or speaking to... Jamie, which is the lady... downstairs. Um, and she did the, did the play group so I always used to bring Jamie to play group as well, um and... and it would be constant. Even when I was at play group, constantly. I remember actually constantly talking about how... stressful it is, and oh do you think – and actually saying, ah do you think I'm making the right decision, do you think there's something going on, do you think she's not being nice to her, do you think, (*inaudible*)? But even though I know that they were

RESEARCHER: Mm.

ALEX: you know [*laugh*] she wasn't being horrible to her!

RESEARCHER: Yeh.

ALEX: She just –

RESEARCHER: And that's the child minder you're talking about?

ALEX: Yeh. She was – Jamie was just struggling to –

RESEARCHER: And you spoke about it at playgroup, is that right?

ALEX: Yeh! All the – yeh. A- now, I – I remember spea- I do remember speaking about it all the time, I just don't remember that two year process of... of her crying. But I know that she cried every day.

RESEARCHER: Yeh. And... one of the things that you spoke about last time is that kind of realising she has to start school.

ALEX: Yeh.

RESEARCHER: Um, when do you think that happened, for you?

ALEX: Umm... I don't know. I just... I think I kind of – I think I kind of knew that before she even started that, I think – they – children... will benefit more by coming to – just socially – will benefit more by going to a nursery

RESEARCHER: Ok.

ALEX: um, for a longer period of time than... you know, and I don't know whether that comes in with the age thing of having this second child who was an August birthday, and he didn't go into that setting and he – alth- yeh he did a, a year at nursery, um, but he didn't have that little bit extra at nursery, and he out of all my children, even now, struggles

RESEARCHER: Ok.

ALEX: um, struggles with that whole setting and stuff, so.

RESEARCHER: Yeh, and you kind of put that down to ha- having more time in nursery.

ALEX: Yeh, definite.

RESEARCHER: Ok. And, um... when do you see the start of school being? When does school start for you, what year?

ALEX: Probably... I don't know whether, maybe – we- as in... school as in...? I think they're always learning, but I think i- when it becomes a bit more – maybe year two when they start to do the SATs

RESEARCHER: OK.

ALEX: and they start to do... it's a lot more. Sitting down and not...

RESEARCHER: Mm.

ALEX: You know, even when they're going to year one, if there's – you know, I went in there for a workshop last week, um, and it was a story workshop, um, and then we – I had the

opportunity with Jamie to decorate a little box chest thing, and they're going to be doing stuff on this through the year – like, through the year and stuff and following into the new year, um. So I still see that setting as very... like, open. Whereas... in, I – C--- is then in the year above, in year two

RESEARCHER: Ok.

ALEX: and that's a lot more – more writing and...

RESEARCHER: And when you say open

ALEX: Yeh.

RESEARCHER: and the setting feeling open

ALEX: Yeh.

RESEARCHER: what do you, what do you mean by that?

ALEX: Like as in, um... they get a lot more choices about... I mean obviously it's not choices as in, right, all day you can go and play with the water, or... not that there is water up there, but – I just think that there's a lot more – I'm sure they have like a little home corner, you know, there's – there's a lot more... I'm not sa- so the ex- so it'll be... there's different tables, but then it'll be... you know, they're working around the same thing but in different

RESEARCHER: Mm.

ALEX: different ways of learning and they get the choices. Obviously I'm not in the classroom so I don't know exactly

RESEARCHER: Yes.

ALEX: what goes on, but when you walk in it seems a lot more...

RESEARCHER: So that, so that makes you feel that year two is when school starts.

ALEX: Yeh, which is, C--- will be seven next week

RESEARCHER: Ok.

ALEX: so

RESEARCHER: Ok.

ALEX: I think before that for me, personally, I think it is about what they learn through... play.

RESEARCHER: Ok. So up until

ALEX: [*cough*]

RESEARCHER: year two it's more about learning through play, and...

ALEX: Yeh, and not so much about learning through play because Jamie can read and write, so, I mean and she's in year one, but you know, learning through that more relaxed environment

RESEARCHER: Ok.

ALEX: because I think it goes in quicker, because if they're remembering a story, or if they know a story, it's going to stick in their brain a little more than sitting there copying the board.

RESEARCHER: Ok. And you notice that difference between year one and year two.

ALEX: Yeh.

RESEARCHER: Great. Ok.

ALEX: More so year one and year two.

RESEARCHER: Ok.

ALEX: Because [*older child*] will come – oh I think that they SATs as well in year two, so... it's a lot more... it's a lot more pressure for them.

RESEARCHER: Ok. I'm conscious of the time

ALEX: [*inaudible*]

RESEARCHER: so, before we finish I just wanted to ask you, um... the process of doing the interviews – we've had two now and there's been a little bit of a gap in between – have your thoughts about Jamie starting school, or any of your children starting school, or their readiness to start school, has any of that changed? Or shifted at all?

ALEX: No, not really. No

RESEARCHER: No?

ALEX: not at all. No.

RESEARCHER: Ok.

ALEX: [*cough*] No, not really.

RESEARCHER: Ok. Um... and is there anything else before we finish that you feel like we haven't talked about

ALEX: No.

RESEARCHER: or hasn't come up?

ALEX: No.

RESEARCHER: No?

ALEX: No.

RESEARCHER: Um... So if you don't mind I'll just keep it recording for one

ALEX: Ok.

RESEARCHER: second, because I just wanted to ask you a little bit about... um... your experience of being interviewed like this

ALEX: Ok.

RESEARCHER: because it would help me to know what your experience

ALEX: Ok.

RESEARCHER: of it has been like. Um, and I know in our first one you kind of talked about not feeling too comfortable just being left to talk, or

ALEX: Yeh. But I do- I think just in general I just find that, you know, I'm, I'm ok speaking to people that I know but sometimes with people I don't know

RESEARCHER: Mm.

ALEX: because I don't know what you're looking for

RESEARCHER: Yeh.

ALEX: and then... sometimes I don't know where I rabbit on a bit too much about stuff that's not even relevant, like, whereas I've got other children, so although this is about Jamie I feel like I've spoke a lot about the others.

RESEARCHER: Yeh, yeh. And that's, that's ok. [*laugh*] Um... have you felt that the two interviews were different in any way, or...?

ALEX: Ehh, not really.

RESEARCHER: No?

ALEX: Nah.

RESEARCHER: Fairly similar?

ALEX: Yeh, very similar.

RESEARCHER: Yeh? Um... ah- you know, have you had any particular feelings about the interviews, like, disliked them?

ALEX: No, no, no, not at all, not at all.

RESEARCHER: Yeh?

ALEX: It does kind of – when you go away you do kind of think, oh, like, oh, well... it is good to know whether it's right for children or whether they're emotionally ready to start

RESEARCHER: Ok.

ALEX: school.

RESEARCHER: That's something you've gone away and been thinking?

ALEX: Yeh, kind of just thought. You know.

RESEARCHER: Ok. And where has that led you in your thinking, where have you got to?

ALEX: Nah, not really, it's not really... what as in, what do I think?

RESEARCHER: Yeh.

ALEX: I personally think that children need to come to nursery

RESEARCHER: Ok.

ALEX: and I think children would benefit from a longer period in nursery. Um, but then it does depend on birth times, years – the time of year that they're born

RESEARCHER: Mm.

ALEX: to whether they get that opportunity to be in nursery for a little longer.

RESEARCHER: Ok.

ALEX: But then, they have all this two year funding now, which... you know

RESEARCHER: Yeh.

ALEX: the majority of people qualify for.

RESEARCHER: Yeh. So you've really gone away and thought about that time in nursery being quite important.

ALEX: Yeh, very important.

RESEARCHER: And preparing them to start in Reception and

ALEX: Yeh.

RESEARCHER: start school.

ALEX: Yep.

RESEARCHER: Ok. Um... Ok. Anything else that you've kind of felt about the interview and think – any comments that you have about it?

ALEX: No [*inaudible*] no that's fine.

RESEARCHER: [*inaudible*]