

Improving transition to school at 5: the impact of collaborative cluster groups in the Foundation Stage

D.M. Borien

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the University's requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

September 2008

**Coventry University in Collaboration with the
University of Worcester**

Abstract

My research evolved from a desire to explore barriers to partnership working between childcare and education providers and seeks strategies to overcome these barriers. The research focuses on relationships between the various early years practitioners and settings, the extent to which they work in partnership, what promotes and inhibits this, and how this affects the educational experience of children. Particular attention is paid to the quality of transition from a pre-school setting into a reception class and a child's first experience of school. Cross sector cluster networks were established as a strategy to enable partnership working to evolve. Management of change, change agents, reflective learning are all key threads and a mechanism for developing and enhancing practice linked to transition for children at age 5.

My research is qualitative; my qualitative approach is concerned with producing meanings and understandings. It is a *non-positivistic* approach, seeking to illuminate a set of circumstances in order to find more effective policies for future action. Data collection methods within this large-scale action research included questionnaires, semi structured interviews, focus groups, vignettes of practice and interviews with children.

The concept of a *Community of Practice* introduced by Lave and Wenger (1991) underpins collaborative networks. Central to this concept is the process of learning from others, that members have shared interests, are motivated to do something about them and that the communities of practice are self-generating. The action research identified impact through the introduction of a change agent to facilitate the networks; the ability to engage with the practitioners at grass roots level and to motivate practitioners to attend was the catalyst for success.

My findings were that collaborative networks promoted reflective thinking in practitioners from all early years sectors leading to change in practice. Children as a result of strong and equal partnerships experienced an enhanced transition to school. My recommendations were for a common model based on the collaborative networks to be established to develop a culture of change and innovation within early years provision. The professional learning that took place in this research crossed sector and institutional boundaries as one sector on its own could not provide the answer.

Acknowledgements

Reflective practice, alongside personal and professional development is a continuous journey and I wish to express my gratitude to those who shared this part of my journey with me.

Stephen Bigger

My thanks go to Professor Stephen Bigger for his friendship, support, patience and guidance during this research project.

Teresa Harms

Dr. Teresa Harms for her warmth, reassurance and self-esteem building, which was gratefully received on many occasions.

Colin Borien

My thanks and love goes to my husband for always believing in me, especially when I didn't believe in myself. Thank you for being there – you have been a constant source of support and encouragement.

Family and friends

Special thanks to my family and friends who supported me during the writing of this thesis and accepted without questioning that I was unable to spend the amount of time with them that they deserved.

Colleagues

Heartfelt thanks go to all my colleagues in both the local authorities where this research took place. Many colleagues shared professional discussions, listened to me, gave encouragement and shared my passion for creating the best possible experiences for our youngest children. Special thanks go to Laura Burroughs and Sandra Warman who have supported me in so many ways as I completed this thesis.

Dedication

Kelsey and Kaiden

I dedicate this thesis to my grandchildren Kelsey Lea More and Kaiden Paul More who during the research and writing of this study went through their own transitions from home to pre-school to school. They are a constant inspiration and a reminder of the importance of ensuring all our children have the best possible start to life. As children start their own learning journeys they require safe, secure, loving but challenging environments where their greatest resource is the practitioner. I hope through this research I have given the vast number of practitioners who contributed to this study the opportunities to reflect on their own practice and to acknowledge with me *Every Child really does Matter*.

Dianne Borien September 2008.

Contents Page

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1	Research context	1
1.2	Research focus and questions	2
1.3	Context: National initiatives	3
1.4	Partnership working	4
1.5	Cluster groups	7
1.6	Learning communities	10
1.7	Theoretical underpinnings	11
1.8	Chosen methodology	15
1.9	Values and influences	18
1.10	Outline of chapters	20

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1	Culture for change	23
2.2	The nature of partnerships	24
2.3	Barriers to partnership working across early years sectors	29
2.3.1	Division between education and care	30
2.3.2	Lack of collaborative working	31
2.3.3	Staffing and training issues	33
2.3.4	International comparisons	35
2.3.5	Summary	36
2.4	Factors enhancing transition	37
2.4.1	Links between practitioners	37
2.4.2	Links with parents	39
2.4.3	Emotional and social development	39
2.4.4	Cultural Identity	44
2.4.5	The adult and child relationship	46
2.4.6	Transactional Development Theory	48

2.4.7	Summary	50
2.5	Links to transition and early success	51
2.5.1	Readiness	52
2.6	Transition process as scaffolding	53
2.7	Transition practices	56
2.8	Transition as rite of passage	57
2.9.	Continuity and progression	60
2.9.1	International comparisons	65
2.10	The new national structure	66

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1	Research design	68
3.1.1	Qualitative and interventionist	68
3.1.2	Why action research?	71
3.1.3	Style of action research	73
3.1.4	History of this style of institutional action research	74
3.1.5	Critical action research	75
3.2	Procedural issues	77
3.2.1	Participant and collaboration issues	77
3.2.2	Self- reflexivity /reflective practice	80
3.2.3	Ethical issues	83
3.2.4	Empowerment	85
3.2.5	Children's voice issues	86
3.3	Research methods	87
3.3.1	Qualitative research methods	87
3.3.2	Data collection strategies and timeline: summary	88
3.3.3	Questionnaires	89
3.3.4	Interviews	91
3.3.5	Focus groups	94
3.3.6	Vignette of practice for discussion	95
3.3.7	Research Journal	96
3.3.8	Analysis methods	97

Chapter 4

Cycle 1

4.1	Reconnaissance stage	99
4.1.1	Personal reflection	118
4.1.2	Conclusion from questionnaires	133
4.2	Development stage	135
4.2.1	Barriers –questionnaires and observation at cluster groups	136
4.2.2	Effect of competition	136
4.2.3	Barriers - the interviews	137
4.2.4	Barriers – focus groups	148
4.2.5	Systemic factors	151
4.2.6	The interviews	151
4.2.7	Focus groups	157
4.2.8	Impact (positive and negative) of partnerships	160
4.2.9	Interviews	161
4.2.10	Findings	164
4.2.11	Themes to evidence impact	166
4.2.12	Impact for children	175
4.2.13	Focus groups – impact on transition	177
4.3	Evaluation	180

Chapter 5

Cycle 2

5.1	Introduction in new authority	185
5.2	Cluster groups and partnership working	185
5.3	Multi- disciplinary teams	188
5.4	Group development	189
5.5	Relationship building	191
5.6	Record keeping	192
5.7	Training	193
5.8	Transition	193
5.9	Evaluation	194
5.10	Conclusion	195
5.11	New Developments	196

5.12	Recommendations	197
5.13	Case study	198
5.14	Interviews with colleagues and reception teachers	201
5.15	Examples of transition practices from Cycle 2	204

Chapter 6

Cycle 3

6.1	Cycle 1 – Schools	206
6.2	Links with parents	212
6.3	Summary	212
6.4	Cycle 2	213
6.5	Links with parents	217
6.6	Summary	217

Chapter 7

Discussion: Management of change

7.1	Fullan’s model of change	219
7.1.1	Initiation phase	219
7.1.2	Implementation phase	220
7.1.3	Institutionalization	221
7.2	Models of change	221
7.2.1	Changing phase	222
7.2.2	Lewin’s unfreezing phase ‘opening up’	222
7.2.3	Refreezing phase	222
7.3	Leadership and management	223
7.4	Resistance to change	225
7.5	Change agents	230
7.6	Networks	233
7.7	Reflection	235
7.8	Conclusion	237

Chapter 8

Discussion: Social and Emotional Development

8.1	Training	240
-----	----------	-----

8.1.1	Persona dolls	243
8.1.2	Circle time	250
8.2	Interviewing children	250
8.3	Well-being and involvement	255
8.4	Adult role	258
8.5	Summary	259

Chapter 9

Discussion: Continuity and Progression

9.1	Continuity in learning	266
9.2	Transferring good practice	269
9.3	Evidence of impact	269

Chapter 10

Discussion Scaffolding

10.1	Dialogue linked to theory	275
10.2	Observation from a cluster group	276
10.3	Developing a collaborative learning community	277
10.4	Critical friend	278
10.5	Mentoring	279
10.6	Scaffolding with children	280
10.7	Reflective practice	280
10.8	Relationship building	281

Chapter 11

Conclusion and Recommendations

11.1	Cluster groups	285
11.2	Change agents	287
11.3	Partnership working	289
11.4	Impact on transition and continuity and progression	293
11.5	Impact on practitioners and children	294
11.6	Next steps and emerging themes	297
11.7	Common model	298
11.8	Recommendations	299

11.9	Generalisability	301
11.10	Conclusion	301
	References	304
	Figures	
Figure 1:	Map of cluster groups for Cycle 1	8
Figure 2:	The Experiential Learning Cycle Kolb and Fry 1975	12
Figure 3:	Model of conceptual framework based on Lave and Wenger (1998) communities of practice as a constellation of interrelated communities	14
Figure 4:	The Ecology of Human Development with links to my conceptual framework	27
Figure 5:	A transitional model of development Dawes and Donald (2005)	49
Figure 6:	Reconnaissance cycle	69
Figure 7:	Action research cycle	70
Figure 8:	Map of cluster groups and associated data for Cycle 2	186
	Graphs	
Graph 1:	Question 1 Do you know that a cluster group is held in your area on a half-termly basis?	101
Graph 2:	Question 2. Do you attend your local cluster group?	102
Graph 3:	Question 3.1. Is venue a barrier to you attending local training?	103
Graph 4:	Question 3.2. Is timing a barrier to you attending your cluster group?	104
Graph 5:	Question 3.3. Is lack of transport a barrier to you attending your local cluster group?	105
Graph 6:	Question 3.4. Is distance a barrier to you attending your local cluster group?	106
Graph 7:	Question 3.5. Are family commitments a barrier to you attending a local cluster group?	107
Graph 8:	Question 4. What would be the most suitable time for you to attend the cluster group?	108

Graph 9: Question 5. What have you found to be the most beneficial, an informal cluster meeting or a cluster meeting with a training focus?	112
Graph 10: Question 6.1. What progress in your own knowledge have you made by attending cluster groups?	113
Graph 11: Question 6.2. What progress in your own skills have you made by attending cluster groups?	114
Graph 12: Question 6.3. What progress in your own understanding have you made by attending cluster groups?	115
Graph 13: Question 6.4. What progress in your own confidence have you made by attending cluster groups?	116
Graph 14: Question 7. Do you have good links with your local pre-school/day nursery/childminder/school regarding the transition of children?	120
Graph 15: Question 8. How do you facilitate this transfer?	121
Graph 16: Question 9.1. Which of the following areas do you feel the children have benefited from cluster meetings: Personal, social and emotional	122
Graph 17: Question 9.2. Which of the following areas do you feel the children have benefited from cluster meetings: 2. Confidence	123
Graph 18: Question 9.3. Which of the following areas do you feel the children have benefited from attending cluster meetings: 3. Self esteem	124
Graph 19: Question 9.4. Which of the following areas do you feel the children have benefited from cluster meetings: 4. Independence	125
Graph 20: Question 9.5. Which of the following areas do you feel the children have benefited from cluster meetings: 5. Communication, language and literacy	126
Graph 21: Question 9.6. Which of the following areas do you feel the children have benefited from cluster meetings: 6. Mathematics	127

Graph 22: Question 9.7. Which of the following areas do you feel the children have benefited from cluster meetings: 7. Knowledge and Understanding of the world	128
Graph 23: Question 9.8. Which of the following areas do you feel the children have benefited from cluster meetings: 8. Physical Development	129
Graph 24: Question 9.9. Which of the following areas do you feel the children have benefited from cluster meetings: 9. Creative Development	130
Graph 25: Question 10. Have you links with your feeder setting with the settling in process?	131
Graph 26: Focus groups – Barriers to partnership working	149
Graph 27: Focus groups – Systems	158
Graph 28: Focus groups –Benefits to partnership working	172
Graph 29: Focus groups – Impact on transition	177
Graph 30: Example of impact – Cycle 1	209
Graph 31: Curriculum areas showing impact – Cycle 1	211
Graph 32: Example of impact – Cycle 2	215
Graph 33: Curriculum areas showing impact – Cycle 2	216

Tables

Table 1: Bonfenbrenners’s 1979 Ecology of Human Development with links to my conceptual framework	28
Table 2: Barriers and Solutions	147
Table 3: Barriers identified by focus groups	150
Table 4: Systems identified by focus groups	159
Table 5: Continuum of practice Handscomb (2002)	169
Table 6: Benefits identified by cluster groups	174
Table 7: Impact identified by focus groups	179
Table 8: Transitional strategy for North West Children’s Centre	200
Table 9: Cycle 3: Question 1. Do you have a working partnership with your feeder pre-school/day nursery/nursery class/child minding network?	207
Table 10: Cycle 3: Question 2. What transition activities/practice do you undertake with your feeder setting?	207

Table 11: Cycle 3: Question 3. Has working in partnership with your feeder setting had an impact on children as they transfer into school, is so, how?	209
Table 12: Cycle 3: Question 4. Do you have on entry data to evidence impact?	210
Table 13: Cycle 3: Question 5. Do you have a named person for transition?	211
Table 14: Cycle 3: Question 6. Do you have a transition policy?	212
Table 15: Cycle 3: Question 1. Do you have a working partnership with your feeder pre-school/day nursery/nursery class/child minding network?	213
Table 16: Cycle 3: Question 2. What transition activities/practice do you undertake with your feeder setting?	213
Table 17: Cycle 3: Question 3. Has working in partnership with your feeder setting had an impact on children as they transfer into school, if so, how?	214
Table 18: Cycle 3: Question 4. Do you have any on entry data to evidence impact?	216
Table 19: Cycle 3: Question 5. Do you have a named person for transition?	216
Table 20: Cycle 3: Question 6. Do you have a transition policy?	217
Table 21: Overview of research findings	284
Photographs	
Photographs 1-6 Vignette of practice using Persona Dolls	247

Appendices

Appendix 1: Table of Cluster Groups - Cycle 1	
Appendix 2: An example of the questionnaire sent to all Cluster Groups in Cycle 1	
Appendix 3: Interview schedule	

- Appendix 4: Questionnaire for Cycle 3
- Appendix 5: An example of a form completed by the Leading Foundation Stage Mentors to evidence activities and communication that had taken place at Cluster Groups.
- Appendix 6: An example of a letter of introduction sent from Leading Foundation Stage Mentor to practitioners.
- Appendix 7: An example of a letter sent to practitioners from Leading Foundation Stage Mentor following cluster meeting.
- Appendix 8: Photographs illustrating activities to support personal, social and emotional development.

Chapter 1

Introduction

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

(Cleave, Jowett and Bate, 1982, p195)

This research is rooted in my own professional practice and resulted from concerns that arose as a consequence of my observations and discussions with cross sector practitioners in my role as an early years adviser. Practitioners within settings were operating within a silo and independently with very little communication or collaborative working taking place between schools, pre-schools, day nurseries and child minders. During professional discussions with various practitioners from these wide ranging settings, practitioners were articulating that there was little liaison between them but were unsure of the rationale behind this or the strategies to be deployed to improve the partnership working leading to positive experiences for children on transition to formal schooling.

1.1 Research context

As an early years adviser I was aware in my professional role that the Foundation Stage for children (designated from 2000) required practitioners from the different sectors to work together in collaboration and mutual respect. All practitioners within the Foundation Stage are working from the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (DfES, 2000) and children as they transfer from one setting to another during this time will continue to have their learning and development planned, observed and assessed from the same document. Yet it was evident to me practitioners were not working together to support continuity and progression in children's learning or putting in place policies and procedures to support children at this critical stage: "*The start of school is recognized as a major transition in a child's life*" (Fabian, 2002, p.1).

The different sectors within the study are private and voluntary settings; pre-schools, day nurseries, child minding networks and maintained settings; nursery classes and reception classes. Maintained settings are funded and run by the local authority. Children within the Foundation Stage are aged between three and the end of their reception year within school, although from September 2008, it will be extended to children from birth and will become The Early Years Foundation Stage (DfES, 2007). For children to have the best possible experience at the point of transition into school I initiated a forum to bring the different practitioners with varying degrees of qualifications and experiences together as a starting point for further developments to flow. For this partnership work to evolve there were issues to address in terms of the cultural formation of individuals and groups at the present time whilst taking into account historical development of the different sectors. To meet the evolving needs of children and parents practitioners have to address the task of finding new professional forms of practice which will be viewed as working in partnership.

1.2 Research focus and questions

My research evolves from a desire to explore barriers to partnership working between childcare and education providers and seeks strategies to overcome these barriers. By gathering information on good practice this research attempts to transfer that practice to other groups. Where pockets of good practice appeared to exist, practitioners met on a regular basis to discuss continuity in the curriculum and visited each other's settings during transition points to share information. The children then appeared to experience a smooth transition into school. I explore how I developed a strategy of bringing the various local partners in early childhood provision together through cluster groups.

This research focuses on:

- relationships between the various early years practitioners and settings,
- the extent to which they work in partnership,
- what promotes and inhibits this, and
- how this affects the educational experience of children.

Particular attention is paid to the quality of transition from a pre-school setting into a reception class and a child's first experience of school. Management of change, change agents, reflective learning are all key threads and a mechanism for developing

and enhancing practice linked to transition for children at age 5.

The study took place in two local authorities, one large Authority (A), one small Authority (B), between 2003 and 2007. I was employed consecutively in each with responsibilities for early years provision. After starting the research in Authority A, I was appointed as an early years strategic manager in Authority B and took the opportunity to continue the research in a different authority and test the model of cluster groups I have devised in Authority A.

1.3 Context: National initiatives

There has been in recent years an increased emphasis in the United Kingdom on the importance of quality and standards in early years services; for example, in the 2004 Children's Act and the 2006 Childcare Act which introduced the Every Child Matters agenda (DfES, 2003). *The Ten Year Strategy for Childcare - Choice for parents, the best start for children* (DfEE, 2004) acknowledged that education and care for the youngest children needed to be brought together in a coherent manner.

The national context has been one of moving towards partnership working with government leading the way. In May 1997, Chief Education Officers, Directors of Social Services and voluntary and private providers received government guidance to develop partnerships between state, voluntary and private providers. Each partnership was required to produce an Early Years Development Plan which led to a need to review current provision and identify gaps. The 1997 document *Progress with Partnerships, How Partnerships contribute to Early Years Services* (DfEE and the National Early Years Network) acknowledged that in the past early years services had been fragmented and that little has been written from the viewpoint of those people actually delivering the services at the level of provision, such as pre-schools, schools and day nurseries.

Since 1997, fast changing initiatives and legislation have been introduced, all emphasising partnership working between different sectors. SureStart, a cross-departmental government strategy to improve services for families and young children in areas of need, was launched in 1999 aiming to achieve positive outcomes for

children through joined-up services. However, Moss, from the Thomas Coram Foundation (cited in Drury, Miller and Campbell, 2000) concluded in 1998 that there is still a long way to go towards “*integrated and coherent service for children 0-6*” (p.2). In 1998 *Meeting the Childcare Challenge* (DfEE) changed the Partnerships to Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships (EYDCPs). The SureStart Unit, within the government’s Children, Young People and Families Directorate aimed to increase the availability of childcare for all children, improving their health, education, and emotional development and by supporting parents. This strengthened the case for collaborative working. However, a professional boundary between agencies has often resulted in ‘joined up’ working not coming to fruition.

Every Child Matters: Change for Children (ECM: DFES, 2003) responded to all 108 recommendations of the Victoria Climbié Inquiry in 1997. At the heart of all of these documents are five outcomes for children: Staying Safe, Being Healthy, Enjoy and Achieve, Making a Positive Contribution and Economic Well being. The *Childcare Act* (2006) stated that accessible high-quality childcare and services are a parent’s legitimate expectation with local authorities as strategic leaders, working in partnership across all agencies.

1.4 Partnership working

Thus the Foundation Stage had made it essential for the different sectors to work together in collaboration and mutual respect even though children may be being educated and cared for in a range of differently funded early years settings. All children during this phase work towards (and if appropriate beyond) ‘*early learning goals*’ across six areas of learning. The *Curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage* (DfES, 2000) has a set of principles, which all practitioners regardless of the type of Foundation Stage setting in which they may be working must uphold. My research posits that, by working with practitioners from all sectors, strategies can be put in place to benefit both practitioners and children, providing consistency in practice and progression in learning. My research particularly focuses on children’s transition from a pre-school setting into formal schooling usually from a private and voluntary setting into a maintained setting. In some cases transition comes from a maintained nursery into a maintained school setting. Research conducted nationally where it has been identified that common issues in relation to transition to school

exist, despite variations between the countries in the age on entry to school and in the nature of early education from country to country will be explored.

Partnership working is not a new concept but is regarded as a key driver for developing policies particularly those directed at young people (Warmington, Daniels, Edwards, Leadbetter, Martin, Brown & Middleton, 2004). The government has emphasised the importance of partnership working in developing the relationship between central and local government with a view to delivering services through 'best value', by organisations coming together and pooling resources to solve shared challenges and issues. Although partnership working is at the centre of, for example, the Ten-Year Strategy (2004) and its delivery through Children's Centres, partnership is seldom defined. Interagency collaboration has a particularly high status within UK social policy however this is rarely informed by "*coherent theories of work or by systematic understanding of the historically changing character of organizational work and service provision*" (Warmington et al. 2004, p.2). The Audit Commission (1988, para 13) defines partnership as a joint working arrangement with several key factors which are present in my research: partners agreeing to achieve a common goal; sharing relevant information and planning and implementing a jointly agreed programme.

Partnership relates to the relationships between different groups, for example professionals and service users, different organisations, or (as in the case of my research) different professionals from different sectors working together at practitioner level. My research investigates possible links between partnerships which communicate effectively and well-adjusted pupils at transition to formal schooling, and explores the extent to which these might be associated. The concept of school readiness, with particular emphasis on social and emotional readiness and seamless continuity and progression, is examined.

There is a long tradition in early years research which links education and care. David (1993) clearly stated that education and care should be inseparable. The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) project (Blatchford, Sylva, Taggart, Melhuish, Sammons, and Elliot, 1997-2003) shows the positive impact that early years provision can have. A key finding included high quality pre-schooling being

related to better intellectual and social and emotional outcomes for children. The government agenda for a single, coherent phase from birth to five, to be implemented September 2008, is based on findings from the EPPE project and the researcher's views of the way that children learn and develop. The Early Years Foundation Stage (DfES, 2007) brings together and replaces Birth to Three Matters: A Framework to support children in their Earliest Years (DfES, 2002), the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (DfES, 2000) and the National Standards for Under 8's Day Care and Childminding (DfES, 2003). At the heart of the EYFS is a principled approach to improving outcomes for all children where continuity and consistency of learning is integral, "*settings should communicate information which will secure continuity of experience for the child between settings*" (DfES 2007, p.10). Part of the change taking place is the introduction of a reformed and simplified childcare and early years regulation framework. Therefore all early years settings will deliver and be inspected against the EYFS. This addresses some historic barriers to partnership working, and currently it is my professional task to co-ordinate the rollout of the materials and support all settings with briefing sessions and training. This aspect becomes mandatory in September 2008.

The EYFS in part addresses the aims of the *Childcare Act* of 2006, to support the delivery of quality integrated education and care for children from birth to five years of age. Although my research has focused only on partners within the care and education sector serving the Foundation Stage, this legislation also requires local authorities to work in partnership with the National Health Service and Jobcentre Plus to deliver services through integrated Children's Centres to enhance outcomes for children. This places a greater responsibility on Local Authorities to monitor the quality of provision.

Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999, p.66) suggest the construction of early childhood institutions can be viewed in different ways, as a means of social intervention, as a deficit model of the child, or as a producer of outputs. There is also the construction of the early childhood institution as a business within a competing market place. This is a result of the expansion of childcare places and growing competition to secure the services of parents seeking education and care for their children and employers who provide child care as part of their employer support.

The pattern and availability of nursery education and childcare services for young children differ across countries, and in every country they have changed over the century in response to shifts in family and work patterns, as well as reflecting changes in educational thought (Penn, 2000, p.7).

1.5 Cluster groups

To develop partnership working, joint training for the private, voluntary and maintained sectors was arranged in Authority A, instigating discussion between the practitioners and giving the participants a professional insight into different working practices. Transition between settings and sharing of information were points of discussion during these training sessions. I led supported by colleagues the development of cluster groups. Fifty cluster groups were established around the county so practitioners from all sectors were able to attend a local forum and “*to empower all practitioners and parents through working closely together*” (DfEE, 2000, p.13). Time was spent identifying which settings should form a cluster in terms of geographical area, particularly identifying feeder settings as transition was a key driver. Letters, visits and phone calls were made to initiate attendance and rationale for these forums.

The rationale for setting up forums was to develop relationships and partnership working across the sector, to share information and ideas of good practice, and as a vehicle to develop reflective practice. Reflection groups come to “*realise the value of their own experiences, they take a critical perspective on these, and they learn how to use this reflection to help them deal with whatever problems they face*” (Boud and Miller, 1996, p.27).

These forums were intended to be the catalyst for change where the difference between good ideas and good practice was to be defined, with transferable good practice being the intention. Change management was pivotal to a successful outcome and I was influenced by Fullan (1991) as he focused his work on educational change, where the human participants take part in the change process. Cluster groups allow practitioners to have access to training opportunities from a variety of agencies which would facilitate wider partnership working. Health, social care, special educational needs, psychology team and the child protection team all became involved. Having access to other agencies had been requested by practitioners.

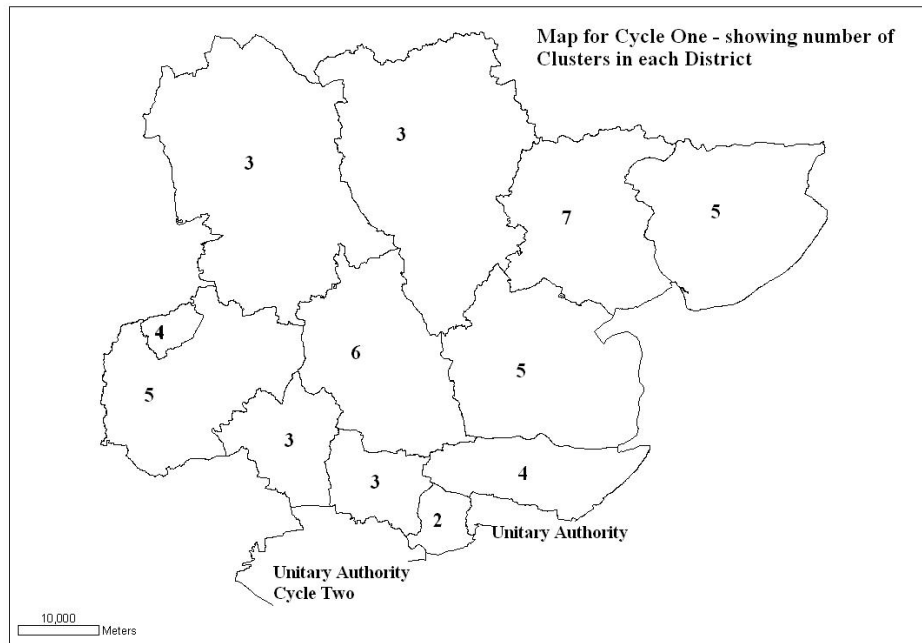


Figure 1 – Cluster groups for Authority A. Local Authority website.
 This map identifies how many cluster groups were located in each geographical area.
 A full breakdown of the cluster groups is shown in Appendix 1.

Cluster groups were expected to support all settings in terms of curriculum development and aid the smooth transition between settings. I created a professional development opportunity for leading Foundation Stage mentors to lead the cluster groups. The county was very large and I was aware that if these cluster groups were to be successful a broker or change agent (Fielding, 2005) was needed to facilitate the change and the transference of good practice.

Change agents or leading mentors were identified through a process of advertisements to apply as a professional development opportunity; selection was through interviews to ensure practice was good, as judged by Ofsted giving external validation; and appropriate interpersonal skills. The mentors were discussed between the advisers before an appointment was made allowing for more than one person making the decision. At interview I shared my vision of joined-up working and supporting children with transition into school. All mentors were invited to a session where there was input from myself in discussing their role, the organisation of the cluster groups

and the support they would receive from the training officer employed by the authority. I also arranged an information session from the Pre-School Learning Alliance, the National Child Minding Association and the National Day Nurseries Association, so the partner agencies felt confident and comfortable with the cluster mentors. These initial sessions were a tool for developing the knowledge of the mentors, which in many cases were teachers from the maintained sector. The cluster groups met locally for joint training and as informal networking groups. I examine the benefits of these mixed cluster groups in my research through individual interviews and focus groups in Chapter 4.

Raising the quality of both provision and outcomes was to be a good lever to use when discussing the issue of change and promoting partnership working with head teachers. I examine in my research change instigated at grass roots level as possible concrete evidence to substantiate my argument. I hope to contribute to management of change theory within early childhood organisation and management.

To support practitioners' learning I promoted a reflective learning style. A mixture of individual reflection and collaborative critical analysis of the difficulties of partnership working and the strategies to develop transition practices was where I placed my theory (Kolb, 1984, Fullan, 1991). I talked through the rationale for the networks, helping participants see that they were a forum to bring together all practitioners from the different sectors, to discuss and share practice, areas for development and an arena to share problems (Engestrom, 1999). An example of this was a practitioner asking how other groups organised snack time.

Vignette

A recent Ofsted inspection within a pre-school setting had identified the implementation of snack time as an area for development. This resulted in the teacher or change agent visiting all local settings, private and voluntary and maintained, taking photographs of snack time and talking through different approaches. At the next cluster meeting she gave a power point presentation analysing effective management of snack time. This was an opportunity for professional discussion to occur and resulted in the pre-school developing and implementing a different approach to snack time which also supported their Ofsted action plan.

Although all 50 cluster groups had the same structure, the needs, discussions, training and issues arising were unique for each group. Training sessions were delivered on the basis of needs identified by each individual cluster group. Theory related to practice, practical ideas to be carried out in settings and professional development underpinned this training. Allowing individual networks money for resources supported sharing ideas. Demonstration of how resources were used in a practical situation embedded good practice and developed aspects of existing practice. A digital camera purchased allowed pre-schools to use this as a tool for making observations of the children and developed their work in assessment. A teacher was able to share observations she had made using a camera and this enhanced the development of the pre-school. The networks were also intended to be supportive, developing individuals' self esteem and confidence as well as sharing and developing shared policies and practices for transition. Expansive learning where practitioners create new knowledge and new practice within the activity of partnership working was an evolving aim. I was aware that time invested in setting up groups would pay in the long term.

1.6 Learning communities

My aim was to create through these forums small *learning communities* (Lave and Wenger, 1991) linked to the cluster groups. Through professional discussion and dialogue, sharing new ways of partnership working and supporting children at points of transition the cross sector practitioners may create their own learning organisation. Similarly to children, adults' learning is grounded in prior experience. Individuals use and build upon their own personal foundation of learning. As adults learn they engage in a complex process, which includes the behaviour, knowledge and skills of others.

These cluster groups were ideal as a medium for adults to learn through participation in real world tasks. This is what Lave and Wenger (1991) called *situated learning*. Through the change agents and colleagues, opportunities will arise for individuals to construct their own meaning through reflective practices. Communities of practice are characterised by mutually defining identities and a shared vision of practice. The change agents may be *animators*: Boud and Miller (1996) show that through learning in context 'animators' may challenge or offer an alternative view of knowledge being constructed. Kolb (1984) believed that individuals learn from experience; the desire to learn, what individuals learn and how they learn are affected by socialisation and educational processes. The forums, as a learning organisation, were an opportunity for the practitioners to identify, access, and use the experiences and knowledge that they

have acquired through life and to use these skills to solve the problems presented. Through working together as a team, more can be achieved than a practitioner working alone.

1.7 Theoretical underpinnings

To support the development of practitioners' learning within the networks, I firstly investigated different theoretical perspectives. On experiential learning (Brookfield, 1983, Houle, 1980) my investigations found two different schools of thought: first that learning takes place within an immediate and relevant setting where the individual applies knowledge, skills and feelings that they have gained; and second that learning occurs as a direct participation in life. The first is more likely to occur when the individual has a direct participation with the area being studied. This, in my research, would translate to the practitioners taking part in the training sessions provided. For example, the tutor asking the practitioners to think about and plan for different transition experiences and the impact on the child. The second example is where learning takes place by reflecting upon everyday experience. It is through reflection at the end of a session within a setting that personal growth and self-awareness are likely to occur as the practitioner reflects and evaluates the experiences the children have received.

Jarvis (1995) states that most literature on experiential learning "*is actually about learning from primary experience, that is learning through sense experience*" (1995, p.75). Experiential learning is underpinned by the theory that individuals can learn effectively through direct hands on experiences, however in some instances thinking, discussing or processing both cognition and emotion linked to the first hand experience supports meeting a particular goal. Within my research, both types of experiential learning take place and are based on the further contributions of Kolb (1976, 1981, 1984).

Kolb and Fry (1975) focused further on experiential learning and produced a model of four elements: concrete experience, observation and reflection, the formation of abstract concepts and testing in new situations. An "experiential learning cycle" was formed which is similar to my methodological action research cycle of Lewin (1948).

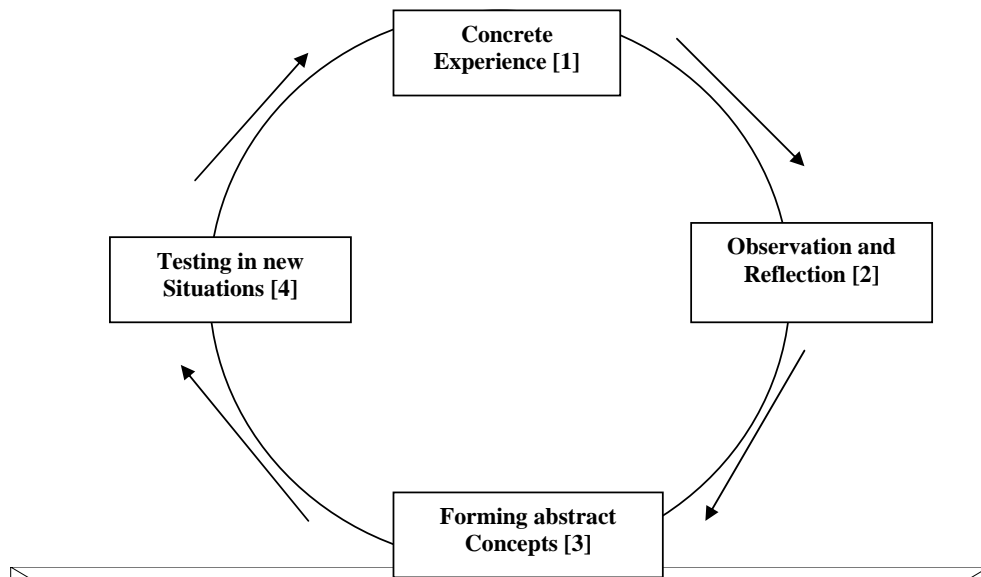


Figure 2. The Experiential Learning Cycle – Kolb and Fry (1975)

Kolb and Fry (1975) argue that the learning cycle can begin at any of the four points and that it should be approached as a continuous cycle. Based on my research study this will translate to the practitioners carrying out an action where they will see the effect of that action on their situation in their setting. The goal is that this will lead to individual practitioners gaining an understanding of the effects of that action in their particular situation so that if the same action occurred again in similar circumstances it is possible for the practitioner to anticipate what would follow from the action. This would lead to the practitioner having an understanding of the general principle under which the particular instance occurs.

Kolb's 4 stage model of experimental learning suggests various generalisations about what to do in different situations. Practitioners will be able to say what action needs to be taken in certain circumstances but there is the possibility of practitioners not being able to transfer this learning to other settings and situations as they will not be able to verbalise their actions in sociological terms. The last part of Kolb's cycle is the application through action in a new circumstance within the range of generalisation. If learning has taken place this may be represented as a spiral. The goal is that concrete experience of the here-and-now will support practitioners to try out new ways of working and transition practices, which will lead to change in

practice. Kolb (1984) links his work to that of Piaget's assimilation and accommodation (1972), Lewin's field theory (1948) and Dewey's (1938) notion of continuity of experience where each experience influences future experiences.

Further investigation led me to the work of Lave and Wenger (1991) where I recognized my cluster groups fitted into this concept well. This model is based on the theory of knowledge acquisition as a social process where individuals can participate at different levels in communal learning. This concept of a *Community of Practice* introduced by Lave and Wenger (1991) mirrored my vision for the cluster groups. Central to this concept is the process of learning from others, that members have shared interests, are motivated to do something about them and that the communities of practice are self-generating. Key to all this was the notion of the practitioners being clearly collaborative. This was a particular aim for the cluster groups.

Originally the Communities of Practice were co-located, however Wenger (1998) suggested an organization was not a single Community of Practice but a constellation of interrelated communities that overlapped within an organization where knowledge and learning is transferred through social networks. This works well in visualising the cluster groups as Communities of Practice which were a constellation within the local authority. Practitioners within the cluster groups through social links, wider training events and conferences were transferring knowledge and learning.

Figure 3 illustrates my conceptual framework. Cluster groups as learning communities were autonomous and developing independently, however they were also interrelated, as there was dialogue and sharing of practice through the leading Foundation Stage mentors. The voices of the parents/carers and children were reciprocal; the voices were filtering through the practitioners as a direct result of the action research. Dialogue was two-way; many of the practitioners were also parents and as such played a dual role. They took part in the different research methods and their views were taken and fed into the development of the cluster groups. Children's voices were taken into account through specific activities such as interviews but also through activities within their specific settings. The Local Authority was the external framework; there was liaison between the cluster groups and the authority. My colleagues and I were disseminating information and ascertaining how the individual

cluster groups were evolving, collecting data and evidence in various formats. This model, devised in authority A, was transferred to authority B; the model was identical apart from there being fewer cluster groups within authority B.

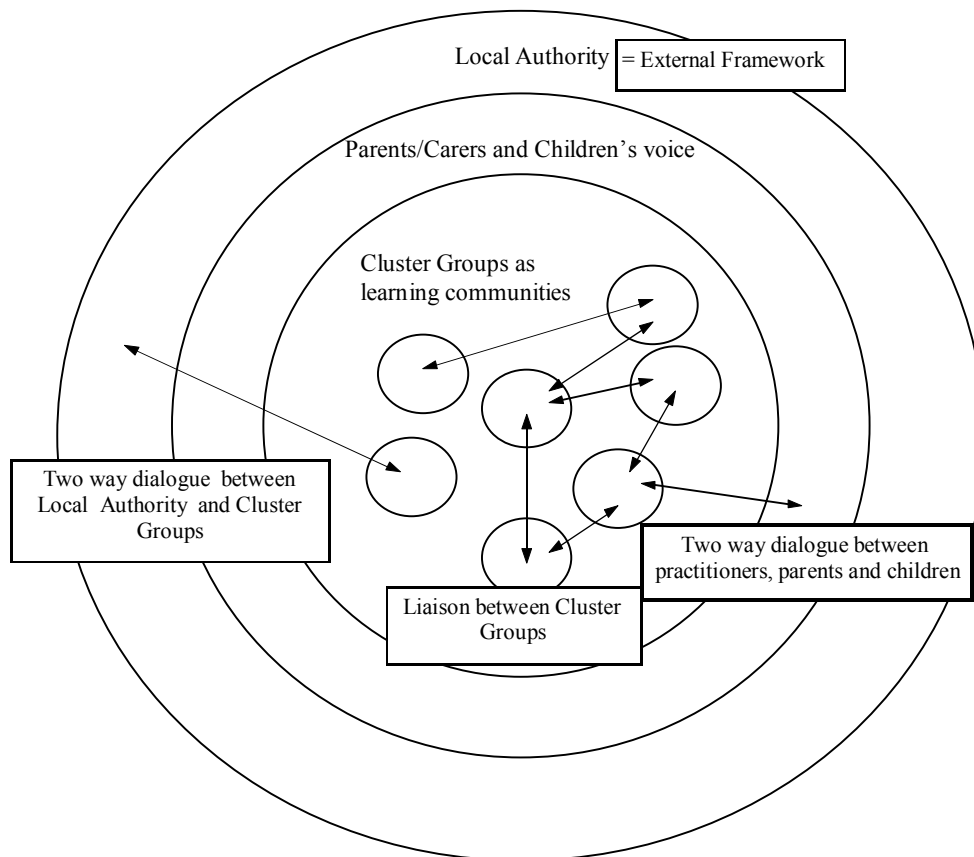


Figure 3. Model of conceptual framework based on Lave and Wenger (1998) Communities of Practice as a constellation of interrelated communities.

This conceptual framework links into Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model of human development (1979) which is discussed in detail in chapter 2.

Vygotsky (1896 - 1934) was a key player in shaping my professional practice with social constructivism central to how I believe children learn. I explored his work in more detail as a pre-requisite to this research and discovered the paradigm of activity theory. When individuals engage and interact with their environment the result is the production of tools which are exteriorized forms of mental processes. As a result of these mental processes being manifested as tools they become more readily accessible

and individuals are able to communicate them more easily to others, therefore becoming a useful means for social interaction.

Activity theory gives an understanding to the way people act. Vygotsky's concept of mediation refers to a triangle consisting of the mediation tools, the individuals and the outcome, this model brings together the cultural artifacts with human actions and tended to focus on individuals. Engestrom (1999) expanded the work by Vygotsky and added a social component which allows for analysis of social systems. This expansion focuses on the macro rather than micro element of the activity system, the group or community rather than the individual operating with the tools. Engestrom (1999) views the internal tensions and dilemmas as the motivating force for change and therefore development. Third generation activity theory sees Engestrom viewing joint activity or practice as the form for analysis rather than individual activity. It is the environment as well as the subject that is modified through mediated activity. Engestrom has developed this third generation activity theory based on dialogue and the voices of the group.

A key concept of activity theory is mediation. Cole (1996, p.108) reminds us "*the structure and development of human psychological processes emerge through culturally mediated, historically developing, practical activity*". The practitioners within the cluster groups will evidence professional learning by interpreting and expanding the object of activity and responding in enriched ways. This is what Engestrom (1987) calls expansive learning. There is some division between the two approaches as Lave and Wenger's model (1991) views consensus and shared vision of practices as a facilitation of interagency working whilst Engestrom et al (1999) views the internal tensions within a group as a lever for change and innovation.

1.8 Chosen methodology

As a professional engaging in research, time was spent firstly identifying the issue and subsequently fact finding in terms of context, approach, and willingness of participants to take part in the research. It was evident from the outset my approach was going to be primarily qualitative as I was concerned with gaining an understanding of barriers and benefits to partnership working with a view to finding more effective strategies to support children at transition.

Action research has been my overarching research design, action research on a large organisational scale within each authority, rather than in a small scale setting. I used a range of research methods, including individual case studies of practice and interviews with individuals and focus groups. Questionnaires were a mechanism to establish the baseline across the authority and to validate the evidence. I have also included in cycle two as part of the research the 'pupil voice' as this is often an 'absent voice' in early childhood research.

Action research was the chosen methodology as I was actively involved in change and improvement in my professional role. The project arose from my visits within my professional role to settings within the Foundation Stage. Through talking to practitioners, I identified the need to develop better links with their feeder settings and ensure transition between settings was based on best practice. However, there was a lack of clarity in how to facilitate and define best practice. I also wanted to develop my understanding of the barriers to cross-sector partnership working, so that in future work I would be able to facilitate and support better links.

As cluster groups were being formed which were to be facilitated by key people, practitioners were introduced to the action research. The cluster groups were to be a forum to develop and build relationships, to share practice and information and to access shared training leading to learning communities. The action research process of planning an action, observing, documenting, sharing and reflecting (Lewin 1948) occurred over a period of two years in Cycle one of the research before moving into Cycle two. Practitioners in initial discussions were open to sharing their settings and to working together to enhance practice. Practitioners were to engage in enquiry and construct theory, and be participants in the action research themselves. This included analysing the historical origins of the existing practice and using the outcomes to analyse existing practice across the sectors. Joint analysis of the data by the participants and the researcher leads to richer data.

When I introduced the innovation of my research I was aware that individuals may have to change their practice to meet this, but also each individual and organisation was different and idiosyncratic and therefore at times I would need to be flexible and

adapt as appropriate. As the researcher I had to be aware of my own beliefs, values and interests and be open to the strengths and contributions of others. I had a responsibility to ensure equity and fairness in my research practice and the results. Self-reflexivity involves deconstructing the ways in which researchers' desires shape the texts they produce (Reason and Bradbury, 2006). This was built into both the methodology and the analysis process.

The desire to change practice is at the heart of action research. I wanted to improve partnership working across the sectors and develop transition processes therefore modelling a new way of working as a result of the data emerging. As change management was embedded in my research I also wanted to understand the process better from a personal and professional perspective. I completed the Belbin (1984) management styles questionnaire; my emerging styles were chair, team worker and shaper. Analysing the characteristics of my styles, there were aspects of each that would support this research, such as, the ability to help others to work towards shared goals, spotting individual talents and using them in the pursuit of group objectives, allowing all members to contribute effectively.

Instead of taking a deficit approach to change, identifying and focusing on what was not happening, I focused on what the possibilities of partnership working could bring. Research evidence has shown (e.g. Margetts, 2002) that where settings have introduced transition programmes that are based on a good understanding of children and families then children's adjustments to their new settings is less likely to be disruptive. Change for some practitioners was unsettling and caused stress and tension. The present climate is one of massive change within the early years sector, with practitioners having to take national and local initiatives on board. Change processes are part of effectiveness and practitioners needed to have an understanding of the dynamics of change and manage the process.

Part of this process was encouraging practitioners to plan, implement and evaluate a number of changes to their historic practice. This involved them in action research. To ensure change to collaborative working and transition practices were going to take place I supported practitioners to feel empowered and willing to respond to the challenge of improving their practice. *"Action research embraces a practitioner's*

professional judgment and, in doing so, it is a means by which practitioners may regain their professional identity” (Blenkin and Kelly 1997, p.93).

I observed that participants from all sectors were confident in putting their views forward. When I visited the groups at the embryonic stage, there was an issue of status and power evident. Where the status between the practitioners was a barrier, the model of change implemented led to power shifting. Observation and professional discussion of the participants interacting supported knowledge emerging. The change model used was *innovation, implementation and institutionalization* (Fullan, 1991). The implementation of the new model was to be monitored and reviewed identifying strengths, concerns and the impact on practitioners, children and families. Collaborative action research (Reason and Bradbury, 2006) is one strategy that provides opportunities for translating concepts for educational reform into practice.

1.9 Values and influences

My research question was based on my belief that children’s emotional well being, their social competence, their self esteem and social skills are fundamental to their learning and development and lead to resilience and ability to deal with change which will support them through all transitions in life (Rutter and Rutter, 1992). Their educational experiences, interactions and relationships with adults and between each other contribute to this. Experiences at this stage will have an important impact on children’s development and life chances. Creating confidence and an enthusiasm for learning in children is a starting point from which all else should flow.

As a nursery teacher working within a large primary school, I witnessed first hand how children made their first transition from home to nursery. It was evident to me that by ensuring children felt safe, secure and had a sense of belonging they settled well within the nursery environment and contributed with enthusiasm to the learning being offered to them. Having an understanding of child development and being sensitive to children’s behaviour within the new environment was crucial during this transition period. The environment was set up in a manner that was conducive to children being able to make choices and become independent learners and thinkers. My primary aim during the time I worked within the nursery was to ensure the environment for these young children and their families was one that was warm,

welcoming and where children's holistic development was fostered.

A core value as a professional within all aspects of my working role and on a personal level is that of inclusion. I echo the sentiments of Edington (1998), who said that having admitted children to early years settings, practitioners should ensure all children have an equal opportunity to access the range of experiences on offer, and that all children feel equally valued as part of a group. Transition can be a particularly challenging time for the most vulnerable children; policies, practices, monitoring and evaluating should take place to ensure the experience of transition for all children is based on best practice. I believe that outcomes for children should be based on an equitable basis and that all children and families are entitled to best practice and a good introduction to school.

I therefore examine the research literature on social and emotional aspects of learning in order to explore and refine these initial assumptions. It has been suggested by Goleman (1996) and Rutter (1997) that children who are able to develop social competence are more likely to have experience of positive experiences in school which in turn will lead to greater emotional well being.

My professional career took me on to teaching within further and higher education. It was during this time I came to appreciate theory linked to practice, reflective practice and the commitment to instil a love for learning in others. Teaching adults working towards a recognised qualification reinforced my belief of the importance of a skilled workforce within the early years sector and adults being the most valuable resource for the child. *“Warm, trusting relationships with knowledgeable adults support children's learning more effectively than any amount of resources”* (EYFS, 2007). The majority of the adults I was teaching worked within the private and voluntary sector.

Working as an Early Years Development Adviser from 1998 to 2005 with both the maintained and the private and voluntary sector led me to reflect on the experiences of the different sectors within early years and childcare. I began to appreciate the difficulties many private and voluntary providers faced on a daily basis. The practitioners from the private and voluntary sector were dedicated and committed to

giving children the best start in life and were keen to develop their knowledge and skills. However, I did witness in some cases they were not viewed as professionals by other colleagues within the maintained sector. My research question also arose from a need within me to highlight and celebrate the work practitioners in the private and voluntary sector often in difficult circumstances were implementing and achieving. My core values and beliefs are threaded throughout the research and underpin my professional practice.

Engaging with practitioners from all sectors in this learning journey was crucial to the research findings and ultimately discovering new and improved ways of working in real partnership to enhance the early experiences of the children on their own learning journey. I initiated my research as a response to the introduction of the Foundation Stage (DfES, 2000), seven years later the EYFS states:

A high quality early years experience provides a firm foundation on which to build future academic, social and emotional success. Key to this is ensuring continuity between all settings..... Transition should be seen as a process, not an event, and should be planned for and discussed with parents and children. Settings should communicate information which will secure continuity and experience for the child between settings (DfES, 2007, p.10).

This validates my research and identifies many key points, which I address.

1.10 Outline of chapters

This chapter introduced the key issues and the rationale for the research question: what impact have collaborative cluster groups had in the Foundation Stage in improving transition at five? This research question is set within the National context which is outlined and explores the legislation and changes within the early years sector which underpins the requirements of working in partnership across the Foundation Stage.

Chapter 1 also elaborates my personal values which led to my interest in promoting learning communities for all practitioners working in settings, private, voluntary and maintained and begins to explore some theoretical frameworks. Chapter 2 (literature review) investigates what has been written and researched within the early years domain relating to the barriers between the sectors and what strategies and practices

strengthen partnership working. Transition practices and school readiness is investigated with international comparisons made. Chapter 3 (research design and methodological approaches) explains the methods, approaches and the research tools used in this study.

Chapter 4 (Cycle 1) illustrates the different stages of the action research within Cycle 1 starting with the reconnaissance stage. Individual interviews, focus group interviews, vignettes of practice are represented in different data forms. Emerging themes are identified and discussed. Chapter 5 (Cycle 2) explains how after a career move into a smaller unitary authority I attempted to replicate a model of partnership working based on cluster groups. This chapter discusses the processes, procedures and journey of the practitioners' and the resulting outcomes. Chapter 6 (Cycle 3) represents quantitative data and the impact on children at the point of transition into formal schooling. This is a result of a return to a random sample of practitioners from Cycle 1 and all reception teachers in Cycle 2.

Chapter 7 (Discussion: Management of change) illustrates how management of change took place within the different organisations using different change models. This chapter investigates the impact on practice and practitioners'. Chapter 8 (Discussion: Social and emotional development) explores the development of children's social and emotional development and its importance at transition points. Practical activities which were found as a result of the action research to support this area of children's development are included. A small sample of children were interviewed.

Chapter 9 (Discussion: Continuity and progression) investigates continuity and progression in children' learning and the impact of the action research on children and practitioners' practice. Chapter 10 (Discussion: Scaffolding) examines using different theories, the scaffolding of adults learning and the development of a collaborative learning community. The final chapter reflects on the processes and outcomes of the research and recommends a common model, which may be transferable to other contexts.

Chapter 2

Literature review

This chapter focuses on barriers to collaborative relationships and working in partnership across the different sectors - maintained and private and voluntary - catering for the Foundation Stage (DfEE, 2000). It examines the criteria for effective partnerships and managing transitions into formal schooling with an emphasis on social and emotional school readiness. Many of the socio-emotional qualities that support school readiness come from the child-adult relationships, which are paramount to high quality care and education. The role of the professional as well as the child's perspective has been considered in the context of the research focus.

The introduction of the Foundation Stage (DfEE, 2000) led me to examine partnership working across the private, voluntary and maintained sectors in more detail based on observations and knowledge in my professional role. There is very little written about practitioners working together in collaboration and mutual respect at the practitioner level within early years settings. Although much of the relevant literature had a common thread advocating the benefits of partnership working during this phase (Fisher, 1996, Frost, 2005) there was little to describe and define it in practice, the practical problems and the strategies to achieve an embedded model. Some case studies, such as those published by the Early Years Network (DfEE, 1997) gave some indication but were still at the developmental stage. At the outset of this study there were no in-depth studies of how different providers worked in the Foundation Stage.

The Ofsted report, "The Foundation Stage, A survey of 144 settings" (2007) found a variety of arrangements for managing transition between pre-school and school, which were only effective in half the settings visited. There were no written transition policies in the majority of settings, and little evaluation of transition arrangements so this is still an issue that needs clarification, to which this thesis provides a contribution. Joint activities between settings were in place, but only a fifth of settings visited for this report had communicated effectively with other settings. The Ofsted

report identified links were more difficult to develop where several settings were involved; links between schools with non-maintained settings were under developed. Some schools had no contact with non-maintained settings, and other schools expressed concern about the pre-school provision their children experienced prior to school. This recent report supports the rationale for my research and recognizes that despite initiatives at local and national level, research and action are still needed into this area of partnership working.

2.1 Culture for change

For the desired partnership working to develop a culture for change needs to take place where information and working in partnership develops.

The process of organisational and cultural change required to move from a vertical silos mentality and adherence to bureaucratic procedures, towards horizontal partnerships based on the delivery of outcomes has large bearings on the extent to which information is used and shared within and across organisations (Frost, 2005 p.31).

There has been since 1997 government guidance asking for traditionally separate agencies to work together in order to counter social exclusion. Warmington et al (2004) identified that the status for interagency working was high but models of partnership working no longer met the emerging practice. There have been examples (Harker, Dobel-Obel, Berridge and Sinclair 2004) where senior management were committed to joined up working but conflicting professional priorities resulted in a lack of partnership working at operational level. Conversely it was also recognized where different agencies were working in a joined up manner at operational level a lack of management support impeded the practice moving forward. There is recognition that the relationships between horizontal and vertical learning are essential to the analysis of organizational learning currently being developed in activity theory (Warmington et al, 2004) where there is sociocultural interest in how conflict contributes to partnership learning. Cultural change includes recognition from leaders and managers that a new way of working is desirable. My action research was designed to explore how managers and leaders might contribute to changes in partnership working within their own organisations. I commence the literature review with investigating models of partnerships.

2.2 The nature of partnerships

Warmington et al (2004) identified a range of terminology to describe collaborative approaches including 'interagency', 'multi agency', 'joined up working' and 'partnership'. Partnership working modelled at government and Local Authority levels as an example of 'best practice' at provider level was a good starting point to identify which models were most effective. The National Childcare Strategy (1998) outlined a commitment by the government to promote better childcare, which they believed would be achieved through better integration of education and childcare services. Osgood and Sharp (2000) in their research undertaken by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) identified three main organisational models, adopted to co-ordinate these services, discussed in the research by McQuail and Pugh (1995):

- Integrated: essentially a single department or service;
- Co-ordinated: essentially separate departments or services which collaborate within a formal structure;
- Collaborative: essentially separate departments or services.

Osgood and Sharp (2000) sought to identify which authorities had adopted the different methods of working in partnership and to identify examples of good practice. They found that the majority of local authorities that responded to their survey had adopted a co-ordinated model for organising their early years services. So, within an authority services and departments were organised separately, but worked together within a formalised structure to deliver early years services; for example, the council members and department directors sharing a vision for co-ordination supporting the structural arrangements for the early years services. The report indicated there was movement towards greater integration. It was clear that where authorities had achieved most integration or co-ordination they were aided by

A shared vision, commitment and support from the top, willingness by officers to work across department boundaries and a good relationship between the authority and the Partnership (Osgood and Sharp, 2000, p.v).

Rudd, Lines, Schagen, Smith and Reakes (2004) identified the characteristics of effective partnerships as:

- Stakeholders having a sense of ownership in the partnership;
- A bottom up approach with everyone's views taken into account;
- Clear and realistic aims and objectives, methodology and structures;

- Trust, honesty and openness between the partners (p.3).

Following these principles supported the development of effective partnerships between the sectors, particularly when sharing the innovation and monitoring the effects of working together. The cluster forums and the key change agent facilitation encouraged a bottom up approach where all individuals had an opportunity to voice their opinion.

Having investigated the various research studies involving partnerships that of Rudd et al (2004) met several of the criteria that my research study included. Partnership has been recognized as a prominent theme within 21st Century education. The aim of Rudd et al's project was "*to examine and assess how schools, supported by the LEAs, have been working together in different local partnerships to foster the development and spread innovative ideas and share best practice for their mutual benefit*" (p.vi). This study included support from Local Education authorities. As the researcher I was also a Local Education Authority Officer and my research was sitting within the wider framework of the Local Authority and needed to fit within these boundaries whilst evidencing the work of the partnerships. The study undertaken by Rudd et al. focused on locality and partnership working in general, both the benefits and challenges. Specific references to Early Years and Childcare partnerships, including providers of early years education from the voluntary, independent and maintained sector, prompted me to investigate their study in more depth. Improved transition as a key finding of the study and the transferability of the project led me to believe building on the key principles as described by the participants of the research was a good starting point for my own research study. The findings of Rudd et al.'s study are interwoven within my data analysis (chapter 4, chapter 5) and discussion (chapter 7).

The present climate provides opportunities for early childhood workers to learn about each other's experiences and expertise (Trudell, 2002, p.60). Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships have led the way; nevertheless, Hall argues that: "*legislation and government fiat is not the way forward but it is at the local level of everyday interaction between the professionals where success might lie*" (1999, p.13) suggesting that top-down government initiatives are not always the best. Yamazumi, Engstrom, and Daniels (2005) agree that policy alone is not enough to

effect changes required for interagency and cross sector practice. Though I agree that often it is the practitioners at grass roots level that can make, or halt, positive changes, in many instances it requires effective leadership, vision and encouragement from the top, careful management of budgets and monitoring of processes and outcomes.

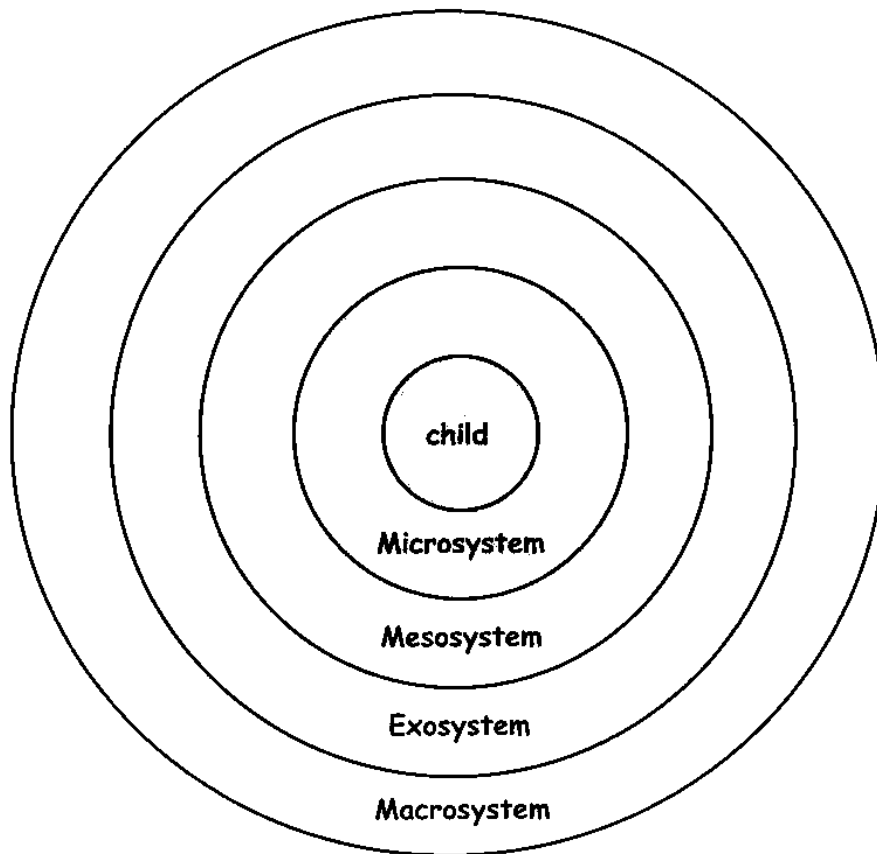
Participants of partnerships will view the partnership in different ways, often leading to a lack of understanding of what is happening, how to move things forward and ultimately being unable to think and plan effectively as a partnership. The vision of my research was a partnership of culture, based on Morgan's (1986) images of organisations, with an emphasis on shared commitment to common values, vision and beliefs. This is rooted in the Human Relations School of Management Sociology (Mayo, 1933). It recognised people are motivated by social concerns, including belonging, commitment and cohesion. Certainly I identified early years practitioners were motivated by vision and beliefs. Ford (2002) identified that partners who have something distinctive to offer but who share a common purpose are likely to form value-added collaborations.

Within my research framework is the child at the centre with the outcome of an enhanced experience of transition from one setting to another through developing stronger partnerships between different sectors. Bronfenbrenner (1979) argued that more attention needed to be paid to how a person behaves in more than one setting and the way relations between the settings can have an effect on the behaviour of a person within a particular setting. This links to my research framework with the relationships between settings impacting on the practitioner and child within a specific setting.

The ecology of human development involves the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p.210).

Bronfenbrenner's theory places the developing person embedded in a series of environmental concentric structures, each contained within the next. This complex hierarchy of systems is called the Micro-system, Meso-system, Exo-system and Macro-system.

Figure 4. The Ecology of Human Development – Bronfenbrenner (1979)



System	Definition Bronfenbrenner (1979 p.22-26)	Contextualised within my research framework.
Micro-system	A pattern of activities, roles and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics.	Child and practitioner within a particular setting, categorised as a childminding home, full day care nursery, pre-school or reception class. Each will be unique from the other.
Meso-system	This comprises the interrelations among two or more settings in which	The relationships through the cluster groups where the different settings

	the developing person actively participates. For a child this is the relations of home, school and peer group. For an adult this is the relations between home, work and social life.	formed relationships. An example for the child is where they attend one or more setting, pre-school and nursery class, or childminder and reception class. For the practitioner this relates to their role as parent at home and practitioner within the setting.
Exo-system	This refers to one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that might affect or are affected by what happens in the setting containing the developing person.	Within my research framework this is the Local Authority. Though the child and practitioner were not directly participating at this level. The policies and practices of each authority will impact on the child and practitioner.
Macro-system	This refers to consistencies in the form and content of lower-order systems that exist or could exist at the level of the subculture or the culture as a whole, along with any belief systems or ideology underlying such consistencies.	National education policy, social and welfare systems that the settings within the micro, meso and exo systems function.

Table 1. Bronfenbrenner's 1979 ecology of human development with links to my conceptual framework.

2.3 Barriers to partnership working across early years sectors

So what have been the key barriers, identified in the literature to achieving this partnership working across the different providers in the early years sector?

Osgood and Sharp's work showed that resistance to partnership working manifested itself through resistance to working across departments, where there were embedded ideas about who did what. There was also reluctance by certain groups who did not want to take part in full partnership working and early years provision was given a low priority (Osgood and Sharp, 2000, p.28).

These conclusions were evidenced from questionnaires, interviews and case studies where the results were analysed in detail. Hudson (2002) argued that, from the standpoint of the sociology of professionalism, three main barriers to partnership working are: professional identity, professional status and professional discretion and accountability. The school of sociology defines professionals as working in a special category of occupations possessing unique attributes that are seen as functional to wider society. These criteria are more related to an ideal type than to rigid criteria that must be met. Professions are defined as a result of a process of social definition. The professional interacts within the social context and has autonomy in which they provide expert service to society. Milbourne, Macrae and Maguire (2003) suggest that individuals recognised and accepted the need to work in partnership but this was constrained by the micro-political conflicts of differences in professional cultures, identities and working priorities. When constructing new ways of working it has to be realised that "*partnership working cannot do away with difference of background, status and hierarchy. Partnership working should recognise celebrate and build on diversity and difference*" (Frost, 2005, p.49).

I recognized that the different practitioners within my research, for example the teacher and the child minder, held a different status with different background training, which was unlikely to change. However, my research was attempting to build on the recognition that each individual would have expert knowledge of the child they were caring for and educating, and that this knowledge would enhance the transition experience for the child. The partnership working was to encourage the practitioners to recognize this in each other. Where barriers had been created through

differences of professional culture and identity Warmington et al (2004) identified there was a lack of integrating this professional culture into wider work related learning or a culture of analyse as a learning process. Engestrom (1999) building on the activity theory of Vygotsky sees the internal tensions within teams as the motive force for change and development. The sections that follow I have identified as potential barriers to partnerships being formed and sustained.

2.3.1 Division between education and care

At provider level, there have been tensions between different providers for over two decades. Blatchford, Battle and Mays (1982); David (1990); Moss (1992); Brown and Cleave (1994); and Smith (1994) have all documented the long-standing divide between the education and care providers for children under five in the United Kingdom. This divide contributed to barriers of partnership working. Pugh (1992) had seen some value in terms of diversity of services, but argued

the current divisions between one form of service and another owe more to history and the professional jealousies of providers than to the needs of children and their families (p.10).

Pugh (1992) commented on different ideologies, different boundaries, different priorities between the services, different training, different management systems and “*even different languages*” (p.11) recognising the huge task involved in co-ordinating a joint approach. She viewed this as a priority if we were to provide children with “*coherence and continuity*” (p.11). Ten years later Fabian (2002) states that traditionally “*pre-school settings and schools have been separate institutions with two different and often contradictory, cultures and ideological goals*” (p.61).

The different histories and perspectives of early years services reinforced the divide between education and care, which had resulted in a barrier to joined-up thinking and working, with even differences in terminology. Fabian (2002) identified that for many children this has resulted in a lack of co-ordination, coherence and continuity. New government legislation has supported the move to dissolve the distinction between education and care. For example, the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfES 2007), which becomes statutory in September 2008 guides practitioners in integrating care and education from birth to the end of their reception year and clearly states the alignment of care and education as a rationale for this new document. “*The EYFS*

brings together and simplifies the learning and development and welfare requirements, in addition to ending the distinction between care and learning” (DfES, 2007, p.10). Many early years practitioners will welcome and recognise that good quality care demands opportunities for learning and development, and that learning will not be effective unless the indoor, outdoor and emotional environment of the setting ensures that children feel included, safe and secure. The role of the local authorities in preparing settings for the implementation of the Early Years Foundation Stage could either support or hinder the partnership process. For example, joint briefings I have initiated in my local authority, and training at initial stages across different sectors will give a strong message to encourage joined-up working practices. It will not be through policy alone that partnership working will evolve between the sectors, but a visionary lead from local authorities and a willingness from practitioners themselves to work in a collaborative manner. A change in practice will not occur overnight; although monitoring and evaluating any identified progress will highlight what is a catalyst for change.

2.3.2 Lack of collaborative working

It is clear from the literature that organisational systems of care and education within the early years domain have developed independently but to ensure a smooth transfer for children agencies need to collaborate. For some children this will include education and health, or education and social care or all three. For the majority of children this is the educational system of school and the pre-school setting which is perceived as care often by practitioners themselves and parents. A system needs to be identified as a model of best practice to support collaborative working that is transferable. Frost (2005) undertaking research in practice, professionalism, partnership and joined-up thinking identified that a more deep-rooted barrier was the way the professionals viewed themselves and that this was determined in terms of differences rather than similarities. This is a barrier at operational level, as it *“becomes impossible to build a joint enterprise on underlying division and rivalry”* (p.33). This needs to be worked through with the practitioners themselves. I used this information within my research to start a dialogue on the similarities between the practitioners, to start the dialogue from a point of shared experiences, rather than the differences between the sectors.

Links between settings have often been on an ad hoc basis so the quality and quantity of this contact has differed considerably. Stereotypes had been expressed by practitioners from both sectors in terms of practice they perceived to be implemented and the role of the adults in delivering the teaching and learning (Smith, 1994; Brown and Cleave, 1994). This literature suggests there has been no consistent approach or desire to bring together different sector practitioners to break down these beliefs based on ignorance due to lack of first hand experience and knowledge of the other sectors practice.

Bertram and Pascal (1999) concluded that teaching staff tend to cause distress among other professionals and volunteers due to the invisible barriers they erect to protect their own professionalism. There was some evidence of this in the initial stages of my research. The multi-disciplinary work of Early Excellence centres demonstrated that the group of people who find it the most difficult to work in these new centres are the qualified teachers. The research paper suggested this relates to their status that they previously held in the classroom. Through working with multi-disciplinary professionals myself within this context I have found tensions have arisen due to individuals' different working practices, although I believe it should be viewed at an individual level rather than generalising or stereotyping a whole profession.

Fabian and Dunlop (2002) point out that both professional groups, teachers and day nursery practitioners, may see closer collaboration as a threat to their way of caring and educating young children. Practitioners working with early years centres have expressed concerns that with closer working relationships with schools, there will be a downward pressure with a greater emphasis in particular on numeracy and literacy, with teachers believing that children are not prepared for school and therefore expecting that pre-schools should focus on education rather than care or unstructured play. Fabian and Dunlop (2002) suggest that this may lead to children finding it difficult to adjust to a new culture within school.

Although co-operation is a form of partnership, it is collaboration where there is a shared goal which is the aim of this research. Frost (2005) refers to the work of Hallett and Birchall (1992) who view collaboration as working together to achieve something which neither agency could achieve alone; "*Collaboration involves the*

genuine extension of professional roles in a process that can be both creative and risky” (Frost, 2005, p.15). This added value of collaboration enhances the optimum experience of transition for children. It is through collaborative working practices by the private, voluntary and maintained sectors that the impact for children transferring into formal schooling will be maximised. Anning and Edwards (1999, p.164) argued that action research provides a structure for collaboration rather than confrontation, developing a bridge between “*the working realities and priorities*” of the different sectors. Dialogue between members of the sectors based on the realities of their everyday working lives will develop the process of interprofessional working practices.

Communication is cited in the research as promoting and establishing continuity. The lack of knowledge between the sectors can be overcome if practitioners liaise regularly, and discuss their philosophies leading to greater understanding helping the needs of the children to be met more effectively. My action research aims to identify how this challenge can be implemented in practice.

2.3.3 Staffing and training issues

The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education 1997 – 2003 (EPPE) Project (Blatchford et al. 2003) concluded that early years settings are very diverse, with little consistency in the training of staff, pay and conditions, adult-child ratios, resources or accommodation. Traditionally, early years workers have tended to be female, hold fairly low status and pay and have few qualifications at higher education level. Penn (2000) argued that recruitment into childcare training in the UK has been aimed at a particular group of women with low academic achievements and from mainly disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. There is certainly evidence of this in my current local authority. In the UK there is very little for this group of practitioners in the way of career opportunities who are therefore disadvantaged as workers in a competitive labour market. Added to this practitioners have different pay and career structures, different aims and objectives and have experienced a difference in training. David (1999) adds “*the status of ‘educators’ in the UK spans the spectrum from those with no qualifications at all to degree level and beyond*” (p.25).

Bertram and Pascal (2002) found variation in staff training and qualification levels

across and within a range of countries with most countries aiming to increase the qualification levels of their early years staff. Moss (cited in Penn, 2000) found that “*in those countries where there are more coherent systems of early childhood services, this is matched by more coherent patterns of training*” (p.104). Research by Thomas Coram Research Unit (2002) commissioned by the DfEE, identified similar findings. In-service training was important in terms of “*delivering continuous improvements in service quality*” (2002, p.3). Cameron and Lart (2003) identified key components of more effective joined-up working as post-qualifying training and team building. Joint training has been identified as essential for the way forward but it is not as widespread as is required to see real improvements.

The present government has recognised many of the issues identified and has started to address these. The Children’s Development Workforce Council is leading on initiatives, Building a Children’s Workforce - A common Core of Skills, Knowledge and Competence (DfES, 2004). This body declared that the common core will provide the necessary foundation for: Establishing expected levels of core skills and knowledge needed when working with young children and families in different jobs in different services:

Establishing the necessary balance required in different jobs and services between core skills (expected across the children’s workforce) and job specific skills and focused work to develop qualifications built around a combination of job specific units is the continuing work of the Children’s Development Workforce Council. Early Years professional status and the raising of qualification levels for practitioners working in the private and voluntary sector such as the Graduate Leader fund will support some of the barriers identified to partnership working through raising practitioner knowledge and status, but is still in the developmental stage and needs time for monitoring and evaluating the impact.

The different training backgrounds of practitioners in the Foundation Stage and how this relates to each practitioner’s mutual understanding and respect needs to be explored by those at policy and management level. The lack of co-ordination of training for adults working with young children has been compounded by many factors, many that have already been referred to David (1993) and Penn (2000). In a

time of change, if those at government and local authority level want practitioners to construct new knowledge it is through changes in practice as well as changes in ways of thinking about practice that is a good starting point. Vygotsky's (1978) model of scaffolding children's learning can be equally applied to adults; the understanding of the learner should be guided by others identifying the knowledge available to them, as well as the learner observing others' practice in their own learning context supports this. Peer mentoring, within a similar context such as the classroom, is an example of how this can be achieved. In learning contexts that are non-threatening and supportive, such as collaborative learning networks, scaffolding processes can occur with new knowledge and new practice evolving.

2.3.4 International comparisons

Brostrom (2000) found there was similarity between the views of pre-school practitioners in the UK and in Denmark in relation to thinking the maintained schooling of children was too formal. The research from Denmark also identified that teachers in both countries saw pre-school provision as a place of care rather than education, although in both countries planning for learning and activities relating to progression in learning have been a requirement for several years. On school readiness, teachers in Brostrom's study believed that children on entering school were lacking skills and competencies. Teachers were critical of the pre-school staff in terms of children being insufficiently developmentally mature to make use of the school learning environment and therefore were not school ready. Brostrom (2000) clearly identifies a lack of communication which exists between practitioners illustrating these findings from the research are not isolated to this country.

Perry, Dockett and Danielle (1998) identified similar findings from their research in Australia which showed pre-school practitioners feeling their expertise in early years was not recognised by the teachers in schools, and their observations and records of the children were not read. On the other hand school teachers were saying that pre-school teachers did not have an understanding of what school was like and that there had to be differences within the school context. Both studies explored the transition experiences of a range of children, their pre-school practitioners and primary school teachers through interviews and detailed observations in both settings and through case studies.

Information collected for the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) project in 2001 found common themes across several countries that were an obstacle to improved co-operation between a pre-school setting and school. The OECD provides comparative data, analysis and forecasts so that governments can compare policy experiences, seek answers to common problems, identify good practice and co-ordinate policies. The common themes related to different visions and cultures between the early years centre and school were due, as in the UK, to each sector having developed independently “*without coherent or shared goals*” Neuman (cited in Fabian and Dunlop, 2002, p.11) with staff training, both pre and in-service, being different in terms of content and orientation.

Another common barrier to partnership working identified in the OECD report (2001) is various structural differences such as early years care and education being essentially in two different departments at local authority level. Different inspection and monitoring regimes and different regulations set the sectors apart. Alongside different pay, training and working conditions this makes co-operation and collaboration very challenging. Practitioners in my region confirm that where there are several feeder settings over a wide geographical area, it presents particular problems: the structural and philosophical differences make promoting shared thinking problematic.

2.3.5 Summary

Barriers to partnership working can be summarised as follows. Services for young children are provided by different agencies, education, private and voluntary, health and social services. The different sectors are required through legislation to provide different ratios of staffing with practitioners receiving different levels of training and achieving varying levels of qualification. The different agencies are governed by different legislation and have different inspection regimes. This is compounded by the different structures relating to fees for the different sectors. If my research shows identified barriers can be overcome with a model of best practice, there will be significant benefits for children, families and the early years workforce.

2.4 Factors enhancing transition

Having researched literature to identify the potential barriers that may impact on positive relationships and transition I then investigated the possible factors that would enhance the transition experience for children. There is a theme in much of the literature (e.g. Drake, 2001; Fabian and Dunlop, 2002; Frost, 2005) of collaborative partnership working impacting positively on children transferring into formal schooling. Improved transition is one of the proposed outcomes from this study, where I am proposing that enhanced partnership working through learning networks will support a positive experience for children at this transition point leading to early success socially, emotionally and cognitively.

2.4.1 Links between practitioners

I turn now to the literature discussing how links between practitioners can have a positive impact on children, especially at the point of transition and how to build improved relationships. Drake (2001) states that children arriving from other settings will settle more easily if links are made with settings children attended prior to starting school. Much of the literature gives examples of how these links have been and can be made. Drake uses the examples of practitioners attending inter-setting meetings or visits to other settings during the working day, saying these can be “*both informative and stimulating*” (p.145). Meetings can be used for sharing good practice, or discussion relating to the curriculum, new initiatives, legislation and policies. Practitioners present at these forums can also set their own agenda focusing on areas of interest or concern. Drake (2001) Trudell (2002) and Frost (2005) have all advocated sharing of information, knowledge, approaches and standards as a route to enhanced partnerships. Networks have been recognised as a rich source of professional support for practitioners across the sectors.

Fisher (1996) and Pianta and Walsh (1996) state the importance of the teacher having conversations with those adults who have experience of the child as a learner outside the context of the home and before starting school. Fisher draws attention to the fact that childminders, pre-school leaders and day care practitioners all may have worked with the child in a very different context than the home.

They have experience of the child in settings which require social adjustments and institutional expectations. These workers will have

experience of the child in varied learning situations and will have much to contribute to the picture of the child as a learner (Fisher, 1996 p.21).

Fisher states that there are many excellent examples where practitioners have worked hard to establish links with all the agencies involved with the pre-school child. Many of these relationships and networks have been based on local knowledge and have been where practitioners want to ensure the best interests of the child are met, through a regular exchange of their knowledge of the child. *“Such information is invaluable to the reception class teacher who has a basis from which to begin - or indeed to continue - a profile of the child and their achievements” (1996, p.21).*

The forums set up as cluster groups in my action research were a vehicle for this sort of information and knowledge sharing, and professional support. Early years practitioners talking to each other and coming to understand and appreciate the role each plays can present a united front to campaign for the rights of young children and their education at management level.

Dockett, Perry & Tracey (1997), when interviewing pre-school and school practitioners, found that many pre-school practitioners felt that there were a great deal they and receiving school teachers could do to support the transition of children from one setting into another. It was suggested by practitioners that services that were available to children, such as those to support children with special educational needs which were not available following transfer into mainstream school, should continue in order to aid successful transition. This view is backed by the Audit Commission (2002) who found good joined up assessment arrangements for children with special educational needs declined once the child reached school age.

Margetts (2002) believe that there are benefits for staff from both sectors when they have information and an understanding of each individual child's background and prior experience. Ongoing communication strengthens the partnership between practitioners and strengthens their knowledge and expertise. Much of the literature that focuses on transition highlights the need for this collaborative working.

Research in recent years has clearly stated the benefits of good quality pre-school provision, therefore it seems a natural and obvious step to ensure continuity through

sharing information and developing relationships to ensure the benefits for children are continued into mainstream school. Rutter and Rutter (1992) argued that transition into school is one of many transitions which determine the child's success and their response to future transitions. Dockett and Perry (1999) argued that effective management is crucial. Dowling (1995) emphasised the head teacher's educational beliefs which reflect the priority accorded to the transition for children into school, the ways staff feel morally supported, and their status. Through this reception teachers

will be encouraged to develop pre-school links to foster a sensitive and phased transition to school and to devise a curriculum that is matched to the child's need and which builds on his or her previous experience (1995, p.7).

2.4.2 Links with Parents

Pianta and Walsh (1996) argue that communication and a developed relationship between the teachers from different settings and parents are essential for a good start in life. Communication barriers between educators and parents may weaken the transition from one setting to another. Parents and carers may not have an understanding of the support needed at crucial points in their child's education, added to the fact they may have a misguided perception of the expectations of the next setting. These were the highlighted present concerns that policy makers held, including transition arising from the report (OECD, 2001).

2.4.3 Emotional and social development

Emotional and social development was the most frequent concept that was shared with me during very initial discussions before I embarked on this research. Emotional and social competence was a consistent link between practitioners when articulating this area as key to children's positive experience at transition into formal schooling. This research encompasses how the social and emotional needs of the child can be met through developing the knowledge and skills of the practitioners.

Emotional and social competence are widely recognised as important for educational achievement and for life long learning, (National commission on Education 1993, Ball 1994; DfEE 1997; DfES, 1998). A definition of emotional competence as taken by Elias, Weissberg, Frey, Greenberg, Haynes, Kessler, Schwab-Stone and Shriver (1997) is the ability to understand, manage and express the social and emotional aspects of one's life in ways that enable the successful management of life tasks such

as learning, forming relationships, solving everyday problems, and adapting to the complex demands of growth and development. Key aspects for children transferring from one setting to another are adapting to new environments, learning and building new relationships with children and adults. Weare (2002) identifies empathy, respect and genuineness as key components of social competence. Another approach to defining social competence is on the social outcomes that children achieve, such as having effective relationships with other children, being liked, and having friends, (Foster and Ritchey 1979; Anderson and Messick, 1974). Peer relationships are important to children throughout their education and play a key role in the way children function. Social development research in the past has focused on the ability of young children to understand emotions in others linked to facial expression. Research has moved on to focus on children's understanding of the connection between common interpersonal situations and the emotions that these situations will provoke, Harris, Olthof, Meerum Terwogt and Hardman (1987). By the end of the pre-school children have an understanding of the situations to which happy, sad, scared and angry may occur.

If I want to develop the practitioners' understanding of social and emotional competence and investigate early intervention by practitioners to support children at transition points, being able to assess and measure development is important. A small scale study (Edmunds and Stewart-Brown, 2003) assessing emotional and social competence in primary schools and early years settings, identified instruments for assessing this area of development in children, albeit mainly used to profile children with difficulties, as part of early identification and to look at social incompetence such as behavioural difficulties. Instruments to assess positive attributes are not well developed. Instruments to assess emotional competence had not been evaluated in any schools in the U.K and there were few for pre-school age children. This particular study concluded that staff development is urgently required.

Aspects of provision such as staff ratios, resources, organisation, activities, interactions between staff and children are all identified as being able to be measured in terms of quality. Dahlberg et al (1999) state: "*That both indicators and outcomes are universal and objectives identifiable through the application of expert knowledge and reducible to accurate measurement given the right technique*" (p.5).

Can emotional competence be measured? Laevers for the Experimental Education Project (1994) developed an emotional well-being and involvement scale. He believed that without emotional well-being there will be no involvement from the children leading to poorer outcomes and results. The involvement scale relates to children's behaviours against a five point scale, which identifies where gaps are and the next steps in addressing them.

It has also been recognised Dahlberg et al, (1999) that defining quality is far more complex than evaluating early childhood experiences against a given criteria. "*Quality is a subjective value-based, relative and dynamic concept, with the possibility of multiple perspectives or understandings of what quality is*" (p.5). Dahlberg et al, (1999) recognised that when making judgments about any aspect of quality this has to be contextualised and that cultural and other significant forms of diversity need to be taken into account. Defining quality is a dynamic and continuous process, which is both measurable against criteria but is also subjective in nature.

The study by Weare and Gray (2003) examined how a child's emotional and social competence and well-being could be developed at all levels. They favoured the terminology 'emotional and social well-being' and 'emotional and social competence' which covers "*both environmental and pedagogic aspects*" (2003, p2). Developing emotional and social competence and well-being in the United States has led to "*a wide range of educational and social benefits, including greater educational and work success, improved behaviour, increased Inclusion and improved learning*" (Weare & Gray, 2003, p.2).

Weare and Gray (2003) recommend development work in the United Kingdom with a clear link between emotional and social competence, well-being, intellectual development and academic learning. The report recommends higher priority is given to this area asking what is the experience like for individual children on entering school and how emotional and social development can be supported. Knitzer (2000) argued that when children are not ready to succeed in school it is primarily because of a lack of behavioural and emotional maturity.

Children at transitions face new social challenges and need to acquire social understanding and to become a social member in their new setting. Learning takes place within a social context and requires the ability to have positive interaction with new peers and adults, leading to cognitive gains. Children will most certainly face a difference in adult ratios as the requirements between the two settings differ, and they may well face different language by the practitioners which the children may have not come across before. Donaldson (1978) refers to this as disembedded language where the language does not make 'human sense' to the child. Curtis (1986) also refers to this theme by suggesting that children may have difficulty interpreting instructions and information. The child has to become familiar with new adults and their mannerisms, and non-verbal gestures. Entwisle (1995) uses the same key points and states that how children face these new challenges will have a direct bearing on how they regard themselves as well as how others will view them. Children facing new experiences will need supportive strategies as success will depend on being able to work within this context,

using talk about thought, about taking another's perspective and about imagining how someone will think or what they should do in a given situation helps to develop this reflective awareness (Early Years Matters, 2006, p.1).

Those children that have the social and emotional skills on entry to school will be able to cope with the changes required of them as they become learners in their new setting. Much research over the years such as that by Wentzel and Asher (1995), Arnold, Ortiz, Curry, Stowe, Goldstein, Fisher, Zeliho, and Yersshova (1999) and McClelland, Morrison and Holmes (2000) has identified a link between children's emotional and social skills and that of their early academic attainment. This research has suggested that children who find it difficult to control their emotions, such as anger and distress and find it difficult to get along with their peer group and have difficulty following instructions and concentrating, are more likely to do less well in school. Academic achievement in the first year of school for many children has been as a result of a strong foundation of good social and emotional skills. The quality of the relationships children have with their peers in pre-school is a significant factor of how they will adjust to school. Many of the relationships that children build with their teachers and peer group on entering school are as a result of children having the ability to behave in prosocial rather than antisocial ways. *"These relationships then*

serve as a source of provisions that either help or hurt children's chances of doing well academically" (Ladd, Kochenderfer and Coleman 1997, p.1375). Children who act in antisocial ways are less likely to be accepted by both teachers and peers. Children who were not socially skilled, with poor emotional well-being did less well academically than their counterparts. However, teachers need to be aware that children who are struggling with reading and showing difficulties with learning may become frustrated and disruptive.

The National Academy of Sciences Study (2000) identified three qualities that children need to be ready for school; intellectual skills, motivation to learn and strong social emotional capacity. Resolving conflicts, relationships with peers and adults, controlling behaviour and understanding feelings and viewpoints help children towards success in school. Lewit and Baker (1995) and Rimm-Kaufman, Pinta and Cox (2000) identified that teachers were most concerned about children that entered school without the socio-emotional qualities as it was more difficult to work with children who lacked confidence in their success, were unable to co-operate with others and lacked self control. Key findings from the study have identified many of the socio-emotional qualities that underlie school readiness come from the child-adult relationship which provides a psychological foundation for such qualities. Two aspects from the study have implications for my research; the importance of the pre-school years in the growth of social and emotional development on school readiness, and supportive relationships as a key ingredient of early social and emotional development. School readiness may be affected by circumstances relating to the family, such as poverty, domestic violence and other risk factors, but it is the preschool setting where my interest lies.

Thompson writing on the roots of school readiness in social and emotional development (2001 p.132) stated that school readiness can also be hindered where

Children are in child-care settings that are stressful or unstimulating, with teachers who are unknowledgeable or uninterested in the importance of fostering growing minds and personalities, or with staff turnover so high it is difficult for children to develop stable relationships with their caregivers.

The research also identified opportunities to facilitate school readiness which includes improving child care settings through training, reducing staff turnover and making

classroom practice more developmentally appropriate and child-centred. Transition was also identified as an important opportunity to instill and maintain enthusiasm for learning.

2.4.4 Cultural identity

Identity formation starts with the child's unique identity at birth and their role in constructing and reconstructing personal meaning within cultural contexts. There has been a growing recognition that children don't acquire one simple and static identity but identity is rather a multiple construct where children acquire multiple identities. *"The self is by no means a simple, unitary concept but a highly complex organisation of multiple constructs- interrelated, yet expressing a variety of different functions"* (Scaffer, 2006, p.74).

There is a rich cultural and ethnic diversity in the UK, which is constantly evolving (DfES, 2007, P16). Children within complex contexts such as multicultural, will encounter multiple and at times competing identities. A child's developing identity and the shaping of a positive identity takes place within wider social situations such as a pre-school or school setting. Here the child will have an opportunity to recognise differences in others whilst developing a secure sense of them self. The extent to which this is a positive experience is reflected in the policies and practices of the setting and their respect for diversity. As children experience the transition process from home to pre-school to school their early identities will change and grow including experiencing positive and negative feelings. Through interactions with their practitioners and their peer group children's identities will be constructed, co-constructed and reconstructed. This occurs in social situations and is a social process, for very young children it will be in activities such as role play that this construction will take place. Robinson and Dias (2006) suggest educators and others working with young children need to reconceptualise their understandings of childhood based on the new sociology of childhood, critical psychology and the utilisation of post-modernist/poststructuralists frameworks. Brooker (2008) suggests western conceptions of identity as a stable, individualised sense of self may not reflect the diversity of cultural understandings. Having a positive sense of identity will develop children's resilience and help them to face new challenges such as new experiences at points of transition. Identity is shaped by encounters with a series of micro-systems

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979). A micro-system “*is a pattern of activities, roles and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics*” (1979, p.22).

A positive sense of self is closely linked to a sense of self-esteem, self-confidence and a sense of well being. Brooker (2008) has suggested that in some circumstances positive self-esteem may lead to negative categorisation of those belonging to other groups and for those children growing up in an excluded group achieving a positive sense of self may be difficult. The challenge for the practitioners is how to support children as they construct and reconstruct identities particularly those related to gender and ethnicity. This is particularly important as children transfer into settings where they will develop new identities. Sensitive support will be needed so that the new identities don't conflict with those cultural and family identities already acquired at home. Inclusive practice that respects multiple identities should be promoted through early years settings so children don't have to make difficult identity choices. Working closely with families will allow each child's home experiences to be reflected in the setting. Brooker (2006) explored the transition from home to group settings and the identities children displayed in the setting relating to gender and ethnicity. This research suggests early years settings may inadvertently “*reinforce rather than diminish the stereotyping along gendered and ethnic lines*” (Brooker, 2006, p.116).

Friendships will give children opportunities to develop new aspects of their identities, friendships also support children when they feel vulnerable by promoting positive feelings, this includes at critical points such as the transition from one setting to another. To support children when facing possible challenges that may threaten their well being and identity they need to acquire resilience. Resilience can be developed through activities within the setting that include conflict resolution, group activities and achieving success. Krovetz (1999) identified four strands linked to resilience; social competence, problem solving skills, autonomy and a sense of purpose. Children who are resilient are able to face new situations and move into new learning environments without fear of failure. Brooker (2008) suggests two other attributes linked to resilience, “*reciprocity, a collaborative spirit which values shared activities and the contributions of peers; and resourcefulness, the ability to identify the most*

important resources (including human resources) for resolving any difficulty, large or small in any environment” (Brooker, 2008, p.48). Practitioners within settings that promote children’s resilience will ensure children acquire and sustain positive identities for future transitions.

2.4.5 The adult and child relationship

The relationship between the child and adult in the setting is crucial. Thompson (2001, p.17) reviewing research into the role of school readiness in social and emotional development observed that the quality of early relationships have a far more significant influence on early learning than pre-school curriculum or educational toys. Relationships guide how young children learn about the world, people and themselves; much of the research links to attachment theorists (Bowlby, 1989) and the impact on human interaction, emotion and friendship. The relationship between the child and practitioner in supporting children is significant. Secure or insecure relationships developed in settings effects children’s socio-emotional, intellectual and personal development. Children need, with support, to understand their feelings in new environments.

Pianta and Walsh (1996) argue that communication and a developed relationship between the teachers from different settings and parents is essential for a good start to school life, while Smith (1995) states *“for some children and their families the transition into school produces feelings of extreme anxiety and stress”* (p.3). Brostrom’s (2000) research identified children’s feelings about starting school where there was some nervousness apparent for some children. Fabian (2002) stresses that children are facing developmental challenges and schools have to support the children with the tools to deal with this change. Therefore systems need to be in place to benefit all concerned.

Fabian (2002) (cites Tizard et al.1988) whose study found *“that initial success during the reception class led to a virtuous cycle whereby those pupils who made the greatest progress remained high achievers throughout their primary schooling”* (Fabian, 2002, p.1). She emphasises the importance of emotional and social well-being (Goleman 1996, 1997, Vandebussche et al 1994, Burrell & Bubb 2000). The consistent message portrayed is the association between high self-esteem and high

academic achievement. If a child does not feel happy and secure they will not reach their full potential which might, however, not be just measured in academic terms. The relationship between the child and the reception teacher is of vital importance in the child's construction of self- esteem.

The first teacher has a role to play in developing children's self esteem, with its resulting confidence, through giving them a feeling of belonging, self worth and helping others to accept them as competent and worthwhile (Fabian, 2002, p.5).

Riley (1996) discusses the importance of class size in the early years particularly when looking at teachers settling children during the transition period. In her own study (1995) Riley found that those children who did not adjust positively and quickly to school, as judged by their teachers after the first half term, were four times less likely to be reading by the end of the year regardless of their skills on entry. Riley argues the reception teacher needs to be skilled to enable the new entrant to cope with the discontinuity of the previous setting and school.

Relationships and the ethos of the classroom have in recent years been valued as an important aspect of children's achievements. Skinner, Bryant, Coffman and Campbell (1998) argued that teachers within the first weeks of school, through co-constructing practices, were moving children onto a path of failure. Those teachers who spent time drawing out children's individual strengths co-created constructs of "promise". They concluded that the academic potential of children was the responsibility not just of schools and parents but also the community at large. Children's worries need to be dealt with at an early stage. Children who are withdrawn or angry can become alienated from the educational process.

Fabian (2002, p.4) also points out that there are philosophical changes which relate to issues such as different approaches to teaching, work and play, possibly a more formal learning environment with a greater emphasis on aspects of the curriculum such as literacy and numeracy. Children, when they enter school, are going to bring with them their own expectations, skills and prior knowledge. Robson and Smedley (1996) identify times of induction and transition as potentially stressful for children and especially for young children. Ghaye and Pascal (1998) found in their research with four year olds that the most stressful times for the children were separation from

the home, transition within the school, and co-operation. Professionals within the school setting should value and build on the experiences, knowledge and understanding that children have already gained prior to entering school. Transition involves change; the quality of this change is central to the children along with sensitive policy and practice.

Drake (2001) argues planned transition “*to allow children opportunities to experience activities in the class, and where possible, should include visits by reception staff to children in their own setting* (2001, p.89). When children arrive at school, they have diverse previous experiences;

And from these experiences, they have acquired attitudes and social dispositions which affect how they relate to other adults and children, the way in which they regard the world and come to understand the rules for living (Dowling, 1995, p.94).

A focus on supporting children in their development of social skills, and the ability to handle difficult situations and conflict resolution can support children at the transition point. Children were more confident when starting school, if they started with a friend, or if they knew someone else in the class. Fabian (2002), Margetts (2002) argued that if children start school with a familiar friend in the same class they adjust better in terms of social skills, have less problem behaviours, and greater academic competence. In fact Margetts goes on to say:

A familiar playmate in the same class also compensates for deleterious factors, such as being young in age, being a boy, pre-school experiences, and not speaking English at home, which place a child at risk of not adjusting well to the first year of school (2002, p.1).

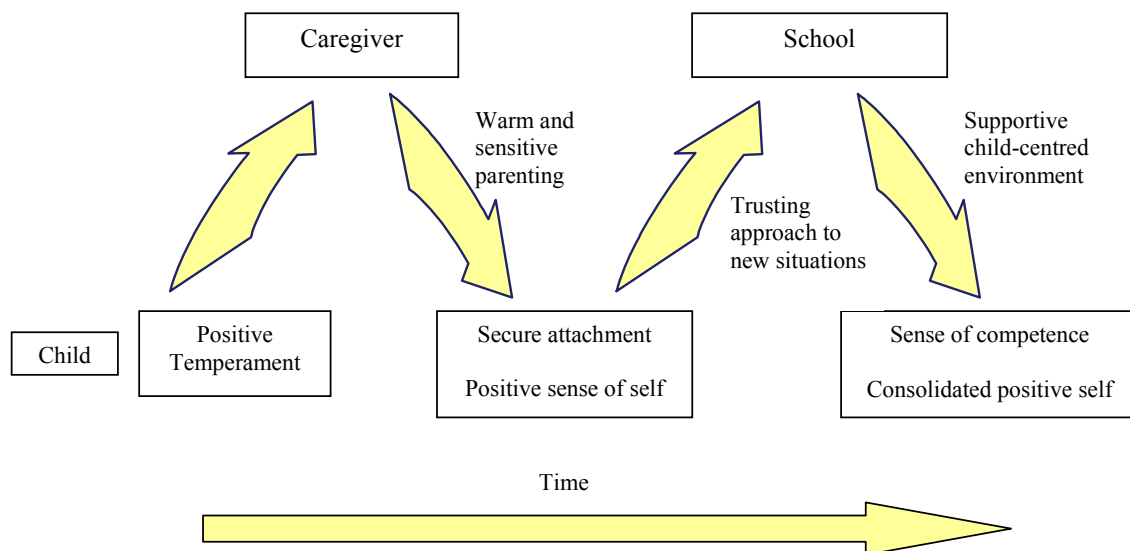
2.4.6 Transactional development theory

Closely related to Bronfenbrenner’s ecological framework (1979) is transactional developmental theory (Sameroff, 1975, Sameroff and Fiese, 2000). A transactional approach “*foregrounds how child-context interactions contribute differently to development at different points in the life cycle*” (Dawes and Donald, 2005). Sameroff’s model analyses how the changing developmental status of the child contributes to these processes. Therefore a child will bring his/her existing psychological capacities to new micro-system interactions. These capacities will

relate to the child's particular stage of development and earlier interactions.

This theory links into my research particularly at the point of transition. If children have experienced warm, positive relationships with parents and other adults providing care and education they will have developed a secure sense of trust in their interactions and will approach the transition to school in a positive manner. A supportive child centred environment at the receiving school results in a transaction that will consolidate a sense of competence and self-worth for the child. However, if children have experienced insensitive and inconsistent parenting where there is mistrust with interactions with adults and insecurity, the transition to school for these children will be viewed with anxiety and with fear. On entering school if their experiences are of a supportive environment and practitioner, then these positive experiences will modify their insecurity and their sense of self-worth and competence will improve. An early negative developmental trajectory or pathway can be moved to a more positive one through the positive experiences a child receives on entry to school. If the interactions on entry to school were negative and unsupportive then a child who has a positive sense of self worth and competence may have his sense of trust in people negatively modified and a child who already has low self-worth and competence will have their sense of mistrust and insecurity further consolidated.

Path 1: From good beginnings to good outcomes.



Path 2: From a difficult beginning to improved outcomes.

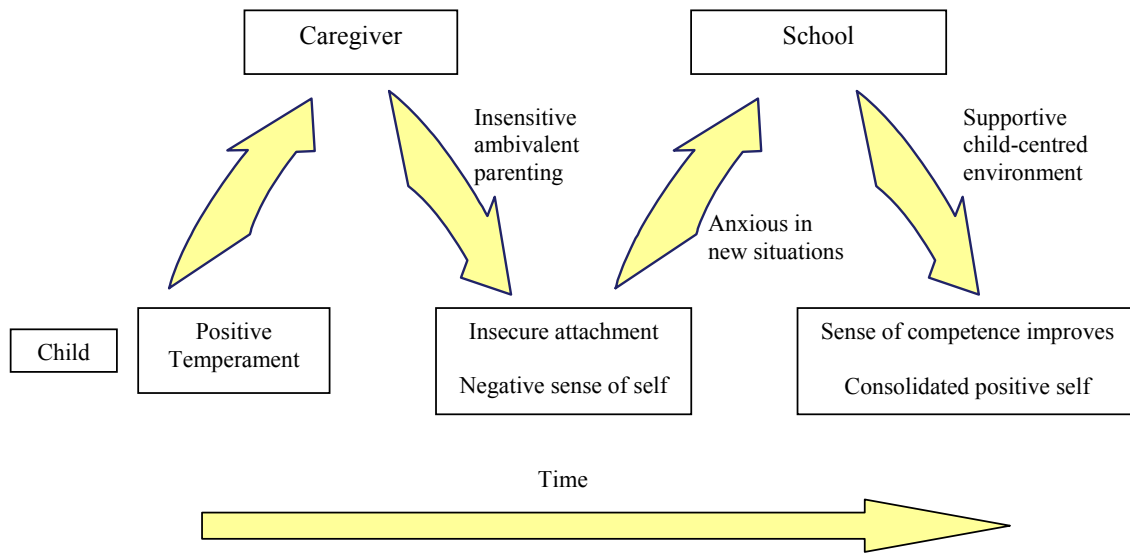


Figure 5. A transactional model of development - Dawes and Donald (2005)

The socio-emotional capacities that children bring with them as they make the transition to school transact with the situation they encounter. As a result these transactions may consolidate or modify the developmental trajectory that has previously formed in the child's life. This theory suggests that what is established in early development does not always have a lasting or permanent effect and highlights the importance of a positive transition for children as they move from one setting to another. McLoyd (1998) identified the two key sites for providing good opportunities for intervention where children are in difficult circumstances; the family and the school. In both situations the adults are close to children for extended periods of time and particularly with younger children can have an enduring influence on their development.

2.4.7 Summary

Many of the skills, knowledge and understanding that children require to support them in transition can be identified in the curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage (2000) under the area of personal, social and emotional development. Graue (1993) seeks improved patterns of social interaction in the transition process. Children should engage in a positive way with the new school curriculum; the practitioners in

each setting can support this transition. Riley (2003) reminds us that dealing with separation may dominate the early weeks as a child experiences settling into a new setting. Riley argues a child's ability to empathise with their peers is one of the practitioners "*greatest assets*" (p.35). Riley views this separation and belonging in different settings as an important learning acquisition in terms of self-concept and self-awareness.

There has over several years been a great deal of research highlighting the fact that children may experience anxiety and trauma when moving onto formal schooling, Fabian (2002). Many authors have stated how the discontinuities between the pre-school establishment and the school can be minimised. The introduction to new experiences and any changes should be introduced gradually rather than be too sudden. Reviewing the literature suggests the building, adults and routines need to be familiar to some extent rather than totally alien and children need to have a sense of security rather than instability.

Dockett and Perry (2005) stated:

"our research indicates that children, parents and early childhood educators are more concerned about social issues, such as adjustment and relationships and ways in which these can be promoted" (2005, p.15).

Fabian (2002) suggests that the physical environment in which the children are working influences attitudes towards learning. Drummond (1993) also stressed the importance of classroom conditions:

The conditions of classroom life, and the ways in which children respond to the demands of the classroom, are an inescapable presence in the complex of factors that bear on children's learning, and teachers' assessments of that learning (Drummond,1993, p.55).

2.5 Links to transition and early success

Through the action research which aims to develop partnership working, I am investigating if good transition experiences for children will have an impact on early success as they enter school. Margetts (1997) measured in quantitative terms adjustment to school, measuring children's adjustment in terms of social skills, problem behaviour and academic competence. Her findings on factors impacting on

adjustment to school were from a number of transition activities conducted by the school and found relative age, gender, children's language, different pre-school type situations and a familiar playmate all had an impact. In conclusion she states

Effective transition programmes should ensure the gradual preparation of children and parents; continuity of peers; continuity of expectations between settings, continuity of programming for children's learning; ongoing communication between staff from school and previous situations including childcare services (Margetts, 1997, p.3).

2.5.1 Readiness

Perry et al. (1998) showed the different perspectives of children, parents and teachers on readiness for school. For parents it was interacting well with other children and adults; for teachers it includes concentration and following instructions; for children it is complying and understanding school rules. Stokes and Ramey (2001) developed a model that reflected a systems approach to support the readiness of children entering school. Their recommendations demonstrated a need for the community to expand and develop comprehensive, quality early childhood pre-school settings to support readiness needs of young children. Emphasis was placed on "*stronger collaborations among pre-schools and health services*" (Shirley-Kirkland, 2002 p.3).

The whole notion of readiness will continue to be debated as interpretation of this term 'readiness for school' means different things to different groups of people. Shirley-Kirkland (2002) focuses on policies and school readiness activities to prepare each child for school. Gullo and Burton (1992) found previous pre-school experience to be a significant factor in academic readiness. Buntaine and Costenbader (1997) concluded that schools should redirect resources and establish policies to enhance regular programmes that meet all children's needs regardless of the differences in linguistic, cognitive, developmental and experiential abilities.

Building on the whole 'school readiness' debate is that of the research by Kagan (1993) who reflects on the statements of 'school readiness' and children being 'ready to learn' which, though related mean two different things. "*Readiness for learning is a gate opener; readiness for school is a gatekeeper*" (Kagan, 1993 p.67). On assessing readiness Kagan believes "*you can't measure what you can't define*" (1993, p.70). That the term 'school readiness' has various meanings is a barrier to understanding; clear agreement and systems in place will provide better continuity.

Morrison, Griffith, and Alberts (1997) and Richardson (1997) believe that there is not a clear association between the age of a child starting school, and the readiness to learn within a school setting. They argue that it is the needs of the individual child, along with teaching styles and the curriculum, which are of importance. Through collaborative working practices these aspects can be debated and consistent strategies implemented to support individual children.

Fabian (2002) highlights that pre-schools are often preparing children in readiness for school “*rather than readiness, an understanding of each other’s settings would be beneficial. This might promote a seamless pathway rather than disconnected thinking*” (Fabian, 2002, p.62). Brostrom (cited in Fabian and Dunlop, 2002) suggest kindergarten classes need to be ‘*child ready*’, the US National Education Goals Panel (1998) calls this ‘ready school’ approach to transition as “*continuity in curricula, home-school communication, and a welcoming environment for family and children*” (p.53)

2.6 Transition process as scaffolding

It is argued on the basis of Bruner (1990), Piaget (1972) and Vykotsky (1978) that new learning builds on previous understanding. This applies particularly when children are transferring from one setting to another. Adults facilitate children’s learning in making sense of their new environment by building on the child’s existing knowledge and previous experiences. A shared understanding of this developmental stage for children between practitioners benefits the child as a learner. The children’s friends, family and teachers help to scaffold academic, social and emotional learning at the transition to school; “*young children learn in contact with other people, whether parents, teachers or peers; the quality of relationships is crucial in provision for them*” (Hurst, 1997, p.57).

Vygotsky (1978) argued that knowledge is socially constructed and that children’s cognitive operations are determined by the meaningfulness of the context, including the quality of the relationship between the child, their peers and the adult with whom the learning is taking place. Human knowledge is developed through talking and actions, with adults and peers through collaboration. When children collaborate on a problem solving task they are more likely to find a solution to the problem than if they

had worked alone. Vygotsky's 'zone of proximal development' model describes the gap between what a child can do alone and what they can do with help from someone more knowledgeable, such as adults moving children from their natural development level to their accelerated level of potential development. Vygotsky believed "*that instead of matching teaching to existing development, teaching had to proceed in advance of development in order to challenge and extend children's maturing functions*" (Fisher, 1996, p.6).

Piaget in contrast believed that development came before learning. For learning in the zone of proximal development to occur, the learning goal must offer a challenge within the child's general framework of understanding. Children themselves

are aware of differences in teachers' patterns of interactions with individual children. In terms of Vygotsky's zone of proximal development the crucial issue is that the adult must believe in the child's potential and therefore want to scaffold the learning (Suschitzky and Chapman, 1998, p.75).

Vygotsky (1986), made a major contribution to theory on children's thinking by emphasising the role of the adult and how crucial they are in developing young children's thinking.

This notion emphasises the important role of the adult in fostering progression in children's thinking: helping children to move forward in, and develop their ideas through, positive and interactive learning encounters between children and adults (Nutbrown, 1994, p.39).

Sociocultural theory, based on the work of Vygotsky, has implications for teaching as knowledge is constructed through language and social interaction. A challenging yet supportive framework is needed. Everything that children do is influenced by the culture in which they grow up and the community in which they live. Cognitive development relies on the use of language: in school the language pattern may be different to the one used in their home. Children have psychological tools such as knowledge, skills, processes and sense making abilities. These tools are made up of emotions, concepts, ideas, language and beliefs. The adults providing the conditions for learning and thinking contribute to a large extent on how children come to know and understand. In Vygotsky's model of teaching and learning the adult's role is central. "*The activities of parents and other adults are critical in supporting a child's*

cognitive development and achievement throughout infancy and childhood” (Wood, 1996, p.99).

Dahlberg et al. (1999) emphasised that children construct knowledge and make meaning of the world together with adults and other peers. School readiness is not just about the child’s skills that promote success on starting school, but also the importance of ‘ecological’ community factors such as the previous setting, the school and the family that will support children in their competencies. Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological model of human development supports this. The content of what is on offer within the school should also reflect the needs of the local area as defined by Bronfenbrenner (1979) as the meso-level of the society and is an incentive for parents to participate. Interaction between these key partners in which the child participates will be the result for school readiness. The skills that children have acquired should not be solely the focus for school readiness, but how the different settings have influenced those skills.

Good policy and good practice have to build on a solid conceptual foundation that recognises that young children’s success in school is intertwined with their experiences in multiple settings, family, peer group, pre-school and school (NCEDL, 2002, p.1).

Dahlberg et al. (1999), noting that children thrive on relationships with peers and adults in small groups, saw the setting and the home as complementary, and that the setting should not try to substitute for home. The relationships children make in the setting should not be a threat to children’s own emotional well-being or their relationship with their parents. Rather there is a complex and intensive web connecting people, environments and activities. For Piaget, Vygotsky and Bruner children are active, social learners.

These three pioneers promote “interactionist” approaches to developing children’s learning. Here the adult is a co-constructor of knowledge and culture, with the child but also their own. Bruner identified enactive thinking, iconic thinking and symbolic thinking and discussed “scaffolding” as a way in which the adult can help develop a child’s thinking. Scaffolding in the learning process uses the image of the adult building a structure around the ideas to enable the child to climb up and reach them. To be as effective as possible this supporting structure “*has to be co structured so that*

the child is not asked to climb too much at once. It has to take account not only of the child's existing level, but of how far she can progress with help” (Smith and Cowie, 1991, p.357).

In this model the child is not a passive bystander but an active participant reconstructing the tasks through their own understanding. The adult supports the children in making the most use of their environment and cultural setting. The adult observes, supports and finally extends the child's learning. Pugh (1992) argued: *“scaffolding leads to progression, each child should have opportunities to move on, developing greater competence and learning” (Pugh, 1992, p.90).* Communication and collaboration, active learning where talk and learning go hand in hand, help children develop new learning. For Vygotsky language helps children to organise their thoughts. Early childhood institutions are viewed by some

not only as places for the transmission of knowledge, but also as places where social and psychological problems can be solved with the careful application of behavioural and social sciences (Dahlberg et al., 1999, p.67).

2.7 Transition practices

As the practitioners develop relationships through the cluster groups, transition ideas, activities and practice will begin to be implemented. Analysing practices within a wider context will be a baseline. A national study by Early, Pianta, Taylor and Cox (2001) on transition practices examined the hypothesis that there were three characteristics to school centred transition policies:

- provide out-reach to families, pre-schools and communities;
- make connections before the child entered school and
- provide activities of appropriate intensity.

The main findings of this research were that teachers who had training in transition activities made efforts to vary activities, concluding that training was beneficial to the process. This study also stated delays in obtaining class lists as a barrier to smooth transition and that schools need to create ready environments rather than making unrealistic assumptions about individual children's school readiness.

Research by Pianta, Kraft-Sayre, Rimm-kaurfman, Gercke and Higgins (2001)

examined transition practices and activities built on a collaborative model. The results showed three emerging themes;

- the need to build parent and teacher relationships,
- a need for various transition activities and
- the importance of pre-school staff supporting children with school readiness needs.

Blake and Finch (2000) in their survey of the movement of children from playgroups to reception classes found that parents' perceptions of playgroups differed from their perception of reception classes. Parents focused particularly on the benefits of social skills within the playgroup although reading and writing were mentioned by a third of parents, educational concerns were the main benefits parents perceived as the services offered by the reception class. This survey also found that when parents were asked about the starting age of their child going into reception, 61% of parents thought the child was 'about the right age', 3% of parents felt their child was too old, with 36% feeling their child was too young and 1% that felt the child was 'much too young'. This research identifies the importance of parents being informed and active partners in their child's education through being informed active participants.

Quick, Lambley, Newcomb and Aubrey (2002) examining the implementation of the Foundation Stage in Reception Classes, interviewed 799 head teachers and 752 reception class teachers. This research found that in 60% of schools all children entered the school in September. The study identified that reception teachers felt they were relatively well informed about the children before they started formal schooling, with 53% of teachers receiving written records from the pre-school provider and approximately the same number having met with the pre-school provider. 31% within the survey had received records and met with the adults from the previous setting. My research collects comparable data for my region.

2.8 Transition as a rite of passage

Rites of passage are transition rituals that move individuals from one social status to another in a three-phased schema of separation, segregation, and incorporation. Van Gennep (1960) outlined the three stages of a transition ritual as the separation phase, (preliminal), the transition phase (liminal) and the incorporation phase (postliminal).

Van Gennep describes rites as occurring at every change of place, state, social position and age and that all rites follow the three successive stages.

Turner (1969) discusses the characteristics of rituals and includes separation as the initial phase, *“this is where the person or group become detached from an earlier fixed point in the social structure or from an earlier set of social conditions”* (Deflem, 1991, p.8). The liminal phase, where there is a period of time Turner calls the ‘betwixt’ and ‘between’ time’. During this phase individuals are seen to be equal, and submissive, Turner considers them to be blank slates and heteronomous at this stage. The person during this time is no longer in the old state but has not yet reached the new one. He also states rituals depend on traditional authority which is considered sacred. The incorporation stage is where the ritual reinforces structure. This is a new stable phase, which has its own rights and obligations. Rituals are looked upon as a mechanism to ensure societal unity; Gluckman (1954) suggests unity can be achieved in spite of social conflicts and competing social norms.

If we consider transition to a more formal learning situation, as a ritual then the equality within the liminal phase is where the children are all considered equal as they are inducted into the new learning environment. *“It is society that conducts individuals from one status to another, as from one room in a house to another, always passing over thresholds. This spatial element is important since changed status often involves changing locality”* (Lewis, 1985, p.131). The practitioner is the representative of society and is initiating the children into the new knowledge of school. Turner (1967) states *“their reduction to a uniform condition, are signs of the process whereby they are ground down to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to cope with their new station in life”* (1967,p.101). School rituals are embedded into the larger ritual of school itself.

Turner (1967) developed the model of life-crisis rituals, which mark the transition of one phase in the development of a person to another. These rituals would be considered to be at important points in a person’s physical or social development. The transition from home to pre-school to school can be considered within this context. Turner (1967) as a result of Lewin’s (1951) field-theory identified two fields in which rituals take place, the social and the cultural fields. The social field is

associated with groups, relationships and social-structural organisational principles of society in which the rituals take place. In the cultural field “*ritual symbols are regarded as clusters of abstract meaning*” (Deflem, 1991, p.9). Turner’s reference to Lewin links to my model of change (discussed in chapter 7) where the three phases of unfreezing, changing and refreezing can be associated with the stages of rituals described as preliminal, liminal and postliminal.

Transition as a rite of passage can be prepared for and my research has identified how through partnership working the status of a child as a pre-schooler moving into the status of a school child can be a positive experience with elements of celebration as the child settles quickly and confidently within their new environment having crossed the threshold of school. Turner (1969) referred to ‘*communitas*’ as positive community action where social action and co-operation takes place. The partnerships established through my cluster groups were the community establishing positive relationships and encouraging change. Both the community and the individual recognises the changing status and work together to ensure the transition from one state to another takes place with the least amount of anxiety.

Ghaye and Pascal (1988) use the work of Van Gennep (1960) and the concept of rites of passage when referring to children moving from home to school and used this as a basis for discussion with parents in relation to appropriate practice in reception classes for four year old children. Ghaye and Pascal (1988) identified the most stressful time for children were the first significant weeks of starting school. The pre-liminal or separation stage is when children leave their home, siblings and parents and make the separation from home to school. The transition or liminal stage refers to the transition taking place at school, the new activities children undertake and the movements within the school from one area to another this includes the adjustments that children need to make that come with the transition. Ghaye and Pascal (1988, p.12) describe visiting the school to familiarise themselves with the new environment as a “*transitional activity*”, which is replicated in my research, to support children at this transition stage. The incorporation or postliminal stage is related to children becoming settled within a larger group of the school and when they acquire a special group identity. Ghaye and Pascal (1988) use the examples of assemblies and lunch times and conclude “*Separations then focus upon breaks between people and places.*”

Transitions stress the links between people in places, while incorporations focus upon the way people identify with a place” (1988, p.12).

Van Gennep (1960) viewed the dynamic of rites of transition "the pivoting of sacredness" during the middle liminal phase, emphasizing door and threshold in both a literal and metaphorical sense as important. Turner (1969) views the movement from one state to another as a change process, which is dynamic. The fear inherent in changing status and responsibilities was managed ritually. These rites mark a journey through life reflecting physical changes and altering responsibilities. Rituals by their nature are a process, which are meaningful cultural performances to the individual. Rituals therefore take place within a social process and are themselves processual. The ritual of transition has a role both in human thought and human action.

2.9 Continuity and Progression

My rationale is that, by enhancing partnership activities across the different sectors, and putting good transition practices in place, children will enter school with enhanced dispositions for learning, leading to continuity and progression. Much of this research links to raising the awareness and ability of the practitioners to ensure this takes place.

Research and projects, on transition from primary to secondary school, for example Galton, Hargreaves, Comber, Pell and Wall (1999) have findings, which are transferable to other phases of education DfES (2008). Ofsted (2002) stated that curriculum continuity and progression in learning between settings have been a long standing weakness of the education system. Galton, Gray and Ruddock (2003) acknowledged progress had been made with transition to ensure it was anxiety free, but suggested more emphasis on academic elements with strategies to support the progression of pupils' attainment. The London Challenge Report (2005) argued that networked learning communities supported transition particularly through the sharing of good practice, but there were few mechanisms in place to ensure new practice or actions were implemented. It was also acknowledged that pupils were passive in the process with little evidence of them being active and autonomous managers of their own learning.

Government pilot schemes encourage partnership working to support transition. The Primary National Strategy issued guidance, “Seamless Transitions - supporting continuity in young children’s learning: (DfES, 2006). This claims profound and long lasting effects, if “*the importance of maintaining coherence and continuity is not well understood*” (2006, p.3). It quotes NFER:

the process of transition may be viewed as one of adaptation. This study has shown that the best adaptation takes place where conditions are similar, communication is encouraged, and the process of change takes place gradually over time (NFER, 2005).

Lombardi (1992) identifies three key elements to continuity the first is developmentally appropriate practice, where Lombardi states, “*programmes for young children should not be seen as either play-oriented or academic, rather developmentally appropriate practice whether in a preschool or primary classroom* (Lombardi, 1992, p.2). She discusses the curiosity of children, a sense of self, promoting of dispositions towards learning, building language skills and cooperation. Children need to continue their learning journey to the early learning goals, rather than participate in the national curriculum irrespective of their ability. The second element is parental involvement. Parents are described in government literature as the child’s first and continuing educator. Wood and Caulier-Grice (2006) argued that the most influencing factor on a child’s attainment during their primary school years was the home learning environment. Third, a range of services supporting families’ lives needs to be developed; for example children’s centres and the extended services agenda. High quality pre-school intervention is an effective means of improving the life chances of those children born into poverty. Lombardi (1992) argued that uniting school and community resources and concerns, recognising that the school is embedded in the community would contribute a great deal to continuity for children and families.

The old notion of transition has moved forward and the current approach is now looking at all settings within the Foundation Stage having developmentally appropriate practice with parental involvement and family support with links to health and social care continuing into school, ensuring continuous and effective services throughout the early years. Partnerships are regarded as key in driving forward social policies. Public services are seeking to join up their services as it is recognised many

of the challenges faced are interconnected and that inter-agency work is the way to tackle them. Therefore continuity is not just related to learning experiences but all aspects of children's experiences. The theme of progression and continuity is identified as a key factor in success for children and staff in relation to transition from Foundation Stage to year 1.

At its best the management of transition from Year R to Year 1 is part of a broader whole school approach to achieving good curricular continuity and progression in pupils learning (DfES, 2000).

Hurst argued that many practitioners in under fives provision and infant's schools believed "*that continuity of educational experience from three to seven or eight years of age is of great importance*" (1997, p.147). Dockett et al (1997) found five common categories, which were emerging and coded them as, knowledge, adjustment, skill, disposition and rules (p.5). The two categories, which were emphasised from the interviews with the adults, were *adjustment*, which related to social adjustment on entering school, and *disposition* relating to the attitudes of the children to school or the context of learning. This supports Kagan (1993) that being ready for school was not the same as being ready to learn.

The rapid change in relation to policy and the importance placed on the early years by the government has resulted in an increase of transitions for young children without any in-depth study into how this would affect young children's learning and development. The new initiatives will also have an affect on parents, carers and those practitioners caring for and educating the children. Fabian and Dunlop (2002) promoted the need to narrow the gap as children move between educational settings rather than bridge the gap and prepare children for the change. If school learning is to be effective it is clear from the various authors that pastoral and curricular continuities and discontinuities are critical. Peters (2000) found that while the transition experiences were important, "*early difficulties did not always lead to poor school experiences*" (p.16) which contrasts with the research outcomes by Dockett and Perry (1999) and Early et al (1999), which found that it did have an impact. Peters suggests the long term impact may relate "*more to the ongoing nature of the children's experiences. For these children, two important factors appeared to be their relationships with friends and families*" (2000, p.15).

Peters (2000) refers to the research by Norris (1999), which suggested the discontinuity is perhaps greater for those children who received a high quality early childhood education. The experiences where the children were offered high quality were *“inadvertently set up to experience relative deprivation at school”*. This would suggest a need to examine what the receiving setting offers. By ensuring transition processes are based on best practice in both directions and responsive to local community need, continuity of experiences will be facilitated, the child will feel secure, teachers will have knowledge of the children’s prior experiences which in turn will ensure quick adjustment for children and families into their new setting.

Wood and Caulier-Grice (2006) argued that some of the benefits of pre-school education can be lost during later childhood if not consolidated. Therefore continuity sustains the social and academic gains that early years provision has supplied. Their research into how primary schools can build on children’s early progress has demonstrated that the early years are crucial for developing cognitive and social skills: *“it is sustaining these gains through the primary school years which will have the most impact on their adult life chances”* (p.19).

The government’s investment into pre-school education will succeed only if primary schools can sustain the progress made by the child prior to entry. Dips in attainment at transitional stages has shown *“the primary school phase does not provide a seamless transition between pre-school and secondary school which is the most beneficial to children’s learning trajectories”* (2006, p.21). The Primary and Secondary National Strategy initiated an action- research pilot project, ‘Strengthening Transfers and Transitions’ (2008). This pilot is a result of government reports and other research projects that have recognised transfer between schools may be a potential barrier to raising standards. The strategy group were most concerned about the management of academic progress at transition points. Ofsted identified key issues relating to the tracking of pupils and an overall weakness in planning for continuity and progression in primary schools. This pilot works collaboratively with local authorities across the country to identify effective practice and to disseminate the findings in order to strengthen progression in learning for all children and young people. Current priorities for the pilot have a focus on effective use of data and information, targeting of support and intervention, continuity and progression in curriculum, teaching and learning,

including assessment for learning, climate for learning and partnership with parents and carers.

Bertram and Pascal (2002) argue learning experiences of young children must be attached to previous knowledge, but concede “*learning also comes with discontinuity and challenge of what is taken for granted*” (p.40) it could be an opportunity for discontinuities to be a medium for learning and reconstructing what was previously believed to be true. Training to support continuity was seen as a need for practitioners.

Bertram and Pascal highlighted the division between education and care and this

tended to exaggerate differences and was reinforced by institutionalised, structural and administrative divisions. Different authorities, regulations, staffing, qualifications created barriers to continuity of experience for the child (2002, p.41).

Successful transitions to school are of great importance to all stakeholders and therefore need to be carefully planned for. Continuity for most of the practitioners has centred on the continuity of the teaching process, continuity of the curriculum and continuity in relation to the environment. Barber (1999) identified five bridges to successful transition. The first is the *Bureaucratic Bridge*, which involves formal liaison between schools/settings, this relates to administrative arrangements, pupil records and common procedures. The second bridge is the *Social and Personal Bridge*, which involves developing social links between pupils, parents and the new school/setting, this relates to induction procedures and familiarity with the building. The third is the *Curriculum Bridge*, which involves sharing of planning, what has been taught and is going to be taught across the two schools/settings, improving the continuity of the curriculum, knowledge of children’s strengths.

The *Pedagogy Bridge* is the fourth bridge; this relates to developing a shared understanding of how children are to be taught and not just a focus on what they are taught. It relates to continuity in teaching and on the practice in the classroom/setting. It is at this stage stereotypes would be challenged, and professional support and dialogue would be encouraged across the phases or school/setting. Finally the *Autonomy and Management of Learning Bridge* relates to children being active participants in the transfer process and in their own learning. Pupils and families would be empowered through information about their achievements and needs;

empowerment includes the confidence to articulate these needs in the new environment. Barber stated that the first three bridges are the easiest to achieve with the last two having the greatest impact.

2.9.1 International comparisons

Transition activities have been introduced to support the transition processes, which are undertaken, by families, pre-schools and schools. Transition activities are evident in Denmark and New Zealand.

A good start in school was a Danish national goal introduced by the Ministry of Education; this goal has four elements attached to it; school readiness, which is defined as the development of personal, social, and intellectual competences that support school success; secondly a caring and stimulating family which also extends to the community, thirdly, high quality pre-schools which provide a rich experience in their own right but also contributes to children's development and learning. Pre schools have to be 'school ready', that is pre-schools, which have practice, which will help the child's transition to school. The fourth element is a 'child ready school' "*that is a school which is able to take the child's perspective, understands the child's needs, and creates an appropriate learning environment* (Brostrom, 2000, p.1).

In New Zealand at a Transition to School seminar it was stated that

In failing to identify a positive relationship between early childhood education and school education Te Whaariki creates the impression that early childhood education exists in a vacuum, is complete in itself and has no relationship with further learning. This has ramifications for children's readiness for school programmes especially in terms of literacy and numeracy (Education Review Office, 1998, p.12).

In New Zealand, as in other countries, there is some discontinuity between the early childhood and primary sectors in terms of pedagogies, ideas and philosophies. Clark and Cheyne (1979) show variations in what is regarded as readiness and acceptability in different schools "*the norm of readiness also varies from country to country and time to time, readiness is an attitude of expectancy on the part of the teachers*" (1979, p.9). Peters (2000) found in her interviewing of pre-school teachers in New Zealand that they actively

resisted pressure to introduce a more school like level of structure to the

early childhood programme believing that discontinuity between the practices in the two settings did not have to be overcome by making the early childhood programme more formal” (Peters, paper presented 2000, p.17).

2.10 The new national structure

In recent years early years services for children and parents have been at the forefront of national initiatives. Part of the research is to view how these changes will impact on the barriers identified and if they will support partnership working, transition into school ensuring continuity and progression for all children socially, emotionally and cognitively.

A principle government commitment was “*to social inclusion and a more equal and just society*” (Brooker, 2007, p.9) with the early years agenda woven into this pledge. The Early Excellence Centres programme was set up in 1997 to develop models of good practice in integrating services for young children and families. Early Excellence Centres offer high quality practice in one-stop-shops, integrated education and day care for young children, and services and opportunities for parents, carers, families and the wider community both directly and in co-operation with other providers. Early Excellence Centres along with other settings - like neighbourhood nurseries, maintained nursery schools, primary schools, family centres, voluntary and private sector provision – are now forming the basis of SureStart Children's Centre developments. Early Excellence Centres and Children's Centres were designed to bring together education and care, with the rationale being to make these services more efficient and effective.

However, Anning (2001) has argued, “*there are very few conceptual frameworks for setting up, managing and delivering joined up services*” (Anning, 2001, p.2). My research develops a framework of partnership working. Anning notes very little training for working in a multi-agency team and very little in terms of theoretical underpinning as evaluations referring to Bertram and Pascal (1999) Easen, Atkins and Dyson (2000) and Atkinson, Wilkin and Kinder (2001). Bertram and Pascal who evaluated multi-agency delivery within the Early Excellence Centres found: “*Difficulties include trying to combine the cultures of distinct services into new ways*

of working, sharing professional knowledge and working as teams at the interface with users (cited in Anning, 2001, p.2).

Anning emphasises firstly the challenge to workers of creating new professional identities, and secondly how workers articulate and share both their professional and personal knowledge so that they can create new knowledge for new ways of working. *“Organisational theory and the sociology of the professions suggest that co-ordination might be more problematic than the policy makers and professional high priests have allowed”* (Frost, 2005, p.38).

Every Child Matters (DfES, 2003) is the main driver for policy and practice at all levels. It will be through the monitoring and evaluating of these outcomes that the benefit for children and families and their lives will be judged. The government's Ten Year Strategy for Childcare, Choice for Parents, the Best Start for Children (DfES, 2004) set out key themes: The first is choice and flexibility; parents to have greater choice about balancing work and family life. The second is availability; for all families with children aged up to 14 who need it, an affordable, flexible, high quality childcare place that meets their circumstances. The third key theme is quality; high-quality provision with a highly skilled childcare and early years workforce, among the best in the world with the fourth being affordability; families to be able to afford flexible, high-quality childcare that is appropriate for their needs.

This legislation and the EPPE (Blatchford et al, 2003) research influenced the new Early Years Foundation Stage (DfES, 2007), which is the next stage of the transformation of early years provision that was initiated in 1997. All of these have partnership working and transition as key components; checking mechanisms need to be established during the implementation stage to monitor progress.

My study constructs a new way of organising and stimulating partnership working, at strategic level and examines the impact this has for children on transition to school in ways, which articulate criteria for best practice.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Research design

3.1.1 Qualitative and Interventionist

My research starts with a very practical issue: how to promote the idea of multidisciplinary partnership across early years settings, and how to sharpen communication and procedures, in order to enhance transition at age 5. Access to data was straightforward since I had professional responsibility in two consecutive posts; but there has been a downside in that I needed to ensure that my management role, that is my power position, has not skewed any of the responses the respondents have made.

My research is primarily qualitative, as I am concerned with exploring the quality of educational provision within the Foundation Stage. My study aims to explain the barriers and benefits of partnership working through the words and eyes of the practitioners themselves, myself and other professionals. Therefore my qualitative approach is concerned with producing meanings and understandings. It is a *non-positivistic* approach, seeking to illuminate a set of circumstances in order to find more effective policies for future action. This research initiative is *interventionist* focussing on real and immediate problems, involving myself as both the researcher and key professional manager in my early years partnership, and the other multidisciplinary practitioners. We have all worked together to find solutions to issues we have jointly identified. In the interventionist research process I have been an active participant seeking to find solutions to organisational problems.

However, the research design has been complex. I surveyed all settings in one large county to establish baselines, using a complex questionnaire. This enabled me to complete the early reconnaissance of the context against which future changes and improvements might be plotted and involved distributing 1176 questionnaires (see Appendix 2). I finally categorised my research as Action Research, because I was proactively designing a programme of change for the county. This is action research on a large scale covering over a thousand settings. This involved setting up 50 clusters

groups within geographical areas. I call this phase of research “Cycle 1”. This consists of reconnaissance, planning the new system, implementation and evaluation. At this point I moved to a neighbouring authority, smaller but more challenging. This enabled me to export the findings from Cycle 1 into a new district to see whether the cluster system and learning networks we had designed might work elsewhere. I call this Cycle 2.

My study and approach is based on action research which is a “*participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowledge in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes*” (Reason and Bradbury, 2006, p.1).

My research design starts with a reconnaissance cycle; my research study was initiated through identifying and examining my idea of developing collaborative partnerships within the context of my professional role. A cycle of fact finding emerged through raising awareness of the research focus through different formats, providing training sessions with supporting theory and research leading to creating cluster groups. A questionnaire provided baseline data, which was analysed and gave lines of enquiry to follow. The reconnaissance cycle led to an overall plan to meeting objectives.

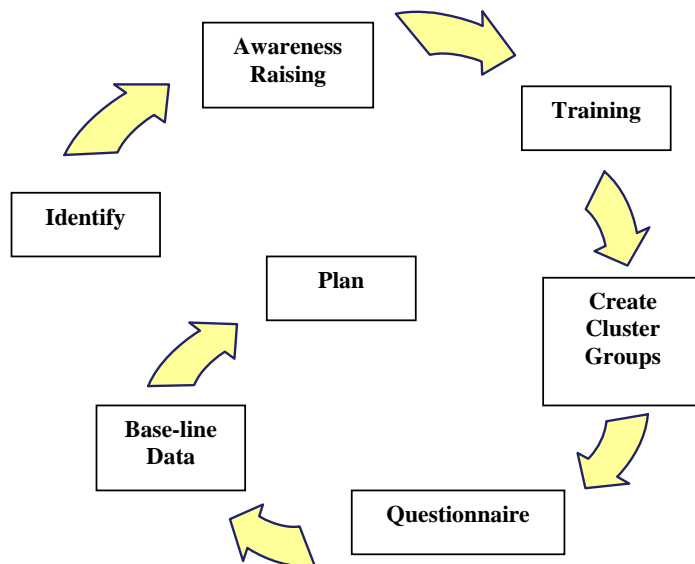


Figure 6. Reconnaissance cycle.

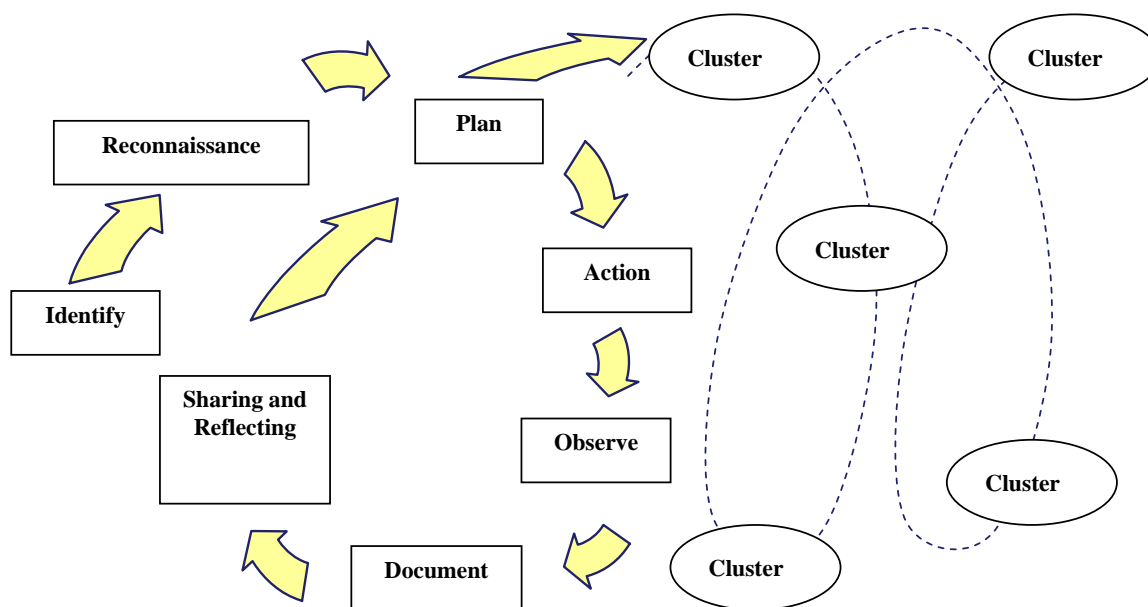


Figure 7. Action research cycle.

Following the identification of my research focus and undertaking the reconnaissance cycle I developed a cycle of planning, implementing the action, observing and documenting. Data emerging was shared with the practitioners, Foundation Stage mentors and colleagues where the next stage of planning took place. The steps were repeated in sequence and as the research developed there was to be a spiral of improving practice. Cluster groups as communities of learning developed at different paces, they spiralled off at different points of the action research cycle. This was dependent on the skills of the change agent, the pedagogic experience of the practitioners and the depth of the relationships between the individuals within the cluster groups. This is discussed in more detail in the analysis of data chapter 4.

My action research was to work towards practical outcomes for practitioners, which would be useful in their day to day lives, through reflection and understanding. This participatory action research was co-constructive, since my colleagues and practitioners were working with me to provide a new approach to partnership which would benefit practitioners and children.

Data collection methods within this complex action research were varied and included questionnaires, semi structured interviews, focus groups, vignettes of practice and interviews with children. As I collected the data I coded and analysed the emerging themes, checking with practitioners and colleagues through professional dialogue their understanding of the data collection. My findings from the data developed into discussion chapters leading to a conclusion and recommendations for change and areas for further research. Dissemination for colleagues and practitioners was through a transition training session and a document with research findings and examples of proven good practice. Through regional networks and sharing research findings with regional advisers a model of partnership working to support children at points of transition will enable other authorities to use aspects of the research to benefit their authority.

3.1.2 Why action research?

I define my study essentially through the literature of action research. I have to be clear however that this project is action research on a large scale, across the two authorities I have sequentially worked for. This is more in line with the industrial action research first developed by Kurt Lewin (1948) than with small-scale classroom based action research which is often carried out in educational research.

I also draw on other related qualitative research traditions. I have been responsible for driving through policy change in partnership in my professional work. This involves structural change at an institutional level involving the participation and empowerment of staff. The tradition of “empowerment evaluation” (Fetterman, 2001) is therefore pertinent to my strategies – that is, a facilitator works with staff to devise and develop policy change. This method was developed as essentially an ethnographic approach to evaluation, based on participation, interviews and observations. However, since I am not an *external* facilitator I structure my own central involvement as action research.

Action research is situational; the problem is defined within a specific context and an attempt to solve the problem within the same context occurs. For Reason and Bradbury (2006) action research brings “*together action and reflection, theory and*

practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people” (p.1).

Action research is collaborative. I the practitioner-researcher and the practitioners worked together on solving the problem in a participatory way. My colleagues and leading teachers/mentors provided me with data within the project I had developed. Action research produces practical knowledge that is useful to people in the everyday conduct of their professional lives. Modifications to practice were made during the research process. I wanted the practitioners at the end of the action research to have gained experience and confidence from taking part. Reason and Bradbury (2006) describe action research and participative research as synonymous. Action research is responsive; action involves responding to the emerging needs of the situation, a gradual process. This fitted well with my need to generate and manage change. Lewin (1948) first described action research as an industrial change model. Carr and Kemmis (1986) emphasis critical features such as equity and justice.

When teachers and researchers work together both parties deal with the educational problem from different perspectives (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2000). The teacher is interested in specific actions whilst the researcher is interested in systematic data collection and interpretation. Marris and Rein (1967) believe it is possible to have a flexible approach to the action and research. I intend to ensure that all participants are clear about the objectives, implications and context of the study. This will ensure there is a precise, flexible approach between the two components.

Issues of reliability and validity are differently handled when taking a qualitative approach. For example the personal bias of both researcher and subjects may affect the validity of the research. I collected data on several different occasions in various settings with a very wide range of different people, using different methods, such as questionnaire, interview, discussion and observation. This helped to reduce bias by having a range of input and ensuring through checking mechanisms this was accurately recorded. It is not possible to be totally objective because as individuals we all experience subjectivity. I had a professional interest in developing individual practitioners and whole setting practice to a new level and I had to be aware of others' perceptions of my stake in the work and my status. As the researcher, I was taking

reflexivity seriously and was not going to hide behind my professional role; the research applied to me as well and may have carried implications for changes to local authority practice (MacNaughton, Rolfe and Siraj-Blatchford. 2001). Using a wide range of methods and sampling views from many settings helped to improve the validity of my findings and grounded the development work strongly in the participants' understanding of their practice.

3.1.3 Style of action research

My particular action research was not a small-scale intervention but across many institutions, with the aim of improving professional practice.

With institutional action research various interventions are planned and introduced over time. Webb and Sherman (1998) defined action research as doing research and working on solving a problem simultaneously. As we worked collaboratively on changing existing practice this was translated into changes in directions, making adjustments and modifications as described by Cohen and Manion (1994). As a group we made the necessary changes to ensure the benefits were related to the on going process rather than focusing primarily on future benefits. The changes in direction were collaboratively agreed upon by the individual cluster groups and professional colleagues.

Stringer (1999) argued that a fundamental part of community based action research is that it starts with an interest in a problem identified by a group, community or organisation. Its purpose is to assist people in understanding their situation and working out how to resolve problems. The purpose of this research was to support early years practitioners in developing their understanding of their working context and therefore assist them in resolving the problems they faced whilst developing practice. Stringer (1999, p.9) viewed community based action research as a process of inquiry that is democratic in which all people are able to participate. Through acknowledging the practitioners' participation and through sharing the action research rationale I was giving the message that each individual was of equal importance in the process. In enabling individuals to express their full potential the process can become life enhancing.

Schools, pre-schools, day nurseries and child minding networks are institutions, but they are also part of the community, particularly the pre-schools that are committee run. In some aspects these institutions are at the heart of the community. Stringer on community based action research (1999, p.43) describes the action research process as look, think and act. Look refers to gathering information: the context in which the identified problem is set and the problem itself. Think refers to the associated interpreting and explaining; reflecting on what participants have been doing, areas of success, and problems. Act refers to resolving the issues and problems, through evaluation of the effectiveness and outcomes of the activities, with a view to formulating solutions to the problems. This model of research was discussed with the participants of the research, and supported the different stages of planning, doing, evaluating.

Closely related to the importance of organisational change is the importance of personal attitudes and behavioural change. Reason and Bradbury (2006, p.79) suggest approaches to training and dissemination need to be found which also focus on changing personal values, ethics and commitments. Training that was integral to the research certainly changed values and at times practitioners' priorities. Part of the action was the time I built in for peer-peer sharing, developing and building activities that were demonstrated and transferred, allowing time for learning, trying out and continuous improvement of the process. Highlander (1989) believes that in order for institutional change to be effective, solutions must come from the people who are experiencing the problem and who will be directly affected by the action taken.

With action research that has an educational focus, evaluation is based on detailed examination of the evidence collected and evaluated whilst the action is underway in order that the next action can be planned. Change is encouraged. The cluster groups were constantly reviewed in terms of attendance and quality of speakers and training. To facilitate partnership working staff involvement needs to increase. I will examine whether the resulting actions have an impact on children as they transfer into the next stage of school.

3.1.4 History of this style of institutional action research

Action research has been credited to Kurt Lewin in the 1940s. He stated research for

social practice was best described as research for social management or social engineering: “*It is a type of action-research, a comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action, and research leading to social action*” (1948, p.202).

The approach Lewin (1948) developed consisted of a cycle of steps. This can be described as identifying the idea, fact finding, planning, taking a first action step, evaluating, amending the plan and then taking a second step and so on. Through examining the idea and the reconnaissance stage an overall plan will emerge, often resulting in modification to the original idea. At this stage the first step of the action will become clear. The cycle of planning, implementing, fact finding, evaluating the results of the second step in preparation for the third continues. This approach to research is orientated to problem solving in social and organizational settings.

There has been some criticism of this sequential approach: for example Elliott, (1991) stated that Lewin’s model assumed that the identified problem could be fixed in advance, where the reconnaissance phase was just fact finding and the implantation stage was an easy process. This criticism of action research reduced with the understanding of the systematic nature of collection of data, and that interpretations of data have regard to validity and reliability. There has also been recognition of the tension between a basis for change through research and the constraints, which allow for the inability of individuals to make those changes (Lewin and Grabbe, 1945). Constraints relate to cultural and social perceptions and the systems of which individuals are a part. Having the knowledge does not automatically lead to change; this was something I was aware of in my research as many individuals were not in a position of management to make those changes. McTaggart (1996) suggests action research is more than following a procedure, such as Lewin’s spiral, but is a “*series of commitments to observe and problematize through practice a series of principles for conducting social enquiry*”(1996, p.248).

3.1.5 Critical action research

Carr and Kemmis (1986) viewed critical action research as always being connected to social action; this being a concrete and practical expression of the aspiration to change the social or educational world for the better. This is achieved through improving

shared social practices, our shared understandings of these social practices, and the shared situations in which these practices are carried out.

Action research is a form of self reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which these practices are carried out (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, p.162).

Action research is related to self reflection, and is firmly rooted in the realm of the practitioner. My theoretical framework relates to the interactions of the practitioners, their experiences and feelings and how they relate to the context of the research. Critical action research is about continually trying to understand and improve the way things are; this was critical to my research as it aimed to create a form of collaborative learning by doing. Participants were to learn from change as they made it. It aims to help people understand themselves as the agents, as well as the products of change. Part of each cycle of the research is the critique of the information collected by the researcher and the participants. This critical reflection and the increased understanding from the emerging new knowledge support the design and implementation of the next steps. Action research is also committed to spreading involvement and participation in the research process. The reflective practice that was integral to this research depended “*upon the critical and creative development of knowledge which is linked to practice*” (Reed and Proctor, 1993, p.30).

The research was collaborative as the data were arrived at by critically examining the practice of individuals within the group. As change is a desired outcome of the study, I needed the commitment and the agreement of the practitioners, as they were going to be part of the change process, and therefore affected by it. I achieved this by involving the participants directly in the research process. Kemmis and McTaggart (1998) use a cycle of plan, act, observe, reflect, then in the light of this plan the next steps. A feature of action research is a cyclic structure, where similar steps tend to recur in a similar order at different phases of the action research. Alongside this progress is made towards action and research outcomes.

3.2 Procedural issues

3.2.1 Participant and Collaboration Issues

Through my role as an Early Years Adviser I had identified the importance of collaborative partnership working by different sectors within the Foundation Stage to enhance the transition experiences of young children. I investigated through a model of change how good practice could be defined and transferred. My vision was that through using a particular model of change, working with county practitioners as participants in action research I might empower them to develop their practice. I wanted to “*re-enthuse and re-empower practitioners to confront the challenge of improving their practice and becoming willing participants and initiators of beneficial change*” (Blenkin and Kelly, 1997, p.93).

One of the principles of this research was involving as wide a range of participants as possible. Groups, particularly the diverse groups in my study, needed time together to discuss where they wanted to move their practice to and why and establish the journey they needed to make to get there. Vital to this research was the interpersonal communication that took place between the practitioners and the relationships within the groups, as well as the transference of practice created by the practitioners themselves. “*People are more likely to believe and use findings and follow recommendations if they were responsible for creating them*” (Fetterman and Wandersman 2005, p.32).

During the initial stages of the research and the start of collaborative working, I shared with the participants my vision that when the research had been completed they would continue to review, evaluate and improve their practice in relation to collaborative working practices and transition between the settings. Elliot, (1991) states that this approach to action research will “*help people to act more intelligently and skilfully. In action research ‘theories’ are not validated independently and then applied to practice. They are validated through practice*” (p.69).

Critical to the research process was a relationship model; how the practitioners collaborated and who they collaborated with was just as important as what they collaborated on. Observations, research field notes and interviews were used to capture the required information and formed part one of the data collection. This is

important in assuring the validity of a piece of research. I was aware of the difficulty of reducing bias

because it is inherent in all research personnel and procedures, in the choice of questions you ask, in the observations you make, even the interpretation of the data could be biased, because of your own value stance, your experience, your skill in making observations (Macintyre, 2000, p.48).

In my role as the researcher this was even more difficult as I had to undertake the research without allowing my professional knowledge to influence the outcomes. As I was responsible for assessing and advising a number of settings I was conscious of the tension between researcher and professional. Tacit knowledge may unwittingly creep in and influence the participants' responses. The solution was to ensure as many settings and practitioners as possible across the county were included in the research. I was responsible for 60 settings out of a total of 600 settings so influence, if at all, was only a small percentage of the total.

Power relations are part of all research but particularly within a positivist paradigm and where the data is quantitative. Within qualitative research there is the opportunity to relocate some of that power, though MacNaughton et al. (2001) refer to Williams and Stewart (1992), Atweh and Burton (1995), Smithmier (1996) and Mayall (1999) who all maintain "*that the balance of power remains with the researcher*" (MacNaughton et al 2001,p.139). However, it is acknowledged that a redefining of power can occur through collaborative approaches. Participants in my research were able to feedback to me on a regular basis, though it was recognised the initial identification of the research and the initiation of the action research was mine which gave me as the researcher more power in the relationship. By returning to the research participants and including them in the analysis of the data, particularly those I was not directly advising in my professional role I was looking for some of the power to be redressed.

Respondents can be influenced by a number of factors, for example during interviews, it is also possible that through non-verbal behaviour such as body language and also through vocal intonation the interviewer's own opinion maybe deduced both inaccurately and accurately. By being aware of these difficulties I took steps to reduce any bias, I wanted the practitioners to see me in a research role and not as their Early

Years Adviser. There were some issues relating to using interviews in research that I needed to be aware of; in particular, the possibility of the interviewee seeking to please the interviewer. I was aware of this bias as I was in my professional role as an Early Years Adviser in the county. It was a possibility practitioners would say what they thought I wanted to hear. However, I made it clear at the beginning of the interviews I was not interviewing in my professional capacity. I was confident as far as I could be that I had built up a relationship with the different individuals, based on mutual trust and that the engagement was on an open and honest basis. I ensured I didn't undertake a didactic approach but interviews were on an interactionist approach.

I carried out a systematic and critical enquiry with a large group of practitioners from different settings to identify the desirable change and then put this innovation into operation by monitoring, reviewing and adjusting with the participants as the process continued. I was able to meet the participants engaged in the action research on a regular basis to share the emerging data, and to reflect on the findings. Colleagues engaged with practitioners on my behalf and this certainly contributed to the validity of the findings. Several practitioners were engaged at such a high level that they began to research and share journal articles and research they had found through websites with the groups, bringing in new ideas and provoking more thought. The practitioners themselves were part of the evaluation process; this involvement strengthened the likelihood of seeing improvements. Self evaluation is the strength of collaborative research.

As I moved from Cycle 1 to Cycle 2 aspects of the methodology were to be repeated although I did have to take into account variances such as the culture and stage of development of the new participants. I did this by talking to them informally on visits to settings and at training events. I was sensitively investigating if there was willingness and a desire to work in cross sector partnerships. I discovered in the new local authority the qualification base line was very low and there had been very little shared practice and thinking. In this authority I was employed in a strategic role and was undertaking less front line work directly with practitioners, therefore issues of validity and reliability were less of an issue.

3.2.2 Self-reflexivity/reflective practice

The change agents and colleagues were critical friends, working outside of the setting and promoting rigorous reflection and recognition of attainments. As the practitioners met in their cluster groups, I built in critical reflection, which is integral to action research. This was facilitated by *the change agents*, those practitioners who had taken on the role of facilitating the groups, at the beginning of the research these practitioners were named as leading Foundation Stage mentors. Critical reflection is a demanding process, as the practitioners have to confront the unintended consequences of the change strategies as well as the desired outcomes. Practitioners had differing interpretations of the implications for practice. This period of critical reflection resulted in dialogue, with the differences in interpretation under discussion being supported by the practitioners working in partnership. This critical reflection assisted in identifying the successes throughout the change process, the short term milestones that were achieved during the research, and the next steps to be taken. An opportunity to talk to the participants to 'check out' the authenticity of the data was part of the rationale for meeting in cluster groups. Conversation and dialogue are crucial for the development of new ideas and concepts; this ongoing action research process evolved through the cycle of reflection of self and practice.

The role of the change agents is explored in depth in chapter 7 (7.5), their role within the action research was an organisational role in terms of making contact with the practitioners in their particular geographical cluster. Contact was in verbal and written formats. They were the link between the practitioners and the Local Authority disseminating training requirements, providing feedback on procedural issues and were a source of data information to myself as part of the action research. Their individual comments and thoughts were included in my journal, their collective ideas and feedback was noted at meetings where all the leads of cluster groups came together. Their role was to support the development and sustainability of the cluster groups by canvassing for attendance, providing a forum for discussion, relationship building and facilitating discussion relating to professional practice. The role of the change agent was not to visit individual settings, to monitor practice or to give individual advice or training. They did however lead on providing vignettes of good practice to give opportunities for transference of practice and also provided examples of practice through different forums for practitioners to evaluate. The role of the

change agent grew naturally and became pivotal to the development of partnerships between the sectors.

The cluster groups were an ideal forum to initiate change and provided an opportunity to begin a debate about the issues that allow for or hinder partnership working. Training and setting up the cluster groups were the catalyst for reflective practice. Using literature and research findings from similar studies as my starting point initiated practitioners into thinking about their own practice and exploring whether there was a better way of working. All the settings from different sectors were mutually interdependent. There were the same descriptions, analysis and criticisms, and I was aiming for practitioners to self-reflect; this was achieved through a collaborative context, where there was mutual trust and respect. This process took time and needed to be built up slowly. The groups met on a regular basis, and with a change agent facilitating the process of change, I observed that practitioners felt comfortable within the groups. As the process developed the dynamics of the group changed and individuals took on new roles.

Reflective practice is achieved through the practitioners responding and reflecting on the experiences of their work, seeking to develop and change their practice. By using past examples of partnership working or transition systems, the practitioners transferred this to a new situation, therefore creating and learning new knowledge. This learning was made explicit so practitioners were encouraged to articulate and reflect on their practice. It was important that the practitioners knew and understood that the action research in which they were taking part was going to be change orientated in nature. I made it very clear that the practitioner was 'signing up' and needed to be committed to a research process that was going to change and improve their practice relating to working in Partnership within the Foundation Stage. My action research depended on me working with the practitioners to plan, test, retry and ensure validity. Murray and Lawrence (2000) state "*validity is usually captured in social and educational research through constructs and concepts; a concept is a generalising idea or term useful for classifying phenomena*" (p.135).

Reflexivity relates to the understanding of the researchers' impact on the study being undertaken. MacNaughton et al, (2001) explain this as two separate issues; those

researchers not engaged in the field they are studying and speaking for those individuals they have studied; and those researchers who are practitioners and already engaged in the field which is where I am placed. In this position I had to distance myself from the field of study, so there was enough separation to look at familiar events through fresh eyes. *“All researchers working with qualitative designs need to be self-aware about the balance they want to achieve between engaged commitment to the field and the capacity to offer an informed and research –based interpretation of it”* (MacNaughton et al, 2001, p.124).

I was a researcher already engaged in the field that I was studying. I considered my study to be a social and cultural construction, *“instead of a vision of reality, self-reflection has been used as a tool for testing validity”* (David, 1998). Self-reflection is discussed in terms of the discourses and concepts that have been used to inform the researcher’s thoughts and actions. Deconstruction therefore allows the researcher to discover their own thought structures as well as being an analytic method to identify the discourses and concepts that build up the structures that are being researched. I, as the researcher, wanted to put myself in a position where the practitioners were able to act and speak on their own behalves. I was aware and valued the complexity and context of the individual practitioners and children within individual settings that were coming together to form partnerships within geographical cluster groups. Acknowledging that my role as researcher could be problematic, with the possibility of my voice dominating and imposing the definitions of the study, was a starting point for addressing the issue. Therefore the practitioners, leading Foundation Stage mentors and colleagues became co-constructors in the change process.

The networking that took place between these groups of individuals, the documentation which was provided and shared and the co-construction which took place that focused on the practitioners within their daily practice ensured the power between the researcher and the practitioners as part of the study was more equal. I was also aware that knowledge and power are closely aligned and the role of disciplinary power which I wanted to avoid (Foucault, 1980). Disciplinary power shapes individuals, *“it is a matter of steering or guiding the subject to a desired end preferably without their awareness of what is happening, the goal is to persuade groups of individuals to behave in a certain way without provoking them into thinking*

critically about what they are being asked to do” (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 1999, p.29). A co-constructive learning culture enhanced relationships and resulted in individuals choosing to take on responsibility within the research study.

I was not in a position of management in authority A where I could influence practice at a strategic level. As the researcher I initiated the action research, engaging in fact finding, raising awareness through activities, training and developing the cluster groups. I was out in the field at grass roots level participating at cluster groups and disseminating data, the emerging trends and facilitating the networking to discuss and analyse the key points and changing practice. Taking the model into authority B was a further opportunity for dissemination and development, the model as described was lifted and implemented within the new authority. Minor adjustments were made to accommodate and value the contextual differences, such as the size of the authority. As I was in a managerial position within this authority I was able to drive the research forward as I had opportunities to speak and share my research at strategic lead level. I also had responsibility for my own budget and a team of consultants to support my vision of change. During this period of the research I spent less time in the cluster groups but more time networking with practitioners, colleagues and head teachers. There were more opportunities for professional discussions and to analyse the emerging trends as my change agents had been part of the research in authority A and had an in depth understanding of the research area.

3.2.3 Ethical issues

I adhered to the University of Worcester ethical guidelines (2005) including the ethical consideration that requires researchers to respect the rights and dignity of the participants, avoiding any harm to them by their involvement, and to operate with honesty and integrity (Denscombe, 2003). In qualitative research, variances that may affect the research data, but are beyond the control of the researcher, can be reduced by the adherence to ethical issues. I was already aware that, as the researcher, I was seen to be in a position of power by some practitioners I was undertaking the research with because of my professional role. I was not going to abuse my position of authority by putting pressure on the practitioners to take part in the research. I was not only engaging with the practitioners and children as a source for providing the data, but as part of a dialogue, which allowed the practitioners to reflect on their own

practice. The dialogue that took place between myself and the practitioners from the different sectors contributed to the process of interpretation. Through this research method the possible authoritarian tendency was reduced.

The welfare of the practitioners and children that I was interviewing came before my self interest in terms of gathering data. I asked the practitioners who knew me to take part with honesty and objectivity. As Macintyre (2000) states there is a need for the researcher to reassure the participants that confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained. All names or locations were changed so that wherever the research was undertaken, individual practitioners and settings were not able to be recognised. I also told the participants that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time. Once I had given these assurances I ensured they were adhered to. Anonymity and confidentiality allowed those practitioners being observed, interviewed or given questionnaires “*to answer honestly without any fear of reprisal*” (Macintyre, 2000, p48). This contributed to reducing bias.

The fact that participants knew me, from a prior relationship built up through delivering training and through my visits to their settings, was taken into account as a possible source of bias. However when undertaking research the participants were comfortable in their surroundings and the context for the interviews and focus group discussions were a natural part of their meetings. Relationships had been established between the participants so I felt confident the speaker genuinely held the views expressed. At cluster meetings individuals expressed their opinions, in the writing of the research their views are reencountered but anonymity is maintained. During individual interviews and through questionnaires at no time was this data attributed to a named individual, explicitly or otherwise.

Part of the ethical considerations I considered was the responsibility of making difficult decisions. Bauman (1993) views this personal responsibility as morality and to take a moral stance means to assume responsibility for the other person. Bauman suggests the ‘Other’ must be recognized as unique and unexchangeable. Part of this relationship is dialogue but also listening to the other persons’ experience and perspective and not putting my own understanding onto them. This ethical theory places the obligation on the researcher where there is not an expectation of

recompense.

3.2.4 Empowerment

Collaboration, participation and empowerment were integral to the evaluation of Cycle 1 and sit well within this research project. It was through participation and collaboration that evidence of good practice in terms of outcomes for children as they moved into formal schooling was to emerge.

Good practice and resulting benefits for children were to empower the practitioners to continue and develop this work after I had moved from this authority. Practitioners were engaged in rich sources of learning about the setting in which the change was taking place and were becoming flexible and adapting to the constraints that were emerging to partnership working. Taking control of the issues arising from the research and finding solutions to the problems was empowering for the participants of the action research. Shared understandings led to discussion in relation to informed choices and empowerment. Practitioners in particular felt empowered as they began to feel strong and able to challenge decisions or practices from the maintained sector. Discussion with participants led to reflection of different power, they found empowerment liberating and positive, whereas power in the form of control was found to be frustrating.

Because of this central interest, I drew further support from a separate but related paradigm, *empowerment* evaluation. This is evaluation rather than action research although the stakeholders control of their part in the study and participate in the work. Practitioners empower themselves through the action and the undertaking of the inquiry. Empowerment evaluation uses an outside facilitator. Allowing for the participants to be in control of the change and through working collaboratively with the practitioners I hope that I will be able to identify the barriers to partnership working through their eyes. Fetterman (2006) suggests empowerment evaluation is a collaborative group activity rather than a pursuit for an individual. Elements of this form of evaluation help to bring the research to life. Fetterman (2001) has defined this “as *the use of evaluation concepts, techniques, and findings to foster improvement and self determination*” (p.3).

Evaluation empowerment is designed to “*help people help themselves and improve their programmes using a form of self-evaluation and reflection*” (Fetterman, online p.2). Fetterman (2006) suggests that considering outcomes of researching organisations might include networks and policy leverage. Policy leverage was considered significant by head teachers and managers in order to promote partnership working in the Foundation Stage. Hard evidence supported the discussions at the policy-making level with a view to moving small pockets of exemplary practice into a system planned for by management and supporting all children as they transfer into, through and out of the Foundation Stage. The evaluation approach was one that

aims to increase the likelihood that programmes will achieve results by increasing the capacity of programme stakeholders to plan, implement and evaluate their own programmes (Fetterman and Wandersman 2005, p.27).

3.2.5 Children’s voice issues.

Children can provide educators as well as researchers with important insights into not only their educational experiences, but also social issues such as inclusion and self esteem. “*In the past interviewing children, especially young children have been seen as a very flawed research method*” (David, 1992, p.208). In recent years it has been recognised that children are reliable and informative interviewees (MacNaughton et al.2001). Issues that have arisen when interviewing children have in some cases been attributed to the skill of the interviewer rather than the child making the responses. It has generally been accepted though that the quality of the responses from children are better when children are in familiar environments with familiar adults.

I interviewed children to support the research into the emotional and social aspects of this study. I was aiming to establish the conditions for learning but also conditions that supported children’s social and emotional development and well being, as they transferred from a pre-school setting into their primary school. So my initial questions were related to what children liked doing at their pre-school setting, who they thought supported them if they needed help whilst at their setting, and if the activities they were taking part in would help them when they moved to school. I was also investigating whether it was important to children to have their friends in their class as they moved into school.

This research explored the adult attributes that children identified as important. Not

only was I looking for key points for optimum conditions to support the children, but I was also developing the children's knowledge of their own ability to have an impact on their experiences; the age and stage of development of the children was fundamental. As an experienced early years educator who has considerable experience in observing and working with young children, I felt confident that I had the ability to judge if a child was uncomfortable or not. I spent time getting to know the children and playing with them, for example in the role play area, before moving into the questions stage. Cohen and Manion (1994) state children have the right not to take part in interviews and an explanation relevant to the child's understanding explaining the research should be given. For a long time I had used Persona Dolls with small groups of children as a stimulus for discussing and finding solutions to feelings and problems and as a prop for supporting children. These sessions in relation to transition were also analysed to identify children's feelings and thoughts and as a catalyst for changing practice. The children's views were a focus point for discussions at cluster meetings, and for adults to reflect on their own practice and ethos. Through interviewing children I wanted to empower children to think about and reflect on their experiences of transition, which might have a positive impact for further transitions.

3.3 Research methods

3.3.1 Qualitative research methods

Qualitative research reflects the subjective nature of reality, in which individuals construct, modify and interpret meaning. This study focuses on shared understandings of professional practices and collaboration. The interactions of the practitioners, their experiences and feelings are examined by qualitative research methods. Qualitative research constructs meaning in patterns of behaviour. Because individual practitioners' views and ideas have been central to my work I sought to draw out what practitioners felt about how they worked. My research paradigm aimed to empower the participants to improve practice. As new data emerged I was able to include this in the next cycle of action. The qualitative methodology therefore allowed me to be flexible and responsive to the changing situation.

For the action research, I employed a range of qualitative methods drawing on interviews from a wide range of practitioners, informal discussions through focus groups and evidence acquired through questionnaires, rather than using just statistics

to gather information and evidence.

3.3.2 Data collection strategies and timeline: summary

The data collection/fieldwork named as Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 took place over five years in two local authorities. Cycle 3 became an evaluation of the institutionalisation of the action research where practitioners from both Cycle 1 and 2 were revisited.

Cycle 1

1. Reconnaissance stage; Questionnaires were designed and sent to all cluster groups in the private, voluntary and maintained sector to establish a baseline of practice, positive and negative. I was drawing on ethnographic evidence to question the existing practice in settings. Analyses of the questionnaires undertaken to identify emerging themes occurring were completed.
2. Non participant observations of a sample of cluster groups took place.
3. Semi structured interviews with a representation of private, voluntary and maintained practitioners, including head teachers and managers across the geographical area of Cycle 1 occurred.
4. Focus group interviews, with a 30% sample of cluster groups were undertaken.

Cycle 2

5. Cluster groups introduced into the new authority, identification of change agents took place.
6. Professional discussion with mentors/change agents and written data.
7. Semi-structured interview with children, head teachers and managers.

Cycle 3

8. Questionnaires were sent to maintained practitioners in Cycle 2 and a representational sample from Cycle 1 to establish the impact on children's learning and development through the interventions employed.
9. Telephone interviews were conducted with participants from Cycle 1 to establish institutionalisation of changes to practice.
10. Final assessment of barriers and benefits to partnership working and impact for children on transition into school.

3.3.3 Questionnaires

The questionnaire is a widely used and useful instrument for collecting survey information, providing structured, often numerical data and being comparatively straightforward to analyse descriptively (Wilson and McLean, 1994). However in selecting this method I had to be equally aware of the difficulties including the time to refine and develop the questionnaire and the possibility of limited response, although Wilson and McLean (1994) believed this could equally be an attraction of this method. Coding questionnaires and guaranteeing anonymity also contributed to the confidence and readiness to respond which the number of returned questionnaires revealed. This numerical data was to be a visual image of findings, to reflect upon and plan the next steps of the action.

However, lack of participation can threaten the reliability of questionnaire findings. Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford (cited in MacNaughton et al. 2001) view this lack of participation as having serious implications for reliability. Participants view the completion of a questionnaire with varying degrees of enthusiasm, due to the time it may take the respondent to complete the form and the sensitivity required when answering particular questions. I included the estimated completion time on the front of the questionnaire. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) state

the questionnaire will always be an intrusion into the life of the respondent be it in terms of time taken to complete the questionnaire, the level of threat or sensitivity of the questions, or the possible invasion of privacy (p.245).

Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj -Blatchford (cited in MacNaughton 2001) take this further by saying people may choose not to complete a questionnaire based on the subject matter, so practitioners choosing not to complete the form can introduce bias. The design of the questionnaire is important so that participants can say what they want to “rather than promoting the researcher’s agenda” (Cohen et al, 2000, p.246). Morrison (1996) highlighted that methodical rigor is an ethical, not simply a technical matter.

A postal questionnaire allowed me to target a wide variety of settings and to obtain a large sample to obtain baseline information. Cohen et al, (2000) state that “*the postal questionnaire is the best form of survey in an educational inquiry*” (p.262). This was

the beginning of a self reflection process for the practitioners. Murray and Lawrence (2000, p.140) state that in terms of sampling, the larger the sample the better, as this minimizes the 'sampling error'. My questionnaire was sent to all settings in the local authority, 600 settings in the private and voluntary sector, 516 schools in the maintained sector and approximately 60 child minders working within child minding networks.

The questionnaire was primarily qualitative although it included some quantitative items to ascertain, for example, the percentage of practitioners who were not accessing cluster groups (appendix 2). The emphasis of the questionnaire was to explore what was happening and why by identifying specific issues. I devised this questionnaire to send to each setting in the county to provide feedback on the cluster groups. The questionnaires were colour-coded which enabled me to identify the different sectors, and access information about issues such as particular sectors not attending cluster groups and where this related to timing, venue, lack of transport and other issues that might apply to the practitioner. Information gathered through the questionnaires was then shared at the focus/cluster groups, reflected on and instituted as a basis for future planning.

The questionnaire also included self-evaluation in terms of knowledge, skills, understanding and confidence that the practitioners felt they had gained from attending the cluster groups, particularly focused training sessions. Links with feeder settings and how transfer was facilitated were included as well as questions relating to perceived impact on outcomes for children. The questionnaire allowed me to measure impact in terms of:

- The progress practitioners had made in their own learning.
- The perceived impact for children particularly relating to their personal, social and emotional development
- Different systems used by practitioners in relation to transition.
- How well children settled into feeder settings.

The distribution of the questionnaires can be classed as 'warm' as many recipients knew me on a personal level through training, conferences and visits to individual

settings. Also, my research question was shared with practitioners at a recent AGM for the Pre-school Learning Alliance. Response rates were good (40.76%).

3.3.4 Interviews

Interviews represent possibly the most respectable data-gathering technique in qualitative approaches to social and educational research (Murray and Lawrence, 2000 p.117).

Interviews allowed me to explore the research issues in more depth and gave me an opportunity to explain the research and the rationale behind the questions in a face-to-face situation.

Interviews can be an important control on reliability when data gathered via other means, but from the same universe of content, is compared with the interview responses (Murray and Lawrence, 2000, p.119).

Patten (1980) claims interviews are the best way “to find out what is on someone else’s mind” (p.196) and this was exactly the information that I wanted to gather from the participants. Interviewing may be directed, informal, semi-structured, and reciprocal in question and answer or interrogative. It was important as a researcher that I knew and understood the implications of these variations in interview techniques. I used two different types of techniques: focus groups and face to face interviews. The focus group interviews were undertaken at the cluster meetings where I had collective representation from all the different sectors. The interviewing technique was semi-structured; it encouraged dialogue and challenges to positions raised, which resulted in some shifting of ground. I listened to these discussions and made my own notes, coding them to analyse after the sessions.

The face to face interviews involved me challenging, questioning, and asking penetrating questions to move practitioner’s thinking forward. As part of this investigation I used interviews to establish issues relevant to the discussion. Kvale (1996) considers the use of interviews during research as a move away from seeing human subjects as simply malleable and data as somehow external to individuals. Instead a move towards regarding knowledge as generated between humans, often through conversation. Interviews are a snapshot of what the interviewee is thinking at the time rather than a capture of unchallengeable information.

I interviewed individuals from a range of sectors including head teachers, teachers, cluster mentors, day nursery practitioners, pre-school practitioners and child minders. This was on a semi-structured, open-ended interview basis, where I brought out the participant's subjective point of view relating to working in partnership with practitioners from other sectors. Transition between the settings was also explored as part of the individual interviews. During these interviews I used open-ended questions as this gave me a varied and in-depth response from the participants. Often the conversation deviated, which gave me rich data in terms of understanding the issues in a deeper manner. However, I used a standard interview schedule, (Appendix 3) and returned to this to keep the interview on track. The same open-ended questions were asked at each interview. I encouraged the participants to develop their answers in some detail and clarified points as necessary, as previously stated. I also questioned and challenged to acquire a full picture of their thoughts and understanding of the subject matter.

The face to face interviews were in contrast to the questionnaires which included mostly closed questions. By using open questions I was provided with more qualitative information, as my respondents were able to express their feelings in their own words. These interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Unlike a psychologist, who is not primarily interested in the words spoken (Argyle cited in Mactintyre, 2000), I am investigating what respondents said and what they meant. Therefore, when transcribing the interviews I focused on what the practitioners were saying. Argyle suggests the transcripts will look like a play or a drama script. I asked the questions and waited to see how the practitioners responded to them. I expanded the question when I wanted the practitioners to talk in more depth about a subject. For example when a teacher said she learnt a great deal from the pre-school, I wanted clarification of the exact practice or activities that she felt she had learnt from them. The transcripts detailed the practitioner talking and where I was speaking, which supported the analysis of the interview data.

Macintyre (2000) says that recording is a good way to reduce bias. I found the advantage of using audio tapes at interview was to provide an accurate record that I could replay as often as I needed to, the data can speak clearly for itself.

The interviews took place with no-one else present and always in a quiet environment. Using a semi-structured interview technique, I was able to follow up lines of questioning which were appropriate for some but not all the participants. For example, when interviewing head teachers I was particularly looking for evidence at a strategic level which was not so appropriate to other practitioners such as the child minders. This approach allowed me to develop the questions, change the order in which they were asked, adding additional wording or explaining in more detail which was occasionally required. Morrison (1993) describes this method as the interview guide approach. The topics and issues are specified but the interviewer decides the sequence and working of questions in the course of the interview. This method is conversational and increases the comprehensiveness of the data and makes the data collection systematic. However Morrison (1993) states that important topics may be inadvertently missed and the interviewer's flexibility in the wording of questions can result in different responses.

I ensured that the language and wording in the interview schedule was appropriate to the participant. As they had all been involved in the action research from the beginning, I was confident that the language itself was not a barrier to gathering the information. Reliability was also an issue to be aware of when undertaking the research. So was ensuring the interview was carried out sensitively and in an appropriate atmosphere. This is highlighted by Mac Naughton et al (2001) and by Kvale (1996) who states: "*As the researcher is the research instrument, the effective interviewer is not only knowledgeable about the subject matter but is also an expert in interaction and communication*" (p.147). All the recipients were agreeable to being recorded. After transcribing, I asked the respondent to read and agree the transcript as being accurate so as to acquire respondent validation.

Of equal importance are clarifying the purpose of the interview and the process of conducting the interview. Therefore I thought carefully about the location and timing of the interviews. I contacted the interviewees to explain the rationale for asking for the interview. Nobody declined the invitation. I ensured I put the interviewee at ease and that they were aware of issues such as confidentiality. When asking the questions I was aware of not asking a leading question, and if a practitioner appeared threatened by a question I moved on to another one. An example of this was when I was

interviewing a child minder and was delving into why she thought the reception teacher did not value her as a professional. The subject's body language conveyed anxiety and so I curtailed questioning. There are occasions when ethical issues have to be considered: "*An interview is an intensely personal and ethically problematic encounter*" (Murray and Lawrence, 2000, p.121).

The interpersonal dynamics of every interactive situation will be unique. Because of this and the varying personal skills of the interviewer there are possibilities that the data may be devalued. It is suggested it is possible for the interview technique to be open to manipulation and distortion as it does rely on the personal skills and judgments of the interviewer (Blenkin and Kelly 1997). I did find the interviewees from the private and voluntary sector needed more coaxing at times to expand on answers whilst the teachers and head teachers were more inclined to deviate from the main questions.

3.3.5 Focus groups

Focus groups are a form of structured group interview; I was using focus groups to facilitate communication between the participants in order to generate data. The same set of questions, the same introduction and structure of the group meetings allowed me to compare like with like. Rather than me posing a question to each individual in turn, part of the rationale for using focus groups was the group interaction process: the practitioners talking to one another, asking questions, exchanging anecdotes and making comments on practitioners' experiences and points of view. Therefore, the focus group was more than what practitioners were thinking; it allowed me to find out how they were thinking and why they were thinking in relation to the research question.

The focus groups were a tool for practitioners to explore and clarify their thoughts and views. Through using a small series of open-ended questions, I wanted the practitioners to explore the issues of partnership working and transition practices, using their own vocabulary, developing further questions and reflecting on their own priorities. I was intending to work as researcher alongside the participants where the research may have been taken in new directions. Group work, such as focus groups, allows for different forms of communication such as joking, anecdotes and arguing

and will yield richer data as knowledge and attitudes can not be completely gathered from a well thought out response to direct question. It is also through this interpersonal communication that group norms can be observed. Focus groups are a good method where cognitions and attitudes are concerned and allowing the researcher to get closer to the participants understanding of a subject (Einarsdottir, 2003).

Focus groups were chosen as part of my action research as they empower the research participants; the practitioners were to become part of the analysis of the data. I employed a sampling model where I used 30% of the cluster groups as focus groups; which reflected a range of the total study population. I used open-ended questions that small groups debated and recorded the key points on a flip chart. The small groups came together to share their findings which resulted in a discussion and recording of results for each question debated.

3.3.6 Vignette of practice for discussion

I used individual vignettes of practice implemented by individual practitioners alongside other research methods to show examples of practice. For example, a reception teacher undertook staff swaps between her teaching assistant and nursery nurse from the day nursery on site. Through sharing this practice, other settings decided to implement this in their own settings. These concrete examples were discussed and analysed in terms of impact in one setting, and judged whether this was transferable to other settings. The difference between good ideas and good practice and how practitioners and professionals define this was a focus for the cluster groups and is discussed later. *“Cases that are selected as exemplary have the potential to tell us more about a wider population than might be gleaned in a survey”* (Edwards, 2001 p.127).

The purpose of sharing these vignettes was to compare and identify common themes and solutions to problems across the settings. These were used to follow up other research methods and to add to the developing themes that had already begun to emerge. By identifying the unique features and common themes across the settings, these examples of practice functioned as tools to illustrate practice that individual practitioners believed worked well in their settings and how it was achieved.

Whilst my questionnaires “*with its statistical sampling will provide a robust empirical generalisation, the case study will provide rich descriptions of individual cases*” (Aubrey, David, Godfrey and Thompson 2000 p.39).

One concern that has been identified in using exemplars is generalising from the case to the wider population (Mac Naughton et al. 2001). It is important to allow for different cultures and contexts. By providing individual case studies for discussion, the practitioners will decide if they are exemplary and if they will be able to transfer to their own particular settings the information, ideas and practical strategies. Bassey (1981) suggests an important criterion of judging how successful a case study will be is for the practitioners who are working in a similar context to relate their decision making to that described in the case study. The validity of the case study is seen as being more important than its generalisability.

3.3.7 Research journal

Journals are closely aligned with three fundamental paradigms in education; the process, the learner and reflection according to Cole, Raffier, Rogan and Schleicher (1998). The journal was a tool for me to make a link between the issues identified, to explore and generate new ideas and to discover meaning during the research process. The journal supported me as a learner and was an aid for reflection. Reflection “*is comprised of identifying questions and key elements of a matter that has emerged as significant, then taking one’s thoughts into dialogue with oneself and with others*” (Jay and Johnson, 2002, p.76). Writing in the journal gave me an insight into patterns of behaviours of the participants of the action research and an opportunity to revisit my thinking at different stages of the research journey. I defined my reflective writing as ‘dialogic reflection’ as the journal reflected a dialogue that I undertook with myself and shows evidence of exploring possible reasons for evolving data.

I shared extracts of my diary with professional colleagues, usually the change agents, who were able to act as a critical friend; these extracts were often the catalyst for the professional discussions that took place. My reflective journal writing links to what Schon (1987) called ‘reflection-on-action’ where I reflected on and contemplated the underlying, implied understandings and assumptions from the research and further

analysed them to gain a deeper understanding of the data emerging. I reflected on what I had learnt from the different aspects of the research, the problems encountered, the possible causes and how they were solved. The journal was a framework for formulating questions, an opportunity to express my own thoughts as well as a tool for understanding others thoughts.

3.3.8 Analysis methods

I coded and analysed data continuously for the emerging themes, checking with the practitioners who provided the data if interpretations I had made were reflective of what they said. When working with the focus groups, there was an opportunity to ask the same questions over time facilitated by a change agent. As I recorded the data I clarified and analysed practitioners' responses. I revisited the groups later to clarify if what we had agreed was still the case. Key themes emerged from the questionnaires, interviews and focus groups. Keeping a completed detailed record, field notes, audio recordings, and photographs supported the accuracy and validity of the data.

Open coding is the first step of grounded theory, drawing theory from the data itself. *“Qualitative data gathering has the potential to generate organisation-situated explanatory theory”* (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p.30). My interpretative methods were based on theme analysis, arising from interviews and determining the tacit and explicit knowledge common across the sectors (Reason and Bradbury, 2006). Explanations are 'grounded' in that they emerge inductively from data actually produced by the membership of the group, which in my case were the Foundation Stage practitioners. Accumulation of data to produce 'grounded theory' is described as *“the constant comparative method of qualitative analysis”* (Murray and Lawrence, 2000, p.16). Thomas and James (2006) suggest the grounded theory procedures provide signposts for those undertaking qualitative research but it can also be constraining and therefore should be flexible.

The collective responses from the diverse backgrounds of the sectors provided valuable insights into practitioners' feelings, for example about barriers to partnership working and transition activities. The data from the focus groups was coded in the same way as the questionnaires and interviews and analysed by aggregating recurring themes. Thus a range of methods were employed to support this cycle of

collaborative, change orientated action research. I was sensitive to the variants that can have a negative outcome on the research process, which helped to ensure validity (MacNaughton et al, 2001). This methodology was to be an effective tool for understanding and improving partnership practice in the early years settings across two authorities.

Chapter 4

Cycle 1

4.1 Reconnaissance stage

The first part of this chapter explains how my research was initiated through discussions with the practitioners and how the initial reconnaissance phase and fact finding shaped the action research. My starting point for this study was my interest in the links between private and voluntary settings working with their local schools. My professional links with practitioners from both the maintained and private and voluntary sectors suggested, through informal discussions, that they wanted to develop links but were not sure how to develop a partnership.

I would like to meet up to make sure assessments are the same, so that records can be passed on and continued to be used (Reception Teacher).

We would like closer links with our feeder schools (Pre-school practitioner).

Time is difficult to find, links are poor (Reception Teacher).

We would like closer links with settings we feed into to ease transitions. We would welcome visits from local schools (Day nursery practitioner).

A contact list for feeder schools in the area would be good (Private day nursery).

I observed through my professional role, that some individual schools and settings had a variety of systems for sharing information and practice. A few settings had transition activities in place and where there was evidence of effective links between pre-school settings and reception classes this seemed to help smooth transition for these children. I wished therefore to examine the potential of enhanced partnership activities. I had identified pockets of good practice based on individuals' good will and enthusiasm but a strategic policy was lacking to develop this area of work.

Our links are good because of personal contacts, but it would be good to have more time to visit (Reception Teacher).

I am hoping to develop links with one of the feeder settings in the near future

(Reception Teacher).

Fifty cluster groups were established around the county so practitioners from all sectors were able to attend a local forum; the rationale for setting them up was to develop relationships and partnership working across the sector, share information and good practice. I viewed these forums as a catalyst for change where the difference between good ideas and good practice was to be defined, with transferable good practice being the intention. Cluster groups allow practitioners to have access to training opportunities from a variety of agencies which would facilitate wider partnership working. Health, social care, special educational needs, psychology team and the child protection team offered training.

It would benefit the groups to have closer links with local health visitors (Pre-school practitioner).

Once the cluster groups were established and had been in place for a short period of time, I devised a questionnaire to be sent to all practitioners to identify a baseline of current practice, level of attendance and to ascertain if the cluster groups in their infancy were impacting on practitioners. I sent out 1176 questionnaires to pre-school practitioners, day nursery practitioners, child minders receiving NEG (Nursery Education Grant) and reception teachers. The response rate was 40.76% (472 returned questionnaires).

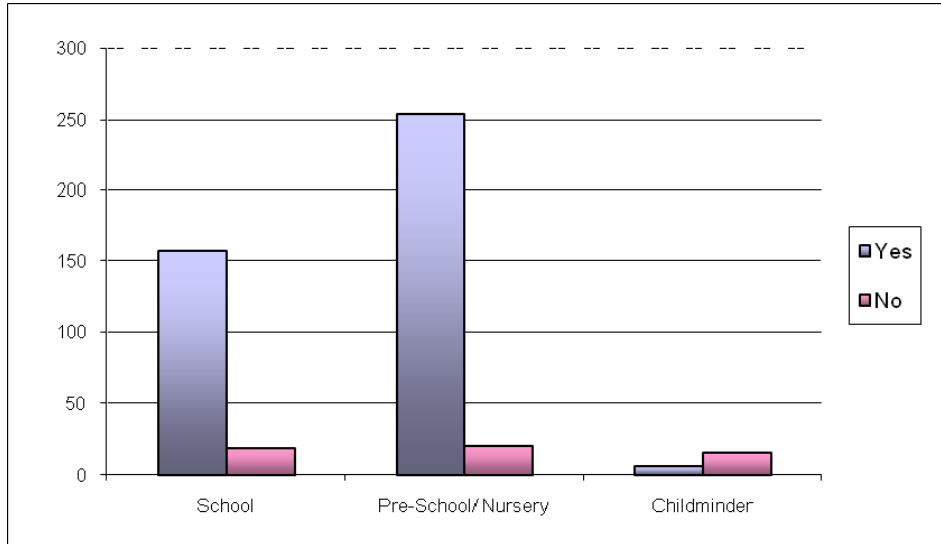
The questionnaires were based around 10 questions. The first questions and resulting graphs relate to which sectors access the cluster groups and how often (graphs 1 and 2). Graphs 3 -7 identify the barriers practitioners indicated on the questionnaire were the reason for non-attendance at the cluster groups. Graph 8 shows the preferred timing of cluster groups by the different sectors. Findings from the questionnaires were shared with cluster mentors as an aid for development.

Q1. Do you know that a cluster group is held in your area on a half-termly basis?

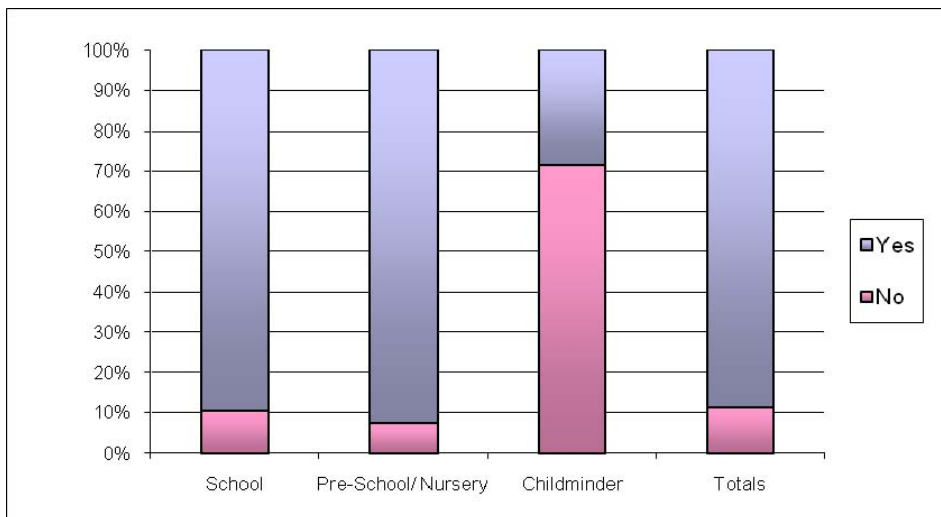
	School		Pre-School/ Day Nursery		Childminder		Totals	
Yes	157	90%	254	93%	6	29%	417	89%
No	18	10%	20	7%	15	71%	53	11%
Totals	175	100%	274	100%	21	100%	470	100%

Graph 1

Comparison of the number of responses for each category



Percentage of responses for each category

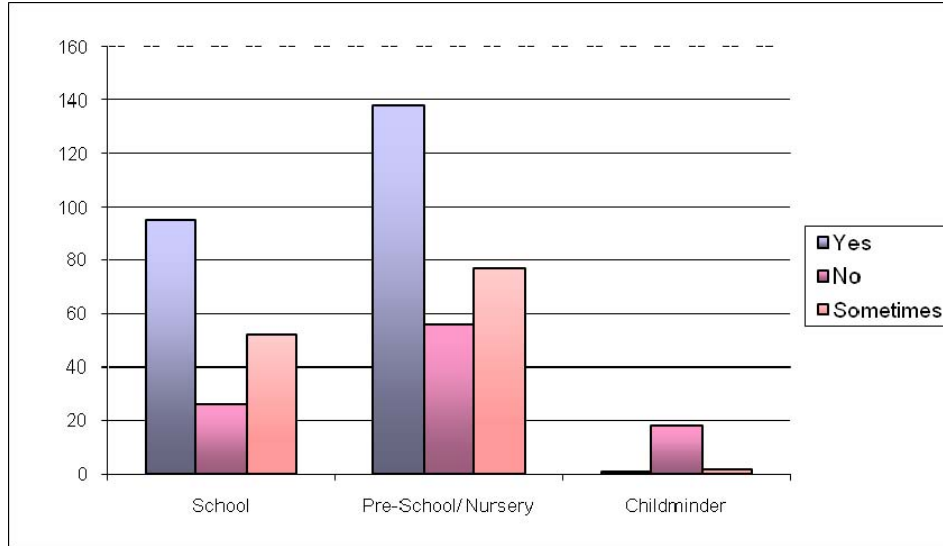


Q2. Do you attend your local cluster group?

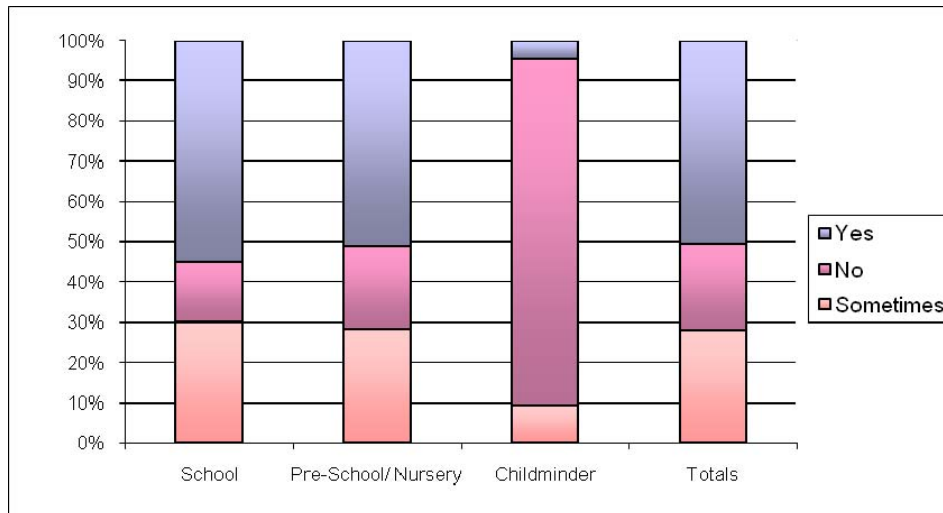
	School		Pre-School/ Nursery		Childminder		Totals	
Yes	95	55%	138	51%	1	5%	234	50%
No	26	15%	56	21%	18	86%	100	22%
Sometimes	52	30%	77	28%	2	10%	131	28%
Totals	173	100%	271	100%	21	100%	465	100%

Graph 2

Comparison of the number of responses for each category



Percentage of responses for each category

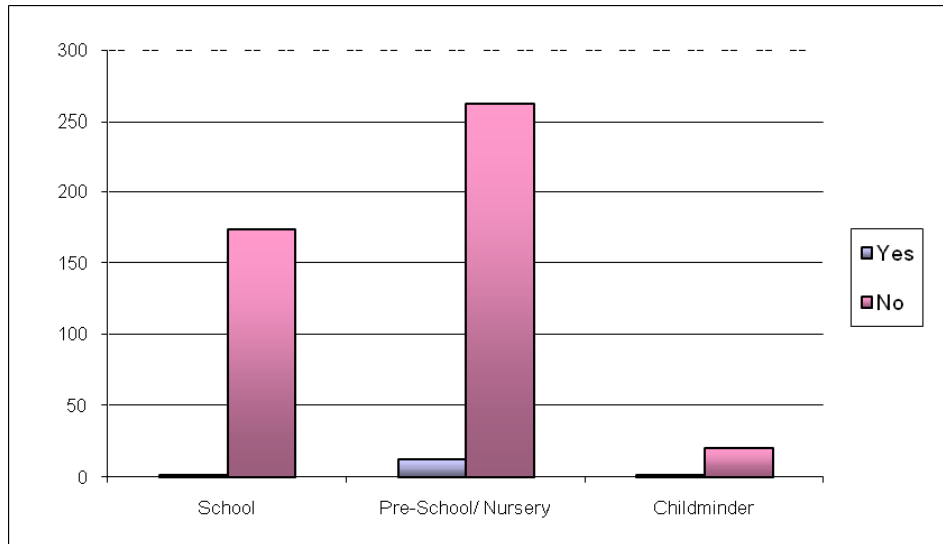


Q3.1 Is venue a barrier to you attending local training?

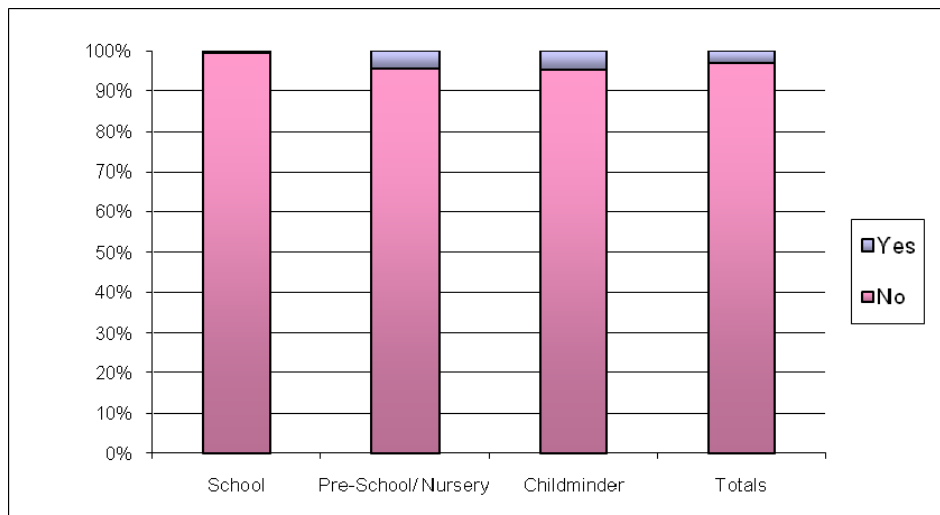
	School		Pre-School/ Nursery		Childminder		Totals	
Yes	1	1%	12	4%	1	5%	14	3%
No	174	99%	262	96%	20	95%	456	97%
Totals	175	100%	274	100%	21	100%	470	100%

Graph 3

Comparison of the number of responses for each category



Percentage of responses for each category

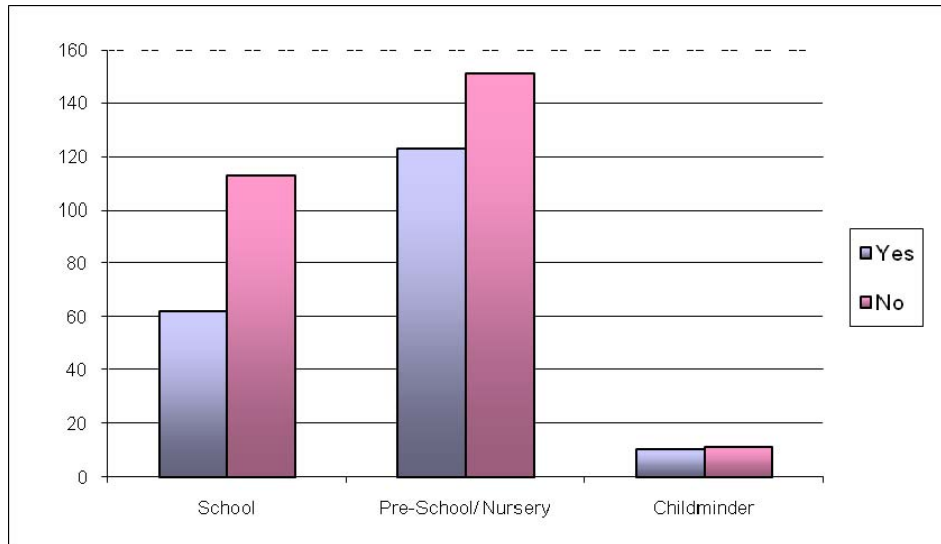


Q3.2 Is timing a barrier to you attending your local cluster group?

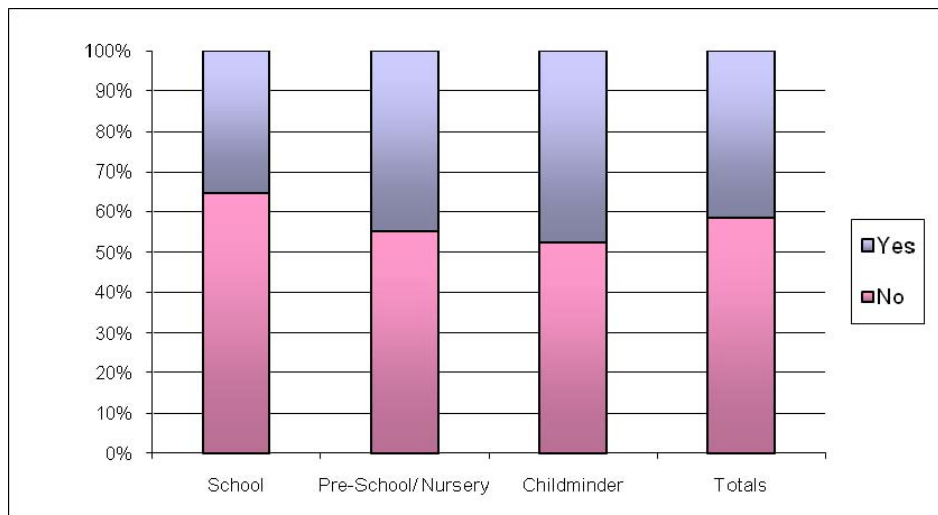
	School		Pre-School/ Nursery		Childminder		Totals	
Yes	62	35%	123	45%	10	48%	195	41%
No	113	65%	151	55%	11	52%	275	59%
Totals	175	100%	274	100%	21	100%	470	100%

Graph 4

Comparison of the number of responses for each category



Percentage of responses for each category

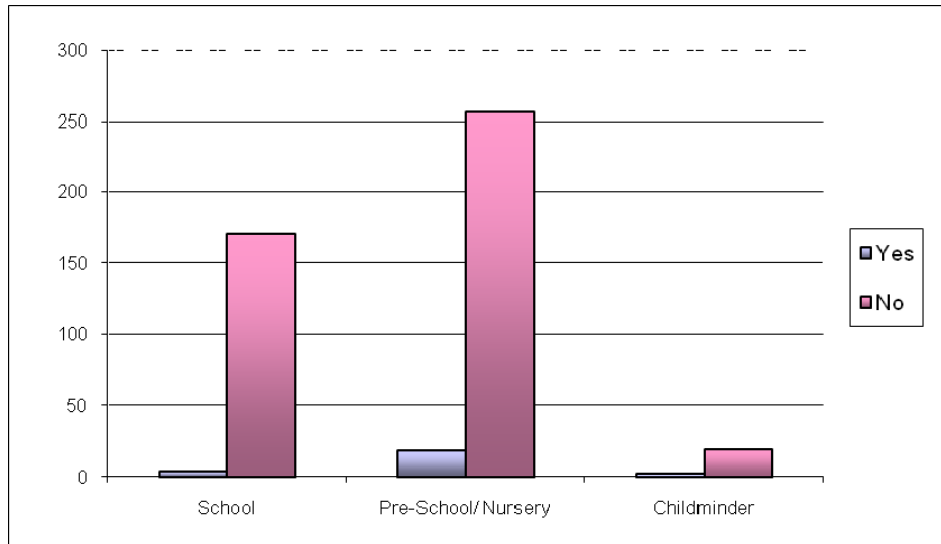


Q3.3 Is lack of transport a barrier to you attending your local cluster group?

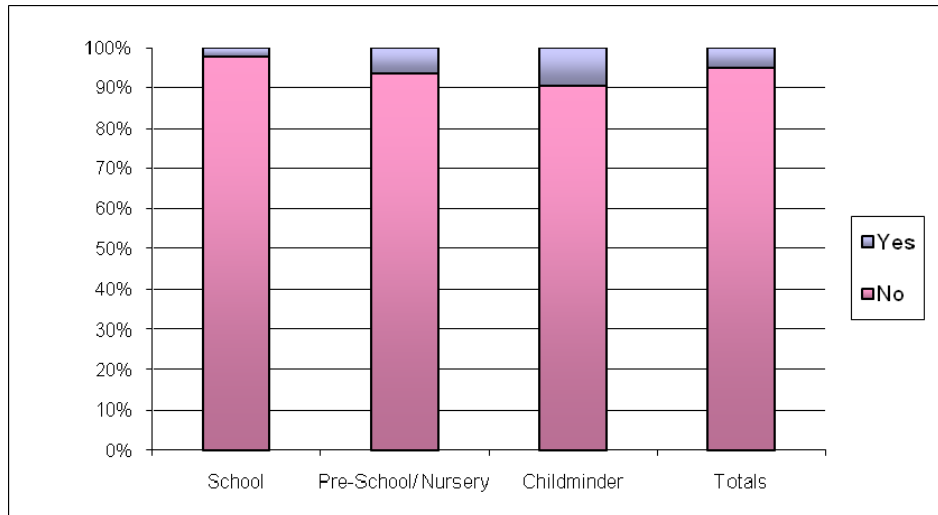
	School		Pre-School/ Nursery		Childminder		Totals	
Yes	4	2%	18	7%	2	10%	24	5%
No	171	98%	256	93%	19	90%	446	95%
Totals	175	100%	274	100%	21	100%	470	100%

Graph 5

Comparison of the number of responses for each category



Percentage of responses for each category

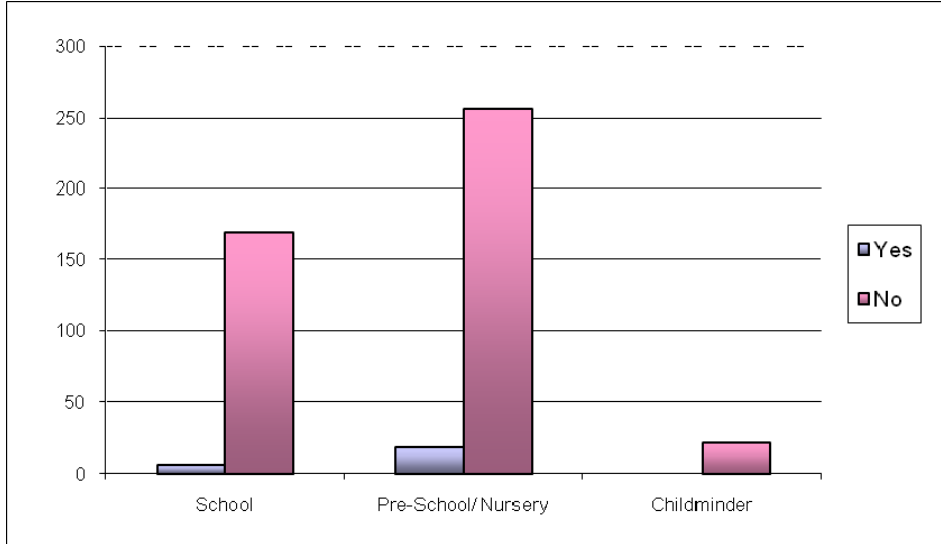


Q3.4 Is distance a barrier to you attending your local cluster group?

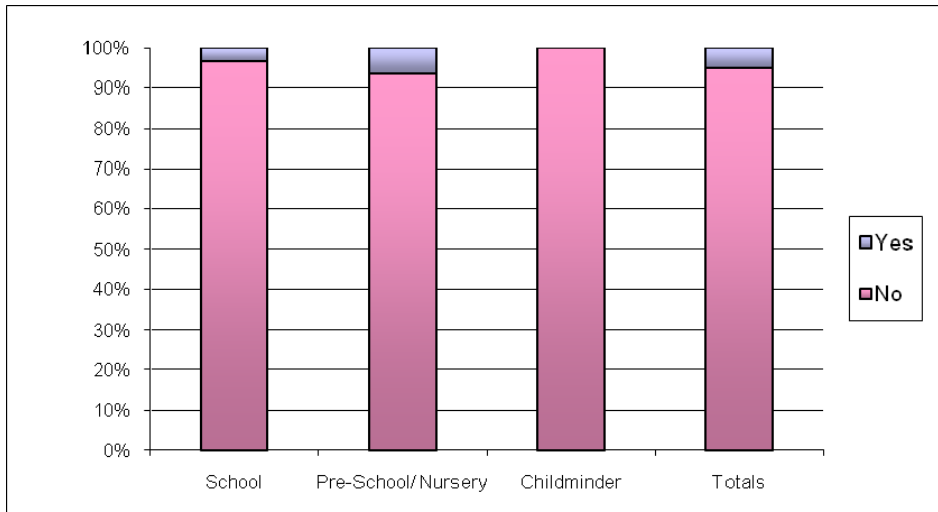
	School		Pre-School/ Nursery		Childminder		Totals	
Yes	6	3%	18	7%	0	0%	24	5%
No	169	97%	256	93%	21	100%	446	95%
Totals	175	100%	274	100%	21	100%	470	100%

Graph 6

Comparison of the number of responses for each category



Percentage of responses for each category

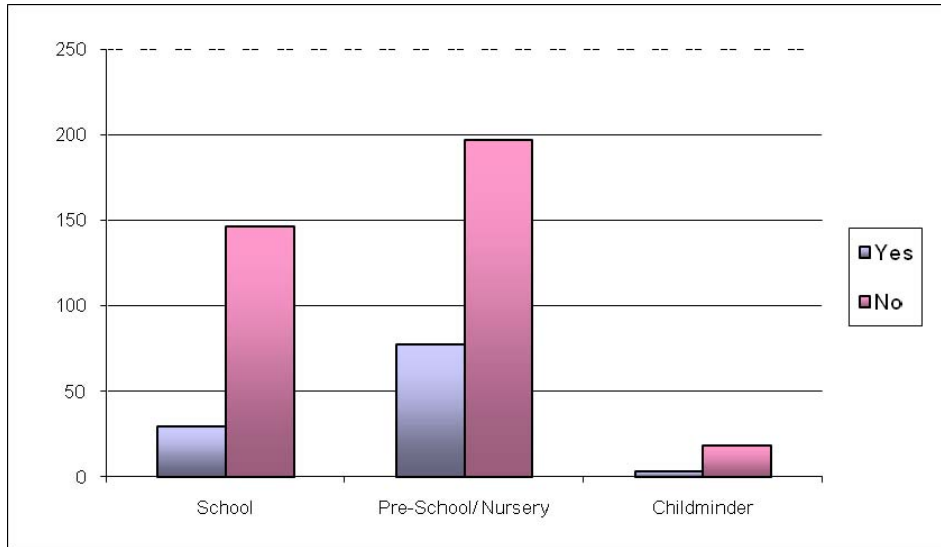


Q3.5 Are family commitments a barrier to you attending a local cluster group?

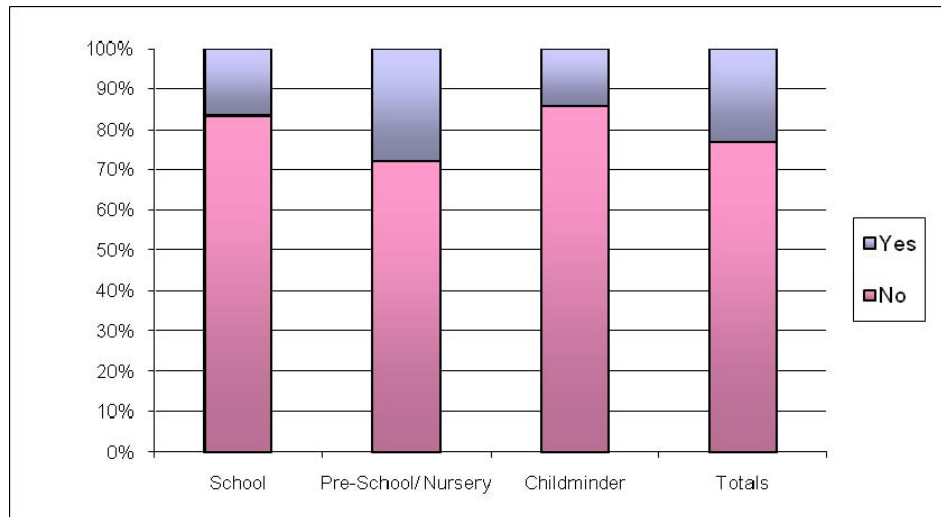
	School		Pre-School/ Nursery		Childminder		Totals	
Yes	29	17%	77	28%	3	14%	109	23%
No	146	83%	197	72%	18	86%	361	77%
Totals	175	100%	274	100%	21	100%	470	100%

Graph 7

Comparison of the number of responses for each category



Percentage of responses for each category

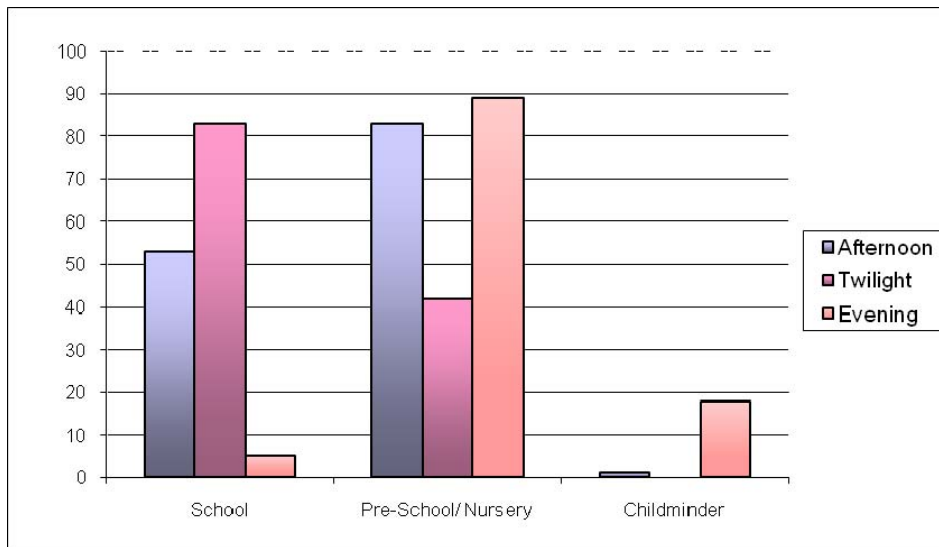


Q4. What would be the most suitable time for you to attend the cluster group?

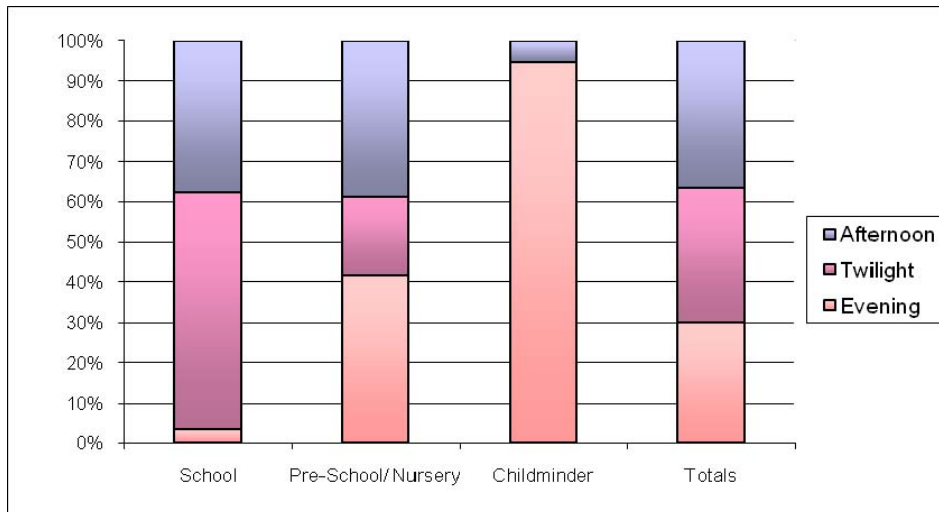
	School		Pre-School/ Nursery		Childminder		Totals	
Afternoon	53	38%	83	39%	1	5%	137	37%
Twilight	83	59%	42	20%	0	0%	125	33%
Evening	5	4%	89	42%	18	95%	112	30%
Totals	141	100%	214	100%	19	100%	374	100%

Graph 8

Comparison of the number of responses for each category



Percentage of responses for each category



This initial data 419 (88.8%) of returns indicated that most practitioners were aware of cluster groups with varied attendance, as indicated by the graphs (graph 1 p.85) and (graph 2 p.86). A few respondents indicated that they were not aware of these forums. *“I would like to be part of one please send dates and information”* (Reception Teacher) and *“have just started in a new school, but looking forward to meeting all in new cluster group”* (Reception Teacher).

The setting up of the cluster groups was to be the catalyst for the change process to be initiated and the innovation to be shared, implemented and to become institutionalised. Therefore attendance at cluster groups and the partnership working evolving needed to be sustained to promote interchange of information and ideas. Identifying barriers to attending the cluster groups was essential as a total of 100 practitioners from the different sectors were not attending the forums. The venue, lack of transport and distance to the cluster group were minor barriers and mainly affected the private and voluntary sector. The main barriers emerging were timing of the cluster groups (graph 4, p.88), family commitments and childcare (graph 7, p.91). All barriers were more of an issue for practitioners from the private and voluntary sector. Practitioners from the maintained sector preferred a twilight session, the private and voluntary sector identified a preferred evening session (Graph 8, p.92). Comments written on the questionnaire indicate an interest and willingness to attend, but drew my attention to preferring a range of timings. *“Please vary times cluster groups are offered”* (Pre-school practitioner). *“Evenings are better for us; this allows more than one person from the setting to attend”* (Pre-school practitioner).

The information below is divided under the different sector headings and illustrates the additional comments that were written on the questionnaires by individual practitioners. These comments related to other barriers to attendance mainly linked to staff cover and work commitments. Workload, school commitments and supply cover for teachers appeared several times.

Comments from teachers from the maintained sector

- a) Workload - time.
- b) Workload.
- c) Commitments of other school meetings.
- d) Clash with staff meetings.
- e) Sometimes school commitments.
- f) Work Commitments.
- g) School meetings arranged at short notice on the same date.
- h) Clash with meetings etc.
- i) Availability of cover for class.
- j) Pressure of work.
- k) Cover for my class unavailable at times.
- l) Clashes with existing school meetings/training sessions.
- m) Cover for class in school.
- n) Other meetings/courses/work commitments.
- o) Having supply cover if PM.
- p) Supply/staff cover.
- q) Funding to release Foundation Stage teacher.
- r) Clashes with other meetings and commitments.
- s) If PM then no cover for school, if evening family commitments.
- t) Too many work related commitments, curriculum development, planning, reports, etc.
- u) School commitments, e.g. staff meetings, after school clubs, courses
- v) Events at school, staff meetings.
- w) Already working very excessive hours.

Comments from private and voluntary practitioners

Preschools

- a) Cover.
- b) Time taken with dealing with day-to-day affairs of the group.
- c) Arranging cover.
- d) Sometimes staff cover.
- e) Dependent on staffing within nursery to release somebody.
- f) Work commitments.
- g) Generally difficult to squeeze in between other work commitments.

Day nurseries

- a) Affording staff cover to make replacements.
- b) Staffing levels.
- c) Staff ratios, other commitments.
- d) Work commitments.
- e) Work commitments.
- f) Staffing and cover levels because we are open 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.
- g) Administration pressures.
- h) Staff Ratios. (e.g. staff illness).
- i) Staffing as we close at 5.45 p.m.
- j) Lack of available staff.

However there were also positive comments in relation to overcoming these barriers.

I make time/arrangements to ensure I can attend (Reception Teacher).

We attend as many as possible (Preschool practitioner).

Work commitments but these can be accommodated (Reception Teacher).

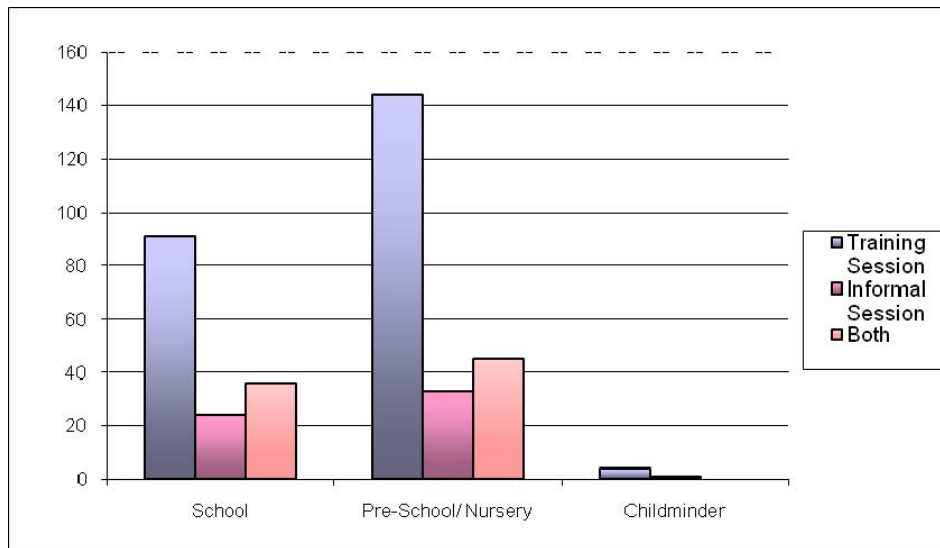
Cover when the meeting is during the day. Although it is difficult my head teacher supports the group and will release me (Reception Teacher).

Q5. What have you found to be the most beneficial, an informal cluster meeting or a cluster meeting with a training focus?

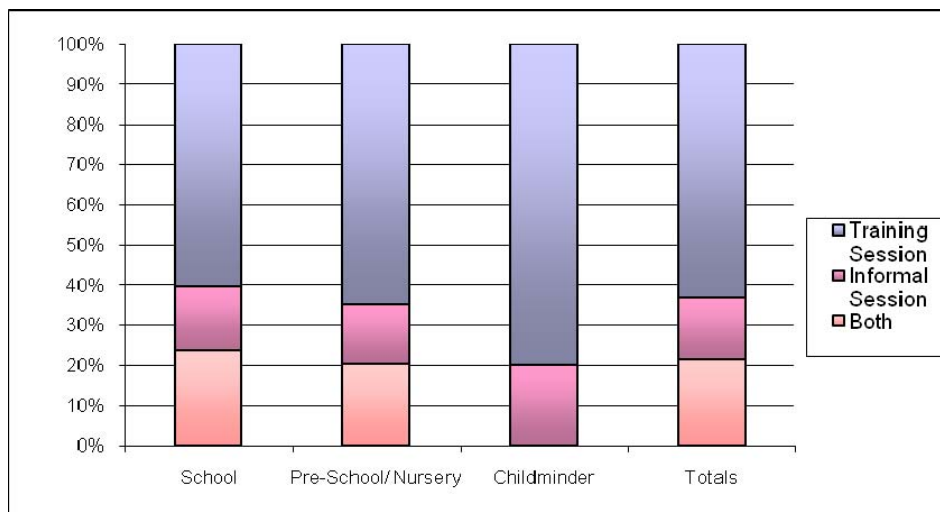
	School		Pre-School/ Nursery		Childminder		Totals	
Training Session	91	60%	144	65%	4	80%	239	63%
Informal Session	24	16%	33	15%	1	20%	58	15%
Both	36	24%	45	20%	0	0%	81	21%
Totals	151	100%	222	100%	5	100%	378	100%

Graph 9

Comparison of the number of responses for each category



Percentage of responses for each category

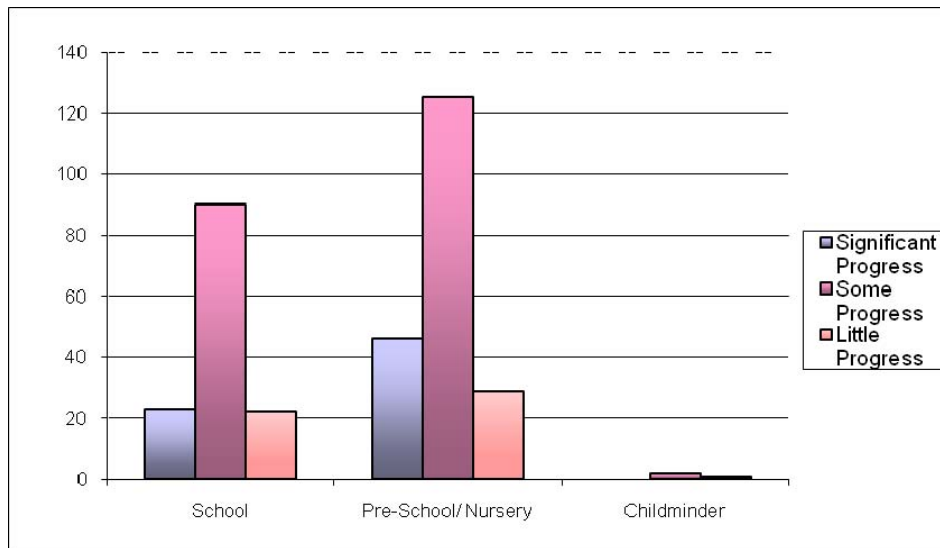


Q6.1 What progress in your own KNOWLEDGE have you made by attending cluster groups?

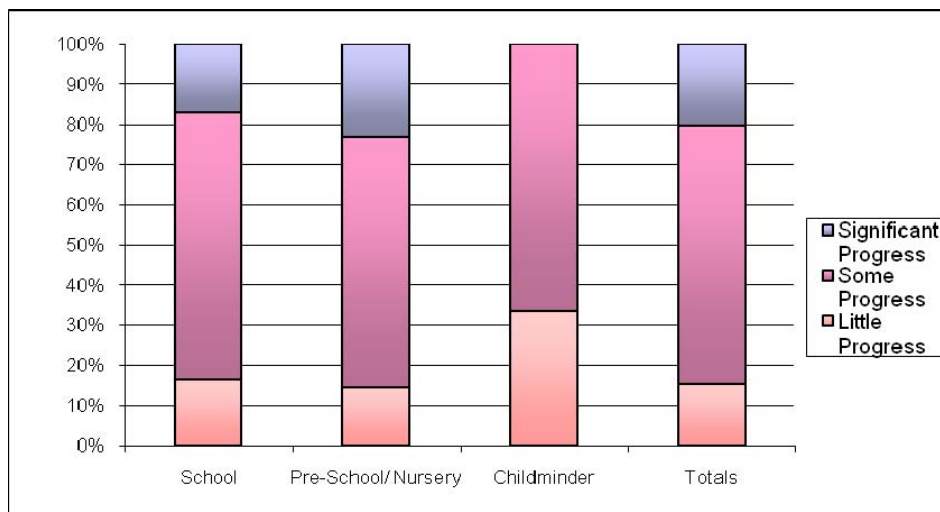
	School		Pre-School/ Nursery		Childminder		Totals	
Significant Progress	23	17%	46	23%	0	0%	69	20%
Some Progress	90	67%	125	63%	2	67%	217	64%
Little Progress	22	16%	29	15%	1	33%	52	15%
Totals	135	100%	200	100%	3	100%	338	100%

Graph 10

Comparison of the number of responses for each category



Percentage of responses for each category

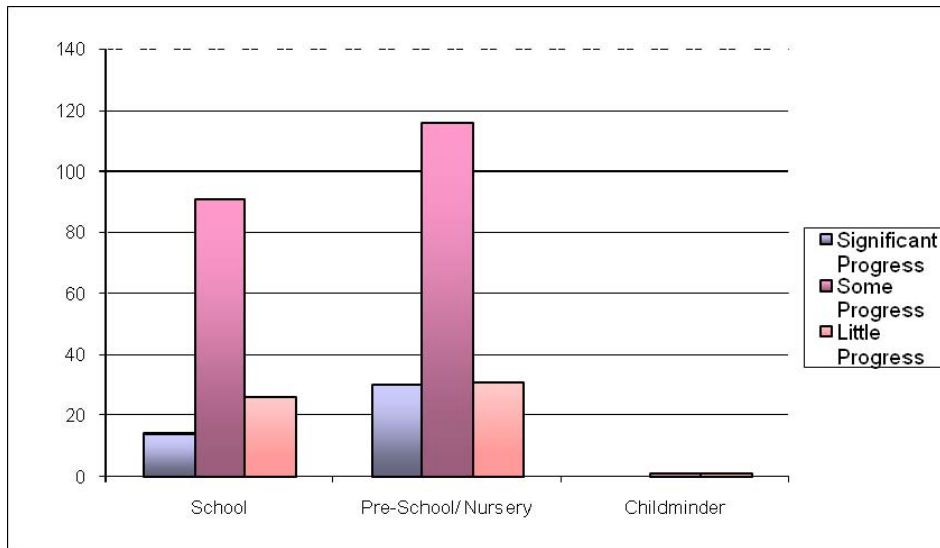


Q6.2 What progress in your own SKILLS have you made by attending cluster groups?

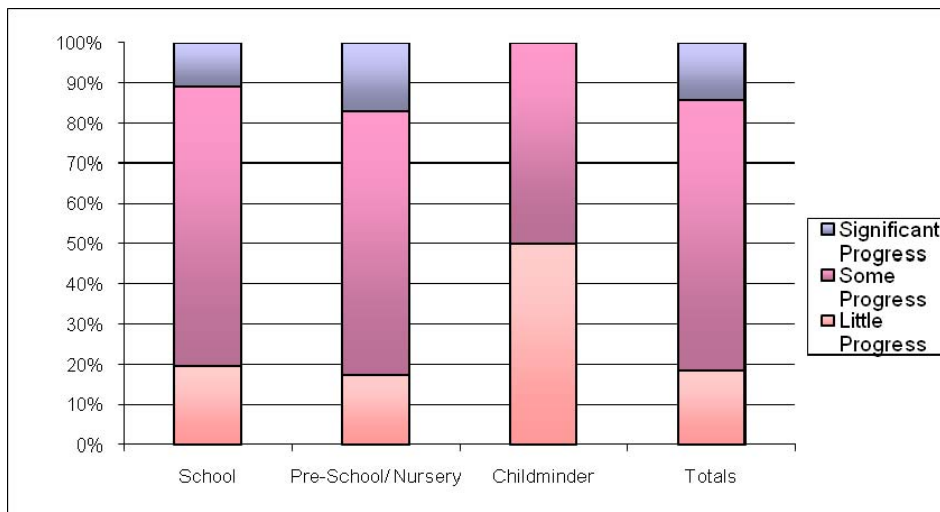
	School		Pre-School/ Nursery		Childminder		Totals	
Significant Progress	14	11%	30	17%	0	0%	44	14%
Some Progress	91	69%	116	66%	1	50%	208	67%
Little Progress	26	20%	31	18%	1	50%	58	19%
Totals	131	100%	177	100%	2	100%	310	100%

Graph 11

Comparison of the number of responses for each category



Percentage of responses for each category

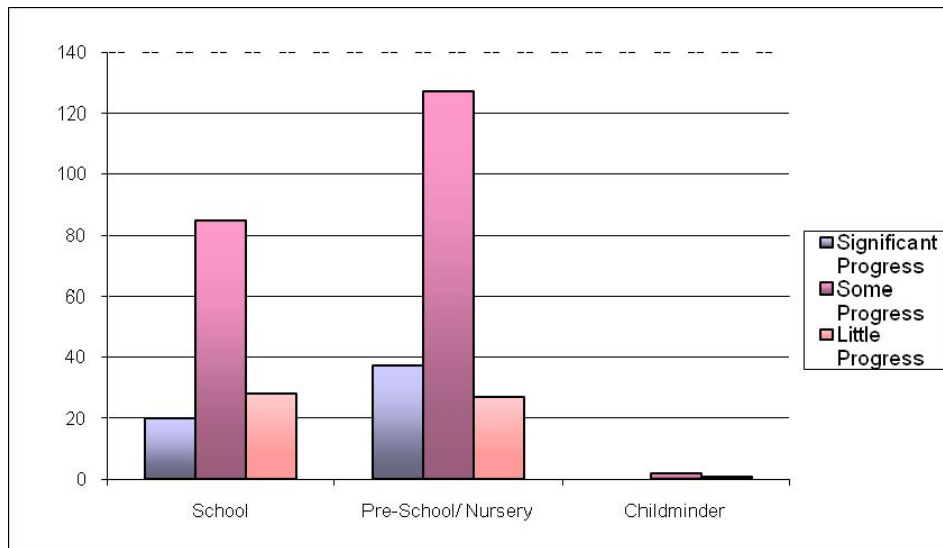


Q6.3 What progress in your own UNDERSTANDING have you made by attending cluster groups?

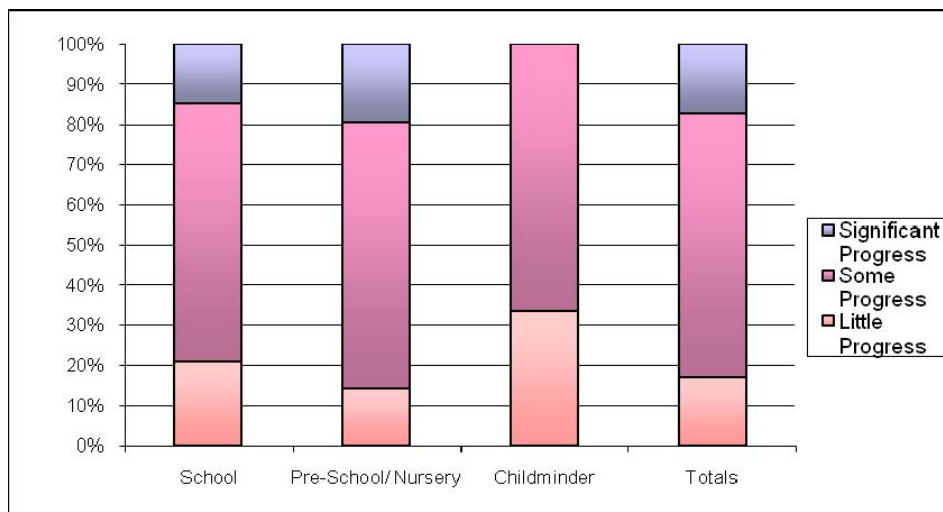
	School		Pre-School/ Nursery		Childminder		Totals	
Significant Progress	20	15%	37	19%	0	0%	57	17%
Some Progress	85	64%	127	66%	2	67%	214	65%
Little Progress	28	21%	27	14%	1	33%	56	17%
Totals	133	100%	191	100%	3	100%	327	100%

Graph 12

Comparison of the number of responses for each category



Percentage of responses for each category

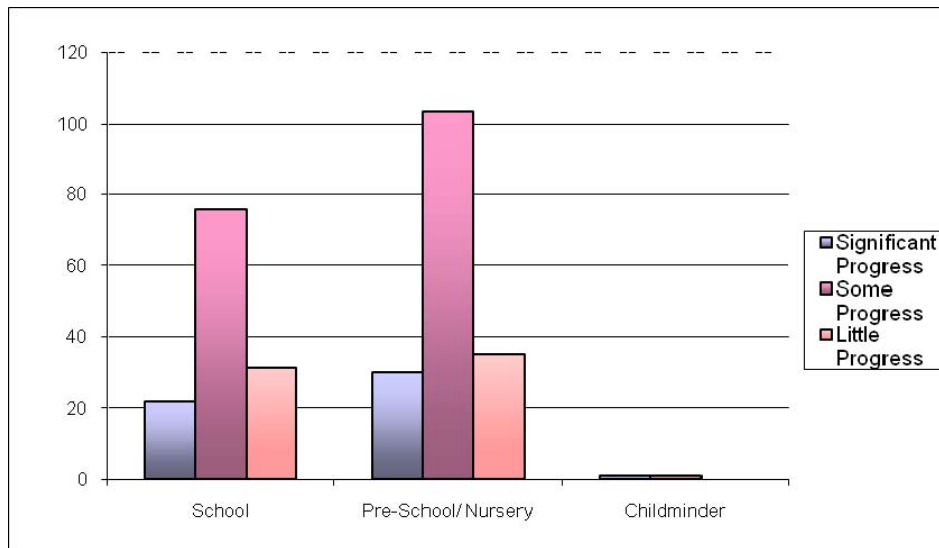


Q6.4 What progress in your own CONFIDENCE have you made by attending cluster groups?

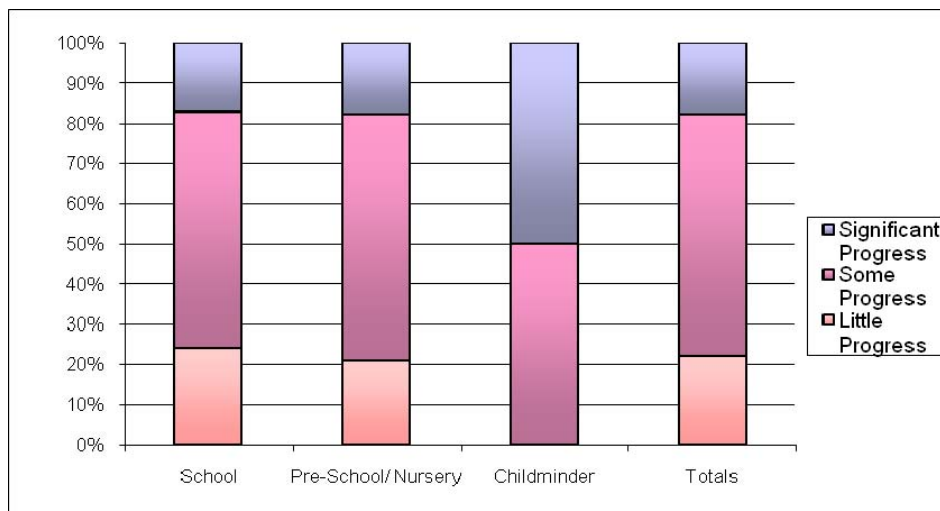
	School		Pre-School/ Nursery		Childminder		Totals	
Significant Progress	22	17%	30	18%	1	50%	53	18%
Some Progress	76	59%	103	61%	1	50%	180	60%
Little Progress	31	24%	35	21%	0	0%	66	22%
Totals	129	100%	168	100%	2	100%	299	100%

Graph 13

Comparison of the number of responses for each category



Percentage of responses for each category



The questionnaires identified practitioners from all sectors at this evolving

The questionnaire identified practitioners from all sectors at this evolving stage preferred cluster groups with a training focus (graph 9, p.96) though many practitioners

- a) Found both very beneficial.
- b) A combination – our format of alternate meetings seems to work very well.
- c) Both have benefits.
- d) Combination, mainly training, some informal.
- e) Good to have a mix of both.
- f) Both equally.
- g) Both equally important.
- h) Both as important as each other.
- i) A mixture of both at each meeting.
- j) Training, but get a lot out of informal too.
- k) Mixture, both good.
- l) Found both equally useful.
- m) Training but both are beneficial.
- n) Sorry, but I very much enjoy and benefit from having a mixture of both.
- o) I feel the mixture of informal and training with the cluster groups is very successful.
- p) Equally useful, both have advantages.
- q) A mixture of both – flexibility.

had written additional comments on the form as shown below.

On further investigation and through liaising with the cluster mentors it transpired that attendance was higher at training meetings. This was an area that I was going to investigate further during the implementation stage of the research. However it was clear benefits were beginning to emerge from both training and informal networks as indicated below:

Being able to have speakers that we would be unable to afford otherwise. Thank you (Reception Teacher).

Training completed through the cluster groups will be recognised and added to staff's portfolio (Preschool practitioner).

Apart from training sessions it's been good to have time to liaise with other reception teachers in our cluster (Reception Teacher).

4.1.1 Personal reflection – Journal extract

This was a point where I spent some time reflecting on the cluster groups. Potentially the action research may have not got off the ground: if practitioners were not attending the groups, or were not continuing to attend as they found them not to be beneficial, then ultimately practitioners from different sectors would not be coming together to develop their practice and build relationships. At this point I felt a mixture of excitement because there were so many positive additional comments written on the questionnaires and a sense of relief that I did not have to abandon the idea of this forum for change. I was pleased the training had been well received. I had invested time to ensure a cluster training booklet had been prepared which clearly demonstrated the aims and objectives of the training. High quality trainers were essential, so not only the Early Years Team delivered training, but outside trainers which I knew to be of high quality were also used. I was aware that the organisation of the training sessions would not have been possible without the high level administrative support. I believed the opportunities and autonomy that individual cluster groups had in deciding upon the training supported the success; the focus of the training was not imposed on them, but mutually decided as a need or interest of the individuals.

Though at times a logistical nightmare, by providing what the practitioners wanted and needed ensured that the groups continued to meet and hopefully evolve. I spent time reflecting on why the informal meetings were not so successful. Possibilities were: time was needed to build relationships; lack of confidence of practitioners to express their thoughts and practice or the facilitation of the groups was poor. I decided to bring all the cluster mentors together to share the initial findings from the questionnaires and to have a dialogue in relation to the informal networking and sharing of practice sessions. I believed that there was real potential for the groups but needed to ensure the innovation was owned by others through dialogue and reflection.

At this stage I was also investigating if the cluster groups were developing the

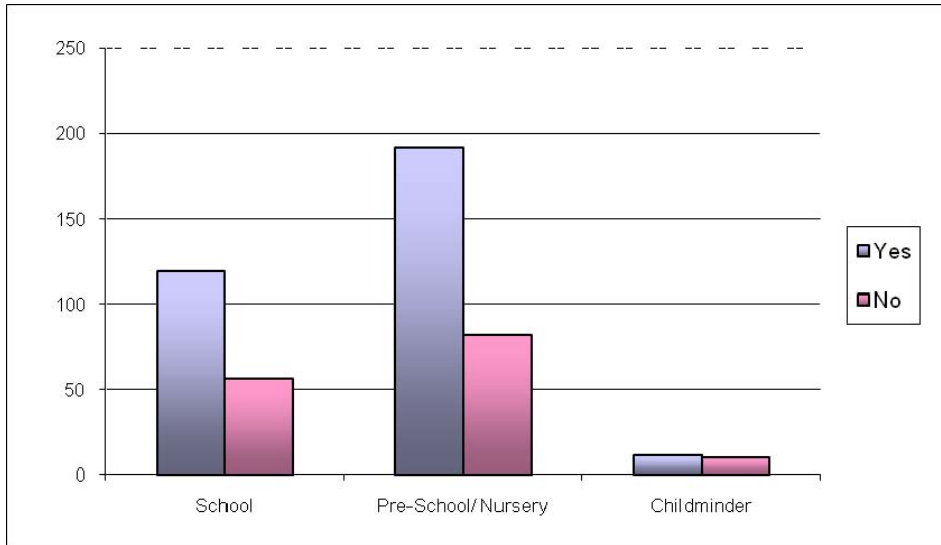
practitioners knowledge and skills. Initial data for identifying progress in knowledge, skills, understanding and confidence by attending cluster groups, mirroring the local authority's evaluation form for training as the criteria, was encouraging (graphs 10-13, pp 97-100). The highest indicator showed that all practitioners had made some progress. Practitioners come from different baselines in terms of qualifications and experience, and all practitioners had reported benefits from attending cluster sessions: 103 practitioners from the pre-schools and day nurseries stated they had gained some confidence from attending the cluster groups (graph13, p.100) "*Confidence and skills gained by staff attending cluster groups must benefit the children, as staff develop so must the setting*" (Preschool Practitioner).

Q7. Do you have good links with your local pre-school/day nursery/childminder/school regarding the transition of children?

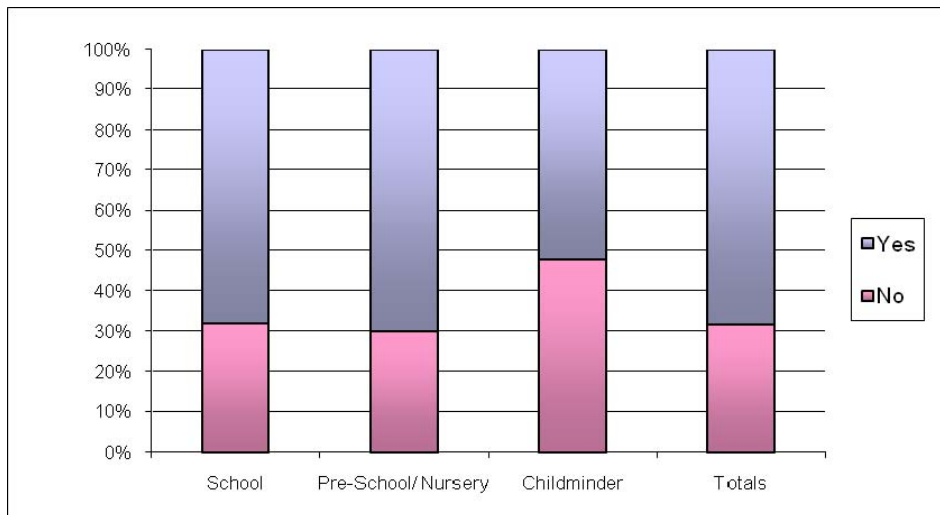
	School	Pre-School/ Nursery	Childminder	Totals
Yes	119	192	11	322
No	56	82	10	148
Totals	175	274	21	470

Graph 14

Comparison of the number of responses for each category



Percentage of responses for each category

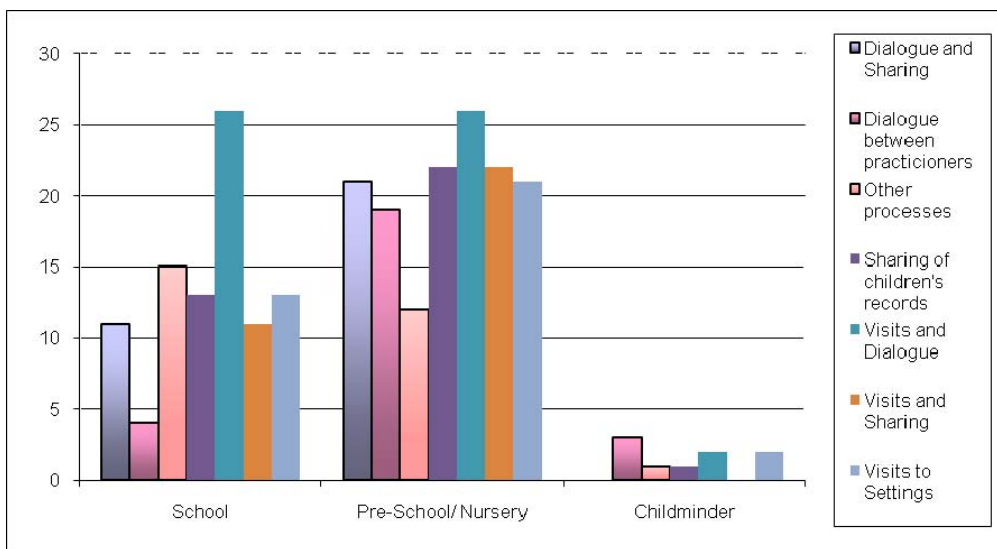


Q8. How do you facilitate this transfer?

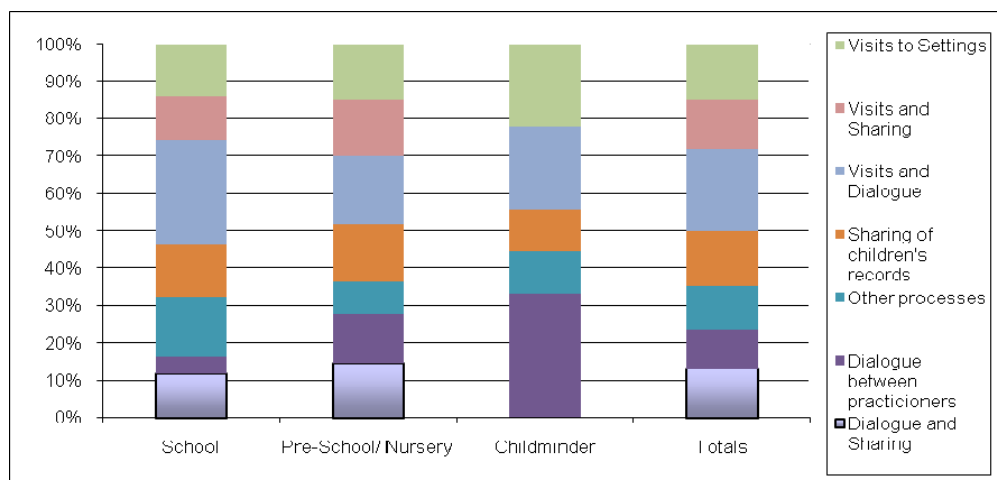
	School		Pre-School/ Nursery		Childminder		Totals	
Dialogue and Sharing	11	12%	21	15%	0	0%	32	13%
Dialogue between practitioners	4	4%	19	13%	3	33%	26	11%
Other processes	15	16%	12	8%	1	11%	28	11%
Sharing of children's records	13	14%	22	15%	1	11%	36	15%
Visits and Dialogue	26	28%	26	18%	2	22%	54	22%
Visits and Sharing	11	12%	22	15%	0	0%	33	13%
Visits to Settings	13	14%	21	15%	2	22%	36	15%
Totals	93	100%	143	100%	9	100%	245	100%

Graph 15

Comparison of the number of responses for each category



Percentage of responses for each category

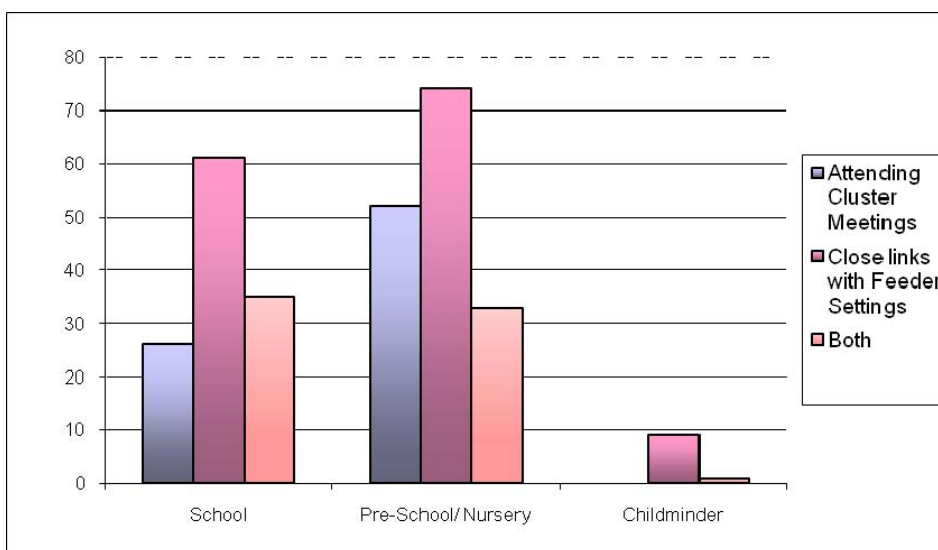


Q9.1 Which of the following areas do you feel the children have benefited from cluster meetings: 1. PERSONAL SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL

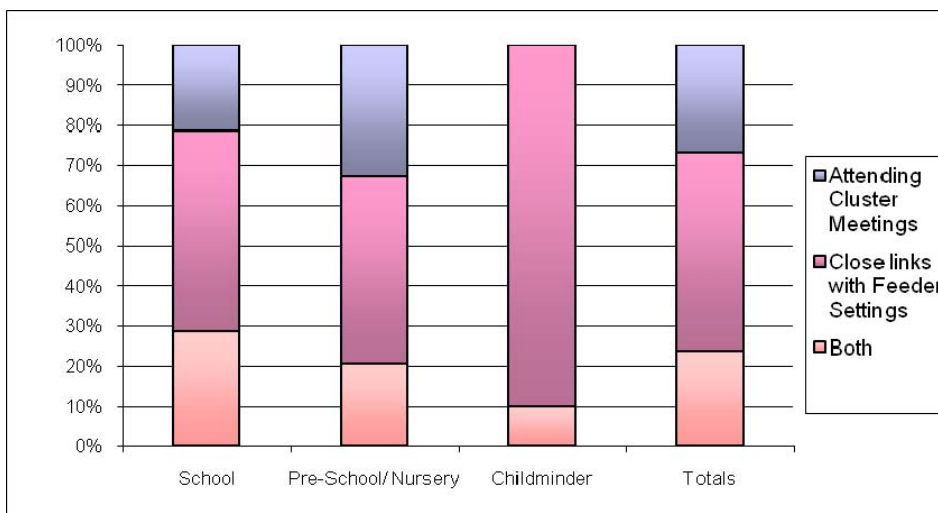
	School		Pre-School/ Nursery		Childminder		Totals	
Attending Cluster Meetings	26	21%	52	33%	0	0%	78	27%
Close links with Feeder Settings	61	50%	74	47%	9	90%	144	49%
Both	35	29%	33	21%	1	10%	69	24%
Totals	122	100%	159	100%	10	100%	291	100%

Graph 16

Comparison of the number of responses for each category



Percentage of responses for each category

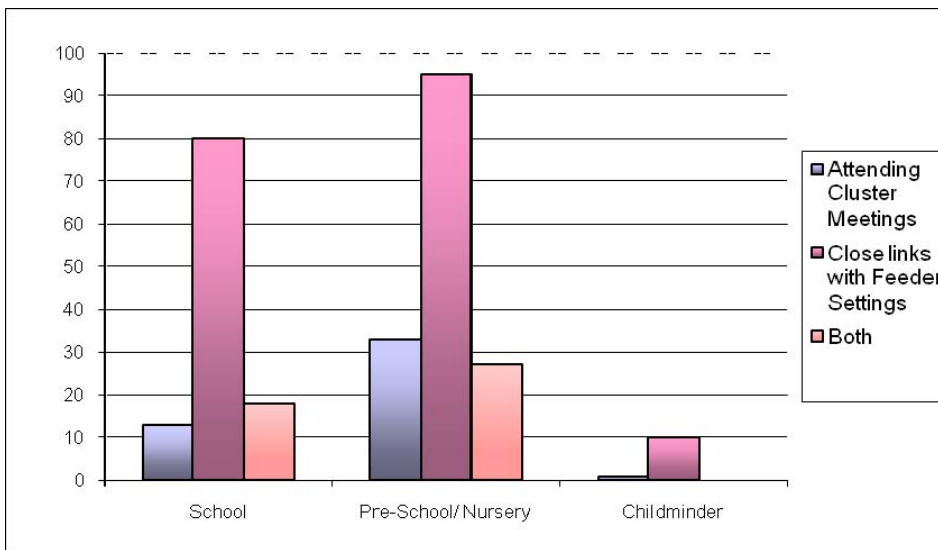


Q9.2 Which of the following areas do you feel the children have benefited from cluster meetings: 2. CONFIDENCE

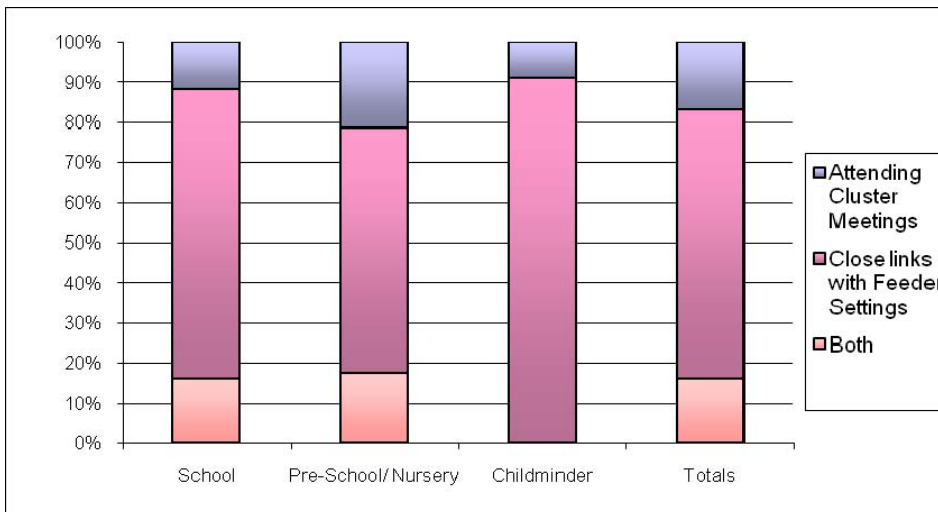
	School		Pre-School/ Nursery		Childminder		Totals	
Attending Cluster Meetings	13	12%	33	21%	1	9%	47	17%
Close links with Feeder Settings	80	72%	95	61%	10	91%	185	67%
Both	18	16%	27	17%	0	0%	45	16%
Totals	111	100%	155	100%	11	100%	277	100%

Graph 17

Comparison of the number of responses for each category



Percentage of responses for each category

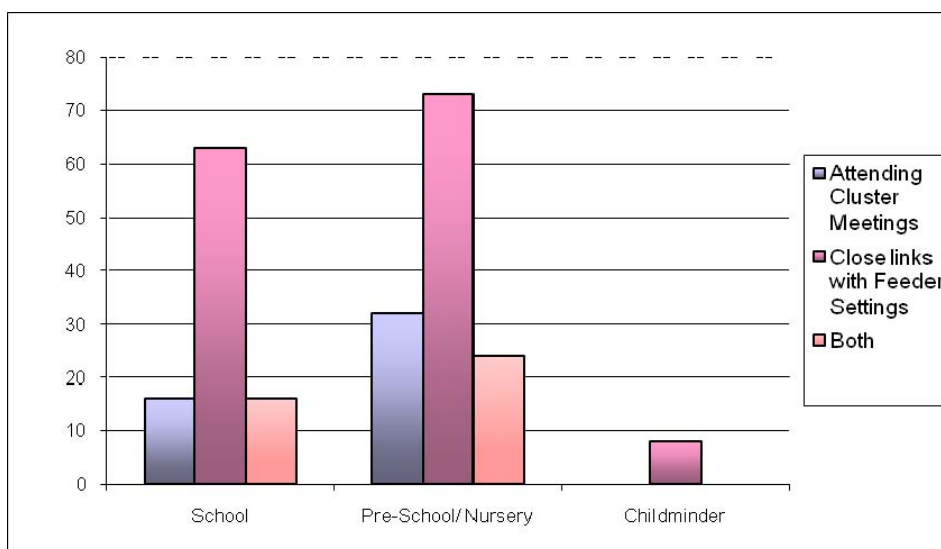


Q9.3 Which of the following areas do you feel the children have benefited from cluster meetings: 3. SELF-ESTEEM

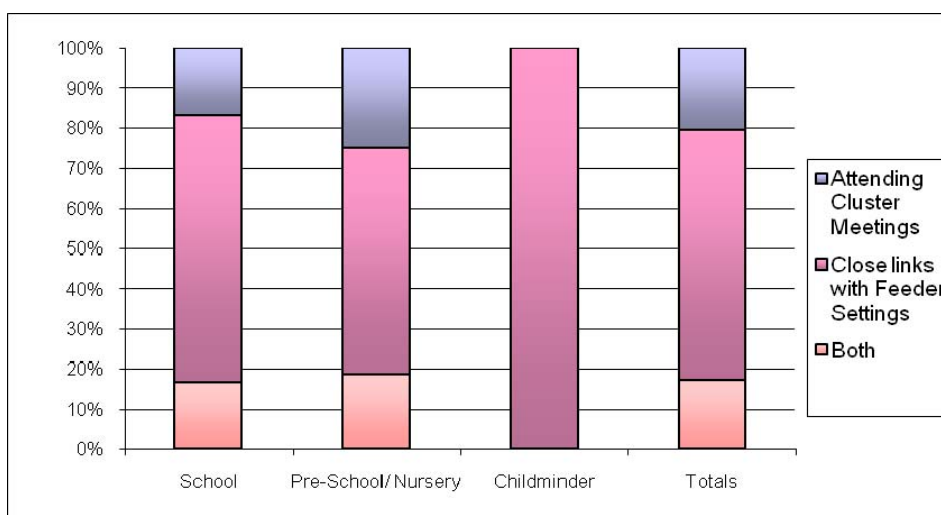
	School		Pre-School/ Nursery		Childminder		Totals	
Attending Cluster Meetings	16	17%	32	25%	0	0%	48	21%
Close links with Feeder Settings	63	66%	73	57%	8	100%	144	62%
Both	16	17%	24	19%	0	0%	40	17%
Totals	95	100%	129	100%	8	100%	232	100%

Graph 18

Comparison of the number of responses for each category



Percentage of responses for each category

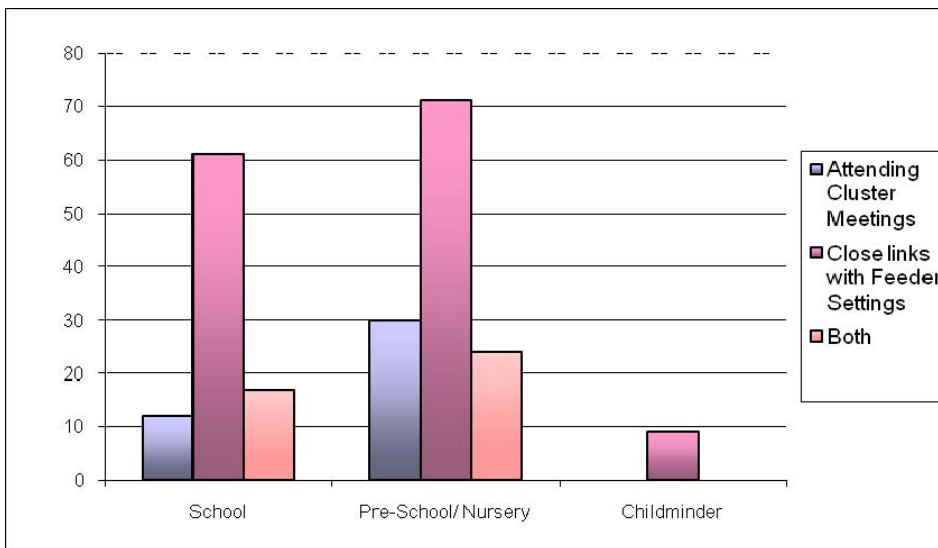


Q9.4 Which of the following areas do you feel the children have benefited from cluster meetings: 4. INDEPENDENCE

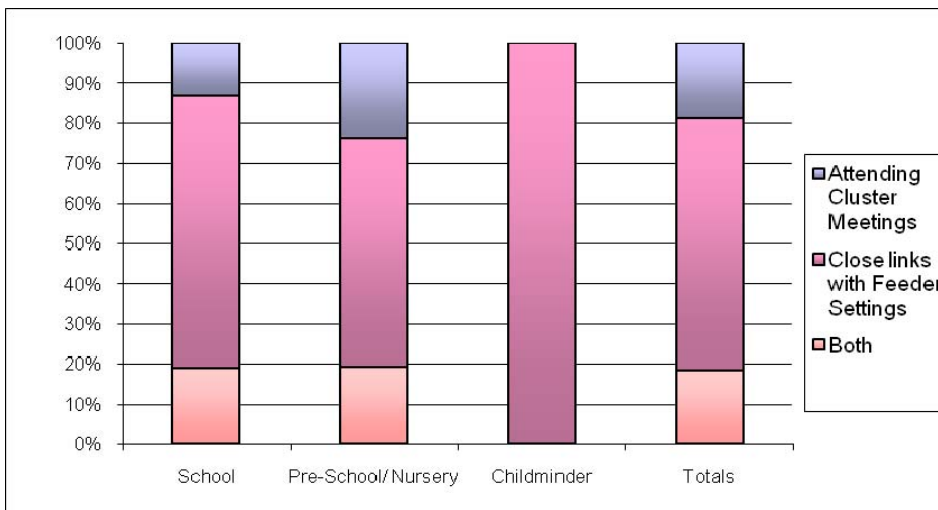
	School		Pre-School/ Nursery		Childminder		Totals	
Attending Cluster Meetings	12	13%	30	24%	0	0%	42	19%
Close links with Feeder Settings	61	68%	71	57%	9	100%	141	63%
Both	17	19%	24	19%	0	0%	41	18%
Totals	90	100%	125	100%	9	100%	224	100%

Graph 19

Comparison of the number of responses for each category



Percentage of responses for each category

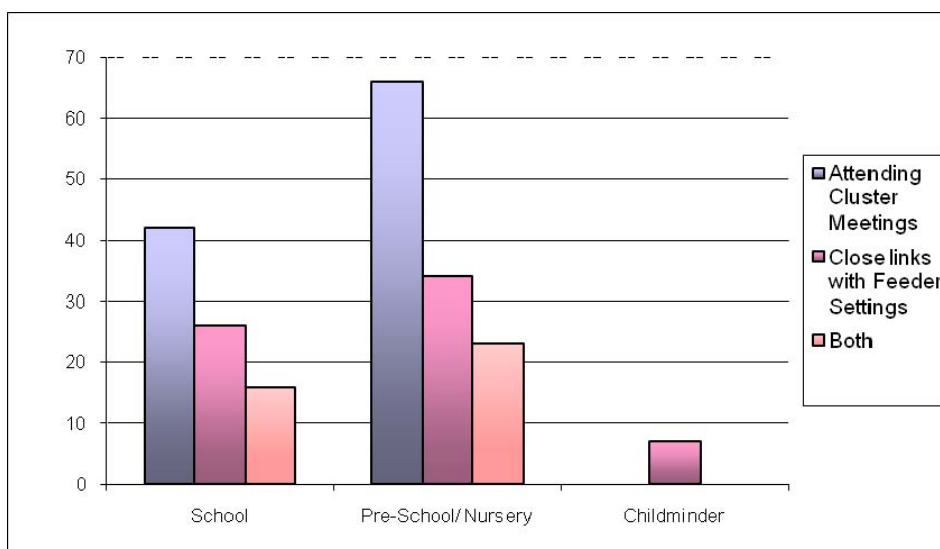


Q9.5 Which of the following areas do you feel the children have benefited from cluster meetings: 5. COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

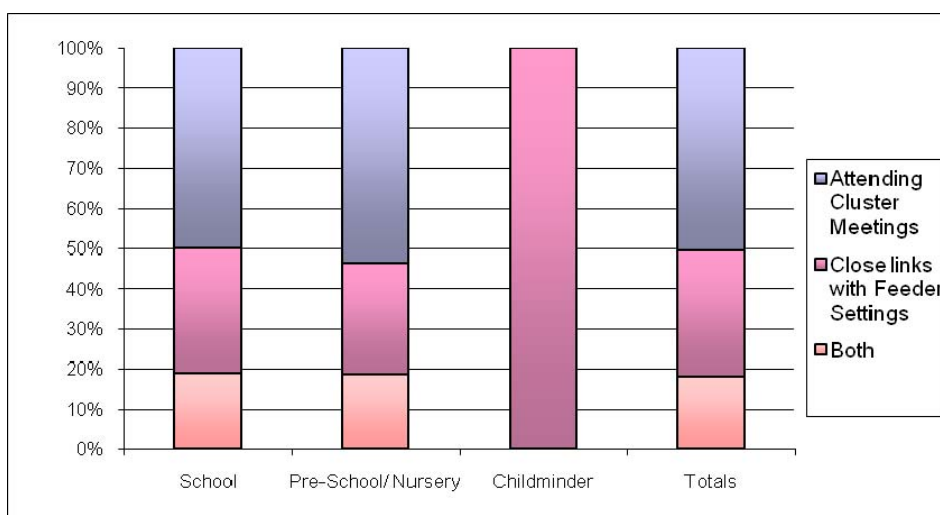
	School		Pre-School/ Nursery		Childminder		Totals	
Attending Cluster Meetings	42	50%	66	54%	0	0%	108	50%
Close links with Feeder Settings	26	31%	34	28%	7	100%	67	31%
Both	16	19%	23	19%	0	0%	39	18%
Totals	84	100%	123	100%	7	100%	214	100%

Graph 20

Comparison of the number of responses for each category



Percentage of responses for each category

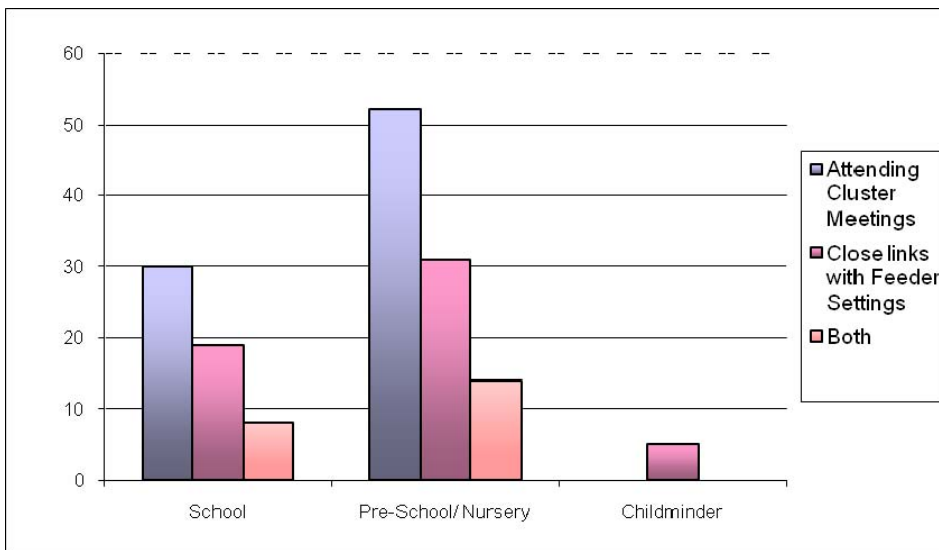


Q9.6 Which of the following areas do you feel the children have benefited from cluster meetings: 6. MATHEMATICS

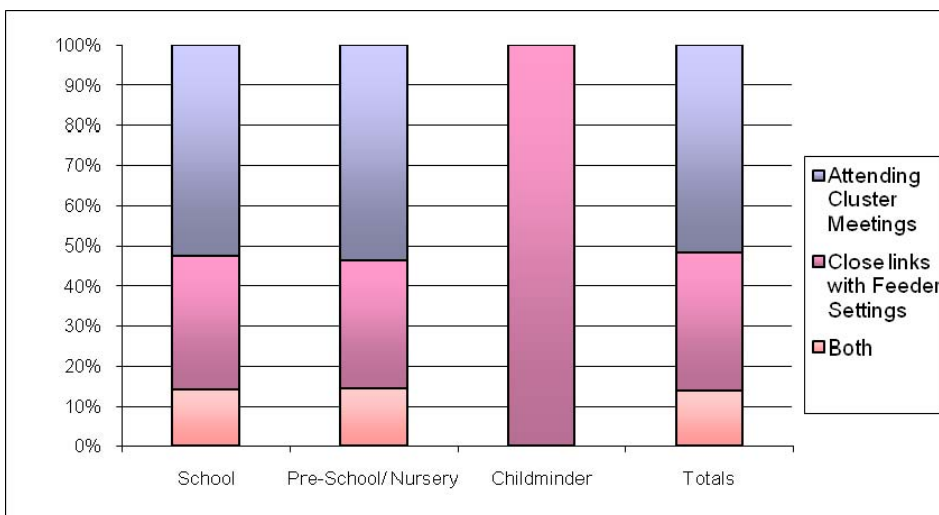
	School		Pre-School/ Nursery		Childminder		Totals	
Attending Cluster Meetings	30	53%	52	54%	0	0%	82	52%
Close links with Feeder Settings	19	33%	31	32%	5	100%	55	35%
Both	8	14%	14	14%	0	0%	22	14%
Totals	57	100%	97	100%	5	100%	159	100%

Graph 21

Comparison of the number of responses for each category



Percentage of responses for each category

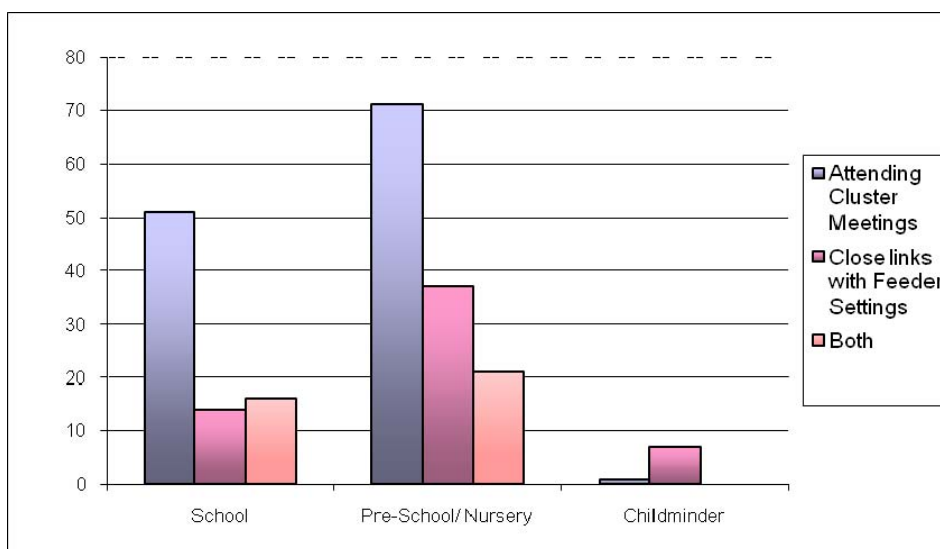


Q9.7 Which of the following areas do you feel the children have benefited from cluster meetings: 7. KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD

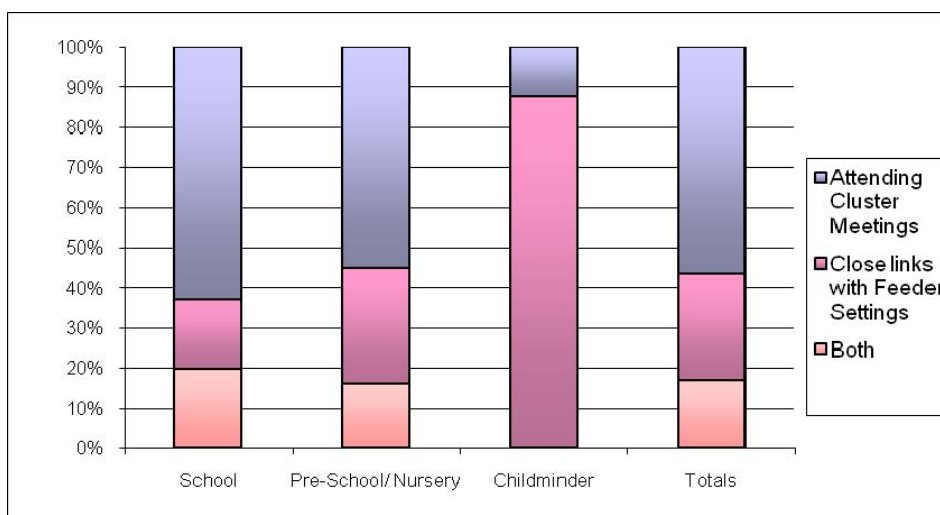
	School		Pre-School/ Nursery		Childminder		Totals	
Attending Cluster Meetings	51	63%	71	55%	1	13%	123	56%
Close links with Feeder Settings	14	17%	37	29%	7	88%	58	27%
Both	16	20%	21	16%	0	0%	37	17%
Totals	81	100%	129	100%	8	100%	218	100%

Graph 22

Comparison of the number of responses for each category



Percentage of responses for each category

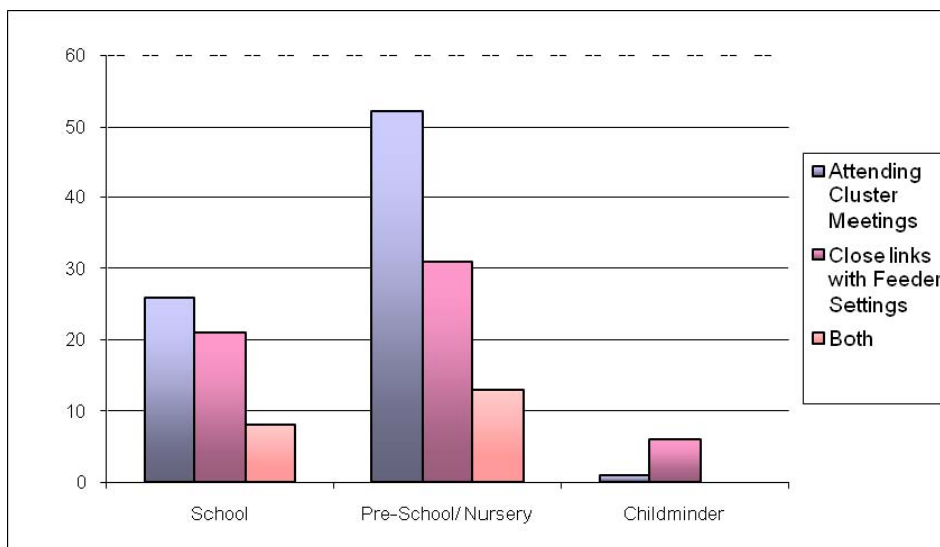


Q9.8 Which of the following areas do you feel the children have benefited from cluster meetings: 8. PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

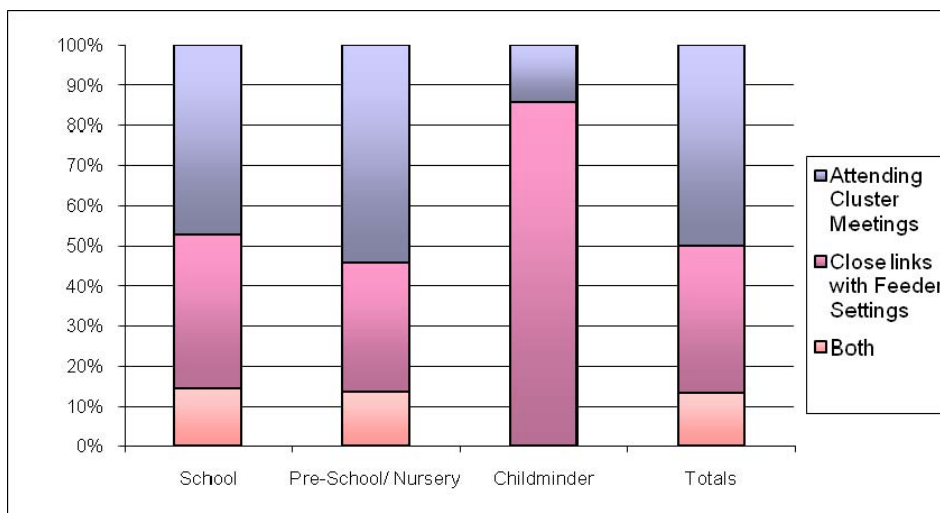
	School		Pre-School/ Nursery		Childminder		Totals	
Attending Cluster Meetings	26	47%	52	54%	1	14%	79	50%
Close links with Feeder Settings	21	38%	31	32%	6	86%	58	37%
Both	8	15%	13	14%	0	0%	21	13%
Totals	55	100%	96	100%	7	100%	158	100%

Graph 23

Comparison of the number of responses for each category



Percentage of responses for each category

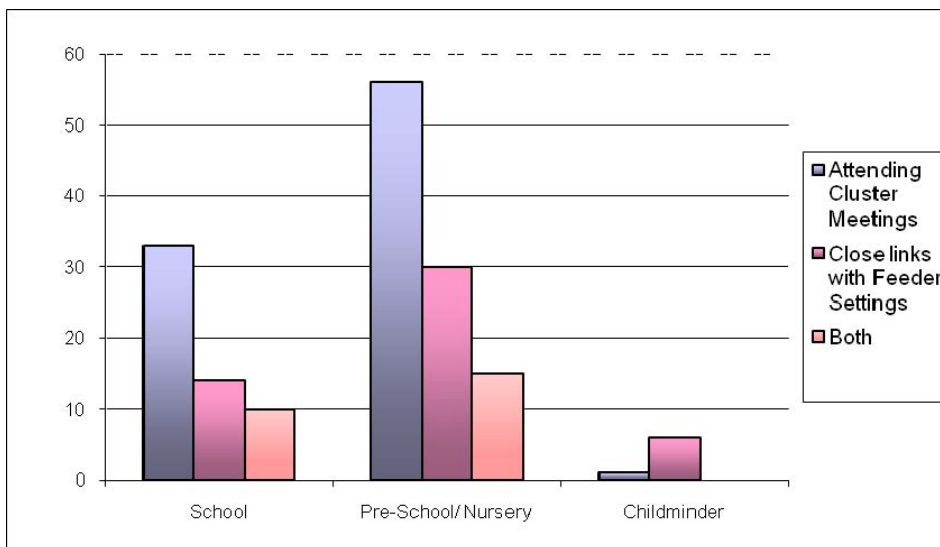


Q9.9 Which of the following areas do you feel the children have benefited from cluster meetings: 9. CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT

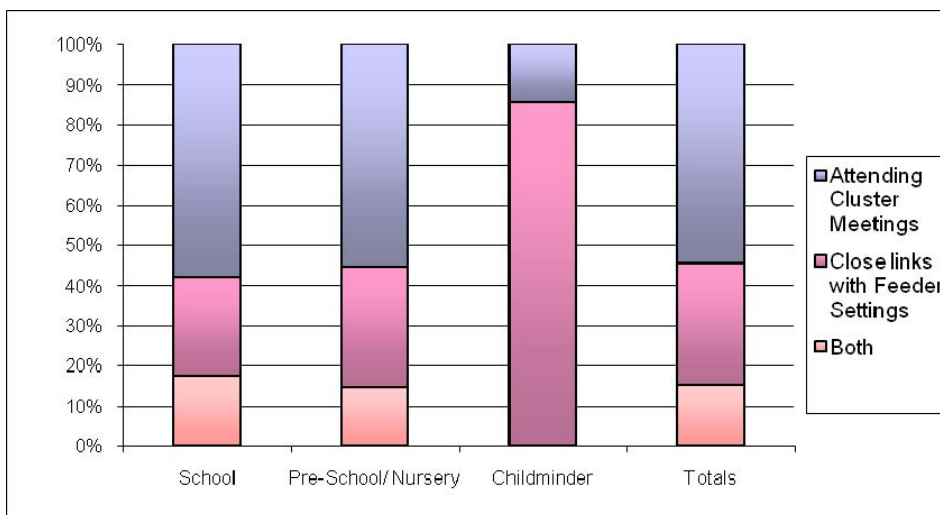
	School		Pre-School/ Nursery		Childminder		Totals	
Attending Cluster Meetings	33	58%	56	55%	1	14%	90	55%
Close links with Feeder Settings	14	25%	30	30%	6	86%	50	30%
Both	10	18%	15	15%	0	0%	25	15%
Totals	57	100%	101	100%	7	100%	165	100%

Graph 24

Comparison of the number of responses for each category



Percentage of responses for each category

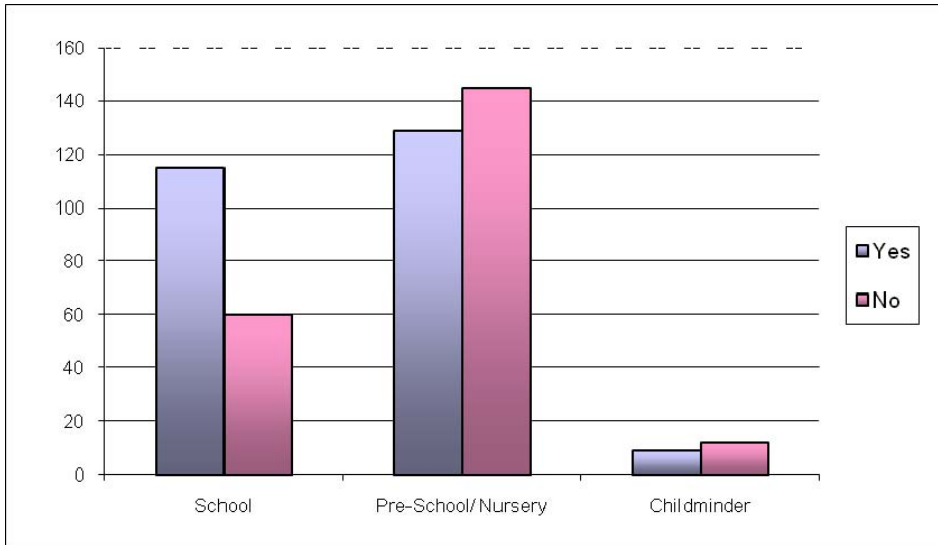


Q10. Have the links with your feeder settings supported children with the settling in process?

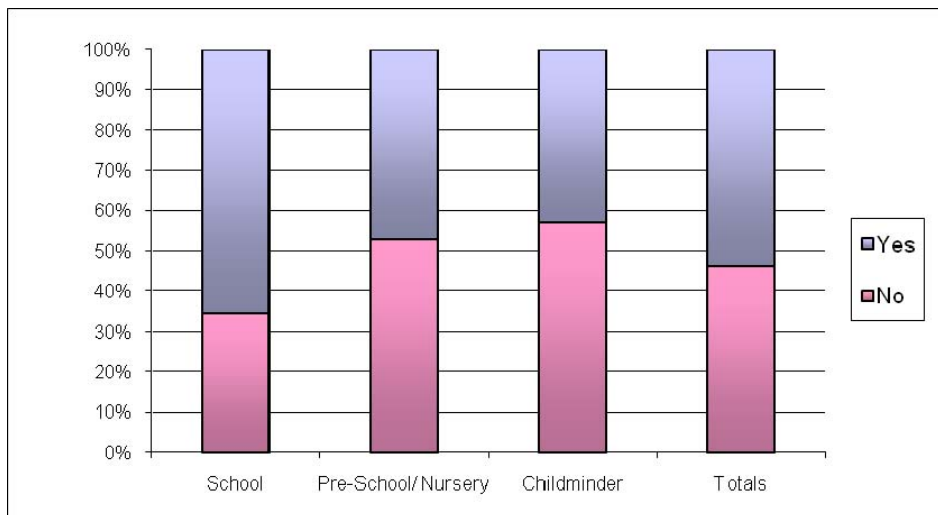
	School		Pre-School/ Nursery		Childminder		Totals	
Yes	115	66%	129	47%	9	43%	253	54%
No	60	34%	145	53%	12	57%	217	46%
Totals	175	100%	274	100%	21	100%	470	100%

**Graph
25**

Comparison of the number of responses for each category



Percentage of responses for each category



At this initial stage of data gathering it was evident that a high percentage of practitioners from the different sectors perceived themselves to have good links with feeder settings/schools with a range of different practices and activities in place to

- a) Working on the situation.
- b) Fair.
- c) Would like more.
- d) This has been set up now. We have good links with the school with regard to transition, however there are other issues we would like to raise with the schools and generally improve our communication.
- e) At present only our local school.
- f) Setting up standard information form to be given to school.
- g) Working on it.
- h) Building with pre-school.
- i) Could be better.
- j) Getting better. I am developing these now.

support the transition of children (graphs 14 and 15. pp104 -105). However, on closer examination many practitioners had indicated yes, but then wrote additional comments.

Visits to settings, dialogue between practitioners and sharing of children's records and a combination of these transition activities were taking place. A large number of private and voluntary practitioners stated they only *"pass on records with the parents' permission"* or *"we give the children's records to the parents to pass to the school"*. This also coincided with comments relating to sharing of records from the maintained sector, stating *"not as well as I hoped – only got stepping stones stepped booklets/reports from one or two parents"* and *"as this is left for the parents to supply the school with there is a lot of work at the beginning of the school year chasing these records up."* This was an area identified as a barrier to continuity in children's learning and an area for further discussion. At this early stage there was evidence of awareness raising with comments such as, *"Hoping to establish all of these links as a result of the*

meetings” (Nursery Teacher) and *“This is something I need to address in the future”*(Reception Teacher). There was a developing theme where staff in settings said they would welcome links *“we would like closer links with settings we feed into to ease transition. We would welcome visits from our local schools”* (Pre-school practitioner).

Part of my baseline information was the identification of benefits for children on transition, either by having closer links with feeder settings, attending the cluster meetings or both. As personal, social and emotional development at points of transition had been a key theme through literature reviews I broke this area down into personal, social and emotional development; confidence; self esteem and independence. This resulted in practitioners from all sectors believing children in this area of development benefited the most from close links with feeder settings/schools (graphs 16-19, pp.106-109). The data showed that this percentage was much higher than for the other two alternatives, attending cluster meetings and both (attending cluster meetings, close links with feeder settings). Personal, social and emotional development was the only area where this data showed this response.

In all the other areas of learning of the Foundation Stage curriculum the data shows the practitioners believed most benefit was gained from attending cluster meetings (graphs 20-24, pp.110 – 114). This is where formal training and discussion relating to the learning of the children took place. Only childminders from the networks who receive funding to deliver the Foundation Stage curriculum to children in their care did not consistently state the formal training at cluster groups had been the most beneficial in moving their practice forward. This corresponds with the data showing that childminders were not accessing cluster training due to barriers such as timing. This data suggest that practitioners believe that children’s personal, social and emotional development is best supported through personal contact and close links with the feeder settings. The data suggest that practitioners thought children’s learning in the five other areas of the Foundation Curriculum is best supported through training and discussion relating to the curriculum guidance. Graph 25, p.115 indicates schools were the sector that believed having closer links supported children in the settling in process. The other sectors answered slightly higher with responses to stating they didn’t think having closer links supported children settling in.

4.1.2 Conclusion from the questionnaire data

The data showed the questionnaires were a starting point in raising the awareness of partnership working and how providers can communicate at points of transition. It was evident that for many practitioners who were not communicating, this questionnaire had been a prompt. *“Would like opportunity to share information and experiences regarding record keeping and children’s progress”* and *“we are currently working with nursery/feeder settings to improve and build links with them for the transition period”* (Reception teachers).

Practitioners wrote additional comments acknowledging this was an area for development. *“I feel transition to us and from us represents a gap for us at the moment and we are currently thinking about how we can improve this”* (Nursery Nurse). Practitioners stated they were building transition activities into their practice, and were currently creating links. There were many positive outcomes showing practitioners were attending the cluster groups and were benefiting on a professional and personal basis. Some questionnaires showed a change in practice at this early stage, *“We now have good links from attending the cluster groups and this has helped to settle children”* (Reception Teacher) and *“speaking to settings where the children have been before us and visiting them is something we have started”* (Reception Teacher). It was very heartening to read comments such as *“this is the only time I meet primary teachers and share ideas and info. There has to be a lot more of this especially with regards to the E.L.G. and the stepping stones notes and records we now keep on each child”* (Reception Teacher). Practitioners said links have improved through attending cluster meetings.

There were barriers identified such as *“the school stated they preferred to have a child with no pre-conceived ideas gained at preschool”* (Pre-school Practitioner) and a preschool staff team saying that they do not have any involvement with the local school due to the head teacher’s attitude to the pre -school. There were different systems in place to support transition and evidence of positive impact for children where a close link had been made. *“We feel very fortunate we have been able to build such a close link with our preschool, and this has been very beneficial to all involved. Last September not a single child had any tears on their first day at school, so we must*

be doing something right” (Reception Teacher).

A thematic analysis of the questionnaire data revealed emergent themes suggesting a direction in which to look. These are: barriers to partnership working; systemic factors; and impact, positive and negative of partnership working. Impact for children on transition to school was also consistently present when discussing developments and findings with the practitioners.

4.2 Development stage

It was evident from the baseline data and observations from attending cluster groups that many practitioners had to go through a cycle of change to adapt to new working practices and have openness to developing new partnerships. Change is constant and part of my role was to encourage practitioners to embrace change and not just cope with it. Hersey and Blanchard (1993) identify two dimensions relating to the management of organisational behaviour. Firstly the task, making sure the purpose is clear, building and sustaining the values and cultures of the networks ensuring communication is effective, allocating resources, building relationships with the stakeholders. The second dimension, the people, relates to securing the commitment of the people involved to get the work done, inspiring, motivating, negotiating and rewarding. The two dimensions are interdependent but there is an emphasis on task or people at varying times to be effective.

At this point the focus was on the people and building relationships. This was the bedrock for developing practice. The maintained sector were perceived as holding the power by some practitioners as identified from visiting the cluster groups in the initial stages and through talking to practitioners from the private and voluntary sector. Recognition and willingness to change the timing of cluster groups so all practitioners were able to participate was an essential barrier to overcome. As the research is to develop partnership working, unless the different sectors are present at the cluster meetings then little progress will be made.

Through regular face to face contact there is some evidence to suggest barriers due to status can be broken down (Frost, 2005). The sense of ownership varied in practice between the networks; based on the stage of their development, some were very

embryonic and the capacity within the group varied. Though ownership starts at the commencement of the group *“it is a cumulative experience, it gets deeper and stronger over time if it is reinforced”* (Fetterman and Wandersman, 2005, p.44).

Using the emerging themes as a framework I investigate the different data sources.

4.2.1. Barriers -Questionnaires and observation at cluster groups:

Unwilling to share

It was clear from observing the cluster groups in action that many respondents did not share information and many have been unwilling to do so. Certainly sharing information was not part of the culture. *“Some groups are not willing to part with their methods”* (Preschool Practitioner). Some blamed this on the school head teacher’s attitude to the pre-school. Many of the private and voluntary settings practitioners reported they were not asked to share information, *“We have found that our records are not asked for, so do not seem to follow on, the child seems to start again”* (Preschool Practitioner). Many had records of achievement in place but did not pass these onto the schools, based on their prior experience. There was an impression of schools not wanting to or being interested in the work childminders were undertaking with the children. Several statements made by practitioners related to groups not willing to share practice or information.

Although this unwillingness to share was a common thread, during the reconnaissance phase I began to observe a culture of change as learning professionals were created who were confident to share practice. Trudell (2002) had advocated shared knowledge base, standards and approaches. One of the direct results of legislation such as Every Child Matters, (2003) and The Children Act (2004) as viewed by the government is enhancement of sharing of information. Information sharing is key to the mutual engagement of my innovation, enhanced partnership and transition. Through engaging the practitioners in learning and taking them through a process of change I anticipated some of these practical barriers were able to be overcome; at this stage I had to accept uncertainty rather than focus too strongly on short term goals and results.

4.2.2 Effect of competition:

As dialogue began to take place at the forums it was identified that as a result of feeder

settings taking children into school earlier, pre-schools and day nurseries were experiencing low numbers and had unfilled places. Many practitioners from both sectors felt children were going into school too early, *“children going into school too early, four years and as many weeks”* (Reception Teacher) with most pre-school practitioners believing that children should only attend one setting in a day. Practitioners believed it was not beneficial for children to experience different provision in a day; this caused an element of competition between settings where both were competing for the same children and ultimately the same pot of funding. *“Because feeder settings take nursery children earlier – we are experiencing low numbers and have many unfilled places”* and *“The school didn’t let us know they had changed their admission policy making it very difficult for us”* (Pre-school Practitioners).

The effects of competition led on to disclosing that feeder schools took children into nursery the week of headcount therefore leaving parents to pay for the weeks used in their pre-school or nursery, otherwise settings are out of pocket. Pre-school settings have asked for co-operation in relation to this from schools; for example sharing the funding, many pre-school practitioners voiced willingness to do this had not been forthcoming. Impact of competition is not just a local issue, and has been well documented when seeking to develop partnerships in early years services (National Early Years Network, 1997). Case studies have been publicised to demonstrate collaborative working had resulted in win-win situations. Collaboration and meeting the individual needs of children and families can be achieved. Through engagement, solutions can be found.

4.2.3 Barriers -the interviews:

- What do you perceive as the main constraints on Partnership working in the Foundation Stage?
- How do you think these constraints can be overcome?

Individual interviews focused on constraints with partnership working in the Foundation Stage and how the practitioners from the different sectors felt they could be overcome. I was ‘checking out’ the developing themes and through interviews was hoping to find that practitioners themselves may begin to identify approaches to

breaking down the barriers.

Key findings

Time was a common response; the interviews resulted in time being a barrier relating to timing of cluster groups, but also time for visits to feeder settings to take place.

I think the biggest constraint is timing, it is difficult to make the links during session time, as there are the issues of cost, if you need to release people and provide cover, and also settings have to maintain their adult to child ratios and that can be difficult too. Timing is also an issue out of session time too, as schools want to meet at 4.00pm and the pre-schools and nurseries find this difficult; they would prefer to meet at about 6.00pm. So I think timing is the biggest constraint. (Foundation Stage Teacher/Deputy Head teacher).

Time was identified as a barrier by practitioners from all sectors. *“Definitely time as we visit all our feeder settings, and we have supply cover so there are issues there, with supply and money for the supply cover”*(Reception Teacher). *“Time is a major constraint”* (Teaching Assistant) and *“the time element”* (Nursery Leader).

Time from busy in-setting responsibilities is difficult to find but very valuable. Matching available time is even harder; this is complicated by teachers’ directed time rulings which say meetings should be kept to a minimum (Nursery teacher).

Childminders in particular were expressing timing of the clusters as a barrier as often after school is their busiest time. *“Lack of time as we have a range of children from babies to older children and it is difficult to get to meeting* (Accredited childminder). Funding was a barrier expressed by a nursery owner *“Funding is an issue, we work until six o’clock in the evening and we have to maintain the staffing ratios, so if we visit the school that does have an impact on funding”*. A reception teacher said funding was an issue when visiting settings *“funding is an issue for supply cover”* and a teaching assistant *“funding is a barrier”*. Time was frequently identified in research as a barrier Milbourne et al (2003). Part of the innovation was to look for creative solutions to the problems of funding and time.

Interviews raised the lack of sharing of information which related to children's learning and children's records which showed what they had achieved against the stepping stones and Early Learning Goals of the Foundation Stage curriculum. This was particularly mentioned by the school sector "*sharing of records, we don't receive records from all the feeder settings*" (Reception Teacher).

Records not being passed on from previous settings. My colleagues in the junior and secondary schools were really surprised when I told them we don't receive records from the previous setting that a child has gone to. They didn't understand how, when we receive a child, we have to get to know the child and where they are in terms of their educational achievement and also any special educational need a child might have (Head Teacher).

The interviews identified a need for a transfer record to be standardised where the practitioners at the feeder setting record assessments accurately.

The standard of the records we receive. I think there needs to be a way of standardising them so that they are similar as some are filled in correctly and some are not so good. The records that come through are too big; they cover all the stepping stones and early learning goals, so that is a lot for us as reception teachers to read through (Reception Teacher).

To build up mutual respect and trust, the school sector needs to feel confident that the previous setting is confident in completing records and has a good knowledge in terms of observation and assessment. This was recognised by a pre-school team leader; "*constraints are the lack of sharing knowledge between the settings and making sure the assessments and records are completed correctly so that the school has faith in your judgements*". There was understanding from a reception teacher who showed empathy in relation to how the pre-school practitioner was feeling: "*The pre-schools often say at cluster meetings their records are not valued by the schools and it is a waste of their time putting them all together when they are not looked at, so I do understand that it is frustrating from their point of view as well*".

This identifies a need for training and consultancy from the Early Years team to ensure

the private and voluntary sector have the necessary skills to undertake this part of their role. Record keeping was a common theme through the interviews and innovation is a response to an emerging need. As practitioners were beginning to develop secure and trusting relationships they were more confident to express areas of practice they were less skilled in. Practitioners from the preschools and day nurseries were more willing to accept advice from the teachers in the maintained sector. The link between training and practice is essential; as a result of interviews training was planned to develop observation, assessment and record keeping.

A strong link through the interviews was the need for communication and this was voiced from a range of practitioners. *“Lack of communication between the different partnerships”* (Network childminder) and *“Lack of effective communication between the different sectors”* (Head Teacher). It was voiced this should be a two way process where there was commitment from all sectors. *“There is apathy on the part of some of the private and voluntary settings, they don’t always want to get involved; it is a two way process and there needs to be commitment from individuals from all the sectors”* (Teaching assistant).

My role leading the innovation and with mentors as change agents was to adopt a transformational leadership style, inspiring and motivating people to do things for themselves. The aim was to lead through consent and commitment where communication would merge as the norm. Kotter (1990) debates the difference between leadership and management; a managing role is transaction rather than transformation, creating and managing structures. Leadership is challenging the existing ways of doing things and setting new directions, inspiring, motivating and enabling people to move in the new directions. Change of staff was also seen as a barrier where good working partnership had lapsed due to change in personnel in the reception class of the school.

I think one of the barriers is when there is a change of staff in the school and suddenly all the good work that has been established just stops if the new teacher doesn’t want to take it on. We had very good links with the reception teacher, she used to come over to see the children prior to them transferring into school, and she used to support us with curriculum ideas and always encouraged us to go and see her if we had any

problems or concerns. When she got promotion the new teacher didn't carry on any of this work. So we felt let down and suddenly that support we had was gone. I don't feel there is enough information or direct contact between us and the schools the children are moving to (Nursery Nurse - Day Nursery).

Childminders were the only group that mentioned lack of respect from other sectors. *"One of the major constraints is lack of respect for childminders; other practitioners such as teachers do not understand how much we know and can do" (Accredited childminder). "Other practitioners valuing the childminders' opinion and valuing them as professionals. Other practitioners feel they know best, they may listen to what you say but do not always value your opinion as a childminder" (Network childminder).*

Journal extract

I have interviewed several childminders across the authority and there is a consistent message- they don't feel valued and don't see themselves as professionals. I need to contact the NCMA development officer and undertake some joint work. Training and maybe some workshops around self esteem building.

Difficulty working with our local feeder school, we have difficulty making contact with them. We at the day nursery want to have contact and liaise with them particularly when it relates to a child with a special education need. There is no willingness from the school to visit the nursery and to talk with the staff or meet the children (Nursery owner/Training provider).

Both sectors spoke about children with special educational needs and the difficulty of arranging meetings for all the multi-agency professionals. *"There are a number of agencies involved with, for example, a child with a special educational need. It may sometimes be up to seven agencies and they all need to get together and have a meeting to support the transition of that child" (Head teacher).*

Although there was a difficulty expressed in ensuring meetings took place the importance of them was expressed particularly from head teachers. *"Multi agency meetings should be mandatory for children with special educational needs, it is important that the knowledge each agency holds is shared and that the school can have*

all the right procedures and resources in place for when the child starts school” (Head teacher).

Journal extract

I realised today I have not utilised links with head teachers to maximise impact of the research. If I can get head teachers on board to be actively engaged they will be a good source to support the changes to practice.

It was beneficial to engage with the head teacher, as he was a key catalyst for change at management level with opportunities for him to share and transfer practice to other heads. The preschool leader from his feeder setting spoke about him in a positive manner. *“We have not had any constraints with our main feeder infant school as the head teacher visits us, and he sits on the floor and plays with the children. We also share our practice and for example had a discussion on why neither we nor the school liked using worksheets”*. The head teacher agreed to chair a multi-disciplinary group linked to the Early Years Area Partnership and was keen to take the research further. He was intending to undertake a review of children’s attainment on entry to school and look for corresponding data relating to his four feeder settings leading to further partnership work. Leadership and management were raised as an issue by some reception teachers. The barriers were less of a problem when leadership and management were on board as there was more of a willingness at strategic level to find a means to overcome issues such as money and time.

The interviews also focused on how the constraints of partnership working could be overcome. Systems can be implemented to ensure practice is embedded and does not rely on individuals to make partnership happen. Part of the dialogue was what these systems would be like in practice. One suggestion was implementing a staff swap between the school and feeder setting which would ensure ratios in settings and not impact on funding

The interviews with a wide range of practitioners from the Foundation Stage identified cluster groups were supporting breaking down barriers that existed between sectors. *“I think the cluster sessions should be opened up to as many practitioners at the setting as possible. I think that the cluster groups are a good opportunity for all practitioners to*

think together and reflect” (Foundation Stage teacher/Deputy Head teacher).

The cluster groups are very effective and have worked very well, and I think helps to overcome some of the constraints, but the pre-schools which I would like to attend often don't come. Clusters and consortiums where the different agencies work together are very beneficial. Working together is a priority (Head teacher).

Relationship building and breaking down barriers were key phrases being used. *“Cluster meetings are a good way to break down the barriers and to build relationships between the sectors” (Nursery Teacher). “Meetings with the staff from other settings and the cluster groups which we go to as often as we can really break down barriers” (preschool practitioner).* Practitioners from both sectors identified the need to be flexible particularly when it came to overcoming the barrier of the timing of the cluster groups. Practitioners also expressed it was individuals that often made the cluster groups successful.

I think it is about being flexible, and about varying the times available, so that at some point everyone can attend. I find that often it comes down to individuals who are willing to give up their time, sometimes you just need a few inspiring people along the way who encourage and inspire others to meet and come to the cluster meeting (Reception Teacher).

Cluster groups really have helped to overcome constraints; it is an opportunity to listen to each other, and to make it beneficial for both parties. It is about sharing good practice and talking about issues that are raised by either the schools or the private and voluntary staff (Reception Teacher).

It is the keenness of individual people to make the links with other sectors and maintain them (Teaching assistant).

Meetings for ‘transition’ purposes should be built into/embedded in directed time. Funding should be put aside for staff to take and receive children due to transfer; it might be expensive but would be worthwhile in terms of personal development and learning needs of children (Nursery Teacher).

Making links was a key theme in the interviews as a mechanism for overcoming the barriers they had expressed. Practitioners gave concrete examples of how through these links they could support their colleagues.

I think it is about making links and befriending other practitioners, to work together and to support each other; for example we could support the pre-schools by offering to photocopy things for them, as they don't have access to a photocopier, and we could easily support them in this way. By working together in the Foundation stage we can build on good practice and share information (Teaching Assistant).

Sharing information, visits both to and from the feeder settings, and not just talking about it but making it happen, were clear themes in the interviews.

By building relationships, getting together at different times, times that are convenient to the private and voluntary settings as well as the schools. Also by making visits between the settings and this should be a two way process, so that the private and voluntary settings visit the schools and the school practitioners visit the pre-schools and day nurseries. I think working together on a shared approach is a good way forward and to look at what best practice is at the cluster meetings (Nursery Teacher).

Once we have managed to make contact then we found working with the receiving reception teacher was better. The constraints could be overcome if there was more communication between the different sectors and more liaison between the practitioners of the settings. Visits from the reception teacher should be made to the nursery. It is a case of not just talking about it, but making it happen, using each others' resources and to maximise opportunities. Opportunities to share ideas and to work together on sharing information relating to the children (Nursery Owner/ Training provider).

The need for clear protocols and different agencies working together was seen as a priority for children with special educational needs. Practitioners spoke about having a formal system in place written into the school policy to ensure transition activities and sharing of information happened. This was voiced from the maintained and the private

and voluntary sector. *“There needs to be clear guidance and protocols in place so that all settings are consistent and that there is good practice relating to transition in place for all children”* (Head Teacher).

I think it would also be a good idea to put in place a simple transitional record or form for all settings to use, based on the stepping stones and early learning goals. The only problem would be that groups that don't attend the cluster meetings wouldn't be doing it so it would need to be put in place at county level and not just at a local level (Reception Teacher).

If there was a formal system in place that was written down, then if a teacher moved on the contact would still be there. I think if it could be arranged that the teachers from the feeder school and the staff from the day nursery could meet up, like the cluster groups, then this would be a good idea. We would welcome more contact from the school (Nursery Nurse –Day Nursery).

Childminders expressed that more respect for them as a group would overcome barriers. *“Practitioners need to respect the childminders' opinion and to take us seriously; we are not just baby sitting”*.

I think there should be more publicity about childminders and how we work to the Foundation Stage curriculum. Also there should be more respect for us as childminders and for teachers to arrange meetings at a more convenient time for us to attend. If time is restricted then written information for us to take away would help the constraints to partnership working (Network Childminder).

A network childminder expressed the need for cluster groups to be held in the evening and the difficulties they face as a particular group.

To have meetings with other practitioners in the other partnerships and to have meetings and cluster groups that are at more convenient times for childminders. Often after school is our busiest time with after school care. Also childminders are not legally allowed to leave their children in a crèche for other people to look after, so an evening would be the best time.

One practitioner mentioned parents and articulated the need for more involvement.

I think it is important to get the message across to parents and ensure they have an understanding of the Foundation stage and what the stepping stones and early learning goals mean, and that children will be working towards the early learning goals and will be working on the same curriculum when they transfer into school. I think we need more contact with the parents, so having parent interviews and home visit; the more knowledge we have about the child before they come to the pre-school the better. Also sharing of information and this is not just information between the settings but also information for parents about the Foundation Stage. We give our parents an information pack about the Foundation Stage as soon as they have registered to come to our pre-school (Preschool practitioner).

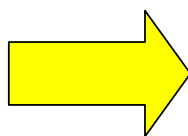
Journal extract

I am really pleased the practitioners are identifying barriers and coming up with solutions with me; they are keen to find solutions to difficulties.

The interviews evidenced and built on the data from the questionnaires. Practitioners identified common barriers but were also keen to suggest ways to overcome them. Cluster groups were identified as a mechanism for supporting new shared working and development of practice. It will be through the development of the cluster groups and through the process of change model that new ways of working will possibly emerge.

Table 2 identifies the barriers and possible solutions as a result of the interviews.

Barrier
Table 2



Solution

Lack of consistent record keeping.	A transfer record for all settings to use to be created
Inconsistent assessment judgements by practitioners in private and voluntary sector	Training and support for practitioners
Change of staff results in lack of continuity	System to be implemented to which all practitioners agree to
Time and staff cover	Creative solutions such as staff swap
Records not being passed onto the school by parents	Parents signing to agree records can be passed from the setting to the school

Staff swaps became a positive model for practitioners to learn about the practice taking place in their feeder settings. Staff swaps developed into a vignette that was shared within a cluster group and transferred to other cluster groups. Staff swaps are discussed further in this chapter. Staff swaps have a different focus to ‘Looping’. Looping is where the teacher moves with the children into the next year rather than the children moving to a new teacher. Burke (1997) describes the experiences of European schools such as those in Germany and Italy. In some German schools children stayed with the same teacher for up to six years, this extended period with one adult strengthened relationships and resulted in supporting children in making the required brain connections for learning. The pre-school children in Reggio Emilia Italy stayed with the same teacher for three years. This was explained to me when I visited the pre-schools as part of a study week; they described the process but didn’t specifically call it ‘looping’. The relationships that were developed with children and parents over this extended period were described as a strength of their system. Discussion with my peers at this time included the possibility of a personality clash between the teacher and a child and how that may impact on the child socially and academically. This concern has been addressed by Burke (1997) where he suggests this occurrence is very

rare and where it has occurred the problem is solved by transferring the child to another class. Benefits of looping are seen to be both academically and socially, looping is *“the promotion of strong, extended, meaningful, positive interpersonal relationships between teachers and students that foster increased student motivation and, in turn, stimulate improved learning outcomes for students”* (Burke, 1997, p.2).

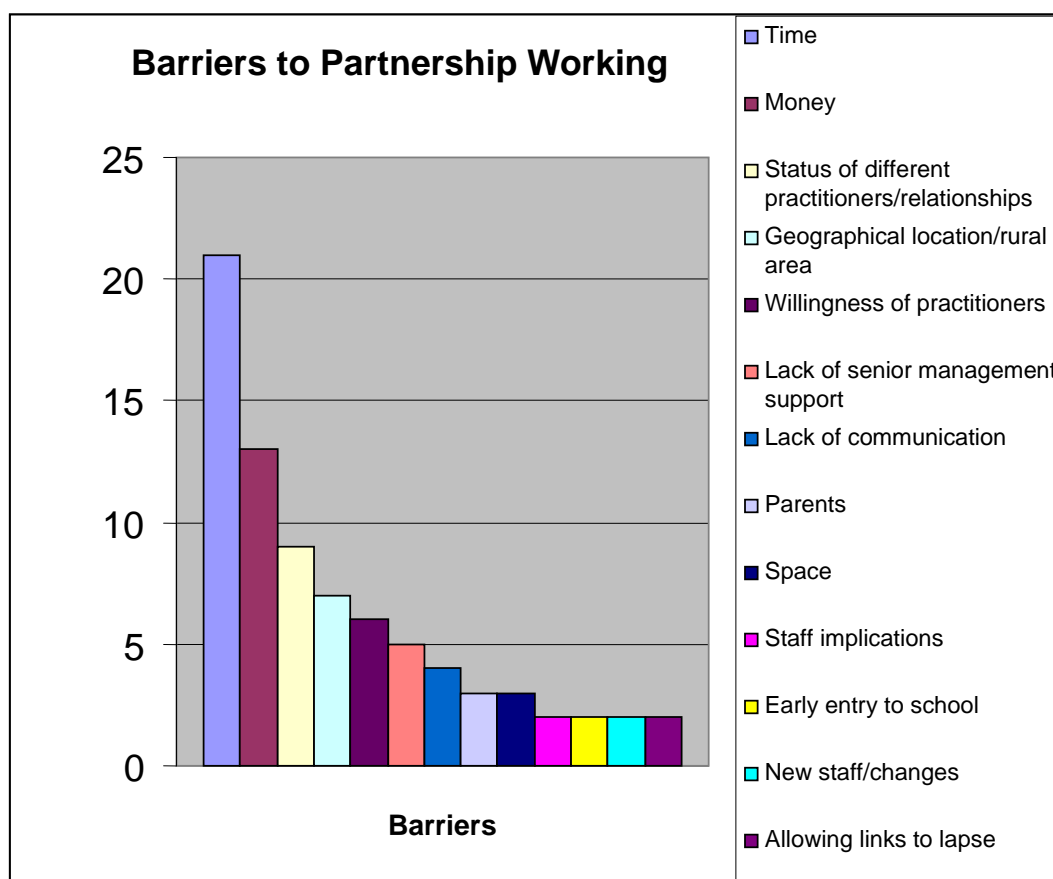
In both local authorities where my research study took place a few schools have introduced this system between reception and year 1. This has been viewed as potentially a difficult transition with a change in curriculum focus. Where this transition of both adults and children has taken place the teachers have suggested there is continuity and progression in children’s learning without a dip at the beginning of the year in September, which often occurs.

The focus of the staff swaps was to enable practitioners from both settings to spend time in other practitioners situations to gain a greater understanding of practices, policies and challenges allowing for greater understanding and development of relationships. There was an opportunity for professional development and to establish relationships with children prior to transferring to a new setting.

4.2.4 Barriers – focus groups

The cluster groups and the practitioners representing the different sectors were ideal to use as focus groups *“Focus groups enable close scrutiny and lengthy discussions”* (Wisker, 2001, p.141). They were used to test out new ideas and I was able to be present at cluster groups at different times to see the progress of the innovation as it was viewed by the participants. The main points were recorded on a flip chart as a record for the barriers to partnership working. As suggested by Wisker (2001), my presence as the researcher needed to be taken into account. However, it was very beneficial to me to sit back and listen to the discussion and then ask particular questions to entice them to dig deeper into their discussions. As the participants debated certain points a picture of their feelings, thoughts and points of views emerged. The main points from the focus groups were analysed. Cross sector practitioners worked in groups to discuss barriers to partnership working.

Graph 26



Singular responses

- Apathy
- Not reaching all the children
- Paper work involved taking school children to visit pre-school, e.g. permission slip, transport.
- Workforce remodelling, PPA time
- Understanding of the Foundation Stage Curriculum and practice by other professionals in school
- What about children from other settings, nurseries?
- Opportunity for a fresh start for the child, negative labelling
- Competition - school may encourage pre-schools to recommend them
- Premises - may be a problem with visits as some pre-schools only open at certain times of the day
- Organiser - there needs to be a named person who will take on the organisation of transition and implement strategies
- Timing of meetings
- Size of cluster group
- Resources

- Having an existing class
- School nursery links with pre-school difficult because of feeling of ‘poaching’ children
- Not seeing the need or benefits to making links
- Lack of confidence or self esteem
- Insular perception
- Lack of transport

The small working groups within the cluster came together as a whole cluster group and prioritized their three main barriers to partnership working. These are shown below. Time was identified as the biggest barrier to partnership working.

Table 3

Barriers Identified by Cluster Groups	Priority		
	1st	2nd	3rd
Time	10		
Lack of support from management	1		2
Money			1
Distance/number of settings		1	1
Lack of Communication		2	
Timing of meetings		2	
Early entry to school			1
Relationships/status of different practitioners			3
Not reaching all children			1
Not seeing needs or benefits of collaboration			1

Funding is often cited as significant for initiatives to succeed, and can be a spur to innovation. However, lack of it should not be a reason to close down opportunities for development of practice. Time for transference of good practice to be strengthened and real collaborative working to take place has to be built into systems. So leadership and management have a role to play. Although lack of time was a consistent theme, those interviewed wanted to be involved in the research and the emerging work. To embed quality practice, time had to be built into the learning process. Good practice was not going to be defined or taken on board at one off events. Reflection and meta-cognition of pedagogy were elements to successful practice. Time was built in for those practitioners who were supporting other professionals through visits, observations or policy writing. Engaging at all levels of the research meant adapting existing practice. Opportunities to target those settings not attending emerged from discussion and where

the change agents were vital to the success.

Research in Denmark (Brostrom, 2000), America (Pianta et al, 1999) and Iceland (Einarsdottir, 2003) has identified barriers exist in several different cultures. The barrier of different status identified here and in my research is difficult to shift, but there has been some success. Frost (2005) examined working in partnership with frontline staff and found “*joined up working faces a profound barrier in operational terms wherever it becomes impossible to build a joint enterprise on underlying division and rivalry*” (p.33). Although the work of the cluster groups addressed this through working together on a day - to - day basis, the work that I am undertaking will need to continue to build on the premise of recognising and valuing the diversity that exists between the sectors.

4.2.5 Systemic factors

The data show different processes that different sectors have in place to facilitate the transfer to school. Two key issues arose from the baseline data.

1. Requests from the private and voluntary settings asking if information could be sent to head teachers informing them of the importance of reception teachers visiting pre-schools. This driver for change linked to leadership and management was an area for further work.
2. Practitioners saying they definitely supported moves to improve links through visits to pre-school settings and sharing records. Practitioners recognised the invaluable information reception teachers may receive to support building a profile of the children. Systems had started to be developed as a result of this research and attendance at cluster groups. Practitioners gave examples of their systems through the interviews.

4.2.6 The interviews:

- What procedures if any have you in place to ensure children have a positive experience of transition from the private and voluntary sector to the maintained sector?

Visits

Visits between schools, preschools and day nurseries were a transition activity evident through the research. *“The reception teacher is going to make visits to the pre-schools and nurseries”* (Teaching assistant). One school had identified there were 22 different settings the children were coming from and they felt they were unable to visit all of them. The school had identified those settings where there were more than three children attending, resulting in visiting eight different settings. The early years co-ordinator said she felt that it is those settings, for example, where only one child is coming to the school, that actually need the visit to give the child more support, as they won't be coming with a friend. She was going to discuss this further with the head teacher. She said the discussions at cluster groups had made her think about these issues in more depth. Other reception teachers felt it was important all settings were visited.

We visit all our feeder preschools which is about ten different settings all together, but we visit all of them even if there is only one child attending our school, as we feel it is important that they see us and we meet them at their setting. The teacher and nursery nurse go together (Reception Teacher).

The interviews identified different systems for implementing the visits to settings *“staff visit the pre-school setting to see the child and begin to make a relationship with them; this is usually the head teacher and the reception teacher* (Head Teacher). The practitioners who visited also showed differences, in some cases it was the head teacher, the nursery teacher, reception teacher, nursery nurse or a mixture of practitioners visiting together. In most examples given, the rationale for the visit was to meet the children in their present setting and talk to the practitioners about any concerns. One interview with a teaching assistant said it was also an opportunity to *“encourage the practitioners to tell parents to share their records with the receiving school”*.

Induction procedures for children starting school had been a discussion point in cluster groups and were mentioned as part of interviews. As part of the induction process in one school the children had three visits to the school. They had included as a result of discussions with other practitioners the opportunity for *“children to walk around the school to become familiar with the layout, they walk in the playground, the dining hall*

and visit the office and meet the office staff” (Reception Teacher).

Parents were spoken about in relation to induction and were invited to contribute to the child’s profile. *“Prior to children starting school we have an interview with the parents and I have devised a conference form which relates to the Foundation Stage Profile and parents contribute to that”*. Other systems identified were *“children coming to the school and having a story session with their new teacher, a letter is sent to each new child and to their parent or carer inviting the children to come in for a story session”*. A new system with one feeder school resulted in very positive feedback from the preschool.

The children also make visits to the school and this time we were invited to go with the children. This was really good as when we walked back from the school to the pre-school the children were able to talk about the visit and we were able to discuss with the children the things they saw, the classrooms and staff and support them with any worries they may have (Preschool practitioner).

Home visits

Home visits had been discussed at cluster meetings and through the interviews more schools were implementing this to support the children at transition.

For the first time we will also be offering home visits to every family that would like to have a home visit. The children will start school two weeks later so that all children will have an opportunity for a home visit (Reception Teacher). The class teacher and the teaching assistant will be making the visits together.

Home visits were taking place for children entering nursery *“we home visit all our children; the nursery teacher and the nursery nurse visit together”* and also entering school *“those children that have not been through the nursery and will be going straight into the reception class will have the opportunity of a home visit” (Nursery Teacher).*

Meetings

Meetings were held at the school as part of induction, which varied from one meeting to several meetings. *“We have an introduction meeting for parents where we talk about the curriculum, parent partnership, settling in procedures and parent helpers etc. We show photographs of the Foundation Stage and give parents an information pack”* (Reception Teacher). Meetings also included individual time with parents and individual information about the child. *“At a parents meeting for new children, parents are also given an individual consultation time with a member of staff. A questionnaire is also filled in with information about the child”* (Head Teacher).

Transition activities

Practitioners through the interviews explained different activities they had in place to support transition. Several practitioners as a result of activities shared at cluster groups had tried these activities in their own schools and settings. A particular favourite was the book of photographs; individual schools had adapted the book to meet their own needs which also included making one for each child to have prior to starting school.

There is a book that we have produced and this goes home with every child before they start school. It has photographs of the staff in it, not just the teacher but the dinner ladies. The book shows the children that they will have a peg to hang their coat, and a picture of the toilets and the playground. Parents tell us that they have been looking at the book with the children and the children are then familiar with not only the building but the adults as well”(Reception Teacher).

Some activities were in place after the children had entered school as well as before. Reception children ‘went back’ to the nursery at playtime to use the nursery garden, the sand pit, wheeled toys, climbing area etc. They did this twice a day so ‘playtime’ was a familiar, enjoyable experience. Routines and toys were kept similar in the first half term with a gradual change-over to a more structured teacher-led input in short sessions. Both the nursery and reception teachers thought this gradual introduction helped the children cope with the change they encountered. Several teachers mentioned *“a staggered entry to the nursery to build up a key worker group, trust and stability* (Reception Teacher) and *“the children have a gradual introduction into the nursery. We have just two new children a day starting, this way we can focus on the new*

children” (Nursery Teacher).

Continuity for children with special educational needs was in place and both sectors spoke about transition arrangements. *“Photographic timetables to support their transition went with the child. The learning support assistants visited the child in the nursery and worked with their key worker on individual education plan activities to support handover and to share strategies” (Reception Teacher).*

If a child has a special educational need we ask the teacher to specifically visit the nursery where the child is observed with their key worker and all relevant information is passed from the day nursery to the reception teacher of the school. The parent is also invited to the nursery to meet with their child’s key worker and the teacher from the receiving school. The individual education plan is shared with the teacher and they are invited to come into the nursery to be present at the child’s review. Any resources go with the child for example their visual timetable (Day nursery manager).

Day nursery practitioners also supported children with transition between rooms, *“we have communication sheets, and visit sheets and we observe how the children cope with the visit to the next room”*. Transition activities took place throughout the year not just at transition points. *“Children are also invited to the school at various times during the year for events such as fetes and open evenings” (Day Nursery Practitioners).*

There was evidence through the interviews that transition activities took place both on entry to nursery and nursery to reception class. No practitioners spoke about transition activities into year 1. Teachers also spoke about the staff looking for friendship groups so the children were able to transfer into reception with a friend; the teachers said they had not realised the importance of friendship groups but had observed particularly in the first few weeks this helped children with their confidence.

Practitioners in maintained settings included parents in their activities; the parents had workshops that gave them an understanding of the Foundation Stage and for example mathematics; the children took part in these workshops with their parents. There were also literacy workshops for the parents. One school invited their feeder setting

practitioners to attend.

Transference of records

Through the interviews only two practitioners spoke about passing on records for the children an accredited childminder *“the stepping stones and early learning goals record sheets are passed onto the teacher in the reception class”* where records went to the school and a day nursery practitioner who passed records onto parents. *“We make regular observations of the children, and fill in developmental sheets; these follow the children through the nursery. We write a summary report about the children when they leave us and go to school, and give this to the parents”*. The interviews highlighted the need for more work with transferring records relating to children’s continuity in learning and development.

Joint projects

There was some evidence of schools and settings beginning to work together, this ranged from attendance at specific events to *“there is a move for us to work on a joint project such as gardening and making joint use of the grounds”* (Reception Teacher) and activities such as fun afternoons where the children from the local feeder settings are invited. Interviews with reception teachers showed a move to have systems in place where they did not just meet at transition points with their feeder setting but *“we have contact throughout the year with our feeder settings and they come into the school, I make sure they always feel welcome in the school”*.

The interviews showed that for systems to be implemented and to be effective there needed to be support from senior management, only one reception teacher spoke about this in a positive manner *“The head teacher is very supportive, I say what I am going to do and she goes along with it, she trusts me to know what good practice is”*.

The childminders expressed good relationships with their feeder schools but their system to support transition for children was preparing the child within their home for school.

I have a good relationship with my local school and pre-school and I have a discussion with them informally. I help to prepare the children by sharing books with them about

starting school and talk to them about what will happen. Often the children are familiar with the school as often I may be picking up or taking children to the school. I also try to support the children in their independence skills, so I will look at practical activities such as putting on their own coats or shoes.

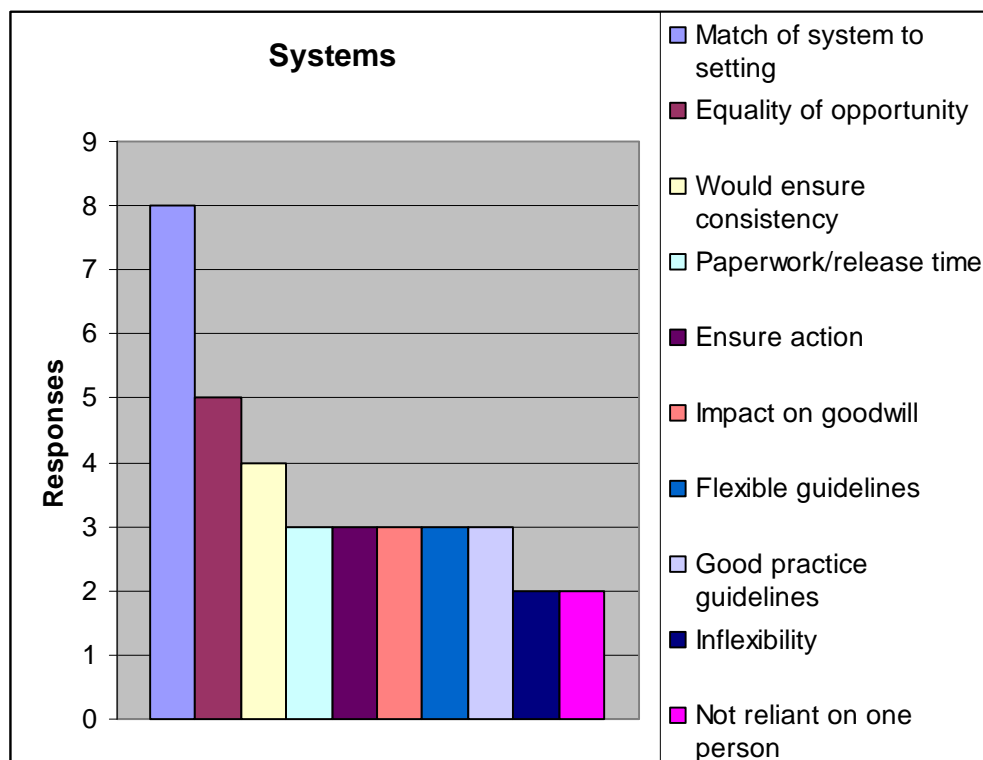
One childminder supported children in their new class. *“I attend part time sessions at the nursery class with the children. This way the children are supported by myself in their new surroundings”.*

The interviews found a range of systems in place for children on transition to school. All practitioners interviewed had some form of system. Individual schools and settings had developed them recently as a result of discussion at cluster groups or the discussion being the catalyst for reviewing them. Practitioners believed this was an area for further development and gave me data for further work to be implemented.

4.2.7 Focus groups

This discussion point related to systems for the focus groups resulted in the most debate. Some practitioners believed a system would be beneficial while others felt it might be too prescriptive. Many groups not giving a series of answers to prioritise. Those that did are shown below

Graph 27



Singular Responses:

- Should be written in a policy
- Transition in place for reception/year 1
- Should be a system in place for children with special needs
- Have a formal system in place, works well
- Head teachers need to be involved right from the start
- Need support of parents to make it work
- All professional practitioners could work as one team
- A formal system for liaison between settings, e.g. visits, sharing of records

Through the development stage there became a consensus where a set of guidelines on transition which all settings should follow should be produced. This was to ensure continuity across all sectors and ensure equality of opportunity for all children. The practitioners believed this was a good way forward as the processes would not be reliant on one individual and not reliant on leadership and management to make sure it happened as it would form part of the setting/school policy. Many practitioners also believed that head teachers should be involved from the beginning and have an understanding of the benefits of the cluster groups and transition into formal schooling for children.

Table 4

Systems Identified by Cluster Groups	Priority		
	1st	2nd	3rd
Formal system would make something happen	5		
Would ensure consistency		2	2
Not reliant on one individual		3	
Good practice guidelines	2	1	
May lose flexibility			1
Liaison between settings	1		
Flexible guidelines	1		
Support from senior management			1

It was agreed flexibility should be built into a system, so there was still a degree of the system meeting the individual needs of the settings. A system not only for transition procedures but also as a way to capture and share knowledge needs to be established which is visible and transparent. A challenge across the county is developing robust ways to identify good practice and help to ensure effective transition and application to other early years settings.

Vignettes

Vignettes of practice identified different systems that were shown to have an impact on partnership working and transition into school. These were discussed in more detail but build on the discussions from the cluster groups where practice was described and transferred to new settings. Discussion involved not just the process but how individual practitioners thought it supported transition. Systems such as, identifying feeder settings and the children from the reception class revisiting their previous setting with photographs of reception activities and talking about their new experience, and pre-school children with a key worker visiting the school are just two case study examples.

Book of photographs

This was one transition activity which captured the imagination of a lot of the practitioners. A book of photographs which shows different areas of the school, the playground, dinning hall, classroom with activities laid out, cloakroom and toilets was produced by the school sector. Photographs also included key people in the school such as the teacher, teaching assistant, head teacher and school secretary. Simple captions were added. The book was taken and left at the feeder pre-schools and day nurseries. The children can look at the book themselves or have it read to them by an adult. Schools particularly felt this was useful where there were too many feeder settings to visit.

Journal extract

I visited a cluster in the north of the county, a very good turn out for a cold night; the cluster mentor showed all the practitioners her book of photographs. This had a new aspect to it, she doesn't just make a book for the pre-schools, she makes a book for each child and gives it to the child and family the term before they start to be shared at home. Some practitioners think this is a lot of work! the teacher said it was manageable!

Establishing a pre-school story group that continued throughout the year was a system that worked and was supported by senior management and the flexibility of the reception practitioners. The system of staff swapping was a successful initiative and this system has been developed as a result of the benefits and impact described by the teacher, the nursery nurse and the teaching assistant. This has been identified as good practice within an Ofsted inspection and written into the report. Transition story sacks and the sharing of resources such as a digital camera to support assessment were systems that have been newly developed as a result of identifying needs. Examples of case studies were shared by the practitioners and discussed in detail at the cluster groups.

4.2.8 Impact (positive and negative) of partnerships

With cluster groups evolving, opportunities for partnerships to develop with practitioners meeting on a regular basis I wanted to identify how the practitioners

thought this was impacting on practice, particularly the impact for children on entry to school.

4.2.9 Interviews

As part of the individual interviews I wanted to establish what the different practitioners thought was best practice to support the process of self reflection and to encourage deep thinking about how this has an impact on the children in their settings. I was aiming for institutionalisation of good practice and continual evaluation where every child had the best start in life as it is recognised that investment in beneficial childhoods provides long term benefits to all.

- What elements of partnership working would you identify as best practice?
- How do you think children will benefit from transition procedures based on best practice?

Best practice

All practitioners spoke about the sharing of experiences and the sharing of different practices across the sector as well as between the sectors as best practice. Particularly where there was only one Foundation Stage class in a school the reception teacher spoke about how *“it can be very isolating; cluster groups are a really good opportunity for me to be with other teachers”*. Cluster groups were described as a way of ensuring partnership working and a forum for best practice being discussed practitioners from all sectors included cluster groups.

The cluster groups are based on best practice where you can really get to know practitioners from the other sectors; in this forum you can have conversations with people and get to understand what it is like in other settings. Informal conversations are really good. Clusters are also a reminder of best practice and an opportunity to share those ideas and also the training workshops where all practitioners can have free access to training and to hear the same messages (Nursery Teacher).

Journal extract

It is very encouraging to hear school practitioners speaking in positive terms in relation

to their local pre-school practice. In some of the cluster groups this has happened at a quicker rate than I initially thought.

It is also good to share ideas and experiences with the preschools as well, I know that some of the schools think that they pick up more ideas from us than the other way round, but I don't agree with that I think they have got some really good ideas especially with the outdoor curriculum and they try really hard to develop their practice. It is also important to understand where the children are at before they come to you, and if we have good links we know what the children are like in their previous setting before they come to us (Reception Teacher).

All the practitioners from the private and voluntary sector thought best practice was the teachers visiting the children in the nursery where they would see the children in their familiar environment and be able to talk to the children and to the practitioners.

Interviews highlighted best practice also involved parents; *“parents need to have support with the transition process because they might not understand all that it is about, and they might not have the confidence to ask for a meeting”* (Pre-school Practitioner). The data from this aspect of the interviews showed parents were spoken about more often than in other areas of practice.

Sharing knowledge of children's interests, learning styles, schematic developments, alerting new staff to children's special needs and concerns so that resources and strategies were in place in preparation for entry to school was a common theme through the interviews. The Head teacher interviewed said *“Multi agency meetings should take place for all children that have a statement. There should also be transition meetings with the settings involved with the child”*.

The sharing of records is a theme throughout the data and was classed as 'very important' so that the receiving school had information about the child; several practitioners stated the importance of parents being encouraged to share these with the receiving school. *“Where possible pre-school, day nurseries and childminders should be encouraged to get permission from parents to share records that have been compiled about the child in the Foundation Stage; this would help to ensure*

consistency” (Foundation Stage Co-ordinator). Both sectors suggested all practitioners in the Foundation Stage should be working together in a confident manner with all practitioners being respected for the work they do using the same curriculum and sharing where the children are on the stepping stones.

Support from management was another theme where it was suggested the manager or the head teacher needed to value the Foundation Stage; one teacher said *“this doesn’t always happen in a primary school where the head teacher has little knowledge of the Foundation Stage and the value of visiting feeder pre-schools”*.

Co-operation between all the settings and liaison between private and voluntary settings and the schools was seen to be key to ensuring best practice. *“There should be two way liaison, between the maintained and the private and voluntary sectors. There should be contact and communication between the two sectors”* (Nursery Manger). Preschools were keen to have opportunities to share ideas with more ad hoc meetings, where they can turn up at the school for advice and the opportunity to have input from a qualified teacher. This had worked well, where the deputy head teacher of one of the infant schools had talked to the preschool practitioners about the teaching of phonics, They regarded this as best practice as it will lead to continuity between the preschool and the school and will benefit the children going to the school.

Practitioners spoke about some of the new transition activities as best practice particularly the book of photographs. *“Best practice is also about finding out what the child likes and ensuring the resources are in the setting when the child transfers into our setting or into school, so the child feels happy and secure”*(Preschool practitioner).

Impact for children

The interviews resulted in practitioners believing the impact on the child mainly related to children settling into school and personal, social and emotional aspects of development. *“Children are familiar with the staff, the environment and the building, and I think this helps them to settle into the routine of the school”* (Teaching assistant). Teachers said the children were entering school feeling relaxed and confident. Having a transition process in place resulted in children being familiar with the changes that were going to happen to them. They were able to understand there was a new routine

and were prepared for what was to come.

A child feeling happy, secure and confident was a phrase used by all practitioners with a focus on personal, social and emotional development. *“Most of the benefits are related to the personal, emotional and social development of the children, and in the pre-school we are helping them prepare for these aspects of the P.S.E. curriculum”* (Preschool Practitioner).

I think the impact is definitely in relation to personal, social and emotional development. Children who feel safe and secure and have a sense of belonging and being valued will accept new challenges, take risks in their learning, be open to new experiences and will have a more positive disposition to learn (Reception Teacher).

Two reception teachers said the impact for children was also in communication skills as well, as the children were more confident to speak to adults and generally more confident to talk. Practitioners interviewed said staff having knowledge about the child and where they were in their learning helped to plan the next steps. This was a common theme particularly with children with special educational needs. Sharing information before children started school resulted in staff planning for differing needs before they entered school. Practitioners viewed one element of impact as continuity in children’s learning. This was a result of consistency of approach, and consistency of language and expectations to help the children cope with the change of moving from one setting to another. Practitioners said the cluster groups had helped them to support children to cope with the change

Practitioners believed if transition was a joyful, happy experience and an exciting experience for the child then they will settle well. A teaching assistant said the experience they have on transition into school will stay with them all the way through school. *“I had a bad experience when I started school, and this stayed with me all through my schooling and I never enjoyed school, that’s why I think it is so important that we get it right for children”*.

4.2.10 Findings

From the interviews the key elements that related to what the practitioners across all

the sectors believed was best practice is described below:

Best practice:

- Visits to settings by reception teachers
- Visits to school by children
- Two way liaison
- Sharing of children's records
- Good induction programme
- Transition meetings
- Cluster groups
- Communication between setting throughout the year
- Co-operation between practitioners
- Support from management
- Finding out what the child likes, ensuring resources are in place in new setting.
- Input from qualified teacher
- All practitioners respected for the work they do
- Sharing of knowledge of the children, e.g. interests, learning styles
- Multi agency meeting for children with special educational needs
- Resources/strategies in place for children with special educational needs

Listed below are the main points that emerged in relation to perceived impact for children.

Impact for children:

- Happy, secure, safe, confident
- Settle better – know routine of the school
- Children have a sense of belonging
- Individual needs of the children are met
- Has an impact on their personal, social and emotional development
- Prepared for school
- Children are ready to accept new challenges
- Communication skills, children are confident to talk to us and speak generally
- The consistency of approach, language and expectations

- Continuity of learning
- Exciting experience
- Familiar with environment
- Self image, well being and school attainment

Evidence from field notes, observations and attendance at cluster groups showed some level of impact. Practitioners from the private and voluntary sectors wanted tangible evidence from cluster training to show professional development. Whilst this was not an issue for qualified teachers, this reflects the growing professionalism of early years workers, whilst demonstrating teachers did not feel the need for external validation. Joint training was also seen as beneficial as there was an opportunity to discuss the issues raised during the training leading to increased knowledge and greater consistency in practice across the sectors. On occasions this led to positive outcomes; for example, the teacher at the local school during training on ICT offered the local pre-school the opportunity to use the ICT suite on a weekly basis. This support was very beneficial for the children not only in terms of their learning but familiarity with the school building, teachers and other staff at the school. Practitioners from both sectors felt this supported the children during transition.

How beneficial informal networking sessions were depended on the individual skills of the mentor. Where the mentor had a clear agenda and a clear focus for the informal meetings, evidence showed they were beneficial. Through the focus groups, there was discussion of the benefits of informal networking, which focused on support, relationships, shared aims and goals. These informal networks developed over time with the confidence and relationships of the individuals becoming stronger.

Journal extract

It is becoming more and more evident the interpersonal skills of the leading mentor are vital to developing the relationships in the cluster groups. Can these skills be developed through the cluster mentor forums?

4.2.11 Themes to evidence impact

Using the different data sources I identified the emerging themes that were having an

impact on developing partnership working, practitioners practice and impact for the child.

Supported transition:

It was identified through the initiatives discussed, transition into a school nursery or reception class was much smoother and practitioners appreciated the opportunity to be able to speak to key workers about the children's needs and experiences. An opportunity for nursery staff to play with children in an environment in which they felt secure and where learning was likely to be at a higher level gave the receiving practitioners better understanding of the child's development. Fisher, (1996) advocated this practice, as pre-school practitioners will have knowledge of the child in a learning environment and will be able to add value to the knowledge of the teacher of the child as a learner. Cluster groups were described as being valuable in smoothing the settling in process into school and as a way of sharing information about children and practice. Teachers stated it was beneficial for teaching assistants to attend the cluster groups as often they had a pivotal role to play. New procedures are in place with private and voluntary staff visiting schools and using the information to adapt their practice and introduce new ideas.

Training

The opportunity to hear speakers at cluster groups that settings would not be able to afford otherwise was praised, along with the opportunity to have training after school resulting in not having to find and fund supply cover. Related benefits were the opportunity to have high quality training in a local venue and the opportunity to discuss the outcomes across the sectors. Often formal training was a prompt for the following informal network meeting. Training on Persona dolls led to the cluster group purchasing a few for practitioners to borrow, the focus for the meeting was writing Persona doll scenarios so there was consistency and sharing of ideas and knowledge.

Liaising and networking with other practitioners:

It was clear from the number of comments received, written on the questionnaires, verbally through interviews and focus groups, that liaising and networking was viewed as a great benefit to all practitioners. Although training was often stated as a benefit practitioners also appreciated the opportunity to liaise with, for example, other

reception teachers. This was particularly mentioned where there was only one Foundation Stage teacher in the school. *“Informal cluster meetings give me an invaluable chance to ask advice, share opinions and ideas with people who understand as they are in the same position”*. As some children attend 2 or 3 settings, cluster groups were seen as a support to form links with all the settings. This forum was an opportunity to widen the networks beyond just the nearest feeder setting. It was clear that the practitioners saw this was an easier way to make links with all practitioners across all sectors being in the same place at the same time. Sharing knowledge and skills was a key theme.

Drake (2001) viewed networks as a rich source of professional support and my research supported this. The success of cluster groups was evident in the following comment taken from a questionnaire *“Always a very useful and pleasant time, offloading and gaining from each other’s experiences, looking around other units and sometimes even having a laugh, we always benefit from these meetings”* (Reception Teacher). Cluster groups were also viewed as a medium for helping to explain what was wanted or required by the DfES and other bodies. They kept people up to date with new initiatives and legislation. The words *‘beneficial’, ‘informative’, ‘well-planned’* were useful in terms of feedback.

Sharing good practice and ideas

An opportunity to share ideas and good practice was welcomed by all practitioners. They found the cluster meetings invaluable as they brought all settings together, enabling them to share venues, ideas, strategies and to support each other in providing the best care and provision for children. Practitioners asked for more opportunities to share ideas and discuss activities with other providers in the cluster groups. As Hargreaves states:

Much is written about the sharing of good practiceunfortunately our knowledge of how this might be best done is frighteningly slight. Where it is being done, it is not being done particularly well or as a result of official action (Hargreaves, 2003, p.44).

Defining and sharing of good practice is not a simple or superficial task. However good practice can be defined as standard practice which is effective in a profession, in this case early years education and care. The term can also be used to describe practice

that is new and judged as more effective than common practice. Or in my particular research good practice is that which is not only effective for those using it but can also be proven to be effective in wider organisational settings. The definition by O’Dell and Grayson (1998) is any practice, know how or experience that has proven to be valuable or effective in one organisation that may have applicability to other organisations.

Within this research framework of examining good practice, two different areas emerged. One was ‘good ideas’. This may be classed as something not proven by an external measurement, but making good sense; these ideas were taken to implement and to monitor if they were effective (Hargreaves, 2003). Secondly, good practice that has already been proven to be effective and had an impact on performance which may also have some third part validation, for example by an Ofsted inspection. Therefore a distinction is made between good ideas and good practice. Hargreaves (2003) suggests good practice should improve learning and support teachers to work smarter, and be transferable to as many practitioners and settings as possible. If the good practice defined by one practitioner or setting was difficult to transfer then it would be of little use. Part of the development stage was discussing this distinction.

Part of this research was, through partnership working, to develop a sharing and learning culture. A continuum of practice (Table 4) devised by Handscomb (2002, p.5) illustrates the direction for sharing of practice and where we were aiming for.

Table 5

Interesting and innovative practice	Good practice	Best practice
Encouraging creativity, innovation and a sense of dynamism	Effective practice. Ideas shared with others, adapted to new contexts and tried out. Learning communities Sharing and trialling	Best practice validated by supporting evidence and proven over time; structured systems; Benchmarking; monitoring and evaluation. Quality assurance. Formal dissemination.

Creativity

During a discussion, practitioners from the private and voluntary sector spoke about the lack of creativity within the curriculum and in particular when children moved into school there were little opportunities for children to be creative. As a result of this dialogue the reception teacher over a week videoed practice in her own and her colleague's reception class. At the next cluster meeting the video was shared and practitioners were encouraged to identify in the practice creativity. This created new knowledge, gave all practitioners ideas to take back to their setting and provided an insight into the maintained classroom for pre-school practitioners.

Practitioners were asked through interviews how children benefit from transition procedures based on best practice. Practitioners suggested that children benefited as they were happy, secure and confident, had increased confidence, good self esteem and self confidence and they would settle better and more quickly. There was a strong emphasis on the personal, social and emotional aspects of the curriculum, with less mentioned about children benefiting in terms of their cognitive skills. Practitioners interviewed also spoke about children being familiar with their new surroundings and staff, and knowing what changes to expect and what was expected of them. Consistency was another word that was often used consistency in approach, language, and learning where next steps could be planned for. This was built into, for example, developing a consistency when using mathematical language. Practitioners spoke about children's dispositions for learning being important for future learning to take place.

Journal extract

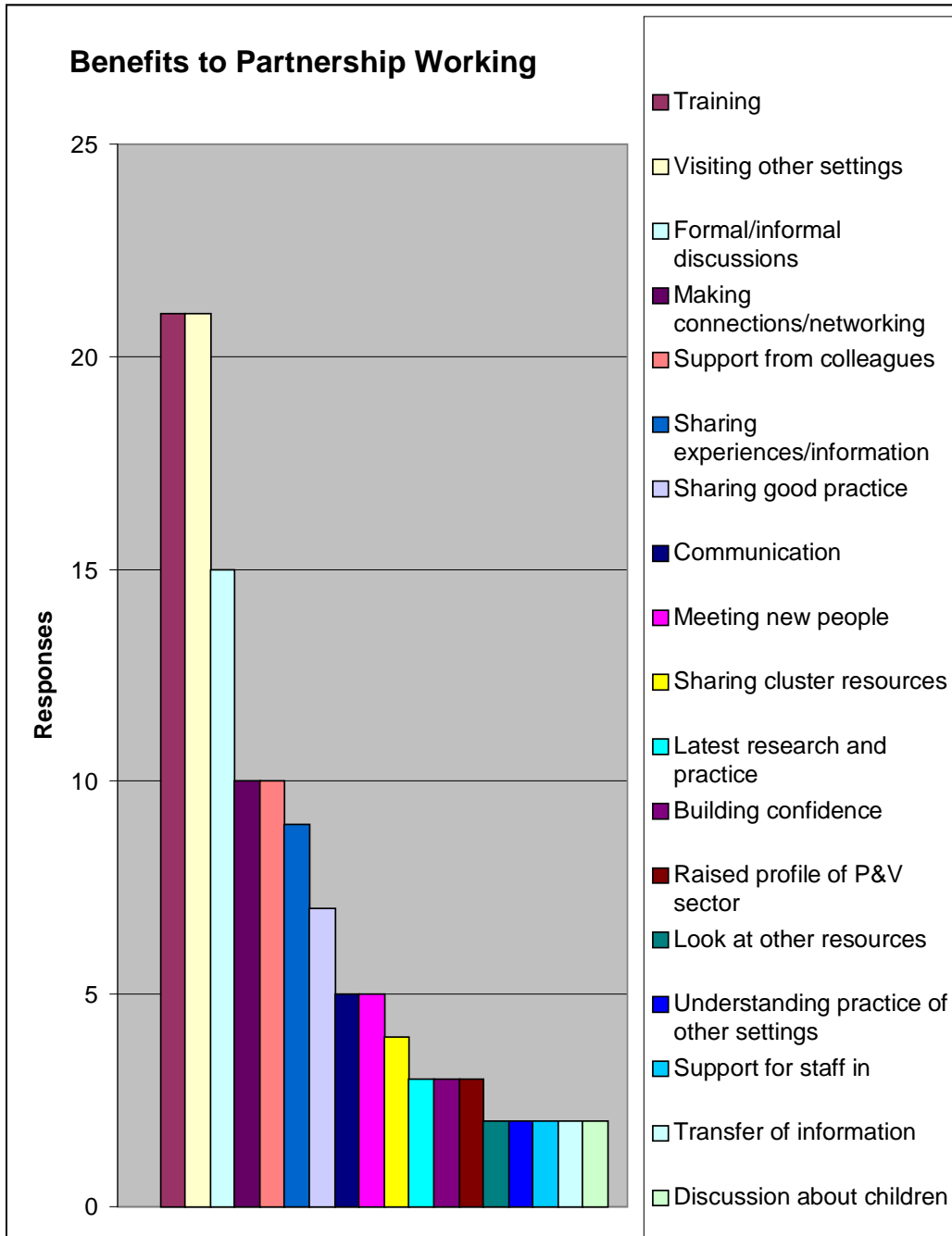
Cluster group today was brilliant, the teacher showed her video of creativity in the classrooms. Lots of discussion, pre-school asked for more sessions like this.

Using the cluster groups as focus groups allowed for discussion which was very detailed and all practitioners from all sectors were able to contribute. During the cycle of change practitioners from the different sectors felt able to speak out openly; the

cluster groups had fostered an atmosphere of mutual respect and where all practitioners felt they had a voice. It was through these informal exchanges that developments were made and individual practitioners expressed the wish to continue with further work in relation to transition practices.

Graph 28

Focus groups saw the benefits as



Singular responses:

- Realising what we do is acceptable and of good value
- More groups have now become involved with the cluster group and it has widened
- More at ease in smaller meeting groups
- Providing more comfort to the child- as their new setting has become familiar to pre-school staff
- They are beneficial for development officers as they can access and talk to all practitioners in one place
- We all share the same 'customers' and the cluster ensures continuity
- Private and voluntary sector have access to a qualified teacher for a sustained amount of time
- School and pre-school practitioners getting together
- Links between childminders, pre-schools and school
- Informal atmosphere
- A social opportunity and an evening out
- An opportunity to learn new things
- Helps those who are doing professional development and courses
- Sharing ideas to support children with special educational needs
- Stops groups from feeling isolated
- Access to outside agencies
- Focus on the important aspects of the early years curriculum.

Opportunities to visit other settings and see first hand examples of practice, for example, the way the outdoor area had been set up and the resources that were found to be the most beneficial. The whole notion of visiting other settings and getting new ideas to take away and try out in their setting was a focus for many practitioners. This transference of practice has emerged as a key theme. The General Teaching Council (2001) stresses the importance for teachers to be not only experts in the classroom and leaders of learning within their own school, but also members of the broader education community. Collaboration has been advocated at national level, but has been recognised that *"the most effective sharing is seeing someone else do it, and apply and try this out in your own context. This cannot be a national strategy: it can only be at local level"* (DfES, 2001).

Through a culture of sharing a learning community across sectors was being established. Practitioners were developing, seeking out and sharing practice and developing communities of practice within and beyond the setting. Rudd et al. (2004) concluded that though demands and commitment were demanded from practitioners in developing new ways of working in partnership, the perceived benefits were

considerable. More open relationships and opportunities to raise attainment and improve experiences for children were highlighted as making the extra work worthwhile.

Table 6

Benefits Identified by Cluster Groups	Priority		
	1st	2nd	3rd
Training	1	4	2
Liasion/networking	2	2	2
Sharing ideas and experiences	3		
Sharing practice/visiting other settings	1		2
Peer support	1	1	
Listening to ideas		2	
Latest research and practice			1
Sharing good practice		1	
Reflective practice			1
Better understanding of other settings			1
Building relationships	1		
Access to outside agencies			1
Sharing Foundation Stage experiences		1	

Training together, collaborating in workshops, exchanging ideas and discussing curriculum issues were the basis of building a new professional partnerships in the education of young children. Continuity and progression in the children’s early years experience was voiced as being the main benefit for many practitioners with easing the transition from pre-school to school as being one of the aims for joint training.

A head teacher that I interviewed was very positive about the benefits of partnership working and gave this a high status within her primary school; she remarked that *“money invested in the early years is money saved later on in the school system”*. She believed that it was important that settings were not working in isolation but that the aim should be working in partnership. Her viewpoint supported the development of partnership working in her area and the good practice within the reception class was an opportunity for other practitioners to visit and learn from.

In terms of the vignettes of good practice investigated, a teacher taking part in training on the use of the document *Evaluating Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years* (author, 2003) who put together an action plan to support effective pedagogy and working with others beyond the setting, (section E) found initiating a close liaison with the pre-school resulted in a smooth transition into school which had a good impact particularly with children's personal, social and emotional development. She reflected on her current practice and identified where the gaps were for all children making that transition into school and recognized the benefits and importance of continuity within the Foundation Stage. This was recognized with children settling into school, ready to engage in the learning offered.

The case study of staff swaps between the school and the day nursery showed positive benefits, where for example the teaching assistant found she had a good insight into the experiences of children before they came into school, and that the children recognizing a familiar adult were more confident when entering the classroom. The nursery staff benefited by having the opportunity to ask the teacher specific questions in relation to the curriculum and the expectations of children in terms of their learning which led to her supporting them ready for the transition to school.

Sharing of resources was highlighted as a benefit as practitioners were able to update their skills through the training session and then have the opportunity to borrow the resources and develop practice in their own settings.

4.2.12 Impact for children

As the action research developed, I wanted to identify the impact that the partnership working and cluster groups were having on children, as they transferred into formal schooling at four or five years of age. The results are based on individual's perception of the impact for children rather than quantitative data. As baseline assessment is no longer a requirement for formal testing on entry to school, data will be rely upon teacher assessment and will form part of the next phase of research.

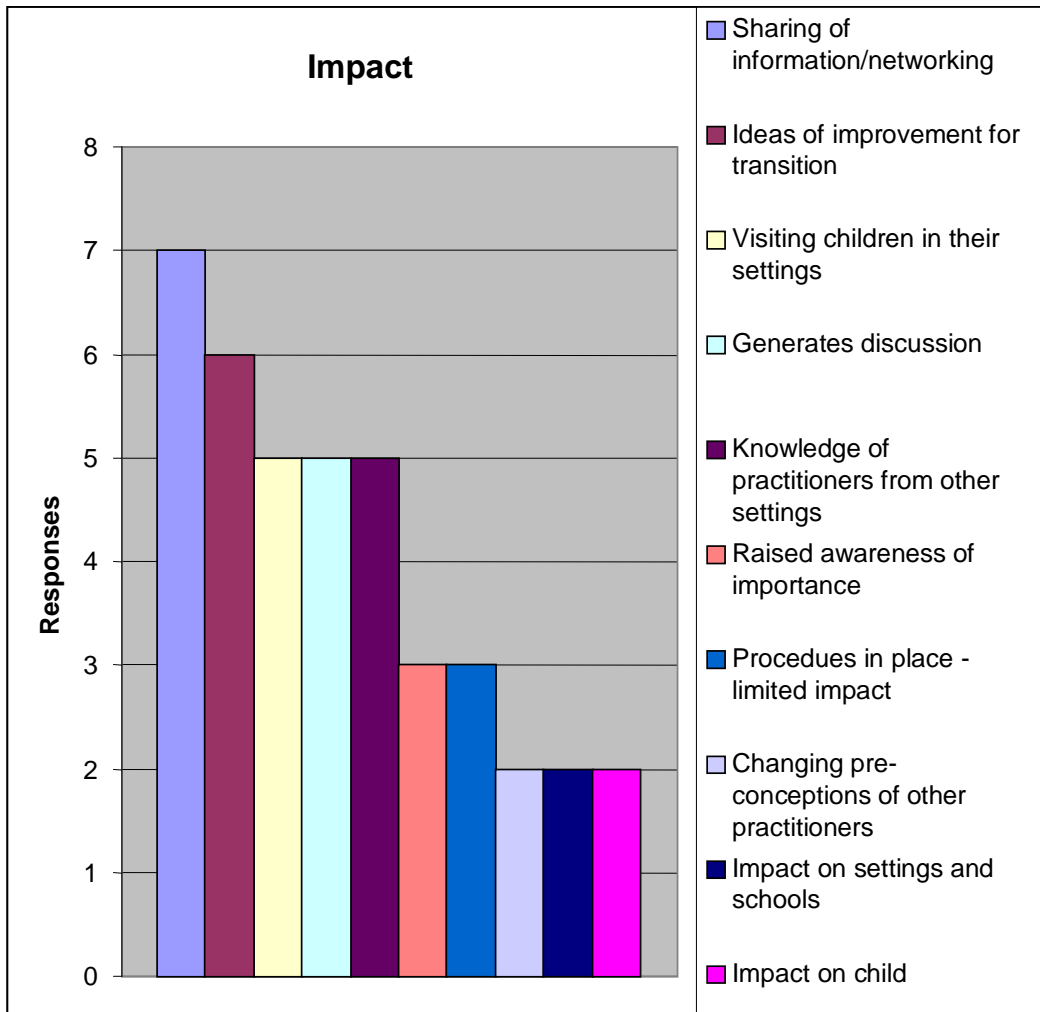
The perceived impact relates to consistency across the sectors with judgements against

the stepping stones and early learning goals within the curriculum guidance. The opportunity to share information and expertise regarding record keeping for children's progress had resulted in practitioners developing increased skills in making accurate judgements. This has resulted in continuity and progression for children entering school with seamless provision. Pre-schools now use similar assessment strategies and are, for example, using Foundation Stage target tracker which previously was only used in the maintained sector. This supports the tracking of individual and groups of children (gender, ethnicity, S.E.N) ensuring all children are making progress in their learning. Training through the cluster groups has resulted in improved knowledge and skills which has had an impact on practice. Head teachers who visited settings used this opportunity to discuss curriculum issues and as a medium to discuss practice which would ensure continuity and develop the knowledge of the practitioners in the pre-school and day nursery. They believed this had an impact on where the children started in terms of cognitive ability, for example, practitioners using the same phonics system.

Through closer links and shared practice reception teachers said children were more relaxed and aware of the expectations from school, though it has to be recognised this is anecdotal evidence. During a head teacher interview, the head felt that though partnership working involved resources, time and money it was still high on his agenda as he could see the benefits as the children transferred into school. He had a good awareness of the numbers of different providers that fed into his school and mixed provision in terms of quality. He was undertaking a mapping exercise to identify on entry levels of attainment from the different providers and then looking to undertake further in depth partnership working with those settings where on entry data was consistently lower. The arrangements he has in place in terms of partnership working and the work he and his reception teachers undertake with the private and voluntary settings were highlighted as excellent in his last Ofsted inspection. This external validation will support transference of practice to other schools. In the Self Evaluation Form under new Ofsted arrangements he has highlighted as a focus the partnership working his school takes part in. He would like to see a standardised record keeping system in place but believes the way forward and the ethos to work towards is that of looking for change and improving practice.

4.2.13 Focus groups - Impact on transition

Graph 29



Singular responses:

- Sharing training, common practice
- Has helped to have familiar adults in both settings
- Identified this needs to be worked on further
- Limited impact, but increases opportunities for communication
- Forms first link with pre-school and school staff
- More support needed from senior management
- Shared expectations from adult/child's point of view
- Sharing of resources
- Looking at curriculum and making assessments
- Supports dialogue/ work with parents on transition
- Built up mutual trust and relationships
- Shared understanding
- Ideas of how to deal with difficult situations
- The introduction of a transfer record for the cluster settings

In terms of the benefit for transition for children one of the most common responses was that in terms of ideas on how to support the transition process many practitioners went away to make books with photographs to leave in their feeder pre-schools and day nurseries. Practitioners also said that the discussion and dialogue that took place in relation to the transition of children had added to the impact on transition. However it was also noted that some practitioners believed that the cluster groups had only had a limited impact on the transition of children but that would have increased if the cluster groups had more focus on transition.

Many settings had good systems in place and believed that this had already had an impact on transitions for children. They considered that having the discussions at the cluster groups had reinforced what they were doing and validated it. Some teachers said through observations of children entering school they had identified where links with other pre-schools were not so strong the children had more difficulty settling. Many practitioners concluded by saying that as a result of the cluster groups there had been an impact on transition stating the networking and sharing of information had had an impact on transition, they knew the children better and the previous experiences they had before moving to school. It was through cluster groups that for some reception teachers visits to children settings were initiated and this was felt as having an impact on transition. The focus groups prioritised what activities had maximum impact on transition.

Table 7

Impact Identified by Cluster Groups	Priority		
	1st	2nd	3rd
Dialogue between settings	3	2	1
Ideas of how to improve transition		3	3
Visits to support transition	1	1	1
Having a shared language/understanding		1	1
Limited impact			2
Sharing training/common practice	1		
Need to work on links		1	
Sharing of information	1		
More impact if a focus at each cluster group	1		
Looking at curriculum and making assessments		1	
Changing preconceptions			1
Has helped build mutual trust and relationships	1		
Awareness raised of importance of transition process	1		

Brostrom (2000) undertook similar research with a range of practitioners to identify their transition activities. The top five were listed as:

1. Pre-school teachers and kindergarten teachers have conferences before school start about children's life and development
2. The next year teachers have some period in kindergarten class
3. Teachers and pedagogues have shared meetings to discuss education
4. The school invites the individual child to visit the kindergarten class before school starts
5. The pre-school teachers and children visit the kindergarten class before school starts.

These transition activities are very similar to the activities described in interviews.

There are common elements in programmes from a range of research, Fabian (2002), Margetts (2002) and Ramey and Ramey (1999) including continuity with the curriculum, liaison and communication between the pre-school and the school, continuity of friendship groups and preparation of the children for the change that is going to take place.

The case studies highlighting good practice identified impact in terms of personal, social and emotional development, building a relationship with the reception teacher before entering school and being familiar with the school building. Other case studies identified children settling well on entry to school and coming in with better listening and concentration skills. The staff swap had an impact in terms of more frequent and better communication and an opportunity for children to revisit and recount events and activities they had previously taken part in. The impact also resulted in this becoming common practice across several schools. This initiative was recognised by Ofsted inspections as good practice. With Every Child Matters (2003) and the Ofsted self-evaluation form there are clear questions being asked about the links beyond the school and with other settings.

4.3 Evaluation

The cluster groups in the County (Cycle 1) were working well and evolving when I left the local authority. There has been a great deal of positive feedback, in relation to training opportunities and in terms of collaborative working across the different sectors. As a result of focus group discussions many of the cluster groups have taken the initiative further and developed induction processes, written their own transition records and one cluster group has developed into a working group on transition to write guidelines for all settings within their cluster area. This was articulated as a particular development which key people took on board to deliver.

Solutions from the barriers identified were in progress; a training programme on transition had been written and was being disseminated across the authority. Support for observation, assessment and record keeping for the practitioners needing professional development in this area was in place. New processes which had needed time for practitioners to agree to were in place so that parents agreed for records to be sent directly to the receiving school. It was clear from these focus groups that practitioners from all sectors felt passionate about the importance of working in partnership and the need for a smooth transition into school for all children. This was evident in the willingness of individual cluster groups to take matters further. This work was developed further in my research when I moved into Cycle 2 of the study.

There has been a move from transition involving just activities, such as linking for

special occasions such as an assembly or the Christmas play, to transition involving continuity in terms of learning and development, such as the pre-school using the same assessment strategies, one example is an ICT tracking system for children in the Foundation Stage.

I have been at several meetings where teachers, teaching assistants, child minders and practitioners from pre-schools and day nurseries have been discussing areas of the curriculum, and what that looks like for them in their particular setting, reflective practice and this desire to change and improve practice was being embedded. In some cases it might be as simple as deciding to use the same language for concepts relating to mathematics, or a discussion relating to a stepping stone and discussing what that particular stepping stone may look like in practice across the settings. Practitioners have voiced their opinion that they now have a greater understanding of the practice in other sectors and the challenges that other professionals may be facing. *“Cluster groups are a useful way for staff who work in the Foundation Stage to meet and talk with others who offer the same curriculum; often you feel isolated without the support of a cluster group”* (Nursery Nurse) and *“this is always a very pleasant and useful time offloading and gaining from each other’s experiences, looking around other units and sometimes even having a laugh, we always benefit from these meetings”* (Reception Teacher).

There has been a greater understanding of Foundation Stage practice wherever that may take place and a deeper relationship between the practitioners that ultimately will support the children transferring into mainstream school. Relationships and the difference in status as a barrier practitioners felt had improved as a result of the cluster groups. Teachers had made contacts with pre-schools and in some cases had invited them to observe and work in the school. Some pre-schools that are situated in the school grounds but independent have begun to work together on joint outdoor play activities and using the facilities in the main school such as Physical Education in the hall, joint planning, visiting for snack time and sharing resources. This has supported partnership working.

This process of implementing change involves motivating, supporting and giving guidance to the range of practitioners, even where the change in practice was facilitated

by the cluster mentor, it was still important to sustain their enthusiasm and optimism especially in the face of any set backs. People oriented actions are part of the theory of changing organisations, and I put in place case studies, speakers and training to demonstrate how they managed the change in practice successfully. Cluster groups were, as seen through the data, also a support group for many practitioners and this was an opportunity to support the practitioners as they went through the change process. My role as facilitator was to empower the practitioners to implement the change. It was also to inspire practitioners through a vision that had strong ideological content that appealed to the members. As Johnson and Scholes (2002) point out there is no right formula for the management of change. *“The success of any attempt at managing change will also be dependent on the wider context in which that change is taking place”* (p.536).

Head teachers were key to the research as they have the capacity to change practice at strategic level. One head of a primary school believed *“in the ideology and ethos of partnership working”*, but believed it was difficult to achieve at practice level. He cited changes in family life and parents needing longer day care facilities as a barrier. The school had a nursery class that catered for 52 children on a part time basis. The day nursery nearby was able to provide longer day care for working parents and this had an impact on the school nursery where they were now working at a loss. This head teacher saw the day nursery as a business. He had liaised with the day nursery to resolve some of the issues, but cited the competition element previously voiced as a barrier. Early years Education and Care are being promoted by successive governments as a market place. For example the 10 year Strategy for Childcare: Choice for Parents (DfEE 2004) promotes diversity and the offering of choice, but it also creates competition and hinders the co-operation that many are striving to achieve.

Evidence from the case studies indicated that with creative thinking some barriers can be overcome. The commitment to finding solutions is an important part of the evidence throughout this research. To reduce barriers to working in partnership commitment is needed from management and practitioner level. Flexibility, creativity and commitment to change in practice can ensure steps in the right direction are taken.

Cluster mentors had an impact on practice through leading developing practice that was then taken back into the classroom. Continuity across the county was ensured, with accurate judgements for assessing the learning being agreed at local authority, school and practitioner level. This also had an impact in relation to practitioner's ability in feeding back to parents and carers where children were in terms of learning and development. A transition pack developed and put together by schools, settings, special schools and all staff for a particular area resulted in a better understanding of the transition process, not just for parents and carers, but supporting the transition process right through the sectors and school phases. What was lacking at the end of Cycle 1 was quantitative evidence of impact on children's learning which was investigated in Cycle 3.

Journal extract

Had a team meeting today, colleagues gave me lots of positive feedback about the cluster groups. Attendance is becoming consistent.

I leave the last words relating to cluster groups to the practitioners.

They have been a really good way of smoothing the settling in process in school and as a way of sharing information about children and practice (Reception Teacher).

Opportunities to share ideas and good practice welcomed by us all. Positive meeting (Nursery Teacher).

The cluster groups are a valuable way of liaising with others and sharing our skills and knowledge. I am really pleased we are able to attend them as a whole group (Day Nursery Manger).

Good liaisons, can only be of benefit to the children and must make the transition to school easier. We would like to attend more; they help to explain what is wanted by the DfES and other bodies (Reception Teacher).

I have benefited by discussing and sharing good practice with others, and gained ideas and methods for planning and record keeping to try in my own setting. It is an

opportunity to discuss best practice with others teaching the same key stage and overcomes some of the feelings of isolation that I feel in my own setting as the curriculum is so different from key stage 1 or Key stage 2. Well planned positive meetings (Reception Teacher).

As a result of this initiative the reception teacher and myself attend training together and share our planning. The teacher visits the pre-school and we have changed how we record information in the children's records so it is easier to use when they enter school. I also do voluntary work in the reception class so I can understand what is expected of the children when they leave us (Pre-school Practitioner).

Chapter 5

Cycle Two

5.1 Introduction in new authority

After a post change, my model was now embedded in the county with the change agents ensuring the partnership working was continuing to develop and evolve with transition based on best practice at the forefront. I intended to implement the same model in a different local authority, which this chapter demonstrates.

After Cycle 1, I had a clear vision and agenda to implement, for cluster arrangements had moved forward considerably. In Cycle 2 I found myself in a position of several years before with very little partnership working taking place with little inclination from both the maintained and private and voluntary sectors to develop this. The stereotypes and lack of mutual respect and dialogue that I had been able to dispel in my previous role were very evident in this authority.

5.2 Cluster groups and partnership working

Cluster groups, so effective in Cycle 1 provided a starting point. As Bennett (1997, p. 160) states, “*the main reason for rapid group formation is physical interaction*”. As individuals come together to share activities they will interact and then there is a high possibility they will form a group. It was through setting up cluster groups that the practitioners discovered they shared the same concerns, interests, information and a common link as Foundation Stage Practitioners. From previous experience, I knew other important factors in group formation are the need for co-operation between the sectors to achieve personal objectives, and emotional support particularly at this time of rapid change in early years at local and national level; “*Membership of a group can validate a person’s perceptions of events and issues*” (Bennett, 1997, p.161).

This authority was very small compared to Cycle 1, and only four cluster groups were required. The private, voluntary and maintained numbers relate to number of settings not practitioners, the child minders are those delivering nursery education.

Cluster Group	Total	Maintained	Private & Voluntary	Childminders
1. Lakeside	30	14	15	1
2. Excellence	17	5	10	2
3. North East	27	11	15	1
4. Central	31	9	14	8

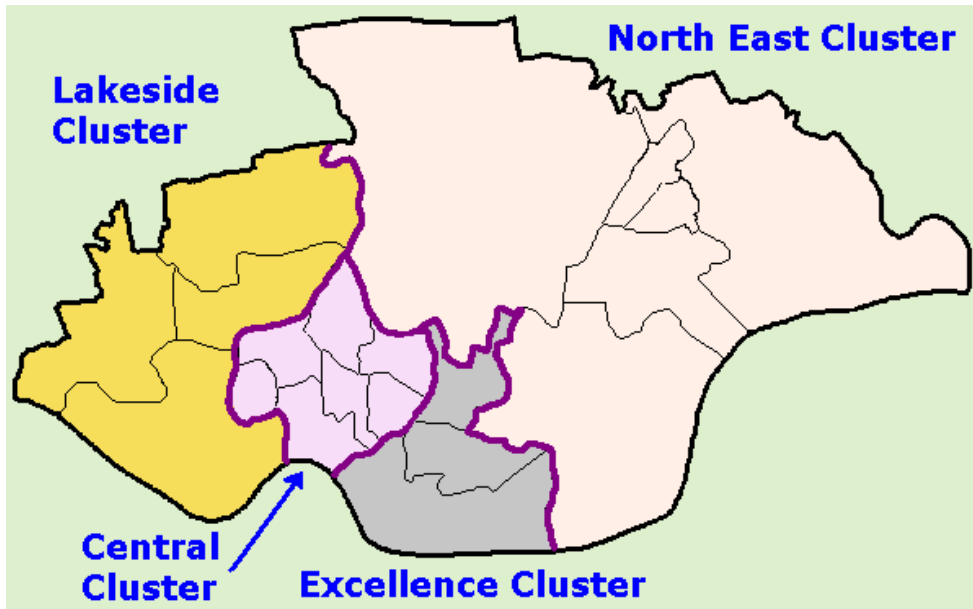


Figure 8 Map of cluster groups for Cycle 2 and associated data.

My initial thoughts that it was going to be easy were dispelled when I sent out a flyer enquiring if any practitioners wanted to take on the role as cluster mentor; as in Cycle 1, I was able to offer a small amount of money for resources and professional development. I only had one response, which was a surprise and a disappointment. The reception teacher whom I interviewed was suitable for the post, and the early years consultants led the other three cluster groups. Attendance was at first rather slow but increased gradually during the first six months; the same issues as previously identified, lack of communication between the sectors, misconceptions about each sectors practice, being present in the new authority.

Journal extract

Is the model I designed for authority A going to work? This authority is about five years behind, there is a lot to do, curriculum planning, assessment, training, developing

partnerships between the sectors is just one aspect of the work.

At this initial stage some practitioners from the private and voluntary sector viewed the cluster groups as *“more for the schools than us”* and needed support to understand how the different sectors could work together. It was important for the maintained sector to witness that the private and voluntary sector had something to offer as I observed a great deal of negativity on the part of the maintained sector towards the private and voluntary sector. Therefore training to develop the skills of the private and voluntary sector was identified through analysis of data such as a training database, Ofsted reports and local knowledge. I had identified an emerging picture, which indicated that the knowledge and skills of the private and voluntary sector were weak; so training and consultancy support was essential.

It was through the cluster groups and the mixed participants that the gradual re-thinking took place. An increased understanding of the change process, phasing and successful behaviours supported Cycle 2. Key personnel within my team, the early years consultants, were keen to move this area of work forward and this supported the developments. At this stage I was able to appoint four new members to my team and reorganise the structure. A new model of working across the authority has strengthened collaborative working; an early years children’s centre teacher has the responsibility for working within a multi disciplinary team in the centre, as well as being the advisor for the surrounding pre-schools, day nurseries, maintained schools and NEG (nursery education grant) child minders. This has resulted in a key person acting as a catalyst for change and good practice. This link between birth to Key Stage 1 has supported continuity, transition, identified barriers to partnership working and supported the learning journey for children academically and socially.

Our regional Foundation Stage advisers have praised this model of working. My local authority is part of a nationally funded programme relating to communication, language and literacy (CLLD) to raise the quality of early reading. Part of this remit is to develop the working relationship between the private and voluntary settings and the Foundation Stage practitioners from the maintained sector to support this curriculum area. The cluster groups were an ideal forum for supporting this programme. As an authority, we disseminated our model of engagement between the two sectors.

Partnership working involves commitment and time from all the participants. Nevertheless, the practitioners I interviewed believed that partnership working was worthwhile in spite of the additional burdens. Partnerships can be cross sector or single sector: our cross sector partnerships were established to raise quality of provision, to develop learning communities and as a mechanism for out reach with parents and carers.

5.3 Multi – disciplinary teams

Within my new local authority, the work relating to the five Every Child Matters (DfES, 2003) outcomes developed well; with phase 1 Children Centres set up and phase 2 on target for completion in 2008. This is an opportunity to develop partnership working to include other multi-disciplinary teams. A key element was the building and sustaining of effective relationships with the key stakeholders. The term stakeholder relates to anyone with an interest in the organisation, including within and outside the organisation (Ford, 2002). Each stakeholder within the group has a degree of power, or a voice in what the group does.

This connection was for some stakeholders strong and close and for others weak and distant. In managing stakeholders the lead person grew to know the stakeholders and their views, and reflected on their power and importance within the organization, and potential threats and opportunities. Influencing stakeholders' opinions so as to achieve the purpose of the organisation ultimately for the benefit of the children and families was important. As these new groups started to work together, these groups of multi disciplinary workers needed to be an effective working group, and the characteristics of an effective group defined by Mullins (2005, p. 533) suggests the underlying feature *“is a spirit of co-operation in which members work well together as a united team, and with harmonious and supportive relationships”*.

The group began to exhibit shared aims and objectives, commitment to the group, acceptance of the group's norms and values and where there was a feeling of mutual trust and dependency. Communication and information sharing started to flow and conflicts within the group were resolved by themselves; this was achieved by the end of the first year. For these newly formed groups to be effective, the manager of each group needed an understanding of the psychological and social influences on behaviour

within organisations. My key change agents in the new authority were aware and had the ability to facilitate the groups to achieve progress in partnership working. By working with individual settings and schools the key people knew the issues arising and were able to support the cluster groups accordingly.

5.4 Group development

Partnerships are not static and they will develop in a similar pattern to other groups. Tuckman's (1965) sequence of forming, storming, norming and performing identifies four successive stages to a group's development. This process can be difficult for members and will take time. The 'forming' stage is where the group first comes together and each individual will bring her or his own identity. Codes of conduct, individual roles and responsibilities are considered, and this stage can bring anxiety as individuals try to establish their own personal identity within the group. In my research, I observed that many of the practitioners from the private and voluntary sector were anxious, lacked feelings of self worth and questioned what they had to bring to the group. These practitioners, mainly from the local pre-school, at the initial stage were fairly quiet and would listen to other members of the group.

The 'storming' stage is where members of the group put forward their own opinions and ideas in a more forceful and open way as they begin to get to know other members of the group. At this stage conflict may arise; this is an important stage of the group's development as if successful new ways of working and agreements can be reached this will lead to more meaningful structures and procedures. It was important in my research to have a facilitator at these meetings to ensure all individuals from the different sectors had a voice and that ground rules were set in terms of everyone having their opinion heard and valued. On occasions, a member of the maintained sector would dominate and some practitioners felt that their status was of less value, and therefore did not always contribute to the discussions and changes to practice. I was confident that this stage would be worked through as a result of my first cycle of research, which evidenced this.

Stage 3, 'norming' is where the group defines acceptable behaviours, guidelines and standards as the group co-operates in planning the actions of the group and fulfilling its purposes. This stage in my research was where I saw the barriers and benefits to

partnership working in the Foundation Stage emerging. Barriers such as the timing of the cluster groups, funding for supply cover and maintaining staff ratios were brought to the forum. Good practice and ideas to develop the transition process were developing and mutual respect and dialogue was being established. Stage 4, 'performing' is where the group has worked through the previous three stages and has a structure and cohesiveness to their work. It is at this stage that the purpose of the group and the performance of the tasks are at its highest.

Cycle 2 saw changes to practice identified through the practitioners themselves. When discussing the transition of children with special educational needs it was through the practices and procedures of members of the group that moved other practitioners to reflect and change to new ways of working. Every child in a pre-school setting on Early Years Action or Early Years Action Plus has a transition meeting, with a policy of transition protocols developed which they signed up to. This helped to break down the barriers of status and hierarchy; pre-school practitioners had good records, observations and individual education plans which they were able to share with the receiving school's special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO).

Below is a brief example that illustrates how practitioners having an opportunity to come together in a cluster group supported each other's practice.

Vignette

A cluster group was discussing transition procedures for children with special educational needs; this had been identified as an area of weakness for one setting. The cluster mentor and the area SENCO facilitated the group. During dialogue a pre-school practitioner talked about how they dealt with transition and how it was a manageable process. The identified setting developed their practice as a result of peer support and guidance. The mentor and SENCO reported back to me how beneficial it was that other settings had facilitated the change.

Much of the partnership working already established as good practice and the barriers identified will support this wider audience of multi-disciplinary teams in training, advice and outreach work. Benefits for the wider community and the participation of parents accessing adult learning have been established in the early stages with a

commitment to developing further. My aim was to widen groups to become learning communities. Some progress has been made where regular joint professional meetings take place; this resulted in an information booklet for each parent and a named link transition person for each setting or school. This practice within one cluster group is beginning to be transferred to the other three cluster groups. Improved communication between health, social care and education support meeting the Every Child Matters (DfES, 2003) agenda.

5.5 Relationship building

One key aspect in relation to this research was to identify the factors influencing the transfer of good practice. Relationships were the key driver of much of this implementing and embedding, and the collaboration of individual practitioners and how this was done was as important as the content of the partnership working. The research report, 'Factors influencing the Transfer of Good Practice' (DfES, 2005) found prior relationships within the group to be enabling, and that an individual's ability to motivate and energise was important. However, the main ingredient was to provide a basis of trust, where professional dialogue and development of practice could happen. Individual personalities were an important factor in establishing a forum for sharing good practice, but professional reputation was also a key. This was evidenced in Cycle 1, especially where the mentor was a deputy head in the school or the Reception teacher that the private and voluntary practitioners' own children had been taught by. They expressed thoughts such as "*Mrs..... is a really good teacher, Jack really liked her*" so they believed the individual to exhibit good practice and so were more willing to follow her lead.

Trust within the group led to maintaining confidentiality, and as time passed practitioners felt able to talk about areas of their practice that they saw as weaker. The visiting of each other's settings, where practice was not just abstract but became a reality, where particular practitioners could relate to the situation, was clearly stated as one of the main benefits from the practitioners. During the formation of the cluster groups in Cycle 2, where sharing and transferring of practice began to be developed, practitioners were very child-centred in their approach, putting the emotional needs of the child first: "*the children, where we have developed collaboration with the settings before the start of school, are happy and confident and settle well on their first day*".

Journal Extract

Over the last few months, several teachers and head teachers have asked if there has been evidence of children's on entry to school levels being higher as a result of the cluster groups. A lot of evidence has been anecdotal, I need to revisit cycle 1 and do some further research from cycle 2 to look to see if there is any data to evidence impact.

It was only towards the end of my research that children's levels of attainment on entry to school became more of a focus in the discussions. This may have been that on entry, levels of attainment in my second local authority were below the national average and I, in my professional role, was working hard to narrow the gap, particularly in the 30% most disadvantaged areas. The research in both authorities from the perspectives of the early years practitioners, when encouraging transfer of good practice, was related to ensuring a better experience for the new child, rather than linked to any Ofsted report or raw data. Where examples of partnership working were highlighted in an Ofsted report this was mentioned, often to reinforce practitioners to be recipients of the practice described. Experience and knowing what worked to break down barriers and facilitate working in partnership resulted in progress being made.

5.6 Record keeping

In Cycle 2, procedures were put in place for sharing of record keeping in every setting. A small cross-sector working party drafted a transition record, which included clear guidance for parents and practitioners. After wide consultation, the recommendations were acted upon and procedures put into place to ensure continuity and progression for all children transferring from one setting to another. A separate transfer sheet was also included for children who are currently on Early Years Action or Early Years Action Plus to support the additional needs that children with special educational needs may have.

As identified in Cycle 1, a barrier expressed by reception teachers was children's records going to parents and not being passed onto receiving settings/schools. Therefore part of the record keeping procedure involved key workers sharing the information with parents, who then signed to agree the records could be passed on by

the feeder setting. It was clearly stated that feeder settings had the responsibility to pass records on to the receiving setting/school. On-going monitoring and evaluation on the impact of the whole authority assessment and record keeping system was conducted. Feedback from schools has shown that feeder schools having the information before children start has supported planning to meet individual needs; for example specific resources in place for a child with special educational needs.

5.7 Training

A clear theme has been the sharing of records and the judgments about children's learning and development linked to the stepping stones and early learning goals as defined in the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (DfES, 2000). To ensure that the authority's transfer arrangements are based on best practice, training, newsletters, cluster groups and awareness raising events were initiated. All pre-school settings were encouraged to attend training on supporting them in making judgements and filling in the transition forms. An issue, which as an early years adviser I have identified and which some schools voiced, was the accuracy of some of the judgments made by the pre-school settings when assessing children's learning and development.

This is a priority for me, as to ensure continuity and progression and for schools to value the work of the previous setting; their judgments of children's stage of development and acquired learning need to be accurate. Training in assessment and the use of the documentation is an ongoing part of training and I am aware that this remains so in other authorities as well. Again the support of the reception teacher and within children centres, the role of the qualified teacher will support this work. Moderation similar to Foundation Stage profile moderation undertaken in reception classes is being developed to ensure accuracy in private and voluntary settings. Training on effective practice for transition and 'top tips for a smooth transition' was implemented on a regular basis. Training has encouraged settings to take on new ideas; the smooth transition for children impacts on the family and emotional well being of the child.

5.8 Transition

Practitioners in the cluster groups were enthusiastic after training and awareness raising and felt they did not do enough to ensure smooth transitions were in place for

children. Now, regular meetings take place; health and other professionals are invited to share information on the children that are transferring. Meetings also take place two weeks after the children have started their new settings to discuss how they have settled. Practitioners from the private and voluntary sector requested these meetings and school practitioners felt it would be useful to have these meetings once they could put a face to a name. Pre-school practitioners have reported they are having more contact with the schools and reception teachers have facilitated visits to the settings. Outreach staff and health visitors' visits have enabled sharing of valuable information; links between these professionals have concluded in better relationships and a more holistic view of the child.

5.9 Evaluation

During the two years I have worked in this new authority I have clear data to show the progress that both the maintained and the private and voluntary settings have made in relation to Ofsted judgments of 'good' or better for inspections and Foundation Stage profile data. The partnership working relating to the communication language and literacy project was focused in the lowest 30% super output area; within a year, there was an increase of twelve points, narrowing the gap in relation to the rest of the authority immensely. There was also an increase in the data for personal, social and emotional development. This resulted in the authority exceeding their equalities target relating to the Early Years Outcomes Duty.

There was, from many practitioners, a strong commitment to their professional work that related more to deeply held principles and beliefs than a judgment by external bodies or in some cases their own management team. Transferring good practice does need to take account of the identities of the individuals concerned; many of the private and voluntary practitioners in Cycle 2 lacked self-esteem and self-confidence. I believed that the starting point of the practitioners was at a lower base line than in Cycle 1 but because the authority was much smaller, I had been able to build capacity quickly and was able to get some 'quick wins' learnt from my previous research. The collaboration and innovative practice moved quickly to implementation stage.

However, for these new procedures to become a reality personalities and identities needed to be acknowledged. Through trust and a relationship model for transference of

practice, practitioners from all sectors became able to identify areas where there was a lack of specific expertise. Engagement of the learners was successful as practitioners had positive relationships with the originators of the practice. Many of my new team had worked with me in my first authority and in some cases had been cluster mentors, so they were seen as the 'friendly professional'. They also had credibility in their pedagogic practice and were skilled in their roles as consultants in working with a range of practitioners. They were able to differentiate their input to individuals and had taken on a 'coaching' style when required which was well received.

5.10 Conclusion

A very positive outcome of the research and change process has been the initiatives that groups have put in place themselves as a result of the training and using the cluster groups as focus groups. Within Cycle 2 of the management of change cycle, we are at the stage of implementation; the innovation and the new way of working has been shared with practitioners and senior management and the structures and systems for partnership working have been put into place. Awareness raising in the innovation stage has led to motivation and enthusiasm for individuals to work with colleagues from different sectors in a new way. A transition guide based on the policies, practices and ideas of this research is being written to disseminate to all schools and settings as guidance.

The impact in terms of the service users, the children and their parents and carers is where this research needs further analysis in terms of quantitative data, possibly through the monitoring mechanisms of the Children's Centres which have been developed. Interviews and focus groups resulted in qualitative data, which clearly showed benefits for children and practitioners. Through this research I have identified areas for further research and development. Adequate time is needed for effective practice to develop and in Cycle 1 of the research partnership working is embedded and evolving through the cluster groups. In Cycle 2, implementation is the present phase.

As practitioners become more skilled at partnership working and transition procedures are developed, the key change agents will take on more of a monitoring and evaluative role. The collaborative working will continue but the practitioners will take on a more

active role in leading this. The networking in both cycles of research resulted in practitioners collaborating at different levels, from making contact through telephone calls, to borrowing resources and looking to one another for answers to difficulties. Rather than remaining insular in individual schools and settings, a wider community relationship evolved.

5.11 New developments

This model of joint working could be transferred into other areas of learning and teaching and is beginning to emerge through clusters linked to extended services. Through my research I have been invited to be involved in developing transition policies and practices for primary and secondary aged children. The Family and Parenting Institute have been commissioned by the DfES to support Local Authorities with the delivery of the parenting support part of the Core Offer of Extended Services (Family and Parenting Institute, 2007). This includes sessions for parents at key transition points in their children's lives, particularly starting primary school and the move to secondary school; "Starting School: Settling into Primary School and Moving to Secondary School" (Transition Information Sessions Project, 2007). The rationale for the sessions is to provide parents with information about the introduction to school and to also engage them with supporting children's well being and best outcomes under the Every Child Matters Agenda.

I am involved at strategic level with the planning and delivery of these sessions for parents and carers; this demonstrates wider partnership working between services for under fives and the extended services team. I am working with pilot schools and settings to look at transition from 0-19 with one transition folder for parents to support them with information at each transition stage. This work involves small case studies and transition guidance across the whole authority. Guidance includes practical suggestions to enable a smooth transition and legal requirements.

Through understanding the processes of change management and leading this research I hope to have begun to create a culture where change and innovation is not feared but embraced, where practitioners from all sectors will look to colleagues for good ideas and believe that their own ideas and practice are worth sharing. This involves the self-esteem of the practitioners and is a key driver for developing this research. Building

confidence is not a short-term fix and takes concerted effort and time until every practitioner really believes they have something worthwhile to share.

My role and that of colleagues will be to continue in a coaching role and to praise and encourage the continuation of such practice, providing moral support and celebrating success as learning communities evolve. The long term aim is to establish collaborative working and good practice relating to transition for children, setting the tone and maintaining this long term has to be established as a high turnover of staff within the different early years sectors is common place. Cycle 3, which I initiated to identify any impact on raising children's attainment levels on entry to school, will be analysed and findings included as chapter six.

5.12 Recommendations

The recommendations from this phase of the research are that cross sector networks are established and a key change agent or broker, who has the credibility and pedagogic knowledge but as importantly the personality to build trusting, supportive relationships, to be a facilitator of these groups. Time, which may be several months, needs to be built in for the innovation and implementation stage of change. Discussion, training, and team building activates true partnerships which will evolve where good practice can be defined and shared in an exchange model. Through meta-practice and in particular defining the practices and relationships for social and emotional competence to support school readiness and early academic success, transition procedures will ensure continuity and progression for all children with early identification for those children most at risk of early failure.

Monitoring and evaluating, with reflective practice, needs to be built in as part of the dialogue. Through appropriate channels, such as visits and briefings, those at management level need to be convinced of the need to engage with the new practice and ideas. A form of measurement of the successes is the next stage to be explored in more detail. Key findings in my research from two local authorities in relation to benefits of partnership working are mirrored in the research by Rudd et al, (2004) which are wider collaboration, improved transition, increased opportunities for staff training and professional development, opportunities to network and share ideas, enhanced teacher confidence, a positive impact on standards and in some cases greater

involvement of the community.

The vision for high quality interagency service formulation and delivery is still not embedded, although initiatives such as the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and Contact Point where individuals from different agencies can access information about individual children are a move in the right direction. For a new form of professional practice to emerge it will require strategic support from each different agency. Yamazumi et al (2005) acknowledge that in order to meet the current UK government policy, responsive interagency work will need to identify a new way of conceptualising collaboration as a result of constant change in terms of resources, people and their delivery.

5.13 Case study

As part of the research to improve partnership working across the sectors and as part of the local authority focus on transition from 0-19, the early years consultant undertook a short case study. The teacher is based in the children's centre which has a full day care nursery, a sessional pre-school and an after school club. The children's centre is based on a school site. The early years teacher works with all the early years practitioners associated with the provision including the school. This case study involves not just the setting but also the parents in how they perceived the transition to be. The aim of the case study was to ensure all children and parents are supported in their transition from preschool/nursery provider into school and to develop consistent and effective strategies for transition.

The present arrangements were reviewed and although there were informal links between the preschool settings and the school with children visiting the new setting, on a few occasions it was felt by all parties, including parents, that this could be improved and that by working together strategies could be put in place to support children and families. Individual interviews were held with parents who were, generally speaking, happy with the transition into school; however a few parents were upset as they had indicated their child's particular friends on the form from the school and assumed they would be in the same class which was not the case, they believed this would have helped their child with the transition to school. A meeting took place between the head teacher of the school, the receiving class teacher and the managers of the preschool and

day nursery where a programme of developments was planned and initiated. The table below shows the developed programme of transition activities.

Table 8

Transitional Strategy for North West Children's Centre

What	Who	When
Open days – invite parents to visit and see school in action.	School	January
Information sheet – clear and simple – on school admission procedure. To be given out to parents at both providers.	Early years teacher	January
Informal invitation to pre-school and day nursery to attend school events.	School	Ongoing throughout year
Opportunities for children from all settings to play together, for example in outdoor space.	All	Ongoing
Meeting of appropriate staff to discuss individual children's needs, friendships and progress before moving into school.	All	June/July
Lunchtime – pre-school children to bring a packed lunch and attend lunch in pre-school. Later have a packed lunch with their parents in school. Possibility of joint Teddy bears picnic.	All	June/July
Give children opportunities to prepare the snacks, peel and cut fruit.	Preschool/day nursery	Ongoing
Prepare a list of skills that children need to be encouraged to develop in preparation for school	Reception teacher	January
Letters and sounds – important for preschool and day nursery to be using phase 1 all the time.	Pre-school/day nursery	Ongoing
Create a CD of songs and rhymes that are common in all settings, e.g. nursery rhymes, phonic songs, routine songs.	Reception Teacher	January
Use involvement and well-being scales as an assessment in preparation for school and on entry to school.	All	Immediately

In first week of new year – tea and tissues/coffee and comfort – for an hour at Children Centre, offering an opportunity for parents to chat and be reassured.	Children Centre teacher	September
Parent Workshops: Run a series for parents <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applying for a school • Language and play • Getting ready for school • Learning at school (introduction to Early Years Foundation Stage, Foundation Stage Profile) 	Children Centre teacher	January July October
Pyramid for Parents group advertise at all three settings.	Children Centre teacher	January
Invite a parent to share experiences at the initial school meeting for new parents in July.	All	Summer Term
Staff swap – swap over staff to experience the other setting and see the children in action.	All	Summer Term

Staff from the school, pre-school and day nursery met on a regular basis to discuss the actions and the impact on children and families. The head teacher reported back to the early years consultant that from her perspective it had been “*the best transition programme she had experienced*”. The Children’s Centre area manager wants to replicate this programme in the neighbouring centre.

Journal extract

I am receiving good feedback and vibes about how the partnership work is developing, the regional adviser was impressed, I need to book out some time for focused discussions with my team

5.14 Interviews with colleagues and reception teachers

Professional discussion with Early Years Consultant

A fairly new member of my team was the facilitator and change agent for one of the

cluster groups. We had a discussion in relation to how the model of partnership working had evolved and was evolving; discussing the barriers, how these had been overcome and if she felt there had been any impact. Below is an example of a short discussion of feedback from a cluster meeting.

Consultant - The schools said information on transfer records from pre-schools are not useful as the judgments made are not on the same level. The pre-schools said they work hard on transfer records but schools do not use them.

Researcher - Similar points of view were voiced in Cycle 1 of the research; the cluster groups were a forum for discussing levelling of stepping stones, early learning goals and were an informal moderation of making judgments

Consultant - This has started in the cluster group and I am hoping as it progresses these issues will be addressed.

Researcher - If the schools receive records where judgments are sound, they will use the information, which will make the pre-schools feel more valued and will ensure continuity in children's learning.

Consultant - There were also some concerns previously from practitioners that feeder settings were not identifying or passing on information for children with special educational needs.

Researcher - How was this resolved?

Consultant - Practitioners are now sharing small niggles or concerns, without having to commit to formal identification. The pre-schools through dialogue at the cluster group realise how important it is to pass on information and how significant it can be in the new setting.

Researcher - Is the new single transition record introduced across the whole borough being used effectively?

Consultant - When settings were passing on the records to parents to take to their new setting, this was not happening. Now the practitioners share the records with the parents, asking them to sign to agree for them to be given to the school and the pre-school passes them on. This is now working. Practitioners at transition time are now making contact between themselves to follow up the records with a discussion about children with special educational needs, so that any special equipment can be put in place in advance. They are sharing tips, for example, on how to deal with certain behaviours.

Researcher - Are relationships developing in a more positive way, and are transition activities now taking place?

Consultant - Through the cluster groups' practitioners swapped contact details with feeder settings. Building relationships didn't happen straight away and there is still more work to do, but practitioners are visiting each others' settings, and looking for ideas of routines and systems which can be shared in order to make children more comfortable with the transition. There is more recognition of where children are in their learning and development when leaving the setting and starting school. Children are also making visits to their new setting before they start so that they are familiar with the new adults and the environment. Over time practitioners have come to recognise the importance of working together with other settings; dialogue has shown they realise transition issues are important and can impact on children in the short and long term.

As the researcher, part of my field notes recorded professional discussions with colleagues, which was for several reasons. I wanted the opinions of those leading the cluster groups, as they were at the grass roots level and formed part of the collaborative action research. It was possible that they were encountering barriers or identifying good practice that I had not. I also wanted to identify how the process of change was taking place within the new individual cluster groups, and if there were similar issues to Cycle 1 where we could use the same strategies to overcome the barriers.

It was evident from this discussion that the judgments relating to assessments and the passing on of records to the next setting were similar barriers to those identified in Cycle 1. Strategies that had been initiated in Cycle 2, such as a borough wide transition record, were beginning to impact on practice. Practitioners from settings not identifying or passing on information relating to children with special educational needs was a new concept. After further discussion with the consultant and practitioners, I believe this was related to a lack of confidence and a concern about labelling the child. As discussed with the consultant, once they could share concerns within the cluster group and receive advice from practitioners in the same role they felt more able to identify and pass on these concerns.

5.15 Examples of transition practices from Cycle 2

School A: primary school, 52 part time place nursery and 2 reception classes. Children who do not attend the nursery come from a local pre-school and local full time day nursery.

All children visit the school before they start in the reception class and all records of previous attainment the school is reliant on the previous setting forwarding them. If the children are moving from the nursery there is a handover meeting between the reception teacher and the nursery teacher. The records of attainment for these children are handed over. The school is keen to develop continuity of provision and have taken steps to have similar, physical learning environments throughout Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 to support the opportunity for children to apply skills across the curriculum in teacher directed and child initiated activities.

School B: small village primary school, one reception class. Children feed into school from local pre-school.

Previously there was no relationship with the feeder pre-school and records of attainment were not received. There is now a developing relationship with the feeder pre-school and records of children's learning and development are being passed onto the reception teacher. Prior to children starting school, they visit and parents are invited and given information in relation to supporting their children's learning at home and general information about the school.

School C: Catholic primary school, nursery class and one reception class. Most children attend the nursery, a small percentage of children join from a local full day care provision.

Before children start in the nursery they have an opportunity to come to the school, visit the nursery and take part in activities such as 'play days' and a picnic session. Staff undertakes home visits and parents of the children are invited to visit the school to meet the head teacher. There is a gradual induction programme, which takes place over a four-week period. When children transfer to the reception class, they visit the classroom and meet their teacher.

Interviews with reception teachers were important, as I needed to have an understanding of how the process was impacting on the receiving practitioner as well

as the practitioners feeding into the school. The above schools were chosen at random and all have induction and transition procedures in place, relationships in school B with the feeder setting have improved with sharing of information now taking place.

At this stage of reflection I was able to evidence impact through specific intervention strategies and was able to identify where there were stronger links between the different sectors. However, I was aware it was going to take time for learning communities to develop, as there was some resistance amongst practitioners from all sectors to share their feelings and practice. Time and relationship building is necessary to build trust and confidence within the cluster groups.

Chapter 6

Cycle 3

During the action research phase data collected was mainly of a qualitative nature, such as individual interviews and focus groups. It became evident during the discussions with head teachers and some practitioners from maintained settings, that there was a need to ascertain if there was any quantitative data that could be used as a checking mechanism to show how partnership working had impacted. In the climate of raising standards and children's individual attainment levels I wanted to investigate if there was any data to support raising attainment levels on entry to school. As a consequence I sent a questionnaire (Appendix 4) to a random sample of maintained settings in Cycle 1 and all maintained settings in Cycle 2.

Part of the rationale for this questionnaire was to also investigate whether, two and a half years after leaving the Cycle 1 authority, the cluster groups, partnership working and transition activities were embedded and continuing to evolve, whilst acquiring qualitative data to investigate the possibility of raised attainment levels on entry to school. Also, at the start of the research there was some negativity from reception teachers in relation to pre-school practitioners' ability to ensure children started school with the skills teachers required. If there was data to show children were entering school with enhanced skills this would support the relationship between the school and pre-school practitioners and raise confidence levels of the pre-school practitioners. Cycle 3 of the research was used as comparative data to look at similarities and differences between the two authorities.

6.1 Cycle 1 - Schools

The questionnaire was sent to a random sample of 50 reception teachers across the geographical area. The response rate was just over 50% which equated to 27 schools; the respondents who returned the questionnaires were from a range of cluster groups across the region.

Q.1 Do you have a working partnership with your feeder pre-school/day nursery/nursery class/child minding network?

Table 9

Yes	No
27	0

Q.2.What transition activities/practice do you undertake with your feeder setting?

Table 10

Visits	24
Curriculum Support	14
Attend cluster group meetings to share ideas and good practice	25
Use transition document to support on entry assessment	15
Shared policies	6

Many teachers added further comments, for example:

I visit the children in their settings and to share good practice. I have supported pre-schools by helping them complete observations on the children (Reception Teacher).

Examples of partnership work taking place included curriculum support for changes to handwriting within the school, phonics strategies to support the introduction of Letters and Sounds into the setting. Staff swaps with feeder pre-schools were taking place across the Local Authority with more schools adopting this initiative. Invitations to curriculum workshops and productions, visits to the school in small groups with their key worker and nursery nurses visiting all pre-schools in the area were activities described by a range of teachers. Evidence from the questionnaires showed visits were made from the school into feeder settings, and visits by the children into school before they started the following term. Often visits included snack time, lunch time and play session experiences.

In some cases visits were made prior to children transferring but in other cases visits took place throughout the year. There was a higher incidence of visits at key points

such as transition, although in four responses there was an indication of visits becoming more frequent. Informal conversations occurred between practitioners from both sectors regarding new intake children. Teaching staff also attended pre-school parties and Christmas productions; this was a two way arrangement where there were visits from both sectors to both settings leading to good relationships between practitioners. Story sessions for pre-school children with reception children supported children with transition. Pre-schools as a result of partnership working used the school's computer suite, hall for PE activities and the library which helped the children become familiar with the school building and routines.

Many teachers supported pre-school practitioners with curriculum issues, particularly in the area of Communication, Language and Literacy and Mathematics, through the cluster groups and polices were developed through this medium. Teachers offered support and training at the cluster groups which has developed and improved the practice of pre- school practitioners. Teachers also invited pre-school practitioners to parent information workshops on approaches to reading, writing, mathematics, learning and teaching in the Foundation Stage which ensured there was continuity in children's learning. Pre-school practitioners visited the school with the parents and children on their first half days and stayed with the children supporting the school staff with induction and settling children into a new environment.

Teachers wrote that many of their feeder settings were using the book of photographs made by the school with their pre-school children. *"We have produced a school photograph booklet which we send to all nurseries"*. One reception teacher had developed this further and made a transition bag for feeder settings. This included a book of photographs showing key features and events in school, but also a book bag, P.E kit and school uniform. Other schools had developed pre-school assessment sheets, puppet shows and opportunities to visit the school to experience snack time. *Feeder pre-schools complete an assessment sheet, which is passed on to the school; there is also a verbal liaison session between the school and preschool* (Reception Teacher).

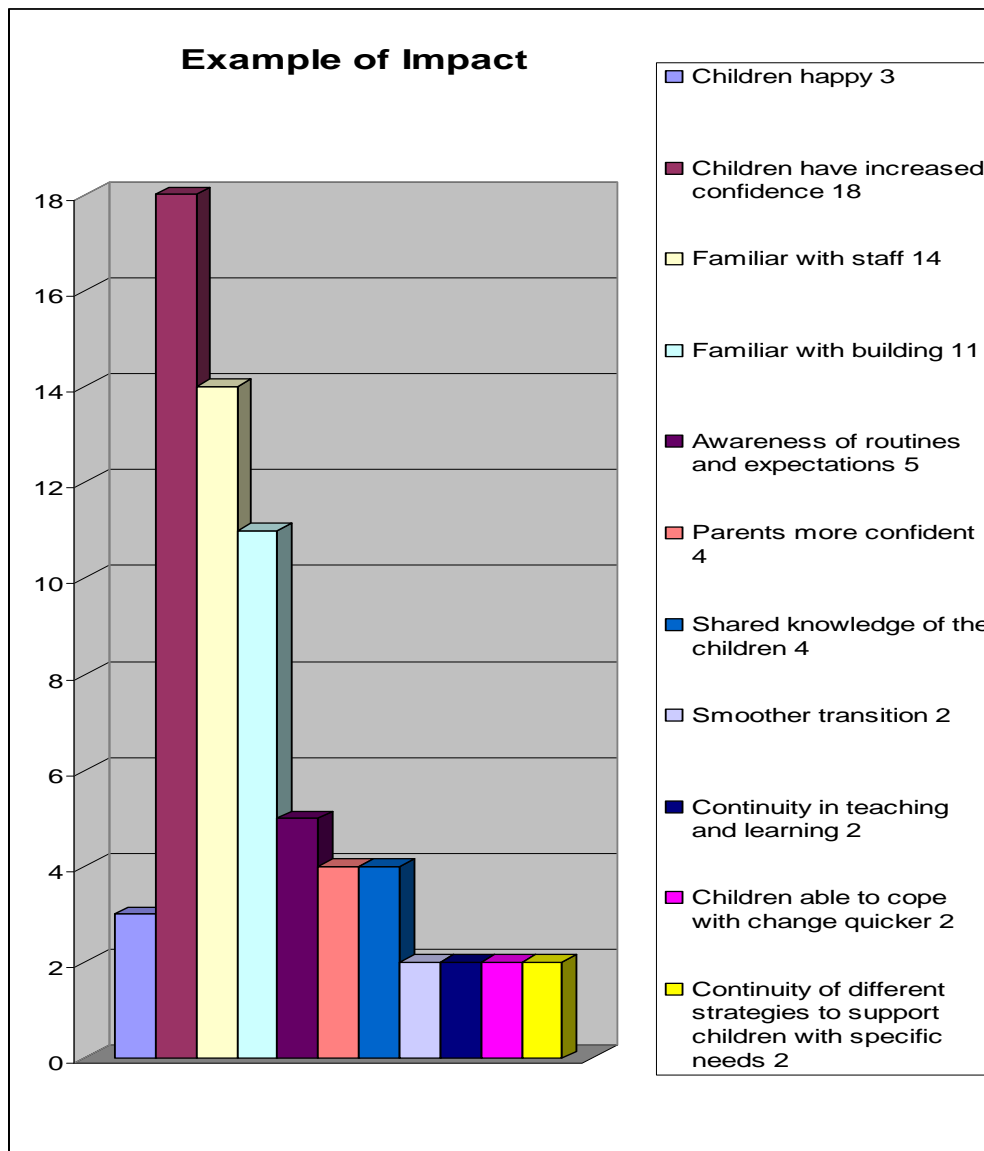
Q.3. Has working in partnership with your feeder setting had an impact on children as they transfer into school, if so how?

Table 11

Yes	No
25	0

Examples of impact include:

Graph 30



Other examples of impact where there was only one teacher making the judgment were; *“having an insight to the family background, learning is happening faster”*. Several comments again related to children’s personal and social development such as children being more independent, relaxed and familiar with other children as a result of the visits to the school, and also children finding it easier to separate from their parents/carers. A couple of comments related to parents; *“expectations of school are more realistic, parents are happy with improved links - especially the staff swaps”*. Sharing of good practice, consistency of systems was mentioned by one teacher.

This data shows confidence of the children as the highest indicator; familiarity with the building and staff was also seen to have an impact. The data shows that teachers believed parents as well as children were more confident as a result of the initiatives implemented.

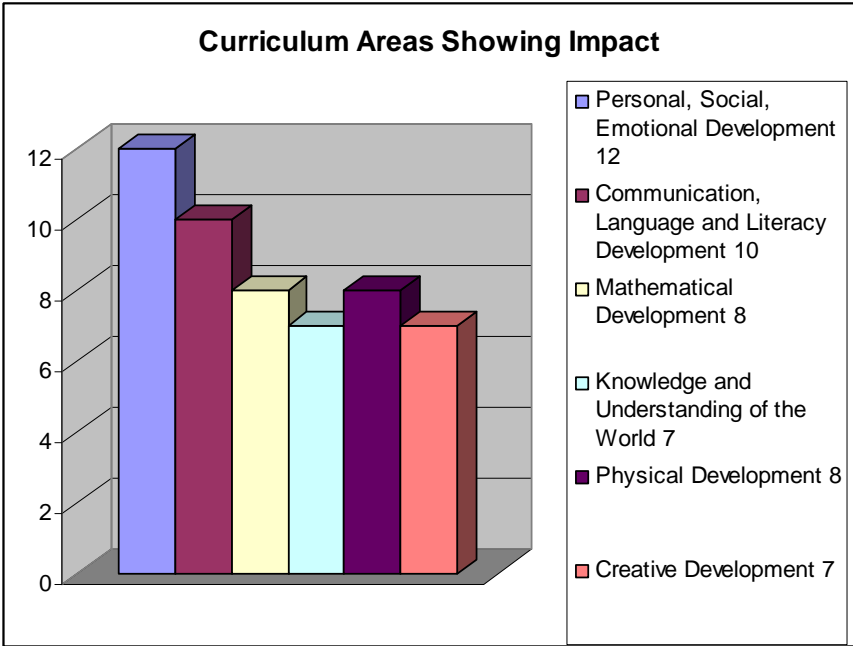
Q.4. Do you have on entry data to evidence any impact?

Table 12

Yes	No
16	8

Curriculum areas showing impact

Graph 31



The data suggests that on entry to school children were achieving higher assessment scores for all six areas of the curriculum. The area achieving the most impact was personal, social and emotional development, which was not a surprise as this was indicated through interviews and discussions. The data also suggests that only 16 of the respondents had data to show an impact on curriculum areas. Some follow up work could include encouraging analysis of the entry data for different cohorts of children.

Q.5. Do you have a named person for transition?

Table 13

Yes	No
23	2

Q.6 Do you have a transition policy?

Table 14

Yes	No
15	10

This suggests most teachers had taken on the advice of having a named person for transition though not so many had a transition policy. Several teachers wrote that the question had prompted them to write a transition policy.

6.2 Links with parents

Although this information was not asked for in the questionnaire several teachers mentioned home visits and induction arrangements. For example, one said; *“I held an informal coffee morning for parents with a power point presentation about life at school. Displays of resources etc. This was in addition to formal new entrants meetings”*.

6.3 Summary

This data suggests that all schools who responded to the questionnaire attend cluster groups and have a partnership working arrangement with their feeder settings. A wide range of transition activities starting as discussion points within the cluster groups have been embedded into practice. Teachers from the maintained sector wrote in detail about the benefits they perceived these transition activities were having on parents and children at the point of transition. Written comments on the questionnaires suggested that teachers wanted to continue with cluster groups and valued attending them. This follow up questionnaire as Cycle 3 of the research acted as a catalyst and a prompt to develop this area of work further through, for example, writing a transition policy. Although it was clear that personal, social and emotional development were the areas of learning having the most impact for children, there was the suggestion that data from teachers on entry to school assessments showing a rise in attainment across all six areas of learning. Although this was a small sample, it highlights how partnership working can benefit children as they transfer into maintained school. One reception teacher summed up the impact: *“Increased confidence of pre-school staff is impacting upon provision and quality of teaching in pre-schools. Increased liaison*

between the pre-schools themselves and the school bridges the gap and encourages the community to come together”.

Journal extract

Cluster groups and the partnerships have impacted upon quality of teaching in the pre-schools! This is a positive outcome to high light.

6.4 Cycle 2

Questionnaires were sent to all 39 schools and achieved a 50% response rate which equates to 19 schools. There were responses from reception teachers across all four cluster groups.

Q.1 Do you have a working partnership with your feeder pre-school/day nursery/nursery class/child minding network?

Table 15

Yes	No
16	3

Q.2.What transition activities/practice do you undertake with your feeder setting?

Table 16

Visits	18
Curriculum support	6
Attend cluster group meetings to share ideas and good practice	15
Use transition document to support on entry assessment	18
Shared policies	5

Additional comments evidenced home visits, visits to the school by children and parents/carers and the establishment of a parent and toddler group to aid transition. Evening meetings took place between some schools and settings to discuss children transferring, with a focus on children with special educational needs and specific problems. Within a Children’s Centre, joint activities took place approximately once a month between the school, feeder day care setting, and pre-school setting. Meetings

between all three settings are held to discuss children and procedures which ensures a smooth transition and consistency for children within the centre. Several schools stated they met with feeder settings to discuss children and procedures. Two schools spoke about sharing their outdoor area with their feeder setting, and have joint training sessions. One school invited children for special events and they stayed to experience snack time. Cluster groups were referred to as going well. Activities had started to develop such as the book of photographs taken of the school being left within the pre-school setting. Home visits were seen to be valuable by practitioners. *“The nursery nurse from the school visits every feeder pre-school to meet and observe the children who are coming to our school, and to talk to the practitioners, who know the children well. She makes notes on every child”* (Reception Teacher).

It was evident from comments written on the questionnaires that teachers were using the transition document that had been written to support transition for children into school.

We have used the transition document from all our feeder settings, so that it didn't just get filed away. I cut out the assessments and stuck them into the relevant sections of the profile, as a form of Baseline. I attend cluster group meetings when possible and found the last one particularly useful as we were discussing the transition documents, how confident the pre-school practitioners had felt about completing them, what the schools were doing with them and whether they found them useful. Several were pleased that I had incorporated their information into the profile and seemed to feel that this gave their assessments and opinions a purpose and value (Reception Teacher).

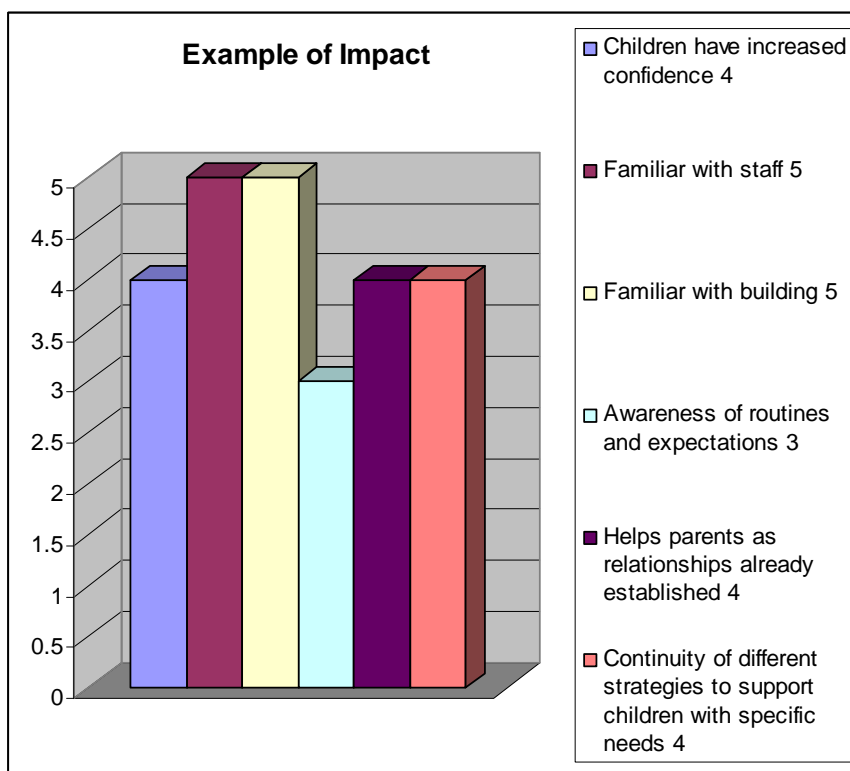
Q.3. Has working in partnership with your feeder setting had an impact on children as they transfer into school?

Table 17

Yes	No
15	4

Examples of impact include:

Graph 32



There were four examples of perceived impact where only one teacher referred to it, these were; children familiar with routines, the transitions are smooth as if it was class to class, children adjust quickly to new setting and staff are all confident as they know the children prior to starting. *“Just had a new intake - all very confident and settled easily with few tears”*; and *“when children transfer from feeder setting they come in confidently on first morning due to our partnership work”*.

The data for cycle 2 was comparable to cycle 1 with children being more confident, children familiar with staff and children familiar with the building having the highest scores. However, overall the data for Cycle 2 showed less impact than Cycle 1. This may be the result of Cycle 1 having longer to implement ideas and activities, build relationships and embed the partnership working.

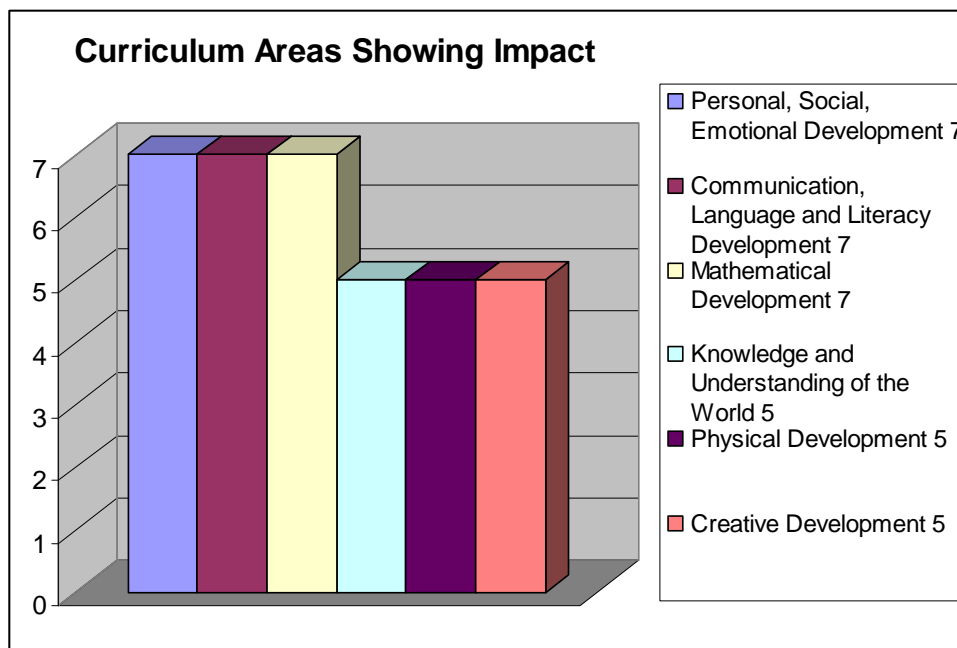
Q.4. Do you have on entry data to evidence any impact?

Table 18

Yes	No
7	7

Curriculum areas showing impact

Graph 33



The data suggests that impact has been made in particularly three areas, personal, social and emotional development, communication, language and literacy and mathematics although the numbers are small.

Q.5. Do you have a named person for transition?

Table 19

Yes	No
17	2

“I have attended training run by the local authority and also work closely to ensure transition from reception to year 1 runs smoothly” (Foundation Stage Co-ordinator).

Q.6 Do you have a transition policy?

Table 20

Yes	No
12	7

The data for having a named person and a transition policy was fairly positive for Cycle 2 of the research and suggests moves to have both in place has been instigated.

6.5 Links with parents

Induction sessions, visits to school and home visits were included by teachers as additional information. Home visits include the sharing of photographs with the parents and children of the learning taking place indoors and outdoors. Children are invited to draw a picture which is then displayed in the classroom when they start school; this becomes the first part of their record of achievement. Many examples of practice are shared with practitioners through cluster groups for transference of good practice within the authority.

6.6 Summary

When moving to the local authority where Cycle 2 of the research took place, I identified there was little partnership working between the maintained and private and voluntary settings. The partnership working within this authority is not so embedded as in Cycle 1. However, these data indicate that through the strategies employed such as cluster groups, developing a transition record of children’s learning and development, a key change agent facilitating visits and dialogue between practitioners, a relationship is evolving and through transition pilot projects and other multi disciplinary groups emerging this will continue to develop. Transition activities were described as positive and practitioners from both Local Authorities appeared to be committed to continue them. Strategic leaders need to ensure the momentum for partnership working and transitions across the key stages continues.

Chapter 7

Discussion of findings - Management of Change

This research encouraged reflection on the change process. As I moved to a new authority to use the evaluation of Cycle 1 into the planning for Cycle 2, I became a manager of a large and newly formed team. At this time of rapid change within early years I found the research in relation to change crucial when working with my team as well as changing practitioners' working practices. My goal for this action research with the support of key change agents was to improve and develop practice, where there was empowerment of all practitioners leading to a win-win situation. Co-operation and mutual respect was a key goal. The participants in this research had to own the activities and be engaged in the process of this joint working. Major change in an organisation is usually initiated from the top:

We continue to witness change driven from the top down, by the few with the power to control the many, without regard to the potential of greater involvement by those who must implement the new way of operating (Reason and Bradbury, 2006, p.46).

In my research I was looking for change to occur through the membership of the organisation and for individual practitioners contributing to the success of change in their own organisations, building the capacity for organisational change at all levels, within the school, pre-school or other setting. Organisational change involves personal attitude and behavioural change. Reason and Bradbury (2006) state that approaches to training and dissemination need to focus on changing personal values, ethics and commitments by those participating in the process.

Through developing a new culture within the setting I intended to encourage, through the change process, new learning and enhanced practice relating to partnership working with an ultimate impact on children's learning and emotional well being at the point of transition into school. Part of this process was using practices from Cycle 1 to encourage reflection in Cycle 2 in the new authority. However, it was not just about taking on the ideas and activities. Rather it involved thinking about child development, developmental practice, the key factors influencing children's emotional and social needs and readiness for school. Time was built in for discussing and reflecting on different aspects individuals brought to the meetings. The theme for

the vehicle for this learning was reflective learning (Atherton, 2005).

7.1 Fullans' model of change

Fullan, (1991) writing on educational change, emphasised the human participants in the change process. As well as the objective meaning of the change process, there is a subjective meaning for those individuals involved in the change situation. These subjective meanings may not only be different for the individuals but also for groups of individuals; in my research the pre-school practitioners, childminders, and teachers. Fullan (1991) describes the change process as falling into three broad phases: initiation, implementation and institutionalization. He also “adds the concept of outcome to provide a more complete overview of the change process” (1991, p.48). More recently Fullan (1999) has included capacity building into his approach to change with recognition of external accountability. “*Two-way inside-outside reciprocity is the elusive key to large-scale reform*” (Fullan, 1999, p.62).

7.1.1 Initiation phase

Embarking on an innovation and the development of a commitment to this process was the initiation phase. Miles, (1986) argues that for successful initiation to take place various factors should be taken into account, namely that innovation should:

- link to a high profile local need and local agenda,
- have a clear well structured approach to change,
- have an active advocate who understands and supports the innovation,
- be a high quality innovation,
- have an active initiation to start the process.

Before embarking on my research I was very clear that partnership working and transition was an innovation high on the local agenda. However, it was also beginning to emerge as a topic for discussion at national level as a result of the Curriculum Guidance for The Foundation Stage (DfES, 2000) and emerging literature on the DfES innovation standards site regarding transition into, through and out of the Foundation Stage. I was very clear about the structure of the change and that the formation of the cluster groups was a good forum to initiate the change process as research indicated in the USA (Rural School and Community Trust, 2000). Through advertising and interviewing cluster mentors to lead the innovation I had

practitioners who understood and supported the change to practice. The innovation that I initiated was not part of a fixed domain, but would adapt to new problems or knowledge as they arose encouraging a cycle of reflection.

Personal dilemma – Journal extract

The hardest part for me at this stage, after the sharing of the research, was letting go and allowing others to lead and develop the cluster groups. Although the change agents were colleagues or experienced practitioners, there was still a concern as to how this was going to be undertaken in practice. Would the change agents have the same commitment and passion as myself to this innovation and did they possess interpersonal skills to change hearts and minds? At this stage I visited approximately half of the 50 cluster groups and delivered a short awareness raising-session stating the rationale and the importance of partnership working and gave examples from the literature reviews which demonstrated the impact for children during periods of transition. It was at these initial sessions where I had to capture the interest of the participants. Practitioners were positive in their responses and there was discussion about the next steps.

When delivering training I have always believed that to take practitioners forward in their thinking they have to feel it as well as understand it. Carl Rogers stated, “*Good education involves addressing emotional (affective) and intellectual (cognitive) dimensions*” (Rogers, in Goodman 2001, p.38). Goodman builds on this by saying “*Learning is more stimulating and meaningful when both the intellect and feelings are attended to*”. It is through providing learning experiences in which people come to their own insights and conclusions that resistance is reduced and more meaningful learning is created. I provided quality assurance through regular contact and meetings with the change agents.

7.1.2 Implementation phase

The implementation phase is the attempted use of the innovation, the putting into practice action plans, the developing and sustaining the commitment from the stakeholders, monitoring the progress of the innovation and attempting to overcome any problems. In my formula for change, I researched what was likely to inhibit the change, and the possibility that for many practitioners change was going to be seen as

threatening. I considered if that threat could be defeated, and concluded that it could. This was validated by comments from practitioners such as “*Vitally important to have dialogue – issues such as jealousy over status can be smoothed, sharing best practice by example etc.*”

7.1.3 Institutionalization

The last phase of change is what Fullan (1991) called the institutionalisation of an innovation; the reaction to the change initiated maybe positive or negative. Institutionalisation occurs when the innovation is no longer something new and becomes part of the usual way of doing things. It is at this stage the embedding of change occurs within the structures and organisations. Widespread use of the innovation and an adequate bank of local facilitators are other key components. Partnership working and new transition processes were evidenced across the local authority with a bank of leading mentors ensuring the change process was supported and to give the confidence to people to continue. Another skill these change agents needed was that of understanding complexity of each individual setting or school. The current climate does not accommodate the traditional mindset based on rational approaches to school/setting improvement. Educational change as Patterson et al (1986) stated is often non-rational and does not respect normative logical conventions.

7.2 Models of change

Although Fullan’s (1991) model of change was the overriding framework for the change process to occur in my research, I had investigated as part of the process other models of change. Change process theories suggest that a process relates to a pattern of events from the beginning to the end of the change process. One classic model is the force-field model (Lewin, 1951). This model has three phases, unfreezing, changing and refreezing. This model is a process for implementing norm changes within a group. A norm is the assumption or expectation held by group members in relation to behaviour, what is right or wrong, good or bad, appropriate or not appropriate. It can be difficult at times to change norms within a group. By addressing the key factors in a systematic way this generated support for change, key points were facilitated and discussed in cluster groups.

7.2.1 Lewin's unfreezing phase 'opening up'

The unfreezing stage (Lewin, 1951) develops an awareness of the change needed and the methods planned so that change takes place. In my research it was through discussion at the cluster groups and during the focus groups that the need for change was initiated: particular aspects of good practice in relation to partnership working were explored and good practice by individuals was explained with concrete examples. This helped the new practice to become embedded. Key personnel asked open ended questions to encourage reflective learning and explore how a child's social and emotional readiness could be supported.

The needs of the practitioners and the children that were going to be affected were part of the unfreezing so that individuals felt confident to make changes. It was at this stage that the monitoring of the change was planned by me, professional colleagues and the practitioners themselves. Individual practitioners observed the children on entry to school and monitored how they approached the transition. They were able to compare situations and the context of the situation prior to and after transition activities had been engaged with. Outcomes were discussed between practitioners from both settings and in for example the children centre settings input from the advisory teacher.

7.2.2 Changing phase

The changing phase of the Lewin (1951) model is where the problem is defined, and solutions are identified and implemented. My research identified the barriers to partnership working and the systems identified as good practice were implemented. It was through the process of dialogue and team building through the management of change process that this changing phase occurred.

7.2.3 Refreezing phase

The third phase the refreezing, is where the situation is stabilised, relationships are built and rebuilt and the new system is consolidated; new systems to support partnership working and transition began to be embedded. Practitioners from the different sectors listened to the ideas and needs of the other group members and a way forward was identified and became embedded in practice.

Another process theory is that built on observations of how people react to traumatic events in their lives such as death of a loved one (Jick, 1993; Woodward and Bucholz, 1987). The reaction pattern has four stages, denial, anger, mourning and adaptation.

a) Denial

The initial reaction is to deny that change is necessary. Some practitioners were happy with their system of transition and didn't see the need for change; a phrase used was, "*we have always done it this way*".

b) Anger

The second phase of being angry often results in people looking for someone to blame; it is also in this stage people will stubbornly not give up their particular way of doing things. Examples of this in my research related to a culture of blame, with practitioners from both sectors not willing initially to move on this. An example from a teacher was "*meetings and visits need to take place during the day to support the workload agreement*". This lack of flexibility was part of this stage of change. It has been suggested to me there is often a bargaining category after anger. This didn't occur straight away, but as the relationships developed individuals began to be less resistant in relation to changing their practice and more open to trying new ways of working when colleagues suggested it.

c) Mourning

The third stage relates to individuals acknowledging that change is inevitable, and mourning the loss of what was before.

d) Adaptation

The final stage is accepting the need for change and moving forward. Each stage may vary in the length of time for different individuals. In each cluster group it was necessary to go through these processes to move forward with desired change. Understanding these stages are important for the leader of change who must be supportive and understanding.

Investigating more than one model of change and relating the model to my research gave me a better understanding of the change process.

7.3 Leadership and management

For partnership working across the Foundation stage to be effective there had to be

support from management and particularly in schools this had to be from the head teacher or senior management team. I found that particularly where there was a head teacher with little early years knowledge or practice, they were more reluctant for the reception teacher to have time out of the classroom to make links with feeder settings. This evidence was gathered from the focus groups and interviews with reception teachers; *“My head teacher does not value the partnership working and transition work I undertake”*.

Five of the fifteen focus groups identified lack of support from management as a barrier to this change of practice. Overall when rating how important this was in relation to changing practice, it was listed high on the agenda. Awareness raising for senior management relating to transition was a vital part of the change process. Many of the head teachers interviewed became part of the research. They had a clear understanding of the benefits and a real step forward was head teachers talking to other head teachers through their networks about the benefits that they had identified with partnership working and for the children on transition to school. This related to a standard record keeping form across the authority and continuity with some curriculum areas. It is vital leaders and managers have an understanding of the rationale for the change as *“leading change is one of the most important and difficult leadership responsibilities”* (Yukl, 2006, p.284).

Brown and Duguid (2002) raise the difficulty of introducing change into organisations such as schools as they have vertical hierarchies and layers of differentiated status and activity which have to be broken through if the new practices and ideas are going to be accessed and benefits gained. In Cycle 2 of the research I was in a position of strategy manager, which gave me more opportunities to work with head teachers and engage them in this debate; being a much smaller authority also aided the process. One head teacher stated, *“I really want to work with our pre-school, they are doing some good work”*. I had supported him in writing the school evaluation form and we had analysed data to show children from his feeder pre-school were entering school at the expected national level or above.

Journal extract

As in cycle 1 the head teachers are a group I need to ensure I make good relationships

with, they can help develop my work and move it forward and will be a good source of support when disseminating to other head teachers.

One success story is a cluster of schools all having an agreed policy on transition and all parents being made aware of this the head teacher who was cluster leader provided ownership from the top. Replicating this model in Cycle 2 should encourage excellent practice across the whole borough in relation to transition for children of all ages. Here with clear leadership the leader revitalised the organisation and helped it adapt to a changing environment. A leader with socialised power orientation is more likely to support, develop and empower. *“An appreciation for individual and cultural differences can help a leader influence people in diverse groups and facilitate cooperation and teamwork”* (Yukl, 2006, p.444).

An inclusive and strong style of leadership was considered to be necessary if partnership working was to flourish. Rudd et al (2004) found this was to take account of the different ethos and management styles of the different partners taking part in this work. This links clearly with the different management styles of the maintained, private and voluntary sector, and for effective communication there needed to be *“regular well managed meetings, common training for participants and the development of a culture that encouraged contributions from a wide range of people”* (2004, p.447). The aims of the group were for practitioners to feel that they contributed to the outcomes rather than having them imposed on them from the local authority. Reflective discussions with my professional colleagues led us to believe this was particularly successful in Phase 1 of the research as the change agents were practitioners working within settings themselves.

7.4 Resistance to change

Resistance to change is common for both individuals and organisations for a range of reasons. In my research one barrier was the belief by some practitioners, teachers and head teachers, that change was unnecessary. *“We have always done it this way, we don’t need to change what we do”*. As Yukl (2006) explains, if there is management level expression of positive views about the status quo, then it is more difficult to persuade people that change is needed. As in my research where some head teachers are happy with the current system, it is difficult to persuade the individual teacher that

systems can be improved. Even when a problem is identified in established systems or strategies, there is often an inclination to do more of the same rather than do something differently. Leading on from this was the belief that the change may not be feasible. Some practitioners were not keen to implement the changes, as they were unsure it would succeed, and for some it was a new way of working. *“Making a change that is radically different from anything done previously will appear difficult if not impossible for most people”* (Yukl, 2006, p.285).

Change that conflicts with strong values and ideals will also be resisted, along with loss of status and power; some teachers felt their status would be downgraded if non-teaching practitioners were valued by other professionals at the same level. This concept of power status was identified as a barrier through the focus groups. Private and voluntary practitioners felt teachers had a power status. Nine of the focus groups identified status as a barrier to partnership working. Particularly childminders felt they were not valued, *“I don’t feel valued or seen as a professional”*. Power involving one group of people or individual to influence one person or multiple persons relates to attitudes, behaviours and events: *“Resistance to change is not merely the result of ignorance or inflexibility; it is a natural reaction by people who want to protect their self interests and sense of self determination”* (Yukl, 2006, p.286).

Power is a dynamic variable and can change over time as conditions change. During the research period of Cycle 1 it was evident that the power status of a few (teachers) diminished within the cluster groups as relationships and partnership working evolved. *“I have encouraged both feeder pre-schools to free a member of staff to spend time in the classroom. We now have monthly discussions on planning and problems”*. Evidencing a willingness to have professional relationships and shared planning.

However as I moved to a new authority, power status amongst the newly formed groups was evident and the change process was initiated again. This distinction of status between institutions and individuals did, at the beginning, get in the way of the learning and the collaboration that was being advocated at national and local level and which many practitioners aspired to themselves. Key personnel helped this process. One deputy head teacher stated, *“It is not just the pre-schools learning from the*

schools, I have learnt a lot from them as well". Through a conversational approach, which was facilitated through the cluster mentors this labelling of settings was reduced, and an openness and willingness to work in partnership was developed.

Practitioners from the private and voluntary sector who had a lack of confidence in their practice, often relating to self-image, found new confidence when discussing topics such as child development, where they had been developing practice for a long time. Some teachers who were trained at primary and sometimes secondary level did not have this theoretical background and acknowledged this at cluster groups by supporting dialogue from practitioners who may have trained as nursery nurses and were able to share their expertise: *"In the early years of the expansion of playgroups and of nursery education there was both friction and misunderstanding in each about the type of provision and goals of the other"* (Clark and Cheyne, 1979, p.5).

The government guidelines for the interpretation of the Children Act 1989 referred to the right of children up to the age of eight to an *"environment which facilitates development"* (Department of Health, 1991a, paragraph 6.2.8) when discussing reference to day care and educational provision. The Act also demanded new ways of working which required

The breakdown of barriers between departments, setting aside professional jealousy and territorial influence, establishing a common language and frameworks for future development, including multi-professional interdisciplinary training (Smith, 1994, p.15).

Nearly twenty years has lapsed between the two quotations but my research was initiated due to witnessing some of this friction and misunderstanding. Changes to working practices have taken place as a result of the Foundation Stage (DfES, 2000) where competition between the sectors has occurred with both sectors encouraging funded four year olds into their particular setting. *"Because feeder settings are taking children into school earlier, we are experiencing low numbers and have many unfilled places"*. Change has taken place in terms of working together rather than in a silo, where schools and settings work in isolation, to solve this difficulty. I was, through many different activities and a strategy, trying to promote partnership working in the Foundation Stage, however, this is sometimes difficult to achieve when schools are taking children younger into school and pre-schools are losing their funding for their

four year old children. This has resulted in a potential conflict between the schools, which want to enlarge the provision they make for pre-school children, and local community based pre-schools.

Some local authorities have adopted flexible admission arrangements where the child may remain in the pre-school and have their place in school deferred until their child is ready to enter school. In the local authority where my research has taken place, tensions in relation to securing places for the same children has been resolved through joint working, sharing of information to parents, joint meetings to explain curriculum issues and a forum for parents to ask questions and make an informed choice. The information leaflet clearly stated the school and pre-school had produced it jointly. Practitioners from both sectors were present at the meeting. The cluster groups where relationships were established at grass roots level supported relationships being maintained during this conflict.

The National Early Years Network (DfES, 1997) stated the reasons for the move to early entry are: falling primary school rolls in the early 1970s and early 1980s which led to spare spaces; pressure from parents for their children to start school as early as possible and concern that summer born children underachieve throughout their school career and that all children should have the same length of time in school.

It may be said that the first governmental effect on early childhood recent policy change has come through legislation in pursuit of major radical initiatives in education and in health and in social services (Blenkin and Kelly, 1997, p.35).

The barrier in relation to competition was addressed through dialogue and open and transparent meetings where solutions were found to address the needs of the parents and the community as well as ensuring both the maintained and the private and voluntary settings continued to be sustainable. The impact of competition with similar case studies has been recognised (DfEE, 1997). Case studies have shown outcomes reminiscent of my own research. It was also identified that the only way forward is to work in partnership

If we don't we almost certainly work against each other and that can only be to the detriment of the children in our care. Collaboration can expand the range and quality of pre-school services without losing the distinctive character and strengths of different ways of working with young children and

families (1997, p.6).

Vignette

An example of good practice in my local authority is the nursery school attached to the primary school taking the children for their two and a half, hours sessions and the day nursery opposite working with the school to provide the wrap-around care before and after nursery sessions. Work between the two establishments led to continuity within curricular provision and a shared educational language. This change to previous working practices had to be worked through with a third party to resolve the matter to an acceptable conclusion to all parties.

It was important to establish the resistance to changing the practices of working in partnership, and to investigate this at individual and group level, in terms of the cluster groups and organisational level, which are the settings, both maintained and non -maintained.

Participatory research (Reason and Bradbury, 2006) takes time and includes the process of peer to peer sharing, building demonstration vignettes, transferring these to other settings, including the time for learning, testing them out and continuous reflection and improvement in the process. The attitude-centred approach to change (Reason and Bradbury, 2006) is where I place my research. This involved changing attitudes and values with persuasive appeals, training programmes and team building activities. This relates to my change process using the model by Fullan (1991) and the implementation stage Miles (1986) identified key features as: in-service training, a mix of pressure and support, shared control over the implementation and rewards early on in the process.

The training supplied during the focus groups was identified as one of the key benefits of the innovation: *“being able to access speakers at cluster groups has been really beneficial”*. A total of 21 focus groups stated training as a benefit. Rewards came in the form of new resources to be shared, and a small amount of funding for the cluster groups to use to support partnership working and transition practices. Shared control related to all practitioners being part of the change process and having ownership and empowerment of the change. Through this was the intention that new attitudes and

skills would encourage behaviour to change in a beneficial way, ultimately working towards these practitioners being change agents themselves and transmitting new ways of working to other practitioners in the local settings.

7.5 Change agents

A change agent is the individual or group that effects strategic change in an organisation (Johnson and Scholes, 2002, p.548): it may not be one individual who is the change agent and it can be an individual in a consultancy role that effects the change. Rogers (1996) views a change agent as an individual who influences clients' innovation decisions in a direction desirable by the change agency. However, Fullan (1999) views every stakeholder in the educational change as a change agent.

Through my research I identified the mentors leading the cluster groups as the change agents. Personality traits were important when employing cluster mentors: I was particularly looking for traits and skills, which related to effective relations-orientated leadership. Communication skills and emotional intelligence support the development of co-operative relationships and make influence more effective. To maintain mutual trust and credibility personal integrity is essential. Stakeholders within the network, but not within the organisation, would be identified in this role as well. Another term often used for this role is a broker, who will provide a context for meaningful engagement and enabling dialogue, put people in touch with one another and make information available to the members and be a catalyst for change (Fielding, 2005). Whatever term we use these people have a strong belief about their work and feel improvements can be made for the ultimate benefit of the children. These brokers/change agents were pivotal to the success of the partnership working and good practice related to transition, as they often knew the history of schools and settings and had established prior relationships with individuals.

To ensure quality assurance was in place and for leading Foundation Stage mentors to come together, regular meetings were held to share concerns, ideas and evaluate the action research and emerging issues. This was also part of quality assurance. Mentors on a regular basis completed forms to evidence what activities and communication had taken place. An example of a completed form is included as Appendix 5, which illustrates this. Mentors had regular professional development training themselves and copies of minutes from these meetings and individual cluster groups were circulated.

Letters from mentors introducing themselves were of a high quality, which stimulated interest from practitioners. Letters following cluster meetings were sent to keep the momentum of the groups sustained. Examples are included as Appendix 6 and 7.

Change agents were able to reassure practitioners that this innovation was not linked to accountability, they were open minded to suggestions within the group, engaged the individuals and supported people in making their own connections. It was important to acknowledge the stages the practitioners were going through in relation to changing their current practice, realising their old ways of doing things were no longer adequate, looking for a new approach and then implementing the new approach which will become established, (i.e. Lewin's (1951) model of change which reflected, the unfreezing, change and refreezing approach).

Before people will support radical change, they need to have a vision of a better future that is attractive enough to justify the sacrifices and hardships the change will require (Yukl, 2006, p.314).

Persuasive communication in relation to facilitating change requires knowledge of the audience. Blundel (2004) suggests clarity is needed in terms of the audience's experience of the individual or organisation they represent, what they already know what their feelings are in relation to the subject. Clarity is also required about whether one individual or a group of people is involved and whether they are able to act independently or do they have a role or acting as an agent for another organisation. Lastly it is important to establish what factors may be persuading them in the opposite direction. (p.109). Human motivation is relevant here. Through the questionnaires, interviews and focus groups, clear barriers and benefits had been identified. However, at grass roots level, many of the practitioners were not in a position of management to make changes themselves but could only make small changes; many individuals were going back to schools and settings to motivate others in relation to changes. Persuasive communication is complex, organisational theorists, and strategy researchers

have pointed out that these processes operate across many different levels of analysis, including the actions of individual managers, interaction between powerful sub-groups within the organisation, and wider economic, social and cultural influences (Blundel, 2004, p.109).

It is important that good practice is disseminated throughout the whole of the county.

I found that having network meetings for the Leading Foundation Stage Mentors has supported the sharing of good practice, and led to mentors taking away many good ideas to develop the good practice when it was in its infancy.

The results of the questionnaires were shared with the mentors, which resulted in some changes to enhance practice. As timing was a barrier, mentors have consulted with their own cluster group at a very local level to find a time that suits most people. Where this has been difficult, meetings are held at different times on a rolling programme so that all settings can at least participate at some meetings. The questionnaires clearly pointed out the barriers to attending and already many of these difficulties have been addressed. It was through the building of the relationships and the understanding of other sectors' practice that individuals came to appreciate times needed to be changed.

The network meetings for the mentors have supported them in leading informal cluster meetings and supported the change process. To develop the good work of the cluster groups, mentors need to be supported in their role and need to have a contact for advice and support. With the network meetings to share good practice and ideas and the support of an early years adviser, the quality of the informal networks has risen and has begun to be valued at the same rate as the training sessions. *"We now meet to make sure assessments are the same so that records can be passed on and continued to be used"*.

Where mentors have put in place opportunities to share planning formats and observation sheets and record keeping procedures these informal ways of sharing these concerns and good practice have worked extremely well. The mentors as teachers were change agents within their own and other schools and settings.

The mentors as leaders of the groups have many roles to play Bennett (1997, p.165) describes the roles of a leader: the relevant roles for the mentor include providing direction for any group activity, sharing of information and communicating information to the group, offering ideas and opinions and encouraging members to do the same, motivating the group and defining problems and objectives. Another responsibility for the leader is to define super-ordinate goals. In this case it would be

improving the practice in all settings during the Foundation Stage for children and improved transition into school.

The leader of a group has to have the power to initiate group activity. When describing power in this context, it relates to other components such as personality, access to resources, information and those people in higher authority, how the members of the group relate and identify the core values of that individual and the willingness of the group to accept the leadership of that particular individual. Therefore in both authorities it was crucial to the success of the research to have a change agent with the right skills and personality.

7.6 Networks

Research in the USA identified that networks and clusters can be a catalyst for change as they can actually inspire movement. Through these networks practitioners had an opportunity to come together and experience the wide range of learning and experience individuals had. Research into how networks operate made the following observations, that as networks develop those involved begin to connect more with the local communities and that successful networks can be thought of as ecosystems, they depend on keeping relationships in balance to maintain themselves (Rural School and Community Trust, 2000, p.29). Bennett (1997) gives the definition of a group as two or more people who possess a common theme. These groups can form without management support, "*Members organise themselves and develop a sense of affinity to each other and a common cause*" (Bennett, 1997, p.159).

Networks also support the emotional needs of individuals as they go through the engagement of new learning. Posch (1994) defined two networks, hierarchical networks and dynamic networks. Dynamic networks I recognised: "*The essential feature of dynamic networks is the autonomous and flexible establishment of relationships to assist responsible action in the face of complexity and uncertainty*" (Posch, 1994, p.68).

Networks are not new, but they are recognised as a mechanism to co-ordinate and safeguard changes. Contracts between organisations are not legally binding but socially binding. One element needed to make these networks successful is that of

trust. Blundell (2004) views the creation of networks as a key entrepreneurial activity. Mullins (2005) believes there are many possible ways of defining what is meant by a group and cites a popular definition as “*any number of people who (1) interact with one another; (2) are psychologically aware of one another and (3) perceive themselves to be a group*” (p.518).

Blundell goes on to say if groups are to be successful and perform effectively there must be a spirit of unity and co-operation. It is clear from my research that the networks or cluster groups have a shared sense of unity. For groups to be effective there are two main sets of functions that must be undertaken, these are task functions and maintenance functions. Task functions are directed towards problem solving: “*Most of the task oriented behaviour will be concerned with production activities, or the exchange and evaluation of ideas and information*” (Mullins, 2005, p.564).

The cluster groups meet this function as the ideas and sharing of information, particularly in relation to transition and partnership working, are at the heart of the groups’ work. Maintenance function is related to the emotional life of the group: “*Most of the maintenance function of the group will be concerned with relationships among members, giving encouragement and support, maintaining cohesiveness and the resolution of conflict*” (Mullins, 2005, p.564). The right balance between the functions needs to be in place. Support, encouragement and the resolving of conflicts, such as the different status of the practitioners, was one of the themes evolving from the research.

Yamazumi et al (2005) predict that interagency practice will emerge through “*Change Laboratory intervention sessions*”. Through these sessions difficulties and dilemmas would be discussed and different ways of working would emerge. It is envisaged that participants would develop their professional activity through professional learning resulting in new ways of working and co-configuration.

The value of these networks/cluster groups was articulated in the research under the heading of benefits, “*the cluster groups give you support, you don’t feel isolated and it helps to know other people are having the same difficulties*” (Reception Teacher).

Informal groups, which I believe the cluster groups to be, developed as a result of the need to satisfy the needs of the individuals within the group. The Foundation Stage practitioners felt an individual need to meet with other people in the same circumstances to share ideas and good practice but also have a support network as evidenced in the research phase. A very clear theme that came from all my data through questionnaires, interviews and focus groups were how valuable these cluster groups have been. They were talked about in terms of good practice on a regular basis. A typical comment is: *“We have found the cluster meetings invaluable as they have brought us all together, enabling us to share views, ideas, strategies and to support each other in providing the best care/provision that we can.”* (Reception Teacher).

7.7 Reflection – Taken from journal

Where there has been a whole school approach this has supported the Foundation Stage practitioners. In one school the designated PPA (planning, preparation and assessment) time has been allocated to working on transitions throughout the primary school. This has allowed the Foundation Stage practitioners to use this time to visit and develop links with their feeder pre-schools. Several practitioners voiced the concern that management was not always aware of the importance and benefits of these cluster groups. It is important that the Foundation Stage (DfES, 2000) is viewed as an important stage in the same way Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 are, if a Foundation Stage practitioner was able to be part of the senior management team, then there is more of an opportunity to influence practice.

Rudd et al (2004, p.viii) undertaking research on partnership approaches to sharing best practice identified through interviews that participants viewed best practice as a sense of ownership of the partnership, a bottom up approach with everyone’s views taken into account and honesty and openness. The sharing of best practice through the groups will be an ongoing activity. Research on school clusters such as Potter and Williams (1994) found the numerous benefits clusters bring outweighed the difficulties cited as time and travel, which as I discovered in my research were common barriers in comparative research studies in other countries such as Iceland.

The concern for many of the head teachers was the benefit to the children and a rise in

attainment on entry to school. Much of the research has been in relation to personal, social and emotional development, which has been of a qualitative nature. On entry assessment has been variable in terms of method and quantity with each school deciding on their own particular method of assessment. With baseline assessment on entry to school no longer in place, there has not been a formal requirement for assessment to take place on entry to formal schooling. Cycle 3 of my research has involved sampling a range of schools from both authorities to investigate if the innovation has been institutionalised and to identify qualitative data linked to on entry assessments. Some clear points for further development related to personal, social and emotional development, which were shared with a wider audience. However, all the research has supported improved confidence, self esteem, social skills and a readiness to learn, with several teachers stating confidently that the shared common language and shared practice has led to raising children's attainment levels on entry to school. Foundation Stage Profile results have been analysed to look at trends over time during my research phase.

Organisational culture involves assumptions, beliefs and values that are shared by members of the organization (Morgan, 1986). My research involves the cluster group as an organisation and the individual's setting as an organisation. It is easier to embed culture in a new organisation but individuals then had to take that change and embed it in their established organisation. Part of the process was to have the confidence to recognise mistakes and what did not work well and to learn from these mistakes whilst celebrating the achievements the group had made, taking this learning forward. In some cases individuals identified their own learning needs and formed a relationship with a partner setting from whom they could learn. This was an exchange model of practice; good working practices were developed through mutual learning. The cluster groups continue to function though there has been a change in membership and at times the cluster group mentor has moved on, leading to new leadership of the groups; the groups have a self-perpetuating identity. The members of the cluster groups themselves have ensured these groups continue through times of rapid change.

Empowerment of those practitioners, who at the beginning of the research felt powerless, was evidenced when a feeder school with one reception class employed a

new reception teacher. The new teacher no longer invited the children to visit the school before starting on their first day. The pre-school practitioners along with parents wrote and phoned the school resulting in the procedure being reversed, the pre-school practitioners had been very involved in the research and the cluster groups and felt empowered to challenge the teacher and the school. The change process did not end with the recognition of the innovation but rather evolved through continuous interaction with the change and the environmental changes that came with it. During the change process, challenge, support and negotiation transpired between practitioners, leading to a change in skills, thinking and a commitment to action, changing established practices for new ways of working.

7.8 Conclusion

This action research has shown that change agents have been the key to partnerships not just developing but sustaining over time. This was a surprise as at the beginning of the research the leading mentors were taken on board to help with capacity as much as changing practice. Though time and effort went into ensuring the right practitioners took on this role, I was surprised at the commitment, reflective thinking and energy that individuals put into leading the cluster groups. Cycle 3 of the research, whilst only small scale, highlighted how cluster groups were attended regularly and were valued. This was evidenced by additional comments written by practitioners. I was surprised how in Cycle 1 the role of the mentor was so popular. As mentors moved on or chose to withdraw from the role recruiting was not difficult. Many Leading Foundation Stage mentors used this role as evidence when applying for jobs. Several mentors went onto promotion and believed the role they had undertaken helped to secure the post. When liaising with colleagues from other authorities at regional events, discussion has taken place relating to cluster groups where colleagues have stated they were not sustained. I shared the role of the mentor and the action research which colleagues were interested in replicating.

Management of change has supported my own reflective learning journey; I believe this action research has led me to be a more effective leader and manager. Sharing this action research with colleagues within my own team, discussing how to lead a culture of change has developed these skills in individuals within my team. As Fullan (2004) remarked, the main mark of an effective leader is how many effective leaders

they leave behind.

Chapter 8

Social and Emotional Development

My data, questionnaires and focus group discussions, identified children's social and emotional development as a key theme. During discussions and reflection within cluster groups and through interviews practitioners were voicing this area of development as crucial to a positive experience for children on transition to school.

Journal extract

I have noticed social and emotional development is written as a key aspect in my notes; these words appear more than any other aspect of children's development. This is a theme across discussion with practitioners from all sectors.

Practitioners in particular articulated the importance of children's developing self-concept and self-esteem and their relationships with their peers and adults. A child's sense of self esteem is deeply influenced by the way they believe that others perceive and value them (Schaffer, 2004). The outcomes from discussion groups resulted in practitioners believing that children need to be empowered so that they have positive attitudes, resilience and have co-operative relationships with their peers. The cluster groups were a forum for discussing the importance of relationships, and how through role-play and miniature-world play children re-enact the patterns of relationships between each other and adults (Blenkin and Kelly, 1996).

Cluster groups reflected on different aspects of provision and practitioners across all sectors particularly discussed aspects of the curriculum, which they believed supported children socially and emotionally, on transition to school. Butterfield (2002) discusses the importance of attending to children's social and emotional well being as a key strategy for children starting school ready to learn. Children, through getting to know the new educational opportunities that will be presented to them use aspects of their emotional and social development (Hurst, 1997). Discussion involved the planning of different experiences and activities for children to explore feelings and relationships, support independence and empower children during the transition period. The experiences, activities and training which practitioners found most effective are discussed in this chapter for example the training and subsequent use of

Persona Dolls.

8.1 Training

The cluster mentors and colleagues at a feedback session believed children's self esteem and social confidence was crucial at the point of transition and wanted to particularly focus on training for practitioners on this aspect. The social and emotional aspects of development in children, and continuity and progression in their learning at points of transition, should not be seen as separate aspects. For children to have good emotional well being and achieve on entry to school, the two aspects should be interwoven in terms of children's continuum of development. Although the link between social and emotional and cognitive development has been acknowledged this has not been made explicit to those adults working and caring for young children across the different agencies. Caine and Caine (1991, p.66) conclude, "*emotions and cognition cannot be separated*".

Cluster groups were a forum for discussing the links and how professional development may encourage individual practitioners thinking. Fisher (1996) was commenting on young children's feelings and attitudes as being crucial to their achievements in all aspects of life, and yet there was little recognition of this in recent national documentation. There have been some recent developments; materials produced by Sure Start (2006) link to the Birth to Three Framework and the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage. These materials state:

"Early personal, social and emotional development and learning has a crucial impact on later well being, learning and achievement in the setting, involvement in crime and anti-social behaviour, economic well being and the strength of communities" (Sure Start 2006, p.1).

These training materials aim to develop practitioners' knowledge, encourage reflective practice and the use of multi agency support. Training was developed using these materials as a basis. Feedback was very positive "*this is the best training I have ever attended*". The training was planned to relate to practitioners' own life experiences and focused on impacting emotionally as well as cognitively. One aim of the training was to help practitioners see the link between their own well being and how that impacts on the child's well being. Evidence (Weare and Gray, 2003) shows teachers cannot transmit emotional and social competence effectively if their own

emotional needs are not met. Materials for the primary age range, Social, Emotional Aspects of Learning (DfES, 2005) provide schools with an explicit, structured whole curriculum for developing social, emotional and behavioural skills in the Foundation and Primary phases in school. It is recognised that:

The development of children's social, emotional and behavioural skills involves both the formal and informal curriculum, and it is therefore important that the aspects of the professional development opportunities include all setting or setting personnel (DfES, 2005, P.22).

My research identified the high turnover of staff particularly in the day nursery sector.

Journal extract

Managers of day nurseries are expressing concern that staff are moving to other day nurseries, usually for a very small increase in wages. In some nurseries there is a high turn over of staff.

It was difficult to develop the key person approach and the links to social and emotional development, when staff kept leaving. A strong relationship between children and their practitioners and the impact on children is therefore an area for further development. The key person approach (DfES, 2007) and attachment theory (Bowlby, 1989) is a start, but particularly in the private and voluntary sector there is a need for further professional thinking. Specific training through the cluster groups has been identified and is now in place, which relates to leadership and management, professional knowledge and retention of staff. The understanding of the practitioners and the impact of their relationship with the child for early academic success is crucial and is integral to our training programmes. The cluster groups that were set up as part of my research to facilitate partnership working and to identify transferable practice are a forum to build expertise. Through dialogue and training practitioners may come to a common understanding of approaches to enhance children's self esteem and social competence and how the transition process will support rather than hinder children's readiness for school.

It was also identified through the dialogue at cluster groups that practitioners required more training to support their work with parents including challenging situations such as domestic violence and the impact on the child. Many researchers believe that the

family is the primary socialisation influence in the child's early years (Dunn, 1995). Children who have negative experiences at home can have difficulties in relation to school readiness and more challenges when adjusting to the changes that school brings (Pianta, et al, 1999). Early identification and intervention before children start school can make a difference. In one particular area of the authority it has been recognised that a high proportion of children are experiencing difficulties within the family unit; as a result, transition meetings facilitated by the children centre teacher for the identified settings and schools focus on the development and learning needs of the child during the transition period and include other professionals such as social workers and health visitors. Working with parents in partnership and the role of parents supporting children at transition points were a thread through the research that has not been explicitly explored.

A demographic change has occurred in the Local Authority where there are a growing number of children from different ethnic backgrounds particularly Nigerian. Training and networks have supported the understanding of different parenting styles. A project such as Parents as Partners in Early Learning (PPEL) with which my present local authority has been involved has developed this area of engagement. An early years consultant/children centre teacher has completed a two-day training session at Pen Green Centre (Research, Development & Training Base and Leadership Centre) Training the Trainers – Parents involvement in children's learning, which has also developed practitioners' skills and knowledge when working with parents. Outcomes were evidenced through such avenues as the teenage parent's project; however, these interventions need to be considered within the cultural framework of the family.

Black and William (1998) investigated whether formative research could be shown to raise attainment levels. They suggested an association between successful learning and high self-esteem. Further training focused on observation and assessment, which is fundamental to early years practice. Assessment, particularly formative assessment, where evidence on a daily basis is used to make decisions about what a child knows and can do is a fundamental part of the role of the adult. The use of formative assessment was a tool to support teachers and practitioners. Self-esteem can be supported by the involvement of children in their own learning. With the skills and positive attitude of the adults' assessment for learning allows children to understand

what they are trying to achieve and how they will know they have achieved it. If children have an understanding that making mistakes is part of the learning process and have an opportunity to talk about what they found difficult, how they would do it differently if repeated and aspects of their learning they enjoyed, they are likely to be more positive about trying new things.

Practitioners discussed various activities they believed supported children and had worked well in their individual settings such as persona dolls and circle time. Not all practitioners had experience of providing these activities so training was delivered across the county. Persona dolls had been used as a tool for developing practice relating to inclusion and there was evidence of children engaging with them.

8.1.1 Persona dolls

Children are active learners who construct knowledge about their world and this knowledge grows through communication with adults and other children. “*The child is a social being whose competencies are interwoven with the competencies of others*” (Bruner and Haste, 1987, p.11). The practitioners through using the persona dolls were encouraging the children to express their feelings and ideas and extend their knowledge base. Children were able to think critically and problem solve through the different scenarios presented to them (Bruner, 1975).

The adults through the process of scaffolding, asking open ended questions, modelling, encouraging children to try different approaches were supporting children with dealing and coping with new experiences on transition. For example the persona doll may not have any friends in his/her new class and through the story the children can find solutions and different strategies of how to deal with this. By building on what children already know they gain greater competence through describing, explaining and justifying their thinking. It is through language and social interaction that knowledge and societal values are transmitted from adults to children. Vygotsky (1978) and Bruner (1983) suggest language, communication and instruction is at the centre of intellectual and personal development. Persona doll story telling was shared with children in their pre-school setting and in their new setting. Photographs to show activities undertaken are included in Appendix 8.

I am a qualified persona doll trainer and I delivered training to cluster groups across the local authority. Practitioners began to write their own stories which they shared within their cluster groups. One reception teacher shared her induction process and how she uses persona dolls.

Vignette of practice using persona dolls.

A reception class teacher explained to the practitioners her transition process using persona dolls and how this has supported children's social and emotional development.

**The use of a persona doll in pre school/nursery visits
to aid a smooth transition process**

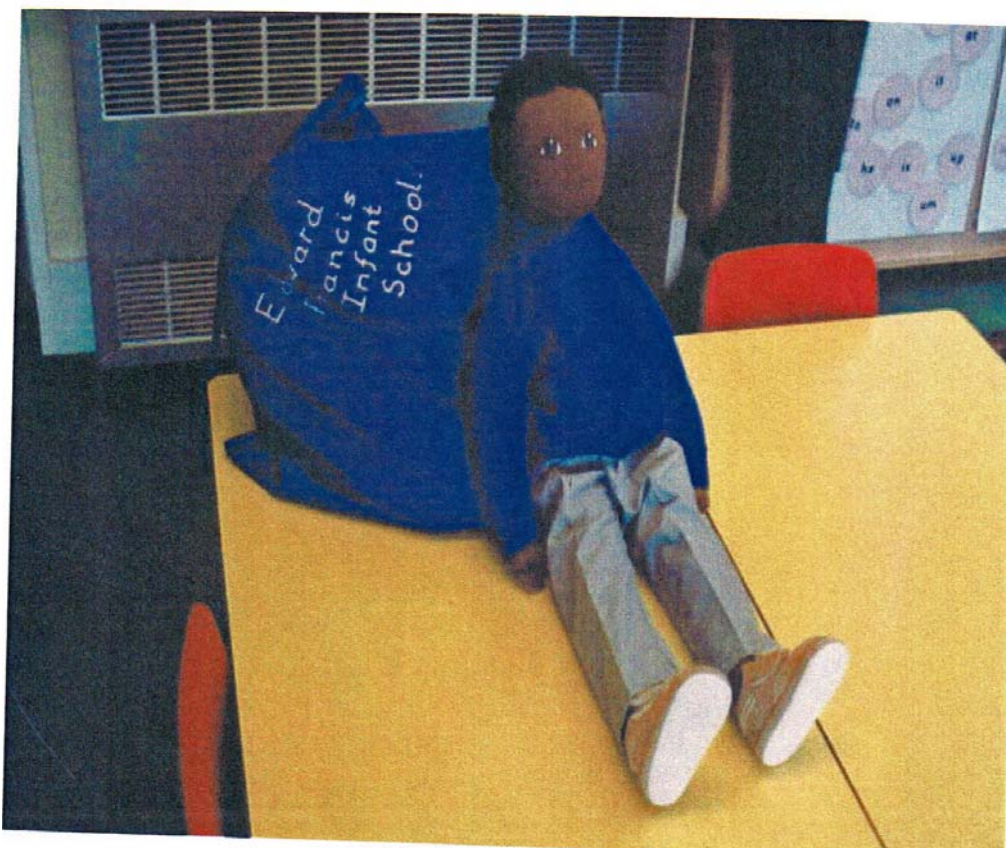
Our transition programme includes an evening meeting for parents/carers, many short visits to school, a short meeting between parents/carers, child and teacher/teaching assistant and visits to feeder pre-schools and nurseries.

A lead teaching assistant and I (as class teacher) visit our feeder preschools together. Earlier in the year the settings will have received a booklet of information and photographs about our setting to share with the children and parents. Towards the end of the summer term we visit the settings and bring with us our bag of goodies and our persona doll, dressed in our school uniform, which the children in our school named 'Jez'. We play with the children, getting to know them and discuss any issues or information the practitioners would like to pass onto us.

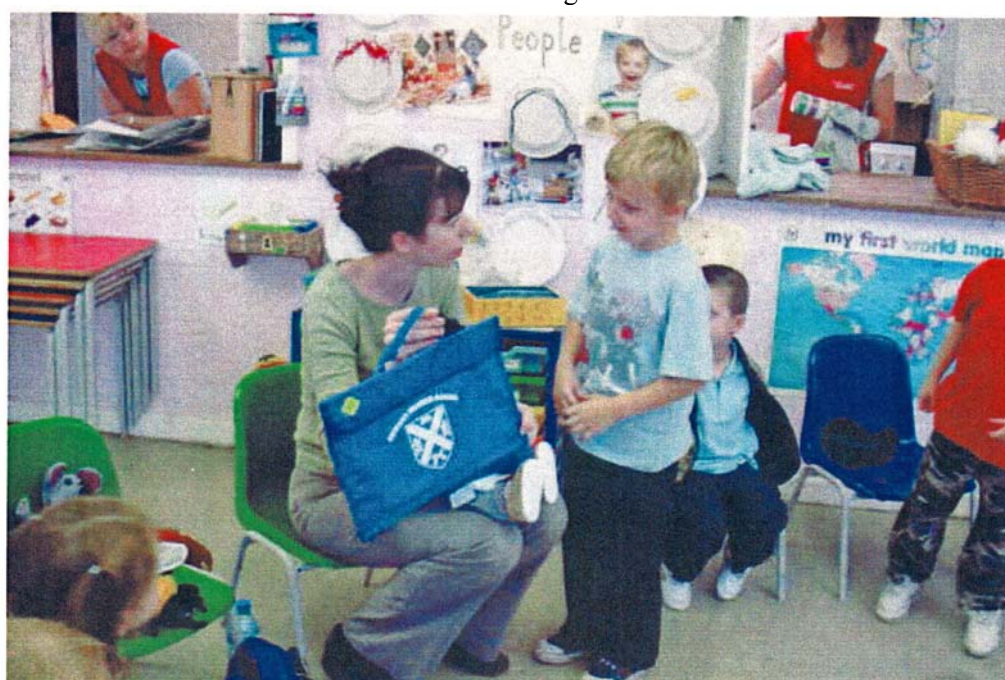
When the setting has circle time we observe and then lead a small part of this session. We introduce our friend 'Jez' and begin by talking about his special clothes or school uniform. We discuss that the children that are coming to our school will wear blue sweatshirts like him. We also discuss the sweatshirt colours of other local schools. (Not all the children would be coming to our school). Jez then invites one child at a time to take an item out of our 'story sack' type bag. We discuss these 'school type' items which include a reading book, snack, a P.E kit, stickers for good behaviour and some 'Jolly Phonics' puppets. We refer to Jez as if he is a pupil at our school.

After the circle time the children are given some free time to come and play with the items and talk to us (or Jez), asking any questions they may have about starting school.

We feel this does have a positive impact on the children because they take a keen interest in 'Jez' and do not find him in the slightest bit threatening. They are interested in the subject of his special clothes and the special clothes they know they will have when they go to 'big school'. The children enjoy exploring the 'school type objects' and often talk about older siblings/friends who use these things. Parents tell us that the children talked about our visit at home. The children then recognize us when they make their visits to our setting and will meet Jez again as part of school circle time sessions.



1. The Persona doll with his bag arrives at the school.



2. The teacher from the school introduces 'Jez' to the children.



3. The children explore what is in the bag.



4. The teacher reads a story with Jez to the children.



5. The children are engaged with the story.



6. The children look at the books that Jez brought in his bag.

After a training session on Persona Dolls, practitioners used them within their setting and then a discussion took place at a cluster group on how practitioners felt the sessions went, what were the benefits and any difficulties. Practitioners said they felt the children were able to explore their feelings and it helped the children to find strategies to deal with emotions such as feeling lonely, or who to ask if they were not sure what to do or where to go particularly at play time.

The requests for training and the use of persona dolls increased. Practitioners used persona dolls in the nursery and classrooms where children took on the role of supporting the doll as a new child in the setting, showing the doll different activities, where to put their coat, where to find the toilets. Photographs of persona dolls taken in different settings were also used with the children.

8.1.2 Circle time

Mosley (1993) suggested practitioners cannot 'teach' children moral values they have to experience them. Circle Time games and exercises are designed to build up a sense of class community and are an effective strategy for promoting positive behaviour and respectful relationships in early years environments. Practitioners who used circle time on a regular basis modelled this for other practitioners; some visited the school to watch a session in action. Formal training was offered and Jenny Mosley accredited trainers were used. Further guidance on implementing circle time sessions, rules for circle time, activities, stories, drama and creative visualisations were shared as follow up sessions at cluster groups after a training session. The focus of discussion was using circle time to incorporate the curriculum for personal, social and emotional development, developing young children's emotional intelligence and helping them to practice problem-solving skills.

Practitioners reported that children, through taking part in circle time were more confident in speaking and listening activities and they observed behaviours and relationship building in the settings which had been a focus of circle time.

8.2 Interviewing children

Children are skilful communicators from a young age and therefore a forum for

expressing their views and perspectives should be provided and viewed as a worthwhile exercise. *If young children are acknowledged as playing an active part in a search for meanings, then their own perspectives on this learning process becomes of paramount importance* (Clark and Moss, 2005, p.8).

Interviews with children helped practitioners gain an understanding of their feelings during transitions. Seventeen children, nine girls and eight boys were interviewed. The interviews were targeted at children transferring from home into a setting and also children who transferred from one room to another within the nursery. Children were selected at random from a pre-school or day nursery and a relationship built with the children before the questions were asked. I visited settings which were familiar to me and where I had a relationship with the adults. I spent time playing with the children and reading stories with them before the interviews. Within the range of children were those from different ethnic backgrounds white, Black African, mixed race and different home languages ensuring inclusion. One child was from the Travelling community. With these youngest children two questions were asked.

1) How did you feel when you started nursery/ moved into your new room?

2) What could we have done to make it better for you?

Responses from question 1

Child A: "Scary, I wanted my mummy to stay so she did".

Child B: "Alright I sat with Bev". (his friend)

Child C: "Yes I liked it, Connar was there". (his friend)

Child D: "Alright, I could be spider man".

Child E: "It was bigger and Kelly (his key person) was not in my room but she was in the garden and art."

Child F: "I was worried and I see Lea (practitioner) in there and she sat with me".

Child G: "I wanted my mummy; Lesa (practitioner) gave me a cuddle and read me a story."

Child H: "My sister stayed with me and showed me the room".

Child I: "I like it, I was happy."

Child J: "I like it and my mummy came to get me".

Child K: "My mummy came and I stayed on my own and mummy came back".

Child L: "Mummy came in and help us, I like it I sat with Dawn." (her friend)

Child M: (From Travelling Community)“My likes to come, I did not know people and now I have friends.”

Responses from question 2:

Child A: “Don’t know”

Child B: “Have cakes for snack time”

Child C: “By playing with me”

Child D: “I wanted my friend to play with me”

Child E: “Have Kelly (his key worker) with me.”

Child F: “Lea (practitioner) made it better”.

Child G: “Mummy staying and not going to work”

Child H: “I liked it in my new room”

Child I: “Tell someone, and they will give you a cuddle”

Child J: “Mummy staying to play with me”

Child K: “Put a plaster on it”

Child L: “Having a kiss and a cuddle”

Child M: “Tell Lesa (practitioner) and she will make it better.”

The responses from the children indicated the importance of a familiar adult and friend in the new setting. In responses to both questions a key worker or a friend was often spoken about.

I then interviewed a very small sample of children from two pre-schools who were going to transfer into school the following term.

Child A

Researcher: “What do you like doing at pre-school?”

Child: “Playing mums and dads”

Researcher: “Who helps you at school if you need help with something?”

Child: “Any of the teachers”.

Researcher: “Who do you like playing with at pre-school?”

Child: “My friends Eleanor and Megan”

Researcher: “Have you learnt something at pre-school which will help you when you go to school?”

Child: “I learnt a story, Lisa read it to us, I will do the story when I go to big school,

and it is I spy with my little eye”

Researcher: “What are you looking forward to doing at big school?”

Child: “Playing mums and dads”

Researcher: “Who do you think will help you at school if you need help”?

Child: “I don’t know”

Researcher “What do you think will be different at school from your pre-school”

Child “I will be learning numbers”

Researcher: “Do you want to have your friends in your class”

Child: “Yes, Megan, Megan is starting the same time as me so she might be in my class, and Eleanor and Imogene please.”

Child B

Researcher: “What do you like doing at pre-school?”

Child: “Painting, snack, going on the computer, playing in the toy house and seeing my friends”

Researcher: “Who helps you at pre-school if you need help to do something”?

Child: “Any teacher”

Researcher: Who do you like playing with at pre-school”?

Child: “Kelsey, Lauren and Eleanor”

Researcher: “ Have you learnt something at pre-school which will help you when you go to school”?

Child: “Telling the teacher when I need to go to the toilet, numbers, computers, write my name little a’s and n’s .

Researcher: What are you looking forward to doing when you go to school?

Child: “New things, reading and writing”

Researcher: “Who do you think will help you when you are at school if you need help?”

Child: “Teachers, but I don’t know what teachers are at that school”

Researcher: “What do you think will be different at school from your pre-school”?

Child: “Less teachers, only be one, only one class. Be wearing a blue costume not just clothes”

Researcher “Do you want your friends in your class at school”?

Child: “There is only one class so of course.”

Child C

Researcher: "What do you like doing at pre-school?"

Child: "Playing mums and dads and Lego"

Researcher: "Who helps you at school if you need help with something?"

Child: "Any of the teachers".

Researcher: "Who do you like playing with at pre-school?"

Child: "Kelsey, Jennifer, Tye, Thomas, Bethan and Megan"

Researcher: "Have you learnt something at pre-school which will help you when you go to school?"

Child: "I am not thinking about that yet"

Researcher: "What are you looking forward to doing at big school?"

Child: "Playing"

Researcher: "Who do you think will help you at school if you need help"?

Child: "Teacher"

Researcher "What do you think will be different at school from your pre-school"

Child "There's drawing at big school"

Researcher: "Do you want to have your friends in your class"

Child: "Yes."

Child D

Researcher: "What do you like doing at pre-school?"

Child: "Painting, there is painting everyday at playschool"

Researcher: "Who helps you at school if you need help with something?"

Child: "The teachers help the little ones; we have to wait our turn".

Researcher: "Who do you like playing with at pre-school?"

Child: "Liam"

Researcher: "Have you learnt something at pre-school which will help you when you go to school?"

Child: "Learning about numbers"

Researcher: "What are you looking forward to doing at big school?"

Child: "Colouring"

Researcher: "Who do you think will help you at school if you need help"?

Child: "The teacher"

Researcher "What do you think will be different at school from your pre-school"

Child “The teachers”

Researcher: “Do you want to have your friends in your class”

Child: “Yes, yes, Liam has not been to nursery a couple of times.”

The children believed that both in their present setting and in school the adults would help them if this was needed. This was consistent across all children and settings. Children understood there was a difference between pre-school and school and identified some of those differences. Folgue 2002 (cited in Woodhead and Moss 2007) found children viewed pre-school and primary school differently in the research undertaken in Portugal. All the children spoke about their friends and that they wanted them in their class. Children’s perceptions of their setting, which involve the adult, are an essential source of information for improving practice. Extensive research projects such as those by Ruddock (1996) and Macbeath (1999) recognised the power of pupil perceptions. The research states view-points of children give insights that adult only view misses. Used effectively children’s views can provide critical feedback for the practitioner and improve learning. Perceptions are a mixture of feelings and subjective experiences and they change from day to day. A child’s attitude to learning can be changed simply by someone walking through the door. However if the way we feel about our learning affects the way we learn, then it is sensible to try to get a wider sense of our learner’s feelings or perceptions. This is important as children’s handling of emotions will be guided by the practitioner, who will give those strategies of how to deal with different feelings in different situations on transferring settings.

8.3 Well being and involvement

In both Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 of the research schools and settings had been involved in the Effective Early Learning (EEL) project, (Pascal and Bertram, 1997). I had been trained as an EEL trainer and knew the materials well. I used the aspects relating to Involvement and Well-being on training sessions to support adults’ observations of children. A small-scale action research project to develop outdoor areas was undertaken where I used the involvement and wellbeing scales with the practitioners for observations of the children within the indoor and outdoor learning environment. One aspect was observations of boys engaged in writing activities undertaken in both learning environments and assessed against the Leuven Involvement Scales (1997). These observations were used to identify where the boys were deeply engaged in

literacy learning and used to inform planning of the indoor and outdoor learning environment.

Through professional dialogue with other EEL trainers, we decided observations of children's involvement and well being at points of transition would generate valuable data. This has been initiated in a Children's Centre as a pilot. Practitioners in the pre-school setting undertook an observation before a child left the setting, which was shared with the receiving school. The practitioner in the new setting undertook a similar observation and compared the results to see if there was a difference in the outcome. Laevers (1997) believed that high levels of involvement are essential criteria for deep level learning. When assessing children's levels of involvement there is a set of signals to be observed, which are: concentration; energy; complexity and creativity; facial expression and composure; persistence; precision; reaction time; verbal expression and satisfaction.

A five point scale was devised by Laevers(1997) to support adults' observations of children known as the Leuven involvement scales. In a similar way to involvement there are a set of signals to be observed to identify levels of children's well being. These being openness and receptivity; flexibility, self confidence and self esteem; being able to defend oneself; vitality; relaxation and inner peace; enjoyment without restraints and being in touch with oneself. A five point scale known as the Leuven well-being scale mirrors the involvement scales. Laevers' research concludes that without emotional well being and involvement within educational settings children do not reach their full potential. Training on the well being and involvement scales was given through the cluster groups, and practitioners will begin to use the materials to assess children's well being before and after transition. The results will be analysed between the practitioners from both settings and in the case study model also by the early years consultant/change agent.

Journal extract

There has been a lot of interest in the well being and involvement scales I will include this as further training in next years training brochure.

The partnership working on developing the tools for enhancing children's socio-emotional development will support children in learning that their feelings are not overwhelming, confusing or frightening but they can manage those feelings. Sensitive adults who relate and respond well to children, based on positive relationships, will model a love of learning which in turn the children will also come to value learning and become competent learners themselves. Leawitt (1994) used the concept of responsive care giving to describe the relationship between adults and children in early years settings. This concept goes beyond the physical care of the child, "*it includes a sense of personal, emotional involvement that is mutual*, (1994, p.90). An understanding of the child, reciprocity and empathy are three related facets that make up the concept of responsive care giving.

The children's workforce strategy group which I am part of asked the views of parents and carers as part of the development of the strategy. The aim for the strategy group was to develop a children's workforce that can deliver excellent services for children and their families. The consultation with parents took place through face to face interviews, focus groups, visits to groups and mail outs. One question related to the most important personal qualities that parents like to see in an adult working with children. In the nursery and primary age range the responses were related to attributes such as the ability to listen/good listening skills, patience, enthusiasm, being able to communicate at a level a child can understand, being tolerant, happy and always smiling, loving, consistent, being able to notice if anything is wrong with a child, genuine interest in children, approachable, welcoming attitude, trust and honesty (Consultation Report, Ngage, 2007, p.11).

The qualities parents' valued related to personal and emotional qualities rather than abilities related to teaching and learning. I cross-referenced the answers parents gave to the Evaluating Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years Manual (Moyle, 2003) under the section Professional Matters. This section has three parts; applying professional knowledge, developing professionally and applying professional qualities. The personal qualities that parents had stated they valued in an adult working with children were included as qualities in the manual under the heading – 'relating to others'. This highlighted for me the synergy between the qualities that parents and the expert panel believed were important to impact on children's learning

and development, particularly the crucial area of social and emotional development. Evaluating Effective Pedagogy in the early years (2003) was a tool to support practitioners' own reflection and as a discussion prompt for personal qualities to support transition.

8.4 Adult role

To support children emotionally, the emotional literacy of the adult working with the children is also important. The EEL Research (Pascal and Bertram, 1997) suggests that practitioners with low self esteem find it very difficult to raise the self esteem of their children. Practitioners with high self esteem are far more able to enhance the self esteem of others. It is the practitioners' role to develop a child's sense of self worth through encouragement and praise. Dweck and Mueller (1998) suggest that praising children's intelligence, far from boosting their self esteem, encourages them to embrace self-defeating behaviours, such as worrying about failure and avoiding risks; and that praising concentration, effort and persistence is more effective. Practitioners need a sound understanding of a child's emotional and social development to anticipate how children might react in certain circumstances. Through observation it is possible to identify if a child is experiencing difficulties in building relationships and responding appropriately to them.

Linked to the involvement and wellbeing scales for children, *Effective Early Learning Project*, (Pascal and Bertram 1997) focuses on key features of adult behaviour that promote good quality thinking, learning and development. These are sensitivity, stimulation and autonomy. Involvement in young children cannot take place unless their emotional wellbeing is addressed. Engagement is similarly dependent on the adult's professional sense of self image; therefore it follows that adults within the settings also need to feel valued, empowered and confident in their abilities. Warm, trusting relationships with knowledgeable adults support children's learning more effectively than any amount of resources (DfES, 2007). Training and discussion within cluster groups focused on adults' own well being.

The environment to support the emotional needs of the child need to be safe, calm and fair, where children feel valued and respected. A negative environment, especially for new children and adults, will leave a lasting impression and will reflect the way they

treat each other and the behaviour in the setting. The quality of the setting and the relationships adults have with the children where children feel competent as individuals, have confidence in themselves and a relationship based on trust are linked to higher intellectual growth that will continue through the school years (Pisner – Feinberg, Burchinal, Clifford, Culkin, Howes, Kagan, Yazejian, Byler, Rustica and Zelazo, 2000). Although there has been research on relationships between parents and children and the home environment, particularly the positive mother-child relationship and how it would enhance school readiness, there has been less research on the relationship between practitioners and children, yet the practitioner-child relationship is crucial for social and emotional development.

Conclusions from research (Peisner-Feinberg et al. 2000; National Research Council, 2001) found developmentally appropriate practice, child centred teaching and the practitioners' sensitivity and responsiveness influenced cognitive and social competence in school. Cognitive and social competence is enhanced when children are in settings with secure, positive relationships with practitioners. Lamb (1998) and the National Research Council (2001) suggest a link between educated and trained practitioners and intellectually and socially competent children. Clusters for developing good practice, training sessions and the work by the Children's Development Workforce Council promoting, the need for all practitioners working with children to be at least level 3 qualified, is a way forward.

An area for developing practice is the teacher and mental health adviser working together in partnership. This will be implemented through 0-5 focus groups set up in each of the Children's Centres. By working with families in the centre and the integrated education and care settings, early identification can pave the way for more specialist help, early on. Parents may be more open to support if they have a previous relationship with the centre or the setting and practitioners have a strong, supportive relationship with them. Areas of concern may not be seen as threatening by the parents/carers and a mental health consultant will be viewed as another adult who will support the child and the family.

8.5 Summary

With children spending long periods of time in settings the practitioner can enhance or impede early social and emotional development. Peisner-Feinberg et al. (1999) suggest warm and supportive teachers impact on children's success at points of transition. Where intervention is identified regardless of the level of intervention, Knitzer, (2000) found effective services to promote emotional health and school readiness share certain characteristics; they are grounded in developmental knowledge, relationship based, family supportive, consistent with the culture of early childhood practice, delivered in settings trusted by the families and responsive to the community and cultural context. These characteristics support the wider partnership working to support early intervention to be delivered through the children centres and will be monitored for impact and reduction of other interventions within school. As this work becomes embedded in programmes such as the programme for Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) outcomes indicators need to be developed.

Partnership working, particularly through the Children's Centres, will support preventative work when working with providers and families. In this context the partnership between the practitioners will be extended to a wider partnership to include health, social care, child and adolescent mental health service, so that early identification can result in intervention before the transition to school rather than afterwards (the Children's Plan 2007). A collaborative model of partnership is a clear remit of the Children's Centres; families will be accessing services and childcare provision through this venue and therefore will be a safe, trusted environment for families to access support.

To develop this identified area further, the cluster mentor who is the Children Centre's qualified teacher is undertaking a certificate in infant and adolescent mental health, and has made links with the children and adolescent mental health team so that training and identification of children needing intervention can occur before the child transfers into mainstream schooling. Part of dialogue was the identification of young children who may need intervention and outside agency support. This supported confidence building of some practitioners when deciding who and how to refer children to outside agencies.

Many of the children's concerns and worries as they move to a new setting will relate to practical issues, and these can be overcome with good planning in place and the opportunities for children to experience the new environment prior to starting school. Through the cluster groups and training, new systems and approaches have resulted in a range and more transition activities taking place.

Margetts (2002) has shown the vital role that friends make in terms of early experiences in school; in fact during all transitions and changes through a child's school career the one thing that stays constant is the presence of friends. This important aspect of transition into school must not be overlooked. Another recommendation to support children with the transition into school is for the adult to build in time as the children start school to show them the environment and the expectations in terms of using resources and equipment.

It should also be acknowledged that for some children leaving a trusted key worker which they may have had a strong relationship with for a long time will be emotionally difficult, and this should not be underestimated. Communication and links between the two settings with a shared philosophy of learning has shown to support the transition journey; this commitment must come from all practitioners and has shown through my research is a key to supporting social and emotional elements of the child. The aim for the child is for this to be a seamless process with as little disruption as possible. Where there are Foundation Stage units and Children's Centres on school sites this is more achievable as has been demonstrated by the transition programme in Authority B.

Many emotional concerns may be common to all children, but children will also have individual concerns. Key workers have a vital role to play at this time as they will have built up a relationship with the child finding time to talk to individual children to support them emotionally has been discussed. Particularly for children who have been in day care since a few months old, there is likely to be feelings of sadness on leaving. Taking time to produce a memento book, or an individual profile of photographs, samples of drawings and observations is an opportunity to share with individual children their experience of nursery and celebrate their achievements and

development. It is the way children are supported by key adults that will set the foundations for children to meet new challenges, learn at the start of school whilst feeling emotionally secure.

The new social setting for the child has many exciting opportunities but can also be bewildering. Children may need help to maximise the educational advantages of the new setting. As stated previously, if transition is not handled sensitively, there may be considerable problems with the child's attitude to education later on. Hurst (1997) states that a child can become alienated from education in many ways during this time and *the invisible quiet child is just as worrying as the one who is disruptive* (1997, p.14). The concerns and worries of children need to be dealt with at an early stage when the child is most receptive. For children whose worries are not dealt with their formative education is associated with distress.

The fear of the unknown can make starting school more stressful for the child so the strategies that have been discussed before such as making a book and putting in photographs of the classroom, activities, hall, playground and other areas of the school will support a child where a visit may not be possible. Schools who found it was impossible to visit all feeder settings, found this to be a compromise, where the book was left in the book corner at the pre-school and the practitioners ensured they read it and talked through the photographs with the children. It has even been suggested by one school that a video could be made for children to borrow prior to starting school.

Some of the best resources children can have to support them with starting school are self confidence, motivation to learn, co-operation, skills in self managing and curiosity. By working together across the sectors relationships built in the pre-school can be transferred to support school readiness and early academic success. Emotionally literate practitioners need time to develop and reflect where all staff across the sectors have an understanding of consistent expectations. The more opportunities there are for self-reflection with other professionals in the cluster groups the more the needs of the children will be met. Supporting children to manage transitions, their emotions and develop meaningful relationships with others is key to promoting school success.

Vignette

A reception teacher shared her transition procedures with other practitioners. She explained why she believed it had a positive impact and, though every school will be different, it was a model for other teachers who didn't have such a comprehensive process to use.

Transition

Prior to starting school

- FS Co-ordinator visits local settings to liaise with staff about new intake children and meets the children.
- FS Co-ordinator joins in with/leads play based activity in the setting.
- Children are invited to the Reception class assemblies in the summer term.
- Children attend look round session with parents and can join in activities in reception classes.
- Children attend a series of three story based sessions in the room and with the teacher they will have when they start.
- Teacher visits the child and parent in their own home and talks to child about things they like/dislike etc. What would they like to do on their first day?

First day

- Children have staggered start with a maximum of 10 new children starting on any one day.
- Children attend half days, alternating between a.m. and p.m.
- Encouraged to bring a teddy to school on first day and new things are explained through the use of the teddies. e.g. the teddies are shown the toilets, coat pegs etc and children are encouraged to help teddy remember things. All activities on the first day are linked to the children's teddies or soft toys that they bring in. Teddy goes everywhere. Teddy can ask as many questions as he likes (teddy will often ask a question when the child does not feel confident enough).
- Time is spent planning, with the children, what teddy would like to do on his second day so that they feel as comfortable and prepared as possible about returning the following day.

First weeks

- At the end of the first week there is a teddy bears picnic, which parents are invited to attend.
- Children attend part time for the first six weeks and are not required to join main play times or school assemblies (the two things we found children were most worried about).

- After six weeks the children attend every morning and stay for lunch, going home at about 1.30. They have lunch earlier than other children and are accompanied by reception staff. (again lunch time was something the children identified as very scary).
- From week eight the children are full time but a familiar member of staff still remains with them at lunch time until the end of the first term.
- Home/School contact books are used to help ease transition, informing and reassuring parents and enabling child led activities to be closely linked to the interests of the children.
- One afternoon a week the parents are invited in to join their children in story/literacy play based activities.
- Early Years Professionals from the settings the children attended are invited in for an afternoon to visit the children in their new class.

Impact

- Quicker and stronger links with parents, leading to greater future parental involvement.
- Home visits provided greater engagement with fathers.
- Children were less anxious and settled more quickly.
- Baseline assessment was more productive.
- Greater/quicker progress in PSED and CLLD.
- Positive affect on Children's Mental Health.
- Greater initial participation in Circle Time/SEAL.
- Quicker, more efficient identification of problems or Special Needs.
- Improved links with feeder settings.
- Greater teacher knowledge of the children allowing for improved planning around the needs and interests of the child.

Induction procedures were discussed and reflected on within cluster groups, this model shared by an experienced reception teacher was transferred or aspects of it were to other schools after questions were asked. Home visits encouraged practitioners to discuss how it was organised and how it impacted on the school one school closed for the first week of term to allow home visits to occur. The induction programme was revisited at cluster groups several times. The pre-school practitioners particularly liked visiting the children in their new setting and this practice was developed in other schools. The reception teacher explained the reasoning behind the impact and supported other reception teachers with implementing similar programmes. Teachers visited the school and saw these activities taking place first hand.

Chapter 9

Discussion - Continuity and Progression

Improvements in education come about when later learning is based on earlier achievement rather than when early learning is conceived simply as preparation for a subsequent curriculum.

(Athey, 1990, p.xii)

Continuity involves keeping some things the same as children transfer into the next stage of their learning and progression involves helping children to move on in a seamless way in their learning (Bayley, 2004). The two aspects are complementary and both need to be planned. The partnership working through the cluster groups has resulted in an approach where the learning environment, a common language and approach to the curriculum stay the same, whilst dialogue, training and shared information support children moving on in their learning.

It is clear from the interviews and focus groups that visiting the children in their existing setting supports and smoothes a transition into school (also see Bayley, 2004). The adults from the receiving settings have commented on how these visits have been beneficial. They told me observations of the child in their familiar surroundings have enabled them to have a better understanding of the child and start to build a relationship with them. Several teachers said knowledge of the child's current environment and level of development, both academically and socially, has smoothed the transition from pre-school to school.

Journal extract

There is a definite move towards an equal partnership between the sectors. It is not a case of settings being invited to schools for specific events, but school practitioners are going to visit children in pre-schools more often, are listening to what they have to say and are using their records of assessment.

In both cycles of action research there was an increase in teachers from the maintained

sector visiting the feeder settings. Practitioners from the private and voluntary sector voiced on many occasions their pleasure that this was happening more often and in some cases for the first time. At the beginning of the research pre-school practitioners stated, *“we make the effort to go there, but they never come to see us”*. The research and interaction with the teachers was the catalyst for visits to start or increase in frequency. It was also voiced by the private and voluntary sector practitioners that as records were not asked for children were not continuing in their learning when they left the pre-school but starting again, often creating a dip in their achievement.

A clear need identified from the research was for barriers to be removed so strategies to support continuity could be implemented. Changes have been made at strategic as well as practitioner levels. Changes that were made led to developments in not only practice but also thinking and reflecting on that practice. The research has shown that good practice developed at grass roots level benefits children in terms of settling into their new environment. The focus groups, interviews and questionnaires from Cycle 3 show that that this good practice has resulted in children being happy, confident with good self esteem and positive dispositions for learning.

9.1 Continuity in learning

Transition records have been developed. In Cycle 1, individual cluster group members have written their own guidelines for transition and produced their own transfer record document. Continuity is maintained across the cluster groups. The transition form includes friendship group, anxieties or worries, dispositions and attitudes and cognitive abilities and skills. Within Cycle 2, a whole authority transfer record has been developed. A transfer record based on the pilot devised by a working party from all sectors is now used universally which demonstrates where children are in their learning and development. It also covers areas of children’s personal, social and emotional development in more depth with separate documentation for children on early years action or early years action plus.

Curtis (1986) refers to collaboration in relation to record keeping and the transfer of assessments to support continuity of children’s educational experiences. An area I investigated is that of a single transfer record that transfers from all pre-school settings to the maintained setting where there will be continuity and clear, concise, relevant

information relating to the child. Closer partnership working between settings has shown where good practice exists or has been developed. This has resulted in continuity in the learning process. Cluster mentors or the early years consultant have been instrumental in supporting the skills and knowledge with completing transition records.

I am in the process of moving this to the next stage, where all private and voluntary settings hand over their records on a set day, ensuring schools have time to read and use them for planning before the children arrive at school. To support the work of completing transition records to a high standard to support continuity and progression in children's learning, moderation of assessment judgements has begun to take place, similar to that undertaken in the maintained sector as part of the Foundation Stage Profile Moderation process.

Work on transition needs to develop relationships based on mutual respect and dialogue with all adults from all sectors. This should ensure the transition for all children into, through and out of the Foundation Stage is smooth and ensures continuity and progression for all. Although a very high percentage, approximately 90% in Cycle 2 of practitioners and settings have signed up to this, there are still a few schools that have not embraced the whole process. Modelling of good practice and employing a gradual but persistent approach should bring these schools on board. The Self Evaluation Form which schools are required to complete has supported this action research at strategic level. The section on the Foundation Stage, transition and links with other settings has moved this area of work higher on the agenda. I have been involved in supporting head teachers putting policies and practice in place.

The study data indicate that continuity in a child's life is important and for children who have difficulty adjusting to school on entry and experience social, academic or behavioural problems they will more likely continue to experience these problems throughout their schooling (Fabian and Dunlop 2002). I facilitated training in both the local authorities as part of the action research; training on transition and continuity has established and promoted good practice in this area. Training has resulted in changes to practice and provision, particularly in relation to continuity, and supporting children with changes from one setting to another.

The key change agents have been instrumental in supporting this continuity, as a key link they have brought together practitioners from both settings and facilitated discussion and supported the implementation of new ways of working. An example has been the qualified teacher in the Children's Centre supporting the practitioners working in the private and voluntary setting, encouraging them to visit the reception class of the local school and developing their knowledge of the next steps in their children's learning.

Issues relating to parental involvement and continuity are an area for development. Work has begun on engaging parents in their child's learning early on and particular emphasis is placed on continuing parents' involvement at points of transition. This has been implemented through the Parents as Partners in Early Learning (PPEL) project, which was government initiated and funded. My present local authority has been involved in producing, implementing and evaluating the project. The good work of the project will continue and an exit strategy has been written to show how the project can be sustained now funding has ceased. What is clear is that continuity in a child's early transitions promotes effective early learning.

Although the process of change for many practitioners in my research was a difficult journey to negotiate, the end result has been many cluster groups have become self-sufficient and have moved the process on themselves by agreeing transition policies and practices. This has not happened in Iceland where programmes have not taken hold (Einarsdottir, 2003). My role in the research process was to support practitioners and managers to understand what continuity and progression looked like in practice for the children; through the cluster groups concrete examples were shown and discussed at a deep level.

Continuity involved the two settings or practitioners liaising to ensure some things stayed the same, for example, a display from the pre-school was transferred to the reception class, as children transferred and progression involved supporting strategies and processes to support practitioners to know where the individual children were in their learning so that they moved on in a seamless way in their learning. These two aspects work hand in hand. Teachers from the reception classes are not just visiting to

observe children but to share policies and practices. For example, the behaviour policy for the pre-school and the feeder school are consistent, so children move into school with the consistent expectations.

9.2 Transferring good practice

Managers, practitioners and consultants need to clearly define what is meant by good practice to ensure consistency. Practice might relate to just one element of the Foundation Stage practitioner's practice, or it may relate to all of her work such as pedagogy, working with parents, inclusion, leadership and management. Reflective practitioners, the way they evaluate and the strategies they put in place to improve practice. Their ability to be aware of their own strengths and areas for development and the conscious effort of seeking further ideas, solutions and continuous professional development all has an impact. This is part of practice as early years practitioners.

Data from the questionnaires and focus groups highlighted the advantages of being able to meet other practitioners in a similar situation and to discuss practice and identify new ways of doing things. A 'coaching' style was sometimes used, where individuals described the processes they had put into place, their starting point and the processes they went through to achieve the end result. This good practice was backed up by external judgements, "*our links with our feeder pre-school was written into our Ofsted report and acknowledged as good practice*" (Reception Teacher). When sharing practice and transferring practice from one setting to another, consideration has to take place in relation to the context of that practice. It may be the individuals at the setting and the ethos that make an impact rather than a set of skills or activities. Researching on a large-scale basis and identifying the conditions that are most likely to be successful with transition practice was an area explored.

9.3 Evidence of impact

Impact is a difficult area to measure as my research focuses on qualitative data, related to observations of the children on entry to school, and their personal, social and emotional development which related to dispositions for learning and readiness for learning. Some teachers stated those children that came from settings where links had developed and there were shared policies and practices, for example same phonics scheme, children were at a higher level of attainment which was evidenced by on entry

data. Also, some of the benefits in relation to learning may not manifest themselves straight away and often teachers want to see results quickly when taking on new ways of working. As there was a range of different practices happening in schools, some transition practices only involved slight changes and these were too small to evaluate in terms of measuring impact.

Outcomes of working in partnership and transition were voiced by practitioners in terms of the child's well being. Children were confident to try new things and were engaging in the new learning taking place. As the action research started to embed in Cycle 2, individual head teachers and practitioners started to voice they were seeing a difference in children moving into their reception classes; this related to personal, social and emotional development as well as higher attainment linked to learning. Practitioners seeing change encouraged further partnership working. I initiated Cycle 3 of the research as evidence for impact related to individual's perceptions and anecdotal evidence.

Results from the questionnaires show quantitative impact through questionnaires that were sent to reception teachers. Impact was shown to be particularly strong in personal, social and emotional development and communication and literacy, although other areas of the Foundation Stage curriculum were highlighted as showing some impact. This is very positive, as the Early Years Outcome Duties (EYOD) targets, both the improvement target and the equalities target, are linked to personal, social and emotional development and language, literacy and communication development. Each individual local authority has EYOD targets set that are monitored by a regional adviser. The local authority where I am currently employed has been able to demonstrate good progress in meeting and exceeding the targets set.

Journal extract

For the third year running FSP data shows an increase, we are now evidencing children at the end of reception achieving scores of national averages, children are achieving better outcomes, the hard work of the team is paying off.

The teachers' motivation to the change in practice was essential, and in some cases practitioners' professional growth was evident as they engaged with new learning

under change conditions. Both the private and voluntary and the maintained sector practitioners saw this development as growing and evolving and that the full potential of the practice may not have been reached. A document of good practice relating to transition practices is being written, with examples of good practice case studies and activities to share with all settings to support new partnership working and transition practices.

When transferring practice from one setting to another, having an understanding of the learning processes of the practitioners and the context of their individual setting was important; case studies of successful practice from different starting points supported individuals in their learning process. Evaluating the action research in relation to continuity and progression can be summarised as follows. Through a change model of partnership working, the area of continuity and progression was a focal point for an area of development resulting in:

1. A series of training sessions focusing on transition policies and practices, which led to a deeper understanding of transition issues and changes to practice;
2. A named person for transition for each setting/school;
3. Cluster groups being well established and new ways of working embedded, commitment to continuing the ethos and work of the cluster groups, whilst changes to mentors and local authority practice (Cycle 1);
4. Cluster groups being established and continuing to evolve (Cycle 2);
5. Transition guidance on good practice developed and disseminated to all settings/schools;
6. Transition policy being put in place for settings/schools;
7. Transfer documents being implemented to support continuity in children's learning, with an understanding of the next steps in children's development and learning;
8. Enhanced support and development with clear transition protocols for children with special educational needs.

This action research reinforced the findings from literature (Hurst, 1997, Fabian, 2002) and liaising with other authorities where continuity, consistency and links between settings need to be emphasised.

The debate in relation to continuity and the different research results have attempted to make changes to practice over the last three decades. However at no other time has it been so topical or as important as the present time. The action research will produce information, which will support and prepare practitioners with the implementation of the Early Years Foundation Stage to be implemented September 2008 where seamless transition from birth to five is at the heart of the document.

Chapter 10

Discussion - Scaffolding adult learning

Although theorising is regarded as a collaborative and cultural endeavour, Bruner (1990) saw culture as living and in the process of continuous development and re-creation. Therefore practitioners can create or change the cultural norms, values or beliefs. The practitioners in the two regions studied became a forum for change; as individuals led discussion about their practice, using concrete examples to help make sense of the developmental theory for children's development and learning, new ways of working for some practitioners began to emerge.

The work of Vykotsky (1978) and Bruner (1983) on the role of the adult in scaffolding children's learning led practitioners to reflect on how effective they were as practitioners when they engaged with the children in, for example, conversations and discussions during learning activities. "*Adults play a crucial role in enabling children to develop thinking skills. Adults need to teach, explain, demonstrate, model, scaffold and support, helping children to develop the skills of thinkers*" (Clark 2007, p.42). Sustained shared thinking between practitioners and children was a topic of discussion that led to a request for a training session on this aspect of practice. The language of pedagogy and a common understanding developed as the practitioners' relationship within the group grew to another level.

Previously I was part of an expert advisory group researching effective pedagogy where we defined the element of principles thus:

Principles underpin practice and are based upon informed knowledge and theories of early childhood development, education and care including management and organisational factors. Principles are at the heart of practitioners' values and beliefs. They are the ideological base for practitioners' thoughts and actions and are reflected in their visions, aims and goals. Practitioners who are reflective and on-going learners recognise that principles are capable of adaptation and change in the light of further evidence (Moyle and Adams 2001, p.18).

Some practitioners found it hard to identify the underpinnings of their practice and to explain the rationale behind their actions and reactions. This opportunity to articulate their thoughts and feelings and learn from a more expert practitioner led to new knowledge and understanding. As time evolved these cluster groups were being seen as

communities of learning. Having cross sector practitioners together within a geographical area sharing their principles and experience was a strategy for enhancing practice. The clusters in geographical areas I hoped would enhance practice and support continuity and progression as children made transitions.

The work of Vygotsky (1978) and Bruner (1983) on scaffolding children's learning also relates to how adults supported other adults. Professional groups can work more effectively when they are supported by professionals with a diverse and complementary range of skills and knowledge. Through sharing these skills the work of the group can grow. More experienced practitioners are able to develop practice with less experienced practitioners. A teacher who had responsibility for science within her school at a cluster group gave examples of practical science activities that pre-school practitioners were able to carry out in their settings. The teacher produced packs to go with each activity which included learning intentions, ideas for differentiation and a range of open ended questions.

Practitioners said feeling supported helped their thinking; different people in the group provided different parts of the scaffold. Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development, referring to the learning of children, can equally apply to adults' learning in relation to the optimisation of practitioners' skills and knowledge. Vygotsky argued that the mental processes that relate to knowledge and understanding have to be understood in a social sense, as he believed most learning takes place through social relationships; our cluster groups facilitated this process. Andragogy (Hansman, 2008) the processes of adult learning, emphasises self directed learning and the utilisation of experience. This applied in our cluster groups.

Observing practitioners in the focus groups and seeing practice in the setting, led to a belief that practitioners who are able to articulate why and how their practice developed and have an underpinning knowledge are the most effective practitioners overall. They have an understanding, for example, about children's patterns of behaviour and relate to schemas (Athey, 1990). These practitioners are able to reflect on learning, articulate why an activity may not have achieved the outcome intended and how to adapt it for further learning.

The cluster groups with a range of focused, spontaneous and sustained conversations were relevant starting points for some practitioners to develop high quality teaching, and also were supportive environments to aid transition. Therefore scaffolding was taking place adult-to-adult as well as adult to child. It was through the cycle of critical reflection that theory attached to practice occurred.

10.1 Dialogue linked to theory

During the collaborative discussions, practitioners talked about their practice in narrative terms but very rarely linked it to theory. Anning (2005) discussed the need for practitioners to share and articulate what they know in order to develop shared understanding. Early years practitioners were not used to taking part in these discussions so everyday practice was discussed. Only if a colleague or I related the discussion to theory did practitioners engage with it. Use of phrases such as ‘social constructivism’ (Vygotsky, 1978) was new to some practitioners.

Journal extract

I was surprised the understanding of the theorists was lacking with practitioners from both sectors at the cluster group I attended today. I will bring this up at a team meeting and discuss specific training linked to different theories, e.g. behaviourists (Skinner, Pavlov) etc.

As early years practitioners it is important to have a clear view of how we believe a child learns and develops and a clear understanding of the theory and principles that underpin our belief in a particular philosophy. The cluster groups were an ideal arena to revisit and explore the different theorists, where practitioners were able to develop a deeper knowledge and commitment to the theory that underpinned their own practice. Engaging the practitioners in reflective practice was an incentive for change. However, Penlington 2007 (cited in Dockett, Perry, Campbell, Hard, Kearney and Taffe, 2007) believes that not all dialogue and reflection among educators promotes the same level of change. Penlington believed dialogue should focus not just on teaching practice but the reasoning behind the different aspects of teaching practice. With this level of discussion Penlington stated the need for supportive colleagues and a sense of collaboration as critical for change to occur. The early years team decided that all our training courses should link to different theorists as a starting point to encourage

individual practitioners to think about how their own philosophies impact on their pedagogy.

10.2 Observation from a cluster group

A cluster group I attended discussed what the term pedagogy means. Some practitioners had not heard of the term before, so other practitioners began to articulate what they believed pedagogy to mean. Some expressed this as the teaching and learning that takes place in the setting. Other practitioners began to expand on this describing their own thoughts,

“It’s everything we do in the setting and how we think about what we do, our principles, the theories that inform our practice” (Reception Teacher)

“It’s also how we interact with the children and their parents and carers” (Nursery Manager)

“And the community, it’s wider than just the setting” (Reception Teacher)

“No-one’s mentioned the learning environment; the learning environment is vital for the teaching and learning to take place” (Nursery Teacher)

The cluster mentor said she would look at the definition as defined in the *Evaluating Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years* manual (Moyles and Musgrove 2003) which gave the definition as

Pedagogy includes teaching and learning and encompasses both what practitioners actually do and think and the principles, theories, perceptions and challenges that inform and shape their practice (p.108).

This discussion led on to discussing practice in other countries. I myself had been on a study week in Reggio Emilia in Italy and described their pedagogy; another teacher had an interest in the New Zealand's Te Whaariki curriculum based on empowerment, providing an opportunity for practitioners to revisit their own theories and their practice. These discussions reenergised individuals who went back to their classrooms and settings to think about and try out new ideas.

Practitioners said there was very little time within their settings to have this kind of debate and welcomed an opportunity to reflect on their own pedagogy and the influences they felt had made a contribution. The cluster groups were, as Fullan (2002) describes professional learning communities; the informal networks were not scheduled meetings but an opportunity to concentrate on pedagogy and ways of enhancing practice.

10.3 Developing a collaborative learning community

There were at times differences of opinion where there was conflict between a child centred approach and a more didactic teaching approach which some practitioners felt was too formal. Some teachers responded by talking about the realities of day-to-day work in the classroom. In some reception classes teachers were working at a ratio of 1:30 without any additional classroom support. Some practitioners became defensive when their professional beliefs were challenged. This was often the result of teachers feeling the pressure from the 'top down'. Discussions about the culture, the assumptions and the beliefs of the different sectors brought together a new-shared understanding and a more seamless transition. Piaget's (1997) cognitive conflict related to theory of learning, where cognitive or emotional dissonance may occur usually manifesting itself during interactions with others. When expectations and predictions are not confirmed, if this is seen not as a threat but as an opportunity for new knowledge, then further understanding will occur.

Bruce (1997) emphasises the different ways of looking at children

Until we are clear about the way we view children, we cannot begin to work with them, nor is it easy to work in partnership with other educators, parents or carers, because our assumptions about the child are critical in influencing our practice (Bruce, 1997, p.7).

When observing the cluster groups, the practical advice and support from trusted and respected colleagues appeared to enhance individuals' self esteem and confidence, which in turn led them to be open to new ideas and theories. The concept of taking on new learning relates to Schratz and Walker's (1995) capability learning cycle, where individuals move through various stages: unconscious incapability → conscious

incapability → unconscious capability → conscious capability. As individuals' become aware that they do not know or are unable to do something, they may make the conscious decision to gain new knowledge or skill; it is as they move into conscious capability that sensitive support is needed. Learning new knowledge requires taking risks; other practitioners' support and encouragement at this stage either inhibited new learning or supported personal growth.

I, together with the change agents, identified a need to unlock the self-defeating beliefs and behaviours of some practitioners (especially the private and voluntary practitioners). Dweck (2002) found that individuals can sometimes function in ways that are self-defeating and destructive. Her research identified adaptive and maladaptive cognitive-emotional patterns; originating in self-theories where some individuals believe that their intelligence is fixed, ('entity theory'); therefore individuals will pass up valuable learning opportunities. This has consequences for the individual not just in terms of achievement but also social relationships and emotional well-being. I have found that applies to practitioners who feel that their own learning experience at school had been poor. A lack of academic qualifications resulted in few opportunities within the workplace and feelings of inadequacy.

Practitioners appreciated the opportunity to share a passion with a like-minded peers and mentors. Teachers are often in a position of isolation with little opportunity for quality discussion to take place. My research suggests that teachers welcome the sharing and discussion of practice. *"I am the only reception teacher in the school; I really appreciate the opportunity to discuss practice with other like minded people"*.

10.4 Critical friend

Cluster mentors in some respects acted as a critical friend, challenging thinking by adding an open ended question, asking for clarification or bringing back research to the group. I wanted the cluster groups to become a cross-sector enquiring, collaborative team. Having a high quality practitioner acting as an external expert helped to integrate theory and practice. These change agents were encouraged and funded to attend conferences and external training to challenge their own thinking and for them to be aware of latest research. The mentors were seen as friendly, but had an established knowledge and expertise to bring to the group; they were not seen as local authority

advisers coming into the setting to make judgements or as inspectors to make an Ofsted judgment. They were seen as giving advice and support. “*Judith made me think about how I organise my outdoor are; I have a better understanding about free-flow indoor, outdoor play now*”. Also;

When she related it to Susan Isaacs and the Macmillan sisters it took me back to my time at college. I had forgotten about how the importance of outdoor learning had developed. Tomorrow I am going to meet the nursery nurse and discuss how we can change what we do in the outside area.”

The role of a critical friend is not new in early years, more recently this role has been attributed to Athey (1990). The rapid culture of change with a national focus on early years has produced new challenges for practitioners working with young children. However, change processes can be empowering (Fullan, 1991; Elliott, 1995) and the action research which practitioners have taken part in develops and enhances self esteem, self confidence leading to creativity and working in new ways.

Sharing knowledge to create a collaborative culture across early years settings was defined using Fullan’s (2004) criteria where access to the explicit and tacit knowledge and skills of individuals within the group were ensured. Practitioners within the settings began to share the same set of beliefs about learning and culture; every practitioner at all levels were teachers and learners. With the learning community there were professional development opportunities and communication and sharing were not just laterally shared but shared up and down the hierarchy as well.

10.5 Mentoring

Experienced practitioners from both sectors became mentors for less experienced practitioners. Megginson and Clutterbuck (1997, p.13) define mentoring as “*help by one person to another in making significant transitions in knowledge, work or thinking*”. The mentoring relationship is most effective in common curriculum areas and this was evident within cluster groups, for example one practitioner mentoring another in relation to developing ICT within the classroom. There are three models of mentoring; the apprenticeship model, the competency model and the reflective model (Kerry and Mayes, 1995). The apprenticeship model was observed where the practitioners from the pre-school were working alongside an experienced teacher in the

classroom, observing but also collaborating. This was most evident where the schools had chosen to follow on from one teacher's case study and implemented staff exchanges into the Foundation Stage.

10.6 Scaffolding with children

Research and practice in other countries (Rogers, 1983) have shown that certain styles or types of teacher behaviour are related to increased pupil learning. It has been shown that certain qualities relating to attitudes can be effective in teaching. Rogers (1969) states there are three qualities necessary for warm person-centred relationships to be established: *“Acceptance, genuineness and empathy. This requires the educator to possess a genuine acceptance of children as they are and to be able to view situations from their perspective”* (Abbott and Rodger, 1994, p.134).

These are qualities required when supporting children during a period of transition but also in all learning situations. These qualities were at the heart of my values and beliefs, and shaped my work with young children and adults. If a child receives instructions from a responsive caring adult in a meaningful context, children will learn from that modelling but will also transfer those dispositions to new learning.

Children's learning dispositions are very often shaped by the adults, who need to perform a supportive role as children acquire the learning dispositions that will take them through their lifelong learning journey. Children who are in secure relationships with adults will be more willing to take risks, admit when they find things difficult and ask questions. Adult-child interaction was one of the four areas identified from the Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years, REPEY (2002) project that investigated the most effective settings. The quality of adult-child interactions was a key feature in the settings that had achieved the highest ratings with children also making the most progress.

10.7 Reflective practice

Reflective practice to enhance the pedagogical experience of the child before, during and after transition was a key ingredient of the action research. The cluster groups were a forum for individual and groups of practitioners to continuously develop their underpinning knowledge through reflection on their own practice and the practice of

others. By integrating theory and practice a result is that of practical knowledge, where practitioners were not integrating theory for its own sake but as research based knowledge underpinning good professional practice.

10.8 Relationship building

Through sharing learning opportunities with others, more practitioners over time felt empowered to reflect on their own practice within the early years community. Harris (2004) highlights trust, autonomy and no blame innovation in developing a culture of change. Creating a climate of trust was critical to the partnership working.

Communication and positive relationships are central components of emotional fitness allowing staff to realistically assess and confront their own strengths and weaknesses in order to achieve personal growth and change (2004, p.402).

John (2000) found there was a need for connectedness in groups and for psychological needs that each member brings to the group process. Individuals need to feel valued and that they are contributing to the group and making a difference. I ensured that either myself, change agents or colleagues within the authority planned times to review successes, such as an outstanding Ofsted inspection or a practitioner sharing an activity which had a particular pleasing outcome.

Fullan (2004) believes the single factor to success in an enterprise is that relationships improve. The optimal development of interpersonal and emotional energy is an essential aspect of successful change. Collaborative cultures will convert tacit knowledge into shared knowledge through interacting with one another. In effective schools and settings collaboration is linked with norms and opportunities for continuous improvement. Improvements in teaching are not an individual process but a collective one; where analysing, evaluating and experimenting with colleagues are contexts for improvement. Practitioners as a result are more likely to value, trust and see giving and seeking help within and outside the school and setting as the norm.

The emotional interchanges that occur will support anxiety that some practitioners will experience over the changing culture or practices. This group culture also supported experimentation; practitioners were more willing to test out their assertion and to practise skills before taking them out into the wider world. As members of the learning

clusters developed a range of knowledge and experience, this contributed to building more complex cognitive structures, so providing more solutions to problems and more evaluative judgements. Over time the cluster groups should develop norms of collaboration and interaction in order to develop practitioners' knowledge and skills. Learning together and achieving together should result in common good for the individual and community.

Whatever individuals' roles were within the clusters, practitioners became committed to learn through and with each other. Visiting, training and joining the different cluster groups across the local authorities, it was evident each cluster had its own dimensions and life of its own. The momentum of the groups that were observed to be different, maintained motivation, where learning took place and a loyalty within the group began to be visible. Vygotsky (1978) used the phrase 'standing a head taller' when children achieved cognitive competence in a particular skill, understanding or disposition. In my research I witnessed adults 'standing a head taller' through scaffolding in a context that that was meaningful, familiar yet challenging.

Chapter 11

Conclusions and recommendations

This final chapter examines where the cluster groups are at the present time and how they have evolved after the initiative was implemented. Key findings linked to the themes running through the thesis are presented as a table below. These key elements are discussed further with final recommendations and conclusion. My action research identified new knowledge in that through collaborative networks, where there is a change agent with the interpersonal and pedagogical skills an equal partnership between the private, voluntary and maintained sectors can be created and sustained. The collaborative networks were based on the concept of a Community of Practice introduced by Lave and Wenger (1991). The networks became a constellation of interrelated cluster groups where the collaborative networks developed into reflective learning communities. Learning and knowledge was transferable within and between the clusters as part of social networking. Activity theory, the role of mediation Cole (1996) and Engestrom (1999) by expanding the work relating to Vygotsky and activity theory by adding a social component resulted in the cluster groups evolving at different paces and at different levels of practice. However, all cluster groups had the same vision and approach to partnership working and supporting children with transition. These collaborative networks were sustainable with practitioners building in their own succession planning ensuring institutionalisation of the innovation. This action research will make a contribution to supporting practitioners in providing effective strategies in providing children with positive experiences at points of transition.

These findings were disseminated both at strategic and practitioner levels, a document incorporating transition activities and background literature has been shared with all settings. This research study has been identified as a mechanism to support ten local authorities with a government initiated pilot project on 0-7 partnerships. This will contribute to supporting practitioners across several local authorities with the development and dissemination of working in partnership and also different transition practices.

New Knowledge	Links to thesis	Validation
Collaborative cluster groups have resulted in enhanced relationships between practitioners in the private, voluntary and maintained sector.	Chapter 4, 4.2.11, 4.3 Graphs 28, 29 Tables 6, 7 Chapter 5, 5.3, 5.5 Chapter 6 Chapter 7, 7.4. 7.6 Chapter 9 Chapter 10, 10.3, 10.8	Questionnaires Interviews Focus groups Professional discussions Vignettes.
Collaborative cluster groups and partnership working impact on children's attainment.	Chapter 5, 5.9 Chapter 6 Graphs 31,33 Chapter 9, 9.3	Questionnaires Interviews Data Professional discussions
Collaborative cluster groups become institutionalised and self sustaining.	Chapter 6 Chapter 7 Chapter 9, 9.1	Interviews Professional discussions Questionnaires Focus Groups
Change agents are a key feature in establishing and maintaining partnerships.	Chapter 5, 5.3, 5.5. Chapter 7. 7.5, 7.8 Chapter 9 Chapter 10, 10.4 Appendices 5, 6 and 7	Letters Completed forms Leading Foundations Stage meetings Interviews
Collaborative cross sector cluster groups result in an improved transition for children as they move into the maintained sector.	Chapter 4, 4.2.5, 4.2.8, 4.2.10, 4.2.11, 4.2.12 Table 6 Graph 29 Chapter 5 Chapter 6. Graphs 30,32 Tables 9 -20 Chapter 8, 8.1, 8.5 Chapter 9.1, 9.3	Interviews Focus groups Vignettes Interviews with children. Journal Case study.
Collaborative cluster groups impact on practitioners practice.	Chapter 4, 4.2.8. 4.2.11. Graphs 10, 11, 12, 13 and 28 Table 6 Chapter 5, 5.9. Chapter 8, 8.1 Chapter 9, 9.3 Chapter 10.10.2,10.3, 10.7	Questionnaires Interviews Observation at cluster groups Case studies Professional discussions with colleagues. Foundation Stage profile data Journal.
The research model is transferable.	Chapter 5, 5.3, 5.4. 5.5 Chapter 11	Professional discussions, Interviews. Feedback from external consultants.

Table 21. Overview of research findings

11.1 Cluster groups

Fifty cluster groups are still established in Authority A where the first cycle of research was undertaken. From the random sample of questionnaires and telephone interviews (Cycle 3) practitioners are still attending the cluster groups and several practitioners wrote positive comments on their feedback forms, such as *“Increased liaison between the pre-schools themselves and the school bridges the gap and encourages the community to come together”* (Reception Teacher). Since leaving Authority A, cluster groups continue demonstrating continuity and work independently of my personal lead. Foundation Stage Mentors, or change agents as I came to identify them are still in place. Several mentors moved to new jobs often to promotion, yet continue to encourage and support their local cluster groups. The practitioners within the cluster groups themselves identified a practitioner to succeed in the role of leading mentor; succession planning was naturally taking place contributing to the sustainability of groups and the institutionalisation. Mentors still come together on a regular basis and receive funding to buy in training that individual cluster groups request. It has not been difficult to recruit new practitioners to take on the role of mentor. One initiative, which has been introduced, is cluster conferences, which take place four times a year, one to cover each area of the county. In Authority A, ninety percent of all settings attend cluster groups on a regular basis. Where a training session (for example on behaviour management) took place, attendance increased to almost one hundred percent.

The barriers identified in the baseline data were a focus for identifying creative strategies to overcome them. Timing of the cluster groups, which initially was the major barrier, became a very small one when interviewing the focus groups. Practitioners from other sectors understanding the restraints and the relationship model, resulted in the timing of the cluster groups being changed to a rota basis to allow access to all practitioners. Drop in planning surgeries allowed practitioners to bring children whether their own or those they were child minding. Data from Cycle 1 suggested practitioners in Authority A found training, visiting other settings for ideas, formal/informal discussions and the networking and support from colleagues as the key benefits from cluster groups (chapter 4, graph 28). Cluster groups have been in place in Authority A, for nearly five years, and have become the norm – they have become self sustaining.

Cluster groups in Authority B are established and attendance at the groups has risen from the initial levels. Practitioners from all sectors now attend rather than just teachers in schools as in the initial stages. Feedback from practitioners to cluster groups has been positive, where practitioners have said “*we attend them when we can*” and have found them beneficial, “*helps to build relationship with pre-school*” (Reception Teachers).

As this authority is very small I was able to identify the changes and impact that has been made and also identify where there is more work to be undertaken. As there are only thirty nine schools and fifty settings I know all the schools and settings individually. In my role as strategic manager, I read all visit notes written by my team and each setting and school is reviewed when I undertake performance management reviews with individual consultants. Relationships between maintained and private and voluntary settings have improved and transition activities are now being undertaken between settings. Similar activities to those in Authority A have been evidenced in Authority B, including visits to feeder settings, support with curriculum areas, books with photographs from feeder schools shared with settings and the introduction of staff swaps. Relationships between settings when I moved to this authority were very poor. There was a great deal of negativity about the other sectors articulated freely, in some cases from head teachers. Therefore a success of the cluster groups has been enhanced partnership working. One teacher told me

I attend cluster groups when possible; it was particularly useful when we were discussing the transition document, how confident the pre-school practitioners had felt about completing it, what the schools were doing and whether they found it useful. Several were pleased that I had incorporated their information into the profile and seemed to feel that this gave their assessments and opinions a purpose and value.

Institutionalisation of the innovation became embedded in Authority A; institutionalisation in Authority B has not yet been achieved, although there has been evidence of progress and impact. The model within Authority A was embedded at local level as the county was large, the management team from the maintained and private and voluntary sector were the people who had an impact in terms of making it happen. As Authority B is small it was possible to have a borough wide policy. This was driven

by a cross section of people from the field and local authority. In both cycles of action research the participants themselves stated the way forward was a system based on a minimum requirement, which all practitioners would sign up to.

Engaging with practitioners from all sectors in this learning journey was crucial to the research findings and ultimately discovering new and improved ways of working in real partnership to enhance the early experiences of the children on their own learning journey. The innovation resulted in enhanced cross sector working as without this co-operation there would have been failure, one sector on its own could not provide the answer.

11.2 Change agents

The aspect, which had the most impact from this action research, has been the introduction of a change agent. Although initially they were introduced to support capacity, their ability to engage with and motivate the practitioners at grass roots level was the catalyst for success. The mentors or change agents were conscientious and intrinsically motivated to lead on the cluster groups; feedback sampled from colleagues still working within Authority A indicates that this remains the case, *“people are really committed to the job”* (Early Years Adviser). Mentors spent time identifying and implementing different strategies to engage the practitioners in the local settings, through face-to-face contact and through a prior relationship, they encouraged attendance at the innovation stage.

Identifying key people who have the enthusiasm, personality and will to drive forward the innovation ensuring it is high on the agenda supported success. These change agents or brokers leading on developing partnerships were crucial to the whole process. It was essential to ensure the change agents or brokers had the ability and the interpersonal skills for the role. An aspect of the reconnaissance stage was to identify who the change agents were and the role they were going to play in developing the cluster groups, they were as described by Fielding (2005) in chapter 7 a catalyst for change. In the early stage without the mentor I believe some cluster groups would not have evolved or been sustained. They kept the momentum of the groups going, were the link between the practitioners and myself, facilitated key discussions and identified training needs. By bringing the mentors together on a regular basis, I was able to share

with them the research findings, reflect on next stages and ensure continuity across the county; the mentors were able to share their knowledge, skills and understanding with each other.

From my data the cluster groups are embedded at a deeper level within Cycle 1 of the research. Through professional discussion I believe this was a result of the mentors working within settings and being practitioners themselves, as well as the cluster groups being established for longer. Practitioners engaged early on in the process have continued to attend and a loyalty amongst the group to continue to attend has developed.

Although relationships have improved in Authority B and the data from Cycle 3 evidences impact for children on entry to school, particularly with increased confidence, and children settle well as a result of the transition activities, the quality of the relationships across the authority is not as strong as in Authority A. For example, in the Children's Centre area there has been in depth work and a transition programme spanning a year with parents and practitioners, which has been very successful. The Children's Centre teacher/early years consultant has been the change agent and the programme facilitator. However, when discussing the action research with this consultant who had been a cluster mentor in Authority A, she agreed with my observation that the quality of the relationships and quality of discussion and reflection was not as advanced as in Authority A. For example, the practitioners in Authority A recognised the difficulties some practitioners had with the timing of the cluster groups and were more flexible with changing them and were more open to discussing aspects of their own practice.

Through discussion with colleagues, we came to two possible conclusions. The change agents for all four cluster groups are the Early Years Consultants and therefore local authority employees. I was aware there were successful relationships between the consultants and the practitioners and that the consultants, through formal and informal feedback, were well respected and liked. However it is possible that their position may have impeded discussion. As the cluster groups are now established and practitioners have an understanding of the format and rationale it will be worth advertising the position again to identify practitioners who would like to take on the role of leading

and facilitating the cluster groups.

Another consideration is the starting point of practitioners at the beginning of the study. Practitioners from the private and voluntary sectors revealed a rudimentary knowledge and understanding in relation to pedagogy, theory and practice. I partly addressed this by setting up a CACHE (Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education) training centre to support practitioners studying and achieving qualifications. Over the last three years there has been an accelerated improvement which has been evidenced by external data and monitoring, although more time is needed to embed this across all settings and practitioners.

A resulting factor of the outcome, and one I have shared with other local authorities, is for cross sector forums or a partnership to be successful there has to be an individual to lead the forum. Other local authorities I have consulted found their cluster groups sustained for only a short period. In their model there was no change agent or broker.

11.3 Partnership working

Cycle 2 of the research was in a new authority, which had recently undergone restructuring. It had moved from a collaborative to an integrated approach within education and social services. Strategic leaders from Social Care and Education shared an office and were developing a shared language and understanding of their service areas leading to a shared Service Plan. Progression to working in partnership at the next level down followed naturally. There was a clear commitment to partnership working across two previously different cultures to a new level. It was essential that there was a clear direction from the top down to practice level promoting good partnership in order to embed practice.

The local authorities in both cycles of the research were in a position of being able to foster new relationships; but it is not in anyone's interest to sustain them artificially. The networks had to grow and develop in an autonomous manner and become embedded in practice. By the end of the research cycles, the practitioners felt independently engaged in the cluster groups and did not feel as though attendance was being imposed on them. They recognised that significant time had to be invested in the early stages of setting up the groups so that rich, meaningful relationships and

collaborative working would develop. At the formation stage of cluster groups, there were individuals that dominated the groups and others who lacked confidence to voice an opinion; however, as the groups met on a regular basis positions shifted. The change agents were skilled as facilitators of the groups.

By the end of the research I came to recognise that two different partnerships were emerging. One partnership was the cluster groups or learning communities, which were partnerships based on professional cultures and “*how participants in a culture learn to use the materials and the language associated with cultural activity in increasingly informed and culturally accepted ways*” (Anning & Edwards, 1999, p.57). The cluster groups were consensus-built communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991). The practitioners were constructing mutually defining identities and there was a high level of consensus among the practitioners in the creating and maintaining of a shared vision of practice. The practitioners within the early years community of practice were using their understanding of knowledge in a specific way. Less experienced practitioners were learning to participate in the practices of the community and learning through participation. It was within this context my research was undertaken.

However I saw a second partnership emerging towards the end of my research, which corresponded with the changes at national and local levels. This is the interagency working with practitioners from different professional backgrounds such as health, social care and education. This partnership was beginning to emerge within Authority B as these other professionals not within early years were joining a cluster group relating to transition and within Children’s Centres. These partnerships brought challenges not witnessed in my cluster groups, such as different perspectives on ways of working. These new emerging partnerships need individuals to collaborate horizontally across sectors (Warmington et al, 2004) to develop practitioners’ expertise. Professional learning will be expanded as individuals negotiate working practices that cross traditional professional boundaries. These emerging partnerships would benefit from the research programme into Learning in and for Interagency Working (Warmington et al. 2004) which is aiming to develop a model of work-based professional learning that will transform interagency collaboration among practitioners working across education, health, mental health, social services and criminal justice.

It has been argued that continuity of the curriculum through partnership working across the Foundation Stage has an impact on the children in terms of educational as well as personal, social and emotional development. With an increase of childcare provision on school sites, it is recognised that this is a clearly attractive option for schools, as identified in the DfES document *Childcare in Extended Schools*: “*The benefits to children who follow the curriculum on one site can be substantial, as there is continuity of learning and teaching together with minimum disruption*” (DfES, 2002, p.17). This document acknowledges that working in partnership is the key to success, as this will take full advantage of the knowledge, skills, and professionalism of established providers. It is suggested that where schools have a childcare provider on site they may well wish to have a link person such as a teacher. The following statement echoes the sentiments many practitioners gave across the county during discussions.

As childcare workers and teachers are fellow professionals, it is important for both school and setting, to build a strong relationship based on mutual trust, respect and co-operation. The school and the setting should complement one another, and an effective relationship will be a major factor in assuring the growth, development and well being of the children” (DfES, 2002, p.19).

This model of partnership working is being established in Children’s Centres in Cycle 2 of my research, where the Children’s Centre teacher has facilitated joint working, joint training and visits into the reception class. Ofsted has declared all the settings and school as ‘Good’, an increase from previous judgement as ‘Satisfactory’.

With the developments of new initiatives from the government at policy level, with the Children and Young Peoples Strategic Partnerships, the five outcomes from Every Child Matters (2003) and the new framework for Ofsted inspections, there are many very good reasons for those at strategic level to ensure there are good and effective strategies in place for partnership working and transition into school for children working their way through the Foundation Stage. With the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage, which will relate to children from birth to the end of the Foundation Stage, this research will be valuable in embedding the new framework into practice within the local authority.

There has been a great deal of change within the early years sector over the last ten

years, Every Child Matters (2003), Children's Act (2004), Childcare Act (2006) The Early Years Foundation Stage (2007) change that many believe has been and will be beneficial for all children because of the coherent approach to care and learning. Working in partnership with statutory guidance to ensure local authorities consult and deliver with the private and voluntary providers will support the development of the Children's Centres. Workforce reform and a move towards a highly educated work force will help to break down the many barriers and ensure good practice identified is widened across the county and the country. The 2020 children and young people's workforce strategy (DCSF, 2008) sets out as part of their vision that everyone who works with children and young people should be committed to partnership and integrated working. Work on developing partnerships to support transition needs to continue with the aim of developing relationships based on mutual respect and dialogue with all adults from all sectors so that the transition for all children into, through and out of the Foundation Stage is smooth and ensures continuity and progression for all.

The National Strategies (2008) undertook an action research project to identify and develop specific action that addresses the link between underachievement and transfers and transitions. Seven key principles were identified that underpin effective transfers and transitions for progress. Although the Foundation Stage was not specifically mentioned, the key principles identified for all other Key Stages in a child's education are common to my research findings. "*Partnership working is essential for effective transfers and transitions for progress*" (DCFS, 2008). It was identified through the National Strategies action research that the stronger the relationship between the stakeholders, the greater the potential for progress. It was suggested that children experience one learning journey therefore establishing continuous conditions for learning has to be achieved by schools and local authorities working together. The report also highlighted "*effective partnerships are built on a common vision, shared responsibility and trust*" (DCFS, 2008) where high levels of mutual professional esteem are essential. Partnership working requires mutual understanding through shared experiences and a common language was another key principle, four of the seven key principles include partnership working. The cluster groups established through the action research clearly represent the key principles described.

11.4 Impact on transition and continuity and progression.

An understanding of the importance for children at points of transition in their education was heightened. Evidence from focus groups and questionnaires suggested that this was true for practitioners from the maintained as well as the private and voluntary sectors. Through joint training, dialogue and sharing of ideas and vignettes, practice that was transferable across sectors was identified. Outcomes included practitioners considering critically issues that may otherwise have remained buried at transition points such as cultural identity and gender. Cluster groups supported practitioners to become more socio-politically aware.

A very positive outcome of the research has been the initiatives that groups have put in place themselves. Led by the mentors, and agreed by the practitioners, cluster groups felt they did not do enough after attending the awareness raising training and briefings to ensure smooth transitions were in place for children. Practitioners were proactive in making contact with their feeder schools and settings and ensuring that visits and continuous links were maintained. Systems to support transition were in various stages at the beginning of the research; the action research raised awareness, from which systems were developed. The practice already in place, which individuals were able to articulate and demonstrate, led to other practitioners implementing. The focus groups identified this as a benefit and impacted on developing transition activities and practice.

There were different starting points for each cluster to continue the work after I left Authority A. Change agents developed clusters in different ways. One example is a booklet devised by a range of practitioners from both sectors with guidelines on transition for all settings in this particular locality to work to. This booklet was shared between all practitioners and parents in the cluster aiming *“To ensure the transition to another setting or the start of school is based on best practice ensuring it is a positive experience for each child”*.

Individual teachers and vignettes evidenced where there were good links with feeder settings, frequent interaction between the practitioners, shared policies and in some cases shared planning led to an increase in children’s attainment on entry to school as evidenced in chapter 6. In some private and voluntary settings there is still a need to

improve the skills of some practitioners within the private and voluntary sector in making assessment judgements as this led to sharing of information which some teachers felt was incorrect. However, recently a reception teacher shared verbally with the Early Years consultant that she believed all the records she received from feeder pre-school settings were an accurate account of children's starting points on entry to school. For continuity and progression in learning to be really successful this is being addressed on a continuous basis through the cluster groups. However, a whole borough approach with a minimum requirement (Authority B) has supported transition, with all practitioners using the same transition record through the Foundation Stage. This has now been updated to include the Early Years Foundation Stage and will be sent to all settings in September 2008. Through dialogue, teachers were able to identify the successful characteristics of previous learning environments so models of teaching could be developed to continue effective learning in the next phase of education. This has also been the case for transition from the Foundation Stage into Key Stage 1.

11.5 Impact on practitioners and children

Being part of the action research of this study, where improvement and involvement were key components, allowed the practitioners to have some control over the outcomes rather than be told by an outside body of changes to be made. My research outcomes were not just for personal reflection but shared with a wider audience of professionals. Outcomes included increased self-esteem, commitment to the development of the setting as an example of good practice and as part of a learning community, and a better understanding of how good practice can be transferred both internally and externally. Deep and meaningful dialogue, which was more than superficial narrative, led to personal and cultural changes, which may influence a wider audience. One practitioner declared herself to have become a totally different practitioner as she had been challenged on every level, both professionally and personally.

Regarding creativity in children's learning, some practitioners believed there was a lack of creativity within the curriculum with many practitioners from the private and voluntary sector believing very little of this took place in school. In response to this feedback, the mentor videoed everyday practices in her classroom over a period of time. At the next cluster meeting she played this to all practitioners who observed the

practice and identified examples of creativity within the curriculum. This developed into a deeper discussion, which challenged the practitioners from the private and voluntary sector about their previous assumptions, and also led to practitioners implementing the ideas they observed into their own practice. This level of commitment to reflective action will continue to be promoted through the forums leading to a continuous cycle of the practitioner as researcher. The vignettes shared between and across cluster groups impacted on developing practice relating to teaching and learning and changes to the environment.

The professional learning that took place in this research crossed institutional boundaries; fundamental to this was trusting relationships, which led to “*increased confidence of pre-school staff impacting upon provision and quality in pre-school*” (Reception Teacher). Very rich discussions took place between practitioners at the forums; they were thinking about, evaluating and seeking to improve their practice. Learning took place by sharing previous experience and by talking to other practitioners and sharing their awareness of the strengths and areas needing development related to practice. The ability to address the areas for development and to manage the time and commitment to ensure this happened varied between individuals. A key point during the discussions was not just the activities or ideas discussed, but the development of individuals’ meta-practice that would lead to long-term improvements. This was not just about changing practice in the classroom or preschool/ day nursery but changing practice at organisational level, at which some individuals were more successful than others. This was not attributed to any specific sector but more in relation to individuals’ ability to manage and drive change.

Self-reflection is a necessary requirement for being a professional educating and caring for young children. In order to achieve this, time to reflect has to be planned and the cluster groups enabled some of this reflective thinking and dialogue to take place. Fisher (1996) reflects on Dewey’s (1933) definition of reflective action as opposed to routine action.

Routine action is guided by factors such as tradition and habits and by institutional definitions and expectations. Reflective action, involves a willingness to engage in constant self-appraisal and development. It requires

teachers to be flexible and to be willing to analyse rigorously their current practice in order to bring about change (p, 162).

Trusting relationships were established which led to new ways of working. I was present at one cluster meeting where a practitioner from the day nursery told the Reception Teacher she found the letter to parents in relation to induction confusing. The practitioner felt the relationship was now strong enough for her to offer this feedback. The teacher had used the same letter for many years but as a result of the conversation adapted it as suggested.

I monitor and evaluate data within my present authority on a regular basis. Since moving to this authority, there has been an increase in settings achieving a 'good' or 'outstanding' Ofsted judgment. Early Years Outcome Duty targets have been achieved or exceeded and there has been an observable improvement in the outcomes related to communication, language and literacy where partnership work across the sectors has occurred. Foundation Stage Profile results have increased with a three year trend. There are many factors leading to improved outcomes for children in Authority B where I have led on a multi-faceted approach to raising quality; the partnership working, improved transitions for children and the sharing of practice has made a positive contribution to raising quality and attainment. The data from the interviews and focus groups evidenced, through more effective partnership working an impact on children's confidence and self esteem on transition. The social competence and emotional development of children were regular topics of conversation at cluster meetings and led to in-depth work in this area. Links with the mental health team and training on the importance of relationships between practitioner and children were initiated. Early identification and intervention for children observed and assessed to be at risk will support children on transition and give them a good start in their formal schooling.

Cycle 3 of the research where I undertook a random sample of questionnaires from Reception Teachers from Cycle 1 and all Reception Teachers from Cycle 2 evidences the impact particularly in relation to children's social and emotional development on entry to school (chapter 6). Data also evidenced, through the different strategies, that children's other areas of development had been enhanced; for example,

communication, language and literacy. A Reception Teacher who is also a childminder and cluster mentor made the following perceptive statement during my research:

If the match is right between children's needs and provision because the practitioner is prepared and understands the needs of the children then the child's involvement and cognitive engagement will be high. The reverse is also true if there is no transition procedure, influenced by best practice, the child may be emotionally unprepared, uninterested and at worse distressed and disengaged. The positive and negative impact of both scenarios will clearly affect the child's school attainment, well-being and self image.

11.6 Next steps and emerging themes

Cycle 2 of the research showed some new themes emerging, which led to new thinking and development and possibly new lines of enquiry for further research. This relates to including a wider range of participants in the partnership working and the earlier identification of children with social and emotional difficulties. These ideas and findings from my research have been shared with my colleague who has the strategic lead role for developing Children's Centres. Partnership working with a wider range of professionals and practitioners will be developed through the Children's Centres as part of the 0-5 forums and will be used as a mechanism for evaluation at local authority level. Further work will take place relating to infant mental health and the development of training in personal, social, emotional development for all practitioners across the Early Years Foundation Stage.

My research did not focus on the importance of parents and family within the transition process. I acknowledge that parents and carers have a vital role to play. This is being addressed through the Parents as Partners in Early Learning project, where a range of work is being undertaken with a clear monitoring and evaluation process in place. Parents have been consulted and included in transition activities linked to Children's Centre transition projects within Authority B. In Authority B, the project by the extended services team engaging parents at points of transition will develop this work further, with a transition record for parents from the pre-school through to secondary school being developed and piloted.

The aim of my research was to establish how all practitioners working with children in the Foundation Stage could develop and promote best practice in terms of partnership

working and ensuring children's smooth transition into school. Through working with practitioners from all sectors and at different managerial levels, a clear theme running through is that although differences existed, all practitioners wanted to give children the best start in life. The importance of continuity and progression in learning and children's social and emotional development should be viewed as one. A clear route has been the importance of early intervention for some children before the start of school; this is being followed up through the Children's Centres. The link that developed through the research between social and emotional development and early academic success has led to early identification and the intervention of other agencies at this point of transition. A member of my team has been given the responsibility for infant mental health and has undergone training to support children and families at an early stage and support with transition. On-going training particularly for practitioners in private and voluntary settings will continue where a clear focus will be on their role as adults in determining children's success on entry to school.

11.7 Common model

Having led action research and been involved in smaller projects relating to partnership working and transition, Fullan's (1991) change model of Innovation, Implementation and Institutionalisation has been successful, with clear processes for each stage. Innovation involves some degree of professional risk taking; it combines the elements of freedom to experiment with skills, knowledge and understanding that have been proven previously. Innovation does not necessarily mean it will be short-term. I was exploring the successful exploitation of new ideas, this innovation was going to be longer term but still have a dedicated purpose of finding new ways to work in partnership and support children transferring into school. An innovation should be sustainable; I was aiming for successful strategies to be implemented and solutions to problems identified, and a model identified that may be replicated. As systems were implemented part of this stage of the process was to continue to evaluate and reflect, measure the impact, evaluate, reflect.

I have used my research when joint strategically leading the government funded Parents as Partners in Early Learning project. The regional adviser asked to take elements of my work to share with other local authorities that were struggling to implement partnership working across Children's Centre provision and the maintained

school on site.

A key statement in each project I was involved in was “communication and commitment” as lack of this at times led to unsuccessful activities. Individual practitioners had spent valuable time preparing to visit to other settings, when on arriving finding out they were not expected. This had an impact on the transition activity planned. The individual from the feeder school had communicated with the head teacher who had not communicated with the individual teacher. This led to dialogue to solve the problem, resulting in the decision that every setting and school would have a named person for transition, which would be circulated. It was identified, for example, when developing a transitions strategy across all age groups that to achieve the identified goal some compromise had to be made. There was a clear need for the innovation to become implemented and embedded with agreement from leaders and managers.

11.8 Recommendations

Cluster groups are a beneficial vehicle to develop partnerships between practitioners from different early years settings. To be successful and sustainable, it is essential to have a change agent to lead and facilitate the cluster groups. This individual will require the interpersonal and pedagogical skills to motivate and engage practitioners and develop reflective practice. Time is required to identify the geographical areas and individual settings to ensure transition activities promote opportunities for continuity and progression in children’s learning. *“The disruptive effects of transition from pre-school to school can prove a significant factor in the fade out of early years gains”* (Wood and Caulier-Grice, 2006, p.134).

An area that would benefit from further work to enhance this research is including the views of children in greater depth. The very name of the Every Child Matters legislation indicates how important the child is. In this very important piece of legislation, the onus is firmly placed upon settings to achieve the following five key outcomes for children and young people: be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, achieve economic well-being and make a positive contribution. In order for pupils to make such a contribution to society, they need to be engaged in the decision-making processes of their settings and community. If this is the directive from central

government, then it follows that the climate within settings ought to be ‘pupil friendly’. Raising the ‘pupil voice’ profile is the message from the DfES and mirrored by Ofsted, which has placed even greater importance on seeking the views of pupils.

In the new inspection framework (2005), Ofsted has raised the profile of the ‘pupil voice’. In the self-evaluation forms, school leaders need to illustrate how the views of pupils are taken into account, with children’s’ views central to the new Ofsted framework that was implemented in private and voluntary settings in September 2008. By working in partnership through multi-agency teams with the family and child firmly at the centre better outcomes can be achieved.

It is important that the Foundation Stage is viewed as an important stage in the same way Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 are. If a Foundation Stage practitioner was able to be part of the senior management team, there is more of an opportunity to influence practice. Support for the research recommendations has to come from senior management or the head teacher. The Self Evaluation Form, which head teachers complete for an Ofsted inspection, is linked to Every Child Matters. The form has a part relating to the Foundation Stage, links to settings and transition arrangements; this validates the work undertaken and ensures it is a focus for senior management.

Practitioners joining existing networks must feel independently engaged in them rather than tolerating what they may see as an imposed connection. How practitioners within early years think, evaluate and improve their practice, including the need for a developmental dimension within their work is still an area for further research. The cluster groups as learning communities are a forum for developing this meta – practice of improvement further, including the transference of practice. Practitioners working within the early years sector need a strong professional identity. Change orientation should be a focus with a clear vision for improving the pedagogy, values and attitudes of individuals resulting in a strong and equal partnership between the different early years sectors.

11.9 Generalisability

In terms of generalisability; not only colleagues with-in my own Early Years Partnership but other Early Years Partnerships across the Country and in particular

those colleagues from neighbouring organizations that I liaise with on a regular basis will be able to relate to my research. As a result they may be able to carry out a similar study, or build on it for their own research, develop and generalise from it. By identifying a model that has evidence of success, other local authorities have the opportunity to transfer this research. This common model has the potential to be used in other educational processes and this has been recognized at national level as other Local Authorities adopt the model.

11.10 Conclusion

My role now is to ensure that my research is widely disseminated so that practitioners know how to give children the best start in life based on research by the practitioners themselves, and to ensure this stays high on the agenda of those at strategic level.

One of the most frequent questions I asked myself as I was undertaking this research was how to find effective ways of removing the barriers between practitioners from different sectors. One conclusion I have come to is that a crucial factor is the attitudes of individual practitioners within the settings. However efficiently systems have been put in place, it is the individual practitioners and their capacity to work together that makes a difference in terms of outcome. This was clearly identified in the qualitative data, particularly in the individual interviews. The cluster mentors as the change agents were the catalyst to drive the change forward. As far back as 1982, Cleave et al. advocated three things to achieve real understanding between the sectors “*An open mind, a willingness to hear and the ability to appreciate another’s point of view*” (1982, p.212). Those three aspects are still relevant within the research I undertook.

Although the government has clearly stated that the maintained sector taking children into school at four should not be a barrier to collaborative working, in my research it was clearly having a knock on effect where as a result, some pre-schools had to close or change their admission procedures and curriculum to accommodate much younger children. Blake and Finch (2000) in “Survey of the movement of children from playgroups to reception classes”, found that 63% of parents stated at the time their child was entering into the reception class there was still a playgroup available for their child, but only 12% of parents considered keeping their child there. The results of the survey did not indicate that any sub-groups of parents were substantially more likely to

have access to or more likely to consider alternatives to reception classes than others. It may be, as in some other local authorities that if a date for entering a maintained school is decided across all schools, then there will be prior knowledge of when a child will be starting school allowing for the pre-school to plan in advance and undertake a sustainability audit with a business and action plan for future needs. It is clear from the research that where pre-school and day nurseries are situated on the school site, this liaison is much easier;

“not only do the parents have the facilities they identified but as the nursery staff work closely with our early years team, there is genuine educational progression” (Head teacher).

The Early Years Foundation Stage (2007) states

Learning is a continuous journey through which children build on all the things they have already experienced and come across new and interesting challenges. Every child’s learning journey takes a personal path based on their own individual interests, experiences and the curriculum on offer.

Through working in partnership practitioners can enhance children’s earliest learning journeys through the Foundation Stage, ensuring that their transition into the next phase is based on best practice. Practitioners can leave children with a desire and motivation for future learning and a resilience and enthusiasm to face all future transitions. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (cited in Woodhead and Moss 2007) recommends a rights-based approach to early childhood programmes, this includes initiatives that relate to transition to primary school.

The Children’s Plan, Building Brighter Futures (2007) sets out goals which will enhance children and young people’s wellbeing, particularly at key transition points in their lives; and ensure every child is ready for success in school. This research supports aspirational outcomes for children both in terms of educational attainment and their wider well being, which The Children’s Plan hopes to achieve by 2020.

References

References

Abbott, L. & Rodger, R. (eds) (1994) *Quality education in the early years* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Abbott, L. & Pugh, G. (1998) *Training to work in the early years. Developing the climbing frame.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Anderson, S. & Messick, S. (1974) Social Competency in Young Children. *Developmental Psychology*, Vol. 10, pp. 282-293.

Anning, A. (1991) *The first years at school.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Anning, A. (1998) *The Education of Three to Five Year Olds in the UK: Early Years Units as a Solution?* Paper presented at BERA Conference: Belfast.

Anning, A. & Edwards, A. (1999) *Promoting Children's Learning from Birth to Five, developing the new early years professional.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Anning, A. (2001) *Knowing who I am and what I know: Developing new versions of professional knowledge in integrated service settings.* Paper presented at BERA Conference: Leeds.

Anning, A. (2005) *Investigating the Impact of Working in Multi-Agency Service Delivery Settings in the UK on Early Years Practitioners' Beliefs and Practices.* *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, Vol. 3, No. 1 pp. 19-50.

Field Code Changed

Arnold, D. Ortiz, C. Curry, J. Stowe, R. Goldstein, N. Fisher, P. Zeljo, A. & Yershova, K. (1999) Promoting academic success and preventing disruptive behaviour disorders through community partnership. *Journal of Community Psychology*. Vol. 27 No. 5, pp. 589-598.

Atherton, J. (2005) *Learning and Teaching: Reflection and Reflective Practice* [Online] UK <http://www.learningandteaching.info/learning/reflecti.htm>

Atkinson, M. Wilkin, A. & Kinder, K. (2001) *Multi-Agency working: An audit of activity.* Slough: NFER.

Atthey, C. (1990) *Extending thought in young children: a parent teacher partnership.* London: Paul Chapman.

Atweh & Burton (1995) in Mac Naughton, G. Rolfé, S. & Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2001) (eds) *Doing Early Childhood Research, International Perspectives on Theory and Practice.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Aubry, C. David, T. Godfrey, R. & Thompson, L. (2000) *Early Childhood Educational Research Issues in methodology*. London: Routledge Falmer Press.

Audit Commission, (1998) *A Fruitful Partnership - Effective Partnership Working*. London: Audit Commission.

Audit Commission, (2002) *Statements and Assessments of SEN: In need of a review*, London: Audit Commission.

Ball, C. (1994) *Start Right, The importance of Early Learning*. London: RSA.

Bassey, M. (1981) Pedagogic research on the relative merits of the search for generalisation and study of single events. *Oxford Review of Education*. Vol. 7, No. 1, pp. 73-93.

Barber, M. (1999) *Bridges to assist a difficult crossing*, London. Times Educational Supplement.

Bathhurst, K. (1905) *Report of the women inspectors on children under five years of age in elementary schools*, in Van der Eyken, W. (ed) *Education the child and society: a documentary history, 1900-1973*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Bauman, Z. (1993) *Postmodern Ethics*, Oxford. Blackwell

Bayley, R. (2004) *Transition, introducing the young ones*. Warwickshire: Practical pre-school, issue 47.

Belbin, M. (1984) *Management Teams: Why they Succeed or Fail*, Oxford: Heinemann.

Bennett, N. & Kell, J. (1989) *A good start? Four year olds in infant schools*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd.

Bennett, R. (1997) *Organisational Behaviour*, 3rd Edition. London: Pitman Publishing.

Bertram, T. & Pascal, C. (1999) *Early Excellence Centres: Developing High Quality Integrated Early Years Services, First Findings*. London: DfEE.

Bertram, T. & Pascal, C. (2002) *Early Years Education: An International perspective*. Windsor, Berkshire: NFER.

Black, P. & William, D. (1998) *Inside the Black Box: Raising Standards through Classroom Assessment*. London: King's College of Education.

Blake, M. & Finch, S. (2000) *Survey of the movement of children from playgroups to reception classes*. London: National Centre for Social Research.

Blatchford, P. Battle, S. & Mays, J. (1982) *The First Transition - home to pre-school*. Windsor Berkshire: NFER.

Blatchford, I. Sylva, K. Taggart, B. Melhuish, E. Sammons, P. & Elliot, K. *The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education 1997–2003 (EPPE) Project*. Nottingham: DfES Publications.

Blenkin, G. & Kelly, A. (eds) (1996) *Early Childhood Education: A Developmental Curriculum (2nd edition)*. London: Paul Chapman.

Blenkin, G. & Kelly, A. (eds) (1997) *Principles into practice in Early Childhood Education*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd.

Blundell, R. (2004) *Perspectives, Principles, and Practices*, Second Edition. F.T. Prentice Hall.

Boud, D. & Miller, N. (eds) (1996) *Working with experience; animated learning*. London: Routledge.

Bowlby, J. (1989) *Attachment and Loss Volume 1 – Attachment*, London: Penguin Books.

Bradley, M. (1982) *The co-ordination of services for children under five*. Windsor, Berkshire: NFER Nelson.

Broadhead, P. (1995) *Researching the Early Years Continuum*. Avon: Multilingual Matters.

Brooker, L. (2007) 'Changing the landscape of early childhood', in Moyes, J. (Ed) *Early Years Foundations: Meeting the Challenge*. Maidenhead. Open University Press

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979) *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Brooker, L. & Woodhead, M. (2008) *Developing Positive Identities*. Milton Keynes: The Open University

Brookfield, S.D. (1983) *Adult Learning, Adult Education and the Community* Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Brostrom, S. (2000) *Children's expectation to school, and fulfilment*. Danish University of Education: Rapport.

Brostrom, S. (2000) *Transition to school, paper presented at EECERA 10th European Conference on Quality in Early Childhood Education*. University of London.

Brostrom, S. in Fabian, H. & Dunlop, A. (eds) (2002) *Transitions in the early years, debating continuity and progression for children in early education*. London: Routledge Falmer.

Brown, J. & Duguid, P (2002) *The Social Life of Information*, Harvard Business School Press.

Brown, S. & Cleave, S. (1994) *4 year olds in school Quality Matters*. Windsor, Berkshire: NFER.

Bruce, T. (1997) *Early Childhood Education*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Bruce, T & Megitt, C. (1999) *Child Care and Education*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

Bruner, J. (ed)(1975) *Play: Its Role in Development and Education*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Bruner, J. (1983) *Childs's Talk: Learning to use language*. New York: Norton.

Bruner, J (1990) *Acts of Meaning*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Bruner, J. & Haste, H (eds.) (1987) *Making Sense*. London: Methuen.

Buntaine, R.L. & Costenbader, V.K. (1997) The effectiveness of a transitional prekindergarten program on later academic achievement. *Psychology in the schools*, Vol. 34 No. 1, pp. 41-50.

Burke, D.L. (1997) *Looping: Adding Time, Strengthening Relationships*. Illinois. *ERIC Digest* University of Illinois

Burns, R. (1982) *Self-concept development and education*. London: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

- Burrell & Bubb, (2000) in Fabian, H. (2002) *Children Starting School, A guide to successful transitions and transfers for teachers and assistants*. London: David Fulton Publishers.
- Butterfield, P. (2002) *Childcare is rich in routines*, Zero to Three, Vol. 22, No. 4, pp. 29-33
- Caine, R. & Caine, G. (1991) *Making Connections: Teaching and the human brain*, Alexandria, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Cameron, A. & Lart, R. (2003) Factors Promoting and Obstacles Hindering Joint Working. A systematic review of the research evidence. *Journal of integrated care*.
- Carr, W. & Kemmis, (1986) *Becoming Critical: Knowing through Action Research*. Geelong: Deakin University.
- Carr, W. & Kemmis, (1986) *Becoming Critical, Education, knowledge and action research*. Lewes: Falmer Press.
- Christensen, P. & James, A. (eds) (2000) *Research with children perspectives and practices*. London: Falmer Press.
- Clark, J. (2007) *Sustaining Shared Thinking*, Leicester: Featherstone Education Ltd.
- Clark, M. & Cheyne, W. (eds) (1979) *Studies in pre-school education*. Kent: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Clarke, A. & Moss, P. (2001) *Listening to Young Children: The Mosaic approach*. London: The National Children's Bureau and Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Cleave, S. Jowett, S. & Bate, M. (1982) *And so to school – A study of continuity from pre-school to infant school*. Windsor, Berkshire: NFER.
- Cleave, S. & Brown, S. (1989) *Meeting their needs*. Windsor, Berkshire: NFER.
- Cleave, S. & Brown, S. (1991) *Early to School Four Year Olds in Infant Classes*. Windsor Berkshire: NFER.
- Cohen, L. and Manion, L. (1994) *Research Methods in Education*. London: Routledge
- Cohen, L. Manion, L. & Morrison, K. (2000, 5th edition) *Research Methods in Education*. London: Routledge Falmer.

Cole, M. (1996) *Cultural Psychology: A once and future discipline*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Cole, R. Raffier, L. Rogan, P. & Schleicher, L. (1998) Interactive group journals: Learning as a dialogue among learners. *TESOL Quarterly*, Vol. 32 (3) pp. 556-568

Corrie, L. (1999) Politics, the provision of physical amenities and the 'push-down' curriculum, *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, Vol. 24. No. 3, pp. 5-10.

Curtis, A. (1986) *A Curriculum for the Pre-school Child – Learning to Learn 2nd Edition*. London: Routledge Farmer.

Curtis, A. & Hevey, D. (1992) *Training to work in the early years*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

Dahlberg, G. Moss, P. & Pence, A. (1999) *Beyond Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care: Post-modern perspectives*. London: Falmer Press.

David, T. (1990) *Under Five Under Educated*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

David, T. (1992) Do we have to do this? *Children and Society* Vol. 6, Issue 3, pp. 204-11.

David, T. (1993) *Educational provision for our youngest children – European Perspectives*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd.

David, T. (ed) (1998) *Researching Early Childhood Education, European Perspectives*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd.

David, T. (ed) (1999) *Young Children Learning*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd.

Dawes, A. & Donald, D. (2005) Improving Children's Chances: Linking Development Theory and Practice. *Children & Poverty working Paper 2*

Deasey & Denison (1978) *Education Under 6*. London: Croom Helm Ltd.

Deflem, M. (1991) Ritual, Anti-Structure, and Religion: A Discussion of Victor Turner's Processual Symbolic Analysis *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 30(1) 1-25

Denscombe, M. (2003) *The Good Research Guide*. (2nd Edition), Maidenhead. Open University Press

Department for Children, Schools and Families (2007) *Parents as Partners in Early Learning (PPEL) Project*. Sure Start.

Department for Children, Schools and Families (2007) *The children's plan: Building brighter futures*. London: The Stationary Office.

Department for Children, Schools and Families (2008) *Building Brighter Futures; Next Steps for the Childrens' Workforce*. London: The Stationery Office

Department for Education and Employment (1997) *Guidance 1998-1999 Early Years Development Plan and Partnerships*. Darlington: D.f.E.E.

Department for Education and Employment (1997) *Progress with Partnerships – How Partnerships contribute to early years services*. London: The National Early Years Network.

Department for Education and Employment (1998) *Meeting the Childcare Challenge: A framework and consultation document*. London: The Stationary Office.

Department for Education and Employment (2000) *Good practice for EYDC Partnerships: working with local agencies and other partnerships and networks*. Nottingham: DfEE publications.

Department for Education and Employment (2000) *Curriculum for the foundation stage*. DfEE publications.

Department for Education and Employment (2004) *The Ten Year Strategy for Childcare – Choice for parents, the best start for children*. DfEE Publications.

Department for Education and Science (1972) *Eveline Lowe Appraisal*. London: HMSO.

Department for Education and Science (1985) *Better Schools*. London: HMSO.

Department for Education and Science (1989) *Aspects of Primary Education, The education of children under five*, Her Majesty's Inspectorate. London: HMSO.

Department for Education and Science (2001a) *Learning and Teaching, A strategy for professional Development*. London: HMSO.

Department for Education and Skills, (2001) *Reporting on Partnerships – What works*. London: DfES publications.

Department for Education and Skills (2002) *Birth to Three Matters: A Framework to Support Children in their Earliest Years*, Nottingham: DfES Publications.

Department for Education and Skills, (2002) *Childcare in Extended Schools providing opportunities and services for all*. Nottingham: DfES Publications.

Department for Education and Skills, (2003) *Every Child Matters: Change for Children*. Nottingham: DfES Publications.

Department for Education and Skills, (2003) *Excellence and Enjoyment, A strategy for primary schools*. Nottingham: DfES Publications.

Department for Education and Skills, (2003) *National Standards for Under 8's Day Care and Childminding*. Nottingham: DfES Publications.

Department for Education and Skills, (2004) *Building a children's workforce – A common core of skills, knowledge and competence*. Common Core Newsletter, Children's Workforce Unit. London: DfES.

Department for Education and Skills, (2004) *Transition and the importance of the learning environment*. The Standards Site, Innovation. London.

Department for Education and Skills, (2004) *The Ten Year Strategy. Choice of parents: best start for children*. Nottingham: DfES.

Department for Education and Skills, (2005) *Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 -The London Challenge*. Nottingham: DfES Publications.

Department for Education and Skills, (2005) *Factors influencing the Transfer of Good Practice*, Nottingham: DfES Publications.

Department for Education and Skills (2005) *Social, Emotional Aspects of Learning*. London: HMSO.

Department for Education and Skills (2006) *Common Assessment Framework*, Children's Workforce Development Council.

Department for Education and Skills, (2006) *The Childcare Act* Nottingham: DfES.

Department of Education and Skills (2007) *The Early Years Foundation Stage* Nottingham: DfES Publications.

Department of Education and Skills (2007) *Diversity and Citizenship Curriculum Review*. Annesley. DfES Publications.

Department of Health (1991) *The Children Act: Guidance and Regulations Volume 2 Family support, Day Care and Educational Provision for young children*. London: HMSO.

Dewey, J. (1938) *Experience and Education*, New York: Collier Books.

Dockett, S. & Perry, B. (1999) *Starting School*, AECA Research in Practice Series, 6.3.

Dockett, S. & Perry, B. (2005) You need to know how to play safe, Children's experiences of starting school. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, Vol. 6, No. 1, pp. 4-18.

Dockett, S. Perry, B. & Tracey, D. (1997) *Getting ready for school*, Paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education Conference. Brisbane.

Dockett, S. Perry, B. Campbell, H. Hard, L. Kearney, E. & Taffe, R. (2007) *Early Years Learning and Curriculum. Reconceptualising Reception: Continuity of Learning*. Adelaide: Office of Early Childhood and State wide Services.

Donaldson, M. (1978) *Children's Minds*. London: Fontana Press.

Dowling, M. (1995) *Starting school at four, a joint endeavour*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd.

Drake, J. (2001) *Planning children's play and learning in the Foundation Stage*. London: David Fulton Publishers.

Drummond, J. (1993) *Assessing Children's Learning*. London: David Fulton Publishers.

Drury, R. Miller, L. & Campbell, R. (eds) (2000) *Looking at Early Years Education and Care*. London: David Fulton Publishers.

Dunlop, A. (1998) *Children's experience of continuity and progression in their curriculum as they move from pre-school to primary education*. Paper presented at the 8th European conference on Quality in Early Childhood Education, Santiago de Compostela.

- Dunn, J. (1995) Children as psychologists: The later correlates of individual differences in understanding of emotions and other minds. *Cognition and Emotion*, Vol. 9.
- Dweck, C. & Mueller, C. (1998) Intelligence praise can undermine motivation and personality. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 75, pp. 33-52
- Dweck, C. (2002) *Self-theories: Their role in motivation, personality and development*. U.S.A: Psychology Press.
- Dweck, C. (2006) *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. New York: Random House.
- Early, D. Pianta, R. & Cox, M. (1999) Kindergarten teachers and classrooms: A transition context. *Early Education and Development*, Vol. 10. No. 1, pp. 25-46.
- Early, D., Pianta, R., Taylor, L. and Cox, M. (2001) Transition practices: Findings from a national survey of kindergarten teachers. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, Vol. 28, No. 3, pp. 199-206.
- Early Childhood Forum, (2005) *Ready for School*. London: Nursery World.
- Early Years' Matters (2006) *Continuity in Transitions*. London
- Easen, P. Atkins, M. and Dyson, A. (2000) Inter – professional collaboration and conceptualisation of practice. *Children and Society*. Vol. 14, No. 5, pp. 355-367.
- Edington, M. (1998) *The Nursery Teacher in Action*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing Limited.
- Edmunds, L. & Stewart-Brown, S. (2003) *Assessing emotional and social competence in primary school and early years settings: A review of instruments and approaches*. London: DfES.
- Education Review Office (1998) *Use of Te Whaariki*, Wellington: Education Review Office.
- Edwards, C. (2001) *Parental ethnotheories of child development: the American perspective*. Paper prepared for the International Workshop on Scientific Advances in Indigenous Psychologies. Taiwan.
- Einarsdottir, J. (2003) *Towards a smooth transition from pre-school to primary school in Iceland*, Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the British Educational Research Association. Edinburgh.

Elias, M. Zins, J. Weissberg, R. Frey, K. Greenberg, M. Haynes, N. Kessler, R. Schwab-Stone, M. & Shriver, T. (1997) *Promoting social and emotional learning*, Virginia: ASCD

Elliot, J. (1991) *Action Research for Educational Change*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Engestrom, Y. (1999) *Innovative learning in work teams: analysing cycles of knowledge creation in practice*, in Y. Engestrom et al (eds) *Perspectives on Activity Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Entwisle, D. (1995) The Role of Schools in Sustaining Early Childhood Program Benefits. *The Future of Children*. Vol. 5, No. 3 - Winter.

Fabian, H. (2002) *Children Starting School, A guide to successful transitions and transfers for teachers and assistants*. London: David Fulton Publishers.

Fabian, H. & Dunlop, A. (eds) (2002) *Transitions in the early years, debating continuity and progression for children in early education*. London: Routledge Falmer.

Family and Parenting Institute (2007) *Starting School: Settling into Primary School and Moving to Secondary School (Transition Information Sessions Project)* London, Family and Parenting Institute.

Fetterman, D. (2001) *Foundations of empowerment evaluation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Fetterman, D. (2006) *Empowerment Evaluation: Collaboration, Action Research and a Case Study*. The Action Evaluation Research Institute.

Fetterman, D. & Wandersman, A. (eds) (2005) *Empowerment Evaluation Principles in Practice*. London: The Guildford Press.

Fielding, M. (2005) *Factors influencing the transfer of good practice*. Sussex: University of Sussex.

Fisher, J. (1996) *Starting from the child*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Folque (2002 in Woodhead, M. & Moss, P. (eds) (2007) *Early Childhood in Focus 2. Transitions in the lives of young people*. Milton Keynes: Open University.

- Ford, K. (2002) *Doing the Hokey Cokey*. Paper to Leicester University, ESRC.
- Foster, S. & Ritchey (1979) Issues in the assessment of social competence in children. *Journal of Applied Behaviour Analysis* 12.
- Foucault, M. (1980) 'The Subject and power' and afterword in Dreyfaus, H. and Rainbow, P. *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Chicago, IL. Univerty of Chicago Press
- Frost, N. (2005) *Research in practice, Professionalism, Partnership and Joined-up thinking*. University of Sheffield.
- Fullan, D. (2004) *Leading in a culture of change*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishing.
- Fullan, M. (1991) *The New Meaning of Educational Change*. London: Cassells.
- Fullan, M. (1999) *Change Forces: the sequel*. London: Falmer Press.
- Fullan, M. (2002) *The Role of Leadership in the promotion of knowledge management in schools*. OECD Conference.
- Galton, M. Hargreaves, L. Comber, C. Pell, T. & Wall, D. (1999) *Inside the Primary Classroom*. London: Routledge.
- Galton, M. Gray, J. & Ruddock, J. (2003) *Transfer and Transitions in the middle years of schooling, continuities and discontinuities in learning*. Windsor, Berkshire: NFER.
- Gammage, P. & Meighan, J. (eds) (1995) *Early Childhood Education: The way forward*, Derby: Education Now Publishing Co-operative.
- Ghaye, A. & Pascal, C. (1988) Four year old children in reception classrooms: participant perceptions and practice. *Educational Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 2, pp. 187-208.
- Gluckman, M. (1954) *Rituals of rebellion in South-East Africe*. Manchester. Manchester University Press.
- Goleman (1996) (1997) in Fabian (2002) *Children Starting School, A guide to successful transitions and transfers for teachers and assistants*. London: David Fulton Publishers.

Goodman, D. (2001) *Promoting Diversity and Social Justice, Educating people from privileged groups*. London: Sage Publications.

Graue, M. (1993) *Ready for what? Constructing meanings of readiness for kindergarten*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Greer, A. & May, J. (1976) *A students' guide to the development of education in England and Wales*. St. Mary's College of Education.

Gullo, D. & Burton, C. (1992) Age of entry, preschool experience and sex as antecedents of academic readiness in Kindergarten, *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, (7), pp. 175-186.

Hall, C. (1999) *Integrating Services for Children and Families: A way forward?* Children and Society.

Hallett, C. & Birchall, E. (1992) *Co-ordination and Child protection: A review of the literature*. Edinburgh: HMSO.

Hanscombe, G. (2002) It's cool to collaborate. *Professional Development Today*, Vol. 5, Issue 1.

Hansman, C. (2008) *Adult learning in communities of practice: Situated learning in practice*. Information Age Publishing Vol. 1 Chapter 15.

Hargreaves, A. (2003) *Teaching and the Knowledge Society*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Harker, R. Dobel-Obel, D. Berridge, D. & Sinclair, R. (2004) More than the sum of its parts? Inter-professional working in the education of looked after children, *Children and Society*, Vol. 18, No. 3 pp. 179-193.

Harris, P. Olthof, T. & Meerum Terwogt, M. & Hardman, C. (1987) Children's Knowledge of the situations which provoke emotion, *International Journal of Behavioural Development*, Vol. 10, pp. 319-343.

Harris, B. (2004) *Leading by heart, school leadership and management*. Oxfordshire: Carfax Publishing.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate, (2004) *Transition from the reception year to year 1*. Office for Standards in Education.

Hersey, P. & Blanchard, K. (1993) *Management of Organisational Behaviour: Utilising Human Behaviour*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Hevey, D. & Windle, K. (1990) *Unpublished report of working with under sevens project occupational mapping survey*, in Pugh (1992) *Contemporary issues in the early years, working collaboratively for children*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

Highlander Research and Education Centre (1989) *An Approach to Education presented through a Collection of Writings*. Tennessee: Highlander Research and Education Centre.

Hogg, C. (1986) *Voluntary organisations and childcare: issues and challenges*. National Council For Voluntary Organisations.

Houle, C. (1980) *Continuing Learning in the Professions* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

House of Commons Select Committee Education, Science, and Arts Committee (1998) *Educational Provision for the under fives (ESAC Report)* London: HMSO.

Hudson, B. (2002) Interprofessionality in Health and Social Care: The Achilles Heel of Partnership. *Journal of Interprofessional Care*.

Hurst, V. (1997) *Planning for Early Learning and Educating Young Children*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

Hutt, S. Tyler, S. Hutt, C. & Christopherson, H. (1989) *Play, Exploration and Learning*. London: Routledge.

Jay, J. & Johnson, K. (2002) Capturing Complexity: A typology of reflective practice for teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education, Vol. 18, pp. 73 – 85*

Jarvis, P. (1995) *Adult and Continuing Education, Theory and Practice*, London: Routledge.

Jick, T. (1993) *Implementing change in Jick, T. (ed) Managing Change. Irwin Homeword 11. pp. 192-201.*

John, K. (2000) Basic needs, conflict and dynamics in groups. *The Journal of Individual Psychology*.

Johnson, G. & Scholes, K. (2002) *Exploring Corporate Strategy*, Sixth Edition, F.T. Prentice Hall.

Kagan, S. (1993) *Defining, assessing and implementing readiness, challenges and opportunities*. Brisbane.

Kemmis, S. & McTaggart, R. (eds) (1988) *The Action Research Planner*, third edition. Victoria: Deakin University.

Kerry, T & Mayes, A. (1995) *Issues in mentoring*, Buckingham, Open University Press.

Knitzer, J. (2000) *Using Mental Health Strategies to Move the Early Childhood Agenda and Promote School Readiness*. New York: National Centre for Children in Poverty.

Kolb, D. & Fry, R. (1975) *Toward an applied theory of experiential learning*; in Cooper, C. (ed) *Theories of Group Process*, London: John Wiley.

Kolb, D. (1976) *The Learning Style Inventory: Technical Manual* Boston, Ma: McBer

Kolb, D. (1981) 'Learning styles and disciplinary differences'. in A.W. Chickering (ed). *The Modern American College*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Kolb, D. (1984) *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall.

Kotter, J. (1990) *A force for Change: How leadership differs from Management*. New York: The Free Press.

Krovetz, M. (1999) *Fostering Resiliency*. Thousand Oaks, CA. Corwin Press.

Kvale, S. (1996) *Interviews*. London: Sage Publications.

Ladd, G. Kochenderfer, B. & Coleman, C. (1997) Classroom peer acceptance, friendship, and victimization: Distinct relational systems that contribute uniquely to children's social adjustment. *Child Development* 68, pp. 1181–1197.

Laevers, F. (ed) (1997) *The Leuven Involvement Scale for Young Children*. Leuven, Belgium: Centre for Experiential Education.

Lamb, M. (1998) Non parental childcare: Context, quality correlates. In Damon, W. (ed) *Handbook of Child Psychology in Practice*. 5th Edition, Vol. 4, Page 126. New York: Wiley.

Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991) *Situated learning: legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lawson, H. (2004) The logic of Collaboration in Education and the Human Services. *Journal of Interprofessional Care*. Vol. 18, No. 3, August 2004, pp. 225-237

Leawitt, R. (1994) *Power and Emotion in Infant-Toddler Day care*. New York: New York Press.

Lewin, K. & Grabbe, P (1945) Conduct, Knowledge, and Acceptance of new values. *Journal of Social Issues* 1, p.39

Lewin, K. (1948) *Resolving social conflicts; selected papers on group dynamics*. Gertrude W. Lewin (ed). New York: Harper & Row

Lewin, K. (1949) *Field theory and social science*. London. Tavistock

Lewin, K. (1951) *Field theory in social science: Selected theoretical papers*. D. Cartwright (ed) New York: Harper and Row.

Lewis, I. (1985) *Social Anthropology in Perspective*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Lewit, E. & Baker, L. (1995) School Readiness. *The Future of Children, Child Psychology in Practice*. Volume 5, pp. 123-139.

Lindon, J. (2000) *Early Years Care and Education in Europe*. Hodder and Stoughton.

Lombardi, J. (ed) (1986) *Easing the transition from preschool to kindergarten*. Washington DC: Administration for children, youth and families.

Lombardi, J. (1992) *Beyond Transition: Ensuring Continuity in Early Childhood Services*. Early Education and Parenting Web Site.

Macbeath, J. (1999) *Schools must speak for themselves. The case for school self evaluation*. London: Routledge & NUT.

Macintyre, C. (2000) *The Art of Action Research in the Classroom*. London: David Fulton Publishers Ltd.

Mac Naughton, G. Rolfe, S. & Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2001) *Doing Early Childhood Research, International Perspectives on Theory and Practice*. Buckingham. Open University Press.

McNiff, J. with Whitehead, J. (2002) *Action research principles and practice*. London: Routledge Falmer.

Margetts, K. (1997) *Factors impacting on children's adjustment to the first year of primary school*. Early Childhood Folio 3, NZCER.

Margetts, K. (1999) Social Skills and behaviours that predict children's adjustment to the first year of school. *In proceedings of the seventh Early Childhood Convention*, Volume 2 pp. 220-228, Nelson , New Zealand.

Margetts, K. (2002) *Starting School Matters: Supporting Children's transition to school*. Faculty of Education. The University of Melbourne.

Margetts, K. (2002) Transition to school – Complexity and Diversity. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal* Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 103-114.

Mayall (1999) in Mac Naughton, G. Rolfe, S. & Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2001) *Doing Early Childhood Research, International Perspectives on Theory and Practice*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Mayo, E. (1933) *The Human Problems of an Industrial Civilisation*. New York: Macmillan.

McClelland, M.M., Morrison, F.J., & Holmes, D.L. (2000) Children at risk for early academic problems: The role of learning-related social skills. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, Vol. 15 No. 3, pp. 307-329.

McLoyd, V. (1998) Socio-economic disadvantage and child development. *American Psychologist* Vol. 53, pp.185-204

McQuail, S. and Pugh, G. (1995) *Effective Organisation of Early Childhood Services* London: National Childrens Bureau.

McTaggart, R. (1996) *Issues for Participatory Action Research*. London: Falmer Press.

Megginson, D. & Clutterbuck, D. (1997) *Mentoring in Action*. London: Kogan Page.

Milbourne, L. Macrea, S. & Maguire, M. (2003) Collaborative solutions or new policy problems: exploring multi-agency partnerships in education and health work, *Journal of Education Policy*, Vol. 18 No. 1, pp. 19-35.

Miles, M. (1986) *Improving the Urban High School: Some Preliminary news from 5 Cases*. University of Texas.

Morgan, D. (1988) *Focus groups as qualitative research*. London: Sage.

Morgan, G. (1986) *Images of Organisation*. London: Sage.

Moriarty, V. & Siraj-Blatchford, I. (1998) *An introduction to curriculum 3-5 year olds*. Nottingham: Education Now Publishing Co-operative.

Morris, P. & Rein, M. (1967) *Dilemmas of Social Reform: Poverty, and Community Action in the United States*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Morrison, F. Griffith, F & Alberts, D. (1997) Nature-nurture in the classroom: Entrance age, school readiness and learning in children. *Developmental Psychology*. Vol. 33, pp. 254-262.

Morrison, K. (1993) *Planning and accomplishing school centred evaluation*. Norfolk: Peter Francis. Mosely, J. (1993) *Turn your School Around*, Wisbech: Learning Development Aids.

Moss, P. (1992) *Perspectives from Europe*, in Pugh (1992) *contemporary issues in the Early Years, working collaboratively for children*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

Moyles J & Adams S. APU School of Education Research and Development in collaboration with DfES Early Years and Child Care Unit, (2001) *A Framework for Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years*, Anglia Polytechnic University, Essex.

Moyles, J. Musgrove, A. (2003) *Evaluating Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years*. Essex County Council.

Mullins, J. (2005) *Management and Organisational Behaviour*. Great Britain: Publishing Imprint.

Murray, L. & Lawrence, B. (2000) *Practitioner based enquiry, principles for post graduate research*. London: Falmer Press.

National Association for the Education of young children, (2000) *From Neurons to Neighbourhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*, Washington DC: National Academy Press.

National Commission of Education (1993) *Learning to Succeed: A Radical look at Education Today and a Strategy for the Future*. Report of the Paul Hamlyn Foundation. National Commission on Education. London: Heinemann.

National Education Union (1870) *A verbatim of the debate in parliament during the progress of the Elementary School Bill*, reported in Whitbread, N. (1972) *The Evolution of the Nursery & infant School*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

National Centre for Early Development and Learning (2002) *Transition to Kindergarten*. North Carolina, NCEDL.

National Federation for Educational Research (2005) in Primary National Strategy (2006) *Seamless Transitions – supporting continuity in Children’s learning*. London: DfES

Neuman, J. in Fabian, H. & Dunlop, A. (eds) (2002) *Transitions in the early years, debating continuity and progression for children in early education*. London: Routledge Falmer.

Ngage (2007) *Children’s Workforce Strategy: Involving our children and young people. Consultation Report*. Voluntary and Community Resource Centre.

National Research Council on Early Childhood Pedagogy (2001) *Eager to Learn: Educating our pre-schoolers*. Washington, D.C: National Academy Press.

Norris, J. (1999) *Transforming masculinities: Boys making the transition from early childhood education to school*. Unpublished MA thesis. Victoria University of Wellington.

Nutbrown, C. (1994) *Threads of thinking – young children learning and the role of early education*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd.

O’Dell, C. & Grayson, C. (1998) *If only we knew what we know: Identification and Transfer of Best Practices*. California: California Management Review. (40), 3

Office for Standards in Education (2002) *Changing Schools: Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Transfer Arrangements at Age 11*. London: Ofsted

Office for Standards in Education (2007) *The Foundation Stage – A survey of 144 settings* London: Ofsted.

Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2001) *Starting Strong: Early Childhood Education and Care*. Paris: Shore. R. (1998) *Ready Schools. A Report of the Goal 1 Ready Schools Resource Group* Washington, DC: National Education Goals Panel.

Osborn & Milbank (1987) in Gammage, P. & Meighan, J (eds) (1995) *Early Childhood Education: The way forward*. Derby: Education Now Publishing Co-operative.

Osgood, J. & Sharp, C. (2000) *Developing early education and childcare services for the 21st century*. Windsor, Berkshire: NFER.

Osgood, J. & Sharp, C. (2000) *The co-ordination of childcare and education services for under fives*. Windsor, Berkshire: NFER.

Owen, R. (1857) *The Life of Robert Owen*. Wilson.

Owen, S. (2005) *Defining and developing an integrated workforce in children's centres*. London: Nursery World, Vol. 105.

Parry, M. & Archer, H. (1974) *Pre-school Education, schools council research studies*. London: Macmillan.

Partners, (Issue 31, 2004) Sure Start and Daycare Trust.

Pascal, C. (1990) *Under Fives in Infant Classrooms*: Trentham Books.

Pascal, C. & Bertram, T. (1997) *A Conceptual framework for evaluating effectiveness in early childhood settings*.

Pascal, C. (1993) Capturing the quality of educational provision for young children: A story of developing professionals and developing methodology, *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*. Vol. 1, Issue 1, pp. 69-80.

Patten, M. (1980) *How to use qualitative method in evaluation*. London: Sage.

Patterson et al, (1986) in Preedy, H. Glatter, R. & Wise, C. (2003) *Strategic Leadership and Educational Improvement*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Penn, H. (ed) (2000) *Early Childhood Services, theory, policy and practice*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Penlington (2007) in Dockett, S. Perry, B. Campbell, H. Hard, L. Kearney, E. & Taffe, R. (2007) *Early Years Learning and Curriculum. Reconceptualising Reception: Continuity of Learning*. Adelaide: Office of Early Childhood and Statewide Services.

Perry, R, Dockett, S & Danielle, T. (1998) *Australian Journal of Early Childhood* Vol. 23 No. 4, pp. 6-11.

Peters S. (1999) *Continuity and discontinuity: issues for parents and teachers seeking to enhance children's transition to school*. Paper presented at 'Sharing Research in Early Childhood Education'. Coventry: University of Warwick.

Peters, S. (2000) *Multiple perspectives on continuity in early learning and the transition to school*. Department of Education Studies, University of Waikato, New Zealand.

Piaget, J. (1972) *The Psychology of the Child*, New York: Basic Books.

Piaget, J. (1997) *The Development of thought: Equilibration of cognitive structures*. New York: Viking Press. Pianta, R. & Walsh, D. (1996) *High risk children in schools: constructing sustaining relationships*. New York: Routledge.

Pianta, R. Cox, M. Taylor L & Early D. (1999) *Kindergarten Teachers, Practices related to the transition to school: Results of a National Survey* The Elementary School Journal 100 (1) in Brostrom, S. (2000) *Transition to school, paper presented at EECERA 10th European Conference on Quality in Early Childhood Education*. University of London.

Pianta, R., Kraft – Sayre, M., Rimm-Kaufman, S. Gerecke, N. & Higgins, T. (2001) *Collaboration in building partnerships between families and schools: The National Centre for early development and learning's kindergarten transition intervention*. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 16(1), pp. 117-132.

Piesner-Feinberg, E. Burchinal, M, Clifford, R. Culkin, M, Howes, C, Kagan, S. Yazejian, P. Byler, J. Rustica, J & Zelazo, J. (2000) *The children of the Cost, Quality and Outcomes study go to school: Technical report*. North Carolina: University of North Carolina.

Posch, P. (1994) in Altrichter, H. & Elliott, J. (1998) *Images of Educational Change*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Potter, A. & Williams, M. (1994) *Clustering in small primary schools: an organisational case study*, School Organisation.

Pramling, I. & Williams Granelid, P. (1993) *Starting Compulsory school*, Paper presented at the New Zealand Association for Research in Education, Hamilton.

Primary National Strategy (2005) *Excellence and Enjoyment: Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning*. London: DfES.

Primary National Strategy (2006) *Seamless Transitions – supporting continuity in Children's learning*. London: DfES

Primary and Secondary National Strategy (2006) *Strengthening transfers and transitions*. London: DfES.

Pugh, G. (1988) *Services for under fives, developing a co-ordinated approach*. London: National Children's Bureau.

Pugh, G. (ed) (1992) *Contemporary issues in the Early Years, working collaboratively for children*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

Quick, S. Lambley, C. Newcomb, E. & Aubrey, C. (2002) *Implementing the foundation stage in reception classes*, Research Brief no. 350. London: DfES.

Ramey, C. & Ramey, S. (1999) *Beginning school for children at risk*. In R.C.Pianta & M.J. Cox (eds) *The Transition to Kindergarten. A series from the National Centre for Early Development and Learning*, pp. 217-252. Baltimore: Paul H. Brooks.

Reason, P. & Bradbury, H. (2006) *Hand Book of Action Research*. London: Sage.

Reed, J & Proctor, S. (1993) *A Reflective Approach*. London: Edward Arnold.

Richardson, L. (1997) Review of transition home to school, *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*. Vol. 22, 1, pp. 18-22

Riley, J. (1995) *The relationship between adjustment to school and success in reading by the end of the reception year*, *Early Child Development and care*, Vol. 114.

Riley, J. (1996) *A discussion of the importance of the first year of school*, Paper presented at BERA Conference, Lancaster.

Riley, J. (ed) (2003) *Learning in the early years A guide for teachers of children 3-7*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd.

Rimm-Kaufman, S. Pinta, R. & Cox, M. (2000) Teacher's Judgements of problems in the Transition to Kindergarten. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 15, pp. 147-166.

Robson, S. & Smedley, S. (eds) (1996) *Education in early childhood, First things first*. London: David Fulton Publishers.

Rodd, J. (1994) *Leadership in Early Childhood*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Rogers, C. (1969) *Freedom to learn*. New York: Merrill.

Rogers, C. (1983) *Freedom to Learn for the 80s. USA, McMillan-Merrill*.

Rudd, P. Lines, A. Schagen, S. Smith, R. & Reakes, A. (2004) *Partnership approaches to sharing best practice*. Berkshire: NFER.

Ruddock, J. (ed) (1996) *School Improvement - what can pupils tell us?* London: David Fulton Publishing.

Rumbold, A. (Chairperson) (1990) *Starting with Quality*. London: HMSO.

Rutter, M. & Rutter, M. (1992) *Developing minds: challenge and continuity across the life span*. London: Penguin.

Rutter, M. (1997) in Fabian, H. (2002) *Children Starting School, A guide to successful transitions and transfers for teachers and assistants*. London: David Fulton Publishers.

Sameroff, A.J. (1975) Transactional models in early social relations. *Human development* 18, 65-79

Sameroff, A.J. & Fiese, B.H. (2000) Transactional regulation: The development ecology of early intervention. In Shonkoff, J.P. & Meisels, S.J. (Eds), *Handbook of early childhood intervention* (2nd ed.) (pp. 135-159). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Sammons, P. Taggart, B. Smees, R. Sylva, K. Melhuish, E. Siraj-Blatchford I. & Elliot. (2003) *The early years transition and special educational needs (EYTSEN) project*. Research Brief No. 431. London: DfES.

Sanchez, S. & Thorp, E. (1998) *Discovering meanings of continuity, Zero to three*, 18,6, pp. 1-6.

Sarason, B. (1981) *The Dimensions of Social Competence: Contributions from a variety of research areas*. In Wine, J. & Smye, M. (eds) *Social Competence*. New York: Guildford Press.

Schaffer, H.R. (2006) *Key concepts in Development Psychology*. London. Sage

Schon, D. (1981) Educating the reflective practitioner. *Paper presented to the 1987 meeting of the American Educational Research Association Washington D.C. 1-19*

Schratz, M. & Walker, R. (1995) *Research as Social Change*. London: Routledge.

Shirley – Kirkland, E. (2002) *Supporting Young Children as they enter School*, A Research Literature Review.

Simmons, S. (April, 2003) *Beacon Highlights, Transfer from pre-school to school*, North Lincolnshire Council.

Siraj-Blatchford, I., and Siraj-Blatchford, J. (2001) in Mac Naughton, G. Rolfe, S. & Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2001) *Doing Early Childhood Research, International Perspectives on Theory and Practice*. Buckingham. Open University Press.

Siraj-Blatchford, I. Sylva, K. Muttock, S. Gilden, R. & Bell, D. (2002) *Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years*. DfES Research Brief 356, London: HMSO.

Skinner, D. Bryant, D. Coffman, J and Campbell, F. (1998) Creating risk and promise: Children's and teachers' co-constructions in the cultural world of kindergarten. *The Elementary School Journal*, Vol. 95 No. 4, pp. 297–310.

Smith, E. (1994) *Educating the under five*. London: Cassell.

Smith, N. (1995) *The power of play packs*, Paper presented at the fifth European Conference on the Quality of Early Childhood Education Sept 1995. Paris.

Smith, P. & Cowie, H. (1991) *Understanding Children's Development*, Blackwell.

Smithier (1996) in Mac Naughton, G. Rolfe, S. & Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2001) *Doing Early Childhood Research, International Perspectives on Theory and Practice*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Stokes, B.R. & Ramey, C.T. (2001) *Bridging our communities. Birmingham, Alabama: The University of Alabama at Birmingham. Civitan International Research Centre*.

Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1990) *Basics of Qualitative Research, Grounded Theory procedures and techniques*. Thousand Oaks: C.A Sage Publishing.

Stringer, E.T. (1999) *Action Research, A handbook for practitioners*. Thousand Oaks, C.A: Sage Publishing.

Sure Start, (2004, issue 1) London.

Sure Start (2004, issue 2) London.

Sure Start (2006) *Personal, Social and Emotional training materials*. London: DfES.

Suschitzky, W. & Chapman, J. (1998) *Valued Children, Informed Teaching*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Sylva, Siraj-Blatchford & Johnson, (1992) in Gammage, P. & Meighan J (eds) (1995) *Early Childhood Education: The way forward*. Derby: Education Now Publishing Company.

The National Academy of Sciences Study (2000) *Early childhood education eager to learn: educating our pre schools*. United States National Academies

The National Strategies, (2008) *Strengthening transfers and transition, Partnerships for progress*. Department for Children, Schools and Families. London.

The Plowden Report, (1967) *Children and their primary schools*. London: HMSO.

The Rural School and Community trust, (2000) *Networks and clusters in the rural challenge*, Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Thomas Coram Research Unit (2002) *Research on ratios, group size, and staff qualifications and training in early years and childcare settings*. Nottingham: DFES Publications.

Thomas, G. & James, D. (2006) Reinventing Grounded Theory: Some Questions about Theory, Ground and Discovery. *British Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 32 No. 6 pp. 767-795.

Thompson, R. (2002) *Set for Success: Building a Strong Foundation for School Readiness Based on the Social –Emotional Development of Young Children*. Kansas City. The Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation.

Tizard et al (1988) in Fabian, H. (2002) *Children Starting School, A guide to successful transitions and transfers for teachers and assistants*. London: David Fulton Publishers.

Trudell, P. (2002) In Fisher, J. (ed) *The Foundations of Learning*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Tuckman, B. (1965) Development Sequence in Small Groups. *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 63, No. 6, pp. 384-399.

Turner, V. (1967) *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. Ithaca. Cornell University Press

Turner, V. (1969) *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Ithaca. Cornell University Press.

United Nations Committee in Woodhead, M. & Moss, P (eds) (2007) *Early Childhood in Focus 2. Transitions in the lives of young people*. Milton Keynes: Open University.

US National Education Goals (1998) in Fabian, H. & Dunlop, A. (eds) (2002) *Transitions in the early years, debating continuity and progression for children in early education*. London: Routledge Falmer.

Van Gennep, A. (1960) *The Rites of Passage*. Chicago. University of Chicago Press

Vandenbussche et al (1994) in Fabian, H (2002) *Children Starting School, A guide to successful transitions and transfers for teachers and assistants*. London: David Fulton Publishers.

Vygotsky, L.S. (1978) *Mind in Society*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Vygotsky, L.S. (1986) *Thought and Language* (revised and edited A. Kozulin), Cambridge: MIT Press.

Warmington, P. Daniels, H. Edwards, A. Brown, S. Leadbetter, J. Martin, D. & Middleton, D. (2004) *Conceptualising Professional Learning for Multi-Agency Working and User Engagement*, Paper presented to the British Education Research Association Annual Conference, UMIST, Manchester, 15-18th September 2004.

Watt, J. (1977) *Co-operation in pre-school education*. London: SSRC.

Weare, K. (2000) *Promoting Mental, Social and Emotional Health: A Whole School Approach*. London: Routledge.

Weare, K. & Gray, G. (2003) *What works in developing children's emotional and social competence and well being?* The Health Education Unit, Research and Graduate School of Education, University of Southampton.

Webb & Sherman, (eds) (1988) *Qualitative Research in Education: Focus and Methods*, London: Falmer Press.

Wenger, E. (1998) *Communities of Practice*, Cambridge: Cambridge.

Wentzel, K. & Asher, S. (1995) *The academic lives of neglected, rejected, popular and controversial children*, *Child Development*, 66, pp. 756-763.

Whalley, M. (1994) *Learning to be strong, setting up a neighbourhood service for under fives and their families*, Sevenoaks: Hodder and Stoughton.

- Whisker, G. (2001) *The Postgraduate Research Handbook*. Hampshire: Palgrave.
- Williams, J. (2003) *The next big step getting children ready for reception*, EYE Volume 4, pp. 15-17.
- Williams and Stewart (1992) in Mac Naughton, G. Rolfe, S. & Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2001) *Doing Early Childhood Research, International Perspectives on Theory and Practice*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Wilson, N. and McLean, S (1994) *Questionnaire Design: A practical introduction*. Antrim: University of Ulster Press.
- Wiltshire Education Department, (1994) *Hold hands and stick together, working with playgroups*. Wiltshire: Wiltshire Education Support and Training,
- Wood, C. & Caulier-Grice, J. (2006) *Fade or Flourish: how primary schools can build on children's progress*. London: The Social Market Foundation.
- Wood, E. & Attfield, J (1996) *Play, learning and the early childhood curriculum*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.
- Woodhead, M. & Moss, P. (eds) (2007) *Early Childhood in Focus 2. Transitions in the lives of young people*. Milton Keynes: Open University.
- Woodward, H. & Bucholz, S. (1987) *After Shock: Helping people through corporate change*. New York: Wiley and Sons.
- Yamazumi, K. Engestrom, Y. & Daniels, H. (eds) (2005) *New Learning Challenges: Going beyond the Industrial Age System of School and Work*, Kansai: Kansai University Press.
- Yukl, G. (2006) *Leadership in organisations*, Sixth Edition, Pearson Education Ltd.

Appendices

Appendix One

Appendix 1 Cluster Groups	Total	Maintained	Private & Vol	Childminders
Cluster 1	17	5	10	2
Cluster 2	72	28	41	3
Cluster 3	38	13	22	3
Cluster 4	34	9	24	1
Cluster 5	48	18	27	3
Cluster 6	44	15	28	1
Cluster 7	25	8	12	5
Cluster 8	10	2	8	
Cluster 9	9	2	6	1
Cluster 10	23	8	11	4
Cluster 11	16	6	9	1
Cluster 12	19	6	9	4
Cluster 13	19	11	8	
Cluster 14	16	6	10	
Cluster 15	19	7	10	2
Cluster 16	20	7	13	
Cluster 17	14	4	10	
Cluster 18	20	7	10	3
Cluster 19	17	7	8	2
Cluster 20	24	7	13	4
Cluster 21	6	2	4	
Cluster 22	19	5	13	1
Cluster 23	44	15	21	8
Cluster 24	38	15	15	8
Cluster 25	18	8	7	3
Cluster 26	31	11	17	3
Cluster 27	11	3	7	1
Cluster 28	24	9	12	3
Cluster 29	17	6	11	
Cluster 30	17	5	10	2
Cluster 31	15	7	8	
Cluster 32	19	8	10	1
Cluster 33	21	9	12	
Cluster 34	25	9	16	
Cluster 35	6	2	4	
Cluster 36	11	5	6	
Cluster 37	25	8	12	5
Cluster 38	17	6	5	6
Cluster 39	41	14	21	6
Cluster 40	17	7	9	1
Cluster 41	30	9	19	2
Cluster 42	29	11	15	3
Cluster 43	32	11	14	7
Cluster 44	26	12	13	1
Cluster 45	24	8	12	4
Cluster 46	20	7	13	
Cluster 47	18	6	10	2
Cluster 48	17	5	10	2
Cluster 49	23	9	11	3
Cluster 50	23	10	13	

Appendix Two

Appendix 2

**Early Years Development & Childcare Partnership
Audit of Cluster Groups**

There are now fifty cluster groups established in xxxxx. Cluster groups are open to all providers in the Private and Voluntary Sector including Childminders as well as the maintained sector.

The Foundation Stage Guidance document states: - “Cluster groups are a recommendation of the DfEE to empower all practitioners and parents through working closely together.”

Benefits of joining a cluster group include:

- Sharing good practice;
- Access to external partners including speakers;
- Training opportunities from a variety of agencies;
- Current national and local information;
- Opportunities to develop smooth transition between settings;
- Support of all Early Years settings for curriculum developments;
- Raising standards.

The National Primary Strategy is also identifying pilot schemes that demonstrate “Effective transition into, within and from the Foundation Stage.”

To ensure we are supporting all our practitioners relating to training and development, we have devised a questionnaire to complete.

This questionnaire should take no longer than 10 minutes of your time and is anonymous.

Please return this questionnaire in the stamped addressed envelope provided and return to

.....

Q1. Do you know that a cluster group is held in your area on a half termly basis?

Yes No

Q2. Do you attend your local cluster group?

Yes No Sometimes

Q3. What are the barriers to you attending your local cluster group?

Venue Timing

Lack of transport Distance

Family Commitments

Other _____

Q4. What would be the most suitable time for you to attend the cluster group?

p.m. Twilight Evening

Q5. What have you found to be the most beneficial, an informal cluster meeting or a cluster meeting with a training focus?

Informal Training

Q6. What progress in your own learning have you made by attending cluster groups?

	Significant	Some	A Little
Knowledge			
Skills			
Understanding			
Confidence			

Q7. Do you have good links with your local Preschool/Day Nursery/Childminder/School regarding the transition of children?

Yes No

Q8. How do you facilitate this transfer?

Visits to Settings

Dialogue between practitioners

Sharing of children's records

Other, please state _____

Q9. In which of the following areas do you feel the children in your setting have benefited by practitioners

a. attending cluster meetings?

b. Having close links with feeder settings?

	a.	b.
Personal, Social and Emotional Development	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Confidence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Self Esteem	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Independence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Communication, Language and Literacy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mathematics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Knowledge and Understanding of the world	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Physical Development	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Creative Development	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q.10 Have the links with your feeder settings supported children with the settling in process?

Yes No

Q.11. Is there any other information relating to cluster groups/links with feeder settings you would like to share with us?

If you would like to take part in research project, "Improving Transition to School at 5; The impact of collaborative cluster groups in the foundation stage", please leave your name and contact number below.

Name

.....

Setting

.....

Address

.....

Telephone

.....

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Appendix Three

Appendix 3

Interview schedule

What are the major constraints on partnership working in the Foundation Stage?

How do you think these constraints can be overcome?

What elements of partnership working would you identify as best practice?

What procedures if any have you in place to ensure children have a good experience of the transition process?

How do you think children will benefit from transition procedures based on best practice?

Appendix Four

Appendix 4

Working in Partnership and Transition into School.

For the past few years I have been undertaking a PhD research degree on working in partnership across all early years settings and the impact on transition into school.

This research has mostly taken place in xxxxx and was mostly of a qualitative nature. I am now concluding and writing up my findings. At the time of my research you were involved with the cluster groups either as a Leading Foundation Stage Mentor or as a reception teacher/Foundation Stage Co-ordinator, as part of the conclusion of the research I want to revisit you as a key person of the initial stages of the research.

Please can you complete the following questionnaire and return it in the pre-paid envelope.

Thank you for your time and co-operation

Dianne Borien (previously early years development adviser for xxxxx)

Early Years Training and Quality Strategy Manager (xxxxxxxxx)

Q1. Do you have a working partnership with your feeder pre school/day nursery/ nursery class/ childminding network?

No

Yes

Q2. What transition activities/practice do you undertake with your feeder setting, (Please specify and if possible give examples)

- Visits,
- Curriculum support,
- Shared policies,
- Use transition document to support on entry assessment.
- Attend cluster group meetings to share practice and good practice
- Other

Q3. Has working in partnership with your feeder setting had an impact on children as they transfer into school?

No

Yes (please specify, e.g. increased confidence, aware of expectations of school, familiar with building etc.)

Q4 Do you have on entry data to evidence any impact?

No

Yes

If you have answered yes to the above question, which curriculum area does this relate to?

- PSED
- CLLD
- MD
- KUW
- PD
- CD

Q5 Do you have a named person for transition?

Yes

No

Q6 Do you have a transition policy?

Yes

No

Contact Name.....

School

Appendix Five

Appendix 5

Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership

Leading Foundation Stage Mentor

Name
Name of cluster group
Activities/communication/ training taken place in cluster group <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Science workshop was well attended. Excellent delivery made it a very worthwhile experience for all who attended and encourages future participation• Sharing of planning sheets and assessment records at informal cluster meetings.• The purchase of Persona Dolls to be used by cluster group settings, (purchased with mentors money)• Informally sharing good practice and who we are etc. worked really well and resulted in inviting 'in house' training from the area senco for my cluster group• Good working relationships have formed between schools and pre-schools as a result of these meetings.

Appendix Six

Dear fellow practitioners

Appendix 6 HAPPY NEW YEAR



This will be just a short note and its purpose is three fold:

1. to introduce myself
2. to ask you to return your preferences for the possible cluster group training sessions in the next financial year AND
3. to canvass your opinion on the times and venues for our meetings in the future.

1. Hi, I'm Janet, your Foundation Stage Mentor for the [redacted] Cluster Group. I am the Nursery teacher at [redacted] Community Primary School where I have been teaching in the Foundation Stage, for the last 7 years. One or two of you do know me and I recently met a few more at the meeting in December at [redacted] and [redacted] School, when Lis [redacted] gave a training session on Behaviour Management. As the mentor for this area, I will do my best to co-ordinate cluster group meetings which you will all *want* to come to but I am also on the end of a phone ([redacted]) if you need information or have a problem. I will do my best to help but if I am unable, I will know a man/ woman who can!!

2. Please send back your preferences forms recently mailed from the EYCDP so that I can book the 3 most popular training sessions for the cluster for the next financial year

3. Please could you indicate your preference for meeting times and venues on the slip below so I can offer the above training possibilities to as many practitioners as possible.

Also would you be interested in 'surgery' sessions in between these training meetings when we could share good practice or discuss common issues, in a relaxed and supportive atmosphere? One such issue suggested at the December meeting was 'exactly what constitutes a child's record, which is both manageable for the preschool setting and at the same time *really* useful and therefore *valued* by Yr R school practitioners?'

If you would like to discuss this and perhaps share your current practice or help to agree some guidelines in this area, why not come to [redacted] Nursery at 4pm on 29th Jan and bring a copy of the records you currently produce to pool ideas. Come and have a cake and a cuppa and enjoy meeting and supporting each other!

Hope to see you then. Our next *training session* is on Feb 24th at [redacted] Primary 5:30 - 7:30pm and is on Practical Equal Opps with Andrew [redacted] the great Persona Dolls guy!



Please return slip to Janet [redacted] CP School, [redacted]

Name:..... Setting:

Preferable days/times: Preferable venues:.....

I/We (#) do/ do not intend to come to the discussion re: children's records on 29th Jan at TD

Appendix Seven

Appendix 7

4 pm EYS cluster
Infant School

(Informal Session)

Science Workshop Follow Up

All settings brought photographs of one science activity that had been successful within their setting.

Feedback was given on the following areas

- Experimenting with coloured water on different types of paper
- Experimenting with sticky play dough and flour/sugar
- Science and ICT - different computer programmes
- New Learning and Teaching Using ICT package which is available from the DFES - 0315-20046 date of issue 9-2004. This package contains 6 CD ROMs - one for each year group including Foundation Stage. It is free.
- Digital cameras for recording practical investigations

Date and time of next meeting

Primary School

20th January 4-6pm

(A reminder will be sent to you nearer the time).

It was agreed to follow the same format for the next informal meeting (Date and time TBA) - Early Phonics follow up session.

Meeting closed at 5pm

Many thanks to all who attended.

Regards

L. M. J.

Appendix Eight

Appendix 8

Examples of persona dolls being used in settings.



Introducing the persona doll to the role play area and interacting with their peer.





Social and emotional development is fostered through the children supporting the persona doll to settle into the setting.



Taking part in the setting activities such as at the writing area.



Photographs have been taken of the persona doll in his new school and the children are looking at them back in their setting.



The children are asking questions and the practitioner supports with the answers.



The persona doll is part of the group; the children relate to him.





Snack time is an opportunity for children to develop independence and decision making skills.

