

**Transition from Preschool to First Grade Primary School in Mexico:  
The Perceptions of Teachers, Headteachers and Parents**

**Miguel Angel Urbina Garcia, BA, MSc.**

**PhD**

**University of York**

**Education**

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## ABSTRACT

Transition from preschool to first grade primary school has been an important topic for worldwide researchers concerned about the promotion of an effective adaptation process for children entering primary school. Studies have highlighted the importance of this process for children's academic and personal development. The main aim of this study was to explore the perceptions of transition between preschool and first grade primary school held by teachers, headteachers and parents in the public education system in Mexico City. A questionnaire was developed based on previous transition studies and administered to a sample 15 preschool and 15 primary school teachers. A semi-structured interview was conducted with five parents from preschool and primary school and five headteachers from preschool and primary school in Mexico City. Overall, the results revealed that teachers moderately used some practices (e.g., creating children's portfolio), whilst some practices were rarely used (e.g., primary school visits). Teachers rarely carry out activities with families and other teachers. Teachers' reported children's problems mostly focused on behaviour and following directions. Working in the same school for a number of years, predicted more family involvement in school matters. Preschool teachers who attended more specialised courses reported more children's problems. Parents and headteachers are aware of this transition and concerned about children's lack of academic skills; however neither group employs a range of effective transition practices to support children. These findings are in line with the international literature, however, further research is needed to address particularities in Latin American contexts. Findings from this study open a window for further research in Mexican educational settings focused on current educational policy reforms. Implications are discussed for research, policy and practice.

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## **Declaration**

I hereby declare that no portion of the work referred to in this thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning. I further declare that this thesis is my own original work, except where reference is made in the text of the thesis to the work of others.

## INTRODUCTION

Preschool transition into first grade has been internationally recognised as an important process not only in children's personal but also academic life (Perry, Dockett & Petriwskyj, 2014). Scholars have focused on exploring a wide range of variables involved in this process which have led to the current knowledge and understanding of the topic in different countries around the world. Empirical evidence has now shown the potential effects this change can have in preschoolers' transition into first grade in a variety of domains such as social, cognitive and emotional (Rosenkoetter et al., 2009; Schulting, Malone & Dodge, 2005). Studies have also emphasised the important role a smooth transition plays in children's later academic life in primary school (Berlin, Dunning & Dodge, 2011). Evidence has also suggested that preschoolers having a smooth transition to first grade can have positive long-term effects in academic performance and personal development (Dockett & Perry, 2007).

Ensuring the provision of high quality of education as well as an adequate access to primary school for children aged 5-7 around the world has been on the global agenda as a major concern (OECD, 2011). The transition to first grade is no exception as the importance of this process has also been highlighted by international organizations such as UNESCO and OECD. Specifically, the importance of this transition has been emphasised as part of the United Nations' second Millennium Developmental Goal which aims to ensure universal access to primary school (Nelson, 2011). In addition, this organization has also recognised the importance of securing a smooth change for preschoolers transitioning to first grade since one of the major global concerns is placed in reducing drop-out rates in different countries (UNESCO, 2014). Research on transition supports the notion that a smooth transition leads to better academic performance which in turn is linked to a decrease in drop-out rates in schools. The evidence also suggests that educational systems around the world differ according to the particularities of each cultural context (UNESCO, 2010) and that as a result, the way in which this transition is experienced by children, also differs. This phenomenon, frames the way in which appropriate interventions are implemented so as to support this period of change (Perry, Dockett & Petriwskyj, 2014).

Research on transitions has helped to understand this process and come up with the most effective policies and strategies so as to lessen its effects. Research in this respect has been carried out in countries such as Australia, Iceland, China, Italy, Greece, United Kingdom and United States, but little has been done in Latin America. As a result of the research done in these countries, a number of educational policies to support this process

have been suggested which specifically address their own cultural characteristics. However, in Latin American countries such Mexico, no research has been done which focusses on this transition process within the educational system particular to each country. Interestingly, The Mexican government has made preschool into a mandatory level for all children aged 3-6 as a requirement for primary school (McConnell-Farmer, Cook & Farmer, 2012), however no educational policies have been developed to ensure a smooth transition. These premises call for the need to undertake research in this respect given the lack of studies in this region of the world and given the need to ensure a smooth transition into first grade in light of this educational reform established in 2002 and put into practice in 2004.

The national education system in Mexico has undergone a significant change in the structure of the basic education scheme which comprises nine years -six and three years of primary and secondary education respectively- of mandatory and basic education provided by the government. By making the preschool level compulsory, the basic education scheme now comprises 12 years of education (Moreles, 2011). In light of this reform, preschool has become an important educational level for Mexican children as it represents the first contact with a formal schooling environment. This educational reform must be considered alongside the lack of research on the transition from preschool to primary school suggesting at the same time, the need to carry out studies to explore and understand how this process of change is experienced in Mexico.

Based on the international research on transitions, gaps identified in the literature and derived from the needs detected in this country, the main aim of this study was to explore the perceptions of transition between preschool and first grade primary school held by teachers, headteachers and parents in the public education system in Mexico City. This study seeks not only to understand this transition process in light of the cultural context and educational policies, but also to generate empirical evidence that will allow the creation of effective educational policies to enhance this process for Mexican preschoolers. Based on the main aim of the study, a number of research questions were derived as follows:

1. What are the problems teachers' perceive preschoolers/first graders face during this transition?
2. What are the main concerns teachers have in this transition?
3. What are the main barriers teachers perceive during this period?
4. What are the transition practices teachers use?

5. What do teachers think can be done in order to improve this transition?
6. What are the perceptions of headteachers about this transition period?
7. What are the perceptions of parents in this transition?

In order to address these research questions, this study followed a mixed-method approach incorporating a number of methodological strategies reported in the specialised literature. Teachers' perceptions were gathered by means of a scale which explored not only the transition practices they implement, but also children's problems they identify in classroom, whilst headteachers and parents' perceptions were obtained by means of semi-structured interviews. The data-collection process for this study was carried out in preschool and primary public schools in Mexico City over a five month period starting at the beginning of the academic year 2012-2013.

Much of the research in this field has highlighted the need to define an adequate methodological approach that permits an appropriate analysis that answers these research questions. Different transition studies have used a variety of methods which have proven useful in pursuing particular objectives. From this variety of approaches, groundbreaking contributions have been made with regard to this topic. A number of transition studies have shown a preference for quantitative methods (Pianta, 1996; Regena, 2004), while others have relied on qualitative methods (Corsaro et al., 2003; Cassidy, 2010). As with other studies (Carida, 2011; Docket & Perry, 2007; La Paro, Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2003), the research strategies implemented in this study followed a mixed-method approach as suggested by Wilson and McLean (2011). Based on previous research, the questionnaires used in this study were developed based upon an extensive literature review in order to obtain preschool and primary school teachers' perceptions and practices on transition. Similarly, the semi-structured interview format was developed based on transition research designed to obtain parents and headteachers' perceptions.

This study contributes to the national and international literature on transitions by gathering empirical evidence with regard to the way in which teachers, headteachers and parents' -from both educational scenarios-, currently perceive this period of change in a Latin American context. Specifically, this research offers additional evidence that contributes to the knowledge and understanding of this transition process in light of Mexican educational policies. Finally, it provides evidence-based information which it is hoped will serve not only for the creation and implementation of new educational policies with regard to this transition, but also as a baseline which upon further research on

transitions can be conducted. The findings from this study could potentially open a new research field in Mexico focused on transitions across the educational system.

This thesis comprises six chapters. The first chapter reviews the international literature on transitions based on a critical analysis of existing studies. This chapter also analyses the theoretical framework upon which recent transition research has relied. It examines the current status of the literature with regard to this topic in a number of different countries around the world. In addition, it attempts to give an overview of the range of variables involved in the transition process as well as the different methodological approaches used to carry out these studies. Finally, it highlights the gaps identified in the literature that contribute to the rationale for the present study.

Chapter two describes the characteristics of the current educational policies in Mexico regarding preschool and first grade. Specifically, this chapter focuses on preschool education describing its mandatory status for access to primary education. It presents the way in which such reform plays a role in basic educational scheme intended to create a coherent connection along the 12-year educational basic scheme which comprising preschool, primary and secondary education. Finally, it provides a general overview of national statistics with regard to preschool and primary education and of the challenges that arise in light of this transition.

The third chapter outlines the main objective of the study as well as the research questions that guided the present research. It describes in a broader sense, the research methodology followed as well as the research strategies implemented. It offers a critical analysis of the methodological framework upon which the chosen methods are grounded and explain the rationale behind it. This chapter also provides a description of the pilot study and its implications for the main study. Finally, a detailed description of the instruments, samples and procedures followed for data collection and data analysis is presented.

Chapter four presents an analysis of the results obtained from the participants involved, namely teachers, headteachers and parents, and describes the quantitative and qualitative data gathered in the study and the methodological procedures followed for the analysis.

Chapter five provides a critical discussion of the main findings of the study in light of research, policy and practice. It presents an analysis which addresses the research questions that guided this study and a critical review of the extent to which the research

aim was reached. The last chapter offers a description of the final conclusions derived from the study as well as a final analysis of the implications of the main findings with the international literature, the link with the main theoretical framework used in transition research and final implications for policy and practice. Finally, it offers an overview of the limitations of the study considering future areas for further research.

# CHAPTER 1: PRESCHOOL TO FIRST GRADE TRANSITION: LITERATURE REVIEW

## **Introduction**

This chapter provides an overview of the current international literature on preschool transition. It offers a critical analysis of the different variables on which scholars have focused when studying transition in order to better understand such a process. Finally, it provides an overview of the main theoretical frameworks which have been used in this field. Final conclusions are also offered in light of the present literature review.

## **The Preschool Transition: An Overview**

The transition from preschool to first grade has been recognized as a developmental milestone in children's lives and has been shown to have an important impact on later academic outcomes (Mascareño, 2014; Suzuki, 2013; Rimm-Kauffman & Pianta, 2000; Rosenkoetter, Schroeder, Rous, Hains, Shaw & McCormick, 2009; Schulting, Malone & Dodge, 2005). This change has been a focus of research in different countries around the world which has considered a wide range of variables involved in the process and led to important contributions to the topic. Transition can be better understood if considered not only the ecologies in which children develop and the experiences of family members, but also the variety of children's early experiences (Dockett & Perry, 2007). These experiences have shaped children's behaviour during their time at preschool, and will have an effect as they enter a completely different new setting, the primary school.

According to Cople and Bredekamp (2009) and Koizumi (2000), changes are very significant in early years for children. Children have not yet developed an adult's knowledge that allows them to adapt to many different circumstances and/or contexts. Dodge, Colker and Heroman (2001) argue that for children, adults who spend most of the time with them satisfying their basic needs namely biological, social, emotional and so forth, become the most significant persons along children's lives thus with the potential to help them during this transition. Li, Mak, Chan, Chu, Y Mak Lee and Lam (2013) emphasise that larger class size, a subject-based curriculum, stricter school rules, more homework, a tighter timetable and longer school hours which demand the use of literacy and numeric skills, are all significant differences that make this transition challenging.

For the past two decades, transition has been recognized as an important period for children to which great attention must be paid because of this drastic change of contexts,

identities, roles and social interactions (Docket & Perry, 2007; Lau, 2014; Sink, Edwards, & Weir, 2007). Some authors argue that transition is a critical period not only for children, but also for their families who transition into a different role together with their child (Koizumi, 2000; OECD, 2011; Robinson & Diamond, 2013; Riley & Fahey, 2006; Sink, Edwards & Weir, 2007). Others, point out that going from preschool to primary first grade represents a very challenging period for children (Schulting et al., 2005) because of the number of variables involved and the ways in which they could negatively affect them. Pianta (2002) argues that transitioning to a more structured classroom and with more peers, has the potential to trigger anxiety in children. Families have also shown some anxiety traits when moving from the known to the unknown (Hanson et al., 2000). Mascareño (2014) goes on to say that children enter a new world of higher expectations where academic demands represent one of their main challenges comprising a more-structured learning environment, more teacher-directed activity and academic assessments. Given these factors, there is no doubt that preschool transition into first grade represents one of the most significant and challenging periods children experience (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2002).

Pianta and Kraft-Sayre (1999) define the transition period as the process through which children experience a significant change from one environment to another quite different one and in which they will need knowledge, abilities and skills in order to adapt to their new setting. In addition, this change from one educational setting to another, must be considered as a 'process' in which all members of the community must be involved (e.g., children, families, policymakers, headteachers and teachers), rather than considering it merely as an isolated 'event' for children (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2002). Other scholars define this transition as "...the process of change of environment and set of relationships that children make from one setting or phase of education to another over time" (Fabian & Dunlop, 2007, p. 3).

As pointed out by Dockett and Perry (2007), this period may represent a great challenge because of the different conceptions, expectations and perceptions adults have in respect to what children need in order to start primary school. For instance, this transition may not have another meaning for children than that of another "school", while for their parents this represents the entrance to formal schooling and a highly structured scenario with higher academic demands (Ladd, 1996 cited in Papalia, 2001). Similarly, Fabian and Dunlop (2005) point out that changing relationships, environment, rules and even teaching style may place strong demands on children and families. International organizations have

provided their own definition of the transition as “children moving into and adjusting to new learning environments, families learning to work within a sociocultural system (i.e., education) and schools making provisions for admitting new children into the system” (UNICEF, 2012, p. 8). There is an ongoing debate as to a universally accepted definition of this construct, but based on different definitions scholars have provided in the last two decades, this process of transition emphasises a change of contexts implicating a change in roles thus identities considering individual and social experiences involving interactions and processes over time (Perry, Dockett and Pietriwskyj, 2014).

A number of studies have stated the importance of this period with regard to children’s personal and academic issues showing that early interventions are strongly associated to children’s future lives in a positive way, thus suggesting the need to promote a smooth transition. For instance, Schulting, Malone and Dodge (2005), carried out an analysis of the effect of the implementation of transition activities in 992 schools with data from a national longitudinal study in the US. The findings showed that schools which implemented more transition activities (e.g., information sessions for parents, open houses, visits to the primary school) showed better academic scores at the end of the year.

Similarly, Giallo’s (2010) study carried out in Australia, focused mainly on the assessment of an intervention program during this transition period. The results showed that when parents participated in more transition activities, they became more involved in their child’s education. This element has shown great influence during this transition period given that it has been observed that major parental involvement leads to greater academic success (Stormshak, Kiminski & Goodman, 2002).

Other studies have highlighted the potential of implementing transition activities in schools and their influence on personal development throughout a child’s life and have emphasised the importance of helping children develop social and emotional skills (McCubbins, 2004). In another study carried out in the US, LoCasale, Mashburn, Downer and Pianta (2008) found that when more transition activities were implemented in pre-kindergarten, a more positive social competence and fewer problem behaviors were reported by kindergarten teachers. In addition, different authors (Claes, 2010; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004) have argued that social skills play a major role in easing the transition into primary school which can be improved by positive and appropriate teacher-child and parent-child relationships.

With respect to emotional skills, studies have stated strong associations between the development of these skills and their effect on children's academic success. A longitudinal ethnographic study carried out in Italy focused on friendship along the transition, Corsaro, Molinari, Hadley and Sugioka (2003) found that children with a better emotional development showed better academic achievement. Another longitudinal study, examined the associations between teacher-child interactions and children's achievement in kindergarten settings in the USA (Curby, Rimm-Kauffman & Ponitz, 2009). These findings revealed that more emotional support offered by teachers led to more phonological awareness

Taken together, these findings underscore the significance of the transition period in child's personal and academic life. Research suggests that the study of this process should not be limited to working with and helping children during this change, but should include parents and teachers. Docket and Perry (2007) point out that the whole community (e.g., children, teachers, headteachers, policymakers and parents) should be included in transition planning and the important contributions that each make to the process, must be acknowledged. As previously stated, transition research has shown not only the impact on children's social, emotional and behavioural skills, but also indicated an important impact on academic issues.

According to the report from Bernard Van Leer's foundation -edited by Moreno and Dongen (2006), preschool transition has been acknowledged as a key process in early education for children. This foundation recognizes the importance the need not only to put in place appropriate and adequate early education programmes, but also to secure a coherent continuity between syllabuses (i.e., the preschool and primary school curriculum) given the fact that these early experiences can have far-reaching future consequences. It points out that Denmark, Sweden and France are currently implementing a curriculum continuity which has produced a positive improvement in children's social and emotional development, and to a lesser extent in their academic skills.

Different organizations around the world are concerned about the important provision of high quality early education for children, and a variety of programmes have been created according to cultural demands. In its annual report *Global Education Digest*, UNESCO (2011) noted that the provision of primary education worldwide increased over the previous ten years by 9%, from 646 million to 702 million children. This increased rate is indicative of the importance that governments from different countries place on primary education and the current awareness of the importance of this educational level. Likewise,

it reflects the commitment of worldwide educational stakeholders and policymakers to programmes created to broaden the provision of primary education which is free and compulsory (Moreno & Dongen, 2006). In spite of this, drop-out and school failure rates are increasing while at the same time increasing repetition rates have become a worldwide trend (UNESCO, 2006).

Some transition studies have investigated the relationship between intervention programmes and transition practices implemented throughout this period and their relationship to the development of academic skills such as reading, math and writing. Research suggests that transition intervention could have positive long-term outcomes on children's academic achievement (Fabian & Dunlop, 2007). This evidence leads to speculate that having teachers well prepared and children ready to transition, a positive and direct impact on first grade failure and repetition rates could be observed (OECD, 2006). Furthermore, transition research has pointed out an important impact on drop-out and course repetition rates if transition process is not appropriately addressed (Moreno & Dongen, 2006; Schulting, et al., 2005).

In a study carried out in Finland, Ahtola, Silinskas, Poikonen, Kontoniemi, Niemi and Nurmi (2011) assessed the transition practices of preschool and primary first grade teachers and the extent to which the use of these practices contributed to children's academic development. Children were assessed in different domains such as reading, writing and math skills. The study's findings suggest that aligning the curricula and sharing written information between preschool and primary school were the best predictors for a positive children's skills development. Further, the more diversity of transition practices implemented, predicted specifically a major development on children's academic skills.

Similarly, Curby et al. (2009) examined the associations between teacher-child interactions and children's achievement in different kindergartens in the US. The researchers assessed children's phonological awareness as well as their reading and math skills. They found that teachers' emotional support was associated with a major phonological awareness. These findings are in line with Belsky et al.'s (2007) results, indicating that when a high quality teacher-child interaction was observed, the vocabulary of fifth grade children increased significantly. Further, emotional and instructional teacher support was associated with an improvement in word-reading. Surprisingly, the way in which classrooms were organized, had a positive impact on the development of math skills.

Schulting et al.'s (2005) study explored the effect of transition activities implemented in a variety of kindergartens in the USA and their relationship with a child's outcomes. It provided evidence for a connection between the number of transitions practices implemented and better academic outcomes. Further, they also suggested that teacher's frequent use of transition practices was associated to a major family involvement which in turn had a positive effect on children's academic attainment.

Taken together, these findings underscore the potential effect this period may have on children's lives and their future academic success as stated in the literature (Ahtola et al., 2011; Curby et al., 2009; Entwisle & Alexander, 1998; Schulting et al., 2005). Empirical evidence shows that during this critical period a number of transition practices need to be considered to support children entering first grade. These include an adequate transition plan involving teachers' transition practices, school transition activities, strategies for parental involvement, the establishment of an effective communication between the different ecologies (i.e., preschool-primary school), sharing a child's portfolio between teachers and linking the curriculum from both educational levels. Given the fact that this transition period has been associated with a number of variables such as children's personal development and academic attainment, family involvement, home-school bridging, decreasing drop-out and failure rates, the transition practices suggested in the literature need to be considered and implemented. Tackling drop-out and failure rates are of particular importance in light of international commitments and policies regarding universal coverage and the provision of high quality educational services in primary education (see UNESCO, 2014).

This overview, demonstrates the importance this transition process has recently gained within the educational field in the last two decades. Research has shown that education can trigger many positive outcomes for groups and societies and has a profound influence on their culture and values. Additionally, early education has been shown to have an effect on different aspects of a society's development. For instance, it can contribute to a country's economic and social development (UNESCO, 2011) and interestingly, has been found to have an effect on the development of more egalitarian and healthier societies (Cutler & Lleras-Muney, 2006; WHO, 2011).

Strongly associated with the idea of successful early education provision worldwide, preschool—considered as level 0 in the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED, 1997)—and primary education—level 1—are now seen as mandatory in different countries around the world importantly focusing on enrolment rates and the

provision and quality of education services (see Global Monitoring Report, EFA, UNESCO, 2007). Moreover, in light of the second millennium development goal stated by UNESCO (2000) whose main aim is to achieve universal primary education by 2015, it is also strongly highlighted the need to ensure and promote a school transition and readiness. As a result, working towards a “continuity” between these two educational levels is strongly recommended (Sink, Edwards & Weir, 2007; Vogler, Crivello & Woodhead, 2008; Woodhead & Moss, 2008) in order to secure a smooth transition process in light of the long-term positive implications on children’s lives the literature has reported. In response to this trend, researchers have carried out a number of studies that not only broaden the understanding and the implications of this process, but also suggest the best practices and policies that need to be implemented in a variety of contexts.

### **The International Landscape of Transition Research**

The international literature on transitions includes a great variety of studies carried out in different countries around the world which have led to several and important contributions to the topic. Studies from countries such as Hong Kong, Greece, Italy, Australia, New Zealand, the US and the United Kingdom, have dealt with important practical issues that highlight the significance of this transition period across cultural contexts.

These investigations have made important contributions to the understanding of a great range of variables involved in such process. Different studies have focused on children’s academic skills (Anthola et al., 2010; Rosenkoetter et al., 2009), teacher-child relationships (Curby, Rimm-Kauffman & Cameron, 2009), family involvement (Wildenger & McIntyre, 2010; Rathburn & Hausken, 2001), peer to peer relationships (Quinn & Hennessy, 2010), families’ perceptions (Hanson et al., 2000; Giallo et al., 2008), teachers’ perceptions (Cassidy, 2010; Saft & Pianta, 2001) and teachers’ practices (Cox, LaParo & Pianta, 2000; LoCasale-Crouch, Mashburn, Downer & Pianta, 2008).

The US in particular has a great body of research on the transition process that has contributed in a significant way to the scientific knowledge of such a critical period. These studies have provided important insights as to the programmes and the factors that need to be considered and/or developed in order to facilitate the transition for children in a great number of American kindergartens, preschools and primary schools. Some investigations have been based on national educational studies carried out by government institutions with large samples which made it possible to make some generalization.

Regena (2004) carried out research aimed at exploring the transition activities used by more than 3,000 American kindergarten teachers as part of a longitudinal study conducted by the National Centre for Education and Statistics (NCES, 1996). The study revealed that most teachers reported not being well prepared to provide a careful and a well-designed plan that would permit an adequate exchange of information between parents and teachers. Interestingly, teachers who had an early childhood qualification tended to utilise more transition activities such as having parents visit the kindergarten classroom which has been reported by other studies, as a good predictor for a family's involvement in their child's education (Giallo, Treyvaud, Matthews & Kienhuis, 2010).

Wildenger and McIntyre (2010) surveyed 86 parents/caregivers in the US to determine their concerns, needs and level of involvement during their pre-schooler's transition process. The authors reported that 72.1% of participants showed few concerns whilst 27.9% showed a deeper interest in issues related to social-behavioural matters. The authors stressed that parents expressed the desire to be given more information about the process, a finding which is consistent with other studies (Hanson et al., 2000). Interestingly, findings suggested that family involvement in transition activities differed from socioeconomic status. Results also suggested that lower socio-economic status, was associated with minor involvement on schooling issues.

To deepen in these findings, Hanson et al. (2000) investigated the experiences and perceptions of families and preschool service providers. Twenty-two family-members from four different regions (i.e., northeast, southeast, northwest and southwest) of the US participated in this qualitative study. Data was collected through interviews, observations, meetings and document analysis. Interestingly, the authors reported that the families experienced this transition as an 'event' rather than as a process. Further, the reported families' perceptions showed a slight level of anxiety when moving from a known to an unknown situation (i.e., preschool to primary school). They also families reported their desire to participate in this period of change and acknowledged the need for further information about this topic.

In a similar study carried out in Scotland, Cassidy (2010) explored the perceptions, attitudes and expectations of primary school teachers with regard to the transition period. Six first grade teachers were interviewed and videotaped in a discussion group. Teachers were concerned about children's ability to adjust to school, mentioned that visiting a preschool centre was a valuable experience and stated that the information and knowledge children bring from preschool was vital to ensure a smooth transition. Although these

results shed light on teachers' perceptions, there is also the need to interpret with caution the results given the small sample size used.

Consistent with these findings, Stephen and Cope's (2003) study also focused on teachers' perceptions. Results revealed that children showing better behavioural skills in Scottish primary schools, teachers tended to rate higher their school adjustment. Moreover, teachers reported more interest in children's personal development (i.e., emotional and social) during this period than in any specific academic skill. This study also emphasises the role of socio-emotional development as a key point to foster this transition to primary school which is aligned with other studies (Denham, 2006; Mashburn & Pianta, 2006). This socio-emotional development is intrinsically linked to the ability –among others- to make friends and general socialisation in classroom and arguably has a positive effect on behaviour in the classroom.

To explore the ways in which Irish preschool children socialise, initiate and establish patterns of friendship, Quinn and Hennessy (2010) investigated 35 preschool children from low-income families throughout a one-year period on their way to primary first grade. An expected level of involvement in terms of peer-to-peer relationships was observed during preschool. These well established relationships, predicted positive friendship at primary school. The fact that children were popular among their friends in preschool made it more likely that they would have more friends and be more popular in first grade which in turn suggested better behaviour in classroom.

Similarly, Corsaro et al., (2003) studied the friendship process of a group of preschool children in Italian schools during their transition to first grade of primary school. They utilised interviews, videotapes, audiotapes and classroom observations. Their findings suggested that the establishment of friendship in childhood was a useful set of skills that could have a positive effect on school adjustment. Interestingly, in some parts of Italy, the preschool teacher spends three academic years with the same children creating a valued community which at the same time has a positive effect on the establishment of social relationships. Moreover, in primary school (e.g., similar to preschool) children stay with the same teacher for 5 years promoting a wider community of friendship without exclusivities and boundaries. While these findings stress children's social skills which are closely related to an easier adaptation process, other studies have attempted to gather children's perceptions when they make this change to primary school. This latter approach has been widely accepted based upon the premise that most of the research on transitions has mainly focused on adults (i.e., teachers, caregivers, families, headteachers) rather than

focusing on exploring the views of the main actors in this shift, preschool and first grade children (Clark & Moss, 2011).

Chun (2003) carried out a study aimed at identifying teachers and parents' perceptions of their roles during this period as well as children's difficulties in this transition in four primary schools in Hong Kong through the use of interviews and questionnaires. As part of the results, children reported having difficulties adapting to a new set of rules and complained about the number of tests they had to take. The authors argued that these findings might be closely related to the pedagogical approach utilised in primary schools, suggested that a discontinuity in the curriculum should be considered as one of the first issues to address in order to promote a better transition which is consistent with other researchers' views (Woodhead & Moss, 2007). It should be noted that this view was also supported by responses from teachers and parents in which they acknowledged this discontinuity as well.

In a similar study, Turunen (2012) carried out a descriptive qualitative case study and attempted to obtain teachers and parents' perspectives on individual plans for children transitioning to preschool in one Finnish day care centre. The results pointed out the importance of the establishment of relationships between teachers and families and highlighted the fact that these adults also showed different perspectives with regard to this transition. However, parents reported completely trusting early child educators and their professional skills, which is consistent with Alasuutari's (2003) findings. Turunen also suggested the importance of working on curriculum continuity. The study highlighted the need to design transition plans carefully to involve parents and help them to help their children. This has been shown to play a major role in making transition a positive experience not only for children, but also for their parents (Niesel, 2002).

In Australia, Dockett and Perry (2004) wanted to explore the views from Australian teachers and parents with regard to this period and to identify what key points these adults perceived as the most necessary for a successful transition. The authors reported the results of the pilot study where interviews and questionnaires were administered. Questionnaires were administered to a sample of 355 parents and 162 teachers. Using grounded theory, the results showed that transition is not the same for both groups of adults since each group raised different concerns. Parents reported that the academic skills which children have prior to starting school are the most important, whereas teachers rated disposition and adjustment as the most relevant issues. The authors concluded that teacher and parental expectations have a huge impact on how learners see themselves adapting to the new

environment and stressed the need to align adults' expectations and perceptions to support children effectively during this period of change. They also indicated that teachers need to be aware of the experiences, perspectives and expectations of both parents and children involved during this period to ensure a successful start to school for children.

To further illustrate how teacher's perceptions play an important role, it might be necessary to look at studies such as Rubie-Davies's whose main focus was on this issue. He carried out a study in New Zealand in 2010, which was aimed at comparing how the expectations of teachers affected how they rated a student's personal attributes (e.g., schoolwork attitudes, social relationships and home support). The sample comprised two groups of teachers, six with high expectations and three with low expectations. The results demonstrated that teachers with high expectations rated their student's attributes and achievement more highly, and their expectations therefore had an effect on children's self-concept. Interestingly, when teachers perceive a student's attitudes as positive, they are more likely to encourage their academic effort and their motivation towards learning, which in turn, has been shown to have an important effect on students' long-term learning outcomes (Rubie-Davies, 2006).

Carida's (2011) research focused on planning, implementing and assessing the effect of six transition programmes in different kindergarten-primary schools in Greece. Results suggested that after having participated in such programme, primary and preschool teachers were more aware of the importance of the transition process. The author emphasised the significant contribution that these programmes made to the development of children's socio-communicational skills. The teachers realized the need to establish this type of programme within primary schools on a permanent basis.

Brostrom (2002) provided important information about transition practices in a Danish nursery and primary school and their effect on the transition experience for children and teachers. The author reported that staff from both scenarios established a bond in order to close the gap in the curriculum discontinuity. Staff organized a series of activities with meetings between the two communities, and the children's work, such as drawings, pictures and stories, was shared among the teachers. As a result of these practices, the teachers gained an insight into the particular interests of the children that would soon be starting primary school, and were in a position to come up with the strategies that best suited a child's needs. The author identified the fact that transitions are often associated with friends and suggested that social relations must be enhanced and

promoted due to the fact that they provide emotional support to children when facing new challenges.

The studies discussed above have made important contributions to the international literature on transitions considering different cultural frameworks in different parts of the world such as Europe, North America, Australia and Asia. These studies have provided with important and valuable cross-cultural information that has contributed to the knowledge and understanding of this process from a number of different contexts and thus helped in the development of intervention programmes during this shift considering the particularities of each context. In contrast, very little research related to transition has been carried out in Latin-American countries. This region has been widely explored in terms of educational coverage, enrolment and educational policies that shape the *status quo* of this continent which makes it the most unequal (e.g., socially and economically speaking) continent in the world (Nelson, 2011; UNESCO, 2010). A number of Latin American countries have been included in international assessment exercises (Valverde & Näslund-Hadley, 2010) which explore the academic performance of children in primary school, but it is suggested that these unequal conditions (i.e., social and economic) might be the same reason that makes more difficult to address educational needs (Nelson, 2011).

Some international reports have questioned the effectiveness of Latin American educational systems based on international and national assessments (UNESCO, 2014). Some authors argue that even though a number of countries have improved in terms of primary education enrolment (Alvarez-Mendiola, 2006; Valverde & Näslund-Hadley, 2010; Wolff, Schiefelbein, & Schiefelbein, 2002) the quality of the education provided and of teachers' preparation in this continent is not the best. At the same time this has been highlighted as a policy-related issue that needs to be addressed as soon as possible. It is within this framework that we must consider the few studies that have been carried out with regard to preschool transition in this region of the world and which can provide basic and useful evidence regarding the ground for theoretical perspectives considering its own cultural and contextual particularities.

For instance, some studies merely focus on reviewing theories regarding transition. A Colombian paper (Abello, 2009) has only reviewed some transition theoretical frameworks in an attempt to make some reflections on the basis of few transition studies such as Arnold, Barlett, Gowvani and Merali; Fabian and Dunlop, (2006 as cited in Abello, 2009). Other studies like Alvarado and Suarez's (2009), attempt to analyse the connections between research on children's transition worldwide, research on Colombian children and

Colombian educational policies with a view to improving preschool level through the implementation of transition to first grade programmes. One of the most significant studies was carried out in Nicaragua where, according to Save the Children US, the implementation of a transition project—the RICA project—showed that after intervention, attendance at school increased from 65% to 94%, while pre-schoolers' performance in reading, writing and arithmetic increased by 56% (Vogler, Crivello & Woodhead, 2008).

On a similar theme, Leon (2011) wrote an article which offered a set of reflections on this important period of change and analysed the psychosocial and pedagogical problems that Venezuelan preschoolers face in this transition. The author made some recommendations about how this transition should be understood as well and how educational policies should consider this important stage for children in terms of curriculum continuity, family involvement and teacher training. However, although this article represents the way in which the author makes her viewpoint public and valid, at the same time it does not represent a transcendental impact in the specialised literature. This might suggest the need to go beyond a reflection. Broader research is needed to examine in a practical way how current policies are being applied as well as the way in which the transition process is understood in such contexts and policies.

For instance, a transition intervention programme was implemented by Urbina (2006) in a preschool centre in Mexico City. The intervention was based on the assessment of children's academic (reading, writing and math skills) and socio-emotional skills (problem solving, social interaction, self-regulation and recognition of other's emotions). The teachers' transition practices were assessed in a similar way. The intervention programme was then designed and implemented based upon the needs detected. A range of transition activities were implemented (e.g., emergent literacy-related activities in the classroom, open doors, information sessions for families, primary school-visits and family's storytelling) involving children, parents, and teachers. Findings suggested an increasing development of children's academic skills as well as an improvement in social skills. Teachers became aware of the importance of such period and the need to implement this type of programme, and acquired some transition practices. These findings are consistent with Carida's (2011) findings in Greek schools after the implementation of the '*Facilitation of the smooth transition from kindergarten to preschool*' programme. Finally, parents became more involved in their children's education and reported the need to keep implementing this type of programme and receiving information in this respect which has

also been observed in a number of studies (Hanson, et al., 2000; Malsch et al., 2010; Wildenger & McIntyre, 2010).

These findings suggest that the transition process is also an important issue in the Latin-American context. These studies represent important steps towards the understanding of the process, in line with similar results from those in other continents. However, further research is needed to examine the effects of contextual and cultural factors within this process in greater depth. The cultural particularities of each country might arguably have specific effects on children transitioning from one place to another as suggested by Chun (2003). The way in which children are educated at home shapes the way they face this period as home is the place where they acquire and develop the knowledge, skills and abilities that allow them to be more resilient (Meisels, 2007). At school, teachers are the ones who play the role of supporters and advocates of children's development and education.

Transition research has shown that a sense of community and positive interactions among the persons involved need to be established in order to promote a smooth transition. Different studies (Corsaro et al., 2003; Giallo et al., 2010; Regena, 2004; Wildenger & McIntyre, 2010) have provided strong evidence about the role of parents and teachers and the extent to which positive outcomes have been observed when they are involved in supporting a child's transition.

Research in this regard has generally focused on different factors when investigating the impact and effect adults can have during the transition to first grade. Such elements include perceptions, practices, involvement strategies and childhood experiences. A number of studies have investigated the role that parents play in this period and have offered important evidence about effective ways in which they can help their children. The experiences of families during this period have also been studied in order to explore the extent to which this transition affects the whole family system in terms of its inner dynamic, the interaction between members and daily routine. As a result of this importance, exploring the needs of parents was the first step considered for some authors.

### **Transition Research on Parents**

Wildenger and McIntyre (2010) investigated the concerns, perceived needs and involvement of parents/caregivers during this period. The authors administered a questionnaire to 86 parents from five different schools in the US. In the results, the parents expressed their interest in receiving more information about the transition period. They

also reported the need to receive information about useful strategies to help their children during this period. Receiving written information from school, going to kindergarten orientation sessions and visiting kindergarten were the most common transition practices reported as useful for family involvement. However, the authors suggested the need for future research to explore the school-family interaction during this transition period given the small sample size used.

In another study, mothers' perceptions and practices with regard to children's readiness for preschool transition were explored by Smith (2012) with a sample of 33 mothers whose children attended the Dale Young Child Development Laboratory at Utah State University. Data collection was carried out through questionnaires which were sent out to families. Findings suggested that mothers were aware of the importance of being involved in their child's education. Participants were also aware of the importance of literacy in preparation for this transition. Results showed that mothers encouraged their children to perform some physical activities as part of their preparation for this transition. Additionally, by comparing means' scores, the authors suggests that while parents know that carrying out practices to support their children is beneficial during this transition, they do not do it in a consistent way. However, one of the limitations of this study is the fact that this was a cross-sectional investigation and thus was unable to establish whether parents carry out such practices consistently in a continuum or not. Given the lack of statistical significance in the analysis reported by the author, the results and interpretations need to be taken with caution.

A qualitative study by Richie and Bentley (2013) which explored families' perceptions with regard to their child's readiness for the transition was carried out with four families (five children were involved) who were interviewed once they had already transitioned to first grade. A qualitative analysis of written anecdotes made by the preschool teacher as well as of interviews with the parents was carried out. Three main themes emerged from the transcriptions of the interviews: engagement of self, social adeptness and flexibility, and finally reading and navigating environments. The authors reached a number of interesting conclusions. Parents reported that their child had high levels of self-awareness and self-assurance which they associated with a better transition. They believed that their children had the ability to adapt in a social environment, being able to share thoughts, ideas and feelings. Parents also reported that their children demonstrated a specific ability to observe their surroundings—that of the first grade classroom—, learn from it and act in consequence. Overall, parents reported that their

children had made a smooth transition. However, these results should be interpreted with caution as the study was carried out with a very small sample from a preschool centre under a special curriculum designed to improve children's development and academic performance. Its findings cannot be generalised to other populations unless the same curriculum is used.

Kreider's (2002) study highlights the importance role of family involvement in these early years of education. The author provides a critical review of the literature in this regard and reaches some very interesting conclusions. For instance, a family's involvement has been shown to have a positive effect on this period. Research has shown that more involvement of parents is associated with greater academic success in children and may significantly contribute to a smooth transition. Parents who attended intervention programmes reported the acquisition of more knowledge about their children (e.g., weaknesses, strengths and developmental stages), and about their classrooms, which in turn promoted a "bridging", process –which is a fundamental element on the transition ecological model proposed by Rimm-Kauffman and Pianta, (2000)-, through which effective community interactions take place (Claes, 2010; Peters et al., 2009). The implementation of transition practices has been shown to have a positive effect on family involvement and in turn these interactions have the potential to build strong school-family relationships in order to help children.

In a similar study, McIntyre et al., (2010) carried out a comparison study identifying American family experiences, involvement in transition and the extent to which families were concerned about this period. The sample comprised 129 parents/caregivers (n=29 special education; n=103 general education) from urban schools and administered a 57-item survey called "*Family Experiences and Involvement in Transition, (FEIT)*". The results showed that parents from both groups involved in transition planning showed more satisfaction with their child's entry to kindergarten. Parents of children with special education needs, showed a little more satisfaction. Parents from both groups reported a variety of concerns about their child's transition, among which the most important was following directions. Less than 20% of parents of general education children were concerned about academic readiness and behavioural problems, while 40% of parents of children with special education needs indicated some concerns in this area. Overall, the need for a transition planning and a transition leader was highlighted. The long-term involvement of families during this period is an important element to consider for further research in order to explore the long-term effect in this shift. A strong collaboration plan

and the establishment of strategies in this respect with members of the transition community are also needed.

A study made by Rathburn and Hausken (2001), aimed at identifying the transition activities implemented by school kindergarten teachers and their relationship with parental involvement, showed a strong association between these two elements. Findings suggested that the transition practices implemented by teachers, such as phoning, inviting parents and children to the classroom and inviting parents to pre-enrollment orientation sessions, greatly contributed to the participation of parents in a range of activities such as information sessions, open houses, conferences and school visits. As a result of this effective home-school link, a better transition was observed. However further longitudinal studies need to be undertaken to examine the long-term effect of such practices in first grader's adjustment.

Barnett and Taylor (2008) conducted a study where 76 families from 20 elementary schools located in southern regions of the US were interviewed. The objective of the study was to explore parents' school early experiences and its relationship with the activities they carry out to help children's transition. Interestingly, the results revealed that mothers who recalled more positive memories of their own parents in terms of school involvement, reported a major engagement in transition activities with their children during this period. However, an important limitation can be observed in the way in which the information was gathered. Although mothers are usually the main caregivers holding important information about the way in which they experience this process with their child, fathers could have also been interviewed to obtain a different perspective. Moreover, it would have been useful to explore children's academic and personal skills during this period in such a way that the association between mothers' perceptions and children's skills could have been established.

In contrast to the body of research dominated by the westernised literature with regard to preschool transition, Lau (2014) carried out an interesting study where she explored parents' practices and perceptions of involvement in their child's education in light of this period of change in China. Through semi-structured interviews, 18 families provided important information about their experience of this transition once their children were in primary school in Hong Kong. Results indicated that parents focused their involvement and support on academic matters at home and were less involved with the school than they had been with preschool. Participants indicated feeling uncomfortable with the infrequent communication established by/with teachers. They wanted to have this

communication on a more frequent basis and to hear about their child's performance in a positive way since most school-home communication was focused on delivering "bad news" about their child's behaviour. Finally, parents reported being more interested in primary school than in preschool because it was more academic and considered the start of formal schooling. These findings make a significant contribution to eastern literature and complement the existing body of western literature on the subject of transitions. However, the results need to be interpreted with caution. A mixed-methods study would have yielded more important information and made it possible to generalise results. Activities and/or strategies the school carried out to promote parental involvement, were not considered and thus the results cannot be related to these variables that would have expanded the nature and understanding of this involvement.

Taken together, these studies point out the benefits of promoting home-school interactions and transition outcomes practices. Their findings suggest the need to promote family involvement through the use of a number of implemented transition activities. Although this body of research emphasises the essential role that parents can play during the transition, it is also important to note that transition practices are a bidirectional-system in which parents and teachers participate together. Parents are not the only responsible for these activities but also teachers, therefore some authors highlight that this bond cannot be underestimated. As a result, some scholars have focused on studying teachers' role in this respect.

### **Transition Research on Teachers**

A great number of investigations have studied the role that teachers play in this period underlying the potential role of a diversity of variables involved in relation to transition. These studies have focused on their attitudes, perceptions, experiences, knowledge, interactions, and their use of transition practices to promote a successful transition, highlighting these variables as essential to research on over the last two decades.

In a study carried out by LaParo, Pianta and Cox (2000), the authors found that 83% of kindergarten teachers from a national sample of 3,595 used a variety of transition practices, among which the most common were sending a letter to the family and holding opening houses. In comparison, 55% of primary teachers reported making use of transition practices, with the most common practice being classroom visits by kindergarten children. Other important and frequent transition practices carried out by teachers were sending flyers to families, creating brochures and organizing open houses (Pianta, Cox, Taylor &

Early, 1999). It should be noted that the literature has reported that carrying out transition practices is only one way among others to help in this transition.

Rim-Kauffman, Pianta and Cox (2000) used data from the same national survey and explored the teachers' judgements so as to identify the prevalence and types of problems during transition to kindergarten in the US. In the results, teachers reported that the 16% of children in their classroom faced serious problems entering to school, whilst 46% of teachers reported that half of their class had specific problems. The most common problems reported were difficulty following directions, working independently and the lack of academic skills. Interestingly, these findings also highlight the fact that the relationship that is established between teachers and children has the potential to shape a teacher's perception of his/her pupils' performance.

Consistent with these findings, Stephen and Cope (2003) reported emotional, personal and behavioural as the most important skills for children to master during this transition in Scottish primary schools. This is in line with other authors' views where socio-emotional competencies are regarded as crucial for a successful transition (Denham, 2006; Mashburn & Pianta, 2006). The authors reported that when teachers observed a better repertoire of behavioural skills on children, their perception of school adjustment was rated higher. However, results also showed that teachers were not concerned about children's developmental process. Moreover, teachers' views on this shift focused on a one-way event suggesting a one-size-fits-all process which totally underestimates the individual differences in children. While teachers mainly focused on how children adjust to the learning environment and the daily routine in the primary school classroom, parents reported difficulties in separating from their child. However, it can be noted that a limitation of this study is the way in which children's sample was recruited -being opportunistic rather than randomized which calls for the need to cautiously interpret these results.

Vecchia (2012) offered interesting data about kindergarten, preschool and primary school teachers' perceptions as their pupils transitioned from kindergarten to preschool and finally into primary school from a mixed-methods approach in American schools. The author focused on a specialised programme where transition techniques were carried out by teachers, and was aimed at exploring their effectiveness. This three-year study gathered data through surveys of first grade teachers during the first two years, while the third year was focused on gathering data from kindergarten teachers. The main findings of this study -specifically in the shift from kindergarten to first grade-, suggest that teachers reported a

smooth adaptation to the new environment experienced by children. By carrying out the transition practices recommended in the curriculum, first grade teachers were able to identify a number of academic and social skills in children significantly improving in a positive way. Teachers also reported that the transition programme helped them understand effective transition practices in order to prepare children for this shift. However, the survey used in this study only consisted of five questions which could limit the information provided by teachers so as to reach general, stable and conclusive statements. Another limitation was that teachers participated in a specialised programme and a control group was not surveyed so as to observe the same phenomenon with teachers in a non-specialised programme for transitions. As a result, differences between groups could have led to important findings with regard to the effectiveness of the programme.

Hindman, Skibbe and Morrison (2013) investigated the extent to which American teachers from preschool, kindergarten and first grade used strategies to approach to families and involve them in their child's education. The authors were also interested in ascertaining the potential association between parents' involvement and children's development of language, literacy and mathematics. Sixty-two teachers were contacted and data were obtained using a survey. Overall, the authors established that teachers used a variety of strategies such as newsletters, volunteering, workshops and training sessions for parents. Interestingly, when teachers invited parents to volunteer in school activities, an association with the development of mathematical problem-solving skills was found, whilst the development of vocabulary in children seemed to be related to the facilitation of workshops on behalf of teachers. The authors also found that these practices were mostly stable over time, and in some cases, the frequency of such practices increased over the years. The authors also highlighted the role of these outreaching practices on behalf of the teachers in light of the transitions through these three educational levels. However a slight limitation needs to be pointed out. The actual family involvement was not directly explored but rather inferred from the information retrieved from teachers' self-reports which calls for the need to further explore the extent to which teachers and schools actually implement and carry out transition practices.

In order to investigate the notion of readiness among preschool and first grade teachers in Turkey, Sahin, Sak and Tuncer (2013) carried out a qualitative study and interviewed 70 teachers (i.e., 35 from each level) and were able to analyse the differences between these two groups and reflect upon the extent to which these differences in concepts can be considered in light of the period of change children go through. Five main

themes emerged from the data: “a) definition of school readiness, b) people and institution in school readiness, c) preschool education for school readiness, d) difficulties encountered in school readiness process and e) suggestions for effective school readiness” (Sahin, Sak & Tuncer, 2013, p. 1710). Most participants highlighted the need to consider all developmental domains in the conception of school readiness. Interestingly, participants stressed that one of the main objectives of preschool is preparing children for primary school, but at the same time they reported not being in favour of developing reading and writing skills at preschool level. Teachers highlighted major difficulties children could face during this period of change such as following more strict rules in terms of behaviour, as well as adapting and following more teacher-directed activities.

Suzuki (2013) conducted a mixed-methods study with 57 kindergarten and 60 elementary school teachers in Japan. The author investigated the views and practices of teachers with regard to this transition. This methodology consisted of teachers rating videos of practices in the classroom and exploring their perceptions regarding the appropriateness of such practices. The author used a 5 point Likert-type scale to this end. On the qualitative side, the author interviewed 16 teachers. The author concluded that teachers from both educational levels see many pedagogical activities as effective in promoting a child’s development in different domains such as the social, emotional, cognitive and physical. However, some activities carried out in elementary school were regarded by teachers as contributing more to the cognitive domain. This particular difference regarding the cognitive area is also discussed by the author in light of the differences in curriculum between these educational levels. Whilst at the preschool level a play-based curriculum is common, the authors argued that the existing academic-based curriculum in primary school might be responsible for this difference. Interestingly, when teachers were asked what the most helpful practices were to give children a smooth transition into elementary school, they reported the need for elementary school teachers to be aware of the practices and purposes of kindergarten teachers. A constant kindergarten teacher-elementary school teacher interaction was heavily emphasised by participants.

Rous et al. (2010) investigated the extent to which transition practices were used in public school teachers from different regions across the US. A total of 2,434 public preschool teachers were included in this study. The results showed that 70% of the teachers used on average 12.2 practices out of 25. The authors found that more qualified teachers tended to use more practices. Teachers’ reported barriers that prevent them from carrying out transition activities, focused on the fact that parents do not read the material provided

and have a lack of interest. However, although parents may not have seemed interested based on teachers' views, teachers could have also considered child's previous experiences. When Tudge et al. (2003) studied the relation between perceptions of children's performance and their everyday activities, they found that when teachers knew more about children going through this transition, they were more able to help them along this period. This help was based on thinking and planning appropriate transition practices to implement such as working independently, following rules and taking turns. Rous et al.'s study provides important information about the practices used in public schools, but the nature of the methodology means that the survey might be biased because such responses cannot be fully validated. Moreover, the low response rate obtained in this study may imply further caution in the interpretation of the results.

O'Kane and Hayes (2006) did a two-year study of preschool and primary school teachers' perspectives in Ireland through the administration of a questionnaire. The sample comprised 249 and 250 preschool and primary school teachers respectively. The teachers rated interaction, social and independency as the most important skills for this period. Sending a letter, visiting the school and meeting parents were the most common practices reported by teachers. The authors highlighted the importance of the results obtained and pointed out the relationship with this transition:

The teachers in this study have suggested that children with the ability to negotiate classroom life independently, equipped with good social skills and the ability to concentrate and listen for short periods of time, are more likely to be successful at primary level. (p.10)

The authors argue further that a teacher can play a major role in building children's self-esteem and confidence which in turn is associated with a better self-efficacy concept (Rubie-Davies, 2010). This latter concept is essential as a predictor in academic success. Empirical evidence highlights the fact that the teacher-child relationship is another strong predictor for children's academic success.

Pianta and Stuhlman (2004) examined associations between closeness and conflict in teacher-child relations in schools located in the US. The findings suggest that when teachers had a close and positive relationship with children, their perception of the children's academic performance was rated higher. Conversely, a relationship with conflicts meant that a lower academic performance was assigned to the child's overall performance. The authors concluded that the type of relationship a teacher establishes with pupils has a definite impact not only on the teacher's perceptions, but also on the extent to

which the children were supported by the teacher and developed personal and academic skills. Although these results offered vital information about important relationships, other variables that might have played a role in a teacher's perceptions regarding children's performance such as the variance of everyday mood, teaching style and previous experiences need to be considered. These results might indicate a tendency for teachers to further support children whose performance is rated higher. This support could potentially foster a major development of skills. However, it would have been useful to explore the extent to which these relationships found, were associated to the overall children's academic performance.

Moritz et al.'s (2006) findings are consistent with the previous study. They point out that these teacher-child relationships can not only help children adjust to the new school, but also have a positive effect in the development of language skills on children. Their study focused on 99 at-risk preschoolers in American schools. Results indicated that children with poor language skills led to conflict relationships, whilst children with a higher complexity in language were associated with a co-dependent relationship with teachers.

Although there are a number of variables to consider in this relationship accounting for negative aspects, it is important to highlight the positive elements of such a bond. For instance, Rosenkoetter et al. (2009) posits that when more transition practices are implemented by teachers, their relationship with their pupils is better and in turn there are fewer conflicts, which arguably leads to higher academic attainment. The authors clarify their argument by claiming that "a close positive teacher-child relationship during and after transition is associated with better cognitive outcomes for children" (p. 6). However, Moritz et al.'s findings must be interpreted with caution. The sample focused on children at-risk which does not allow for generalisations. In addition, the teacher-child relationship was based on reports provided by teachers rather than by direct and more objective classroom assessment that would allow a wider range of interactions to be observed.

In the final analysis, these findings provide strong evidence of the role that teachers play during the transition to first grade and that needs to be considered when planning and designing transition intervention programmes. It is noteworthy that teachers' intervention during this transition by implementing different practices, has shown to be effective not only for children, but also for parents. This implementation of transition practices has largely been associated with better support for school adjustment (Moritz et al., 2006; Stephen & Cope, 2003). Interestingly, the awareness and knowledge teachers have about

this change in a child's life, has also been highlighted as vital not only to support them, but also to carefully design the strategies which need to be utilised along the academic year (Wildenger & McIntyre, 2010).

Some studies have shown the teacher-child interaction to be an effective predictor in children's academic performance (Anthola et al., 2010; Rimm-Kauffman & Cox, 2000; Tudge et al., 2003). Also, an adequate establishment of these relationships would have an important impact on a child's social, emotional and behavioural skills development (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; Rous, et al., 2010). Another essential element in this process is the role that teachers play in the creation of the appropriate links with families. When teachers carried out activities where families were involved, it was observed that parents were more interested thus active in their child's education. This involvement in turn, has also been associated with a better academic performance and a smoother transition.

Taken together, these studies have provided evidence of the major role that significant adults play in helping children adjust to primary first grade. Apart from the importance of personal variables in this process (e.g., perceptions, experiences, temperament), most of the theoretical perspectives these studies rely on, highlight that by creating these links between teachers and parents –thus promoting a 'bridging' in the community (Fabian & Dunlop, 2007; Koizumi, 2000; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000), children will positively be supported and benefited in an appropriate manner on their way to primary first grade. In addition, this body of research supports the idea that parents and teachers must be aware of such a process, and have knowledge of effective transition practices that enable them to help children transitioning (Regena, 2004; Schulting et al., 2005; Stormshak, Kiminski & Goodman, 2002). However, as pointed out by Dockett and Perry (2007), to promote a successful change to primary school, it is necessary to understand and explore different variables of all the persons involved, such as perspectives, experiences, knowledge, skills and expectations. In this sense, although major contributions have been obtained from studies focusing on these adults, a number of studies have also considered not only children's views but also a number of children-related variables within this process.

### **Transition Research on Children**

Bossaert et al. (2011) conducted a two-year longitudinal study in Belgium aimed at exploring the academic achievement of 153 children at the end of first grade. Data was

processed through a parallel processes mediation model as suggested by Buhs (2005). The authors concluded that the predictive model was only partially useful for this transition. They found that children's academic self-concept had an indirect effect (i.e., through classroom participation) on academic achievement, although the latter did not have a significant effect on the former. Finally one of the most important findings of this study was the role that the physical environment played in the transition. Peer acceptance and children's participation in classroom appeared to have an effect on children's academic self-concept. This highlighted the importance of promoting teachers practices focused on effective classroom engagement and participation so as to promote a better achievement and adjustment. However, it should be noted almost all children's parents had very high academic background which could have an effect in these results, and is a weakness of the study. Further, according to OECD Family Database, (2010) Belgium is one of the countries with highest attendance rates and thus the generalisation of these results should be treated with caution.

McWayne, Green and Fantuzzo (2009) conducted a longitudinal study in the US to explore the extent to which a child's skills repertoire can predict academic success through the change from preschool to first grade. One hundred and fifty two children were followed through this shift whose data were processed through a bivariate analysis. Findings suggested that cognitive, social and motor skills could serve as good predictors for first grade outcomes. Children's social interactions in preschool were found to be similar to those developed in primary school, suggesting an established pattern through this shift. Moreover, children considered at risk in preschool continued to be at risk through this change in first grade. However, one of the argued limitations is the sample size used which calls for the need to cautiously interpret the findings. Moreover, the effect observed in this study in terms of children's performance in first grade cannot be generalised to further academic levels (e.g., fifth and sixth) or to identify children's performance and whether the transition has a permanent effect on their skills.

In a study focused on investigating early educational experiences and their association with family involvement in relation to children's socio-behavioural outcomes during this transition period in New York, Wildenger and McIntyre (2012) reported interesting facts about this relationship and its significance in this period of change. The sample comprised 86 typically developed children with their parents as well as 14 teachers who reported on how the children adjusted their behaviour in the classroom. Findings suggest that preschool preparation was found to be significantly related not only to

behavioural problems reported by teachers but also to the quality of the student-teacher relationship. Children who had already had formal schooling displayed fewer behavioural problems and had more positive interactions with teachers. Family involvement was also found to be related to children's socio-behavioural outcomes, highlighting its importance during this shift. The authors stress the importance not only of children's early educational experiences but also the ways in which the family can engage in their child's education and facilitate this transition. However, some of the limitations might include the unknown activities parents reported to be involved in (e.g., curriculum-mandatory or extra activities designed by teachers) and the lack of parents report on their children's school adjustment. As a result, the information obtained was limited to only teachers' judgements.

Robinson and Diamond (2013) explored the association between children's social-interpersonal skills and the transition on a sample of 133 preschool children in the US. A number of measures were carried out to this aim. Children reported on their own problem solving skills, teachers reported children's social skills and classroom problems, whilst teachers and parents reported children's adjustment. Findings from this study showed an association between children's social skills used in preschool and a more positive adjustment in first grade. The most common children's problems teachers reported focused on difficulties working independently and following directions in the new educational setting. Parents reported that their children showed a positive perception about their new school but teachers observed that children did have some difficulties in the classroom. However, one important limitation of this study should be noted. Researchers did not carry out any direct classroom observation in either setting of children's behaviour and merely relied on adults' reports. In addition, the study focused only in children living in poverty, and its results should therefore be interpreted with caution.

In a short-term longitudinal study, Daniels (2014) explored the perceptions of children as well as approaches to learning during preschool and the first couple of months of kindergarten in American schools. Thirty five children from a rural-suburban area were assessed in their behavioural regulation, personal attitudes to kindergarten and perceived competencies. Interviews focused on children's expectations and perceptions related to the forthcoming new setting, the kindergarten. Parents and teachers (the latter from both educational scenarios) reported the children's adjustment to school through the use of surveys. Results from this study suggest that children's attitudes and learning approaches were consistent during this transition despite the change of physical environment. One of the key aspects highlighted by the authors was the fact that the children's interest and

attitudes towards kindergarten were associated with the type of activities carried out in the new school, where 71% of children emphasised fun or play activities. Adjustment to school was found to be significantly related to a child's affective orientations in preschool. It is also argued by the researchers that children's motivation decreased to some extent due to the change of teaching approach. This phenomenon can also be explained by the differences in curriculum. Whilst in preschool, a child-centred programme prevails there is a constructivist and didactic-based programme in kindergarten. Moreover, this children's motivational decrease could also be explained by the fact that in kindergarten, children might have fewer materials to play with. However, despite the important contributions and findings from this study, further studies with a larger number of children are needed. A further element to consider is the fact that this study was carried out in schools where a high quality programme was in place, and it is therefore not possible to generalise the results to other American schools.

In a similar study, McDermott, Rikoon and Fantuzzo (2014) used a three-year longitudinal study to explore the role of learning approaches used in preschool and their relation to a child's social and emotional development across the transition. The sample comprised 2,152 children from the north of the US during the 2000-2001 academic year. Results showed that the learning approach adopted at preschool can be changeable and adaptable to the new learning ecology; the first grade classroom. In addition, this learning approach can also be adaptable to the new social interactions children will have in primary school. These findings suggest the need of adaptation on behalf of children which at the same time, confirms a lack of continuity across this transition. It is also suggested that low-achievers in a preschool setting experienced a loss of motivation during this shift which had an important effect on their performance once they were in formal schooling. However it is necessary to bear in mind that the authors did not use a control group (e.g., a non-Headstart programme) which would have allowed a comparison to see the impact of other variables including a different educational approach. Nevertheless, this association of socio-behavioural and emotional skills with academic matters has been further investigated.

A latent class analysis was used to examine work attitude, socio-behavioural competence and academic skills in a sample of Dutch preschoolers to identify profiles of competence and predict achievement in first and second grade of primary school. Mascareño, Doolaard and Bosker (2014) used previous data collected by Doolaard and Bosker (2006) in order to carry out the analysis. Two groups were followed longitudinally

from preschool to first and second grade, the sample comprising 2,367 and 973 students respectively. After the analysis, the authors clustered the results in five different profiles based on the children's skills. Results indicate that profiles identified with a set of well-developed skills (e.g., social, academic and learning) could indicate academic attainment at first and second grade. One unexpected finding was that children with high scores in academic skills but who had higher rates of socio-behavioural problems performed better in primary school with regard to academic attainment. These findings suggest that socio-behavioural skills do not compensate for the lack of academic skills in this transition, and thus highlighting the importance of the latter set of skills. However, one of the limitations to bear in mind is the fact that children's socio-behavioural data was only reported by teachers at the end of the preschool stage and no classroom observations were carried out. The teachers could have associated a child's behaviour with its final grades, arguably limiting the objectivity of such socio-behavioural-related data collection. Researchers have also focused on exploring children's views when involved in this period of change, as a way to illustrate how first-hand information can also be gathered –rather than merely relying on adults' reports.

In 2004, Dockett and Perry studied the perspectives of an Australian sample where parents, educators and children starting school were interviewed. Results indicated a great variety of factors that adults (i.e., parents and teachers) perceive as an adequate adjustment to school. While teachers focused more on children's adjustment as well as temperament, parents mainly focused on academic knowledge. However the importance of preparing children for this change was a common element reported by both groups of adults. The authors reported that children highlighted the role of friends and friendship during the process and emphasized this as an important issue that can help children through this change. In addition, children reported that in order to behave appropriately in the new classroom, they had to know the rules. They thought the main objective of attending primary school was to learn how to read and write. Overall, this study revealed that children experience this transition in different ways and those significant differences were also observed in adults' perceptions.

These findings are consistent with other studies (Corsaro et al., 2003; Quinn & Hennessy, 2010) which have suggested that being popular or having good friends in preschool (i.e., ability that heavily relies on an adequate development of social skills), are good predictors for establishing future friend relationships in primary school, which in turn have a positive effect on a child's emotional development -for instance in his/her self-

esteem and self-confidence. This latter concept has been positively associated with a better academic achievement.

To further examine the role of children's views in this process, Einarsdottir (2010) investigated the experiences of 22 five and six-year old children and their parents in Iceland during their first year of primary school. The author asked their opinions about how they made decisions at primary school. Through drawings, interviews and photographs, the children provided the researcher with important insights into the way they perceived school. Findings reported that children said their favourite activity was playing in the playground during "the break". They placed a high value not only on play but also on friendship with their peers, and highlighted the importance of acquiring and following new rules for behaviour and play. Both groups agreed that outdoor activities and playing were the most exciting events at this educational level. It might also be important to highlight this evidence as part of the rationale for the so-called curriculum discontinuity in this transition suggested by a number of authors (Rim-Kauffman, Pianta & Cox, 2000; Woodhead & Moss, 2008). This discontinuity emphasizes an important shift between a play-based and an outcome-based curriculum. This shift can also be better illustrated with children's views where they highlighted that the main role of first grade teacher was teaching how to read, write and do maths.

These results offered evidence that the children primarily associated primary school with the development of academic skills, stating that these skills were the main learning objective in primary school. Numeracy as well as reading and writing skills were rated as the most utilised and practiced activities in classroom. The role of the teacher was mainly to teach subjects rather than play. As for decision making, when asked what type of things they could decide to do or not at school, children's responses focused mainly on three elements: a) they could decide their activities during the break; b) they could decide only when provided choices, and c) they could decide what sort of activities they could do in their free time. These findings reveal an important shift regarding the minor role children play in classroom-decision making compared to a major role played at the preschool setting. Overall, this study sheds light on a number of interesting elements with regard to children's perceptions and the way in which they experience this new stage of their lives. Among these elements should be emphasised the dominant role not only of the new rules that children have to understand and follow but also of the shift in the type of activities carried out in the primary school classroom (e.g., play-led *versus* academic-led) which lessened their opportunity to decide which type of activities to engage in and which not.

Although the voices of children were heard in this study, it also had some limitations in light of the data-collection strategy used. Children were interviewed in pairs, trios or small groups to place them in a familiar context. This methodology was followed as suggested in the literature; however, it could be argued that the children's views could have been influenced by their peers' comments and therefore did not reflect a personal opinion but rather a group consensus. These findings also provide evidence about how greatly children's perceptions of primary school in comparison to their former preschool differ. Results offer an important insight into the dramatic shift in curriculum discontinuity from children's perspective. It can also be said from these findings that focusing on academic skills and teachers' role, are also concerns for children.

In Italy, in a six-year longitudinal ethnographic study involving direct observations of teacher-child and peer to peer interactions in the classroom, Corsaro and Molinari (2008) found important elements relating to children's experiences of the transition to first grade. The study also involved interviewing parents and teachers before and after the transition to first grade. From the substantial amount of data collected, the authors stressed that continuity or discontinuity in this learning process plays a major role in helping children adjusting to their new setting. Early experiences in preschool in terms of social interactions, attention span in activities, friendship, tasks carried out and classroom rules, are the foundation of primary school adjustment. The authors concluded that children have different experiences which need to be considered when planning transitions. They argue that Italy's educational scenarios have particular characteristics that may help children in this period of change, but general conclusions in this regard must be carefully addressed given these specific educational conditions. One of these conditions and arguably limitations to draw general conclusions is the fact that there are two teachers in a classroom, one of whom is in charge of teaching in the following academic years. A teacher may spend three or five years with the same children—in preschool and primary school respectively—which represents an important advantage when it comes to school adjustment.

The experiences of Australian children in transition once they were in first grade, were analysed in the book called "*Transition to School*" by Dockett and Perry (2007). Firstly, one important finding revealed that children are concerned about the new set of rules. When children were asked their opinions about primary school, one of the common elements mentioned was following the rules imposed by the teacher which needed to be learned and followed, otherwise, they might be punished. It is worth noting that the teacher

was understood as ‘the one who commands and give directions’. Secondly, when children were asked about the purpose of going to primary school, most reported that it was to learn how to read, write and count numbers. Children also highlighted having friends as a important issue in this transition.

Children pointed out differences in the physical environment which is an essential element highlighted on the ecological model by Rimm-Kauffman and Pianta (2000). A bigger school, major number of classmates, a bigger playground and books instead of having toys, have also been pointed out as one of the main concerns that children notice in this change. This situation -as suggested by the authors- may trigger a diversity of internal cognitive process which has to do with emotional disposition. According to the authors, this disposition is usually described as the set of either positive or negative feelings children may experience during the transition. Although some children reported feeling scared, nervous and anxious prior to starting primary school, others had feelings of happiness and excitement.

Overall, this body of research offers important views to consider in relation to this transition and the way in which not only influences the lives of children, but also the way it shapes their perceptions. It supports the idea that this period of change has a great influence on a number of areas of a child’s development. Moreover, it is suggested that the relationship between the transition and children skills is bidirectional. While it is argued that this period requires a number of skills in children to be ready and thus perform well in primary school, it is also important to note that this period can either lessen or maximise their personal and academic development/performance depending on how the transition is managed. This body of research offers important insights into the way in which children experience this period of change, and provides a useful theoretical framework under which a number of transition strategies can be considered. It also provides important information to be considered when designing and planning interventions taking into account not only experiences from adults, but also from children. In every case, planning and carrying out transition-interventions have been informed by research where the literature has also identified a number of positive and negative outcomes on children, teachers and parents as a result of the planning and implementation of transition activities. Studies aimed at obtaining important information of those involved in the process, such as research with parents and teachers, parents and children or teachers-parent-children and headteachers have yielded interesting data which have undoubtedly contributed to the understanding of this phenomenon.

## **Transition Research with Parents and Teachers**

Interviews with Headstart staff, parents and teachers from a preschool in the US allowed Malsch et al. (2010) to explore the way in which this government programme helped parents during the transition. The main focus of the research was to explore parents' perceptions with regard to the implementation of the transition programme as well as the support provided by the school staff. Results suggested that the Headstart programme did indeed help families by creating links between these two ecologies, that is, preschool and the child's home. The parents greatly valued the efforts of school staff who provided important information with regard to this transition and the strategies with which they could support their children. Teachers reported having sessions with families which gave them the opportunity to meet the parents as well as the children. They admitted paying more attention to families whose children had behavioural challenges. Despite the fact that this study was carried out with a sample which had a very specific inclusion criteria (e.g., children with suspected delay in the socio-emotional area), it still sheds light on the importance of creating bonds among the members of communities at preschool and home as an effective strategy to support children transitioning to the next educational level.

Arndt et al. (2013) explored the views of parents and educators about the learning process of socioeconomically disadvantaged children in the transition to primary school in Germany. The study was the first stage of a bigger project which included interviews with 13 teachers and 15 parents. The authors were interested in gathering the perceptions of parents and teachers regarding the support provided to children's learning process in home and school. Results indicated that teachers perceived less support to children's learning process on behalf of the family at home. However, a strong contrast is highlighted when authors state that parents reported a strong commitment by offering a non-stop support to their child. All parents considered the preschool centre as a fundamental stage in their children's learning. They placed great importance on a child's academic-related learning while educators were more likely to emphasise a holistic view of child development as preparation for primary school. The sample criteria could be regarded as a potential limitation. The socioeconomic status of families was regarded as disadvantaged, placing some restrictions in order to draw more general conclusions from the data. Further, although important information from the interviews was gathered, the way in which the potential researcher's bias could affect results is not clearly described in the study placing important doubts with regard to the trustworthiness of the research.

In another qualitative-based study, Hatcher, Nuner and Paulsel (2012) studied kindergarten readiness and the extent to which preschool centres (rural, suburban and small city) helped children prepare for American urban schools. The authors interviewed parents and teachers from three different programmes in two different US states to explore their beliefs in this regard. Thirteen teachers and 16 parents participated in the study. Six main themes emerged from the qualitative analysis of the interviews carried out by the authors. Overall, participants acknowledged the major role that preschool plays in getting children ready for primary school. Although children's socio-emotional aspects were regarded as the most important elements that could influence readiness, participants also highlighted the importance of developing academic skills. Participants' notions in relation to the preschool centre, seemed to be important for this transition. Moreover, parents seemed to be aware of the demands of the new setting to which their children would be transitioning.

### **Transition Research with Parents and Children**

Peters (2013) argues that most of the research on transitions focuses on the views of educators and parents in relation to this shift. As a result, her study was aimed at understanding the experiences of preschool and kindergarten children as well as the way in which parents help children during the transition to kindergarten by participating in transition activities. Thirteen parents (mostly mothers) were interviewed along with 20 children that were interviewed prior to the entrance to kindergarten and 25 after having done the transition, however only 34 out of the 45 children's interviews are reported. Results indicated that parents placed more importance on child's academic-oriented skills. Parents did not think their involvement was important because the aim of kindergarten was to prepare their children and as a result, they were less concerned about their child's readiness. Interestingly, mothers reported a number of strategies to support their child during this transition. These strategies comprised: establishing strict routines at home, looking for age-appropriate skills for a five-year old child and ensuring their child had the recommended skills. The authors reported that children in the preschool group raised concerns about leaving their current friends and wondered if they would all go to kindergarten together. More importantly, the children knew neither what the kindergarten would be like nor the way they would be expected to behave. After the transition, children who were already in the new setting shared their views about the school in terms of rules and the material they utilised in the classroom.

## **Transition Research with Teachers, Parents and Children**

Through the use of classroom observations, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, Chan (2012) explored the expectations of kindergarten and primary school teachers and parents in light of the transition to primary school in Hong Kong. These expectations focused on children's preparedness in five different domains namely, pre-academic skills, social skills, self-sufficiency skills, personal qualities and conduct. Preschoolers and first graders were also interviewed to gather information about their views of this period of change. Results indicated that the parents of kindergarten were concerned about academic skills and personal qualities for the forthcoming shift while kindergarten teachers highlighted the importance of self-sufficiency skills (e.g., autonomy, independence). There were differences between the students' current performance and adults' expectations mainly in academic skills and self-discipline. Primary school teachers reported being concerned about discipline, attention span and self-sufficiency skills in classroom. It is notable that all adults reported being worried about the change to a stricter learning environment and the effect this might have on their children. Issues such as longer school hours and the amount of homework were highlighted by preschool and primary school parents. Interestingly, children mainly emphasized issues regarding the amount of subjects and homework they have in first grade. It would have been helpful however, to know the interview-process used by the researcher. Children are very sensitive to strangers (e.g., establishing a conversation with the researcher) resulting in potential biased-information. The author failed to describe in a precise way the process he followed to ensure qualitative rigour not only in the data-analysis, but also at the data-collection stage.

In a similar study, Latte (2012) investigated not only the practices implemented for this change but also the transition-related policies carried out in two different American schools in order to facilitate the transition. Interviews, observations and reviews of documents were the main strategies utilised for these purposes. In order to explore the policies implemented, administrators were also included in this study making it unique among the transition literature. Six parents, seven children, four teachers and two administrators were included in the study. Results revealed a general awareness/consensus regarding the importance of implementing transition activities during this period that took into account the contextual factors of each school, but indicated that the activities implemented were not enough to support this transition and that further implementation needed to be considered. Better teacher training specifically for this period was needed. Parents expressed their interest in being more involved in the transition process while

teachers were keen to establish a closer communication between preschool and primary school staff. Responses from children reflected comfort when they met the new school they were going to attend to by highlighting similarities and differences between their kindergarten and the preschool. It could be argued however, that this study represents a description of policies in light of this transition process rather than an attempt to associate the effect of such policies on the process. Moreover, caution is needed when interpreting these results because of the schools selected. As both schools are located in districts with high poverty rates, the government requires them to develop and run a specific transition programme, and the results may not reflect to a great extent the way in which transition happens in other preschool programmes. These limitations call for the need to carry out further research.

### **Transition Research with Headteachers**

In Australia, Noel (2012) investigated the transition activities carried out in three different primary schools by interviewing their headteachers. Results revealed that the headteachers were aware of the importance of the transition process, but the activities proposed and implemented only met the minimal criteria suggested by transition research. The headteachers established communication with families by providing information prior to enrolment, tours around the school and information about their policies and programmes offered by the school. However, most of these activities were carried out without considering a family's needs with regard to this transition but focused instead on normal enrolment procedures. Two headteachers revealed strong efforts to promote nurturing relations with teachers and parents while only one of the headteachers mentioned a continuous collaboration between preschool and primary school staff during this transition. None of the participants had a specific transition plan to help children and families. Although this study offers important information about this period based on the perceptions of headteachers, the small sample used might represent a strong limitation. To the knowledge of the author of this dissertation, this was one of the first efforts to obtain views from administrators in the large body of transition research. However it would have been important to gather more opinions in different educational centres to obtain a bigger and broader perspective of how transition is experienced by headteachers in this region. The views obtained could also have been contrasted and/or complemented with the views of children and parents with regard to the activities carried out by the administrators. As a result, more general, reliable and conclusive statements could have been reached.

Overall, the body of transition research reviewed here has provided important information about this period of change based on a number of combinations in the way authors gathered data. This empirical evidence supports the idea that the community members play a major role in this shift by carrying out different practices. The interconnection not only of the ecologies, that is, preschool and primary school, but also the interpersonal links between members involved could lead to the development of effective interventions to support families and children in this shift. The studies reviewed in this section, have also offered strong foundations to support the development of further research focused on the creation of effective intervention plans and programmes. The following section explores the literature which critically analyses and appraises the advantages and disadvantages of different types of interventions implemented in schools.

### **Benefits of Interventions in Preschool Transition**

Transition literature incorporates a wide range of studies that have investigated a great number of variables on children, teachers and parents during this period of shift. Research has also established that this transition period, and the persons involved, can be very well supported when transition intervention is adequately designed with empirical-based evidence. An intervention is defined as a set of actions designed in collaboration in order to produce a desired outcome focusing on a number of variables involved in this transition process and based on a predetermined goal (Pianta, Kraft-Sayre & Rimm-Kauffman, 2001).

An intervention may focus on a range of implemented actions, such as a complete transition programme or provide a set of transition-related knowledge and practices to parents, teachers or headteachers. This knowledge offered, aims at explaining the effect of this transition process considering policies and practices that research dictates as effective in order to support along this shift.

For instance, Lee & Gogh (2012) undertook an action-research with 14 five and six-year-old children in Singaporean preschool centres. Researchers' interests focused on helping children familiarise themselves with buying their own meals (and all the skills associated with that activity) which they would have to do on their own once they were in primary school. The main project carried out by the researcher was a visit to primary school, and the preparation of material for the children was an integral part. The learning project was designed to promote the development of social, emotional and cognitive skills on children as a preparation for primary school. The creation of a "newsletter" was

designed as a follow up activity in order to let parents know about their child's activity. Note taking, photographs and observation records were the main methods used to gather data in classrooms. The data gathered revealed strong benefits of this activity in light of the transition to primary school. Not only did the children have a reflection-time so they can share their experiences on the activities developed promoted by the researchers, but also, their experiences were related to what they would experience in first grade. Some parents were concerned about their child's ability to respond to the academic demands (e.g., literacy and numeracy) of first grade. The authors reported that these experiences helped shape children's attitudes towards primary school. Parents reported that this activity helped reduce to some extent the anxiety provoked by this period of change.

Berlin, Dunning and Dodge (2011) assessed the efficacy of a four-week summer programme aimed at preparing children for their transition to kindergarten. The programme focused mainly on literacy, numeracy, school routines, parental involvement and children's social skills across four different low-income public schools in the US. The research followed a randomised control trial design where 60 children were placed in the experimental group, while 40 were allocated to the control group. The main feature of this programme was a half-day of classroom activities prior to the entry to kindergarten. Teachers were supported by specialists in involving families in children's education. Home visits were performed by these specialists in an attempt to help families during this period of change. Results indicated that this programme helped the development of social skills for girls but, surprisingly, not for boys. Based on what kindergarten teachers reported, this programme did not appear to have a significant impact on children's efficacy on academic demands, nevertheless a significant effect on the ability to adapt to school routines was observed on children participating in this programme. One of the main limitations of this study is that the children included belonged to a category of children at risk of academic failure, which not only makes the generalisation of data difficult, but also the application of such results to other populations. Moreover, the study did not include a base-line assessment of the children's cognitive and social domains which made it impossible to measure the impact of such programmes in these areas.

In an interesting study, and rather different from western literature, a play-integrated preparatory programme was implemented in order to help children transit to first grade of primary school in Hong Kong. Li et al. (2013) used a randomised control trial research design including 143 families. Levels of happiness and anxiety as well as psychological adjustment were measured in children. Results indicated a decrease in levels

of worry and increased levels of happiness six weeks and three months after the intervention in the control and the experimental group. Although the authors reported no immediate effect as a result of the intervention play-integrated programme, -with no statistically significant differences in the three measurements between groups observed, they claimed that the experimental group reported more happiness and less anxiety than the control group. In addition, the parents of the experimental group perceived fewer difficulties in the psychological adjustment of their children. However, there are some limitations in this study. The authors claimed that in order for children to have a smooth transition, they need to develop self-control skills so they can cope with the potential stressful and anxious situations when transitioning, nevertheless this was not measured in this study. Furthermore, authors claimed that the programme served this purpose, however no measure with regard to self-awareness, self-control or self-efficacy was carried out.

Pierce and Bruns (2013) offered a thorough analysis of two approaches used in preschool and kindergarten as effective frameworks under which transition to first grade can be conceived and the community can be supported. The recognition response (R&R) system focused on identifying the needs of preschoolers in order to design effective interventions which would address such needs, whilst the response to intervention (R&I) system was designed to develop an intervention programme based on an assessment of student's needs in primary school. Overall, the analysis indicated a number of similarities that are worth highlighting in light of the transition to first grade. An early and accurate identification of the needs of children is essential. Teachers carry out their practices based on an evidence-based curriculum. Children who do not receive any additional intervention to address their specific needs will still have to be monitored. Students who have not mastered a set of skills require an ongoing intervention process to ensure their progress. The link between home and school, and the establishment of positive relationships between these communities were strongly emphasised. Overall, the authors concluded that the integration of these two systems in the preschool transition process may offer a number of positive benefits in designing interventions.

Hart (2013) implemented two different programmes to help children behaviourally at-risk transitioning to kindergarten in American preschool centres and evaluated their efficacy. Fifty children were identified and allocated to two different groups (high and low intervention) in order to receive the transition programme designed. Programme A (high intervention) comprised a special focus on children's behavioural, socio-emotional and academic skills development. A four-week summer programme before the start of

kindergarten, a weekly information session for parents before and after the entrance to kindergarten, as well as monthly school meetings were carried out. Programme B (low intervention) offered the same parent information sessions but did not have the summer programme or the schools consultations. Parents and teachers assessed the children's behavioural, socio-emotional and academic skills. Classroom observations were also carried out. The results indicated fewer behavioural and academic problems for children in the high intervention programme than in programme B. As for behavioural impairment, parent involvement and social competence, no significant differences between the two groups were found. The high intervention group showed better behavioural adaptation during the first year of kindergarten. Parents showed a major involvement in the high intervention groups arguably having a positive effect in helping children during this period. However, further studies are needed in the future to focus on the attendance rate. Parental absenteeism had an effect on the data-collection phase in this study and this could affect the application of such results to a wider population.

Based on the Interactive Systems Framework proposed by Wandersman et al. (2008), Smythe-Leistico et al. (2013) implemented a transition programme in collaboration with teachers, families and research staff from an American university. Wandersman et al. proposed three main systems: the *Synthesis and Translation System* which lands research findings into practical applications; the *Support System* which focuses on training the personnel involved; and the *Delivery System* which deals with the actual application in the field. Preliminary results from a broader project indicated a major family involvement as well as an increase in perceptions of community-based support throughout the transition period. An increased enrolment-rate was also observed during the implementation of this programme. The authors pointed out that a sense of community-school collaboration was improved as well as the self-efficacy perceived by parents with regard to their child's education. However, one of the limitations of this study is the fact that no direct assessments of these elements have yet been carried out. These preliminary arguments are based on the authors' claims and it is unclear how far the effects observed were due to the implementation of the programme.

Although Turunen's (2012) study focused on the transition from early education setting to preschool level (i.e., an earlier transition than that of preschool to primary school, which is the main focus of the this thesis), it is worth noting the significant results obtained given that it might open a new line of research where individual plans of intervention can be considered in shifting to first grade. Results from Turunen's study, might be in line with

parents' views on the transition to primary school. This author investigated the extent to which individual planning was beneficial during the transition from early education care to preschool, given the fact that individual planning at preschool level is mandatory in Finland. Further, the lack of research with regard to individual planning in early childhood during this transition was also a strong justification for this study. The author interviewed six educators in order to explore the way in which individual planning was carried out. Perceptions about individual planning were also gathered from eleven parents. Results from this study suggested that parents felt effectively listened by teachers when they were constantly involved in school activities. Their experience of their involvement with their child's education was also shared, but they were not aware of the individual planning that the school carried out to help their child in this transition. The teachers revealed that as a result of individual planning they met parents more often during the year. Participants reported that in order to carry out such plan, an interdisciplinary and collaborative work is needed. Working with a child with special needs requires collaboration between a child specialist, the early education teacher, the preschool teacher and the family. The small sample used in this study makes it difficult to draw more general conclusions. Nevertheless, its findings are particularly interesting in light of the early childhood to preschool transition, suggesting the likelihood to replicate this study but in the shift to first grade.

In working with kindergarten level, Konerza (2013) assessed parents with regard to the readiness and development of children in order to make the transition to school after the implementation of the "Gearing Up for Kinder Programme" in an American school. Children's literacy skills (e.g., letter identification and numeracy) were also assessed by the researcher. This programme promotes general *readiness* for school without a particular emphasis on the transition process. The author carried out a pre, post and post-post assessment of 75 parents, divided into a control and an experimental group, by administering the "Practical Parent Assessment of School Readiness survey" which focused on five different developmental domains. Results indicated that the programme did not produce significant differences between the groups in four out of five domains relating to children's readiness. The social domain was the only one where significant differences were found. Konerza argued that the programme implemented was heavily focused on the development of social activities and thus had a direct effect on those skills. He did not find any significant differences between groups in relation to children's literacy skills. However, the lack of random assignment of participants to each group represents one of

the main limitations for this study. The small size of the sample is another factor that could have affected the results. In conclusion, the author suggested that the lack of significant effects of the programme was because the main curriculum implemented in the school had been carefully planned with effective content and practices. Based on this evidence, it can be observed that implementation of a complete programme can have a direct effect on specific children's skills depending on the main aim of such intervention. It would also be important to analyse the research that has shown a number of different combined outcomes which are triggered by working closely with one specific person in this process. For instance, an intervention directed at teachers might have an effect on children, while an intervention targeted at families might have positive outcomes in children's education and the teacher-parent relationship.

For instance, Giallo et al., (2010) reported that the implementation of transition programmes (i.e., aimed at providing transition practices, establishing home-school links and fostering children's development) resulted in a higher rate of parents' self-efficacy perception which in turn led to a greater involvement in their child's education. The authors also concluded that when parents are provided with information regarding this transition, they become more interested and tend to establish a more frequent and active home-school interaction.

Parents' involvement in transition activities has been associated with significant outcomes with regard to the acquisition of effective transition-related parental practices. Some studies have suggested that parents can become aware of the importance of the transition process after participating in transition programmes (Carida, 2011; Urbina, 2006), which leads to a greater participation in school-related activities with their children. Interestingly, some studies have reported the interest of parents in this process and specifically with regard to their child's education (Dockett & Perry, 2007). This interest and awareness have been closely related to their quest for additional information about this process of change so they can help their child (Wildenger & McIntyre, 2010).

When parents attended parental-group sessions provided by a group of researchers during the transition period, they developed a set of important skills that enabled them to support their children in a more effective way (Stormshak, Kaminski & Goodman, 2002). This attendance to specialized sessions has been associated with a positive impact on school readiness and success not only in school adjustment but also in academic life (Schulting, Malone & Dodge, 2005). Although a certain level of 'anxiety' and stress has

been reported in families during the change from one school to another (Hanson et al., 2000; Rosenkoetter et al., 2009), the participation of parents within the school scenario has led to the establishment of increased communication with teachers. This family involvement has been acknowledged as a very important link to be created and maintained along school years (Rimm-Kauffman & Pianta, 2000). Further, providing information sessions to parents has also been associated with effective support in this period for both children and parents (Kane, 2008; Turunen, 2012).

As suggested by Stormont et al. (2005), parents need to be involved in transition activities in schools. LaParo, Kraft-Sayre and Pianta (2003) argue that when a series of transition activities are offered to parents, they are likely to attend and take part, showing their interest not only in their children but in supporting them during the transition. The need to create and build significant relationships and bridges between families and school has, always been highlighted in the literature as an important practice during this transition (Fabian & Dunlop, 2007; Pianta, 2000). McIntyre et al. (2007) showed that the majority of the families participating in their study wanted more involvement in the transition to kindergarten-planning, and more information about kindergarten readiness and the ways in which they could support their child. While research has provided strong evidence of the enormous benefits to parents who participate in home-school activities and help their children during this shift, it has also shown how teachers can help significantly during this period of change.

A number of studies have revealed a variety of benefits that transition intervention can have for teachers (Hausken & Rathburn, 2001). Some of these benefits focus on different elements such as awareness, knowledge, educational practices and community interactions. An increasing awareness and knowledge among teachers about the implications of such a period has been associated with the implementation of more effective transition practices (LaParo, Pianta & Cox, 2000; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008). Studies have also reported that when teachers are informed about this period they become aware of its importance and are more able to help children and their families (Carida, 2011). Teachers who have participated in transition interventions have acquired new educational practices to their repertoire.

Some studies have focused on examining practices that teachers currently report and investigated the effect of these during this period when they implement them (Rous, et al., 2010). Surprisingly, the implementation of transition practices has shown to have an effect on children's school adjustment, and on their academic and personal skills

development, as well as on parent involvement (Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000). Other studies have reported a reduced number of teachers' transition practices, however, when teachers are included in intervention programmes, the acquisition of new practices has been observed (LoCasale-Crouch, et al., 2008).

With regard to community interactions, another benefit that has clearly been observed is that teachers that participated in transition interventions have shown a major involvement with families (LaParo, Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2003). This major involvement with families has resulted in better collaborations among members of the community which have been associated as a key element to support this transition (Claes, 2010; Kreider, 2002; Peters et al., 2009). Once teachers are aware of this shift, they are more likely to carry out more transition activities in the educational scenario, which has an effect not only on children, but also on their families (Kreider, 2002).

Children are also positively affected by their interactions with teachers. Pianta and Stuhlman (2004) explored the associations between closeness and conflict in teacher-child interactions in first grade. Findings suggested that this relationship had a positive impact on a child's ability to develop and acquire the necessary social skills for success at school. Further, positive teacher-child relationships were also associated with better cognitive outcomes (Rosenkoetter et al., 2009). Rous et al., (2010) argue that teachers who use transition activities are more able to have a positive impact on academic and social outcomes in children. Further, an additional development of children's emotional skills has also been observed based on teacher-child interaction which in turn has an effect on a successful school adjustment (Denham, 2006; Mashburn & Pianta, 2006). It is interesting to note that when curriculum continuity is considered during this transition (e.g., Denmark, Sweden and France), social and emotional skills in children have significantly been enhanced (Moreno & Dongen, 2006).

When Tudge et al., (2003) examined children's engagement in activities in the first year of school, they reported that a children's greater perception of self-direction led to more engagement in classroom activities which in turn influenced better academic performance. Similarly, Rosenkoetter et al., (2009) asserted that children's engagement in transition activities before starting kindergarten was associated with a more positive teacher-child relationship and consequently, with a better academic achievement.

Taken together, these findings provide strong evidence about the effectiveness of interventions during this shift. These studies show how designing and planning an effective

intervention during this period can lead to the establishment of a framework within which children, teachers and parents can not only successfully transit through the period of change, but also build a sense of community needed for this change. Research on children, parents, teachers and intervention programmes, supports the idea that this phase of change can be experienced in a smoother way if all the elements involved are considered.

Research on children provides useful information about how children experience this stage of life and the extent to which they can benefit from interventions. Research on parents and teachers emphasises the important role these adults play in the change and how their involvement, awareness, interaction, knowledge and practice can greatly benefit not only themselves, but also children. Research focused on interventions has also provided a theoretical baseline for the way in which effective interventions need to be carried out and the elements that need to be considered.

The role that parents play in their child education is an important factor to consider in not only formal schooling in general, but also during this transition to primary school. Research has shown that parents could maximise children's potential not only in terms of personal development, but also regarding academic performance (Rathburn & Hausken, 2001; Stormont et al., 2005). According to a number of studies, it is of the utmost importance to involve parents in children's formal schooling (Barnett & Taylor, 2008; Fabian & Dunlop, 2007). Parents and teachers must develop a close link whereby an important exchange of information can take place (Einarsdottir, 2010; Giallo, 2010). Specifically during this transition, there is evidence to support the idea that major involvement of parents during this process has substantially helped children to make a smooth transition into primary school (LaParo, Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2003). Parents must be included during this process in such a way that they hold enough information with regard to the implications of this shift (Berlin, Dunning & Dodge, 2011). Research suggests that this involvement must take place in a continuum so as to help children transit from preschool (Barnett & Taylor, 2008). Specifically, specialists in this transition suggest that parental involvement must start at the beginning of preschool following the shift to primary school (Stormshak, Kaminski & Goodman, 2002). Once in primary school, parents' involvement must prevail so as to ensure and help children experience an adequate adaptation to the new environment (Fabian & Dunlop, 2007).

Community members are situated at the core of this transition process where the interconnections are of the utmost importance during this change. This community consists not only of individuals but also of different contexts/ecologies such as preschool, primary

school, home and neighbourhood, which are core elements of a smooth transition, according to Rimm-Kauffman and Pianta's (2000) model. These ecologies as pointed out by a number of authors (Ahtola et al., 2010; Chan, 2012; Dockett and Perry et al., 2007; Wildenger & McIntyre, 2010), play a major role along this period of change. The need to create the links among these contexts is suggested as a major intervention in this transition period. This linking process has been recognized in a number of studies which urge the need to promote this bridging between ecologies (Kreider, 2002) in order to promote a smooth transition for children and families. This ecological view is one of the fundamental theoretical models in which research on transition has relied on so as to understand and intervene in this change.

### **Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of Human Development**

Urie Bronfenbrenner's model (1979) provides a theoretical framework that describes the way in which contextual factors influence human development especially since early childhood. This model highlights the need to understand the contexts, known as ecologies, in which children grow and develop, and conceptualizes child development as a permanent change in the way a child perceives and interacts with his/her environment.

With this ecological model it is necessary to highlight two main elements. On one side, this model points out the gradual accommodation of the subject who is in constant growth and development while on the other, it emphasises the changing situations of the context that surrounds him/her (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) and the direct influence these have on a child's development. This mutual accommodation derives from an ongoing process of interaction which is influenced by the establishment of continuous relationships occurring at different levels among ecologies.

Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994) highlight two important aspects that are worth considering: a) the subject cannot be considered as a passive entity merely influenced by the environment, but rather, the subject must be seen as a dynamic and developmental entity who is progressively adhering to the ecologies promoting a restructuration of the world she/he lives in; and b) this child-ecologies link is largely a reciprocal two-way interaction system. It is assumed that this constant interaction must have a regular basis over time so as to consider that the environment can have an effect on the individual. This constant interaction is what the author calls *proximal processes*.

An important feature of this model is the important role of the interconnections among ecologies across time. It is argued that it is not sufficient to consider merely the contexts in which the individual lives, but also the need to be connected (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). In order to experience an adequate development, it is necessary to create links between the contexts in which the human being develops (e.g., home, school, neighbourhood, and parent’s workplace). Bearing in mind that growth and development are conceived as ongoing processes, it is to highlight that these links must be kept across time at different stages in individual’s life. Given that human being is considered as an entity in constant change, time is an essential element to take into account. The role of the interconnectedness of ecologies across time is an essential element in this model to enhance person’s development.

The person is placed in an active role interacting with his/her immediate environment. This environment at the same time possesses a number of characteristics that need to be analysed. Bronfenbrenner suggests that the environment is complex due to the fact that it extends beyond the immediate contexts of the individual so as to widen the interconnections with other ecologies. The author proposes the ecological environment as a series of concentric circles placing the child at the core of the model.

**Figure 1** Bronfenbrenner’s Model of Human Ecological Development modified by Dunlop



*Figure 1.* Diagram by A.W. Dunlop (2002), based on Bronfenbrenner’s systems model. In Fabian, H. and Dunlop, A. (2007). Outcomes of good practice in transition processes for children entering primary school. Working papers in Early Childhood Development.

This ecological model adapted by Dunlop follows the initial four different levels which are linked together in order to foster, shape and influence human development. According to Bronfenbrenner (1994), the *macrosystem* refers to the cultural and ideological context such as government, political institutions and social institutions, which influence and are influenced by the constant interaction between systems. He claims:

The Macrosystem consists of the overarching pattern of micro,-meso,- and Exosystem characteristics of a given culture or subculture, with particular reference to the belief systems, bodies of knowledge, material resources, customs, life-styles, opportunity structures, hazards and life course options that are embedded in each of these broader system. (p. 40)

In this model, Mexican government policies (e.g., educational, social, financial), ideologies (e.g., religion), social institutions (e.g., health, welfare, labour, educational) and cultural traits, have a great influence on individual's development across their life span. Specifically at this macrosystem level, this ecology is shaped by the general law of education, by the government institutions that provide educational services at preschool level in Mexico, by the Catholic religious beliefs that prevail in the country and by the social customs and values of Mexican society. Parental employment is also an element to consider, given that research provides evidence of the association between socio-economic status (SES) and a child's general education, as well as the transition to first grade. At this level is where the educational policies that established the preschool as mandatory are inserted. In this same level, it is suggested that the policies regarding the promotion of a successful transition must be grounded. According to Bronfenbrenner, these ecologies also influence the ecologies found in the *exosystem*.

The exosystem refers to the ecologies in which the child is not directly included such as social services, social programmes and local educational policies, however, decisions made at this level may have an effect on inner contexts where subject is included and more likely to have a direct effect. The author asserts:

The exosystem comprises the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings, at least one of which does not contain the developing person, but in which events occur that directly influences processes within the immediate setting in which the developing person lives (e.g., for a child, the relationships between the home and the parent's workplace; for a parent, the relation between school and the neighbourhood peer group). (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 40)

In the Mexican context, the exosystem can be better understood if a number of elements are considered, such as the child's local community practices, social services

providers and local school policies. In addition, at this level we could find normal school enrolment procedures, school social events, community social gatherings as well as services and events organized by governmental institutions in the child's neighbourhood. At this level, important elements emerge given that the parents' workplace could have an effect on the way in which parents get involved in their child's transition. This scenario represents a key point in this process where parents need flexibility to attend school meetings which enhance the school-teacher relationship and help establish the family-school bridge necessary for the transition. At the same time and according to this view, the system influences the microsystem.

The *microsystem* is considered the level at which close and direct interactions take place. These interactions comprise the children's relationships with parents, relatives, teachers, close friends and co-workers. As Bronfenbrenner (1994) comments:

A microsystem is a pattern of activities, social roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face setting with particular physical, social and symbolic features that invite, permit or inhibit engagement in sustained, progressively more complex interaction with, and activity in the immediate environment. (p. 39)

At a practical level, this microsystem comprises the child's home, his/her school, family, teachers and group of friends. According to this model, decisions taken not only by parents but also by teachers and headteachers have an immediate effect on a child's development. This is what is regarded as the ecologies-subject interaction and reciprocity. Decisions made by parents may have an effect on a child's performance in this transition period and have an impact not only at home but also in the educational scenario. Conversely, decisions taken by teachers may have an immediate effect on the child and its performance in the educational ecology. At this level and within the educational scenario, namely preschool and primary school, teachers can ensure children develop the necessary skills to make the transition, while at home, parents can have a direct influence on the readiness of the child. A child's friendship with his/her peers, and the way in which these relations influence this transition process, is also embedded in this system.

Finally, the *mesosystem* encompasses interactions between two or more ecologies. That is to say, microsystems can be included in this ongoing interaction. Bronfenbrenner argues the following:

The mesosystem comprises the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings containing the developing person (e.g., the relations between home and school, school and workplace, etc.). In other words, a mesosystem is a system of microsystems. (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 40)

In the Mexican context, the mesosystem comprises the links teachers establish with families to engage them in their child's educational activities. Headteachers' policies may fit into this category, when their decisions directly influence the family dynamic by encouraging (or preventing) more involvement during this transition. In this system, the interaction between parents and teachers is considered of the utmost importance in ensuring children's readiness for entrance to first grade. This system represents one of the essential principles for this transition where effective interactions among ecologies need to be encouraged in order to help make this transition smoother.

Although the ecological model offers many advantages in understanding transition, there is also the need to bear in mind a couple of elements to consider as the main critiques. Based on Gibson's (1997) ecological perception framework, Tudge et al. (1997) proposed a number of limitations of Bronfenbrenner's model. These authors argue that Bronfenbrenner did not take into account an essential action of the subject at the cognitive level, where he/she develops an interpretation (based on perception) of the social context rather than merely accepting what is observed and acting in consequence. As suggested by Gibson, Bronfenbrenner also failed to consider that the subject's perception is mediated by the cultural background and the set of beliefs the subject has and uses in order to create the interpretation of the physical context. According to Tudge et al., Gibson highlights a strong perceiver-perceived relationship where one of the main features is the change over time across physical environments. One of the strongest critiques to this theory is made by Tudge, Mokrova, Harfield and Karnik (2009) who emphasise the lack of empirical evidence in Bronfenbrenner's work (i.e., developed by himself). It is argued that the studies Bronfenbrenner used to develop his theory were not made to test a theory. They also argue a lack of rigour in the applicability of this theory because Bronfenbrenner did not provide a clear guide for the testing of his theory under rigorous scientific conditions.

In spite of the above-mentioned critiques, Bronfenbrenner's model provides significant advantages for the study of human development and facilitates the understanding of transition processes in a person, making its application easier in a variety of areas. For instance, the ecological model has been utilised in studies of violence and health (Krug, Mercy, Dahlberg & Zwi, 2002), substance abuse (Caldwell & Darling, 1999), pregnancy and prevention of STD (Meade & Ickovics, 2005) and technology in schools (Zhao & Frank, 2003). As such, and as stated by Koizumi (2000) and Ahtola et al. (2010), this ecological model has been widely used as a framework that explains this

period of change between ecologies. This model offers an adequate framework to understand the child development given that it offers important opportunities for children to grow up, develop and progress through a series of not only physical changes but also changes in roles, attitudes and interrelationships (McCubbins, 2004).

Although Bronfenbrenner emphasised the study of human development based on this model, a more detailed analysis of the implications and benefits of such framework in preschool transition has been offered by a number of authors (Dockett and Perry et al., 2007; Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000; Rimm-Kauffman & Pianta, 2000; Rous, Hallam, McCormick & Cox, 2011, Rosenkoetter et al., 2009).

### **Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition**

Based on Bronfenbrenner's model, Rimm-Kauffman and Pianta (2000) proposed the Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition as a theoretical framework in which preschool transition can be framed in order to understand and analyse the interactions and relationships occurring during this period (Stormshak, Kaminski & Goodman, 2002). These authors highlight the importance of this idea by arguing that "the development of this ecology itself is a key focus for understanding transition processes and outcomes" (p. 500). It is also important to note that this framework has been successfully applied in the context of transitions in a range of studies (Corsaro et al., 2003; Fabian & Dunlop, 2002; Hausken & Rathburn, 2001; Regena, 2004), that emphasise the importance of its application.

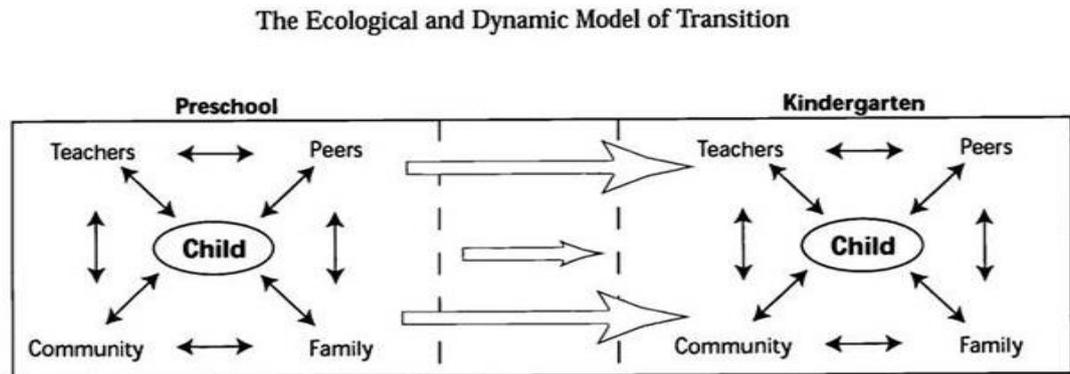
This model is based upon a complex set of elements and variables involved in the transition period. Preschool children experience a physical change when entering primary first grade (Carida, 2011). This represents a major challenge, not only because they are no longer be in a familiar environment and have to adapt to a new one, but because the interrelations they use to have completely change (Curby, Rimm-Kauffman & Cameron, 2009). Children's relationships change when they leave the social connections they used to have (e.g., group of friends, teachers) in preschool. In addition, by the end of preschool year, they have already established a close relationship with the teacher who has become a significant figure (Copple & Bredekamp, 2006), a relationship which will change as well. Moreover, the home-school link already established will suffer a significant shift.

In the new scenario, the primary school, children face new challenges. They need to adapt not only to a new physical environment but also make new friends and establish a relationship with the new teacher and adults involved (Rimm-Kauffman, 2000). In addition, they no longer have the opportunity to play. Instead, they have to show and use their academic skills to fulfil the requirements of an outcome-based pedagogy (Docket & Perry, 2007; Einarsdottir, 2010). In addition, a new parent-teacher relationship will have to be established (Wildenger & McIntyre, 2010). These are not easy tasks (arguably they are not easy for parents or teachers either) and require a set of cognitive, social and emotional skills that children may or not may have, depending upon a number of variables such as early educational experiences and family background.

Overall, the above-mentioned conditions set the background which this model relies on in order to explain and better understand the transition process. A number of studies have highlighted a range of physical, cognitive, social and emotional elements to consider during this shift. One of the key elements this model emphasises are the links and the interconnections that need to be established and enhanced between child, schools, teacher, parents and neighbourhood in order to tackle the challenges that transition represents. Rimm-Kauffman and Pianta (2000) assert that “The central distinction of this model is its emphasis on the development of relationships over time” (p. 499). Expanding on this key point, the authors argue that:

The Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition defines the transition to school in terms of the dynamic qualities of the transition ecology—the interconnectedness of relationships among child characteristics; and peer, family, school, and neighbourhood contexts—and how these connections develop and change. (Rimm-Kauffman and Pianta, 2000, p. 501)

**Figure 2** Main Elements of the Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition



*Figure 2.* Graphic description of the main elements involved in the ecologies considered in this transition namely preschool and kindergarten. From Kraft-Sayre, M. and Pianta, R. (2000). "Enhancing the transition to kindergarten" Charlottesville: University of Virginia, National Centre for Early Development & Learning.

According to Kraft-Sayre and Pianta (2000), this model is based on five guiding principles:

1. *Foster relationships and resources.*  
Relationships are conceived of as key elements that need to be promoted since they play a major role in enhancing a smooth transition.
2. *Promote continuity from preschool to kindergarten.*  
Fundamentally three elements need to be considered to assure continuity between home, preschool and kindergarten. Above all, the link between these elements will promote continuity.
3. *Focus on family strengths.*  
Strengths on families can be enhanced and supported by establishing home-school links.
4. *Tailor practices to individual needs.*  
Transition practices will need to be carried out taking into account the strengths and weaknesses of families, children and teachers.
5. *Form collaborative relationships.*  
The establishment of a collaborative community is a keypoint in this model and needs to involve the main persons involved in this transition such as teachers, headteachers and families.

This model highlights and considers a number of ecological elements that help to understand the implications of the preschool transition. It is necessary to point out that from this perspective, a child's evolution is considered as a progressive differentiation of activities, roles, and interactions which take place in a direct relation with different systems

(Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000). Consequently, Bronfenbrenner (1994) argues that the most significant relationships of the child are grounded in the adults with whom he/she has a continuous and constant interaction. Based on this idea, the family, community and group of professionals from the educational scenario, represent the main social groups with which children develop (Urbina, 2006). These interactions have a major impact not only on a child's development, but also on this transition.

The main individuals of the transition period are involved from this perspective (Rous, et al., 2010; Stormshak et al., 2002). For instance, the macrosystem can be seen as the ideological framework that shapes the values and beliefs of a certain social group in which family, children and teachers are embedded and that involves their interactions (e.g., culture, government policies and ideologies). The beliefs of parents not only about the importance of their child's education but also about this transition are included in this system. The exosystem can be seen as the ecologies that may affect the child even when he/she is not directly inserted into such scenarios (e.g., parents' workplace, and parents' friends). In the microsystem the direct and constant child interaction (i.e., interpersonal relationships) includes the relationships established (or yet to be established) during this transition with relatives, preschool/primary teacher, parents and peer group in preschool and primary school. The relationship between home and preschool/primary school as well as the relationship between the child and his/her groups of friends, are importantly located in this mesosystem.

It is argued that home and school are two ecologies that constantly interact despite the fact that the influence of one on the other cannot be directly observed (Epstein & Sanders, 2000). That is to say, what happens at home undoubtedly has an effect on school and vice versa (McCarthy, 2000; Roopnarine et al., 2006). These two ecologies have different goals and objectives given their own nature, but share one goal in light of this transition process: an adequate development and a smooth adjustment of the child. Understanding this reciprocity across time is of the utmost importance when children transition to primary school.

It is important to address the implications of this model for the transition process in the Mexican context. In the preschool ecology, a number of variables need to be considered, such as syllabus, teacher-child interactions, supervisions, teaching pedagogical approach, performance assessment, home-school links and specific educational policies established for this educational level. In this respect, one of the major elements in the current socio-cultural situation in Mexico City is the mandatory status of the preschool

level (INEE, 2008). This status places serious implications to consider in light of the importance of the first stage of formal schooling (UNESCO, 2011) and the way in which children might be transitioning into first grade. These conditions are part of the exosystem and have an effect on the community members, namely families, children, teachers and headteachers. Under this ecological model it is necessary not only to consider all the actors involved in this change, but also to develop strong interconnections between these members and with the other ecology, the primary school.

Primary school has its own features as another ecology whose regulations are established by national policies dictated by the Ministry of Education in Mexico and which are embedded in the macrosystem. At a lower level (the exosystem), a primary school has its own particular elements such as educational programmes, syllabus, internal regulations, professional staff, academic assessments, supervisions and home-school practices. An appropriate link between these two ecologies is of the utmost importance for the transition under this framework. Another ecology which might need to be considered during this process is the child's home.

Embedded into the microsystem, the first nuclear social group where the child initiates his/her development is *home*. This ecology has also its own features which are strongly rooted in the parents' beliefs. For instance, parental practices are based on what parents believe are the most appropriate ways to "educate" their child (Hoover-Dempsey, 1997). The family dynamic is also rooted in such perceptions and has an important effect on a child's personal and academic development. The extent to which parents are interested in their child's education will be strongly influenced by a number of factors such as their own educational experiences (Barnett & Taylor, 2008), socio-economic status (Moreno & Dongen, 2006; UNESCO, 2014) and the value placed on education (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). It is in this microsystem where the notion of preschool transition must be considered.

Under the ecological framework proposed by Rimm-Kauffman and Pianta (2000), effective interconnections across time need to be promoted among these three ecologies which as a result will foster an exchange of important information to make the transition smoother. The members of these communities are considered as experts with regard to a given area. For instance, parents are experts in their child at home, preschool and first grade teachers are experts in the pedagogical field and in the child's performance at school, and children are experts in their own life and experience of this transition. Taken together, these elements form the base-line of this model where the combination of all this

information can be used to produce positive outcomes related to the transition to first grade.

Interesting conclusions can be drawn in light of the previous evidence which focused on this transition from an ecological perspective. The need to have a framework that considers not only the main persons in this process, but also the ecologies in which they are included, has resulted in the constant use of the model proposed by Rimm-Kauffman and Pianta (2000). The characteristics of the individuals, the features of the ecologies as well as the interconnections among these, are at the core of this model. The Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition (Rimm-Kauffman & Pianta, 2000) has been of great help in a variety of studies in order to explore a number of variables included in this transition process across cultural contexts. As a result, its wide use supports the notion of its effectiveness during this period of change. This model has broadly helped to better understand this phenomenon and address effective interventions in consequence.

To understand and effectively intervene in this period of change, the main actors involved need to be taken into account not only by the transition coordinator but also by every educational policy so as to work together towards the establishment of important links that allow an important exchange of information in order to transit through this phase in a smooth way. The ecologies in which the preschoolers and first graders grow, develop and interact must also be considered in light of this shift. Further, these must be considered not only to better understand this stage, but also to plan and design effective interventions across contexts. One of the main elements of the dynamic and ecological model is that contexts will invariably have an impact on children's growth and development which could arguably be cultural-dependant. In this sense, it has been observed that educational policies in preschool and primary school have also an important effect during this transition. However, policies greatly differ among educational systems, contexts and countries. Based upon such premises, it can be suggested that this transition might also be cultural-dependant. The fact that most of the transition research has been done in the US, Europe, Australia and Asia, suggests that the elements established by a given cultural framework, have already been identified in such regions, and that based upon such knowledge, effective interventions have been designed, planned and delivered. However, Latin American region has been underestimated. The lack of transition research in Latin America calls for the need to produce studies regarding this transition. Of the utmost importance is to consider the particularities of the cultural context in which research needs to be carried out. In this way, the social, economic and political conditions of the region that frame this

transition, must be considered at all times to achieve a better and broader understanding of this process. As a result, effective interventions aimed at not only creating educational policies to favour this process, but also smoothing in a more straightforward way the transition to first grade, could be better tailored and delivered. Transition research in Latin America is strongly recommended by different international organizations such as OECD (2007) and UNESCO (2014) as an essential topic to be investigated if the quality of education is to be enhanced and the universal coverage of primary school education is to be achieved.

## **Conclusions**

This chapter has reviewed the importance of preschool transition in children's lives, and the way in which parents, headteachers and teachers are intrinsically involved in this process. One of the most currently accepted definitions for transition is the one proposed by Pianta and Kraft-Sayre (1999) who claim that this period is the process through which children experience a great change from one environment to another very different one, and for which they need knowledge, abilities and skills in order to make a successful move to a new setting. Docket and Perry (2007) offer another closely related definition whereby a transition is a noteworthy change not only in physical terms but also in attitudes, roles and interrelations, in which family and community actively participate. These authors also highlight that this period includes a change of identities and expectations for the persons involved.

Preschool transition has been recognized as an important process to consider for the community involved, and a number of researchers have carried out studies to elucidate the implicated mechanisms in such period. While one body of research has focused on describing the role of a range of variables (e.g., teacher practices, parental style, self-efficacy, curriculum continuity, self-esteem and children's performance) in teachers, headteachers, children and parents, other studies have highlighted the essential element along this period; helping children making a smooth transition to primary school.

Early education is a topic of major worldwide concern (UNESCO, 2007; UNESCO, 2014), and studies have found that designing and planning effective transition interventions may have an important impact on children's personal and academic performance in later years. In light of the main objective established in the second millennium development goal of achieving universal primary education by 2015, ensuring not only coverage but also a high quality of instruction (Moreno & Dongen, 2006;

UNICEF, 2007; UNESCO, 2011; Woodhead & Moss, 2007), this transition to first grade has been identified as a potential contributor in this respect (Moreno & Dongen, 2006; Nelson, 2011; UNESCO, 2007). Therefore, researchers have suggested paying greater attention to this period of important changes. A number of studies have focused on the development of academic competencies (Rous et al., 2010), while other studies have highlighted the positive outcomes that can be reached at a personal level, such as the development of emotional, behavioural and social skills. Overall, research in this topic has demonstrated that specialised intervention can have positive impact on this transition process. It has also shown long-term effects in academic and personal life of children. International research has contributed significantly to the knowledge and understanding of this topic. Researchers from different parts of the world have carried out investigations into the transition period and showed the way in which different contexts, cultures and educational policies impact this process (Fabian & Dunlop, 2007).

The importance of this period is supported by the fact that a number of studies have been carried out in different countries around the world such as England, Iceland, Italy, USA, Australia, Finland and China which have all contributed to the current body of knowledge with regard to this phase. These studies have clearly shown that this transition process is a cross-cultural phenomenon to which greater attention needs to be paid in view of a wide range of variables. However, in light of this literature review it is important to highlight an essential gap in this respect whereby the lack of research in Latin America, seems to be obvious. Only a couple of studies related to this region were found, however their authors usually showed a theoretical reflection rather than a scientific study of the transition process. This gap calls for the need to carry out studies in this area which will importantly contribute to the international literature. The empirical evidence has also shown that by taking into account the cultural factors and particularities of each society, a better understanding can be reached so as to address effective interventions and create educational policies at this stage with preschoolers and first graders. The fact that this phenomenon has been observed and recognized as important in different regions of the world clearly supports the idea that preschool and primary education has not been adequately linked in order to offer a smooth transition. This also suggests the need to make efforts to elucidate the transition process in Latin American contexts to gain a better understanding of the way in which children, parents and teachers experience this change.

This review shows that transition research from different countries shares common factors and differences. The international transition literature has focused on different

subgroups of research that have been identified: studies focused on a) children, b) parents, c) teachers, d) intervention programmes and e) a combination of persons (e.g., teachers and parents, children, parents and teachers, children and teachers and so forth). However, it is important to highlight a clear lack of research focused on headteachers. Very few studies were found that elucidated the role headteachers play in the transition. This calls for the need to further expand the knowledge and understanding of the role of headteachers in this process. In spite of this gap, transition research has stated the importance of teachers, children and parents by identifying the intrinsic characteristics of each subject and the implications during this shift. This has provided a body of knowledge that helps understand this change from a wide range of perspectives.

Research on parents has shown the undoubtedly important role these adults play in the transition process. Parents have an enormous impact in the first early experiences of children which have also the potential to shape children's future lives. Findings suggest that parents can help children transitioning to first grade in a significant way. If parents have the knowledge, understanding and appropriate practices, significant contributions can be made to their children's shift. Studies have shed light on a range of variables to describe parent's involvement through this change, such as perceptions, educational experiences, parental practices and parent-child relationships. Findings support the idea that if parents are involved in this process, they gain the knowledge, understanding and practices needed to help their children. Studies have demonstrated that whenever parents are aware of this period and carry out transition practices, significant and positive outcomes are observed in children.

Preschool and primary teachers are recognised as specialists and potential facilitators of a smooth transition. Studies support the idea that when teachers are aware of this process, they can contribute to making the change smooth. Teachers can acquire and develop a set of useful skills that enable them to help in this process. Teachers' knowledge and practices are two elements highlighted in the literature which are more than important in this process, being essential tools through which an effective action can be delivered. Studies have demonstrated that when teachers carry out effective transition practices, significant gains are observed in children and families. Teacher-child interactions and teachers' expectations have been observed to play a fundamental role during this shift. Further, better conditions for a transition-related intervention were found whenever teachers and parents shared similar expectations and perceptions about this transition. Research shows that the outcomes of such interventions are certainly beneficial to parents

and teachers, but we cannot forget about the main actors in this process, preschool children.

Research specifically carried out with children has shown the positive and negative aspects of the transition. The literature has also shown the advantages for children through the implementation of different intervention programmes during this shift. Research clearly emphasises the potential difficulties which children face when changing from one educational level to another. It has also shed light on the way in which their personal and academic skills can be enhanced if proper intervention is put in place. Significant gains for children have been found whenever adults actively participate in this process and when children are taken into account in the design of such intervention. Literature also supports the view that children's perspectives are of the utmost importance to consider during this process despite the scarce production of studies in this respect. Few studies have focused on gathering children's perceptions where results have been of great importance to understand the way in which children experience this shift. Results from these studies have led to important and effective interventions for this shift. The scarcity of studies in this regard, calls for the need to carry out future studies focused on gathering children's perceptions and exploring the extent to which this information could serve for future effective intervention across a number of contexts (e.g., Latin American) which could potentially lead to the creation and/or modification of educational policies.

Scholars clearly suggest that the more research on transition, the better understanding of this process across contexts. As noted above, empirical data on transition shows different combinations to study this process, however, only one study which included teachers, children, parents and headteachers was found. Results from these studies have enriched the knowledge and understanding with regard to this process by investigating different perspectives on a common process. Researchers have not only focused on obtaining information from the main persons involved namely children, teachers, headteachers and parents, but also made efforts to see the effects that adults can have during this shift when involved in transition-related interventions.

A number of interventions have shown positive outcomes with regard to this period. Interventions reported in the literature range from basic support (e.g., training teachers in transition practices) to more complex support such as the implementation of a whole transition programme in the preschool setting. Studies suggest that by intervening during this process from an ecological perspective, as suggested by Rimm-Kauffman and Pianta (2000), the negative effects on children and families can be ameliorated. The most

important elements highlighted in such interventions have been the inclusion of all the persons during this process as well as the establishment of links among ecologies. Research has revealed a variety of benefits for children, parents and teachers whenever interventions are carried out. Positive benefits include the acquisition of effective parental transition practices, teacher's transition practices, the creation of a transition community through bridging (Kreider, 2002; Peters et al., 2009), awareness of this process among adults and the acquisition and development of academic and personal skills in children. All these benefits have highlighted the advantages of specialised interventions to promote a smooth transition into first grade. Taken together, these findings outline the impact intervention has in a variety of contexts considering the particular needs of each community and its members. Studies focused on developing intervention programmes have highlighted the effectiveness of using an ecological approach to understand and support such a process.

Most authors have relied on this ecological approach, specifically using the Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition (Rimm-Kauffman & Pianta, 2000) to study this phenomenon. Whenever the ecologies and their members have been taken into account into this process, important findings that contribute to the literature on transitions have been obtained. Interestingly, research emphasises the importance not only of studying the different contexts in which children are immersed, but also the interconnections among members as an effective way to make the transition smooth. Of particular interest however, is the fact that one study by Li et al. (2013) was carried out under a rather different theoretical framework. This study was based on the Theory of Cognitive Appraisal (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) which focuses on the way in which people with stress face period of changes. Li et al.'s study was carried out under the assumption that this shift triggers anxiety and stress on preschoolers. Despite this difference in the theoretical approach, the study revealed interesting issues about this phenomenon. A play-integrated preparatory programme promoted a better psychological adjustment during this transition, nevertheless further studies need to be carried out under this theoretical framework. Overall, from an ecological perspective, the interconnectedness of home, preschool, primary school and neighbourhood is recognized as essential to enhance a smooth transition. People involved in each of the contexts largely mentioned, are acknowledged as the principal persons on which the action of intervention must rely. However, it is important to note that by nature, every context is different and thus has a variety of features that make them unique.

Three major gaps were identified in this literature review. First, the scarcity of research in Latin America, and specifically in Mexico, was observed in the transition literature. As previously stated, a body of research has been developed in a number of countries such as Australia, United States, Italy, Greece, Hong Kong, Iceland, United Kingdom and Ireland. In contrast, few studies have been found on this topic in countries such as Venezuela, Nicaragua, Mexico and Colombia. Unfortunately, most of this research has focused on the analysis of international literature on transitions in comparison with national educational policies pertaining to each country rather than on establishing the foundations of transition research in a Latin American context. There is therefore, a clear need to carry out more transition studies as argued by other researchers (Docket & Perry, 2007; Entwisle & Alexander, 1998; Koizumi, 2000; McCubbins, 2004; Moreno & Dongen, 2006; Turunen, 2012). Although international studies have depicted a wide range of underlying mechanisms of this period of change, it is yet to be determined the extent to which such characteristics and needs are similar or different to Mexican preschoolers. Further, the way in which effective interventions need to be planned under the Mexican context, is yet to be known.

Secondly, transition research focused on headteachers has been found to be very limited. Given this limited body of research and considering headteachers' important role in the internal educational policies at preschool and primary school, there is the need to carry out studies focused not only on gathering their perceptions, but also the practices they implement during this period of change. Research in this respect could potentially broaden our understanding about the way in which headteachers can help easing this transition. Finally, no research on transition has specifically considered teachers, parents and headteachers from a mixed-method perspective.

Taken together, these gaps are essential components of the current study. The present study focuses on gathering the perspectives of these three persons from a mixed-method approach in a Latin-American context as the one in Mexico -whose preschool transition process is still virtually unknown. This study will establish whether the conditions reported in the international literature can also be observed and applicable in other contexts specifically that of Mexico. This idea is very much in line with Chun (2003) who argues that studies in the western world must be reviewed to understand and identify their applicability in the eastern world. Although this particular study is not the case, the lack of a broader body of research in eastern societies may resemble that of Latin American societies. Differences in educational policies, social conditions and cultural traits

of the Mexican context will be considered. In order to reflect upon these elements and their implication for the transition process, it is necessary to provide an overview of the current preschool situation in Mexico that can help identify the way in which transition is approached, especially since preschool education has become mandatory for the past nine years.

## **CHAPTER 2: EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT IN MEXICO: PRIMARY SCHOOL AND PRESCHOOL**

### **Introduction**

This chapter offers a review of the particular educational context of preschool and first grade of primary school in Mexico City used for this study. It highlights the main elements around these educational levels offering a general overview of the current situation in terms of current educational policies around this transition.

### **Importance of Early Years of Education**

The Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention of the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), the World Education Forum at Dakar in 2000 and the declaration of Education for All in 1990 (UNESCO, 2007) have framed the importance of early years education for the past 30 years. Early education has been recognized as one of the keypoints which contribute to every country's development. Based upon these worldwide declarations, a variety of programmes and policies have been developed in order to widen education opportunities for children around the world. For instance, the Development Millennium Goals highlight a fundamental objective in terms of worldwide coverage, access and quality of primary education as its second goal. In the words of the United Nations (2000), "...by the year 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling." However is necessary to analyse the available evidence in this respect.

Positive outcomes have been reported in this regard. For instance, 56 million children were enrolled in a 10-year period, an increase from 646 million in 1999 to 702 million in 2009. Although a number of countries around the world have now achieved that goal, there are still some countries that struggle to place all primary-aged children into formal schooling (UNICEF, 2007). It is estimated that around 93 million primary school age children are still out of school and lack basic education (UNICEF, 2007). Based on more recent reports, the goal of giving every child primary school by 2015 is unlikely to be achieved since there are still 57 million children who are denied entrance to this educational level of whom nearly 28 million will not have the opportunity to be enrolled at all (UNESCO, 2014).

Over the last three decades, a great emphasis has been placed on the role that education plays not only in society as a whole (see Jomtien and Dakar forums), but also in an individual's personal life—especially in childhood. It is argued that pre-primary and primary education secures a great range of opportunities for future lifelong learning (Rosenkoetter, 2009; UNESCO, 2011), and as such, governments must ensure that their children have access to early education. Education for children aged five and twelve is universal in all the OECD countries; in half of these countries full enrolment starts between the ages of five and seven (OECD, 2011). A significant increase in enrolment rates has been observed over that past nine years with regard to pre-primary education. An increase of 31% (148 million children) was reported by 2008 in comparison with 1999 rates (UNESCO, 2011), but strongly argued that a great number of children were excluded from these figures. It should be noted that although two regions were mainly involved in this important progress (south and west Asia), some countries such as Nicaragua, Mongolia and South Africa, also reported significant progress in their pre-primary enrolment rates (UNESCO, 2011). However, there is not always a relationship between enrolment rates and quality of education. Although many countries have made great efforts to broaden their coverage, low quality of education is an issue that has not been tackled (UNESCO, 2014). Analysing the increase in enrolment rates in different countries and the quality of education provided goes beyond the scope of this study. Although this duality is not explored in the current study, it is well known that whenever an adequate quality of education is provided, positive outcomes can generally be observed.

Empirical evidence has emphasised the importance of pre-primary education in the early years in different parts of the world. In Bangladesh an experimental group of preschool children in a specific programme were reported to have developed their literacy and math skills in a more significant way (58% more in a standardised test) than their counterparts in the control group (Aboud, 2006). In Nepal, at risk children attending preschool education made significant progress in terms of cognitive skills development (Engle et al., 2007). In Argentina, an increase of 8% in maths and Spanish in third grade performance after having preschool education was reported by Berlinski et al. (2009). Finally, in Myanmar, students enrolled in pre-primary education programme were more successful in enrolling in primary school obtaining better results in exams during the first three years of primary education (Lwin et al., 2004). Overall, this evidence of pre-primary education demonstrates the wide range of benefits that this educational level can have for children. Although positive results in this respect have been described in a number of

worldwide reports, there are still elements to be considered in order to secure the enrolment of preschool-aged children into this educational level.

Education International (2010) provides a number of suggestions for tackling the lack of enrolment of children in different countries around the globe. This institution highlights the importance of creating not only educational policies but also specific strategies to include children who are currently out of school. Specifically in Latin America, attention has been paid to enrolment issues in light of the social inequalities that characterise this region (UNSECO, 2010). It is also well documented that Latin America region is the most unequal continent in the world (Nelson, 2011), which has an important impact on educational matters at all levels, as well as on other issues. While it has been described an excellent progress in terms of educational coverage in this region, these results are also questioned in light of the quality of education provided (UNESCO, 2014). These data raise important implications for Mexico as well. Interestingly, Mexico has one the highest rates of not only preschool but also primary education enrolment in the Latin American region among the OECD countries (OECD, 2009), but its performance in international tests such as PISA raise important concerns. Annual reports point out that the levels of academic achievement and quality in education in Mexico, is among the lowest results of OECD countries in the last exercise (OECD, 2012).

The age children start kindergarten, preschool and primary school widely differs across the globe. It should also be noted that in some countries kindergarten and preschool are used interchangeably, but in others there are marked differences. According to the International Standard Classification of Education (UNESCO, 2011), primary education must be started between the ages of five and seven, while pre-primary education (which in different countries might comprise playschool, kindergarten, *education inicial* or preschool), is offered to children aged three. However, not all countries follow this classification due to cross-cultural differences that need to be considered. The age at which children start Kindergarten, preschool and primary school is a matter of debate in different studies. To offer a few examples, in Afghanistan, children aged between three and six can attend a wide range of services such as nursery, preschool and kindergarten. In Australia, primary education starts at age five, while earlier educational services such as preschool, kindergarten or reception are also offered to children from the ages of three to four. It is important to note that these ages also vary among Australian states. In Bangladesh, kindergarten school is usually provided for to children from three to six years old. In Chile and China, children aged five can start kindergarten education before the first grade of

primary education. However, China also has a preschool level (different from that of kindergarten) which children aged five also attend. In France, the preschool system is divided into three levels, Petite, Moyenne and Grande, which provide an education for three, four and five-year old children respectively before primary school entrance. In Germany children from three to six years old attend kindergarten—which by the way, is optional for parents—before beginning primary education. Specifically in Mexico, preschool is provided for children aged three to six (preschool 1, preschool 2 and preschool 3). It is to mention that based on the last reform in 2002, this educational level is compulsory prior to commencing primary school at the age of 6.

In an interesting study, Narahara (1998) carried out a study focused on determining the different age of entrance to preschool and kindergarten in the US. The author offered an important analysis of the North American system and observed a great variation between different states. While in some states the entry to kindergarten is five, in others children are enrolled at the age of six. The author goes on to say that a number of studies have focused on exploring these age-related differences and their association with academic performance. Interestingly, one of the author's main conclusions is focused on the advantages observed in different scenarios which are associated with the age. While some studies suggest that there are significant advantages in starting school older in terms of academic performance, in other studies no significant differences were found. The author goes on to say that there is the need to explore this issue further considering a number of different variables such as gender, socio-economic status, type of family (e.g., mono-parental) and second and language experience to fully understand this phenomenon. Finally, the author concludes that it is a difficult decision to state whether one age is more appropriate than other in light of the diverse empirical evidence supporting contrary views in the existing literature. However the emphasis is still on providing access to adequate education to children in different countries, as it represents an important stage which will foster their development.

In Latin America as in other regions around the world, children who have access to early education are provided with important learning experiences that will found and shape their future academic and personal development (Bossaert & Buyse, 2011; OECD, 2013). Early education represents an opportunity to make a better transition to primary school thus increasing the likelihood to complete it and has a direct effect drop-out rates (UNESCO, 2007). Participation in early education gives children a set of advantages such as higher levels of cognitive, social and emotional development that significantly help

them prepare for the entrance to primary school (Woodhead & Moss, 2007). As a result of providing children with early education it has been observed higher rates not only of completion but also of higher academic achievement as well as a decrease in drop-out rates (UNESCO, 2011). The transition from preschool to primary education has widely been documented in the specialised literature (Arndt, Rothe, Urban & Werning, 2013; Bossaert, Doumen, Buyse & Verschueren, 2011; Chan, 2012; DiSanto & Bernan, 2012; Lee & Goh, 2012; Hatcher, Nuner & Paulse, 2012) and is also highlighted as an important issue on the international agenda by important organizations such as OECD (2007). Specifically, Starting Strong II (OECD, 2006) emphasises the importance of this process as follows:

[A]ttention should be given to transition challenges faced by young children as they enter school [...] Facilitating transition for children is a policy challenge in all systems. Transitions for children are generally a stimulus to growth and development, but if too abrupt and handled without care, they carry –particularly for young children- the risk of regression and failure (p. 1).

In light of these challenges, a number of elements are included in this process of change from preschool to primary school that need to be closely analysed considering the specific demands of each educational level (Fabian & Dunlop, 2007). It is strongly argued that the syllabus, teaching practices, pedagogical theories/models and community participants have a great impact on this educational change (Corsaro & Molinari, 2008; Claes, 2010; Malsch, Green & Korhari, 2010; Peters et al., 2009; Riley & Fahey, 2006). In addition to these variables, it is also necessary to consider the way in which preschool and primary education in Mexico is structured and the way in which the transition is experienced by preschoolers in view of the particularities of the culture. Chun (2003) suggests that given that culture plays a major role in a number of educational processes, this transition is not the exception. He goes on to say that although an adequate body of international research has been done with regard to this process, it is also important to explore the extent to which the community involved experience this shift in each country.

A specific description and analysis of the structure and implications of the national education system in Mexico is provided. Preschool, primary and secondary school comprise the basic education scheme in Mexico. Given the interest of the current study, the analysis will focus on preschool and the first grade of primary school. Essential elements such as the curriculum, syllabus, pedagogical approaches and teachers' training assessment procedures, supervisions and students' academic assessment are discussed for each educational level. In addition, in order to establish the international context of Mexico,

international perspectives and statistics are also provided in an attempt to establish the international context in which Mexico is inserted nowadays. Finally, a number of conclusions are provided in light of the main topic of interest of the current research, the transition from preschool to first grade of primary school.

### **The Preschool Education System**

Mexico comprises 32 states and one federal district. The government (which is a republic) is responsible for providing basic and free education for all in accordance with Article 3 of the Mexican constitution. Although the Secretaria de Educacion Publica (SEP) is in charge of providing education for the whole country, over the last three decades there have been policy reforms which have decentralised education (Rosado, et al., 2011). This reform of decentralization took place in 1992 when each member state of the Mexican republic was given responsibility for providing and ensuring access to basic education to the population (Rosado et al., 2011). However, it is the SEP which regulates standards of education in the country (OCDE, 2011). Although the country has been under this reform for the past 30 years, this process is limited to some issues such as teacher training and hiring process as well as for budget management (Zorrilla, 2004). There are two main sectors in education, public and private. Public education is provided by the government while private education is not; nevertheless both sectors are regulated by the SEP. The Secretaria de Educacion Publica is in charge of the syllabus design, recruitment process, teacher training and the provision of textbooks.

The basic education scheme in Mexico comprises three levels of education, preschool, primary and secondary, which lasts 12 years. The preschool level includes three sub-levels, the first, second and third year of preschool education. Primary education comprises six years of compulsory instruction which allows access to secondary school, which lasts three years (SEP, 2012). Preschool level is attended by children from 3-5; primary school from 6-11 and secondary school from 12-14. In both preschool and primary school, there are four different types of instruction such as rural, communitarian, urban and indigenous. The focus of the current study is on the urbanized sector of education. Although urban schooling is provided by different government institutions in Mexico City, it is regulated by the SEP.

The population in Mexico is nearly 122 million, and predicted to reach 130 million by 2050 according to Alvarez-Mendiola (2006). Throughout the country's history, this called for the need to create a number of government institutions to address a number of

social issues such as health and education. Specifically, these social conditions led to the creation of various institutions for education and childcare ranging from 45 days to 6 years old for children whose parents work full time for such institutions (McConnell-Farmer, Cook & Farmer, 2012; Rivera & Guerra, 2005). These sub-systems—SEDESOL (Social Development Secretariat), DIF (National System for Integral Family Development), SEDENA (National Defence Secretariat), IMSS (Mexican Institute for Social Security) and ISSSTE (Social and Security Services Institute for Government Workers), where this study was carried out—operate under SEP regulations, but each institution has also its own internal regulations and guidelines for its educational services. Historically, these institutions were created for workers to leave their children in a safe place during long working hours. Personnel in these institutions for children were primarily women with no education at all about child development and/or child caring services (Rivera & Guerra, 2005). According to Rivera and Guerra, it was enough for a woman to be a mother to become one member of these institutions and ‘*look after*’ other children. Given the nature of their origins, these institutions’ services were aimed at providing “non-pedagogical care” (i.e., usually known as nursery) to children rather than a proper education-focused service (Rivera & Guerra, 2005). Similarly, there was a lack of norm-based programmes in the early days, and it was not until 1960 that early education programmes were created in line with American preschool programmes. Rivera and Guerra (2005) point out that by 1980 the “childcare” vision of these centres finally turned into an “educational” one, which has prevailed for the last three decades and gave birth to the first Preschool Education Programme. The second programme was created in 1992 and remained untouched for more than ten years until the last version in 2004 which was revised for its final and most updated edition in 2011 and published by SEP with slight changes.

**Curriculum structure.** The preschool programme (SEP, 2011) provides a full description of the main purposes for preschool education, along with the rationale behind the suggested activities. Additionally, it contains a detailed guideline for preschool teachers which suggests a number of topics of interest, such as learning activities design, didactic design, learning situations planning and the way in which evaluations can be carried out by preschool teachers. This competencies-based programme defines an educational competence as “...the person’s ability to act with efficacy in certain situations through the use of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values” (SEP, 2011, p. 14). This is very much in line with other conceptualisations as suggested by Tedesco, Operti and Amadio (2013) where, from a European perspective, a competency is considered “a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to the context”. The Mexican preschool

programme encompasses six core subjects referred to as “formative areas”, namely, Language and Communication, Mathematical Reasoning, Investigation and Knowledge of the World, Health and Physical Development, Personal and Social Development and Artistic Expression and Appreciation. Each of these areas is provided with a clear description of the educational competences expected to be achieved by children. Additionally, the programme describes a set of general targets for preschool education which children are expected to reach (See Appendix I)

The purposes of preschool education stated in the curriculum indicate the wide range of objectives preschool teachers need to address in one academic year. In order to cover these objectives, a number of tailored pedagogical activities in the classroom need to be organised. These activities also need to follow the pedagogical principles described in the same curriculum (See Appendix J) which are integral to the planning and design of their educational practices. Given the fact that this syllabus is a competencies-based programme, teachers need to bear in mind the competencies children need to acquire and/or further develop through preschool education and consider these in line with the general purposes.

**Pedagogical planning.** Preschool teachers are encouraged to use a wide range of activities in order to reach the above mentioned objectives. In the preschool programme, teachers are expected to carry out their pedagogical action through the use of two main elements: a) didactic situations and b) project-based activities. The former refers to organized and structured activities focused on promoting children’s development of competencies, whereas the latter refers to activities that promote collaborative work among children and their learning by using previous knowledge and skills in order to construct new knowledge (SEP, 2011). It is suggested in this programme that these activities need to be novel, attractive and challenging for children. The need for teachers to take the developmental stages for preschoolers aged five into account when planning such activities is also highlighted.

It is important to mention that one of the main characteristics of this programme is the fact that the teaching-learning process is oriented through the use of play, which is in line with other preschool programmes around the world (DiSanto & Berman, 2012; Kane & Hayes, 2006; OECD; 2006; Woodhead & Moss, 2008). The programme acknowledges the advantages of creating learning opportunities in a ludic way considering “play” as an essential tool through which significant learning experiences need to be planned, designed, structured and delivered to children. To summarise, preschool teachers need to consider a

number of elements that enable them to carry out their teaching practice throughout the academic year while pursuing the main objectives of the programme. Children's developmental stages, the use of pedagogical principles and the use of play are the main characteristics of this programme.

**Assessment procedures.** As in every educational activity, assessment plays a major role in the identification of the extent to which a given set of main objectives are achieved, as well as the way in which areas for improvement can be detected (Tedesco, Operti & Amadio, 2013). The preschool programme outlines three different types of assessment at the preschool level. These take place three times during the academic year. Preschool teachers need to carry out: a) diagnostic, b) formative and c) summative assessment. Teachers are encouraged to do an initial assessment of children's competencies that will serve as the foundations for the design of pedagogical activities at the beginning of the preschool academic year. The second assessment is intended to gather information related to competencies that children have acquired/developed by the middle of the academic year. The main purpose of the final evaluation is to explore the extent to which the learning outcomes have been achieved. The programme also suggests teachers use a diary in which they can record important facts about children. A portfolio and a checklist are also suggested in this programme as an optional strategy for gathering information related to children's progress, although a clear and defined format for the assessment procedure is not provided. The preschool programme suggests that teachers can have a certain leeway in deciding the way in which they can retrieve the abovementioned information. Teachers can use whatever methods they might find useful. Generally speaking, it is pointed out by SEP (2011) that preschoolers should have access to primary school regardless of the application of a formal assessment and based merely on the process above-mentioned. Preschoolers will have the preschool level accredited just by considering their attendance to daily classes.

In a recent and updated report, SEP's (2012) authorities published a new format that preschool teachers have to complete from the 2012-2013 academic year onwards and which is applied to all preschool levels (i.e., first, second and third year of preschool which comprise three, four and five-year-old children respectively). This new "letter-based" format requires preschool teachers to grade children's performance based on four levels: A=outstanding performance, B=satisfactory performance, C=sufficient performance and D=unsatisfactory performance. The letters are assigned by the teacher in every formative area, that is, Language and Communication, Mathematical Reasoning, Physical

Development and Health and so forth. This evaluation format is used not only at preschool, but also in primary and secondary education. The results obtained and registered in this format are shared with the parents. However, it should be noted that this assessment procedure was not in place when the current study was carried out.

**Supervisions.** Scholar supervision at preschool level is a challenging topic in the Mexican system. Although the role of supervisors is neither explicitly published nor stated in official documents according to Rivera (2005), the persons in charge of this task along with their performance have gained recognition due to the social role they play in preschool education. Rivera carried out the most extensive research to date on the role preschool supervision plays in the national education system in Mexico. This scholar supervision is carried out by professionals who usually have a number of years' experience in teaching and have acquired a great deal of knowledge. With an average age of 45, women that have previously been classroom teachers and headteachers are persons who become supervisors. Out of the total number of supervisors analysed and reported by Rivera, only 51.7% have an undergraduate diploma, 28.5 years of experience in preschool education on average and 85% of them do not receive any specialised training for this role (Rivera, 2005). The INEE (2010) states that an adequate number of teachers comply with the minimum requirements for teaching in preschool education. This institute also emphasises that there are still a great number of teachers who do not. Moreover, it is suggested the need to further investigate the effect of teachers' background on their teaching practices.

Supervisors play an important role in the educational system structure due to the fact that they are the main link between the preschool centre and the sub-secretariat of basic education belonging to SEP. They usually do two monthly visits to public preschool centres and one visit to private preschools. They review the physical conditions of the educational centre and making sure everything is in accordance with federal regulations, ensuring that the professional profiles of employees are in line with SEP regulations and providing head teachers with the most up-to-date information from the sub-secretariat of Basic Education. Supervisors also make sure of the adequate application of educational policy reforms in every educational centre.

Rivera (2005) goes onto say that supervision role is of the utmost importance given the administrative role they play. However, given the reward-based system under which supervisors carry out their tasks the paperwork has become the most important element in their daily routine. Unfortunately, this emphasis in paperwork has deviate the main

function of supporting the community in educational centres lessen the positive impact that supervision (i.e., a tool used to obtain feedback) could have in educational matters. Further, there are a number of critiques to this supervision system that are valuable to consider according to the author. This model does not tackle particular needs that each educational centre reports. This system does not trust in the capabilities of headteachers and teachers when it comes to decision-making. The collaborative work in schools is inefficient, thus making an adequate analysis of schools' situations challenging and difficult. Not all schools are visited due to an inefficient organisation of the institution in charge. Important information does not get on time to every school creating difficulties in communication. There is a lack of deep knowledge about the preschool programme as well as the theoretical elements that could be useful when assessing the performance of headteachers and teachers. It is also argued that supervisors lack appropriate skills to carry out their tasks. Finally, paperwork is excessive and feedback-related processes are virtually non-existent (Rivera & Guerra, 2005). In conclusion, Rivera and Guerra point out that the supervision process is perceived as threatening and punitive by teachers, and has a very negative impact not only on the performance of supervisors but also on that of classroom teachers.

**Teacher-child ratio.** In Mexico, the SEP recommends a teacher-child ratio of 25:1 for effective learning, however it has been found that the number of children per classroom can range between 40 and 50 (INEE, 2008; OECD, 2011). This phenomenon is specially found in urbanized areas where the educational demand is higher. Moreover, this ratio is one of the biggest in OECD and G20 countries (OECD, 2013), placing Mexico in the first place out of the 31<sup>st</sup> countries included in the exercise. This is particularly interesting if the variability found in this respect in different countries is considered. For instance, in Denmark the teacher-child ratio is 6:1, in Sweden it is 18:1 while in France and Spain the ratio is 27 and 25 children per teacher respectively. Nevertheless, in recent reports (UNESCO, 2014), at preschool level in Mexico the prevailing pupil/teachers ratio is 21:1. Although this tendency has not changed in Mexico at least for the last decade, Education International (2010) and OECD (2007) recommend regulating the teacher-pupil ratio in Mexico to improve the quality of preschool education.

**Current national assessments exercise.** The government institution in charge of educational assessments in Mexico was created in 2002; the Instituto Nacional de Evaluacion Educativa (National Institute for Educational Assessment) is part of the SEP (INEE, 2013). Its main aim was to design tests, organize national assessments exercises,

analyse results and inform SEP about children’s achievement in the national educative system. In 2013, based on current policy reforms, this institute has become an autonomous and independent institution in 2013 (INEE, 2013). As a result, its main objectives are now to assess the quality, performance and results of the national educative system at preschool, primary, secondary and high school level (INEE, 2013). However it is of utmost importance to note that the Ley General para la Evaluacion Educativa (General Law for Educational Assessment) was only created in August 2013 (INEE, 2013), which suggests a lack in records regarding educational assessments for decades.

The first national assessment for preschoolers was carried out in 2007. A test called EXCALE00 (Examen de Calidad y Logro Educativo; Assessment of quality and educational achievement) was administered to 10,300 pupils from 1,091 schools in an attempt to measure the academic achievement of preschool children aged 5 specifically in two ‘formative areas’: Language and Communication and Mathematical Reasoning. The second exercise, carried out in 2013 comprised 14,256 pupils from 1,451 different schools. Results were reported in four categories (See Table 2) where academic achievement was considered based on a 200-800 points scale:

Table 1

*Categories Created from the Point-based System for Preschoolers’ Academic Achievement Exercise (INEE, 2013)*

| Categories   | Punctuation Range                         |                                       |
|--------------|---|---------------------------------------|
|              | Language and communication<br>(113 items) | Mathematical reasoning<br>(130 items) |
| Advanced     | (659-800)                                 | (664-800)                             |
| Intermediate | (547-659)                                 | (569-664)                             |
| Basic        | (407-547)                                 | (467-569)                             |
| Below Basic  | (200-407)                                 | (200-467)                             |

Assessment was carried out on four different scenarios in terms of socio-cultural and economic status.

- Private Schools
- Urban Schools
- Rural schools
- Communitarian services

Table 2

*Results of Preschool Assessment Exercises. Average obtained by Preschoolers in the First and Last Assessment Exercise.*

|               | Language and Communication |          | Mathematical Reasoning |          |
|---------------|----------------------------|----------|------------------------|----------|
|               | 2007                       | 2011     | 2007                   | 2011     |
| National      | 500 pts.                   | 513 pts. | 500 pts.               | 497 pts. |
| Urban Schools | 498 pts.                   | 507 pts. | 499 pts.               | 489 pts. |

From Table 2 it can be observed that results from both assessments reported by INEE preschoolers at a national level are located in the “basic” category in both “formative areas”. Children from urban schools are in the same category. These results have been analysed and criticised by independent researchers who argue that the quality of preschool education is not adequate at all and that it is affecting children’s performance in primary and secondary school (McConnell-Farmer, Cook & Farmer, 2012). Moreover, it is argued that SEP official reports highlight that preschool education is doing well and that the preschoolers’ academic achievement is very good (Myers & Martinez, 2007; Vidal & Díaz 2004), while the evidence available from international assessments supports a different idea. Based on PISA results 15-year old Mexican children were located in the last quartile of the ranking (BID, 2012; OECD; 2006). In an analysis of the results from the first exercise, Moreles (2011) argues that there are an important number of school centres that fulfil neither the criteria nor the conditions to offer this type of education. He also highlights two important: firstly, the main suppliers of didactic material are parents rather than the school, and secondly, he mentions that the teacher-ratio does not meet SEP’s criteria.

With regard to the test administered by INEE, there are a number of critiques that need to be considered. One of the flaws of this assessment was the fact that the test mainly focuses on rote knowledge rather than on analytical capabilities (OECD, 2009). Another critique suggests the limited perspective of what a child aged five should learn and questions the quality of education (Myers & Martinez, 2006). Myers and Martinez go onto say that the results can be associated neither to specific child characteristics, nor the educational centre or family context. The educational policies set by the government in terms of the quality of education have not produced the expected results.

Interestingly, it is the INEE (2010) itself which provides a set of recommendations for future assessments. The institute suggests the need to collect information not only about preschool achievement but also about the impact such results have in primary and secondary school children. Follow-up studies are needed to ascertain the effect of preschool education on Mexican children. In addition, it might also be important to explore the effects of the physical environment on preschoolers especially in light of this transition. Finally, it is of the utmost importance to consider children's perceptions with regard to preschool in future studies.

**Mandatory reform.** In 2002, the Mexican legislature approved an educational reform by which preschool education became mandatory for children aged three to six. This reform was gradually applied, starting in the 2004-2005 academic year for children aged five, in 2005-2006 for children aged four, and in 2008-2009 for children aged three (Rivera & Guerra, 2005; SEP-UNAM, 2009). The reform was aimed at making coherent the whole scheme for basic education which comprises primary and secondary school as well. This scheme now includes 12 years of formal schooling for Mexican children. It is also argued that this reform placed the government in a critical situation in terms of infrastructure due to the need to ensure the enrolment of every child aged 3 and provide with a good quality of education. However, this law also gives parents the right to decide whether to enrol their children in preschool level or not (Rivera, 2009). Rivera also clarifies that without any previous formal-schooling experience from preschool, children can still enter into primary school. Although it is argued that this reform has been one of the government's main achievements in the last decade in the field of education (Lopez, 2013), there are also a number of critiques in this respect.

In INEE's 2008 report "*Progressing or going backwards in education quality?: Tendencies and Perspectives of Basic Education in Mexico*", it pointed out that although lawmakers intended well by proposing and finally approving this educational reform, they failed to consider the most effective way of implementation given the dimensions of the challenge as well as the resources available. As a result, it was argued that this reform contributes to existing inequalities rather than reducing them.

Moreles (2011) suggested that the reform lacked strong foundations with regard to the empirical evidence supporting the lawmakers' decision. He argued that scientific research is not considered for changing educational policies in Mexico, but rather, these changes are exclusively made because of other political commitments. The author went onto say that the rationale behind the decision for such reform was so vague and general

that no specific findings were considered. Moreover, the few pieces of research that were taken into account were only included to justify a decision that had already been made by politicians (Moreles, 2011). The INEE (2010) also pointed out that this decision lacked of previous evaluations with regard to the conditions under which preschool education is provided. This institute along with Lopez (2013) state that lawmakers should have taken into account the implications of a reform like this, such as infrastructure, physical spaces, classroom availability, teachers training and so forth.

Similarly, Rivera and Guerra (2005) highlighted four main challenges that the government should have borne in mind with regard to this reform. The authors questioned the need to create specialised criteria so as to incorporate schools which did not have validation from SEP and would provide this type of education. It is suggested the need to establish an effective preschool programme so as to address the diversity of Mexico's child population. As far as teachers and headteachers are concerned, these changes might call for the need to think about professional development strategies that will help them carry out their role in an appropriate way. Finally, Rivera and Guerra stress the fact that it is essential to think about a strategy that makes teachers and headteachers aware of the need to focus on children and their learning process rather than on paperwork.

An interesting investigation carried out by Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico (National Autonomous University of Mexico; UNAM) and SEP (2009) with regard to the organisation of preschool system in Mexico offered important critiques regarding this reform. It was suggested that despite the application of such reform, the educational sector was not prepared for such implementation considering economic resources and infrastructure. Moreover, it was argued a lack of specific and well-defined teacher's profile for preschool and primary school. The preschool curriculum is not in line with the primary school programme despite the fact that the layout might seem similar (e.g., both are described in terms of 'formative areas'). Moreover, teaching in primary school differs from that of preschool thus leading to a discontinuity which has been highlighted in different studies (Chun, 2003; Moreno & Dongen, 2006; Turunen, 2012). The document highlighted the need to articulate and promote a continuity of these two educational levels by considering not only the content but also the methodology used in the teaching-learning process. From an international perspective, this continuity can be observed in different programmes around the world such as in Jamaica, Guyana, France and Sweden, where both syllabi are conceptually linked, ensuring a smooth transition into primary school (OECD, 2007). Overall, different perspectives with regard to making

preschool mandatory can be found in the literature. It is interesting to note, however, that considering this reform as a success is a vision mainly held by the SEP, while the limitations and challenges are essentially highlighted by external and independent researchers such as those from Lopez (2013).

### **Primary Education System in Mexico**

**General structure and curriculum organization.** Primary school comes between two more education levels namely preschool and secondary school. The basic education scheme, comprising 12 years, was formulated in an attempt to establish coherence in the curriculums of these three levels under a competencies-based approach. The primary school system in Mexico is also divided into two main areas, public and private sector. The SEP is the government institution in charge of setting the regulations, guidelines and criteria for this educational level at both sectors, public and private (Alvarez-Mendiola, 2006). Primary education comprises six years of formal schooling for children aged six to 12. The programme for primary education (SEP, 2011) outlines the way in which the work of teachers in this educational level should be organized and structured. The primary education curriculum comprises four main “formative areas”: Language and Communication, Mathematical Reasoning, Exploration and Understanding of Natural and Social World, and Personal Development for Social Interaction. Likewise, this programme introduces six different subjects which are arguably in line with the formative areas mentioned in the preschool programme (see Appendix K).

The programme contains a detailed description of the main purposes and educational competencies children should acquire and develop through this six year-period of education for each formative area. This programme and the way in which the curriculum is structured may seem in line with other curriculums across the world which have adopted the same competency-based approach (Tedesco, Operti & Amadio, 2013). According to Tedesco, Operti and Amadio, almost 90 countries from different regions of the world including EU and OECD genuinely promote a number of competencies in the general education curricula. Although very well-defined curricula intend to ensure and improve the quality of education, there is still the need to analyse the main role teachers play in the use of such contents. It is argued that teachers need to thoroughly understand the basic concept of a competency-based approach and its aims in order to design and implement their teaching practices accordingly. However, it is also argued that teachers should have acquired such competencies in order to adequately help children develop them. This calls for the need to carry out a study to explore this condition (OECD, 2009). From the list of

subjects stated in primary school syllabus, it can be observed that each subject has a number of educational competencies that first graders have to acquire or develop throughout the academic year (see Appendix K). Teachers should consider these purposes as the learning outcomes which will guide not only their teaching plans but also their assessment strategies.

Similar to the preschool programme, this is a competencies-based curriculum where the main emphasis is placed on students' development of educational competencies along a six year-period. This perspective is also in line with the conceptualization of the 'formative areas' stated in the curriculum (see Appendix L). It is stated in the programme itself that this competencies-based model is one of the main efforts to provide continuity along the basic education scheme (i.e., preschool, primary and secondary school), highlighting the importance of this period (SEP, 2011).

**Pedagogical planning.** First grade of primary school programme offers a particular flexibility for teachers to make use of any pedagogical strategies in order to achieve the main objectives for each subject. Although the programme is structured according to the formative areas –to be in line with preschool programme, it requires teachers to focus on the subject's abovementioned (i.e., spanish, mathematics, civics and ethics) when it comes to their teaching practices. Teachers are required to work on these subjects and achieve the learning outcomes throughout the academic year. In order to achieve such learning outcomes, teachers are encouraged to work through didactic situations which include workshops or projects in order to promote the expected learnings in students. An educational project according to the first grade of primary school programme is “[...]a set of systematic and interrelated activities to recognize and analyse a situation or problem so as to propose potential solutions” (SEP, 2011, p. 206). The programme does not offer a clear guideline or a defined class-format in which to carry out learning activities, but rather, highlights the elements teachers need to consider when designing and planning their didactic situations.

According to this document, teachers' work should be focused on:

- Students' learning.
- Generating conditions for pupils' inclusion considering family and contexts diversity.
- Producing effective teaching actions so as to stimulate the use of students' previous knowledge to foster problem solving competencies.
- Applying a diversity of strategies to address specific needs of students.

- Promoting a learning environment to support the achievement of the learning outcomes.

In this document, didactic guidelines are also provided aimed at helping teachers organize their classroom-work by considering:

- Teachers´ practice planning
- Learning-promoter environment
- Teaching-work modalities
- Collaborative work
- Educational resources and material.
- Assessment

From an international perspective, a number of countries around the world make use of a variety of approaches to plan the way in which teaching is carried out. However almost all of the OECD countries reported teachers using mainly one dominating type of method, the structured-practices approach (OECD, 2009). Interestingly, the student-oriented approach is not frequently used. It is argued by the report of the OECD (2009) that the latter approach is more in line with a constructivist view usually considering particular students´ needs (i.e., placing the student into a more active role). This approach helps teachers identify, address - thus enhance the quality of the learning experience (OECD, 2009). Mexican teachers are aligned with a pattern found in different countries such as Brazil, Korea and Malta where student-centred practices are infrequent. It can be highlighted that in half of the countries surveyed in the exercise carried out by OECD (2009), this approach showed some advantages with regard to disciplinary issues and classroom control, however there is the need to further explore the effect of this approach in students´ attainment specifically in Mexican context.

**Assessment procedure(s).** In-classroom assessments strategies are recommended in the document for teachers to use. These strategies are intended to be used for the formative assessment. These strategies include:

- Verification matrix
- Checklist
- Anecdotal records
- Observation
- Written and graphical records
- Collective projects
- Conceptual maps
- Students´ attitudes records
- Portfolio

- Written and oral tests

Teachers are encouraged to use these strategies to gather important information about pupils' performance which is useful for grading purposes. The assessment process is expected to be carried out for each subject taught along the year which will help them decide which "letter" (grade) a student will be given. As for the summative assessment, SEP provides an established format which teachers must use to determine whether a student passes or fails the first grade of primary. This format comprises the six subjects whereby students are assessed and graded according to a four-letter scale (see Table 3). Teachers are asked to carry out such assessment in five bimonthly-periods throughout the academic year.

Table 3

*Assessment Criteria used by Teachers to assess Students' Performance*

| Level of Performance | Description  | Numeric Reference |
|----------------------|--|-------------------|
| A                    | Shows an <b>outstanding</b> performance with regard to the educational competencies expected in the formative area.  | 10                |
| B                    | Shows a <b>satisfactory</b> performance with regard to the educational competencies expected in the formative area.  | 8 or 9            |
| C                    | Shows a <b>sufficient</b> performance with regard to the educational competencies expected in the formative area.    | 6 or 7            |
| D                    | Shows an <b>insufficient</b> performance with regard to the educational competencies expected in the formative area. | 5                 |

It can be observed in Table 3 that teachers not only grade each of the six subjects with a letter but also with a numeric reference which helps to decide whether a student passes or fail the academic year. This final grade is obtained by calculating the average grade from the six subjects where a 6 is the minimum grade to pass a course. However there is still another procedure to highlight. In addition to the procedures described, teachers are asked to carry out an assessment three times a year, usually at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the academic year (i.e., diagnostic, formative and summative assessment respectively). The first grade curriculum recommends teachers to use "any" effective strategy to collect the necessary data from children to make decisions

with regard to didactic situations giving a wide flexibility to teachers. For instance, for the initial assessment, the document outlines that teacher should:

[E]stablish a strategy in order to find out students' initial status, that is to say, a strategy that helps identify what students know in relation with what they are expected to learn. This information can be obtained in different ways through an oral or written questionnaire; through an activity that could allow teachers observe what students know; or through any other way teacher considers appropriate according to groups' characteristics. (SEP, 2011, p. 254)

For the final grading process, the programme suggests that teachers should come up with "any" assessment every two months to assign grades to students based on the projects worked throughout this period of time. At primary school level, a 0-10 grading system is used where 6 is the minimum grade needed to go onto the following academic grade (SEP, 2011).

In conclusion, there are clear times and types of assessment procedures first grade teachers need to carry out, but there is neither an established strategy nor a format (i.e., specifically in this case for the formative assessment) for gathering information that would help/facilitate this evaluation. According to UNESCO (2014), it is of the utmost importance that classroom-based assessments are at the heart of the learning process. This type of assessment needs to be combined with national assessments which inform the way in which students are performing. However, teachers need to be provided with clear assessment procedures and tools which have to be strongly linked to instruction and the curriculum. Gove and Cvelich, (2011) pointed out that classroom assessment is useful at a practical level but its results are often underestimated and not considered to improve learning. Research has shown that teachers trained in assessment procedures can greatly benefit from it and can improve their teaching practice. For instance, whenever teachers are not trained for this matter, delivery of specific assessment procedures has shown to be very useful (UNESCO, 2014). This might call for the need to either provide very well defined and structured assessment strategies and tools, or design workshops and training courses for teachers in Mexico to help improve assessment techniques/strategies thus pupils' learning.

**Supervisions.** Given the size of Mexico City and its population, school supervisions are divided into 16 'delegaciones' (boroughs) which are divided into scholar sectors in order to make supervision possible. Each of these sectors is run by a person who is the head of the borough which in turn organizes supervisors' work in a number of schools within each scholar sector. The number of schools a sector could have greatly

varied and is decided by SEP, which also outlines the role of supervision for primary schools in the Manual para la Organizacion de la Direccion General de Operacion de Servicios Educativos (Manual for Organization of General Department of Educational Services) (SEP, 2006).

In the document '*La Supervision Escolar de la Educacion Primaria en Mexico: Practicas, Desafios y Reformas*' (Scholar supervision in primary education in Mexico: practices, challenges and reforms) by Calvo et al. (2002), the supervision is defined as a "pedagogical work in essence, carried out in a dynamic, active and collective way based on a horizontal-type network of communication among general supervisors (traditionally known as Sectorial-Head Department), zone supervisors, headteachers and teachers" (Calvo et al., 2002, p. 44). This role of supervisor, represents the link between high-level of educational authorities and every school headteacher. The objectives of the supervisors are "to offer technical-administrative and technical-pedagogical advise to headteachers and teachers as well as to promote the active participation of community members, specifically families" (Calvo et al., 2002, p. 45). Official papers from SEP clearly define the tasks to be carried out by supervisors. Generally speaking, Calvo et al.'s document describes five stages of supervision, ten general roles (nine administrative and one pedagogical), 21 technical-administrative tasks and 12 technical-pedagogical related to 26 headteachers and nine teachers' duties and 155 recommended activities with six types of actions aiming at achieving 33 specific technical-pedagogical and technical-administrative roles (Calvo et al., 2002). It is argued by these authors that the supervision role encourages an automatic performance with lack of reflection on behalf of the supervisors. These authors go onto highlight "...supervisors must do such activities which do not require them to go beyond" (Calvo et al., 2002, p. 48).

Three main roles are highlighted by Calvo et al. (2002) in their thorough analysis of supervision in primary schools in Mexico such as reviewing the adequate development of 'Consejos Tecnicos Consultivos de Zona' CTCZ (Technical councils of zone), visiting schools and producing the annual programme/final report of the whole scholar sector activities. The CTCZ are groups organized by each headteachers whose essential role is working in a collaborative way so as to gather information, analyse situations, propose and implement possible solutions with regard to educational matters. The supervisor not only reviews and assesses this groups' performance, but also provides feedback to improve its work (Santizo, 2009). Supervisors visit every school at least four times per academic year in order to check the adequate application of official norms, procedures as well as

technical-pedagogical and technical-administrative processes (Rivera & Guerra, 2005). They produce the annual programme of the sector which is based on the diagnostic assessment of schools' needs (i.e., in the second month of the academic year) so that they can address throughout the year, the gaps and needs found in every school.

Supervisors are recruited following a clear and established criteria provided in official documents. In order to become a supervisor in primary education, the person needs to: (a) hold a primary education teacher diploma; (b) have experience as a headteacher; (c) have adequate decision-making skills in order to manage human relationships and suggest appropriate changes; (d) have initiative to propose different ways to perform a task and advise feasible solutions; (e) have the ability to work with and manage groups (to listen, to provide feedback and to interact with); and (f) have a respectful attitude, commitment and responsibility (Calvo et al., 2002). Finally, with regard to training courses, SEP is in charge of providing professional development workshops not only to supervisors but also teachers and headteachers all over the country. Interestingly, according to statistics from OECD (2006, 2009), Mexico is among the OECD countries with more training courses offered to teachers and headteachers (including the highest attendance rate of 94%). However the same document strongly questions the quality of such courses which is a perspective strongly supported by Wolff, Schiefelbein, and Schiefelbein's (2002) ideas with regard to the low-quality of education offered in Mexico.

To summarise, in Mexico there is an excellent document of official norms and procedures that provide a detailed description of the role supervisors must carry out in primary education. However, this system is also critiqued in terms of turning supervisors into automatized 'robots' whose main objective is following supervision's official activities and making sure that norms and procedures set by SEP are strictly applied on each educational centre (Calvo et al., 2002). Calvo et al. go onto say that this supervision process has resulted in an administrative role rather than in collaborative work where feedback is important to improve the quality of the educational service. Moreover, it is also argued that the supervision manuals are obsolete due to the fact that the most updated version is from the 80s which contravenes any logical sense if we consider that the earliest Law of General Education published by SEP dates back to 1995. Supervision norms and procedures currently applied in schools do not rely on the most recent version of the law of education. This might imply a number of problems that could be important to analyse, although this is beyond the scope of this study.

**Teacher-child ratio.** Although the literature provides some evidence to justify an adequate teacher-child ratio considering the learning process, there is some variety in figures regarding the prevailing ratio in Mexican schools based on different data sets. The SEP suggests a 25:1 teacher-child ratio for primary schools in Mexico which is close to the information provided by INEE (2008) where the number of pupils per teacher can reach up to 26.1. However, other organizations such as OECD (2011) reveal that this ratio is actually 24:1 which –still represents one of the highest ratios in countries belonging to this organization. The OECD states that the average is 16 students per teacher among these countries, however there are reports highlighting the fact that 30 or 40 students can be found in urban schools’ classrooms in primary education level in Mexico. According to OECD (2013), “The number of students per teacher in primary schools is one of the largest among OECD countries and G20 countries with available data (28, rank 1/35)” (OECD, 2013). As for the education background of teachers, there are around 200 private/public universities in Mexico which offer teachers training for people interested in becoming teachers (OECD, 2006). These universities are run by SEP and usually provide an undergraduate diploma (i.e., lasting 4 years) for primary school education. SEP states that professional training development for primary teachers (i.e., including headteachers) must be an ongoing process. The Subsecretaria de Educacion Basica (Basic Education Sub-Secretariat) through the Departamento de Actualizacion del Magisterio (Department of Teacher Training), is in charge of designing, planning and delivering professional training courses for teachers at a national level. However, this department does not clarify the periodicity of such training. It is important to note that Mexican teachers have the highest number of courses available for professional development (OECD, 2009). The attendance rates are one of the highest among OECD countries, but the quality of such training not only in Mexico but in general in Latin American countries is strongly critiqued and questioned (Wolff, Schiefelbein, & Schiefelbein, 2002). These authors point out the need to assess and re-design the training provided by the Ministries of Education since the performance of teachers is not reflected in the academic achievement of students.

At a global scale, OECD suggests in its *Global Monitoring Report* in 2007, that education goals do not have to focus merely on enrolment and worldwide coverage, but also on the preparation of teachers through high-quality training courses which will raise the quality of education provided. Specifically in Mexico City, teachers who want a teaching career need to be enrolled in “Carrera Magisterial” (Teaching Career). This is a reward-like type of programme where teachers who have more training courses attended have the possibility to do tests that will enable them to access to different levels into this

programme thus earn more money (OECD, 2006). However it is argued that this programme/system has been strongly corrupted suggesting that not the best teachers are the ones who are at the top of the ranking system and receiving a good wage, but people who has friends or relatives in the management of this system from whom receive a lot of help despite their lack of professional training (Santizo, 2009). Overall, the professional training system in Mexico for primary teachers appears to be very well structured, organized and delivered, which is reflected in the number of courses offered and teachers' attendance rates. However the quality of such courses has been severely criticised. Further research is needed in order to explore not only the quality of these training but also the impact on teachers' performance.

**Current national assessment exercise.** In Mexico, there is a test administered by the INEE called Examen Nacional de Logro Academico en Centros Escolares: ENLACE (National Assessment of Academic Achievement in Educational Centres) which began its application in 2006 in primary and secondary public schools around the country. This exercise focuses mainly on literacy and maths and one randomised subject, every exercise being applied from third to sixth grade of primary school as well as at secondary school. Its application starts in the third grade of primary school, meaning that first and second grade students are not assessed. Although this has been acknowledged as an incredible effort by the Mexican education authorities to create a database (i.e., the first of its kind in Mexico's education history) to inform the current status of the education in Mexico, it has also been the target of many critiques. It is strongly argued that educational assessments are not enough nowadays. This calls for the need for more national exercises retrieving the necessary information so as to improve the quality of Mexican education (INEE, 2008). Although this test administered by INEE has shown good psychometric properties, there is still the need to carry out further applications so as to corroborate the results obtained so far (OECD, 2011). National assessments exercise by not only internal or national staff (i.e., school teachers and headteachers), but also by external observers/staff are required not only to ensure the validity of such application (OECD, 2011; Schweltnus, 2009), but also to reach better conclusions. It is also necessary to use the information obtained in order to address the gaps identified and propose political reforms so as to raise the academic achievement of pupils. This might represent an important step towards the improvement of the quality of instruction given that unfortunately the information retrieved is not used to improve educational system in Mexico (Myers & Martinez, 2007; OECD, 2011). Moreover, Schweltnus (2009) posits that this assessment exercise has focused on assessing

rote knowledge rather than assessing analytical competences which calls for the need to re-design the focus of the test.

The INEE (2014) suggested that the ENLACE assessment has been strongly corrupted leading to its suspension during the same year. These statements created a vigorous debate that took place early in 2014. There were a number of issues mentioned by staff from INEE. For instance, it said that private schools (e.g., primary and secondary) were using the results to promote their educational service by obtaining high rates of achievement. Another strong critique was that the results were not reliable due to the fact that public sector schools (arguably the SEP itself) linked ENLACE results with teachers' wages. That is to say, if a public school obtained high results in the assessment, its teachers would receive an economic bonus (INEE, 2014) thus contributing to a vicious cycle. This information may also be supported by results from the first TALIS exercise (OECD, 2009) which argued that not only Mexican, but also Brazilian, Hungarian, Italian, Korean, Malaysian, Polish, Slovakian and Slovenian teachers benefitted the most in terms of remuneration and bonuses based on school evaluations.

The official press conference document from INEE written by Backhoff (2014), also offers six main strategies which were arguably used to corrupt the test that led to its suspension: (a) showing the test to students and practising the answers; (b) promoting absenteeism of low-achievement pupils on the day of the test; (c) showing the test preparation book earlier than planned; (d) stealing and selling the test; (e) providing right answers to students during the test; and (f) changing the wrong answers to the correct ones.

Overall, interesting conclusions can be drawn from the previous analysis. One benefit of this type of assessment exercise was the establishment of the first national database of educational matters in Mexico. However, it is strongly argued that the information retrieved by SEP with regard to education is not always available since this secretariat decides which type of information is to be made public or not (Santibanez, Vernez & Razquin, 2005). The '*Global Monitoring Report*' (UNESCO, 2014) strongly suggests that the administration of national assessments is particularly useful for low-achievement pupils. These assessments have provided important information that has enabled countries to identify needs of the education systems and thus intervene in consequence, where the cases of Armenia, Uruguay, India and Brazil are highlighted. According to this report, results from national assessments should be used in order to inform practices and guide countries' policies reforms. Moreover, although this practice is

less common in other countries such as Uganda, the results are still useful to improve a number of issues in educational matters such as teachers' practices, curriculum adequacy, classroom assessment and so forth (UNESCO, 2014).

For instance, in Liberia the EGRA project, information gathered was used to train teachers in terms of classroom assessment and reading practices. As a result, levels of reading were raised in grade 2 and 3 students. Unfortunately a huge disadvantage in Mexico at first sight could be that there is no information about academic achievement for first graders of primary schools. This calls for the need to include this academic level for the 2015 national assessment exercise. As a result, SEP will hold information about not only the performance of preschoolers, but also the academic achievement of first graders. Moreover, this information will be added to the database concerning coverage, enrolment and drop-out rates at a national and regional level.

Based on the available data from third to sixth grade of the ENLACE test, Schweltnus' (2009) provide an interesting analysis thus suggestions to the strategy used for such assessment. The author highlights the need to adjust the results to allow for socio-economic background so as to have a clearer idea of how students are doing in school in different regions of the society given the great cultural diversity found in Mexico City. There is the strong need to use such results in order to analyse, propose and carry out not only local intervention programmes (e.g., directly applied to schools) for students and families, but also national policies reforms aimed at addressing the low achievement found in primary education students across the country (UNESCO, 2014). Likewise, this information could be used to design training courses to better prepare primary school teachers and to raise the quality of their teaching. The system that rewards teachers for attending to training courses needs to be analysed and modified. This is to say, it is necessary to sever the link of the national assessment exercise with the wage of teachers to avoid corruption and mainly focus on educational matters such as students' actual achievement.

### **Conclusions and Challenges in the Mexican Educational Context**

Having looked at the current situation of preschool and primary school in the Mexican educational system, there are a number of issues that need to be considered in order to gain a better understanding of the current situation that frames the transition of preschoolers into first grade. The government's policy reform reflects a major interest in securing education to children aged five by establishing preschool as a mandatory

educational level that would set the grounds for a higher academic demand such as that of primary school. Both programmes are competency-based which is in line with some of the programmes used in other countries, but although both have very well-defined objectives and learning outcomes, the methodological approach used on each programme should also be considered.

While in preschool a play-based approach is emphasised, it can also be observed that in primary school this approach changes to an outcome-based curriculum. This change raises interesting questions about continuity during this transition period which is highlighted as an essential factor by a number of scholars (Chun, 2003; Rim-Kauffman, Pianta & Cox, 2000; Sink, Edwards & Weir, 2007; Turunen, 2012). In light of the expected learning for children, it is important to look at the structure of each programme regarding their contents and the way in which the competencies and learning outcomes can be achieved. While both programmes outline a set of formative areas for teachers to guide their teaching practice, the first grade programme has different subjects thus different competencies that guide the teachers planning especially when these subjects are used to assess the academic performance of first graders. It also seems pertinent to consider three essential elements that according to Tedesco, Opertti and Amadio (2013) are important whenever a competencies-based curriculum is considered. First, it is important to assess not only knowledge but also non-cognitive skills (e.g., attitudes, values and emotions) that could help pupils acquire the expected competencies. Second, it is necessary to find a way to explore the extent to which students' knowledge can be successfully applied in a variety of situations and third, to reconsider the design of learning experiences, teaching methods and assessments systems in light of a competency-based approach. It might be interesting to analyse the Mexican curriculums in light of these elements in both, preschool and primary school level.

Adequate assessment procedures have been recognized as key elements in educational scenarios aimed at improving the quality of education (Lockheed & Verspoor, 1991). The assessment procedures stated in both curriculums –including instruments and strategies, need to be clear enough for teachers so as to be carried out based on the needs of students. Both educational levels share a common pattern with regard to assessment, with teachers required to carry it out at three different times, at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the academic year. This procedure aims to gather important data about pupils' performance so teachers can make appropriate decisions in order to achieve the learning outcomes. However it is noteworthy that a format specifying a particular scale, a checklist

or questionnaires is not provided, and instead teachers are responsible for deciding the best way of recording data. As for data-collection, both educational programmes offer teachers with a level of flexibility so they can choose from a wide range of strategies that best suit their own and their students' needs. Among such strategies we can find creating a portfolio, anecdotal records and observations, however although this view is supported by important organizations (OECD, 2011; UNESCO, 2014) which encourage teachers to make their own decisions in this respect, it is also highlighted that teachers' previous education may be an essential element to consider in this respect. This flexibility could be useful with well-prepared teachers, nevertheless, Mexican teachers might need additional training with regard to assessment matters (UNESCO, 2014). It is therefore necessary to consider teachers' background so as to take into account the extent to which they could choose appropriate data-collection strategies. It is also important to bear in mind that whenever the background of teachers is not strong enough to make such decisions, a clearer education assessment procedure must be provided.

Scholar supervisions are aimed at supporting teachers, headteachers and families from an external standpoint (Calvo et al., 2002), where in addition, supervisors are the main persons of the connection between educational authorities and every educational centre. Moreover, the literature suggests that the role of the supervisors is of the utmost importance given that they are able to provide more insightful and objective feedback to improve the service provided by personnel of the schools. It is clear that supervision plays a decisive role in both educational levels in the way it can support the main persons involved. Both levels provide a clear description of the tasks that supervisors are to carry out and the way in which they support the educational action. Supervisors need to do a number of activities that might seem overwhelming thus affecting the main aim of the supervision. It is suggested by Calvo et al. (2002) and Santizo (2009) that the current role of the scholar supervision has changed from a feedback-led model to a more paperwork-led system. Moreover, it is necessary to explore the supervision process in Mexican educational contexts further so as to understand the extent to which all the tasks and duties are completed and the way in which it has an impact not only on educational issues in general, but also during the transition to first grade. Finally, it is necessary to update the primary education supervision document so as to adapt such activities to the current conditions of schools as well as the needs of teachers and pupils.

The teacher-child ratio has also been recognized as an important element to consider in educational scenarios with regard to the quality of teaching. Empirical evidence

has shown that the smaller the ratio, the better the quality of education provided (INEE, 2010; OECD, 2013). In this respect, the information reviewed highlights the fact that both educational levels are above the recommended ratio by OECD, meaning that there are more children per adult than the average reported in other countries included in this international organisation. It is to pay attention to this phenomenon in light of the quality of education provided in Mexico, however a number of elements also need to be considered such as social, political and economic so as to understand this situation. Moreover, it is be useful to investigate further the extent to which overpopulated classrooms have an effect not only on teachers' practices but also on preschoolers transitioning to first grade.

National educational assessments exercises are important and useful in order to know the current academic status of pupils, to detect areas of improvement in classrooms and to come up with the best strategies to address the needs found in educational scenarios (UNESCO, 2011, 2014). While the Mexican government made an important step in educational history by implementing the first assessment at preschool level in 2007, which enabled the creation of the first database for academic attainment, there are still some doubts about the usefulness of the information gathered and its effects on the quality of education in the country. Unlike the preschool level, first graders may still have to wait until the government decides the best option to assess their academic performance given the current policy of assessing their attainment starting from third grade. This assessment exercise is of the utmost importance given that it would provide important information so as to detect areas of improvement at this educational level. Moreover, it would also be helpful to share this information to policymakers about the performance of students and teachers so as to have evidence that could help inform policy reforms. Finally, in light of this transition period, the academic assessment would play a major role in understating the extent to which preschoolers succeed in the first grade and the way in which not only programmes and contents, but also pedagogical approaches and material are effective in reaching the expected learning outcomes.

Overall, there are a number of elements to be considered in the educational context in Mexico in light of preschool transition to first grade. Educational processes and procedures need to ensure not only a wide educational coverage, but also a high quality of education that is delivered at both educational levels. To this end, the persons involved in the teaching-learning process need to be included and considered to combine their knowledge and experiences in order to design a clear and defined pathway for the

preschool transition into first grade. The curriculum, learning outcomes, pedagogical approaches and assessment procedures need to be in line and really clarified to personnel in schools. This will allow carrying out a consistent practice in education centres and helping during this transition. Further, educational policies, processes and procedures should primarily rely not only on empirical evidence, but also on national assessments which show the most appropriate and essential elements to consider in light of Mexican culture.

This literature review with regard to the current Mexican context shows a number of essential elements that strongly shape the preschool and primary education in Mexico. The studies describe to a great extent the current educational conditions of which the transition is part. Certainly, a number of challenges can be observed which hinder not only children, but also teachers and families from making a smooth transition into primary school. In line with this, it may be important to reflect upon a number of elements found in the Mexican context in light of the challenges reported by the international literature on transition. This reflection may also lead to some suggestions where the role and active participation of education professionals and policymakers is essential. It is argued that educational policies should be based on evidence-based information provided by the specialists in the educational field. Further, research has been regarded as a powerful tool to inform not only policies but also practices (Reimers & McGinn, 1997). This pathway may also seem feasible in the Mexican context in order to propose and make changes, however in light of Reimers and McGinn's statements, it can then be suggested that the baseline for potential modifications is the production of research.

A lack of research on preschool transition has been found in Latin America and especially in the Mexican context. Thus, it is necessary to carry out studies that could help explore and understand the way in which preschoolers transit to first grade in Mexico. This will help not only to understand this process and the variables involved, but also set a theoretical baseline under which further studies can be done. This thesis seeks to inform with evidence-based information not only the persons involved in this transition process—teachers, headteachers and parents—but also stakeholders and policymakers who have the potential to reform policies in light of research that could help promote a smooth transition. Once the context of this phenomenon is described, researchers will be able to come up with research-based ideas and propose effective intervention programmes/policies tailored to the needs of the communities of Mexico which could potentially result in important educational reforms to offer a smooth transition.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

This chapter describes the methodological approach used in this study to investigate community perceptions and practices with regard to the preschool transition process including the principal aim, research questions and research design of the thesis. It also explains the rationale behind the methodology chosen which is based on the previous studies carried out in this respect. Given that this study follows a mixed-method approach, a critical review of the main advantages and disadvantages of this methodology is also provided in light of the most up-to-date research.

A description of the general research design comprising the main purpose of the research as well as the research questions is provided. It offers a framework under which the development of the measures was carried out in addition to a description regarding the creation of the semi-structured interview formats, sample selection and school selection criteria. Finally, in addition to a thorough description of the data-collection procedure, the data analyses process used is also detailed in order to understand how the quantitative and qualitative data gathered was processed so as to answer research questions and therefore to reach the principal aim of the study.

### Previous Research

Research on transition has used a wide variety of methodological approaches in order to carry out important studies across the globe. From the two methodological approaches widely known namely quantitative and qualitative, some studies have used one approach in particular in an attempt to contribute to the understanding of this phenomenon by obtaining a wide range of information that these two perspectives allow (Corsaro et al., 2002; Cassidy, 2005; Carida, 2011; Nix et al., 2013; Robinson & Diamond, 2013). Nevertheless, extensive studies have also followed a mixed-method approach (Chan 2012; Lau 2014; Rubie-Davies, 2010). Quantitative studies have focused on a number of variables involved in this period of change such as children's academic performance, classroom behaviour, teachers' practices, effectiveness of transition programmes, teacher-child interactions, parents self-efficacy and so forth (Li et al., 2013; Wildenger & McIntyre, 2012), while qualitative research has focused on studying perspectives and perceptions of children, parents and teachers in addition to children's friendships (DiSanto & Bernan, 2012; Hatcher et al., 2012; Peters, 2013).

For instance, an interesting quantitative study was carried out by Giallo et al. (2010) as part of which the authors surveyed 576 parents from five different schools in order to assess the effectiveness of the implementation of transition programmes. The authors used additional scales so as to measure a number of variables such as parental self-efficacy, parental sense of competence, parental involvement in school activities, children's adjustment to school, socio-emotional and behaviour functioning and parents' satisfaction with the programme implemented. Similarly, Robinson and Diamond (2013) used a quantitative approach to examine the association between preschoolers' socio-interpersonal skills and their adjustment to kindergarten. The authors used five scales to assess different variables such as vocabulary, problem solving skills, social skills, children's adjustment and teachers' transition practices. Results indicated that preschoolers' social skills are of the utmost importance for this period as they enhance the adjustment to the new setting. Further, higher rates in children's competence as well as in problem-solving skills were related to less children's problems reported by teachers.

Conversely, in another study, Cassidy (2005) followed a qualitative approach in order to explore the perceptions, attitudes and expectations of primary school teachers in Scotland by using discussion groups and individual interviews. Results revealed that teachers need important information with regard to the preschoolers coming to first grade in order to assist them in this transition. Teachers highlighted the need to be aware of children's previous learning and indicated at the same time a great concern about this stage for children. Visits to primary school were regarded as a main strategy to make this transition easier.

In order to further expand this knowledge of teachers' perceptions, Dockett and Perry (2004) carried out a qualitative study which gathered data from 300 children, 300 parents and 300 teachers in Australia in order to investigate their views with regard to the entrance to the new school using grounded theory. Results revealed that parents and teachers had very different perceptions of this transition. Six main themes emerged from the data analysis: knowledge, skills, adjustment, dispositions, physical environment, and family-related issues. Similarly, based on a longitudinal research design and using qualitative techniques for data collection such as interviews, Arndt et al. (2013) examined how parents, children and teachers understood this transition. The aim was to explore the way in which parents and children from a disadvantaged socio-economic background dealt with this period of change. Results indicated that teachers perceive a clear lack of

encouragement and involvement by families their child's education. In contrast, parents believed that they give total support to their child within the family environment.

A mixed-methodology has been also useful to explore perceptions of teachers and classroom interactions, views of parents regarding transition and their child's readiness, as well as the practices of teachers and academic skills of children (Chan, 2012; Chun, 2003, Nix et al., 2013). For instance, Suzuki's study (2013) used a mixed-methodology to explore the views of kindergarten and primary school teachers in Japan. Video recorded classes were used to show teachers different educational practices so they could rate them in terms of effectiveness. Additionally, 16 teachers were interviewed by the author in order to find common patterns in terms of pedagogical thoughts and beliefs using grounded theory. Among the most important facts found was the different emphasis teachers place on routine activities. Whereas preschool teachers highlighted more play-based activities as important, primary school teachers emphasised the academic activities.

Chun (2003) also investigated the practices and views of difficulties in light of this transition. Primary school teachers, parents and children were the participants. In order to collect the data, the author used questionnaires, classroom observations and interviews. The information gathered helped to identify the strong desire children had to go back to kindergarten based on their perspectives. It confirmed what previous studies had indicated about the difficulties children face in first grade. Teachers reported that following rules and adjusting to the routine were important factors in this transition.

Nix et al, (2013) carried out a study in order to explore the effectiveness of a specialised kindergarten programme in comparison to the usual Headstart programme in USA. A mixed-methodology was used in this study where different scales were used to measure a number of variables such as vocabulary, emotional understanding, social problem skills, positive social behaviour, reading achievement and learning engagement. Classroom observations were carried out by research assistants in order to measure children's interactions. Results revealed a strong association between children's emotional understanding and adjustment to the new school. Moreover, the adequate development of this set of skills was associated with positive outcomes regarding academic issues such as reading performance.

From this review, the variety of methodological strategies used in transition research can also be observed when analysing the types of techniques used in data-collection and data-analysis processes. Quantitative studies have used a number of

techniques that include survey, checklists, scales and questionnaires, whilst qualitative research has relied on the use of interviews, classroom observations, and anecdotal records. Studies from a mixed-method stance comprise a combination of different techniques such as scales, group discussions, interviews, questionnaires, performances tests and observations.

### **Rationale, Main Aim of the Study and Research Questions**

Based on an analysis of the literature, an important gap needs to be highlighted. The international literature is based on a number of important contributions to the knowledge and understanding of this phenomenon in a number of countries; however the Latin American context has been largely ignored in this respect. Moreover, specifically in Mexico City there has been a little research on how preschoolers currently make the transition to first grade. This study focuses mainly on public schools in Mexico City from an urbanized area. In order to address the main aim as well as the research questions of the current study, a mixed-method approach was adopted. This approach was selected due to the advantages it provides not only data-collection but also in data-analysis stages. The approach draws together a wide range of important information from participants essential to the aim of this research.

The main aim of this study was to explore the perceptions of transition between preschool and first grade primary school held by teachers, headteachers and parents in the public education system in Mexico City. A number of previous studies have focused on the main persons when studying transitions namely children, parents, teachers and headteachers (Dockett & Perry, 2007; Noel, 2012). This study focuses on participants' views from both educational levels from a mixed method perspective. As a result and based on the main aim of the study, the following research questions applicable to both scenarios were drawn up:

1. What are the problems teachers' perceive preschoolers/first graders face during this transition?
2. What are the main concerns that teachers have in this transition?
3. What are the main barriers teachers perceive during this period?
4. What are the transition practices teachers use?
5. What do teachers think can be done in order to improve this transition?
6. What are the perceptions of headteachers about this transition period?
7. What are the perceptions of parents in this transition?

## **Mixed-Method Approach**

It is argued by some scholars that the mixed-method approach is a combination of elements between two of the most prevailing methodologies accepted by the scientific community, namely quantitative and qualitative (McDowell & Mclean, 2012). Tashakkori and Creswell (2007) offer an interesting definition by stating that this approach is a “research in which the investigator collects and analyses data, integrates the findings and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches” (p: 3). Despite the ongoing debate in the scientific community about the advantages and disadvantages this approach may represent, this approach has now been established as a third approach which combines strengths as well as limitations (Wilson & Wilson, 2008). For the purposes of the present study, it is necessary to give a sense of the main characteristics of both approaches so as to arrive to the final conception of a mixed-methodology adopted. This analysis could offer the expected debate among paradigms, however the main objective is to clarify the use and the strengths of this approach that significantly benefit the current research.

The quantitative approach is strongly associated with the positivistic view which claims that the source of authoritative knowledge must be grounded in logical and mathematical reasoning and treatments (Cohen et al, 2013; Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011). This approach is also regarded as an objective approach whereby the researcher has no effect on the object studied (Scheurich, 2014). The epistemological assumption for this approach suggests that the world’s phenomena are “out there” waiting to be observed, explored and investigated by the subject (Scheurich, 2014). This author goes on to say that the researcher does not modify the reality observed, but rather is a mere observer and investigator of the properties of the event or phenomenon researched.

There are a number of techniques used by this approach that scholars have specifically regarded as specifically quantitative-based, but an examination of them all goes beyond the scope of the present study. The most important techniques used by this approach include scales, surveys, performance or clinical tests, checklists and questionnaires, given that the nature of their applicability allows the mathematical treatment expected in different stages of a research (Cohen, et al., 2013). A number of advantages that this approach offers have been highlighted by scholars, among which the most important include the generation of a hypothesis prior to conducting the study, the way results can be generalized because of the sample size used and predictions derived from the data analysed. In addition, it provides precise numerical data and is less time

consuming. It is also suggested that this easy-to-use approach for big samples, offers a total objectivity in the results and major credibility of the findings (Onwuegbuzie, Johnson & Coluns, 2009). This is to say, by using this methodology, the researcher is in a position to reach meaningful, objective and more generalizable results when working with a large data set. There are some specific research designs assigned to the quantitative approach, namely true experiments, quasi-experiments and non-experiments (Cohen et al., 2013). These designs have been developed under the assumption that the variables of the phenomenon studied can arguably be controlled to some extent, giving the opportunity to the researcher to observe different effects (Cozby & Bates, 2012; Kantowitz, Roediger & Elmes, 2014). Although there are a number of advantages claimed by different scholars, specifically Langdrige and Hagger-Johnson (2013) offer a contrast between some advantages and disadvantages of this approach as shown in Table 4.

Table 4

*Advantages and Disadvantages of Quantitative Research According to Langdrige and Hagger-Johnson (2013, p.14)*

| Quantitative   |  |
|--|--|
| Advantages   | Disadvantages  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Precise (in terms of measurement)</li> <li>• Controlled (in terms of design)</li> <li>• Makes claims about causation</li> <li>• Has predictive power (can generalize to other settings on the basis of some finding in a particular setting)</li> <li>• Is a dominant approach in psychology</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May grossly oversimplify the complexity of human nature</li> <li>• May fail to recognise or be explicit about the subjective nature of social science research</li> <li>• May fail to recognize the individuality and autonomous of human beings</li> </ul> |

According to Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010), the type of data used in this approach varies widely depending on the objectives of the research. However the main characteristic of this approach is that the events, phenomenon or reality studied can be interpreted based on a numerical conception. This view is grounded in the premise that the positivist view supports the idea that the research can measure the phenomena in an objective way. As a result, scholars have suggested a number of strategies in order to transform the observable into numerical data. For instance, the scientific community has widely accepted the use of scales such as the Likert-type which became famous after its inventor Rensis Likert used it in a number of studies (Howitt & Cramer, 2008).

Data-collection procedures for this approach include surveys, observational checklists, questionnaires and scales (Coolican, 2009). All these procedures share one characteristic in particular; they are built in such a way that information can be easily gathered and analysed by mathematical models (Muijs, 2010). In order to benefit from this advantage, positivist scholars have created a set of categories to classify the data gathered, namely nominal, ordinal or interval (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). The use of these categorized data makes its analysis significantly faster by using specialised software focused on analysing these types of data (Trafimow, 2014).

The data-analysis of quantitative data allows the researcher to obtain a summary of the results in a numerical way which is arguably easier to manage and interpret (Trafimow, 2014). Trafimow goes on to say that the strategies used to this end offer some advantages when the researcher is interested in isolating confounding variables involved in the results which presumably are causing an effect on the main variable studied. It is argued that another advantage is that the results reflect more credible findings because a degree of confidence can be obtained through the use of these analytical strategies (Trafimow, 2014). To this end, the quantitative paradigm utilises a number of current statistical analyses such as correlations, analysis of variance (e.g., ANOVA, MANCOVA), regression analyses and so forth.

Finally, the scientific community has developed a way to ensure that the results obtained, analysed and reported under this quantitative perspective reflect the truth the researcher is claiming with regard to a given phenomenon (Trafimow, 2014). To this end, the positivist community uses two broad concepts—borrowed from the psychological field—which are always placed at the core of the debate, validity and reliability (Twycross, & Shields, 2005). Validity refers to the extent to which the instrument utilised measures the construct or variable intended to be measured (Rossiter, 2011). Through this process, the researcher makes sure that the results he/she is yielding are truly reflecting the main characteristics of the phenomenon studied. There are a number of different types of validity, namely, construct, convergent, content, criterion, concurrent, predictive and so on. Reliability is a process which relates to the fact that an instrument used to gather information produces consistent results (Twycross, & Shields, 2005). Although this concept is usually regarded as a way to ensure that the quantitative study is producing reliable results, it has also been broadly used as a quality of the instrument *per se* (Rossiter, 2011). For instance, in order to ensure a reliable instrument there are a number of ways such as Cronbach alpha, split-half, test-retest, inter-observer and so forth. These strategies

are used to ensure that result obtained from the data analysis is reliable by obtaining a given coefficient.

Conversely, the qualitative paradigm is heavily based on the constructivist-interpretivist stance. This epistemology relies on the fact that rather than observing, exploring and researching one single entity, its particularities, features and conception are given by the construction of its definition on behalf of the researcher (Merriam, 2014). Scholars also suggest that this paradigm is closely attached to hermeneutics, which in turn, makes the process of interpretation a single one whereby the meaning of the object studied and observed is hidden and needs to be discovered by the researcher (Trafimow, 2014). There is necessarily a close interaction between the researcher and the object. The relationship established between these two, is therefore of the utmost importance within this paradigm where the object has an effect on the researcher whilst the researcher has an effect on the object (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The result of this interaction, in addition to the interpretation of the phenomenon on behalf of the researcher is the essential premise under which this paradigm suggests that knowledge is constructed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). To summarize, the essential element that distinguishes the positivist from the interpretivist paradigm, is that the reality is constructed by the researcher (Ponterotto, 2005). To this end, the researcher focuses on gathering participants’ lived experiences which are claimed to be the anchor point of the qualitative designs (Schwandt, 2000). In this context, Langdridge and Hagger-Johnson (2013) share an interesting contrast between the advantages and disadvantages of this approach (see Table 5).

Table 5

*Advantages and Disadvantages of Qualitative Research According to Langdridge and Hagger-Johnson (2013, p. 15)*

| Qualitative  |  |
|--|--|
| Advantages   | Disadvantages  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognises the subjective experience of participants</li> <li>• Often produces unexpected insights about human nature through an open-ended approach to research</li> <li>• Enables and “insider” perspective on different social worlds</li> <li>• Generally does not impose a particular way of “seeing” on the participants</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cannot apply traditional notions of validity and reliability</li> <li>• It is often not appropriate or even possible to make generalizations</li> <li>• Needs justification for it is still not a widely and consistently accepted approach to psychological research</li> <li>• Lack of replicability</li> </ul> |

As previously mentioned, the types of data mainly used under this paradigm are the lived experiences of the participants. This type of information can take many forms in the research field such as perceptions, expectations, ideas, preconceptions, notions, concepts and so on (Trafimow, 2014). Data is gathered mainly from people the researcher has chosen to investigate and address the main objective of the study. Documents, biographies, discourses, speeches or anecdotal records are of great help to this end and give the researcher the opportunity to analyse in depth and reflect upon the material retrieved and provide his/her interpretation (Tesch, 2013).

In this paradigm, data-collection procedures focus on gathering the type of information above-mentioned. To this end, the researcher makes use of a wide range of strategies to collect the data such as interviews, anecdotal logs, reflective journals, focus groups, field note, observations and so on (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). One of the main characteristics of this paradigm is that the researcher himself/herself is regarded as the main tool or instrument in order to yield the information required (Silverman, 2011). In contrast to the positivist view where scales, surveys or instruments are used to collect data, under the interpretivist paradigm the researcher is the main tool in this process (Collins, Onwuegbuzie, & Sutton, 2006). As a result of this emphasis on the researcher, under this paradigm the values, background and beliefs of the researcher play an important role not only in the data-collection but also during the data-analysis process (Silverman, 2011). However, the same arguments are used to highlight the richness not only of the data but also of the interpretation and final results of the research (Silverman, 2011).

The data analysis of this type of information ranges from the categorisation of concepts to the search for themes, common patterns or deep meanings (e.g., ideas, concepts, notions) in the information analysed, to the construction of a new theory following specialised approaches to this end (e.g., grounded theory) (Tesch, 2013). At the core of the data-analysis process, a reflective process on behalf of the researcher is pointed out by the scholars as an essential element that reflects one the main principles of the interpretivist perspective (Leech, & Onwuegbuzie, 2010). It is argued that this reflective process is focused on the interaction between the researcher and the object where the researcher is able to show the elements involved in such interaction that may have an effect in the interpretation of the results (Schwandt, 2000). All in all, these premises underscore the nature *itself* of the interpretivist paradigm with regard to data analysis.

Lastly, scholars who specialise in the qualitative approach have suggested one specific term to help ensure the worth of the research from this stance which is what in the

quantitative approach refers to validity and reliability. The concept referring to these processes is trustworthiness (Twycross, & Shields, 2005). Guba (1981) proposed a model in this respect where he created four categories which together constitute the concept of trustworthiness. These four categories are credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Credibility mainly refers to the extent to which efforts are made by the researcher to provide credible or believable results from the participant's viewpoint. Transferability refers to the extent to which results can be generalised or translate to different contexts. To this end, the researcher must ensure an accurate description of the context in which the research was carried out. Dependability refers to the extent to which the same results from a study can be observed if the study is replicated, and conformability refers to the degree to which the results yielded can be corroborated or observed by other researchers (Creswell, 2007; Krefting, 1991; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

Finally, the mixed-methods approach derives from the paradigms described above, and implies a combination of strategies, methodological techniques and epistemological assumptions (Hanson, et al., 2005; Small, 2011). As Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner (2007) rightly posit:

Mixed methods research is the type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g., use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration. (p.123)

Called the third methodological movement by Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003), the mixed-method approach also supposes the combination of the defining elements of quantitative and qualitative approaches in light of three main areas, data collection, data analysis, and viewpoints. This methodology relies heavily on another epistemological assumption derived from the ongoing debate of positivist *versus* interpretivist, pragmatism. According to Morgan (2007), this epistemology, refers to the way in which a researcher's worldviews, epistemologies, ethics, values and beliefs shape actions and methodologies. Most of the scholars in favour of this approach have highlighted that one of its main characteristics is the combination of strengths, rather than the overlap of the weakness (Johnson, et al., 2007). Under the ongoing debate about these two approaches as argued by Schwandt (2000), it is also suggested that the mixture of both perspectives can be challenging due to the proper nature of the quantitative and qualitative viewpoints (Small, 2011). Moreover, this challenge extends to the data-collection and data-analysis process.

Although these approaches differ greatly in their techniques for collection and analysis, there is a strong consensus that these differences do not necessarily represent disadvantages but strengths along the process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

At the heart of the debate, both approaches can be complementary as suggested by some scholars such as Guba and Lincoln (1994). Quantitative strategies can help make more accurate the selection of the sample while conducting a qualitative study, whilst the qualitative techniques can be of great help in providing a wider theoretical support to the mathematical-based interpretations of the quantitative perspective (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Both approaches can coexist in light of the current methodological demands and both can certainly contribute to the investigation of a number of phenomena that require a broader analysis and different methodological strategies (Johnson, et al., 2007) for a better comprehension of the phenomena. Although Johnson et al. (2007) raises important questions about the weight each perspective gives to the final mixed-method process leading to the creation of different categories, a debate and/or analysis of such categories and classification might seem not important for this study, nevertheless it is clear that the student-researcher is aware of such conceptions bearing in mind the advantages and limitations of such definitions (see Johnson et al, 2007).

As with the quantitative and qualitative perspectives, it is necessary to analyse the way in which the mixed-methods approach benefits from these two perspectives in different areas of the research process, namely type of data, data-collection and data-analysis process (Evans, Coon & Ume, 2011), but given that these characteristics have already been described, a brief mention will suffice for the present study. The type of data this method uses results in a wider variety, ranging from numerical data obtained through scales to speeches or document analysis. The data-collection techniques are broader, now ranging from interviews to performance tests. The data-analysis process can make use of a variety of techniques such as correlations or ANOVAs to content or thematic analyses (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

The following conclusions can be drawn from the previous analysis. From the above-mentioned debate regarding methodological approaches, a number of disadvantages can be highlighted bearing in mind the differences in epistemologies. Scholars could spend years of debate where the main advantages and limitations of each perspective would be highlighted and contrasted over and over again. Nonetheless, there is strong evidence to

state that this third paradigm provides accepted scientific results (Hanson et al., 2005). There is also evidence to support the idea that the combination of strategies, techniques and viewpoints enables the researcher to make clearer, deeper and stronger arguments (Collins, Onwuegbuzie, & Sutton, 2006). Furthermore, the use of this third paradigm requires the researcher to have a different set of skills which will directly benefit him/her and prepare him/her for the current research demands in a globalised world (Creswell, 2012). These demands are in line with the challenges this study represents and as such, the mixed-method approach will be of great help bearing in mind that –as suggested by Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003)–the main advantage of these mixed methodologies is that it ‘...enables the researcher to simultaneously answer confirmatory and exploratory questions, and therefore verify and generate theory at the same time’ (p.15).

In light of the main aim and objectives of the present study, a mixed-method approach was chosen because it provided benefits in different areas of the research process as described below. The rationale behind this choice was very much in line with five main aspects Green et al. (1989) proposes:

1. *Triangulation*: ‘convergence, corroboration, correspondence or results from different methods. In coding triangulation, the emphasis was placed on seeking corroboration between quantitative and qualitative data’
2. *Complementarity*: ‘seeks elaboration, enhancement, illustration, clarification of the results from one method with the results from another’
3. *Development*: ‘seeks to use the results from one method to help develop or inform the other method, where development is broadly construed to include sampling and implementation, as well as measurement decisions’
4. *Initiation*: ‘seeks the discovery of paradox and contradiction, new perspectives of frameworks, the recasting of questions or results from one method with questions or results from the other method’
5. *Expansion*: seeks to extend the breath and range of enquiry by using different methods for different inquiry components’ (p. 259)

This approach benefits from the advantages of both methods. As a result, a number of scholars have reported such advantages (De Silva, 2011; Jones & Summer, 2009; De Lisle, 2011; Singleton & Straits, 1999) as follows:

- Broader use of tools and strategies for data-collection.
- Greater transferability of results.

- Better in-depth discovery of patterns and practices in data.
- Collection of different types of data.
- A broader scope to study the phenomenon.
- Expanded understanding of the phenomenon studied.
- Complementary assumptions and understanding of the given phenomenon.
- Provides a fuller and richer view of the phenomenon.
- More confidence in results.
- It can complement fuller explanations.
- Diminishes the researcher bias by relying on each method's results.
- Multiple uses of strategies for data-analysis.
- Encourages the use of multiple paradigms or perspectives.
- Allows the emergence of inductive and deductive thinking

Overall, the elements above were considered essential to pursue the objective of the current study as well as to address the research questions. The combination of types of data, data-collection strategies and data-analyses techniques was found to be extremely useful for the current study and to enrich the different stages of the research.

### **Research Design**

A mixed-method research design was chosen for the current study to take advantage of the benefits this approach provides as suggested by Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2010). A combination of questionnaire, scale and interviews was carried out in order to address the main research questions. Table 6 summarises the instruments used for the data collection stage, highlighting the methods used for each data needed. A cross-sectional design was also chosen to gather the data needed at a single point in time during the transition process. This design had a number of advantages, including simple, cheap and quick data collection. Further, it also helped establish association rather than causality which is helpful whenever establishing prevalence is more important than establishing incidence (Coolican, 2009). As suggested by Ritchie and Lewis (2003), cross-sectional studies are not intended to look at how participants change over time, but rather at the specific particularities of the participants at a certain period of time. For this, the contexts in which participants are situated considering the environmental variables around are of the utmost important for the study. This will help understand and explain participants' experiences

specifically under such context. To this end, data were collected during the first semester of the beginning of the academic year in both scenarios, preschool and primary school.

Table 6

*Data-collection Methods used for each Research Question.*

| Research question   | Data Collection Method              |                             |            |
|---|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|
|   | Questionnaire: Open-ended questions | Questionnaire: Rating Scale | Interviews |
| 1. What are the problems teachers' perceive preschoolers/first graders face during this transition? | x                                   | x                           |            |
| 2. What are the main concerns teachers have in this transition?                                     | x                                   |                             |            |
| 3. What are the main barriers teachers perceive during this period?                                 | x                                   |                             |            |
| 4. What are the transition practices teachers use?  |                                     | x                           |            |
| 5. What do teachers think can be done in order to improve this transition?                          | x                                   |                             |            |
| 6. What are the perceptions of headteachers about this transition period?                           |                                     |                             | x          |
| 7. What are the perceptions of parents in this transition?  |                                     |                             | x          |

### Instruments and Measures

Two different surveys and semi-structured interviews were developed based on an extensive literature review of a number of studies carried out on the subject of transition (Ahtola et al., 2011; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2013; Dockett & Perry, 2004; Kane, 2008 ; Gill, Winters & Friedman, 2006; LaParo, Pianta, & Cox, 2000; Lara-Cinisomo et al., 2007). It is worth noting that the psychometric properties of the instruments reviewed, have shown their efficacy when used in a number of similar transition studies (Hausken & Rathburn, 2001, Nathanson, Rimm-Kauffman & Brock, 2009; Ponitz et al., 2009; Pianta, 1996; Pianta, Rimm-Kauffman & Cox, 2001). Before describing the main instruments used in this study, it is important to highlight the features and importance of the methods chosen.

**Questionnaires: open-ended questions.** These are regarded as essential and one of the most frequently used methods for data collection from a quantitative perspective because of the advantages (see Table 7) they offer (Bryman, 2004). Questionnaires allow gathering a wide range of information from a large number of people. Information can take the form of participants' perceptions, attitudes, opinions, beliefs and viewpoints

(Langdridge & Hagger-Johnson, 2013). The types of questions that can be used in this method are diverse and have the potential to obtain information in different ways. Psychological and educational literature focuses primarily on two types of question that can be used, namely closed and open-ended questions. The former gather information by providing a series of alternative yet closed answers to participants. These alternative answers are usually predefined by the researcher where the participants' choices are limited to certain clusters (Newby, 2010). By using open-ended questions, the researcher offers more flexibility to respondents without providing any specific potential responses. The researcher instead, offers an 'open space' so respondents can share in an ampler way their views in response to specific questions (Langdridge & Hagger-Johnson, 2013). Among the types of information that can be gathered from questionnaires, we can find factual knowledge, understanding, mental schemes, analysis of situations, values, judgements and so on (Newby, 2010).

Table 7

*Advantages and Disadvantages of using Questionnaires according to Bryman (2004, p. 143)*

| Questionnaires  |  |
|---|--|
| Advantages  | Disadvantages  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respondents can answer in their own terms</li> <li>• They allow unusual responses to be derived</li> <li>• The questions does not suggest certain kinds of answer to respondents</li> <li>• They are useful to explore new areas or ones in which the researcher has limited knowledge</li> <li>• They are useful to generate fixed-choice format answers</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They are time consuming for interviewers</li> <li>• Answers have to be "coded"</li> <li>• They require greater effort from respondents</li> </ul> |

Questionnaires are easily-administered to big samples. Its construction however, needs to be carefully carried out since it requires a number of essential elements in order to ensure its effectiveness. Some specific characteristics of questionnaires highlighted by Langdridge & Hagger-Johnson (2013) include the need to ensure a quick and easy version of the questionnaire considering to be short in length. The questionnaire is more likely to be completed if it is easier to read and must therefore be clearly written. An information sheet where the main objective of the study is explained as well as participants' consent form must be attached. Likewise, Langdridge and Hagger note common pitfalls when constructing the questionnaire such as asking one question at a time, avoiding jargon,

avoiding ambiguous questions and avoiding double-negative questions instead of offering neutral questions. In short, the type of questions, the structure and the layout of the questionnaire depend not only on researcher's choice, but also on the aims of the study.

**Rating Scale.** The so called Likert-type scale measures the degree to which participants agree or disagree with a statement provided by the researcher (Langdrige & Hagger-Johnson, 2013). Rensis Likert (1932) was a pioneer in developing this type of measurement. This is a very useful tool that allows obtaining not only participants' answers, but also capturing the intensity of their responses whereby the researcher provides a set of statements and also a numerical scale predefined by the researcher (Wilson & McClean 2011). In this type of data-collection method, there is an important concept to bear in mind during the construction of scales which is the semantic differential. This term means that the options offered in the scale can usually be opposite adjectives where the respondents' answers will be registered (Langdrige & Hagger-Johnson, 2013; Newby, 2010). According to Newby (2010) this differential is based on two main elements namely the aim of the study and previous research. The semantic differential dimensions proposed by Langdrige and Hagger are activity, potency and evaluation which means meaning that possible categories for response will vary among these dimensions. Likert-type scales have different formats according to Clark and Watson (1995) such as "frequency (*ever to always*), degree or extent (*not at all to very much*), similarity (*like me to not like me*), and agreement (*strongly agree to strongly disagree*) formats" (p. 313).

Scales clearly offer a number of advantages (see Table 8) which can be of great help during the data-collection stage(s) of the research process. Scales capture not only a response, but also its intensity. When participants are given bipolar adjectives and a scale with additional options in between, they can decide to what degree they value the statement provided (Newby, 2010). Scales are easy to administer because the instructions are included and participants answer accordingly without additional difficulties. This is a quick and efficient data-collection method which also leads to an easy analysis of the responses gathered (Bryman, 2004). Data-analysis is a smooth process because the collection of responses is based on numerical data derived from degrees previously defined by the researcher (Wilson & McClean, 2011). This mathematical characteristic offers a wide range of opportunities in terms of statistical analysis that can be applied to the collected data (Coolican, 2009). In conclusion, although there are some disadvantages attached to the use of scales, the advantages clearly outweigh them. The advantages this data-collection has demonstrated are clearly beneficial for the current study.

Table 8

*Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Rating Scales based on Different Authors*

| Rating Scales   |   |
|---|---|
| Advantages  | Disadvantages   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It captures intensity of responses</li> <li>• Easy-to-administer</li> <li>• No time-consuming</li> <li>• Easy-to-analyse</li> <li>• Responses categories predefined</li> <li>• Allow statistical analysis</li> <li>• Large number of participants can be included</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Its construction takes considerable amount of time</li> <li>• Cannot obtain deep information</li> <li>• Does not allow participants to share additional ideas</li> <li>• Categories are so narrowed not allowing further clarifications</li> </ul> |

Based on the empirical evidence highlighting not only the advantages but also the appropriateness of the use of rating scales, a number of transition-related questionnaires and scales were extensively reviewed which helped reach the final construction of the Teachers' Perceptions on Transition Survey (TPTS). This questionnaire was developed on two different versions, each of which focused on preschool teachers (see Appendix G) and primary first grade teachers (see Appendix H) respectively. The final version of both surveys comprised 38 items in total divided into four sections: a) demographic data, b) children's problems rating scale, c) teachers' perceptions questionnaire with open-ended questions and d) teachers' transition practices rating scale.

- a) Demographic information: This area focused on retrieving information regarding participants' age, gender, years of experience and so forth with a total of nine questions.
- b) Children's problems rating scale: This section comprised 12 different problems to be rated by teachers (e.g., *Children show difficulty following directions*) on a 5-point Likert type format ranging from "1 = *Not at all true*" to "5 = *Yes, very true*", in order to obtain the prevalence and frequency of children's problems teachers identify during this transition.
- c) Teachers' perceptions questionnaire: A total of five open-ended questions were included in the survey in order to obtain teachers' perceptions of the preschool transition (e.g., *Describe the child who is well-prepared for 1<sup>st</sup> grade of primary school*).

- d) Transition practices rating scale: This section comprised a compilation of 20 items relating to transition practices and was aimed at obtaining the prevalence of the transition practices used by teachers on a 5-point Likert type scale ranging from “1= Never” to “5 =Always” (e.g., *The preschool children’s portfolio is shared with first grade teacher.*). It is important to mention that this section was different for preschool and primary teachers. Such differences mainly focused on changing the perspective through which teachers considered children’s transition (e.g., *Primary school: ‘Review the pre-schooler final report with parents in regard to child’s academic and /or developmental skills’; Preschool: ‘Provide a final report to parents in regard to child’s academic and /or developmental skills’*).

**Interviews.** The importance of the use of interviews is amply documented in the literature. This strategy represents one of the simplest ways to gather information in social sciences from a qualitative stance. As Silverman (2011) posits, the interview is one of the most frequently used data-collection strategies in research. Interviews can have different forms determined by the objective of the study such as structured, semi-structured and unstructured (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003). According to Doody and Noonan (2013), structured interviews are those in which “each participant is asked the same questions using the same wording and in the same order as all the other participants” (p. 28). This type of interview is time effective and reduces the researcher’s bias by giving total control to the interviewer with regard to the topic and format. Unstructured interviews, on the other hand, begin with open questions which trigger the interviewee’s responses from which subsequent questions arise in light of the main topic to be analysed. The interviewer has neither a predefined format nor an order of questioning which offers the advantage of following the flow of information provided by participants’ responses. This type is non-directive and flexible having general themes instead of a strict set of questions (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Finally, the semi-structured interviews comprise a set of predefined questions that guide the conversation, but which also give the interviewer the opportunity to go beyond the participants’ response to clarify topics, themes, definitions, ideas, terms and so forth. A well-structured guide is often developed in this type of interview and serves for collecting all the participants’ information. It also offers the opportunity to explore further ideas that arise unexpectedly but are closely related to the topic being addressed.

Kvale (1996) offers a thorough rationale behind the use of interviews in qualitative research arguing that if the researcher is interested in getting to know anything from the

physical world, he or she simply needs to ask. In a complete analysis of interviews as an effective tool from the interpretivist position, the author suggests that an interview "...is a conversation that has a structure and a purpose determined by the one party—the interviewer" (p. 7). One particular element frequently highlighted in interviews he suggests, is the relationship established by the interviewer and the interviewee which is of the utmost importance in order to offer an adequate interaction and atmosphere. This would allow the interviewee to feel safe and will encourage the disclosure of important information pertinent for the study.

In light of the current study's aims and the use of interviews for collecting data, it is important to highlight the advantages and disadvantages (see Table 9) of this strategy as suggested by Doody and Noonan (2013).

Table 9

*Advantages and Disadvantages of Interviews taken from Doody and Noonan (2013, p. 29)*

| Interviews   |  |
|--|--|
| Advantages   | Disadvantages  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They are useful to gain insight and context.</li> <li>• They help participants describe what is important to them.</li> <li>• They are useful in generating quotes and stories.</li> <li>• They enable the researcher to develop a rapport.</li> <li>• They give the researcher the opportunity to observe as well as listen.</li> <li>• They enable more complex questions to be asked.</li> <li>• The researcher can explain the purpose of the research and answer any questions the participant may have about the study.</li> <li>• The researcher can probe the participant's responses and seek further clarification.</li> <li>• Participants can seek clarification of a question.</li> <li>• They help the participant to give detailed responses.</li> <li>• They can explore participants' reasons for acting in a certain way or their interpretations of events.</li> <li>• They are more appropriate for certain groups, such as those with reading or writing difficulties.</li> <li>• Interviews can be rewarding for participants as they stimulate self-exploration and discovery.</li> <li>• Personal benefit: the telling of one's story.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They may seem intrusive to the participant.</li> <li>• They are time-consuming, not only in terms of conducting them but also in relation to arranging them, travelling to the venue, post-interview transcription and analysis of the data.</li> <li>• They can be expensive compared with other methods.</li> <li>• Interviews on a personal and/or intimate subject can evoke strong feelings and these feelings need to be handled with great sensitivity.</li> <li>• They are susceptible to bias, which may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ The participant's desire to please the researcher.</li> <li>➢ Saying what they think/feel the researcher wishes to hear, such as giving an official point of view rather than their personal view.</li> <li>➢ The desire to create a good impression may lead to participants not answering honestly.</li> <li>➢ There is a tendency to say something rather than nothing if the participant cannot answer a question or has nothing to say on a topic.</li> <li>➢ The researcher's views can influence the participant's responses by expressing surprise or disapproval.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |

Additionally, focusing on the interviewing process *per se*, there is the need to emphasise the elements involved to ensure an effective interview which will be directly related not only to the quality of the interview but also to the information gathered. King and Horrocks (2010) highlight seven essential elements all of which must be carefully considered by the researcher when conducting qualitative interviews:

- The interview setting: The physical environment must be carefully chosen as it can have a marked influence on the interview's outcomes. The location needs to offer the interviewee a friendly and comfortable environment in order to facilitate the participant's disclosure of information.
- Audio/video recording: This is one of the most useful tools in order to ensure accuracy of the information retrieved and analysed, but the interviewer needs to be aware that the recording device and the whole situation, might have an effect on the participant's behaviour. Any negative effect must be avoided by paying attention to these issues. Consent from the participant must always be obtained when making a recording.
- Building rapport: This is regarded as an essential ingredient of the interview process. A clear communication of the main study goals needs to be established right at the beginning of the session. Interviewer openness must be promoted to give the opportunity to the interviewee to share any concerns or doubts he/she may have about the interview or the topic. The interviewer must ensure an empathetic, confidential and friendly relationship with the interviewee to make him/her feel comfortable and safe which will promote an adequate conversation.
- Asking questions: Questions need to be asked in a clear way so that the interviewee can understand exactly what is being asked, and answer in consequence. The interviewer needs to ensure that questions are correctly worded and provide further clarification whenever necessary. The non-verbal language also plays a major role at this point. The interviewer must be aware not only of the interviewee's body language but also his/her own. Note-taking needs to be considered when necessary as an oral response usually comprises non-verbal responses as well. It is essential that the interviewer must have non-judgemental questions or statements.

- Probing: The interviewer must be prepared to probe whenever further in-depth information is required about a certain topic. A total understanding of the participant's world view needs to be ensured.
- Starting and finishing: The interviewer must provide a personal introduction and a clear explanation of the main objective of the interview. At the end of the session, the interviewer must offer the interviewee the opportunity to share any "additional" comments or information she/he might have.
- Managing 'difficult' interviews: Difficulties during an interview can also be present at all times and the interviewer must deal with them in an effective way to avoid any possible effect they could have on the quality of the interview. Potential problems could be related to status issues, the interviewer's role, dealing with sensitive topics and speaking too much or too little.

Based on this empirical evidence, interviews offer important advantages from which this study can benefit in order to explore the transition-related perceptions on participants selected. This type of interview allowed the researcher not only to gather specific participants' experiences and perceptions, but also to explore further spontaneous ideas or concepts. A pre-defined guide helped the researcher focus on the main concepts important to the study, while at the same time giving the opportunity to focus on the important topics on preschool transition the researcher identified as they arose.

A number of transition studies have aimed at gathering families' perceptions through the use of interviews (Barnett & Taylor 2009; Noel, 2012; McIntyre et al., 2007; Pianta, 1996; Pianta, Quintero & McIntyre, 2001). Based on these, a semi-structured interview format was developed in order to obtain parents' perceptions regarding this process of change. The format contained six fundamental topics around which the conversation was held with a member of the family, such as *"What are the transition practices you as a parent carry/ed out to/that support/ed your children?"* Socio-demographic data was also collected at the beginning of the session (e.g., *parents' job, number of siblings, educational qualifications*).

The semi-structured interview designed to gather headteachers' perceptions was also based upon the literature findings (Begeny et al., 2008; Pianta, 1996; Pianta, Kraft-Sayre & Kauffman, 2001; Hanson et al., 2000, Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011) obtaining five keypoints which guided the interviews (e.g., *What type of transition activities do you*

*implement as a headteacher?*). It is important to mention that during the interviews socio-demographic data was also collected at the beginning of the interview (e.g., *highest educational level completed*).

## **Participants**

A number of earlier studies focused on gathering community transition practices and perceptions on this critical period were carried out using a wide range of a number of participants. In some cases, the sample was taken at a national level, while in others it was reduced to a small number of participants. For instance, in a study carried out in USA by Regena (2004), the information was obtained from a sample of over 3000 teachers in order to examine the transition practices most frequently implemented by them. Similarly, a study carried out in Finland, (Ahtola et al., 2004) 104 teachers (41 from preschool and 63 from primary first grade) completed a questionnaire in order to obtain their transition practices and analyse the extent to which these were associated with children's academic performance.

In contrast, Cassidy (2010) carried out a study in Scotland whose principal aim was to obtain teachers' perceptions by working through discussion groups; the sample comprised only six teachers. Wight and Chapparo (2008) distributed a questionnaire to a 21 teachers in Australia in order to explore their perceptions of the social competence and learning difficulties of their pupils during this transition. After reviewing the literature on community perceptions, it can be highlighted that a similar objective was pursued in these studies (which in turn is similar to the current investigation), however, the number of the participants greatly varied, and yet has provided important understanding and knowledge about this transition period.

In relation to the interviews, a number of studies have also used different sample sizes across different study purposes. For instance, Arndt et al. (2013) interviewed 89 parents in order to examine their perspectives in relation to children's learning processes in Germany. Another study conducted by Malsch, Green and Korhari (2010), focused on examining parents' perspectives with regard to the way in which they experienced transition practices implemented by the educational centre in American preschools. The authors recruited 57 parents from different schools to be interviewed by telephone. Turunen (2012) interviewed 12 parents in Finland in order to examine what they thought about the plans offered by the school centre. Finally, three headteachers were interviewed by Noel (2012) so as to explore the type of transition activities implemented in three

different schools in Australia. Overall, research has shown a number of different sample sizes used in transition research when it comes to interviews of parents and headteachers. Despite the differences in sample sizes, these studies have significantly contributed to the international literature.

Specifically for the purpose of the current study, a non-probabilistic purposive sample was chosen given that this sampling process offers the advantage of recruiting participants with specific criteria in line with the main objective of the research which will help to address the main research questions (Maxwell, 2012; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003; Teddlie & Yu, 2007). For parents, the inclusion criteria comprised families whose children did not show a history of developmental delays, or any disability or special education needs. For headteachers the only inclusion criteria was to have at least two years of experience in the same position, while for preschool and primary teachers, two years at the same educational level was sought. Obtaining access to the participants was not an easy task given that educational authorities—generally speaking—do not want external personnel to know what happens inside schools. This view is also supported by some scholars (Santibanez, Vernez & Rasquin, 2005) who have found that public institutions in Mexico—especially the Ministry of Education—do not share information with regard to current conditions of schools. As a result, The Ministry of Education decides which information to make public and which not. This situation placed some obstacles in carrying out the present study. After struggling with paperwork as well as highlighting the importance of this study within the educational context in Mexico, the researcher received permission from the authorities to undertake the present study.

The participants for the questionnaire survey comprised 15 preschool teachers and 15 primary first grade teachers from public schools located in the metropolitan area of Mexico City. Preschool teachers were recruited from 15 different preschool centres while first grade teachers came from five different primary schools. In addition, a total of 10 headteachers and 10 parents from 10 different public educational centres (five from preschool and five primary educational centres respectively) were recruited in order to obtain their perceptions through semi-structured interviews.

### **Selection of Schools**

The selection of schools focused on public service schools provided by the federal government of Mexico. Fifteen preschool centres belonging to the Institute of Security and Social Services for Federal Workers (Instituto de Seguridad y Servicios Sociales de los

Trabajadores del Estado {ISSSTE}) and located in the south of the city were selected. These educational centres provide educational services at minimal cost for government employees. They offer nursery care and early education services to children ranging from 45 days to six years old where the preschool level is the last educational service provided. In addition, five public primary schools run by the Secretaria de Educaci3n Publica (Ministry of Education) were facilitated for this study. These primary schools are part of the basic educational scheme and offer grade 1 to grade 6. They are located in the northern part of the city and offer a free educational service for children aged 6-12. It is to mention that the main researcher sought for permission for data-collection purposes (see Appendix B).

### **Ethical Considerations**

The methodology used in the current study followed the strict ethical regulations set out by University of York (see Appendix D). The present study was approved by the Ethics Committee of this University. Ethical approval was not required by the Secretaria de Educacion Publica (Ministry of Education) however, individual consent forms and general information sheets which highlighted anonymity and confidentiality were provided to all the participants in this study before any data collection began (see Appendix A). Participants were given the right to stop their participation at any point if they wished. Once consent was secured, the researcher administered the questionnaires and carried out the interviews.

### **Pilot Study**

The preschool and primary school version of the questionnaires developed was administered to a smaller sample in order to carry out this phase of the study. According to Wilson and McLean (2011) the fundamental aim of a pilot is to refine the procedures of the research in order to identify not only any possible issues that may affect the main study, but also areas where the questionnaire needs to be improved. In addition, it provides an opportunity to observe different aspects during the administration of such measures regarding timing, wording of questions the order of items, the type of information gathered and the clarity of the questions.

These measures were administered to three preschool teachers and three primary first grade teachers from schools other than those used for the main study. The data collected provided the opportunity to observe the type of information gathered and the extent to which this information was useful to answer the research questions of the current

study and thus pursue the main objective of the research. The procedure carried out for the administration of these measures was followed equally in both scenarios, preschool and primary school. The questionnaires were handed out to the teachers in a classroom specifically for this purpose when they had a break authorised by the headteacher. The researcher provided the instructions verbally in addition to the instructions stated on the questionnaire to ensure the accuracy in completing the survey. The time spent for responding to the questionnaire was 20 minutes on average after which teachers handed them back.

The principal investigator carried out the analysis of the responses as a result of which the following conclusions could be reached: a) the instructions were clear enough to assure the correct completion of the questionnaire; b) the time used to respond to the instrument was considered adequate by participants; c) the length of the questionnaire was acceptable so as to maintain the attention span of the teachers (Cohen, 2007); d) responses revealed that the information obtained by participants was highly related to the information intended to gather (Wilson & McLean, 2011), suggesting it was appropriate to address the main research questions (Treiman, 2008); and e) the language, definitions and terms used were appropriate for the sample.

The format of the semi-structured interviews addressed to collect perceptions of parents and headteachers was reviewed by a panel of three experts in preschool education in Mexico City in order to ensure, among other issues, the accuracy of terms used, the appropriateness of the topics in light of the main objective of the study, the suitability of the statements presented, the usage of language and the sequence of the proposed topics for discussion (Rusell, & Ryan, 2010). Important feedback was obtained from these peer reviewed analysis with regard to the order and wording of the questions. The format was modified and words were changed to ensure a clearer understanding. The three reviewers agreed on the importance of the topics covered by the format, and thus no major modification (e.g., content) was necessary.

Overall, it was concluded that the pilot study (i.e., the experts' review and the participants' results) offered a robust test of the capabilities and limitations of the tools developed for the purpose of the study. It permitted, at the same time, improving such measures in light of their trustworthiness, reliability and validity.

## **Data-collection Process**

Data collection was carried out by the main researcher from September 2012 to January 2013 in Mexico City. Data was collected from teachers headteachers and parents from both educational levels, namely preschool and primary school as follows.

### **Preschool**

**Teachers.** In order to recruit the preschool teachers, the principal researcher contacted the educational authorities of the (Instituto de Seguridad y Servicios Sociales de los Trabajadores del Estado {ISSSTE}) and requested permission to administer the questionnaires in preschools centres. The researcher presented the main objective, the rationale and the measures to be used with participants to the person in charge of the preschool administration. Permission was also requested to contact families from each centre. Once the permission was granted, the main researcher visited each of the 15 preschool centres and contacted the headteacher to offer a full explanation of the study. This process was carried out for each of the 15 preschool centres. With every headteacher, the researcher also sought permission to contact a family member in five of the centres for the purposes of the study. In each centre, the researcher was introduced by the headteacher to one preschool teacher who was given a full explanation of the study. Consent forms were provided to each teacher to ensure the ethical rigour of the study. Once the consent forms were signed and handed to the researcher, the teachers completed the questionnaires. The headteacher allowed one specific room where there were no children in order to administer the questionnaire. Once the teacher had finished the questionnaire, researcher's personal contact details were shared for further enquiries. On average, the administration of the questionnaires took between 15-20 minutes.

**Headteachers.** The researcher fully disclosed the purpose of the study to every headteacher and emphasised the importance of the information that the interview was intended to gather. The researcher explained that the interview needed to be audio-recorded for methodological purposes and the headteacher had the opportunity to accept or reject such a condition. Furthermore, participants were given the right to stop the interview at any given moment should they desire. The headteacher signed the consent form given by the researcher and the interview was carried out in headteacher's main office. Once the interview was finished, the researcher stopped the audio-recorder and thanked the Headteacher for her help in carrying out this study. The length of the interviews ranged 25 to 55 minutes.

**Parents.** After having obtained the permission from the educational authorities as well as from the headteacher in every preschool centre, the researcher contacted parents to invite them to participate in the study. The researcher arrived at the preschool centre at 07.00 a.m. which was the time where most of the families left their children at the school, and came back again at 13:00 p.m. when families came back to the preschool centre to pick their children up. The headteacher was present as well (as part of her daily routine) sharing the researcher's project. The researcher talked to parents whose children were at preschool 3 (considering that there is preschool 1 and 2, with 3 and 4 year old children respectively) and explained the project. When the researcher contacted parents, he explained in detail the purpose of the study to give the opportunity to decide whether to participate or not. Some families showed interest and accepted, while others were not interested at all, or claimed the lack of time or job-related issues/restrictions as the main drawback.

The researcher spent a week contacting parents and setting appointments for the following weeks. Two families accepted to have the interview on the same day they were contacted by the researcher, while three more families agreed to have the interview the following weeks. The preschool headteacher allowed a specific room to carry out the interviews. It is to note that parents did not have any distraction since there were no children. Once in the room with the family member, the researcher explained that the purpose of the interviews was to gather their views with regard to the transition process of their children into first grade of primary school. It was also emphasised that the interview had to be audio-recorded for methodological purposes and the family member had the chance to accept or reject this condition. The researcher then shared the consent form to the family member and highlighted the fact that anonymity and confidentiality will be ensured. Once the consent form was completed, the researcher started the interviews which ranged in length from 20 to 45 minutes. Additionally, the researcher carried out an active note-taking during all the interviews. It is to highlight that for all preschool interviews, only mothers showed up for the interview. Once the interviews were finished, the researcher thanked the family member for her participation in the interview sharing at the end of the session his personal contact details should they wished to know about the final results of the study and/or any further enquiries or doubts.

### **Primary School**

**Teachers.** The principal researcher contacted the educational authorities of the Secretaria de Educacion Publica (Ministry of Education) in order to explain the main objective of the current study as well as the methodology that would be followed. Once the

authorities granted permission, the researcher visited five different public primary schools to meet the Headteachers. In each educational centre, the researcher fully explained the purpose of the study to the headteacher and requested permission to administer the questionnaire to five first grade teachers. Once the permission was granted, the researcher was introduced to the first grade teachers where the main purpose of the study was explained. Consent forms were given to teachers highlighting anonymity and confidentiality giving the opportunity to accept or deny the conditions. Once the forms were signed by participants, the administration of the questionnaires followed. Given that these visits to the primary school were held during school-time, teachers answered it in their own classroom bearing in mind the nature of the daily routine where children could not be left alone. Once the questionnaire had been fully answered, teachers handed it in to the main researcher. The researcher gave his personal contact details for any further doubt or enquiry.

**Headteachers.** The researcher explained the nature and intention of the interviews to every Headteacher of the primary schools. The researcher shared the consent form where anonymity and confidentiality were importantly highlighted. The headteachers always had the opportunity to stop and/or withdraw from the study at any time should they desire. Once the consent forms were signed by the headteachers, the researcher started the interview. The researcher also asked for permission to audio-record the interview and the headteacher had the opportunity to accept or reject such conditions. All the interviews on each school were held in the headteacher's office. A small audio-recorder was placed on the headteacher's desk to avoid any additional distraction. Additionally, the researcher took notes during the interviews. Once the researcher reached saturation during the interviews, the researcher finished the sessions and stopped the audio-recorder thanking headteacher for his/her help in carrying out this study. The length of the interviews ranged from 30 to 45 minutes.

**Parents.** After having obtained the permission from the educational authorities as well from the Headteachers, the researcher contacted families for interviews. The Headteachers also offered their support and invited families to participate in the study. The researcher contacted five families willing to take part in interviews with the researcher. The researcher shared the main purpose of the interviews and highlighted the importance of parents' participation to explore their perceptions with regard to the transition of their children into first grade of primary school. The researcher and parents set specific dates to carry out the interviews. In the case of four parents, a very quiet and well illuminated room

was facilitated by the Headteachers to hold the interviews, while for one family the headteacher's office was used. The researcher explained the structure and dynamic of the interview and offered the consent forms to the family member. It is to mention that only one mothers showed up for the interviews. The researcher requested permission from the family member to audio-record the interviews. Additionally, note-taking was carried by the researcher during all the interviews. All participants agreed to this. The researcher established an adequate rapport with participants allowing an appropriate flow of conversation. Once the interviews had finished, the audio-recorder was stopped and the researcher thanked the family member for their participation. The researcher's personal contact details were shared to participants not only to make available the final results of the investigation, but also for further enquiries and doubts.

### **Data-Analysis Process**

The information was analysed by using specific strategies from both perspectives of the mixed-method approach, namely quantitative and qualitative. Questionnaires were analysed by means of quantitative strategies while the interviews were analysed by means of qualitative techniques described below. It should be noted that interviews were held in Spanish as this was the participants' first language. Further, the transcriptions were done in the same language while the analysis was carried out in English.

**Quantitative analysis.** Data obtained from the surveys completed by teachers were entered into an electronic file to work with specialised software SPSS version 20. The information obtained from the scales allowed running the appropriate tests given the nature of the data collected. The information was processed to obtain general descriptive statistics of the data. Central tendency and dispersion measures were obtained in order to explore the prevalence and frequency of problems reported by teachers. Likewise, the transition practices reported by teachers were analysed by means of percentages and frequencies. The potential associations between socio-demographic data, transition practices and children's problems were also obtained by using Pearson Correlation.

Given that the data gathered comprised the results from two groups, an analysis of variance was carried out by running one-way ANOVA looking for the significant variations among preschool and primary school teachers. This study sought for differences in children's problems reported by teachers as well as teachers' use of transition practices. This analysis was required for this study as it was important to seek for differences between the means of the two groups. According to Howitt and Cramer (2008), this test is

of great help whenever significant differences in the dependent variable between two sets of unrelated data need to be analysed. Both groups' means with regard to transition practices and children's reported problems were analysed through this test.

The Pearson correlation was also run to identify any association between the demographic data obtained from participants and the transition practices, as well as the children's problem reported by teachers. This test was chosen as it offers the opportunity to explore possible associations between two or more variables and provides numerical indexes to indicate association or the lack of (Coolican, 2009) any link. According to this author, the correlation value could be either positive or negative ranging from 0 to 1, whilst a lack of association would be determined whenever the values obtained is close to zero.

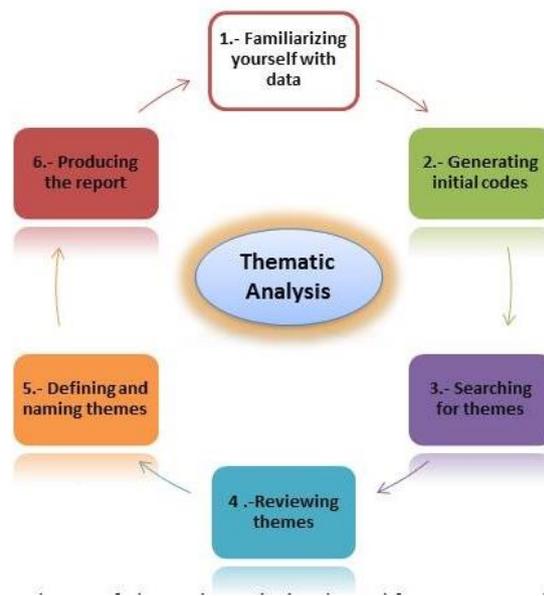
**Qualitative analysis:** Data gathered through interviews with families and Headteachers were fully transcribed in Spanish into electronic files for subsequent analysis using specialised software (NVivo 10). Following Braun and Clarke's (2008) ideas, a thematic analysis was carried out based on the data obtained. The thematic analysis according these authors is defined as "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (p.79). The authors go on to say that a theme might not be a universal concept since it requires the researcher's judgement which might be influenced by a number of variables, such as background, theoretical assumptions, previous research experience and so forth. Themes are important pieces of information, grounded in the data analysed, which capture essential components in line with the overall study aims, and specifically to the research questions. Furthermore, thematic analysis can be conceived as a realist or essentialist method since it reports the vivid experiences of participants' information. A series of advantages the thematic analysis represent, have also been highlighted as follows by Braun and Clake, (2008):

- Flexible.
- Easy-to-learn/understand method.
- Summarises large portions of data.
- Highlights key terms among a large amount of information.
- Helps identify consistencies and inconsistencies across data.
- Permits the analysis from social or psychological perspectives.
- Influences policies based on a thorough analysis of large amount of information.

Braun and Clarke (2008) differentiate two main types of thematic analysis namely inductive analysis and theoretical analysis. Inductive analysis is a data-driven method

whereby codes identified are not fitted into pre-existing categories the researcher might have defined, but rather, are deeply rooted in the information analysed allowing the emergence of new categories, while theoretical analysis is usually influenced by the researcher's theoretical assumptions and attempt to fit the themes found into categories already pre-defined by a given theory. The current analysis follows an inductive approach as suggested by these authors to identify patterns and themes emerging from the data without having any pre-existed categories based on previous theories.

**Figure 3.** Phases of Thematic Analysis according to Braun and Clarke (2006)



*Figure 3.* Description of the phases through which the thematic analysis must be carried out as described by Braun and Clarke. Adapted from “Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology” by Braun, V. & Clarke, V., 2006, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, p. 87.

This method is helpful since it portrays the way in which reality is perceived by participants in a given phenomenon. In this particular case, the preschool transition as seen by headteachers and families. The analysis of the data followed the six-stage model proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) as shown in figure 3, where defined steps need to be carried out in order to perform the thematic analysis with the information obtained. The process the researcher followed was:

1. The researcher thoroughly read the information provided in the transcriptions several times in order to familiarise himself with the main ideas shared by participants. This stage was initiated when transcribing the audio-records.

Subsequently, the researcher read the texts a number of times. This allowed him to take notes and come up with some initial ideas about the information obtained.

2. During this phase the researcher started assigning initial codes to important pieces of information found. The main ideas were reflected in the information and were organized in “meaningful groups” as suggested by Tuckett (2005).
3. A deeper analysis of the codes was carried out in this phase where a combination of different codes was used in order to identify common patterns that could form potential themes.
4. During this phase, the researcher carried out a refinement of the themes identified. The codes and information initially contained on each theme was thoroughly reviewed looking for evidence (i.e., grounded in the transcripts) to support every theme. Additional information omitted in earlier stages, was included in the themes identified where shared patterns were observed.
5. At this final stage, a more accurate definition and refinement of the themes was carried out. A clearer definition of what each theme meant was established at this stage highlighting the essence of each final theme.
6. A report containing the final analysis was then completed in light of the thematic analysis previously done. The “story” as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2008), was told in relation to the main topic of the study, supported by excerpts from the original transcripts.

A parallel process was also running in order to decrease the effect of researcher’s bias. Bracketing is a method that emerged in response to the demands of ensuring the quality of a given piece of research from the interpretivist view. As suggested by Tufford and Newman (2012) a number of authors state that bracketing comprises the beliefs, values, thoughts, hypothesis, biases, preconceptions, emotions, presumptions and assumptions of the researcher while carrying out the study. These elements may influence to some extent the research process at different stages jeopardizing the rigour and quality of the study. The main aim of this method therefore, is to avoid these elements that influence the research design, data-collection and data-analysis process (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The

qualitative researcher must ensure that the whole study is not affected by all these factors by making strong efforts to set aside any preconceived ideas that might bias the study. Creswell and Miller (2009) highlight this mainly as a reflective process in which the researcher needs to engage prior and during whole process of research.

Scholars suggest a variety of methods such as writing memos, bracketing interviews and a reflexive journal in order to carry out this reflective process (Tufford & Newman, 2012). For the purposes of the current study, the researcher took notes during data collection (i.e., interviews) in order to account for the researcher's cognitive process mainly in form of ideas and immediate reactions or thoughts when listening to participants' lived experience. The researcher's feelings and emotions were also registered. This memo was used not only during data-collection but also data-analysis process in an attempt to decrease the potential bias trying to set aside presumptions and prejudices regarding the main topic of preschool transition.

A researcher's journal was kept bearing in mind these points at different stages of the study, namely, research design, data collection, data analysis and the writing up of results. Keypoints stated in the literature helped the researcher set aside his personal beliefs, values and interests that might have led to a biased understanding of the data collected and analysed as some scholars posit (Creswell, 2013). However, it is also important to note that a complete removal of the abovementioned aspects is somewhat impossible as suggested by some other scholars (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

### **Limitations**

The current study sought to obtain the perceptions of teachers, parents and headteachers with regard to this transition process in public preschool centres and primary schools in an urbanized area. A number of methodological elements were carefully chosen, based not only on the advantages they represented, but also on what previous research had shown to be effective methodologies bearing in mind the main objective of the study. However, there are some limitations that need to be carefully analysed and described that need to be considered in the study results.

Although the sample size was chosen considering previous research, there is the need to be cautious in the interpretation provided here, given the small sample size used in this study –from the qualitative instance. The number of headteachers and parents recruited may well represent a significant progress towards the understanding of their views in this period; however generalizations to other populations cannot be easily done (Newby, 2010).

This could always be improved by recruiting a larger number of participants to answer questions about their perceptions and experiences. On the other hand, from a quantitative perspective, the sample size was adequate in that it allowed the main objective of the study to be achieved.

The current study considered some important variables in line with the research questions; however, there are additional variables that could have been taken into account in the study to further analyse this transition period in a broader sense. As a result, not only could have additional and more robust statistical analyses been carried out, but also further qualitative-type data could have been collected for additional analyses which might have an impact on validity, reliability and trustworthiness issues (Carter, Wiliford, & LoCasale-Crouch, 2014; Tierney & Clemens, 2011). Further, the scale, questionnaire and interviews, did not consider exploring—as the first element to examine—what this transition process meant to participants leading to another strong limitation. Specifically, this situation could have potentially biased the results obtained due to the fact that the scale contained preconceived transition practices and children’s problems. Moreover, the instruments used, could have introduced the topic of transition to participants without registering the extent to which participants were aware or familiarised (or not) with such process (Pianta, Cox & Snow, 2007).

One of the characteristics of cross-sectional designs is the fact that they allow the researcher to gather data at a single point in time. Data-collection of the current study was carried out during the first six months of the beginning of the academic year which undoubtedly provided important information from participants which made it possible to address the research questions. However, the study could have benefitted from the advantages of a longitudinal design. For instance, perceptions could have—arguably—changed if measured at a mid-point and at the end of the academic year. This could have provided important information with regard to the way in which transition practices were carried out by teachers on a continuum (Rous et al., 2010). Children’s problems as reported by teachers could have also varied from one point to the other. The perceptions of parents and headteachers could have been different once the transition period was finished (Dockett & Perry, 2007). In conclusion, given the cross-sectional design chosen, long-term assumptions cannot be made.

Finally, another limitation of the current research was the lack of measurement of the transition in primary schools *per se*. This is to say, the school adjustment reported in the literature which arguably reflects the degree to which first graders adapt to the new

ecology, was not measured in this study. This could have provided important insights as to the effect the community practices might have in children's transition (Perry, Dockett & Petriwskyj, 2014).

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

### Introduction

This chapter describes the analyses carried out and the main results obtained from the study. Given the nature of a mixed-method study, different sections in regard to the types of data gathered and analysed are presented. In line with this, it should be noted that results from participants were analysed differently in light of adequate quantitative and qualitative methodological procedures. This chapter comprises a variety of analyses using the information obtained from participants in terms of frequencies, percentages, correlations, analysis of variance and themes emerged from a thematic analysis. However the chapter is structured in such a way that results from teachers, headteachers and families can be easily identifiable and understood. It is important to highlight that these results need to be interpreted with caution given the sample size used in the study and generalizations need to be carefully inferred.

A description of the demographic data is presented at the beginning of the chapter where the main characteristics of the sample are described. The following section comprises an analysis of teachers' concerns, transition practices, children's problems and the associations between transition practices/children's problems and demographic data for both groups of teachers. The analysis of the interviews with parents is also presented in a comparative way between preschool and primary school settings. Similarly, the thematic analysis of interviews with headteachers is also presented in a similar format so as to highlight differences and similarities.

### Demographic Data

**Preschool and first grade teachers.** In the data-collection stage, a total of 30 questionnaires were administered. Data came from 15 preschool (PT) and 15 first grade primary teachers (FG) from 20 different public schools (i.e., 15 preschool centres and 5 primary schools) located in Mexico City. Socio-demographic data from participants from both groups were analysed by means of frequencies, percentages and average scores (see Table 10). The total number of participants from the preschool cohort was female, whilst the cohort of first grade teachers comprised six males (40%) and nine females (60%). The average age reported for PT was 39.3 years old whilst that for FG was 42.4. Only one preschool teacher (14%) did not share this information. The number of children reported by teachers in their classroom greatly varied. First grade teachers had more than twice ( $M=31.9$ ) the number reported by PT ( $M=13.4$ ). In regard to years of experience in

teaching, FG teachers reported having more experience ( $M=19.2$ ) than PT ( $M=13$ ). Further, the number of years working specifically at preschool and primary school level respectively was also significantly different between groups. Preschool teachers reported having more experience at their educational level ( $M=13.4$ ) than their colleagues in primary school ( $M=5.7$ ). Similar scores were observed in regard to the number of years working in the same educational centre, being 13 years on average for PT and four years for FG teachers.

Teachers' educational background also varied. From six levels of education designated (1=primary, 2=secondary, 3=high school, 4= paraprofessional, 5=diploma and 6= postgraduate), the level of education reported by both groups of teachers ranged from high school to postgraduate. First grade teachers had a higher educational background in comparison with preschool teachers, their distribution being as follows: two teachers were paraprofessional (15.38%), 11 teachers had a diploma (84.61%) and two participants did not report these data. In contrast, one preschool teacher (7.69%) reported having completed high school, 5 teachers (38.46%) paraprofessional studies, 6 participants (46.15%) a diploma, and one participant (7.69%) postgraduate studies whilst another one did not share this information. Teachers reported the number of courses they had attended which specialised in preschool and first grade level respectively. Whilst 11 (84.6%) preschool teachers reported having attended at least one specialised course in the last three years, less than half (40.6%) of primary teachers reported having attended such courses. Two preschool and nine first grade teachers reported not having attended any courses (15.4% and 59.4% respectively). Only two preschool teachers did not share this information.

Table 10

*Demographic Data for Preschool and First Grade Teachers*

|   | Preschool Teachers   | Primary Teachers   |
|---|--|--|
| No. years teaching experience   | M=13 years   | M= 19.2 years  |
| No. years in preschool/first grade  | M=13.4 years   | M=5.7 years  |
| No. of year in current school   | M= 13 years  | M= 4 years   |
| Highest academic degree completed<br>(Primary, Secondary, High school,<br>Paraprofessional) | No Answer: (2)<br>High school: 7.6% (1)<br>Paraprofessional: 38.46% (5)<br>Diploma: 46.15% (6)<br>Postgraduate: 7.6% (1) | Paraprofessional: 15.38% (2)<br>Diploma: 84.61% (11)<br>No answer: (2) |
| Attendance on specialised<br>preschool/first grade training course                          | No: 15.4% (2)<br>Yes: 84.6% (11)<br>No answer: (2)   | No: 59.4% (9)<br>Yes 40.6% (6)   |
| No. specialized courses attended  | M= 2.2 courses   | M=1.13 courses   |
| Date last training course   | M= 1-2 years ago   | M= 2-3 years ago   |
| Age   | M=39.3   | M= 42.4  |
| Gender  | 100% Female  | 40% Male<br>60% Female   |
| No. children in group   | M=13.4   | M=31.9   |

**Preschool and first grade parents.** A total of 10 semi-structured interviews were carried out with parents from both educational levels (i.e., five from each educational level), namely preschool and primary school. Results from the families were collected in their entirety from females who provided all the information gathered (see Table 11). The gender of the children in the families interviewed differed. Whilst 3 (60%) preschool families had a female child, 2 (40%) of them had a male child with an average age of 5.06 years old. On the other hand, there were five primary school families where 20% (1) had a female and 80% (4) had a male child with an average age of 6.2 years old. Preschool families reported having one sibling on average for the child under study ranging from 3 to 21 years old, whilst primary families greatly varied. Forty percent of families (2) reported having one sibling each, another 20% (1) indicated having two siblings, 20% (1) reported having three siblings and 20% (1) of families reported not having any other child. The educational background of the families indicates a similar distribution with regard to mothers' level of education. Forty percent (2) of preschool-mothers reported having technical studies, 20% (1) had completed high school, 20% (1) had first degree diploma and only 20% (1) reported having completed postgraduate studies, whilst 40% (2) of primary-mothers reported having technical studies, 20% (1) completed high school studies and 40% (2) had first degree diploma. The educational background of the fathers was distributed as follows: 80% (4) of fathers in preschool families reported having only completed high school studies whilst 40% (2) primary school fathers reported the same educational level. Interestingly, no preschool-father reported having a first degree diploma,

whereas 40% (2) of primary-fathers held a diploma. Finally, only the 20% (1) of preschool-fathers held postgraduate studies whereas in primary school families this was not observed.

Similarly, only one (20%) primary school father indicated having completed secondary education whereas this was not observed in preschool-fathers. The distribution of the mother's employment was as follows: 40% (2) of mothers work as a federal employee, 20% (1) works as psychologist, 20% (1) as a physician and 20% (1) as a nurse, whereas most of the primary school had teaching-related jobs. Forty percent (2) of the primary school mothers indicated were homemakers, 60% (3) indicated working as a primary school teacher. In contrast to the females, 40% (2) the male members of preschool families reported working as federal employees, 20% (1) as an assistant, 20% (2) as a physician and 20% as a technician whereas the occupations of the primary school fathers were more varied being 20% (1) shopkeeper, 20% (1) a primary teacher, 20% (1) a businessman, 20% (1) an employee and 20% (1) involved in vehicle transportation.

Table 11  
*Demographic Data for Preschool and First Grade Parents*

|                                | Preschool Parents | Primary School Parents |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| Child's mean age               | 5.06 years old    | 6.2 years old          |
| Child gender                   | 60% Females       | 20 % Females           |
|                                | 40% Males         | 80% Males              |
| No. additional siblings        | 80%= 1            | 40%= 1                 |
|                                | 20%= 0            | 20%=2                  |
|                                |                   | 20%= 3                 |
|                                |                   | 20%= 0                 |
| Education background<br>Mother | 40% Technical     | 40% Technical          |
|                                | 20% High school   | 20% High school        |
|                                | 20% Diploma       | 40% Diploma            |
|                                | 20% Postgraduate  |                        |
| Education background<br>Father | 80% High school   | 40% High school        |
|                                | 20% Postgraduate  | 40% Diploma            |
|                                |                   | 20% Secondary          |
| Mother's job                   | 40% Employee      | 40% No job             |
|                                | 20% Psychology    | 60% Primary Teacher    |
|                                | 20% Physician     |                        |
|                                | 20% Nurse         |                        |
| Father's job                   | 40% Employee      | 20% Transportation     |
|                                | 20% Assistant     | 20% Employee           |
|                                | 20% Physician     | 20% Business Man       |
|                                | 20% Technician    | 20% Primary Teacher    |
|                                |                   | 20% Shopkeeper         |

**Preschool and first grade headteachers.** The five primary schools (PS) visited by the researcher showed to have specific demographic characteristics that would be important to mention. PS1 reported to have three first-grade classrooms with a total of 90

first grade children enrolled ( $M=30$ ), PS2 three first-grade classrooms with a total of 120 first grade children enrolled ( $M=40$ ), PS3 five first-grade classrooms with a total of 200 first grade children enrolled ( $M=40$ ), PS4 five classrooms with a total of 140 first grade children enrolled ( $M=35$ ) and PS5 four first-grade classrooms with a total of 140 first grade children enrolled ( $M=35$ ). All of the primary schools reported to have one main classroom teacher per group without any assistant. Table 12 shows demographic data for headteachers indicating that both groups had the same average score related to teaching experience ( $M=24.2$ ) whilst regarding their specific experience as headteachers, the preschool group showed greater experience with ten years ( $M=14.2$ ) more than the preschool group ( $M=4.2$ ). Whilst all of the preschool participants were female, there were 3 (60%) female and 2 (40%) male primary school headteachers. Participants also indicated the total number of children enrolled in their school, showing surprising and interesting differences. Primary school headteachers reported almost six times ( $M=480.6$ ) the number of pupils reported by the preschool group ( $M=82.4$ ). This fact was also reflected in the number of classrooms headteachers indicated they had for preschool level and first grade. Primary headteachers had more first grade classrooms ( $M=2.6$ ) than their counterparts from preschool ( $M=1.6$ ). On average, primary headteachers reported having more than twice ( $M=28$ ) the number of children in classroom reported by preschool headteachers ( $M=13.4$ ). Interestingly, all preschool headteachers reported having technical studies whilst 4 (80%) primary school headteachers held a first degree diploma. Only one primary school headteacher reported having postgraduate studies.

Table 12  
*Demographic Data for Preschool and First Grade Headteachers*

|  | Preschool<br>Headteachers | Primary<br>Headteachers         |
|--|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Years of experience teaching             | M=24.2                    | M=24.2                          |
| Years of experience as<br>headteacher    | M=14                      | M=4.2                           |
| Total no. children enrolled              | M= 82.4                   | M= 480.6                        |
| No. preschool/first grade<br>classrooms  | M= 1.6                    | M= 2.6                          |
| No. children in preschool/first<br>grade | M= 13.4                   | M= 28                           |
| Educational background                   | 100% Technical            | 80% Diploma<br>20% Postgraduate |
| Gender                                   | 100% Female               | 60% Female<br>40% Male          |

### Preschool Teachers

**General concern reported by teachers.** Teachers were asked to rate on a 5-point scale how concerned they were in regard to this transition process: “1= *not at all*

concerned”, “2=little concerned”, “3=somewhat concerned”, “4=very concerned” and “5=extremely concerned”. A cross-tabulation was obtained from SPSS showing participants’ level of concern in percentages (see Table 13). On average, participants reported to be somewhat concerned regarding this period of change ( $M=3.20$ ). Most of the teachers reported to be very (33.3%) and extremely (13.3%) concerned which accounts for more than 46% of the sample with regard to children transitioning to first grade primary school. Almost 27% of participants showed a little concern whilst 20% reported to have some concerns about this period. Only one participant (6.7%) reported not being concerned at all.

Table 13

*Percentage of Preschool Teachers’ Level of Concern*

| Not at all concerned | Little concerned | Somewhat concerned | Very concerned | Extremely concerned |
|----------------------|------------------|--------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| 1                    | 4                | 3                  | 5              | 2                   |
| 6.7%                 | 26.7%            | 20.0%              | 33.3%          | 13.3%               |

**The prevalence of problems perceived by teachers.** Three categories were created according to the frequency with which teachers reported the problems experienced by children in the classroom (see Table 14). The categories were evenly distributed so as to obtain a clear idea of the teachers’ position on a continuum scale considering that the maximum points that a teacher could obtain is 60: “*Infrequent*”, “*Moderate*” and “*Frequent*”. The majority of participants (60%) reported problems with children on a moderate number of occasions during this period, whereas a small number of them (33%) reported having them infrequently. Only one teacher (7%) reported having children with these problems frequently.

Table 14

*Categories for Preschool Teachers regarding Problems Children show in Classroom.*

| Categories              | Frequencies | Percentage |
|-------------------------|-------------|------------|
| Infrequent = 12-24 pts. | 5           | 33%        |
| Moderate = 25-47 pts.   | 9           | 60%        |
| Frequent = 45-60 pts.   | 1           | 7%         |

Similarly, teachers rated on a 5-point Likert scale of 12 items the problems they perceived in children ranging from “1=Not at all true” to “5=Yes very true”. In order to obtain the prevalence of the problems children may face during this transition as reported by teachers, means and standard deviations were obtained by using SPSS software (see

Table 15). Two main problems teachers observed in their classroom occurred most frequently. The item regarding to “*Children show behaviour problems*” was the highest in prevalence ( $M=2.87$ ,  $SD= 1.356$ ), whilst “*Children show difficulty following directions*” was observed as the second problem more often identified ( $M=2.80$ ,  $SD= 1.265$ ) by teachers. More than 60% of teachers reported children in their classroom having behavioural problems, whilst more than 50% of participants’ responses ranged from “sometimes true” to “often true” in regard to children having difficulty following directions. In contrast, there were two problems less frequently reported by teachers. “*Children show difficulty working independently*” was the lowest in prevalence ( $M=1.60$ ,  $SD= 1.056$ ) with 60% of participants reporting not at all or rarely true having such problems, whilst “*Children show difficulty adjusting to the schedule or the rhythm of the day*” ( $M=1.87$ ,  $SD= 1.246$ ) was the second difficulty reported by the teachers as a less frequent problem.

Table 15  
*Means and Standard Deviations of Children’s Problems as Rated by Preschool Teachers (N=15)*

| Children’s Problems  | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|--|------|----------------|
| 1. Children show behaviour problems.   | 2.87 | 1.356          |
| 2. Difficulty following instructions   | 2.80 | 1.265          |
| 3. Children show difficulty respecting my authority as a teacher.                | 2.67 | 1.397          |
| 4. Children show difficulty in carrying out the work.                            | 2.53 | 1.125          |
| 5. Children show difficulty taking turns or waiting until his/her turn to speak. | 2.53 | 1.060          |
| 6. Children show difficulty communicating or language problems.                  | 2.40 | 1.242          |
| 7. Children show lack of academic skills.  | 2.40 | 1.352          |
| 8. Children show difficulty maintaining attention and concentration.             | 2.27 | .799           |
| 9. Children show difficulty working as part of a group.                          | 2.13 | 1.125          |
| 10. Children show difficulty getting along with other children.                  | 2.07 | 1.223          |
| 11. Children show difficulty adjusting to the schedule or the rhythm of the day. | 1.87 | 1.246          |
| 12. Children show difficulty working independently.                              | 1.60 | 1.056          |

In order to analyse the frequency and prevalence of each item, a cross tabulation was computed and percentages are presented in Table 16. These percentages represent teachers’ rates on each category of response. As for the frequency of children showing lack of academic skills, most of the teachers mentioned this as rarely true (42.8%) whereas other teachers indicated to be sometimes true (28.5%) and very true (14.2%). The latter percentages account for 40% of the sample reporting that children did show this type of

difficulty. More than 50% of participants reported children having difficulty following directions either as sometimes true (26.7%) or often true (26.7%). An important number of teachers (40%) reported their children not having problems working in groups, whilst another similar percentage reported having children with this problem (26.7% sometimes true and 13.3% often true respectively). Only 20% found this as rarely true. The majority of participants (67%) reported that their pupils establish appropriate relationships with their peers, whilst only few participants (33%) reported sometimes and often true having children facing problems in this regard. More than half of participants (57.1%) rated their children as capable of working independently in the preschool classroom whilst only a few (21.4%) teachers found this issue rarely true. Twenty per cent of participants found their children having difficulty working independently. Seven participants (46.7%) reported children rarely showing language problems whilst four (33.3%) reported having such problem in their class (20% sometimes and 13.3% yes, very true respectively). Regarding the ability of children to adjust to the daily routine in class, more than half of participants (53%) reported not having problems at all whilst a small number (26.7%) claimed to have found this rarely. Only two participants (13.4%) mentioned having children facing this problem.

Forty per cent of participants reported as “rarely true” the fact that children do not respect their authority, whilst other participants reported this as sometimes, often and very true accounting for the 40% of the sample (6.7% 20% and 13.3% respectively). Interestingly, more than half of teachers (60%) found their children rarely to have problems taking turns, whilst a third of participants reported this as a common problem (13.3% sometimes, 13.3% often true and 6.7% yes, very true) in their classroom. In relation to children’s behavioural problems reported by teachers, the answers varied greatly, but a large number of participants reported sometimes, often and always (26.6%, 20% and 13.3% respectively) having children with behaviour problems, which accounts for more 60% of the sample. Likewise, 46.7% of teachers reported rarely finding children having difficulty finishing activities assigned, whilst another 40% reported children with this problem (20% sometimes, 13.3% often true and 6.7% yes, very true). Finally, the majority of participants (73.3%) reported that children in their class did possess the ability to maintain their attention span adequately during routinely activities.

Table 16

*Crosstabs for Preschool Teachers' Percentages for Reported Children's Problems*

| Children's Problems  | Not at all true | Rarely true | Sometimes true | Often true | Yes very true | Total |
|--|-----------------|-------------|----------------|------------|---------------|-------|
| 1. Children show lack of academic skills.  | 14.2            | 42.8        | 28.5           | 0          | 14.2          | 100   |
| 2. Children show difficulty following directions.                                | 20              | 20          | 26.7           | 26.7       | 6.7           | 100   |
| 3. Children show difficulty working as part of a group.                          | 40              | 20          | 26             | 13.3       | 0             | 100   |
| 4. Children show difficulty getting along with other children.                   | 46.7            | 20          | 13.3           | 20         | 0             | 100   |
| 5. Children show difficulty working independently.                               | 57.1            | 21.4        | 14.2           | 7.1        | 0             | 100   |
| 6. Children show difficulty communicating or language problems.                  | 20              | 46.7        | 20             | 0          | 13.3          | 100   |
| 7. Children show difficulty adjusting to the schedule or the rhythm of the day.  | 53.3            | 26.7        | 6.7            | 6.7        | 6.7           | 100   |
| 8. Children show difficulty respecting my authority as a teacher.                | 20              | 40          | 6.7            | 20         | 13.3          | 100   |
| 9. Children show difficulty taking turns or waiting until his/her turn to speak. | 6.7             | 60          | 13.3           | 13.3       | 6.7           | 100   |
| 10. Children show behaviour problems.  | 20              | 20          | 26.7           | 20         | 13.3          | 100   |
| 11. Children show difficulty in carrying out the work.                           | 13.3            | 46.7        | 20             | 13.3       | 6.7           | 100   |
| 12. Children show difficulty maintaining attention and concentration.            | 6.7             | 73.3        | 6.7            | 13.3       | 0             | 100   |

**The use of transition practices by teachers.** Three categories regarding the frequency of use of transition practices were created based on the maximum of total points possible a participant could have (see Table 17). The categories were evenly distributed so as to obtain a clear idea of the teachers' position on a continuum scale considering that the maximum points that a teacher could obtain was 100: "*Infrequent*", "*Moderate*" and "*Frequent*". Most of the teachers (60%) reported an infrequent use of transition practices during this period, whereas others (40%) reported a moderate use. No one reported a frequent use of these educational practices.

Table 17

*Categories of Frequency in the use of Transition Practices by Preschool Teachers*

| Categories              | Frequencies | Percentage |
|-------------------------|-------------|------------|
| Infrequent = 20-40 pts. | 9           | 60%        |
| Moderate = 41-79 pts.   | 6           | 40%        |
| Frequent = 80-100 pts.  | 0           | 0%         |

Teachers rated their use of transition practices on a 5-point Likert scale: “1=Never”, “2=Rarely”, “3=Sometimes”, “4=Often” and “5=Always”. Central tendency measures were obtained so as to explore the prevalence and frequency in regard to teachers’ transition practices (Table 18). Interestingly, the most frequently reported transition practices used by teachers were: “Provide a final report to parents in regard to child’s academic and /or developmental skills” ( $M= 4.47, SD=1.246$ ) and “Involve parents in classroom activities during last 3 months of preschool” ( $M= 3.27, SD= 1.280$ ). Moreover, the item regarding “Organise an open doors activity for parents and children before primary school starts” was also highly rated by the participants ( $M= 3.14, SD= 1.351$ ). In contrast, the lowest practices rated by teachers were “First grade teacher visits preschool class” ( $M=1.00, SD= .000$ ) and “Have informal contacts with first grade teacher about children” ( $M= 1.07, SD= .258$ ).

Table 18

*Preschool Teachers' Means and Standard Deviations of Transition Practices Use*

|   | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|------|----------------|
| 1. Provide a final report to parents in regard to child's academic and /or developmental skills.                              | 4.47 | 1.246          |
| 2. Involve parents in classroom activities during last 3 months of preschool.   | 3.27 | 1.280          |
| 3. An open house for parents and children before primary school starts.   | 3.14 | 1.351          |
| 4. Preschool children visit first grade class.  | 3.13 | 1.922          |
| 5. Have a talk with child's parents before primary school starts.   | 2.86 | 1.292          |
| 6. Consider teaching action activities/content according to first grade curriculum.   | 2.73 | 1.421          |
| 7. Preschool children's "portfolio" is shared with first grade teacher.   | 2.55 | 1.753          |
| 8. Have a meeting with child and family before primary school starts.   | 2.53 | 1.407          |
| 9. Have parents and child visit primary school prior to the start of the school year.   | 2.47 | 1.246          |
| 10. Have parents whose children are in first grade talk to preschool parents.   | 2.47 | 1.302          |
| 11. Explain to parents what children are expected to do in first grade.   | 2.36 | 1.447          |
| 12. Give parents orientation session about primary first grade.   | 2.33 | 1.447          |
| 13. Provide written (letter, brochure, flyer) communication regarding transition to the child's family.                       | 2.07 | 1.534          |
| 14. Have school workshops with children and parents to prepare them for primary school.                                       | 1.93 | 1.335          |
| 15. Have preschoolers perform a planned activity in first grade classroom.  | 1.80 | 1.207          |
| 16. Preschool and first grade teachers talk about social and academic skills to prepare children for primary school.          | 1.36 | 1.082          |
| 17. Have first grade children visit preschool class to talk about first grade experience.                                     | 1.33 | 1.047          |
| 18. Have regular meetings with first grade teacher to discuss continuity in the curriculum between preschool and first grade. | 1.13 | .516           |
| 19. Have informal contacts with first grade teacher about children.   | 1.07 | .258           |
| 20. First grade teacher visits preschool class.   | 1.00 | .000           |

A cross tabulation was obtained using SPSS (see Table 19) and the results showed that 40% of teachers never provide orientation sessions to families, whilst another 20% rarely organise such sessions. An interesting 60% of teachers never offer any sort of written information to families with regard to starting primary school, whilst only 20% carry out such a practice. Half of the participants reported rarely discussing children's performance and transition matters exclusively with parents prior to the start of school, whilst 35.7% reported carrying this out often and always. Further, almost half of the

participants reported never and rarely establishing informal sessions with parents and their child before the start of primary school (26.7% and 33.3% respectively), accounting for the 60% of the sample, whilst only a 26.6% carry out this often and always (13.3% and 13.3% respectively). Sixty percent of teachers do not usually encourage families to visit the primary school of their choice (20% never and 40% rarely), whilst only 13.3% do this always. A large number of participants (80%) provide a final report to families regarding their child's performance; however 57.6% do not usually explain families what it is expected from them and their child when starting primary school (42.9% never and 14.3% rarely). Interestingly, the majority of the sample (93.3%) reported never organising meetings with the first grade teacher before primary school starts, and 85.7% of participants never discuss the skills repertoire of preschool children with the first grade teacher. Forty-five percent of participants never or rarely consider first grade curriculum in their teaching (27.3% and 18.2% respectively) whilst only a third of teachers consider it.

Almost half of preschool teachers (45.5%) do not review the portfolio of preschool children with the first grade teacher, whilst only a small percentage (27.3%) carries this out. Most of the participants (93.3%) do not even have an informal chat with first grade teacher. Forty percent of teachers rarely involve families within the last three months of preschool, whilst another 40% do this often and always (13.3% and 26.7% respectively). More than half of the sample (50% often and 7.1% always) carry out "open doors" activities in order to involve families during this process, whilst almost a third do not usually do this. Forty-six percent of participants reported organising a visit to primary school with preschool children, whilst another 40% do not. Almost the entire sample (86.6%) reported never and rarely involving preschoolers on a planned activity during the visit to primary school classroom (53.3% and 33.3% respectively). Almost all of the participants reported having first grade teacher neither visiting preschool classroom, nor having a teacher-teacher talk (100% and 86.7% respectively). Additionally, 60% of the sample never organise workshops for families. Finally, one-third of teachers never organise a session where families from the primary school meet families from the preschool, whilst only 33.3% of participants carry out this practice sometimes. Only 20% of the sample carries out this practice often and always (13.3% and 6.7% respectively).

Table 19

*Crosstabs for Preschool Teachers' Percentages of Transition Practices Use*

|  | Transition Practices |        |           |       |        | Total |
|--|----------------------|--------|-----------|-------|--------|-------|
|  | Never                | Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Always |       |
| 1. Give parents orientation session about first grade.   | 40                   | 20     | 20        | 6.7   | 13.3   | 100   |
| 2. Provide written (letter, brochure, flyer) communication regarding transition to student's family.                       | 60                   | 6.7    | 13.3      | 6.7   | 13.3   | 100   |
| 3. Have a talk with child's parents before school starts.  | 7.1                  | 50     | 7.1       | 21.4  | 14.3   | 100   |
| 4. Have a meeting with child and family before school starts.  | 26.7                 | 33.3   | 13.3      | 13.3  | 13.3   | 100   |
| 5. Have parents and child visit primary school prior to the start of the school year.                                      | 20                   | 40     | 26.7      | 0     | 13.3   | 100   |
| 6. Review the preschooler final report with parents in regard to child's academic and/or developmental skills.             | 6.7                  | 6.7    | 0         | 6.7   | 80     | 100   |
| 7. Explain to parents what children are expected to do in first grade.   | 42.9                 | 14.3   | 14.3      | 21.4  | 7.1    | 100   |
| 8. Have regular meetings with preschool teacher to discuss continuity in the curriculum between preschool and first grade. | 93.3                 | 0      | 6.7       | 0     | 0      | 100   |
| 9. Consider teaching action and content according to preschool curriculum.   | 27.3                 | 18.2   | 18.2      | 27.3  | 9.1    | 100   |
| 10. Preschool and first grade teachers talk about social and academic skills to prepare children for primary school.       | 85.7                 | 7.1    | 0         | 0     | 7.1    | 100   |
| 11. Have the preschool children's "portfolio" revised.   | 45.5                 | 9.1    | 18.2      | 0     | 27.3   | 100   |
| 12. Have informal contacts with preschool teacher about children.  | 93.3                 | 6.7    | 0         | 0     | 0      | 100   |
| 13. Involve parents in classroom activities during last weeks of preschool.  | 0                    | 40     | 20        | 13.3  | 26.7   | 100   |
| 14. An open house for parents and children before school starts.   | 21.4                 | 7.1    | 14.3      | 50    | 7.1    | 100   |
| 15. Preschool children visit 1 <sup>st</sup> grade class.  | 40                   | 0      | 13.3      | 0     | 46.7   | 100   |
| 16. First grade teacher visits preschool class.  | 100                  | 0      | 0         | 0     | 0      | 100   |
| 17. Have first grade children visit preschool class to talk about first grade experience.                                  | 86.7                 | 6.7    | 0         | 0     | 6.7    | 100   |
| 18. Have preschoolers perform a planned activity in first grade classroom.   | 53.3                 | 33.3   | 0         | 6.7   | 6.7    | 100   |
| 19. Have school workshops with children and parents to prepare them to primary school.                                     | 60                   | 6.7    | 20        | 6.7   | 6.7    | 100   |
| 20. Have parents whose children are in first grade have a talk with preschool parents.                                     | 33.3                 | 13.3   | 33.3      | 13.3  | 6.7    | 100   |

## Correlations

A series of correlations using the Pearson product-moment coefficient were computed on SPSS to explore the associations between transition practices, children's problems and teachers' characteristics. The analysis run through the use of SPSS software revealed important links as follows:

**Teachers' characteristics and use of transition practices.** The associations between teachers' characteristics and their use of transition practices were computed. Teachers carrying out activities within the last three months of the academic year where they involved families in school activities was strongly related to the number of years teachers have been working in the current school ( $r = .54, p = 0.05$ ). Sharing a final report with families where children's academic skills are recorded was negatively associated to having had preschool-related training courses ( $r = -.76, p = 0.05$ ) for teachers. Interestingly, the variable that predicted sharing a child's portfolio with the first grade teacher was the number of courses attended by the teachers ( $r = .72, p = 0.05$ ). The design and facilitation of workshops addressed to families was positively associated with the number of years of teaching experience ( $r = .69, p = 0.01$ ), the number of years working at preschool level ( $r = .71, p = 0.01$ ) and the number of years working at the same educational centre ( $r = .56, p = 0.05$ ).

**Teachers' characteristics and reported children's problems.** A correlation was calculated between teachers' characteristics and the children's problems they reported. Teachers reporting having attended specific preschool training courses within the last three years was strongly related to teachers reporting children having language problems ( $r = .76, p = 0.01$ ) and children's difficulty adjusting to daily routine ( $r = .74, p = 0.01$ ). The number of courses attended by teachers, highly correlated to children's difficulty respecting the authority of teachers ( $r = .90, p = 0.01$ ), difficulty taking turns ( $r = .71, p = 0.05$ ), difficulty finishing assigned tasks in classroom ( $r = .73, p = 0.05$ ) and difficulty keeping focused on activities ( $r = .72, p = 0.05$ ).

**Children's problems – transition practices.** The correlation was computed between children's problems and the transition practices teachers used. Children's difficulty following directions was found to be negatively related to the organization of activities where teachers involved families in the last three months of preschool academic year ( $r = -.67, p = 0.01$ ). Children's language-related problems ( $r = .66, p = 0.05$ ) and behaviour problems ( $r = .68, p = 0.05$ ) were positively associated with teachers sharing children's portfolios with the first grade teacher. The organization of meetings with

families from both educational levels was negatively related to children’s difficulty working in groups ( $r = -.53, p = .05$ ) and establishing adequate relationships among peers ( $r = -.60, p = .05$ ). Finally, children’s lack of academic skills was strongly associated with teachers sharing children’s portfolios with the first grade teacher ( $r = .60, p = 0.05$ ).

### Primary School Teachers

**General concern reported by teachers.** Teachers were asked to rate on a 5-point scale how concerned they were in regard to this transition process: “1= *not at all concerned*”, “2=*little concerned*”, “3=*somewhat concerned*”, “4=*very concerned*” and “5=*extremely concerned*”. On average, teachers reported being somewhat concerned ( $M=3.40$ ) during this period of transition (see Table 20). The majority of teachers (40%) reported being somewhat concerned, whereas almost half of the participants (46.7%) reported being very and extremely concerned (26.7% and 20% respectively). Finally, only two participants (13.3%) mentioned not being concerned at all.

Table 20

*Percentage of Primary School Teachers’ Level of Concern*

| Not at all concerned | Little concerned | Somewhat concerned | Very concerned | Extremely concerned |
|----------------------|------------------|--------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| 2                    | 0                | 6                  | 4              | 3                   |
| 13.3%                | 0%               | 40%                | 26.7%          | 20%                 |

**Teachers’ perceptions of problems prevalence.** Three categories were created according to the frequency with which teachers reported children’s problems in the classroom (see Table 21). The categories were evenly distributed to obtain a clear idea of the teachers’ position on a continuum scale considering that the maximum points that a teacher could have obtained was 60: “*Infrequent*”, “*Moderate*” and “*Frequent*”. The majority of the participants (73%) reported having a moderate number of children with problems during this period, whereas a small number of them (27%) reported having them frequently.

Table 21

*Categories for Primary School Teachers regarding Problems Children show in Classroom.*

| Categories              | Frequencies | Percentage |
|-------------------------|-------------|------------|
| Infrequent = 12-24 pts. | 0           | 0          |
| Moderate = 25-47 pts.   | 11          | 73%        |
| Frequent = 45-60 pts.   | 4           | 27%        |

Teachers rated the problems they perceived in children on a 5-point Likert scale of 12 items: “1=Not at all true”, “2=Rarely true”, “3=Sometimes true”, “4=Often true” and “5=Yes very true”. In order to obtain the prevalence of problems children may face during this transition as reported by teachers, the means and standard deviations were obtained by using SPSS software (see Table 22). Results indicate that there were three main problems with the highest prevalence reported by primary teachers: “Children show difficulty following directions” ( $M=3.80, SD=.941$ ), “Children show behaviour problems” ( $M=3.80, SD=.862$ ) and “Children show difficulty taking turns” ( $M=3.80, SD=1.014$ ). Conversely, the lowest problems rated by teachers were “Children show difficulty respecting my authority as a teacher” ( $M=2.60, SD=1.121$ ) and “Children show difficulty communicating or language problems” ( $M=2.80, SD=9.41$ ).

Table 22

*Means and Standard Deviations of Children's Problems as rated by First Grade Teachers (N=15)*

|  | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|--|------|----------------|
| 1. Children show difficulty following directions.                                | 3.80 | .941           |
| 2. Children show behaviour problems.   | 3.80 | .862           |
| 3. Children show difficulty taking turns or waiting until his/her turn to speak. | 3.80 | 1.014          |
| 4. Children show difficulty adjusting to the schedule or the rhythm of the day.  | 3.53 | 1.060          |
| 5. Children show difficulty in carrying out the work.                            | 3.53 | .915           |
| 6. Children show difficulty working independently.                               | 3.47 | 1.125          |
| 7. Children show difficulty maintaining attention and concentration.             | 3.47 | .990           |
| 8. Children show lack of academic skills.  | 3.47 | .834           |
| 9. Children show difficulty working as part of a group.                          | 3.13 | .915           |
| 10. Children show difficulty getting along with other children.                  | 2.87 | .990           |
| 11. Children show difficulty communicating or language problems.                 | 2.80 | .941           |
| 12. Children show difficulty respecting my authority as a teacher.               | 2.60 | 1.121          |

In order to analyse the frequency and prevalence of each problem reported by teachers, a cross tabulation was computed and percentages are presented (see Table 23). Interestingly, almost all the teachers reported having children with a lack of academic skills in their classroom as either sometimes true, often true or very true (53.3%, 26.7% and 13.3% respectively), accounting for the 93.5% of the participants. The same percentage reported having children with difficulties following directions (sometimes true 33.3%, often true 33.5% and 26.6% very true). One third of the participants (33.4%) reported having children with difficulties working in groups, whilst other 40% of teachers reported that this was sometimes true in their classroom. Sixty per cent of the sample ranged from sometimes to often true having children with difficulties establishing appropriate peer to peer relationships (26.7% and 33.3% respectively). Further, 80% of the sample reported from sometimes to very true, having children with difficulties working independently (40%, 13.3% and 26 % respectively). Surprisingly, almost all participants (93%) reported having children with behavioural problems by rating (from sometimes to very true 26.7%, 46.7% and 20% respectively) the extent to which they have children with these characteristics. Moreover, more than half of the participants (53.3%) reported children with language problems (sometimes= 33.3% often= 13.3% and very true= 6.7%).

A large number of participants, accounting for 80% of the sample, reported having children with difficulties adjusting to the daily routine (sometimes= 26.7%, often= 33.3% and very true 20%), whilst only 20% reported having these rarely. Furthermore, most of the teachers (86.7%) reported sometimes, often and very true having children with difficulties taking turns (20%, 40% and 26.7% respectively). Only 20% of the teachers reported having children with difficulties respecting the teacher's authority, while only 26.7% of participants reported having these cases of authority respect sometimes. An important number of participants (73%) reported having children with difficulties working in groups sometimes, often and very true (40% sometimes, 26.7% often and 6.7% very true), whilst 86.7% of the teachers reported having children with difficulties carrying out the tasks assigned (sometimes 33.3%, often 40% and very true 13.3%). Finally, 80% of the participants (sometimes 26.7%, often 40% and very true 13.3%) reported having children with difficulties keeping focused on activities organised by the teacher.

Table 23

*Crosstabs for First Grade Teachers' Percentages for Reported Children's Problems*

| Children's Problems  | Not at<br>all<br>true | Rarely<br>true | Sometimes<br>true | Often<br>true | Yes<br>very<br>true | Total |
|--|-----------------------|----------------|-------------------|---------------|---------------------|-------|
| 1. Children show lack of academic skills.  | 0                     | 6.7            | 53.3              | 26.7          | 13.3                | 100   |
| 2. Children show difficulty following directions.                                | 0                     | 6.7            | 33.3              | 33.3          | 26.7                | 100   |
| 3. Children show difficulty working as part of a group.                          | 0                     | 26.7           | 40                | 26.7          | 6.7                 | 100   |
| 4. Children show difficulty getting along with other children.                   | 6.7                   | 33.3           | 26.7              | 33.3          | 0                   | 100   |
| 5. Children show difficulty working independently.                               | 0                     | 20             | 40                | 13.3          | 26.7                | 100   |
| 6. Children show difficulty communicating or language problems.                  | 0                     | 46.7           | 33.3              | 13.3          | 6.7                 | 100   |
| 7. Children show difficulty adjusting to the schedule or the rhythm of the day.  | 0                     | 20             | 26.7              | 33.3          | 20                  | 100   |
| 8. Children show difficulty respecting my authority as a teacher.                | 13.3                  | 40             | 26.7              | 13.3          | 6.7                 | 100   |
| 9. Children show difficulty taking turns or waiting until his/her turn to speak. | 0                     | 13.3           | 20                | 40            | 26.7                | 100   |
| 10. Children show behaviour problems.  | 0                     | 6.7            | 26.7              | 46.7          | 20                  | 100   |
| 11. Children show difficulty in carrying out the work.                           | 0                     | 13.3           | 33.3              | 40            | 13.3                | 100   |
| 12. Children show difficulty maintaining attention and concentration.            | 0                     | 20             | 26.7              | 40            | 13.3                | 100   |

**The use of transition practices by teachers.** Three categories regarding the frequency of use of transition practices were created (see Table 24). The categories were evenly distributed to obtain a clear idea of the teachers' position on a continuum scale considering that the maximum points that a teacher could have obtained was 100: "*Infrequent*", "*Moderate*" and "*Frequent*". Most of the teachers (67%) reported a moderate use of transition practices during this period, whereas the others (33%) reported an infrequent use. No one reported a frequent use of these educational practices.

Table 24

*Categories of Frequency in the use of Transition Practices by First Grade Teachers*

| Categories              | Frequencies | Percentage |
|-------------------------|-------------|------------|
| Infrequent = 20-40 pts. | 5           | 33%        |
| Moderate = 41-79 pts.   | 10          | 67%        |
| Frequent = 80-100 pts.  | 0           | 0%         |

Teachers rated their use of transition practices on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “1=Never” to “5=Always”. Descriptive statistics were obtained to describe the prevalence and frequency of the use of transition practices by teachers. Central tendency measures were obtained to explore the prevalence and frequency in regard to the use of teachers’ transition practices (see Table 25). The most frequently used transition practice was “Explain to family and child the expectations for first grade of primary” ( $M=4.53$ ,  $SD= 1.060$ ). Interestingly, however, there were three more transition practices which obtained similarly high rates: “Involve families in activities during the first weeks of the first grade year” ( $M=3.80$ ,  $SD=1.082$ ), “Have a talk with families before school starts” ( $M=3.67$ ,  $SD=1.718$ ) and “Organise and provide orientation sessions to families” ( $M=3.60$ ,  $SD=1.298$ ). In contrast, the transition practices with the lowest rate of use reported by teachers were “Have informal talk with preschool teacher” ( $M=1.00$ ,  $SD=.000$ ) and “Preschool children carry out an activity in primary school classroom” ( $M=1.00$ ,  $SD=.000$ ).

Table 25

*Means and Standard Deviations of First Grade Teachers' Transition Practices Use*

|   | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|------|----------------|
| 1. Explain to parents what children are expected to do in first grade.  | 4.53 | 1.060          |
| 2. Involve parents in classroom activities during early weeks of first grade  | 3.80 | 1.082          |
| 3. Have a talk with child's parents before primary school starts.   | 3.67 | 1.718          |
| 4. Give parents orientation session about primary first grade.  | 3.60 | 1.298          |
| 5. Provide written (letter, brochure, flyer) communication regarding transition to child's family.                          | 3.07 | 1.580          |
| 6. Consider teaching action activities/content according to preschool syllabus.   | 2.87 | 1.552          |
| 7. Have a meeting with child and parents before primary school starts.  | 2.60 | 1.724          |
| 8. Have the preschool children's "portfolio" revised.   | 2.20 | 1.320          |
| 9. Review the pre-schooler final report with parents in regard to child's academic and /or developmental skills.            | 1.93 | 1.280          |
| 10. Have parents and child visit primary school prior to the start of the school year.                                      | 1.93 | 1.280          |
| 11. An open house for parents and children before school starts.  | 1.93 | 1.163          |
| 12. Preschool and first grade teacher talk about social and academic skills to prepare children for primary school.         | 1.60 | 1.404          |
| 13. Have regular meetings with preschool teacher to discuss continuity in the curriculum between preschool and first grade. | 1.60 | 1.404          |
| 14. Have school workshops with children and parents to prepare them to primary school.                                      | 1.40 | .910           |
| 15. Have parents whose children are in first grade have a talk with preschool parents.                                      | 1.27 | 1.033          |
| 16. Preschool children visit first grade class  | 1.27 | .799           |
| 17. Have first grade children visit preschool class to talk about first grade experience.                                   | 1.13 | .516           |
| 18. First grade teacher visits preschool class.   | 1.13 | .516           |
| 19. Have preschoolers perform a planned activity in first grade classroom.  | 1.00 | .000           |
| 20. Have informal contacts with preschool teacher about children.   | 1.00 | .000           |

A cross tabulation was computed in order to identify the prevalence and frequency in the use of transition practices by first grade teachers (see Table 26) showing that more

than half of the sample (53.3%) often and always provide orientation sessions to families (20% and 33.3% respectively), whilst other participants (66.7%) ranged from sometimes to always offering families with written information (26.7%, 13.3% and 26.7% respectively) for this period of change. More than 60% of participants reported having informal talks with parents before the beginning of the academic year, whilst a similar percentage never or rarely have meetings with families (40% and 20% respectively) prior to the start of school. More than half of the participants never or rarely invite preschool families to visit their primary school (60% and 6.7% respectively), whilst only three participants (20%) invite them often. Sixty percent of the teachers involve families during the first weeks of the first grade academic year, whilst more than half of the sample (66.6%) never or rarely (53.3% and 13.3% respectively) have open door activities for families, and a large number of teachers (80%) do not organise workshops for parents and children. Almost all of the participants (93.3%) do not organise meetings between preschool and primary school families. A large number of participants (73.3%) rarely or never (20% and 53% respectively) review preschoolers' final report along with parents.

A large number of participants (73.3%) always explain parents and children the expectations for the first grade of primary school. Interestingly, the majority of the sample (80%) never meets the preschool teacher to discuss curriculum-related matters. The same number of teachers never has a meeting with the preschool teacher in order to discuss preschool children's skills repertoire. None of the primary teachers have informal talks with preschool teachers. Almost half of the sample (46.6%) considers the preschool syllabus when designing and planning activities for the first grade classroom, whilst other participants (40%) do not. The majority of teachers (86.7%) never have preschoolers visiting the first grade classroom, and almost the entire sample (93.3%) do not visit any preschool centres. A similar percentage of primary teachers (93.3%) never have first grade children visiting preschool centres to exchange experiences with teachers and children. Finally, none of the participants reported having informal talks with preschool teachers or an activity in the classroom for preschoolers during visits to primary school.

Table 26

*Crosstabs for First Grade Teachers' Percentages for Reported Transition Practices Use*

| Transition Practices   | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Always | Total |
|--|-------|--------|-----------|-------|--------|-------|
| 1. Give parents orientation session about first grade.   | 6.7   | 13.3   | 26.7      | 20    | 33.3   | 100   |
| 2. Provide written (letter, brochure, flyer) communication regarding transition to student's family.                       | 26.7  | 6.7    | 26.7      | 13.3  | 26.7   | 100   |
| 3. Have a talk with child's parents before school starts.  | 20    | 13.3   | 0         | 13.3  | 53.3   | 100   |
| 4. Have a meeting with child and family before school starts.  | 40    | 20     | 6.7       | 6.7   | 26.7   | 100   |
| 5. Have parents and child visit primary school prior to the start of the school year.                                      | 60    | 6.7    | 13.3      | 20    | 0      | 100   |
| 6. Review the pre-schooler final report with parents in regard to child's academic and /or developmental skills.           | 53.3  | 20     | 13.3      | 6.7   | 6.7    | 100   |
| 7. Explain to parents what children are expected to do in first grade.   | 6.7   | 0      | 0         | 20    | 73.3   | 100   |
| 8. Have regular meetings with preschool teacher to discuss continuity in the curriculum between preschool and first grade. | 80    | 6.7    | 0         | 0     | 13.3   | 100   |
| 9. Consider teaching action content according to preschool curriculum.   | 33.3  | 6.7    | 13.3      | 33.3  | 13.3   | 100   |
| 10. Preschool and first grade teacher talk about social and academic skills to prepare children for primary school.        | 80    | 6.7    | 0         | 0     | 13.3   | 100   |
| 11. Have the preschool children's "portfolio" revised.   | 46.7  | 6.7    | 33.3      | 6.7   | 6.7    | 100   |
| 12. Have informal contacts with preschool teacher about children.  | 100   | 0      | 0         | 0     | 0      | 100   |
| 13. Involve parents in classroom activities during early weeks of first grade.   | 0     | 13.3   | 26.7      | 26.7  | 33.3   | 100   |
| 14. An open house for parents and children before school starts.   | 53.3  | 13.3   | 20        | 13.3  | 0      | 100   |
| 15. Preschool children visit first grade class.  | 86.7  | 6.7    | 0         | 6.7   | 0      | 100   |
| 16. First grade teacher visits preschool class.  | 93.3  | 0      | 6.7       | 0     | 0      | 100   |
| 17. Have first grade children visit preschool class to talk about first grade experience.                                  | 93.3  | 0      | 6.7       | 0     | 0      | 100   |
| 18. Have preschoolers perform a planned activity in first grade classroom.   | 100   | 0      | 0         | 0     | 0      | 100   |
| 19. Have school workshops with children and parents to prepare them to primary school.                                     | 80    | 6.7    | 6.7       | 6.7   | 0      | 100   |
| 20. Have parents whose children are in first grade have a talk with preschool parents.                                     | 93.3  | 0      | 0         | 0     | 6.7    | 100   |

## Correlations

A series of correlations using the Pearson-product moment coefficient were computed in order to examine the associations between transition practices, children's problems and teacher's characteristics. The analysis run through the use of SPSS software revealed important links as follows.

**Teacher characteristics and use of transition practices.** The relationships between teacher characteristics and transition practices were computed and results showed that the maximum academic degree reported by teachers was positively related to whether they explained expectations of the first grade of primary school to the child and the parents ( $r=.600, p= 0.05$ ) and negatively associated with the organisation of meetings where families from preschool could talk to families from primary school ( $r= -.674, p= 0.05$ ). Likewise, the number of children in the classroom was positively associated with involving families in activities during the first weeks of primary first grade ( $r=.694, p= 0.01$ ) and negatively related to preschoolers visiting first grade primary classroom ( $r= -.678, p= 0.01$ ). Finally, the number of first grade-related training courses attended by teachers was negatively correlated to involving families in activities in primary school during the first weeks of the academic year ( $r= -.769, p= 0.05$ ).

**Teacher characteristics and reported children's problems.** Correlation analysis showed that the maximum academic degree reported by teachers was positively associated with reporting children with difficulty following directions ( $r=.614, p= 0.05$ ), children with behavioural problems ( $r=.614, p= 0.05$ ) and children having difficulty carrying out pedagogical activities in the classroom ( $r=.702, p= 0.05$ ). The number of first grade-related training courses attended by teachers was found to be highly correlated to reporting children with difficulty respecting the teacher's authority ( $r=.850, p= 0.05$ ).

**Use of transition practices and teachers' reported problems.** Teachers having formal meetings with families before starting primary school are associated with teachers reporting children with a lack of academic skills ( $r=.515, p= 0.05$ ). Explaining the expectations for primary school to parents and the child was related to reporting children with difficulty following directions ( $r=.616, p= 0.05$ ). Teachers organising for preschool families to meet first grade families were negatively associated with reporting children with difficulty following directions ( $r=-.529, p= 0.05$ ) and children showing behavioural problems ( $r=-.578, p= 0.05$ ). Interestingly, the transition practice where the primary

teacher meets the preschool teacher in order to discuss a child's skills repertoire was negatively associated with children having difficulty keeping focused on pedagogical activities ( $r = -.678, p = 0.05$ ), working independently ( $r = -.597, p = 0.05$ ), adjusting to the daily routine ( $r = -.662, p = 0.01$ ), taking turns ( $r = -.762, p = 0.01$ ) and showing behavioural problems ( $r = -.602, p = 0.05$ ).

### Comparison among Reported Teachers' Children's Problems and Transition Practices Use

Interesting differences and similarities in children's problems reported by teachers in both cohorts were found in the analysis. However, it is important to mention that given the small sample used in this study, statistical significance could not be established. Nevertheless, this analysis may lead to further research in the future to examine whether there are significant differences or not in the problems children face and the practices in use during transition.

**Children's problems.** A comparison of the most and least frequent children's problems reported by both cohorts of teachers is shown below in Table 27.

Table 27

#### *Children's Problems as Reported by Preschool and Primary School Teachers.*

| Children's Problems   |   |
|---|---|
| Most Frequent Problems Reported by Preschool Teachers   | Most Frequent Problems Reported by Primary School Teachers  |
| <i>"Children show behaviour problems"</i><br>( $M=2.87, SD= 1.356$ ),   | <i>"Children show difficulty following directions"</i><br>( $M=3.80, SD=.941$ )   |
| <i>"Children show difficulty following directions"</i><br>( $M=2.80, SD= 1.265$ )                               | <i>"Children show behaviour problems"</i><br>( $M=3.80, SD=.862$ ) and<br><i>"Children show difficulty taking turns or waiting until his/her turn to speak"</i><br>( $M=3.80 SD=1.014$ ). |
| Least Frequent Problems Reported by Preschool Teachers  | Least Frequent Problems Reported by Primary School Teachers   |
| <i>"Children show difficulty working independently"</i><br>( $M=1.60, SD= 1.056$ )                              | <i>"Children show difficulty respecting my authority as a teacher"</i><br>( $M=2.60, SD=1.121$ )  |
| <i>"Children show difficulty adjusting to the schedule or the rhythm of the day"</i><br>( $M=1.87, SD= 1.246$ ) | <i>"Children show difficulty communicating or language problems"</i><br>( $M=2.80, SD= 9.41$ ).   |

It can be seen in Table 27 that preschool and primary school teachers agreed to some extent in the problems they perceive children face during this transition given that both cohorts reported behavioural problems and following directions as the most frequent problems observed in their classroom. It should be highlighted that the order in which teachers rated these problems as the first and second most frequently reported was different. Whilst one cohort placed behavioural problems as the most frequent, the other cohort placed it second. However, primary school teachers reported another problem that preschool teachers did not. It was seen by primary school teachers that children have difficulties taking turns which was not observed in the preschool cohort.

On the other hand, the problems least reported by teachers are completely different between the two cohorts. Whilst preschool teachers reported difficulties working independently and adjusting to the daily routine, primary teachers rated having children with difficulties respecting their authority and showing language problems as least frequent. These results may indicate that difficulties following directions and behavioural problems are mainly observed in both educational scenarios during this transition; however children may show different strengths in different areas which arguably do not follow a pattern that can be identified by teachers.

**Transition practices.** A comparison of the most and least frequent transition practices used reported by both cohorts of teachers is analysed below (see Table 28). The use of these practices also varied in both educational levels, namely preschool and primary school.

Table 28

*Use of Transition Practices as Reported by Preschool and Primary School Teachers*

| Transition Practices   |  |
|--|--|
| Most Frequent Transition Practices Reported by Preschool Teachers  | Most Frequent Transition Practices Reported by Primary School Teachers                               |
| <i>“Provide a final report to parents in regard to child’s academic and /or developmental skills”</i><br>(M= 4.47, SD=1.246) | <i>“Explain parents what children are expected to do in first grade.”</i><br>(M=4.53, SD= 1.060),    |
| <i>“Involve parents in classroom activities during last 3 months of preschool”</i><br>(M= 3.27, SD= 1.280).                  | <i>“Involve families in activities during early weeks of first grade year”</i><br>(M=3.80, SD=1.082) |
| <i>“An open house for parents and children before primary school starts.”</i><br>(M= 3.14, SD= 1.351).                       | <i>“Have a talk with child’s parents before school starts.”</i><br>(M=3.67, SD=1.718)                |
|  | <i>“Give parents orientation session about first grade.”</i><br>(M=3.60, SD=1.298).                  |
| Less Frequent Transition Practices Reported by Preschool Teachers  | Less Frequent Transition Practices Reported by Primary School Teachers                               |
| <i>“First grade teacher visits preschool class”</i><br>(M=1.00, SD= .000)  | <i>“Have informal contacts with preschool teacher about children.”</i><br>(M=1.00, SD=.000)          |
| <i>“Have informal contacts with first grade teacher about children”</i><br>(M= 1.07, SD= .258).                              | <i>“Have preschoolers perform a planned activity in first grade classroom”</i><br>(M=1.00, SD=.000). |

Table 28 shows that the most frequent practices used by teachers from preschool differ from those reported by primary school teachers. On the one hand, whilst preschool teachers focus their practices on reporting the child’s performance to the parents, involving parents in school-related activities towards the end of the academic year and organising open activities for parents, primary teachers focus on explaining expectations to parents, involving families at the beginning of the academic year and organising information sessions to provide useful information to parents about primary school.

On the other hand, having informal talks with the teacher of the other educational setting (i.e., preschool with the first grade and vice versa), was rated as one of the least frequent practice used by both cohorts. The second practice used least frequently by teachers was different for each group. Preschool teachers do not have primary teachers visiting preschool classroom, whilst primary teachers do not carry out any activity with

preschoolers during their visit to primary school. These results may indicate that both cohorts of teachers focused on the establishment of home-school links by carrying out different practices aimed at involving families in school activities during this shift. Finally, teachers do not seem to carry out any practice to establish and/or enhance any link with the preschool and primary teacher respectively.

Although these results suggest interesting facts regarding this transition period and the use of transition practices by teachers, strong conclusions cannot be drawn from these analyses because of the lack of a statistical significance. This statistical analysis could be carried out in future by using a larger sample. However, and despite this limitation, it is interesting to see how some practices are shared by both cohorts whose main interest is family-involvement.

### **Statistical Comparison between Means Scores for Both Groups of Teachers**

A statistical comparison by using one-way ANOVA was computed in order to examine whether the means scores of teachers were statistically significant or not between groups. Despite the fact that statistical differences were found in this analysis, the results should be interpreted with caution because of the sample size used in the study. Nonetheless, these differences could aid the development of future studies that explore the differences found in greater depth.

### **Children's Problems Reported by Teachers**

An analysis of variance revealed that there were statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the two groups of teachers in a number of items related to children's problems (see Table 29). Within the items identified with significant statistical differences, primary school teachers rated higher than preschool teachers based on the means scores in those items. These results may indicate that first grade teachers report more frequent problems in the classroom regarding a number of different necessary skills for this transition than their counterparts the preschool teachers.

Table 29

*One-way ANOVA Results Showing Statistical Significant Differences in Children Problems between Groups based on Means Scores*

| Children's Problems  | Preschool teachers mean | First grade teachers mean | F      | Sig.   |
|--|-------------------------|---------------------------|--------|--------|
| 1. Children show behaviour problems  | 2.87                    | 3.80                      | 5.063  | .032*  |
| 2. Children show difficulty following directions.                                | 2.80                    | 3.80                      | 6.034  | .020*  |
| 3. Children show difficulty taking turns or waiting until his/her turn to speak. | 2.53                    | 3.80                      | 11.181 | .002*  |
| 4. Children show difficulty in carrying out the work.                            | 2.53                    | 3.53                      | 7.127  | .012*  |
| 5. Children show lack of academic skills.  | 2.40                    | 3.47                      | 6.762  | .015*  |
| 6. Children show difficulty maintaining attention and concentration.             | 2.27                    | 3.47                      | 13.341 | .001*  |
| 7. Children show difficulty working as part of a group.                          | 2.13                    | 3.13                      | 7.127  | .012*  |
| 8. Children show difficulty adjusting to the schedule or the rhythm of the day.  | 1.87                    | 3.53                      | 15.569 | .000** |
| 9. Children show difficulty working independently.                               | 1.60                    | 3.47                      | 21.952 | .000** |

\*\**. Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)*

\**. Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)*

### **Teacher's use of Transition Practices**

One-way ANOVA showed significant differences between means scores in regard to the use of transition practices (see Table 30). Within this group of items, it can also be observed that first grade teachers obtained higher mean scores in only two items (*Explain to parents what children are expected to do in first grade* and *Give parents orientation session*), whilst preschool teachers obtained higher scores in the remaining four items. That is to say, primary school teachers focus more on exchanging transition-related information with parents whilst preschool teachers' practices include not only sharing information with parents, but also carrying out visits and performing activities in primary school. These results may indicate that not only do preschool teachers report the more frequent use of these specific transition practices, but also that there were significant differences in comparison with the first grade cohort that might need further investigation. It could be argued that primary school teachers are more aware of the importance of school-home connections, whilst preschool teachers are aware of the importance not only of home-school but also of school-school links.

Table 30

*One-way ANOVA Results Showing Statistical Significant Differences in Transition Practices between Groups based on Means Scores*

| Transition Practices   | Preschool teachers mean | First grade teachers mean | F      | Sig.    |
|--|-------------------------|---------------------------|--------|---------|
| 1. Review/provide preschoolers' final report to/with Parents.                          | 4.47                    | 1.93                      | 30.173 | .000 ** |
| 2. Preschool children visit 1 <sup>st</sup> grade class.                               | 3.13                    | 1.27                      | 12.062 | .002 *  |
| 3. Have parents whose children are in first grade, have a talk with preschool parents. | 2.47                    | 1.27                      | 7.821  | .009 *  |
| 4. Explain to parents what children are expected to do in first grade.                 | 2.36                    | 4.53                      | 23.753 | .000 ** |
| 5. Give parents orientation session about primary first grade.                         | 2.33                    | 3.60                      | 6.365  | .018 *  |
| 6. Have preschoolers perform a planned activity in first grade classroom.              | 1.80                    | 1.00                      | 6.588  | .016 *  |

\*\**. Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)*

\**. Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)*

### **Comparison of Transition Practices Use: “My Community” versus “Ideal World”**

Both groups of teachers were asked to rank the use of the transition practices on a 5-point Likert type scale from “1=Never” to “5=Always” from two different perspectives: a) “What happens in my community” and b) “What I would do in an ideal world”. The former perspective was intended to gather teachers’ practices which they use in their daily routine, whilst the latter attempted to obtain teachers’ perspectives of the use of the practices provided considering an “Ideal World”.

**Preschool Teachers.** Table 31 shows the means calculated by using SPSS in order to obtain the most and the least rated transition practices from the ideal world perspective. As it can be observed, the two main practices teachers reported as the highest were “Give final child’s report to family” ( $M=5.00$ ;  $SD=.000$ ), “Meeting with the first grade teacher to discuss children’s skills” ( $M=4.86$ ;  $SD=.363$ ) and “Preschool children visit primary school” ( $M=4.85$ ;  $SD=3.76$ ), whilst the least frequent practice reported by teachers was “Having meetings with first grade teacher” ( $M=3.87$ ;  $SD=1.24$ ).

Table 31

*Descriptive Statistics for Preschool Teachers Cohort of Transition Practices Use in an “Ideal World”*

|   | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|------|----------------|
| 1. Provide a final report to parents in regard to child’s academic and /or developmental skills.                              | 5.00 | .000           |
| 2. The preschool and first grade teacher talks about social and academic skills to prepare children for primary school.       | 4.86 | .363           |
| 3. Preschool children visit first grade class.  | 4.85 | .376           |
| 4. Provide written (letter, brochure, flyer) communication regarding transition to child’s family.                            | 4.80 | .775           |
| 5. An open house for parents and children before primary school starts.   | 4.79 | .426           |
| 6. Involve parents in classroom activities during last 3 months of preschool.   | 4.71 | .469           |
| 7. Explain to parents what children are expected to do in first grade.  | 4.69 | .630           |
| 8. Give parents orientation session about primary first grade.  | 4.67 | .816           |
| 9. Have parents and child visit primary school prior to the start of the school year.   | 4.64 | .842           |
| 10. Have a talk with child’s parents before primary school starts.  | 4.64 | .842           |
| 11. Have school workshops with children and parents to prepare them to primary school.  | 4.60 | 1.056          |
| 12. Have preschoolers perform a planned activity in first grade classroom.  | 4.60 | .910           |
| 13. Have a meeting with child and family before primary school starts.  | 4.60 | 1.056          |
| 14. Have parents whose children are in first grade talk to preschool parents.   | 4.57 | 1.089          |
| 15. Have first grader children visit preschool class to talk about first grade experience.                                    | 4.57 | 1.089          |
| 16. The preschool children’s “portfolio” is shared with first grade teacher.  | 4.55 | 1.214          |
| 17. First grade teacher visits preschool class.   | 4.47 | 1.125          |
| 18. Consider teaching action activities/content according to first grade curriculum.  | 4.42 | 1.165          |
| 19. Have informal contacts with first grade teacher about children.   | 4.33 | 1.113          |
| 20. Have regular meetings with first grade teacher to discuss continuity in the curriculum between preschool and first grade. | 3.87 | 1.246          |

**Primary School Teachers.** Table 32 shows the two most frequent practices rated by primary teachers; “*Explaining to family what is expected*” ( $M=4.73$ ;  $SD= .799$ ) and “*Having a chat with family and child before entering first grade*” ( $M=4.73$ ;  $SD= .799$ ).

Conversely, the least frequently rated practices were “*Preschool children carry out an activity in primary classroom*” ( $M=4.14$ ;  $SD= 1.29$ ) and “*First grade teacher visit and chat with preschool children*” ( $M=4.14$ ;  $SD= 1.23$ ).

Table 32

*Descriptive Statistics for First Grade Teachers Cohort of Transition Practices use in an “Ideal World”*

|   | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|------|----------------|
| 1. Explain to parents what children are expected to do in first grade.  | 4.73 | .799           |
| 2. Have a meeting with child and family before school starts.   | 4.73 | .799           |
| 3. Have a talk with child’s parents before school starts.   | 4.67 | .816           |
| 4. Involve parents in classroom activities during early weeks of primary first grade.                                       | 4.60 | .737           |
| 5. Review the pre-schooler final report with parents in regard to child’s academic and /or developmental skills.            | 4.60 | .828           |
| 6. Have the preschool children’s “portfolio” revised.   | 4.53 | .640           |
| 7. Consider teaching action content according to preschool curriculum.  | 4.53 | 1.060          |
| 8. First grade teacher visits preschool class.  | 4.43 | 1.158          |
| 9. The preschool and first grade teacher talk about social and academic skills to prepare children for primary school.      | 4.43 | 1.158          |
| 10. Give parents orientation session about first grade.   | 4.40 | 1.242          |
| 11. Have parents and child visit primary school prior to the start of the school year.                                      | 4.40 | 1.242          |
| 12. Have school workshops with children and parents to prepare them to primary school.                                      | 4.36 | 1.082          |
| 13. Have parents whose children are in first grade talk to preschool parents.   | 4.29 | 1.267          |
| 14. Provide written (letter, brochure, flyer) communication regarding transition to student’s family.                       | 4.29 | 1.267          |
| 15. Preschool children visit first grade class.   | 4.27 | 1.163          |
| 16. An open house for parents and children before school starts.  | 4.27 | .961           |
| 17. Have informal contacts with preschool teacher about children.   | 4.21 | .893           |
| 18. Have regular meetings with preschool teacher to discuss continuity in the curriculum between preschool and first grade. | 4.21 | .975           |
| 19. Have preschoolers perform a planned activity in first grade classroom.  | 4.14 | 1.292          |
| 20. Have first grade children visit preschool class to talk about first grade experience.                                   | 4.14 | 1.231          |

Total means scores were compared between and within groups showing interesting results despite the lack of statistical significance. Table 33 shows the total means score for transition practices computed for both groups based on two different perspectives proposed to teachers. Results indicate substantial differences when teachers were asked to rate the use of transition practices from these different perspectives. Results show that primary teachers carry out slightly more transition practices than preschool teachers from the

perspective of “my community”. In contrast, based on the ideal world perspective, preschool teachers rated higher than the first grade teachers. However, it should be noted that the biggest difference is observed when comparing the first and second perspective within the groups. Both groups of teachers rated substantially higher the practices they “would” carry out in an ideal world than the ones they reported as normally carrying out in their community.

Table 33

*Comparison of Total Means Score for Transition Practices for both Groups based on both Perspectives*

| Perspectives                                 | Educational level |         |
|--|-------------------|---------|
|  | Preschool         | Primary |
| What Happens in<br><i>My community</i>       | 2.17              | 2.19    |
| What I would want in a<br><i>Ideal world</i> | 4.61              | 4.41    |

**Statistical comparison.** In order to examine whether there was any significant difference between the means scores from both groups in their use of transition practices from these two perspectives, a one-way analysis of variance was calculated. It should be stressed that *no statistical significant difference* was found between both group’s means. However, when comparing the total means scores within groups between what happens in their community and the ideal world, substantial differences could be observed (see Table 33). Whilst small differences can be observed between groups, the bigger difference is clearly apparent within groups indicating a more frequent use of transition practices in the ideal world than in their current practice. Despite the lack of statistical significance of these results, it might be important to consider such comparison for future research aiming at finding statistical significant differences.

**Preschool and Primary School Teachers’ Open-ended Questions Responses.**

**Teachers’ responses analysis.** Five open-ended questions were included in both versions of the Teachers’ Perceptions on Transition Survey (TPTS). Both groups of teachers’ responses (preschool and primary) were computed by using specialised software for qualitative analysis: NVivo. A thematic analysis as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) was carried out with teachers’ responses in order to come up with the common patterns and codes that led to the identification of themes. The main codes obtained for each question for both groups were used to identify the main and key phrases (Sandelowski, 1995) that led to the central themes explained below (see Table 34).

Table 34

*Codes obtained from Responses gathered from Open-ended Questions*

| Preschool Teachers Responses Codes   | Primary Teachers Responses Codes   |
|--|--|
| <p>Question 1: What concerns do you have regarding the transition process for pre-schoolers to first grade?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Primary teachers focus on academic issues</li> <li>➤ Lack of academic skills in children</li> <li>➤ Keep children steady in classroom</li> <li>➤ Lack of children's personal skills</li> <li>➤ Less individualized attention to children</li> </ul> | <p>Question 1: What concerns do you have regarding the transition process for pre-schoolers to first grade?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Adapting to a new routine</li> <li>➤ Lack of children's maturity</li> <li>➤ Lack of parent's support</li> <li>➤ Very different children's background</li> <li>➤ Lack of oral language skills</li> </ul>   |
| <p>Question 2: Describe the child who is well-prepared for first grade of primary school.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Holistic view of child (personal and academic skills developed)</li> </ul>  | <p>Question 2: Describe the child who is well-prepared for first grade of primary school.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Holistic view of child (personal and academic skills developed)</li> </ul>  |
| <p>Question 3: Can you identify the most common issues and problems children might face during their transition to primary first grade?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Lack of literacy knowledge-skills</li> <li>➤ Adaptation to new and different environment</li> </ul>   | <p>Question 3: Can you identify the most common issues and problems children might face during their transition to primary first grade?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Following rules and directions</li> <li>➤ Coexist with new peers-teachers</li> <li>➤ Adapting to a new routine</li> <li>➤ Children's insecurity</li> <li>➤ Lack of oral language skills</li> <li>➤ Children want to keep playing</li> </ul> |
| <p>Question 4: What are some barriers that you feel may prevent you from engaging in transition practice?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Preschool teacher willingness</li> <li>➤ No links with primary school</li> <li>➤ None</li> <li>➤ Lack of institutional support (school)</li> </ul>  | <p>Question 4: What are some barriers that you feel may prevent you from engaging in transition practice?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Limited time to help children</li> <li>➤ Lack of communication between P3 and primary</li> <li>➤ Heavy workload of paperwork</li> </ul>   |
| <p>Question 5: In your judgement, how do you think teachers can help to improve this transition period in first grade?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Establish effective community-links</li> <li>➤ Turn P3 classroom into primary classroom</li> <li>➤ Teacher's commitment with his-her job</li> <li>➤ Telling children what primary is</li> </ul>  | <p>Question 5: In your judgement, how do you think teachers can help to improve this transition period in first grade?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Receive teacher training sessions</li> <li>➤ Establish P3-primary close communication</li> <li>➤ Follow preschool activities at the beginning</li> <li>➤ Provide information to parents</li> <li>➤ Carry out P3-primary activities</li> </ul>                |

**Analysis of Responses by Question**

**Question 1:** Regarding concerns teachers have as to this transition process, the important elements were highlighted where similarities and differences are apparent. As can be observed in Table 34, preschool teachers focused on a number of issues, however most of the teachers' comments focused on the lack of children's personal skills including autonomy and independence in carrying out activities on their own. Teachers also highlighted their concerns regarding the less individualized attention children receive once

they enter primary school, which suggests that primary school teachers focus more on children's academic performance than the development of skills pertaining to the personal domain.

“Children acquiring skills to adapt to a new environment, to acquire skills of self-care and the necessary competencies to start literacy” -*Preschool teacher*

“self-esteem and independence” -*Preschool teacher*

“What worries me the most, is that children may feel insecure, not being autonomous, without adequate knowledge and not having the parental support” -*Preschool teacher*

“The lack of attention, care and support for all children starting their basic education, likewise the quality of an adequate interest in their learning” -*Preschool teacher*

Conversely, primary teachers reported that their major concern is children's ability to adapt to the new routine in a primary school setting. Moreover, teachers highlighted their concern about the lack of children's maturity which was related to the adaptation to the new routine.

“Children not being able to keep focused for longer periods. Not all children follow directions adequately”  
- *Primary teacher*

“Children need to adapt to the new activities carried out” -  
*Primary teacher*

**Question 2:** Teachers were asked to describe the characteristics of a child who they think is well-prepared for entering first grade. Interestingly, both groups reported very similar information highlighting the numerous skills children need. These skills pertain not only to the personal domain (e.g., taking turns, behaviour, independency, autonomy, working in groups), but also to the academic domain (e.g., knowing numbers, letters, figures and shapes). This is to say, both groups of teachers emphasised the need for children to be well-prepared from a holistic perspective.

“Accomplish four important steps for their life namely theoretical knowledge, values, attitude and self-esteem”

- *Preschool Teacher*

“He/she has to be autonomous in every aspect, good fine motor skills, spatial awareness, knowing how to write, already with writing skills, knowing his/her own emotions and knowing how to express him/herself and the most important thing would be to ask whatever he/she does not understand and solve his/her own struggles, to acquire good mathematical knowledge”

- *Preschool Teacher*

“The boy follows directions. Cuts paper adequately, knows colours, participates, talks, coexists with his peers without any aggression. Follows the line, knows how to write his name, etc.” - *Primary teacher*

“He has gross and fine psycho-motor skills. Spatial awareness, language and basic knowledge, colours, numbers 1-10, vowels. Order and cleanliness habits”

- *Primary teacher*

**Question 3:** When teachers were asked to mention the most common problems they think children might face entering primary school, both groups of teachers concurred on one issue: the adaptation to the new routine which is different from that of preschool. However, it should be noted that the difference relied on the fact that preschool teachers highlighted the children’s lack of literacy skills, whereas primary teachers focused more on children having difficulties following rules and directions.

The adaptation to his new group, peers and teacher”

- *Preschool Teacher*

“Not having previous knowledge of reading and writing. Does not question anything, talk, formulate hypothesis. Not feeling secure due to the lack of knowledge. Does not express him/herself about likes and dislikes. Affection”

- *Preschool Teacher*

“The adaptation to work, schedule, working in groups, focusing on the activities”

- *Primary teacher*

“Children’s adaptation to regulations and timetables”

- *Primary teacher*

**Question 4:** Teachers were asked to mention any drawback that might prevent them from carrying out transition practices to facilitate this period of change. Interestingly, both groups of teachers reported the lack of institutional support that does not permit establishing links with primary school staff. Primary teachers also reported the limited time they have to implement transition activities.

“Lack of institutional support. Governmental policies and political strategies and the fact that primary teachers consider preschool teachers as “baby sitters”. That is why they do not think our work is relevant, it is said that children just come here to play”

- *Preschool Teacher*

“A lot of paperwork has to be done and the deadlines. The double-standards between what the Ministry of Education states and what they allow us to do”

- *Primary teacher*

**Question 5:** Information provided by preschool teachers regarding the way they can help ease this transition period focused on the importance of establishing effective community links (preschool-primary), whilst primary teachers reported similar ideas. Primary teachers mentioned the need to carry out activities between preschool and primary school, and thus the need for such links, to help this transition. Additionally, this group reported the need to implement in-classroom activities during the early months of first grade similar to those carried out at the preschool level to keep the continuity.

“To invite [primary] teachers to chat about their experiences regarding their teaching practice and [invite] children so they can share the experience of their daily routine”

-*Preschool Teacher*

“Allow preschool centres near primary schools to visit each other and carry out one activity along with preschool teachers. Provide information to parents [...] Parents need to be aware of handing in all the documents when requested. Preschool teachers need to give us information about preschool syllabus”

-*Primary Teacher*

“To carry out similar activities to the preschool centre at the beginning and adjust them so as to avoid this strong change from one educational centre to the other”-*Primary Teacher*

## Central Themes Identified

From the previous analysis, three important themes emerged reflecting the essence of teachers' responses. However it is important to point out that a "miscellaneous" category was also created. This category comprised topics that do not fit well into any of the categories from which the final themes emerged. The topics included in this category are: preschool teacher willingness and commitment, turning the preschool into a first grade classroom, lack of support from parents, primary teachers receiving training sessions and heavy workload for paper-work. The final themes emerged from the remaining categories created, deriving from the following descriptions.

**The need for children to develop personal and academic skills.** This theme refers to participants' responses regarding their concern about children acquiring/developing personal and academic skills for this transition. On the one hand, a number of teachers mentioned the need for children to have developed/acquired a number of personal skills such as independence, socialisation, autonomy, self-efficiency, emotional self-regulation, self-care and self-esteem. These results are consistent with other studies where it has been stated that preschool teachers are more concerned about these set of skills than the academic ones (Stephen & Cope, 2003). On the other hand, teachers also reported the need for children to have academic skills such as pre-reading and pre-writing, including basic knowledge in regard to literacy such as numbers and letters, as well as figures, shapes and colouring abilities. Interestingly, these results are also in line with previous studies reporting the interest of primary teachers in academic skills (McCubbins, 2004) given the fact that the academic demands will be greater once in first grade, and given that an outcome-based curriculum is mainly used rather than the play-based one used at preschool level. From the previous remarks, it can be argued that each group of teachers requires children to have a combination of skills based on the objectives of each educational level.

**Adapting to the new routine.** This theme focuses on teachers' views regarding different conditions/elements that may make this change difficult for children adapting to a new daily routine. Teachers shared their opinions regarding this transition by highlighting that the new place where pre-schoolers will go—primary school—greatly differs from the environment found at preschool level. Teachers reported this adaptation process to the new environment as one of the main concerns and problems they think about when it comes to pre-schoolers transitioning into primary school. This perspective is also shared by Vogler, Crivello and Woodhead (2008) who highlight that teachers are aware not only of these

differences, but also of the implications for preschoolers transitioning into a new, unknown and different setting. Furthermore, it is to highlight the importance of this adaptation in light of previous empirical evidence. Some authors (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009) argue strongly that children aged 5-6 are very sensitive to radical changes like this one. Further, some authors (Corsaro & Molinari, 2008; Lovett & Haring, 2003; Pianta, 2002; Riley & Fahey, 2006) go on to say that these changes may be drastic for preschool children because they are leaving their friends and a very significant adult for them, the preschool teacher. The responses of teachers mainly focused on the new peers and teachers. The acquisition and adaptation to a new set of rules and directions was also pointed out. Meal-time was mentioned along with the length of time children spend seated as part of the daily routine. Finally, teachers pointed out the different dynamic children have in the first grade classroom in terms of group-based activities. This awareness of differences between schools has also been highlighted in a number of studies (Chun, 2003; Rim-Kauffman, Pianta & Cox, 2000; Turunen, 2012; Vogler, Crivello & Woodhead, 2008) suggesting that teachers are aware of the importance of establishing a continuity between these two educational levels. In conclusion, teachers acknowledge that a number of important elements are involved relating not only to a set of activities that are carried out in first grade but also to the physical environment which may have an significant impact in children transitioning to first grade.

**The establishment of community links (preschool-primary school).** This theme reflects teachers' comments regarding the lack of links between communities, preschool and primary school. These links have been highlighted in Rimm-Kauffman & Pianta's (2000) Dynamic Ecological Model of transition which emphasises the importance of establishing such connections to ease transition not only for children but also for parents. Firstly, teachers reported that in order to help in this transition, constant and effective communication between school staff must be established. Teachers' responses focused on the need to establish teacher-teacher interaction, enhance communication between teacher and parents and improve communication between teacher and children. Further, some teachers mentioned the likelihood of preschool children carrying out activities in a primary school if this connection exists. These activities are important for this transition period as suggested by Turunen (2012). These results also relate to Regena's (2004) findings where she examined a number of successful transition activities implemented by teachers. Establishing links between schools was considered as a fundamental transition activity carried out by teachers in order to ease this shift. Secondly, teachers also mentioned the potential barriers to the abovementioned elements. They pointed out the lack of support

from the authorities of the institution that provides this day-care and educational service in which they work. Moreover, they mentioned that educational authorities have double standards; this is to say there is a difference between what it is said and what it is carried out by the Ministry of Education. Likewise, teachers commented that the workload in terms of paper-work is one of the main obstacles during this transition. As a result of this, teachers reported they have limited time to implement transition activities to help children and families. These views are consistent with Pianta, et al. (1999) where teachers reported the need for more time to support this difficult change. It can be argued that teachers are aware of what they do not have, the possible causes and what it is needed to tackle such situations.

## **Interviews**

A semi-structured interview designed to examine the perceptions of parents and headteachers was developed by the main researcher based upon the literature findings (Begeny et al., 2008; Hanson et al., 2000; Pianta, 1996; Pianta Kraft-Sayre & Kauffman, 2001). The format in its final version comprised five and six keypoints which guided the interviews for preschool and primary school participants respectively. It is important to mention that socio-demographic data was also collected at the beginning of the interview (e.g., *highest academic grade completed*). The interviews adopted an open-ended approach which was intended to encourage interviewees to reflect on their own practice (Silverman, 2013). Participants' responses were audio-taped, transcribed and computed by using specialised software for qualitative analysis: Nvivo. Responses were analysed to obtain patterns, codes and, finally, themes that emerged from the data following the six-stage model proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006).

## **Parent Interviews**

**Preschool.** Face-to-face interviews were carried out by the researcher with one member of the family, usually the mother. Table 35 shows the main codes obtained for each question as well as themes emerged from them.

Table 35

*Codes and Themes Emerged from Preschool Parent Interviews*

| Codes Identified   | Main Themes Emerged  |
|--|--|
| <p>QUESTION 1.- What are/were the fundamental issues for your child as he/she transition/ed to primary first grade?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Difficult change</li> <li>2. Lack of academic skills</li> <li>3. Change of environment</li> <li>4. More children in primary school</li> <li>5. Different pedagogical approach</li> <li>6. Child personal development</li> <li>7. Gender differences (boy-easy and girls-difficult)</li> <li>8. Change of daily routine habits</li> <li>9. Promote confidence in child</li> <li>10. Parental support in child skills</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Primary School features</li> <li>2. Concerns about children personal/academic skills</li> </ol>  |
| <p>QUESTION 2.- What are the transition practices you as a parent carry/carried out to/that support/ed your children?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Siblings support</li> <li>2. Buying books</li> <li>3. No support at the moment</li> <li>4. Teaching academic skills</li> <li>5. Talking to child about the primary school</li> <li>6. Introducing daily routine</li> <li>7. Teaching child to obey adults</li> </ol>   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Enhancing academic skills</li> <li>2. Communicating child expectations</li> <li>3. None (at the moment)</li> </ol>                         |
| <p>QUESTION 3.- What kind of school-involvement did/do you have in your child's transition to primary school?</p> <p>No school-transition activities</p>   | None   |
| <p>QUESTION 4.- What do you think you can/could do in order to help your child in this transition?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. More attention and support</li> <li>2. Promoting child's confidence</li> <li>3. Talking about primary school</li> <li>4. Enrolling child in language school</li> </ol>  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Provide general information based on an adequate parent-child relationship</li> <li>2. Enhance academic skills</li> </ol>                  |
| <p>QUESTION 5.- What do you think the school can do to support children during this transition period?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Visit primary school</li> <li>2. Talking about primary school</li> <li>3. Information about choosing primary school</li> <li>4. Teaching academic skills</li> <li>5. Increasing the workload</li> </ol>   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Enhancing and promoting academic skills</li> <li>2. Provide orientation to families</li> <li>3. Community links between schools</li> </ol> |
| <p>QUESTION 6.- Can you identify any kind of barrier that prevents you from engaging in transition practices?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. No barriers</li> <li>2. Mother's personality traits</li> <li>3. Financial issues</li> <li>4. Work schedule</li> </ol>  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Work-related schedule and finances</li> </ol>  |

As can be observed in table 35, when asked to share the fundamental issues and /or problems they think children face during their transition to primary school, parents mainly focused on two topics, *primary school features* and *children's personal skills*. The first theme focused on issues such as a different daily routine, a greater number of children and a different pedagogical approach. For children's personal skills, parents emphasised a lack of academic skills and of a daily routine which makes this a difficult change for their children. Parents were further asked to share the transition practices they carry/carried out to support their children in this period. They concentrated their responses on three main themes: *enhancing academic skills*, *communicating child expectations* and *no support at all*. The first theme identified included activities such as buying books and teaching numbers and letters, whilst the second included talking to their child about primary school, rehearsing a daily routine and teaching obedience to adults.

When parents were asked the type of activity they were involved in with the school to help their child, all the participants reported that they did not participate in any activity. Parents also shared what they thought they could do to support their child at this time. Two themes emerged from the information which focused on *providing general information* based on an adequate parent-child relationship and *helping children enhancing their academic skills*. For the former theme, parents highlighted the provision of more attention and support for their child, the need to talk about primary school and promoting confidence in their child, whilst for the latter, the main focus for parents was to enrol their child in language-learning schools. When the researcher asked parents about the way in which the preschool centre could help in this process, their responses focused on three major topics, *enhancing and promoting academic skills*, *providing orientation to families* and *promoting links between schools*. In the first theme, parents included the need to teach and develop more academic skills in children including letters, numbers and shapes, whilst in the second theme, information about choosing the appropriate primary school and having chats about primary school were highlighted. Finally, parents mentioned visiting primary school as a way to help their children at this time.

For the last question, parents talked about the obstacles that prevent them from engaging in transition practices offered by the school. They specifically highlighted *work-related schedule* and *finances*. In this theme, parents included the need to have two jobs to have enough money for living expenses, and the long hours they have to work accordingly.

**Primary school.** Interviews with the families were carried out by the researcher with mainly one member of the family. A thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of the transcriptions was carried out resulting in different central themes (see Table 36).

Table 36

*Codes and Themes Emerged from Primary School Parent Interviews*

| Codes of Response   | Main Themes Emerged  |
|---|--|
| <p>QUESTION 1.- What are/were the fundamental issues for your child as he/she transition/ed to primary first grade?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. More disciplined work in primary school</li> <li>2. Teachers helped transitioning</li> <li>3. Starting formal literacy</li> <li>4. Physical school differences</li> <li>5. Positive changes in child behaviour</li> <li>6. Play-based <i>versus</i> outcome-based routine</li> <li>7. Lack of meal time</li> <li>8. Drastic change</li> <li>9. Children being seated for longer hours</li> <li>10. Child's difficult behaviour</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. School characteristics differences</li> <li>2. Children's behaviour change</li> </ol>  |
| <p>QUESTION 2.- What are the transition practices you as a parent carry/carried out to/that support/ed your children?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Older siblings support</li> <li>2. Child's working habits</li> <li>3. Helping with homework</li> <li>4. Telling child future skills to acquire (read-write)</li> <li>5. Building a confident mother-child relationship</li> <li>6. Taking child to extra classes for swimming/cycling</li> <li>7. Spending more time with child</li> </ol>  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Helping children in academic tasks (performance)</li> <li>2. Enhancing child-mother relationship</li> </ol>  |
| <p>QUESTION 3.- What kind of school-involvement did/do you have in your child's transition to primary school?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Non-transition activity (just reading tales)</li> <li>2. Helping teacher preparing classroom</li> <li>3. Non-transition activity (Mother's &amp; Father's celebration days)</li> </ol>  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Attending normal school activities</li> <li>2. Miscellaneous (helping teacher prepare classroom and reading tales to children)</li> </ol>  |
| <p>QUESTION 4.- What do you think you can/could do in order to help your child in this transition?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Collaborative work between parent and teacher</li> <li>2. Helping with homework</li> <li>3. Teaching child new rules</li> <li>4. Teaching child alphabet</li> <li>5. Talking to child highlighting school's features</li> <li>6. Explaining to child differences between schools</li> <li>7. With extra classes (English &amp; computing)</li> </ol>   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Supporting children's development of academic skills</li> <li>2. Explaining school differences</li> <li>3. Miscellaneous (establish parent-teacher work and extra-classes of a second language and computing)</li> </ol> |
| <p>QUESTION 5.- What do you think the school can do to support children during this transition period?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teacher working towards aims</li> <li>2. Teacher organizing excursions</li> <li>3. Homework extra help sessions</li> </ol>   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Support academic performance</li> </ol>  |
| <p>QUESTION 6.- Can you identify any kind of barrier that prevents you from engaging in transition practices?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Work schedule (times)</li> <li>2. None</li> </ol>   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Miscellaneous (parents' work schedule)</li> </ol>  |

Table 36 shows the themes that emerged from the categories observed in the transcriptions of the interviews with families with a child in first grade of primary school.

The fundamental issues families think their children face during this process were grouped in two themes, *school characteristics differences* and *child's behaviour change*. Families highlighted the different physical environment in primary school from that of preschool, the lack of meal time and the child's need to be seated for longer hours. Moreover, parents included the difference in routine (i.e., play-based vs. outcome-based) and the starting of formal literacy. For the second theme, families reported difficult changes in their child's behaviour once they entered primary school, highlighting the need for the teacher's help. For the second question, parents mentioned key parental practices they carry out to help their children such as *helping children in academic tasks* and *enhancing child-mother relationship*. In the first theme, parents mentioned their help in doing the homework along with their child, having siblings supporting their child and the child's working habits, whilst for the second theme, parents emphasised the need to build confidence in the child and spending more time with their child. As for the type of involvement parents have with the primary school in order to support this transition, results show this involvement was limited to the *attendance at normal activities* carried out by the school because they are mandatory, such as Mother's Day, Father's Day, and Valentine's Day.

Results indicate that parents perceive they can help their children in a certain way during this period. Two main themes emerged from these data, the need to *support the development of academic skills* and *explaining school differences* to the child. In the former category, parents commented on helping their children with homework and teaching the alphabet, whilst in the latter, they reported the need to highlight the differences between preschool and primary school as well as teaching the new rules that children have to follow in first grade. Parents focused mainly on one issue when asked the way in which primary school can help in this process. Their responses strongly focused on *supporting academic performance*. They highlighted the need for the teacher to work hard with their children to achieve the goals of the syllabus. Moreover, parents reported the need to have extra class session to help children improve their academic performance.

Finally, parents did not indicate any type of obstacle they think prevents them from not engaging in transition activities carried out by the primary school. However, it should be mentioned that one fifth of the sample mentioned that work-related schedules might be an obstacle.

## **Headteacher Interviews**

**Preschool.** The researcher carried out face-to-face interviews with five different headteachers. The information transcribed was then analysed in order to identify codes that will help the emergence of final themes (see Table 37).

Table 37

*Codes and Themes Emerged from Preschool Headteacher Interviews*

| Codes of Response  | Main Themes Emerged  |
|--|--|
| <p>QUESTION 1.- What do you think about this transition period from preschool to primary first grade?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A shift in assistance and pedagogical approaches</li> <li>2. Different environment</li> <li>3. Different pedagogical approach</li> <li>4. Difficult change</li> <li>5. Easy-difficult depending on child skills</li> <li>6. Important change</li> <li>7. No problem at all</li> <li>8. Preschool syllabus is well developed</li> </ol>                                     | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Smooth change for children</li> <li>2. School differences</li> <li>3. Difficult change</li> </ol>                              |
| <p>QUESTION 2.- What do you think are the main issues/problems/concerns for children transitioning from preschool to primary first grade?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Different daily routine in primary</li> <li>2. Teacher-child interaction (emotional)</li> <li>3. Change of physical environment</li> <li>4. Different pedagogical approach</li> <li>5. Parental support is relevant</li> </ol>   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. General school differences</li> <li>2. Adult-child relationship</li> </ol>   |
| <p>QUESTION 3.- Do you implement any kind of transition activities? Yes/No. What type of transition activities do you implement as a headteacher?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teacher's normal activities</li> <li>2. Give classroom teacher freedom</li> <li>3. Supervise classroom teacher talking to children</li> <li>4. Supervise teacher promoting writing skills</li> <li>5. Following supervision directions</li> <li>6. Headteacher supports teacher</li> <li>7. No activities at all</li> </ol>    | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Support/supervise classroom teacher</li> <li>2. Following supervision directions (Ministry of Education supervisor)</li> </ol> |
| <p>QUESTION 4.- Can you identify any kind of obstacle that prevents you from implementing transition practices in your school?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Family's meetings lack of attendance</li> <li>2. P3 Syllabus for writing skills</li> <li>3. Ministry of Education permission-involvement</li> </ol>   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ministry of Education regulations/guidelines</li> <li>2. Family's lack of attendance at meetings</li> </ol>                    |
| <p>QUESTION 5.- What do you think you can do in order to help your children in this transition?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Visiting primary school</li> <li>2. Talking with children</li> <li>3. Provide lunch in primary school</li> <li>4. Promoting children's confidence</li> <li>5. P3 Teacher psychological training</li> <li>6. Establishing teacher 1- P3 teacher communication</li> <li>7. Constant family-school communication</li> <li>8. Channelling children psychology counselling</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Create community connections (preschool and primary school bridging)</li> <li>2. Work in children's agency</li> </ol>          |

From Table 37, it can be observed that two main themes emerged with regard to headteacher's opinions (which were interestingly divided) about this transition period.

They understood the transition as a *smooth change* and as a *difficult change for children*. For the former theme, headteachers reported that syllabuses are well organised and aligned allowing children to develop a good set of skills, whilst for the latter, teachers mainly included the physical differences between schools as well as the pedagogical approach used in each setting. In the second question, teachers concentrated their opinions around two basic themes: the problems children mainly face are the *general characteristics of the school* and the *adult-child relationship*. As for the first theme, headteachers reported the daily routine, the physical environment and the pedagogical approach used, whilst for the second one, the support that parents can provide to their children was very important.

Regarding the type of transition activities headteachers implement to help children, indicated that these were the *supervision of classroom teacher* and *following directions from the Ministry of Education*. Headteachers mentioned that they give total freedom to the classroom teacher and highlighted the importance of supervising such actions. They also commented that they have to make sure the classroom teacher talks about the transition with children. For the second theme, headteachers indicated the need to stick to Ministry of Education regulations and to follow the directions provided. For the fourth question, headteachers specified a number of obstacles which were included in two main topics: *Ministry of Education regulations/guidelines* and *family's lack of attendance at meetings*. Headteachers highlighted the need to ask for a number of permissions from the Ministry of Education to implement any type of activity beyond the scope of the syllabus. They emphasised the lack of commitment families have to educational matters such as meetings. Finally, when headteachers were asked to share the strategies they can implement to help in this transition, two basic elements were pointed out: the *creation of community connections* and the need to work in *children's agency* to prepare them for this shift. To foster community connections, headteachers suggested the need to create and promote school-home and preschool-primary links, whilst talking with children and promoting children's confidence were proposed as important strategies.

**Primary school.** The researcher carried out face-to-face interviews with five different headteachers. The information transcribed was then analysed in order to identify categories that will help the emergence of final themes (see Table 38).

Table 38

*Codes and Themes Emerged from Primary School Headteacher Interviews*

| Codes of Response  | Main Themes Emerged   |
|--|---|
| <p>QUESTION 1.- What do you think about this transition period from preschool to primary first grade?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Easy adaptation process</li> <li>2. Less traumatic change</li> <li>3. Easy-due to P3 children visits</li> <li>4. Difficulties adapting to new routine</li> <li>5. Difficult change for teachers</li> <li>6. Lack of academic skills</li> </ol>   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Difficult change</li> <li>2. Easy change</li> </ol>   |
| <p>QUESTION 2.- What do you think are the main issues/problems/concerns for children transitioning from preschool to primary first grade?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Lack of personal skills development</li> <li>2. Children with different backgrounds</li> <li>3. Difficulties adapting to new routine</li> <li>4. Coexisting with older and lots of children</li> <li>5. Drastic change for private school children</li> <li>6. More children to coexist with</li> <li>7. Adapting to new routine</li> <li>8. Behaviour problems</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Children's different backgrounds</li> <li>2. School differences</li> </ol>                                |
| <p>QUESTION 3.- Do you implement any kind of transition activities? Yes/No. What type of transition activities do you implement as a headteacher?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Talking to children about peer differences</li> <li>2. Preschoolers visiting primary one day</li> <li>3. None</li> <li>4. Meeting with classroom-teachers</li> <li>5. Introducing headteachers to children</li> <li>6. Headteacher supports classroom teacher</li> </ol>   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Working closely with Classroom teacher</li> <li>2. Familiarizing children with new environment</li> </ol> |
| <p>QUESTION 4.- Can you identify any kind of obstacle that prevents you from implementing transition practices in your school?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. No obstacle</li> <li>2. Not enough time to organize activities (paperwork)</li> <li>3. Not enough time (because of workshops)</li> <li>4. Teachers go on holidays</li> </ol>  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Excessive administrative-paper work</li> </ol>  |
| <p>QUESTION 5.- What do you think you can do in order to help your children in this transition?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Follow normal procedures-children's files</li> <li>2. Introduce myself as the headteacher</li> <li>3. Talk to parents about importance of independency-autonomy</li> <li>4. Saturday meetings with parents</li> <li>5. Integrating activities (ice-breaker)</li> </ol>   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Carrying out normal school activities</li> <li>2. Promote parental involvement</li> </ol>                 |

As noted in Table 38, a number of ideas were reported by headteachers that led to the creation of two main and opposed themes when asked about this transition process: this

transition is an *easy change* and a *difficult one*. The first theme includes opinions about primary school visits which make this period an easy shift. As for the second one, headteachers reported that this could be a traumatic change for children as they may have a difficult time adapting to their new routine because of a lack of academic skills. There were many issues that headteachers reported as the main problems for children during this period. These issues were included in the notion of children *coming from different backgrounds* and *school differences*. Headteachers highlighted the difference between preschoolers coming from private and public schools. Further, they mentioned that the lack of personal skills and behaviour problems might be important factors to consider. As for the second theme that emerged, participants highlighted the new routine in primary classrooms, the greater number of children in the classroom and the difficulties of coexisting with too many children.

When headteachers were asked to describe the type of transition activities they carry/carried out to help children, the results indicated a number of elements which are in line with *working closely with classrooms teachers* and *familiarizing children with the new environment*. As for the former theme, headteachers reported organising meetings with classroom teachers and supporting them in normal classroom activities, whereas for the latter, participants indicated that talking with children about primary school, explaining the differences with their new peers and introducing the headteacher him/herself to children are important strategies they carry out. However, they also mentioned a number of elements that prevent them from carrying out such activities which, interestingly, led to a single theme: *excessive administrative paper-work*. Headteachers commented that filling out too many forms meant that they could neither organise nor carry out these activities. Finally, headteachers shared what they can do in order to help in this transition. The results were included in two main themes, namely, *carrying out school normal activities* and *promoting parental involvement*. Headteachers indicated that by following the normal procedures and activities in the school such as ice-breaker activities and introducing themselves as headteachers to children, they could help them during this change. They also mentioned they could help by talking to parents about this transition.

Overall, this chapter showed the main results obtained from the analysis carried out from the two perspectives chosen, namely quantitative and qualitative, and demonstrated interesting issues that were identified in light of the research questions of this study. Results from both cohorts were shown in an attempt to highlight not only the particularities of each group, but also to compare the data obtained. These results will be discussed in

more detail in the following chapter where links to previous empirical studies will be highlighted.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

### Introduction

This chapter focuses on the various elements comprised in this study which are of the utmost importance to discuss at this stage in light of the results obtained. Firstly, it offers a summary of the main findings of the study, following a similar structure offered in the results section, to provide a logical and coherent sequence of the findings. Secondly, a section of main conclusions is included to analyse the way in which the research questions were addressed. Findings are discussed by comparing results from both groups rather than analysing each cohort separately. This discussion is held in light of previous research, theoretical perspectives and the educational context in Mexico.

The main aim of this study was to explore the perceptions of transition between preschool and first grade primary school held by teachers, headteachers and parents in the public education system in Mexico City. The following research questions were derived from this aim:

1. What are the problems teachers perceive that preschoolers/first graders face during this transition?
2. What are the main concerns teachers have in this transition?
3. What are the main barriers teachers perceive during this period?
4. What are the transition practices teachers use?
5. What do teachers think can be done to improve this transition?
6. What are the perceptions of headteachers about this transition period?
7. What are the perceptions of parents in this transition?

The following sections will discuss the different information obtained as a result of the study in such a way that the reader will find separate sections in which the research was structured, such as the perceptions and practices of preschool and primary teachers, and the perceptions of parents and headteachers. Finally, a section analysing the way in which the research questions were addressed is also provided.

### Level of Concern (Comparison Preschool and Primary School)

Generally speaking, results indicate that half of participants from both cohorts are concerned about the preschoolers transitioning into first grade, which is a view also found in other studies. These results are consistent with those of Della-Vecchia (2012) who found

that not only kindergarten but also first grade teachers in the US reported concerns about children's lack of academic skills during this period. Further, Cassidy (2005) reported that primary 1 teachers were concerned about child adjustment in Scottish schools. Fisher's (2010) study found that teachers from preschool and primary school were mainly concerned about the pedagogical approach used in both educational levels. More importantly in Fisher's study, the curriculum discontinuity was highlighted, placing an important emphasis on the way in which their teaching practices affected children's learning. These results seem to indicate that for some teachers this period of change is important and thus they might be aware of its importance as well as the challenges it represents. However, for other teachers it might not seem important. Further research is needed to explore the rationale behind these concerns. Overall, results of the present study contribute to the existing evidence, where teachers are not only concerned about this shift for preschoolers, but also recognise the differences between these educational levels, and the need to work on a continuity to help children in this transition.

### **Prevalence and Frequency of Children's Problems and Transition Practices**

Teachers reported the problems that children show not only to observe differences and similarities, but also to explore the extent to which such situations prevail in preschool and primary school classroom. Although both cohorts reported problems in the classroom that may have an effect on this transition, results indicated a slight difference in both groups. Whilst more than half of the preschool teachers reported a moderate level of problems, primary school participants reported them on a moderate and on a more frequent basis. These findings confirm what Rim-Kauffman, Pianta and Cox (2000) found in a national sample in the US where kindergarten teachers reported a considerable percentage of children in their classroom having problems during this shift. Conversely, Robinson and Diamond (2013) found that more problems were reported by American preschool teachers with a smaller sample, which might seem different to the results of the current study. Nevertheless, these results contribute to the existing literature with regard to the type and prevalence of children's problems reported by teachers and shed light on important issues that need to be considered in the Mexican context. Moreover, these results may also indicate the differences in contexts that need to be considered when carrying out research on transitions given that the ecologies in the microsystem and macrosystem, as suggested by Bronfenbrenner, such as family, school, community and governmental policies may have an effect not only in school classrooms but also on teachers' perceptions. These results seem to be consistent with the idea reported in the literature in which children's

individual differences need to be considered in light of this transition (Copple & Bredekemp, 2009). Arguably, this could propose a quite logical sequence in this respect where the elements from the microsystem have an important effect in the development of children's skills based on the wide range of experiences children have in such contexts. These early experiences have the potential to shape children's behaviour and as such, this individual differences could be reflected in the educational settings thus in this transition. Further research is needed in order to explore the nature of these problems reported by teachers. Moreover, it is also important to study children's problems as reported by teachers with a bigger sample and from an exploratory perspective where teachers can share the problems they find in the classroom based on open-ended questions.

As for the frequency of the transition practices used by teachers, this study found that more than half of the primary teachers use transition practices at a moderate level, whilst nearly the same number of preschool participants reported an infrequent use of practices. The use of transition practices has been widely researched in different ways and found to be a predictor of an adequate adjustment to first grade and a higher academic achievement (Ahtola et al., 2011). Ahtola's study examined teachers using an adequate number of practices which were used to make correlational tests. LoCasale-Crouch et al. (2008) found kindergarten teachers generally to use six out of nine transition practices in American schools which were observed to have a positive impact on children's social competence, whilst Rous, Hallam, McCormick & Cox (2010) found that 70% of preschool teachers surveyed from a national sample in the US reported an average use of 12.2 practices out 25, where, interestingly, classroom size, specialized training in practices use and school context were related to the use of such practices. Findings from this study seem to indicate that teachers are knowledgeable about effective transition practices needed in this process. Further, primary school teachers seem to carry out transition practices on a more frequent basis than their preschool counterparts. However the extent to which such practices are used throughout the whole transition process, which comprises preschool academic year, summer time and first grade, should also be borne in mind (Perry, Dockett & Pietriwskyl, 2014). Further research should focus on exploring the extent to which these practices are used on a continuum (i.e., throughout the whole transition process) in addition to examining the rationale behind the lack of use of other essential transition practices as reported by the literature, and the rationale behind that which prevents teachers from using them in a more consistent way.

These results reveal important information about the frequency and prevalence of children's problems in the classroom and the use of transition practices by Mexican teachers. They contribute to the current evidence regarding the frequency with which teachers use transition practices in different countries and suggests possibilities for further research focused on the rationale behind the use (or lack) of transition practices and the possible links with educational policies at preschool and primary school level.

### **Transition Practices (Comparison between Preschool & Primary School: Use, Type and Prevalence)**

One of the main purposes of the current study was to explore not only the frequency of the use of transition practices but also the type of practices used by both cohorts of teachers. Results indicate that both groups use some transition practices to support children's successful adjustment to primary school, but there are other practices which are used on a less frequent basis. The most frequent practices used by both groups are focused on promoting home-school communication during this transition; however there are minor differences between groups in relation to one practice. Whilst preschool teachers also share a portfolio of children's records with parents before the start of first grade, primary teachers explain their expectations to parents once the academic year has started.

More specifically, preschool teachers focus their practices on having parents involved in school-related activities within the last three months of the academic year. They also interact with families when "open door" activities are carried out in the educational centre. Primary school teachers provide orientation sessions for parents about the first year as a way to establish this home-school link. Moreover, these teachers also have talks with parents before school starts and involved them in activities during the early weeks of the academic year. Results also indicate that the least frequent practices used by preschool teachers focused on asking the first grade teacher to visit the preschool class and having informal chats with the primary school teacher, whilst primary school teachers do not generally use practices related to having informal talks with preschool teachers or having preschoolers perform an activity in the primary school classroom.

These results provide evidence of the most common practices currently carried out by teachers in both educational centres, and at the same time show the less frequent activities in light of the Mexican context. Results suggest that the most frequently used practices mainly focus on enhancing family-school links for both groups whilst the less

used practices focus on establishing school-school links. These findings are in line with other studies where the orientation to families was also reported by teachers (Pianta et al., 2001) as a common practice. However Pianta et al. also found at the same time that one of the most common practices was for preschoolers to visit the kindergarten centre, which the current study found to be a less frequent practice. This lack of visits and connections between the ecologies (i.e., preschool and primary school), was also found to be a practice less used in some other studies (Cox, Laparo & Pianta, 2000; LoCasale, et al., 2008; Wildenger & McIntyre, 2010), but others have found it to be a common one in teachers' repertoires (O'Kane & Hayes, 2006). These results are also different to Regena's (2004) findings where she found that sending written information to parents was one of the most common practice used in American schools. The "open door" activities found in this study have also been reported in previous research as a common practice carried out by teachers (Cox, LaParo & Pianta, 2000; Pianta, Cox, Taylor & Early, 1999). Interestingly that research also found that having preschoolers visit first grade was rated as a frequently used practice while it was found to be a less frequent practice in this study.

Pianta, Cox, Taylor and Early (1999) found that 95% of their sample had a talk with parents once the kindergarten-academic year had started which is similar to the results in the present study. The sample in this study revealed that primary teachers frequently explain their expectations to families once the school year has already started. These results are also similar to those reported by Rous et al. (2010) where it was found that talking to parents before and after the child started school was a common practice by teachers. It should be highlighted that results in the present study revealed that both groups of teachers reported that establishing connections with the preschool centre or primary school respectively, was not a frequent practice. This practice has been reported by Brostrom (2002) as common in Danish schools where different activities were carried out between both centres in order for teachers to involve and exchange information with parents which led to positive outcomes in terms of children's adjustment.

Having activities where parents are involved in school activities during this transition has been recognised as an important keypoint for teachers and schools. Although this practice has been outlined as an essential activity in order to enhance children's successful transition to first grade (Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000), there is little evidence in the current study to support the notion that teachers actively involve parents either in preschool or in primary school as part of their practices repertoire. This practice can usually be observed whenever studies have implemented transition programmes in school

so as to explore the effect of such programmes (Carida, 2011; Corsaro & Molinari, 2008; LaParo, Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2003), although other studies highlight that this practice is carried out by teachers in a quite limited way. Hausken and Rathburn (2001) found that teachers do involve parents during this transition period, however the school-home interaction found in the current study was limited to children's enrolment procedures. These results contribute to this field of family involvement-related practices where findings revealed that teachers from both groups reported using this practice on a frequent basis; however there is the need to explore the rationale behind this practice carried out by the teachers since the actual reason for carrying out this practice is unknown. On the basis of these results, it can be speculated that teachers may be reporting the activities that school carries out in a usual way, where families are expected to attend events such as Mother's Day, Father's Day, enrolment day, Christmas-related events and so forth. Given the lack of teacher's awareness in regard to this process, the precise meaning of transition activities aimed at involving families could have been unclear. It could be argued that the teachers' lack of transition-related specialised training might be part of the rationale behind the lack of family involvement focused on this transition. In this way, it seems important to carry out further research in order to examine this rationale given that the implementation of these practices would be of extreme value as considered in the Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition (Rimm-Kauffman & Pianta, 2000). In this model, the connections among ecologies within the microsystem are considered an anchor point for promoting a successful transition (Koizumi, 2000; Perry, Dockett & Petriwskyj, 2014). Microsystem connections between the preschool, primary school and home in the Mexican context will help support a smooth transition.

There are other practices aimed not only at preparing the final preschoolers' portfolio but also sharing it with parents and the first grade teachers in order to learn about children's overall performance and in consequence to prepare specific activities to ease this transition. Results of this study revealed that preschool teachers provide a final portfolio to parents where a record of children's academic and personal skills is kept. These results are consistent with the findings reported by Turunen (2012) where educators share the children's portfolio with the preschool teacher in order to gain insight into children's needs. This view was also shared by parents, highlighting the importance for preschool teachers to know their child better and help them during this transition. Conversely, this finding is different from those reported by Ahtola et al. (2012) who found that less than a third of the sample reported the use of this practice, who reported that the familiarization with the physical environment and the provision of information to new first graders was

among the most common practices used by teachers. It is to note however, that Ahtola's study was carried out with elementary school teachers. Nevertheless, an interesting factor must be highlighted here which could help explain this situation. Teachers in the current study are meant to share children's final records at the end of the academic year. This is to say, this practice seems to be related to the policy-related regulation found in the preschool programme where teachers are obliged to share such information with parents (SEP, 2011). This information may lead one to think that the portfolio shared with families could have been reported as a normal procedure rather than a specific practice aimed at supporting this transition. Although this transition practice has been regarded as an essential keypoint to enhance the transition to primary school (Peters, 2010), it cannot be concluded that teachers in this study carry out such a practice based on their awareness of this drastic change. Further studies should focus on the type of practices and the rationale behind them in order to examine whether teachers are just complying with educational policy for preschools. Overall, from the previous statements there are important conclusions that can be drawn; however the results should be interpreted with care due to the reduced number of practices used by both groups of teachers. It can be argued that both groups of teachers' practices are focused on establishing home-school connections with parents by providing important information with regard to this period and involving them in different activities such as "open door" and information sessions. Conversely, these results suggest that school-school links are not a common practice in this context. This finding may also suggest the need to think about the relation between the less frequently used practices (e.g., school visits) and the educational policies in schools. It can be argued that both groups of teachers make use of these practices to help children and parents in this period; however, there is the need to explore further the extent to which such practices are carried out bearing the importance of the transition in mind. It is also important to ascertain whether teachers are aware of the benefits of the practices they carry out or not. Further, it may also be important to explore the reasons behind the use of such practices in order to examine the rationale behind the practices teachers do not use.

This ecological perspective of transition suggests that the interconnections among ecologies should rely on a constant exchange of this type information to develop the most effective strategies in order to promote a smooth transition (Berlin, Dunning & Dodge, 2011; Rosenkoetter et al., 2009). It may be beneficial if teachers acquire new transition practices. As a result, teachers would have the opportunity to promote, a successful transition in a wider sense. However, it is important to note the need to consider other variables involved in carrying out transition practices in these educational settings, such as

teachers' motivation, school policies, the population's socio-economic status or the geographical location of schools within the Mexican context.

### **Children Problems (Comparison Preschool & Primary School: most and least reported)**

The Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition proposed by Rimm-Kauffman and Pianta (2000), places children at the core of such a model. As a result, one of the most important topics being researched in the literature of preschool transition has been the challenges and problems children face during this period as reported by teachers or parents (Lo-Casale et al., 2008; Stormont, Beckner, Mitchell & Richter, 2005; Wildenger & McIntyre, 2010). In line with the international literature, this study aimed to identify the problems that a sample of Mexican children might face in this period as reported by preschool and first grade teachers. Results from this study revealed that both groups of teachers reported similar problems in their classroom: children with behaviour problems and children having difficulty following directions. However, first grade teachers reported an additional problem which was having children with difficulty taking turns. These findings support previous research from overseas (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; Rimm-Kauffman, Pianta & Cox, 2000) which states that in the teachers' judgement, some children may face major problems which may have an important impact in their transition to primary school.

The findings from this study are consistent to those studies related to the display of behavioural problems that have also been reported by Wildenger and McIntyre (2012), where not only teachers but also parents reported behavioural problems in their children. Further, the authors provided evidence to support the idea that having fewer behavioural problems was positively associated with a successful preparation for entrance to primary school. In an interesting study, Mascareno, Doolaard and Bosker (2014) analysed a set of data from Doolaard and Bosker (2006) where socio-behavioural problems in primary school children were identified. Interestingly, children's academic skills and socio-behavioural problems were analysed in order to examine their association with academic attainment. Results revealed an association between the academic skills and academic attainment suggesting a minor association of the latter aspect with behavioural problems.

Children having difficulties following directions has also been found in other studies which are consistent with the present findings highlighting its importance during this transition period. These sets of skills have been found to be intrinsically associated

with a successful adaption to primary school (Denham, 2006; Hatcher, Nuner & Paulse, 2012; Nathanson, Rimm-Kauffman & Brock, 2009; Stormont et al., 2005). The judgements of a national sample of kindergarten teachers were analysed by Rim-Kauffman, Pianta and Cox (2000). One of the main results the authors highlighted was that teachers reported three main problems found in classroom during this transition, namely following directions, working independently and lacking academic skills. Similarly, problems with following directions were found to be the greatest problem reported by kindergarten and first grade teachers by Della-Vechia (2011). Robinson and Diamond (2013) also found different problems where following directions was importantly highlighted. The other problems found in this study were lack of academic skills and working independently. Moreover, these types of problems have also been reported by caregivers and parents in other studies, highlighting the need to obtain information as to the appropriate way to cope with such problems in an attempt to ease children's transition (McIntyre et al., 2007; Wildenger & McIntyre, 2010). Finally, as for the third most reported problem on behalf to primary teachers group (children with difficulty taking turns), it should be noted that there is little literature focused in this regard. Instead, this set of skills has been regarded as an essential part of the social skills-repertoire that needs to be developed in children during this shift (Denham, 2006; Tudge et al., 2003; Stormont et al., 2005). To summarise, the results of the current study support the idea that teachers also think of this as an important problem found in primary school classroom that could be important in this transition, suggesting the need to conduct future research in this respect to shed light specifically in regard to this set of skills and its implication for the transition to first grade.

These results also revealed the less frequent children's problems found in classroom as reported by teachers. Preschool teachers reported having children working independently and adjusting to the daily routine without any problem, whilst first grade teachers reported having children respecting their authority as teacher and a good set of communicational skills where no language problems were reported. Interestingly, these findings are different from others reported in the literature where Rimm-Kauffman, Pianta and Cox (2000) found children having problems working independently to be one of the major problems reported by teachers. Similarly, Robinson and Diamond (2013) found that the most common problems reported by teachers were mainly following directions and working independently. It is noteworthy that working independently has also been regarded as an essential element in this transition for children by some scholars. O'Kane and Hayes (2006) for instance, emphasise that this must be one of the main skills to be developed in children along with other sets of social skills such as peer interaction. Having

problems adjusting to the new routine has also been highlighted in other studies as an important factor to take into account during this transition and is considered as a key element in children readiness for primary school (Hatcher, Nuner & Paulse, 2012; Berlin, Dunning & Dodge, 2011). However this study's results are different from what the literature reports. The results of the present study are also different to those found by Stephen and Cope (2003) where teachers reported adjusting to the learning environment and adjustment to the daily routine as the main problems found in classroom in association with first grade transition. It is significant however, that Stephen and Cope's study was focused on first grade teachers, suggesting that this group of teachers may be more likely to report such problems due to the preschoolers' adaptation process *itself*. Nevertheless, the preschool cohort from the current study did not find problems in this regard, suggesting that children experience an adequate adjustment to the routine at the preschool level.

On the one hand, these results provide evidence that primary school teachers did not have children with language problems and children lacking respect for teachers' authority in the first grade classroom. Some research has highlighted language skills as essential in child development. These language skills have also been associated with the development of emergent literacy skills and a successful academic performance (Hatcher, Nuner & Paulse, 2012; Rudasill, Rimm-Kauffman, Justice and Pence, 2006; Nix et al., 2013). In light of the evidence, this could represent an advantage in the transition process for the teachers included in this study. On the other hand, the fact that teachers did not find children having problems respecting their authority may be supported by the idea that children are aware of the new rules they need to learn and follow in primary school as suggested by Dockett and Perry (2005). Similarly, Sheridan and Samuelsson (2001) argue that children seem to be aware of their role in the school by granting and following the authority invested in the teacher. Moreover, a British study suggests that children in primary school know beforehand that the teachers' authority cannot be challenged (Robinson & Fielding, 2007). All in all, having children respecting teacher's authority in classroom can be stated as an asset towards a successful transition into first grade in Mexican schools.

### **Correlations (Preschool & Primary School: demographic, practices and problems)**

Although it was not one of the main aims of this study, correlations were carried out in light of the results obtained in order to explore the extent to which potential associations could be identified with the variables involved that would contribute to the understanding of these variables within the Mexican context. As a result, the present study

explored associations between demographic data considered as an independent variable and teachers' practices as well as children's problems as dependant variables in both groups of teachers. The first aim was to associate demographic data with transition practices. The second aim was to associate demographic data with children's problems and the third one was to associate transition practices with children's problems.

A series of correlation analyses indicated that preschool teachers' demographics were positively and negatively associated with a number of transition practices. The number of years working in the same educational centre was moderately associated with involving parents during the last weeks of the preschool academic year. Having specialised training courses for the teachers was strongly associated with sharing children's final report with the first grade teacher, albeit negatively. This is to say, teachers who had more training courses had less interaction with the primary school teacher to share the final report. Likewise, the number of courses attended was also strongly—and positively—associated with sharing the children's portfolio with the first grade teacher. Delivering workshops for parents was moderately associated with the number of years of teaching experience and the number of years working in the same school, whilst a strong association was found with the number of years working at preschool level.

On the other hand, primary teachers' academic background was moderately associated with explaining expectations about first grade to families and negatively associated with organizing meetings among families at both levels (e.g., preschool and primary school) to exchange experiences. This is to say, teachers who reported a higher academic background had less meetings organised to exchange information in regard to the transition. Results also showed that the number of children in the classroom was moderately associated with two practices: having families involved during the early weeks of the academic year and having preschoolers visit primary school, although the latter was found to be negative in nature. This is to say, teachers with large classes have less visits from preschool children. Finally, results also indicated a strong and negative correlation between attending specialised courses and involving families during the early weeks of first grade, meaning that the more prepared teachers are, the less family involvement is observed.

Overall these results indicate that for the preschool cohort, having more years of experience is associated with more practices related to the establishment of home-school connections. Interestingly, however, having attended more specialised training courses hinders the establishment of school-school links with primary teachers. These findings

seem to be consistent with other studies which suggest that the experience obtained through the years provides teachers to some extent with an awareness of the important elements involved in early years of education (Liu, Jones & Sadera, 2010). Empirical evidence also supports the notion that spending a number of years in the educational field is important for teachers since they are acquiring and developing strategies and practices that could serve for multiple purposes (Pugh & Duffy, 2013). Although not all the experiences can lead to positive educational practices, working in a continuum period of time provides teachers with the opportunity to refine their practices as they implement them constantly (Pugh & Duffy, 2013). Whilst this is true for the preschool cohort, the first grade cohort showed some particularities worth highlighting. Results indicated that teachers with a higher educational background tend to promote more home-school interactions through different practices. However, the opposite phenomenon is observed in regard to school-school connections where teachers having a higher educational background were found to be less prone to promote such links. Interestingly, teachers with few specialized courses tended to invite families to school to carry out a pedagogical activity. Finally, whilst having a large group in first grade favoured the involvement of families during early weeks of the academic year, it prevented a visit from preschoolers.

These findings seem to be similar to previous research, indicating that academic background provides teachers with a number of educational practices making them knowledgeable in regard to a specific educational field (Pugh & Duffy, 2013). It could be argued that an awareness of the importance of family involvement with school matters is one of the main aspects teachers may have acquired in college (Harris & Sass, 2011). Although this evidence seems to support the notion of promoting school-school links in the same way, it needs to be carefully analysed from an alternative perspective. A possible explanation may consider the current educational policies in the Mexican context. It is possible that the Ministry of Education regulations do not allow the establishment of connections among schools, especially under the current socio-political and economic situation not only in the city, but the country as a whole.

Surprisingly, teachers with less specialised training are more likely to involve families in classroom-activities. There might be the need to explore this issue further; however one possible explanation could stem from the fact that the educational background teachers already possess is sufficient to plan, design and carry out these sorts of activities. This idea may be better understood if we consider that although Mexico is one of the countries within the OECD group with the broadest coverage and availability of

teacher training workshops and courses, the quality of such courses has also been heavily questioned (UNESCO, 2007, 2011). Interestingly, results indicated that primary school with larger classes promotes a major the involvement of parents during the early weeks. Similar studies have shown that large classes in schools offer the opportunity of designing a wide range of activities not only with the children but also with their parents (Moreno & Dongen, 2006) in order to foster home-school connections and have a positive impact on children's academic performance. However, care must be taken with this interpretation due to the fact that results only show what teachers reported, which could arguably be the activities they follow as part of normal procedure in the early days of enrolment based on Ministry of Education regulations (SEP, 2011). An interesting implication can be mentioned here whereby more populated first grade classroom may prevent primary school teachers from carrying out effective transition practices. Further, personalised attention like the one children receive in preschool is not possible in this context. Further studies should explore the type of activities teachers carry out with families and the extent to which these are transition-related. In line with this, results also indicate that the same effect of having large classes prevents teachers from having visitors from preschool centres. An alternative explanation for this has to do with three main variables: Ministry of Education regulations, a lack of awareness about this transition and the current socio-economic conditions in the school context. Whilst the former may represent some restrictions in favour of children's safety, the lack of transition-related culture can also be a possibility to bear in mind given that the concept of transition *per se* was not explored but rather assumed by the researcher. The latter may offer implications in terms of social variables and contexts that could hamper the implementation of school-school links (OECD, 2011).

### **Statistical Comparisons**

**Children's problems.** Once the frequency of children's problems as reported by teachers from both cohorts was obtained, further analyses were carried out in order to examine statistically significant differences between these groups. Interestingly, the results were statistically significant, indicating that first grade teachers reported more frequent problems in the classroom than preschool teachers. These results are consistent with a number of previous studies where teachers have reported children facing any kind of problem during the change between one school and another (Rim-Kauffman, Pianta & Cox, 2000; Robinson & Diamond, 2013; Wildenger & McIntyre, 2012). In fact, previous findings such as Rim-Kauffman, Pianta and Cox's (2000) stated that kindergarten teachers reported that 16% of children faced serious problems entering school whilst 46% reported

that half of their classroom had some type of problem. Other studies have indicated that preschool teachers also report having children with problems (Robison & Diamond, 2013). These results indicate not only that both cohorts have found problems with children facing this transition, but also that first grade teachers report a greater frequency of problems in the primary school classroom. A possible explanation for this might be related to individual differences among children as suggested by the literature from a developmental perspective (Copple & Bredekemp, 2009) where pupils may have a well-developed set of skills whilst some other skills have not been mastered. As some scholars suggest, the different backgrounds of children (e.g., early home experiences) must be considered given the opportunities offered at home to develop skills related not only to the personal domain but also to the academic one (Jonassen & Grabowski, 2012; McIntyre et al., 2010; Riley & Hiley, 2006; Urbina, 2006). It should be highlighted that the activities in the microsystem as suggested by Rosa and Tudge (2013), have the potential to engage children in a number of opportunities that allow the development of different skills, but early parental practices greatly vary among communities, which might be another element to bear in mind not only in interpreting these findings but also during this transition.

Another possible explanation may rely on the so-called discontinuity in the curriculum (Chun, 2013; DiSanto & Bernan, 2012; Sink, Edwards & Weir, 2007), given that the preschool syllabus emphasises a play-based approach where children are constantly playing around the classroom in the different areas designated, whilst the first grade curriculum emphasises a more academic-led environment which requires children to be seated in their chairs paying attention to the teacher and carrying out academic work. Differences among preschool centres located in the microsystem must also be considered for explaining the curriculum discontinuity. First graders may come from public or private preschools creating substantial differences. Some children do not even attend preschool level prior to entering first grade despite the fact that this educational level is now mandatory. These results might also help explain the fact that primary school teachers are more concerned about this transition than the preschool cohort.

Although previous literature reports preschool teachers having children with problems (Robinson & Diamond, 2013), this study's findings indicate less frequency in reporting such problems. This is an interesting finding due to the fact that preschoolers may not have previous experience of formal schooling prior to entering the last level of preschool (preschool 3), thus a major frequency of problems reported due to the lack of adaptation to a certain set of rules. It should also be mentioned that there are studies

supporting the notion that the school-home transition also creates important challenges whenever children leave their primary environment (i.e., home) and their primary caregivers in order to attend preschool (Margetts & Phatudi, 2013). This condition could have led preschool teachers report more frequent problems, however these findings show an opposite tendency. We could speculate that preschool teachers reported less frequent children's problems given that teachers are used to behavioural and following directions-related problems. Moreover, the fact that this group of teachers reported having more experience, may suggest that teachers hold low expectations in regard to well-prepared children with different skills already developed. Research supports the idea that teachers with low expectations rate children's performance and characteristics lower in comparison with teachers with high expectations (Rubie-Davies, 2010). According to Rubie-Davis, how teachers justify children's performance is based in teacher's preconceptions. The author goes on to say that such perception is not negative, but rather that teachers do not expect a better performance or perceive better characteristics in children. To summarise, there may be a number of variables involved in why first grade teachers report more frequent children's problems. Some of them have been explored in this study, whilst others need to be examined further in future research.

**Transition practices.** Differences between groups of teachers in regard to transition practices were found to be statistically significant in six of the 20 practices included in this study. Specifically in these six practices, preschool teachers reported a more frequent use of four practices whilst primary teachers reported a more frequent use in two of them. Results indicate that primary school teachers used more practices related to sharing important transition-related information with parents. Teachers focused their practices on explaining to families what it is expected at primary school and providing orientation sessions, which is consistent with previous findings such as those of Hausken and Rathburn (2001) who found that kindergarten teachers in American schools reported organising information sessions to families and phoning parents during this period of shift as a way to promote home-school links. A possible explanation for these findings might be that primary school teachers may be aware of the importance of parents knowing about this transition period and thus share this type of information to help promote a smooth transition. A contrasting explanation however, may suggest that this exchange of information might be due to regulations within the school where informative sessions are supposed to be provided prior to school entrance based on school policies. Additional research examining not only the rationale behind this practice but also exploring the type

of sessions teachers hold with parents is needed to find out whether the sessions are transition-oriented.

Preschool teachers more frequently use practices related not only to exchanging information with parents but also to promoting school-school links which is an important element highlighted in the literature as an essential practice under the Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition proposed by Rimm-Kauffman and Pianta (2000). This ecological model when applied to the preschool transition underscores the importance of creating community links in the microsystem. This is to say, the community members of the different ecologies, namely, the school, neighbourhood and home in which children are growing up and developing, must be bridged in this period of change to ease the transition (Kreider, 2002; Peters, 2010). These school-school links promoted by teachers ranged from reviewing the children's final report with parents to visiting the primary school, which is a practice widely recommended by a number of scholars in the transition literature (Carida, 2011; Claes, 2010; Marsh, Green & Korhari, 2010). Surprisingly, preschool teachers reported having parents from primary school exchanging information in regard to this shift with preschool parents, but caution must be used when interpreting these results given the low mean reported specifically for this practice. Further exploration of this issue should be carried out.

Overall, these findings contribute to the existing international literature stating that teachers do carry out to some extent a number of transition practices. It seems possible that these findings are due to preschool teachers' awareness of the importance of these practices in light of this period of change, in addition to the fact that the preschool cohort reported having more years of experience at this educational level. This could also be related to the high number of specialised courses preschool teachers reported having attended, whilst in contrast, primary teachers reported a lower attendance rate. These training courses may have provided teachers with a major or different repertoire of transition practices which allow them to carrying them out in their educational centres. Further research should explore the rationale behind the use of specific transition practices as this study which is focused mainly on the type and frequency of practices used by both groups of teachers.

### **“My Community” versus “Ideal World”**

This study attempted to explore the extent to which preschool and primary teachers are aware of any difference(s) between their current transition practices and the practices

that might be expected or “ideal” during this transition period. The format to gather this data was adapted from Early, Clifford and Howes (1999). In light of this purpose, teachers rated the use of transition practices in their “community”, meaning what they actually do, and considering an “ideal world”, meaning what they would ideally do. The interest in doing this was based on a study conducted by Early, Clifford and Howes (1999) in American preschool centres where 1,902 teachers were asked to reveal how engaged they were with the practices they endorsed. The study results did not find major differences between the practices teachers reported doing in their everyday routine and what they would do in a “perfect” world. However, the authors did report very slight discrepancies where they found that teachers would engage more in a “perfect world” in just four practices out of the 21 provided. Although Early and her colleagues’ study focused only on one group of preschool teachers, the results can be compared to some extent with the findings from the present study.

This study’s results are somewhat different to the findings reported by Early and colleagues. Interestingly, results indicate that from the “my community” perspective, primary school teachers reported a more frequent use of transition practices than the preschool teachers, whilst from the “ideal world” perspective, preschool teachers reported a more frequent use of these practices. There might be several explanations for these results given that there is the need to consider a number of variables. For instance, in light of these results, primary school teachers may have been reporting the actual practices they carry out, an idea which is also supported by the percentage of frequency for transition practices. In the first grade teachers’ cohort, 67% of participants reported carrying out such practices in a moderate way whilst only 40% was reported by their counterparts, the preschool teachers. In contrast, preschool teachers may have been reporting the practices they do not actually carry out, but which they would be able to do. This seems to be consistent with the 60% of preschool teachers reporting an infrequent use of these practices. Based on the fact that this group of participants reported having attended more specialised training courses, it could be argued to some extent that teachers had a major awareness regarding this transition and appropriate practices. There is empirical evidence to support the idea that whenever teachers take training courses, additional knowledge is acquired as well as different skills leading the participants to be more aware of the elements implicated in preschool education (Rous et al., 2010).

As for the most and least frequent practices reported by both groups in this “ideal world” perspective, results revealed that preschool participants reported practices related to

sharing information with parents and first grade teacher as well as visiting primary school as practices they would carry out the most, whilst primary first grade teachers' practices focused mainly on having meetings with parents and children to share information in regard to this period of change.

Comparing these “ideal world” practices with those reported in the “my community” perspective, differences cannot be stated since the most frequent practices reported by both groups in the latter perspective are closely related to the practices they actually carry out. The fact that similar practices are and would be carried out by teachers from both perspectives could be better explained by considering a number of variables. In order to offer different explanations, we may make use of the concept of triangulation provided by Denzin and Lincoln (2000) as well as considering Newby's (2010) ideas in that a mixed-method research can help in explaining findings not by confirming one data with another data, but rather complementing each other so as to provide a wider perspective of the phenomenon observed. It could be argued that these similar practices are the only ones with which the teachers are familiar. Another possible explanation could be that the policies established in each educational centre, namely preschool and primary school, do not allow them to carry out other practices. These ideas could also be complemented by the barriers both groups identified that prevent them from carrying out transition practices in their current educational centre. On the one hand, preschool participants pointed out the lack of institutional support, whilst on the other hand, first grade teachers reported the same lack of support, in addition to the limited time to carry out transition-related activities. These types of obstacles may play a role in the practices they would do more frequently, however this might seem a contrasting keypoint given that teachers are currently carrying out these practices despite the barriers abovementioned. These types of barriers may also prevent teachers from broadening their repertoire of other practices included in the present study, but it might also be interesting to bear in mind a third possibility which is that teachers do not think that the rest of the practices are important for this period.

Finally, these differences were clearly observed when comparing the total means scores from both groups based on the “ideal world” perspective despite the lack of statistically significant differences. Results indicate that there are slight differences between groups considering both perspectives. However, the biggest difference was observed within the groups, where the total mean score of the “ideal world” was greater to the total mean score of the “my community” perspective, meaning that teachers would

carry out more practices than they currently use. Early's study focused on general effective teaching practices carried out in early-years education, therefore the current study findings represent the first evidence where teachers' perceptions from two different perspectives focused on transition practices were gathered. In a way, these findings contribute to the literature which argues that teachers may be aware of the possibility of carrying out transition practices to ease this period of change in a more frequent way. Although this study also yielded valuable information about the barriers perceived by both groups of teachers, there is the need to explore further the rationale behind the reasons why teachers do not carry out transition practices more frequently as stated in the "ideal world" perspective. Moreover, these findings suggest the need to replicate this research by gathering teachers' perceptions from both perspectives not only in wider populations but also in different cultural contexts.

### **Open-ended Questions on Survey (Preschool & Primary School)**

As in previous studies, teachers' responses in this study revealed that children's personal and academic skills are considered important and necessary for this transition. These two aspects constitute the first theme that emerged from the data collected. Results indicate that both groups of teachers considered the need for children to acquire/develop not only personal but also academic skills during this transition period. It should be mentioned, however, that the inclusion of these two aspects is interestingly not divided as the literature suggests. Some studies describe a tendency for preschool teachers to focus more on personal skills whilst primary teachers have shown more interest in academic skills (Fabian & Dunlop, 2007). This division is not surprising. Preschool play-based curriculum emphasises an integral development of the child. Given the nature of the curriculum, academic skills are somewhat considered, but there is a greater emphasis on the child's personal skills development through play (Dodge et al., 2002). Conversely, an outcome-based curriculum in the first grade of primary school mainly focuses on the acquisition and development of early literacy skills (Dodge et al., 2002). Empirical evidence supports the idea that teachers are interested in both personal and academic skills (Arndt, et al., 2013; Chan, 2012; McCubbins, 2004; Stephen & Cope, 2003) in light of this transition. This concern for both set of skills in children found in the literature is corroborated by the results of this study where teachers from both cohorts reported being concerned with the lack of these types of skills in children who are transitioning or have already made the transition to primary school.

Although the preschool curriculum in Mexico is also a play-based syllabus, preschool teachers considered both groups of skills necessary for a successful transition. Similarly, primary teachers believed that both set of skills are needed for this period of change despite the fact that the curriculum is academic-based. That is to say, both groups of teachers considered that skills such as self-care, autonomy and/or independence are as important as pre-reading and pre-writing skills for the transition to primary school. It should be highlighted that preschool and first grade teachers consider children's readiness for this transition from a holistic viewpoint. This is an interesting finding. Teachers' awareness regarding the needs of children for this period can be inferred from their responses. Teachers noticed that the lack of these skills can have an important effect on this shift, thus suggesting the need to support children's development of such skills. Further research should be undertaken to explore the rationale behind their responses.

According to participants' responses, both groups of skills are needed at the preschool and primary school level. This holistic view might be interesting to explore further considering the participants' educational background, given that 38% of preschool teachers are paraprofessionals whilst only 46% hold an undergraduate diploma. Conversely, almost 85% of primary teachers hold an undergraduate diploma whilst 15% are paraprofessionals. Teachers' educational background has been shown to be associated with a wider view of children's education (Guevara et al. 2009). Whereas this association might support primary teachers' responses, it might also be interesting to investigate further the perspective of preschool teachers given that almost 40% of participants hold a paraprofessional qualification. To summarise, the teachers' perspectives regarding children's needs in terms of skills are aligned with previous studies indicating teachers' concerns with regard to these types of skills. Teachers acknowledge not only the lack of but also the need to help children acquire/develop these skills. The holistic view teachers showed is a significant step towards the understanding of this transition in Mexico on behalf of teachers. These findings may suggest teachers' awareness about this change as important since they consider not only the educational level in which they work, but also the previous or the following one respectively. Moreover, this view may facilitate future intervention programmes (e.g., transition activities, training courses) aimed at providing teachers with the knowledge and skills that help not only children but also parents during this period. Teachers can make significant contributions during this period of change by implementing transition activities (Tudge et al., 2003). Therefore, the need to train teachers in this respect is clear (Guevara et al., 2009) so that they can help children develop/acquire a number of skills. These skills, as suggested by McIntyre et al. (2010), are of utmost

importance for children's adjustment to the new stage in academic life. Children will not only have to use this knowledge and abilities to meet new people—peers and teachers—but also to adjust to a new physical environment and a set of new regulations/rules that will guide the new routine and their performance in their new school.

Transition research has also revealed that skilled children tend to adapt more rapidly to the new environment (McCubbins, 2004; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). The greater number of skills a child has acquired and developed, the easier and faster a child will adapt (Fabian & Dunlop, 2007). Teachers' responses led to the creation of the second theme referring to the adaptation to a new routine. Both groups' responses, reflected teachers' concerns about the adaptation to a new routine, pointing out a wide variety of contrasting elements found in the primary school setting, such as following new rules and directions, working individually and in small groups, taking turns, being seated for longer periods of time (and the requirement for a longer attention span), spending most of the time reading and writing, socializing with more children and solving problems independently with just one teacher in the classroom. These elements have also been highlighted in previous research (Chun, 2003; Turunen, 2012) which points out the potential effect they may have in children's adaptation. An interesting emphasis found on each group of teachers should be highlighted. On the one hand, preschool teachers strongly emphasised the time children spend engaged in activities related to reading and writing as opposed to the type of activities in preschool which are mainly play-based. They also pointed out the less individualized attention children may have from the teacher given the fact that in primary school there is only one teacher rather than two as in preschool. Finally, teachers shared that children need to become more independent due to the increasing number of peers in the new classroom which sometimes is three times the number of pupils in the preschool classroom and may make it difficult for the first grade teacher to give personalised attention. It can be observed from the elements mentioned by preschool teachers that most of them focused on the social-emotional aspect of children, although they did point out the longer time spent in academic-related activities. These main issues found in preschool teachers' responses are in line with previous studies (O'Kane & Hayes, 2006) stating teachers' concerns regarding the development of children's interpersonal skills, although other studies have also shown preschool teachers focusing on academic skills (Chan, 2012; Chun, 2003). These results may reflect to some extent teachers' awareness of the differences between the preschool level and first grade which may have an impact on children transitioning, which at the same time contributes to the existing evidence that

points out the challenges children may face as well as the necessary skills they will need for a successful transition.

Primary school teachers' responses highlighted other issues such as adapting to the new set of rules in first grade, focusing on activities for longer periods of time, adapting to a larger number of subjects and having enough knowledge and skills to start formal literacy instruction. From these elements, it can be observed that primary school teachers are interested not only in social, but also in academic demands. Interestingly, these views are in line with the previous literature suggesting that primary teachers are more concerned about children's readiness to face the new academic demands in primary school (Chan, 2012; Dockett & Perry, 2009; Sink, Edwards & Weir, 2007). A possible explanation for these results could be that primary school teachers are aware of the demands that first grade represents. Such views are arguably shaped not only by a teacher's previous experiences, but also by the demands of an academic-based syllabus.

From the above-mentioned arguments related to the second theme, the following conclusions can be drawn. Certainly, entering a new physical and social environment represents a major challenge for children (Vogler, et al., 2008). Children have to face a number of conditions highlighted by teachers in the new educational setting where their skills will play a major role in the adaptation process. It is worth noting however, that both sets of skills—personal and academic—are necessary, as pointed out by both groups of teachers at this time. The preference of each group for emphasising one set of skills over another can be better understood by considering the nature of the curriculum at each educational level (i.e., preschool and first grade). Nevertheless, it is important to note that both groups in a sense considered both set of skills. Based on this, it can be argued that teachers are aware of the challenges children face when entering into first grade. They know that it represents a social, emotional and a cognitive challenge for children. Therefore, children need to be prepared for this shift. Further, teachers also shared their insights regarding the way in which they could help during this transition, one of the most important of which being the establishment of continuity between both educational levels located in the microsystem importantly mentioned. This continuity can also be enhanced by establishing effective community links as suggested by a number of authors (Ahtola, 2008, Claes, 2010; Rimm-Kauffman & Pianta, 2000) where not only teachers but also headteachers and families can share experiences, exchange information and work collaboratively towards an effective way to help children transitioning to first grade.

The third theme that emerged from teachers' responses focuses on the importance of establishing effective links between preschool and primary school personnel. It is important to mention that teachers shared their views regarding the lack of institutional support during this period, which has also been shown to be a fundamental factor in other studies (Pianta, Cox et al., 1999). Specifically, issues such as the lack of connections between schools, heavy paperwork workload and limited time to carry out transition activities were emphasised by both groups as the main barriers perceived. This limitation has also been found in previous studies where teachers shared the need to have enough time to carry out activities to help children and families (LaParo, Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2003). Teachers also noted a lack of communication between teachers, and they proposed collaboration between the preschool and primary teacher should be established to help in this transition. This kind of collaboration has been recognised as one of the most effective transition activities as suggested by a number of authors (Athola et al., 2011; Chun, 2003; Dockett & Perry, 2007; McCubbins, 2004; Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000).

Interestingly, primary teachers indicated that a way to help in this transition would be the establishment of continuity in regard to the activities carried out in preschool. That is to say, teachers considered carrying out preschool-like activities at the beginning of the first grade academic year. One explanation stems from the fact that teachers might be aware not only of the significant gap between both syllabuses highlighted in the literature (Sink, Edwards & Weir, 2007), but also the negative impact this shift might have on children's adaptation process. In this way, teachers' beliefs may be based on the idea that by avoiding this abrupt change represented by going from a socially-oriented preschool to an academic-oriented first grade programme, a smooth transition could be facilitated as some scholars have also emphasised (Dockett & Perry, 2007; Fabian & Dunlop, 2007; Rosenkoetter et al., 2009).

The preschool teachers' responses also reflected some initial and useful ideas as to the way in which such connections can be utilised by highlighting the exchange of knowledge regarding children's general performance. Further, they also mentioned that an exchange of ideas regarding the differences between the syllabuses might be of the utmost importance. This exchange of information is consistent with previous studies (Rous et al., 2010; Vogler et al., 2008) where the potential benefit of sharing teachers' views from both educational centres is well-known. Likewise, positive agreements as well as effective strategies can be established to enhance children's transition as suggested by McCubbins (2004). Overall, it can be argued that teachers are aware not only of the limitations they

have during this period of change, but also of the way in which the transition can be enhanced. Moreover, teachers acknowledge the major role that children's skills and the role that teachers from the "other" school play in this shift. In a sense, the teachers demonstrated their awareness from both perspectives, the individual (considering children's skills) and the social (the way in which adults can help). There is a reason to believe that teachers considered themselves part of this transition process. They did not take the whole responsibility of fostering children's skills, but considered the need to work as a community which is a core element from the ecological perspective. Educational policies are important in this respect where it should be emphasised a work at the micro level on this communities-connection in Mexico City schools. However there might also be the need to explore further the feasibility of such implantation given the socio-economic and political context in which pre-schoolers transit to the primary schools. The current educational policies prevailing at the microsystem and the macrosystem must be closely analysed. Additionally, there is a need to consider the creation and/or reform of educational policies not only regarding teachers' exchange of ideas (i.e., preschool and first grade teachers meetings), but also teachers accessing the "other" school (i.e., visits to primary school or preschool).

Taken together, these results confirm previous findings and contribute additional evidence to the existing body of literature that suggests the importance of considering the child from a holistic view during this transition. This is very much in line with Bronfenbrenner's understanding of child development where the elements not only of the microsystem, but also of the meso and macro system have an important effect on children's development in general. Specifically in the Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition proposed by Rimm-Kauffman and Pianta (2000), the ecologies comprised in the microsystem level are regarded as the most immediate environments which can have a positive effect on children's development of skills, and thus a positive effect on the transition to first grade. Likewise, these results emphasise the significant change children face when moving from preschool to primary school in terms of the physical environment. That is to say, these findings also add to the evidence about the way in which adults perceive the physical differences as important elements to consider in this transition, where not only children's skills but also adults' knowledge play a major role. In line with this, these results also extend the empirical evidence that highlights the importance of and the need to create and establish links between ecologies in a way to help in this transition.

## **Parent Interviews**

Interviews with parents from preschool and first grade were carried out in order to understand the way in which they perceive the preschool transition into first grade. Results from this study suggest that parents from both educational levels are aware of some challenges in this period of change, and acknowledge that some of the main issues in this process derive from the differences between the preschool centre and the primary school. This idea is supported when parents highlighted the fact that the primary school and the preschool centre have a different pedagogical approach, different physical environment and a different daily routine. These results are consistent with previous studies where parents have acknowledged the drastic change this period represents (Giallo et al., 2010; Wildenger & McIntyre, 2010). Moreover, when parents have been involved in transition programmes, they have further acknowledged the important elements for their children during this period (Chan, 2012; Schulting et al., 2005). A second element observed in these findings was parents' concerns in regard to children's skills. Whilst preschool parents showed more concern for personal and academic skills, primary school parents revealed a major concern in regard to personal skills specifically related to children's behaviour. The difference observed in these results suggests that preschool parents are aware of the academic demands of the primary school which has also been found in previous studies specially when parents have been involved in transition programmes (Li et al., 2013), calling for the need to develop a set of personal and academic skills, whilst the emphasis placed on behaviour by school parents may suggest little concern with academic matters. Whilst this tendency has been observed in previous findings (McIntyre et al., 2007), other studies have reported different results where parents focused more on academic rather than personal skills (Chan, 2012). These results confirm previous findings and reinforce the idea that there is variability in parents' perceptions which could be potentially influenced by the elements in the macrosystem such as governmental policies as well as cultural and societal practices; however, they still seem to be very keen to support their children (Dockett & Perry, 2007). These results also confirm previous empirical evidence that support the idea that "readiness" for kindergarten varies across communities (Perry, Dockett & Petriwskyj, 2014; Graue & Reineke, 2014).

In light of these fundamental issues raised by the participants, it is interesting to see what the respondents shared in regard to the transition practices they carry out in order to help their children during this period. Results revealed that both groups of parents focused their efforts on helping children enhance their academic skills. Such support ranges from

buying books to helping children with their homework. These results might reflect to some extent parents' awareness in regard to the discontinuity in the curriculum which has been documented in several studies (Lau, 2014), where a drastic difference is highlighted between a play-based and an outcome-based curriculum (Häidkind, Kikas, Henno & Peets, 2011; Lau, 2014). In light of this difference, it could be argued that parents in consequence act to prepare their children for academic demands. Interestingly, some primary school participants carry out this practice by having older siblings helping the younger children in academic-related activities, a parental practice that was not shared by preschool parents. This difference can be better understood if we consider that primary parents reported having on average more children than their counterparts, preschool parents. This practice has been highlighted in previous studies (Giallo et al., 2010; Kravdal, Kodzi & Sigle-Rushton, 2013) where parents involve older siblings to help the younger child in academic activities. Whilst this might represent an advantage for parents with more than one child, it might be a disadvantage for families with an only child.

Results revealed other transition practices that parents carry out during this period of change which were different in both groups. Whilst preschool parents help their children by communicating to them the expectations for first grade, primary school parents focus their attention on promoting and enhancing the mother-child relationship. If we consider the wide range of transition practices that literature has reported (Ahtola et al., 2011; Dockett & Perry, 2007; Rous et al., 2010), the limited use of practices by both groups can be observed. This could have several explanations taking into account a number of variables among which we can find the educational background of parents, where more than half of the participants from both groups reported having high school and technical qualifications. An alternative explanation for this is the lack of training aimed at preparing parents with regard to this transition period, as a result of which little knowledge and practices would be expected in this respect. In this regard, empirical studies have revealed that parents develop more awareness thus transition-related practices when involved in transition programmes aimed at easing this period for children (Corsaro & Molinari, 2008; Giallo et al., 2008; Lau, 2014). Other studies have also revealed the important role that an effective and close involvement of parents in their child's education represents, given that it has been observed that the more involvement, the better the child's academic performance (LoCasale, 2008; Schulting et al., 2005).

The transition practices reported by parents are also in line with the way in which they think they can help their children. Based on this study's results, both groups agreed

that improving children's academic skills is a priority and an effective way to help their children. Both groups focus on providing information to their children with regard not only to the expectations when in primary school, but also the difference between schools. However, primary school parents also put their efforts into enrolling their children in second language and computing sessions. Although the latter perception might be consistent with Dockett and Perry's (2004) findings where learning the English language was one of the parents' concerns, it is to mention that children included in that study were from different countries transitioning to primary school in Australia, and there is no empirical evidence to support this view specifically in Mexico. At this point, it is interesting to see that respondents' answers focus on the practices which can be of help during this period, which are the same practices they reported as currently carrying out. These results can be better understood if we consider research indicating that parents are more likely to carry out parental practices over and over again until new practices are taught. Their limited knowledge and awareness on transition-related issues could be the rationale behind (Giallo et al., 2010). These results seem to contribute to the existent knowledge with regard to parents' perceptions and the way in which they can help during this transition (Wildenger & McIntyre, 2010). These findings shed light on the current practices of parents from preschool and primary school, calling for the need to suggest educational policies at the micro level focused on offering different alternatives to the way in which effective support can be provided to their children.

This study also sought not only to explore the way in which parents perceive their involvement with the school to help their children during this change, but also their expectations as to what the school can do to help them. Results indicate that preschool parents do not have any specific type of involvement with the school whilst the involvement of primary school teachers focuses on attending school activities planned by teachers. These activities were limited to those carried out as usual during every academic year such as reading stories in the classroom and helping the teacher with physical arrangements in the classroom. That is to say, no specific transition-related activity was reported by participants. However, participants were also asked to share what they thought the school could do in order to help at this time. Results revealed that preschool parents think the school could help by providing them with specific information and organising orientation sessions in light of this transition, which is consistent with previous studies such as Wildenger and McIntyre's (2007), where parents highlighted not only the need to have more information in regard to this change, but also information regarding their children's abilities. Moreover, the same group of participants mentioned that school could

establish home-school links that would improve communication and thus the transition, which is also an important element shared in other studies (LaParo, Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2003). It is noteworthy that both groups agreed in that a good way in which the school could help, is by helping children develop their academic skills, which is an expectation also mentioned in previous studies (Wildenger & McIntyre, 2010), emphasising parents' concerns regarding children's academic skills. Although current school policies allow and promote family-school links, there is a need to consider educational policies that promote these links but focus on transition activities.

Although it can be observed that the participation of primary school parents in usual school activities is an asset as suggested by Tveit (2009), there is also the need to acknowledge the lack of transition practices aimed at involving parents specifically during this transition. Research supports the idea that school-home connections are of the utmost importance during this period of change (Wildenger & McIntyre, 2007) given the fact that the ecologies from the microsystem must be linked to support this transition. Specifically, the Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition (Rimm-Kauffman & Pianta, 2000) highlights the need to promote these type of activities by bridging the gaps between both contexts. This bridging calls for the need to have frequent interactions between teachers and parents in light of this transition by exchanging information and planning additional transition activities in school that will benefit the participants in this process, namely children, parents and teachers as stated in the literature (Malsch, Green & Kothari, 2011). Interestingly, participants from the preschool group perceived two main activities, the mother's personality traits and financial-related problems, as barriers that prevent them from carrying out transition practices, , but both groups agreed that work schedules were a major barrier. However this claim must be interpreted with care given the small number of participants that shared this view, and given that the majority of participants did not mention any barrier.

The fact that parents are not involved in any specific transition activity may have different explanations. For instance, there is a need to consider the lack of transition-related culture in the group of schools used in this study. In addition, there is no empirical evidence to support the notion that intervention programmes are run by the Mexican Ministry of Education that might suggest that schools are failing to follow regulations. It could be argued that parents do not understand how this transition can be better supported based on the practices reported in the literature. Research suggests that parents must be involved in this transition process to improve their awareness in this respect, and to have

an effect on the acquisition and development of effective practices (Giallo et al., 2010). These findings contribute to the understanding of the current situation in which the preschool transition is observed in these schools. The limited family involvement observed in these results, contribute further to the knowledge we have in this respect where parents' involvement is not specifically observed during this period but rather, in the form of generic contacts with school staff (Wildenger & McIntyre, 2007), however this phenomenon could also be explained by the differences observed in the regulations of educational.

Parents' perceptions of the transition period gathered in this study are of the utmost importance to understand their experiences and explore the variables involved. This knowledge will lead to propose future educational policies reforms which could facilitate and improve the interconnections at the microsystem level which could lead to the implementation of effective transition practices. As suggested in previous studies, parents' views are important since they play a major role in helping their children during this transition not only at home, but also by involving themselves in their children's education, which is an important factor heavily associated not only with academic performance (Dockett & Perry, 2007; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Lau, 2014), but also with school adjustment (LoCasale et al., 2008). Further studies should focus on gathering parents' experiences with a bigger sample that would allow more conclusive statements.

Overall, these results give reason to speculate that parents are aware of the different stages which their children will be transiting and acknowledge not only the differences in settings but also the skills that their children might need to face this shift. Results seem to indicate that both groups of parents are concerned about their children having the appropriate academic skills for this period. In consequence, parents tend to support the development of such skills; however the strategies parents use might not be the most appropriate and effective. It could also be argued that there is no school-home link focused on helping not only children but parents during this transition, but rather the usual activities carried out by the educational centre. However parents place an important responsibility on schools by highlighting the need to have additional information in regard to this shift. The fact that parents showed themselves to be mainly focused on their children's academic skills is reinforced by the expectation they have regarding the help school can provide. This help mainly focuses on enhancing children's academic skills and establishing home-school links. Finally, in light of the evidence presented in this study, the parents' work schedule seems to be the main barrier preventing them from helping their

children in this transition, however there is a strong need to explore this notion further in order to reach more conclusive ideas.

### **Headteacher Interviews**

One of the particular objectives of the current study was to explore the perceptions of headteachers in charge of the educational centres at both the preschool and primary school level. The role that headteachers play in this transition process has been highlighted by few scholars (Kagan & Tarrant, 2010; Noel, 2012) who point out the need to have an organised transition plan to help the community involved during this period. Arguably, headteachers play a major role in the establishment of transition programmes in terms of regulations within the school specifically considering the Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition (Rimm-Kauffman & Pianta, 2000) where headteachers could also play a role with educational policies at a macro level. Research supports the idea that a coherent transition activities-related organization can be achieved if we consider the educational policies of the educational centre (Berlin, Dunning & Dodge, 2011). The role the headteacher plays in the microsystem is important as they have the opportunity to design and propose activities during this period which can have a direct impact on children, teachers and parents. However, although great importance has been given to the role of the headteachers during this process, to the knowledge of the researcher there is very little research with regard to headteachers' perceptions regarding this transition period, given the fact that most of the literature has focused on children's, parents' and teachers' perceptions. The researcher found one study by Noel (2012) which sheds light on the transition activities as reported by the headteachers implemented in three different primary schools in Australia which will be used to analyse and discuss the results from the current study. This gap in the literature has also been recognised by other prominent scholars in the field (Perry, Dockett & Petriwskyj, 2014). As a result, these findings give reason to speculate that this is one of the first efforts to gather headteachers' perceptions, and to analyse and highlight their role within the transition process, despite the fact that it has been acknowledged at a theoretical level.

Results from this study shed light on headteachers' perceptions about this period of change where both groups mainly focused on a dichotomy. Whilst some headteachers consider this shift an easy one, other participants consider it a difficult one. Interestingly, among the difficulties mentioned by the participants, we found the physical environment, the pedagogical approach and the adaptation to a new routine. However, other participants just referred to this process as one with no difficulties. It should be mentioned, that

participants did notice the main differences in this change when asked about the problems children may face in this period. Whilst both groups acknowledge the differences between the primary school and preschool centre, the preschool headteachers also consider the change in adult-child relationships which is focused on the classroom teacher, whilst primary headteachers focus more children's different backgrounds. These results seem to indicate that headteachers are aware of some of the general differences in this shift, although the implications of such differences in not only the academic but also the personal domain in children might not be clear for these participants.

Headteachers were asked about the main transition activities they implemented in their schools to aid children, parents and teachers. Both groups indicated that a close-relation with the teacher is established during this process, however results indicate a limitation with regard to the transition-related activities carried out since such activities focus on supervising and supporting classroom teachers in general pedagogical activities. On the one hand, preschool headteachers highlight the need to follow Ministry of Education regulations in this respect despite the fact that there is no specific section of such regulations focused on aiding during this process of change. On the other hand, primary school headteachers help children familiarise themselves with the environment (i.e., the new school) once children start the academic year. In line with this, participants were asked about the barriers that prevent them from carrying out transition activities in order to have a fuller picture of their practices. Results indicate that the main barriers for preschool participants were the Ministry of Education regulations and a lack of interest by the families, whilst primary school participants focus on an excessive paper-work workload. The participants also shared what they thought they could do to help during this period. Results revealed that both groups would emphasise the creation and establishment of community links, namely school-school and/or school-family. However, both groups differed in the second practice they would carry out. Whilst the preschool group focus more on working in children's agency, the primary cohort did not propose anything different than carrying out the "normal" activities the school usually does.

In light of these results, different explanations can help to better understand these perceptions. Although responses vary as to whether the process is easy or difficult, results revealed a lack of awareness with regard to this process to some extent. It may be possible that given the lack of transition-related culture in this context, this situation leads to ascertain lack of awareness of the implications of this change for their pupils. Moreover, it could also be included the lack of literature related to the transition process in addition to

the limited access to research that could potentially lead to not well-informed decisions thus practices. Results regarding the way in which headteachers support classroom teachers during this process may potentially reflect the usual activities carried out by the headteachers, given the lack of transition-related activities implemented reported by participants. These results are consistent with Noel's (2012) findings where headteachers did not report any specific activity carried out to aid this transition process, but rather, results indicated that the activities were mainly focused on enrolment-related matters. However, Noel reports some efforts made by headteachers whereby some of them organise and invite preschool teachers to informative sessions in the primary school. A lack of interest by preschool teachers was also reported by headteachers.

The current study's findings also indicate that the main barriers preventing them from carrying out transition activities are mainly an overwhelming workload, Ministry of Education regulations and the lack of interest from families. The latter confirms what Noel (2012) found in her study, where some participants organised a social gathering to meet families from preschool and primary school to exchange valuable information about this transition, but the families did not show up. In regard to the activities headteachers could carry out to support this period, these results may reflect the intention headteachers have to involve not only families but also personnel from the other school (e.g., preschool or primary school) in the educational process of children. However, there is still a need to explore further the main objective of such connections given the fact that this is not clear. These connections could arguably be focused on enhancing parental involvement in the usual school-related activities and/or to 'open doors' focused on teachers. This speculation could be better understood if we keep in mind that lack of awareness in regard to this transition process reported by headteachers. Future research should explore the type of activities headteachers have in mind as effective practices that could be used to support children, teachers and parents in this shift.

Overall, these findings together with those from Noel (2012), contribute to the scientific knowledge and understanding of the role headteachers play in this transition process. These results shed light on headteachers' perceptions which could potentially shape their action in the form of practices and help understand the way in which they perceive this transition as well as the practices they do (or do not) carry out in light of this process. These results revealed the different perspectives headteachers may have in regard to this process. Whilst some perceive this process as easy, others can see it as a drastic change. Based on this evidence, we can also observe that headteachers are at least aware of

the main differences this process comprises and which are identified in the literature. However, it could be argued that the practices they implement are not the most effective to aid this period of change. Moreover, future research should focus on exploring the way in which headteachers conceptualize this transition process to better understanding their current perceptions and practices. Headteachers identify some barriers that prevent them from carrying out transition practices which might be important to tackle if a successful transition is to be enhanced; however given the lack not only of transition practices reported, but also transition-related regulations, these barriers could arguably be applied to general issues of the school centre rather than specific barriers for this transition process. Finally, headteachers acknowledge the importance of establishing community links such as home-school and school-school connections which have been recognised by the literature as an anchor point in this process (Rosenkoetter et al., 2009). However, there is still the need to explore the nature and aims of such connections.

In conclusion, the practices and perceptions explored may serve well to identify the way in which educational policies can be reformed, and/or implemented for the first time. Headteachers are the main authority in the educational centres, and thus have the agency to propose changes in the way in which activities can be carried out in line with the Ministry of Education regulations. For instance, transition-related policies could be implemented in these educational scenarios by focusing on the establishment of transition activities before and after school has started. As suggested by the Dynamic and Ecological Model of Transition and other scholars (Rimm-Kauffman & Pianta, 2000, Dockett & Perry, 2007, Dockett, Perry and Pietriwskyj, 2014), summer activities have also been shown to support this transition process well, although specific policies need to be established to this aim (Dockett, Perry & Pietriwskyj, 2014). Moreover, the establishment of communication links between schools could be of the utmost importance in addition to the existing family-school links each educational centre has. However, family-school links should be focused on transition-related activities rather than on the normal activities carried out by the school. It is important to note that there are a great number of practices that can be carried in either preschool or primary school in this context as the literature suggest (Skouteris, Watson & Lum, 2012). Nevertheless, there is also the need to consider not only the specific Ministry of Education regulations, but also the socio-economic and political context of Mexico. Given that the macrosystem comprises government policies as well as political and social institutions to a wider extent, it is necessary to consider this influence in the application/creation of educational policies in the microsystem in which school policies are located. It would be helpful to know the extent to which these links between systems (i.e.,

conceived as the mesosystem) and ecologies is achieved to move forward not only to the conceptualisation of the transition process in Mexico, but also to the implementation of appropriate transition-related policies.

### **Addressing the Research Questions**

**1.- What are the problems teachers perceive preschoolers/first graders face during this transition?** Results from this study indicate a variety of problems reported by teachers. However, the main issues relate to children's personal and academic skills. Participants revealed that the lack of academic skills and behavioural problems are the most common issues found in their schools, while some participants also highlighted the issue of children having difficulty taking turns, especially in first grade classroom. In addition, these results were confirmed by additional teachers' views where the adaptations to a new routine as well as the need to follow rules/directions were identified as potential problems during this transition period. Moreover, this view was completed with teachers' description of a "child ready" for this transition, where results suggest that a holistic view of children was predominant among teachers. That is to say, teachers see a child "ready to start" as an individual with a number of skills that will help him/her during this period of change rather than merely focusing on one specific developmental area. These results are consistent with previous studies where teachers have highlighted similar problems in different countries where teachers' perceptions have been gathered (Rudasill & Rimm-Kaufma, 2009; Riley & Fahey, 2006; Rimm-Kauffman, Pianta & Cox, 2000; Rimm-Kauffman & Pianta, 2000; Schulting et al., 2005). These findings suggest that teachers are aware not only of children's essential skills for school, focusing on the curriculum-related demands, but also on the social domain where children need a variety of skills that allow them to face the challenges of first grade. The specialised literature on transitions has highlighted the importance of these types of skills during this period (Nix et al., 2013) which are conceived from the Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition (Rimm-Kauffman & Pianta, 2000) as essential for children transitioning. According to this model, this is not a single-time event but rather a process whereby children change not only from one environment to another, but also change their roles and thus their identities, which has also been emphasised by other scholars (Hatcher, Nunner & Paulse, 2012; McCubbins, 2004). Based on these data, it seems important to track children's skills development prior to first grade and offer opportunities for children to develop skills they lack and master the ones they have already developed.

**2.- What are the main concerns teachers have in this transition?** Results from this study revealed that half of the participants were very concerned about this change, whilst the other half was somewhat or not at all concerned. The main concerns shared by both groups of participants were mainly related to children's personal skills such as autonomy and independence that might potentially hinder a successful adaptation to the new routine. However, preschool teachers did emphasise the less personalised attention children receive once in first grade. Although these results confirm some empirical studies where the main concern focuses on this type of skills (McCubbins, 2004), these data are different from other studies where teachers have been shown to be more concerned about academic skills (Chan, 2012). In the former case, it is interesting to see that this pattern is observed across cultures, whilst in the latter, there is the need to explore further the elements causing this variance. Taken together, these results give reason to speculate that for some participants in this study this transition is important. Some teachers seem to be aware of its implications in children's future life, whilst other participants of this study might not be aware of the importance of this process. A lack of interest by teachers could also be argued; however, this thought would lead us back to the first premise with regard to the importance of this process which could also be part of a prevailing lack of preschool transition culture in the context of Mexico City. Teachers are conceived of as key participants in this transition under the Dynamic and Ecological Model of Transition (Rimm-Kauffman & Pianta, 2000), where they have the agency to carry out a number of transition practices that could help children have a smooth transition. Based on such a premise, it might seem important to reflect upon the need to establish the appropriate policy-related mechanisms that could enable teachers take into account the importance of this process, given that once teachers are aware of its importance, the likelihood of acting in consequence could potentially increase.

**3.- What are the main barriers teachers perceive during this period?** Results revealed that both groups of teachers did perceive barriers during this process which were fundamentally focused on the lack of institutional support and the lack of school-school links. However, the primary school teachers also emphasised the limited time they have to carry out transition-related activities. These results can be related to previous research where different problems have been highlighted by teachers, among which we can find the work schedule and administrative-related issues such as the late generation of class lists for first grade (LaParo, Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2003) as well as a lack of communication between the preschool and the first grade teacher. These results suggest that teachers have

neither the support nor the time to implement transition activities which calls for the need to work with local authorities to create opportunities to facilitate the application of transition activities for the teachers. These data contribute to the existing body of research that highlights the different barriers found for this transition across cultures (Perry, Dockett & Petriwskyj, 2014). Results also suggest that teachers do not carry out specific transition-related practices given the barriers highlighted by them. Research however, should focus on examining the type of support teachers demand as well as the type of paper-work carried out by teachers which prevents them from implementing transition-related activities. Literature supports the idea that transition activities can be implemented during preschool, during summer time and during first grade (Rimm-Kauffman & Pianta, 2000), calling for the need to organise a number of activities to involve teachers, children, headteachers and parents (Pianta & Cox, 1999). However, this organisation needs to start by considering the educational policies not only at a macro level but also at a micro level. The organization of these activities could potentially have an effect of creating the appropriate links between the ecologies included in the microsystem which have shown to be effective strategies during this period of change (Fabian & Dunlop, 2007; OECD, 2007). Policies in relation to providing institutional support to teachers in this respect should be considered, as highlighted by international organizations (UNESCO, 2014).

**4.- What are the transition practices teachers use?** This study found that both groups of teachers carry out a variety of transition practices. These practices mainly focused on establishing home-school links during this transition such as providing children's final report to parents, involving parents in school activities, explaining expectations and giving orientation sessions to parents. These practices are consistent with previous research indicating that teachers do contact families during this period but are mainly focused on providing transition-related information and promoting the family's involvement in their child's education (Regena, 2004). The second major finding in this regard was that primary school teachers use the transition practices reported more frequently than preschool teachers. These results contribute to the existing empirical evidence that highlights the importance of bridging the contexts in an attempt to exchange information between community members to promote a successful transition (Pierce & Bruns 2013). These results also seem to suggest that teachers not only support children but also parents during this shift in an adequate way; however there is also the need to explore further the type of activities participants reported. That is to say, the transition activities reported by teachers are indeed practices that have been stated in previous research as

effective during this period. However, the practices found in this study could potentially be applicable in any context. Research should focus on examining the specific type of activities teachers implement since these practices may also be mandatory activities based not only on the curriculum, but also on school regulations. Research supports the notion that by carrying out different transition activities, a better school adjustment and thus a better transition has been observed (Eisenhower, 2008). Scholars have also found associations between the use of transition practices and better academic performance by children in primary school (Dodge, 2011; Nix et al., 2013) highlighting that the implementation of transition activities also enhances family involvement during this transition (McCubbins, 2004; Rosenkoetter et al, 2009).

It is important to note, however, that results also revealed that in an “ideal world” teachers would carry out, the same practices they reported to using but in a more frequent way. These results contribute to the existing literature of transition by being one of the first efforts to gather teachers’ perceptions from two different perspectives regarding this transition. These results call for the need to be replicated in future studies not only to examine what teachers would do in an ideal world but also to examine if the practices are the same or different from those already included in teachers’ repertoire, as well as the rationale behind their use. Moreover, once the main transition practices used by teachers were analysed in terms of type, prevalence and frequency, further correlational analysis indicated interesting associations in the use of these practices. Some of the main associations found for preschool teachers, was that more experience working at the same educational level was linked to more workshops provided for parents. Interestingly, teachers who had attended more specialised courses reported a greater number of children’s problems and finally when more children’s problems were reported, teachers shared the children’s portfolio with parents. Similarly, a higher academic background in the primary school teachers’ cohort and specialised training courses were also associated with more children’s problems reported. Further, this tendency of reporting more children’s problems was also associated with the lack of transition practices focused on establishing home-school and school-school links.

Based on these data and what the literature reports, the implementation of these practices seems to be of the utmost importance during this period when it is important to consider their application in the Mexican public school context. The application of these transition activities works well in the microsystem due to the fact that they promote not

only the connections between communities which are necessary under the Ecological and Dynamic Model of transition (Rimm-Kauffman & Pianta, 2000), but also trigger the communicational process and exchange of information among members which is one of the core elements of this transition model. This study's results are consistent with some previous studies that suggest that by carrying out more practices, fewer children's problems related to this transition are observed in the classroom (Li et al., 2013; Rosenkoetter, 2009). Policies focused on the implementation not only of these transition practices, but also of others reported in the literature should be seriously considered in the Mexican public system to support the community members in this transition, namely, children, teachers and parents, and ensure a successful transition.

### **5.- What do teachers think can be done in order to improve this transition?**

Participants in this study highlighted the need to promote not only home-school but also school-school links as a way to assist at this time. Carrying out similar pedagogical activities was also emphasised. The findings indicate that teachers perceive that a useful way in which they could help is by establishing close communication between school and home, which is an essential element recommended in the literature (OECD, 2006). These results confirm previous empirical evidence where the importance of the establishment of community links by the teachers has been widely documented (UNESCO, 2014). In addition, this study found that teachers consider implementing similar pedagogical activities in their educational centres to be a good strategy. That is to say, preschool teachers perceived the implementation of primary school-type activities in the preschool classroom as useful, whilst first grade teachers thought they could help by implementing preschool-type activities in the primary school classroom. There is some research linked to this idea whereby in light of the challenges of this transition, similar activities are proposed in both educational centres, but scholars also suggest the need to be cautious about turning preschool into a pre-first grade with the high academic demands of the first grade of primary school (Pianta & Cox, 1999). These results give reason to speculate that teachers are aware of the importance of these links. However, these views should be considered in light of the barriers teachers also perceive (e.g., lack of institutional support and limited time). Whilst the practices reported by the participants might seem easy to apply at first sight, it is necessary to look at the implications of these strategies which might need to be considered in light of the educational policies that prevail at each school. Whilst educational policies in regard to contacting families to discuss children's educational issues do exist, the extent to which these links can also be used to facilitate a smooth

transition are of the utmost importance to consider and explore further. Overall, the way in which teachers can help is consistent with effective strategies conceived in the Rimm-Kauffman and Pianta's (2000) model highlighting the importance of establishing effective connections in the micro system to facilitate this shift. If these types of connections are established between Mexican preschools and primary schools, great benefits would be obtained by involving the community members (i.e., parents, preschool teacher, first grade teacher and headteacher). Moreover, the implementation of transition-related pedagogical activities might also be important to consider in order to prepare children for this change and help them adjust successfully to first grade. However, there is also the need to consider the wide range of additional transition practices reported by the literature that need to be integrated in the repertoire of teachers' educational practices.

#### **6.- What are the perceptions of headteachers about this transition period?**

Results from this study indicate that headteachers hold contrasting views in that some participants reported this process to be smooth whilst others reported it to be a difficult period. Findings reveal that headteachers are aware of the differences and thus the challenges implicated in this shift since they are aware not only of the differences between preschool and primary school, but also acknowledge the different backgrounds children have which play an important role in this transition. Although not directly from headteachers, these views expand on the previous transition literature where those involved in this period of change acknowledge not only the psychological differences between schools, but also the different pedagogical approach used in each educational centre (Berlin, Donning & Dodge, 2011; Love, Logue, Trudeau & Thayer, 1992). These findings may represent the first evidence in regard to headteachers' perceptions in the literature of transitions which could trigger further research in this respect. Findings show that the current activities headteachers carry out are not specifically focused on transition practices reported in the literature, but, rather, educational practices that are an inherent part of their role as school principals. On one hand, these results might seem similar to Noel's (2012) whereby normal enrolment procedures are carried out by headteachers which are understood by headteachers as activities which enhance the transition period. On the other hand, these results are different to Noel's since some of the headteachers in her study reported organising information sessions and meetings for families and teachers specifically for this transition, although the attendance rate was not at all good. Data from this study also show that the main barriers for headteachers that prevent them from carrying out transition practices are the Ministry of Education regulations, an excessive

paper-workload as well as lack of interest from families. The latter issue is consistent with the low interest showed by the families in Noel's study. The excessive paper-workload has also been reported in previous studies focused on barriers reported by teachers which might indicate that this phenomenon is not only experienced by teachers, but also by headteachers. Finally, this study also found that headteachers could help in this period by creating community links (e.g., school-school and home-school) as well as working on the development of children's skills.

Taken together, these findings seem to indicate that headteachers are aware of the challenges of this period of change by acknowledging the differences between these two educational levels, but the lack of implementation of transition practices is also evident. Although headteachers do carry out their usual activities in school, these results revealed that they do have some idea about helping effectively during this process by establishing community links, however there is the need to further explore the aims of the activities implemented as well as the way in which these links can be further promoted. These activities could potentially have a positive effect in the microsystem since the contexts involved (i.e., primary school, preschool centre and home) could be linked in such a way that headteachers, together with teachers, could promote a smooth transition. As suggested by the model proposed by Rimm-Kauffman and Pianta (2000), the exchange of information between the communities involved is of the utmost importance in this process, bearing in mind that this is not a single event, but rather an on-going process where constant interactions (i.e., the mesosystem) are essential to make this a successful change. The empirical evidence of this study could also serve well to explore the negative effect on headteachers' performance of the paper-workload which could have implications for the reform or creation of educational policies to allow the implementation of transition activities. Given that headteachers are authority figures in the educational centres, an important role could be played by them in terms of policies focused on promoting a smooth transition within the educational centre. However, the policies already established by the Ministry of Education must also be borne in mind. It would be useful to consider the need to reflect upon a close and collaborative work between authorities whereby elements of the macrosystem (e.g., Ministry of Education and government policies) meet the microsystem (e.g., primary school and preschool policies) to offer better opportunities to implement transition activities.

**7.- What are the perceptions of parents in this transition?** These findings suggest that in general, parents from both groups acknowledge the main challenges of this transition to first grade by recognising the differences between schools as well as the essential personal and academic skills children need. These results are consistent with previous studies where these two domains are highlighted as important for community members (Hatcher, Nuner & Paulse, 2012). Based on the main challenges perceived by parents, the support in consequence is quite clear. Parents tend to support their children by helping them improve their academic skills, which is also in line with previous findings where academic skills are of the utmost importance prior to the entrance to first grade (Arndt et al., 2013). It was also shown that parents perceived enhancing the mother-child relationship as well as communicating expectations about first grade to children as an important element during this transition,. Although the challenges and practices reported by parents seem to indicate their awareness about the importance of this change, their involvement with school was limited to carrying out the usual school activities which meant that no transition-related activities with school were carried out by parents in this study. Based on these results, it is not surprising to see that what parents can do to help this process is to reinforce children's academic skills, reported as a potential transition activity to carry out. In addition, parents also indicated communicating expectations to children as a supportive activity in light of this transition whilst second language and computing classes also appeared to be of great significance mainly for primary school parents. Similarly, results revealed that an effective way in which school can help during this period of change is by helping children develop their academic skills. Apparently, the only barriers that prevent parents from carrying out transition practices or involving themselves in transition-related activities is their work schedule. Taken together, these results give reason to speculate that parents are aware of the difference between these two educational levels, although the extent to which they are aware of the implications of such differences and challenges in their child's development and school adjustment is still unclear. The evidence from this study suggests that there is a lack of home-school involvement focused on promoting a smooth transition which could help not only parents but their children in this period of change by connecting these two ecologies as well as exchanging valuable information in regard to children and the implications of this period which is a core element in the transition model (Rimm-Kauffman & Pianta, 2000).

Overall, these results make several contributions to the existing literature by confirming parents' views about this time found in other studies (Chan, 2011; Lee & Gogh,

2012). Moreover, it also adds to the research literature more reason to think that one of the main focuses in this transition is children's academic skills. This idea may also reflect one of the main general issues widely discussed in the international literature on transitions, the curriculum discontinuity (Perry, Dockett & Petriwskyj, 2014). The empirical findings from this study give reason to reflect upon the need to create policy-related mechanisms that allow parents to access transition-related information and become aware not only of the implications of this process on their child's development, but also how they could effectively support them. These results also support the action for future policy implications within the Mexican context where research should focus on the current educational policies and the ways in which they can be improved so as to promote a transition-related culture in the Mexican public school system.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS

### Introduction

This chapter offers final conclusions drawn from not only the results obtained by this research, but also from the discussion and critical debate held in the discussion section. The main findings and ideas will be highlighted in this section which focuses on research, theory and practice in a broad sense. The final section, will be focused on highlighting limitations of the present study as well as suggesting directions for further research.

### Main Findings

Transition to primary school represents the entrance to formal schooling for preschoolers in different countries around the world. Mexico is no exception. This transition has been characterised by on-going changes not only in interactions but in the contexts and relationships of the main actors involved. The need to explore this transition process further in different educational systems has been highlighted in the literature in order to broaden the knowledge and understanding of this process in different contexts. In light of these premises, the Mexican educational system is no exception.

The main aim of this study was to explore the perceptions of transition between preschool and first grade primary school held by teachers, headteachers and parents in the public education system in Mexico City and a number of conclusions can be drawn based on the findings of the present study which are important to highlight. Half of the participants were somewhat concerned with regards to the time children will face when leaving preschool to enter primary. There is a need to investigate the genesis of a lack of concern observed in some teachers. Preschool and first grade teachers seem to be aware of the challenges for children this change represents by acknowledging the main differences between preschool and primary school (e.g., physical environment, curriculum, pedagogical approach), but an acknowledgement of the implications of such differences not only for a child's personal development but also for its academic development was not reported by some teachers. Teachers from both groups seem to carry out some of the transition practices reported in the literature as effective to help make this transition smooth. However, some other practices important for this period are not considered. Moreover, the rationale behind the transition practices reported by teachers needs to be explored further as results indicate that these practices may not be

specifically used to promote a successful transition, but seem rather to be carried out as part of the practices teachers have to use in order to comply not only with the syllabus, but also with internal school regulations. Further, the long-term impact of these practices during school transition should also be considered from a longitudinal perspective.

Children with problems that have been highlighted in the literature were also reported by these teachers. Results indicate that teachers acknowledge a wide range of children's problems in their classroom in light of this period of change; however, there is a need to explore further the main problems teachers observe in their classroom without suggesting *a priori* any type of problem. As a result, this might contribute to the understanding of the problems mainly grounded in the Mexican educational system as reported by Mexican teachers. Although children's problems reported by teachers are consistent with those found in the international literature, it might be useful to consider the particularities of the Mexican educational system in order not only to understand the nature of such problems but also to address them in an effective way under the transition perspective.

An interesting finding from this study is that some headteachers seem to recognise the difficulties of this change for children whilst others understood it as an easy transition. These views are supported by the fact the headteachers do not have well-defined transition practices leading to a lack of practices used in a consistent way. Headteachers use educational practices that could be regarded as necessary to carry out their main functions as school leaders; however, findings from this study indicate that transition-related practices reported in the specialised literature are not carried out by headteachers. Although some headteachers seem to be aware of the main differences this shift comprises (e.g., physical environment, pedagogical approaches, academic demands), they may not recognise the deeper implications of such a period of change in a child's academic and personal life. Future research should focus on gathering teachers' perceptions regarding the implications of the differences observed between schools and the way in which they impact on children's personal development and academic performance during the transition to first grade.

Another interesting finding of this study is that parents seem to be aware of this change which at the same time triggers their concerns in regard to the academic demands of the primary school. Parents did not appear to have a great understanding of the implications of this transition for their children, nor did they have an ample

repertoire of transition practices to support their child. However, these findings need to be interpreted with care since the way in which families support their children (e.g., helping develop academic skills, extra classes) may be an indicator of their concern. That is to say, given that parents think of the academic aspect as the most important during this shift, as a logical consequence their efforts are focused on helping their children develop such skills by whatever means. This may suggest a lack of knowledge in regard to transition-related challenges during this period not only for children, but also for parents which indicates a need to carry out further research with a bigger sample in order to explore whether this tendency prevails across the country. An interesting issue that can be highlighted here, however, is the fact that community links were emphasised by participants in this study. School-school and home-school connections were emphasised by some teachers, headteachers and parents as an effective strategy to support children transitioning to first grade. Although such connections were also reported as practices some of them carry out, it would be interesting to examine further the main purpose of such connections and explore whether such links could be focused on promoting a smooth transition.

Overall, these results contribute to the international literature of transitions in regard to the knowledge and understanding of this process in a Latin American context, specifically, the Mexican educational system. These findings not only support previous studies' results, but also add empirical evidence that contributes to the existing evidence highlighting the significance of the transition process not only for preschoolers but also for parents, teachers and headteachers. Interestingly, this study offers what could be early empirical evidence as to the perceptions headteachers have in regard to this process which to the knowledge of the researcher has been underestimated in transition literature. This study also confirms the importance of the elements considered in the Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition (Rimm-Kauffman & Pianta, 2000) where not only ecologies, but also relationships and interactions are regarded as essential during this shift.

### **Findings Linked to International Literature**

There are several ways in which results from this study are not only linked with but also contribute to the international literature on transitions. They expand the current international knowledge and understanding about the implications of this transition process by adding empirical evidence about the way in which the main persons involved in this shift, namely teachers, headteachers and parents, perceive such a

process in Mexico. The main challenges Mexican children face during this process were highlighted. Likewise, it could be observed a general awareness on behalf of participants by acknowledging a number of variables the literature has reported as essential during this shift. Differences between schools, children's academic and social skills, a different physical environment, different pedagogical approaches as well as different curriculums were found in this study. Although this seems to indicate an advantage in understanding the transition in the Mexican context, it also calls for the need to explore further participants' perceptions in regard to the major implications of such challenges in their children's academic and personal life and, ultimately, in their transition to first grade.

Participants reported that children in the public system face similar problems to those reported in different countries. Consistent with previous studies, this study expands the understanding of the main challenges children face during this shift, although it is noteworthy that other problems reported in the literature were not found in this study. This suggests that the transition process and its challenges could be regarded as a global phenomenon while different implications of this process are observed in different countries and cultural frameworks. These results seem to support the view of some scholars which is that cultural differences as well as government educational policies play an important role in light of this transition. In different countries, research has informed practice where transition programmes have been created and implemented to lessen the impact of this transition on children's academic and personal life that has been widely reported in the literature. This study adds further empirical evidence that could potentially support the creation of transition-related educational policies.

Similarities in the transition practices used by teachers were found, although other practices reported in the literature were not observed in this research. The findings also support previous studies where the main concerns of parents during this change are focused on children's academic skills. Evidence of how parents perceive the academic demands of first grade of primary school as a challenge is also provided by teachers. These views are also shared by some of the teachers in this study whilst results from headteachers suggest a lack of awareness of the implications of this shift in children's academic performance and personal development. This study offers additional evidence to the international literature whereby headteachers' perceptions were gathered to provide a different perspective to the other actors involved than those who

have traditionally been included in transition research, namely parents, children and teachers. Based on these results, a wider landscape can be observed and considered not only when carrying out further research but also when considering transition-related educational policies under an ecological model. However, it might also be necessary to explore further the perceptions of this process of the central persons experiencing this change in a direct way, preschool and first grade children.

Overall, these findings represent one of the first efforts to provide empirical evidence with regard to this transition period in Mexico City adding to the limited body of research on preschool transition in Latin America important and useful information as to the way in which this process is experienced and perceived by the persons involved. These results may lead to further research not only in Mexico City, but also in other Mexican states and Latin American countries, which should focus on expanding our understanding of this process across the continent. Similarities found in this study with the international literature may suggest that the transition-related intervention programmes in schools derived from the creation of educational reforms in other countries could also be applied in Mexico City. These intervention have shown to be useful to lessen the impact of this shift and promote a successful transition however, there is a strong need to consider different variables within the Mexican educational context which is permeated by the current social, economic and politic situation of the country. Although these findings may represent one important step towards the creation of a transition-related research culture in Mexico, they also represent valuable evidence that could inform not only adequate educational practices, but also educational policies to promote a smooth transition in Mexican preschools.

### **Findings Linked to Theory**

In transition research, a particular theoretical model has prevailed across the globe in order to understand this phenomenon. Specialists in this topic have focused their research on ecologically oriented models based on the early ideas of Bronfenbrenner (1979), Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) and Rimm-Kauffman and Pianta (2000) which have served as theoretical frameworks in which the transition process can be better understood. The latter is one of the most prevailing models in transition research nowadays and contains important elements taken from the former models which have produced the Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition. Based on this model, actors, ecologies, connections and interactions over time play a major role in this transition. The present findings provide evidence of the major role these variables play

in the transition process in Mexico. Participants' perceptions highlighted the importance of the need to create links between different ecologies, namely school and home, which are located in the microsystem according to Rimm-Kauffman and Pianta's model. These ecologies are to be linked in light of this transition which is characterised by a constant interaction in an attempt to exchange valuable information so as to promote a smooth transition. Of particular interest is the need to recognise such interactions in an ongoing timeframe during this period, given the fact that this transition process is considered an on-going process rather than a single-time event. Transition-related policies in Mexico should focus on strengthening these collaborations between preschool and primary school centres if already established and fostering the ones which have not yet been established or created.

The Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition also highlights the need for the community members, namely, teacher, family and children, to work towards the implementation of effective transition strategies to promote a smooth transition. Members involved in this framework should establish connections to collaborate working towards a successful transition. However, little is known about the role headteachers play in this process. Arguably, the findings from this study contribute an understanding of this process from headteachers' perspectives and suggest the need to consider the role headteachers play in this process so as to come up with a transition team that could implement effective strategies in this respect. Given the role headteachers play in the application of norms, procedures and regulation within schools (e.g., preschool and primary school) and given that teachers follow such norms, there is a need to create a coherent process of exchanging information between teachers and headteachers in light of the application of school-educational policies that could favour the implementation of transition-related practices. This collaborative work should also be extended to working with policymakers to align national educational policies in preschool and first grade of primary school and the internal regulations within each educational centre. The links between these educational policies are framed under the Ecological model whereby the macrosystem elements (e.g., government policies) meet the microsystem elements (e.g., inner school policies) which should be aligned to offer a smooth transition. In conclusion, Ministry of Education policies should be revised in light of the empirical evidence available with regard to this transition to work closely with headteachers in order to create and deliver transition policies that could potentially become effective practices in Mexican schools. Although limited, the findings from this study provide evidence of the awareness of this transition process from

headteachers' perspectives despite their lack of effective transition practices applied. The practices found in this study could better be used to work closely with headteachers from different preschools and primary schools to create policies related to the transition plans in light of the mandatory reform of preschool education prevailing in the Mexican educational system. Based on the importance of the headteachers in this process, it might be also important to include their role and the benefits they can offer to this period to the current transition-related models. As a result, they could form part of the community members already considered in such models such as teachers, peers, child neighbourhood and family (Rimm-Kauffman & Pianta, 2000). The need to create transition-related policies is also framed by the mandatory regulation of the preschool level in the Mexican public system where working towards these policies seems to be extremely important.

Curriculum discontinuity is an important factor highlighted in the specialised literature as a variable to consider when understanding this transition process (Perry, Dockett & Pietriwskyj, 2014). Research suggests that a curriculum continuity must be promoted to lessen the effects of this period of change. Empirical evidence from this study suggests that this discontinuity is also acknowledged by the participants. By acknowledging the difference between educational objectives and contents in both the syllabus and academic demands but above all in the different pedagogical approaches used in preschool and primary school, the findings of this study support the notion stated in the literature that a discontinuity is observed and should be considered in light of this transition. The international literature as well as the findings from this study supports the need to revise the coherence of preschool and first grade curriculum based on the abovementioned factors to promote and offer a more logical continuity to preschoolers transitioning to first grade in Mexican public schools. This situation calls for policymakers who regulate the national educational policies located in the macrosystem to consider the possibility of not only aligning the academic demands but also the pedagogical approaches used at both levels to promote a smooth transition into first grade.

Taken together, the empirical evidence offered by this study contributes not only to the international literature but also to the prevailing transition theoretical models to better understand this process in light of these drastic changes as stated by the same literature. The evidence gathered in this study suggests the need to develop a number of transition-related policies within the Mexican educational system that could serve to

promote a successful transition to Mexican preschoolers and first graders. Whilst the policies suggested in this section focus on important issues such as the implementation of transition activities in educational centres, the enhancement of community links as well as an alignment in curricula, the creation and implementation of such policies should be carefully analysed as part of a wider picture of the socio-economic and political situation in Mexico City. Research has reported the implementation of a number of educational policies in other countries which resemble the ones needed in the Mexican context; however, care must be taken when analysing this claim. The similarities found in this study with those reported in the international literature, may suggest the likelihood to apply similar interventions to those that have been applied in different countries. However this application must strongly consider the particularities of the Mexican culture and, more precisely, the characteristics of the educational system in Mexico.

Further research should focus on replicating studies of this nature across the country to gather evidence that could help provide a broader picture of the transition process at a national level which could result in important knowledge and understanding in this respect to think about educational policies. Future research should also explore the feasibility of the application of the policies suggested in this section in light of the evidence gathered considering the prevailing national educational policies. Although the scope and thus the evidence obtained from this study could be regarded as limited, these findings represent one of the first attempts to explore the way in which transition process happens in Mexico, and arguably in the Latin American continent. This study suggest possibilities for carrying out further research on preschool transition in Mexico to explore further additional variables that the international literature has pointed out as important in this process, such as children's experiences, parental style and its relation with school adjustment, the effect of transition practices in school adjustment, socio-behavioural and emotional skills and its relation with this transition process and so forth. As a result of this, a stronger body of research with regard to the transition could be developed which could provide additional evidence to support the creation and/or implementation of transition-related educational policies in Mexico.

### **Implications for Policy and Practice**

The findings of this study have not only a number of important implications for educational policies within the Mexican context, but also for future practice which are important to analyse. Findings from this study indicate that teachers carry out certain

transition practices reported in the literature; however, there are a number of practices which are not used by teachers and ideally should be included in their skills repertoire. This calls for the need to create opportunities in the Mexican public schools for teachers to develop and acquire new transition practices that will enable them help the community involved make a smooth transition. This could take the form of professional training programmes which have to be in line with a preschool transition culture which has not yet been developed in Mexico City, and arguably in the whole country given the lack of research in this respect. As a result, a number of transition practices can be provided to teachers at both educational levels which could have a major impact not only on children's adjustment but also on behavioural problems, academic performance and arguably first grade dropout rates. In this respect, participants from the study revealed some barriers that prevent them from carrying out transition practices. These barriers focused on the lack of institutional support as well as the limited time for such activities. Based on these results, it is important to consider how institutions can provide effective support for teachers. Schools and teachers need to be aware of the importance of this transition process and to create educational policies in regard to this period of change to help families, children and teachers. Moreover, there is a need to examine carefully the current educational regulations in the public sector and to analyse the way in which community connections in the microsystem can be promoted. Bridging the gaps between the ecologies at a micro level is an essential keypoint during this transition according to Rimm-Kauffman and Pianta's (2000) model, and to encourage the participation of the community members in this transition process. In this respect schools should promote not only family involvement but also interaction between preschool and first grade teachers. Where the links are promoted in the microsystem, activities need to be included in the repertoire of teachers' educational practices in light of this transition period.

From the headteachers' perspective, results indicate different views in regard to this period of change. Whilst some headteachers think this period is a difficult one, others perceive it as easy. Findings from this study suggest that while headteachers are aware of the differences and thus the challenges that this change represents for children, they do not carry out effective transition practices needed during this process. The importance of the transition process must be highlighted in the public schools in Mexico to support this change in an adequate way. Headteachers must acknowledge the importance not only of applying the current syllabus, but also of including new practices in the school during this process. Given the authority headteachers hold, it

might be important to consider the inclusion of professional training courses, workshops and seminars in regard to this period to create a social awareness within the educational community in this respect. There is also a need to work with Ministry of Education personnel to find out the most appropriate way to propose the inclusion of transition programmes in public schools as suggested in the literature (Carida, 2011, Giallo et al., 2010). Research suggests the need to create a transition team to offer support during this process by working closely with the personnel in schools. Headteachers ought to be aware of the wide range of activities reported by the literature that can be carried out in support of this process. Teachers are not the only staff who could support this period of change, but headteachers and parents must be involved. Headteachers must acknowledge the importance of proposing the reform/inclusion of educational policies (e.g., to the Ministry of Education) so as to allow the development of such activities in the school. As a result, headteachers would be in the position to provide opportunities for preschool and first grade teachers to carry out transition practices with institutional support. In light of the results from teachers, it is necessary to think about the need to include and/or develop initiatives where strong community links (i.e., school-school and home-school) can be fostered. Headteachers should develop an adequate mechanism whereby a constant interaction between primary schools and preschools can be established. Policies encouraging an adequate and constant exchange of transition-related information, organization and collaborative planning among communities are needed.

Results from this study also revealed that families are aware of the main challenges this change represents for children based on the differences between schools and the skills needed by children during this process. In light of these results there might be a need to consider working towards a curriculum continuity as highlighted in the international agenda (UNESCO, 2014). By acknowledging the differences between schools as well as the skills necessary for this change, participants are somehow recognising the existing discontinuity within this process. This calls for the need to carry out a thorough review of the curricula involved at both educational levels (i.e., preschool and primary's school) in order to identify the main characteristics of each programme and propose a continuity not only in terms of content, but also in the pedagogical approaches used and the physical organisation of the classroom.

The data obtained also indicate that parents mainly support their children by developing their academic skills. Parents perceive that school must help children

develop such skills during this period. This view may be deeply rooted in the idea that the academic demands of primary school are higher than those of preschool, a view that is grounded in the curriculum discontinuity mentioned above, and which is important to consider in light of the application of policies. There is reason to believe that children's academic performance in preschool needs to be constantly tracked every year with up-to-date, valid and reliable instruments to allow valuable information regarding the set of skills preschoolers have developed by the end of this educational level to be gathered and to identify areas for improvement. Likewise, educational policies in this respect, should immediately be created in regard to academic performance at first grade of primary school. Based on the current educational policies dictated by the Mexican Ministry of Education, academic assessments are not carried out in the first grade of public primary school in Mexico. As a result, the way in which first graders perform at school is not known at a national level. This seems to be of utmost importance since academic performance records would allow the effect of preschool level on first grade transition to be identified. Similarly, the domain of children's personal skills (e.g., social and emotional), could also be assessed not only at preschool but also at primary school. As a result, the extent to which continuity is taking place in preschool and first grade could clearly be observed.

The results of this study also suggest that the transition practices used by parents are not as effective. Moreover, parents' repertoire of practices seems to be quite limited. Parents should have access to transition-related information provided by the schools, given that the literature supports the idea that parents who are better informed provide better support in this process. There is a need to create appropriate mechanisms (i.e., through the implementation of educational policies) whereby parents can have access to a wide range of information in relation to this transition process, its implications as well as effective parental transition practices that could be used during this period. Professional courses, workshops or seminars should be implemented by the preschool and primary school in light of this transition. Schools should take the responsibility of offering research-based orientation to parents to promote a social awareness of this process in public schools in Mexico City.

Overall, findings from this study contribute to the existing literature on preschool transition in regard to different elements that international research has focused on. Results suggest several courses of action not only for research but also for practice focused on the development of specialised transition-related training courses for first

grade and preschool teachers and headteachers which would lead to the creation of transition programmes where all the main persons involved in the shift are considered under an ecological framework, namely, headteachers, teachers, parents and children. One implication of these findings is that these results should be taken into account when thinking about educational policies aimed at easing pre-schoolers' transition in a way that contributes not only to a successful adjustment but also to a better academic performance that might in turn have an effect on drop-out rates in Mexico City. Findings from this study contribute to the knowledge and understanding of this process in the Mexican context by broadening previous international knowledge in regard to teachers' perceptions and practices during this period of change. It should be noted, however, that this study also proposes an alternative way of exploring the importance and frequency of teachers' transition practices in an attempt to infer teachers' awareness of the importance of such practices. Results also provide to the current international literature, additional empirical evidence with regard to parents' views and practices used during this shift and finally, offer additional and new evidence related to headteachers' views and practices which is a topic that has not been explored in depth in the field of transitions. Whilst this study and its main aims represents one of the first efforts to explore the preschool transition in the Latin American context, the evidence gathered also adds to the international literature in transitions widely carried out in United States, Australia, Iceland, Asia and Europe by offering new empirical evidence of the way in which the preschool transition is experienced in a Latin American context. Finally, given the proper nature of the research methodology, there is always the need to acknowledge the methodological limitations and future avenues for research in light of these findings.

### **Recommendations**

In light of the latest educational reform in 2004 where preschool level became a mandatory educational level in Mexico, it will be necessary to reflect upon the need to ensure a smooth transition to first grade of primary school. In addition, findings from this study would certainly help in the development of a set of recommendations which could be taken into account by educational authorities in order to positively impact this difficult shift for children and parents. Although there could be a number of recommendations derived not only from this study but also from the international literature, it is still necessary to carefully review them in light of the current educational

policies in Mexico. This will ensure their applicability and/or help in the modification and thus adaptation of educational strategies to enhance a smooth transition.

Findings from this study suggest that most of the teachers use a reduced number of adequate transition practices, however it is also important to note that their use was not carried out on a frequent basis. Moreover, teachers did not seem to know the implications of this transition in children's personal development and academic performance. Based on these findings, it is necessary to promote professional training courses for teachers where the importance of this transition can be highlighted. It is also necessary to let teachers know the wide range of practices they can use in order to help children make a smooth transition. In this way, teachers will know the potential implications of not only this period of change, but also of their teaching that could potentially increase the use of the transition practices.

Children's problems as reported by teachers were found to differ from preschool and first grade of primary school. Although these results shed light on the type of problems Mexican teachers find in their classroom, there is also the need to further prepare teachers in order to adequately identify problems and other behaviours which are expected at a specific children's age. It is necessary to ensure that preschool and first grade teachers are aware of the developmental stages in which children are and differentiate these behaviours from problematic behaviours. This distinction seems to be of particular importance considering the level of academic background found in this sample. As a result, teachers will be able not only to identify typical and non-atypical behaviour in their classroom but also to effectively intervene through the use of adequate practices.

This study found that headteachers from both educational levels did not seem to have a clear understanding of the implications of this period of change for children. Although they acknowledged the "change" from preschool to a more formal and academic environment, headteachers did not seem to know the direct implications of this shift in children's personal development and academic performance. It is necessary to raise awareness in this respect and create training courses for headteachers. In this way, they will not only be aware of the importance of this period, but also will be able to carry out transition practices and support the creation of transition programmes in their school in an attempt to make this a smoother transition.

Results from this study suggested that parents were aware of this period of change and showed to be concerned about this shift, however parents did not show to be aware of the implications of this transition in their child's future academic performance and personal development. Moreover, parents did not show to have adequate practices that could help their children during this transition. It is important to mention that parents did not show to be aware of the potential implications for children in changing from a play-based to a more academic-led environment. In light of these findings, it is of the utmost importance to share information with parents with regards to the preschool transition and the way in which this period can have an impact on their children. In addition, sharing a set of effective transition practices will be helpful so they can help their child make a smooth transition. Highlighting the role that personal skills play in this transition rather than focusing merely on academic skills, would be an asset in working with parents towards a successful transition. Transition practices that parents can carry out could importantly help enhance these type of skills in children that will significantly help children have a smooth transition to first grade.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

This study used a mixed-method approach whereby the advantages of each approach complement the disadvantages of the other approach and vice versa, as suggested by some scholars (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Despite the advantages that a mixed-method approach represents, there are some limitations to consider in the present study. One of the limitations of the present study was the fact that the initial conception of this transition process was not gathered from participants but rather, could have been inferred by administering the scales and carrying out the interviews. An initial exploration of the way in which this process is understood by Mexican teachers, parents and headteachers seems to be necessary so as to have empirical evidence of their perceptions within the specific educational Mexican context. Another limitation of the study is that despite the fact that the number of teachers involved was adequate to answer the current research questions, it was too small to allow broader generalizations. Future studies should focus on bigger samples to gather additional information and make generalisations to a wider population possible. Moreover, studies must allow participants to report children's problems they find in their classroom based on open-ended questions rather than providing a set of predetermined children's problems that occur in different cultures. As a result, a broader and clear picture of the main problems occurring within the Mexican context could be reached.

An issue that was not addressed in this study was the transition practices that teachers use in their daily routine since such practices were suggested by the study. This could raise some implications regarding biased responses. Future research should focus on gathering educational practices that preschool and first grade teachers use without suggesting transition practices already reported in the literature that could allow the creation of initial records (e.g., a Mexican transition database) of the practices used by teachers in Mexico City which might be different to those reported in the literature and which at the same time could enrich the literature by highlighting specific practices within the Mexican context. This study focused on the type and frequency of the transition practices used at a given time, but it did not evaluate the extent to which such practices are used on a continuum along this transition. Future research should consider a longitudinal rather than cross-sectional research design to obtain information regarding the use of transition practices across preschool and first grade as well as to examine the extent to which the practices used have an effect on school adjustment once in first grade.

This study aimed to explore the perceptions of parents, teachers and headteachers during the preschool to first grade of primary school transition. This study yielded important information as to the way in which the persons involved in this process, experience on the one hand the upcoming transition (i.e., for preschool parents, teachers and headteachers) and on the other, the way in which this shift had been experienced (i.e., primary school parents, teachers headteachers). This study represents one of the first attempts to gather the community perceptions focused on the preschool transition in a Latin American context such as Mexico City. Although this information is valuable and would certainly serve as a baseline for future research, there is also the need to acknowledge an essential limitation in this study. The rating scales as well as the items used in the questionnaire were obtained from the international literature where transition research has been previously done. This is to say, the way in which the transition practices of teachers and reported children's problems were measured, only reflect the transition practices found in other countries such as Australia, United Kingdom, Iceland, Greece, Italy, Hong Kong, US and so forth. Although the information obtained was of extreme value for the transition research in Latin America, there is still the need to explore the transition practices specifically carried out and reported by Mexican teachers. This limitation suggests the need to explore and thus create a database in order to come up with a list of transition practices that could be

part of the repertoire for Mexican teachers. This database could be followed by the production of specific measures which can be standardised for Mexican teachers and expand the research on preschool transitions.

The number of headteachers and families interviewed in this study made it possible to gather interesting perceptions about the transition process; however during the data-analysis process the small number of people was quite problematic given the difficulty it created about identifying and themes. Further, the small number of participants in the interviews did not make it possible to generalise the results obtained to a broader community. Future research should focus on larger samples to allow the gathering of additional information which would allow a better data-analysis from the qualitative perspective. Although this study sought to gather perceptions of this process, there is a need to gather an initial understanding of the transition process given that the questions in the semi-structured interview may have potentially biased participants' responses towards the significance of such period. Future research could explore the meaning of this transition for participants to obtain a base-line in regard to the current conceptualization of this process by public school staff in Mexico before introducing the questions used in this study. In addition to the semi-structured interview applied to headteachers and parents, it might also be interesting to consider the administration of a scale of transition practices to obtain important information not only about the frequency and type of practices used, but also to explore the extent to which these practices are consistent with practices used in different countries.

Following the ideas of Santibanez, Vernez and Rasquin (2005) who mention that obtaining information in Mexico to carry out research is quite difficult even for scholars and researchers, this study confirms that having access to public institutions to gather information is quite challenging. One of the main elements of this study's rationale was the need to conduct research in this topic in a continent where transition has been largely underestimated. However, getting access to participants in schools included in this study represented a challenging process for which the permission of the educational authorities was not easy to obtain. Eventually, and after long conversations between the researcher and the educational authorities, the permission was granted to a limited number of schools for a limited period of time. Future research should consider this situation in light not only of current educational policies in Mexico, but also the common practices of the educational public service.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Informed Consents used for Participants.



**Universidad de York, Reino Unido**  
*Departamento de Educación*  
*Programa de Estudios Doctorales*

**Título de la Investigación:** “Transición del Prescolar al Primer año de Primaria en México: Percepciones y Practicas de maestros, directores y familias”

**Investigador:** Mtro. Miguel Ángel Urbina García

#### HOJA DE CONSENTIMIENTO

El proceso de transición al primer año de primaria mismo que ha sido ampliamente abordado por diversos investigadores a nivel mundial resaltando la importancia de este periodo no solo en los niños/as sino también en los maestro/as y las familias. De acuerdo con estos estudios, este proceso es un periodo a través del cual los preescolares experimentan un cambio significativo de un ambiente a otro muy diferente. Para este proceso, es deseable que los niños/as cuenten con habilidades, conocimientos y destrezas así como con relaciones significativas que les ayuden a experimentar una transición exitosa a su nuevo ambiente.

Actualmente se esta llevando a cabo esta investigación doctoral (avalada por el Consejo Nacional De Ciencia y Tecnología: CONACYT) con la finalidad de explorar las opiniones de los maestros/as, familias y directores/as en relación a este cambio que experimentan los niños del preescolar a la primaria. Es por lo anterior que agradecemos su participación en dicho proyecto y hacemos extensivas las siguientes consideraciones.

- Es importante destacar que toda información brindada será tratada de manera confidencial y será utilizada solamente para efectos de investigación científica.
- Asimismo, no será posible identificar la identidad de los participantes por ningún medio.
- Los resultados de dicha investigación tendrán la posibilidad de impactar de manera importante en intervenciones educativas a futuro que favorezcan esta transición.
- Si usted desea a futuro conocer los resultados finales de dicha investigación, puede contactar al investigador principal con la finalidad de que le sea enviada dicha información vía correo electrónico.

Yo \_\_\_\_\_ (por favor escriba su nombre claramente) estoy de acuerdo en participar en la investigación arriba mencionada y autorizo el manejo de la información de acuerdo a las previas consideraciones éticas.

**Fecha:**  
**Correo electrónico:**  
**Firma:**

#### **Contacto:**

*Universidad de York , Reino Unido.*  
*Departamento de Educación*  
*Mtro. Miguel Ángel Urbina García*  
*e-mail: maug500@york.ac.uk*



**Universidad de York, Reino Unido**  
**Departamento de Educación**  
**Programa de Estudios Doctorales**

**Título de la Investigación:** “*Transición del Prescolar al Primer año de Primaria en México: Percepciones y Practicas de maestros, directores y familias*”

**Investigador:** Mtro. Miguel Ángel Urbina García

Yo \_\_\_\_\_ (por favor escriba su nombre claramente) estoy de acuerdo en ser grabado como parte del estudio arriba mencionado.

Estoy en el entendido de que puedo requerir que se detenga la grabación en cualquier momento así como requerir que mi información no se incluya en el estudio. Estoy consciente de que en el estudio se omitirá mi nombre para mantener mi confidencialidad y proteger mi identidad, así como también no podre ser identificado en ningún artículo, publicación, reporte o presentación.

Autorizo para que la grabación sea utilizada en la siguiente forma:

- La grabación puede ser utilizada en el proyecto de investigación
- La grabación puede ser utilizada para publicaciones científicas
- La transcripción puede ser guardada en archivo para otros investigadores

**Fecha:**

**Correo electrónico:**

**Firma:**

**Contacto:**

*Universidad de York , Reino Unido.  
Departamento de Educación  
Mtro. Miguel Ángel Urbina García  
e-mail: maug500@york.ac.uk*

## **Appendix B:** Format used to obtain Permission for Data Collection in Preschool Centres.



**Universidad de York, Reino Unido**  
*Departamento de Educación*  
*Programa de Estudios Doctorales*

**Título de la Investigación:** “Transición del Preescolar al Primer año de Primaria en México: Percepciones y Practicas de maestros, directores y familias”

**Investigador Titular:** Mtro. Miguel Ángel Urbina García

**LIC. MIRIAM TRINIDAD DEL ROSARIO ESPEJEL**  
**JEFA DE SERVICIOS EDUCATIVOS PARA ESTANCIAS Y PROGRAMAS DE BIENESTAR Y DESSARROLL INFANTIL EBDI**  
**P R E S E N T E**

**México D.F. a 31 de Agosto del 2012**

El proceso de transición al primer año de primaria mismo que ha sido ampliamente abordado por diversos investigadores a nivel mundial resaltando la importancia de este periodo no solo en los niños/as sino también en los maestro/as y las familias. De acuerdo con estos estudios, este proceso es un periodo a través del cual los preescolares experimentan un cambio significativo de un ambiente a otro muy diferente. Para este proceso, es deseable que los niños/as cuenten con habilidades, conocimientos y destrezas así como con relaciones significativas que les ayuden a experimentar una transición exitosa a su nuevo ambiente.

Actualmente se esta llevando a cabo una investigación doctoral (avalada por el Consejo Nacional De Ciencia y Tecnología: CONACYT 48972) con sede en la Universidad de York en el Reino Unido a este respecto, con la finalidad de explorar las opiniones, practicas educativas y parentales de los maestros/as, directores/as y familias respectivamente en relación a este cambio que experimentan los niños del preescolar a la primaria.

Es por lo anterior que el titular de esta investigación solicita su invaluable apoyo para poder tener acceso a la comunidad escolar (Maestras, Directoras y Familias) de las Estancias para el Bienestar y Desarrollo Infantil del ISSSTE conferidas a su digno cargo. Dicha comunidad servirá como parte fundamental para el desarrollo de esta investigación que pretende tener un impacto no solo a nivel nacional, sino un impacto internacional al contribuir científicamente tanto al conocimiento de la Psicología educativa como al entendimiento de esta etapa tan relevante.

La muestra de la que consta dicha investigación es la siguiente:

- 15 maestras de nivel preescolar.
- 15 padre o madre de familia con niños/as en nivel preescolar.
- 5 directoras de centros educativos.

Cabe destacar que todos los aspectos éticos de una investigación como esta de talla internacional, han sido cuidadosamente pensados y adecuadamente cubiertos. El periodo contemplado para la recolección de datos es Septiembre a Octubre del 2012. La recolección de datos consistirá en la aplicación de una escala de 40 reactivos a maestras y una entrevista semi-estructurada para el padre o madre de familia.

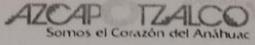
En espera de su invaluable apoyo, quedo a sus órdenes.

*Mtro. Ángel Urbina García*  
*Universidad de York, Reino Unido.*  
*Departamento de Educación*  
*e-mail: maug500@york.ac.uk*

**Appendix C:** Format provided by Educational Authorities so as to collect data in Preschool Centres.

 **Ciudad México**  
Capital en Movimiento

Delegación Azcapotzalco  
Dirección Gen. de Desarrollo Social  
Dirección de Educación y Cultura  
Subdirección de Servicios Educativos  
JUD de Servicios Educativos y CENDIA

 **AZCAPOTZALCO**  
Somos el Corazón del Anáhuac

**"2012 Año por la Cultura de la Legalidad"**

**Oficio:** DGDS/DEC/SSE/204/2012  
Azcapotzalco, D. F., a 10 de Septiembre del 2012

**A LOS 14 CENTROS DE DESARROLLO INFANTIL.  
P R E S E N T E**

Por este medio instruyo a usted se otorgue el acceso al maestro Miguel Ángel Urbina García de la Universidad de York, Inglaterra, para llevar a cabo la aplicación de cuestionarios referentes a la investigación denominada **"Transición del Preescolar al primer grado de primaria en México: percepción y prácticas de maestras, directoras y familias"**, dichos cuestionarios serán aplicados a la maestras de Preescolar III.

Sin más por el momento aprovecho la ocasión para enviarle un cordial saludo.

**A T E N T E M E N T E**  
EL JEFE DE LA UNIDAD DEPARTEMENTAL

  
TOMAS MONTES DE OCA PEREZ

C.c.p. Marisol Ayala Paniagua.- Subdirectora de Servicios Educativos.

  JUD de CENDIA  
Antigua Calzada de Guadalupe No. 127, Col. Santo Tomás, 02020, México D.F.  
Tel. 5561 7493

**Appendix D:** Ethical Issues Audit Form from the University of York.

**Department of Education**  
**Ethical Issues Audit Form**

THE UNIVERSITY *of York*

This questionnaire should be completed for each research study that you carry out as part of your degree. You should discuss it fully with your supervisor, who should also sign the completed form.

**You must not collect your data until you have had this form signed by your supervisor.**

|   |                |
|---|----------------|
| <b>Surname / family name:</b>   | Urbina Garcia  |
| <b>First name / given name</b>  | Miguel Angel   |
| <b>Programme:</b>   | PhD Education  |
| <b>Supervisor (of this research study):</b>   | Chris Kyriacou |
| <b>Topic (or area) of the proposed research study:</b><br>"Perceptions and Practices in Transition from Preschool to Primary First Grade in Mexico" |                |
| <b>Where the research will be conducted:</b><br>Mexico City   |                |
| <b>Methods that will be used to collect data:</b><br>Questionnaires and Interviews  |                |

**To be completed by the supervisor of the research study** (after reviewing the form):

Please  one of the following options.

|                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | I believe that this study, as planned, meets normal ethical guidelines |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | I am unsure if this study, as planned, meets normal ethical guidelines |

|                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | I believe that this study, as planned, does not meet normal ethical guidelines and requires some modification. |
|--------------------------|--|

Signed (Supervisor):

Date:

**Supervisor, please now pass to the Programme Administrator.**

**Or, if there are concerns, pass to the Programme Leader (or TAG member for research students).**

(If the Programme Leader is the same person as the supervisor, then the Programme Director).

**If these concerns cannot be resolved, then please pass to the Chair of Education Ethics Committee.**

***Data sources***

- 1 Does your research involve collecting data from people, e.g., by observing or testing them, or from interviews or questionnaires. **YES/NO**

*Note: The answer to this will normally be 'yes'. It would only be 'no', if the research was entirely based on documentary sources, or secondary data (already collected by someone else). If the answer is 'no', then please go straight to question 12.*

***Impact of research on the research subjects***

For studies involving interviews, focus group discussions or questionnaires:

- 2 Is the amount of time you are asking research subjects to give reasonable? Is any disruption to their normal routines at an acceptable level? **YES/NO**
- 3 Are any of the questions to be asked, or areas to be probed, likely to cause anxiety or distress to research subjects? **YES/NO**
- 4 If the research subjects are under 16 years of age, have you taken steps to ensure that another adult is present during all interviews and focus group discussions, and that questions to be asked are appropriate? **YES/NO**

For studies involving an intervention (i.e., a change to normal practices made for the purposes of the research):

- 5 Is the extent of the change within the range of changes that teachers would normally be able to make within their own discretion? **YES/NO**
- 6 Will the change be fully discussed with those directly involved (teachers, senior school managers, pupils, parents – as appropriate)? **YES/NO**

***Informed consent***

- 7 Will steps be taken to inform research subjects in advance about what their participation in the research will involve? YES/NO
- 8 Will steps be taken to inform research subjects of the purpose of the research? YES/NO

Note: For some research studies, the data might be seriously distorted by informing research subjects in advance of the purpose of the study. If this is the case (and your answer to question 8 is therefore 'no'), please explain briefly why.

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- 9 Will steps be taken to inform research subjects of what will happen to the data they provide (how this will be stored, for how long, who will have access to it, how individuals' identities will be protected during this process)? YES/NO
- 10 In the case of studies involving interviews or focus groups, will steps be taken to allow research subjects to see and comment on your written record of the event? YES/NO
- 11 Who will be asked to sign a statement indicating their willingness to participate in this research? Please **tick all categories** that apply:

| <i>Category</i>             | <i>Tick if 'yes'</i> |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| Adult research subjects     | yes                  |
| Research subjects under 16  |                      |
| Teachers                    | yes                  |
| Parents                     | yes                  |
| Headteacher (or equivalent) | yes                  |
| Other (please explain)      |                      |

### *Reporting your research*

- 12 In any reports that you write about your research, will you ensure that the identity of any individual research subject, or the institution which they attend or work for, cannot be deduced by a reader? YES/NO

If the answer to this is 'no', please explain why:

Signed:

Date:

Please now give this form to your supervisor to complete the section on the first page.

**NOTE ON IMPLEMENTING THE PROCEDURES APPROVED HERE:**

If your plans change as you carry out the research study, you should discuss any changes you make with your supervisor. If the changes are significant, your supervisor may advise you to complete a new 'Ethical issues audit' form.

For Masters students, on submitting your Masters Dissertation to the relevant programme administrator, you will be asked to sign to indicate that your research did not deviate significantly from the procedures you have outlined above.

For MPhil/PhD students, once your data collection is over, you must write an email to your supervisor to confirm that your research did not deviate significantly from the procedures you have outlined above.

**Appendix E: Parents' Perceptions on Transition Interview**

**PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON TRANSITION INTERVIEW**

***INTRODUCTION:** We are mainly interested in learning about how you experience/d your child's transition process from preschool to primary first grade. The information you provide will be kept confidential and will only be used for research purposes and future parenting practice.*

Child age: \_\_\_\_\_

Date completed: \_\_\_\_\_

Child gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's

Job: \_\_\_\_\_

Other siblings: \_\_\_\_\_

Lives

with: \_\_\_\_\_

Highest Grade Completed: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

- 1.- What are/were the fundamental issues for your child as he/she transition/ed to primary first grade?
- 2.- What are the transition practices you as a parent carry/ed out to/that support/ed your children?
- 3.- What kind of school-involvement did/do you have in your child's transition to primary school?
- 4.- What do you think you can/could do in order to help your child in this transition?
- 5.- What do you think the school can do in order to support children during this transition period?
- 6.- Can you identify any kind of barrier that prevent you from engaging in transition practices?

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP!**

**Appendix F: Headteachers' Perceptions on Transition Interview**

**HEADTEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ON TRANSITION INTERVIEW**

***INTRODUCTION:** We are mainly interested in learning about how you experience your students' transition process from preschool to primary first grade. The information you provide will be kept confidential and will only be used for research purposes and future educational practice.*

Years in School Teaching: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Date completed: \_\_\_\_\_

Years as a Head Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_

Highest Grade Completed: \_\_\_\_\_

Total number of Students Attending at your school: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

No. of Preschool-3/First Grade Classrooms: \_\_\_\_\_

No. of Preschool-3/First Grade Children enrolled: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What do you think about this transition period from preschool to primary first grade?
2. What do you think are the main issues/problems/concerns for children transitioning from preschool to primary first grade?
3. Do you implement any kind of Transition Activities? Yes/No. What type of Transition Activities do you implement as a Head Teacher?
4. Can you identify any kind of barrier that prevents you from implementing transition practices in your school?
5. What do you think you can do in order to help your children in this transition?

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP!**

**Appendix G: Preschool Teachers' Perceptions on Transition Survey**

**TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ON TRANSITION SURVEY**

**(TPTS Preschool)**

Dear Teacher:

Thank you for helping us with this survey in regard to the transition process which has been widely investigated by worldwide researchers highlighting the importance of this process not only for children, but also for their families and teachers. According to a number of researchers, this process is a period through which preschool children experience a significant change from one environment into another. Through this process, children must have skills, knowledge, abilities and significant relationships that help them have a successful transition to their new environment.

We are mainly interested in learning about how the transition process from preschool to primary first grade occurs in your community. This knowledge, will allow us to identify the most effective ways to support not only preschool children, but also teachers and parents during this transition period.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Completed \_\_\_\_\_

Date

**Instructions**

- This survey seeks information on your knowledge and practices that are related to children's transition from preschool into first grade of primary school.
- We ask you to be very honest with your answers.
- The information you provide will be kept confidential and will only be used for research purposes.

- It is important to notice that there are not “right” or “wrong” answers. The information you provide will be very useful for future educational practice.

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No. of Years of Teaching Experience: _____</li> <li>• No. of Years in Preschool Level: _____</li> <li>• No. of Years in this School: _____</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highest Grade Completed (Vocational Training, Bachelor, Master, PhD): _____</li> <li>• Have you been in a preschool training course: _____; If yes, how many?: _____</li> <li>• Date of last training course: _____</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age: _____</li> <li>• Gender: _____</li> <li>• No. of Children in your group: _____</li> </ul> |
|--|---|---|

1. Overall, how concerned are you about preschool children’s transition to primary first grade? Please tick one of the following options. (Quintero & McIntyre, 2011)

- Not at all concerned...
- Little concerned ...
- Somewhat concerned...
- Very concerned ...
- Extremely concerned...

Some children have a difficult time becoming accustomed to a new classroom environment whilst others have an easy time with this transition. Overall, to what degree are these statements true for preschool children? Please circle the number to each statement. (Rimm-Kauffman, 2005; Rimm-Kauffman, Pianta & Cox, 2006)

|  | Not at all true | Rarely true | Sometimes true | Often true | Yes very true |
|--|-----------------|-------------|----------------|------------|---------------|
| 1. Children show lack of academic skills.  | 1               | 2           | 3              | 4          | 5             |
| 2. Children show difficulty following directions.                                | 1               | 2           | 3              | 4          | 5             |
| 3. Children show difficulty working as part of a group.                          | 1               | 2           | 3              | 4          | 5             |
| 4. Children show difficulty getting along with other children.                   | 1               | 2           | 3              | 4          | 5             |
| 5. Children show difficulty working independently.                               | 1               | 2           | 3              | 4          | 5             |
| 6. Children show difficulty communicating or language problems.                  | 1               | 2           | 3              | 4          | 5             |
| 7. Children show difficulty adjusting to the schedule or the rhythm of the day.  | 1               | 2           | 3              | 4          | 5             |
| 8. Children show difficulty respecting my authority as a teacher                 | 1               | 2           | 3              | 4          | 5             |
| 9. Children show difficulty taking turns or waiting until his/her turn to speak. | 1               | 2           | 3              | 4          | 5             |
| 10. Children show behaviour problems.  | 1               | 2           | 3              | 4          | 5             |
| 11. Children show difficulty in carrying out the work.                           | 1               | 2           | 3              | 4          | 5             |
| 12. Children show difficulty maintaining attention and concentration.            | 1               | 2           | 3              | 4          | 5             |

2. What concerns do you have regarding the transition process for preschoolers to first grade? (Quintero & McIntyre, 2011)

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3. Describe the child who is well-prepared for 1<sup>st</sup> grade of primary school. (Lara-Cinisamo, 2008)

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4. Can you identify the most common issues and problems children might face during their transition to primary first grade? (Pianta, 1996)

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5. What are some barriers that you feel may prevent you from engaging in transition practices (Quintero & McIntyre, 2011)

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Below are listed a number of transition practices that **might** occur to facilitate children’s transition to first grade primary school. For each of the practices below, circle the number on the left side the ones you think happen in ***your community***, and on the right side please indicate how often you think each practice would happen in a ***perfect world***.

| Transition Practices   | What Happens in <b><u>MY COMMUNITY</u></b> ... |        |           |         |        | What I would want in a <b><u>PERFECT WORLD</u></b> ... |        |           |         |        |
|--|--|--------|-----------|---------|--------|--|--------|-----------|---------|--------|
|  | 1  | 2      | 3         | 4       | 5      | 1  | 2      | 3         | 4       | 5      |
|  | never  | rarely | sometimes | usually | always | never  | rarely | sometimes | usually | always |
| 1. Give parents orientation session about primary first grade. (Quintero & McIntyre, 2011)   | 1  | 2      | 3         | 4       | 5      | 1  | 2      | 3         | 4       | 5      |
| 2. Provide written (letter, brochure, flyer) communication regarding transition to your children’s family. (Quintero & McIntyre, 2011) | 1  | 2      | 3         | 4       | 5      | 1  | 2      | 3         | 4       | 5      |
| 3. Have a talk with child’s parents before primary school starts. (Pianta, 1996)   | 1  | 2      | 3         | 4       | 5      | 1  | 2      | 3         | 4       | 5      |
| 4. Have a meeting with child and family before primary school starts. (Pianta, 1996)   | 1  | 2      | 3         | 4       | 5      | 1  | 2      | 3         | 4       | 5      |
| 5. Have parents and child visit primary school prior to the start of the school year. (Regena, 2004)                                   | 1  | 2      | 3         | 4       | 5      | 1  | 2      | 3         | 4       | 5      |
| 6. Provide a final report to parents in regard to child’s academic and /or developmental skills.                                       | 1  | 2      | 3         | 4       | 5      | 1  | 2      | 3         | 4       | 5      |
| 7. Explain parents what children are expected to do  | 1  | 2      | 3         | 4       | 5      | 1  | 2      | 3         | 4       | 5      |

| in first grade.   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8. Have regular meetings with first grade teacher to discuss continuity in the curriculum between preschool and first grade. (Pianta, 1996; Ahtola, 2010) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. You consider into your teaching action activities/content according to first grade curriculum.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. The preschool and first grade teacher talks about social and academic skills to prepare children for primary school. (Gil, Winters & Friedman, 2006)  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. The preschool children's "portfolio" is shared with first grade teacher. (Ahtola, 2011)   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. Have informal contacts with first grade teacher about children. (Pianta, 1996)  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. Involve parents in classroom activities during last 3 months of preschool.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. An open house for parents and children before primary school starts. (Pianta, 1996)   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. Preschool children visit 1 <sup>st</sup> grade class. (LoCasale & Crouch, 2008)   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. First grade teacher visits preschool class. (LoCasale & Crouch, 2008)   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 17. Have first grader children visit preschool class to talk about first grade experience. (Pianta, 1996) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. Have preschoolers perform a planned activity in first grade classroom.                                | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. Have school workshops with children and parents to prepare them to primary school.                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. Have parents whose children are in first grade, have a talk with preschool parents.                   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

6. Based on your experience, what can teachers do to help improve this transition process into first grade?

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**THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP!**

**Appendix H: First Grade Teachers' Perceptions on Transition Survey**

**TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ON TRANSITION SURVEY**

**(TPTS First Grade)**

Dear Teacher:

Thank you for helping us with this survey in regard to the transition process which has been widely investigated by worldwide researchers highlighting the importance of this process not only for children, but also for their families and teachers. According to a number of researchers, this process is a period through which preschool children experience a significant change from one environment into another. Through this process, children must have skills, knowledge, abilities and significant relationships that help them have a successful transition to their new environment.

We are mainly interested in learning about how the transition process from preschool to primary first grade occurs in your community. This knowledge, will allow us to identify the most effective ways to support not only preschool children, but also teachers and parents during this transition period.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Completed \_\_\_\_\_

Date

**Instructions**

- This survey seeks information on your knowledge and practices that are related to children's transition from preschool into first grade of primary school.
- We ask you to be very honest with your answers.
- The information you provide will be kept confidential and will only be used for research purposes.

- It is important to notice that there are not “right” or “wrong” answers. The information you provide will be very useful for future educational practice.

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No. of Years of Teaching Experience:<br/>_____</li> <li>• No. of Years in 1<sup>st</sup>. grade level:_____</li> <li>• No. of Years in this School:_____</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highest Grade Completed (Vocational Training, Bachelor, Master, PhD):_____</li> <li>• Have you been in a 1<sup>st</sup>. grade training course:_____; If yes how many?:_____</li> <li>• Date of last training course:_____</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age: _____</li> <li>• Gender:_____</li> <li>• No. of Children in your group:<br/>_____</li> </ul> |
|--|--|--|

7. Overall, how concerned are you about preschool children’s transition to primary first grade? Please tick one of the following options. (Quintero & McIntyre, 2011)

- |                           |                          |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| • Not at all concerned... | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Little concerned ...    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Somewhat concerned...   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Very concerned ...      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Extremely concerned...  | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Some children have a difficult time becoming accustomed to a new classroom environment whilst others have an easy time with this transition. Overall, to what degree are these statements true for grade 1 children? Please circle one number to each statement. (Rimm-Kauffman, 2005; Rimm-Kauffman, Pianta & Cox, 2006)

|   | Not at all true | Rarely true | Sometimes true | Often true | Yes very true |
|---|-----------------|-------------|----------------|------------|---------------|
| 1. Children have shown lack of academic skills.                                       | 1               | 2           | 3              | 4          | 5             |
| 2. Children have shown difficulty following directions.                               | 1               | 2           | 3              | 4          | 5             |
| 3. Children have shown difficulty working as part of a group.                         | 1               | 2           | 3              | 4          | 5             |
| 4. Children have shown difficulty getting along with other children.                  | 1               | 2           | 3              | 4          | 5             |
| 5. Children have shown difficulty working independently.                              | 1               | 2           | 3              | 4          | 5             |
| 6. Children have shown difficulty communicating or language problems.                 | 1               | 2           | 3              | 4          | 5             |
| 7. Children have shown difficulty adjusting to the schedule or the rhythm of the day. | 1               | 2           | 3              | 4          | 5             |
| 8. Children have shown difficulty respecting my authority as a teacher.               | 1               | 2           | 3              | 4          | 5             |
| 9. Children have shown difficulty taking turns or waiting until his/her turn to speak | 1               | 2           | 3              | 4          | 5             |
| 10. Children have shown difficulty to remain seated as expected through the day.      | 1               | 2           | 3              | 4          | 5             |
| 11. Children have shown difficulty in understanding the work.                         | 1               | 2           | 3              | 4          | 5             |
| 12. Children have shown difficulty maintaining attention and concentration.           | 1               | 2           | 3              | 4          | 5             |

2. What concerns do you have regarding the transition process for preschoolers to first grade? (Quintero & McIntyre, 2011)

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3. Describe the child who is well-prepared for 1<sup>st</sup> grade of primary school. (Lara-Cinisamo, 2008)

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4. Can you identify the most common issues and problems children might face during their transition to primary first grade? (Pianta, 1996)

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5. What are some barriers that you feel may prevent you from engaging in transition practices (Quintero & McIntyre, 2011)

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Below are listed a number of transition practices that **might** occur to facilitate children’s transition to first grade primary school. For each of the practices below, circle the number on the left side the ones you think happen in ***your community***, and on the right side please indicate how often you think each practice would happen in a ***perfect world***.

| Transition Practices  | What Happens in <b><u>MY COMMUNITY</u></b> ... |        |           |       |        | What I would want in a <b><u>PERFECT WORLD</u></b> ... |        |           |       |        |
|---|--|--------|-----------|-------|--------|--|--------|-----------|-------|--------|
|   | 1  | 2      | 3         | 4     | 5      | 1  | 2      | 3         | 4     | 5      |
|   | never  | rarely | sometimes | often | always | never  | rarely | sometimes | often | always |
| 1. Give parents orientation session about first grade. (Quintero & McIntyre, 2011)  | 1  | 2      | 3         | 4     | 5      | 1  | 2      | 3         | 4     | 5      |
| 2. Provide written (letter, brochure, flyer) communication regarding transition to student’s family. (Quintero & McIntyre, 2011)                              | 1  | 2      | 3         | 4     | 5      | 1  | 2      | 3         | 4     | 5      |
| 3. Have a <u>talk</u> with child’s parents before school starts. (Pianta, 1996)   | 1  | 2      | 3         | 4     | 5      | 1  | 2      | 3         | 4     | 5      |
| 4. Have a <u>meeting</u> with child and family before school starts. (Pianta, 1996)   | 1  | 2      | 3         | 4     | 5      | 1  | 2      | 3         | 4     | 5      |
| 5. Have parents and child visit primary school prior to the start of the school year. (Regena, 2004)  | 1  | 2      | 3         | 4     | 5      | 1  | 2      | 3         | 4     | 5      |
| 6. Review the pre-schooler final report with parents in regard to child’s academic and /or developmental skills.  | 1  | 2      | 3         | 4     | 5      | 1  | 2      | 3         | 4     | 5      |
| 7. Explain parents what children are expected to do in first grade.   | 1  | 2      | 3         | 4     | 5      | 1  | 2      | 3         | 4     | 5      |
| 8. Have regular meetings with preschool teacher to discuss continuity in the curriculum between preschool and first grade. (Pianta, 1996;Ahtola et al., 2011) | 1  | 2      | 3         | 4     | 5      | 1  | 2      | 3         | 4     | 5      |
| 9. You consider into your teaching action content according to  | 1  | 2      | 3         | 4     | 5      | 1  | 2      | 3         | 4     | 5      |

| preschool curriculum.   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10. The preschool and first grade teacher talk about social and academic skills to prepare children for primary school. (Gil, Winters & Friedman, 2006) |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 11. Have the preschool children's "portfolio" revised. (Ahtola, 2011)   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. Have informal contacts with preschool teacher about children. (Pianta, 1996)  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. Involve parents in classroom activities during early weeks of primary first grade.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. An open house for parents and children before school starts. (Pianta, 1996)   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. Preschool children visit 1 <sup>st</sup> grade class. (LoCasale & Crouch, 2008)   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. First grade teacher visits preschool class. (LoCasale & Crouch, 2008)   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. Have first grade children visit preschool class to talk about first grade experience. (Pianta, 1996)  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. Have preschoolers perform a planned activity in first grade classroom.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. Have school workshops with children and parents to prepare them to primary school.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. Have parents whose children are in first grade, have a talk with preschool parents.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

6. In your judgement, how do you think teachers can help to improve this transition period in first grade?

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**THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP!**

**Appendix I:** General Purposes stated in the Preschool Education Program which guide the achievement of Educational Preschool Goals; Ministry of Public Education (Secretaria de Educacion Publica, 2011)

| PURPOSES  | DESCRIPTION   |
|-----------|---|
| Purpose 1 | Learn how to control and regulate their emotions, work collaboratively, solve problems through dialogue and follow classrooms rules for coexistence in an out of school, behaving with initiative, autonomy and willingness to learn.   |
| Purpose 2 | Have confidence to express themselves, being able to dialogue and communicate in their mother-tongue language; improve their listening skills and enrich their oral language when in a diversity of situations.   |
| Purpose 3 | Develop an interest for reading, use a range of written material and know what they are for; initiate their writing skills by expressing graphically ideas they want to communicate and recognize some properties of writing-system.  |
| Purpose 4 | Use mathematical reasoning in situations where relations, quantity and location of objects when counting, estimate, compare attributes, compare and measure; to understand the relation between the information of a given problem and use appropriate strategies or procedures to solve them.  |
| Purpose 5 | Develop an interest in observation of natural phenomena as well as the human beings features; participate in experimental situations which lead them to describe, question, predict, compare, register, elaborate explanations and exchange opinions about social and natural world's transformation processes acquiring positive attitudes for environmental care. |
| Purpose 6 | Acquire necessary values and basic principles for coexisting in a social group, recognising that people have different cultural traits and consequently behave in a respectful way towards the rights of others; consider responsibilities, justice and tolerance and the acknowledgement of language, ethnicity and gender diversity.                              |
| Purpose 7 | Use imagination and fantasy, initiative and creativity to express themselves through artistic means (music, visual arts, theatre and dance) and appreciate artistic and cultural works of their own and other communities.  |
| Purpose 8 | Improve their control, manipulation and gross motor skills; improve individual self and social care practices to preserve and promote a healthy life style understanding attitudes and actions whenever their individual integrity is at risk.  |

**Appendix J:** Preschool Pedagogical Principles stated by the Preschool Education Programme (SEP, 2011)

| Pedagogical Principle                              | Objective   |
|--|---|
| Child development features and learning processes. | Children are considered to have a huge background of knowledge which needs to be considered and used by the teacher to promote new learnings through the use of play-based activities and considering peer-to-peer learning as well.  |
| Diversity and Equity                               | Promote children’s learning, awareness and acknowledgment of the differences in a multi-cultural country like Mexico. Likewise, help preschoolers understand differences in children with special education needs as well as children with outstanding cognitive performance. |
| Educational Intervention                           | Promote children’s interest, confidence and motivation towards learning. Likewise, encourage school-families links so as to support children’s learning and personal development.   |

**Appendix K:** Fundamental Purposes of First Grade Primary School Programme. Main Competencies Children Need to Develop on each Subject According to the Programme (SEP, 2011)

| Subjects                               | Purposes: pupils will be able to...  |
|--|--|
| <b>1. Spanish</b>                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participate efficiently in diversity of oral communication situations.</li> <li>• Read comprehensively a diversity of texts to satisfy their own information and knowledge needs.</li> <li>• Participate in the original production of diverse written texts.</li> <li>• Consistently reflect upon the features and functions of written system (graphic aspects, orthography and punctuation).</li> <li>• Know and value the language and cultural-diversity of Mexico’s regions.</li> <li>• Identify, analyse and enjoy different literary styles.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>2. Mathematics</b>                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Know and use the decimal metric system to interpret and communicate amounts in different ways. Explain differences and similarities between decimal-metric system and other systems.</li> <li>• Utilize mental calculus, results estimation or written operation with natural numbers, as well as addition and subtraction in fractions and decimal to solve additive and multiplying problems.</li> <li>• Know and use the basic properties of angles and different types of lines, and circle, triangles, quadrilaterals, regular and irregular polygons prisms, pyramids, cone, cylinder and sphere to make some buildings and calculate measures.</li> <li>• Use and interpret various codes for orientation in space and locate objects or places.</li> <li>• Express and interpret measures with different types of unit, to calculate perimeters and areas of triangles, quadrilaterals, regular and irregular polygons.</li> <li>• Undertake search processes, organization, analysis and interpretation of data in images, text, tables, bar graphs and other carriers to provide information or to answer questions for themselves or others. Represent data using tables and bar charts.</li> <li>• Identify sets of varying amounts or not proportionately calculated missing values and percentages, and apply the constant proportionality factor (natural numbers) in simple cases.</li> </ul> |
| <b>3. Exploring Nature and Society</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognize their personal, family and community history, the similarities between the living beings, and the relations between the components of the nature and society where they live.</li> </ul>  |

|                              |  |
|------------------------------|--|
|                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore and obtain information from the natural, social components and cultural events where they live to describe and represent their main features and how they have changed over time.</li> <li>• Value the natural and cultural diversity of the local environment recognized as part where they live, with a common past to strengthen their personal identity and national.</li> <li>• Recognize the importance of caring for your body and to participate in actions to prevent accidents and disasters in the place where they live.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>4. Civics and Ethics</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop their personal potential of healthy, pleasant, affectionate, responsible, and free from violence and addictions, for the construction of a viable livelihood project that includes personal and social improvement, respect for diversity and the development of healthy environments.</li> <li>• Know the fundamental principles of human rights, values for democracy and respect for the laws to favour their ability to make ethical judgments and decision making and responsible participation from reflection and critical analysis of his person and the world in which they live.</li> <li>• Acquire elements of a democratic political culture, through active participation in matters of public interest, for the construction of forms of inclusive, equitable, and supportive intercultural life that enrich their sense of belonging to their community, their country and humanity.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>5. Physical Education</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop knowledge of themselves, their communication skills, relationships skills and motor skills through various demonstrations to encourage their corporeality and cooperative sense.</li> <li>• Reflect on the changes involved in motor activity incorporating new knowledge and skills, so as to adapt to the demands of their environment facing a variety of situations and unexpected events that occur in the daily work.</li> <li>• Develop skills and abilities to participate in motor skills-led games proposing norms, rules and new ways of living together in the game, the sport initiation and school sports highlighting the importance of collaborative work as well as the recognition of multiculturalism.</li> <li>• Think about the everyday actions that are linked to its socio-cultural environment and contribute to its socio motor-relations.</li> <li>• Take care of your health based on informed decision-making on hygiene, promotion of habits and recognizing the possible risks when performing motor actions to prevent accidents in your daily life.</li> </ul> |
| <b>6. Artistic Education</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obtain the basics of visual arts, body language and dance, music and theatre to further develop artistic competence and cultural, as well as encourage life skills as part of the comprehensive training in Basic Education.</li> </ul>   |

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop artistic thought to express ideas and emotions, and interpret the different codes of art to stimulate sensitivity, perception and creativity from academic work in different artistic languages.</li><li>• Build up your identity and strengthen their sense of belonging to a group, valuing cultural heritage and diverse artistic manifestations of the environment, their country and the world.</li><li>• Communicate your ideas and thoughts through personal creations from of two and three dimensional productions, experimentation of their possibilities of body movement exploration of sound phenomenon and participation in theatre games and dramatic improvisations.</li></ul> |
|--|--|

**Appendix L: Operational Definition for each Formative Area stated in the Preschool Programme (SEP, 2011).**

| Formative Areas   | Conceptualization   |
|---|---|
| <b>Language and communication.</b>                                | Develops communicative and reading competencies in students by making use of different social language use thorough everyday practice in different contexts. It looks for the development of reading and argumentation competencies at a complex level.   |
| <b>Mathematical reasoning.</b>                                    | It develops reasoning for problem-solving in the formulation of arguments to explain results and in the design of decision-making processes.  |
| <b>Exploration and understanding of natural and social world.</b> | It Integrates a diversity of disciplinary perspectives related to biologic, historical, social, political, economic, cultural, geographic and scientific aspects. It constitutes the foundations for scientific and historical reasoning through the use of evidence-based information considering different phenomena of reality. It is about knowing ourselves as well as the world’s complexity and diversity.   |
| <b>Personal development for social interaction.</b>               | <p>It integrates a diversity of disciplinary perspectives related to social sciences, humanities, sciences and psychology including civics and ethics, artistic education and physical education for a holistic development of individuals. It is about students learning how to act with a critical view towards democracy, freedom, peace and respect for other people as well as the legality and human rights.</p> <p>It also means educating for social coexistence conceived as the building up of interpersonal relations of mutual respect, problem solving through dialogue as well as the education for emotions in order to produce individuals able to interact with others, express their affection, personal identity and develop social awareness.</p> |

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