

Pedagogy, culture and transition: a qualitative,  
collective case study exploring pedagogies of the  
transition from Reception to Year One in  
England

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## Abstract

Pedagogy, culture and transition: a qualitative, collective case study exploring pedagogies of the transition from Reception to Year One in England

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Over the last two decades, the English state has sought to establish increasing levels of control over pedagogy in Reception and Year One. As a result, the transition between these year groups is dominated by a readying for school discourse. This discourse is established and enforced through policy technologies – relating to curriculum, assessment and accountability measures – that work to steer teachers towards the outcomes desired by the state. Understanding how policy technologies operated and influenced pedagogies of the transition from Reception to Year One was a central focus of this thesis which explored and compared two different settings; one where policy technologies were enforced and another where they were not. These settings were in the state- and independent-sector respectively.

Taking a broad view of pedagogy – as both performance and discourse – a conceptual framework, based on activity theory, was developed. The framework was able to identify how the socio-cultural-political factors unique to each setting mediated micro-level classroom processes which, in turn, shaped how pedagogies of the transition from Reception to Year One were experienced by children and parents. Using a qualitative, collective case study, the research followed seven children in each setting over a period of ten months as they transitioned from Reception to Year One. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with children, parents, teachers and headteachers in each case and were triangulated against observations, documentation and online interviews.

The findings indicate how socio-cultural-political factors exert significant influence on pedagogy. In the state-sector case, the pedagogies enacted in Reception and Year One were heavily conditioned by government policy whereas in the independent-sector case, they reflected teacher beliefs, the children's needs and parental expectations. The contrasting approaches in each case had important implications

for how children and parents were able to navigate the transition between Reception and Year One.

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# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the pedagogies enacted in Reception and Year One in two different school settings and to consider how these pedagogies influence how children and parents experience and perceive the transition between them. Informed by activity theory (Engeström, 2015), the research positions Reception and Year One in each setting as individual activity systems and takes into consideration the different sociocultural factors that play a role in shaping teaching and learning. Understanding how Reception and Year One operate as individual activity systems is essential to understanding the transition between them (Sandberg et al., 2017).

In England, the transition from Reception (ages 4-5) to Year One (ages 5-6) marks the move from Early Childhood Education (ECE) to Compulsory School Education (CSE). This transition provides an opportune context through which to investigate pedagogy as it is a time where different approaches to teaching and learning ‘converge in a common space’ (Dockett et al., 2017a, p. 188). In recent years, recognition of the transition to CSE as a pertinent and important context for investigating pedagogy has developed internationally, as illustrated by the development of the Pedagogies of Educational Transition (POET) alliance in 2010 by transition to compulsory school researchers in five different countries: Australia, Iceland, New Zealand, Scotland and Sweden (Ballam et al., 2017). Yet, in the context of England, although there are well-established bodies of literature and research concerned with pedagogy in ECE (Moyle et al., 2002; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002), pedagogy in primary education (Alexander, 2001, 2010; Siraj et al., 2014) and the transition from Reception to Year One (Ofsted, 2004; Sanders et al., 2005), relatively less attention has been directed towards researching these areas collectively and to a level of depth that considers the complexities associated with each.

This study addresses the gap in the English research literature and, at the same time, contributes to the emerging international research concerned with POET (Ballam

et al., 2017; Davies, 2018). By designing and implementing a qualitative, collective case study, this research follows two cases of children as they transition from Reception to Year One. Taking a broad, sociocultural perspective of pedagogy – as both the *performance* of teaching together with its attendant *discourse* (Alexander, 2001, 2009a) – the case study facilitates an in-depth exploration of the pedagogies enacted in both year groups in each case and considers in what way these pedagogies influence how children and parents experience and perceive the transition between them.

## 1.1 Context of the study

ECE and CSE are recognised as each having their own activity systems, operating with, and informed by, different priorities, histories and practices (Karila & Rantavouri, 2014). Within their different activity systems, children, parents and educators play contrasting roles and are provided with different opportunities and experiences (Sandberg et al., 2017). ECE, for example, is typically holistic in its focus, emphasising play, exploration and interaction whereas CSE tends to prioritise the teaching of subject-specific knowledge and academic skills (Wood & Hedges 2016; Woodhead & Moss 2007). As Pramling Samuelsson and Carlsson (2008) note, the emphasis in early childhood is on the ‘act of learning’ while in compulsory school the ‘object of learning’ takes precedence. The nature and extent of these pedagogical differences – which form an important part of Chapter 2 – means that a ‘gulf’ (Fisher, 2020) or ‘chasm’ (Peters, 2014) has been identified as existing between these two institutions, meaning that some children experience the transition between them as a ‘culture shock’ (Broström, 2007, p. 61). While a level of change in the transition to compulsory school is described as inevitable (O’Kane, 2016) and, if properly supported, desirable (Peters, 2004; Walsh et al. 2008), it is important to avoid discontinuity that goes beyond children’s ability to negotiate as this may jeopardise later school success and the development of ‘positive life trajectories’ (Dockett & Perry, 2014, p. 7).

In order to navigate the contrasting pedagogical traditions underpinning ECE and CSE, and support children to experience a successful transition between them, it has long been recommended that countries and local authorities work to establish a

strong and equal partnership between these phases of education (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2001, 2006). A strong and equal partnership is a type of relationship where ‘neither culture takes over the other’ (Moss, 2008, p. 230) and the diverse traditions of ECE and CSE come together, ‘focussing on the strengths of both approaches’ (OECD, 2001, p. 129). Yet, in the context of England, attempts to closer align ECE and CSE are viewed from the perspective and priorities of compulsory school and a relationship based on ‘readying’ children for formal learning is promoted (Moss, 2012; 2013; Neaum, 2016; OECD, 2006). Under a ‘readying for school’ relationship, only ECE is at issue and, as such, is duly subjugated by the ‘taken-for-granted’ and ‘uncontested regime and purposes of CSE’ (Moss, 2012, p. 340).

A hierarchical relationship based on ‘readying’ presents a powerful narrative and is a product of the neoliberal discourse (Moss, 2019) that has fundamentally shaped education over the last four decades (Ball, 2021b). Neoliberalism is a ‘powerful theory, movement, ideology [and] story... that has laid claim to understand how human life on earth works and what needs to be done to bring about an ideal future’ (Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021, p. 6). This ‘claim’ is summarised by Theodore et al. (2011), who state that:

Neoliberal ideology rests on the belief that open, competitive, and “unregulated” markets, liberated from state intervention and the actions of social collectivities, represent the optimal mechanism to socio-economic development. (p. 15)

Under neoliberalism, all dimensions of life are understood as operating in terms of, and as being motivated by, market rationality (Giroux, 2016). Here, social and communal bonds are weakened (Giroux, 2016) and ‘everything is seen and understood in economic terms’ (Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021, p. 93). Neoliberalism reconstructs social relationships as economic ones (Brown, 2016; De Lissovoy, 2013) – with the two becoming binary opposites (Davies & Bansel, 2007) – and the autonomous individual is positioned as a ‘customer’ and ‘consumer’ (Hall, 2011), governed by the forces of competition, choice and calculation (Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021).

While neoliberalism has ‘penetrated many aspects of daily life’ (Moss & Roberts-Holmes, 2021, p. 1), education has been ‘particularly targeted’ (Sims, 2017, p. 1) and ‘particularly troubled’ (Connell, 2013, p. 99) by its presence. Over the last four decades, the discourses and practices of neoliberalism have created systems that are driven and justified by competition, management, accountability and performance (Ball, 2021b; Davies & Bansel, 2007). In relation to questions about aims and purposes (Biesta, 2009), neoliberalism posits a ‘definite view of education’ (Connell, 2013, p. 104), understanding it as ‘having a primarily or even exclusively economic rationale, with the production of human capital at its core’ (Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021, p. 52). The foregrounding of the economic – at the expense of the social, cultural, aesthetic, moral and political (Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021) – frames education as an investment and as a product through which human potential and productivity can be improved, shaped and realised (Connell, 2013; Davies & Bansel, 2007).

In England, neoliberalism has shaped and is shaping how interpersonal relations, subjectivities and practices are formed in both ECE and CSE as well as the relationship between these phases, profoundly altering ‘how we value ourselves and value others, how we think about what we do, and why we do it’ (Ball, 2016, p. 1047). Under neoliberalism, the purpose of ECE has been re-engineered, moving away from its holistic emphasis and towards the foundation for the formation of human capital (Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021). It is positioned as the ultimate long-term investment (Sayre et al., 2015); a time where young children can be prepared or readied to succeed, initially in CSE and eventually as calculated and competent market actors (Brown, 2015). This framing has led to a unidirectional relationship between ECE and CSE (Moss, 2013) where the role of ECE is to work towards forming the ‘average child, the one that fits in the [compulsory school] system’ (Vandenbroeck et al., 2013, p. 189). This relationship operates as a ‘functional linkage’ where the priorities and practices of CSE are the frame of reference to which ECE must assimilate and adapt (Boyle & Petriwskyj, 2014, p. 393).

To ensure that children and teachers work towards the ‘ultimate goal of school readiness’ (Wood & Hedges, 2016, p. 393), ECE – like primary education, which

itself is governed by neoliberal discourses of ‘productivity, human capital, efficiency [and] excellence’ (Hall & Pulsford, 2019, p. 242) – has become the site of technical practice, where it is subject to the application of:

effective “human technologies” [that aim] to produce standardised and pre-determined outcomes for young children, outcomes expressed in terms of developmental or learning goals, and embodying the acquisition of competencies and skills that represent the initial building blocks of human capital and ensure that the young child is ready or prepared for the next stage of human capital formation – compulsory primary schooling. (Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021, p. 102)

Within technical practice, Moss (2019) suggests that the ‘whys’ and ‘whats’ of educational practice are undisputed and taken for granted and attention is fully focussed on the ‘hows’ (pp. 48-49). This has meant that the richness, diversity and complexity of young children’s learning is reduced to ‘what works’ (Ball, 2016b), with education becoming a matter primarily of reproducing fixed and pre-determined outcomes (Pascal et al., 2017). The outcomes that teachers and children are expected to work towards – which in England comprise of seventeen Early Learning Goals, which will be explored further in Chapter 2 – act as a form of neoliberal governance that privileges some forms of knowledge ahead of others; namely, those that are associated with meeting economic objectives and the formation of human capital (Ball, 2021b). The neoliberal lens through which the school readiness discourse is constructed is explicit in one Public Health England (2016) report, which states that:

School readiness at age five has a strong impact on future educational attainment and life chances... The costs of delivery per child are outweighed by the benefits to the individual, taxpayers and others through improved educational outcomes, reduced healthcare costs, reduced crime and increased taxes paid due to increased earnings as adults. (pp. 4, 8)

The association of ‘school readiness’ with economic objectives reimagines ECE as a place where human capital is formed and developed, with the intention of ensuring children become adults who are assets, rather than burdens to or dependents on, the state (Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021). This is particularly the case for children who

are considered 'disadvantaged' or 'at risk'. These children, considered as children who come from poor families and/or families from ethnic minorities, are particularly targeted by the school readiness discourse as it is these children who have been evidenced as being more likely to fail at school and, as a consequence, are at greater 'risk of later dependency on the state' (Vandenbroeck et al., 2013, p. 188). Rates of return on investment are therefore considered highest for 'at risk' children (Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021), although it should be noted, however, that the role of education and schooling in supporting children and young people to overcome disadvantage and inequality has long been a point of contestation (see for example, Freire, 1970; Illich, 1971).

The 'readying for school' relationship is grounded in discourses of developmental psychology and stage theory where children's learning and development is assumed to follow pre-determined and predictable stages (Dahlberg et al., 2007). This construction results in an 'empiricist' view of what it means to be 'ready' (Meisels, 1999), requiring children to demonstrate 'a checklist of expected or normal behaviours' (Dockett, 2014, p. 192). In doing so, it creates a binary distinction whereby children are assessed as being 'ready' or 'unready' for Year One (Kay, 2018). Readyng for school therefore promotes a normative construction (Dockett, 2014), with young children, irrespective of their backgrounds and experiences, 'measured against a fixed "yardstick" of "readiness"' (Bingham & Whitebread, 2012, p. 5). By taking the 'average' child as its benchmark (Vandenbroeck et al., 2013), the school readiness discourse fails to acknowledge the strengths, potential and diversity that children possess (Bennett, 2013; Bingham & Whitebread, 2012; Dockett, 2014). These checklists, made up of 'ready-made categories', Dahlberg et al. (2013) caution, replace and overlook 'the richness of children's lived lives and the inescapable complexity of concrete experiences' (p. 39). The school readiness discourse promotes a modernist image of the child, a 'poor', 'passive' and 'dependent' subject (Dahlberg et al., 2013) who is 'waiting in 'the ante-chamber of life where she or he can be prepared or readied' (Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021, p. 98).

In addition to the image of the child the school readiness discourse promotes, it also labels children who do not meet the requisite threshold as being 'deficient'

(Bingham & Whitebread, 2012, p. 5) and, as a result, in need of ‘remediation of some form’ (Dockett, 2014, p. 192). This was a finding reported by Nicholson and Hendry (2020) who identified how one school implemented alternative pedagogical approaches for children who did and did not attain a Good Level of Development (GLD), a single performance measure indicating whether or not children have achieved an ‘expected’ level of learning and development by the end of Reception (Standards and Testing Agency, 2018b). For children who did not attain the GLD, and therefore considered ‘unready’ for a traditional Year One approach and environment, an alternative pedagogical approach – positioned by the school as an intervention that was intended to ‘close the gap’ – based on continuing EYFS pedagogical principles, was attempted (Nicholson & Hendry, 2020, p. 194). Conversely, ‘a formalised learning approach’ was implemented for children who attained the GLD (Nicholson & Hendry, 2020, p. 189). A key finding reported by Nicholson and Hendry (2020) was how ‘at risk’ or ‘disadvantaged’ children were ‘overwhelmingly’ and ‘disproportionately’ placed within the ‘EYFS continuation’ class, with children in this group more likely to be younger, have a Special Educational Need, speak English as an additional language and/or be in receipt of pupil premium funding, which is awarded to schools to support children from low socio-economic backgrounds (Nicholson & Hendry, 2020, p. 192). The stratification of children reported by Nicholson and Hendry (2020) is consistent with government statistics which affirm that certain groups of children, particularly those born in the summer months, those with a Special Educational Need, and those eligible for Free School Meals, are on average less likely than their more advantaged peers to attain a GLD each year (Department for Education, 2019a). This pattern of attainment prompted Kay (2018) to argue that the GLD is in itself ‘an act of marginalisation’ that fails to take into account the ‘developmental complexities and variations of young children’ (p. 47). By promoting normative ‘truths’ about children, how they learn and what level of development they should be at by the end of Reception, school readiness, and the indicators developed to measure it, privilege certain children and families ahead of others (Osgood, 2016; Vandembroeck et al., 2013). In doing so, a paradox emerges where the children and families that the school readiness discourse claims to include are in fact marginalised and excluded.



The status of readying for school as the mainstream discourse through which ECE and CSE are aligned in England has been consistently reinforced through the introduction of an array of human or policy technologies – the apparatus through which the neoliberal state can ‘steer at a distance’ the work of teachers and children (Ball, 2021b, p. 214), relating to, for instance, nationally prescribed curricula, standardised assessments, inspection regimes and accountability agendas – each applied with the intention of governing and controlling ECE towards greater conformity to the demands of CSE (Moss, 2012, 2013). Summarising the direction of ECE policy in England over the last two decades, Roberts-Holmes and Moss (2021) note how:

the English state has created a “delivery chain” of standards (Ball, 2012) for children from birth to 6-years-old, and accompanying performance measures, a national system of performance management that strongly governs early years education and care. It prepares and readies the young child for the test-based culture of compulsory schooling, with its “high-stakes” SATs at age 7 and 11... [it is] a constant regime of standards and measurement, by which the neoliberal-infused state has sought to manage, from a distance and in great detail, both children and the practitioners who work with them. (p. 124)

The impact that these technologies have had on teaching and learning is profound, with the contents and methods of CSE pervading ECE (Ang, 2014; Neaum, 2016), a process identified as ‘schoolification’ (OECD, 2006). To frame this using components of Bernstein’s (2000) theory on educational knowledge, which this research does throughout, ECE is under pressure to move away from its competence-based model, where children are ‘active and creative in the construction of a valid world of meanings and practice’, to introduce performance-based practices that place emphasis upon a ‘specific output... the acquirer is expected to construct’ (pp. 43-44).

The application of policy technologies, which are understood by Rose (1999) as being ‘imbued with aspirations for the shaping of conduct in the hope of producing certain desired effects and averting certain undesired events’ (p. 52), have played a key role not only in establishing a ‘readying for school’ relationship between ECE

and CSE but also in maintaining its position as the dominant discourse and silencing alternatives (Moss, 2019). Identifying and exploring the extent of this hegemony was an important aspect of this research. Hence, one of the settings included in this study was a state-sector school required to deliver centrally devised curricula and administer national standardised assessments in Reception and Year One as well as be inspected by Ofsted, the non-ministerial department of the English government. However, another aspect of this research was to consider the potential to construct and explore alternative discourses to that of ‘readying for school’ (Moss, 2019). Therefore, an independent-sector setting – not required to deliver centrally devised curricula, administer national standardised assessments or be inspected by Ofsted – was also included in the research.

It is important to point out that the inclusion of these settings was by no means a self-fulfilling prophecy and carried no guarantee of the ways in which teaching and learning were enacted in Reception and Year One or the discourses that they were shaped by. Across the transition from Reception to Year One, some state-sector schools and teachers are active in challenging dominant discourses (e.g. Archer, 2019) and can and do construct alternatives to that of ‘readying’ (e.g. Fisher, 2020). Equally, schools working within the independent-sector subscribe to the dominant discourse, although it should be noted a lack of empirical evidence prohibits complete certainty of this. As Ball (2021a) argues, dominant discourses and neoliberal policies are ‘selectively taken up in diverse political contexts’ and insert themselves ‘differently into different local contexts’ (p. xv). However, the inclusion of a setting independent from central government and therefore able to make its own decisions in relation to curriculum, assessment and inspection increased the potentiality for alternative discourses to be constructed across the transition from Reception to Year One. This is a view shared by Preedy et al. (2019) who indicate that the independent-sector can play a vital role in the process of constructing and exploring alternative discourses in ECE. In quoting a speech delivered by Sir Christopher Ball at the 2019 Early Childhood Redefined event, Preedy (2019) states that ‘independent schools can use the freedom that they have been granted to reach out and lead the changes needed in early childhood education’ (p. 31).

## 1.2 Research objectives and questions

The objectives of this research were as follows:

- To understand and explore how pedagogy is enacted in Reception and Year One in schools in different sectors.
- To understand how the pedagogies enacted in Reception and Year One in different sector settings influence child and parent experiences and perceptions of the transition between these year groups.

As a way of ‘operationalising’ (White, 2017) these objectives, the thesis aimed to answer three specific research questions:

- 1) How do a state-sector primary school and an independent-sector primary school organise teaching and learning in Reception and Year One?
- 2) What factors influence and shape teaching and learning in Reception and Year One in these different settings?
- 3) How do children and parents experience and perceive the pedagogies enacted in Reception and Year One and, the transition between them?

## 1.3 Researcher standpoint

This doctoral research took place in the early stages of my professional career in education and as an educational researcher. Nevertheless, the motivation behind the research was the result of a long-standing interest in children’s formative educational experiences, developed from over a decade of working with young children in a range of capacities including education, playwork and sport in addition to studying Education (BA Hons) at undergraduate level. The latter provided many practical experiences in, and an in-depth understanding of, both early childhood and primary education. From this developed an interest in the intersection of these phases of education, their respective pedagogical traditions and how these impact children’s ability to negotiate the transition between them.

When afforded the opportunity to design my own research project in the final year of undergraduate study, I focussed on the transition from Reception to Year One and, in particular, the potential for play-based pedagogy to ‘bridge’ pedagogical discontinuity between these year groups. This piece of research was published in Bishop Grosseteste University’s ‘in-house’ journal (Nicholson, 2017) and later formed the basis for a peer-reviewed journal article (Nicholson, 2018). The findings generated, although small scale, identified significant pedagogical discontinuity between Reception and Year One (Nicholson, 2018). Despite the teachers in these year groups expressing that they believed play-based pedagogy should be extended into Year One to bridge pedagogical discontinuity, top-down pressure, particularly from the National Curriculum, meant that the Reception teacher felt pressure to adjust her approach prematurely so that it aligned with the expectations of Year One (Nicholson, 2018). These pressures ultimately meant that play-based pedagogy moved from a proximal to a peripheral position in favour of ensuring children were prepared for the demands of Year One (Nicholson, 2018). This study further strengthened my interest in the area of pedagogy and transition to CSE. It also ignited a passion for research and for respecting and following its conventions and procedures. It therefore provided the launchpad – with the unwavering support of my tutors, to whom I owe a great deal – for researching pedagogy across the transition from Reception to Year One at doctoral level.

In addition to the factors that motivated this research, it is also important to clarify the decision to include a case from the independent sector as well as the state-sector. Despite only accounting for a small proportion (7%) of the pupil population in England (Independent Schools Council, 2020), the influence of independent schools is extensive and privately educated people disproportionately occupy – and have done over a significant period of time (White, 2015) – high-status professional occupations, including top political and cultural positions (Henderson et al., 2020). This perpetuation, it is argued, positions independent schools as anti-democratic institutions (Boyask, 2015) that assist the richest in society to maintain major positions of power (White, 2015). For this reason, independent schools are a controversial and contested policy in England (White, 2015).

Mindful of these debates, it is necessary to clarify my position in the context of this research. As a state-school educated individual who attended a non-selective comprehensive secondary school, I do not have any affiliation to the independent-sector. Politically, I am sceptical of the role of independent schools and agree that they can be anti-democratic institutions that serve to perpetuate inequalities in society. However, I also recognise that the independent sector is a broad church and that some independent schools are committed to democratic aims (Boyask, 2015) and are far removed from the elitist institutions that often stereotype the sector (Mawston, 2019; Robinson, 2019). For example, some schools that are classed as independent, despite not charging tuition fees, have been established in response to the increasing pressures contained within the state education system (see for example, Staufenberg, 2021). At a time where the regime and political ideology of neoliberalism was driving educational policymaking and reform for children aged 0-6 (Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021), often against the beliefs and values of teachers (e.g. Early Excellence, 2017), and the state-sector was described as a 'system in disarray' (Ball, 2018), the independent-sector offered an opportunity to consider alternative discourses (e.g. Benn, 2020) which could contribute to challenging those dominant in public education (Preedy et al., 2019). The inclusion of a case in the independent sector was thus borne out of a desire to investigate, consider and compare the pedagogies enacted in Reception and Year One in settings where neoliberal policies aimed at reducing ECE and the first few years of CSE to that of preparation are and are not enforced, rather than a desire to compare the effectiveness, quality and outcomes of schools in the state and independent sector.

## 1.4 Terminology

At the outset, it is important to clarify and define some of the key concepts explored throughout the thesis. In particular, the terminology associated with the transition from ECE to CSE and school readiness will be clarified and the study's interpretation of pedagogy will be articulated.

### 1.4.1 Transition from Reception to Year One

Internationally, the transition from ECE to CSE is most commonly referred to as the 'transition to school' (e.g. Ballam et al., 2017; Perry et al., 2014). Yet, in the

context of England, the term ‘transition to school’ is a source of confusion because Reception – the final year of ECE and the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) – is located within the primary school. Although not compulsory, the vast majority of children in England, 633,499 for the 2019/20 academic year (UK Government, 2020b), start their school career in Reception which commences in the September following a child’s fourth birthday. Hence, when the majority of children make the transition from ECE to CSE in England, they have already been in primary school for one full academic year. For the purpose of this thesis, the term ‘transition to school’ will be avoided and terms such as ‘transition from Early Childhood Education (ECE) to Compulsory School Education (CSE)’ and ‘transition from Reception to Year One’ will instead be applied and used interchangeably throughout.

#### 1.4.2 School readiness

Moreover, the organisation of primary schools in England also adds confusion to the concept of ‘school readiness’, a term that is often associated and used interchangeably with the transition from ECE to CSE (Dockett et al., 2014). For example, researchers in England have suggested that there is uncertainty regarding the age to which the term ‘school readiness’ applies, with it being used to refer to both starting primary school in Reception and starting compulsory school in Year One (Bingham & Whitebread, 2012; Kay, 2018). In this research, the terms ‘school readiness’, ‘readiness for school’ and ‘readying for school’ are all used in the context of children’s transition to Year One, the first year of compulsory school.

#### 1.4.3 Pedagogy

Researching and understanding pedagogy in Reception and Year One is a central aspect of this research. Although it is a term that is widely used and its meaning assumed to be self-evident (Adams, 2011; Murphy, 2008), pedagogy is interpreted with considerable variation (Alexander, 2009a). In this research, pedagogy is conceived broadly and, influenced by the work of Alexander (2001, 2009a), defined as the *performance* of teaching together with its attendant *discourse*. The *performance* encompasses all of the educative interactions between teachers,

children and parents and takes into consideration how the environment shapes teaching and learning (Pascal et al., 2019). It involves a number of different ‘versions of teaching’, such as didactic interactions, modelling, exploration, negotiation, scaffolding and evaluation (Alexander, 2008b, p. 78; Stephen, 2010), that, in turn, ‘provide opportunities for the acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions’ (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002, p. 28). The attendant *discourse*, in recognising that the *performance* of teaching is not innocent (Bruner, 1996), attempts to understand the theories, beliefs and policies that shape it (Alexander, 2001). The understanding of pedagogy informing this research and how it differs from terms such as teaching and curriculum will be explored in more detail in the next chapter (section 2.3.1).

## 1.5 Structure of the thesis

This thesis comprises eight chapters. This introduction has provided an overview, taking into consideration the research context and questions as well as researcher standpoint and terminology.

Chapter Two presents a review of the literature informing this research, exploring the transition from Reception to Year One, the differences in pedagogy in these year groups and the differences between state and independent schools in relation to curriculum, assessment and inspection. It also identifies how a conceptual framework based on Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) (Engeström, 2015) can facilitate an understanding of pedagogy, both *performance* and *discourse* (Alexander, 2009a), in Reception and Year One in two different settings.

Chapter Three describes the methodological choices taken to answer the research questions. It provides justification of the research design, taking into consideration the research paradigm, research strategy, sampling strategy, pilot study and ethical considerations. It also outlines the implementation of the research, addressing matters such as data collection, data analysis and trustworthiness and authenticity.

Chapter Four presents a short preface that outlines the structure of the three proceeding chapters in the thesis which focus on presenting and discussing the research findings.

Chapter Five and Six present the findings from the within-case analyses, focussing on the state-sector case and independent-sector case respectively.

The penultimate Chapter (Seven) presents a within-case discussion of each case followed by a cross-case discussion that explores some of the similarities and differences between the two cases.

Chapter Eight concludes the thesis by revisiting the research questions, taking into consideration the study's implications, contributions to existing research and limitations. Future directions and possibilities for research are also discussed.



## Chapter 2 Literature review

### 2.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a narrative review of the literature, critically describing and appraising existing research relating to the transition from Early Childhood Education (ECE) to Compulsory School Education (CSE), pedagogy in Reception and Year One and curriculum, assessment and inspection requirements placed on state and independent schools in England. The review does not present an exhaustive account of these areas but is instead selective, drawing on the research that is most relevant to the research objectives and questions. This approach aligns with Maxwell's (2006) contention that 'relevance', rather than 'comprehensiveness', is the 'most essential characteristic' of a literature review (p. 28). As a result, while the review presents and discusses research from a broad and diverse range of international contexts, it particularly draws on literature from England, Australia and New Zealand. Research carried out in these 'broadly similar' contexts (Peters, 2010, p. 1) has particular 'relevance' to the study's research questions (Maxwell, 2006).

Research carried out in England is particularly relevant to the present study. Studies from England reflect the similar, but not identical, socio-cultural-political conditions within which the current research is situated. As an example, common to both previous studies carried out in England and the current study is that they research the transition from Reception (ECE) to Year One (CSE) as a transition that takes place within the primary school, an arrangement that is different to a number of other international contexts (see section 1.4.1). This alignment – as well as others relating to curriculum, assessment and inspection policies – makes research carried out in England highly relevant to the present study. In addition to England, research carried out in Australia and New Zealand – recognised as two countries 'leading the way in work on transitions' (O'Kane, 2016, p. 13) – contributes extensively to the review. Antipodean research, particularly the work concerned with pedagogies of transition from ECE to CSE (Ballam et al., 2017), has important implications for the present study.

The chapter is divided into four sections. Section One (2.1 – 2.2) explores the transition from Reception to Year One and takes into consideration some of the key issues. Section Two (2.3 – 2.4) describes the concept of pedagogy and explores how Reception and Year One are typically informed by two different approaches to teaching and learning. Building on this, Section Three (2.5) presents a sociocultural conceptual framework that is capable of understanding the pedagogies enacted across the transition from Reception to Year One. The Fourth and final section (2.6 - 2.7) of this chapter considers the different types of relationship that can be constructed between Reception and Year One. It also establishes the differences between the state and independent education sectors in England and considers how these differences have the potential to shape pedagogy in Reception and Year One.

## Section One

### 2.1 Understanding the transition from Early Childhood Education to Compulsory School Education

Transition is a term that is used widely to refer to the process of change from one form to another. In education, it is typically associated with the significant, vertical shifts that children and young people experience as they progress through the education system. For example, an educational transition is defined by Fabian and Dunlop (2006) as ‘the process of change that children make from one place or phase of education to another over time’ (p. 3). In England, the expansion of and increased participation in educational provision both pre- and post-compulsory school education (ages 5-16) means that it is likely that children and young people will experience many educational transitions in their lives (Brooker, 2008). The focus of this research is on the transition from Early Childhood Education (ECE) to Compulsory School Education (CSE) which in England is represented by children moving from Reception (ages 4-5) to Year One (ages 5-6).

The transition from ECE to CSE is understood and defined in a range of ways and subsequently, ‘there is no universally accepted definition’ (Dockett et al., 2014, p. 3). It is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon (Margetts, 2002) that is interpreted and experienced with significant variation (Dockett et al., 2014). Yet, when taking a holistic perspective, it is possible to identify the transition to CSE as

encompassing three important characteristics: first, it is both an individual and social experience, involving a range of different stakeholders (Dockett & Perry, 2015); second, it is a long-term process as opposed to a single time-change event (Petriwskyj et al., 2005); and third, it is culturally and contextually bounded, ‘experienced in different ways by different people in different contexts’ (Dockett et al., 2014, p. 3). In order to understand the processes and interactions that take place during children’s transition from Reception to Year One it is necessary to explore these three concepts in more detail.

### 2.1.1 An individual and social experience

The transition from ECE to CSE is recognised as both an individual process and a social experience (Dockett & Perry, 2015; Dockett et al., 2014). It is a process where children and their families experience a change to ‘their role in their community’s structure’ (Rogoff, 2003, p. 150) and, as a result, their position in the ecological environment alters (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These understandings of transition, which emanate from sociocultural theory (Rogoff, 2003) and ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) respectively, indicate that individuals are not isolated but instead share their experiences with families, educators and the wider community (Brooker, 2008; Dockett & Perry, 2015). As children and their families engage in new educational settings, they assimilate, adopt and adapt a new status and position within society, leading to a change of identity and agency (Dockett et al., 2014). This ‘reorganisation of roles’ (Fthenakis, 1998, p. 12) repositions the way that children, families and educators participate in educational (Stephenson & Parsons, 2007) and community structures (Einarsdóttir et al., 2008).

### 2.1.2 A process as opposed to a single time-change event

Another important aspect of the transition to CSE is that it is a long-term process, starting long before and extending well into Year One (Educational Transitions and Change Research Group, 2011; Fabian & Dunlop, 2006). Viewing transition as a long-term and more complex process, as opposed to a single-time change event, is a trend that emerged in the 1980s (Petriwskyj et al., 2005). It is a distinction that encourages all involved to move beyond thinking that the transition to CSE is

simply a 'single snapshot of adjustment' (Ramey & Ramey, 1999, p. 232) or a 'short period during which children start [compulsory] school' (Chun, 2003, p. 83). Vogler, Crivello and Woodhead (2008) do acknowledge that framing transition as a key event or a turning point that happens at a preordained time offers a 'generic definition' of transition (p. 1); however, they recognise that in practice transition is much more complex and nuanced. Indeed, an educational transition is conceptualised as a highly complex, multi-level and multi-directional process (Vogler et al., 2008) that, in some instances, is never complete and needs to be continually reworked (Ecclestone et al., 2005). This view of transition is supported by research that has identified that children can continue to experience adjustment difficulties long after starting CSE (Chun, 2003; Miller, 2015). This is particularly illustrated by Miller's (2015) research which reported how parents believed that their child, despite having attended CSE for a full academic year, had not fully adjusted and that their transition was still in progress, leading Miller (2015) to conclude that the process of transition can last 'far beyond the first few days of school' (p. 219).

### 2.1.3 Culturally and contextually bounded

In addition to being understood as an individual and social experience that occurs over an extended period of time, the transition to CSE is also a cultural and contextual phenomenon (Doucet & Tudge, 2007; Tudge et al., 2012). When undergoing transition, children and their families move from the culture of ECE, with its associated values, traditions and beliefs, and enter the culture of CSE with its own, and often quite different, values, traditions and beliefs (Fabian & Dunlop, 2002). Adding to this, children and their families bring their own culture (Brooker, 2002) and the interaction of these 'three worlds' (Fluckiger, 2010), Reception, Year One and home, influences how the transition to CSE is experienced (Tudge et al., 2012). The characteristics of the setting (e.g. location and resources) and the characteristics of the individuals (e.g. race, ethnicity, social class and gender) that work in and attend the setting are identified as playing an important role in 'shaping how the transition to [compulsory] school is perceived, how children are prepared for it, and how easily the transition is made.' (Doucet & Tudge, 2007 p. 307).

The cultural nature of the transition to CSE is reflected in variance across international, national and local contexts, particularly relating to starting ages and the systems in place to support transition. In some countries, for example Estonia and Finland, children start CSE at age seven whereas in others, such as England, New Zealand and the Netherlands, CSE commences at age five (OECD, 2018). In addition, different cultural contexts support the transition to CSE in a number of different ways (OECD, 2006). For instance, education ministries in Denmark, Finland and Sweden have established a year-long ‘preschool class’ for children aged 6-7 that is designed to act as a bridge between preschool and school (Ackesjö, 2017; Garpelin, 2014). This distinct educational phase synthesises the different pedagogical traditions from preschool and school in order to establish continuity and facilitate a smooth transition (Ackesjö & Persson, 2016; Garpelin, 2014). In contrast, England does not officially designate an extended period of time to bridge the transition from Reception to Year One. The term ‘transition’, used in the context of moving between these phases of education, is absent from both the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum framework (Department for Education, 2017a) and the National Curriculum (Department for Education, 2014). Assisting children’s adjustment to Year One is only promoted in relation to the EYFS Profile, with Reception and Year One teachers advised to use this assessment to ‘inform a dialogue’ about children’s stage of learning and development (Department for Education, 2017a, p. 14). How schools and teachers support children and families through the transition, therefore, is predominantly facilitated at the level of school, leading to great variation in transition-based practices. The significant variance associated with the transition to CSE, both within and across cultures and contexts (Tudge et al., 2012), indicates that not all children and families will experience the transition in the same way (Dockett et al., 2014; Doucet & Tudge, 2007).

## 2.2 Navigating the transition from early childhood education to compulsory school Education

The transition from ECE to CSE is informed by a well-established body of research and has been studied from a range of different perspectives and in a range of different contexts (Ballam et al., 2017; Dunlop & Fabian, 2007; Perry et al., 2014). This section reviews some of the key themes developed from this research, taking into consideration the significance of the transition, how a successful transition is

understood and defined and finally, how children and families have experienced the transition to CSE.

### 2.2.1. The significance of the transition to compulsory school

While the passage to Year One may not be children's first educational transition, the importance of starting CSE is widely acknowledged. Fabian and Dunlop (2006), for example, discuss how starting compulsory school is seen by many as 'one of the most important transitions in a child's life and a major challenge of early childhood' (p. 1). In support of this view, Peters (2010) suggests that the transition to CSE, over and above other transitions, requires 'particular attention' as it has significant implications for children's learning and development (p. 1). Moving from Reception to Year One involves the negotiation of and adjustment to a number of changes and the process of adapting to these is seen as a 'developmental trigger' for young children, a time where developmental demands intensify and accelerate (Brooker, 2008; Fthenakis, 1998). How children and families are supported to negotiate the changes involved has the potential to shape subsequent achievement trajectories (Alexander & Entwisle, 1988), set the tone and direction for children's well-being and success throughout school (Margetts, 2007; Pianta and Kraft-Sayre, 1999) and influence how children navigate future transitions (Alexander, 2010; Dockett & Perry, 1999). As Tudge et al. (2012) note, 'children who make this transition smoothly may be on an easier road to success than those for whom the transition is more troublesome' (p. 117).

As a reflection of its significance, the transition to CSE is the focus of much interest internationally, including from policymakers, researchers and educators (Ballam et al., 2017; Dockett et al., 2014; Huser et al., 2016; OECD, 2017). Interest in the transition from policymakers in particular, according to Ballam et al. (2017) and Dockett et al. (2014), has developed from worldwide recognition of the importance of children's early educational experiences. There is growing awareness that effective ECE provision can positively impact children's immediate and later development (Sylva et al., 2004) and that this can provide nations with notable longstanding benefits (Heckman, 2011). Such findings have helped to position ECE as the ultimate long-term investment (Sayre et al., 2015), engendering many governments internationally to increase public spending on, and expand

participation in, ECE (OECD, 2006; Wood & Hedges, 2016). As a result, ECE, though it has been an important field for decades, has recently emerged as an ‘important educational player’ which has, in turn, made its relationship with CSE, and hence the transition between these phases, more ‘salient’ and ‘inescapable’ (Moss, 2013, pp. 3-4). The move to CSE is seen as a critical period that, if navigated successfully, enables nations to capitalise on and realise the impact of ECE provision (Kagan & Nueman, 1998; OECD, 2017). This has moved the transition away from a predominantly local focus and firmly embedded it on national and international education agendas (Dockett et al., 2014).

This trend can be observed in England where there has been a proliferation of studies carried out on the transition from ECE to CSE by policymakers and researchers, particularly since the inception of the Foundation Stage in 2000. While these studies will be referred to at various points throughout this research, along with literature from different international contexts, Appendix A provides a descriptive summary of the key research carried out on, or relating to, the transition from Reception to Year One in England since 2000.

### 2.2.2 What constitutes a successful transition?

While there is consensus concerning the importance of the transition to CSE, less agreement exists with regard to what constitutes a successful transition. As suggested, starting school is an individual and social process (Dockett & Perry, 2015) and determining success must therefore take into consideration the perspectives of all stakeholders involved (Peters, 2010). Yet, when it comes to children starting CSE, ‘different things are important for different groups of people’ (Dockett & Perry, 2004b, p. 218) and what is considered to be a successful transition is likely to differ between policymakers, educators, children and families across, but also within, different contexts and cultures (Ballam et al., 2017; Dockett & Perry, 2004b). According to Peters (2010) and Tudge et al. (2012), what is valued when children start CSE is shaped by a number of different theoretical perspectives and worldviews.

Some views, particularly at policy level in England, emphasise a ‘school readiness’ theoretical perspective where a successful transition to CSE is largely determined

by whether or not children have attained a normative checklist of requisite academic and developmental criteria (Bingham & Whitebread, 2012). This view has resulted in standardised measurements, such as the Good Level of Development, being positioned as a legitimate indicator of children's readiness to move to Year One (Kay, 2018; Wood 2019), and hence, their perceived ability to make the transition successfully (Nicholson & Hendry, 2020). The achievement of certain knowledge and skills – those indicative of the formation of human capital (Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 20212) – is seen as a way of enabling children to 'perform, conform and learn in the new setting' (Brooker, 2008, p. 6). Failure to demonstrate these can result in children being positioned as deficient and in need of interventions to improve their 'readiness' (Dockett, 2014). In this account, the responsibility of a successful transition to CSE is placed solely on the child and the Reception educators whose job it is to prepare them (Brooker, 2008; Dockett & Perry, 2002).

Yet, the narrow focus of a school readiness theoretical perspective is opposed by a number of researchers who believe that skills and attributes should be one aspect of a much broader evaluation of success (Broström, 2002; Dockett & Perry, 2007a; Yeboah, 2002). This suggests the need to take a more holistic perspective of what it means to complete a successful transition to CSE. It is argued that a holistic theoretical perspective is important because irrespective of how academically capable a child is, unhappiness in other areas of school can have consequences for learning and development (Broström, 2002; Peters, 2010). One such broader evaluation is provided by Yeboah (2002) who proposes that a successful transition to school occurs if the child adjusts emotionally, physically, psychologically and intellectually. This is supported by Broström (2002) who asserts that a successful transition to school requires children 'to feel suitable' in both academic and social domains. A successful transition, when taking a holistic view, is said to have taken place if the child feels a sense of belonging in their new setting (Broström, 2002; Bulkeley & Fabian, 2006; Dockett et al., 2014) and 'participates in the requirements and educational opportunities optimally' (Griebel & Niesel, 2009, p. 64).

Viewing a successful transition to compulsory school through a holistic theoretical perspective is widely supported, particularly by educators. A number of studies report that while teachers believe academic skills are an important attribute for



children starting CSE, they do not believe that they should be prioritised ahead of other areas of learning and development (Choy & Karuppiah, 2016; Dockett & Perry, 2004b; Lin et al., 2003; O’Kane & Hayes, 2006). Instead, these studies report that teachers value attributes and dispositions as well as skills in other areas – including independence, confidence, relationships, social interaction, language and communication and physical abilities – just as highly as academic skills. In some cases, a number of these attributes were considered far more important than cognitive skills. For example, in O’Kane and Hayes’ (2006) study, only 13% of infant educators agreed that pre-academic skills were important in order to experience a successful transition to primary school, whereas 91% stated that social skills, independence and self-help were important. While O’Kane and Hayes’ (2006) research demonstrates how teachers support a holistic perspective, developments since their research – including the intensification of the ‘school readiness’ agenda (Dockett & Perry, 2013) and the increased mobility of neoliberal education policies through the Global Education Reform Movement (Sahlberg, 2012, 2016), both of which emphasise academic skills, particularly relating to literacy and numeracy – have the potential to shape subsequent perspectives.

Understanding successful transition from a holistic perspective suggests that all areas of learning and development are valued by those involved in the transition. This indicates that there should be a balance between both *what* children learn and *how* children learn, a view that is summarised by Dockett and Perry (2001) who argue that ‘dispositions, values, feelings, attitudes, and understandings are equally as important as skills and knowledge.’ (p. 15). In line with Dockett and Perry (2001), and a number of other researchers (Broström, 2002; Griebel & Niesel, 2009), this study takes a holistic view, and suggests that a successful transition from Reception to Year One has occurred if a child feels a sense of belonging in their new setting and participates in the opportunities, requirements and challenges optimally.

### 2.2.3 Children and family experiences

The transition to CSE can represent a significant change for children, and evidence suggests that some are more successful than others at negotiating this change. A number of international empirical studies have attempted to understand children’s

experiences when transitioning to CSE. Some of these studies are summarised in Table 2.1 below which reports the percentage of children that were identified, by educators, parents or both, to have found the transition problematic. Not only were these studies conducted in a diverse range of contexts, at different periods of time and at different points in the transition, but they also employed different data collection methods and varied in terms of small (Chun, 2003; Choy & Karuppiah, 2016; Dockett & Perry, 1999; O’Kane & Hayes, 2006) and large (Carter et al. 2010; Hausken & Rathbun, 2002; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000) sample sizes, meaning that caution should be exercised when comparing these studies. These differences mean that it is not possible to discern any clear trends or patterns concerning the type of difficulties that children face and how long these last. However, a synthesis of these studies does indicate that transition difficulties, as perceived by adults, are common in a number of different contexts globally, albeit to varying degrees and interpretations.

*Table 2.1 A synthesis of international empirical studies reporting the percentage of children that experienced difficulties when transitioning to compulsory school*

<b>Authors (date order)</b>	<b>Country/ region</b>	<b>Percentage (%) of children reported as experiencing difficulties when transitioning to compulsory school</b>
Dockett & Perry (1999)	Australia	20%
Pianta & Kraft-Sayre (1999)	United States	33%
Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta (2000)	United States	16%
Hausken & Rathbun (2002)	United States	8 - 21%
Chun (2003)	Hong Kong	31.3 - 37.5%
O’Kane & Hayes (2006)	Ireland	< 20%
Carter et al. (2010)	United States	21.6%
Choy & Karuppiah (2016)	Singapore	30 - 40 %

Since the introduction of the EYFS in England, no research studies, at least to the best of the researcher’s knowledge, have quantified the prevalence of transition difficulties. Instead, research has tended to report qualitatively on the extent to which children have made a successful transfer to Year One (e.g. Howe, 2013; Sanders et al., 2005; White & Sharp, 2007).

As a way of understanding children's experience of the transition from Reception to Year One, Sanders et al. (2005) invited seventy children on two occasions (when in Reception and Year One respectively) to draw a picture of themselves in their current class and take part in a semi-structured conversational interview. White and Sharp (2007), who were part of the research team in Sanders et al. (2005), suggested that although children had to negotiate a range of changes relating to pedagogy and curriculum, which seemed to impact on their enjoyment of learning, the majority of children adapted well and experienced 'a relatively smooth transition' (p. 98). However, it is important to note that the research carried out by Sanders and colleagues (2005) only took into consideration children's initial experiences of the transition to Year One. As was reported in the research carried out by Chun (2003) and Miller (2015), a significant number of children still experience transition difficulties after one month of moving to CSE and by only understanding children's initial experiences of Year One, Sanders et al. (2005) were limited in their ability to infer if the transition was associated with any longer-term effects.

In her doctoral research, Howe (2013) was able to go beyond children's immediate passage into Year One and carry out 'intensive research' over a period of ten months, starting when children were in Reception in July and concluding in May the following year (p. 80). Her ethnographic case study followed eleven children as they made the transition in an outer London borough school. Similar to Sanders et al. (2005), Howe (2013) reported that the children were 'broadly positive' about their new way of working at the start of Year One, indicating that the transition was, for most, a positive experience. An exception to this, however, was the experience of one child (referred to as David) for whom the initial move to Year One was particularly problematic (Howe, 2013, p. 156). Howe (2013) describes how, as the initial excitement of moving to a new setting wore off and children spent more time in Year One, their experiences and views became more ambivalent, with some children demonstrating signs of dissatisfaction, resistance and even hostility towards Year One.

The research findings, both internationally and domestically in England, suggest that the majority of children do make a successful transition to CSE. Nevertheless, these studies consistently report, albeit to varying degrees, that some children find

the move problematic, and certain groups of children are disproportionately more at risk than others. For as Broström (2007) notes, the transition can be especially challenging for children with ‘less than optimal circumstances’ (p. 62). Groups of children that have been identified in particular as more likely to experience a negative transition to CSE are children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Hausken & Rathbun, 2002; Margetts, 2003, 2007); children that have a Special Educational Need (Hausken & Rathbun, 2002; Sanders et al., 2005); children that speak English as an additional language (Margetts, 2003, 2007; Sanders et al., 2005); and, children who are younger in their year group (Hausken & Rathbun, 2002; Howe, 2013; Sanders et al., 2005). Moreover, boys (Hausken & Rathbun, 2002; Margetts, 2003, 2007; Monkeviciencé et al., 2006), lower attaining children (Sanders et al., 2005) and children who are the first in their family to undergo the transition (Fabian, 2002; Miller, 2015) are also identified as being more at risk of experiencing a problematic move to CSE. These children can often find that their strengths and diverse socio-cultural tracks are in tension with the expectations of school, particularly in contexts where a neoliberal-infused ‘readying for school’ relationship between ECE and CSE is promoted. Such a relationship is based on a normative construction, premised on the ‘average child’ (Vandenbroeck et al., 2013, p. 189) fitting into a compulsory school system that is fixed and taken for granted (Bingham & Whitebread, 2012). This construction of the compulsory school can mean that children who do not meet the requisite threshold are labelled as in need of alternative types of provision (see for example, Nicholson & Hendry, 2020) or, as Dockett (2014) suggests, an intervention to move them ‘from unready to ready’ (p. 192). This threatens to marginalise children’s participation in education and compromises their right to have their ‘identity, agency and integrity’ respected in school (UNESCO, 2007, p. 28).

It is important to state that disadvantage is not destiny and that many children with ‘less than optimal circumstances’ (Broström, 2007, p. 62) can, and do, experience a successful start to CSE and achieve positive educational outcomes (Dockett & Perry, 2012). Therefore, while ‘personal characteristics and experiences, family background and societal trends’ can influence how individuals experience the transition to CSE (Margetts, 2003, p. 7), it is important to not assume that children who are considered disadvantaged or vulnerable are automatically going to find the

transition unsettling (Dockett, 2014; Perry, 2014). Dockett (2014) argues that when the transition to CSE is predicated on normative expectations – such as the narrow school readiness perspective that labels children as ‘ready’ or ‘unready’ based on a checklist of requisite academic and developmental criteria – specific groups can be stigmatised, have their incompetence assumed and labelled as unable to navigate the transition without support. Instead of ‘formalising’ and ‘institutionalising’ support based on the identity or background of individuals, Dockett (2014) argues that it is important to see transitions as relative and individual and as times of opportunity where appropriate support that acknowledges and builds on the strengths and diversity of individual experience can be offered and continually negotiated.

A focus on the relative and individual nature of transition indicates that children’s individual characteristics should not be the sole focus at times of transition. This is a key point made by Peters (2010) who argues that the role children’s individual characteristics play in their transition from ECE to CSE depends on the nature of the context they attend. She states that:

almost any child is at risk of making a poor or less successful transition if their individual characteristics are incompatible with the features of the environment they encounter. (Peters, 2010, p. 2)

This is a crucial distinction and one that shifts the emphasis away from the child and considers the type of provision provided as being just as, if not more so, important to facilitating a successful transition to CSE. This conceptual shift considers that the experience of difficulties in the transition are attributable, not to the child, but to inappropriate provision (Bingham & Whitebread, 2012). With this in mind, it is important to consider how ECE and CSE support children’s transition. One way to achieve this is by striking an appropriate balance between continuity and change.

#### 2.2.4 Continuity and change

In the context of the transition to CSE, continuity is understood as ‘experiences and learning that build on what has gone before’ (Dockett & Einarsdóttir, 2017, p. 133).

It is concerned not only with academic learning but also with a range of other areas such as relationships, curriculum, resources and support (Ballam et al., 2017; Margetts, 2002). Establishing continuity is often discussed in terms of a metaphorical ‘bridge’ that connects ECE and CSE (Educational Transitions and Change Research Group, 2011; Huser et al., 2016). This metaphor has been particularly applied to describe the role of the ‘preschool class’ that, as suggested earlier in this chapter, a number of Nordic countries have established as a way of mediating preschool and compulsory school cultures (Ackesjö, 2017; Garpelin, 2014). Huser et al. (2016) suggest that a metaphorical bridge:

can promote connections, particularly between the familiar and unfamiliar; provide support as a passage is navigated and serve as a platform for guiding that passage. (p. 440)

Understanding the transition to CSE as a bridge is a notion that is associated with the liminal (van Genneep, 1960) or neutral phase (Bridges, 1986) of transition and is a space where the transitioning individual ‘wavers between two worlds’ (van Genneep, 1960, p. 18); namely, between the culture of ECE and the culture of CSE. The importance of promoting continuity and bridging children’s experiences between ‘what was, and what is to come’ (Ackesjö, 2014, p. 5) is widely recognised, particularly in terms of supporting successful transition.

Continuity of experience and learning is widely acknowledged as a crucial component of supporting a successful transition to CSE (Ahtola et al., 2011; Margetts, 2002; O’Kane, 2016). In their evaluation of the transition from Reception to Year One, Sanders et al. (2005) highlighted that ‘the best adaptation takes place where conditions are similar, communication is encouraged, and the process of change takes place gradually over time’ (p. 4). This is supported by Fisher (2010, 2020), who argues that effective transitions seamlessly build on good EYFS practice, and by Niesel and Griebel (2007), who view continuity as the leading mechanism to solve transitional problems. Moreover, instead of promoting continuity, some authors opt to emphasise the importance of avoiding excessive discontinuity. For example, Hirst and colleagues (2011) state that:

The greater the changes that need to be negotiated, the more difficult it can be for children and families to manage the increasing demands of the new environment and to make a successful transition in the early years of school. (p. 10)

An absence of bridging between these phases can mean that children are at risk of experiencing an abrupt transition to formal schooling. This has been particularly evidenced by research which has reported that discontinuity, and in particular pedagogical discontinuity, causes major transitional issues for children (Chan, 2012; Chun, 2003).

In addition to being identified as important for supporting successful transition, continuity is also recognised as having a positive impact on later academic and social achievement (Ahtola et al., 2010; OECD, 2017). In their study on the transition from preschool to elementary school in Finland, Ahtola et al. (2010) investigated the extent to which the implementation of seven transition practices aimed at establishing continuity (familiarisation with the school, teacher co-operation, joint events for parents, personal meetings with the teacher, discussions on the school entrants, the passing on of children's 'growth portfolio' and co-written curricula) predicted children's academic development in the first year of formal education. They reported that the number of transition practices that preschool and elementary school teachers implemented correlated with children's attainment of academic skills in Grade 1 (Ahtola et al., 2010). Where preschool and elementary school teachers implemented various transition practices, children developed academic skills more quickly in comparison to children and families who were exposed to fewer transition practices. Ahtola et al. (2010) reported that the transition practice that had the greatest influence on later academic achievement was where preschool teachers and elementary school teachers cooperated on the curriculum. The positive impact of mutually designed and prepared curricula on later academic achievement emphasises the importance of establishing connections between ECE and CSE (Ahtola et al., 2010).

The advantages of establishing continuity mean that it is often the focus of attention during times of transition. Commenting on this trend, Ackesjö (2014) suggests that this has led to an assumption where continuity is often 'considered as something

undeniably positive and always desirable’ (p. 4). Yet, there is growing recognition that children’s exposure to change and discontinuity is also an important aspect of the transition to CSE. This suggests that instead of being avoided and seen negatively, change and discontinuity should be embraced (Walsh et al., 2008) and balanced against the importance of continuity (Dockett & Einarsdóttir, 2017). Change and discontinuity can provide children with a variety of opportunities and challenges (Ackesjö, 2014) and a number of researchers draw attention to how children pursue change in order to stimulate new experiences (Dockett & Perry, 2012; Peters, 2004; Walsh et al., 2008). From their research with children in Northern Ireland, Walsh and colleagues (2008) concluded that children are ‘more robust than we think’ and enjoy the challenge that is associated with uncertainty and change (p. 64). Children look forward to new experiences in Year One, such as completing ‘harder work’ or being able to go on the playground with the ‘bigger’ children, as they provide proof of their passage from Reception (Fisher, 2009; Wilder & Lillvist, 2018). Hence, change and discontinuity can serve as ‘border markings’ that confirm to children that they are now in compulsory school and are becoming more ‘grown up’ (Ackesjö, 2014; Dockett & Perry 2012).

The importance of children experiencing new opportunities and challenges during the transition to CSE suggests that greater consideration should be given to the role of change. This should not be seen as a way of replacing one dominant discourse with another but instead should be a negotiation that recognises the value of both continuity and change. This perspective is reinforced by Peters (2000, 2004, 2010) who argues that while maintaining complete continuity is not beneficial, it is important to avoid discontinuity that goes beyond each child’s ability to negotiate. Drawing on the work of Vygotsky (1978), and in particular his notion of the Zone of Proximal Development, Peters (2004) suggests that instead of establishing greater continuity, a focus on supporting and scaffolding children to manage change is sometimes more appropriate:

It appears that children do not require homogeneity, or protection from the potentially difficult situations that they encounter in the process of becoming [compulsory] school pupils. However, when the challenges are too great for them to negotiate alone, a focus on support that is empowering is important. (p. 437)



As a way of emphasising the delicate balance, a number of researchers situate the interplay between continuity and change in the transition to CSE along a continuum (Hirst et al., 2011; Podmore et al., 2001). A continuum avoids the dominance of one over the other and recognises the transition as a dynamic process of both continuity and change (Educational Transitions and Change Research Group, 2011, p. 1).

While the importance of negotiating both continuity and change at times of transition is supported theoretically, it is a balance that is much more difficult to achieve in practice. Even in the case of the Nordic ‘preschool class’, which was designed to bridge the gap between ECE and CSE, there is evidence that achieving a balance between continuity and change is complex (Sandberg et al., 2017). For example, in their investigation of children’s learning journeys in Sweden, Sandberg et al. (2017) reported that teachers in the ‘preschool class’ did not adequately synthesise the traditions of preschool and primary school and that the activities lacked an appropriate level of stimulation and challenge. This prompted Sandberg and colleagues (2017) to question whether the ‘preschool class’ was bridging children’s transition into primary school or whether it was holding some children in a state of limbo. In England, concerns about the balance between continuity and change have also been voiced. However, in contrast to the findings reported by Sandberg et al. (2017), these concerns are of a different nature and relate to a lack of continuity between Reception and Year One, particularly in terms of their respective pedagogical approaches.

## **Section Two**

### **2.3 Pedagogy**

#### **2.3.1 Understanding pedagogy**

In education, pedagogy is a term that is applied and understood with great variation (Anders, 2015; Murray, 2015). Though its meaning is often assumed to be self-evident (Murphy, 2008), pedagogy exists in a ‘contested and dynamic space’, understood, defined and experienced in a number of different ways (Murray, 2015,

p. 1719). This is particularly the case in England where Simon (1994) notoriously questioned *'Why no pedagogy in England?'*. In his discussion of the status of pedagogy in England, Simon (1994) noted that in contrast to other European countries where it has an 'honoured place' (p. 10), pedagogy 'has never taken root and flourished in Britain' (p. 14). Simon's (1994) assessment was not an indication that no teaching took place during this time but instead was a concern that 'pedagogic discourse was confused, anecdotal and eclectic rather than coherent, systematic and purposeful' (Alexander, 2001, p. 540). Perspectives on and engagement with pedagogy, in both early childhood and primary education, have tended to be limited (Stephen, 2010) and as a term it has often been confused and used interchangeably with other terms such as 'teaching' and 'curriculum' (Alexander, 2001, 2009a; Siraj-Blatchford, 2010).

#### 2.3.1.1 Pedagogy and teaching

While the term 'teaching' is strongly associated with the term 'pedagogy', there are important differences. A key distinction between these terms is provided by Alexander (2001, 2008b, 2009a) who suggests that teaching is an *act* whereas pedagogy is both an *act* and *discourse*. The *act* of teaching – referred to hereafter as the *performance* of teaching – according to Alexander (2009a), is the self-contained, observable actions referring to what teachers and children do in classrooms. Teaching is thus concerned with what teachers do but not why they do it, described by Alexander (2008b, p. 1) as action divested of its justifications, values, theories, evidence and relationship with the wider world. Pedagogy, on the other hand, is both *performance* and *discourse*, encompassing the 'bigger picture' of teaching, including both what teachers do as well as why they do it (Alexander, 2008b, p. 1). Alexander (2001) thus defines pedagogy as 'the *performance* of teaching together with the theories, beliefs, policies and controversies that inform and shape it' (p. 540). This definition offers a broad, complex and holistic view of pedagogy. Crucially, it recognises that pedagogy – far from being a 'mindless activity' (Alexander, 2009a, p. 928) or a 'disembodied technique' (Adams, 2011, p. 470) – is an amalgam of both practice and theory.

### 2.3.1.2 Pedagogy and curriculum

In addition to ‘teaching’, the term ‘curriculum’ is identified as being closely related to that of ‘pedagogy’. Pedagogy and curriculum have been identified as overlapping (Anders, 2015) and this has often resulted in the two terms being applied ‘synonymously’ and appearing as ‘indistinguishable’ from one another (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010, p. 149). Yet, in the same way that it is possible to identify subtle differences between pedagogy and teaching, it is also possible to distinguish between pedagogy and curriculum (Alexander, 2001; Siraj-Blatchford, 2010). The extent to which these differences can be discerned is, to a large extent, dependent on whether curriculum is understood in a broad (everything that a school does) or narrow (what is formally required to be taught) sense (Alexander, 2009a, p. 927). Where curriculum is broad, such as in the Anglo-American tradition, matters of curriculum are central and pedagogy is peripheral, ‘sometimes inferring little more than teaching method’ (Alexander, 2009a, p. 927). In contrast, when curriculum is narrow, as in the Central European tradition, it is recognised as a branch or subset of pedagogy (Alexander, 2001, 2009a).

Currently in England, curriculum is a term used broadly, identified as ‘sitting at the very heart of education’ (Spielman, 2017) and as comprising ‘all learning and other experiences that each school plans for its pupils’ (Department for Education, 2014, p. 5). However, Alexander (2001) notes that when curriculum is framed as ‘everything the school does’ it has the potential to reduce all educational interactions and experiences to ‘what is prescribed’. This, he argues, ‘encourages the narrow treatment of matters of teaching strategy and style’, resulting in a ‘tendency to downgrade pedagogy’ (Alexander, 2001, p. 551). In order to avoid this, Alexander (2004) argues for a focus on pedagogy rather than curriculum as the overarching term, making the case that:

The prominence of curriculum in English educational discourse has meant that we have tended to make pedagogy subsidiary to curriculum. My own preferred definition has it the other way round... Curriculum is just one of its [pedagogy’s] domains, albeit a central one. (p. 11)

Prioritising pedagogy ensures that attention is not just given to understanding curriculum, but all aspects of classroom practice, of which curriculum is an important part. Alexander (2001) therefore positions pedagogy centre-stage as the overarching concept around which other domains – space, pupil organisation, time, routine, rule, ritual, task, activity, interaction, judgement and curriculum – are framed (Alexander, 2001, p. 551). This understanding is closely related to Bernstein’s (1990) notion of pedagogic discourse. Bernstein (1990) notes that:

pedagogic discourse is a principle for appropriating other discourses and bringing them into a special relationship with each other... it relocates, refocuses and relates other discourses to constitute its own order and orderings. (p. 175)

In line with the preferences stated by Alexander (2001), this study takes a broad view of pedagogy – as encompassing more than, but also including within its scope, ‘teaching’ and ‘curriculum’ – and defines it as the *performance* of teaching together with its attendant *discourse*.

### 2.3.2 Pedagogy and the transition from Reception to Year One

The transition to CSE provides an opportune context for investigating pedagogy (Ballam et al., 2017). It is a time and space where different contexts, systems, and traditions intersect (Dockett & Einarsdóttir, 2017) and, as a result, different approaches to pedagogy converge, ‘both physically and conceptually’ (Ballam et al., 2017; Dockett et al., 2017a, p. 188). Reception and Year One are described as two different activity systems (Karila & Rantavuori 2014), informed by different visions, cultures and expectations (Huser et al., 2016) and operating with different priorities and practices (Dahlberg et al., 2007). In moving from the activity system of Reception to the activity system of Year One, children will experience and be exposed to two separate, and often quite different, pedagogical approaches (Fisher, 2020; Sanders et al., 2005). Generating an in-depth understanding of these pedagogies is essential to understanding the transition between them (Sandberg et al., 2017). In addition to these two pedagogies, a third pedagogy is said to exist, identified as the pedagogy *of* the transition itself. This pedagogy, which operates within the boundary spaces and borderlands between Reception and Year One, has

recently emerged as an important area of focus for transition to CSE researchers (Ballam et al., 2017; Davies, 2018; Dockett et al., 2017a, 2017b).

#### 2.3.2.1 Two decades of tension

The way in which pedagogies are enacted in Reception, Year One and in the liminal space between these year groups is critical in supporting children and families to make a positive transition to compulsory school (Dockett et al., 2017a). Yet, research carried out on the transition from Reception to Year One in England, particularly over the last two decades since the introduction of the Foundation Stage (now EYFS) in 2000, has consistently identified that significant and excessive pedagogical differences exist between these two year groups (Ellis, 2002a; Early Excellence, 2017; Fisher, 2009; Huf, 2013; Nicholson, 2018; Ofsted, 2004; Roberts-Holmes, 2012; Sanders et al., 2005). This has been recognised by two national reviews carried out in England, focussing on Early Childhood (Pascal et al., 2019) and primary education (Alexander, 2010) respectively. First, the Cambridge Primary Review, led by Alexander, identified that the ‘vital point of transition’ between Reception and Year One is ‘increasingly fraught’ due to these year groups embracing contrasting pedagogical views, traditions and practices (2009b, p. 23). Second, Pascal et al. (2019) – who on behalf of a coalition of early years organisations, reviewed the research evidence concerned with early learning, pedagogy and curriculum content – came to a similar conclusion. They stated that: ‘A fundamental problem in England is the discontinuity between the EYFS and the Key Stage 1 curriculum and its associated pedagogy’ (Pascal et al., 2019, p. 41). While it is not possible to discuss all of the studies that have identified concerns about the pedagogical discontinuity between Reception and Year One (more detail of these studies can be found in appendix A), it is necessary to consider a selection of the findings in more detail.

In two studies carried out in quick succession, Ofsted (2003, 2004) reported that the transition from Reception to Year One was ‘abrupt’ and that insufficient consideration was being given to the relationship between the areas of learning in the Foundation Stage and the subjects included in the National Curriculum for Year One. Their first study, which compared and contrasted the educational experiences

of six-year-olds in England, Denmark and Finland, found that teachers in England were troubled by the 'ideological dissonance' and lack of compatibility between the EYFS and National Curriculum (Ofsted, 2003, p. 38). Prompted by these findings, Ofsted (2004) investigated the transition in England in more depth and reported that while schools and teachers mostly supported children's transition effectively, timetabling constraints and pressure to ensure pupils made good progress towards the standards expected in the national tests at the end of Key Stage One caused an abrupt transition to CSE. In particular, inspectors commented on a sense of 'provision which swung heavily and suddenly, for all pupils at the beginning of Year 1, towards literacy and mathematics' (Ofsted, 2004, p. 8). Similar findings were also reported by Sanders and colleagues (2005) who found that teachers in both Reception and Year One felt 'torn' and 'pulled in different directions' when attempting to bridge the differences between these year groups (p. 128). A particular challenge was the move from a play-based pedagogy to a more formal and structured approach in Year One which was identified as posing challenges for both children and schools (Sanders et al., 2005).

Similar findings were registered by Fisher (2009) who investigated the transition in one English Local Authority. Fisher (2009) found that Reception and Year One teachers believed that the pedagogical differences between these year groups were 'too pronounced' and that they felt somewhat 'uncomfortable' about current practices in Year One, which reduced opportunities to learn through play and prioritised the importance of the literacy strategy. Subsequent research has shown that the concerns expressed by classroom teachers are shared by headteachers. For instance, in his research with nursery and primary school leaders, Roberts-Holmes (2012) noted how pedagogical tension exists between the child-led, play-based EYFS and the knowledge-based National Curriculum. In accordance with the teachers in Sanders and colleagues' (2005) study, leaders described feeling 'pulled in different directions by the EYFS and the subject-based National Curriculum' (Roberts-Holmes, 2012, p. 38).

In addition to studies on the transition, research focussed specifically on practice and provision in Reception has also highlighted significant pedagogical differences with Year One (Early Excellence, 2017; Ellis, 2002a; Ofsted, 2017). For example,

Ofsted (2017) investigated the Reception Year in a sample ( $n = 41$ ) of ‘good’ and ‘outstanding’ primary schools. From school visits and discussions with leaders and teachers, Ofsted (2017) concluded that teachers struggle to facilitate a smooth transition to Year One because the Early Learning Goals are not aligned with the increased expectations of the National Curriculum. In the same year, Early Excellence (2017) carried out a more comprehensive review of current practice and provision in the Reception Year. Their review, entitled *The Hundred Review*, administered an online survey ( $n = 4250$ ), conducted interviews with headteachers/senior leaders and Reception teachers, and visited forty-four schools with Reception classes (Early Excellence, 2017). When asked to consider the relationship between Reception and Year One, the vast majority (79%) of participants stated that the requirements of the National Curriculum did not build on the outcomes of the EYFS. Specifically, participants identified that the ‘shift from an emphasis on process as well as content in YR to a greater emphasis on the latter in Y1’ contributed to significant differences in approaches to pedagogy between Reception and Year One (Early Excellence, 2017, p. 31).

The research concerned with the transition from Reception to Year One in England over the last two decades suggests that there are significant differences in pedagogy between these year groups and that the nature and extent of these differences has the potential to problematise children’s transition to CSE (e.g. Sanders et al., 2005) and impact upon their enjoyment of learning (e.g. White & Sharp, 2007). To fully understand the pedagogical differences between Reception and Year One and the implications for the transition, it is necessary to explore pedagogy (*performance* and *discourse*) in more depth in these year groups.

## 2.4 Pedagogy in Reception and Year One

### 2.4.1 The *performance* of teaching

Understanding and comparing the *performance* of teaching in Reception and Year One is a complex task and points towards the need for a framework that can make sense of teaching and learning in two different contexts and cultures. One such framework was developed by Alexander (2001) as part of his attempts to compare pedagogy in primary schools across five different countries. The ‘action-based

framework for the analysis of teaching’, shown below in Figure 2.1, is positioned as a model that is capable of ‘researching teaching in any context and by any means’ (Alexander, 2009a, p. 930). In designing the framework, Alexander (2001) was motivated by ‘keeping it simple’ and staying ‘as close as possible to everyday understanding and action’ (p. 323). The framework thus reduces teaching to its ‘barest essentials’ and is built on the premise of two ‘simple and irreducible propositions’ (Alexander, 2008b, p. 77):

- teaching, in any setting, is the act of using method  $x$  to enable pupils to learn  $y$ .
- teaching has a structure and form; it is situated in, and governed by, space, time and patterns of pupil organisation; and it is undertaken for a purpose.

The framework, which is intended to be ‘descriptive rather than prescriptive’ (Alexander, 2001, p. 323) and ‘conceptual rather than technical’ (Alexander, 2009a, p. 931), provides a way of understanding the key elements of teaching that hold true in most, if not all, settings (Alexander, 2009a).

<b>Frame</b>	<b>Form</b>	<b>Act</b>
Space		Task
Pupil organisation		Activity
Time	Lesson	
Curriculum		Interaction
Routine, rule and ritual		Judgement

*Figure 2.1* An action-based framework for the analysis of teaching (Alexander, 2001, p. 325)

The elements of the framework are grouped under the category headings of *frame*, *form* and *act* (Alexander, 2001) and, when discussing how each of these categories and their constituting elements relate to one another, Alexander (2001) states that:

The core *acts* of teaching (task, activity, interaction and judgement) are *framed* by classroom organisation (space), pupil organisation, time and curriculum and by classroom routines, rules and rituals. They are given *form* in the lesson or teaching session. (p. 325)



From this description, it is possible to see that each of the categories and the elements within them exist in a symbiotic relationship, meaning that a change in one affects the practices of the others.

Alexander (2008b, 2009a) positions the categories *frame*, *form* and *act* as broad analytical units and their constituting elements as analytical sub-units. The discrimination between different categories and elements is helpful as it provides a focus for making comparisons between Reception and Year One and, as will be described later on in this study, state- and independent-sector settings. However, while Alexander's framework is a useful way of understanding the key categories and constituting elements of teaching that are 'stable across time, place and culture' (Alexander, 2010, p. 301), it is important to further develop his framework in order to generate more intricate descriptions of the micro classroom interactions that exist within these categories and elements. For this, components of Bernstein's (1971, 1975, 2000) theory on educational knowledge are particularly helpful.

Through his work, Bernstein developed a language that enables researchers to investigate, describe and take measures of pedagogical modality (Daniels, 2001). In particular, Bernstein's (1971) concepts of *classification* and *framing* provide a way of understanding in more detail the underlying structure of the *frame*, *form* and *act* of teaching (Alexander 2001) in Reception and Year One. Classification refers 'to the degree of boundary maintenance' between different categories (Bernstein, 1971, p. 49) and, using the terms 'strong' or 'weak', can be applied to describe the nature of a number of different relationships in education, such as those: between teachers and children, between groups of children and between curriculum areas and subjects (Brooker, 2002). Where classification is strong, categories are 'well insulated' from one another and boundaries are distinct; where classification is weak, there is less insulation between categories and boundaries are ambiguous (Bernstein, 1971, p. 49). While classification establishes the boundaries between categories, framing refers to the form in which behaviour and communication between and within categories are 'transmitted and received' (Bernstein, 1971, p. 50). Framing thus determines who has control over principles such as selection, organisation, sequencing, pacing and criteria (Bernstein, 2000, pp. 12-13). If

framing is strong, the locus of control rests explicitly with the ‘transmitter’ (teacher), whereas if framing is weak, the locus of control rests more evenly with the ‘acquirer’ (child) (Bernstein, 2000, p. 13).

Although Bernstein’s work was more broadly concerned with how the transmission of educational knowledge reflects principles of power and social control, concerns which lie beyond the scope of this research, his formulation of the concepts *classification* and *framing*, and the extent to which they are strong or weak, are helpful as they distinguish between different modalities of educational practice (Brooker, 2002; Daniels, 2004; Siraj-Blatchford, 2008). The strength of classification and strength of framing can, and often do, vary independently of each other (Bernstein, 1971). However, when aligned, these concepts evoke distinctive pedagogical modalities. For example, Daniels (2004, pp. 128-129) indicates that strong classification and strong framing leads to pedagogical practice that: is organised around discrete school subjects; places an emphasis on the acquisition of specialised knowledge and skills; and, promotes an asymmetrical and hierarchical relationship where the teacher is dominant and has a high level of control over the intended learning. This approach is described by Bernstein (2000) as a performance model of education where all teaching and learning is explicit, resulting in what he calls a ‘visible pedagogy’. Conversely, where classification and framing are both weak, a more symmetrical relationship between teachers and children exists and children are seen as active participants in the classroom, encouraged to explore and discover (Daniels, 2004). In this modality, children are supported to work at their own pace and their personalised development is foregrounded (Brooker, 2000). Bernstein (2000) recognises this approach as a competence model of education and the implicit nature of categories such as space, time, evaluation and control lead to an ‘invisible pedagogy’.

In this sense, while Alexander’s (2001) framework enables us to understand the *what* of teaching, the concepts developed by Bernstein (1971) helps us to discern the *how* of teaching. The synthesis and application of these two concepts will be discussed in more detail in the next section of this chapter where the conceptual framework will be presented. It is important to clarify at this point that while Bernstein (1975) offered and distinguished between two extremes, such as strong

or weak and visible or invisible, this does not necessarily promulgate the application of his theory in a binary way. In order to develop more nuanced descriptions of the *performance* of teaching in Reception and Year One, this study will take a relational approach to Bernstein's theory and consider whether different activities contain stronger or weaker classification and framing than others.

Bernstein's (1971, 1975, 2000) concepts will now be applied to describe the *frame*, *form* and *act* and of teaching and their constituting elements (Alexander, 2001) in Reception and Year One. Although organised separately, the interdependence of these elements means that there are considerable overlaps. Also, due to limitations on word count, the elements 'routine, rule and ritual', which relate to the 'evolution of the classroom microculture', and 'interaction', which concerns 'how the teacher presents, organises and sustains learning tasks and activities' (Alexander, 2001, p. 325), will not be discussed individually. However, it is hoped that the overlapping nature of the framework will mean that these elements are still taken into consideration.

#### 2.4.1.1 Frame

##### 2.4.1.1.1 Space

The element space refers to the way in which the classroom is 'disposed, organised and resourced' (Alexander, 2001, p. 324). Important considerations here relate to the scale and range of the setting and the movements permitted within it (Cleave et al., 1982).

#### **Reception**

Research carried out in Reception suggests that most providers have environments that contain an outdoor area, have considerable indoor space and boast a wide range of resources (Early Excellence, 2017; Sanders et al., 2005). Indeed, the EYFS curriculum framework outlines that providers must meet indoor space requirements and provide access to an outdoor learning area (Department for Education, 2017a, p. 30). The boundaries separating the different areas of the learning environment are often weakly classified, with spaces and resources serving multiple purposes. In particular, spaces are recognised as communal rather than individual and children

are permitted on a regular basis to ‘flow’ between different areas and engage with resources of their choice (Fabian, 2005; Fisher, 2020). For instance, in a study on outdoor learning across the transition, Waite et al. (2009) observed that children in Reception spent around a third of their time outside the classroom.

### ***Year One***

In comparison, space in Year One often contains stronger classification. The purpose of spaces in the classroom are more explicit and each child has their own place at a table (Fisher, 2020). Unlike Reception, Year One settings are not required to provide an outdoor learning environment (Department for Education, 2013), meaning that outdoor provision is often not provided (Fabian, 2005). For example, Sanders et al. (2005) found that only two out of the twelve schools included in their case study had access to outdoor provision in Year One. This results in a reduction of opportunities to learn outdoors, evidenced as being as low as 10% by Waite et al. (2009). According to Fabian (2005), Year One children’s access to the outdoors is often restricted to ‘playtime’ when children have a ‘break’ from learning.

#### ***2.4.1.1.2 Pupil organisation***

Pupil organisation is an element that considers whether teaching is carried out whole-class, in small groups or on an individual basis (Alexander, 2001). Often, decisions concerning how pupils are organised are tied to the nature of learning tasks and activities that pupils undertake (Blatchford et al., 2008).

### ***Reception***

According to Fisher (2020), children in Reception work most often in small groups, in pairs or alone and whole-class teaching is minimal. The organisation of pupils in this way reflects the structure and form of lessons in Reception which typically include a balance of framing (see *lesson* below). This approach to pupil organisation is supported by the presence of another adult and emphasis is placed on children accessing and exploring the learning environment independently (Fisher, 2020). When children work in groups, the formation is often flexible and children can work with different children depending on their preferences and/or differentiation (Fisher, 2020). The range of ways in which pupils are organised and

the absence of explicit boundaries defining how children are organised indicates weak classification (Bernstein, 1971).

### ***Year One***

In accordance with Reception, children in CSE are organised in a range of ways and can be ‘found in large groups, in a range of small groups and in pairs or triads’ (Blatchford et al., 2008, p. 14). However, the Cambridge Primary Review (CPR) found that pressures relating to curriculum and classroom context result in a ‘heavy emphasis on whole-class teaching... with little room for group work’ in primary schools in England (Blatchford et al., 2008, pp. 28-29). The CPR made the distinction that while children usually ‘sit in groups they rarely interact and work *as* groups’ (Alexander, 2010, p. 290). As the CPR reviewed the whole of primary education in England, this finding is not necessarily specific to Year One. However, from her work on in-service training with teachers, Fisher (2020) corroborates this by identifying that children in Year One ‘learn frequently as a whole class ... [towards] a common whole class learning objective’ (p. 30). This type of approach to pupil organisation coincides with the activities containing stronger framing in Year One (see *lesson* below). When children are organised in groups, whether that is to work *as* or to sit *in*, the arrangement tends to be relatively fixed (Fisher, 2020) and the boundaries between groups more explicit than in Reception.

#### ***2.4.1.1.3 Time***

The temporal element relates to how time is determined, controlled and negotiated within the setting (Alexander, 2001).

### ***Reception***

Reception tends to operate with a flexible and weakly classified timetable, where adults and children work towards a loosely defined structure, often in the form of a handful of ‘sessions’ or ‘blocks’ throughout the day (Cleave & Brown, 1991). Within these periods, children are afforded time to pursue activities at their own pace and interruptions to children’s learning are minimised (Fisher, 2020). For example, Fisher (2020) notes how Reception age children are often exempt from

whole-school organisational arrangements such as assemblies and playtimes. In this sense, time in Reception is elastic and does not necessarily punctuate the move to a new task or activity; instead, it is subject to the teacher's discretion and continually negotiated with children in the present tense (Bernstein, 2000). The weak classification of time in Reception works in conjunction with an integrated curriculum where 'contents stand in an open relationship to each other' (Bernstein, 1971, p. 49).

### *Year One*

In Year One, the organisation of time is typically more finite and non-negotiable. In accordance with older year groups in primary school, Year One follow a compartmentalised timetable where teachers and children change activities at specific points in the day (Fisher, 2020). According to Ellis (2002b), Year One requires children to 'work and then to stop work at specific times, rather than at times appropriate to the learning' (p. 117). Time allocation is thus pre-determined and strongly classified, and lessons are explicitly punctuated from one another. This approach corresponds with the implementation of a 'collective' curriculum in Year One where lessons and subjects are well insulated from one another (Bernstein, 1971).

#### *2.4.1.1.4 Curriculum*

The curriculum element refers to the knowledge and understanding that 'are most of worth to the individual and society' (Alexander, 2001, p. 324). Bernstein (1971) distinguished between two broad types of curriculum that sit at opposite ends of a continuum: a collection type, where contents stand in a closed relation to one another; and, an integrated type, where contents stand in an open relation to one another (p. 49). The continuum can be applied to explore and compare the statutory curriculum frameworks that inform Reception and Year One, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and the National Curriculum respectively.

## ***Reception***

The EYFS framework is predicated on four ‘overarching principles’: the unique child; positive relationships; enabling environments; and, children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates (Department for Education, 2017a, p. 6). Such ‘overarching principles’ can be seen to promote a postmodern construction of childhood and pedagogy (Dahlberg et al., 2007) and suggest that children take an ‘active role in the construction and acquisition of learning and understanding’ (Neaum, 2016, p. 244). As the child is positioned as taking an active role in the classroom, boundaries separating the contents of the curriculum are more implicit. The framework comprises seven important and interconnected areas of learning and development (Department for Education, 2017a). Three areas in particular – labelled as the ‘prime’ areas: communication and language; physical development; and, personal, social and emotional development – are identified as being crucial for developing children’s curiosity, enthusiasm and capacity to learn (Department for Education, 2017a). In addition to these, the document identifies four ‘specific’ areas: literacy; mathematics; understanding the world; and expressive arts and design (Department for Education, 2017a). The curriculum document states that the specific areas provide the context through which the prime areas can be strengthened and applied (Department for Education, 2017a).

In addition to the prime and specific areas, teachers are required to embed the Characteristics of Effective Teaching and Learning in their practice (CoETL) (Department for Education, 2017a). The CoETL are dispositions which encourage teachers to consider *how* as well as *what* children learn (Moylett, 2014). They are recognised as developing children’s ‘participation repertoires’ (Carr, 2001, p. 47) and ‘habits of the mind’ (Katz & Chard, 1989, p. 30), ensuring that children have the ‘will’ as well as the ‘skill to do’ (Sylva, 1994, p. 163). They are identified in the EYFS framework as: playing and exploring, active learning and creating and thinking critically (Department for Education, 2017a, p. 10). In accordance with a holistic approach, they ‘underpin learning and development across all areas’ (Moylett & Stuart, 2012, p. 4). The weak classification of the seven areas of learning and development and the underpinning nature of the CoETL means that

contents of the EYFS curriculum stand in an open relation to each other and the curriculum is integrated (Bernstein, 1971).

### *Year One*

In Year One, teachers are required to follow the National Curriculum which is described as providing pupils with ‘an introduction to the essential knowledge that they need to be educated citizens’ and attempts to ‘introduce pupils to the best that has been thought and said’ (Department for Education, 2013, p. 6). The framework is predicated on a modernist construction, positioning the ‘child as reproducer of culture and knowledge’ (Moss, 2013, p. 22). This leads to a collective type curriculum where individual subjects are strongly classified and stand in a closed relationship from each another (Bernstein, 1971). The National Curriculum for KS1 (ages 5-7) is structured around ten discrete subjects and identifies literacy, numeracy and science as ‘core subjects’ with the remaining subjects – art and design, computing, design and technology, geography, history, music, physical education – termed, ‘foundation subjects’ (Department for Education, 2013). These subjects are positioned as stand-alone units of disciplinary knowledge that need to be taught and assessed (Manyukhina & Wyse, 2019).

#### 2.4.1.2 Form

##### *2.4.1.2.1 Lesson*

The lesson element is concerned with the structure and form of teaching (Alexander, 2001). While these concepts are discussed broadly by Alexander (2001), they are applied here to refer to how teaching and learning activities are organised and controlled. Hence, Bernstein’s (1975) notion of framing is particularly helpful. It is at this point where taking a relational approach to Bernstein’s theory is perhaps most beneficial, helping descriptions of framing in Reception and Year One to move beyond the dichotomy of ‘strong’ or ‘weak’. A relational approach also avoids the nebulous, but nevertheless popular, labelling of teaching as either ‘teacher-centred’, or ‘child-centred’ (Alexander, 2009a). Indeed, in their report, ‘Teaching and play in the early years – a balancing act?’, Ofsted (2015) reported that teachers believed that using an either/or approach to separate adult-led or child-led activities was unhelpful. Instead, they opted to situate ‘the interplay between

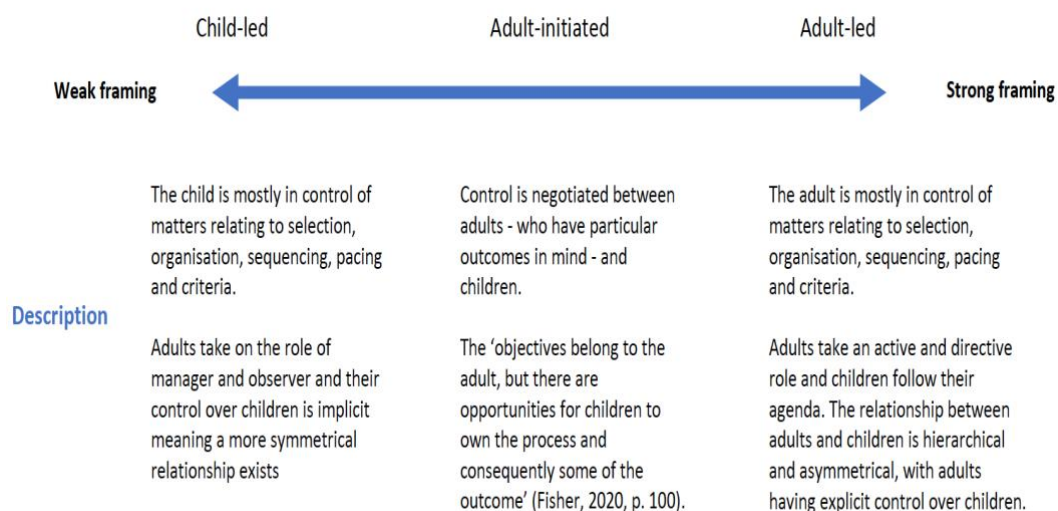


adults and children’ along a continuum where teachers could make ongoing decisions regarding the ‘level of formality, structure and dependence’ (p. 6), or, in Bernstein’s (1975) terms, judgements about the strength of framing. As can be seen from Figure 2.2, conceptualising the structure and form of *lessons* as existing along a continuum displays how the balance of control ranges from being child-led to adult-led, with adult-initiated learning situated at the centre (Fisher, 2020). As activities move along the continuum from child- to adult-led, it is possible to see that framing gradually becomes stronger, and, as a consequence, the relationship between adults and children (classification) is reconfigured.

Understanding how lessons are framed using this continuum is an approach that can be applied to describe the structure and form of activities in both Reception and Year One (Fisher, 2020; Hood, 2013). In doing so, it is possible to identify considerable differences.

### ***Reception***

The structure and form of lessons in Reception includes a ‘balance’ (Fisher, 2020) or ‘fusion’ (Pascal & Bertram, 2019) of different interactions, with the locus of control fluctuating between adults and children (Department for Education, 2017a).



**Figure 2.2** The balance of control between children and adults in Reception and Year One (adapted from Fisher, 2020, p. 97)

This approach is based on evidence showing that in the most effective early years settings, both adults and children contribute to the learning experience (Siraj-

Blatchford et al., 2002; Sylva, et al., 2004). For example, an in-depth analysis of pedagogical interactions in ECE settings across England carried out as part of the Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (REPEY) project found that the most effective settings achieve an equal balance between child- and adult-led experiences, combining interactions that are traditionally associated with ‘teaching’, such as instruction and explanation, with freely chosen and potentially instructive play activities (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). However, in comparing the balance of interactions between different providers, the REPEY project revealed that in Reception classes, the balance tended to emphasise adults, with approximately three quarters of learning episodes identified as being adult-initiated (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). Yet, caution should be exercised when interpreting this finding as only two out of the fourteen settings included in the REPEY project were Reception classes (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). Other research, while acknowledging that the balance of control between adults and children in Reception is a ‘challenge’, has reported that the vast majority of teachers and senior leaders (93%) ( $n = 4250$ ) ‘plan either for mostly child-initiated experiences or a mixture of adult-directed and child-initiated activities’ in Reception (Early Excellence, 2017, p. 10). The balance of different interactions in Reception suggests that the strength of framing is not fixed but varies depending on how control is negotiated between adults and children.

### *Year One*

In contrast to the more balanced approach in Reception, the structure and form of lessons in Year One tends to gravitate more towards the adult-led end of the continuum (Fisher, 2020; Hood, 2013). For example, Fisher (2020) suggests that learning in Year One is predominantly adult-led and occasionally adult-initiated. This is supported by Sanders et al. (2005) who found that Year One is ‘more structured’ in comparison to Reception and, as a result, activities tended to be adult-led. Sanders et al. (2005) also reported that opportunities for child-led learning in Year One were limited because of pressures associated with time. This meant that, in sharp contrast to Reception where child-led learning was valued as part of a balanced approach, child-led learning in Year One was relegated to ‘golden time’, which occurred once a week as a reward for good behaviour or the completion of ‘work’ (Sanders et al., 2005, p. 86). Subsequent research, carried out by Nicholson (2018), has confirmed the peripheral role of child-led interactions in Year One, with

children only permitted to lead their own learning when they have completed adult-led tasks. Thus, while interactions in Year One still move along the continuum, they do so predominantly between adult-initiated and adult-led points (Fisher, 2020), meaning that activities in Year One typically contain stronger framing than in those in Reception (Bernstein, 2000).

#### 2.4.1.3 Act

##### *2.4.1.3.1 Task and activity*

Task and activity are two interconnected elements, and hence discussed here together, which form the learning encounter (Alexander, 2001). The task element is conceptual and relates to the particular areas of the curriculum the teacher chooses to focus on and the activity element is ‘the task’s practical counterpart’, relating to the ‘means through which the teacher intends the child to make the required conceptual advance’ (Alexander, 2001, p. 351). Understanding task and activity in Reception and Year One in more detail is enhanced by applying Bernstein’s (1975) concept of visible and invisible pedagogy. Bernstein (1975) defines the basic difference between visible and invisible pedagogies as ‘the *manner* in which criteria are transmitted (activity) and in the degree of specificity of the criteria (task).’ (p. 116). While the specificity of criteria and explicitness of transmission can vary independently of one another, the area of the curriculum under focus (task) does appear to be a strong determinant of the mode of transmission (activity). Such a trend can be observed in both Reception and Year One.

#### ***Reception***

As identified earlier, the Reception curriculum is an integrated type (Bernstein, 1971), consisting of three broad areas: the ‘prime’ and ‘specific’ areas and the CoETL (DfE, 2017a). Two of these areas – ‘prime’ and the CoETL – are process- and context-driven (Rogers, 2014) and encourage teachers to focus broadly on ‘ways of knowing’ (Bernstein, 1975). As a result, when teachers are supporting children’s development in these areas, it is not always possible to identify discrete areas of learning as the boundaries separating criteria are diffuse and overlapping (Rogers, 2014; Tickell, 2011). While tasks with low specificity can be transmitted

in a range of ways, they are typically associated with implicit modes of transmission where children assume some level of control, if not all, over the learning process. In particular, child-led free play, where children direct their own play episodes, and adult-initiated collaborative play, where play is directed towards simultaneous goal orientation (Pyle & Danniels, 2017), are often positioned as the means through which children are supported to develop and strengthen broad developmental areas (Moylett & Stuart, 2012; Rogers, 2014). For instance, the REPEY study reported that when activities are weakly framed and the adult is absent, children's learning is oriented towards personal, social and emotional, physical and creative areas of the curriculum (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). Moreover, Katz (1987), suggests that dispositions, such as the CoETL, are likely to be acquired when children are given the opportunity to observe and exhibit them. She argues, along with a number of other researchers (Walsh et al., 2006; Wood, 2007), that play-based experiences provide optimal opportunities for developing positive learning dispositions. The diffuse nature of the prime areas and the CoETL and their association with implicit modes of transmission suggests that Reception, at least in part, operates with an invisible pedagogy (Bernstein, 1975). Indeed, tasks that focus on 'ways of knowing' and activities that promote learning through play are, according to Bernstein (1975), hallmarks of an invisible pedagogy.

In contrast to the prime areas and the CoETL, when teachers in Reception focus on the 'specific' areas of learning and development (DfE, 2017a), a higher degree of specificity is employed. Here, the focus of learning becomes content-focussed and concerned with 'states of knowledge' (Bernstein, 1975). While tasks with a high degree of specificity can be implemented through play – recognised as 'learning through games', a form of play that supports the development of discrete academic skills (Pyle & Danniels, 2017) – they are more commonly carried out in adult-framed contexts and associated with more explicit forms of transmission (Ofsted, 2017; Sanders et al., 2005; Tickell, 2011). For example, the Hundred Review identified that 'specific' curriculum areas, particularly those relating to literacy and numeracy tended to 'pressurise YR (Reception) into a more specific and overwhelmingly didactic approach' (Early Excellence, 2017, p. 33). This was also evidenced in the REPEY study which reported that when literacy and numeracy were the focus of teaching, they were taught using direct instruction 70% and 60%

of the time respectively (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). The specific criteria and the explicit way in which it is transmitted are indicative of a visible pedagogy (Bernstein, 1975). This suggests that Reception contains tasks and activities that vary in terms of their visibility, typically moving from an invisible pedagogy to support the prime areas and CoETL to a more visible pedagogy for the teaching of specific areas.

### ***Year One***

In Year One, the curriculum framework is a collective type (Bernstein, 1971) and is organised around ten discrete subjects (DfE, 2013). Much like the ‘specific’ areas of learning and development in Reception, the National Curriculum prioritises ‘states of knowledge’ (Bernstein, 1975), outlining the ‘essential core knowledge’ that children ‘should be taught’ (DfE, 2013). The strong focus on knowledge acquisition results in highly prescriptive criteria and expected outcomes in each subject-specific discipline (DfE, 2013; Manyukhina & Wyse, 2019). This means that the dual emphasis on both the *act* and *object* of learning (Pramling Samuelsson and Carlsson, 2008) in Reception is replaced by a far greater emphasis on the latter in Year One. As Manyukhina and Wyse (2019) state, ‘knowledge-based curricula are focussed firmly on what students should know as opposed to how they should be’ (p. 236). The high level of specificity of National Curriculum subjects gives rise to more explicit modes of transmission, with teaching containing stronger framing (Manyukhina & Wyse, 2019). Hence, a visible pedagogy is typically enacted in Year One (Bernstein, 1975).

#### ***2.4.1.3.2 Judgement***

The final element of Alexander’s (2001) teaching framework is judgement which relates to the way in which teachers assess children’s learning and development.

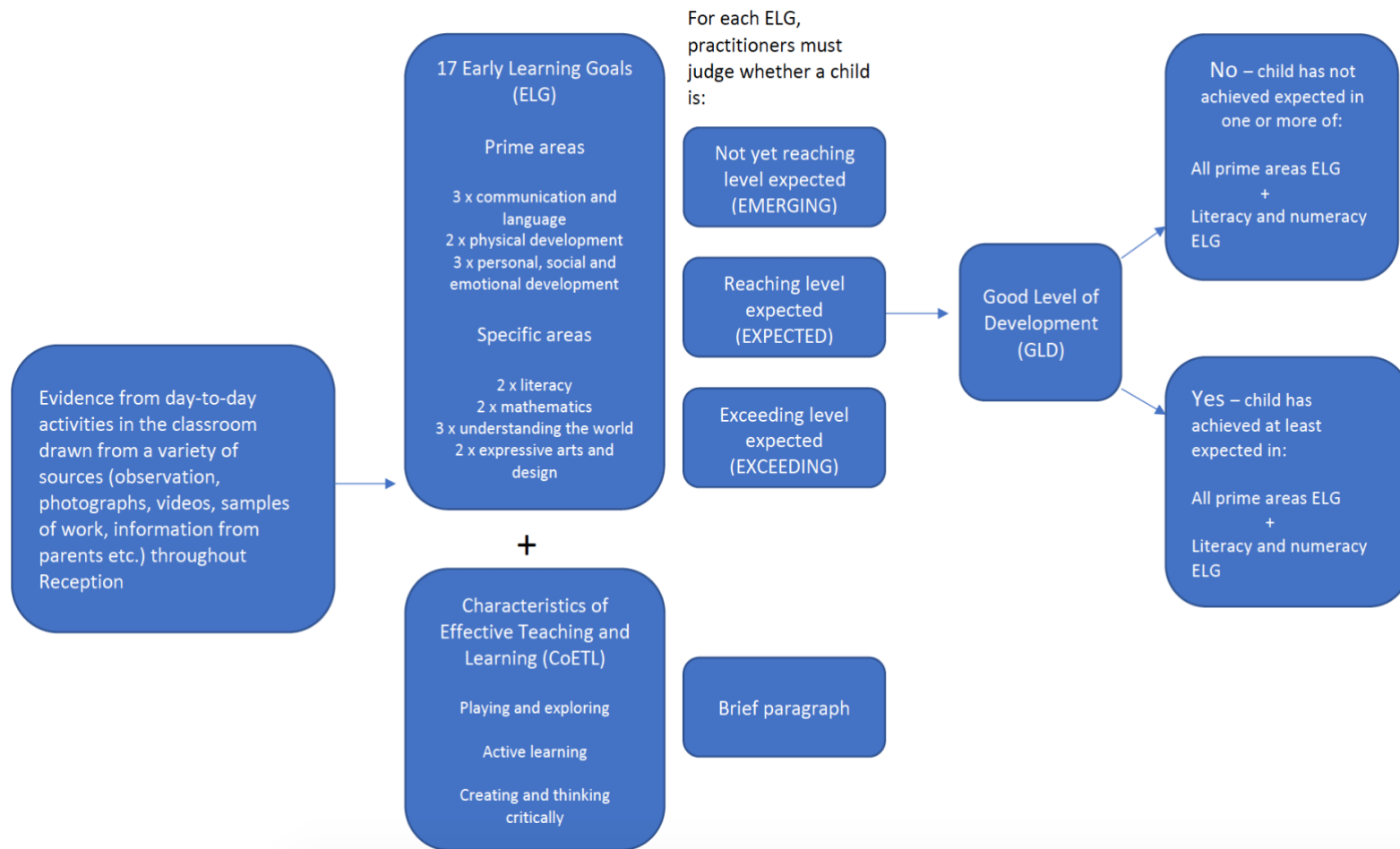
### ***Reception***

In Reception, judgements about children’s learning and development are predominantly based on observations and conversations with children and parents (Early Excellence, 2017; Fisher, 2020). Observational assessments are identified as being ‘central to understanding what children really know and can do’ and are

interwoven with ongoing classroom interactions (Department for Education, 2020a, p. 10). This means that the boundaries between the learning encounter (task, activity and interaction) and judgement are weakly classified, and, as a result, children are not necessarily aware that they are being assessed. As teachers in Reception are constantly observing and making judgements about children's holistic development, assessment procedures are subjective, multiple and diffuse and, in keeping with a competence model, focus on what is present in children's learning (Bernstein, 1975, 1990). According to Bernstein (1975), this type of judgement, which he associates with an invisible pedagogy, leads to the compilation of a 'dossier' consisting of each child's internal processes, states and external acts (p. 132). Indeed, while Reception teachers are advised to avoid 'excessive evidence gathering', they are encouraged to collect and triangulate evidence that 'supports the overall picture of a child's development' (Department for Education, 2020a, p. 14). Increasingly, evidence of children's learning is managed and stored digitally and encompass photographs, video clips and written observations (Early Excellence, 2017). How and when evidence is recorded and what is recorded is at the discretion of each teacher and consequently judgement varies from setting to setting, class to class, and even child to child (Department for Education, 2020a).

While the judgements Reception teachers make are flexible, subjective and individualised, towards the end of the year they cumulate to an objective and standardised measure of children's progress. Figure 2.3 displays how the evidence that teachers collect throughout Reception is used to support the completion of the EYFS Profile. The completion of the Profile is used to judge whether a child has met a Good Level of Development (GLD), a single, standardised performance measure indicating whether or not children have achieved an 'expected' level of learning and development by the end of Reception (Department for Education, 2020a). The GLD is then used to measure children's school readiness for Year One (Kay, 2018), with a 'system of inspection and moderation' used by Local Authorities to 'mark the accuracy of teachers' judgements' (Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021, p. 122). The government then make comparisons to previous years and report variations between characteristics relating to gender, Local Authority and inequality (Department for Education, 2019a). Although the GLD provides an indication of children's readiness for Year One, creating a binary distinction

whereby children are judged as being 'ready' or 'unready', most, if not all, children typically still make the transition from Reception. The EYFS Profile should inform a discussion between Reception and Year One teachers (Department for Education, 2017a, p. 14) and Year One teachers are advised to continue with the Early Years Foundation Stage learning goals for literacy for children who do not meet the GLD (Department for Education, 2013).



*Figure 2.3 The shift from subjective to objective assessment in Reception, culminating in the Good Level of Development indicator*



### *Year One*

In contrast to Reception, judgement in Year One places an emphasis on concrete evidence. This is explicit in the assessment guidance for Key Stage One teachers (Year One and Two) which states that judgements ‘must be based on sound and demonstrable evidence’ (Department for Education, 2020b, p. 8). This is seen as a way of ensuring that judgements ‘are as objective as possible, and consistent between classes and schools.’ (Department for Education, 2020b, p. 8). This type of judgement, which is often the corollary of a visible pedagogy, is based on an ‘objective’ framework consisting of clear criteria and explicit boundaries separating success and failure (Bernstein, 1975; Brooker, 2002). Bernstein (1975) suggests that this approach generates a standardised academic profile of the child, a construct described by Bradbury (2019a) as a ‘data double’ of the child, that enables comparisons to be drawn with other children, both locally and nationally. While evidence can be collected from a range of sources, such as projects, assessment notes and phonics records, it is suggested that pupils’ workbooks and tests are particularly useful indicators of overall attainment (Department for Education, 2020b). The evidence obtained from these sources contribute to the academic profile of the child, providing a clear and objective measure of children’s progress in a particular subject (Fisher, 2020).

In accordance with Reception, in Year One there is a statutory summative assessment, the Phonics Screen Check (PSC). However, whereas the EYFSP is completed by the Reception teacher, the PSC is an assessment taken by children at the end of Year One, when about six years of age (Standards and Testing Agency, 2018a). The PSC is designed to ‘confirm whether pupils have learnt phonic decoding to an appropriate standard’ and comprises of 40 words – 20 real words and 20 pseudo words – that pupils are required to read out loud to the teacher (Standards and Testing Agency, 2018a, p. 30). As with the GLD, the percentage pass rate schools achieve on the check is compared and judged by the Department for Education and Ofsted. This percentage – which schools are required to increase each year – is ‘used by Ofsted in its judgement of a school’s standing’ (Clark & Glazzard, 2018, p. 6).

#### 2.4.1.4 Summary

A summary of the differences in the *performance* of teaching in Reception and Year One using Alexander's (2001) framework and components of Bernstein's (1975) theory on educational knowledge is provided in Table 2.2 below. It is acknowledged that the differences explored are not an exact science and will resonate with and reflect the practice of some teachers more than others; however, the *performance* of teaching in Reception and Year One can be seen to significantly differ from one another. It is possible to see that Reception typically operates with a competence model of education where *space*, *time*, *pupil organisation* and *curriculum* are weakly classified, and *lessons* vary in terms of how strongly they are framed, depending on the specificity of the *task* under focus (Bernstein, 2000). Conversely, Year One is typically associated with a performance model of education where *space*, *time*, *pupil organisation* and *curriculum* contain strong classification and *lessons* are strongly framed, employing explicit *activities* to focus on specific *tasks* (Bernstein, 2000).

Table 2.2 A summary of the differences in Frame, Form and Act (Alexander, 2001) in Reception and Year One using components of Bernstein's (1975,2000) theory on educational knowledge

Category	Element	Reception	Year One
<b>Frame</b>	Space	<b>Weakly classified:</b> spaces serve multiple purposes and children permitted to 'flow' between different areas of the environment (indoor and outdoor).	<b>Strong(er) classification:</b> spaces more explicit, each child has their own space and access to areas of the environment (i.e. outside) become more restricted.
	Pupil organisation	<b>Weakly classified:</b> children are organised in a variety of different ways for a variety of different reasons and boundaries between groups are implicit.	<b>Strong(er) classification:</b> children are organised in a variety of ways but there is more emphasis on whole-class teaching. Groups are relatively fixed and the boundaries between them more explicit.
	Time	<b>Weakly classified:</b> time is flexible, elastic and negotiated between children and adults.	<b>Strong(er) classification:</b> time is externally controlled, non-negotiable and punctuates the move from one lesson/activity to another.
	Curriculum	<b>Weakly classified:</b> Integrated type curriculum with weakly classified contents (broad areas of learning and development).	<b>Strong(er) classification:</b> Collection type curriculum with strong classification between contents (subject-based).
<b>Form</b>	Lesson	<b>Balance of framing:</b> control moves along all areas of the continuum evenly, giving children regular opportunities to direct their own learning.	<b>Strong(er) framing:</b> control mainly moves between adult-initiated and adult-led areas of the continuum and opportunities for child-led learning are significantly reduced.
<b>Act</b>	Task and activity	<b>Invisible and visible pedagogy:</b> when focussing on broad developmental areas (i.e. Prime areas and CoETL) teaching activities tend to be more implicit and more <b>invisible</b> . When the focus is on specific areas (i.e. literacy and mathematics) teaching activities tend to be explicit and more <b>visible</b> .	<b>Visible pedagogy:</b> emphasis on knowledge acquisition promoted by the National Curriculum and the specific criteria for each subject means teaching is explicit and more <b>visible</b> .
	Judgement	<b>Weakly classified:</b> judgements of children's learning and development are subjective and interwoven with teaching. The focus is on what is present in children's learning.	<b>Strong(er) classification:</b> judgements of children's learning and development are objective and based on evidence of what pupils produce. The focus is on what is absent from children's learning.

Given the number and nature of the differences between the *performance* of teaching in Reception and Year One, it is not surprising that a 'gulf' has been described as existing between these year groups (Fisher, 2020, p. 29). While it is important to recognise that children pursue and anticipate change at times of transition (Ackesjö, 2014; Peters, 2004), such levels of discontinuity risk going beyond children's ability to negotiate (Peters, 2004), making the passage from Reception to Year One challenging for children (Dockett & Perry, 2012). This

stands in tension with the importance of ensuring children and families experience a positive transition to CSE, as explored in the first section of this chapter. In response to this, the need to establish greater continuity between Reception and Year One is, and has been for some time, widely recognised by all stakeholders (Alexander, 2010; Ofsted, 2004, 2017; Fisher, 2020; Sanders et al., 2005). However, the best way to go about establishing better connections generates less consensus, with different groups promoting very different types of relationship between ECE and CSE. The different types of relationship that are constructed between ECE and CSE will be considered in more detail in Section Four of this chapter. Before then, however, it is important to focus on pedagogical *discourse*, the second aspect of pedagogy.

#### 2.4.2 Pedagogical *discourse*

At the start of this section, it was established that pedagogy is a concept that encompasses both the *performance* of teaching and its attendant *discourse* (Alexander, 2001). This broad view recognises that pedagogy is a phenomenon that reflects and manifests ‘the shared and/or disputed values of the wider culture’ (Alexander, 2008a, p. 19). In this sense, pedagogy is never neutral or innocent but is a ‘medium that carries its own message’ (Bruner, 1996, p. 63); namely, the set of beliefs, theories and visions that are valued by society and culture at a particular historical time and place (Davies, 1994; Leach & Moon, 2008). Thus, in order to be able to ‘make sense’ of the *performance* of teaching and understand why teachers do what they do, researchers are required to ‘engage with culture, values and ideas at the levels of classroom, school and system’ (Alexander, 2009a, p. 938).

As with the *performance* of teaching, understanding pedagogical *discourse* is a complex task. It necessitates engaging with the ‘bigger picture’ of teaching (Alexander, 2008b) and focussing on the factors that mediate children’s experiences (Bennett et al., 1997). However, such factors have the potential to be profuse and potentially unwieldy; as argued by Nind et al. (2016, p. 238), ‘pedagogy is hard to know’. One of the key elements that shapes pedagogy is individual factors, such as teacher values (Alexander, 2009a) and their beliefs about ‘who [they] think the young child is’ (Dahlberg et al., 2007, p. 52). However, pedagogies are also

influenced by the physical, cultural, social and political contexts in which they are enacted (Adams, 2011; Dockett et al., 2017b; Stephen, 2010). Such complexity necessitates a sociocultural analysis that is capable of identifying these different layers of influence and connecting them to the *performance* of teaching. The goal of a sociocultural approach, according to Wertsch, del Rio and Alvarez (1995), is to:

explicate the relationship between human action, on the one hand, and the cultural, institutional, and historical situations in which this action occurs, on the other. (p. 11)

Within the established literature, there are a number of frameworks that have employed a sociocultural lens to analyse pedagogical *discourse* (see for example, Alexander's (2009a) 'pedagogy as ideas', Bennett, Wood and Rogers' (1997) 'model of teacher thought and action' and Nind, Curtin and Hall's (2016) pedagogy as 'specified', 'enacted' and 'experienced').

Perhaps the most obvious of these – particularly given that it is his definition of pedagogy that informs this thesis and it is his action-based framework (*frame, form and act*) that is positioned as central to understanding the *performance* of teaching – is Alexander's (2009a) 'pedagogy as ideas'. 'Pedagogy as ideas' is a framework that 'defines three levels (classroom, system/policy and cultural/societal) and 11 domains of ideas through which the act (*performance*) of teaching is enabled' (Alexander, 2010, p. 302). It therefore presents a highly detailed and principled way of mapping the main elements of pedagogical *discourse* to the *performance* of teaching. This framework was used to inform Alexander's (2001) comprehensive and intensive research comparing pedagogy across five different cultures. However, limitations on word count and the practicalities of having to apply this framework four times (twice in Reception and twice in Year One) over the course of the study meant that 'pedagogy as ideas' was not suited to, nor capable of, meeting the research objectives. The challenge therefore was to identify and construct a framework that could capture and connect pedagogical *discourse* to the *performance* of teaching but do so in a succinct way. One way to achieve this was

to develop a conceptual framework informed by Cultural Historical Activity Theory (Engeström, 2015).

## Section Three

### 2.5 A conceptual framework for investigating pedagogies of the transition from Reception to Year One

This section presents a conceptual framework that is capable of researching pedagogy as both the *performance* of teaching together with its attendant *discourse* (Alexander, 2001). It proposes that a conceptual framework rooted within Cultural Historical Activity Theory (Engeström, 2015), referred to hereafter as activity theory, has the potential, if adapted and applied accordingly, to relate micro-level classroom processes (*performance*) to macro-level influences (*discourse*).

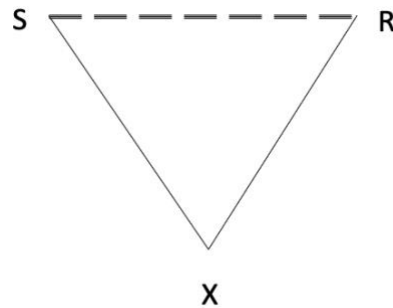
#### 2.5.1 Activity theory

Activity theory is developed from the work of Vygotsky (1978) and draws upon his sociocultural theory which recognises the individual and the cultural as ‘mutually formative elements of a single, interacting system’ (Daniels, 2001, p. 84). Rooted in this unified framework (Vygotsky, 1978), activity theory conceives human activity as a ‘culturally mediated phenomenon’ and focusses attention on the ‘systemic relations between the individual and the outside world’ (Engeström, 2015, pp. 32-33). According to Edwards, Gilroy and Hartley (2002), activity theory provides researchers with:

a framework for understanding how actions and tools have been shaped by the socio-cultural-historical forces within and outside the system in which the action occurs. (p. 117)

The ‘shaping’ of human actions by ‘socio-cultural-historical forces’ is described by Vygotsky (1978) as the process of mediation. Mediated activity moves beyond a dualistic, stimulus-response formula, central to the behaviourist theories developed by Pavlov and Skinner, and instead recognises that human behaviour is subject to the influence of an auxiliary, indirect and culturally based stimulus (Vygotsky,

1978, p. 40). The structure of mediated activity is represented by Vygotsky's (1978) basic mediated triangle, depicted in Figure 2.4 below.

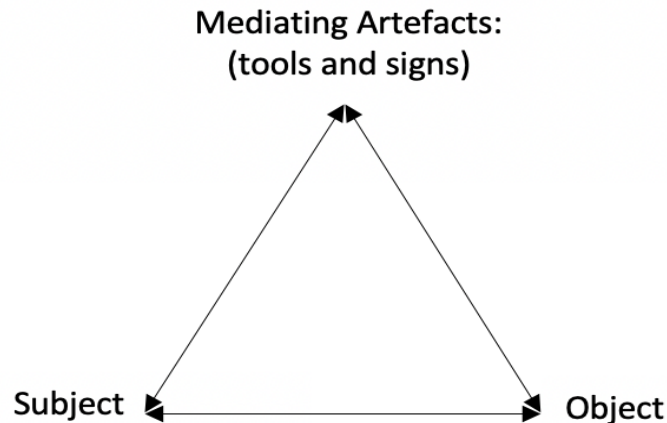


*Figure 2.4 The structure of mediated activity (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 40)*

Vygotsky (1978) identified that human behaviour can be mediated through a number of different activities but distinguished between two types in particular based on their orientation: tools and signs. Tools are externally oriented and technical (a hammer, pen) (Daniels & Tse, 2021) and function as the ‘conductor of human influence’, leading to physical changes in the object (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 55). Signs, on the other hand, are internally oriented and psychological (language, mnemonic techniques) and are devices for mastering or controlling the mind and behaviour (Daniels & Tse, 2021, p. 5).

#### 2.5.1.1 Three generations of activity theory

Vygotsky's representation of the mediated act provides the foundation upon which activity theory has been developed (Wertsch, 2007; Yamagata-Lynch, 2010) and is central to the three generations identified by Engeström (2001). Indeed, there are striking similarities between Vygotsky's (1978) notion of mediation and first generation activity theory, as depicted below in Figure 2.5 (Engeström, 2001). The triad of subject (individual, dyad or group), object (the goal of the activity) and mediating artefact (physical or psychological) represented in the first iteration of activity theory brings ‘together cultural artefacts with human actions’ (Daniels, 2001) and means that the actions of individuals are no longer ‘understood without his or her cultural means’ (Engeström, 2001, p. 134).



*Figure 2.5 First generation Activity Theory model (Engeström, 2001)*

Although first generation activity theory presented a ‘revolutionary’ way of understanding human actions, it was limited in that the unit of analysis tended to focus on individuals (Engeström, 2001, p. 134). It was this limitation that gave way to the second generation of activity theory which – guided by Leont’ev’s distinction between actions, which are individual, and activity, which is social (Engeström, 2001; Hardman, 2008) – takes into consideration the social structures which enable and constrain human activity. Engeström (2015) makes this distinction clear by stating the importance of human activity not being reduced to the triangle depicted in Figure 2.5 above:

Human activity is not only individual production. It is simultaneously and inseparably also social exchange and societal distribution. In other words, human activity always takes place within a community governed by a certain division of labour and by certain rules. (p. 114)

Accordingly, Engeström (2015) extends the activity system to include rules, community and division of labour, shown below in Figure 2.6. The rules are formal or informal conditions that support or constrain activity, community represents the social group who are involved in the activity, and division of labour refers to how tasks are distributed among the community (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). The expansion of the upper sub triangle to include these elements emphasises the collective and social elements of human activity and moves the analysis away from an over reliance on the micro-level and towards an examination of the macro-level factors that influence activity (Daniels, 2001, 2004).



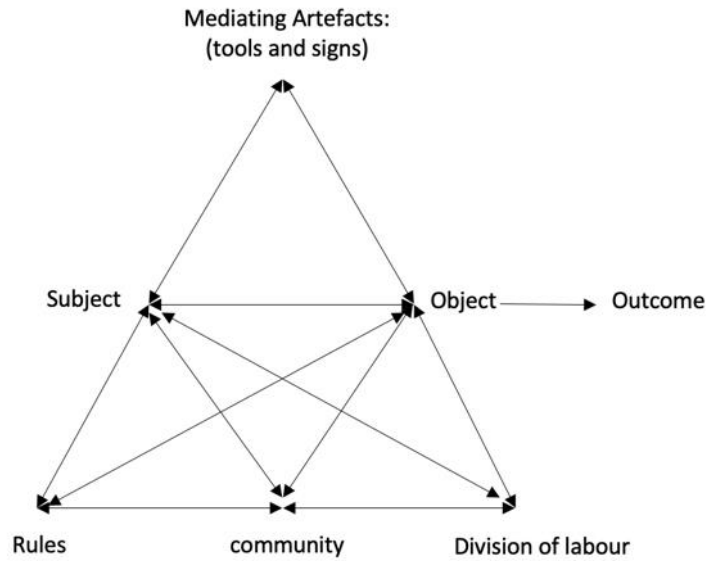


Figure 2.6 Second generation Activity Theory model (Engeström, 2001)

The third and final iteration of activity theory proposed by Engeström (2001) recognises that activity systems do not exist in isolation but are part of a larger network of interacting activity systems. As can be seen in Figure 2.7, an important feature of third generation activity theory is the interaction of two different activity systems through the means of a partially shared object. The intersection of two activity systems (e.g. Reception and Year One) promotes dialogue and multiple perspectives and creates a ‘third space’ where new meanings can be negotiated and established (Daniels, 2001; Engeström, 2001). Activity theory researcher, Edwards (2011), refers to this as learning and operating within the ‘boundary spaces’ of each activity system.

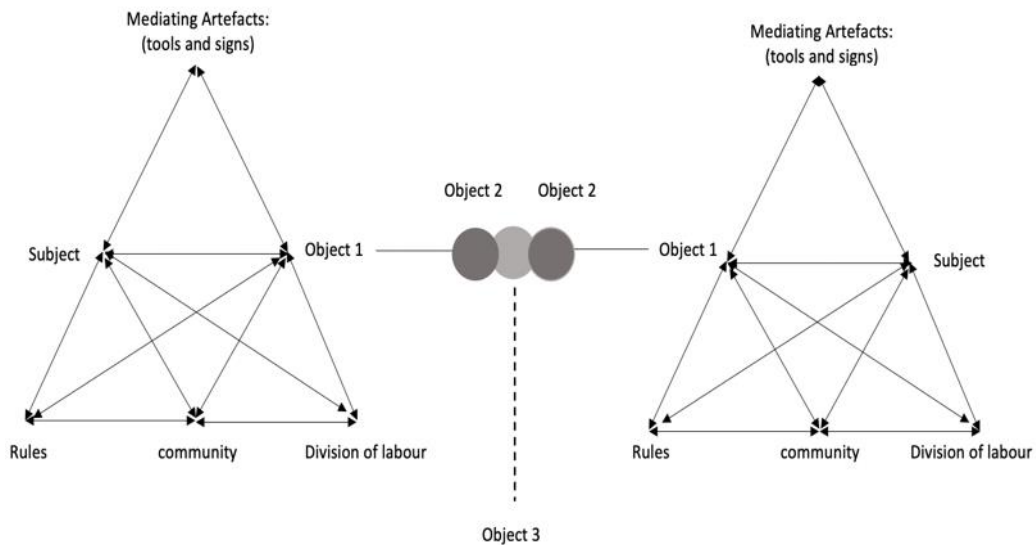


Figure 2.7 Third generation Activity Theory model (Engeström, 2001)

### 2.5.2 Activity theory and the transition from Early Childhood Education to Compulsory School Education

Activity theory presents a powerful framework for understanding the factors that mediate human activity (Engeström, 2015). Yet despite this, its application in the context of the transition from Reception to Year One is somewhat underdeveloped, but for a few notable exceptions (see for example, Broström, 2005; Karila & Rantavuori, 2014; Rantavuori, 2018; Sandberg et al., 2017). These studies can be broadly recognised as falling into one of two categories: studies that apply second generation activity theory to explore the individual activity systems in ECE and CSE in more depth while considering children's learning journeys as they transition between these institutions (see for example, Sandberg et al., 2017; for a cultural-historical analysis, see Hedegaard & Fler, 2013); and, studies that apply the principles of third generation activity theory to focus on professional learning and collaboration in the boundary spaces between ECE and CSE (see for example, Broström, 2005; Karila & Rantavuori, 2014; Rantavuori, 2018). While both of these categories are of interest to the researcher, the research objectives and questions required an in depth understanding of how the pedagogies enacted in the Reception and Year One activity systems influenced how children and their parents navigated the transition between them. The study is therefore informed by the theoretical underpinnings of second generation activity theory (Engeström, 2015). Third generation activity theory does, however, present important directions for future research, more of which will be discussed in Chapter 8.

Researching the pedagogies enacted in the transition from Reception to Year One using second generation activity theory presents an opportunity to understand how these year groups operate as separate pedagogical activity systems that facilitate children's learning differently (Sandberg et al., 2017). As Karila and Rantavuori (2014) note, ECE and CSE each 'have their own activity systems' and function with 'different meaning systems, priorities, histories, time scales, practices and planning cultures' (p. 382). It is proposed here, in accordance with Sandberg et al. (2017), that it is necessary to understand the pedagogical activity systems of Reception and Year One in order to be able to understand the transition between them.

### 2.5.3 Activity theory and pedagogy

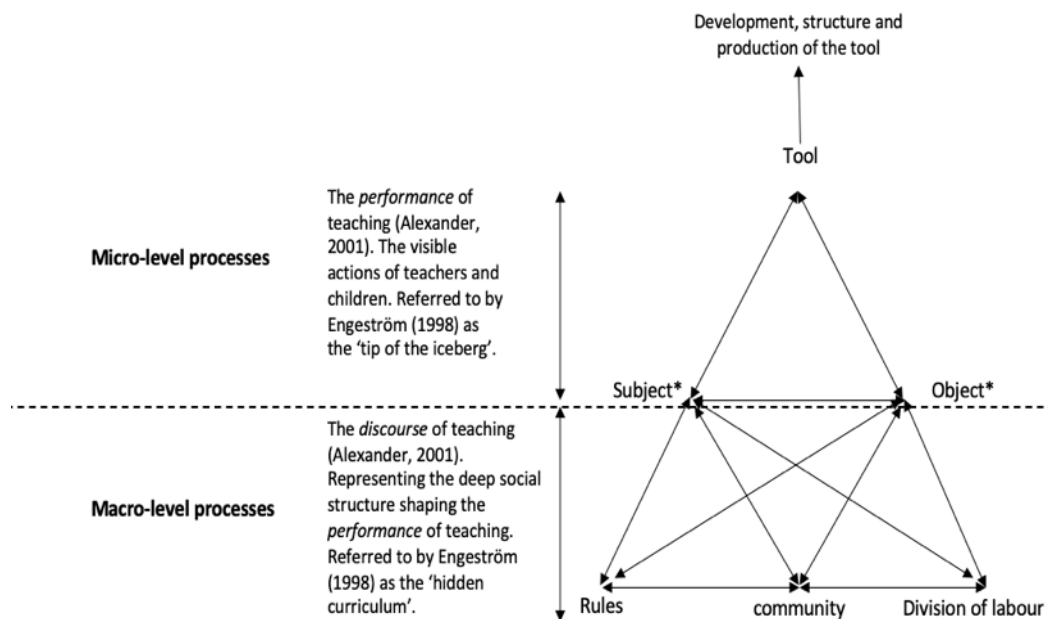
A key component of this chapter has been to highlight that understanding pedagogy, both as *performance* and *discourse* (Alexander, 2001), necessitates consideration of both micro- and macro-level dimensions (Daniels, 2001). It is proposed here that activity theory – by recognising that individuals influence and are influenced by the cultural-historical contexts in which they live and work (Engeström, 2015) – presents a powerful framework for connecting these different layers of influence. Crucially, by building on the work of Vygotsky, who himself recognised that ‘pedagogies arise and are shaped in particular social circumstances’ (Daniels, 2001, p. 5), activity theory provides a framework for investigating why certain activities are performed in certain ways (Anning, 2009). It is important to state that activity theory is a heuristic tool (Lin, 2007) and therefore does not operate as an ultimate truth or as a ‘strongly predictive theory’ about human activities (Nardi, n.d., p. 4). Nevertheless, it has considerable potential for understanding pedagogy as it ‘allows for a questioning of the structural determinations of current educational practices’ (Roth & Lee, 2007, p. 217). It provides, according to Daniels (2001), ‘important tools for the development of an understanding of pedagogy’ (p. 2).

However, despite these advantages, the application of activity theory to the study of pedagogy has not always been fully realised (Daniels, 2001; Hardman, 2008). The reasons for this appear to be twofold: first, activity theory research tends to focus on the production of the outcome, rather than the development, structure and production of the tool itself (Daniels, 2001, 2009); and second, activity theory, as it stands, lacks a ‘language of description’ that can adequately connect and relate specific modalities of pedagogical practice to the socio-cultural-political context in which they are enacted (Daniels, 2004; Hardman, 2008). These issues necessitate adapting and extending activity theory to meet the aims of this research.

#### 2.5.3.1 A focus on the development of the tool

According to Daniels (2001), activity theory is somewhat ‘constrained’ when it is applied to the study of pedagogy. He identifies how in activity theory, ‘the production of the outcome is discussed but not the production and structure of the tool itself’ (p. 135). Focussing on the object and outcome of human activity (e.g.

children’s grades) presents a number of issues when researching pedagogy; namely, a tendency to under-theorise the pedagogical differences between different settings and year groups (Daniels, 2001). Daniels (2004) therefore argues that pedagogical research adopting an activity theory lens would be better served by shifting its gaze to the development, structure and production of the tool. By focussing on the ways in which tools are produced, rather than the outcome of activity, it becomes possible to consider the social and institutional factors that influence how pedagogy is enacted (Daniels, 2009). Indeed, such a shift provides a means of analysing the structure of pedagogy in the context of its production (Daniels, 2004; Daniels & Tse, 2021). In the context of this research, this holds importance as it provides a framework for exploring pedagogy as both *performance* and *discourse* (Alexander, 2001) in Reception and Year One in each setting. Moving the focus of activity theory to the development of the tool and its alignment with Alexander’s (2001) definition of pedagogy is represented in Figure 2.8 below.



*Figure 2.8 Moving the focus of the activity system from the object to the development, structure and production of the tool, enabling an understanding of pedagogy as both performance and discourse. \* Subject and object can be included in both the performance of teaching and its attendant discourse depending on their visibility (represented by the dashed line)*

The *performance* of teaching (Alexander, 2001) is situated at the part of the activity system that Engeström (1998, p. 79) refers to as the ‘tip of the iceberg’. Here, the tool, subject and object represent the visible actions of teachers and children

(Engeström, 1998), identified by Alexander (2009a) as the self-contained observable actions referring to what teachers do in classrooms. This section of the activity theory triangle can be seen to deal with the micro-level processes of pedagogy (Jaworski & Potari, 2009). The remainder of the activity system includes the non-visible aspects relating to the subject (e.g. teacher beliefs) and object (e.g. children's perceptions) and also includes what Engeström (1998) refers to as the 'hidden curriculum'; that is, the rules, community and division of labour. These less visible and 'hard to know' (Nind et al., 2016, p. 238) elements mediate and shape how the *performance* of teaching takes place and therefore relate to what Alexander (2001) calls the attendant *discourse*. It is here where the activity system triangle confronts the broader, macro-level influences on pedagogy (Jaworski & Potari, 2009). It is argued that adapting activity theory to focus on the development, structure and production of the tool enables an analysis of pedagogy in its broadest sense; that is, 'the performance of teaching together with the theories, beliefs, policies and controversies that inform and shape it (Alexander, 2001, p. 540).

#### 2.5.3.2 *Language of description*

In addition to shifting the focus of activity theory towards the development of the tool, applying activity theory to the study of pedagogy requires the development of a 'language of description' where micro-level processes and concepts occurring in the topmost sub-triangle (*performance*) can be sensitively described and then related to macro-level influences through the sub-triangles at the bottom of the framework (*discourse*) (Daniels, 2009). For instance, Daniels (2009) argues that post-Vygotskian theories, such as activity theory, do not provide descriptions of processes 'through which the micro-level can be both uniquely described and related to the macro-level' (p. 31). He sees the development of a 'language of description' as an essential aspect of distinguishing between social practices and connecting the *performance* of teaching to its *discourse*, arguing that:

Such a description would facilitate the development of empirical research that could examine the relation between discursive, organizational and interactive practices within the analysis of specific activities and their outcomes. (Daniels, 2004, p. 122)

It is proposed here that the framework combining Alexander's (2001) action-based model (*frame, form and act*) and Bernstein's (1975) theory of educational knowledge (i.e. classification and framing) used to map the differences in teaching and learning between Reception and Year One in this chapter (see section 2.4.1) presents a highly effective language of description. A synthesis of Alexander's and Bernstein's theories presents an 'empirical referent' (Bernstein, 2000) capable of intricately describing the *performance* of teaching in Reception and Year One. By then situating the *performance* of teaching as the tool within an activity system (Engeström, 2015), it is then possible to relate such practices to the factors that are instrumental in mediating and shaping it. Used in combination (Alexander/Bernstein & activity theory), these concepts will provide an account of pedagogical practice that integrates micro-levels of analysis with large-scale macro factors (Daniels, 2001).

#### 2.5.4 Summary

This section has presented a conceptual framework capable of exploring and understanding how pedagogy is enacted across the transition from Reception to Year One. By adapting activity theory (Engeström, 2015) to focus on the development of the tool and to create a language of description – both of which are recommended by Daniels (2001, 2004, 2009) – it is possible to consider how the *performance* of teaching in Reception and Year One is shaped by socio-cultural-political factors. The conceptual framework developed means it is possible to investigate teaching and learning in Reception and Year One empirically and, at the same time, access the *discourse* which informs, shapes and explains it (Alexander, 2001). Achieving both of these elements is a key condition for comparing pedagogy (Alexander, 2009a).

In each setting in this research, Reception and Year One were positioned as individual activity systems. The definition of each element in the activity system (Engeström, 1993, 2008) and their subsequent interpretation and application in this research are outlined in Table 2.3 below. Below this, Figure 2.9 provides a visual representation of how each element has been interpreted for the purposes of this research.

Table 2.3 Activity system elements and their application in this research

Element	Definition	Application in this research
<b>Subject</b>	The individual or group whose agency is chosen as the point of view in the analysis. In a traditional school system, this is the teachers (Engeström, 2008)	Reception and Year One teachers
<b>Object</b>	The problem space at which the activity is directed. In a traditional school system, this is the children (Engeström, 2008)	The children who are undergoing the transition from Reception to Year One
<b>Tool</b>	Mediates the object of the activity	The <i>performance</i> of teaching ( <i>frame, form, act</i> ) in Reception and Year One
<b>Rules</b>	Explicit and implicit regulations that constrain actions and interactions	Curriculum, assessment and inspection regulations (explicit) and school expectations (implicit)
<b>Community</b>	Participants of an activity who share the same general object	Headteachers and parents
<b>Division of labour</b>	Division of tasks between the community	Roles and responsibilities of year groups and staff

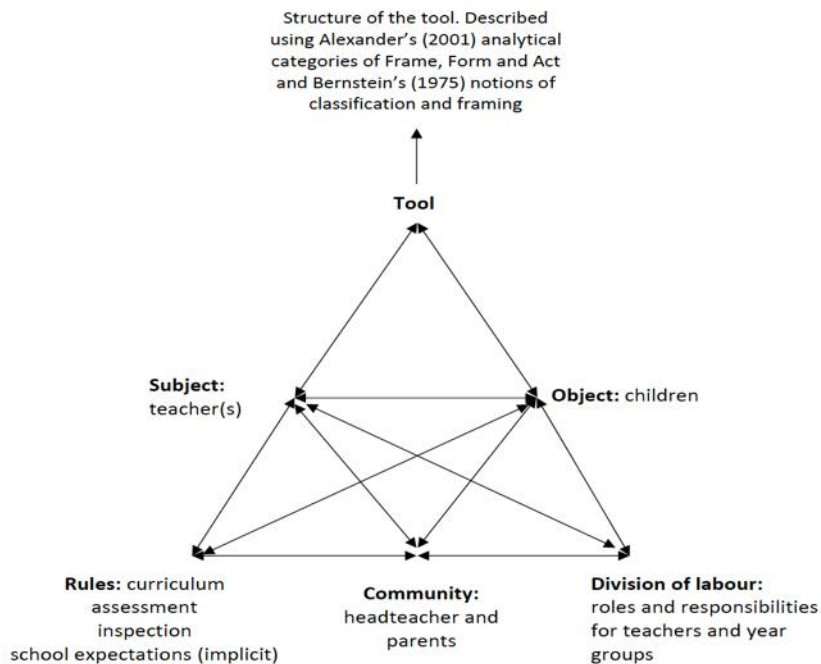


Figure 2.9 – An activity system identifying how elements are applied in the present study

While the activity system developed has the potential to recognise a range of factors that influence and shape the *performance* of teaching and learning (tool) in Reception and Year One, its particular advantage in the context of this research is its identification of rules as being particularly influential on the way activity systems take shape (Engeström, 2015). Engeström (1993) defines rules as ‘the explicit and implicit regulations, norms and conventions that constrain actions and

interactions within the activity system’ (p. 67). Based on this definition, it is possible to consider the different curriculum, assessment and inspection regulations placed on state and independent schools – which are considered in the next section – as rules within the activity system. This was also the approach taken by Kay (2018) who, in considering school readiness through an activity theory lens, positioned the EYFS curriculum framework and its corresponding assessments as the rules that governed pedagogical practice in Reception.

Following an identification of the differences in teaching and learning in Reception and Year One, carried out in Section Two, this section has developed a conceptual framework capable of understanding the *performance* of teaching in these year groups and connecting it to their attendant *discourses*. Section Four identifies some of the different types of relationships that can be established between ECE and CSE before considering how the relationship is constructed between Reception and Year One in England. Following this, the differences between the state- and independent-sectors in England are outlined and their implications for pedagogy discussed.

## **Section Four**

### **2.6 The relationship between Early Childhood Education and Compulsory School Education**

How the relationship between ECE and CSE is forged is described by Moss (2013) as a ‘properly political question’, by which he means that there are a number of conflicting alternatives, each inscribed with ‘particular constructs, values and assumptions’ (p. 2). While suggesting that a range of different relationships are possible, Moss (2013) chooses to focus his analysis on three forms in particular: readying for school; a strong and equal partnership; and the meeting place. As will now be explored, these relationships differ on a number of dimensions which, in turn, have different implications for pedagogy in Reception and Year One.

The first type of relationship identified by Moss (2013) – readying for school – is characterised by a school readiness discourse that reduces the role of ECE to that of preparing young children for the demands of CSE. According to Moss (2013), a relationship based on ‘readying’ is hierarchical; the ‘lower educational level, ECE,



must serve the needs of the higher, CSE' (p. 36). When framed in this way, the relationship leads to the 'schoolification' of ECE, where CSE pedagogical ideas and practices, *discourse* and *performance* (Alexander, 2001), are introduced into ECE to ensure that children are 'ready to succeed' in CSE (Moss, 2013). This unidirectional and asymmetrical relationship is recognised by Boyle and Petriwskyj (2014, p. 393) as a 'functional linkage', with CSE acting as the frame of reference to which ECE must adapt. As will be discussed shortly, this form of relationship is a powerful one and is identified as being particularly dominant in England (Moss, 2019; Neaum, 2016; Wood & Hedges, 2016), as well as in many other Anglophone countries (Moss, 2013; OECD, 2006). The dominant status of a 'readying for school' relationship in these countries coincides with the prevalence and promotion of neoliberal education policies in these contexts. For example, Roberts-Holmes and Moss (2021) identify how, 'aided' and 'abetted' by the reach of the English language, 'neoliberalism has taken deepest root in the Anglosphere, in particular England, Australia and the United States' (p. 39). These countries see a 'readying for school' relationship as a method for ensuring ECE provides the platform for learning and success in CSE, particularly in relation to the core subjects (OECD, 2006).

In recent years, however, there has been evidence reporting that 'schoolification' is becoming apparent in contexts where socio-pedagogic approaches are traditionally celebrated, such as in Denmark (Brogaard Clausen, 2015), Norway (Otterstad & Braathe, 2016) and Sweden (Ackesjö & Persson, 2019). The presence of a readying for school relationship in contexts where downward pressure on ECE has typically been resisted demonstrates how neoliberal ideas and practices are gaining mobility throughout the world, a trend described by Sahlberg (2012) as the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM). GERM describes a 'process of global convergence' (Ball, 2021b, p. 49) where neoliberal policies are promoted by, borrowed from and flow between nation states, creating an 'orthodoxy' of educational reforms – including competition between students, teachers and schools, standardisation of teaching and learning, an increased emphasis on literacy, numeracy and science, corporate models of management and test-based accountability – as a means of improving education (Sahlberg, 2012, 2016).

A strong and equal partnership – the second type of relationship – is where ‘neither culture takes over the other’ (Moss, 2008, p. 230) and the diverse traditions of ECE and CSE come together, ‘focussing on the strengths of both approaches’ (OECD, 2001, p. 129). In contrast to ‘schoolification’, a strong and equal partnership rejects CSE’s subjugation of ECE, instead recognising that the sector has much to contribute (Moss, 2013; OECD, 2001). The relationship is therefore bi-directional and characterised by what Boyle and Petriwskj (2014, p. 393) term ‘systemic linkages’ and ‘partnership interactions’, where sustained contact and collaboration between settings and stakeholders is promoted and valued. Prior to the dominance of the readying for school discourse, the essence of a strong and equal partnership was recommended by policymakers in England as a way of more closely aligning Reception and Year One (Ofsted, 2003, 2004). Although, while the notion of a partnership is conceptually appealing, Moss (2013) warns that a ‘strong partnership may not necessarily be an equal one’ and that the ‘powerful gravitational pull’ of CSE can often position ECE as the less experienced partner in any exchange (p. 15). A strong and equal partnership, Moss (2013) concludes, does not go far enough in identifying how such a relationship can be realised. For this, he turns his attention to a third form of relationship – the meeting place.

Moss (2013), in quoting Dahlberg and Lenz-Taguchi (1994), states that the meeting place is a space where educators in both ECE and CSE ‘settle on a similar view of the learning child, pedagogy’s role and pedagogical work’ (p. 28). The meeting place, much like third generation activity theory (Engeström, 2015), encourages ECE and CSE educators to integrate their approaches and establish a ‘pedagogical value base’, co-constructing and working with shared: images of the child, understandings, values, ethics, curricula goals and practices (Moss, 2013, pp. 42-43). These features, Moss (2013, p. 200) argues, makes the meeting place ‘more transformational’ than a strong and equal partnership; it goes beyond taking and mixing the best of both ECE and CSE and instead invites both sectors to engage in ‘dialogic interactions’ and ‘deep professional debate’ (Boyle & Petriwskj, 2014, p. 394), each deconstructing their respective traditions and practices to ‘construct something totally new together’ (Dahlberg, 2013, p. 82). This resembles bell hooks’ (1994) recommendation that changing teaching practices requires collaboration that crosses boundaries. For hooks (1994), this is a process of ‘individuals who occupy

different locations ... mapping out terrains of commonality, connection and shared concern.’ (p. 130). The notion of the meeting place, therefore, can be seen as an attempt to achieve a balance of discontinuity and continuity in the relationship between ECE and CSE (Moss, 2013).

### 2.6.1 The relationship in England

As highlighted above, the relationship between ECE and CSE in England is characterised by readying for school, meaning that Reception teachers are under pressure to align their pedagogical practice with Year One in order to ensure that children are compulsory ‘school ready’ (Moss, 2013; Neaum, 2016). While school readiness is recognised as having a multitude of meanings (Bingham & Whitebread, 2012), it is dominated by a discourse centred around preparing children for CSE (Moss, 2013). This narrow perspective – focussed on children acquiring the ‘competencies and skills that represent the initial building blocks of human capital’ (Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021, p. 102) – is increasingly powerful and is established as a ‘prominent driving force in current educational policy’ (Kay, 2018, p. 12). It appeals to governments as it seemingly carries the promise of ‘delivering’ children to compulsory school ready to conform to classroom routines and be able to perform basic reading, writing and numeracy skills (Bingham & Whitebread, 2012; OECD, 2006). Children’s proficiency within these ‘core’ areas is particularly important to governments as they are the focus of international student assessments (such as the Programme for International Assessment and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) (Sahlberg, 2012) which are used as indicators of national competitiveness and economic success (Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021). As ‘core’ subjects are the ‘main determinants of perceived success or failure of pupils, teachers, schools, and entire education systems’ (Sahlberg, 2012), an ‘earlier is better’ mind-set is adopted and the role of ECE is to ensure children gain a ‘head start’ by being ‘ready’ to perform a normative list of competencies and skills in these areas by the time they start CSE (Bingham & Whitebread, 2012). Adding to the attractiveness of readying for school for governments is that in comparison to the other two relationships identified above, it is simple and linear, in both its implementation and evaluation, predicated on ‘predetermined, sequential and predictable stages’ that can be easily measured, assessed and accounted for (Moss, 2013, p. 36). Such efficiency is bound up with a performative, neoliberal

education agenda where tight control over teachers is exercised as a way of governing them into readying or preparing children ‘for the next stage of human capital formation – compulsory primary schooling’ (Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021, p. 102).

As a way of ensuring teachers, children and families work towards the ‘ultimate goal’ of school readiness, policymakers in England have, and continue to be, engaged in a calculated act of establishing the forms of control needed to align Reception with Year One (Wood & Hedges, 2016). According to Moss (2012, p. 366) and Oates (2010, p. 13), control is facilitated through ‘human’ or ‘policy technologies’ such as: changes to curriculum content; new modes of assessment; teacher training and professional development; accountability arrangements; inspection; and incentives and sanctions. Such technologies – which operate as rules within a pedagogical activity system – can be identified as operating in Reception and in Year One in England. As examples, the level of detail identified in the EYFS Profile (Bradbury, 2013) and pressures placed on teachers to ensure children attain a Good Level of Development at the end of Reception (Kay, 2018) and pass the Phonics Screening Check in Year One (Roberts-Holmes, 2019) – with ramifications if national benchmarks are not met (Roberts-Holmes, 2020) – have strengthened a readying for school relationship between Reception and Year One. This is compounded by the role of the inspectorate, Ofsted, who, in extending their original remit of inspection to that of knowledge producers and researchers, have started to construct what they believe is ‘good’ and ‘effective’ practice (Wood, 2019). An example of which is the highly contentious *Bold Beginnings* report (Ofsted, 2017) which praises schools for introducing Year One concepts in Reception and states that the ‘teaching of reading, including systematic synthetic phonics, is the core purpose of the Reception Year’ (p. 7). These policies serve as a mechanism for steering ‘ECE towards greater conformity to the needs and demands of CSE’ (Moss, 2012, p. 366), profoundly altering the pedagogical landscape in Reception, and ECE more generally.

The concerted effort by policymakers to align Reception with Year One through a readying for school relationship has meant that Reception is situated at the intersection of two competing agendas where its child-centred pedagogical tradition

confronts a neoliberal, one-size-fits-all school readiness model (Neaum, 2016; Wood, 2019). As a result, Reception is under pressure to move away from its competence-based approach towards the performance-based approach that informs Year One (Neaum, 2016; Wood & Hedges, 2016). This shift has resulted in pedagogical practices typically associated with CSE and Year One, such as ability grouping (Bradbury, 2018; Roberts-Holmes, 2019) and an increase in adult-led and direct teaching, particularly focussed on literacy and mathematics (Pascal et al., 2017), becoming more prominent in Reception. From these findings, it is possible to see that the identified differences between Reception and Year One in relation to *frame*, *form* and *act* (Alexander, 2001) are reimagined, reconfigured and repurposed (Roberts-Holmes, 2020), not through the vision of a meeting place (Moss, 2013) or a bridged partnership (Huser et al., 2016), but through the subjugation of Reception by the compulsory school sector.

While policymakers in England continue to align Reception and Year One through a readying relationship, research understanding educators' perceptions reveal that they favour a very different type of relationship. For instance, studies taking into consideration the views of Reception (Early Excellence 2017), Year One (Fisher 2011) and headteachers (Roberts-Holmes 2012) have identified that these groups believe that the pedagogical principles underpinning Reception should be extended into Year One and, in some cases, Year Two. Indeed, in contrast to Reception teachers basing their curriculum on the Year One National Curriculum, as was recommended by Ofsted (2017), the *Hundred Review* Report (Early Excellence, 2017) disclosed that 97% of participants ( $n = 4250$ ) believed that Year One provision should resemble that of Reception as children commence Year One. A similar level of congruence, albeit on a much smaller scale, was reported by Fisher (2011) who revealed that 17/18 of the Year One teachers who took part in a project aimed at introducing a more play-based approach did so because they wanted to 'change the formal and prescribed experiences of Year 1' (p. 36).

In addition to educators, extending Reception pedagogical principles into Year One is supported by researchers (Alexander, 2010; Bingham & Whitebread, 2012; Fisher, 2020; Pugh, 2010). A key recommendation made by the Cambridge Primary Review stated that the EYFS should be extended to age six, giving children

sufficient time to ‘establish positive attitudes to learning and begin to develop the language and study skills which are essential for their later progress’ (Alexander, 2010, p. 491). In agreement, Bingham and Whitebread (2012) reject the ‘earlier is better’ approach and argue:

that the provision of a mere “curriculum” is inadequate for children in English primary schools’ Reception, Year 1 and 2 classes. A more holistic and balanced approach is required for young children in these crucial years of development than a framework of curriculum content, to be “transmitted” in lessons. (p. 7)

Central to these perspectives is the understanding that Reception and Year One children are typically progressing along similar trajectories and that the move to a performance-based approach in Year One is not developmentally justified (Bingham & Whitebread, 2012; Fisher, 2010). As Fisher (2010) remarks, ‘children’s learning needs at age six are pretty much the same as at age five’ (Fisher, 2010, p. 18) and hence, what is seen to be appropriate in Year One should not be any different from what is seen to be appropriate in Reception (Fisher, 2020).

Despite the preferences of educators and researchers, a relationship based on readying for school is by some distance the dominant discourse through which Reception and Year One are aligned (Moss, 2012, 2019; Neaum, 2016; Wood & Hedges, 2016). Its dominance is, to a large extent, attributable to it being the predilection of policymakers who see it as a way of ensuring that children are able to conform and perform by the time they start Year One (Moss, 2013). Such a relationship is pursued through and strengthened by control technologies that persuade and constrain teachers into shaping their pedagogical practice in a way that fulfils politically motivated objectives (Moss, 2012; Roberts-Holmes, 2020). Often, these objectives run counter to the perspectives of educators and researchers who can be seen to favour alternative relationships (Alexander, 2010; Early Excellence, 2017), indicating that decisions about pedagogy in Reception and Year One are politically driven rather than educationally motivated (Neaum, 2016).

Against this political backdrop and the dominant discourse of school readiness, the aims of this study were to consider how pedagogies in Reception and Year One

were enacted, how the relationship between these phases of education was established and the impact this had on child and parent experiences and perceptions of the transition. Given the formidable role that policy technologies play in buttressing a readying for school relationship between Reception and Year One, this study attempts to compare and contrast settings where different technologies (rules) are present, in a state-sector school and an independent-sector school respectively. The different regulations imposed on these two sectors – particularly relating to curriculum, assessment and inspection – will now be discussed in more detail.

## 2.7 State and independent sectors

Given that pedagogy in Reception and Year One is highly politicised, this study attempts to compare how it is enacted in a state-sector school, where teachers are subject to policy technologies, with how it is enacted in an independent-sector school, where such control factors are not enforced. State and independent<sup>1</sup> schools have very different relationships with the state and differ in relation to a number of factors (New Schools Network, 2015), a number of which can be seen in Table 2.4 below. These differences have traditionally meant that state and independent schools are positioned as two very separate groups of the education system (White, 2015). Yet, it is worth noting that the different relationships these sectors have with central and local government has been somewhat blurred by the relatively recent privatisation of state-funded schools through the academisation programme (Boyask, 2015; White, 2015). Thus, schools with academy status can be seen to share features of both of these sectors (White, 2015): aligning with state schools in relation to aspects such as assessment and inspection; and with independent schools in relation to aspects such as curriculum, employment and qualifications (Roberts & Danechi, 2019). While this semi-autonomous arrangement poses interesting questions about pedagogy in Reception and Year One, the aim of this study is to compare a state-sector school with a setting where most, rather than some,

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<sup>1</sup> In the independent sector, parents fund their child's education: for day pupils, fees in 2014 were on average £12,582 per annum (Winch, 2014 as cited in Ndaji et al., 2016) but, according to White (2015) can range from between £3,000 to £21,000+ per annum.

technologies of control (Moss, 2012) are not enforced. Hence, it was decided that an independent school had the potential to facilitate the most interesting comparison.

*Table 2.4 Differences between State- and Independent-sector schools (New Schools Network, 2015)*

	<b>State</b>	<b>Independent</b>
<b>Finance</b>	Publicly funded and funds are disbursed by the Local Authority	Private: fees (parents) and bequests – no public funds committed
<b>Governance</b>	Local Authority and governing body	Proprietor, school governors, trustees,
<b>Employment and qualifications</b>	Local Authority is technically the employer and they follow national pay and conditions  Teachers must have Qualified Teacher Status (QTS)	Free to hire as required and set own pay and conditions  Teachers are not required to have Qualified Teacher Status (QTS)
<b>Inspection</b>	Must be inspected by Ofsted	Schools associated to the Independent Schools Council (ISC) can be inspected by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) and non-associated independent schools are inspected by Ofsted
<b>Accountability and transparency</b>	All results, pupil attainment and inspection, made public	No public reporting requirements for pupil attainment but inspection reports made public by Ofsted and ISI
<b>Outcome indicators</b>	Student outcomes monitored through inspection by Ofsted and schools must meet national floor targets	No mandatory inspection requirements for achievement and no external targets set
<b>Curriculum</b>	Must follow and meet the requirements of the National Curriculum	Exempt from following and meeting the requirements of the National Curriculum
<b>Assessment</b>	Must administer national assessments and ensure that children are assessed at all key stages	Not required to perform national assessments

As the focus of this study is on pedagogy in the transition from Reception to Year One, two of the differences between state and independent schools highlighted above are seen as being particularly pertinent in their ability to influence pedagogy; that is, curriculum and assessment. As part of his theory, Bernstein (1975) argued that curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation are the three ‘message systems’ of schooling. These three message systems are symbiotic, meaning that a change in one affects the practices of the others (Bernstein, 1975; Lingard, 2010). Thus, the nature of the curriculum and assessment message systems influence, and are influenced by, how pedagogy is enacted (Dockett et al., 2017a). Taking this into account, this research attempts to understand how different obligations to follow statutory curricula and administer mandatory assessments might shape pedagogy in Reception and Year One. In Table 2.5 below, the specific curriculum and



assessment requirements for state and independent schools in Reception and Year One and Two are outlined in more detail. It shows how settings in these sectors are subject to a number of different curriculum and assessment requirements. This is significant because, as was identified in the previous section, curriculum and assessment are two important mechanisms through which policymakers ‘steer’ teachers into working in certain ways and towards certain outcomes (Moss, 2012; Oates, 2010). Both of these technologies will now be considered in relation to state and independent schools and, following this, a third and equally as influential ‘control factor’ – that of inspection – will also be considered.

*Table 2.5 Government regulations relating to curriculum and assessment in state- and independent-sector settings in Reception and Year One and Two. \*Forthcoming*

	State		Independent	
	Curriculum	Assessment	Curriculum	Assessment
<b>Reception</b>	Obligated to follow the EYFS framework but can apply for full or partial exemption through the ‘established principles route’.	Reception Baseline Assessment*  EYFS Profile and Good Level of Development (GLD)	Obligated to follow the EYFS framework but can apply for a full exemption through the ‘independent schools route’.	<b>Cannot</b> ‘opt in’ to Reception Baseline Assessment* (Standards & Testing Agency, 2021, p. 19)  EYFS Profile and Good Level of Development (GLD)
<b>Year 1</b>	Obligated to follow the National Curriculum.	Phonics Screening Check	<b>Not</b> obligated to follow the National Curriculum.	<b>Cannot</b> formally administer Phonics Screening Check (Standards & Testing Agency, 2018, p. 54).
<b>Year 2</b>	Obligated to follow the National Curriculum	Standardised Assessment Tests in English, Mathematics and English grammar, punctuation and spelling (optional)	<b>Not</b> obligated to follow the National Curriculum.	Optional to take part in SATS.

### 2.7.1 Curriculum

As identified in Table 2.5, both state and independent schools are required to follow the EYFS curriculum framework in Reception (Department for Education, 2017a) and settings in both sectors can apply for exemption, albeit through two different ‘routes’ (Department for Education, 2017b). In Year One and Two, however, state schools are required to follow the National Curriculum whereas independent schools are released from its delivery (Department for Education, 2014). These different curriculum regulations have the potential to significantly impact pedagogy in Reception and Year One. As Sandberg and colleagues (2017) note, ‘the demands and guidelines in the curricula exert a major impact on the way practices take shape’ (p. 250).

While the process of recontextualisation from policy text to educational practice is multi-faceted and one that can take multiple pathways (Bernstein, 1990), the high level of ‘input regulation’ (Leat et al., 2013, p. 233) contained in the National Curriculum – outlining what it is exactly that pupils should be taught (‘pupils should be taught to...’) (Department for Education, 2014) – propagates a particular approach to pedagogy; namely one that contains strong framing and reduces learner agency (Manyukhina & Wyse, 2019). In addition, the previous section identified how in a readying for school relationship, the National Curriculum is inflexible and one-size-fits-all (Bingham & Whitebread, 2012) and that in order to ensure children are ‘ready’ for Year One, schools should introduce National Curriculum objectives in Reception (Ofsted, 2017). The National Curriculum is therefore a key technology underpinning a readying for school discourse, significantly influencing how pedagogies in Reception and Year One are formed.

It is important to note that independent schools are not entirely deregulated and must provide ‘appropriate plans and schemes of work’ relating to linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical and aesthetic and creative education domains (Department for Education, 2019c, p. 6). While these areas elicit some consistencies with the National Curriculum programmes for study (Department for Education, 2014), how independent schools design and implement their curriculum is at the discretion of individual teachers and schools rather than central government. Smithers and Robinson (2008) suggest that this level of autonomy enables the curriculum to be tailored to the needs of children and decisions about teaching and learning to be taken close to the classroom. Hence, being released from delivering the National Curriculum appears to increase the potential for different pedagogical approaches to be enacted in Reception and Year One.

### 2.7.2 Evaluation

From Table 2.5, it is possible to see that state and independent sectors are subject to a number of different assessment regulations. It shows how, apart from the EYFS Profile, which both state and independent schools are required to complete (unless

exempt) (Standards and Testing Agency, 2020b), there are a number of different evaluation requirements placed on these sectors. Schools in the state-sector are required to complete the Reception Baseline Assessment (from 2021) (Standards and Testing Agency, 2020a), administer the Phonics Screening Check (PSC) in Year One and carry out Standardised Assessment Tests (SATs) in Year Two (Standards and Testing Agency, 2018). Independent schools, in contrast, cannot carry out the RBA from 2021 (Standards and Testing Agency, 2021) or ‘formally administer’ the PSC in Year One (Standards and Testing Agency, 2018, p. 54). They can, but are not required to, administer SATs in Year Two (Standards and Testing Agency, 2018a). These different requirements are significant as evaluation is described as one of the major steering mechanisms in education (Lingard, 2010), positioned as an element that has the potential to fundamentally shape and change established pedagogical practices (Bradbury, 2018). In England, the evaluation message system is identified as being particularly influential (Leat et al., 2013; Lingard, 2010). For example, Lingard (2010, p. 131) describes the English education system as the ‘best case in point’ for evaluation, and in particular high-stakes testing – which is a symptom of GERM (Sahlberg, 2016) and a key apparatus for neoliberal governments to regulate and control the work of schools and teachers (Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021) – driving curriculum and pedagogy. The strong ‘input regulation’ characteristic of the National Curriculum is therefore compounded by the strong ‘output regulation’ of assessment (Leat et al., 2013), a combination which carries strong implications for pedagogy.

In the previous section it was identified how the GLD, PSC and SATs play an important role in directing teacher’s professional practice, resulting in ability grouping (Bradbury & Roberts-Holmes, 2017) and a stronger focus on adult-led teaching (Pascal et al., 2017) in Reception and Year One. Evidence also suggests that the strong emphasis given to assessments in England has contributed to a narrowing of the primary school curriculum (Berliner, 2011; Ofsted, 2018), and the emergence of a two-tier curriculum, identified by Alexander (2012, p. 377) as ‘the basics (core) and the rest (foundation)’. The hierarchical nature of the National Curriculum, weighted in favour of subjects that are testable, marginalises teachers’ capacity to develop and employ pedagogies that are sensitive to the needs of individual children (Connell, 2013). With independent schools not required to

administer the RBA in Reception, PSC in Year One and SATS in Year Two, there is potential to remove three technologies that are instrumental in establishing a readying for school relationship (Roberts-Holmes, 2019). This can alleviate significant pressure from teachers, giving them greater capacity to implement alternative approaches to pedagogy in Reception and Year One.

### 2.7.3 Inspection

In addition to curriculum and assessment, Ball (2003) reminds us that ‘who controls the field of judgement is crucial’ (p. 216) and in England, the role of the inspectorate has become increasingly influential (Wood, 2019). As can be seen in Table 2.6 below, Ofsted is responsible for inspecting ECE and CSE in all state-sector schools (Ofsted, 2019b) and they also inspect around half of independent-schools, those that are not affiliated to the Independent Schools Council (ISC) (Long, 2019). They inspect, judge and report on the overall effectiveness of schools, focussing on: the achievement of pupils, the quality of teaching, the quality of leadership and management and the behaviour and safety of pupils (Wood, 2019). Based on their inspection, Ofsted rate settings as either: outstanding (grade 1), good (grade 2), requires improvement (grade 3) or inadequate (grade 4) (Wood, 2019). The other half of independent schools are inspected by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI), which is affiliated to the ISC (Long, 2019). Inspections carried out by ISI are stated as being for the benefit of pupils and seek to ‘improve the quality and effectiveness of their education and of their care and welfare’ (Independent Schools Inspectorate, 2019, p. 3). The inspection of educational quality focusses on two main outcomes, pupil achievement and personal development (Independent Schools Inspectorate, 2019). For the EYFS, ISI is required to use the same four ratings as Ofsted; however, for Year One onwards it uses different terminology: excellent (grade 1), good (grade 2); sound (grade 3) or unsatisfactory (grade 4).

*Table 2.6 Government regulations relating to inspection in state- and independent-sector*

	<b>State</b>	<b>Independent</b>
<b>Inspection regulations</b>	All ECE and CSE settings inspected by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted)	Non-association schools inspected by Ofsted.  Association schools (Independent Schools Council) inspected by the Independent School Inspectorate (ISI)

Earlier on in this chapter it was noted how Ofsted have advanced their original remit of inspection to that of developing guidance on the ‘good’ and ‘effective’ practice that they expect to see in settings (Wood, 2019). In doing so, they have established themselves as a powerful authority which can create and maintain dominant discourses (Neaum, 2016) and, in the process, set the tone and direction of young children’s learning, development and educational experiences (TACTYC, 2017). The mandate Ofsted have acquired, Wood (2019) argues, positions them as the ‘sole arbiter of quality’, strongly influencing ‘how practitioners go about their work’ (p. 787).

In comparison to Ofsted, relatively little attention has been given to the role of ISI. On their website, ISI suggest that the reports generated from their inspections are different to that of Ofsted, as they apply a different framework and have different criteria for judging school quality (Independent Schools Inspectorate, n.d). However, apart from this, comparisons are limited to newspaper articles (e.g. Floyd, 2016) and school review guides (e.g. The Good Schools Guide, n.d). Although by no means conclusive, it appears that the dominant role that Ofsted currently occupies in the state-sector (Neaum, 2016; Wood, 2019) is not necessarily mirrored by that of the ISI in the independent-sector, something inferred in both articles (Floyd, 2016; The Good Schools Guide, n.d).

This section has explored three policy technologies – curriculum, assessment and inspection – that are identified as being particularly influential in buttressing a readying for school discourse between Reception and Year One. In isolation, these technologies might not be particularly effective; however, when linked together they connect and reinforce one another to form a powerful array, one that is far more than the sum of its parts (Moss, 2019, p. 15). The centralised control over these technologies – a key component of neoliberal governance (Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021) – enables the government to ‘steer at a distance’ (Ball, 2021b, p. 214) and maintain ‘a firm and directional hand over how teachers go about their professional duties’ (Berry, 2012, p. 399) in Reception and Year One. While resistance to these technologies in ECE is occurring at local (e.g. Archer, 2019) and national levels (e.g. Pascal et al., 2019), their non-statutory status in the

independent-sector gives greater potential for different discourses and approaches to teaching and learning to emerge in Reception and Year One. In this sense, while teachers in the state-sector are engulfed in an age of ‘collegial professionalism’ – where all too often curriculum, assessment and inspection demands mean that teachers lose ‘possession of their purposes to central governments’ – their independent-sector counterparts can be seen to remain in an age of ‘autonomous professionalism’ – whereby they are afforded freedom over curriculum and assessment development and decision making (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 166).

## 2.8 Chapter summary

This chapter has presented a review of the literature informing this thesis. It has explored established research concerned with the transition to compulsory school and pedagogy in Reception and Year One in England. Informed by activity theory, a conceptual framework capable of researching pedagogy, as both the *performance* of teaching and its attendant *discourse*, in Reception and Year One was developed. The chapter concluded by considering the different types of relationship that can be established between Reception and Year One and how the different curriculum, assessment and inspection requirements placed on state and independent schools in England has the potential to influence how settings in these sectors organise teaching and learning.

The next chapter addresses the methodological decisions taken to meet the research objectives and answer the research questions.

## Chapter 3 Methodology

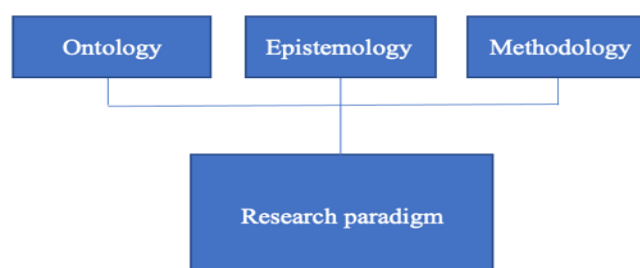
### 3.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines and provides justification for the methodological choices taken to answer the research questions. Broadly, it will describe two important components of research: the design and implementation of the study. The design component of the research will include discussion of the research design, research strategy, sampling strategy, pilot study and ethical considerations. The implementation component of the research will include discussion of data collection, data analysis and trustworthiness and authenticity.

### 3.1 Research design

#### 3.1.1 Research paradigm

When conducting research, it is important to acknowledge the philosophical assumptions guiding the inquiry (Waring, 2012). Creswell and Creswell (2018) reiterate the interconnectedness of research designs, philosophical assumptions and research methods and stress the importance of researchers being able to articulate their study's philosophical position. This requires researchers to address three philosophical assumptions relating to ontology, epistemology, and methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Mukherji & Albon, 2018). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) outline that: ontology is concerned with the nature of reality, epistemology is concerned with the nature of knowledge, and methodology is concerned with how we can gain knowledge of the world. As can be seen in Figure 3.1 below, when taken collectively, these three principles – ontology, epistemology and methodology – combine to form a research paradigm (Guba, 1990), also understood as an interpretive framework (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), or a worldview (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).



*Figure 3.1 The philosophical assumptions underpinning the research paradigm*

When engaging with the philosophical assumptions outlined in Figure 3.1, researchers are presented with an ever-expanding network of research paradigms from which to choose (Creswell, 2013). However, the research paradigms within this network have and continue to be defined, characterised and applied in a range of different ways by researchers (Cohen et al., 2018). Observing such inconsistencies, a number of authors have conceded that making sense of these perspectives can be a daunting task for researchers (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Punch & Oancea, 2014). Punch and Oancea (2014) argue that the variety of philosophical claims, inconsistent terminology and the disciplinary politics that shape debate have all contributed to the confusion associated with research paradigms. In order to navigate this ‘contested terrain’ (Denscombe, 2010a, p. 116), it is asserted that there is no such thing as a ‘correct’ research paradigm (Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012). Rather, researchers should make sense of the role of philosophy in their own way and in a way that is appropriate to their research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Selecting a research paradigm is a process that requires researchers to reflect on their beliefs about the world and the nature of research. Some researchers hold deeply engrained beliefs about a particular research paradigm while others prefer a more eclectic approach (Creswell, 2013). Different strengths of attitude towards the role of philosophy in research have clear implications for the selection and application of a research paradigm. Here it is helpful to draw on Punch and Oancea’s (2014) distinction between paradigm- and question-driven research. Both of these approaches recognise the importance of the research paradigm; however, it is possible to see that they differ in terms of how and why a research paradigm comes to be selected, and subsequently when it is addressed in the research process. These considerations are identified in more detail in Table 3.1 below. Before designing this research, a primary consideration was to establish whether this study would be paradigm- or question-driven. This required me to consider both of these approaches in more detail and consider which approach best reflected my own personal views on the role of philosophy in research.



*Table 3.1 Key paradigm considerations of paradigm- and question-driven approaches to research (developed from Punch & Oancea, 2014)*

<b>Approach</b>	<b>How is a research paradigm chosen?</b>	<b>Why is a research paradigm chosen?</b>	<b>When is the research paradigm chosen?</b>
<b>Paradigm-driven approach</b>	Based on researcher's personal ontological and epistemological beliefs.	It aligns with the way in which researchers view the world and the nature of research (e.g. ontology & epistemology).	Before the consideration of the research topic, questions and design.
<b>Question-driven approach</b>	Based on what is most appropriate in order to meet research objectives and answer the research questions.	It aligns with the research aims and the philosophical assumptions (ontology and epistemology) underlying the research strategy.	After the research objectives, questions and an appropriate research strategy have been identified.

### 3.1.2 Paradigm-driven approach

In taking a paradigm-driven approach, researchers begin with a paradigm from which they develop research questions and methods (Punch & Oancea, 2014). Selecting a research paradigm at the start of a study requires researchers to identify their ontological and epistemological beliefs. Through exploring these philosophical tenets, researchers are able to position themselves and their work within a particular research paradigm (Kivunja, & Kuyini, 2017). This is an approach that is encouraged in much of the research methods literature (Biesta, 2020; White, 2013). For example, Mason (2005) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016) believe that the start of a research project should involve researchers examining their ontological and epistemological beliefs and that this positioning should precede the consideration of a research topic or research question. A paradigm-driven approach is described by Biesta (2020) as a 'confessional approach' where researchers 'sign up' to a particular research paradigm before starting the research process. It is an approach that invites researchers to lay their 'cards on the table' (Biesta, 2020, p. 9) and position themselves within a particular research tradition (Punch & Oancea, 2014).

When considering a paradigm-driven approach it is important to take into account that the language used to describe research paradigms ‘often suggests that there are a number of fundamentally different approaches to doing research’ (Biesta, 2020, p. 14). In discussing how research paradigms are framed, Pring (2015) warns that there is a tendency in educational research to draw sharp contrasts between different types of research. He argues that:

These sharp divisions are frequently “institutionalised”, with members of one “institution” sniping at members of the other. Thus, in many theses and books... a sharp distinction is made. The distinction is made on the basis not of “appropriateness to task” but of “epistemology” and even “ontology”. (Pring, 2015, p. 59)

Often, in educational research, the most notable contrast made is between positivism and interpretivism (Hammersley, 2012; Pring, 2000, 2015; Wellington, 2015). This binary construction has often encouraged researchers to situate their work within only one of these traditions (Macfarlane, 2021), a concept that Punch and Oancea (2014, p. 19) term ‘paradigmatic loyalty’. However, it is proposed that such dualistic thinking is reductionist and based on exaggerated and false dichotomies (Pring, 2015; White, 2017). Research paradigms are not necessarily mutually exclusive and the network of philosophical positions from which to choose is vast (Cohen et al., 2018). Yet, the approach to selecting a research paradigm based on ontology and epistemology can be seen to contribute to and encourage partisan approaches to research. Paradigm-driven approaches can often mean that in making a personal choice for one research paradigm researchers are making a personal choice against another (Biesta, 2020).

When presented with such sharp distinctions between research paradigms, there is a temptation to neatly position oneself on one side of the debate (Punch & Oancea, 2014). However, Punch and Oancea (2014) argue convincingly that such positioning, especially early on in the career of a researcher, runs the risk of ‘freezing identities into an artificial land-scape of paradigmatic, and disciplinary crevasses.’ (p. 18). In agreement, White (2013) argues that positioning oneself within a particular research tradition can limit the type of enquiry that researchers are willing, or able, to carry out. Moreover, this positioning can contribute to the

development of ‘mono-method’ identities and ‘methodolatry’; terms that describe the repeated application of a particular research approach (Macfarlane, 2021; White, 2013, 2017).

As this study developed, I engaged with and saw the value, as well as the limitations, of research from a number of different research paradigms. Therefore, the idea of aligning myself to a particular paradigm prior to the research design was not something I felt entirely comfortable with. I recognise that different philosophical positions and modes of enquiry can all help to advance research. This is a position that is shared by transition to Compulsory School Education (CSE) researchers (Dockett & Perry, 2013) as well as the Early Childhood Education (ECE) community more broadly (OECD, 2012). It signifies the importance of moving away from dominant evaluations and towards a multiplicity of languages through which we can understand ECE (Dahlberg et al., 2007). This identifies the need for researchers to be eclectic and recognises that different questions require different kinds of research (Pring, 2015). A potential way to implement this is to consider the research paradigm through a question-driven, rather than paradigm-driven, approach (Punch & Oancea, 2014).

### 3.1.3 Question-driven approach

As an alternative, a question-driven approach places an emphasis on formulating research questions and selecting an appropriate research design (Punch & Oancea, 2014). After these processes have taken place, it is then possible to situate the study within a particular research paradigm. Rather than seeing the research paradigm as a position that one can confess to, or even occupy, it is instead conceived as a tool to be used to achieve the aims of a study (Biesta, 2020). Biesta (2020) argues that when research paradigms are framed as tools we use instead of positions we take it is possible to see that a confessional, paradigm-driven approach is problematic. He makes the case that:

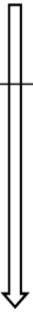
The first judgement, after all, is never about which tool one should use, but about what the issues are that need addressing, as it is only then that we can begin to ask which tool might be useful for addressing the issues. (Biesta, 2020, p. 9)

A question-driven approach, therefore, applies philosophy based on ‘appropriateness to task’ (Pring, 2015, p. 59) and allows researchers to draw upon the research paradigm that most appropriately answers the research questions. To take this approach is not to relegate the research paradigm, but instead, it repositions it to allow an unfettered approach to research.

Situating the aims at the outset of the research design is an approach recommended by a number of researchers (Biesta, 2020; Pring, 2015; Punch & Oancea, 2014; Thomas, 2016; Wellington, 2015; White, 2013). It recognises that paradigms do not necessarily drive research, ‘as research is driven by the purposes of the research’ (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 9; Punch, 2014). By focussing on the aims of the research at the outset, a question-driven approach encourages researchers to select a research paradigm specific to the context of their research. This means it is possible to avoid selecting a research paradigm based on objectified, abstract and often competing philosophical principles (Biesta, 2020; Punch, 2014). It allows researchers to apply philosophy with particularity; namely, the selection of ‘particular data, a particular design, a particular methodology’ (Biesta, 2020, p. 15).

Assimilating these arguments, the research objectives and the research questions were considered at the start of this study. This approach can therefore be understood as question-driven (Punch & Oancea, 2014). Applying a question-driven approach impacts the order in which aspects of the research design are addressed. Following the identification of research objectives and the formulation of research questions it was possible to consider a research strategy that was capable of meeting the aims of the study. Once an appropriate strategy had been selected its associated philosophical assumptions were then considered. It was at this stage where it was possible to situate this study within a particular research paradigm. This approach, which draws upon Denscombe’s (2010a, p. 111) depiction of the research design process, is visually represented in Table 3.2 below. The proceeding sections will explore these concepts in more detail in the order that they are presented in Table 3.2.

*Table 3.2 Research design process using a question-driven approach (adapted from Denscombe, 2010a, p. 111)*

	<b>1) Research objectives and questions</b>	What is the research trying to achieve?	
	<b>2) Research Design</b>	<b>2a) Strategy</b>	Which approach will best meet the aims of the research and answer the research questions?
		<b>2b) Philosophy</b>	What are the underlying philosophical assumptions? Which research paradigm should be applied?

### 3.1.4 Research objectives and research questions

In taking a question-driven approach, the process of developing research questions was considered as the starting point for the research design. When developing the research questions, it was helpful to first articulate the broad aims and objectives of the study before deducing more specific research questions (Punch, 2014). The aims and objectives of a study can provide direction and act as an intermediary between a broad topic of interest and the formulation of specific research questions (White, 2017). The objectives of this study were:

- To understand and explore how pedagogy is enacted in Reception and Year One in schools in different sectors.
- To understand how the pedagogies enacted in Reception and Year One in different sector settings influence child and parent experiences and perceptions of the transition between these year groups.

Once the research objectives had been established, it was possible to consider the formulation of research questions (White, 2017). Research questions narrow the research objectives down into more specific areas of focus, a process called ‘operationalisation’ (Cohen et al., 2018; Denscombe, 2010a; White, 2017). Research questions require researchers to provide a detailed and precise account of what it is exactly that is being investigated (Denscombe, 2010a). They also require that researchers consider the feasibility and practicalities of their research

(Denscombe, 2010a; Punch, 2014). This is especially important when researching phenomena that are time bound, such as the transition from Reception to Year One. After several iterations (Punch, 2014; White, 2017) the following research questions were formulated:

- 1) How do a state-sector primary school and an independent-sector primary school organise teaching and learning in Reception and Year One?
- 2) What factors influence and shape teaching and learning in Reception and Year One in these different settings?
- 3) How do children and parents experience and perceive the pedagogies enacted in Reception and Year One and, the transition between them?

### 3.1.5 Research strategy

The formulation of clear and specific research questions helps researchers to develop an appropriate research design (Denscombe, 2010a; White, 2013). This provides a logical structure connecting research objectives and questions to data and conclusions (Cohen et al., 2018; White, 2013). It encourages researchers to consider types of evidence needed to answer the research questions in a coherent way (de Vaus, 2001). It is important to ensure that research design is fit for purpose; namely, meeting the research objectives and answering the research questions (Cohen et al., 2018). In order to develop an appropriate research design, which includes selecting a suitable research strategy (2a in Table 3.2) and then identifying its associated philosophical assumptions (2b in Table 3.2), it was necessary to consider the research objectives and questions in more detail.

To help this process it was useful to understand the formulation of the research questions. Denscombe (2010a, pp. 11-12) presents six different question types according to their purpose: forecasting an outcome, explaining causes or consequences, criticising or evaluating, describing and exploring, developing good practice, and empowerment. In the context of this study, it is possible to see that the research questions formulated were descriptive and exploratory. Their intention was to describe the *performance* of teaching (Alexander, 2001) in Reception and

Year One in each setting (RQ1); to explore pedagogical *discourse* in Reception and Year One in each setting (RQ2); and, within each setting, explore how children and parents experienced and perceived the pedagogies enacted in Reception and Year One and, the transition between them (RQ3). Answering these questions was therefore primarily concerned with describing ‘how things are’ (Denscombe, 2010a, p. 11) as well as exploring ‘what is going on?’ (White, 2017, p. 57).

In addition to question types, the concepts included in research questions can help researchers to navigate some of the key considerations related to the research design. Denscombe (2010a, p. 101) outlines that these key decisions relate to time frame, number, environment, data and theory. By analysing the research questions, it was possible to make inferences about these key decisions, as outlined in Table 3.3 below.

Table 3.3 Key considerations related to research design (Denscombe, 2010a, p. 101)

Key decision	Consideration of key decision in relation to research questions
<b>Time frame</b>	<i>Time frame</i> refers to whether the research will aim to provide a ‘snap-shot’ of the situation at a particular time or whether it aims to track phenomena over a period of time (Denscombe, 2010a; White, 2017). It is possible to see from the research questions that this research aimed to understand how a cohort of children in the state- and independent-sector respectively experience the transition from Reception to Year One. Hence, this study can be described as a cohort-study that has a longitudinal time frame (Denscombe, 2010a).
<b>Number</b>	The key decision relating to <i>number</i> requires researchers to think about whether they are aiming for breadth or depth (Denscombe, 2010a). This research aimed to study one school from the state-sector and one school from the independent-sector. It therefore aimed to achieve an in-depth investigation into the transition in two cases.
<b>Environment</b>	<i>Environment</i> relates to whether the research is carried out in a controlled or natural environment (Denscombe, 2010a). The aim of this research was not to establish causal relationships in a controlled environment but was to get as close to reality as possible by understanding participants’ activities and behaviours in the natural setting that they occur.
<b>Data</b>	<i>Data</i> is a key decision which asks if the research questions are intended to measure or interpret phenomena and subsequently whether they would be best answered using data that is quantitative, qualitative or a combination of both (Denscombe, 2010a). The research questions necessitated an interpretation of the Reception and Year One pedagogical activity systems in each sector and also aimed to understand participants’ perceptions and experiences as they encountered these activity systems. Therefore, the research questions promulgated the collection of qualitative and relatively un-structured data. Punch (2014) indicates that if research questions are formulated well it is possible to identify the necessary data collection techniques. To reach the level of description and explanation necessitated by the research questions, it was clear that multiple qualitative data collection techniques would be required.
<b>Theory</b>	The decision pertaining to <i>theory</i> refers to whether the researcher is attempting to build or test theory (Denscombe, 2010a). Denscombe (2010a) suggests that theory relates to the type of research questions being investigated and whether they are of a descriptive/exploratory or explanatory nature (Denscombe, 2010a). This has been outlined above where it was established that the research questions are predominantly descriptive but also contain an exploratory aspect. The research questions were formulated to understand ‘what is going on?’ (White, 2017, p. 57) as well as ‘why is it happening?’ (Denscombe, 2010a, p. 105). This reflects that while the transition from ECE to CSE has been widely investigated there is a lack of research on how schools in different sectors organise teaching and learning across the transition. In addition, the application of activity theory represents a new way of framing the transition. Therefore, this study primarily attempted to generate theory by taking ‘a fresh look’ at an established research area (Denscombe, 2010a, p. 105).



By giving consideration to the type of research questions asked, and the five key decisions outlined by Denscombe (2010a), it was possible to select a qualitative, collective case study as the research design for the present study. An in-depth and detailed explanation of qualitative collective case study will be presented later on in this chapter (section 3.2). However, it is necessary to first provide a brief outline of the appropriateness of qualitative collective case study in answering the research questions. Following this, the philosophical assumptions underpinning qualitative collective case study will be explored, enabling the researcher to situate this study within a particular research paradigm.

### 3.1.6. Qualitative collective case study research strategy

The process of selecting a qualitative, collective case study happened at two levels. First, the key decisions (Denscombe, 2010a) relating to data, theory and environment meant that it was possible to distinguish between quantitative, qualitative and mixed method research approaches. Decisions about these components made it possible to understand that I needed to select a research design that could generate relatively un-structured data in order to describe, explain and interpret phenomena occurring in two natural settings. By establishing these requirements, it was possible to identify that the research design for this study would be situated within a broadly qualitative research approach. A qualitative research design supports flexible forms of inquiry that are aimed at discovering and understanding how human beings experience and interpret the natural and social settings in which they live and work (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hammersley, 2013; Sandelowski, 2004). A qualitative approach is a research design in its own right, however, it is perhaps most commonly applied as an ‘umbrella’ term for a number of more specific research designs (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For example, Creswell and Poth (2018) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016) choose to discuss five and six common qualitative research designs respectively. Patton (2015) chooses to offer a more expansive classification and presents sixteen different qualitative research designs.

After identifying a broadly qualitative approach, the second consideration was to decide which specific qualitative research strategy was best suited to meet the

research objectives and answer the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Although many qualitative research designs overlap, and can even be combined, there are subtle differences between each approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In order to identify these nuances and differentiate between qualitative research designs, it was again helpful to consider the research objectives and questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The key decisions (Denscombe, 2010a), especially relating to time frame, number and data, played an important role in narrowing the number of potential research designs for the present study. By considering these aspects, it was possible to understand that I needed to select a qualitative research design that could facilitate an in-depth investigation, using multiple methods of data collection, into two settings over a sustained period of time. These characteristics led to the selection of a case study research strategy, defined by Creswell and Poth (2018) as:

a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audio-visual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case themes. (p. 97)

In particular, case study focuses on achieving an in-depth understanding of phenomena in one or a small number of instances (Denscombe, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It is the ability to support a holistic investigation into a relevant area of interest that distinguished qualitative case study research from other qualitative research strategies (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Vershuren, 2003) and positioned it as an appropriate research strategy to meet the objectives for the present study.

Yet, in order to be certain that case study was the most appropriate research strategy it was important to be able to define the unit of analysis as it is this that characterises case study research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The way the researcher delimits the case can determine if a study is a case study or whether a different qualitative research strategy should be used (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, although the range of potential cases is broad (Denscombe, 2010a), not everything can qualify as a case (Stake, 1995); there are certain characteristics that need to be

present. As an example, Stake (1995) draws a distinction between the study of a teacher, who could be a case, and the study of teaching, which could not. Central to this distinction is that an individual teacher is specific whereas teaching is a generality (Stake, 1995). For Stake, a ‘case is a specific, a complex, functioning thing’ (Stake, 1995, p. 2), it is ‘a noun, a thing, an entity; it is seldom a verb, a participle, a functioning’ (Stake, 2006, p. 1). Guided by Stake (2006), Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state that a case can be a specific programme, a particular classroom of learners or a particular individual (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This aligns with the present study which comprised of two cases, both of which included a class of children who were transitioning from Reception to Year One in 2019 in a state and independent school respectively. These cases were indicative of specific, functioning groups that were intrinsically bounded.

As stated earlier, the implementation of a qualitative collective case study as this study’s research strategy will be explored in more depth in section 3.2 of this chapter. First, however, it is necessary to explore the second and final aspect of the research design and identify the philosophical assumptions associated with qualitative collective case study research strategy.

### 3.1.7 Philosophical assumptions

In a question-driven approach, ontology and epistemology are understood in relation to the research objectives, questions and strategy. This is an antithesis to a paradigm-driven approach which, as outlined in Table 3.1 above, places an emphasis on researchers establishing their ontological and epistemological orientations based on personal predilection. Case study is commonly discussed as a qualitative research strategy (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hamilton & Corbett Whittier, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), yet it is versatile in that it can, unlike other research strategies, be oriented from various ontological, epistemological and methodological positions (Gerring, 2004; Harrison et al., 2017; Yazan, 2015). This has meant that ‘case study survives in a curious methodological limbo’ (Gerring, 2004, p. 341) with all methods of data capture deemed permissible (Merriam, 1998). This transcendence means that it not possible to identify ontological or epistemological positions specific to a case study research design alone. Instead, it

must be positioned within a quantitative, qualitative or mixed method tradition. It is only then that it becomes possible to identify this research strategy as being underpinned by certain ontological and epistemological beliefs.

#### 3.1.7.1 Subjectivist ontology

Ontology is concerned with the nature of phenomena under investigation (Cohen et al., 2018). It considers whether the reality of phenomena is of an objective nature, 'out there' in the world, or of a subjective nature, the product of individual consciousness and cognition (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 1). From an objectivist ontology, reality is perceived as stable, predictable and existing independent of the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Wellington, 2015). Alternatively, when perceived as the product of individual consciousness, there is no single, observable reality that exists independent of the researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Rather, reality in the social world is subjective, socially constructed and multiple realities exist (Waring, 2012). As explored above, case study is a versatile research strategy and can therefore be oriented from an objectivist or subjectivist ontology. However, when positioned within a qualitative research tradition it is possible to identify, with more clarity, an underpinning ontological position.

Merriam (1998) and Stake (1995), who have both written extensively about case study research, suggest that qualitative case study is influenced by principles of relativity and subjectivity. To develop an in-depth understanding of a small number of cases, qualitative case study is concerned with 'insight, discovery and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing' (Merriam, 1998, pp. 28-29). It therefore aims to build rather than test theory, which was identified, with the help of Denscombe's (2010a) key decisions, as an important aspect of this study's research objectives and questions. In qualitative case study, reality is not singular and objective but rather, 'there are multiple interpretations of reality' (Merriam, 1998, p. 22) which individuals, who are knowledgeable about the case, construct through their subjective and unique experiences (Stake, 1995). This necessitates a nuanced understanding of reality (Flyvberg, 2006) that positions individuals as 'meaning making beings who actively construct their own meanings of situations and make sense of their world' (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 288). It recognises that reality

is a ‘creation of the human mind’ (Denscombe, 2010a, p. 119), a social construct influenced by time and context (Mertens, 2015), generating complex, multiple and, at times, contradictory versions (Cohen et al., 2018).

The subjectivist view of reality that underpins qualitative case study was reinforced by the study’s research objectives and questions. The aims of this study necessitated a view of reality that could acknowledge ‘that the nature of the social world might vary between different cultures and different groups’ (Denscombe, 2010a, p. 119), in this case between state- and independent-sector settings and between the educators, children, and parents within these settings. Instead of trying to establish or explain the existence of a single and observable reality across these two cases and between participant groups, as would be the case with an objectivist ontology (Creswell, 2016), the research aims and questions emphasised individual participants actively constructing their own interpretations (Cohen et al., 2018). Reality was therefore understood from the views of the participants, which were varied, multiple, and complex (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Moreover, viewing reality as a social construction meant that it was possible to take into account the cultural, historical and contextual factors of each setting (Creswell, 2013). Such factors are an essential aspect of understanding pedagogy in its broadest sense (Alexander, 2001). The research objectives and questions therefore supported and strengthened the subjectivist ontological orientation emphasised by a qualitative case study research strategy.

### 3.1.7.2 Interpretivist epistemology

While ontology is associated with the nature of reality, epistemology is concerned with the knowledge we are able to generate from reality. The relationship between ontology and epistemology is a mutually dependent one; beliefs about the nature of reality influence how we come to know it (Crotty, 1998; Scott & Morrison, 2007). Hence, if reality is regarded as fixed and ‘out there’, then it can be objectively measured and observed (Denscombe, 2010b). The aim of the researcher is to test, verify, and refine established laws that govern our understanding of the world (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). However, if there is no single, observable reality, knowledge generation relies on human capacities to

‘make sense’ of it (Denscombe, 2010b, p. 119). Emphasis here is placed on understanding and interpreting the subjective meanings that participants use to describe their personalised experiences and individual perceptions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The epistemological orientation of a qualitative case study research strategy is underpinned by an emphasis on interpreting participants’ subjective accounts (Bassegy, 1999; Stake 1995). In qualitative case study, where contextual conditions are not always known and phenomena can develop in unexpected ways, Stake (1995) describes how it is essential that researchers hold ‘interpretive powers’ that are in ‘immediate touch with developing events and ongoing revelations’ (Stake, 1995, pp. 41-42). This involves researchers gaining an insider’s perspective (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) that allows them to ‘look through the eyes of the participants’ (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 289). It favours a ‘personal capture’ of the research context, enabling researchers to interpret phenomena, recognise contextual factors and understand participant’s multiple realities (Stake, 1995, p. 44). In this position, meaning is not found or discovered in an objective fashion, but instead, it is produced, constructed, and negotiated alongside participants through a process of interaction (Crotty, 1998; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stake, 1995).

The research objectives for this study were descriptive and exploratory. They sought to explore the pedagogies enacted in Reception and Year One in two different school settings and consider how these pedagogies influenced how children and parents experienced and perceived the transition between them. Such research objectives necessitated an experiential rather than operational approach (Stake, 1995). This positioned myself, the researcher, as the primary instrument of data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), and meant that I needed to step inside Reception and Year One in each setting to observe pedagogy and transition from the participants’ perspectives. Stepping inside genuine cases, in natural settings, supported the researcher to identify, consider and interpret the actions and perceptions of real people in real-life situations (Flyvbjerg, 2011). In exploring unique cases with particularity (Bassegy, 1999), in this case a class of children who transitioned from Reception to Year One in 2019 in a state- and independent-sector school, emphasis was placed on constructing ideographic

rather than nomothetic knowledge (Sandelowski, 2004). Instead of aiming to achieve statistical or scientific generalisations, qualitative case study presented a chance to explore ‘fuzzy generalisations’, which Bassey (1999, p. 46) describes as a ‘qualified generalisation, carrying the idea of possibility but no certainty’. It is a notion that Biesta (2020, p. 131) terms the ‘domain of possibility’ where researchers can predict ‘what might be the case’.

In following a question-driven approach, ontology and epistemology were understood in relation to a qualitative case study instead of the researcher’s personal beliefs. The subjectivist ontological and interpretivist epistemological orientation of a qualitative case study were supported by the research objectives and research questions. This displays coherence between the research design process components of a question-driven approach (Denscombe, 2010a), which were identified in Table 3.2 above. After identifying the underlying philosophical assumptions of qualitative case study, it was possible to consider which research paradigm was most appropriate.

### 3.1.7.3 Interpretivist research paradigm

Research can be informed by a range of different research paradigms. Some researchers, especially in education, choose to only discuss positivism and interpretivism (e.g Wellington, 2015) whereas others distinguish between four (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and five (Guba & Lincoln, 2008), including pragmatist, critical and postmodern research paradigms. When taking into consideration the subjectivist ontology and interpretivist epistemology of qualitative, collective case study, a number of research paradigms are appropriate. For example, interpretive, critical and postmodern research paradigms espouse the notion that there can be multiple realities and truths (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016) and that knowledge is transactional, subjective and interpretive (Guba & Lincoln, 2008). In addition, pragmatism could be perceived as appropriate as it is agnostic in that it does not hold a fixed ontological and epistemological position (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This means that the ontological and epistemological orientation of qualitative case study can be situated within a number of different research paradigms.

To distinguish between these ‘appropriate’ paradigms further it was necessary to understand the ‘purpose’ of each research paradigm in relation to the research objectives and questions. As shown in Table 3.4 below, which is taken from Merriam and Tisdell (2016) and extended by Creswell and Creswell (2018), these research paradigms have different ‘purposes’ which lead to different ‘types’ of research. The research objectives and research questions placed significant emphasis on understanding and interpreting participants’ experiences and perceptions. From the research paradigms identified in Table 3.4 below, it is evident that interpretivism aligns with the study’s objectives and is best placed to answer the research questions. Interpretivism is a common research paradigm in qualitative research (Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It regards the social world as nuanced and complex and best understood through a process of interpreting the subjective meanings that participants attach to their experiences (Creswell, 2013; Denscombe, 2010b). To understand social phenomena researchers therefore have to grasp how participants interpret, perceive, and make sense of the world around them (Hammersley, 2012).

*Table 3.4 Purpose and types of research associated with ‘appropriate’ research paradigms for the present study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 12). \*Entries in this column are based on Creswell and Creswell (2018)*


<b>Research paradigm</b>	<b>Interpretivism</b>	<b>Critical</b>	<b>Postmodernism</b>	<b>Pragmatism*</b>
<b>Purpose</b>	Describe, understand, interpret	Change, emancipate, empower	Deconstruct, problematise, question, interrupt	What works?
<b>Types of research</b>	Naturalistic, qualitative	Action research, critical race theory	Postcolonial, postmodern	Mixed methods (qualitative & quantitative)

A subjectivist ontology, an interpretivist epistemology and an emphasis placed on describing, understanding and interpreting phenomena in natural settings positions interpretivism as the most appropriate research paradigm for the current study. It is at this stage where important questions associated with a question-driven approach to research design, as posed in Table 3.2 above, can be answered. An updated version of Table 3.2 is shown in Table 3.5 below which, in the right hand-side



column, identifies the research design components that are most appropriate to meet the research objectives and research questions.

*Table 3.5 The answers (right hand column) to the important questions posed (middle column) by a question-driven approach to research design (adapted from Denscombe, 2010a, p. 111)*

	<b>1) Research objectives and questions</b>	What is the research trying to achieve?	An in-depth investigation into two settings over a sustained period of time	
	<b>2) Research Design</b>	<b>2a) Strategy</b>	Which approach will best meet the aims of the research and answer the research questions?	A qualitative collective case study
		<b>2b) Philosophy</b>	What are the underlying philosophical assumptions?  Which research paradigm should be applied?	Subjectivist ontology and interpretivist epistemology  Interpretivism

### 3.2 Qualitative collective case study

In the previous section of this chapter, a qualitative, collective case study was identified as the most appropriate research strategy to meet the research objectives and answer the research questions. Key to this selection was first, the level of depth qualitative case study can generate and second, the ability to identify two specific cases around which clear boundaries could be established. These two characteristics, as was discussed, distinguish qualitative case study from other qualitative research strategies (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Vershuren, 2003).

Case studies are particularly useful in generating rich (Thomas, 2016) and ‘thick’ description (Merriam, 1998) and these characteristics, according to Stake (1995), facilitate an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied. To achieve this level of depth, case study encourages researchers to employ a variety of data collection methods (Denscombe, 2017; Pring, 2015) in order to explore ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions (Thomas, 2016; Yin, 2014). This was well suited to the focus of the current study which was identified earlier, with the help of Denscombe’s (2010a, pp. 11-12) research question typology, as placing an emphasis on ‘describing and

exploring' ('how') and 'explaining causes or consequences' ('why'). This research was therefore not only concerned with identifying what goes on in Reception and Year One but was also interested in explaining why these year groups function as they do. Hence, the focus of case study is on developing a holistic view by engaging with and unravelling the 'complexities of a given situation' (Denscombe, 2017, p. 58), a focus that is complemented by this study's conceptual framework, activity theory (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). Contributing to the level of depth achieved in case study is a focus on 'singularity' (Bassey, 1999, p. 47) and 'particularisation' (Stake, 1995, p. 8). By researching just one or a small number of instances, researchers are able to explore phenomena with profundity, something Pring (2015, p. 55) refers to as 'intensity in the examination of the particular'.

An important characteristic of a case study approach is for the unit of analysis to be embedded within a natural setting (Bassey, 1999; Denscombe, 2010b; Yin, 2014). Here, behaviours in the case are not manipulated (Yin, 2014), nor is the case artificially constructed; instead, it 'exists prior to the research project and ... continues to exist once the research has finished' (Denscombe, 2010b, p. 54). The role of the researcher is to conduct naturalistic enquiry (Merriam, 1985; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in order to get as close to reality as possible (Flyvberg, 2011). The transition from Reception to Year One represents a naturally occurring phenomenon (Yin, 2014). It is a process that is experienced by a cohort of children each year and stepping inside genuine cases will enable the researcher to identify and understand the actions and perceptions of people in real-life situations (Flyvbjerg; 2011). The naturalistic component of case study research means that there are not always clear boundaries separating phenomenon and context (Yin, 2014). This, unlike methodologies that attempt to control certain variables, enables the inquirer to take into account the contextual factors of a case (Pring, 2015) which can greatly impact social behaviour (Cohen et al., 2018). Accounting for these contextual factors is seen by Stake (1995) and Yin (2014) as critical for developing a holistic understanding of a real-world contemporary case.

The naturalistic characteristic of qualitative case study research makes it highly compatible with activity theory (Engeström, 2015), the conceptual framework underpinning this study. Activity theory involves 'the examination of self-sustained

systems that are difficult to remove from [their] context' (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010, p. 79). Used in combination, qualitative collective case study and activity theory presented a way of enabling the researcher to gain insight into complex phenomena that, according to Stake (1995, p. 17), are often 'intricately wired to political, social, historical, and especially personal contexts'.

It is important to recognise that qualitative case study is often criticised on the basis that its findings have limited generalisability (Cohen et al., 2018; Denscombe, 2017). This criticism is concerned with how researchers can generalise when  $n = 1$  (Bassegy, 1999) and when the aim is particularisation (Stake, 1995). However, this view is based on a need to conform to scientific notions of generalisability where researchers extrapolate on the basis of representativeness (Cohen et al., 2018; Thomas, 2013). This form of generalisation is unsuitable for case study (Stake, 1995; Thomas, 2016; Yin, 2014). For example, Yin (2014, p. 40) argues strongly that 'A fatal flaw in doing case studies is to consider statistical generalisation to be the way of generalising the findings from your case study'. Later on in this chapter, the concept of representativeness will be addressed and an alternative, one based on the notion of transferability rather than generalisation, will be presented.

### 3.2.1 Defining and bounding the case

An important aspect of employing a case study approach is to consider how the unit of analysis is defined. Yin (2014) suggests that this process comprises two components: defining the case and bounding the case. Together, these components allow the researcher to study the complexity of a specific case that is contained within defined parameters (Creswell, 2013; Thomas, 2016). The former component, defining the case, is paramount to the design of a case study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, Yin, 2014). Defining the case should be informed by the research questions and study propositions as these features provide the case with focus and help to identify relevant information (Silverman, 2010; Yin, 2014). Without these to guide the enquiry, Yin (2014) argues that there is a temptation to cover everything about a case, something he describes as impossible and something other researchers have expressed as undesirable (Mason, 2018; Silverman, 2010). Approaching case study research without an established motive is aligned with what Stake (1995) identifies

as an ‘intrinsic’ case study. Here, the aim is to capture a case in its entirety and learn holistically about a particular case (Stake, 1995). Stake (1995) contrasts ‘intrinsic’ with ‘instrumental’ case study where the aim is to generate insight into an aspect, concern or issue of a particular case. This aligns with the purpose of the present study which attempts to understand particular aspects of the transition from ECE to CSE, namely, the pedagogies enacted in Reception and Year One in a state and independent school and how children and parents within these settings experience and perceive these pedagogies and, transition between them. It can therefore be understood as a collective, instrumental case study (Stake, 1995).

After defining the case, the latter component – bounding the case – becomes important (Yin, 2014). Denscombe (2010b) reiterates the importance of establishing distinct boundaries for the unit of analysis and suggests without identifying these it becomes difficult to state what the case is. For Denscombe (2010b), ‘good case study research needs to contain a clear vision of the boundaries to the case and provide an explicit account of what they are’ (p. 56). The process of making the case a bounded unit includes establishing spatial, temporal and personnel boundaries. These boundaries help to distinguish between data both about and external to the case.

### 3.2.1.1 Spatial

The focus of this research is on the pedagogies enacted in Reception and Year One in two different schools. These year groups are recognised as making use of a range of different learning environments meaning it is necessary to establish broad spatial boundaries. Hence, the spatial boundaries for each case in this study were teaching and learning activities that occurred within the school grounds using the indoor and outdoor environment, in school communal spaces, such as the hall, library, woodland area, school field and playground. Activities that occurred outside of the school premises, such as school trips, fell outside of the spatial boundaries and were not included within the case study.

### 3.2.1.2 Temporal

With regards to temporal boundaries, Yin (2014) states that it is desirable to outline the beginning and ending of the cases. A key consideration of this study was to identify the transition from Reception to Year One as a process rather than an event (Petriwskyj et al., 2005). The case study therefore began in June 2019 and concluded in April 2020. Within this time frame, there were three data points in each case, as will be outlined shortly. In addition to the broad temporal boundaries outlined, time needed to be bounded on a day-to-day basis. In line with the focus on pedagogy in Reception and Year One in each case, all teaching and learning activities that occurred within school hours (between 8:45am and 3:45pm) were included within the study. Other activities – breaktime, lunchtime, breakfast and afterschool clubs – were not considered as part of the case study.

### 3.2.1.3 Personnel

It is also important that people who are included in the case are distinguished from people who are not (Yin, 2014). The children transitioning from Reception to Year One were considered as the only permanent members of each case because they were the only participants who were ever-present throughout the duration of the study. Children are therefore depicted within the red circle in Figure 3.2 below. However, the red circle is a dashed line to represent a porous boundary through which other personnel could move in and out depending on their involvement. For example, when children were in Reception, their teachers in each case were considered as members of the case at that time. However, when children were in Year One, the Reception teachers were no longer considered within the case. Hence, the Reception and Year One teachers in each setting were classed as partial members of each case, represented by the space in between the red and blue circle in Figure 3.2 below. The headteacher and parents within each setting did not have membership, whether permanent or partial, within the case. However, both headteachers (Fisher, 2021) and parents (Yeboah, 2002) play an important role in the transition from Reception to Year One and understanding the case in its entirety

necessitated their inclusion. They therefore occupied a peripheral membership, depicted as the space between blue and orange circles.

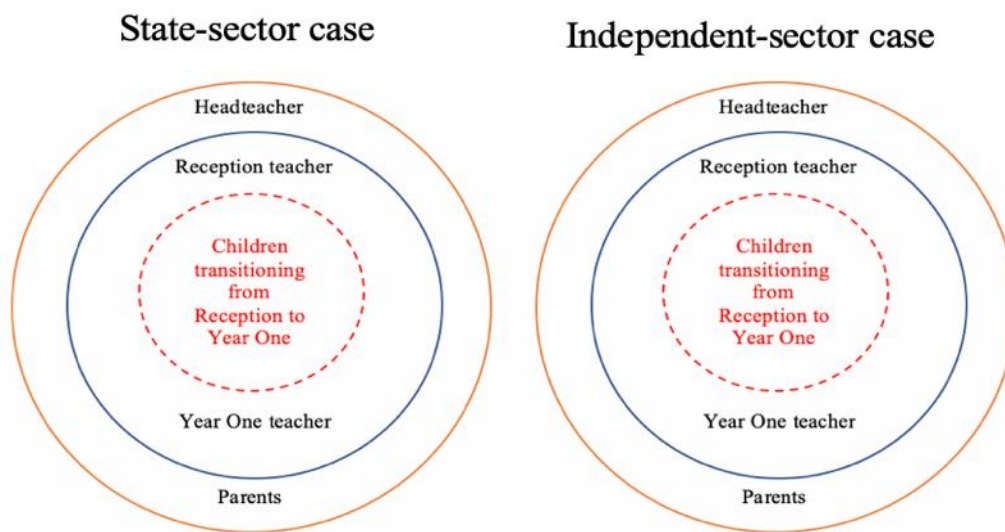


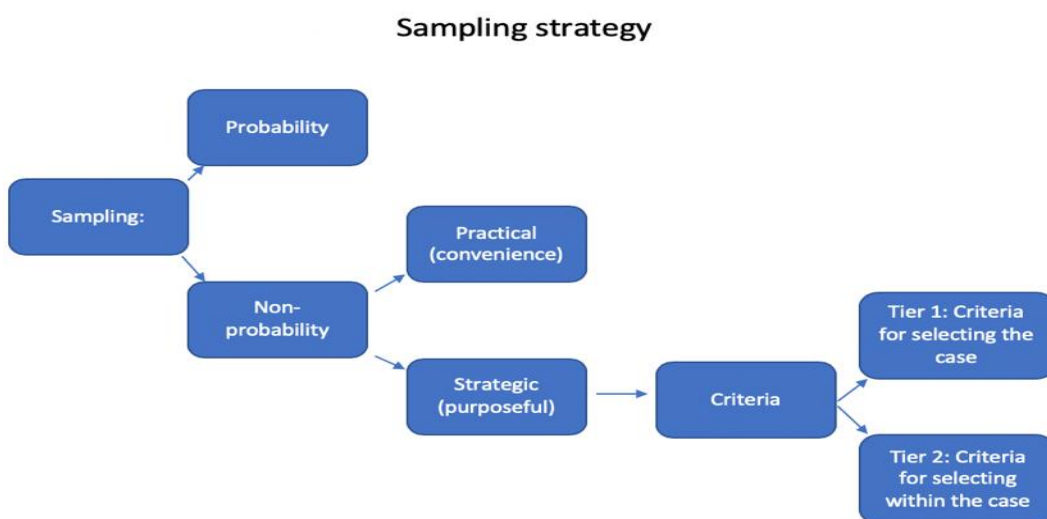
Figure 3.2 Personnel boundaries for the current case study and *permanent*, *partial* and *peripheral* membership

### 3.3 Sampling strategy

In case study research, the boundaries of the case can be strengthened by identifying the sampling strategy, namely how and why the case sites and participants have been selected (Miles et al., 2020). As the aim of qualitative case study is not to ‘extrapolate probabilities’ (Yin, 2014, p. 21) a non-probability sampling strategy was employed. A non-probability sampling strategy moves away from trying to establish representation and instead focuses on generating depth and engaging in complexity (Mason, 2018). It is an approach that rejects the random component of probability sampling and instead relies on the subjective judgement of the researcher to identify relevant data sources (Mason, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It is therefore applied by researchers who are conducting small-scale research where the aim is to understand phenomena in rich detail (Patton, 2015; Richie et al., 2012), as was the case in this study. This research necessitated a move beyond a conventional understanding of sampling and employed a non-probability sampling strategy that could identify cases and participants who were best placed to inform the research objectives and questions.

### 3.3.1 Non-probability sampling

A non-probability sampling strategy requires the researcher to make deliberate and conscious decisions about sampling related to both case sites and participants (Creswell, 2013; Denscombe, 2010b). This involved considering practical and strategic factors (Mason, 2005) and required the researcher to consider ‘what, where, when and whom’ in relation to data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 96). This often results in researchers choosing between purposive sampling – a strategy that attempts to sample information-rich cases – and convenience sampling, where the primary concern is to sample easily accessible data sources (Patton, 2015). Case study researchers have acknowledged the contribution of both convenience (e.g. Stake, 1995) and purposeful sampling (e.g. Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), however, despite this, convenience sampling is positioned as the least desirable non-probability sampling strategy. As a strong critic of convenience sampling, Patton (2015) argues that selecting cases based on the ease of their availability is a poor rationale that holds little credibility. While acknowledging that cost and convenience can place constraints on researchers, Patton (2015) argues that these factors should be the last to be considered when deciding which cases and participants to sample. Convenience sampling is problematic because the most readily available source of data might not necessarily be the most informative. Therefore, to avoid the possibility of selecting a sample that was detached from the research questions, the present study implemented a non-probability, purposive sampling strategy, as displayed in Figure 3.3 below.



*Figure 3.3 Non-probability, purposive sampling strategy employed for the present study*

### 3.3.2 Purposive sampling

Purposive sampling is based ‘on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which most can be learned’ (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 96). It is an approach that positions some case sites and participants as more suitable than others in informing, and ultimately, answering the study’s research questions. This strategy, according to Stake (1995, p. 56), requires researchers to have an ‘appetite for [selecting] the best persons, places and occasions... to help us understand the case’. Sampling for this study was not guided by the need to represent a wider population, or by convenience but instead necessitated the identification of ‘information-rich cases’ (Patton, 2015, p. 53). Hence, case study sites and participants were purposefully selected on the grounds that they could provide information that would help to meet the research aims and answer the research questions (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015).

A central aspect of purposive sampling is to establish the criteria that informs the selection of research sites and participants (Denscombe, 2010b; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). While this process is not statistically motivated, it is neither a personal endeavour; rather, it is a process that is theoretically grounded (Mason, 2018; Silverman, 2010). For Mason (2018), purposive sampling is ‘concerned with constructing a sample which is meaningful theoretically and empirically’ (p. 59). It should represent and have relevance to what she terms ‘the wider universe’ (Mason, 2018, p. 59). Hence, it was important to establish sample criteria that reflected the purpose of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and the argument that was being developed (Mason, 2018). For the case study, sample criteria needed to be established at two levels, which – unlike other types of qualitative enquiry – is usually necessary in case study research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This process is described by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) as ‘two-tier sampling’ and requires the inquirer first to select the cases to be studied, and second, to sample people, activities, or documents within each case.



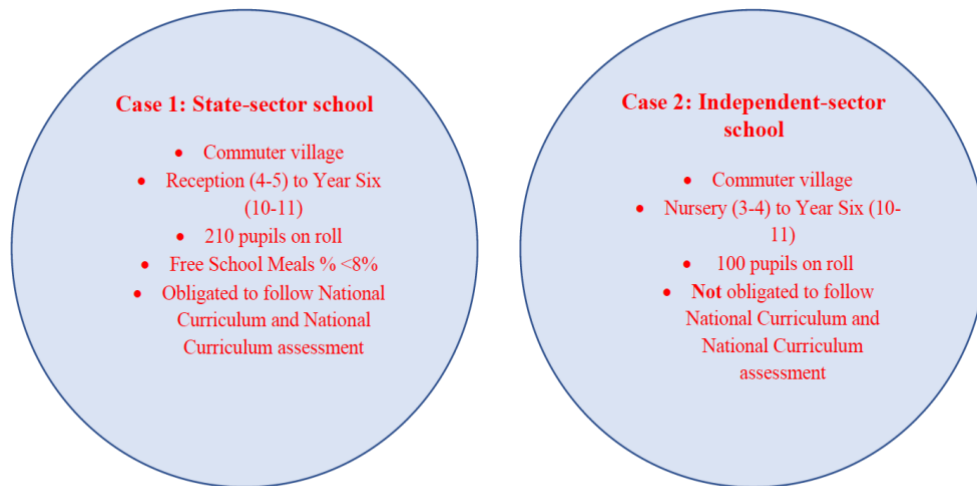
### 3.3.3 Tier one: sampling of case sites

With only 7% of pupils in England attending independent schools (Independent Schools Council, 2020), settings in this sector were approached first. Following invitation emails to independent settings, the researcher was invited by one independent school to discuss the research project with the headteacher who consented for the transition from Reception to Year One at her school to be the basis of research. The independent school's characteristics were used to establish the criteria for selecting the state-sector case, a strategy that Creswell (2013) argues is useful for quality assurance. To align with the independent-sector school on a range of criteria, excluding their different obligations concerning the National Curriculum and national assessment (criteria number 3), the sampling criteria stipulated that the state-sector school must be:

- 1) Within a commuter village (within 10 miles of a specified urban area), in the county of Lincolnshire. This identified 27 potential cases.
- 2) A primary school within the commuter village. Not all villages identified contained a primary school. Therefore, this criterion reduced the potential number of cases from 27 to 24.
- 3) In a Local-Authority state school that is required to follow the National Curriculum, administer national assessments and be inspected by Ofsted. This reduced the potential number of cases from 24 to 15.
- 4) In an 'all-through' primary school educating children from Reception to Year Six (age 10-11). This criterion did not reduce the number of potential cases.
- 5) One form entry (one class per year group). This reduced the number of potential cases from 15 to 6.

Following the identification of six potential cases, the researcher ranked schools in an order in which they would be contacted. It was decided that schools would be approached based on the percentage of children eligible for Free School Meals (FSM), a statutory benefit available to children from families who receive financial support from the government. Unsurprisingly, 0% of children enrolled at the private-sector school were eligible for FSM. Therefore, the six eligible state-sector schools were approached in order of lowest to highest FSM percentage. The state-

sector school with the lowest FSM percentage (<8%) on the short-list, and the first to be approached, agreed to participate in the research. The exact FSM percentage of the school cannot be disclosed because it could lead to the school being identified. The cases purposefully sampled in tier one and additional contextual information related to each are summarised below in Figure 3.4.



*Figure 3.4 Purposefully sampled cases identified in tier one for the present study*

Implementing this strategy does not completely eradicate contextual differences between cases, however, nor does it attempt to. Rather, it is proposed that by considering contextual factors such as school location, school size and FSM percentage as part of the sampling strategy, it was possible to minimise differences in these areas, in comparison to other potential cases, in order to focus the nature of the enquiry on the different curriculum, assessment and inspection requirements placed on state and independent schools. For example, previous research has shown that the socio-economic status of children has an impact on teacher's pedagogical practice in the early years of schooling (e.g. Stipek, 2004) and their priorities for disadvantaged children in the transition to formal school differ from those for their more advantaged peers (e.g. Dockett & Perry, 2007a). However, despite the importance of such issues, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to investigate the impact of socio-economic status. Therefore, after taking into account the different curriculum, assessment and inspection requirements placed on these settings, the aim was to minimise, not maximise, variance across the cases, ensuring that the sampling of cases reflected the purpose of the study (Mason, 2005, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

### 3.3.4 Tier two: sampling within the case

#### 3.3.4.1 Educators

When the gatekeepers of the schools identified in tier one agreed to take part in the research project it was then possible to consider purposeful sampling within each case. In both cases, Reception and Year One teachers and headteachers were all included in the sample. These educators play a critical role in the transition from Reception to Year One (Peters, 2002) and purposefully selecting them to participate in the study was essential to developing an in-depth understanding of each case, contributing to the generation of ‘information-rich cases’ (Patton, 2015, p. 53). As discussed earlier in this chapter, classroom teachers were not permanent members of the case; however, when they had direct involvement in the case they were considered members of the case and invited to participate in the study. Headteachers were considered as peripheral members of the case. However, unlike class teachers, they were invited to take part in the research throughout because of their connection to, influence on and role within both the Reception and Year One activity systems. Table 3.6 below provides some information on the eight educator participants, who were all female, outlining their role, years of teaching and qualifications. They have been assigned a pseudonym to ensure anonymity.

*Table 3.6 Educator participant information*

<b>Educator code</b>	<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Educator participant role</b>	<b>Years of teaching</b>	<b>Qualification(s)</b>
StR	Nadia	State-sector Reception teacher	19 years	BSc (Hons) Psychology; Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE)
StY1a	Helen	State-sector Year One teacher (part time Monday to Wednesday lunchtime)	8 years	BA (Hons) Primary Education with Qualified Teacher Status
StY1b	Claire	State-sector Year One teacher (part time Wednesday afternoon to Friday)	15 years	BA (Hons) Education Studies; Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE)
StHT	Susan	State-sector headteacher	37 years	BA (Hons) Education; MA Primary Education.
InR	Ann	Independent-sector Reception teacher	16 years	BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies; Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE)
InY1a	Julie	Independent-sector Year One teacher (co-teachers)	12 years	BA (Hons) Professional Studies in Primary Education with Qualified Teacher Status
InY1b	Kayleigh	Independent-sector Year One teacher (co-teacher)	9 years	BA (Hons) Applied Studies in Education
InHT	Maria	Independent-sector headteacher	20 years	BA (Hons) Primary Education with English with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS)

#### 3.3.4.2 Children and parents

The state-sector case and independent-sector case contained thirty and twelve children respectively. As part of whole class observations, all children in each case were included. The researcher, with the help of the school, informed all parents and children in each case about the purpose of the research project and when the researcher would be visiting. It was not possible, however, to interview all children and their parents within each case. Therefore, it was decided that a sample of six children and their parents, with an extra child and parent participant included to guard against sample mortality, making it seven altogether, was an appropriate sample in each case. This sample of children and parents negotiated a balance between generating ‘reasonable coverage of the phenomenon’ under investigation in each case (Patton, 2015, p. 314) whilst remaining feasible in terms of time, resource and organisation.

As children were the only permanent members of each case (see section 3.2.1.3) and directly participated in the pedagogies enacted in Reception and Year One, it was decided that they, and not their parents, would be the focus of the sample criteria. The sampling criteria for children was influenced by Stake (2008) and in particular his recommendation to establish balance and variety within the sample. Therefore, the researcher endeavored to include children of different genders, seasons of birth and ability levels, a criterion also used by Sanders et al (2005) in their study of the transition from Reception to Year One.

In the state-sector case, the researcher received eleven parental consent forms indicating their willingness to participate and permission for their child to be invited. To narrow this sample from eleven to seven, the researcher, in conjunction with the Reception teacher, applied the sample criteria in order to identify the most suitable seven children. These seven children and their parents are identified in Table 3.7 below which details each child’s gender, month and year of birth and ability (according to the Reception teacher) and the gender of each parent participant. Each child included in the sample is related to the parent positioned parallel in Table 3.7 (Child 1 is the child of Parent 1).

Table 3.7 State-sector case child and parent demographic information

<b>Child participant code</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Month and year of birth (no date to protect anonymity)</b>	<b>Ability (according to Reception teacher)</b>	<b>Parent participant code</b>	<b>Gender</b>
Child 1	Male	09/2013	'Expected'	Parent 1	Female
Child 2	Female	10/2013	'Expected'	Parent 2	Female
Child 3	Male	06/2014	'Exceeding'	Parent 3	Female
Child 4	Male	03/2014	'Emerging'	Parent 4	Female
Child 5	Female	08/2014	'Emerging'	Parent 5	Female
Child 6	Male	09/2013	'Exceeding'	Parent 6	Female
Child 7	Male	08/2014	'Exceeding'	Parent 7	Female

In the independent-sector case, the researcher received five responses from parents indicating that they would be happy to participate and that they gave permission for their child to be invited to participate. In addition to this, two parents declined to participate due to time constraints, however gave consent for their child to participate in the research, should they wish to do so. The seven children and five parents are identified in Table 3.8 below which details each child's gender, month and year of birth and ability (according to the Reception teacher) and the gender of each parent participant. The ability levels of the children included in the independent-sector sample are not as varied as the state-sector case; however, in the independent-sector the class size was smaller and fewer parents indicated a willingness to participate, meaning it was not possible to apply the sampling criteria. As above, child participants are related to the parent participant positioned parallel in Table 3.8.

*Table 3.8 Independent-sector case child and parent demographic information*

<b>Child participant code</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Month and year of birth (no date to protect anonymity)</b>	<b>Ability (according to Reception teacher)</b>	<b>Parent participant code</b>	<b>Gender(s)</b>
Child 1	Male	03/2014	'Exceeding'	Parent 1	Female
Child 2	Female	07/2014	'Exceeding'	Parent 2	Female
Child 3	Male	05/2014	'Exceeding'	Parents 3a & 3b	Female (parent 3a) and male (parent 3b)
Child 4	Female	04/2014	'Expected'	Parent 4	Female
Child 5	Female	10/2013	'Exceeding'	Parent 5	Male
Child 6	Female	04/2014	'Exceeding'	N/A	N/A
Child 7	Male	08/2014	'Expected'	N/A	N/A

## 3.4 Data collection

### 3.4.1 Pilot study

Although the flexibility of a case study allows data collection and analysis to be continually adjusted, giving researchers an opportunity to 'learn on the job' (Robson & McCarten, 2016, p. 156), a pilot study was carried out in order to consolidate plans for main data collection. According to Denscombe (2014), there is no substitute for trialling research methods 'in the field with real participants' (p. 165). He believes pilot studies can identify mistakes and ensure that researchers commence final data collection with confidence (Denscombe, 2014). Similarly, Yin (2014) identifies the importance of pilot studies and supports their role in preparing to carry out case study research. A pilot study, Yin (2014) outlines, helps researchers to refine data collection plans and pursue relevant lines of enquiry. Pilot studies are not just limited to trialling data collection methods; they also challenge the researcher to select a sample (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). To assess the sample and data collection techniques, a pilot case study, approved by Bishop Grosseteste University's Research Ethics Committee, was carried out in April 2019.

### 3.4.1.1 Sample and data collection

The participating school was a two-form-entry primary with academy status and therefore not included in the shortlist of sampled schools for main data collection. This was an important distinction because it removed the possibility of repeating data collection methods with the same participants, which risks semantic satiation (Ismail et al., 2018). It was important, however, to conduct the pilot study in a similar educational setting to where main data collection took place. This ensured that I would be trialling data collection methods with participants who held equivalent qualifications and shared similar experiences to that of the educators included in the main study. The data collection methods and participants included in the pilot study are identified in Table 3.9 below.

*Table 3.9 Data collection methods and participants included in the pilot study*

<b>Reception</b>	<b>Year One</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 2 full days of observations 8:30 – 3:15</li><li>• Interview with Reception teacher and Early Years Lead</li><li>• Interview with 2 Reception parents</li><li>• Interview and drawing with 3 children</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 2 full days of observations 8:30 – 3:15</li><li>• Interview with Year One teacher</li><li>• Interview and drawing with 3 children</li></ul>

### 3.4.1.2 Case study pilot reflections

Throughout the pilot study, I compiled a case report which helped me to identify and be explicit about amendments to the research design (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2014). This led to some adaptations to the observation and interview schedules. For example, these were slightly amended to include a column that encouraged the researcher to write their immediate reflections of an observation, as recommended by Merriam and Tisdell (2016). Not having the space or the prompts to do this in the pilot meant I wrote reflections of observations at the end of the day. These were hard to remember in detail because of the pace of the school day, leading to data that lacked richness and authenticity. In addition, some interview questions were also slightly reworked in order to provide clarity. As an example, in the parent pilot study interview the question, ‘To what extent is continuity between Reception and Year One important?’ was adapted to ask, ‘To what extent is continuity in terms of teaching and learning between Reception and Year One important?’. This process

increased clarity and ensured that some of the interview questions were more specific to the research questions.

The rest of this section now moves on to address main data collection.

### 3.4.2 Duration and timing

Given that the transition from Reception to Year One is an annually occurring phenomenon, decisions on timing were particularly pertinent in this research. The collective, qualitative case study comprised of three phases of data collection over the course of children's transfer from Reception to Year One: June 2019, November 2019 and March/April 2020. Both the *duration* and *timing* of data collection points reflected important aspects of transition. First, the *duration* of data collection acknowledged that the transition to CSE is a process as opposed to a single time-change event (Petriwskyj et. al., 2005). By collecting data at numerous points over a period of ten months (between June 2019 and April 2020), it was possible to take into account the evolving and changing perceptions and experiences of participants as they transitioned from the activity system of Reception to Year One.

Second, the *timing* of data collection and in particular the decision to have three data collection points was influenced by theories that have delineated transition as a three-part process, such as van Gennep's (1960) 'rites of passage' (preliminal, liminal and postliminal) and Bridges' (1986) work on managing organisational transitions (initial, neutral and new beginnings). Within such theories, however, it is important to recognise that they are not necessarily three distinct phases and that an individual can be in multiple phases at any one time (Ackesjö, 2014). Therefore, the models of transition proposed by both van Gennep (1960) and Bridges (1986) were not applied as an exact science, but were simply used as a guide to think about how often and when it would be best to collect data. Other factors such as access, time and school closure also influenced data collection points. Important information relating to each phase of data collection is presented in Table 3.10 below. Following this, the positioning of each data point is explored in more detail.



*Table 3.10 Information (dates, data collection methods and participants) relating to each phase of data collection in each case*

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Independent-sector case</b>		<b>State-sector case</b>	
<b>Phase One</b>	<b>Week 1</b> (10/6/19 – 14/6/19)	<b>Week 2</b> (17/6/19 – 21/6/19)	<b>Week 1</b> (24/6/19 - 28/6/19)	<b>Week 2</b> (01.07.19 - 05/07/19)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 full days of observations 8:30am – 4:00pm</li> <li>• Interviews and drawings with children</li> <li>• Interviews with parents</li> <li>• Generation of documentation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews with Reception teacher, Head Teacher and remaining parents</li> <li>• Generation of documentation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4 full days of observations 8:30am – 4:00pm</li> <li>• Interviews and drawings with children</li> <li>• Interviews with parents</li> <li>• Generation of documentation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 full day of observations 8:30 - 4:00pm</li> <li>• Interviews with Reception teacher, Head Teacher and remaining parents</li> <li>• Generation of documentation</li> </ul>
<b>Phase Two</b>	<b>Week 1</b> (04/11/19 - 08/11/19)	<b>Week 2</b> (11/11/19 - 15/11/19)	<b>Week 1</b> (18/11/19 - 22/11/19)	<b>Week 2</b> (25/11/19 - 29/11/19)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 full days of observations 8:30am – 4:00pm</li> <li>• Interviews and drawings with children</li> <li>• Interviews with parents</li> <li>• Generation of documentation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews with Year One teachers, Head Teacher and remaining parents</li> <li>• Generation of documentation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 full days of observations 8:30am – 4:00pm</li> <li>• Interviews and drawings with children</li> <li>• Interviews with parents</li> <li>• Generation of documentation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews with Year One teachers, Head Teacher and remaining parents</li> <li>• Generation of documentation</li> </ul>
<b>Phase Three</b>	<b>March – April 2020</b>		<b>March – April 2020</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online Interviews with Year One teachers, Head Teacher and parents</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online Interviews with Year One teachers, Head Teacher and parents</li> </ul>	

### 3.4.2.1 Phase One

In Phase One, the researcher visited each case approximately three weeks before the end of the academic year prior to the Summer Holiday (independent-sector school had a shorter academic year). It was important to visit each case as children were in their final term of Reception. This can be seen to be the ‘preliminal’ phase as the children were shortly to undergo a process of separation (van Gennep, 1960) and detachment (Huser et al., 2016) from Reception. Attending settings at this point gave the researcher an opportunity to understand the Reception activity system in each case. It also presented the chance to interpret participants’ perceptions and experiences of Reception, as well as their hopes and expectations for Year One.

### 3.4.2.2 Phase Two

In Phase Two, case study visits took place at just over the half way point of children's first full term in Year One. This point in the transition resembles what Bridges (1986) and van Gennep (1960) refer to as the 'neutral' and 'liminal' phase respectively. This phase is characterised by individuals encountering and assimilating new cultures, environments, people, roles and rules (Fabian, 2007). It was essential to visit each setting around this point as it is considered to be the 'core' of transition, a phase where 'the individual is placed between what was, and what is to come' (Ackesjö, 2014, p. 5). By having a data point at this time, it was possible to develop an understanding of the Year One activity systems at a crucial stage in the transition process. It also provided a timely opportunity to explicate how educators, children and parents were negotiating the space between new and old realities.

### 3.4.2.3 Phase Three

It was agreed with both case study settings that Phase Three of data collection would take place in April and May 2020. The researcher was due to visit the independent-sector case from 27<sup>th</sup> April - 8<sup>th</sup> May 2020 and the state-sector case between 11<sup>th</sup> - 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2020. However, in March 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic forced all state- and independent-sector schools to close for all children (settings were asked to remain open for children of key workers and vulnerable children) for the foreseeable future (UK Government, 2020a). Therefore, a decision was made to adapt the methods included in the Third Phase of data collection by moving them online. Here, online interviews became the principal method of data collection. Unfortunately, by moving online, children were not able to take part in the Third Phase of data collection.

In light of this adjustment, the timing of the third data point was brought forward to March 2020. This was to ensure that participants still had a good understanding of Year One provision up until school closure. Collecting data towards the end of children's second term in Year One aligns with the 'postliminal' phase (van Gennep, 1960) of the transition process. The children were over half-way through Year One and at this stage it is anticipated that most will have had time to adapt to the policies

and procedures (Bridges, 1986), helping them to assume the identify of a Year One pupil (Huser et al., 2016). This data point was therefore identified at the start of this research as a potential ‘confirmatory phase’, providing further understanding of the Year One activity system in each case and giving parents and educators opportunity to reflect on the transition process.

### 3.4.3 Data collection methods

The selection of data collection methods was based on fitness for purpose, something that Denscombe (2014, p. 163) and Wellington (2015, p. 108) describe as ‘a matter of horses for courses’. This understanding strikes consistencies with the question-driven approach to research design implemented in this study, in particular Pring’s (2015, p. 59) notion of ‘appropriateness to task’. For example, instead of selecting data collection methods because they are ‘superior to all others in any absolute sense’, a ‘criterion of usefulness’ is applied which encourages researchers to consider the ‘method that works best in practice for the specific purposes of the investigation’ (Denscombe, 2014, p. 163). As can be seen in Table 3.11 below, this study required interviews, online interviews, observations and documentation. These data collection methods helped to construct ‘meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights’ (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 106) into the research questions and the conceptual frame through which they were interpreted. The data collection methods required for this study will now be explored individually whereby the appropriateness of each in meeting the research objectives will be discussed along with the practical information of administering each method.

*Table 3.11 The conceptual framework, appropriate data collection methods and participants for each research question*

Research question		Conceptual considerations	Appropriate data collection method(s) and participants
1.	How do a state-sector and an independent-sector primary school organise teaching and learning in Reception and Year One?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language of description based on the <i>performance</i> of teaching (<i>frame, form and act</i>) (Alexander, 2001) and Bernstein's (1975) theories of educational transmission</li> <li>• Positioned as the <i>tool</i> within the activity system</li> <li>• Focus on <i>what</i> teachers and children do</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whole class observations</li> <li>• Documentation</li> <li>• Interviews with Reception and Year One class teachers</li> <li>• Online interviews with class teachers (Phase 3)</li> </ul>
2.	What factors influence and shape teaching and learning in Reception and Year One in these different settings?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pedagogical <i>discourse</i> (Alexander, 2009a) in Reception and Year One, understood through the remaining activity theory (Engeström, 2015) elements – subject, object, rules, community and division of labour</li> <li>• Focus on <i>why</i> teachers and children do <i>what</i> they do</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews with Reception and Year One class teachers and headteachers</li> <li>• Online interviews with class teachers (Phase 3)</li> <li>• Whole class Observations</li> <li>• Documentation</li> </ul>
3.	How do children and parents experience and perceive the pedagogies enacted in Reception and Year One and, the transition between them?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of experiences in and perceptions on Reception and Year One will be undertaken through the lenses of opportunities, involvement, engagement and enjoyment</li> <li>• Analysis of experiences on and perceptions of the transition will be undertaken through the lenses of continuity and change and adjustment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews with parents and children</li> <li>• Online interview with parents (Phase 3)</li> <li>• Whole class Observations</li> </ul>

### 3.4.3.1 Interviews

Individual face-to-face interviews were undertaken with educators, parents and children in Phase One and Two of data collection. Through interviews, it was possible to gain insight into these participants' perceptions and experiences of pedagogy in Reception and Year One as well as the transition between them. In research, interviews are more than just a conversation (Denscombe, 2010b). They are seen as purposeful interactions aimed at obtaining specific kinds of information (Mason, 2005; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). They allow researchers to explore complex, intricate and subtle phenomena that cannot always be observed (Denscombe, 2010b; Wellington, 2015). In this study, interviews provided opportunities for participants to contribute their subjective perceptions and lived experiences of the transition from Reception to Year One. In doing so, interviews generated meaningful knowledge that helped to construct participants' multiple

realities (Mason, 2002; Stake, 1995). The depth of understanding that interviews can achieve (Gillham, 2005) made them an appropriate method for achieving the research objectives and answering the research questions.

To give participants opportunity to share such insights, it was important to design and carry out interviews that negotiated a balance between maintaining relevance to the research topic and allowing participants scope to expand and speak widely about the issues raised. This prompted a consideration of different interview styles, of which Wellington (2015, p. 141) identifies three common types: unstructured, a format where there is no set agenda; semi-structured, a format which follows a framework of questions but in a flexible manner; and structured, a format which does not deviate from a rigid list of questions. It is proposed that no research interview can be completely devoid of structure (Mason, 2005), but equally a tightly controlled structure is unlikely to reveal the intricacies of complex and subtle phenomena (Opie, 2004). Situated in the middle of these two styles, a semi-structured format can therefore be seen to strike an appropriate balance between flexibility and structure (Gillham, 2005). Semi-structured interviews can follow specific lines of enquiry while allowing the interviewee to expand, develop and take the discussion in different directions (Cohen et al., 2018; Denscombe, 2010b). The structure of this format encourages respondents to elaborate on points of interest while the flexibility allows for clarification, and the potential to explore issues that may not have been previously accounted for.

In Phase One and Two of this study, semi-structured interviews were carried out with educators, parents and children who agreed to participate. The study recognised that these participants all play an active role in the transition process, making it important to understand their perceptions and experiences (Chan, 2012; Dockett & Perry, 2002, 2004a). Not consulting any one of these group's perceptions and experiences can result in 'an incomplete picture' of the transition from ECE to CSE (Dockett & Perry, 2004a, p. 186). The number of semi-structured interviews for each role group can be seen in Table 3.12 below. In both cases, the parents and children who were interviewed in Phase One all took part in a follow up interview in Phase Two. The interviews for each role group differed across a number of factors; however, consistent to all was that they were carried out face-to-face at the

respective schools, audio recorded on a mobile phone device and manually transcribed in preparation for analysis. In addition, before each interview, educators, parents and children were all reminded that the interview was intended to capture their perceptions and experiences and hence there were no right or wrong answers. For all participants, semi-structured interviews were designed based on previous literature and a process of mapping research questions to interview questions. Several questions were based on what was observed during week-long case study visits. Anchoring interview questions to observations provides a context for such conversations and encourages participants to interpret their actions (Sandberg et al., 2017) and explain the thinking underlying particular behaviours (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The rationale for carrying out semi-structured interviews with these groups of participants will now be discussed in more detail along with specific information relating to each.

*Table 3.12 Number of semi-structured interviews carried out in Phases One and Two*

	<b>Number of semi-structured interviews in state-sector case</b>	<b>Number of semi-structured interviews in independent-sector case</b>
<b>Phase One June 2019</b>	1 x Reception educator 1 x Head Teacher 7 x Parent 7 x Child	1 x Reception educator 1 x Head Teacher 5 x Parent (1 joint interview) 7 x Child
<b>Phase Two November 2020</b>	2 x Year One educator (job share) 1 x Head Teacher 7 x Parent 7 x Child	2 x Year One educator (co-teachers) 1 x Headteacher 5 x Parent (1 joint interview) 7 x Child

#### *3.4.3.1.1 Educator interview (class teacher and headteacher)*

Reception and Year One teachers are critical stakeholders in the transition to CSE (Peters, 2002). Interviewing them presented an opportunity to illuminate their beliefs and perceptions which have been found to be instrumental in shaping pedagogical practice (Priestley et al., 2015). Teachers control the classroom environment and their perceptions influence ‘how they teach’ as well as ‘what and how children learn’ (Dockett & Perry, 2007a, p. 115). Headteachers too play a critical role in the transition to CSE (Grace & Brandt, 2006) and their perceptions

also have the potential to impact classroom practice (Fisher, 2021). Interviewing classroom teachers and headteachers led to a deeper understanding of the *discourse* – subject, rules, community, division of labour and object – underpinning the *performance* of teaching in Reception and Year One in each case.

As shown in Table 3.12 above, across Phases One and Two of data collection, a total of ten semi-structured interviews were completed with (head)teachers. Interviews with classroom teachers and headteachers took place the week following observations in each setting. Reception teachers ( $n = 2$ ) were interviewed in Phase One, Year One teachers ( $n = 4$ ) were interviewed in Phase Two, and headteachers ( $n = 2$ ) were interviewed in both Phases One and Two. For all educators, semi-structured interviews took place on a one-to-one format. Mostly, interviews with classroom teachers took place after school hours. For teachers with flexibility in their teaching commitments, it was possible to interview them during school hours. All interviews with headteachers took place during school hours. When conducted after school, interviews took place in the classroom whereas an office was used during school hours. These locations provided a quiet space and offered a good level of privacy (Denscombe, 2010b). Reception teacher, Year One teacher and headteacher interview schedules (examples of which can be found in Appendix B, C and D respectively) consisted of predominantly open-ended questions which could be explored in more detail. On average, classroom teacher interviews ( $n = 6$ ) took 57.47 minutes, ranging from 30.07 minutes to 84.52 minutes. The average headteacher interview ( $n = 4$ ) took 56.19 minutes, ranging from 37.12 minutes to 82.48 minutes.

#### *3.4.3.1.2 Parent interview*

As well as educators, parents are important actors in the transition from Reception to Year One. Parents hold their own perceptions and feelings about the transition (Chan, 2012) and such notions are likely to affect the way they experience the move from Reception to Year One (Fabian & Dunlop, 2006). Semi-structured interviews provided an opportunity to understand parent experiences and perceptions as they and their child transitioned from Reception to Year One.

Across Phases One and Two, a total of twenty-four semi-structured interviews were undertaken with parents, the majority of which (22 out of 24) took place on a one-to-one format. The only exception was when both parents of a child in the independent-sector case requested to take part in a joint interview in each phase. This meant that six parents took part in five interviews in both Phase One and Two. Most semi-structured interviews with parents took place during the same week as participant observations in each case. If a mutually convenient time could not be arranged during this week, the researcher returned to the school the following week. Interviews took place at a range of times such as lunchtime, after school and during after-school club. The preferences of parents needed to be balanced with the requirements of the observation schedule. This meant that it was important, where possible, to avoid carrying out interviews during classroom teaching. It was possible in both settings to book an office space to carry out the interviews, again providing a quiet and private environment (Denscombe, 2010b). Similarly to educators, the parent interview schedule (see Appendix E for an example) consisted of predominantly open-ended questions. Across both cases and phases, parent interviews took an average of 29:30 minutes, ranging from 14:52 minutes to 43:22 minutes.

#### *3.4.3.1.3 Child interview (and drawing)*

In addition to seeking adult views on the transition to formal school, it is paramount to listen to children's experiences of, and perceptions on, this critical period in their lives (Einarsdottir, 2007). Acknowledging children's views is essential because it is they who are 'living the experience' of transition (Dockett & Perry, 2007b, p. 48). The participation of children in research has grown due to a significant shift in the way that society considers and positions children and childhood. This theoretical shift, understood as the *new sociology of childhood*, has repositioned children as knowledgeable, competent and capable contributors who hold valid and important opinions on matters that concern them (Harcourt & Conroy, 2011; Dunlop & Fabian, 2007). This construction recognises children as 'social actors' who are more than capable of participating in and contributing to research (Mukhurji & Albon, 2018). This shift has emphasised the importance of conducting research with, instead of on, children (Harcourt & Conroy, 2011). Similarly to parents, semi-structured



interviews provided an opportunity to understand children's perceptions and experiences of Reception and Year One as well as the transition between them.

A total of twenty-eight semi-structured interviews were carried out with children across both phases. All fourteen children who participated in Phase One agreed to take part again in Phase Two. After receiving parental consent, children were asked if they would like to draw a picture and answer some questions about their experiences in Reception and then in Year One. As with adults, the children were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw at any point. To reiterate this, consent was continuously reviewed throughout the interviews and drawings; an essential component of carrying out research with young children (Arnott et al., 2020). It was important, however, not just to rely solely on verbal consent. Power differentials between children and adults can sometimes make children feel as if they have to take part (Harcourt & Conroy, 2011). Therefore, close attention was also paid to children's demeanour throughout the interview to assess whether they appeared to be comfortable taking part.

When carrying out research with children, it is essential to ensure that data collection methods are appropriate and meaningful to them (Dunlop & Fabian, 2007). This meant that the style of interview carried out with educators and parents needed to be adapted to be less formal and child-friendly, and more representative of what Dockett and Perry (2007b, p. 54) term a 'research conversation'. Therefore, as part of the research process the children were asked if they would like to draw themselves learning in Reception/Year One while sharing their experiences in these year groups. Using drawing alongside interview dialogue is an effective way of enabling children to share their understandings and experiences (Clark & Moss, 2011; Einarsdóttir et al., 2009). Drawing is a familiar activity to most children and its open-ended nature affords children some control over the research process (Einarsdóttir et al., 2009). Sanders et al. (2005) assert that drawing as a research tool can serve a dual purpose; it not only helps to relax children and stimulate conversation, but it can contribute to a rich data set in its own right (Sanders et al., 2005). Although Sanders and colleagues (2005) do not identify the order in which the interview and drawing occurred in their research, it is proposed that a simultaneous 'draw-and-talk method' is a more effective research tool than a 'draw-

followed-by-talk' approach (Tay-Lim & Lim, 2013). By following a draw-and-talk approach, the research was able to take into account 'children's simultaneous utterances' (Coates & Coates, 2006, p. 221) which contributed to a rich understanding of children's perceptions and experiences.

Child interviews took place on the fourth and fifth day of participant observations in Phase One and Two in each setting. This gave the researcher time to establish and re-establish, as was the case in Phase Two, a research relationship with the children and explain the purpose of the research (Harcourt & Conroy, 2011). All child interviews and drawings were carried out on a one-to-one basis during school hours when the classroom teacher deemed it most appropriate. In the state-sector case, all child interviews and drawings took place in an informal teaching space located in the 'infant-part' of the school. In this large open-plan space, small groups of children from other classes would be working with adults. In the independent-sector case, child interviews took place in a redundant space adjoined to the classroom in Phase One, and outside the classroom entrance in Phase Two. Although these locations added background noise to the interview, carrying out the interviews in the school's communal spaces worked towards negating some of the formal aspects associated with interviews. The locations represented a familiar surrounding for the children (Harcourt & Conroy, 2011) and the social nature of these spaces appeared to help children relax and empowered them to talk freely about their beliefs and experiences. The language of the questions was designed to ensure that they were appropriate and accessible (Einarsdóttir, 2007). Most questions in the interview schedules (see Appendix F for an example) were open-ended as these encourage children to reflect more deeply on their experiences (Ponizovsky-Bergelson et al., 2019). Some closed questions were included in an attempt to ensure children did not feel under interrogation (Sharp, 2009). On average, child interviews took 7:08 minutes with a range of 4:15 minutes to 12:46 minutes.

Although face-to-face interviews are an effective way to understand participants' experiences and perceptions – and a major data collection method in this study – it is important to recognise that there are some factors that can affect the quality of data generated. One factor can be the interviewer-respondent relationship. Power

dynamics in this relationship can be particularly affected by personal characteristics such as, race, socio-economic status, gender and age (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Paramount to this research was a stance that positioned each participant – educator, parent and child – as an equal contributor whose perceptions and experiences deserved to be heard in a ‘non-judgemental, sensitive and respectful’ way (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 130). To approach this relationship sensitively it was important to ensure that all participants knew why and how the research was being carried out and had a chance to ask questions (Cohen et al., 2018). In this study, the researcher met all participants for the first time at the research site and therefore only knew participants in a professional and research capacity. This meant that the researcher could establish a professional rapport that contained distance from the participants while including an appropriate degree of social interaction to clarify any ambiguities (Opie, 2004; Wellington, 2015).

Another factor which can affect the quality of data is interviewer bias (Bell, 2005; Wellington, 2015). Bias can occur from leading questions which King and Horrocks (2010) describe as questions worded in a way that pressures interviewees into giving an anticipated and expected response. To guard against leading questions, the interview schedules were clear, simple and did not limit the range of responses (Wood & Smith, 2016). Moreover, steps were taken to ensure that prompts and probes were short, neutral and not excessive (King & Horrocks, 2010; Wellington, 2015). The careful structuring of interview questions, which was enhanced through piloting, helped to minimise inaccuracy and bias (Cohen et al., 2018). Following transcription in full, all interview transcripts were sent back to adult participants for member checking, increasing the accuracy, authenticity and subsequently the quality of the interview data (Denscombe, 2014; Wellington, 2015).

#### 3.4.3.2 Online interviews

As mentioned, the intention was to visit case study settings for a Third Phase of data collection. In this phase, headteachers, Year One teachers and parents in both cases had all agreed to participate in a face-to-face semi-structured interview. However, the Covid-19 pandemic forced all schools to close in March 2020 for the

foreseeable future (UK Government, 2020a). A decision was made to continue data collection online and, where appropriate, replicate the intended methods. Unfortunately, it was not possible to employ a suitable online alternative to the interview and drawing method planned with children and thus, children were not involved in the Third Phase of data collection. Following the approval of amendments to the ethical proposal, Year One teachers, headteachers and parents from both cases were emailed to explain that case study visits would now not be possible and as an alternative invited them to answer some questions online. The researcher also asked participants who would be willing to take part if they had a preference between a synchronous or asynchronous approach. Unanimously, educators and parents stated that they would prefer an asynchronous approach, citing a lack of time, uncertainty of routine and increased working demands. Some parent participants were ‘key workers’ and requested that they participate at a later date, when the first peak of Covid-19 had passed (end of April 2020).

Taking these preferences and circumstances into account, asynchronous interviews via email were carried out with educators and parents, reducing temporal restrictions and enabling participants to respond at their own convenience (James & Busher, 2009; O’Connor et al., 2008). In comparison to Phase One and Two, where the participation rate was 100%, 61% (11/18) of educators and parents who were eligible to take part in Phase Three completed an online interview. The breakdown of participation for online interviews for educators and parents can be seen in Table 3.13 below. Due to limitations on word count, it is not possible to consider online interviews and their application within this research any further within the main body of the thesis. For more information relating to the online interviews, including how they were administered, the types of questions asked and their suitability as an alternative to face-to-face interviews, please see Appendix G.

*Table 3.13 Number of online interviews carried out in Phase Three across both settings (61% (11/18) participation rate in comparison to Phases One and Two)*

	<b>Number of online interviews completed in state-sector case</b>	<b>Number of online interviews completed in independent-sector case</b>
<b>Phase three March 2020 - April 2020</b>	2 x Year One educator 6 x Parent	1 x Year One educator 2 x Parent

### 3.4.3.3 Observations

In addition to semi-structured interviews, observations were carried out in Phase One and Two. By observing phenomena in a natural context, it is possible to generate rich contextual information (Cohen et al., 2018) and encounter activities, events and behaviours first-hand (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The ability to get ‘inside’ a research setting enables researchers to develop a greater understanding of specific cases (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). Through observations it was possible to generate a direct account of the *performance* of teaching in Reception and Year One in each setting. This captured data that was important in its own right and provided a context for attempting to understanding pedagogical *discourse* in Reception and Year One in each setting.

Being able to see activities and behaviours first-hand is a distinctive feature of observation and moves away from an over-reliance on second-hand accounts from interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This is important because, at times, what people say is not always commensurate with what they do (Hammond & Wellington, 2012). For example, previous studies have revealed that teacher perceptions are not always aligned with their practice (Bennett et al., 1997; Peters, 2002). This is perhaps because some research participants are keen to portray themselves in a particular light and tell ‘the researcher what they want them to hear’ (Wellington, 2015, p. 247). By using observations in conjunction with interviews it was possible to corroborate what teachers said with what they did, increasing the credibility of the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Like interviews, observations can be highly structured, semi-structured or unstructured (Cohen et al., 2018). For this research, it was necessary to develop a tentative and flexible agenda for the observations; yet the intention was not to systematically ‘count’ instances of predetermined phenomena. As Alexander (2001) suggests, his ‘action-based framework for the analysis of teaching’ (frame, form and act) – implemented in this study to understand the *performance* of teaching in Reception and Year One in each case (see section 2.5.3.2) – is intended to be ‘descriptive rather than prescriptive’ (p. 323). The observations for this study were therefore of a semi-structured nature (Cohen et al., 2018), generating highly

descriptive, qualitative data focused on achieving a deep understanding (Denscombe, 2010b) of the activities that teachers and children engaged in.

In addition to the type of observation it is important for researchers to consider their role as an observer (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Observational roles can be seen to lie on a spectrum ranging from complete participant to a complete observer (Wellington, 2015). Striking a balance between these two roles, researchers can either take on the role of ‘participant as observer’, where research activities are secondary to the role of participant, or ‘observer as participant’, where participation is subordinate to the role of data capture (Cohen et al., 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In all observations, the role of the researcher was prioritised ahead of the role of participant, however, not to the extent of a ‘complete observer’ which requires detachment from the group (Cohen et al., 2018). Therefore, the researcher’s role can best be described as ‘observer as participant’. This role ensured that the role of participant did not jeopardise the role of observer (Denscombe, 2010b) but still allowed me to enter Reception and Year One activity systems in order to listen, observe, question and understand case participant’s actions and behaviour (Bell, 2005).

During case study visits, I undertook observations of all classroom activities, including whole class teaching, group work, carousel activities and child-led learning, both inside and outside. Within and across these activities, the nature of the activity systems meant that the focus of observation fluctuated back and forth from the specific to the more holistic (Cohen et al., 2018). Observations also took into consideration the learning environment and resources in each activity system and how educators and children made use of these spaces throughout the week. In order to record activities, actions and interactions in a chronological order, highly descriptive field notes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) were taken by hand at the time of observations. Following each day of observations, field notes were immediately converted into an electronic format and stored in preparation for analysis (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

While observation is a considerable means for generating qualitative data, it is important to caution against an over-reliance on their contribution (Pring, 2015).

Cohen et al. (2018) and Guthrie (2010) both state that observation is particularly susceptible to issues relating to validity. A key concern is recognising that observers ‘cannot help but affect and be affected by the setting’ (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 161). Acknowledging this, I ensured that I reiterated to all classroom teachers that I was not looking to observe anything in particular but instead was interested to see the workings and organisation of a ‘typical’ week. The considerable time spent undertaking observations enabled the researcher to establish rapport with educators and children and also supported participants to become familiar with my presence (Denscombe, 2010b). In addition, it is important to state that observations are not always open to ‘immediate acquaintance’, indicating that the meanings, intentionality and motivations of participants require judgement from the observer (Pring, 2015, p. 48). In an attempt to avoid misinterpretation, it was necessary to corroborate observations with additional methods such as interviews and documentation (Cohen et al., 2018). This recognises that observations are most effective when they are supplemented by and triangulated against other data collection methods (Wellington, 2015; Pring, 2015).

#### 3.4.3.4 Documentation

The qualitative case study also considered documentation in Phase One and Two. Including documentary analysis as a data collection method gives researchers access to significant amounts of information (Denscombe, 2010b). While not all information is necessarily relevant to specific research objectives and questions, as most documents are produced for other purposes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), documents that do hold relevance are a rich source of data that can provide meaningful insights (Mason, 2005; Punch & Oancea, 2014). This is especially the case in educational settings where documents, of which there can be many (Wellington, 2015, p. 208), play an important role. In this study, the documents generated, which are outlined below in Table 3.14, were particularly useful in providing contextual information that supported, explained and verified what was learnt from interviews and observations (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). There are two main categories for documents: pre-existing or researcher-generated (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Wellington, 2015), both of which were used in this study.

*Table 3.14 Type of documentation gathered from each case (pre-existing documents non-bold, researcher-generated documents bold)*

Year group	State-sector documents (author, date, location)	Independent-sector documents (author, date, location)
Reception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Blank school report (Reception) (Reception teacher, 2019, Reception teacher's computer)</li> <li>Reception timetable (Reception teacher, June 2019, Reception teacher's personal folder)</li> <li>Teacher planning (Reception teacher, 2019, Reception teacher's personal folder)</li> <li>Intervention timetable Reception teacher, 2019, Reception teacher's personal folder).</li> <li><b>Photographs of learning environment (researcher, 27<sup>th</sup> June 2019, Reception classroom)</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School assessment system (Headteacher, 2019, Headteacher's computer)</li> <li>School curriculum policy (Headteacher, 2018/19, school website)</li> <li>Reception timetable (Reception teacher, June 2019, Reception teacher's computer)</li> <li><b>Photographs of learning environment (researcher, 13<sup>th</sup> June 2019, Reception classroom)</b></li> </ul>
Year One	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Blank school report (whole school) (Headteacher, 2019, Headteacher's computer)</li> <li>Year One timetable (Year One teachers, November 2019, Year One teacher's computer)</li> <li>School improvement plan (Senior Leadership Team, 2019, school office)</li> <li>School priorities (Senior Leadership Team, 2019, school office)</li> <li><b>Photographs of learning environment (researcher, 19<sup>th</sup> November 2019, Year One classroom)</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Year One timetable (Year One teachers, November 2019, Year One teacher's computer)</li> <li>Curriculum framework (EYFS, KS1 &amp; Senior Leadership Team, 2019, school one drive)</li> <li>Weekly newsletter (Year One teachers, 15<sup>th</sup> November 2019, school website)</li> <li><b>Photographs of learning environment (researcher, 9<sup>th</sup> November, 2019, Year One classroom)</b></li> </ul>

#### 3.4.3.4.1 Pre-existing

Pre-existing documents are natural aspects of the research setting that exist prior to the start of the research process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, while interviews and observations address specific research questions, pre-existing, secondary documents are often 'inadvertent sources' of data (Duffy, 2005, p, 126). This means it is down to the individual researcher to use their discretion when assessing their relevance (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). In this study, most documents were generated from pre-existing sources that were text-based (Denscombe, 2010b). These documents, which are in non-bold in Table 3.14 above, ranged in terms of accessibility. For example, blank school reports, weekly timetables and teacher planning were restricted, requiring permission from educators (Denscombe, 2010b; Wellington, 2015) whereas the curriculum framework and weekly newsletter – generated from Year One in the independent-sector – were freely available via the school's website (Wellington, 2015). These



documents were what Merriam and Tisdell (2016, p. 189) refer to as ‘nonreactive’, meaning that they were unaffected by the research process or the presence of the researcher. Instead, they were produced independently and were ‘grounded in the context’ of Reception and Year One in each case. Pre-existing documents therefore provide an opportunity for researchers to triangulate interviews and observations against a more ‘objective’ source of data, increasing the trustworthiness and authenticity of the study (Wellington, 2015). A key consideration when using pre-existing documents is determining the authenticity and accuracy of each source (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To be included in this study, the author, location and date of documents had to be discernible (Denscombe, 2010b; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), as is shown in Table 3.14 above. The scrutiny of each document ensured the credibility of each source.

#### *3.4.3.4.2 Researcher-generated*

In addition to pre-existing documents, this research also included researcher-generated documents. These documents are more specific to the research objectives and questions, initiated by the researcher to develop insight into the phenomena under investigation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Researcher-generated documents – in bold in Table 3.14 above – were visual, in the form of photographs. Denscombe (2010b, p. 227) identifies the generation of visual images for the purposes of research as ‘created images’ and suggests that this type of documentation present a valuable way of recording important and contextual information. Visual images enabled the researcher to capture and record the organisation of the learning environments, both inside and outside, in the Reception and Year One activity systems in each case. All photographs were taken, with permission, in the same week as observations following school hours when no children or adults were present.

### **3.5 Data analysis**

Data analysis in qualitative research concerns the transformation of raw, complex data into interpretation, description and understanding (Gibbs, 2007). It is a process that involves ‘making sense out of the data’ so that researchers can answer their research questions and meet their research objectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.

202). As this study was longitudinal, carried out over a period of ten months with three data collection points, data analysis was formative, recursive and dynamic. It began as soon as the first case study visit took place and, as suggested by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), became more intensive as the study progressed.

### 3.5.1 Preparation and organisation of data

For some aspects of the dataset, such as documentation and observations (once written up electronically), preparation involved generating duplications and saving electronically. The preparation of interview data, however, required transcription and each interview audio recording was transcribed in its entirety by the researcher directly after each phase of data collection. Although transcribing is a highly time-consuming process, in this case requiring many weeks of activity, it was important as it produced a form of data that was far easier to analyse than the original audio recordings (Denscombe, 2017). In addition, by transcribing all interview recordings myself, I was able to get ‘close to the data’ (Denscombe, 2017, p. 307) and establish familiarity with the interview content (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Gibbs, 2007). For this reason, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) view transcription as a form of ‘rudimentary analysis’ (p. 200).

As the process of data collection produced a significant amount of data it was important to organise it within a ‘case study database’, defined by Yin (2014, p. 238) as a ‘systematic archive of all the data from a case study, assembled to enable the later retrieval of specific pieces of evidence’. The case study database for this thesis was stored on NVivo version 12, with duplicate files stored on an encrypted computer. NVivo has the capacity to organise and store large, complex qualitative data sets (Denscombe, 2017; Gibbs, 2007) meaning that the researcher could easily access the entire dataset. As a way of structuring the case study database on NVivo, data were organised by case, time frame, data collection method and participant, as depicted in Figure 3.5 below.



*Figure 3.5 The organisation of case study data by case, time frame (phase), data collection method and participant using NVivo version 12*

## 3.5.2 Analysis

### 3.5.2.1 Stages of analysis

The different stages of analysis for this research were organised based on cases, time frame and research question. These stages of analysis are depicted in Figure 3.6 below.

#### 3.5.2.1.1 Cases

The collective case study comprised of two stages of analysis: a ‘within-case’ analysis and a ‘cross-case’ analysis (Miles et al., 2020). Treating each setting as a ‘comprehensive case in and of itself’ (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 234), the ‘within-case analyses’ were carried out first and following these analyses, a ‘cross-case analysis’ discussing the similarities and differences between the two cases was carried out (Miles et al., 2020).

#### 3.5.2.1.2 Time Frame

Within each ‘within-case analysis’, data were analysed at three different time frames, positioning each phase of data collection as a ‘fixed unit of analysis’ (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 663). Analyses were carried out in the order in which data were collected, starting with Phase One and concluding with Phase Three.

#### *3.5.2.1.3 Research question*

The final stage of analysis related to each research question. Within each case and within each time frame of data collection, the analysis was driven by attempting to understand and answer the study's three research questions.

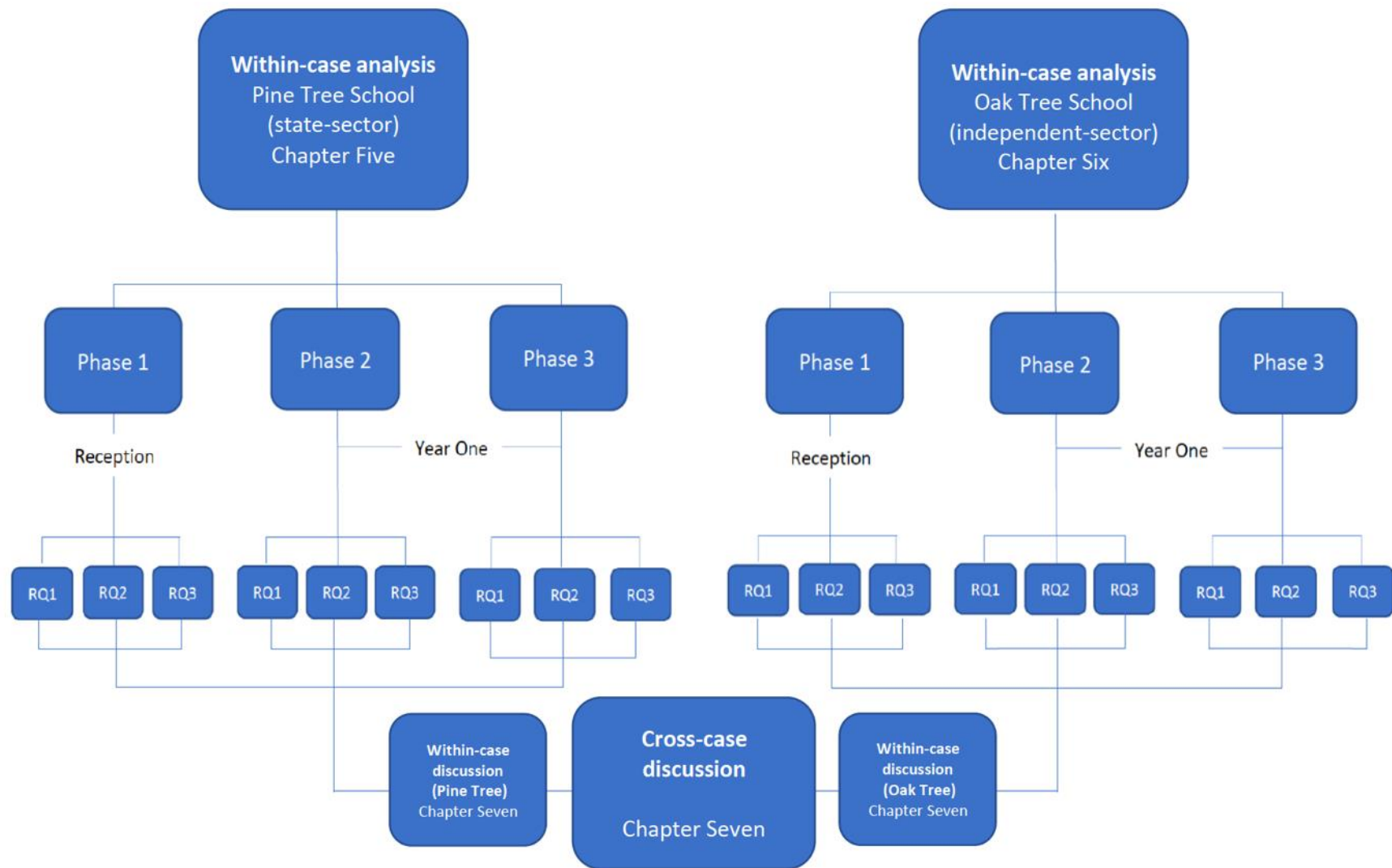


Figure 3.6 The different stages of data analysis relating to cases, time frame (phase) and research question

### 3.5.2.2 Reflexive Thematic Analysis

The analysis of data was based on the Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) method developed, and later expanded on, by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021b). RTA is defined as a ‘method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). It is positioned as a flexible analytic approach that can be applied ‘within any of the major ontological, epistemological and theoretical frameworks underpinning qualitative research’ (Braun & Clarke, 2021b, p. 131). According to Braun and Clarke (2021b), RTA can also be applied to answer a number of different research questions, a number of which are highly compatible with the aims of this research, as outlined in Table 3.15 below. RTA also corresponds with the implementation of a case study research strategy as it can be employed to analyse ‘rich, nuanced, complex and detailed’ data that is generated from a range of different data collection methods (Braun & Clarke, 2021a, p. 10). As will be identified below, RTA was particularly suited to this research as it can facilitate multiple analyses within the same dataset, enabling a nuanced and insightful account of the themes that related to each research question to be generated (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021a).

*Table 3.15 The alignment between suitable research questions for Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021a, p. 9) and this study's research questions*

<b>Suitable research questions for Reflexive Thematic Analysis</b>	<b>Alignment with research question</b>
The things people do in the world—their contextually situated (variously conceptualized as) behaviours or practices, and their sense-making around them	RQ1: How do a state-sector primary school and an independent-sector primary school organise teaching and learning in Reception and Year One?
The (often implicit) contextually situated rules and norms that regulate particular phenomena	RQ2: What factors influence and shape teaching and learning in Reception and Year One in these different settings?
The factors or social processes that influence the shape and texture of particular phenomena	RQ2: What factors influence and shape teaching and learning in Reception and Year One in these different settings?
The views, perceptions, understandings, perspectives, needs, motivations of particular groups, about particular phenomena, in particular contexts (often combined with lived experience questions)	RQ3: How do children and parents experience and perceive the pedagogies enacted in Reception and Year One and, the transition between them?

Given its flexibility and diversity, RTA is a popular analytical approach in qualitative research. Yet, according to the authors who – to a great extent – popularised it, its application is not always congruent with the assumptions and principles that underpin it, leading to confusion and misconceptions about RTA as a method (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2020). Observing this confusion, Braun and Clarke (2019, 2020, 2021a) have recently clarified their conceptualisation to better distinguish their approach from other versions of Thematic Analysis, which they stress is not a homogenous or one size fits all method (Braun & Clarke, 2020). The reflexive component of RTA captures the distinctive features of Braun and Clarke’s (2019) approach, foregrounding the researcher’s subjectivity and reflexivity. Indeed, they state that ‘the researcher’s role in knowledge production is at the heart’ of their approach (2019, p. 594), making it consistent with an interpretivist research paradigm:

Quality reflexive TA is not about following procedures “correctly” (or about “accurate” and “reliable” coding), but about the researcher’s reflective and thoughtful engagement with their data and their reflexive and thoughtful engagement with the analytic process. (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p. 594)

Hence, while being mindful of not wanting to establish a ‘recipe that must be followed precisely’ (2019, p. 589), Braun and Clarke have explicated, and continue to explicate, a six-phase process for data engagement, coding and theme development. The six-phase process first outlined (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87) has since been re-articulated to clarify a number of misconceptions relating to terminology, most notably replacing ‘generating initial codes’ with ‘data coding’ and ‘searching for themes’ with ‘initial theme generation’ (Braun & Clarke, 2021b, pp. 134-137). According to Braun and Clarke, these changes to terminology clarify and reflect important aspects of implementing RTA, particularly the notion that ‘themes do not passively emerge from either data or coding’ but are instead ‘produced at the intersection of the researcher’s theoretical assumptions, their analytic resources and skill, and the data themselves’ (2019, p. 594). In this sense, themes are the outcome of a creative and active process, one which the researcher is central to (Braun & Clarke, 2020). Taking these changes to terminology into account, the six-phase process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021b) is

described in Table 3.16 below. Importantly, Braun and Clarke (2021b) reiterate that the six steps are ‘recursive’ rather than ‘linear’, with potential for each phase to ‘blur into each other’ (p. 133).

*Table 3.16 Six-phase process of (reflexive) thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp. 86-93, 2021b, pp. 133-143)*

Phase	Descriptive features of the process
1. Data familiarisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transcribing data (if necessary)</li> <li>• Reading and re-reading of the data</li> <li>• Making notes/personal memos of analytic insights</li> <li>• Reflecting on researcher’s positioning in relation to the research topic and participants</li> </ul>
2. Data coding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working through the data set systematically, developing codes for segments of data</li> <li>• Every time there is something of interest in the data, a decision should be made whether to use an existing code or create a new one</li> <li>• Implementing numerous rounds of coding so that ‘coding drift’ is counter-balanced</li> <li>• Prepare for theme development by compiling a list of all codes and the attendant data excerpts</li> </ul>
3. Initial theme generation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stepping back from the minutiae of the data and think about broader patterns that capture shared meaning</li> <li>• Collate and cluster together codes that relate to a particular idea or concept</li> <li>• Compile all data extracts associated with all codes relevant to each candidate theme</li> </ul>
4. Developing and reviewing themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Checking for fit between candidate themes and coded data (Level 1)</li> <li>• Checking for fit between the candidate themes and entire data set (Level 2)</li> <li>• Generating a thematic ‘map’ of candidate themes and identifying the relationship – both ‘horizontal’ and ‘vertical’ – between them</li> </ul>
5. Refining, defining and naming themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme</li> <li>• Demonstration of the patterned nature of the themes by drawing widely from across the data set</li> </ul>
6. Writing up thematic analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentation of ‘evidence base’ from the data - using vivid, compelling examples – combined with the analytic narrative that locates and ‘answers’ the research questions.</li> <li>• Production of a research report that explains, locates and contextualises the analysis in relation to existing theory and research.</li> </ul>

All six of the phases described by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021b) informed data analysis in this research. However, as noted above, a strength of RTA in the context of this study was its ability to ‘produce an insightful analysis that answers particular



research questions' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 97). Being able to approach analysis with particularity was helpful as the focus of the research questions, and the conceptual framework applied to help answer them, necessitated an analytical approach that was tailored and specific to each question. Thus, the way in which data were analysed, particularly in the second phase of the six-phase process, focussing on 'data coding', differed depending on each research question and its accompanying conceptual framework. The development of coding within RTA and the different coding approach implemented for each research question will now be explored in more detail.

#### 3.5.2.2.1 The development of data coding (Phase 2) within Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Data coding involves 'systematic' engagement with the data, requiring the researcher to apply codes to key analytical ideas that are of particular interest to the research questions and theoretical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2021b, p. 134; Elliot, 2018). The development of coding for this research can best be described as a process of drawing 'together all the relevant data for the exact issue of concern' (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 662) and 'identifying segments in the data set that are responsive to [each] research question' (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 203). This involved implementing a coding strategy that was specific to the research questions and the conceptual framework through which they were interpreted, meaning that a number of different approaches to coding data were implemented, including both inductive and deductive strategies.

Despite being positioned as contrasting approaches, qualitative data analysis can apply both inductive and deductive coding approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Gibbs, 2007; Elliot, 2018). In fact, Wellington (2015) argues that a combination of both inductive and deductive logic is the 'most common' and 'most rational approach to analysing qualitative data' (p. 268). This indicates that approaches to coding data do not need to be 'either/or' but instead the range of possibilities exist along a continuum (Punch, 2014, p. 174). In agreement with this, Braun and Clarke (2019) note how the idea that coding must be either inductive or deductive rather than a mixture of both is a common misapplication of RTA. The authors also allude

to the notion of a continuum, rather than a dichotomy, suggesting that coding can be both ‘grounded in the data’ (inductive) as well as driven by existing theories or research (deductive) (Braun & Clarke, 2020).

The different approaches to data coding carried out within the RTA in this research will now be outlined, taking into consideration the research questions and the conceptual framework through which they were interpreted.

#### 3.5.2.2.1.1 Research question one

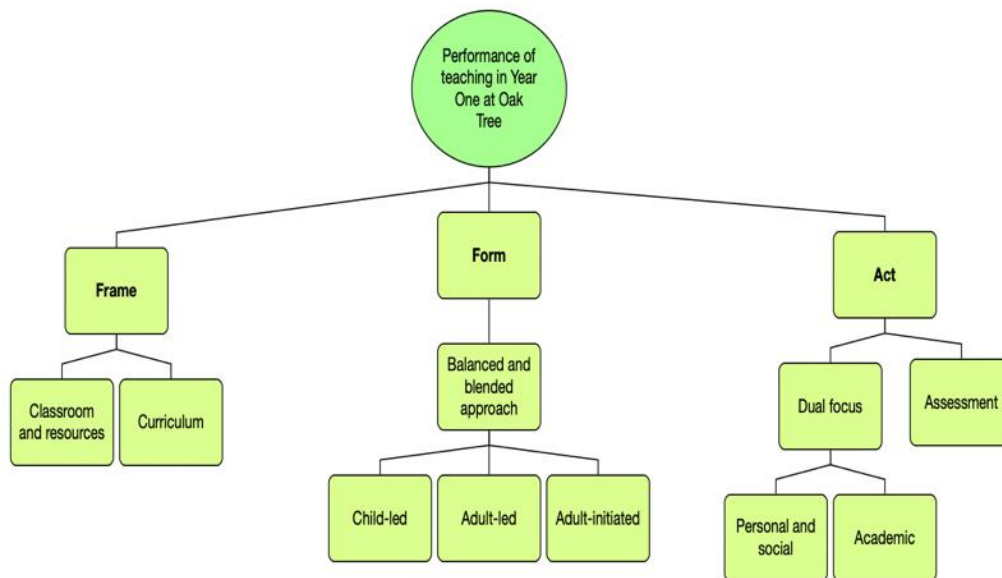
- 1) How do a state-sector and an independent-sector primary school organise teaching and learning in Reception and Year One?

Research question one is closely associated to what Alexander (2001, 2009a) considers the *performance* of teaching, which relates to the self-contained, observable actions referring to what teachers and children do in classrooms. As a way of considering the *performance* of teaching in Reception and Year One in each setting (positioned as the *tool* element in the activity system, see section 2.5), the previous chapter identified that Alexander’s (2001) ‘action-based framework for the analysis of teaching’ (*frame, form* and *act*) and components of Bernstein’s (1975) theory on educational knowledge (i.e classification and framing) combine to provide a ‘language of description’ that is capable of sensitively describing different modalities of teaching and learning.

In articulating his framework, Alexander (2009a) indicates that the broad analytical categories of *frame, form* and *act* facilitate an analysis of the key elements of teaching that hold true in most, if not all, settings. Whilst the framework can take into account a significant level of complexity, Alexander insists that the model employs ‘common-sense validity’ (2010, p. 302) and is intended to be ‘conceptual rather than technical’ (2009a, p. 931) and ‘descriptive rather than prescriptive’ (2001, p. 323). Despite these factors – which appear to support an inductive approach – Alexander (2008b) does indicate that the *performance* of teaching concerns *what* teachers and children do and *how* they do it, not necessarily *why* they do it. Although still broad, this crucial distinction required a deductive level of

analysis that separated the *what* from the *why*. With these theoretical permutations in mind, the six-phase RTA process was followed, with specific decisions made in relation to Phase 2 and 4, as outlined below:

- (Phase 2) When working through the data set systematically, data that related to the actions and behaviours of teachers and children (the *what* and the *how*) were deductively coded.
- (Phase 2) Once all data relating to the *performance* of teaching were collated, inductive codes were then developed, generating a list of codes.
- (Phase 4) Once candidate themes had been checked they were then grouped under the broad analytical categories of *frame*, *form* and *act* (Alexander, 2009a). This generated a thematic map identifying the relationship between themes and sub-themes, an example of which is presented in Figure 3.7 below.



*Figure 3.7* Example of a thematic map identifying the relationship between themes and sub-themes grouped under frame, form and act

#### 3.5.2.2.1.2 Research question two

- 2) What factors influence and shape teaching and learning in Reception and Year One in these different settings?

Research question two considers the factors that shape teaching and learning and is therefore closely related to what Alexander (2001, 2009a) considers pedagogical *discourse*. This study considers pedagogical *discourse* through the activity system elements of subject, object, rules, community and division of labour (see section 2.5). Although these elements are well defined, activity theory is considered not to be overly restrictive and methods for interpreting data are ‘often unspecified’ (Seaman, 2008, p. 5). In this sense, activity theory is not a monolithic theory (Kaptelinin, 2005) and data coding can apply both inductive (e.g. Yamagata-Lynch, 2010) and deductive logic (e.g. Goodnough, 2019).

Taking this into account, data coding for research question two aimed to negotiate a balance between being theoretically driven (deductive) while ensuring themes were grounded in the data (inductive) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In following the six-phase RTA process to answer research question two, specific decisions were made in Phase 2 and 4, as outlined below:

- (Phase 2) When working through the data set systematically, data were deductively coded to the activity theory elements of subject, object, rules, community and/or division of labour.
- (Phase 2) Once data had been coded into activity theory elements, inductive codes were then developed, generating a list of codes within each element.
- (Phase 4) Within each activity theory element, the themes generated were mapped to an activity system, an example of which is shown in Figure 3.8 below.

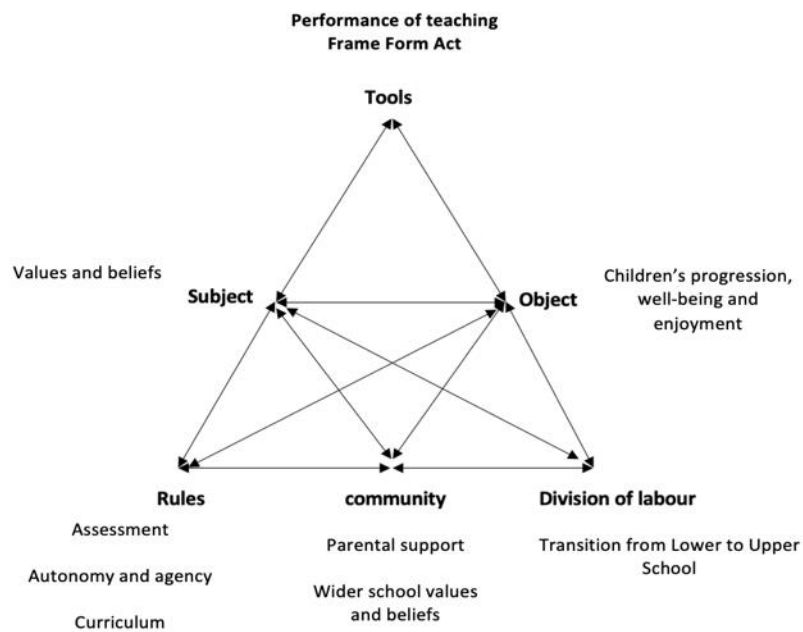


Figure 3.8 Example of how the themes generated were mapped to an activity system

### 3.5.2.2.1.3 Research question three

- 3) How do parents and children experience and perceive the pedagogies enacted in Reception and Year One and, the transition between them?

Unlike research question one and two, research question three was not interpreted through any particular theoretical lens. To answer research question three, it was necessary to generate specific information relating to child and parent experiences and perceptions of Reception and Year One and, the transition between them. Analysis of child and parent experiences and perceptions of Reception and Year One were undertaken through the lenses of opportunities, involvement, engagement and enjoyment. Analysis of child and parent experiences and perceptions of the transition were undertaken through the lenses of continuity and change and adjustment. From a review of existing literature, these lenses have been identified as being important aspects of child and parent experiences of ECE (Reception), CSE (Year One) and the transition between them (Ballam et al., 2017; Dockett et al., 2014). The coding of data therefore took a largely deductive approach, using key themes identified in previous literature ‘as a lens through which to interpret the data’ (Braun & Clarke, 2021a, p. 6).

It is necessary to point out, however, that although analysis was largely deductive, it did not attempt to force data into pre-existing themes but remained open to the generation of new themes. An example of which is the generation of ‘rules’ as being an important aspect of children’s experience in Year One at Pine Tree (see section 5.6.1.3). The six-phase RTA process was followed, with specific decisions made in relation to Phase 2 and 4, as outlined below:

- (Phase 2) Data were coded deductively focussing on opportunities, involvement, engagement, enjoyment, continuity and change and adjustment.
- (Phase 4) Checking for fit between coded data and themes. If data did not fit, themes were reviewed and if necessary, new themes developed (see ‘rules’ above). Theme names developed that reflected the nature of the data.

### 3.6 Trustworthiness and authenticity

When considering the trustworthiness and authenticity of research, it is necessary to apply criteria that are congruent with the philosophical assumptions underlying the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Thus, the criteria conventionally used in research predicated on positivist principles – such as validity, reliability and objectivity – are not suitable nor feasible in interpretivist research (Denscombe, 2017; Mason, 2005). Recognising this, Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that the traditional positivist criteria of internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity should be substituted with concepts more suited to interpretivist research; namely, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability respectively.

Credibility concerns the extent to which ‘data are *reasonably likely* to be accurate and appropriate’ (Denscombe, 2017, p. 326). In this research, matters of accuracy and appropriateness were addressed by employing two different strategies of triangulation: through ‘multiple methods’ and ‘multiple sources’ (Denzin, 2009). The former enabled the researcher to pursue what Yin (2014, p. 120) terms as ‘converging lines of enquiry’, where the information generated from interviews, observations and documentation were corroborated against one another, enhancing

the accuracy of findings and conclusions. The latter strategy refers to data being collected at different times throughout the study, in this case in Phase One, Two and Three. An advantage of this is the ability to compare and cross-check data collected at different times, with the same, as well as different, participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Employing two methods of triangulation is identified by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) as a ‘powerful strategy for increasing the credibility’ of qualitative research (p. 245). Other steps taken to increase credibility were prolonged engagement at case study sites and respondent validation through member checking (Cohen et al., 2018; Denscombe, 2017).

Transferability takes into consideration the representativeness of research; that is, whether the ‘findings reported in one study can be applied to other situations’ (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 253). Earlier on in this chapter, it was noted how a criticism often levelled at case study is that the sample size is too small to adequately draw inferences to larger populations (Bassegy, 1999). Yet, it was argued that such a view is based upon a positivist notion of generalisation which is not compatible or attainable when carrying out qualitative case study (Thomas, 2013; Yin, 2014). Instead, it is proposed that case study should attempt to explore ‘naturalistic’ (Stake, 1995, p. 87) and ‘fuzzy’ generalisations (Bassegy, 1999, p. 46). Such concepts are more indicative of the notion of transferability – rather than generalisation – and indicate that it is possible, but by no means certain, that findings may be more general (Bassegy, 1999). It can alert others to ‘similar possibilities in other situations’ (Pring, 2015, p. 56), placing emphasis on the reader being able to evaluate the findings in relation to their own experiences (Stake, 1995; Wellington, 2015). To give the reader opportunities to make an informed judgement about the transferability to other instances, this study presents rich, thick descriptions of the research contexts and participants, providing readers with the ‘relevant details on which to base a comparison’ (Denscombe, 2017, p. 328).

To address issues around dependability, which concerns ‘whether the results are consistent with the data collected’ (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 251), complete records of procedures, methods and key decisions made by the researcher throughout the research process were kept in a research diary, with important decisions and memos relating to data analysis also documented on NVivo. This

detailed account, referred to by researchers as an ‘audit trail’ (Denscombe, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), included the reflections made, questions posed, and dilemmas encountered at key junctures throughout the research.

Confirmability concerns matters of neutrality and the extent to which interpretations are rooted in and derived from the data rather than personal predilection (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). While suggesting that no research is ever completely independent from the influence of those who conduct it, Denscombe (2017) asserts that it is particularly important for researchers carrying out qualitative research to provide a reflexive account of the ‘researcher’s self and its impact on research’ (p. 330). This involves critical self-reflection by the researcher regarding issues that have the potential to shape interpretations of the data, such as identity, values and beliefs. These issues were addressed in the first chapter where the researcher’s positionality – particularly in relation to the independent-sector – was outlined. Confirmability was also addressed in this research by ensuring that all interpretations of the data were visible and explicit, and efforts were made to preserve participant experiences and perceptions through the use of participant quotes. Additionally, in keeping with the exploratory nature of this research, the importance of approaching data with an ‘open mind’ was foregrounded (Denscombe, 2017).

### 3.7 Ethical considerations

The consideration of ethical and moral issues is paramount in research, especially when it involves the study of people (Wellington, 2015). Researchers have a responsibility to ensure that participants are ‘treated fairly, sensitively, and with dignity and freedom from prejudice’ (British Educational Research Association, 2018, p. 6). Ethical issues permeate all aspects of the research process (Cohen et al., 2018) and, according to Denscombe (2017), should be considered when designing research, collecting and analysing data, and disseminating research findings. In the present study, each of these stages were informed by the ethical guidelines outlined by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2018) and by the European Early Childhood Research Association (EECERA) (Bertram et al., 2015). These ethical frameworks provided guidance for the present study, indicating appropriate actions and decisions as well as those that must be avoided (Cohen et



al., 2018; Denscombe, 2017). It is important to note, however, that while the frameworks provide essential guidance, which researchers must assimilate, it is still necessary for researchers to be personally responsible for the decisions they take and the judgements they exercise (Denscombe, 2017).

The present study and pilot study were included together in an ethical application which was approved by Bishop Grosseteste University's Research Ethics Committee in April 2019. When the research moved online in Phase Three due to Covid-19, the approved ethical clearance form had to be amended. These amendments, which were informed by the Ethical Guidelines developed by the Association of Internet Researchers (Franzke et al., 2020), were granted institutional approval in March 2020.

### 3.7.1 Informed consent (adults)

After ethical approval was granted, the researcher approached the gatekeepers of the settings identified in the sampling strategy. This led to the researcher meeting the headteacher, Reception and Year One teachers in each case. The meeting presented an opportunity to go through and clarify the educator participant information sheet (Appendix H) and to respond to any questions. All educators indicated that they were happy to take part and provided written and dated consent. Parents in each setting were approached two weeks prior to the first case study visit via an email sent by the Reception teachers in each setting. The Reception teachers attached the parent participation information sheet (Appendix I) and encouraged them to direct any questions to the researcher's email address. Parents who were happy to take part, and willing for their child to be approached to take part, signed, dated and returned the consent form (Appendix J) to the school prior to case study visits. The participant information document was designed based on the key principles of informed consent, as identified by Cohen et al. (2018, p. 125), and attempted to provide adult participants with 'sufficient information' in order to arrive at a 'reasoned judgement' about whether or not they would like to participate (Denscombe, 2017, p. 343).

It was important to see informed consent as a process rather than an absolute state of affairs, so that continued participation was not assumed. Hence, at the start of each phase, all participants were asked if they were happy to continue their participation and if so, provide a signature, as was the case in Phases One and Two, and respond to an email, as was the case in Phase Three.

### 3.7.2 Informed consent (children)

In each case, the school informed all parents and children that the researcher would be visiting for one week at different points in Reception and Year One. Only children whose parents had given informed consent that was evidenced in writing were asked if they would like to draw a picture and answer some questions about their experiences in Reception and Year One. As with adults, the principles of informed consent (Cohen et al., 2018) outlined above were applied and steps were taken to ensure that children were empowered to make an informed decision about whether or not they would like to participate (Harcourt & Conroy, 2011). This involved the researcher using the first three days of case study observations in each visit to establish a ‘research relationship’. The researcher explained to the children, initially as a whole class, and then in smaller groups over the course of the week, the reasons for being at the school, the basic concepts of research and their involvement. Using the first three days to discuss these concepts with the children enabled them to become accustomed to the researcher’s presence and helped to negotiate a shared meaning for wanting to participate in the research (Harcourt & Conroy, 2011). Children were reminded that their participation was voluntary and that they could exit the activity at any stage; principles that were continuously reiterated and negotiated throughout the ‘draw-and-talk’ activity (Arnott et al., 2020). To ensure that children did not feel obliged to take part because of power differentials, close attention was paid to their demeanour throughout the activity. When invited individually, all children indicated that they would be happy to take part. In the majority of cases this meant doing the ‘draw-and-talk’ activity straight away. However, some of the children negotiated the time when they took part, showing their control over the process.

### 3.7.3 Confidentiality and anonymity

In order to ensure anonymity, all participants were allocated an identification code that was converted into a corresponding pseudonym. The research settings were also anonymised through pseudonyms: Pine Tree School (state-sector school) and Oak Tree School (independent-sector school) respectively. This ‘fictionalised’ approach (British Educational Research Association, 2018, p. 21) ensured that participants and settings included could not be directly identified. Measures were taken to ensure that information relating to participants and settings, such as school demographic information and precise location, struck a balance between providing enough context to enrich description whilst ensuring participants and settings would not be at risk of being identified. All participant information, their identification codes and pseudonyms were contained within a spreadsheet database stored on a password protected computer, only accessible by the researcher.

In accordance with General Data Protection Regulation, the participants were made aware that all data generated would only be handled by the researcher for the purposes of the present research, including potential publication in academic journals and at academic conferences. All data collated throughout this research, both electronic and paper forms, were stored in secure locations – on password protected devices and in locked drawers respectively – to which only the researcher had access. Once transferred on to an encrypted computer, audio recordings were deleted from the mobile device used for interviews with participants. All information seen and discussed that was beyond the focus of this research was handled with the strictest confidentiality. It was communicated to the participants that the only exception to their confidentiality and anonymity was if it came to light that they were involved in illegal or harmful behaviours in which case the researcher would be obliged to disclose to the appropriate authorities. However, disclosures of this nature did not come to the attention of the researcher during case study visits.

### 3.7.4 Research with children

This study recognises the importance of children’s contribution to research. In the child interview section (3.4.3.1.3), a number of ethical considerations were

discussed such as: the approach to informed consent; ensuring that the data collection method was both appropriate and meaningful; steps taken to negate power differentials; giving children control over the process; and the establishment and re-establishment of a research relationship. Giving consideration to these ethical issues took steps to ensure that all children were respected, well informed, able to consent, decline, negotiate and withdraw their participation freely (Alderson, 2008; Harcourt & Conroy, 2011). One issue, however, was the inability to transition out of children's worlds as planned. The Covid-19 pandemic meant that the researcher did not have the opportunity to understand children's experiences and perceptions for a third time and it was decided that it would not be ethically and morally appropriate to include children in the Third Phase of data collection at a time of significant and unprecedented change. Unfortunately, this meant that the researcher was not able to properly thank children for their participation throughout the research study.

### 3.8 Chapter summary

This chapter has outlined and provided justification for the methodological choices taken into consideration throughout this research. It has described how through taking a question-driven approach, a qualitative, collective case study, situated within an interpretivist research paradigm, was identified as the most appropriate research strategy to answer the research questions. For the qualitative, collective case study, boundaries were established in relation to space, time and personnel and the purposive sampling strategy that was implemented – which included sampling sites and participants – was outlined. Details relating to the pilot study, the timing and duration of data collection and the methods employed were then considered, followed by an explanation of how data were prepared, organised and analysed. Matters relating to trustworthiness and authenticity were then addressed and, following this, the ethical considerations informing all aspects of the research were clarified.

Chapter Four presents a short preface to the findings and discussion chapters included in the thesis, outlining their structure and purpose.

## Chapter 4 Preface to findings chapters

### 4.0 Introduction

This short preface outlines the structure of Chapter Five and Six which take the same approach, enabling the researcher to avoid repeating information throughout each chapter.

### 4.1 The structure of Chapter 5 and 6

The next two Chapters, Five and Six, present the themes generated from the within-case analysis (Miles et al., 2020) of Pine Tree School (state-sector case) and Oak Tree School (independent-sector case) respectively.

These chapters are structured based on the premise that to understand the transition from Reception to Year One it is necessary to first understand how these year groups function as individual pedagogical activity systems (Sandberg et al., 2017). The chapters are therefore divided into three sections, as shown in Figure 4.1 below. The focus of each section will now be discussed in more detail.

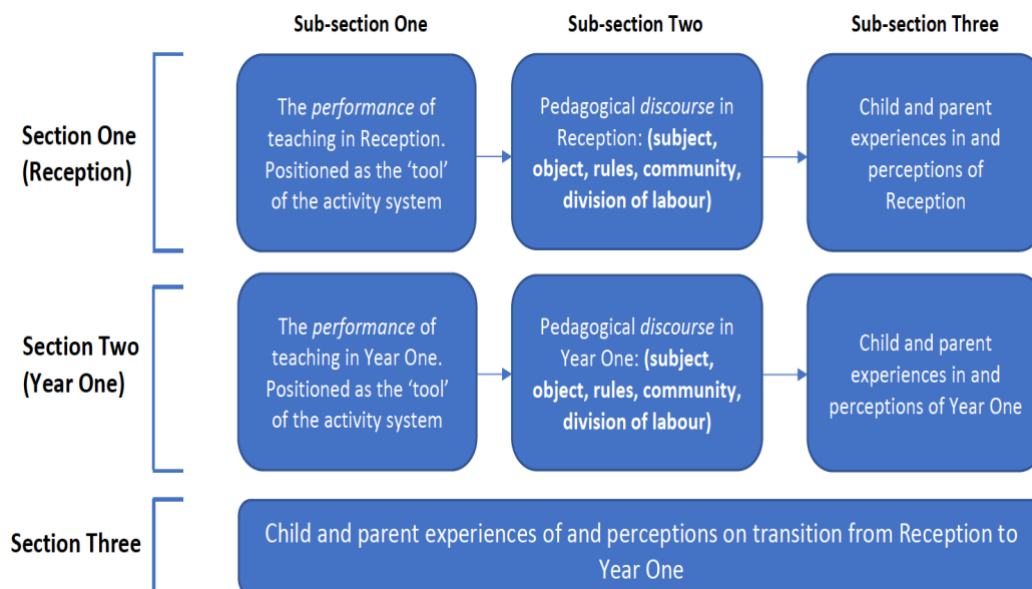


Figure 4.1 The structure of the within-case analyses carried out in Chapter 5 and 6

### 4.1.1 Section One and Two

Section One and Two in each chapter follow the same structure, albeit focussing on Reception and Year One respectively. Both sections are divided into three sub-sections: the *performance* of teaching, pedagogical *discourse* and child and parent experiences and perceptions.

#### 4.1.1.1 Sub-section One: the *performance* of teaching

The first sub-section in Reception (Section One) and Year One (Section Two) will focus on the '*performance of teaching*' (Alexander, 2001). In particular, this sub-section aims to contribute towards answering research question one:

- 1) How do a state-sector primary school and an independent-sector primary school organise teaching and learning in Reception and Year One?

Drawing on the work of Daniels (2004), Chapter 2 highlighted how the *performance* of teaching for this thesis is positioned as the tool within the activity system (see section 2.5) and the first sub-section focusses on identifying and describing its structure. To achieve this, a 'language of description' combining Alexander's (2001) broad analytical categories of *frame*, *form* and *act* and components of Bernstein's (1975) theory on educational knowledge (i.e classification and framing) will be employed. This descriptive section will draw largely upon data generated from observations and documentation but will also take into consideration some descriptive direct quotes from participants. Crucially, however, this section focusses on *what* teachers and children do, not necessarily *why* they do it, as this is considered in the following sub-section, focussing on *discourse*. This section, then, can best be summarised as the *performance* of teaching 'divested of its justifications, values, theories, evidence ... [and its] relationship with the wider world' (Alexander, 2008b, p. 1). This sub-section is represented by the top level of the activity system in Figure 4.2 below, a space that Engeström (1998) refers to as the 'tip of the iceberg' where the actions of teachers

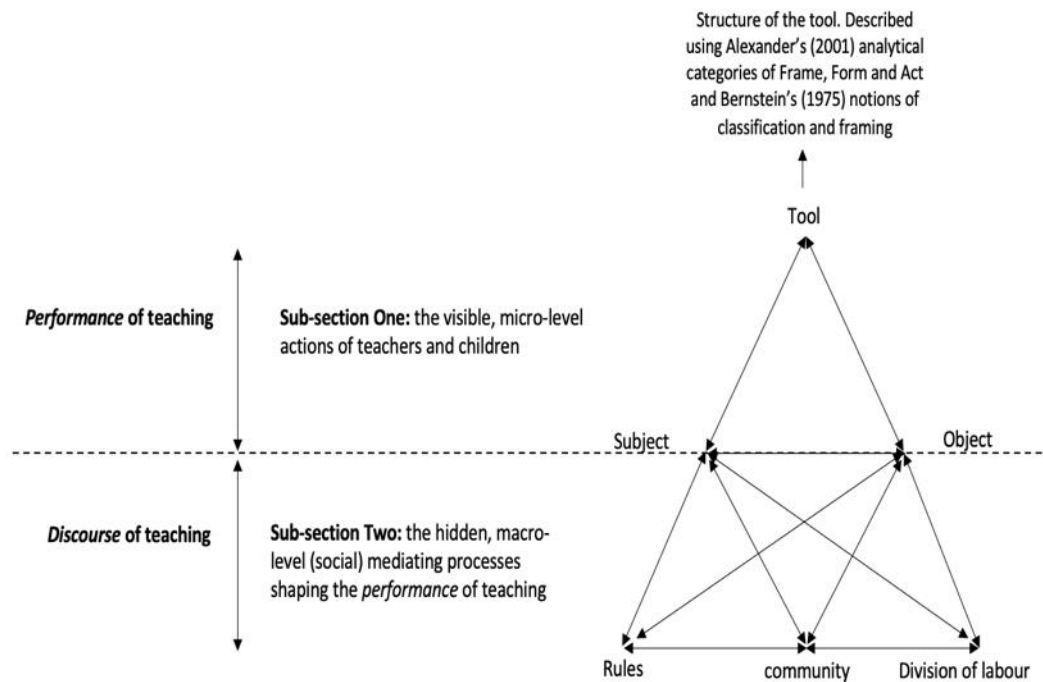
and children are visible. This section of the activity theory triangle can be seen to deal with the micro-level processes of pedagogy (Jaworski & Potari, 2009).

#### 4.1.1.2 Sub-section Two: pedagogical *discourse*

Building on the first, the second sub-section will attempt to understand pedagogical *discourse* in Reception (Section One) and Year One (Section Two). In particular, this section aims to contribute towards answering research question two:

- 2) What factors influence and shape teaching and learning in Reception and Year One in these different settings?

In order to understand the *discourse* that influences and shapes the *performance* of teaching (tool), the remaining activity system elements of subject and object (which can contribute to understanding both micro- and macro-level factors, see section 2.5.3.1) are combined with the deep social structures that shape activity; that is, rules, community and division of labour, the three elements Engeström (1998) refers to as the ‘hidden curriculum’. These elements enable the research to consider the socio-cultural-political, macro-level influences on the structure of the tool (Jaworski & Potari, 2009; Kinsella, 2018). Explored in combination with the preceding sub-section, these elements offer the opportunity to connect ‘the apparently self-contained *act (performance)* of teaching with culture, structure and mechanisms of social control (*discourse*)’, giving an account of pedagogy in its broadest sense (Alexander, 2008c, p. 3). While all data sources were used to explore the macro-level factors that shaped teaching and learning (tool) in Reception and Year One, interviews with teachers and headteachers and the generation of documents were particularly valuable data sources. This sub-section is represented by the activity systems elements occurring on and underneath the dashed line in Figure 4.2 below.



*Figure 4.2 Sub-sections One and Two combining to represent pedagogy (performance and discourse) in Reception and Year One. Dashed line emphasises the focus on different parts of the activity system while working towards an understanding of the whole*

It is important to state how the activity systems analysis employed to understand pedagogical discourse in both year groups (Reception and Year One) in both cases (Pine Tree and Oak Tree) generated a number of themes that, due to limitations on word count, cannot all be presented in detail. Thus, Sub-section Two presents five themes in depth with additional themes summarised in tabulated form. The decision concerning which themes to present in depth and which to tabulate was guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) advice regarding the 'keyness of a theme' (p. 82). They suggest that:

Part of the flexibility of thematic analysis is that it allows you to determine themes (and prevalence) in a number of ways. What is important is that you are consistent in how you do this within any particular analysis. (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83)

Taking this into consideration, themes generated from the activity systems analyses were not ordered with regards to their prevalence in terms of instances or coverage but were based on the extent to which they appeared to influence and shape the *performance* of teaching. Deciding which themes to present in more detail and



which to summarise therefore involved an interpretative process of triangulating against the themes generated from the *performance* of teaching in each year group within each case. This approach was consistent for Reception and Year One in each case.

#### 4.1.1.3 Sub-section Three: child and parent experiences and perceptions

The Third and final sub-section will focus on child and parent experiences and perceptions of the pedagogies enacted in Reception (Section One) and Year One (Section Two). This sub-section contributes to answering research question three, particular the aspects relating to pedagogy (in bold):

3) **How do parents and children experience and perceive the pedagogies enacted in Reception and Year One** and, the transition between them?

This sub-section will draw predominantly on interviews and online interviews carried out with children and parents. It interprets their experiences and perceptions through the lenses of opportunities, involvement, engagement and enjoyment. While the data analysed and presented in these sections will provide some understanding of how children and parents experienced the transition from Reception to Year One, it was still necessary to consider this explicitly. This is therefore the focus of Section Three in each chapter.

#### 4.1.2 Section Three

Having gained an in-depth understanding of the pedagogies enacted in Reception and Year One and child and parent experiences and perceptions of these, Section Three in Chapter Five and Six focuses on child and parent experiences and perceptions of the transition between them. Specifically, this section works towards answering the latter part of research question three, focussing on the transition (in bold):

3) **How do parents and children experience and perceive the pedagogies enacted in Reception and Year One and, the transition between them?**

This final section will take into consideration data generated from interviews carried out in Phase Two and Three of data collection, when children were in Year One and had experience of both pedagogies. Their experiences and perceptions of the transition are explored through the lenses of continuity and change and adjustment.

## Chapter 5 Pine Tree School

### 5.0 Introduction

I think it's obvious, isn't it? It's what we have to measure. We measure English, maths, writing, reading and gaps. That is the system we have got. So of course, the structure of the system is going to impact on the skewness of the curriculum and the areas we focus on.  
(Susan, headteacher at Pine Tree)

Pine Tree is a Church of England, state-sector primary school located in a small Lincolnshire village (population of approximately 2,000 people). It educates children from Reception to Year Six and has approximately 210 pupils on roll. The children in attendance live within the village and surrounding areas. The school's website states that Pine Tree provides an inclusive and welcoming environment aimed at 'creating a community with open hearts and open minds'. In its most recent inspection in 2017, Ofsted – who rated the school as 'good' – praised Pine Tree on their ethos, commenting that school leaders were 'determined that pupils gain the abilities needed to be well-prepared, confident, independent learners'.

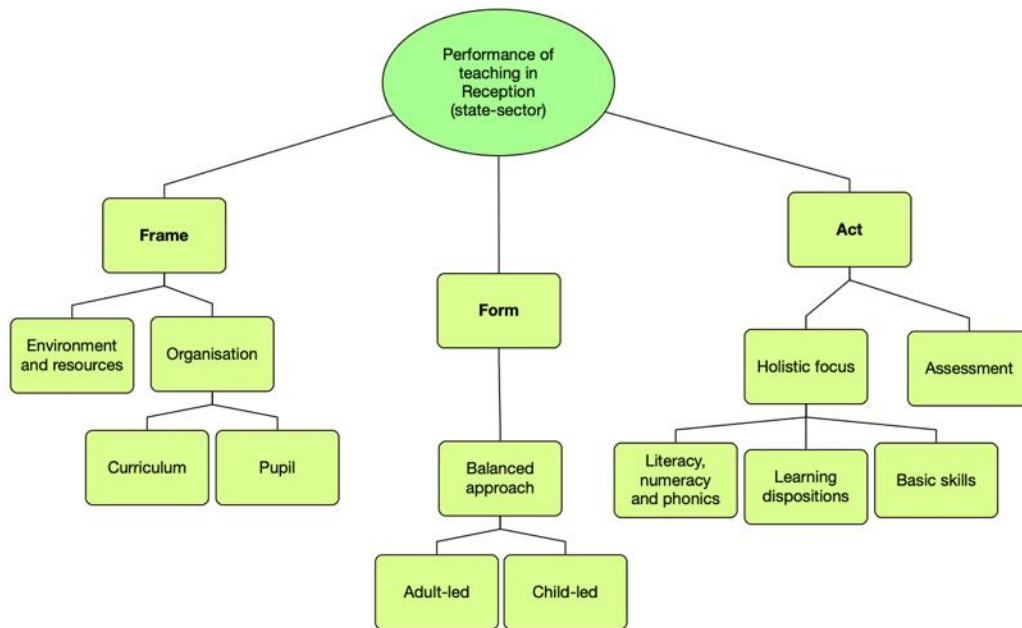
### Section One: Reception at Pine Tree

All data presented in Section One (5.1-5.3) were generated in Phase One (Reception).

#### 5.1 The *performance* of teaching in Reception

In Reception there was one full-time teacher (Nadia) and one full-time Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) working with thirty children aged 4-5 years.

When analysing the *performance* of teaching, themes and sub-themes were developed and subsequently grouped under the broad analytical categories of *frame*, *form* and *act*, presented below in Figure 5.1.

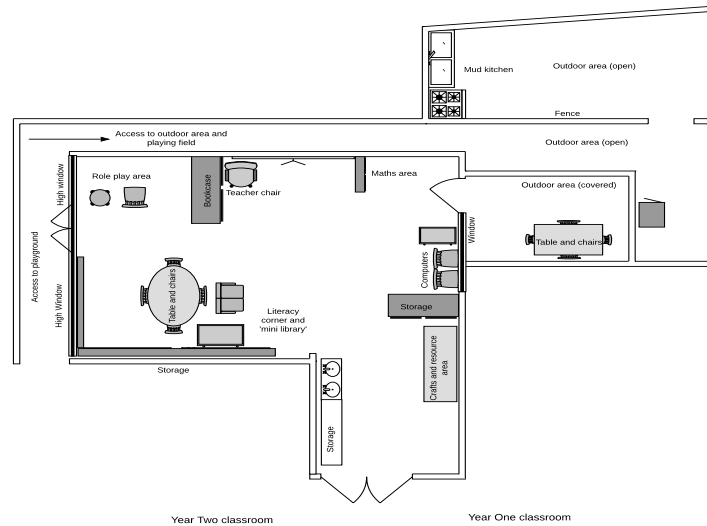


*Figure 5.1 Performance of teaching in Reception organised into frame, form and act*

## 5.1.1 Frame

### 5.1.1.1 Environment and resources

The indoor learning environment in Reception consisted of an L-shaped, open plan classroom with areas weakly classified and serving multiple purposes. The classroom was organised with a large space in front of the interactive whiteboard so that all children could sit on the carpet together. The furniture in the classroom was minimal, comprising of one table seating up to eight children. Otherwise, furniture was mostly used to store and organise classroom resources. The wall-mounted displays celebrated children's birthdays and displayed their work and learning journeys. Adjoined to the Reception classroom was a spacious outdoor environment including both sheltered and open areas. The organisation of the learning environment in Reception is demonstrated by the indoor and outdoor floor plan depicted in Figure 5.2 and by Image 5.1 and 5.2 below.



**Figure 5.2** Floor plan of indoor and outdoor learning environment in Reception at Pine Tree



**Image 5.1** Indoor learning environment in Reception at Pine Tree



**Image 5.2** Outdoor learning environment in Reception at Pine Tree

Images 5.1 and 5.2 depict a learning environment rich with material resources. The classroom boasted a wide variety of books, literacy and numeracy apparatus, arts, crafts and construction materials, technological and musical devices and contained

activities such as Lego and board games. The outdoor environment included a water tray, sandpit, mud kitchen and a variety of loose objects and materials.

#### 5.1.1.2 Organisation

The organisation of teaching and learning was identified by Nadia as being 'structured' and 'planned'. It was considered to be an important theme through the generation of two sub-themes: curriculum and pupil organisation.

##### 5.1.1.2.1 Curriculum

In Reception, teaching and learning activities were organised into a daily and weekly curriculum timetable, depicted in Figure 5.3. The curriculum in Reception was predominantly an integrated type, including tasks and activities that had the potential to meet broad developmental goals (e.g. Discovery Time). Exceptions to this were daily Carpet Sessions (literacy and numeracy) and phonics. These activities were oriented towards specific curriculum areas. To integrate different areas of the curriculum, the Reception teacher and children explored and revisited themes throughout the year:

We have autumn and harvest and we look at change, we do winter and cold and freezing. So, seasons are very important and festivals. A lot of what we do is threads that run through the whole year where you just keep revisiting themes. (Nadia)

At the time of case study visits to Reception, the central theme being explored was 'The Ocean' and Nadia used this theme to provide children with a number of in-depth, cross-curricula experiences. To introduce the theme, she organised a visit to a seaside town where the children attended a sea life sanctuary and spent time on the beach. In the following days, the ocean theme was explored in a variety of ways, including through stories, picture books, drawing activities and arts and crafts. The theme also provided context for an extended writing activity where the children were asked to 'write something that you did in Skegness yesterday' (Observations, June 2019). As a way of enabling children to explore the theme independently, adults encouraged and supported children to access the sand and water resources in the outdoor area.

	Monday		Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8.55	Self Registration, find cone, RWInc book (T does register using self registration blocks)	8.55	Funky Fingers (T does register using self registration blocks)	Funky Fingers (T does register using self registration blocks)	Funky Fingers (T does register using self registration blocks)	Funky Fingers (T does register using self registration blocks)
9.00	Get changed	9.20	Singing	Singing	Singing	Singing
9.15	PE	9.25	Carpet Session (RWInc initially)	Carpet Session (RWInc initially)	Carpet Session (RWInc initially)	Carpet Session (RWInc initially)
10.00	Get changed	9.45	Discovery Time	Discovery Time	Discovery Time	Discovery Time
10.15	Playtime	10.25	Tidy up time	Tidy up time	Tidy up time	Tidy up time
10.30	Story, Milk and fruit	10.30	Story & snack	Story & snack	Story & snack	Story & snack
10.45	Key Work and Intervention / Problem Solving session	10.50	Playtime	Playtime	Playtime	Playtime
		11.10	Group Time	Group Time	Group Time	Group Time
		11.30	Tidy up time	Tidy up time	Tidy up time	Tidy up time
11.35	Phonics (Red words)	11.35	Phonics (rhyming initially)	Phonics (rhyming initially)	Phonics (rhyming initially)	Phonics (rhyming initially)
11.50	Tidy up, prayer, wash hands	11.50	Tidy up, prayer, wash hands	Tidy up, prayer, wash hands	Tidy up, prayer, wash hands	Tidy up, prayer, wash hands
11.55	Lunch	11.55	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
1.05	Dough Disco, drink & Register	1.05	Dough Disco, drink and register	Dough Disco, drink and register	Dough Disco, drink and register	Dough Disco, drink and register
1.15	ICT input	Outdoor Learning	1.15	Carpet Session	Carpet Session	Carpet Session
1.30	Guided Reading / ICT/ Follow up task Session 1		1.30	Group Time	Group Time	Group Time
1.45	Guided Reading / ICT/ Follow up task Session 2		1.50	Tidy up time	Tidy up time	Tidy up time
2.00	Playtime	1.55	Discovery Time	Discovery Time	Discovery Time	Discovery Time
2.15	Outdoor Learning	ICT input	2.25	Tidy up time	Tidy up time	Tidy up time
2.30	Outdoor Learning	Guided Reading / ICT/ Follow up task Session 3	2.30	Playtime	Playtime	Playtime
2.45		Guided Reading / ICT/ Follow up task Session 4	2.45	Collective Worship	Collective Worship	Collective Worship
3.00	Collective Worship	3.20	Collect bags and say prayer	Collect bags and say prayer	Collect bags and say prayer	Celebration assembly
3.30	Hometime	3.30	Hometime	Hometime	Hometime	

Figure 5.3 Reception curriculum timetable at Pine Tree

### 5.1.1.2.2 Pupil

Throughout the year, pupils in Reception were organised into four groups: red, orange, purple and blue, as demonstrated in Figure 5.4 below. Children were required to stay in these groups for a number of activities throughout the day, including planned group work and carousel tasks. This organisation also extended to child-led learning, with different groups permitted to access different areas of the environment at certain times. Nadia stated that she ‘changes the groups at various points in the year’ in order to give children a chance to socialise and learn alongside different children. However, she indicated that towards the end of the Summer Term, groups contained stronger classification and children were organised in terms of ability.














*Our Groups - June*

Red	Orange	Purple	Blue
M	E	P	L
H	C	A	J
S	O	E	T
L	N	Z	F
J	J	J	J
H	C	A	E
M	G	F	R
M		L	

Figure 5.4 Grouping of children June 2019 (based on ability). Edited to ensure anonymity

In addition to being placed in ability groupings, certain children in Reception in the Summer Term were identified as needing additional, targeted support. Nadia designed and implemented an ‘Intervention Timetable’, depicted below in Figure 5.5, which identified how certain children were required to complete particular tasks, often relating to literacy, numeracy or phonics and geared towards Early Learning Goals (ELGs). Often, interventions would take place on a one-to-one basis with the teacher or HLTA during child-led learning, represented by ‘D.T’ (Discovery Time) in Figure 5.5.



Every am		Star jumps to 20
Every am	 (Monitor 	Paired reading of red books and sight words
Every phonics		Segmenting to write CVC Blending to read sh,ch,th words
Every pm	 	Sequence numbers to 10 and use them to work out 1 more and 1 less to 10 (when ready extend sequencing to 20)
D.T.		Match numbers 5-10 with objects they count out
D.T.		Recognise numbers to 10
D.T.		Sequence numbers to 10
D.T.	 	Recognise 11,12,13,15,20
 end of the day		Readit2
End of the day	15 identified children – to be focused further each session	Dough disco – fine motor

**Focus children to get to ELGs** **Children needing support at their own level**

Figure 5.5 Intervention Timetable in Reception for the Summer Term. Edited to ensure anonymity

## 5.1.2 Form

### 5.1.2.1 Balanced approach

In Reception, the strength of framing shifted throughout the day and moved between child- and adult-led points of the continuum (Fisher, 2020). Often, these approaches tended to be implemented separately meaning that the locus of control was either with the adults (strong framing) or the children (weak framing) at any one time.

#### 5.1.2.1.1 Adult-led

An adult-led approach to learning was adopted at regular times throughout the day, normally for around twenty to thirty minutes, and often involved children sitting on the carpet in front of the teacher and interactive whiteboard. The adults employed a range of strategies during this time, using didactic interactions, modelling and questioning. On some occasions, children would be split into groups where the focus of adult-led activities would be differentiated:

The class is divided into two groups of 15. One group worked on split digraphs ('i-e') with the teacher. The other group worked on worked on digraphs ('sh') with the HLTA. (Observation, June 2019)

An adult-led approach was also used as a way of introducing new concepts to the children, including themes such as seasons, the Ocean, Diwali and Chinese New Year.

#### *5.1.2.1.2 Child-led*

The adult-led approach implemented in Reception was balanced with providing a number of weakly framed opportunities where children could direct their own learning and explore the learning environment freely. This allocated time, referred to by the teacher and children as ‘Discovery Time’ (D.T), lasted for approximately forty-five minutes and took place twice a day. The only stipulation impacting children’s choices was that they were required to spend one D.T session inside and the other outside. That aside, children were given control over how they initiated and directed their learning during this time. During D.T, adults took on a range of roles including supporting children to access and use resources, observing children and scaffolding those engaged in play episodes. Predominantly, however, Nadia used this time to carry out interventions and work with children on a one-to-one basis.

Although the framing tended to be either strong or weak, there were occasions where the choice and direction of activities were negotiated. For example, some daily activities, such as ‘Funky Fingers’ and ‘Dough Disco’, although designed with specific intentions in mind, contained elements of choice so that children could decide how to complete the activity. As a way of showing how the strength of framing shifted throughout the day, a ‘typical day’ in Reception, developed from case study observations, is presented in Appendix K(1).

### **5.1.3 Act**

#### **5.1.3.1 Broad focus**

Teaching and learning in Reception varied in terms of its visibility and was focussed on ‘states of knowledge’ as well as ‘ways of knowing’. From analysis, three themes relating to the focus of teaching and learning in Reception were generated: literacy,

numeracy and phonics; learning dispositions; and, basic skills. For coherence, these areas of focus are presented separately; however, due to the fluid nature of Reception, they are by no means mutually exclusive and can, in some instances, be seen to overlap.

#### *5.1.3.1.1 Literacy, numeracy and phonics*

A clear emphasis was placed on literacy, numeracy and phonics through daily structured sessions. Although the Reception teacher ensured that children could access and explore literacy, numeracy and phonics resources through their play, these areas of learning were, to a great extent, delivered to the whole class using an adult-led approach:

All children are on the carpet with a whiteboard and pen. They have a worksheet in front of them identifying capital letters. The teacher played the ABC song twice and asked the children to follow the letters in the song. The teacher then gives children a range of lower-case letters and asks them to find the corresponding capital letter. (Observation, June 2019)

On some occasions, these activities were organised as part of a carousel, enabling the teacher to work with a small number of children while other groups participated in organised independent activities. These areas were also the focus of one-to-one, targeted interventions.

#### *5.1.3.1.2 Learning dispositions*

In Reception, importance was placed on children developing positive learning dispositions, such as inquiring, exploring and generating, executing and persisting with ideas. To support this emphasis, children were given regular opportunities to freely access the well-resourced indoor and outdoor learning environments and were encouraged to interact, cooperate and negotiate with other children in the class. The time afforded to child-led activities gave children a number of opportunities each day to exercise agency, choice and control over their learning, supporting the development of learning dispositions:

During D.T, eight children are in the mud kitchen making a potion. The children discuss with each other the special ingredients that can go into the potion and what measurements are needed. They take it in turns to add their own symbolic ‘ingredient’, explaining to the other children how it contributes to the potion. Each child’s ingredient takes the play episode in a different direction. (Observation, June 2019)

#### *5.1.3.1.3 Basic skills*

An additional theme that was generated from the data was the development and consolidation of basic skills. Closely related to both sub-themes identified above, basic skills were considered as an important purpose of Reception and included broad competencies relating to aspects such as physical dexterity, speaking and listening, interpersonal and social skills. Enabling children to develop basic skills permeated all aspects of Reception, from allocating enough time for children to zip up their own coats to being confident enough to read with their Year Six buddy. Basic skills were developed responsively, in the moment, and were also planned as part of the curriculum:

Two of the four groups are working independently. One of the groups was asked to design a fish out of play-doh and another group were cutting out and colouring in fish templates. (Observations, June 2019)

#### *5.1.3.2 Assessment*

In Reception, diverse approaches to assessment were implemented. The majority of assessments were formative and involved observations of children taking part in child- and adult-led activities. These observations were recorded in a variety of ways, including teacher notes, photographs and videos. Some were then stored and uploaded to the *Early Excellence Assessment Tracker*. Summative assessment in Reception was strongly influenced by the EYFS Profile and, in particular, the Good Level of Development (GLD) indicator and the Characteristics of Effective Teaching and Learning (CoETL). The data generated from the EYFS Profile for children involved in the case study are shown below in Figure 5.6 (1 = emerging, 2 = expected, 3 = exceeding). The total of these scores confirmed whether children had met (highlighted green) or not met (highlighted blue) the GLD. Nadia indicated that this process was based on her ‘knowledge’ of each child rather than a particular

piece of work that a child had ‘produced’. Summative assessments were also carried out on a one-to-one basis with an adult at regular points throughout the year to track children’s progression in literacy, numeracy and phonics.

ELG outcomes – 2018 - 2019																			
EYFSP	PRIME AREAS OF LEARNING									SPECIFIC AREAS OF LEARNING									
	Communication and Language			Physical		Personal, Social and Emotional				Literacy		Mathematics		Understanding the World			Expressive Arts and Design		TOTAL
	L&A	U	S	MH	HSC	SCSA	MFB	MR	R	W	N	SSM	PC	W	T	EMM	I		
Child	ELG1	ELG2	ELG3	ELG4	ELG5	ELG6	ELG7	ELG8	ELG9	ELG10	ELG11	ELG12	ELG13	ELG14	ELG15	ELG16	ELG17		
	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	2	2	3	3	3	3	2	2	3	46	
	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	35	
	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	46	
	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	51	
	1	1	1	2	2	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	24	
	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	40	
	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	2	1	2	2	2	2	30	
Emerging	5	3	4	0	0	3	0	0	5	8	5	3	5	2	0	0	2		
Expected	17	16	19	24	20	20	13	17	17	16	15	18	16	18	23	19	20		
Exceeding	8	11	7	6	10	7	17	13	8	6	10	9	9	10	7	11	8		
At least expected	25	27	26	30	30	27	30	30	25	22	25	27	25	28	30	30	28		
Percentage	83%	90%	87%	100%	100%	90%	100%	100%	83%	73%	83%	90%	83%	93%	100%	100%	93%		

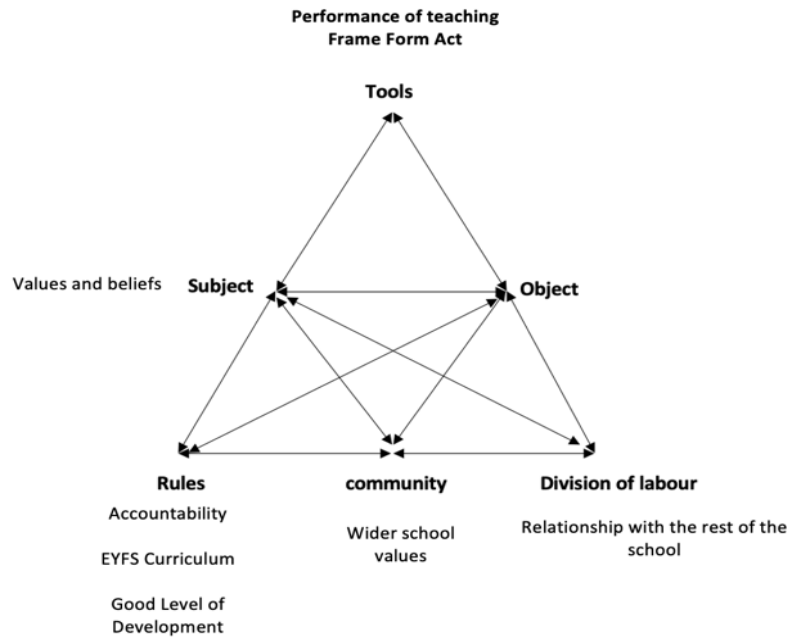
Met GLD

Not met GLD

Figure 5.6 EYFS Profile and Good Level of Development (GLD) data for case study children in Reception at Pine Tree

## 5.2 Pedagogical discourse in Reception

From the activity systems analysis, a number of different themes were generated that appeared to shape the *performance* of teaching in Reception at Pine Tree. These themes, and the elements of the activity system within which they are located, are identified in Figure 5.7 below. Due to limitations in word count, it is not possible to consider each theme in detail. Therefore, the themes that appeared to be most influential in shaping the *performance* of teaching (see section 4.1.1.2) will be considered in more depth with a summary of the remaining themes included in Table 5.1 at the end of the section.



*Figure 5.7 Pedagogical discourse in Reception at Pine Tree represented as an activity system*

### 5.2.1 Values and beliefs (subject)

Teacher values and beliefs appeared to be highly productive of teaching and learning. Nadia, who referred to herself as an ‘Early Years person’, had been teaching for nineteen years, of which twelve of those were in Reception and the rest in Key Stage One. This was her sixth consecutive year in Reception at Pine Tree.

Nadia spoke at length about how over the course of her career she had developed ‘strong beliefs’ about how young children learn best, sharing the view that:

They [children] learn best when they follow their interests, when its meaningful, when they are engaged and when it’s done in a multi-sensory way. So, it’s hands on, they can explore it physically, they can see it, they can manipulate it. (Nadia)

These beliefs seemed to inform Nadia’s perception of her role within the classroom and she often referred to herself as a ‘facilitator’ of the children’s learning. When asked what she meant by the term, Nadia expressed a range of different meanings, indicating that for her it was about giving children ‘ownership’ of their learning and being ‘flexible’ around and ‘responsive’ to their needs. Ultimately, she stated that it was a case of ‘following the children’s interests based on where they want to go with it’.

In addition to being responsive, Nadia also believed that a key part of her role as a ‘facilitator’ was to ‘broaden children’s horizons’ and introduce new concepts to them:

For some of these children, their world is so restricted. It’s like Autumn, they haven’t been out conker hunting. They haven’t been and stomped through leaves. These are important things that they are not getting the opportunity to do. You can’t just follow their lead because if they don’t know something is out there how would they suggest it? (Nadia)

In discussing this further, Nadia referred to herself as ‘old fashioned’ because she believed that children were not being exposed to certain opportunities at home that were ‘much more common’ in the past.

In the interview, it was clear that Nadia valued the development of certain attributes and skills more highly than others. Specifically, she identified the Characteristics of Effective Teaching and Learning (CoETL) – a collection of learning dispositions outlined in the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum framework (Department for Education, 2017) – as by far the most important attributes for children to develop. This preference was conveyed in the following exchange:

**Nadia:** It’s these (CoETL), these characteristics are the most important because these are the skills that are going to get you to where you want to go in life. They are more important than your academic ability.

**Researcher:** Do you think so?

**Nadia:** Yeah, absolutely. I think these are the most important indicator of a child’s future success. You know, resilience, determination, having strategies... the best determinants.

This was not to say that Nadia did not value other skills. For example, she stated that it is ‘clearly desirable’ that children develop abilities in literacy and numeracy in Reception, particularly as she saw these as the skills children needed ‘to be able

to float and succeed in Year One’. However, it was clear from speaking to Nadia that she attached a particular value to the CoETL.

### 5.2.2 Wider school values (community)

In addition to Nadia’s personal values and beliefs, the values of the wider school community also appeared to influence the approach to teaching and learning in Reception. Having been the headteacher at Pine Tree for the previous twelve years, Susan was well placed to comment on the school’s ethos. She suggested there is a ‘commitment from governors and Senior Leaders to make sure that both adults and children are able to flourish’. Susan identified how a child-centred approach is central to their vision:

We are a school that wants to develop the whole child. We recognise them as unique individuals and enable them to have the opportunity to develop their interests and showcase their talents. (Susan)

Susan did caution, however, that because of ‘the system we work in’, it was essential to balance such a vision with ensuring academic ‘rigour’:

So obviously there are external measures like SATs and expectations in terms of standards and obviously we want to make sure there is rigour within the academic part of our school... you have got to have a moral purpose about what you want to do but we also know someone will be coming in to verify and hold us to account. (Susan)

When speaking about Reception in particular, Susan – who herself was once a Reception teacher – recognised it as a ‘distinctive curriculum’. Similar to Nadia, she stated how it was important to ‘look at the curriculum through the eyes of the child’ and recognise that ‘every child is coming in at a different level.’ Susan went on to express a number of interconnected issues that she felt strongly about in Reception. First, she believed that it was essential to recognise that children’s learning and development do not follow linear trajectories:

It’s not an upward line that goes up like that (gestures a 45-degree angle) in terms of the path to progress. There will be flat lines. (Susan)



Second, Susan spoke about her frustration that there can be a temptation to ‘rush’ children on in Reception:

One of my problems is about this idea that you rush on, you can count to twenty you can count to one hundred. But they need to understand the ‘threeness’ of three. You can get some children who can write all their numbers down to 20 but they just know the symbols. They don’t have a clue what the ‘threeness’ of three is. (Susan)

Like Nadia, Susan identified the CoETL as being particularly important, describing them as a ‘big backbone’ of teaching and learning, not just in Reception but throughout the school. In recognition of their importance, Susan recently decided to include the CoETL in all children’s End of Year Reports (Appendix L for Reception & Appendix M for Year One), enabling the school to ‘inform parents on the type of learner their child is’.

### 5.2.3 Relationship with the rest of the school (division of labour)

Another important theme that was generated from the activity system analysis as influencing teaching and learning was the relationship between Reception and the rest of the school. The positioning and role of Reception at Pine Tree was discussed by both Nadia and Susan. Susan, in particular, felt strongly about ensuring that Reception was understood and respected within the school:

As school leader, I feel it’s really important that the rest of the school understands that it all starts in Early Years. It’s (Reception) not a kind of bolt on. They need to understand what it means in terms of a GLD coming out of Reception and how that starts to join up with the National Curriculum, or not. (Susan)

Yet, the importance of not viewing Reception as a ‘bolt on’ was balanced against a need for Reception to have separate organisational arrangements to the rest of the school, most notably in terms of timetabling. Nadia identified how this arrangement meant that it was possible to avoid practices unsuited to Reception children:

We made a decision a long time ago that Reception don’t go into Collective Worship because it doesn’t allow our day to work as it

should. It's completely over their heads; they just end up in trouble for not sitting still. These things [assemblies etc.] are not Early Years expectations and what we can give them in here is of far higher quality for what they need. (Nadia)

Susan also discussed a need to differentiate Reception from the rest of the school with regards to teaching and learning. She recognised how it was important for Reception to maintain their holistic approach and resist any pressures to narrow the curriculum:

There is a danger in Reception in a school setting that you might decide you need to start doing some of the curriculum that's actually National Curriculum. That you might need to suddenly get children to be able to write reams and reams and reams. But you're not understanding the full curriculum where you're looking at their emotional needs, you're looking at the language, you're looking at their numeracy, their personal skills and development. I don't feel like we should be pressurised into thinking that the literacy and numeracy strands are weighted more heavily. (Susan)

The recognition of Reception as a respected and important part of the school was evidenced further by Susan who spoke about the need for the Year One teachers to 'adapt' to the children coming from Reception, particularly the '30%' who do not meet the GLD:

If anything, my concern would be in terms of transition from Reception to Year One is "hold on a moment, what are we doing with that 30% of children who haven't met the GLD and who are not ready?" Because we should be in my view providing the Foundation curriculum for those children who still need it when they go into Year One. But that brings lots of challenges. (Susan)

In response to the numbers of children who move to Year One without having attained the GLD, Susan identified how 'Year One is an area of priority in terms of making sure that provision is right'.

However, as Nadia discussed the relationship between Reception and the rest of the school further, she highlighted how there is pressure on her to 'prepare' children

for Year One. Nadia mentioned how as the year progresses, literacy, numeracy and phonics assume more prominence in Reception and that this is particularly the case as the transition to Year One nears closer:

It's still an Early Years day, we don't change how we format the day at all. We don't get rid of Discovery Time. But we have to be more focussed at this time of year (June). So, it's filling and drilling down on those gaps that I think will support them to access the Year One curriculum as best as they can. There are those children that still need to work on blending, segmenting and letter formation and so we try secure that, give them what they need. (Nadia)

The pressure Nadia felt to prepare children for Year One prompted her to adapt her practice in Reception, sometimes in ways that went against her values and beliefs. For example, the need to ensure the children 'had the best chance of going out of Reception with things in-tact' led Nadia to organise children in ability groups for the last three weeks, despite her stating how she does not 'believe in ability groups'.

Nadia also identified that there were pressures from other year groups, stemming from a perception of Reception as the year group where solutions to whole school problems are sought. She expanded on this by stating:

It's a case of if there is a problem we need to start earlier. We are seen as a place where everything should be thrown. It's like "oh handwriting is not good enough, why aren't Reception doing this?". Then it's "can you do joined up writing?". It's ploughing everything that is not working at the top end of the school into here. (Nadia)

This was a source of frustration for Nadia who explained how there is a 'mistaken' belief at the school that other year groups, particularly Year One, are 'fixed'. Voicing her frustration, she argued that 'Year One can still teach them things, they do not need to come into Year One the finished product'. Nadia mentioned that she 'is not completely opposed to anything' but that she has had to 'fight' against a number of initiatives. Ultimately, however, she spoke about how she has 'to keep two heads on': one for her responsibilities to the children in Reception and the other for her duties to the rest of the school.

#### 5.2.4 EYFS Curriculum (rules)

The EYFS curriculum framework also appeared to influence teaching and learning in Reception. The nationally specified areas of learning and development identified in the framework formed a significant part of the Reception class curriculum and were integrated with school-specific areas of focus, such as collective worship and outdoor learning. In the interview, Nadia identified how she follows the ‘framework very closely’ over the course of the year.

The central role the EYFS Curriculum played in Reception meant that it was a key talking point in the interview with Nadia and it was clear that she thought highly of the framework. In particular, Nadia appeared to value the level of autonomy and flexibility the curriculum provides:

I like the fact that I have written my own curriculum effectively and it takes their lead. I really like the fact that it’s so responsive... there is no curriculum content if that makes sense? It’s about skills development, and it’s about developing as a person but it’s not about imparting specific amounts of knowledge to children. (Nadia)

It is clear to see that the principles discussed by Nadia align well with her own personal values and beliefs regarding how children learn best and the types of experiences she attempts to provide, both of which were identified earlier. Indeed, the integrated nature of the framework, where areas of learning and development are weakly classified from one another, was seen by Nadia as complementing a responsive and exploratory approach:

It gives us the opportunity to teach them what is important to us but in an exploratory way. So, things like the seasons, things that are growing around them, all the different things that we explore. They are doing science, they are doing all these different things: “let’s go and look at the ice, what can we do with the ice? Why are there conkers? Where do they come from? How do they grow? How have we changed?” (Nadia)

For Nadia, the EYFS curriculum contains a structure which introduces ‘the things that are really important for four- and five-year-olds to know’ while at the same

time provides freedom and flexibility for children to explore concepts independently and ‘decide where they take it’.

### 5.2.5 Good Level of Development (rules)

In addition to the EYFS curriculum, the Good Level of Development (GLD) policy also appeared to influence teaching and learning in Reception. The nature of the GLD, particularly its focus on both social and academic areas of learning and development, was recognised by both Nadia and Susan as being something that supports a focus on children’s holistic development in Reception. However, beyond this, the GLD was identified as constraining practice in Reception. At the time of case study visits to Reception, Nadia had just submitted the school’s EYFS Profile data to the Local Authority and, with the process fresh in her mind, she spoke at length about the indicator.

The need to ensure as many children as possible achieved the GLD was a source of constant pressure for Nadia, starting at the beginning of Reception and continuing throughout the year. These pressures meant that children’s progress towards the GLD and a number of other metrics (e.g. age-appropriate levels) were closely tracked throughout the year. This process for the children included in the sample is illustrated below in Figure 5.8. Nadia identified the need to meet national benchmarks and close the gap between children meeting and not meeting the GLD as a particular pressure point:

I feel pressure from a national data point of view. Three months before the data you will have nowhere near enough children where they need to be because that progress keeps happening. It’s also hard because the other flipped side of the coin is the whole government thing of “close the gap, close the gap, everybody has to be there”. The pressure to get to a national standard of a GLD is huge. (Nadia)

Throughout the year, these pressures led to an increased focus on children who were still ‘emerging’ in a number of areas. These children, who accounted for around 30% of the group, were identified as needing additional and targeted support, actioned

through grouping by ability (Figure 5.3 above) and an Intervention Timetable (Figure 5.5 above).

Reception EExAT data 2018 - 2019

Name	DOB	BASELINE - SEPT 18			ASSESS WINDOW 1 - DEC 18			ASSESS WINDOW 2 - APR 19			ASSESS WINDOW 3 - JUN 19		
		EExAT Score	Age app? (NC = Not concerned)	Score towards GLD (209)	EExAT Score	Age app? (NC = Not concerned)	Score towards GLD (209)	EExAT Score	Age app? (NC = Not concerned)	Score towards GLD (209)	EExAT Score	Age app? (NC = Not concerned)	Score towards GLD (209)
	/09/13	213	No (NC)	168	246	Yes	195	251	Yes	200	265	Yes	210
	/09/13	223	Yes	178	253	Yes	203	268	Yes+	215	288	Yes+	228
	/10/13	210	No (NC)	165	241	Yes	191	260	Yes	208	272	Yes	215
	/03/14	208	Yes	162	235	Yes	186	239	Yes	189	257	Yes	203
	/05/14	218	Yes +	173	244	Yes +	196	258	Yes+	205	278	Yes+	221
	/08/14	211	Yes	166	237	Yes +	188	256	Yes+	203	281	Yes+	223
	/08/14	190	Yes	154	205	Yes	165	218	Yes+	174	247	Yes+	194

Amber = middle range scores, the darker the green, the higher and the darker the pink / red, the lower.

Figure 5.8 Sample children's progress towards the Good Level of Development throughout Reception

Nadia was highly critical of the GLD, indicating that she 'hates' it and that it is a 'flawed system'. She identified how the indicator is not a 'level playing field' and how for children who enter Reception 'at a low entry point', achieving the Early Learning Goals is 'especially hard'. She also discussed how it disadvantages younger children and children who have a Special Educational Need, represented by the two respective quotes below:

If you measure them [children] against the age-appropriate stage of "what should they be at just before five" they are where they should be. Until the day that you have to do that absolute measurement (GLD) and then they are apparently not where they should be.

One little boy who is autistic will not get the writing, he's got everything else, but he cannot compose a sentence that makes sense in his head. He has done brilliantly but he's 3.3% of my data. A second autistic child in here who has got all of the academic subjects, but I can't give that PSED. That's another 3.3% of my data. You know, we are being judged against that. That's already 6.6% that I can't do anything about, and they are marked as having failed. (Nadia)

### 5.2.6 Additional themes

As well as the themes described, an additional theme was generated from the activity systems analysis and identified as influencing the *performance* of teaching in Reception. The description of this theme and supporting direct quotes are outlined in Table 5.1 below.

Table 5.2 Additional themes generated from the activity systems analysis of pedagogical discourse in Reception

Theme	Description	Examples
Accountability (rules)	<p>Factors relating to accountability were discussed by both Nadia and Susan. They both identified how they are inspected by both Ofsted and SIAMS (Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools). Nadia described the importance of data and being able to document children’s progress, suggesting that this is a particular focus during inspections. Susan suggested how a change in focus from Ofsted as part of their new Framework prompted the design and distribution of a handout to parents across the school explaining the importance of fluency in reading.</p>	<p><b>Nadia</b>            “For Ofsted, it is always going to be about the figures but there is more than figures. Having an ethos like ours will never allow you to get away with not producing the goods. So, it’s data, data, data that’s what Ofsted wants and I think it’s about that data has to be there and the children have to be making progress.”            “Ofsted is tough, they will not listen to excuses, they will not, so you can’t get away with not doing what you should be doing.”            “We also have a SIAMS inspection and again that is very stringent and very tough but that is about how everybody in the school is flourishing. They will not allow you to do well in SIAMS if the data is not good because you can’t say a child is flourishing or achieving if they are not making progress.”</p> <p><b>Susan</b>            “There is a pressure there, there is always a pressure with anything to do with Ofsted or any inspector. You never quite know either, it can vary so much depending on the person who walks through the door.”            “But what the new Ofsted framework is doing ... is that they (Ofsted) are saying fluency in reading is really key. So, we have just given out this (handout) just last night to our parents across the school [to explain] about what fluency needs to look like because of what Ofsted are doing now.”</p>

## 5.3 Child and parent experiences and perceptions of Reception

### 5.3.1 Children

From an analysis of children's experiences and perceptions of Reception three important themes were generated from the Phase One data: broad range of opportunities, enjoyment and friends.

#### 5.3.1.1 Broad range of opportunities

At the start of the interview, the discussion with children centred around their experiences in Reception. In support of the observations detailed in the *performance* of teaching, the children discussed how they participated in a broad range of activities in Reception. A number of children made reference to weakly framed activities where they were given opportunity to lead their own learning, referred to by the children as 'Discovery Time' and/or 'play'. As examples, two of the children's responses to the question 'What types of things do you do in Reception?' are displayed below:

First, we do the register, then we do Discovery Time and then we go to lunch, and then we do the afternoon register, Discovery Time, and then we get ready for home. (Child 2)

In the morning and afternoon we do Discovery Time...it's the time where we play. We can play with some Mobilo and some Lego or draw a picture. (Child 3)

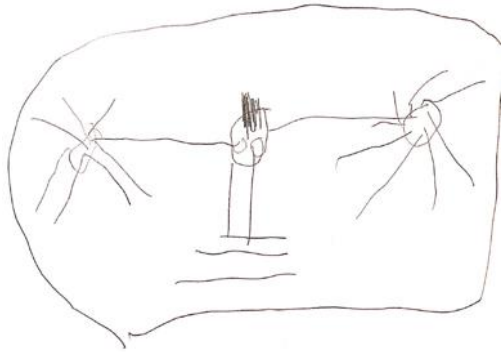
When asked the same question as above, some of the children identified how they also take part in activities that contain stronger framing, alluding to adult-initiated and adult-led activities:

Each morning we do Funky Fingers... the teacher asks us to cut [out] a rainbow fish and then colour it in. (Child 3)

We do sounds and solving problems in maths with Mrs \*\*\*\*\* [Nadia]. (Child 7)



The broad range of opportunities that children experienced in Reception is illustrated by the variety of activities that the children produced when asked if they would like to draw themselves 'learning in Reception' (Figures 5.9 - 5.15 below).



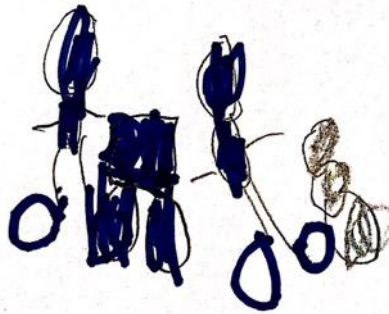
*Figure 5.9 'Playing on the climbing frame in Discovery Time' (Child 1)*



*Figure 5.10 'Writing in group time' (Child 2)*



*Figure 5.11 'My visit to Seaworld with Reception' (Child 3)*



*Figure 5.12 'Playing in the water tray with \*\*\*\*\*(friend)' (Child 4)*



*Figure 5.13 'Doing my numbers' (Child 5)*



*Figure 5.14 'Learning new sounds' (Child 6)*



**Figure 5.15** 'Learning sounds and letters on the board with my friends' (Child 7)

### 5.3.1.2 Enjoyment

The seven children interviewed appeared unanimous in their enjoyment of Reception. When asked if they like being in Reception, all of the children included in the sample answered 'yes'. The children made reference to a number of aspects that they enjoyed in Reception, referencing activities such as 'going on the school trip' (Child 3), 'solving problems in maths' (Child 7) and 'playing football' (Child 6). However, when asked 'what is your favourite thing to do in Reception?', the majority of children ( $n = 5$ ) cited 'Discovery Time'. The identification of Discovery Time, and children's reasons underlying their choice, are documented below.

**Child 1:** Discovery Time.

**Researcher:** Why Discovery Time?

**Child 1:** Because you get to choose what you like to play with.

---

**Child 2:** I like Discovery Time best.

**Researcher:** Why do you like Discovery Time best?

**Child 2:** Because you get to choose what you want to do.  
Because the teachers don't say what to do, we just go and choose.

---

**Child 3:** I like Discovery Time.

**Researcher:** Could you tell me why you like it?

**Child 3:** Because I get to play with my friends.

**Child 4:** Because I get Discovery Time.  
**Researcher:** What do you like about Discovery Time?  
**Child 4:** It's playing, playing all day... until when the timer (the timer for tidying up) goes on and we can't [carry on]... I don't like that.

---

**Child 7:** I most like Discovery Time.  
**Researcher:** Do you?  
**Child 7:** Yes.  
**Researcher:** Why is Discovery Time your favourite?  
**Child 7:** Playing... the role play area outside is a beach. It's so fun, you get to play in it.

Children were also asked if there were any aspects of Reception that they did not like. In response, two children answered 'no' and a further two children made reference to activities that occurred outside the classroom, commenting 'when it's lunch time and they blow a really loud whistle' (Child 2) and 'eating my lunch' (Child 3) respectively. The other three children, when asked 'is there anything you don't like about Reception?', shared the following dislikes:

**Child 1:** I don't like ... getting told off.  
**Researcher:** Do you get told off much?  
**Child 1:** Erm ... no.

---

**Child 4:** Doing maths.  
**Researcher:** You don't like maths?  
**Child 4:** No.  
**Researcher:** Why don't you like maths?  
**Child 4:** Because I don't like it ... there are a few numbers in my wallet and that is hard for me. So that's why I don't like that.

---

**Child 7:** Erm... people making fun of me and making me upset [saying] things what I don't like.  
**Researcher:** Does that happen a lot?  
**Child 7:** No.

While asking the children if there was anything that they disliked about Reception raised important concerns that they held, they did not appear to detract from their overall enjoyment of Reception.

As will be discussed shortly, children's enjoyment of Reception was also corroborated by their parents.

### *5.3.1.3 Friends*

The final theme developed from interviews with children concerning their experiences and perceptions of Reception was the importance of friends. Five of the seven children who participated in the interview referred to friends and all did so in a positive way. Being able to spend time with friends was identified as one of the reasons children enjoyed Reception, as indicated in the following extract:

**Researcher:** Do you get chance to go outside in Reception?

**Child 7:** Erm... every day.

**Researcher:** Is that a good thing?

**Child 7:** Yes.

**Researcher:** Why is it a good thing?

**Child 7:** Because I like playing with my friends.... I like playing with \*\*\*\*\*. He's my best friend and I am going to his house for tea one day and he is coming to my house for a play date.

Other children mentioned friends in the context of caring for each other. As examples, in response to the question 'What types of things are important to you in Reception?', one child responded 'friends, because if you're hurt then they might help you up' (Child 6) and another stated 'looking after your friends and keeping safe' (Child 1).

### *5.3.2 Parents*

From the parent data collected in Phase One, two themes were generated: partnership and enjoyment.

### 5.3.2.1 Partnership

In the interviews, the majority of parents ( $n = 6$ ) discussed their relationship with the staff in Reception and, of these parents, all described how a strong partnership had been established. This partnership appeared to be based on constant and reciprocal communication between Reception staff and parents. Parents described Reception staff as ‘very approachable’ (Parent 2), as operating with an ‘open-door policy’ (Parents 1 and 7) and referred to how they were present each morning and afternoon in the playground to discuss any concerns that they might have (Parents 2 and 6). This presence provided the context for a number of interactions between parents and Reception staff throughout the year:

We communicate daily if needs be. If any worries or concerns I can always have a word with them. They are great like that. There’s the odd time they will pop out and say, “can we have a quick chat?” if there’s something I need to be aware of and vice versa. (Parent 1)

I pick him up three nights and there’s that chance to quickly mention something. “He’s worried about this” or just any questions that you have got. (Parent 3)

Two of the parents indicated how their work commitments meant that they were unable to drop off and pick up their children at these times and therefore missed out on communicating daily with the Reception staff. However, both parents indicated that they have benefitted from ‘evening sessions’, the focus of which were discussed in more detail by Parent 6:

Mrs \*\*\*\*\* [Nadia] did a session in September and told us how they teach literacy and numeracy. She explained the things that would be coming home to us, she showed us all the things. It was really good, especially for parents like me who have got no idea. She also ran through things like how to empower your child to deal with conflict and things, you know trust us a bit. As a parent it was reassuring to hear that. (Parent 6)

Another parent suggested that her relationship with Reception staff meant that she felt her opinion and knowledge of her child were taken into consideration. For example, Parent 5 indicated how the needs of her daughter – who was the youngest

in the class, with her birthday at the end of August – were accommodated in Reception, exemplified in the following extract:

**Parent 5:** A few weeks ago, she wasn't herself and was really teary, didn't want to come to school and just really unhappy. So, I spoke to them [Nadia and HLTA]. I think she was just run down, like just tired from school. And they thought the same. So, they said to her she could have a little rest if she wanted. Since then, she has started coming home and talking to me more. She said "mummy, I had a lay down on the sofa in my classroom!".

**Researcher:** So, would you say that they are accommodating?

**Parent 5:** Oh yeah definitely, they have always been really understanding that she is a full year younger. They say they've got to go by the curriculum but they also accommodate the fact that she might just need that extra little bit of help to get her there.

When discussing the relationship, a number of parents ( $n = 4$ ) spoke about the notion of trust and how there was a 'strong trust' between them and the Reception staff. This is exemplified in the following quote from Parent 2:

It's that safety of Reception. You feel so safe with the Reception team. They are just so good and warm. They are the kind of team that you want your children to go into and you know that with that particular team that children will thrive. (Parent 2)

#### 5.3.2.2 Enjoyment

Interviews carried out with parents in Phase One unanimously confirmed children's enjoyment of Reception. All of the parents were asked 'what has Reception been like so far this year for [child's name]?' and their responses can be seen in Table 5.2 below.

*Table 5.3 Parent responses to the question 'What has Reception been like so far this year for [child's name]?'*

<b>Parent</b>	<b>“What has Reception been like so far this year for (child’s name)?”</b>
<b>Parent 1</b>	“He loves coming in and seeing his friends. He really likes the teachers. He likes doing stuff. He likes to be busy, he likes the work, playtime, lunches, yeah, he loves it all.”
<b>Parent 2</b>	“Well, **** has just really enjoyed learning. She’s definitely just loving taking it all in, the learning, everything. She quite often comes home and says, ‘I have had an amazing day’. That is her actual words, ‘I have had an amazing day’. So, it’s nice.”
<b>Parent 3</b>	“He has loved it, really loved it. No tears about going to school. Always talking about what he is doing at school. Yeah, really happy, he has absolutely loved it. They do such exciting things, it’s so busy the day. He definitely feels ... well I feel like he is really, really happy and safe. Yeah, he loves it.”
<b>Parent 4</b>	“I would say yes it’s been good. There are days when he wakes up and says that he doesn’t want to go to school but he hasn’t missed a day of school yet. He hasn’t been sick or anything and has a fantastic record. It is just a thing that he says, ‘I don’t want to go to school today’. So, he is one of those kids who needs encouragement to get out of bed and go to school and he enjoys himself when he is here.”
<b>Parent 5</b>	“Yeah, loved it, loved it. Reception is more playful and I think because it is still fun, isn’t it? They still get to play a lot. It doesn’t feel like ... she has learnt loads and has come on loads, but she doesn’t feel like she’s sat a desk learning... They [Reception] are pushing learning more but in a way that is fun, and she can walk away from it if she doesn’t want to do it. Just recently I have noticed more that when they have gone off to do activities now, she has done writing, and it is because she is enjoying it.”
<b>Parent 6</b>	“He’s absolutely loved it. The teaching is exceptional in there, he loves learning, he has lots of friends, it seems fun. He really enjoys coming to school every day. He is really enjoying that and I think he is being allowed to push past where his peers are at the moment which as a teacher/parent I am also really pleased with that. But I mean, trips, going down to the church, going down into the village, all of those little enrichment things that they do are all stand out moments.”
<b>Parent 7</b>	“He absolutely adores it. He has really enjoyed learning about the letters and how to form them. He has enjoyed learning to read and ... so he can now discover books even more than he did before. I think sometimes because he doesn’t even notice he is learning. So, it’s all a lot of fun, he is enjoying it. He gets very tired at the end of the day, definitely. I have seen that a lot but yeah, he wants to come to school, he is enjoying being here, enjoying being with his friends, and enjoying learning about the world around him. He gets very excited about every aspect of it.”

In addition, when describing their child’s favourite aspects of teaching and learning in Reception, a number of parents confirmed the importance of Discovery Time for their child and reiterated this as something that they enjoyed and look forward to at school:

It’s Discovery Time, he loves Discovery Time. If he’s been mucking about or if he has to go off and do something and he misses a bit of Discovery Time, that’s his day, he will be mardy. (Parent 1)

He likes Discovery Time, which I think is kind of playing, isn't it? He said the other day that he was quite looking forward to Discovery Time because he missed that when they went to the seaside. I think he likes that, probably because he's not having to do any concentrating. (Parent 4)

Parents also described activities such as 'learning how to read' (Parent 2 and 5), 'outdoor learning' (Parent 3) and 'school trips' (Parent 4) as enjoyable moments for their children in Reception. One parent also reiterated the importance of friendship for her daughter, commenting that:

Meeting friends as well actually. At preschool she had friends, but she didn't really talk about them. She interacts a lot more with other children and comes home and says that she has got friends now. (Parent 5)

As with children's interviews, parents were asked 'have there been any aspects or moments that [child's name] hasn't enjoyed in Reception?', to which the majority of parents ( $n = 6$ ) answered 'no'. The remaining parent suggested one moment, commenting that her son found 'finding out about Easter really difficult. It really upset him finding out about what happened to Jesus' (Parent 3).

Clearly, for this sample of parents, Reception had been an extremely positive and enjoyable experience for them and their child. One parent appeared to summarise this collective view effectively by indicating that Reception was an environment that provided her child and other children with a sense of belonging:

Whenever I have been into the classroom the children are just really engaged with the teacher. And so, it's not about a competition, it's not about anything like that. It's just feeling part of something, and that is the key. Feeling like they are being part of something, being part of a team, they are all learning together, they are all sharing the same experiences. (Parent 2)



## Section Two: Year One at Pine Tree

All data presented in Section Two (5.4-5.6) were generated in Phase Two and Three. To distinguish between these phases, data generated in Phase Three will include the following reference: ‘Phase Three – [participant]’.

### 5.4 The *performance* of teaching in Year One

In Year One at Pine Tree there were two teachers – working as part of a job-share arrangement – with Helen teaching Monday to Wednesday lunchtime and Claire teaching the remaining part of the week. A part-time Teaching Assistant (TA) provided additional support in the mornings. All of the children enrolled in Reception transferred to Year One.

Like in Reception, the themes and sub-themes that were generated from an analysis of the *performance* of teaching in Year One were grouped under the broad analytical categories of *frame*, *form* and *act* (Figure 5.16).

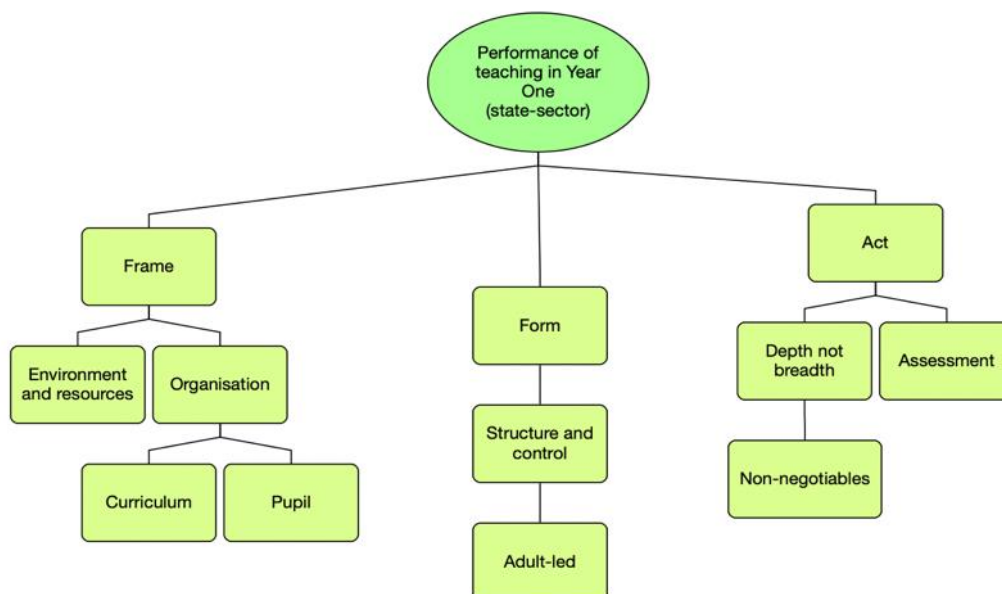


Figure 5.16 Performance of teaching in Year One organised into Frame, Form and Act

#### 5.4.1 Frame

##### 5.4.1.1 Environment and resources

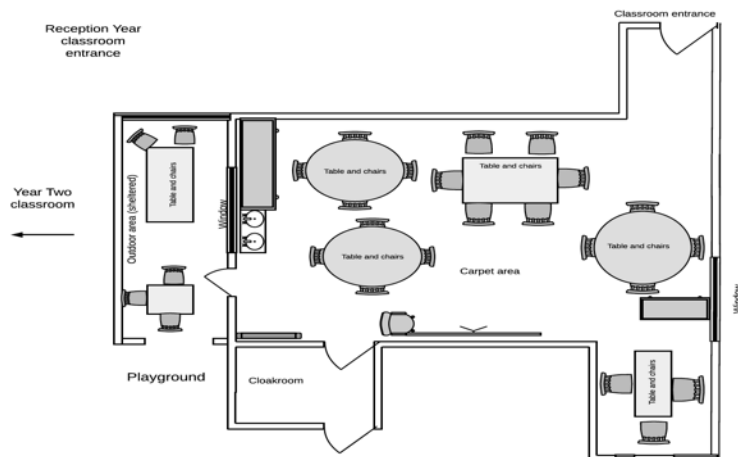
The indoor learning environment in Year One was organised so that all children had an allocated table space. There were four main tables seating up to seven or

eight children each. Like in Reception, a large space in front of the interactive whiteboard was kept free so that all children could sit on the carpet simultaneously. The wall-mounted displays, while used in part to present some of the children's work, were mostly populated with information relating to the focus of teaching and learning, such as phonics, maths and the current topic. As an example, the wall display relating to 'non-negotiables' is presented in Image 5.3 below.



*Image 5.3 Non-negotiables wall display (from left to right: finger spaces, handwriting and words we know)*

To the side of the classroom was a sheltered outdoor environment shared with Year Two. This space contained additional tables and chairs but did not include any other resources and was used mainly to store equipment and children's belongings. The organisation of the indoor and outdoor environment in Year One is shown by the floorplan depicted in Figure 5.17 and by Images 5.4 and 5.5 below.



*Figure 5.17 Floor plan of indoor and outdoor learning environment in Year One at Pine Tree*



*Image 5.4 Indoor learning environment in Year One at Pine tree*



*Image 5.5 Outdoor learning environment in Year One at Pine Tree*

The indoor and outdoor environments were strongly classified from one another with children only permitted to move areas as part of planned, adult-led activities. For example, while the majority of teaching and learning took place indoors, a group of children would be based outside when engaged in a carousel activity with the TA. Outdoor learning was organised as a scheduled lesson taking part at a specific time each week.

#### 5.4.1.2 Organisation

At Pine Tree, Year One was the first year where the whole school timetable (Y1-Y6) was implemented. The school day in Year One was compartmentalised into a pre-determined structure of lessons, breaks and lunch; in addition, children were required to attend whole school assemblies and Collective Worship at set times. This strongly classified structure meant that time (and the school bell) punctuated

a change in activity for the children. In addition to these broad organisational features, more specific considerations relating to curriculum and pupils were developed from the data.

#### 5.4.1.2.1 Curriculum

The curriculum was organised into six different areas of learning: English, Maths, Theme, The Arts, Physical Education and Religious Education. The six areas of learning were used to inform planning and within each area the teachers identified the focus of teaching and learning for the week (e.g for Maths, addition and subtraction). These areas of focus were then incorporated into a daily and weekly curriculum timetable, as identified in Figure 5.18 below.

The contents of the curriculum varied in terms of their relationship with one another. Some activities were integrated, for instance, the focus in English built on children’s experiences of the theme (walk around the village). However, on other occasions contents in each area were well insulated from one another. For example, addition and subtraction in maths and spelling and handwriting in English focussed on discrete skill acquisition. In addition, some areas were the focus of teaching and learning considerably more than others. Using the daily curriculum timetable above, Table 5.3 below provides a breakdown of the six areas of learning. Excluding the first session of each day (Funky Fingers), it shows how during the week of case study visits to Year One in November, English was the focus of 44% of activities whereas the Arts, P.E and R.E only accounted for 24% collectively.

Table 5.3 The breakdown of time spent on each area of learning in Year One

Area of learning	English	Maths	Theme	The Arts	Physical Education	Religious Education
<b>Number of lessons (%)</b>	11/25 (44%)	4/25 (16%)	4/25 (16%)	2/25 (8%)	2/25 (8%)	2/25 (8%)
<b>Activity of focus within each area of learning (number of lessons)</b>	Phonics (4) Story map (1) Handwriting (4) Story recount (1) Spelling (1)	Addition and subtraction (4)	Walk around village (1)  Outdoor learning (2)  History - remembrance (1)	Nativity songs (1)  Art lesson (1)	Gymnastics (1)  Dance (1)	Creation (Knowledge Harvest) (1)  Celebration Assembly (1)

**Year 1 Weekly Planning**

**Changes - Term 2 - Week 2**

**Timetable**

Week	English	Maths	Theme	The Arts	PE	RE
<b>Week 2</b>	Re-counts- walk around the village.  Spellings- they, there, here Ext- June July Phonics- i-e o-e Handwriting- cursive- r n	Addition and Subtraction	Walk around the village- Monday am- 3 helpers- key buildings inc cenotaph, church, old school, coop. Gather Autumn treasure. Remembrance- cenotaph link to changes in village- when was cenotaph built	Songs for Nativity  Look at Autumn treasure- sketching, Making poppies/ poppy art	Dance Gymnastics	Teach- the creation story. Children to create a story map including images and some key words to help them re-tell the story of creation.

	<b>Funky Fingers</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> Session</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Session</b>	<b>Phonics</b>	<b>Afternoon 1</b>	<b>Afternoon 2</b>
<b>Monday</b>	Reading with YELLOW group.	Maths – addition and subtraction	Theme - Walk around the Village	All letters of alphabet i-e (word building)	English – story map about our walk ready for the recount on Friday.  <b>Story Map</b>	<b>Handwriting</b> – cursive - Cover sounds r on WBoards <b>Story</b> - recommended reading book
<b>Tuesday</b>	Reading with GREEN group	PE – Dance	Maths – addition and subtraction	All letters of alphabet i-e (word building)	Handwriting straight after lunch 1.05 – 1.30 – cursive r in books.  <b>Theme – writing about the war memorial</b>	2.50 – singing Nativity Songs
<b>Wednesday</b>	Reading with BLUE group.	Outdoor Learning /GR	Outdoor Learning /GR	All letters of alphabet o-e (word building)	Re – Creation (Knowledge Harvest) Teach- the creation story. Create a story map including images and some key words to help them re-tell the story of creation.	<b>Handwriting</b> – cursive – n on whiteboards. <b>Story</b> – Class Novel- Worst Witch
<b>Thursday</b>	– Support changing for PE	Maths – addition and subtraction	Maths – addition and subtraction	All letters of alphabet o-e (word building)	1.30 – 2.30 – Theme Lesson 5 – History – remembrance	<b>Handwriting</b> – cursive - n in handwriting books. <b>Story</b> - Class Novel- Worst Witch
<b>Friday</b>	– Reading with RED group	PE – gymnastics (KM to Change yellow books)	English – Recount about walk around the village.	Spellings – they, there, here. Ext – June, July  Take, snake, steam, leak.	Theme - Art Lesson 3	Celebration Assembly

Figure 5.18 Year One curriculum timetable at Pine Tree for week of case study visits in Phase Two (18<sup>th</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup> November)

### 5.4.1.2.2 Pupil

Consistent with Reception, children were organised into four groups and the Year One teachers decided initially to maintain these groupings which, as mentioned earlier, were based on ability. However, shortly after children started Year One, the teachers decided to re-organise children into ‘mixed ability’ groups. These groups were used to organise children for most activities throughout the week. The tables in the classroom were allocated to each group and children were required to sit and work at that table at various points throughout the day. The grouping of children was also used as a way of facilitating different activities over the course of the week through a carousel approach. This is evidenced by Figure 5.19 below which shows the rotation of different groups for ‘Funky Fingers’ (the starter activity carried out each day) over the course of the week.

Funky Fingers

	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Red	I- Mindfulness Colouring – Autumn colouring? Thin felt tips.	I- Reading book from book bag – TA to listen	I - Minute Maths Pin a shape	T –Children write sentences about an Autumn image?
Yellow	T –Children write sentences about an Autumn image?	I - Minute Maths Pin a shape	I- Reading book from book bag – TA to listen	I- Mindfulness Colouring -
Green	I – Minute Maths Pin a shape	T –Children write sentences about an Autumn image?	I- Mindfulness Colouring -	I- Reading book from book bag – TA to listen
Blue	I- Reading book from book bag – TA to listen and change.	I- Mindfulness Colouring -	T –Children write sentences about an Autumn image?	I - Minute Maths Pin a shape
TA	Register Listen to individual readers- Blue	Register Listen to individual readers- Red	Register Listen to individual readers- Yellow	Register Listen to individual readers- Green

Figure 5.19 Carousel activities for different groups of children (I = Independent, T = Teacher-led)

On some occasions, the teachers combined groups, splitting the class in to two groups of fifteen. This approach enabled the implementation of two different activities simultaneously:

Red and Green groups take part in an outdoor learning activity led by the TA. Meanwhile, Yellow and Blue groups are completing an assessment booklet. The groups then swap over for the next lesson. (Observations, November 2019)

## 5.4.2 Form

### 5.4.2.1 Structure and control

Teaching and learning were, to a large extent, organised, initiated and controlled by the Year One teachers. The teachers indicated that they provided some

opportunities for children to initiate their own learning at the very start of the year to ‘ease transition’ but beyond this, child-led learning appeared to be limited to the independent tasks included as part of the weekly carousel (‘I’ on Figure 5.19 above). At the time of case study visits, therefore, activities tended to be strongly framed and an overarching theme generated from the data was that teaching and learning in Year One were predominantly adult-led.

#### 5.4.2.1.1 Adult-led

Adult-led interactions predominated teaching and learning in Year One. Often, lessons would comprise of a whole-class input with children situated on the carpet in front of the interactive whiteboard. During such sessions, the teacher implemented a range of different strategies, such as didactic interactions, modelling, questioning and discussion. As a way of checking for engagement and understanding, children were often given a whiteboard and pen and required to complete specific activities:

All children on the carpet and sounding out words that include the trigraph ‘are’. The teacher says the word and the children repeat. Children are then asked to write as many words as they can including ‘are’. (Observation, November 2019)

The activity identified above, and similar ones carried out throughout the week (see Appendix K(2) for a semi-structured transcript of a typical day in Year One, developed from case study observations), were strongly framed with the teacher maintaining control over factors relating to selection, organisation, pacing and criteria. However, while the majority of adult-led activities took place on the carpet, some did require the children to be more active. One example was as a maths lesson focussed on adding and subtracting numbers under 20 (Observations, November 2019). The teacher distributed approximately twenty different sums (e.g.  $16 + 2$ ) around the classroom and asked the children to find and complete as many sums as possible. While the selection, criteria and organisation of the activity rested with the teacher, children did have some control over pacing and sequencing.

### 5.4.3 Act

#### 5.4.3.1 Depth not breadth

Depth not breadth relates to how a large proportion of teaching and learning was focussed on introducing and consolidating a small number of ‘states of knowledge’. This narrow focus was identified by the Year One teachers as being motivated by a need to ensure all children could ‘grasp’ and have a secure understanding of the ‘basics’:

This year we’re having a really big focus on filling the gaps and making sure that they are really secure in the basics before we move on. So, we haven’t taught with much breadth, we have just tried to consolidate a small number of things; addition, subtraction, a simple sentence. (Helen)

The strong focus on ensuring children were secure with fundamental concepts meant that Helen and Claire emphasised the ‘repetition’ and ‘recapping’ of specific areas of learning. It is possible to see this emphasis in the Year One curriculum timetable above, which shows that all maths lessons focussed on addition and subtraction and four English lessons focussed on phonics and handwriting respectively. The development and consolidation of basic concepts in each area of learning meant that the focus of sessions were often explicit and strongly classified, meaning that Year One predominantly operated with a visible pedagogy.

##### *5.4.3.1.1 Non-negotiables*

The focus on depth not breadth was, to a large extent, epitomised by the presence of what teachers, parents and children referred to as ‘non-negotiables’. Non-negotiables in Year One related to the English curriculum and focussed on five concepts in particular: finger spaces, handwriting, ‘words we know’, capital letters and full stops. As the phrase suggests, non-negotiables carried the expectation that all children would be able to perform skills in these areas to a certain level, identified below in Table 5.4.



Table 5.4 Non-negotiables in Year One

Non-negotiable	Expectation
Finger spaces	Use finger spaces to separate the ending of one word and the beginning of the next
Cursive handwriting	Be able to form lower case letters cursively and join them to form words
‘Words we know’	Be able to identify, apply and correctly spell 50 different words (e.g. she, ask, were)
Capital letters	Use capital letters for the start of a sentence and for names of people, places, days of the week and personal pronoun ‘I’
Full stop	Finish sentences with a full stop that is appropriately sized

Some of the non-negotiables, such as finger spaces, capital letters and full stops, although once taught explicitly, were consolidated through other activities. For example, when children were recounting their village walk, the teacher reiterated the importance of sentences containing these non-negotiable elements. However, the other non-negotiables, handwriting and ‘words we know’, were frequently taught explicitly:

All children are on the carpet in front of the teacher. They initially watch the teacher write the letter ‘k’ cursively a number of times. They then practise. The teacher goes around and supports children individually. (Observation, November 2019)

All children are on the carpet in front of the teacher. The teacher introduces three words to the children: ‘was’, ‘were’ and ‘love’. The children have to write out each word three times. (Observation, November 2019)

While non-negotiables were clearly emphasised in the first term of Year One, online interviews carried out in Phase Three identified that they remained an important focus. For example, when asked about the ‘focus of teaching and learning in Year One up until school closure in March 2020’, non-negotiables were alluded to by both Year One teachers, summarised in the response from Helen:

The main focus was on the non-negotiables taught in the previous terms along with spelling the Year One words correctly, independently and cursive handwriting to ensure the children

continue to use what was taught in the previous terms. (Phase Three – Helen)

#### 5.4.3.2 Assessment

Assessment in Year One was weighted heavily towards summative methods. Case study visits in Phase Two coincided with a two-week period where the children were each completing a standardised assessment in reading, spelling, grammar and punctuation and maths. Children were required to complete these assessments independently under ‘test conditions’: spaced out within the classroom, prohibited from talking and given a specific amount of time to complete. In addition to standardised tests each term, children were assessed more frequently in relation to spellings (weekly), phonics (fortnightly) and independent writing (fortnightly). These assessments were carried out on an individual basis with the TA and, as stated by Claire, enabled the teachers to ‘build up their evidence’ of children’s progress. The ‘End of Year Report’ sent to parents in Year One reported on children’s attainment in each subject of the National Curriculum and – as was the case in Reception – the extent to which they demonstrated the Characteristics of Effective Teaching and Learning (CoETL) (Appendix M).

### 5.5 Pedagogical discourse in Year One

As in Reception, a number of different themes were generated from the activity systems analysis and identified as shaping the *performance* of teaching in Year One. These themes, and the elements of the activity system within which they are located, are identified in Figure 5.20 below. Five of the themes will be presented in detail with the remaining themes summarised in Table 5.5 at the end of the section.

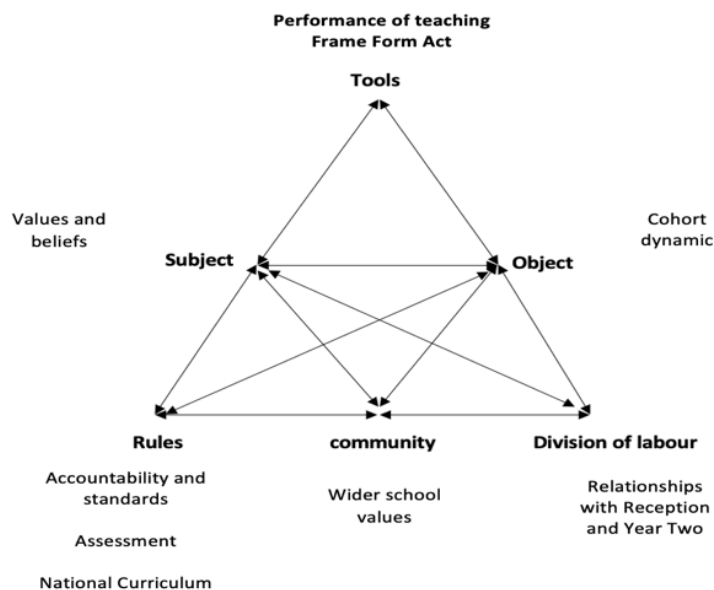


Figure 5.20 Pedagogical discourse in Year One represented as an activity system

### 5.5.1 Accountability and standards (rules)

In Year One, accountability and standards appeared to have a significant influence on the *performance* of teaching. Although improving standards was a whole-school focus, Key Stage One (KS1) was identified by Susan as ‘a particular priority area’. This specific focus was discussed at length in her interview and she identified how concerns about standards, particularly in writing, led to an increased focus on raising expectations in Year One:

Our standards at the end of KS1 aren’t high enough. Standards in writing have not been good by the end of Year Six or by the end of Year Two. They are weak. And my analysis of that is that it’s to do with teacher expectation, particularly in KS1. I mean I am obviously telling you that there needs to be a higher expectation in KS1. So that is why we have introduced non-negotiables. (Susan)

The school’s drive to improve standards in writing was also apparent in the most recent Ofsted inspection in 2017 which observed that ‘Pupils’ writing is a key priority’ and that ‘previously, spelling and inconsistently good joined handwriting had been particular barriers for some pupils’. The inspectorate recommended that the school, as part of its ‘next steps’, should ‘work to improve pupils’ writing skills’. In addition to the school’s previous inspection, Ofsted’s Education Inspection Framework, launched in May 2019, appeared to play a role in shaping how the

school and Year One teachers set about increasing expectations. For example, Susan stated how:

In the context of Ofsted and the new framework, where obviously the new drive is the quality of education, which is the curriculum intent, implementation and impact, I think that this is a really good time for Year One to actually articulate what they are doing and why. (Susan)

Considering the Year One curriculum in relation to intent, implementation and impact seemed to be internalised somewhat by Claire who suggested that ‘we have to make sure we are justifying what we are doing... and we need to know that what we are doing is going to impact on standards’.

The drive to improve standards and increase expectations in Year One was discussed by both Year One teachers in their interviews. Helen and Claire each indicated how they have raised their expectations of the children in Year One:

The expectations are really high, but we’re becoming more secure in what we want them to know. So, we’re not expecting them to write a letter or a whole story at this point because our expectations are high that they use our non-negotiables straight away and that they are able to use them purely before we move on. So, it’s high expectations but in a different kind of way. (Helen)

The expectations are actually an awful lot higher, but our expectations are higher for things that are more achievable. Just taking handwriting, for example, we have raised our expectations infinitely this year and the impact has been massive. (Claire)

The increase in expectations meant that Helen and Claire narrowed their focus to have a ‘big push’ on a small number of concepts.

As alluded to by Susan and Helen, higher expectations in Year One were, to a great extent, actioned through non-negotiables. Non-negotiables were implemented at Pine Tree for all year groups following the National Curriculum (Y1-Y6). In particular, they related to the English area of the National Curriculum, although Claire noted how there were ‘plans to bring them in for maths as well’. Non-negotiables, while differentiated for each year group, were included as part of the

School Improvement Plan for the 2019-20 academic year, as shown in Figure 5.21 below.

Non-negotiables played a pivotal role in Year One. Helen and Claire were clear that

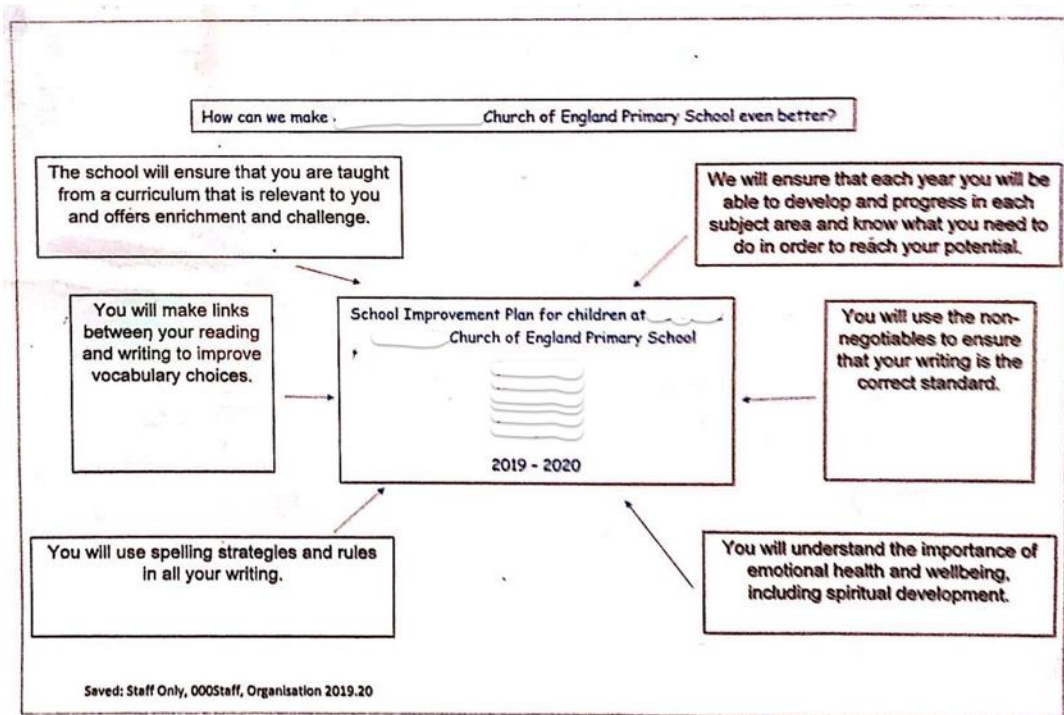


Figure 5.21 School Improvement Plan at Pine Tree 2019-20

their expectations were for all children to know and apply the non-negotiables and until such concepts were secure, they would remain a strong focus. They were seen as a way of maintaining clear and consistent expectations for children and were described by Helen as mechanism for ‘not getting carried away’ with what they would like the children to do. A similar point was also discussed by Claire:

Yes, we might teach question marks, and we might teach various things in Year One but actually for our ‘expected’ children we need to make sure that regardless of those things that we do teach, actually they just need to do finger spaces, capital letters, full stops and they need those Year One words. So, we are going to keep with these 50/60 Year One words and making sure that they are actually applying them in their own writing and if they are not we will keep revisiting them. (Claire)

Using non-negotiables as a medium for raising standards in Year One meant that they permeated all aspects of classroom practice. Helen, for example, stated that they were at the ‘forefront of her mind’ when planning:

We were meant to do letter writing the other week and we looked at each other and thought why are we pushing them to write a letter when we know some of them can’t use capital letters, finger spaces and full stops? We just want to really get into the basics. I mean, there is no point asking them to do that if they are not ready. (Helen)

Online interviews carried out in Phase Three indicated that the strong focus on non-negotiables appeared to have the desired effect in Year One, helping children to ‘grasp’ and develop their understanding of ‘basic’ concepts in English:

I feel that all the children are able to explain what the non-negotiables are and spot missing non-negotiables in the work of others. Most can edit their own work for non-negotiables too. (Phase Three – Claire)

The teachers also commented that they were an effective way of helping them to monitor children’s progress throughout the year.

### 5.5.2 National Curriculum (rules)

The National Curriculum was identified as having an influential role in regulating teaching and learning in Year One. The six areas of learning that were identified in the Year One curriculum were developed from teachers’ interpretations of the National Curriculum and seen as an effective way of covering the programmes of study:

We try and fit everything as best we can. So, all of the National Curriculum bits, we tore it all part and we put it into how they best fit the six areas. (Claire)

We do English and maths as stand alone, and R.E and P.E as well. The theme is kind of the history, the geography, the science. The Arts is Art and Design and Music. (Helen)

These areas of learning were distributed across twenty-five lessons throughout the week, although the majority focussed on ‘core’ subjects, with English and maths accounting for 60% of lessons (44% and 16% respectively). Speaking about this balance, Helen indicated how there was ‘more pressure on the core subjects’ in Year One because these were the areas targeted for raising standards. English and maths were also prioritised because of the focus of assessment in Year One, as identified by Susan, who spoke about the imbalance of the curriculum:

I think it’s obvious, isn’t it? It’s what we have to measure, we measure English, maths and you know, writing, reading and gaps. That is the system we have got. So of course, the structure of the overall system is going to impact on the skewness of the curriculum and the areas we focus on. (Susan)

Both Helen and Susan did highlight that the new Ofsted framework has the potential to shift this balance. They indicated how the increased emphasis on the ‘quality of each subject’ (Susan) meant that the school need to be prepared for ‘a deep dive into any subject of the curriculum’ (Helen).

Following the National Curriculum appeared to influence the way Helen and Claire organised teaching and learning in Year One. Claire, for example, discussed the requirement to compartmentalise their day in line with all other year groups following the National Curriculum. These requirements led to a structured approach to organising teaching and learning:

I think in Year One we are more restricted to lesson, playtime, lesson, phonics, lunchtime, lesson, playtime, you know. It’s much more structured, it’s more lesson-based. (Claire)

In her interview, Helen discussed how this way of organising teaching and learning was effective as it enabled subjects to be ‘blocked’ into lessons, sometimes back-to-back, giving children ‘continuity’ within each area of learning.

In addition, National Curriculum content appeared to shape the delivery. Although the teachers mentioned that, overall, they thought the programmes of study and attainment targets for Year One were ‘manageable’, the importance of ensuring

‘coverage’, particularly in core subjects, appeared to promote an emphasis on ‘explicit teaching’. For example, in discussing the programmes of study in English, Claire indicated that an adult-led approach was most effective and that it carried certain assurances in terms of what children should be able to know and do once taught:

I know that I have explicitly taught those spellings to every child. So, the expectation is now that we should be able to spell those words. They are displayed on the wall to help you, you have had them sent home and you have been taught them. (Claire)

This was supported further when Claire suggested that play-based and child-led learning is something that – if to be successfully oriented towards attainment targets – necessitates the presence of an adult:

They could still be doing some really valuable stuff, but they are only going to be consolidating. They are not going to be learning [new things] ... even if they are discovering stuff through their play and learning, they still need somebody to verbalise that with them, otherwise it’s not going to become anything that they have learned. (Claire)

An adult-led approach was therefore positioned as the most effective means for covering the programmes of study and helping children understand and progress in subject specific areas.

### 5.5.3 Assessment (rules)

Assessment was also an important influence on teaching and learning. One assessment identified as being particularly influential was the Phonics Screening Check (PSC). Although the PSC is carried out at the end of Year One, it was identified as influencing the focus of teaching and learning from the beginning:

We start looking at the Phonics Screening really early on, from day one in Year One, so they will look at real words and nonsense words all of the time. We send home a lot of stuff to parents for their support as well. We explain to them exactly what the Phonics Screening is. (Helen)



This was supported by Claire, who stated that phonics is a ‘big priority’ in Year One. Its importance was also evidenced in the weekly curriculum timetable (Figure 5.18) which showed Helen and Claire planned for daily phonics sessions, with the exception of Friday which instead focussed on spellings.

Over the course of the year, children’s phonetic knowledge and understanding were assessed individually with an adult on a fortnightly basis and children’s progress was tracked. The results from these fortnightly assessments informed the focus of future phonics lessons:

It gives us an indication of our teaching. So, “what sounds do we need to do more of? What do we need to put in place for everyone?”. It gives us good knowledge to say, “we have got this many weeks left this term, this is the sound we need to work on”. (Helen)

Although both teachers recognised phonics as an important area of learning in Year One, the requirement to submit PSC data to the Local Authority appeared to increase its significance. This was summarised by Helen:

It’s the only thing that goes out of school for Year One that gets compared to other schools and scrutinised so in that sense there is more pressure on phonics. (Helen)

In addition, due to their prominence during the time of case study visits, the standardised assessments that the teachers were carrying out were discussed during both informal conversations and the interviews with Helen and Claire. Both discussed how the assessments were useful in tracking children’s progress each term and identifying which children they ‘needed to target for interventions or additional support’ (Helen). This was echoed by Claire:

It’s vital, it’s important at any stage because you have got to know where children are and know where children need to go next and what you need to do to get them there. They are quite a useful measure because they are consistent all the way through the school. (Claire)

Helen and Claire were required to input the results from the standardised assessments to track the children’s progress from the end of Reception to the end

of Term 1 in Year One. An example of the tracking document used, referred to by the teachers as ‘Pinks and Greys’, is included in Appendix N.

#### 5.5.4 Relationships with Reception and Year Two (division of labour)

As in Reception, the relationship with other year groups was identified as having an influence on teaching and learning in Year One. In particular, the relationships between Year One and its neighbouring year groups – Reception and Year Two – were identified as being most significant.

During the interviews carried out in Phase Two, Helen and Claire both discussed the relationship between Reception and Year One and identified a lack of alignment between the GLD and Year One expectations:

It’s very different and actually the curriculum that they come out of, if they come out at age expectation it doesn’t necessarily mean that they are expected in Year One because it’s kind of different things that they are covering. (Helen)

The assessments are different and that they don’t particularly align... I mean our standardised testing certainly doesn’t align. We have got about a third of them who have come out of Reception as exceeding mathematicians; well, they are not greater depth mathematicians in any way. (Claire)

This was somewhat problematic as it led to an expectation that children who achieved the GLD would possess and be able perform certain skills when in Year One. For example, Susan – who also noted how the GLD and Year One expectations ‘don’t correlate at all’ – indicated that there is a danger that ‘you have an expectation that they can do things because of the way the assessments look’. She suggested it is important to exercise caution when interpreting the GLD in relation to children’s level of ability in Year One. Ultimately, the lack of correlation between the GLD and Year One expectations meant that Helen and Claire did not use the EYFS Profile but instead administered their own standardised assessments within the first term of Year One.

The relationship with Year Two also influenced teaching and learning in Year One. This was discussed by Helen in particular who suggested that one of the key purposes of Year One is to ensure that children are prepared for Year Two where they will be exposed to a ‘really hard’ curriculum and required to sit Standardised Assessment Tests (SATs). She noted how Year One is a transitional year, ‘getting them [children] from a very kind of play-based curriculum to preparing them for the formal structure of the Year Two curriculum’:

I think it’s such a huge jump. Preparing them for SATs and the Year Two curriculum is really hard. There’s a lot in Year Two for them to have to do. And the jump is massive. You know, SATs you have to sit down, you have to read it yourself, you have to do everything independently. (Helen)

Ensuring children were ‘prepared’ for the demands of Year Two meant that Helen and Claire were directed to teaching certain concepts that would serve as a platform for the Year Two teacher to build on. This led to the division of specific tasks and outcomes between Year One and Two, exemplified in the following quote from Helen:

That’s the discussion that we are having with Year Two. Year Two will say “right we want them to know this, don’t worry about that and that because we can do that. As long as they know this, this and this”. (Helen)

Moreover, the end of Year Two, and hence Key Stage One, was seen as a critical ‘data point’ within the school where children needed to have certain things in place. For instance, Claire mentioned how there is a ‘stronger focus on general reading in here [Year One] this year because we have got too many children leaving Year Two who are not fluent.’.

#### 5.5.5 Cohort dynamic (object)

Another theme generated from the data as influencing teaching and learning in Year One was Helen’s and Claire’s perceptions of how children were responding to the approach being implemented. Both teachers described how the children had

transferred from Reception ‘ready for the structure’ of Year One and enjoyed this way of working. Helen, for example, stated:

This year, they have adapted to Year One very well, I think. They have enjoyed the structure and the formality in Year One ... they have come up ready to be sat at tables. You know, they like the handwriting, they like having the books and all of those formal things. (Helen)

This was mirrored by Claire who noted that ‘the majority [of children] are ready for that structure and I think they do enjoy it’. Interestingly, Helen made reference to the previous Year One cohort and mentioned how they needed a different approach to the current group. This was captured in the following exchange:

**Helen:** Last year it was very practical, you needed a lot of moving around because they couldn’t sit for too long. We extended the time that they had for child-initiated stuff. This class are a little bit more focussed and enjoy the kind of the structure a little bit more. So, I think it depends on the year group.

**Researcher:** So, would you say that you haven’t had to adapt much?

**Helen:** Not as much this year I don’t think. Previous years we have maybe had to have different zones and activities but this year it has been... they just seem to be a very easy class.

During informal conversations with Helen and Claire throughout the week of case study visits, they often referred to the children as the ‘perfect class’. When asked what they meant by this in their interviews, they both identified a number of similar characteristics that the children, as a group, possessed:

They will sit, they will listen, they are quiet when you want them to listen, they love a challenge, they have all got that motivation, or the majority have that motivation to do things for themselves and not the reward really. They are all incredibly helpful and kind and want to do everything for anybody. Yes, they are just lovely. (Helen)

I think it's because there is just such a lovely balance. It's not that every child finds learning easy or that every child is impeccably behaved necessarily. The children are full of questions, they want to learn stuff. They just listen, they are engaged. They are just very engaged and they are very easy to teach. They are receptive to everything. (Claire)

The cohort's characteristics and 'readiness' were identified by Helen as enabling and supporting whole-class teaching and adult-led approaches, both of which were identified earlier as important when delivering the Year One National Curriculum. For example, Helen stated:

It's been a lot easier to cover things that we want to cover because we can do it more whole-class. Whereas last year we did a lot more 'carousel-ing' and kind of splitting the class. Whereas this year we do split the class but if there is not a TA there it doesn't matter, the whole class can kind of do what you want them to do at the same time. (Helen)

#### 5.5.6 Additional themes

Two additional themes were generated from the activity systems analysis and recognised as influencing the *performance* of teaching in Reception. However, it is important to state that in comparison to the other themes discussed, the values and beliefs of the Year One teachers (subject) and the wider school values (community) appeared to have significantly less influence on teaching and learning in Year One. The description of these themes and supporting interview quotes are outlined in Table 5.5 below.

Table 5.4 Additional themes generated from the activity systems analysis of pedagogical discourse in Year One

Theme	Description	Examples
Values and beliefs (subject)	<p>Understanding the values and beliefs held by Helen and Claire was an important part of understanding pedagogy in Year One. However, their beliefs and values did not appear to be particularly productive of practice. Both teachers expressed similar views about how children in Year One learn best and the types of experiences that are effective, espousing values and beliefs that can be seen to reflect a competence-based pedagogy. Yet, these views did not always appear to inform teaching and learning in Year One and other factors within the activity system seemed to have more influence.</p>	<p><b>Helen</b>            “They learn best when they use lots of practical resources, lots of child-initiated learning, making sure that they are engaged, inside and outside.”            “I think anything that is hands-on that they can talk about that they have experienced first-hand. If they are sat listening to you for too long it can go in one ear and out the other.”</p> <p><b>Claire</b>            “Practical, hands-on, being able to manipulate things, so certainly with maths and things being able to see things in a solid form. I think just being told something doesn’t particularly help them. It can reinforce but it doesn’t particularly... they don’t actually learn from that I don’t think particularly well. It is real life experiences.”            “I don’t believe that any child, certainly Year One-age should be sitting on the carpet for more than 15 to 20 minutes. It is too long. I mean 20 minutes at an absolute push. They are not going to listen for that long. They need to be doing and they need to be moving about.”            “We have got an idea of where we want to go but if it goes in a slightly different way, as long as we have got our idea of what we need to achieve, if the children are particularly motivated in a certain way then we are happy to kind of take that lead.”</p>
Wider school values (community)	<p>Similarly to the values and beliefs held by Helen and Claire, the wider school values appeared to have little impact on the approach to teaching and learning enacted in Year One. Susan, in keeping with the values and beliefs she documented in Phase One (Reception), spoke at length about how it is important to avoid too much structure in Year One. She believed that the Year One teachers prioritised the outcome of learning over the process of learning. Other elements of the activity system seemed to have much more impact on teaching and learning in Year One.</p>	<p><b>Susan</b>            “The danger when they go into Year One is that their wings are slightly clipped because the outcome is more determined. The teacher might plan it [the outcome] to be more important than the process.”            “What would worry me and it does worry me slightly if I am honest if I look in all of those Year One books, if they all look so similar, why? We don’t need thirty things identical. And I think we could do more of that here. I think teachers often work on an expectation of what they think it needs to look like. I have said, and I probably need to re-articulate it, that the only thing that is a boundary for anybody in this school is the time that they have got slotted in to go and use the hall. The rest of the week they can organise the learning however they want, as far as I am concerned.”            “There is absolutely no reason why you couldn’t have a much more free-flowing structure of the day and deliver the Key Stage One curriculum.”            “You know if you want children to be able to write they have got to have a curriculum in Year One and beyond where they have the same sort of opportunities that they have had in Early Years to talk.”            “There are children in the current Year One that still need the Early Years provision, you know, that still need to be working on Foundation Stage (areas of learning).”            “The wider agenda is across all schools, all primaries is that everybody should be active in their learning. So, the principles that I am talking about don’t just apply to Year One. You wouldn’t want them sitting at the tables in any other year group. There is that expectation that everyone is sitting and we are working and it is more formal. But I wouldn’t necessarily say that is the right provision.”</p>

## 5.6 Child and parent experiences and perceptions of Year One

### 5.6.1 Children

From an analysis of children's experiences and perceptions of Year One, three themes were generated from the Phase Two data: subjects and lessons, enjoyment and rules.

#### 5.6.1.1 Subjects and lessons

When discussing their experiences, the children often made reference to Year One being organised into lessons that focus on specific subjects. When asked 'what types of things do you do in Year One?', the children responded by suggesting areas of the curriculum, such as maths ( $n = 5$ ), handwriting ( $n = 4$ ), English ( $n = 3$ ) and P.E ( $n = 3$ ). In response to the same question, one child identified the compartmentalised structure of Year One, suggesting:

Normally you do Funky Fingers, and then you go to something like maths, then it's usually Collective Worship, then it's playtime, then we swap over... in the afternoon it's handwriting, sometimes it's R.E. and after R.E it's usually playtime and then it's handwriting, then it's story, and then it's home time. (Child 6)

Interviews with the children also revealed how weakly framed activities, such as Discovery Time, were now largely absent in Year One. For instance, some of the children indicated that opportunities to choose their own activity and engage in play were limited to whole school breaktimes and 'wet playtimes'. This is illustrated in the following extract:

**Researcher:** I haven't seen you do Discovery Time yet in Year One.

**Child 1:** No, it only happens in Reception.

**Researcher:** So, you don't have chance to play in Year One?

**Child 1:** We only get playtime out there (points to the playground).

**Researcher:** What about during lessons in the classroom?  
**Child 1:** No...only when it's raining and we don't get to go outside.

In addition, opportunities to be outside during lessons were, to a large extent, limited to the outdoor learning timetabled lesson, identified by one child as taking place 'only on a Wednesday'.

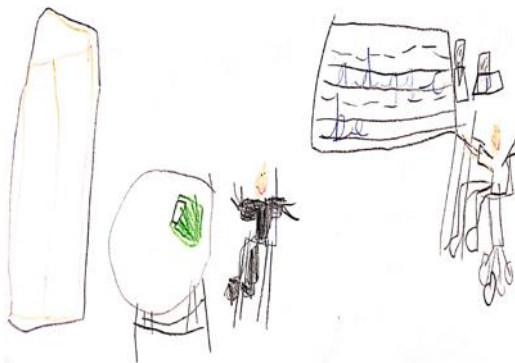
The organisation and focus of teaching and learning in Year One were somewhat reflected in the drawings children produced when asked if they would like to draw themselves 'learning in Year One' (Figures 5.22 - 5.28 below). Three of the children decided to draw themselves practising their handwriting which, as identified earlier, was a non-negotiable activity in Year One and hence, a strong area of focus.



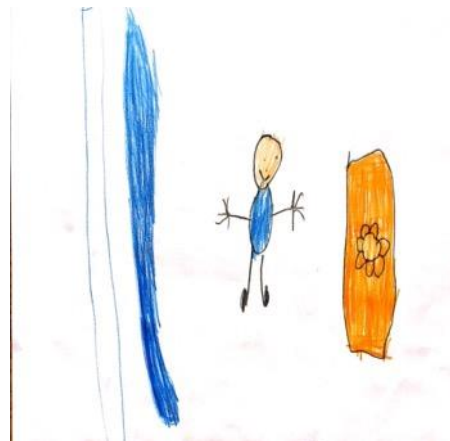
*Figure 5.22 'Playing football in the hall in P.E' (Child 1)*



*Figure 5.23 'Practising my handwriting' (Child 2)*



*Figure 5.24 'Practicing handwriting in Year One' (Child 3)*

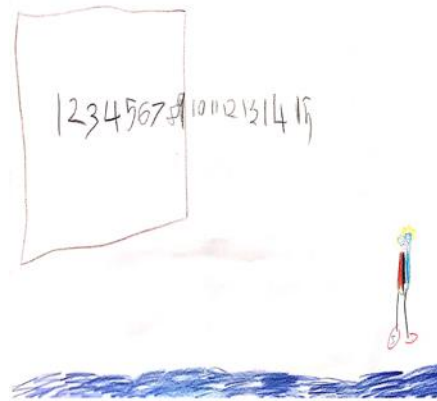


*Figure 5.25 'Playing in the playground' (Child 4)*

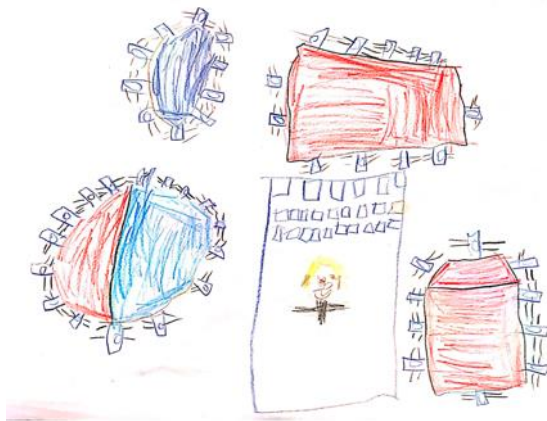




*Figure 5.26 'Me doing my handwriting on my whiteboard' (Child 5)*



*Figure 5.27 'Working on the carpet doing my number line' (Child 6)*



*Figure 5.28 'Me learning in my classroom' (Child 7)*

### 5.6.1.2 Enjoyment

Like in Reception, children's enjoyment was generated as a theme in Year One. However, whereas children's enjoyment of Reception appeared unanimous, their perceptions of Year One, although still predominantly positive, were less congruent. When asked 'do you like being in Year One?', the majority of children ( $n = 5$ ) answered 'yes' and, when asked 'why?', offered a number of different reasons, such as 'Because I get to sit and do work on the chairs' (Child 2), 'Because we learn more' (Child 3), 'Because I like handwriting' (Child 5, Child 7) and 'Because you learn lots of things' (Child 6). The other two children, however, were not as positive, indicating that they 'didn't know' (Child 1) and 'I don't really enjoy it' (Child 4) respectively. The ambivalence showed by Child 1 and the lack of enjoyment expressed by Child 4 were both attributed to a reduction in opportunities to play in

Year One, something which they both expressed as enjoying in Reception. In the interview, Child 1 discussed his mixed emotions further, suggesting that although he enjoys doing the work in Year One, it is ‘hard’ and sometimes not very engaging:

- Researcher:** What is it like being in Year One?  
**Child 1:** It’s like really hard because you do hard work.  
**Researcher:** What do you think about that?  
**Child 1:** It’s good because I like doing work. I just find it a bit boring.  
**Researcher:** What do you find boring?  
**Child 1:** When we do maths and stuff and things like that, it’s really hard and busy.

The interview with children also attempted to understand their favourite and least favourite aspects in Year One. All children’s responses to the questions ‘What is your favourite thing about Year One?’ and ‘Is there anything you don’t like about Year One?’ are documented in Table 5.6 below.

*Table 5.5 Children's favourite and least favourite aspects of Year One at Pine Tree*

	<b>‘What is your favourite thing about Year One?’</b>	<b>‘Is there anything you don’t like about Year One?’</b>
<b>Child 1</b>	“Doing P.E”	“Doing maths and art”
<b>Child 2</b>	“English”	“When we are not allowed to bring toys in”
<b>Child 3</b>	“When the teacher sees if you know the answer to her questions.”	“No”
<b>Child 4</b>	“Playtime” “Because we get assembly every single day.”	“Getting bossed around” “Every time on a cold day or rain day they always make us do P.E.” “Thinking my name is going to move down to the raindrop because that is when you get a phone call home and my toys get taken away then.”
<b>Child 5</b>	“I always get happy when people play with me.”	“I like everything.”
<b>Child 6</b>	“My favourite thing is going to my table and doing tasks.”	“Not really.”
<b>Child 7</b>	“Probably writing sentences.”	“No.”

### 5.6.1.3 Rules

From the interviews, rules were identified as playing an important role in shaping children's experiences and perceptions of Year One. Alluded to by five of the seven children, rules encompassed the requirement for children to behave in certain ways and such requirements were internalised by the children early on in Year One. For example, when asked 'What types of things are important to you in Year One?', children often responded by outlining classroom rules, examples of which are illustrated in the following extracts:

**Child 1:** They [teachers] always say "you have got to listen because you won't learn"... and "make sure you're fidget free".

**Researcher:** What does fidget free mean?

**Child 1:** You put your stuff down.

**Researcher:** And is that with your arms and body?

**Child 1:** No, it means you don't fidget with your stuff.

---

**Child 2:** We don't get to talk when we are sitting on the carpet. There's no talking.

**Researcher:** Why do you think you are not allowed to talk?

**Child 2:** Because the teacher is trying to tell us something.

---

**Child 5:** It's important not being naughty.

**Researcher:** Why do you think that's important?

**Child 5:** It's about being good and listening to what they [teachers] say.

The importance of rules in Year One was made explicit by some of the children's references to the behaviour chart where children, depending on their behaviour, were placed on either the star, sun, cloud or raindrop. This system was alluded to by two of the children:

If somebody is on the star and they be naughty in the day, they will choose somebody else. (Child 2)

Thinking my name is going to move down on the raindrop because that is when you get a phone call and my toys get taken away then....I have always stayed on the sun and the star but one time I might, I always think about it. (Child 4)

Incentives to behave were also associated with giving children opportunities to choose their own activities in Year One:

We do get some [opportunities to choose] if we work really hard. (Child 1)

If we work really, really hard we do get chance to choose in the classroom. (Child 6)

## 5.6.2 Parents

From the parent data collected in Phase Two and Three, three important themes were generated relating to their experiences and perceptions of Year One: schoolwork, engagement and communication and enjoyment.

### 5.6.2.1 Schoolwork

One theme generated from parent interviews was the concept of schoolwork and the shift to a subject-based curriculum, stronger framing and more emphasis on literacy and numeracy in Year One. The approach to teaching and learning was characterised by parents in a number of different ways. For example, one parent commented how 'it is certainly more school in Year One, with an emphasis more on learning rather than on the nurture' (Parent 2) and another stated 'He comes home talking more about subject areas... it is definitely more subject-based, he is understanding subject areas' (Parent 6). When describing their understanding of the focus of teaching and learning, this shift was discussed and acknowledged by the majority of parents ( $n = 6$ ), as shown in Table 5.7 below.

*Table 5.6 Parent's understanding of the focus of teaching and learning in Year One*

Parent	<b>“Could you tell me a little bit about your understanding of the focus of teaching and learning in Year One so far this year?”</b>
2	“Well obviously the things she comes home with. The homework is very much geared towards literacy and maths. So, she comes home with maths, she comes home with spellings, she comes home with the reading and the phonics. But I know they do lots of other things as well.”
3	“I know there is a lot more... like he has got exercise books that he is writing in. I obviously know that they are focussing on the reading a lot. He is bringing four books home so I think they are obviously really pushing them on the reading. I know Miss ***** (TA) has done some really exciting outdoor learning things with them. ***** [Child 3] is definitely more aware that he is doing more literacy and numeracy. I think a lot of it is disguised as play in Reception, isn't it? He is a lot more aware because he has got his literacy and numeracy books, yes he's definitely more aware.”
4	“I think they do a test on phonics at the end of the year (PSC) so they do quite a lot of work on the phonics. So there has been a real drive on phonics so far. It seems they have taken their foot off the number learning first thing and it was more about spellings and obviously getting their handwriting better. ***** [child 4] mentions cursive writing and the non-negotiables, the finger spacing.”
5	“Its gone up a notch. A lot more demands, a lot more expectations in reading, and writing and spellings, They seem to do handwriting a lot, every day. She has come home and told us about The Great Fire of London. What else did they do? Oh, about the history of the village. And she loves that, she is really into all of the history of everything.”
6	“I don't think they have as much free choice in what they do, I think it is a lot more structured. They have more books obviously and there is more written work and I get the feeling that ***** is doing things more independently... Literacy and numeracy were clearly a focus in the EYFS. I feel like now there is more of a focus. I know he has spellings and he has a little spelling book and is tested every week.”
7	“It is all about the phonics and certainly his books have obviously become more difficult for him to read so there is a lot more emphasis on those. He has started getting spellings, I mean spellings, it's small words obviously, you know, he calls them spellings. There is more emphasis on literacy and maths and it is obviously more structured, it is more like school and less play. And obviously the kids still want that play. But because I think they have some of the outdoor learning, I think that has slightly offset it [play] a little bit for him.”

Parents were also asked what they thought the Year One teachers had prioritised from September to the time of case study visits. Consistent with the responses documented in Table 5.7 above, parents tended to mention foci related to literacy, numeracy and phonics. As examples, parents responded by stating ‘maths and reading’ (Parent 3), ‘phonics and the non-negotiable spellings’ (Parent 4) and ‘establishing their handwriting and their letter formations and that that they can write correctly’ (Parent 5). One parent also commented on how the first week in Year One appeared to include some weakly framed opportunities as a way of helping the children ‘settle in’. However, beyond this, the focus shifted significantly:

I think they were just settling in and being a little bit more play-orientated than cursive writing and finger spacing, which is what it seems to be about now. (Parent 4)

Online interviews carried out in Phase Three appeared to indicate that the emphasis on literacy, numeracy and phonics persisted throughout the year. This is inferred in Table 5.8 which displays each parent’s response to the question ‘To your knowledge, what has been the focus of teaching and learning in Year One up until school closure in March?’.

*Table 5.7 Parent's responses to the question 'To your knowledge, what has been the focus of teaching and learning in Year One up until school closure in March?'*

Parent	<b>“To your knowledge, what has been the focus of teaching and learning in Year One up until school closure in March?”</b>
1	“Let the children build relationships and understand more of how the school day happens. Do their reading everyday and their maths and also some spellings.”
2	“Reading, spelling, maths and phonics.”
3	“Phonics and reading. Numeracy.”
4	“Spellings and handwriting and learning about non-negotiables. Each term also had a theme which the children learnt about. Before they finished they were learning about the weather and seasons.”
5	“They seemed to be working on the basics of writing, spelling and maths although I’m not totally sure as ***** won’t talk about any work she doesn’t enjoy.”
7	“Literacy and numeracy and let's explore as the overall subject”

#### 5.6.2.1.1 Engagement and communication

As in Reception, parental relationships with their child’s teachers was an important aspect of their experiences in Year One. However, unlike in Reception, where parents and staff established a strong partnership, parent engagement in Year One was less active and communication with Helen and Claire more limited. In the interviews, the majority of parents ( $n = 5$ ) described how they had little contact with the Year One teachers, particularly in comparison to Reception:

I don't feel like we see the teachers as much as in Reception. Other than the parents' evening where you get five minutes with the teachers, there hasn't been anything. We haven't had anything to do with teaching and learning. (Parent 3)

Yesterday was the first time I have spoken to them all year. I don't feel like they are on the playground as much in a morning, they are not as easily accessible whereas as Reception the teacher and the TA would always be out. Whereas yesterday, I had to go and ask for her. So, they are just not as visible. (Parent 5)

For two of the parents, the reduced level of communication did not necessarily seem to be an issue. For example, one of the parents commented 'if there's no worries they don't need me to be bugging them. They have got enough on their plate' (Parent 1) and the other stated that the lack of contact 'has not appeared to have had an effect' (Parent 3). However, other parents voiced a desire for more engagement and communication with the Year One teachers:

We always appreciate and need a little reminder. I want to be kept in the loop and know what they are doing each term. There are a handful of posts in the Year One channel [website] whereas this time last year [Reception] there would have been twenty-five. (Parent 4)

It was hand holding for parents in Reception. Whereas now it's very much for us "let your children go and off you pop" just kind of completely put your trust in us. I would like more opportunities [to communicate]. (Parent 5)

Parents consistently made reference to the level of engagement and communication that they had with Nadia in Reception and indicated that their experiences in Year One were the polar opposite, prompting one parent to suggest that 'a happy medium with a bit more information would be better.' (Parent 4).

#### 5.6.2.1.2 Enjoyment

In interviews carried out in Phase Two, the majority ( $n = 5$ ) of parents appeared to indicate that their child enjoyed the pedagogical approach enacted in Year One. A number of these parents discussed why their child found the focus of teaching and learning in Year One enjoyable:

She's enjoying this [Year One] because she's learning a lot more structured work I suppose. She's doing very well and enjoying it as well. (Parent 2)

He's absolutely loving it. He's enthusiastic about writing and doing his maths and reading. (Parent 3)

He's enjoying the work, the maths he's really enjoying, and English, and feeling really grown up. (Parent 6)

The Great Fire of London, it's those sorts of things that he's really, really enjoyed. He loves the sport as well, being outdoors, being active. (Parent 7)

Other reasons mentioned related to factors outside of the classroom, with one parent stating 'as long as he has got playtime in the day, he is a happy chappy' (Parent 1).

Two parents indicated, however, that their child did not enjoy the approach to teaching and learning in Year One, suggesting that:

I think he's probably one of the ones who really misses Discovery Time, but I think the realisation that it wasn't going to be going on hit him quite soon. Which is probably why during week two he came home and said he didn't want to go to school. (Parent 4)

Just in terms of the work. I think she feels quite a bit of pressure at the minute. She is struggling a little bit. "It's all boring" is what she says. I think because they are sat down at an actual desk a lot more, I think just the whole sitting at a desk, she feels pressured. She feels like they have got to do work all of the time, whereas before, she was learning but she didn't realise she was learning. (Parent 5)

Online interviews carried out in Phase Three appeared to largely mirror the experiences and perceptions captured in Phase Two. However, one exception to this was Parent 4 who suggested that her son had now 'adapted well to the style of teaching' in Year One. The responses of parents who took part in Phase Three are presented in Table 5.9 below.



Table 5.8 Parent responses to questions around the suitability and enjoyment of Year One for their child, taken from Phase Three

Question	Parent	Response
<b>To what extent has the focus of teaching and learning in Year One suited your child? Why/Why not?</b>	1	“Yes, ***** loves learning and although they have gone up a year and the learning is more structured.”
	2	“Yes it has, ***** loved it. She enjoyed the progress of new books and I realised that she’s every bit as competitive as her sister. She's enjoyed the structure and topics they've covered.”
	3	“We are very happy with how much he has progressed, particularly in his reading. He really loves reading this year and has rapidly moved through the book bands. He can pick up any book now and have a go at reading it and considering he is still only 5 years old, we are pretty proud of him!”
	4	“I think ***** has coped well with the style of teaching. They sit in small groups round tables for activities as well as doing group stuff sat on the floor (like in Reception). His reading and writing has improved massively.”
	5	“Not really, it was far too structured for *****. There was too much learning sat at desks, the expectations felt really high from the beginning so ***** shut down to it and refused to do anything at home because she had already done too much at school.”
	7	“Yes, he has really engaged with the theme and was excited about it. It allowed him to learn through different methods.”
<b>Is there anything in particular which your child has found enjoyable in Year One? If so, what?</b>	1	“The trip to the watch a play.”
	2	“Becoming a free reader.....she was very proud of herself.”
	3	“***** has often spoken about really enjoying outdoor learning.”
	4	“I asked ***** that question and the answer was playtime! Especially the day each week it is his turn to go on the climbing frame. Still missing discovery time I think.”
	5	“***** loves all the themed work they do because it’s often a lot more creative. They did a lot about the Great Fire of London and they made models of the buildings and had a fire with them in the playground so she can recite all the facts. They also looked into the history of the village where they went on a walk to look at different things like the church and the shop that was a pub, they spoke to different people, she loved that because she could see how it had changed.”
	7	“Craft and singing as well as sport and maths.”
<b>Is there anything which your child has found unenjoyable or has</b>	1	“Nothing really, ***** loves school and being with his pals.”
	2	“I can honestly say that ***** has loved every minute. So far, I've not been aware of any struggles or concerns.”
	3	“He hasn’t enjoyed having to persevere with cursive handwriting. He was quite enthusiastic about adding a ‘whoosh’ onto his letters when it was first introduced at the start of the year but he seems to have given up a bit on that I have noticed in his writing! Other than that he really loves going to school!”
	4	“He has struggled a little with his spellings.”

**struggled with in  
Year One? If so,  
what?**

5	“*****’s struggling with most of the basic core subjects, she finds them really hard, and she gets bored and frustrated easily so switches off and doesn’t listen or refuses to do anymore. Maths and spellings are the things she finds least enjoyable, they do spelling tests and she hates that because she sees other people doing better than her so she compares herself. She’ll often come home she says she’s not good enough and everyone did better than her, I find it really hard it’s so sad to hear her upset like that. I have spoken to the teachers and *****’s was getting some extra support and wasn’t being ‘tested’ she was just practising her spelling whilst the others did a test which she preferred but I still couldn’t get her to do spellings at home.”
7	“Writing, English”

## Section Three

### 5.7 Child and parent experiences and perceptions of the transition from Reception to Year One

In Phase Two and Three, children and parents were invited to share their ongoing perceptions, experiences and reflections on the transition from Reception to Year One at Pine Tree. These were generated deductively and explored through two themes: continuity and change and adjustment. To distinguish between data developed in Phase Two and Three, data generated in Phase Three contains the following reference: ‘Phase Three – [participant]’.

#### 5.7.1 Children

##### 5.7.1.1 Continuity and change

When asked to compare Reception and Year One, the majority of children alluded to how their experiences changed significantly. Children identified how in comparison to Reception, they ‘do harder work’ (Child 1), ‘do much harder numbers and shapes’ (Child 5) and ‘do a lot more work and lots more writing’ (Child 6) in Year One. A number of children ( $n = 3$ ) indicated how one of the biggest differences was that Discovery Time – which the majority of children found highly enjoyable in Reception – was not implemented in Year One. This was particularly illustrated in the following extract:

- Researcher:** What is Year One like compared to Reception?  
**Child 4:** It’s very different.  
**Researcher:** What is different?  
**Child 4:** Because there is no Discovery Time.  
**Researcher:** Why do you think that is?  
**Child 4:** Because they think Discovery Time is too babyish.

Children also identified that there were significant differences between the learning environment and resources in Year One compared to Reception. For instance, children made the following observations:

This place [Year One] doesn't have any puppets, and they [Reception] have lots of puppets. We don't have any balance bikes. That is our outdoor area [points to Year One outdoor area], all it has is colouring... boring! (Child 4)

We didn't really have tables in Reception but we do now and we don't have a reading area now. (Child 5)

It was a bigger classroom in Reception, I think. But in here it has more books... in Reception there was only one table in the classroom ... [in here there are] one, two, three, four, five ... five tables. (Child 7)

In inviting children to compare their time in Reception to their experiences in Year One, a number of them spoke about how their predecessors in Reception took part in different activities to what they now do in Year One. For example, some stated that Reception children were able to 'play' when they were required to take part in more structured activities, noting how 'when we do outdoor learning, the Receptions are all outside having fun playing' (Child 2) and 'Year Two and Year One always have to go inside when the Reception children are outside doing play' (Child 7). This observation was particularly vivid for one child:

**Child 6:** Do you know what I have realised?

**Researcher:** What?

**Child 6:** When we have to go to Collective Worship at different times, when we are in the hall, they [the Reception children] are always playing.

#### 5.7.1.2 Adjustment

Although moving from Reception required children to negotiate significant change, most appeared to indicate that they had adjusted well to life in Year One. For instance, four children appeared to provide firm affirmation of their adjustment when discussing whether they have 'enjoyed moving to Year One', as exemplified in the following extracts:

- Child 2:** Yes, I prefer being in Year One.
- Researcher:** Why?
- Child 2:** Because in Reception there was loads of Lego and it all got messy but now we are in Year One our classroom always stays tidy... I can read in the reading corner without everybody sitting next to me.
- 
- Child 3:** Uh hm yes.
- Researcher:** Why have you enjoyed moving to Year One?
- Child 3:** I like hard work... and because I'll be six soon.
- 
- Child 6:** Year One is better.
- Researcher:** Why do you think it is better?
- Child 6:** Year One is better because I like learning around new stages of learning, and I like seeing different classrooms. I can't wait for move up day because then we will get to see Year Two.
- 
- Child 7:** Year One I like most.
- Researcher:** Why is that?
- Child 7:** It's more work than Reception.

However, not all children appeared to have fully adjusted to Year One by the time of case study visits in Phase Two, although some children appeared to feel more comfortable than others. One child was somewhat torn, suggesting that 'I always miss Reception but I have been happy in here [Year One]' (Child 5). However, for the remaining two children, it appeared clear that they missed the experiences provided in Reception and, in particular, regretted the loss of opportunities to play:

- Researcher:** Have you enjoyed moving to Year One?
- Child 1:** No.
- Researcher:** Why not?
- Child 1:** Because we don't get any Discovery Time. I really miss playtime and Discovery Time.
- 
- Child 4:** I miss being in Reception. I really want to go back in Reception and stay in Reception.
- Researcher:** Why do you miss Reception?
- Child 4:** Because it has play time and all of them puppets and toys.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, children's adjustment appeared to mirror their level of enjoyment of Year One, as expressed earlier on in the chapter (see section 5.6.1.2). The two children who appeared to still be adjusting to Year One and who expressed missing, and even a desire to return to, Reception were the same as those identified as not enjoying (Child 4) and being unsure of how much they enjoyed (Child 1) Year One.

## 5.7.2 Parents

### 5.7.2.1 Continuity and change

When invited in Phase Two and Three to reflect on their child's transition, parents had different perceptions on the extent to which Year One differed from Reception. Two of the parents, for instance, indicated that they thought changes to teaching and learning had been 'gentle' (Parent 1) and 'gradual' (Parent 7). Yet for the remaining parents, Year One was identified as a considerable shift in approach, captured by some parents stating how 'it is quite a jump from Reception to Year One' (Parent 2), 'it is a significant change in Year One' (Parent 3) and 'it's definitely more teaching related and sitting rather than learning through play' (Phase Three – Parent 7). Parent 5 also stated how moving to Year One 'has been a big shift' and noted that the changes involved were implemented almost immediately upon children's entrance to Year One, as illustrated in the following extract:

**Parent 5:** She said the first day they came back they had got partners and they were sat at tables. And that for her was like wow! And she said she wasn't sat with her friends. I don't know who she was sat with. I think they were all sat like boy, girl, boy, girl. She didn't like that. It was all different.

**Researcher:** Were some of the changes quite sudden then?

**Parent 5:** Yes, quite significant I would say. A lot more demands, a lot more expectations.

**Researcher:** Okay and who would you say the onus was on to adapt?

**Parent 5:** I think they [teachers] didn't adapt to them [children] at all. The children had to adapt to 'this is Year One and this is what you are doing'.

Some of the key differences between Reception and Year One have been explored in previous sections of this chapter. These related to parent's relationship with their child's teacher and the introduction of a subject-based approach in Year One. Given their significance in shaping how parents experienced and perceived Reception and Year One, such issues were generated as themes in their own right and were presented in earlier sections; however, when reflecting on the transition parents also identified a number of other differences. Most of the parents made reference to how the learning environment and resources were drastically different in Reception and Year One. These observations centred around how the classroom in Year One was smaller, was populated with desks and contained an impoverished outdoor learning area in comparison to Reception:

If you look at the outdoor environment outside the Year One class – it's horrible! From the Reception class you just sort of compare and think it's nothing is it really? But it's not like all of a sudden, they have gone up to Year One and thought 'hang on a minute we don't want to play, and we don't want to be outside'. (Parent 5)

The classroom is slightly smaller and there is not the separate outdoor learning area as there was in Reception. They have still got an area where they sit to look at the board all together and they do have the tables so it's a little bit more formal. (Parent 7)

Differences were also identified in relation to how the teachers in Reception and Year One engaged with children and the expectations they had for children's learning, as illustrated in the respective quotes below:

In Reception, \*\*\*\*\* got a lot of individual attention. I'm not sure how much time the children get individually with the teachers in Year One. I think they tend to engage with them in the groups round the tables. (Phase Three – Parent 4)

I think the [Year One] teachers expect more. It's more important now that they are getting it right. I think it is, I think that has shifted quite a bit. (Parent 5)

As well as these changes, parents did also identify how a number of aspects were similar from Reception to Year One, mentioning, for example, how children 'still have the same book bag' (Parent 3) and that the 'homework is very similar to Reception' (Parent 5).

#### 5.7.2.2 Adjustment

In the same way that they held different perceptions on continuity and change, parents shared different experiences about their child's adjustment to Year One. The majority of parents ( $n = 5$ ) appeared to indicate that their child had adjusted well to Year One by the time of case study visits in Phase Two. This included, perhaps unsurprisingly, Parents 1 and 7 who suggested that the transition had been 'gentle' and 'gradual' respectively, as well as parents who had identified higher levels of discontinuity. For this latter group of parents, although they suggested that moving to Year One was characterised by high levels of change, they believed that their child had negotiated the transition well:

It's gone probably better than expected. It is quite a jump from Reception to Year One. But she is just loving it and seems to be taking things in her stride. There was no knock of confidence, she has really enjoyed it. (Parent 2)

It's been absolutely fine. We're really happy with the transition. \*\*\*\*\* is just so happy, he loves coming to school. He has got so many good friends and it is a lovely class and he has built a really good relationship with the teachers who had big shoes to fill. It is such good peace of mind for us. (Parent 3)

Yep, really good. He is enjoying the work, the maths he is really enjoying, and English, and feeling really grown up, I think. (Parent 6)

For two of the parents, however, the level of discontinuity between Reception and Year One appeared to impact their child's transition negatively. Both of these parents – whose children did not achieve the Good Level of Development indicator



(highlighted blue in Figure 5.6) – indicated that the changes to teaching and learning had been challenging for their children.

Discovery Time was his favourite part of Reception and in Year One it's academic, and it's learning, "these are our non-negotiables". He has realised that it is more about learning and that's been tricky and taken time for him to process. (Parent 4)

There is a lot more expected of her. Just in terms of the work and I think she is feeling that. I think she feels quite a bit of pressure at the minute. She is overtired and just really struggling. She is really against everything at the minute. (Parent 5)

These participants were the same two parents who indicated in Phase Two that their child was not enjoying being in Year One (see section 5.6.2.3).

To a great extent, parent's views of their child's adjustment to Year One were mirrored in Phase Three. Four of the five parents who suggested that their child had adjusted well to Year One in Phase Two reiterated this in the online interview in Phase Three (Parent 6 did not participate in the online interview). Their responses to the question 'On reflection, how has your child found the transition from Reception to Year One so far?' can be seen in Table 5.10 below.

*Table 5.10 Parent responses to the question 'On reflection, how has your child found the transition from Reception to Year One so far?'*

<b>Parent</b>	<b>"On reflection, how has your child found the transition from Reception to Year One so far?"</b>
1	"Really good, the teachers have supported him well and made it easy for the children"
2	"She's found it very easy and has enjoyed it and I can certainly see an increase in her confidence."
3	"He has loved Year One. He has responded to the extra challenges that being in year one has had and really flourished"
7	"He has managed it well we believe, although he was tired and the start of the year."

For the parents who suggested that their child's adjustment to Year One had been less successful in Phase Two, it was possible to see contrasting experiences from their responses in Phase Three. For example, Parent 4 indicated that by March 2020,

their child had settled well into Year One. Their response to the question posed above (Table 5.10) was:

He sometimes reflects on Reception and will say that he misses things from there. But actually the transition has been completely fine. I was more worried than \*\*\*\*\* but he's taken it all in his stride.  
(Phase Three – Parent 4)

Parent 5 indicated, however, that her daughter – who was the youngest in the class, born at the end of August – was still experiencing difficulties after almost six months in Year One. She gave the following response to the same question:

\*\*\*\*\* loved reception and always skipped into school happily, she loved the teachers and assistant teacher but we've had lots of occasions in Year One where I've had to pass her to the teacher whilst she was sobbing. Year One has been far harder in terms of workload for \*\*\*\*\* and the expectations far higher. (Phase Three – Parent 5)

## 5.8 Chapter summary

This chapter has presented the 'within-case' analysis (Miles et al., 2020) carried out at Pine Tree. It has reported the themes that were generated from an analysis of the pedagogies enacted in Reception and Year One – both *performance* and *discourse* (Alexander, 2001) – as well how children and parents experienced and perceived these year groups and the transition between them.

The findings reported in Section One indicated how the *performance* of teaching in Reception largely resembled a competence-based approach but that it also contained performance-based features (Bernstein, 2000). By positioning the *performance* of teaching as the *tool* element within the activity system, it was possible to identify how a number of elements shaped its modality. These related to teacher (subject) and wider school (community) values, curriculum, assessment and accountability (rules) and the relationship with the rest of the school (division of labour). Although some themes were generated as shaping practice more than others, teaching and learning was influenced by a number of elements within the Reception activity system without any particular one appearing to dominate

practice ahead of the others. The findings generated illustrated that all children found participating in Reception to be a highly enjoyable experience.

In Section Two, focussing on Year One, the *performance* of teaching was identified as being firmly positioned within a performance-based model (Bernstein, 2000). This modality was shaped by a range of different contextual factors, relating to teacher (subject) and wider school values (community), National Curriculum, assessment and accountability and standards (rules), its relationships with Reception and Year Two (division of labour) and the cohort dynamic (object). While all themes generated contributed to understanding the *performance* of teaching in Year One, those developed within the rules of the activity system appeared to be particularly influential. The data generated from children and parents indicated that most, but not all, children enjoyed participating in Year One.

Section Three presented the themes generated in relation to child and parent experiences and perceptions of the transition. Children and parents identified significant pedagogical discontinuity between Reception and Year One. Most of the children were recognised as navigating these changes successfully, however, for some children in the sample, the transition to Year One, and its performance-based modality, was a much more challenging experience.

The themes presented in this chapter and the insights developed from the data are considered further and situated within the context of existing literature in Section One of Chapter 7. Before then, however, the themes generated from the within-case analysis carried out Oak Tree are presented in Chapter 6.

## Chapter 6: Oak Tree School

### 6.0 Introduction

At Oak Tree, we do things differently. There's no blanket syllabus; no repetitive, basic teaching framework. (Oak Tree School website)

Oak Tree is a recently formed (2013) independent school located on the outskirts of a medium-sized commuter village (population of approximately 4,000 people) in Lincolnshire. It educates children from Nursery (age 2) to Year Six (age 11) and has approximately 105 pupils on roll. Tuition fees are set at £9000 for the academic year – which is below the sector average of £12,582 reported in 2014 (Winch, 2014, as cited in Ndaji et al., 2016) – although a significant number of children (37%) benefit from the school's scholarship and bursaries programme. The children in attendance tend to live within a 15-mile radius of the school. On their website, Oak Tree outline that their teaching methods are 'progressive, innovative and forward-thinking' and that they pride themselves on ensuring 'students develop on a personal level, as well as intellectually'. The school is a member of the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and is therefore inspected by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI). Although the school has not yet had a full inspection, the ISI carried out a Regulatory Compliance inspection in 2018 judging that the school met all of the standards required for ISC affiliation, commenting that Oak Tree 'aims to give children an outstanding preparation for life, through offering a happy, fun and stimulating all-round education.'

### Section One: Reception at Oak Tree

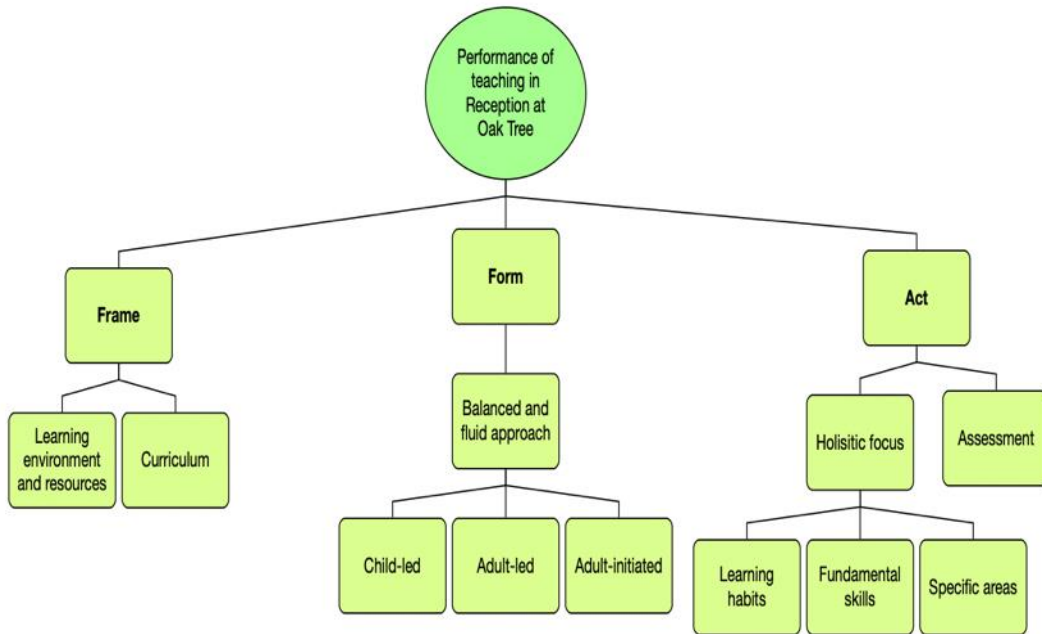
All data presented in Section One (6.1-6.3) were generated in Phase One (Reception).

#### 6.1 The *performance* of teaching in Reception

In Reception at Oak Tree there was one full-time teacher (Ann) and one part-time Teaching Assistant working with twelve children aged 4-5 years. Ann was responsible for the majority of teaching and learning although some timetabled

periods, such as P.E, Music and Spanish, were delivered by educators who specialised in these areas.

The themes and sub-themes that were generated from an analysis of the *performance* of teaching in Reception at Oak Tree were grouped under the broad analytical categories of *frame*, *form* and *act*, shown below in Figure 6.1.



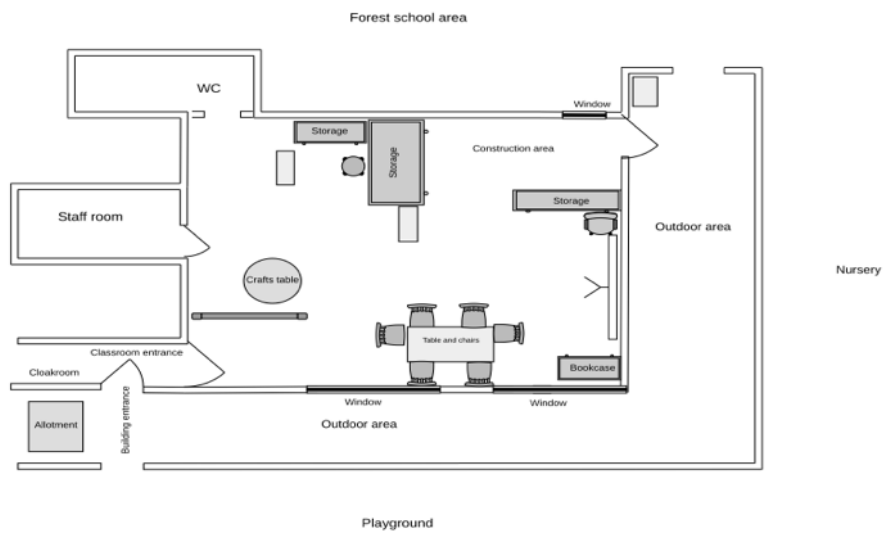
*Figure 6.1 Performance of teaching in Reception at Oak Tree organised into Frame, Form and Act*

## 6.1.1 Frame

### 6.1.1.1 Learning environment and resources

The indoor learning environment comprised of a rectangular-shaped classroom that was organised to contain a number of weakly classified and open spaces. The largest of which was in front of the interactive whiteboard which was kept free so that all children could be together with the teacher at certain points throughout the day. The classroom contained two tables, one designated for ‘arts and crafts’ and another that could seat up to six children. All spaces in the indoor classroom were communal and, for large parts of the day, children were permitted to access areas freely and engage with resources of their choice. To the front and side of the indoor classroom was a spacious outdoor area that was shared with Nursery. To illustrate how the learning environment was organised in Reception, Figure 6.2 displays a

floor plan, Image 6.1 shows the indoor environment and Images 6.2 and 6.3 depict the outdoor environment.



*Figure 6.2 Floor plan of indoor and outdoor learning environment in Reception at Oak tree*



*Image 6.1 Indoor learning environment in Reception at Oak Tree*



*Image 6.2 Outdoor learning environment in Reception at Oak Tree*



*Image 6.3 Outdoor learning environment in Reception at Oak Tree*

Both the indoor and outdoor areas of the learning environment were well resourced. In her interview, Ann indicated that she has made a ‘conscious effort to go back to using traditional, authentic resources’, meaning that plastic materials were kept to a minimum and more sustainable resources (e.g. wood and recycled materials) populated the environment. The indoor and outdoor environment were weakly classified from one another and for large periods of time throughout the day, children were permitted to move freely between these spaces.

Located behind the Reception classroom were three acres of woodland that the Reception class, along with all other year groups in the school, considered to be part of their learning environment. This area was, however, strongly classified from the other spaces within the learning environment, with children only permitted to enter with adult supervision. The woodland (Image 6.4 and 6.5) provided the context for a number of teaching and learning activities carried out in Reception, both planned (see section 6.1.1.2) and spontaneous.



*Image 6.4 Woodland area at Oak Tree*



*Image 6.5 Woodland area at Oak Tree*

#### 6.1.1.2 Curriculum

The teaching and learning activities carried out in Reception were organised into a daily and weekly curriculum timetable, presented in Figure 6.3 below. The curriculum was predominantly an integrated type (Bernstein, 1975), with the majority of contents standing in an open relation to one another and focussing on broad areas of learning and development.

## Reception Class Timetable

Summer 2019

8.40am	9am	9.25am	10.55-11.20am	11.20-12.50pm		12.50pm	1.45pm	3.20pm - 3.40pm
<b>Monday</b> Handwriting Registration	Assembly Hymn Practice	<b>Cross Curricular Activities</b>  Spanish Mrs	Outdoor Play	<b>Cross Curricular Activities</b>	<b>Physical Development</b>	Lunch Outdoor Play	<b>Guided Reading</b>	Story/ Songs Home time Organisation
<b>Tuesday</b> Handwriting Registration	Assembly	<b>Forest School</b>		<b>Cross Curricular Activities</b>	Lunch Outdoor Play	<b>Cross Curricular Activities</b>	<b>Music</b> Mrs	
<b>Wednesday</b> Handwriting Registration	Assembly Rev Bowes-Smith	<b>P.E/ Games</b> Mr	Outdoor Play	<b>Cross Curricular Activities</b>	Lunch Outdoor Play	<b>Cross Curricular Activities</b>		Story/ Songs Home time Organisation
<b>Thursday</b> Handwriting Registration	Circle Time	Spanish Mrs  <b>Cross Curricular Activities</b>	Outdoor Play	<b>Cross Curricular Activities</b>	Lunch Outdoor Play	<b>Core Conditioning/ Physical Development</b>	<b>Cross Curricular Activities</b>	Story/ Songs Home time Organisation
<b>Friday</b> Handwriting Registration	Celebration Assembly	<b>P.E/ Games</b> Mr	Outdoor Play	<b>Cross Curricular Activities</b>	Lunch Outdoor Play	<b>Show &amp; Tell</b>	<b>Performing Arts/ Drama</b>	Story/ Songs Home time Organisation

Come to school in P.E kit on a Wednesday- no uniform required.  
Waterproofs/ wellies and trainers needed in school all week

School uniform to be worn on a Friday- P.E kit required  
Show & Tell- prepared for Friday

Figure 6.3 Reception curriculum timetable for the Summer Term at Oak Tree



The integrated nature of the Reception curriculum was epitomised by the number of periods designated for ‘Cross Curricular Activities’ (CCA), accounting for over half (10/19) of timetabled sessions. Within periods allocated for CCA, time tended to be weakly classified, flexible and negotiated between the teachers and children. This meant that changes to the focus of teaching and learning were based largely on factors relating to children’s understanding, engagement and enjoyment. The integrated nature of the curriculum supported the teacher to investigate themes alongside the children. The theme, which at the time of case study visits was ‘minibeasts’, was explored by the children in a number of different ways, including through drawing, numeracy (symmetrical characteristics of minibeasts), literacy (sentence writing), painting and a minibeast hunt in the woodland (Observations, June 2019).

Although predominantly integrated, the Reception curriculum did encompass some activities that were more closed and more finite in terms of when and for how long they took place. These specific areas related to Forest School, Spanish, P.E and Music and each were delivered by teachers who specialised in these areas and were responsible for their delivery to all year groups at the school.

## 6.1.2 Form

### 6.1.2.1 Balanced and fluid approach

The strength of framing in Reception, although predominantly weak, moved between all points – child-led, adult-initiated and adult-led – of the continuum (Fisher, 2020). These shifts were fluid and occurred frequently throughout the day. On some occasions it was possible to see that control was explicit, resting completely with either the children or adults at any one time. Yet, on others the strength of framing was negotiated between adults and children, often within the same CCA period. From analysis, three sub-themes were developed that illustrate the breadth of framing in Reception. Although it was possible to discern differences between each of these sub-themes, overlaps were observed, such was the complexity of this approach. Capturing these nuances, a ‘typical day’ in Reception, developed from case study observations, is presented in Appendix O(1).

#### *6.1.2.1.1 Child-led*

Teaching and learning activities in Reception were, to a great extent, weakly framed and children were given many opportunities to choose, explore and pursue activities that interested and motivated them. The freedom for children to lead their own learning occurred largely during the time allocated within the curriculum for CCA. During this time, children accessed different areas in the learning environment and were observed initiating and engaging in diverse activities, such as water and sand manipulation, building, painting, drawing, boardgames, completing puzzles and imaginative play. Throughout the week of case study visits, a number of play episodes were observed and documented, an example of which is included below:

Two girls turn an area of the classroom into a café. They write invites for the other children, set the table with various cutlery and discuss the types of things other children might like to eat and drink. Their discussion identifies the need to write a menu. (Observations, June 2019)

Clearly, this play episode, like many others observed, contained weak framing, with children having control over matters relating to selection, organisation, sequencing, pacing and criteria. During these activities, adults adopted a variety of roles including organising classroom resources, carrying out one-to-one and paired activities and interacting with the children. Most often, however, they assimilated the role of observers, taking photographs and notes relating to the children's actions and behaviours.

#### *6.1.2.1.2 Adult-led*

An adult-led approach was adopted at various points throughout the week. This was particularly the case at the start and end of the day when children were taking part in Circle and Story time respectively and also when specialist areas of learning within the curriculum were being delivered, specifically Spanish, P.E and Music. In these sessions, selection, organisation, sequencing, pacing and criteria tended to reside with the adult throughout, enabling them to focus on introducing specific concepts to the children:

All children are in front of the teacher and interactive whiteboard. The Spanish teacher shows the children a picture of a fruit or vegetable, offers the Spanish pronunciation and then asks the children to repeat. Following this, the teacher selects a fruit or vegetable at random and asks children individually to recall and recite the appropriate translation. The teacher also asks the children if they can say in Spanish the colour of the fruit or vegetable and whether they like it (“me gusta”) or not (“no me gusta”) (Observations, June 2019)

On several occasions, activities that contained strong framing were also implemented by Ann during CCA. Ann suggested that during these sessions, which tended to focus on specific areas of learning and development, she aims for ‘20 minutes of good quality interaction’ before seeking a change of activity.

#### *6.1.2.1.3 Adult-initiated*

For several of the teaching and learning activities carried out in Reception, complete control did not appear to rest explicitly with either children or adults but was instead negotiated between them. During CCA, for example, Ann incorporated different adult-initiated activities, referred to as ‘challenges’, which were often in the form of creative tasks that related to the theme under investigation:

The teacher introduced a ‘challenge’ to the children that was to create a minibeast out of transient art materials. The teacher modelled a number of different minibeasts that could be created. (Observations, June 2019)

After demonstrating this activity – and others like it throughout the week, such as painting a ladybird and mixing colours to paint a minibeast of their choice – Ann let the children decide when they would participate in the activity, the only stipulation being that they needed to ‘have a go at some point during the session’ (Ann). Some children would complete the activity straight away whereas others waited until a later point (Observations, June 2019). The inclusion of ‘challenges’ in Reception struck a balance between strong and weak framing. The selection and organisation of the activity were decided by the adult but the sequencing, pacing and criteria rested with the children.

### 6.1.3 Act

#### 6.1.3.1 Holistic focus

The focus of teaching and learning in Reception was directed towards supporting children's holistic development. This was achieved through an approach that included both invisible and visible pedagogies, aimed at supporting broad ('ways of knowing') and specific ('states of knowledge') areas of learning and development respectively. Three sub-themes developed from analysis embodied this holistic focus: learning habits, fundamental skills and specific areas.

##### *6.1.3.1.3 Learning habits*

Developing positive learning dispositions, identified by Ann and the school as 'learning habits', were a clear and important focus of teaching and learning in Reception. Ann explained that 'learning habits' related to an array of different competencies, such as independence, creativity, self-regulation and problem solving, but ultimately they concerned children's 'application of strategies for learning' and their 'knowledge of how to learn'. While it could be argued that supporting children to develop these metacognitive traits pervaded all teaching and learning in Reception, weakly framed activities that provided children with a degree of control over the learning encounter, if not all, appeared to provide the optimal conditions for supporting children to develop and foster 'learning habits'.

Three boys are working in the construction area and together decide that they would like to build a bridge so that minibeasts could pass from one table to another. They rearranged the tables in the classroom, negotiating how far away the tables should be and hence, how long the bridge should be. They then used blocks, Duplo, Lego and cardboard to construct the bridge. After many attempts and deliberations, the children, to their delight, successfully built the bridge and it was strong enough to support the minibeast models (Observations, June 2019)

The diffuse criteria of learning habits and the implicit forms of transmission used to develop them indicate the enactment of an invisible pedagogy.

#### *6.1.3.1.2 Fundamental skills*

The development of ‘fundamental skills’ was also an important focus in Reception, and, like learning habits, they related to a broad range of skills and attributes:

The basic skills of cutting, fine-motor, speaking, listening, putting your coat on, your shoes on the right feet, being able to organise yourself, get a drink, be responsible for your own things and your own tray. Socially as well, being able to say please and thank you without being prompted. Being able to concentrate for a certain period of time. (Ann)

These skills, identified by Ann as providing children with ‘foundations for life’, were supported in different ways, including through child-led, adult-initiated and adult-led activities. In some instances, their development was diffuse and somewhat implicit:

Each child is given five minutes to present something to the rest of the group that they find interesting. After their presentation, the children take questions from the group. This is managed by the children themselves, who are required to put their hand up if they have a question. (Observations, June 2019)

On other occasions, activities were explicitly directed towards particular skills:

The children all watched ‘Let’s get Squiggling’, an interactive video aimed at developing fine motor skills and pen grip. The video required children to draw a range of objects such as a wizard, parrot and broom. (Observations, June 2019)

#### *6.1.3.1.3 Specific areas*

In Reception, several activities were directed towards specific areas of learning and development. Some of these more specific areas were delivered during the time allocated for CCA, with activities related to literacy (e.g. sentence writing), numeracy (e.g. number patterns and symmetry) and phonics (e.g. split diagraphs) all being implemented during this time. To a great extent, the teacher decided the

selection and criteria of these activities and controlled how they were organised, sequenced and paced:

Children were each given the opportunity to stand up and count aloud to 25 in front of their peers. This was followed by the teacher and children counting in 10s, 5s, and 2s to 100. Children then used a whiteboard to complete some number patterns. (Observations, June 2019)

Other areas containing a specific focus were included within the curriculum. With the exception of Forest School, which gave children a high level of control over their learning, specialist areas – Spanish, P.E and music – were oriented towards discrete skills and knowledge, such as the Spanish translation of fruits and vegetables, striking and fielding and rhythm and rhyme respectively (Observations, June 2019). The use of strongly framed methods to focus on more explicit criteria within specific areas resulted in a visible pedagogy being adopted at certain points throughout the week.

#### 6.1.3.2 Assessment

In Reception, children’s participation in classroom activities were continuously assessed through observations. These were documented through jottings on ‘Post-it’ notes and collated to a physical document where each child had their own profile. Observations were also recorded electronically through photographs and videos, some of which were uploaded to Tapestry and shared with parents. For example, when documenting the three children who constructed the bridge (see above), Ann uploaded an image and supporting information to each child’s Tapestry profile, shown in Figure 6.4 below.



#### **Building a bridge!**

This morning, \*\*\*\*\* worked with \*\*\*\*\* and \*\*\*\*\* to build a bridge for minibeasts and cars to pass. \*\*\*\*\* showed teamwork skills and impressively communicated with the other boys to negotiate how best to build the bridge and delegated their roles to achieve this. \*\*\*\*\* took into consideration a range of mathematical concepts, such as weight, height and measurement. He also showed great perseverance and resilience as the bridge collapsed a number of times! A really fun activity and great to see him complete an idea that he thought of.

*Figure 6.4 Example observation from Reception at Oak Tree that was uploaded to Tapestry*

In addition to observations, some of the work that emerged from children’s participation in teaching and learning activities, including painting and sentence writing, were also documented and used as evidence of children’s knowledge, skills and progression.

Towards the end of Reception, Ann used the observations recorded throughout the year to complete the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile. An example of this assessment for some of the Reception children at Oak Tree is illustrated in Figure 6.5 below which reports a numerical measure (2 = expected, 3 = exceeding) for each Early Learning Goal. These scores were then accumulated to determine whether children met a Good Level of Development (represented by \*).

EYFS PROFILE - June 2019																				
CHILD	DOB	PRIME AREAS OF LEARNING						SPECIFIC AREAS OF LEARNING												GLD*
		Personal, Social & Emotional Development			Communication and Language			Physical Development		Literacy		Mathematics		Understanding the World			Expressive Arts & Design			
		MR	SCSA	MFB	LA	U	S	MH	HSC	R	W	N	SSM	PC	W	T	EM	I		
	07.2014	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	*	
	10.2013	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	*	
	03.2014	3	3	3	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	*	
	04.2014	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	*	
	04.2014	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	3	3	*	
	05.2014	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	*	
	08.2014	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	*	

Figure 6.5 EYFS Profile and Good Level of Development (GLD) data for children in Reception at Oak Tree

## 6.2 Pedagogical discourse in Reception

The activity systems analysis generated a number of different themes that appeared to shape the *performance* of teaching in Reception. These themes, and the elements of the activity system within which they are located, are identified in Figure 6.6 below. A selection of these themes, the ones that appeared to have the strongest influence on teaching and learning in Reception (see section 4.1.1.2) will be presented in detail with the remaining themes summarised in Table 6.1 at the end of the section.

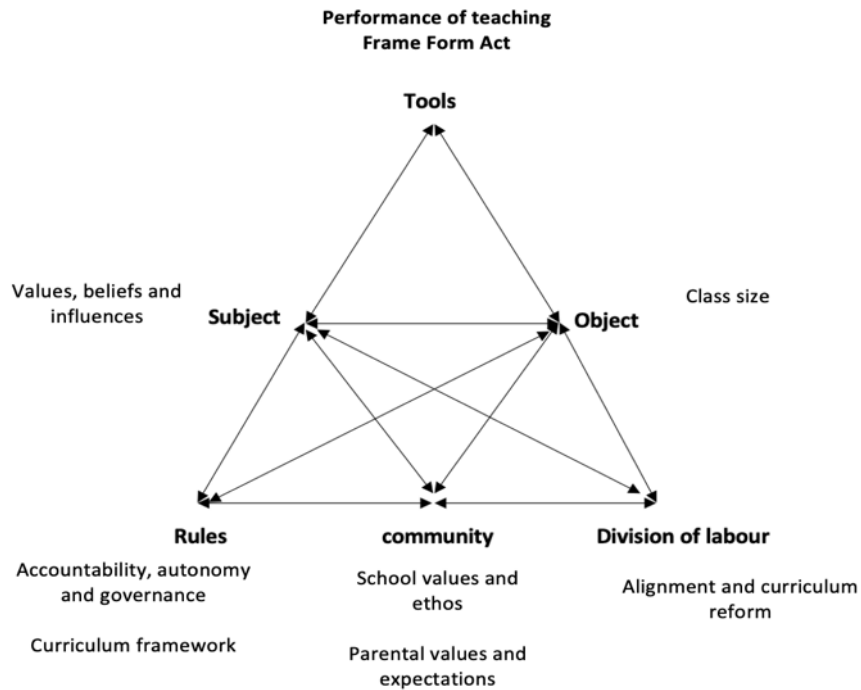


Figure 6.6 Pedagogical discourse in Reception at Oak Tree represented as an activity system

### 6.2.1 Values, beliefs and influences (subject)

The approach to teaching and learning that was enacted in Reception at Oak Tree appeared to strongly reflect Ann’s beliefs about children’s learning. Ann was in her seventeenth year of teaching – the majority of which (11) were in the state sector – and all were spent working with children across the 0-5 age range. She moved to Oak Tree when it was founded in 2013, taking up the position of Reception teacher and Early Years Lead, roles that she still held at the time of case study visits.

When discussing her teaching philosophy, Ann identified how it has been, and continues to be, influenced by a number of different theories and approaches, of which were first introduced to her when studying:

Having studied Early Childhood, having looked at lots of different philosophers, researchers, curriculums, you know the Reggio Emilia, Steiner, Montessori approaches, and having gone to settings where they do that. There are different elements of those approaches that I love, and I think that’s what we are trying to do in the EYFS. We are trying not to be too specific in terms of focussing on one thing but instead adding in lots of elements from these that work for us. (Ann)



The influence of renowned approaches in shaping Ann's teaching philosophy appeared clear when she went on to discuss her beliefs about children's learning in Reception. In particular, she described a number of competence-based tenets, such as 'exploration' and 'freedom', and identified the importance of being 'flexible' and 'spontaneous' so as to accommodate and follow children's lead:

It's about first-hand experiences and active learning and giving them opportunities to use their senses to explore. They need the opportunity to guide that learning as well. So, I have an idea of where I want to get to in the week, but I don't have a plan where I've said "no, it's Monday today and I said that we would do this and it's Friday so we should be here". I think having that opportunity to let them lead their play and guide that learning is huge. I want them to be able to make those choices. (Ann)

Here, Ann identified play as a medium for incorporating many of the principles that were central to her vision concerning how children learn best:

Play gives them a chance to express themselves, gives them opportunities to explore and experiment... to find their own individuality and their individual learning needs. It gives them chance to learn and develop through their interests. (Ann)

However, Ann made a point of stating how, despite giving children substantial control over their learning, she still had high expectations for how they should make use of this time:

I want to see them utilising the things that they have learnt in their play. I want to see constructive play when they do go and choose something to do, and I will bring them back in if they're not. Because I think "right okay, we need to refocus you into something else". (Ann)

Ann appeared to view child-led, play-based activities as achieving a dual purpose; enabling children to pursue activities that interest and engage them while, at the same time, providing the conditions for them to 'consolidate, progress and make links between all of the things they have learnt' (Ann).

Underlying Ann's pedagogy was a belief that the processes of learning are just as, if not more so, important as the outcome. For instance, when discussing the intention behind some of the activities carried out during the week, Ann provided examples where the process appeared to be prioritised over the outcome:

The ladybirds, I'm not really interested in how they turn out. I want it to be from their perspective. It's how they interpret what I have said, how they observed me modelling something and it's that instruction, it's listening to it. When we did the colour mixing the other day with paint, I wasn't interested in what they painted, it was the fact that they could mix those colours. (Ann)

Capturing the importance that Ann placed on process was her belief that the Characteristics of Effective Teaching and Learning (CoETL) play a central role within Reception. Over the course of the interview, she made a number of references to the CoETL, stating, most notably, that she aims to 'ensure all of the children can develop these traits' and that they can 'do all of those things in a very adept way' (Ann).

### 6.2.2 Curriculum Framework (rules)

Teaching and learning activities in Reception also appeared to be influenced by the EYFS curriculum framework and Profile. In the interview, Ann confirmed that she follows the 'guidance for the Foundation Stage and completes the Profile at the end of Reception'. She also stated how she is 'guided by Development Matters', a non-statutory guidance document that supports the delivery of the EYFS.

Ann commented that these national policy documents informed teaching and learning on a 'day-to-day' basis and provided a 'benchmark' for understanding children's development:

[The framework] is always at the back of my mind and so too Development Matters. I know from experience and having knowledge of it, I know where I want the children to be, how I can move them on to the next step. It gives us a good basis of where they are at. (Ann)

On the whole, Ann spoke positively about the EYFS framework, suggesting that ‘for every practitioner it has what it needs’. In particular, she noted how its holistic emphasis, with its focus on Prime and Specific areas, as well as the CoETL, enabled her to design teaching and learning activities around the children’s interests, something she identified as central to her beliefs around how children learn best (see 6.2.1 above):

As a practitioner I think it gives you a really good guide to actually thinking about that child as an individual, and what interests that child, and what sort of journey that child is taking, and what their interests are and how we can enhance that. (Ann)

However, both Ann and Maria (headteacher) made points of saying how the EYFS framework acted as a ‘guide’ and that the Reception curriculum ‘goes beyond’ (Maria) and ‘adds parts to’ (Ann) the nationally specified areas of learning and development. While this could most notably be observed through the inclusion of specialist areas such as Forest School and Spanish, Ann also integrated what she referred to as the ‘Curiosity Approach’ which is an approach that promotes ‘making mistakes, risk taking and independence’ and ‘provokes children’s imagination’ through the resources that are provided.

The influence of the statutory guidance was also apparent when important concepts endorsed within the EYFS curriculum framework, such as the importance of learning through play and the use of observations as the predominant method of assessment, were reiterated and expanded upon in the school’s own ‘EYFS Policy’, illustrated in Figure 6.7 and Figure 6.8 respectively. Figure 6.8 also details the school’s requirement to complete the EYFS Profile for children at the end of Reception.

### Active Learning through Play

At \_\_\_\_\_ we recognise that young children learn best through when they are active. This active learning involves other people, objects, ideas and events that engage and involve children being as practical as possible and learning through play. Play is an essential and rich part of their learning process which supports all areas of development. It is a powerful motivator encouraging children to be creative and to develop their ideas, understanding and language.

Practitioners provide both structured and unstructured play opportunities within the indoor and outdoor environment. These activities are designed to engage children in practical, first-hand experiences which will support children to discover, explore, investigate, develop their personal interests and areas of curiosity, and help to make sense of the world around them as they begin to understand specific concepts. Play opportunities are also set up to provide children with opportunities to apply newly acquired knowledge, demonstrating their skills and level of understanding.

*Figure 6.7 The role of active learning through play in Reception at Oak Tree (Oak Tree EYFS Policy 2018/19)*

### The Cycle of Observation and Assessment

At \_\_\_\_\_ we hold the individual child at the centre of our planning. This is achieved through detailed observation and assessment. This observation and on-going formative assessment is at the heart of effective early years practice.

Staff achieve this through:

- Observing children as they act and interact in their play, everyday activities, child initiated activities and planned activities, and learning from and sharing with parents about what the child does at home.
- Considering the examples of development as stated in the unique theme: observing what children can do, and identifying the stage on their developmental pathway.
- Considering ways to support the child to strengthen and deepen their current learning and development.
- Considering the individual needs, interests, and stage of development of each child in their care. This information is then effectively used to plan a challenging and enjoyable experience for each child in all of the areas of learning and development.
- An online learning journal is used called Tapestry. This allows practitioners and parents to share information about their child through pictures, videos and notes.

The EYFS requires \_\_\_\_\_ to undertake summative assessments in which staff review children's progress and share a summary with parents.

- 2 year Progress Check in the prime areas between the ages of 24 and 36 months
- The Baseline Assessment on entry to the Reception class through a 'settling in' discussion.
- The EYFS Profile at the end of the academic year in the Reception class.

This information is shared at parent/practitioner/teacher meetings and in an end of year written report.

*Figure 6.8 Assessment in Reception at Oak Tree (Oak Tree EYFS Policy, 2018/19)*

### 6.2.3 School values and ethos (community)

The values and ethos of the community at Oak Tree, particularly those held by Maria, were also identified as influencing teaching and learning in Reception. Maria was the proprietor/headteacher at Oak Tree, a role that she had held since 2013 when the school formed. She was widely regarded, by both staff and parents, as the 'driving force' behind the school's formation, meaning that she played a central role in developing the school's ethos and culture.

As well as discussing the reasons behind the school's formation, Maria provided an in-depth account of the values that underpin Oak Tree. In particular, she commented on how a 'children-first' ethos guides their approach:

The biggest one thing we do is ... [ask] "is it right for the children?" Every question is: "is this right for the children?". It's about the child and being personally accountable to that child and the value added of that child. Physically applying purpose and audience, not your purpose and audience, theirs. (Maria)

In describing the school's ethos further, Maria identified how there is a commitment at Oak Tree to finding and nurturing children's passion, regardless of what that might be:

They will exceed and excel in something and we will find their thing. It might be music, it might be on the sports pitch, it might be the chessboard... but it doesn't mean it will be in every area and it might not be what parents or teachers want it to be because we are all different. So, its remembering that each child is individual, and they are not your child... they are their own person and the expectations you have aren't necessarily what they are going to be or want to be. (Maria)

When asked about how this ethos relates to Reception in particular, Maria shared strong views concerning the importance of meeting children's needs in the present:

We are too busy always looking at the next step. These kids need us to look at them now. Their learning is happening now. If we keep looking forward we are not going to focus on the now and we need to develop the now so that they are secure, rounded and grounded individuals. The whole of society needs early years education to stop focussing on what's next but focus on what's now. (Maria)

When asked how this ethos informs teaching and learning, Maria spoke about how she wants activities and lessons to be 'engaging', 'enthusiastic' and 'inspiring', aimed at developing children's 'confidence' and challenging them to 'go out of their comfort zone'. Related to this, she also stated that teachers 'are not the oracle' and that children 'should constantly teach us [teachers] new things too'.

Although Maria indicated that her involvement in Reception (and indeed other year groups) was limited – stating that ‘I employ outstanding professionals who know what they are doing in their area’ (Maria) – it was clear that there was a strong alignment between the approach being implemented and the wider school ethos. For example, she was highly supportive of the Curiosity Approach that informed the Reception curriculum:

I love what they have done with the Curiosity Approach to early years. That is much more natural, and the children respond well. It’s that awe and wonder and being engaged. That they are learning through doing and scientific inquiry. (Maria)

Maria outlined how in Reception and the ‘Lower School’ (Year One & Two) she would like an even greater emphasis on competence-based principles, such as learning through ‘play’, ‘exploration’ and ‘discovery’ as well as giving children opportunities to ‘problem-solve’ and to ‘compromise, negotiate and discuss’. Related to these concepts, she also indicated that she would like to see these year groups make even more use of the outdoor learning facilities at the school:

I’d like the woodland area to be used even more. Up until the end of Year Two I really want us to have much more of a Scandinavian approach to that. We’re outdoors and the maths outdoors and the English is outdoors where possible. And actually, your classroom is just a base and that’s where our belongings go. I’d love them just to be out more. (Maria)

In addition, Maria, like Ann, was a strong advocate of the CoETL and suggested that, in her opinion, ‘they should go all the way through, in life not just education’. When describing what was important in Reception, the importance she attached to these dispositions was clear:

It’s to build on those characteristics really ... it’s that independence and inspiring a love of learning. What I want them to have is that thirst for knowledge. (Maria)

Influenced by the CoETL, Oak Tree developed their own version – referred to by the school as ‘learning habits’ – and extended them as an assessment tool to all year groups. An explanation of ‘Learning Habits’, and their role within the school, is

illustrated in Figure 6.9 below which presents an extract taken from the Oak Tree Curriculum Policy 2018/19.

At \_\_\_\_\_, our '**Learning Habits**' are regarded as a fundamental part of what we do. They are divided into four areas: what we would like children to do and be, and how we would like them to relate and think. They are defined for the pupils as follows:

Do – Plan, Questions and Reflect.

Relate – Learn from each other, listen to others and think of others feelings.

Be – Accurate, Motivated, Brave and Responsible.

Think – Be creative, logical and flexible.

These are not attainment targets in themselves; they are subjective and difficult to assess but we believe it is these qualities which, along with the knowledge base and skill set required to function in modern British society, parents, teachers and ultimately employers would like to see in young people, and it is these qualities which ultimately lead to happiness and fulfilment.

*Figure 6.9 'Learning Habits' at Oak Tree (Oak Tree Curriculum Policy, 2018/19)*

#### 6.2.4 Class size (object)

Class size was also generated as a factor that influenced the *performance* of teaching in Reception. Having 'small classes' was an important aspect of the educational offer at Oak Tree and Maria described how the ratio of teachers to children 'builds up as children get older', with 'the youngest children having the highest ratios.'. Matters of class size were addressed in the Oak Tree EYFS Policy for 2018/19 which outlined and justified the number of places available in Reception:

The Reception offers a maximum of 16 places:

The reason for this number ensures that the needs of each child are met both academically and emotionally, helping to develop each child's confidence and independence. Small classes enable the teacher to provide an individual education, planned around the needs and experiences of each child so that true potential can be nurtured and realised. (Oak Tree Curriculum Policy, 2018/19)

In the interview, Ann made a number of references to the fact that she only had twelve children in the class. Recalling her time in her previous school, where she

had thirty children, she explained how having a smaller class increases the range of teaching and learning activities that can be carried out in Reception:

In terms of the curriculum, I can do so much more because of having a lower number whereas when you have got thirty, how do you rotate that? I know when we talked before and I have said “we get through a lot of things in a week” because of there being twelve. An activity that would take me two days in the maintained sector takes me half a morning. So, I think that autonomy of getting to choose when and how we do things. I can be flexible and say “no, we are going to do this now” because with only twelve you can. Movement wise, it’s easier and resource wise, it’s easier. (Ann)

For Ann, having a smaller class dovetailed with the implementation of a weakly framed and classified approach where children are afforded significant periods of time to direct their learning:

I think being the class teacher, I don’t have to do as much planning because I have only got twelve and I can do that planning in the moment, I can do incidental planning, I can go with them. The days feel longer and I have got much more opportunity to get things done. (Ann)

Ann also pointed out that by having a smaller class size she was able to ‘look closely at their [children’s] individual needs’, helping her to carefully monitor both ‘progress’ and ‘where they need to go next’.

#### 6.2.5 Alignment and curriculum reform (division of labour)

During Phase One, it became apparent that Oak Tree was in the process of reforming the ‘Early Years’ (Nursery and Reception) and ‘Lower School’ (Year One and Two) provision by integrating these phases. This created a single phase, known as ‘Lower School’, spanning from Nursery (age 2) to Year Two (age 7). The synthesis of these two phases was accompanied by the development of a 2-7 curriculum – constructed by all educators within the phase collaborating ‘as a team’ (Maria) – which was aimed at extending and broadening EYFS curriculum principles to the end of Year Two. For example, the following description of the ‘Lower School’ curriculum was outlined on the school’s website:



Lower School ... is cross-curricular and forms parts of a progressive learning journey for ages 2–7. Here, we focus on creating a nurturing environment, through which skills such as problem-solving, reasoning, organisation, and sharing can be developed. While students learn academically during this time, their social and emotional development is another key focus. (Oak Tree website, 2019)

The school's plan to integrate these phases more closely, through extending competence-based principles until the end of Year Two, was perceived as having an influence on teaching and learning in Reception.

The decision to reform the Lower School phase and establish a new curriculum appeared to be motivated by different factors. Although Ann was broadly positive about the EYFS curriculum framework, there was an indication, from both her and Maria, that it could still be enhanced to reflect the range of experiences they provide in Reception:

We are looking at our own curriculum because some of the things that we are giving them opportunities for don't fall under those bands, those Early Learning Goals. In parts it's very basic and we feel we can add parts to that. (Ann)

I think there's lots missing, and I think it's too woolly. Where's the science? STEM is the thing moving us forward. Where's the outdoor learning? Where's that learning about nature? (Maria)

Similar views were also expressed in relation to Year One, albeit to a much greater extent, where the Key Stage One phase of the National Curriculum was identified as promoting an approach in contrast to Ann and Maria's personal values and beliefs. They both viewed the extension of a competence-based pedagogy as more beneficial to all children's learning and development in Year One and Two:

In the past there hadn't been continuity. I think that extending through to Year One and Two would be highly beneficial. I think for those children who struggle or aren't quite ready, developmentally quite immature. But then I think for the ones that are more able, I think it gives them a different concept because I think they are very fixated on more structure whereas our curriculum allows for making

mistakes, risk taking, them making those choices. And going back to those Characteristics of Effective Learning, having to make decisions for themselves, not be told what to do all the time. Because I found that, I know with having experienced that previously, I think the children then lose that sense of imagination in Year One. And I think this curriculum, the Curiosity Approach elements that we do would massively benefit them. (Ann)

Give me a child until they are seven, those first few years are so fundamental. It [National Curriculum] needs to be much more child focussed. They're not at all ready for that sit-down school bit and I don't want them to be, and I don't need them to be. They need to learn through doing. I won't say learning through play because every time I say the word 'play', people go "they just play". They don't, they're physically learning through doing. (Maria)

Given the importance of these issues in influencing pedagogy in both Reception and Year One, the research made a point of revisiting the decision to move away from delivering the National Curriculum in Year One in Phase Two of the case study. Such issues are therefore explored in more detail in the next section, focussing on pedagogical *discourse* in Year One (section 6.5).

In addition to a belief that they could further develop the EYFS and National Curriculum respectively, another key driver of curriculum reform was the problem caused by a lack of alignment between these frameworks. By establishing one phase spanning from age 2-7, Maria spoke about how they could 'eliminate' the current discontinuity between these phases of education:

There's an issue with the Early Years Profile and the expectations of baseline at Key Stage One and there's a gap and that's what we are trying to address. So, where they are all meeting or exceeding expectations in Reception, they are not meeting it and exceeding it at the beginning of Year One. There's a significant gap there and it's national. This curriculum is looking to close that gap. (Maria)

The move to establish a new curriculum appeared to have an influence on teaching and learning in Reception. For example, Ann mentioned that separating Year One and Two from the National Curriculum has enabled the teachers to establish a much more fluid relationship between the year groups included in the 'Lower School'. In

doing so, it moved discussions away from what children need to be able to do within certain year groups and by certain time points, to a focus on each child's individual development:

I think in terms of looking at a child's next stage of education. We always talk a lot about the next stage of their learning journey. So, it's just a case of carrying on and I am teaching them the skills that they need in order to move onto their next stage of development. It's not a "they have got to do this because that's what they do in Year One." It's how they progress in their way, not because that's what they have to do at Key Stage One. (Ann)

Continuity between Reception and Year One was also supported by the Year One educators assimilating the approach to teaching and learning enacted in Reception:

The current Year One teachers have adapted the classroom massively to incorporate role play, lots of small world, and obviously because we have introduced the Curiosity Approach, they have begun to include that in their teaching as well. They are also very much into the outdoor provision, the physical development. So, that has that benefit for us in a sense that they continue that learning outdoors. (Ann)

#### 6.2.6 Additional themes

In addition to the themes described, two additional themes were generated from analysis and recognised as influencing the *performance* of teaching in Reception. A short description of these themes along with supporting interview quotes is provided in Table 6.1 below.

Table 6.1 Additional themes generated from the activity systems analysis of pedagogical discourse in Reception

Theme	Description	Examples
<p>Parental values and expectations (community)</p>	<p>The values and expectations held by parents were also generated as having an influence on teaching and learning in Reception. Both Ann and Maria indicated that parental expectations can be extremely high and are one of the key pressures in the independent sector. From the interviews carried out in Phase One, it was possible to identify an alignment in the values and expectations parents espoused with the approach being enacted in Reception. A number of the parents indicated that the commitment to learning through ‘play’ as well as the emphasis on outdoor learning were key elements in their decision to send their child to Oak Tree. The alignment of expectations with the approach delivered appeared to mean that parents viewed Reception as providing positive experiences that their child enjoyed.</p>	<p><b>Ann</b>                      “In the independent sector you haven’t just got the children to focus on. You have also got parents, because at the end of the day they are paying a lot of money. Those expectations that those parents have of me and for their children are quite big really.”</p> <p><b>Maria</b>                      “The hardest part of being in the independent sector is parent expectation. It comes on lots of different levels. One is that they are paying for it, so they expect to be able to have it their way. Like when you buy a steak, and you want it cooking how you want it cooking. I have many a conversation where I sit people down and I say ‘we are professionals, let us do our job. I wouldn’t tell you how to do your job, please do not tell us how to do mine’. They have to believe in the school and believe in the teaching staff and believe in me as a head. That is the hardest thing and I think the other thing is because they are paying for it, they expect their children to exceed and excel.”</p> <p><b>Parent 1</b>                      “My attitude towards learning and education, particularly at this stage, I would rather they were outside running around. That was part of the reason we chose Oak Tree, because of the outdoor ethos.”</p> <p><b>Parent 2</b>                      “Before ***** started, I had looked into like different teaching approaches and things like that and I quite like the Steiner approach and looked locally for Montessori, Steiner, all those. I don’t like the thought of someone sat in a classroom at such a young age just having to learn. I want it to be enjoyable, I want them to live a little as well.”                      “She is still young and it is about playing and learning, learning through play rather than actually sitting them down and saying ‘no you’ve got to listen to this, you’ve got to do that’.”</p> <p><b>Parent(s) 3 (3a = mother; 3b = father)</b>  <b>3b:</b> “That was a big thing, the social stuff and the play was really important. Letting them just do what they want to do and let them be a bit creative with it. I think probably for us with ***** the social side of things... because that was something he struggled with in nursery.”</p> <p><b>Parent 4</b>                      “Erm... I wanted it to be play. Play and exploration. Exploring what they find interesting. So, very child-centred. I think if you don’t allow freedom for play and follow the child’s play you get too many children lacking with creativity, you know that can just follow instructions rather than having a very independent mind.”</p> <p><b>Parent 5</b>                      “I think it’s important to let them find something that they are interested in and develop it through play really. They tend to be quite motivated by you know finding something they are interested in and doing it in a playful way.”</p>

<p>Accountability, autonomy and governance (rules)</p>	<p>The way teaching and learning were organised in Reception was influenced by the accountability, autonomy and governance structures in place at Oak Tree. Ann discussed how she had autonomy over all aspects of classroom practice, including the focus of activities as well as how and when they took place. This high level of agency was facilitated by a strong level of trust between Ann and Maria (headteacher). It was also apparent in a number of school documents. The level of autonomy in place for teachers at Oak Tree also appeared to be supported by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI).</p>	<p><b>Ann</b></p> <p>“I have got more autonomy compared to what I was doing in the maintained [sector]. I have autonomy on curriculum. I have got nobody saying to me ‘that’s what you do, and I want to see this and I want to see that’. I haven’t got someone at my door saying ‘you should be doing numeracy right now’. I know what I am doing, I know how to get the children to where I know they can be.”</p> <p>“I am well supported by the deputies and by the head because they allow me to do that. They trust my experience, and knowledge, and judgement. I think in the past that’s where in the maintained sector every day you were showing evidence for something, you couldn’t pick up a pen without somebody seeing. Your door had to be kept open so they could hear. So, always somebody could hear you, see you, whatever. Everything I did was always regulated, so my books, my teaching, my displays, everything... it was a killer! Demoralising.”</p> <p>“Whatever I choose to do is of my choosing, not from somebody telling me about test results. I am making those decisions.”</p> <p><b>Maria</b></p> <p>“We can pick and choose so we’ve got our own curriculum. We make sure that there isn’t anything missing but we are just very child-led. So, if the children want to go off in their subject that plan goes out the window and we will take it in that way. They are not missing anything, but they are inspired.”</p> <p>“They are professionals. They know what they are doing in their area. So, I don’t go in and tell them. The autonomy and how they teach and what they teach is down to them. If I said to them ‘oh you’ve got to teach this, this way... [They would say] ‘not doing it, bye’. These are quality staff who have walked from other places because of that.”</p> <p>“When ISI come in to inspect they take the feeling and they listen to the children. It is less about the data. ISI look at pupil development and personal development, so academic and personal. And you can feel that through... what you actually do is talk to the children and you listen to the children and that is how we are assessed through ISI. Ofsted inspectors place an emphasis on paper evidence. No! Just listen to the children and talk with the children. Have a conversation with these kids. Stop looking for their books.”</p> <p><b>Oak Tree Curriculum Policy, 2018/19</b></p> <p>“Structure of the School Day: EYFS and Lower School pupils have periods as decided by their class teacher as appropriate – except where they are delivered by a subject specialist at a particular point in the week.”</p>
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## 6.3 Child and parent experiences and perceptions of Reception

### 6.3.1 Children

From an analysis of children's experiences and perceptions of Reception two themes were generated from the Phase One data: range of experiences and enjoyment.

#### 6.3.1.1 Range of opportunities, experiences and environments

The interviews carried out with, and drawings produced by, the children confirmed that they were offered a range of different experiences across a number of different environments in Reception.

When asked 'What types of things do you do in Reception?', the children commonly referred to 'play' and indicated that they were given significant opportunities to choose their own activities. When describing their play activities, the children revealed how they engage with a range of different resources and spend time with different children in the class. As an example of the latter, one child indicated how 'I sometimes do hairdressing with \*\*\*\*\* and sometimes \*\*\*\*\* and \*\*\*\*\* join too' (Child 4). In addition to 'play', the children made reference to a whole host of other activities, such as 'numbers and letters' (Child 2; Child 7), 'painting' (Child 3), 'doing hard shapes' (Child 4) and 'times tables' (Child 6). The range of activities that children participated in – from those that were play-based to those that were more focussed – was captured in the following extract with one boy in the class:

**Child 3:** We can play, we can go outside and play. There is this little cupboard outside and that's where the big pipes and stuff are, and we can play with them and make houses.

**Researcher:** That's interesting. Do you do anything else in Reception?

**Child 3:** We learn things like ... can you see that board all the way over there (points to a display board)?

**Researcher:** Yes.

**Child 3:** Every day we learn a letter and each letter we learn each day, we put on that board with the letters and numbers. It tells us about them.

As well as discussing the types of activities they take part in, the children also identified that they move between a number of different spaces within the learning environment. In particular, there was frequent mention of activities that took place in the woodland area, an example of which is provided in the following extract:

**Child 1:** It's interesting in the forest.

**Researcher:** Why?

**Child 1:** Because there's lots of things to do.

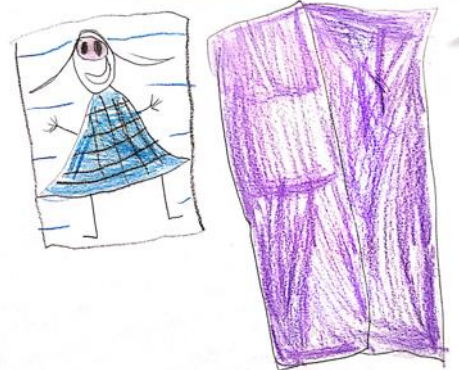
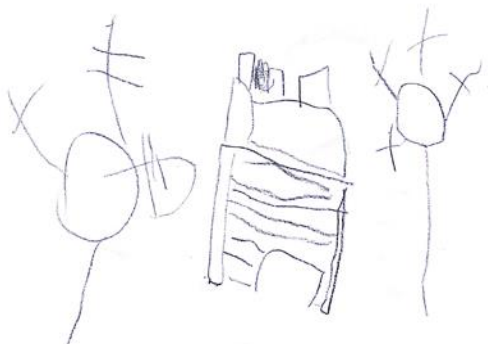
**Researcher:** Is there? Like what?

**Child 1:** Go in the castle and stuff.

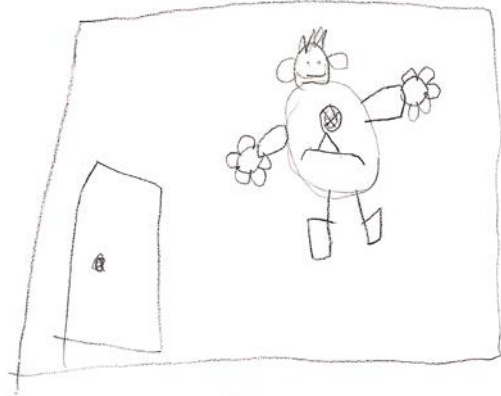
**Researcher:** Okay, I haven't seen that yet, is there anything else?

**Child 1:** There's a slide too, but we need a teacher there to lift us up.

The range of experiences and environments that children experienced in Reception was, to a great extent, supported by the variety of activities the children decided to draw. These are displayed in Figures 6.10 - 6.16 below. Three of the children opted to draw themselves participating in activities in the woodland, supporting the significance of this aspect of the learning environment.



*Figure 6.10 'Me playing in the castle in the forest' (Child 1) Figure 6.11 'Doing yoga at school' (Child 2)*



**Figure 6.12** 'Me going to assembly' (Child 3)



**Figure 6.13** 'Me learning numbers with my friends' (Child 4)



**Figure 6.14** 'Learning in the forest' (Child 5)



**Figure 6.15** 'Me painting a picture' (Child 6)



**Figure 6.16** 'Going down the slide in the forest' (Child 7)



### 6.3.1.2 Enjoyment

The seven children who took part in the interview and drawing all indicated that they enjoyed being in Reception. While this was stated explicitly (with each child answering ‘yes’ when asked whether they ‘like being in Reception’), it was also evident through each child’s description of the activities that they participate in. When articulating the aspects of Reception that they found most enjoyable, the children cited different reasons. Most children ( $n = 5$ ) identified how activities that contained weak framing were their favourite:

My favourite thing is playing with the Duplo... because you can build loads of things and there is also a giraffe in it, and you can build jungles and houses and stuff like that. (Child 1)

Playing... I like playing with my friends (Child 3)

Getting to play and draw lots of new things that I have never drawn before. (Child 5)

I like doing drawing, doing painting and getting [to do] activities that I want to do. (Child 6)

Getting to play and stuff like that... it’s exciting (Child 7)

The two other children in the sample indicated that ‘learning new things’ (Child 2) and ‘getting to have snacks’ (Child 4) were their favourite activities in Reception.

In addition to understanding what children found most enjoyable, the interview also encouraged them to reflect on aspects that they viewed less positively. Yet, to the question ‘is there anything you don’t like about Reception?’, four of the children responded by saying ‘no’ and did not identify any aspects of Reception they disliked, indicating that Reception, for them, was an overwhelmingly positive experience. When asked the same question, the other three children shared the following dislikes:

**Child 3:** Work.

**Researcher:** What is work?

**Child 3:** When you have to do something important.

**Researcher:** Okay, could you give me an example?  
**Child 3:** Well, I don't like work because it is just a bit boring because we don't get to play much.  
**Researcher:** Okay, so what would you say work is?  
**Child 3:** Like... drawing is quite nice, like writing is something boring.

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**Child 4:** I don't like that we have to learn.  
**Researcher:** Okay, why is that?  
**Child 4:** Because it's hard work and because I like playing.  
**Researcher:** Why do you like playing?  
**Child 4:** Because you don't have to do anything, just play.

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**Child 7** That it's tiny.  
**Researcher:** It's tiny?  
**Child 7:** Yes, it's only about one metre!

Clearly, these concerns raise important questions, not least relating to children's conceptualisation of terms such as 'work', 'play' and 'learning', but when situated within the 'bigger picture' of these children's experiences in Reception, they did not appear to be of such a degree that they impacted children's overall level of enjoyment. Children's enjoyment of Reception, from the perspective of their parents, will be explored further shortly.

### 6.3.2 Parents

As well as generating an understanding of parental expectations, which were identified as shaping the *performance* of teaching in Reception (see section 6.2.6), the interviews carried out in Phase One were intended to understand parent experiences and perceptions of Reception. Relating to this, two themes were generated: communication and enjoyment. The latter of these themes – enjoyment – includes a sub-theme of relationships.

#### 6.3.2.1 Communication

All parents who were interviewed in Phase One mentioned that they had regular contact with the Reception teacher; they described various avenues of

communication, including parents' evenings and updates in children's planning journals (online and physical):

We have the parents' evenings and she [Ann] always writes in her little book if something stood out that week or if something was noticeable that she's been learning better or taking things in; you know, some kind of milestones have been achieved. So, every week they are writing stuff and that helps me just read at home or chat or go and have a look. (Parent 4)

In addition to these more structured approaches, the parents commented on their daily, 'informal conversations' with the Reception teacher, which occurred most often at the beginning and end of the day when parents were taking and picking up their children respectively:

I mean she's [Ann] great. We are here every day and we chat about \*\*\*\*\* and his learning. (Parent 1)

We speak every day. I am quite fortunate that I bring him every day, I pick him up every day and we get a snapshot of the day. And we always have a chat. We get on really well. (Parent 3a)

I speak to her most days. I personally value being able to have that conversation. I don't know that it has an impact on the education, but I think it is reassuring as a parent to have that feedback. (Parent 5)

The communication between parents and Ann was also outlined as being mutual, with both parties sharing important information concerning the children. One parent, for example, suggested 'if we have got any concerns, I'll grab her' (Parent 2) while another stated that 'if there was ever anything serious, we trust her to come to us' (Parent 3b).

Regular communication between parents and the teacher, particularly the 'informal conversations' at the beginning and end of each day, was recognised as an important aspect of establishing 'Parents as Partners' in Reception. This is illustrated in Figure 6.17 below which displays an extract taken from the Oak Tree 'EYFS Policy'.

### Parents as Partners

At [ ] we recognise the importance of establishing positive relationships with parents, as highlighted by the EYFS framework. We understand that an effective partnership between school and home will have a positive impact on children's learning and development. So, practitioners endeavour to encourage the regular sharing of information about the children with parents.

We value the role of parents as children's primary educators. Through questionnaires and informal conversations at the beginning and end of the day, practitioners encourage parents to share their unique knowledge of their child, providing further insight into the child as an individual (e.g. characteristics, interests, experiences, likes, dislikes). This supports practitioners in establishing interesting and stimulating learning experiences, responding to children's needs and interests.

Parents are kept informed of what is happening in the setting through regular letters, weekly newsletters, daily planner (in Reception), Tapestry, displays in the classroom, notice boards in both Nursery and Reception and informal chatting at the beginning and end of the day. Email is also a tool used for communication when necessary. There are also opportunities for parents to support their children's learning at home by selecting books from the sharing box in Nursery to take home. Within the Reception class the parents can choose phonics games and complete the homework that has been set weekly.

Parents are also invited to get involved with school life. There are opportunities for them to help with activities such as sharing their experiences in school with the children relating to their professions or knowledge, as well as offering their particular skills (e.g. cooking, art, music) to support children's learning. Parents may be invited into the setting on other occasions such as open afternoons where children show them their work and special events including 'Show Off' in Reception, during Stay and Play sessions and the Nativity productions. As well as informal concerts where the Reception children join the main school. Parents are always welcomed into school and encouraged to discuss any concerns they might have.

*Figure 6.17 Parents as Partners policy in Reception at Oak Tree (Oak Tree EYFS Policy, 2018/19)*

#### 6.3.2.2 Enjoyment

All of the parents interviewed indicated that their child enjoyed Reception, with two parents going as far as to say that their children 'absolutely love it' (Parent 2; Parent 3b). Parents gave a number of reasons for this, suggesting that their children enjoy elements such as: the number of opportunities to play (Parent 1; Parent 5) learning languages (Parent 2; Parent 3a, 3b; Parent 4), Forest School (Parent 1; Parent 3a; Parent 4) and Show and Tell (Parent 2). To a great extent, parents saw Reception as enjoyable as it provided experiences that they believed suited their child:

I think the outdoor things and the forest school has been really enjoyable and a really important part of Reception. I think it fits in with \*\*\*\*\* and what he likes. (Parent 3a)

Well, I know she enjoys the playing activities and I think they base a lot of the learning around play. I think she likes the structure and it suits where she's at and what she's ready for. (Parent 5)

Both outdoor learning and opportunities to play were central to the expectations and values expressed by parents, which were identified as shaping the *performance* of teaching in Reception (see section 6.2.6).

Although all of the parents interviewed were positive about their child's experience, the interview asked them to reflect on whether there were any aspects of Reception that their child had not enjoyed. In response, two parents (Parent 1; Parent 5) were not able to identify any unenjoyable elements. The three remaining parents all discussed one aspect each, indicating that 'feeling like no one wants to play with her' (Parent 2), 'saying goodbye in the morning when we first started' (Parent 3a) and 'occasionally getting tired after a bad night's sleep' (Parent 4) had been unenjoyable experiences for their child in Reception.

#### *6.3.2.2.1 Relationships*

An important aspect of children's enjoyment in Reception, according to the majority of parents interviewed ( $n = 4$ ), was the relationships that they had established throughout the year. This included the development of friendships with other children in the class as well as the relationship with Ann:

The friendships he's made... he's formed some stronger friendships I think this year. He calls them his 'crew' like he has got some sort of gang (laughs). He just loves playing with the other children. I think he's quite a sociable little soul. (Parent 1)

I am sure there are many reasons [why Child 2 enjoys Reception]. Miss \*\*\*\*\* (Ann) is obviously a big part of that I'm sure. She is very positive about her. Making new friends also because she didn't go to the nursery here, so she was one of them that came in from outside. (Parent 2)

I think she really enjoys getting friendship groups. She knows them really well because there are only twelve of them so she is very contained in that. (Parent 4)

It also encompassed the relationships that the children developed with older children at the school through the 'buddy system'. Each child in Reception was

assigned a ‘buddy’ from Year Six who was responsible for supporting the children to navigate whole school break and lunchtime routines.

## Section Two: Year One at Oak Tree

All data presented in Section Two (6.4-6.6) were generated in Phase Two and Three (Year One). To distinguish between these phases, data generated in Phase Three will include the following reference: ‘Phase Three – [participant]’.

### 6.4 The *performance* of teaching in Year One

In Year One at Oak Tree there were two teachers (Julie and Kayleigh) working together with twelve children aged 5-6 years. The teachers worked alongside one another under a ‘co-teaching’ arrangement, distributing responsibilities for teaching and learning in Year One equally between them. Yet, there was an understanding, both between them and within the school, that Julie – the more experienced and senior of the two – was the pedagogical lead. As in Reception, specialist educators were responsible for teaching P.E, Music and Spanish in Year One. All children enrolled in Reception made the transition to Year One.

The themes and sub-themes generated from an analysis of the *performance* of teaching in Year One were grouped under the broad analytical categories of *frame*, *form* and *act*, as shown below in Figure 6.18.

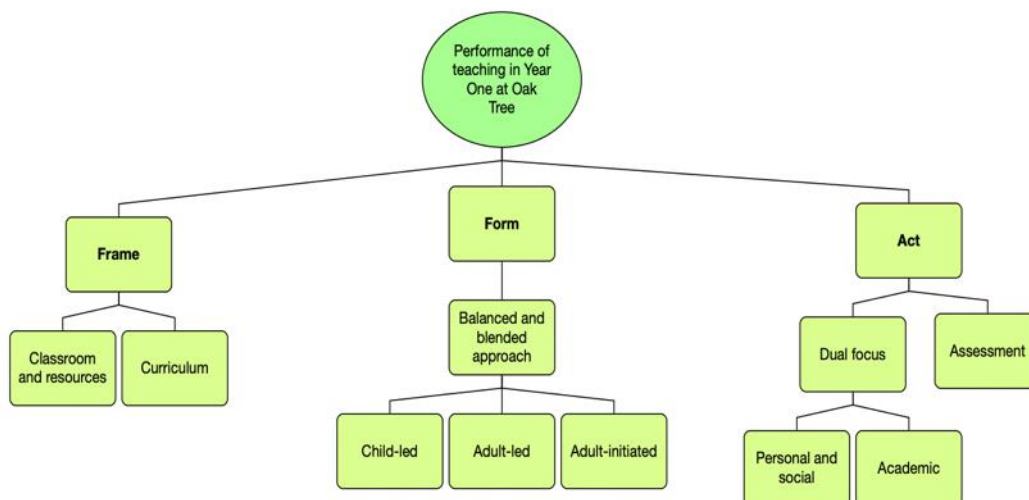
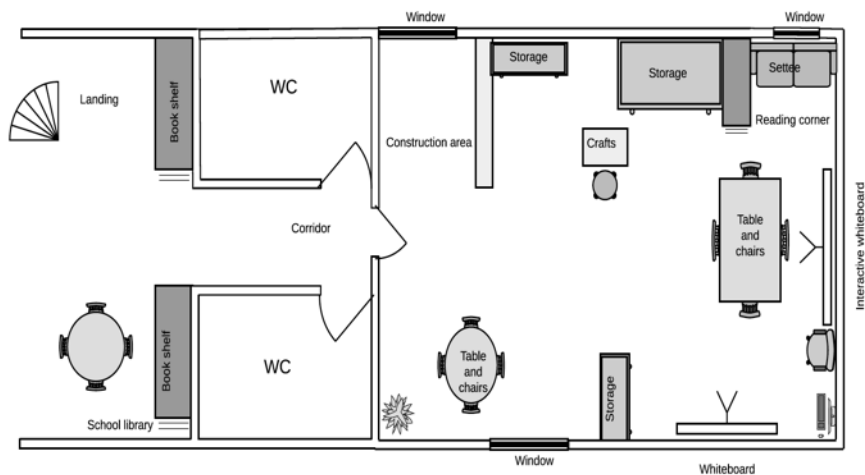


Figure 6.18 Performance of teaching in Year One at Oak Tree organised into Frame, Form and Act

## 6.4.1 Frame

### 6.4.1.1 Classroom and resources

The Year One learning environment at Oak Tree comprised an indoor classroom located upstairs in the main building. The classroom included a number of designated spaces, such as a ‘construction area’ and a ‘reading corner’. A large space was kept free in front of the manual whiteboard so that children could congregate for adult-led activities. There were two tables, each of which could seat up to six children. Children’s recent works and birthdays were celebrated and displayed on the walls of the classroom. With the classroom being located upstairs, there was no outdoor area designated for Year One, meaning that indoor and outdoor areas were strongly classified from one another. However, as with other older year groups in the school, teachers and children made regular use of the communal outdoor environments contained within the school grounds (Observations, November 2019). The organisation of the indoor classroom in Year One is depicted by the floorplan shown in Figure 6.19 and by Image 6.6 and 6.7 below.



*Figure 6.19 Floor plan of indoor learning environment in Year One at Oak Tree*



*Image 6.6 Indoor learning environment in Year One at Oak Tree*



*Image 6.7 Indoor learning environment in Year One at Oak Tree*

The indoor classroom boasted diverse resources, including natural objects taken from the woodlands and different types of wood and recycled materials. In taking influence from the ‘Curiosity Approach’, there was an emphasis on natural and sustainable materials and a number of items of furniture were handmade. There was also a concerted effort to populate the classroom with ‘open-ended’, flexible resources:

We’ve tried to use things that are more open-ended so they are using their imagination and using figures that can be anything they want them to be. You could use the same thing for lots of different activities. Is a stick a stick? It can be lots of things. (Julie)



In addition, the teachers made sure that all classroom resources were accessible to the children, with Julie stating that ‘the resources aren’t locked away in a cupboard; they are there and obvious, it’s important they know they have access to them.’.

#### 6.4.1.2 Curriculum

Daily and weekly teaching and learning activities in Year One were organised into a curriculum timetable, illustrated in Figure 6.20 below. As for Reception, the curriculum was broadly an integrated type, including contents that stood in an open relationship to one another. This was evidenced by the allocation of periods of time to activities that had largely diffuse criteria, such as ‘Motor Movers’, ‘Children’s Challenges’ and ‘Forest School’. Most clearly, however, the integrated nature of the curriculum was embodied by units of time dedicated to ‘Choosing Our Own Learning’ (‘COOL Approach’) which accounted for the majority of weekly activities. Although there was a pre-determined structure outlining when and for how long COOL took place, time within these periods was weakly classified, and children flowed between different activities, depending on their enjoyment and level of engagement. This meant that time spent on activities was continuously negotiated between teachers and children, with the quality of learning taking place often judged to be the key criterion upon which changes in focus were decided. The Year One curriculum also contained activities indicative of a collection type curriculum where contents – such as Phonics, Spanish, Music, R.E and P.E – were directed towards specific areas of learning and development.

	8.40-9.00	9.00-9.25	9.25-10.10	10.10-10.55	10.55-11.20	11.20-12.05	12.05-12.50	12.50-1.50	1.50-2.10	2.10-2.55	2.55-3.40	3.40-3.55	3.55-4.55	
Monday	Motor Movers	Singing Assembly	COOL Approach		B	Phonics/ Spellings	Spanish	L	COOL Approach	Music	Group Read	STORY	Drink & Biscuit	Club
Tuesday	Motor Movers	Children's Challenges	COOL Approach		R	Phonics	COOL Approach	U	Group Read	P.E/Forest School/ Swimming		STORY	Drink & Biscuit	Club
Wednesday	Motor Movers	Rev.	Forest School		E	Phonics	COOL Approach	N	with Yr 2 COOL Approach		STORY	Drink & Biscuit	Club	
Thursday	Motor Movers	Children's Challenges	P.E		A	<del>T</del>	Phonics	C	COOL Approach		STORY	Drink & Biscuit	Club	
Friday	Motor Movers	Celebration Assembly	Phonics	COOL Approach	K	Spanish	R.E	H	COOL Approach		STORY	Drink & Biscuit	Club	

COOL= Choosing Our Own Learning

Figure 6.20 Year One curriculum timetable at Oak Tree (n.b. names and initials have been covered to protect anonymity)

In Year One, themes were identified as ‘infiltrating the whole curriculum’ (Julie) and at the time of case study visits it was possible to discern two different, but concurrent, themes under investigation: a long-term, overarching theme and a topic theme, being explored over the course of two weeks (Observations, November 2019). The former, which centred around the concept of a ‘hook’ (Squeaky the Mouse), was introduced to the children at the start of the year:

In September, we put a hook in and saw where it went from there. It was not coming from any curriculum planning; it literally came from ‘Squeaky the Mouse’. He wrote a letter introducing himself and then the children, after receiving the letter, wrote back to him and told him all different types of things. (Julie)

The latter, which at the time of case study visits was ‘transport’, was being explored by the teachers and children through dedicated activities. These included a presentation on how transport has evolved, an activity aimed at making wheels from paper straws and painting pictures of different modes of transport (Observations, November 2019).

## 6.4.2 Form

### 6.4.2.1 Balanced and blended approach

As in Reception, the strength of framing in Year One manifested all points – child-led, adult-initiated and adult-led – of the continuum (Fisher, 2020). On some occasions it was possible to demarcate activities as being positioned at only one point of the continuum at any one time. Yet, on others, it was possible to see activities with strong, weak and negotiated forms of framing being enacted alongside one another. For example, during COOL periods, while some children could be seen pursuing their own activities (child-led), other children were completing independent ‘challenges’ (adult-initiated) or working with one of the teachers (adult-led). Like a pendulum, therefore, children moved back and forth along the continuum within each COOL session. While the analysis generated three sub-themes, representing a point of the continuum each, the blended nature of framing in Year One, particularly during COOL, meant that there were notable overlaps between these sub-themes. This complex structure is illustrated in Appendix O(2) which, using case study observations, outlines how the strength of

framing shifted between, and even within, activities in Year One during a ‘typical day’.

#### *6.4.2.1.1 Child-led*

In Year One, great emphasis was placed on giving children opportunities to lead their own learning. These moments occurred regularly throughout the day, including during transitions when, for example, children entered the classroom at the start of the day and after break and lunch (Observations, November 2019). Most notably, however, weakly framed opportunities were provided during time allocated to ‘Choosing Our Own Learning’. As the name suggests, ‘COOL’ sessions permitted children to explore the learning environment freely and engage in activities that motivated them, meaning that they enjoyed control over factors relating to selection, organisation, sequencing, pacing and criteria. During these sessions, the teachers covered a number of roles between them. Often, one of them would be working with children individually or in pairs while the other observed children in their play.

The freedom given during COOL sessions resulted in children engaging in a broad range of activities throughout the week such as symbolic and imaginative play, construction activities as well as drawing, painting and writing (Observations, November 2019). Yet, within child-led learning, there were certain permutations incorporated; an example is the daily allocation of a ‘budget’ to purchase classroom resources:

Children are given a 10p daily allowance during COOL. They can spend it on resources around the classroom. For instance, to enter the kitchen area, it costs 3p. The children place the money in the pot (sometimes needing change) and write the sum in their personal ‘Money Book’. (Observations, November 2019)

The concept of a budget not only supported children’s understanding of money but also required them to think carefully about the areas of the classroom they wanted to explore.

#### *6.4.2.1.2 Adult-led*

In Year One, weakly framed, child-led opportunities were balanced against the inclusion of activities that contained much stronger framing, where teachers maintained control over selection, organisation, sequencing, pacing and criteria. Over the course of the week, these activities varied in terms of how and where they took place. The teachers employed a number of different strategies – such as direct instruction, modelling, questioning and discussion – and made use of a number of the learning environments included in the school grounds (Observations, November 2019). In some instances, sessions included a number of different strategies and locations:

The children watch a ten-minute video on the interactive whiteboard focussing on three different diagraphs ('th', 'ch', 'sh'). Then, the teachers put three whiteboards (with each diagraph on) at different ends of the playground. The teachers said a number of sentences (exaggerating certain words: 'thank you', 'chips' and 'shop') and the children ran to the whiteboard that they thought included the sound. (Observations, November 2019)

Activities also varied in terms of who was involved and when. In some instances, adult-led approaches involved the whole class:

Julie takes the children to the pond to explore the autumnal changes to the environment. In particular, the children are asked to search for different types of fungi. (Observations, November 2019)

On other occasions, teachers required children to work with them on tasks and activities individually, in pairs and/or in small groups:

During COOL, Julie asks pairs of children to join her to look at three different poems. The children are asked to underline the words in poems that rhyme and then write a sentence describing which of the poems is their favourite and why. (Observations, November 2019)

#### *6.4.2.1.3 Adult-initiated*

As in Reception, teachers initiated ‘challenges’ for the children to complete during COOL periods. For the week of case study visits, the teachers designed three ‘challenges’:

**Challenge One:** Create a portrait using the Autumn leaves and vegetables provided.

**Challenge Two:** Using the cards provided, can you pair together all of the words that rhyme?

**Challenge Three:** Using the number socks 1-30, can you put them in order? Can you then count in patterns of 2s (odd and even), 5s and 10s? (Observations, November 2019)

These challenges negotiated control between adults and children, with selection, criteria and organisation (albeit to a lesser extent) stipulated by the former. However, sequencing and pace rested firmly with the latter as, after each challenge was introduced, explained and demonstrated by the teachers at the beginning of the week, the children were given the rest of the week to complete them.

The teachers monitored children’s participation at certain points throughout the week, a process called the ‘Challenge Checker’. For each challenge completed, the children were given additional funds to add to their ‘budget’. The process of bringing children together to assess whether they had completed the challenges, and if so, to collect their reward, appeared to increase children’s motivation to complete the challenges, as evidenced in the following extract recorded during case study observations (November 2019):

**Child 7:** I haven’t done mine. Can I do mine now because I haven’t done one?

**Julie:** Not yet but it’s only Tuesday. There’s lots of time for your artistic flair to come out. We will check the challenges again tomorrow.

**Child 7:** I’m going to do them before tomorrow.

### 6.4.3 Act

#### 6.4.3.1 Dual focus

The focus of teaching and learning in Year One was broad and it was possible to see that the teachers pursued an agenda that was both social and academic. This focus was reflected in the two sub-themes that were generated from the data.

##### *6.4.3.1.1 Personal and social*

In Year One, there was a clear focus on supporting children's personal and social development. Julie and Kayleigh both made this focus explicit stating that 'independence and social skills are very high on the agenda' and that 'we are very big on social skills' respectively. In many respects, these broad areas of development were fostered during weakly classified activities as it was through these that children could exercise agency and regulate their own behaviours. For example, COOL periods and Forest School sessions encouraged children to balance their own interests and motivations with those of others, providing the context for cooperation, negotiation and compromise:

Children are put into four groups of three and assigned different roles (group leader, deputy leader, assistant). Using resources from within the woodland, the groups are given 30 minutes and challenged to build a high structure that can support the weight of an egg, with the highest structure that can do so being the winner. (Observations, June 2019).

During the week of case study visits, weakly framed activities occurred frequently and while they were enacted with intentionality, aimed at supporting children's personal and social development, such aims were not necessarily obvious to the children, who were motivated by acting on their inclinations to explore and investigate alongside their peers. This dynamic is indicative of an invisible pedagogy.

##### *6.4.3.1.2 Academic*

The emphasis on personal and social development was balanced against activities that were directed towards the advancement of children's academic knowledge and

understanding. These activities tended to include a high level of specificity, focussing on subject-specific concepts such as letters, sounds and rhyming (phonics), doubling and sharing (maths), poems (English), balancing (P.E), tempo and rhythm (music) and numbers 1-20 (Spanish) (Observations, November 2019). While a selection of these concepts – rhyming (phonics) and number patterns (maths) – were reiterated and extended through the adult-initiated ‘challenges’, these areas were mainly delivered using a strongly framed approach:

The teachers introduced odd and even numbers (1-20) to the children. The children then practise with a partner and take it in turn to count to 20 (one child even, one child odd). Using puppets, the teachers ask the children a range of questions (i.e. “can we share 9 puppets between 2 people?”). The children then work out which numbers 1-20 can be shared equally. (Observations, November 2019)

The use of explicit – but often still playful – modes of transmission to focus on certain criteria within subject-specific areas meant that the Year One and subject-specialist teachers often operated with a visible pedagogy to develop academic competencies.

#### 6.4.3.2 Assessment

A range of approaches to assessment were carried out in Year One. Julie outlined how their approach was largely ‘diagnostic’, helping her and Kayleigh to plan future activities. This placed great emphasis on weakly classified assessment procedures; in particular, observations of children’s participation in child-led, adult-initiated and adult-led activities. All insights developed from these activities were documented manually – using ‘Post-It!’ notes – and were recorded on children’s individual files. In each child’s file (which the researcher was allowed access to), a range of information from observations was collated including details related to broad areas of learning and development, such as children’s language and communication, and more specific areas, such as each child’s letter and number formation.

Although great emphasis was placed on observations in Year One, teachers also implemented assessments that contained stronger classification. For instance, every



two weeks, teachers would listen to children read independently with a view to recording their progression throughout the year. The children were also required to participate in a weekly spelling test:

The teachers go through 7 words (his, but, with, all, are, zip, zag) with the children. Following this, children are given immediate feedback and, if necessary, required to write the correct spelling out again. The children are then given the spellings they need to learn for next week. (Observations, November 2019)

These summative methods were included in each child’s file and triangulated against the teachers’ observations.

### 6.5 Pedagogical *discourse* in Year One

Different themes were generated from the activity systems analysis and identified as shaping the *performance* of teaching in Year One. These themes, and the elements of the activity system within which they are located, are identified in Figure 6.21 below. Five of the themes will be presented in detail with the remaining themes summarised in Table 6.2 at the end of the section.

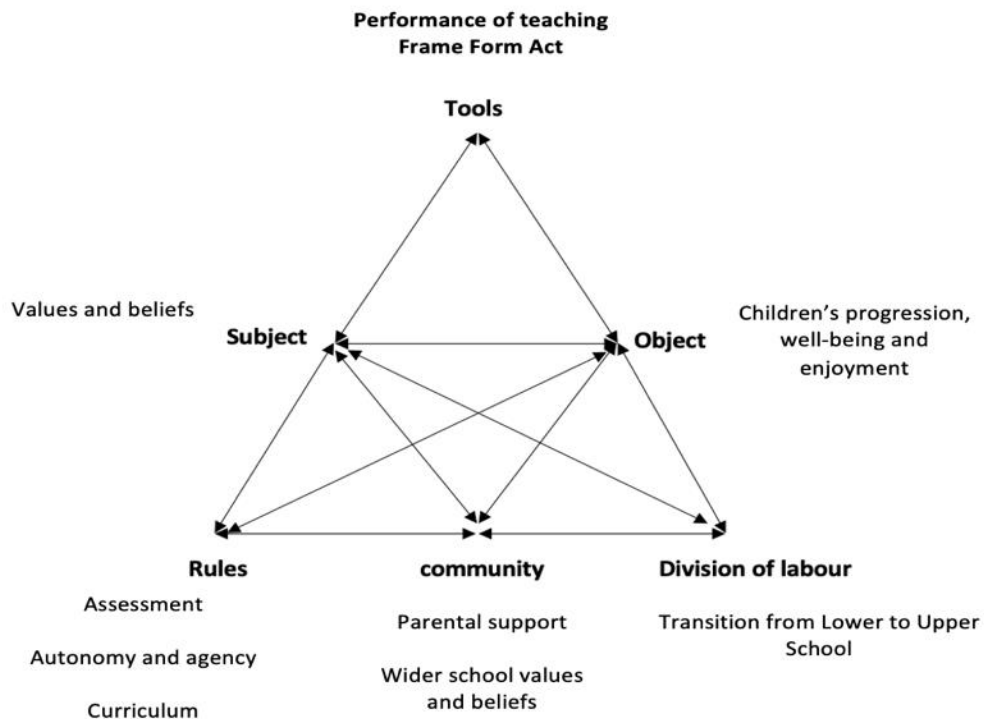


Figure 6.21 Pedagogical discourse in Year One at Oak Tree represented as an activity system

### 6.5.1 Values and beliefs (subject)

The values and beliefs held by the teachers (Julie and Kayleigh) appeared to have a significant influence on the approach to teaching and learning enacted in Year One. Julie, a Qualified Teacher (QT) and Level Three Forest School practitioner, was in her twelfth year of teaching, half of which were in the state-sector and the other half at Oak Tree. She was described by the headteacher (Maria) as ‘very outdoorsy’ and ‘very much play-based’. Julie was supported by and taught alongside Kayleigh, who, although in her ninth year of teaching, did not hold QT Status and had only taught in the independent-sector.

Julie and Kayleigh had a strong working relationship and shared a number of common values. For instance, when invited to discuss their beliefs about how Year One children learn best, both espoused similar views:

Well, without a doubt through play. That’s got to be number one. It has got to be through play, hands on activities that they have got chance to revisit anything that you have looked at. It’s so important to bring learning to life; it needs to be meaningful and purposeful and catered to each child’s needs. And to allow it to be open-ended, you are going to get far more creative results from it... these activities have ‘stick-ability’, it’s there, it’s a memory, it’s planted. (Julie)

I feel strongly that it’s important to give children open-ended learning opportunities as I believe it enables and encourages independent thinking without suggesting that a certain way/thought is the ‘right’ one. A child’s mind is a curious, creative one and with the right guidance (through an open-ended learning opportunity), a child is allowed to experiment, discover, fail and succeed which I believe are all important in child development. (Phase Three – Kayleigh)

These views bear all of the hallmarks of a competence-based pedagogy, including references to ‘play’, ‘experimentation’ and ‘discovery’ and alluding to notions such as the unique child and choice. Clearly, the importance of providing children with open-ended experiences was particularly valued by both teachers and this was a concept discussed in more detail by Julie:

It's that imagination and them thinking and making connections themselves. It's stretching them in different ways and not always being the same...You want something drawing and you're saying "no, it needs to be like this, it must look like this". That's being prescriptive, that's limiting the child and closing them off. They need to have spirit and a bit of fire and think "I want to do it like this". Otherwise, they will be like sheep. (Julie)

In their endorsement of open-ended activities, both Julie and Kayleigh reiterated the importance of being sensitive towards and respecting the direction of children's activities. Julie, for example, indicated that she is always mindful of how her involvement could 'interrupt' and 'stop and spoil the flow' of children's self-directed learning. Kayleigh discussed a similar point:

Interrupting is not always the best thing to do. So where possible, and it's not always possible, but we try not to stop. So, if there is a really nice game or episode going on we try not to stop stuff like that to bring a child away to do something else (Kayleigh)

Julie and Kayleigh did discuss, however, that these freedoms needed to be 'balanced' against their own intentions for children's learning and development. For example, Kayleigh stated how 'there is definitely intention behind every single thing we do' and while this involved 'manning the environment closely' (Kayleigh), it also related to the role of 'challenges' in Year One, as discussed by Julie:

If they are completely free you can see that some of them will revert to certain things and they will stick to it. So, again it's about hooking them in and having something that you are guiding them towards because you want them to be involved in particular activities. It's about getting them outside their comfort zones to try something else. (Julie)

For Julie and Kayleigh, challenges appeared to strike an intricate balance between keeping activities 'open-ended' while at the same time 'guiding' children to engage with important areas of learning and development.

Consistent with the views expressed by Ann (Reception teacher) in Phase One, both Julie and Kayleigh also stressed that the processes of learning are more important

than the outcome. While both teachers made this point, it was Julie who spoke at length about why this distinction is important:

A lot of children have a fear of getting it wrong. So, the ethos for me in the classroom is have a go. Yes, there might be a product, there might not be, but it is how they have gone through that process. The process of getting to that point is more important, that's where the better learning is. (Julie)

Julie seemed to indicate that assessing children through observations – a key assessment tool in Year One – supported a focus on the processes of learning.

### 6.5.2 Curriculum (rules)

The introduction of the new Lower School curriculum at Oak Tree had a significant influence on the *performance* of teaching in Year One. As its initial implementation coincided with case study visits in Phase Two, the Lower School curriculum was an important focus in the interviews carried out with Julie, Kayleigh and Maria.

The move away from the previous curriculum, which ‘was very sit down, very chalk and talk’ (Maria) and ‘based heavily’ on the Key Stage One National Curriculum (Julie), marked a significant change in direction and led to what Julie described as a ‘radical change’ in teaching and learning in Year One. The new curriculum was seen as an important step in establishing greater continuity and achieving what Maria referred to as ‘the seamlessness of learning from physically doing that they [children] had in Reception.’ However, the educators did indicate that they still ‘dip in and out’ of (Julie), and ‘don’t miss anything out’ from (Maria), the National Curriculum. Speaking about this dynamic, Maria suggested:

The structure is different and the areas of learning are different but actually if you really sat down and went through it [National Curriculum] as we have, we don’t miss anything out. But anything that was woolly we have made more detailed but without being too prescriptive that you feel that you haven’t got any flexibility... The fact that if you wanted to focus on one thing for longer you can do that. You’re not having to tick boxes all of the time. The coverage will still be there, but we can say we need to go deeper with this or we need to expand this. It’s in a different way, it’s not so regimented,

it's much more creative and lets the children decide where they want to take it. (Maria)

From the discussions with the educators and the sharing of documentation, it was possible to understand more about the way in which the Lower School curriculum had been conceived, designed and structured. The curriculum was a product of the decision to integrate the 'Early Years' and 'Lower School' phases at Oak Tree. According to Maria, the process of reforming these phases had 'been developing over the last four years' but was formalised for the 2019/20 academic year. Although herself a key driver of the reforms, Maria suggested that the vision for the extended phase required 'all stakeholders working together' and that all of the teachers were involved in 're-writing the curriculum as a team.' This involved collaboration and dialogue between teachers working across the Lower School, particularly during the 2019 summer break:

This summer we [Lower School educators] worked really, really closely together. We discuss and plan together and are getting very good at doing that. The idea is that we will work together and we will have the same themes running across the Lower School. So, the theme from nursery to Year Two has been 'changes' and we all work together on that and share ideas. (Julie)

Further to this, the school also consulted with external professionals including their Local Authority contact – who offered guidance on 'being exempt' (Maria) from the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum framework (Department for Education, 2017a) – and an experienced Early Years researcher and consultant – who visited the school on a number of occasions to deliver training. The influence of the latter was discussed in detail by Kayleigh:

Having \*\*\* \*\*\*\*\* (Early Years researcher and consultant) come in and work with us to implement something that would suit the earliest ages to the end of Key Stage One was key. It reassured us that actually we can do this, that it is possible, and they do make progress. (Kayleigh)

Parents too were consulted about the decision to integrate the two phases and the focus of the curriculum. They were provided with opportunities to attend a parent

forum and complete a short, open-ended questionnaire expressing their views. Parental perceptions on the approach to teaching and learning enacted in Year One are explored further in section 6.5.6.

In Phase Two, all educators stated how the curriculum was based on eight areas of learning and these were outlined in the Early Years and Lower School (EYLS) section of the Oak Tree Curriculum Policy (2019/20), illustrated in Figure 6.22 below. As can be seen from Figure 6.22, these areas were largely integrated and implemented thematically.

### **Organisation of the Curriculum**

For the purposes of curriculum delivery, the School is divided into two areas: Early Years & Lower School (Nursery -Year 2) and Upper School (Year 3-6)

#### **EYLS**

In EYs and Lower School (Nursery – Year 2), the children are taught through themes with a variety of cross-curricular links. The programme of activities reflects pupils’ needs, focusing on our children’s ages and stages of development. The children are also encouraged to make relationships, work together and learn to take turns and share, linked to our whole school ethos of respect.

The curriculum covers the following areas of learning:

- Health, Safety, Personal, Social and Emotional Development
- Physical Development
- Communication (Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening, Drama) World Languages, Citizenship and Universal Understanding
- Mathematical Development
- Scientific Development
- History and Geography
- Digital Learning
- Creativity, Art and Design

In addition, specialist teaching is provided in PE, Music, forest school, Spanish in Year Reception and Years 1 and 2 and also Art in Year 2.

The Head of Early Years is responsible for the development and implementation of schemes of work in Nursery classes except where the lessons are delivered by a subject specialist in which case it is that person’s responsibility. In Reception and Years 1 and 2 the class teacher is responsible for the development and implementation of schemes of work in classes except where the lessons are delivered by a subject specialist in which case it is that person’s responsibility.

*Figure 6.22 Organisation of the Lower School curriculum at Oak Tree (Oak Tree Curriculum Policy 2019/20)*

For each area of learning within the curriculum, educators working within the Lower School (nursery to Year Two) contributed to and collaborated on a progression document that outlined the types of knowledge, skills and dispositions appropriate for each year group (the example for Communication, World Language, Citizenship and Universal Understanding is included in appendix P). When asked about this document, Maria revealed how it was modelled on the non-statutory

‘Development Matters’ guidance that supports the delivery of the EYFS. She made a point of stressing, however, that the indicators are not a ‘pure science’ but instead are intended to ‘show how children’s knowledge and understanding develop over the course of the age range’ (Maria).

The integrated nature of the curriculum encompassed a great deal of flexibility for Julie and Kayleigh. This was exemplified by the move towards what they both referred to as ‘in the moment planning’, an approach which keeps teaching and learning activities open-ended and responsive to children’s interests, engagement and enjoyment. With the exception of phonics and subject-specialist areas, the remaining areas of the curriculum were negotiated between adults and children:

We have tried to go for more of in the moment planning. We have obviously got to follow the planning for phonics so there are no gaps. But for our actual literacy, numeracy, topic work it all comes from the hook and then we see where it will go from there. It’s all based around ‘Squeaky the Mouse’. (Julie)

We did our planning around the Mouse and just seeing where it leads us really and where the children lead us. They have responded so well to it, and we have got loads of work out of it. (Kayleigh)

This way of working meant that teaching and learning activities were somewhat opportunistic and able to capitalise on developments that occurred naturally throughout the day:

I think because if something happens and it’s about “oh, hold on a minute let’s have a look at this, come on let’s have a look at this”. Or we could be outside ...[and] someone has found something, “let’s go and have a look.” (Julie)

### 6.5.3 Autonomy and agency (rules)

The ability to move away from statutory curriculum and assessment requirements, and the Year One teachers’ agency over decisions related to teaching and learning, were also generated as having a considerable influence in shaping the *performance* of teaching in Year One.

Exercising the freedoms granted to independent schools was instrumental in the design and implementation of the Lower School Curriculum at Oak Tree. In many ways, the new curriculum was a solution to the problems presented by what the teachers saw as a lack of alignment between the EYFS and National Curriculum and the overly formal nature of the KS1 programmes for study:

I thought “okay alright, what’s the issue here? What’s happening?”, “Why are we sticking to this when we don’t need to?” Well fortunately I am not in the state-sector so let’s do our own that’s absolutely right for the children to make sure they are making progress in all of the areas with no gaps and that it’s seamless. Otherwise, what’s the point in being independent? And how fortunate because if I was in a school where I couldn’t do that, I would be hitting my head against a brick wall. (Maria)

Related to this, Maria reiterated that Oak Tree was formed, in part, as a desire to move away from policies that, in her view, did not foreground children’s learning and development:

I hate red tape. That is why we established the school. I like to do what is right for each child, right there and right then. Without jumping through a load of hoops. I know this is right for the children and not because some framework says we have got to do that. Government red tape gets in the way of that. If you think about SATs results and league tables; that’s not about the child. It’s about the school being better in the league tables. (Maria)

In her interview, Julie shared a perspective similar to that of Maria, indicating that government ‘red tape’, in particular SATs, have the potential to shift the focus of teaching away from children:

The SATs I detest with all my heart. I have seen it in Year Two but more in Year Six. Children are just taught to the test to pass that for the benefit of the school. There is no benefit for the child in any way, shape, or form. It’s all government red tape; done for statistics to see how each school is doing in each LEA (Local Education Authority). Our teaching is about the children, not about the tests and the school. (Julie)

Not having to comply with statutory requirements was seen by both Maria and Julie as having a significant impact on the type of approach to teaching and learning that



could be implemented in Year One. Maria, for example, stated how ‘having the autonomy makes a huge difference’ as it enables the Year One teachers ‘to teach how they want to teach’ (Maria).

Although Maria played a pivotal role in establishing the nature of children’s experiences in Year One, how the teachers organised teaching and learning was, to a great extent, at their discretion. This was the same in all year groups:

Maria lets us all be individuals, so we all teach in a different way. It’s not that it’s prescribed, and we have all got to teach in a particular manner. Because I think if you have gone around the teachers, you will see that they all do it very differently. (Julie)

As well as a high level of agency, there appeared to be a strong working relationship between school leaders and the Year One teachers based on ‘trust’ and an ‘open-door policy’:

I don’t feel like someone is over my shoulder and watching how I am doing it and getting me to justify. It’s an open-door policy for the staff as well so Maria will pop in at any point and it’s quite relaxed. (Julie)

Ultimately, these structures gave Julie and Kayleigh a high level of control over teaching and learning, evidenced by Julie indicating that ‘everything I do, I do it because I feel it is best for the children’. When speaking about how Julie and Kayleigh were finding this new approach, Maria stated how ‘they’re loving it. I think they feel like it’s shackles off and freedom’.

#### 6.5.4 Wider school values and beliefs (community)

As in Reception, the values and beliefs of the community, particularly those of the leadership, were generated as influencing the *performance* of teaching in Year One. Although the creation of the Lower School phase at Oak Tree was recognised as ‘very much a team effort’ (Maria), Maria’s involvement was identified as integral; she was positioned as spearheading curriculum reform which extended competence-based principles until the end of Year Two. The interview carried out

with her during Phase Two presented an opportunity to explore the school's ethos and provided further insight into how this shapes teaching and learning in Year One:

I wanted to get away from this sitting down textbook type. It's giving them wings of their own. I want them to absolutely love learning and for them to feel confident in themselves, to be challenged when they are ready to be challenged but be supported when they need that. And feeling safe enough that they know if it goes wrong it doesn't matter. I don't want them to be spoon fed. I want them to explore and discover even more so that they start to plan what they are going to do themselves. Using the resources and equipment themselves. Understanding the value of the resources and the value of each other, and learning from each other, not just the teachers. (Maria)

A number of the aspects alluded to by Maria – particularly those related to independence, 'having a go' and peer learning – were explicit in the approach to teaching and learning enacted in Year One.

As part of the new approach Maria, along with other members of the Lower School team, designed the Oak Tree Lower School 'Code of Conduct' that was designed to guide the actions and behaviours of both adults (teachers and parents) and children. The Code of Conduct, shown below in Figure 6.23, was introduced in addition to the school's 'learning habits' and was displayed throughout the school, including at the entrance to the Year One classroom.



Figure 6.23 Lower School 'Code of Conduct' at Oak Tree 2019/20

### 6.5.5 Children's progression, well-being and enjoyment (object)

The progress children made – both academic and social – and their enjoyment levels appeared to support and endorse the approach to teaching and learning being enacted in Year One. In the interviews carried out with educators at Oak Tree during Phase Two, it was possible to discern that the move to a new curriculum, although exciting and empowering, was associated with certain pressures:

We want to achieve, we want it to work. It's taking a risk because we are doing something that hasn't been done here like that. (Julie)

Well, it's new and we didn't know the effect that it was going to have on them. We have got to show that it's working... the pressure has been massive. (Kayleigh)

It has changed so much and because it's new, we're not going to get it right straight away. It's going to develop as we get better and better. All that we want to do is make sure that it is right for the children and their progress. (Maria)

However, despite these apprehensions, the insights developed from interviews appeared to indicate that children were responding well to this way of working, both in terms of their development and enjoyment. This was evidenced from the initial insights developed from Phase Two and strengthened further by the perceptions of Kayleigh, generated in Phase Three.

At the time of case study visits in Phase Two, the teachers had delivered the new curriculum for one half-term (six weeks) and – despite still being in its infancy – the teachers' initial impressions appeared to be extremely positive:

I feel that the children are achieving more already and I think that is because we are able to spend more individual time with them. You can work in smaller groups; you can speak to them on an individual basis. The learning is individualised. I feel like this [approach] is all for the children and it gets the best out of their learning and they're happy and engaged. (Julie)

So far, I know it's early days, but I think although it was a risk it has been one that is paying off. You know, just in terms of looking at the

children now from when they first came to us, to where they're at now, in a term. There are massive, massive steps in that. I think there is definitely progress with lots of hands-on learning, lots of practical ways of learning. It works. They love coming to school in the morning. (Kayleigh)

This was supported by Maria who, although not involved in the class on a day-to-day basis, made the following observation:

It's worked brilliantly... far better than I could have imagined it to be. They just seem very relaxed and confident. It's so real every day and you can adapt to what is happening. You can be much more flexible with your approach. (Maria)

The positive reactions from children, both in terms of perceived progression and enjoyment (see section 6.6.1.2 for children's enjoyment of Year One), appeared to provide reassurance and affirmation to this way of working in Year One.

The positive impact of the new approach to teaching and learning on children's progress and enjoyment prompted Julie, Kayleigh and Maria to reflect on how it would have also suited previous year groups. This was particularly the case for the cohort of children now in Year Two who, according to Julie, experienced a 'more formal' approach where 'play was an add-on; it wasn't during the learning'. In reference to the previous cohort, the teachers all suggested how that group of children in particular would have benefitted from the approach currently being enacted in Year One. This collective view was, to a great extent, summarised in the following quote:

Last year it was the biggest jump ever. It was massive and that cohort of children didn't respond well to that, they struggled massively. I just think the set-up that we have got now would have been really beneficial for them to do more hands-on learning instead of sitting at the desk for a huge chunk of the day. (Kayleigh)

Kayleigh went on to indicate that because the new approach to teaching and learning was working so well, she viewed their old approach with a sense of regret, remarking that 'you sort of feel like you have done a disservice to that year group because we didn't do it a year earlier.' (Kayleigh).

Although Kayleigh was the only educator to take part in the online interview in Phase Three, her response indicated that the initial positivity with which the new approach to teaching and learning had been perceived in Phase Two had remained:

This curriculum has worked really well so far, and I hope that we don't ever go back to formal learning at this age. Our parents give us regular feedback, for example they will say "X really loves it in this class" and "X says he never wants to leave". We have had some recent feedback from a parent saying their child is becoming worried due to possible long-term school closure and "never being in the Year 1 class again". This shows us the children are enjoying their school journey with us and assessment results are proving that our new curriculum has been successful so far. (Phase Three – Kayleigh)

#### 6.5.6 Additional themes

In addition to the themes explored in detail, three additional themes were generated from analysis and recognised as influencing the *performance* of teaching in Reception. A short description of these themes along with supporting interview quotes is provided in Table 6.2 below.

Table 6.2 Additional themes generated from the activity systems analysis of pedagogical discourse in Year One

Theme	Description	Examples
Parental support (community)	Although some parents were identified as being sceptical at first, the support from parents in Year One appeared to influence the <i>performance</i> of teaching. In Phase Two and Three, parents appeared to be in full support of the decision to introduce competence-based principles in Year One. This was confirmed in the interviews with parents as well as with Kayleigh and Maria.	<p><b>Kayleigh</b> “The support from them [parents] has been unbelievable really.”</p> <p><b>Maria</b> “The parents have been really involved with the process. I think that has made it so much better.”</p> <p><b>Parent 1</b> “I think as long as a child is happy and enjoying it, they must be hitting the right level. But certainly ***** is happy and I think he is getting a really nice balance of play versus learning. It’s quite nice to keep it like this so they can just have a bit more freedom.”</p> <p><b>Parent 2</b> “I like the method of learning from what I have seen so far, absolutely. I prefer that they are still taking the learning through play approach.”</p> <p><b>Parent 4</b> “For me it’s good, I don’t want too much structure. ***** has already got it naturally, she wants to know the structures, so we go with that but I don’t want too much structure too early, I think space for creativity is much better, to find themselves and then bring the structure in, because if it comes before then you become too compliant, you don’t question things in a way that they need to be.”</p> <p><b>Parent 5</b> “Yes, I think we are pretty happy with it. I think ***** feels like she’s keen to learn stuff. I think she’s one of those people who likes to have that feeling of learning. So, I think although the playful elements of it are necessary and helps to develop them socially and their friendship groups and how to interact with one another, she also does like knowing that she is learning stuff. So, taking that time aside and doing maths for maths’s sake. I think she quite likes that as she identifies that as learning.”</p> <p><b>Kayleigh (Phase Three)</b> “The only challenge I can think of was in the beginning when we had to convince some of the parents that this would work, and it wasn’t just ‘playing’. But the feedback we have been given has been nothing but positive. It is really working for the children, parents and for us.”</p> <p><b>Parent(s) 3a (Phase Three)</b> “Most definitely, we are confident that if anything wasn’t suited to ***** then the teachers would be aware of this and adapt to his needs / level. Most importantly ***** enjoys it, and to us it always seems to be pitched at the right level for him.”</p>
	It became clear that another important reason for extending competence-based principles until the end of Year Two (age 7) was the transition from	<p><b>Maria</b> “There is a gear shift when they move to Year Three and the format of Year One and Two used to be with the previous teacher very regimented and the children had great results. What we found, and this is why it has been an action for us, when they came into Year Three, where they are moving around [going to different lessons] and are much more independent and responsible, they were so used to being spoon-fed they didn’t have that independent learning of</p>

<p>Transition from Lower to Upper School (division of labour)</p>	<p>Lower School (Year Two) to Upper School (Year Three). In particular, Maria (headteacher) indicated how previous children moving to Year Three found the transition hard and she attributed this to the children lacking certain skills, abilities and dispositions; namely, ‘independence’, ‘creativity’ and ‘discovery’. Clearly, the desire for children to develop these skills supported the approach to teaching and learning being enacted in Year One.</p>	<p>discovery or explanation themselves, or investigating, estimating, or anything. They all thought it was so black and white. And so that is something we have really tried to move away from so that they feel confident in learning and how to have imagination and creativity themselves. There is no right or wrong answer, it doesn’t have to be one-way.”</p> <p>“They were achieving really well at the end of Key Stage One but there was a significant dip in Year Three and that certainly wasn’t quality of teaching. It was the style of teaching in that it was very spoon-fed whereas I always think you can be a real hard worker, your work can be really, really neat, you can listen you can take the facts in and do really, really well. But if don’t know how to go about something or how to apply what you have learnt to a problem, you can come unstuck. And for us in Year Three, Four, Five and Six it’s what you know and how do you apply that to this problem. It’s all about application... not compliance and copying.”</p> <p>“They need to have that independence, be able to problem solve and reason themselves. And also know that part of that process is, we do a lot of work on this, is that you are going to fail a huge amount of times and that the most successful people in the world are fantastic failures. They have failed, and they have failed, and they have failed.</p>
<p>Assessment (rules)</p>	<p>The assessments carried out supported the approach to teaching and learning in Year One. Placing high emphasis on observations meant that Julie and Kayleigh felt that they knew the children extremely well. They indicated how observational assessments gave them much more insight into (‘handle on’) children’s learning and development in comparison to summative assessments, of which were more prominent in previous years. Assessment was also flexible around the needs of the children and focussed on what was present in children’s learning. Not having to complete the Phonics Screening Check and participate in SATs also played a significant role.</p>	<p><b>Julie</b></p> <p>“It’s so much better, we have a better handle on the children...just because we are involved with them day-to-day. You are looking, you are listening to what they are saying, you are going around listening. Observing their language actually tells you if they have fully understood something and that they have got it. Listening to that language, you know they have got full understanding of that subject.”</p> <p>“The Phonics Screen Check for a start... it puts children on a stressful wicket there. It doesn’t make sense; some are not real words. They are probably thinking ‘why are you trying to get me to read a word that doesn’t make any sense?’. So, we are lucky we don’t have to do that. I would rather do it with the real words and see. And you can do that without sitting down and doing that test.”</p> <p><b>Kayleigh</b></p> <p>“Definitely, I think last year we didn’t have half a handle on each child that we have got now. You just feel like you know each child inside out, you know what strengths they have got, where they need to work, what ticks them, what helps and encourages them and what switches them off. And it is just finding that route of getting them to learn in a way that they feel comfortable.”</p> <p>“It makes a big difference. If you are able to record how a child is doing without putting them under that stress [of a test] is a bonus. So, if you are doing it properly, if you are doing it well, why put them through that when they don’t need to?”</p> <p><b>Maria</b></p> <p>“So, assessment is really important for us for progress obviously. [But] It is not about sitting down doing tests for test’s sake and we don’t do any SATS. But the assessment is just informing, ‘What do we need to do next?’, ‘What can the parents work on with us?’, because we can’t do it all here. It has got to be all stakeholders working together.”</p>

## 6.6. Child and parent experiences and perceptions of Year One

### 6.6.1 Children

From an analysis of children's experiences and perceptions of Year One, two themes were generated: balance of opportunities and experiences and enjoyment.

#### 6.6.1.1. Balance of opportunities and experiences

In the interviews carried out in Phase Two, the children alluded to a range of different opportunities and experiences in Year One. In many ways, the balance of activities that children described was similar to what they experienced in Reception. This was evidenced by a number of the children – when asked about the 'types of things' they do in Year One – making reference to both 'play' and specific areas of learning:

We like do learning, like maths and spellings, and like writing. We do P.E and other sports like that... and we can play with the Lego; with the cars; and the wooden bricks and things; and the pipes and tubes. (Child 1)

I learn sums and numbers, and drawing... and we choose. We go in little areas and then I tell \*\*\*\*\* or he tells me and we all have a chat together about what we would like to play together, and what we want to play. (Child 3)

We do lots of stuff and lots of lessons. We get to play with brand new cars and we get to go into the kitchen area and into the home area, then you can go to the construction area. (Child 7)

One child spoke in more detail about the relationship between play and more specific areas of learning and indicated how she believed that the former is intended to ensure children do not get 'bored' of taking part in the latter. This is illustrated in the following extract:



- Child 2:** We have a free play and it's just so we don't have to get bored all the way through when we are doing maths or learning, or writing, or practising our letters.
- Researcher:** Can those things get a bit boring sometimes?
- Child 2:** I could get a bit bored.
- Researcher:** ... and you said there that it's free play. What does that mean?
- Child 2:** That we get to choose whatever we want.
- Researcher:** Is that a good thing?
- Child 2:** Yes.
- Researcher:** Why?
- Child 2:** Because then you can do whatever you want.
- Researcher:** What do you normally choose?
- Child 2:** I usually choose the home area because then I just get to play mums and dads.

The balance between weakly framed play opportunities and more specific activities containing stronger framing was evident across the drawings that children produced in Year One, which are displayed in Figures 6.24 - 6.30 below. These drawings could be seen to span the whole length of the child- to adult-led points of the continuum (Fisher, 2020), depicting child-led (e.g. 'Playing with \*\*\*\*\* (friend)', Child 7), adult-initiated (e.g. 'Me making a pumpkin', Child 4) and adult-led activities (e.g. 'Me doing maths with Mrs \*\*\*\*\*', Child 2).

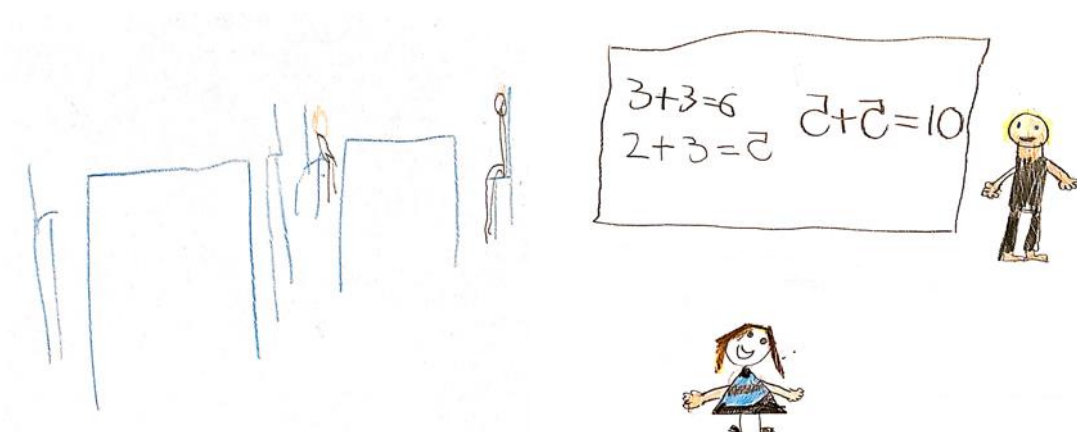


Figure 6.24 'Me and my teacher sitting down' (Child 1) Figure 6.25 'Me doing maths with Mrs \*\*\*\*\*' (Child 2)



Figure 6.26 'Me drawing a toy shop' (Child 3)



Figure 6.27 'Me making a pumpkin' (Child 4)



Figure 6.28 'Me learning inside' (Child 5)



Figure 6.29 'Me reading a book' (Child 6)

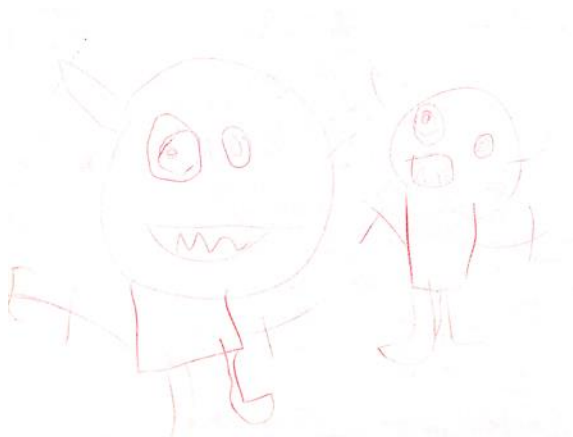


Figure 6.30 'Playing with \*\*\*\*\* (friend)' (Child 7)

### 6.6.1.2 Enjoyment

The interviews indicated that being in Year One, for this sample of children at least, was a highly enjoyable experience. Unanimously, the children answered ‘yes’ when asked if they ‘enjoy being in the Year One class’, with one child going beyond this to state ‘Yes, it’s brilliant. I love it!’ (Child 3). All seven children provided descriptions of the aspects of Year One which they enjoy, with playing ( $n = 5$ ), learning new things ( $n = 3$ ) and being with friends ( $n = 3$ ) receiving multiple references. Although the interview encouraged children to share all of the aspects that they found enjoyable, it also prompted them to consider what their favourite element of Year One was. Children’s responses to this question are outlined in Table 6.3 below.

*Table 6.3 Children's favourite aspect of Year One at Oak Tree*

	<b>‘What is your favourite thing about Year One?’</b>
<b>Child 1</b>	“My favourite thing about Year One is liking to take part in things.”
<b>Child 2</b>	“I get to play with my friends and doing running club.”
<b>Child 3</b>	“My favourite thing is playing outside.”
<b>Child 4</b>	“That it helps you to get you to know things.”
<b>Child 5</b>	“I get to have some friends to play with... because I like playing at home so that is why I like it; I am used to playing.”
<b>Child 6</b>	“Playing.”
<b>Child 7</b>	“That we get to play a lot.”

As in the interview carried out in Phase One, children were asked to consider if there were any aspects that they did not enjoy in Year One. Four of the seven children did not identify any elements of Year One that they found unenjoyable, commenting ‘no, not really’ (Child 6; Child 7), ‘There is nothing that I don’t like about Year One’ (Child 1) and ‘I like everything’ (Child 5). The other three children all described aspects of Year One that they did not like. Yet, none of the factors described appeared to be related to the organisation of teaching and learning in Year One:

I don’t like people who are being silly together when we are doing whatever we are doing. (Child 2)

Yes, there is one thing. I don't like it when people get mad at me or be naughty to me. And when \*\*\*\*\* (another child), he does this quite a lot of times, he is naughty to me, he is the only one who is naughty to me, the only one. I don't know why. (Child 3)

I don't like taking my boots off when we go in the forest (Child 4)

While being cautious of not delegitimising these children's concerns – or speaking on their behalf – the nature of these dislikes appeared to reflect momentary frustrations rather than pronounced discontent with any particular aspect of the approach to teaching and learning in Year One. They did not appear to be at a level so as to detract from children's overall enjoyment of Year One.

In confirming their enjoyment and providing examples of this, the children affirmed the perceptions of their teachers who had identified their enjoyment as having an important influence on the way teaching and learning was organised in Year One (see section 6.5.5). The enjoyable nature of Year One for the children included in the Oak Tree case is strengthened further by the perceptions and experiences of parents.

## 6.6.2 Parents

From the interviews carried out with parents in Phase Two and Three, three themes were generated: broad and balanced focus, communication and enjoyment.

### 6.6.2.1 Broad and balanced focus

In the interviews carried out in Phase Two, parents described how teaching and learning in Year One was broad and balanced, focussing on a wide range of concepts and including activities that varied with regards to how strongly they were framed. The parents made reference to a number of focussed areas of learning such as 'basic letter pronunciations, numbers, counting, adding, taking away' (Parent 4); 'Motor Movers, Spanish, phonics, reading, letter writing and numeracy' (Parent 2); and indicated that 'spellings come home for us to practise every week' (Parent 3a). Alongside this, parents also commented on how 'they certainly do a lot of playing' (Parent 1) and that 'there is definitely space for play' (Parent 4) in Year One. Taking

this further, one parent commented on how his son and his friends ‘really hammer that construction area!’ (Parent 3b). Some parents spoke explicitly about the balance of teaching and learning in Year One:

I think it’s the literacy, the numeracy and the play. I think from my point of view, it just seems a fair mix. I have not looked at it and thought “oh gosh, he has got lots of numeracy this week, what’s going on?”. You don’t tend to notice it because it’s so weaved in with everything. (Parent 3b)

This was extended on by another parent who – a teacher himself in secondary school – commented on the balance of teaching and learning from what he stressed as his ‘understanding’. This is illustrated in the following exchange:

**Parent 5:** I think it’s a very broad curriculum I would have said, the things that they are learning about.

**Researcher:** What makes you think that?

**Parent 5:** Well, my understanding is that a lot of it is sort of play-orientated and social-orientated. Through discovery and more sort of practical contexts but trying to bring it back towards an academic base as well; where that happens naturally perhaps, rather than trying to find a forced way as in “right, we are going to do number work”. You know it’s about trying to do number work but giving it more of a practical context about why they are doing it. Like in the woods maybe doing it with sticks or whatever. It’s a playful way of learning.

All of the parents stated that the children explored ‘topics’ and ‘themes’ in Year One and the majority ( $n = 4$ ) spoke about the Year One teachers’ strategy of using ‘Squeaky the Mouse’ as a ‘hook’ to plan the learning around. The parents stated how ‘the mouse has been a big thing so far’ (Parent 3a) and that ‘learning is constantly about the mouse’ (Parent 2). As will be explored shortly, the use of a ‘hook’ to engage children in a range of cross-curricula activities was seen by parents as an aspect of Year One that their children found enjoyable.

Although only two parents responded to the online interview in Phase Three, the broad and balanced nature of the curriculum appeared to have been sustained throughout the year. For example, to the question ‘To your knowledge, what was the main focus of teaching and learning in Year One up until school closure in March?’, the parents of Child 3 gave the following response:

Learning all about transport and space (their topics), phonics – phonemes and split digraphs, maths – using real money, relationships with others / community all with lots of opportunity to play and be creative, and it sounds like there has been plenty of time in the construction area for \*\*\*\*\*! (Phase Three – Parents 3)

#### 6.6.2.2 Communication

As in Reception, parents commented on how they communicated regularly with the teachers in Year One and that they were ‘well-informed’ of the activities taking place. Indeed, some of the parents indicated that their level of communication was at a similar level to what it was in Reception (Parent 1; Parent 3a; Parent 5). This appeared to be supported by Year One continuing with a number of the policies observed in Reception, such as encouraging parents to enter the classroom to drop off and pick up their children, having ‘informal conversations’ and operating with what Julie referred to as ‘very much an open-door policy’:

If there is anything I know I can always grab them. Every morning I will say good morning and if I have got any issues or if we have forgotten something, which we usually have (laughs). So, it’s daily really. (Parent 2)

It’s me for the drop off and pick up and they are always there which is great. They don’t seem to get flustered or put off in the morning when every child wants to show them everything. They are great. It is not stand offish and ‘I am busy’. It’s more like “come along” and “if you need a book we will sort you all out”. (Parent 3b).

Three days a week I don’t do it because I drop them off early and collect them late but on the other two days it’s quite nice to pop in and say hello. (Parent 5)

Some of the parents ( $n = 3$ ) who had older children at the school indicated that these policies were not in place when their other children experienced Year One, indicating that the synthesis of the EYFS and Lower School has altered parental relationships with the teachers in Year One.

Parents also made reference to how they communicate back and forth through their child's 'homework diaries' and that they receive regular email updates detailing the activities carried out each week:

We get emails which are great to see. We got one today just to run through what they are doing and how they are teaching and things.  
(Parent 3b)

They are very good, they send emails and I quickly read and get a rough idea of what they are doing. (Parent 4)

One of the emails sent to parents was a 'Weekly Newsletter' which, for the week of case study visits in Phase Two (4<sup>th</sup> -8<sup>th</sup> November 2019), is shown below in Figure 6.31.

Good afternoon, and a very warm welcome back to you all!

We hope you have had a wonderful break and you are ready for a very busy half term! This is one of our favourite half terms of the year, and we have some very exciting plans in place for your little ones to enjoy! Keep your eyes peeled 😊

Well we must say how smart your children look in their new winter uniforms- it is great to see! They have all settled right back into the swing of things and are full of smiles and excitement for the next part of their journey in school! We would like to thank those of you that have kept the 'academic ball' rolling with them- it is making a huge difference to their learning!

This week in English, we have introduced rhymes and poems to both groups. They chose their favourite poem and wrote a sentence about it, and they have been trying to learn a poem off by heart and perform it to an audience!

In Maths, we have looked at doubles and sharing between two. We have done this very practically as it is a difficult concept to grasp and they have really enjoyed it so far! We have done some problem solving to find which numbers are odd and even. If, like us, you have a mountain of odd socks at home, you could challenge your child to sort them into pairs to see if there is an odd or even amount!

We discussed safety on Bonfire Night at the beginning of the week and read a really lovely story to go with it, and we were chuffed to bits to hear of the knowledge the children have in order to take care of themselves and be safe around fires and fireworks! We put a positive spin on this learning by creating our very own firework picture using Mrs \*\*\*\*\*'s special pastels on black paper- they look amazing so please pop in for a look if you have chance!

In the woods, we made some really creative firework pictures using leaves and twigs before roasting cinnamon flavoured apples on the fire to enjoy and a s'more marshmallow! We also went on a fungi forage around the lake, taking photographs of a range of wonderful shapes and colours for us to identify next week. Mr Nicholson has been with us all week and really enjoyed this forage.. what a 'fun-gi' he is! (Sorry!)

The next stage in our Motor Movers programme is as follows:

**Yes and No:** Slowly and smoothly nod head forwards and backwards- repeat three times. Then move head to the side, holding for 3 seconds, and to the other side- repeat three times.

**Starfish:** Stretch out fingers **and toes** like a starfish. Make a fist with thumb on top of fingers **and curl toes over**. Squeeze and hold for 3 seconds- repeat 5 times.

**Walk the Plank:** Walk in straight line, heel to toe for five steps. Then walk backwards for five using arms to balance.

**Pulling Faces:** Puff cheeks with air and hold for a count of three. Move the air from side to side, slowly blowing the air out, repeatedly making a 'p' sound. Repeat 3 times. Suck air in as if sucking through a straw then blow out slowly. Repeat five times.

Next week, we will be writing our own poem for a competition held by the Independent Schools Association which will begin with: 'If The World Were...' If you can come up with any ideas at home together, please feel free to share them with us.

Have a super weekend and stay dry!

Best wishes,

Mrs  and Mrs

*Figure 6.31 Weekly Newsletter emailed to parents in Year One at Oak Tree*

### 6.6.2.3 Enjoyment

The interviews carried out with parents unanimously confirmed children's enjoyment of Year One. Indeed, a number of parents indicated in Phase Two how Year One had been an extremely positive experience for their child:

He is really loving it. He is thriving. (Parent 1)



She just seems quite happy. She seems happy with the school, she seems happy with the teachers, she seems happy with everything. (Parent 2)

It seems to be suiting her, she is happy and she enjoys coming to school. She was really excited about coming back after the holiday. (Parent 5)

The parent sample offered a number of reasons for their child's enjoyment of Year One. Some parents, for instance, referenced how their child enjoyed the development of, and progression in, 'academic elements':

It's been his own amazement at his ability to read a word, and his pride in being able to do that is massive. A whole new world has opened up to him. And he is now asking us if he can read to us, whereas six months ago we would try and get him to read to us and he just wouldn't, he would have struggled. (Parent 1)

I think she enjoys some of the more academic elements. I think she enjoys the spellings tests and learning spellings. She enjoys getting homework immensely. She will go home, she's very self-conscious of needing to do it and will want to do it the same evening that it's set. She seems to thrive on that really (Parent 5)

In addition to this, a number of the parents identified how the 'hook' implemented by the Year One teachers – through the medium of 'Squeaky the Mouse' – was something that their children found enjoyable:

One thing has got to be the mouse, Squeaky the mouse, have you heard about him? Oh my goodness, everything has been about Squeaky. They have made a house for him and I think they have had cheese tasting days. They are writing invitations for the mouse. It's just constantly about this mouse. (Parent 2)

They had the mouse thing last term, which \*\*\*\*\* went wild for. The mouse has been a big thing. To the point where we are actually thinking about buying a little mouse and saying it is Squeaky's cousin and he has come to stay. (Parent 3a)

Parent perceptions of children's enjoyment were affirmed when they were asked to comment on any aspects of Year One that their child had not enjoyed. To this

question, most parents ( $n = 4$ ) did not name any aspects, epitomised by one parent stating ‘There’s nothing we can think of – he genuinely seems to enjoy every aspect of it’ (Parent 3b). To a great extent, the remaining parent agreed with the views of her counterparts but did comment that her child ‘doesn’t like getting muddy in the woodlands’ (Parent 4).

The online interviews carried out in Phase Three, although only completed by two of the parent sample at Oak Tree, appeared to confirm that children had continued to find Year One enjoyable. For example, in response to the question ‘Is there anything in particular which your child has found enjoyable in Year One? If so, what?’, Parents 3a and 3b returned the following response:

\*\*\*\*\* really enjoys it. We asked \*\*\*\*\* this the other day and his response was ‘learning new things... everything... learning new words... learning all about space!’. Oh and of course the class mouse... we could probably go on forever! (Phase Three – Parents 3)

## Section Three

### 6.7 Child and parent experiences and perceptions of the transition from Reception to Year One

In Phase Two and Three, children and parents were invited to share their ongoing perceptions, experiences and reflections on the transition from Reception to Year One at Oak Tree. These were generated deductively and explored through two themes: continuity and change and adjustment. To distinguish between data produced in Phase Two and Three, data generated in Phase Three will include the following reference: ‘Phase Three – [participant]’.

#### 6.7.1 Children

##### 6.7.1.1 Continuity and change

When asked to consider notions of continuity and change, the children unanimously described how their experiences in Year One were almost synonymous with those encountered in Reception. Three of the children appeared to summarise this well in their interviews by stating that ‘things are the same and look the same as Reception’ (Child 1), ‘we are in a different year, but that’s really it’ (Child 4) and ‘we have the

same amount of play as what we did in Reception' (Child 7). Given that a high level of continuity was established, only a handful of differences were referenced by the children. Some of these related to teaching and learning like when, for instance, Child 5 noted how 'it is more harder to learn things' in Year One and Child 6 stated that they learn spellings now, which 'they don't do in Reception'. Further to this, other changes identified by the children related to how the learning environment in Year One differed from that in Reception; namely how 'Reception isn't upstairs, and doesn't have stairs' (Child 3) and that the 'classroom is quite a bit bigger in Year One' (Child 2; Child 7).

#### 6.7.1.2 Adjustment

The themes generated in relation to children's experiences and perceptions of Reception (see section 6.3.1) and Year One (see section 6.6.1) – namely those relating to enjoyment – identified how case study children at Oak Tree found participating in each year group an overwhelmingly positive experience. Given such unanimity, it is of little surprise that all children indicated that they found the transition from Reception to Year One a pleasant process. When asked about what they have enjoyed about 'moving to Year One', one child indicated how starting Year One was a daunting prospect but one that he quickly got used to:

- Child 1:** Well when I was first in Year One, I was quite shy but now I have got quite used to it and things like that.
- Researcher:** Have you settled in well then?
- Child 1:** Yes. I enjoyed nursery, then I enjoyed Reception and now I enjoy here.
- Researcher:** Why do you think you got used to it?
- Child 1:** It is because I went into nursery first and then I met \*\*\*\*\* [Child 3] and then me and \*\*\*\*\* saw \*\*\*\*\* [Child 7], then we made friends, then we came into Reception, and we are still friends, and now we are here and we are still friends.

The importance of relationships – both with peers and teachers – in making the adjustment to Year One was also mentioned by two other children:

I love my new teacher, my new classroom and all my friends. (Child 3)

It was a bit different to me. I have got friends [in here] who I used to be with in nursery and the same class as me last year. So, that is why I have liked coming here [to Year One]. (Child 5)

The positivity with which all children viewed Year One was not to say that children did not look back fondly on their experiences in Reception, as some children suggested how they ‘miss being in Reception’ (Child 3, 5 & 7). However, their fondness was not to the extent that they indicated a desire to return to Reception, with all children, when asked if they ‘prefer Reception or Year One’, opting for the latter.

## 6.7.2 Parents

### 6.7.2.1 Continuity and change

Given the similarity with which parents experienced and perceived Reception and Year One, it was little surprise that they all identified a high level of continuity between these year groups. The parents characterised the transition as ‘very seamless’ (Parent 1), ‘really smooth’ (Parent 2) and ‘extremely similar’ (Parent 4; Phase Three – Parents 3). In testimony to the level of continuity Maria and the classroom teachers sought to establish within the Lower School, parents suggested how ‘it is a very arbitrary line between Reception and Year One’ (Parent 4), postulated that both year groups were built on similar philosophies (Parent 2, 3a & 5) and commented on the continuity within the learning environment, both in terms of classroom organisation and access to the woodlands (Parent 1, 2 & 5). Further to this, two parents indicated how they believed that, if anything, Year One appeared ‘less structured’ than Reception:

If anything, it seems even less pressured [in Year One]. I don’t know whether it is because he is more interested in the work they are trying to get him to do whereas in Reception a lot of things sent home were reading and writing, which he wasn’t ready for, whereas now he is ready for it. (Parent 1)

In fact I feel that Miss \*\*\*\*\* (Ann) is a little bit more focussed probably. I mean I don't know but these teachers (Julie and Kayleigh) seem a bit more playful. (Parent 4)

Parents did identify some aspects that were different; yet the majority of these were not related to teaching and learning (e.g. uniform). The most notable difference with regards to teaching and learning, and in some instances the only one identified by parents, was the introduction of weekly spellings.

Although only two of the five parents responded to the online interview in Phase Three, the level of continuity established in the early parts of Year One appeared to be maintained throughout the year. For example, Parents 3a and 3b, when asked 'how different/similar has Year One been in relation to Reception?', filed the following response:

Extremely similar, the focus on play and creativity remains at the forefront, and the structures of the day remain similar. The work has increased in difficulty, but this has been gradual and at a pace that suits \*\*\*\*\* – there has been no sudden jump into Year One, and I would say the transition has gone so smooth that we barely even notice it. For \*\*\*\*\* , the biggest difference is the physical environment and the fact that he is now upstairs! (Phase Three – Parents 3)

#### 6.7.2.2 Adjustment

In accordance with the perceptions shared by children, all parents interviewed in Phase Two confirmed that the transition to Year One had been a positive experience and that their children had adjusted well. Some parents suggested how the transition 'has been really positive so far' (Parent 1) and 'has gone wonderfully' (Parent 2). Others alluded to how their child had struggled with previous transitions and that the process of moving to Year One had exceeded their expectations:

I think probably better because we are always aware that transitions are hard. He seems to find transitions hard sometimes, so we are always prepared. But yes, I think it has gone really well, yes better than what we thought, yes. (Parent 3b)

I think it's probably gone smoother than I expected. I think because she found the transition from nursery into Reception quite difficult...

[but] it seems to have gone very smoothly. She never really showed any sort of anxiety or anything else coming up this year. She is really enjoying it. (Parent 5)

The online interviews in Phase Three provided further support of children's adjustment to Year One. When asked 'How has your child found the transition from Reception to Year One so far?', Parents 3a and 3b submitted the following response:

On a personal level we know that \*\*\*\*\* always finds transitions difficult, however the transition across school years went really well – he was very well prepared for this when he was in Reception, and he settled in really well. Even since starting in Year One, he spends time each week with the Year Two class and their teacher – so we anticipate the next transition being similar. The classes spend lots of time mixing which really helps when it comes to transitioning – they already know the teachers pretty well which is so lovely, and helpful. (Phase Three – Parents 3)

## 6.8 Chapter summary

This chapter has presented the 'within-case' analysis (Miles et al., 2020) carried out at Oak Tree. It has reported the themes that were generated from an analysis of the pedagogies enacted in Reception and Year One – both *performance* and *discourse* (Alexander, 2001) – as well how children and parents experienced and perceived these year groups and the transition between them.

The findings presented in Section One showed how the *performance* of teaching in Reception was informed by a competence-based model of education (Bernstein, 2000). This modality was shaped by a number of different sociocultural factors, relating to the teacher's (subject) values, beliefs and influences, the values and ethos of the school (community), the EYFS curriculum framework and the accountability, autonomy and governance structures in place at Oak Tree (rules), alignment and curriculum reform (division of labour) and class size (object). Unanimously, children indicated how Reception had been a highly enjoyable experience and this was confirmed by their parents.

The data generated identified that the *performance* of teaching in Year One was also organised within a competence-based model, thus providing children with similar, but not identical, experiences to Reception. The *performance* of teaching in Year One was produced by a range of sociocultural influences, relating to the values and beliefs of the teachers (subject) and the school (community), assessment, curriculum and teacher autonomy and agency (rules), parental support (community), the transition from Lower to Upper School (division of labour) and finally, children's progression, well-being and enjoyment (object). All of the themes generated were recognised as sculpting practice in Year One; however, the values and beliefs held by the teachers (subject) and headteacher (community) and the reform and implementation of a new age 2-7 curriculum (rules) appeared to be particularly influential. Like in Reception, the children and parents included in the sample, as a collective, shared extremely positive experiences and perceptions of Year One.

Section Three focussed on the transition from Reception to Year One and presented data relating to child and parent experiences and perceptions of continuity and change and adjustment. Children and parents reported that high levels of continuity had been established between Reception and Year One. This level of similarity was viewed positively and identified as supporting all children to make a successful transition to Year One.

The themes presented in this chapter will be considered further in relation to existing literature in Section Two of Chapter 7.

## Chapter 7 Within- and cross-case discussion

### 7.0 Introduction

The previous two chapters have presented the themes that were generated from an investigation of pedagogy – both *performance* and *discourse* – in Reception and Year One at Pine Tree (Chapter 5) and Oak Tree (Chapter 6). Themes were also presented relating to child and parent experiences and perceptions of these year groups as well as the transition between them. This chapter situates the insights developed from the data within the context of previous literature. It attempts to ‘explain, locate and contextualise the analysis in relation to existing theory and research’ (Braun & Clarke, 2021b, p.142).

The chapter is organised into three sections and includes within-case and cross-case discussions (Miles et al., 2020). Section One and Two present a within-case discussion of the themes generated at Pine Tree and Oak Tree respectively. These sections are concerned with comparing the *performance* of teaching and pedagogical *discourse* in Reception and Year One and take into consideration how these pedagogies shaped child and parent perceptions and experiences of these year groups and the transition between them. Following this, Section Three presents a cross-case discussion where four themes common to each case are explored.

### Section One: Pine Tree within-case discussion

#### 7.1 The performance of teaching in Reception and Year One

The *performance* of teaching in Reception at Pine Tree was a complex and eclectic modality, containing features of both competence and performance models of education (Bernstein, 2000). Although diverse, a number of its core features could be seen to broadly reflect a competence-based approach, and these were evidenced within the *frame, form* and *act* of teaching (Alexander, 2001) in Reception. These included:



- (Frame) Few specially defined pedagogic spaces; a predominantly integrated curriculum containing open contents with implicit foci (e.g. Group Time).
- (Form) Fluctuations in the strength of framing, with time allocated daily for children to assume some control over factors related to selection, organisation, sequencing, pacing and criteria (e.g. Discovery Time).
- (Act) A focus on ‘ways of knowing’ and ‘states of knowledge’, achieved through a balance of visible and invisible pedagogies; judgements that foregrounded observations to focus on what was present in children’s learning.

Although a unique modality in its own right, the *performance* of teaching in Reception at Pine Tree very much reflected a common and accepted approach to organising the Reception Year in England. In line with evidence indicating that the most effective pedagogies in Early Childhood Education (ECE) combine adult-led interactions with freely chosen and potentially instructive play opportunities (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002; Sylva et al., 2004), the majority of teachers in Reception provide weakly framed experiences alongside adult-initiated and adult-led activities (Early Excellence, 2017; Ofsted, 2017). Although teaching and learning spanned the full length of child- to adult-led continuum (Fisher, 2020), very rarely was the locus of control negotiated but instead appeared to be either held or relinquished by adults, a finding also reported by McInnes et al. (2011). It was therefore more representative of a balanced, rather than synthesised, pedagogy (Pascal & Bertram, 2019). Nevertheless, by providing experiences and opportunities that varied in terms of how strongly they were framed, the *performance* of teaching incorporated many of the principles recognised as supporting best practice in Reception, as concluded in recent reviews of the research evidence (Pascal et al., 2017, 2019).

Although Nadia primarily presided over a competence-based approach, it was also possible to identify aspects of a performance model in Reception (Bernstein, 2000). For instance, the stipulation that children must spend one Discovery Time session inside and one outside each day – while clearly established as a method of ‘crowd

control’ for managing a class of thirty (Blatchford & Russell, 2020, p. 130) – could be seen as limiting children’s access and regulating their movements (Bernstein, 2000). Additionally, the highly structured sequencing of activities evidenced in the curriculum timetable (see section 5.1.1.2.1) meant that time was often ‘finely punctuated’ and used as a ‘marker of different activities’ (Bernstein, 2000, p. 46). However, arguably the biggest indicators of performance-based tenets pervading Reception was in the ‘stratification’ of children based on their ability and the inclusion of judgements that sought to identify what was ‘missing’ in children’s learning, with specific children (those perceived as deficient) targeted and interventions planned accordingly (Bernstein, 2000, pp. 45-46). These findings align with a wider trend of performance-based principles suffusing competence-based contexts in England (Neaum, 2016). This tension will be explored further in the next section focussing on pedagogical *discourse* in Reception and Year One.

In contrast to Reception, the *performance* of teaching in Year One was firmly positioned within a performance-based model which, according to Bernstein (2000), ‘places emphasis upon a specific output of the acquirer, upon a particular text the acquirer is expected to construct and upon the specialised skills necessary to the production of this specific output, text or product.’ (p. 44). The performance-based model was embodied in the *frame, form and act* of teaching in Year One:

- (Frame) Designated spaces at tables for each child and regulatory boundaries that limited movements within the learning environment; a collective type curriculum – where most contents were closed and their focus explicit (e.g. English and Maths) – with the duration of lessons following a pre-determined structure.
- (Form) The vast majority of activities contained strong framing with adults maintaining control over factors related to selection, organisation, sequencing, pacing and criteria.
- (Act) A strong focus on ‘states of knowledge’ (e.g. ‘non-negotiables’) which were taught using a visible pedagogy; judgements that relied on summative methods seeking to collate evidence of what was missing in children’s learning.

To a great extent, the *performance* of teaching enacted in Year One was a modality that children commonly experience following the transition from Reception. For example, previous research has identified that when children move to Year One, child-led and play-based opportunities are significantly reduced (Fisher, 2009; Nicholson, 2018) and teaching and learning shifts ‘heavily and suddenly’ towards strong classification, framing and a greater emphasis on literacy and mathematics (Ofsted, 2004, p. 8; Sanders et al., 2005). The way teaching and learning were organised also confirmed that in Year One, in comparison to Reception, children tend to experience a reduction in opportunities to learn outdoors (Fabian, 2005; Waite et al., 2009), are taught more often as a whole class and are subject to whole-school policies, including a requirement to follow a standardised timetable (Fisher, 2020). The shift from a predominantly competence-based model containing performance-based elements in Reception to an unequivocal performance-based model in Year One was influenced by a range of socio-cultural-political influences.

## 7.2 Pedagogical discourse in Reception and Year One

By situating the *performance* of teaching as the tool element within an activity system (Daniels, 2004), it was possible to generate an in-depth account of pedagogical *discourse* in Reception and Year One, summarised in Figure 7.1 below. The similarities and differences in these discourses will now be considered in relation to each element of the activity system.

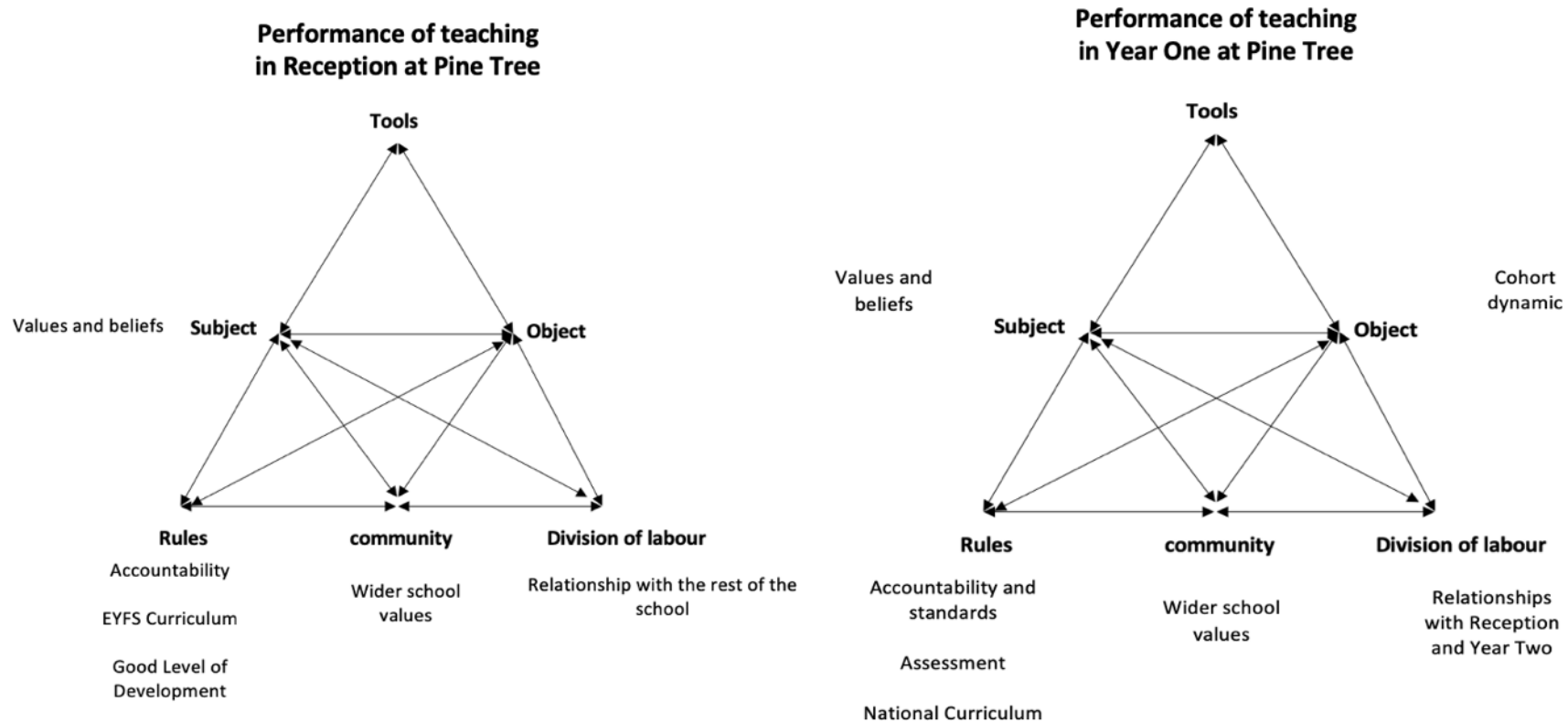


Figure 7.1 Pedagogical discourse in Reception and Year One at Pine Tree

### 7.2.1 Subject

Taking into consideration the values and beliefs of teachers is an important aspect in developing an account of pedagogical *discourse* as it is recognised that they have the potential to significantly shape teaching and learning (Alexander, 2009a; Dahlberg et al., 2007). It was possible to identify how the values and beliefs expressed by Nadia (Reception), Helen and Claire (Year One) – who were positioned as the subject(s) within their respective activity systems – played contrasting roles in Reception and Year One. In Reception, Nadia’s values and beliefs appeared to have an important influence on teaching and learning. She outlined how she thought children learn ‘best’ when ‘following their interests’, ‘when it’s done in a multi-sensory way’ and when ‘they can explore physically’. Hence, Nadia saw her role as a ‘facilitator’ of children’s learning and, related to this, explicated the importance of being ‘flexible’ around and ‘responsive’ to children’s needs and interests. The values held by Nadia are consistent with a postmodern perspective of childhood and pedagogy where emphasis is placed on giving children opportunities to ‘explore their own theories’ and take ‘responsibility for themselves and for realising their own possibilities’ (Dahlberg et al., 2007, p. 56). Although not to the same extent as Nadia, Helen and Claire also subscribed to a postmodern construction. They each shared, for example, how children benefit from learning that is ‘child-initiated’, ‘practical’, ‘real life’ and ‘engaging’ and warned against children having to ‘sit and listen’ for prolonged periods of time. The values and beliefs outlined by Helen and Claire support previous research in identifying how Year One teachers believe children learn best (Fisher, 2011, 2020) and the types of experiences that they think will support children’s development (Nicholson, 2018). Indeed, a number of the elements identified by the Year One teachers in Fisher’s (2020) research regarding how Year One children learn best – ‘when engaged and involved’, ‘being active’ and ‘by initiating their own enquiries’ (pp. 37- 40) – directly correlated with the values and beliefs shared by Helen and Claire.

Fisher (2020) considers teacher beliefs as the ‘the most influential factor’ in determining the types of experiences and opportunities that are provided in Reception and Year One (p. 33). While to an extent this was the case in Reception

– with Nadia’s values corresponding with a number of aspects of practice – the approach enacted in Year One was not aligned with, and in many ways was the antithesis of, the views expressed by Helen and Claire. For instance, the postmodern perspective invoked in the ‘espoused theories’ shared by Helen and Claire were distinct from the modernist conditions pervading their ‘theories in use’ (Argyris & Schon, 1974). Dissonance between values and practice has been reported in prior research concerned with young children’s educational experiences (Bennett et al., 1997; Peters, 2002). It was also evident in Fisher’s (2021) recent research which identified that despite Year One teachers ( $n = 537$ ) stating unanimously that they believed children should have opportunities to play in Year One, only 29.4% went on to indicate that play-based opportunities were provided in their class. Priestley et al. (2015) also identify instances of dissonance and suggest that it is ‘generally accepted that beliefs and practices do not necessarily correspond’ (p. 42). They draw attention to how correspondence between values and practice is moderated by the cultural and structural contexts in which such practices are enacted (Priestley et al., 2015). To understand why a certain level of correspondence was achieved in Reception but not in Year One it is therefore necessary to consider the deep social structures that shaped activity; namely, the ‘hidden curriculum’ of rules, community and division of labour (Engeström, 1998).

### 7.2.2 Rules

The rules governing the Reception and Year One activity systems played a key role in shaping the *performance* of teaching in each year group. In Chapter Two, it was noted how Bernstein (1975) positioned curriculum, assessment and pedagogy as three symbiotic ‘message systems’. Revisiting this notion is helpful, as curriculum and assessment – and the accountability structures relating to and designed in response to them – were generated as having a significant role in mediating pedagogy in each year group.

The statutory curriculum frameworks informing Reception and Year One – the EYFS (Department for Education, 2017a) and National Curriculum (NC) (Department for Education, 2014) respectively – exerted a significant influence on how pedagogy was enacted in these year groups. Nadia identified that the EYFS Curriculum was an integral part of her practice in Reception and noted how she

followed the framework ‘very closely’. This aligns with the research carried out by Brooker et al. (2010) which reported how the framework is central to the work of educators in ECE settings and ‘influences many aspects of daily practice’ (p. 1). When sharing her views on the framework, Nadia spoke with great enthusiasm and it was clear that she believed – along with the majority of Reception teachers who participated in Early Excellence’s (2017) research – that the EYFS Curriculum ‘provides a suitable framework for learning and teaching in Reception’ (p. 22). Many aspects of the framework, particularly the emphasis on holistic development and the Characteristics of Effective Teaching and Learning (Department for Education, 2017a), were consistent with the values and beliefs expressed by Nadia. A high level of congruence between the framework and professional values was reported by both Brooker et al. (2010) and Early Excellence (2017) who found that the statutory document validates and legitimises the values held by educators. In particular, Nadia valued the framework for its low ‘input regulation’ (Leat et al., 2013) which she perceived as giving her a high level of autonomy and flexibility over teaching and learning. This was emphasised by her stating that the framework enabled her to ‘write her own curriculum’ as well as be ‘responsive’ and follow children’s lead.

The influential role that the EYFS Curriculum played in Reception was mirrored by that of the NC in Year One. The collective nature of the NC (Department for Education, 2014), where ‘contents are clearly bounded and separated from each other’ (Bernstein, 1975, p. 80), resulted in teaching and learning in Year One being ‘lesson-based’ (Claire) and organised into a compartmentalised timetable. As a way of ensuring coverage, the teachers in Year One ‘recontextualised’ (Bernstein, 1990) the NC programmes for study into six areas of learning: English, maths, theme, the arts, P.E and R.E. An analysis of the six areas indicated that they held ‘differential status’ (Bernstein, 1971, p. 49), with English accounting for a significant proportion (44%) of timetabled lessons during the week. Despite the NC stating that state-funded schools ‘must offer a curriculum which is balanced and broadly based’ (Department for Education, 2013, p. 5), the quantity and quality of time devoted to all curriculum subjects has long been an issue in primary education in England (Alexander, 2010, 2012; Ofsted, 2018). This research has identified – in line with numerous other studies (Alexander, 2010; Berliner, 2011; Galton et al.,

2002; Ofsted, 2018) – the presence of a two-tier curriculum in favour of English and, to a lesser extent, mathematics at the expense of foundation subjects. Alexander (2012) suggests that the narrowing of the curriculum is, in part, related to the NC document where the content for core subjects is specified ‘in exhaustive detail’ with ‘scant regard’ for foundation subjects (p. 376). Indeed, for Key Stage One and Two, the framework allocates 160 pages to the core subjects and only 24 for the eight foundation subjects (Department for Education, 2013).

In addition to influencing *what* the teachers focussed on, the high level of ‘input regulation’ (Leat et al., 2013) contained within the NC also shaped *how* the framework was delivered. Specifically, the knowledge-based principles upon which the framework is predicated (Department for Education, 2014) appeared to engender a highly visible, performance-based pedagogy in Year One. In their analysis comparing different curriculum models, Manyukhina and Wyse (2019) note how knowledge-based frameworks, such as the NC, ‘assign teachers the role of knowledge transmitters as opposed to facilitators or mediators of the learning process.’ (p. 236). In keeping with a modernist view of childhood and pedagogy (Dahlberg et al., 2007), this, Manyukhina and Wyse (2019) argue, results in a ‘situation where teachers assume positions of authority and dominance’ and, subsequently, children’s capacity to exercise agency over the learning process is significantly reduced (pp. 236-237). This was evidenced in the *performance* of teaching in Year One which was characterised by an asymmetrical relationship between teachers and children with the locus of control resting almost exclusively with the former. It was also embodied in the attendant *discourse* with Claire perceiving strongly framed activities – referred to her as ‘explicit teaching’ – as being the most effective strategy with which to ensure children made the ‘required conceptual advance’ (Alexander, 2001, p. 351) in their learning. This was compounded by the level of scepticism with which Claire viewed the ability to meet NC objectives through child-led and play-based activities in Year One, despite believing these strategies support children’s learning and development most effectively. Weakly framed activities can contain elements of spontaneity (Fung & Cheng, 2012) and unpredictability (Wood, 2007), yet such ambiguities are in tension with the requirement to impart highly specific and explicit criteria, such as the non-negotiable elements. As Wood and Hedges (2016) suggest, ‘it is not clear



how curriculum content can be learned, or how coherence can be assured during play.’ (p. 391). This reinforces Brundrett’s (2015) contention that knowledge-based curricula foreground rote and teacher-led learning over and above other pedagogical strategies.

In each year group, high-stakes assessments were a source of constant pressure for the teachers and being ‘burdened with the responsibility to perform’ (Ball, 2016a, p. 1054) appeared to exert significant influence on teaching and learning. In Reception, it was possible to identify how the pressure to achieve a ‘national standard’ for the Good Level of Development (GLD), which in 2019 was 71.8% (Department for Education, 2019a), resulted in performance-based principles pervading Reception, a process identified as ‘schoolification’ (OECD, 2006). This was evidenced by the close tracking of each child’s academic profile, the targeting of specific children for interventions and grouping children based on ability. Previous research suggests that tracking (Roberts-Holmes & Bradbury, 2016), interventions (Kay, 2018) and ability groupings (Bradbury & Roberts-Holmes, 2017), despite being typically associated with older primary school children, are increasingly prevalent in Reception in attempts to meet the prescribed targets and outcomes outlined in the GLD. In Year One, the Phonics Screening Check (PSC) at the end of the academic year, and the Standardised Assessments Tests (SATs) at the end of Year Two<sup>2</sup> further strengthened the grip of a performance-based model. This was apparent in the greater emphasis on strongly framed activities and the intensification of tracking children’s performance (see below). The greatest influence, however, was how the PSC and SATs appeared to narrow the curriculum in order to focus on what they measure; namely, English – phonics (‘real and nonsense words’), reading, spelling, grammar and punctuation – and maths. These areas accounted for 60% of timetabled lessons carried out in Year One. When speaking about this imbalance, the influence of assessment was made explicit by Susan who remarked how ‘what we have to measure ... English, maths, writing,

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<sup>2</sup> It is worth mentioning that due to the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, case study children did not have to complete the PSC at the end of Year One or SATs at the end of Year Two. However, the postponement of these assessments was not known by teachers, children or parents until data collection had been completed.

reading’ skews ‘the areas we focus on’. This finding is in line with previous research that has reported how high-stakes testing contributes to a narrowing of the primary school curriculum in England in favour of the two tested subjects, English and mathematics (Alexander, 2010; Berliner, 2011; Ofsted, 2018; Spielman, 2017).

The strategies implemented in Reception and Year One were designed and introduced with the purpose of maximising ‘the production of required attainment data’ (Roberts-Holmes, 2019, p. 8). Moving towards pedagogical principles that are most likely to positively impact on measurable performance outcomes, often at the expense of those that appear to have no immediate measurable value (i.e. adult interventions carried out during Discovery Time in Reception and core subjects prioritised ahead of foundation subjects in Year One) demonstrates how Reception and Year One were each subject to the ‘rigours of performativity’ (Ball, 2003, p. 225). In performative conditions, activities come to be appreciated in terms of their products or calculabilities; hence, ‘experience is nothing, productivity is everything’ (Ball, 2016a, p. 1054). The inclusion of performance-based tenets, despite such practices going against teacher values, confirms how the GLD (Kay, 2018), PSC (Roberts-Holmes, 2019) and SATs (Alexander, 2010) all act as ‘calculated technologies of performance’ (Ball et al., 2012, p. 518), working to ‘steer and govern early years education in the direction of *calculable pedagogies* that produce required results’ (Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021, p. 127).

Also evident was how the performative environment created by the GLD, PSC and SATs placed demands on the teachers to produce, analyse, compare and track data. In both Reception and Year One, highly detailed ‘products of datafication’ (e.g. spreadsheets and tracking documents) were generated as a way of ensuring children were ‘moving forwards’ in their learning, with the focus of pedagogical activities adjusted accordingly to address any ‘gaps’ (Roberts-Holmes & Bradbury, 2016, p. 604). The high-stakes assessments carried out in these years groups led to a proliferation of further assessments aimed at monitoring whether children were ‘on track’ to meet national benchmarks. This reflects what Moss (2019) identifies as dataveillance where data on children relating to high-stakes assessments are routinely collected and analysed so that teachers and schools can ensure ‘compliance to prescribed standards and targets’ (p. 13). A consequence of such

intense surveillance of data in response to high-stakes assessment is the ‘datafying of young children’ (Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021, p. 139) and the establishment of ‘data-driven teacher subjectivities’ (Bradbury, 2019a, p. 7), both of which reduce the complexity of children’s learning to a collection of numbers. This was particularly apparent, for example, in how Nadia spoke about some of the children in her class – mainly for whom achieving the GLD was particularly challenging – as ‘assemblages of data’ (‘he’s 3.3.% of my data’) (Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021, p. 139).

In addition to the curriculum and assessment message systems – but also inseparable from them – the *performance* of teaching in both Reception and Year One was influenced by the accountability and standards regimes in place at Pine Tree. In both year groups, accountability predominantly centred around the role of Ofsted and the demands it placed on practice.

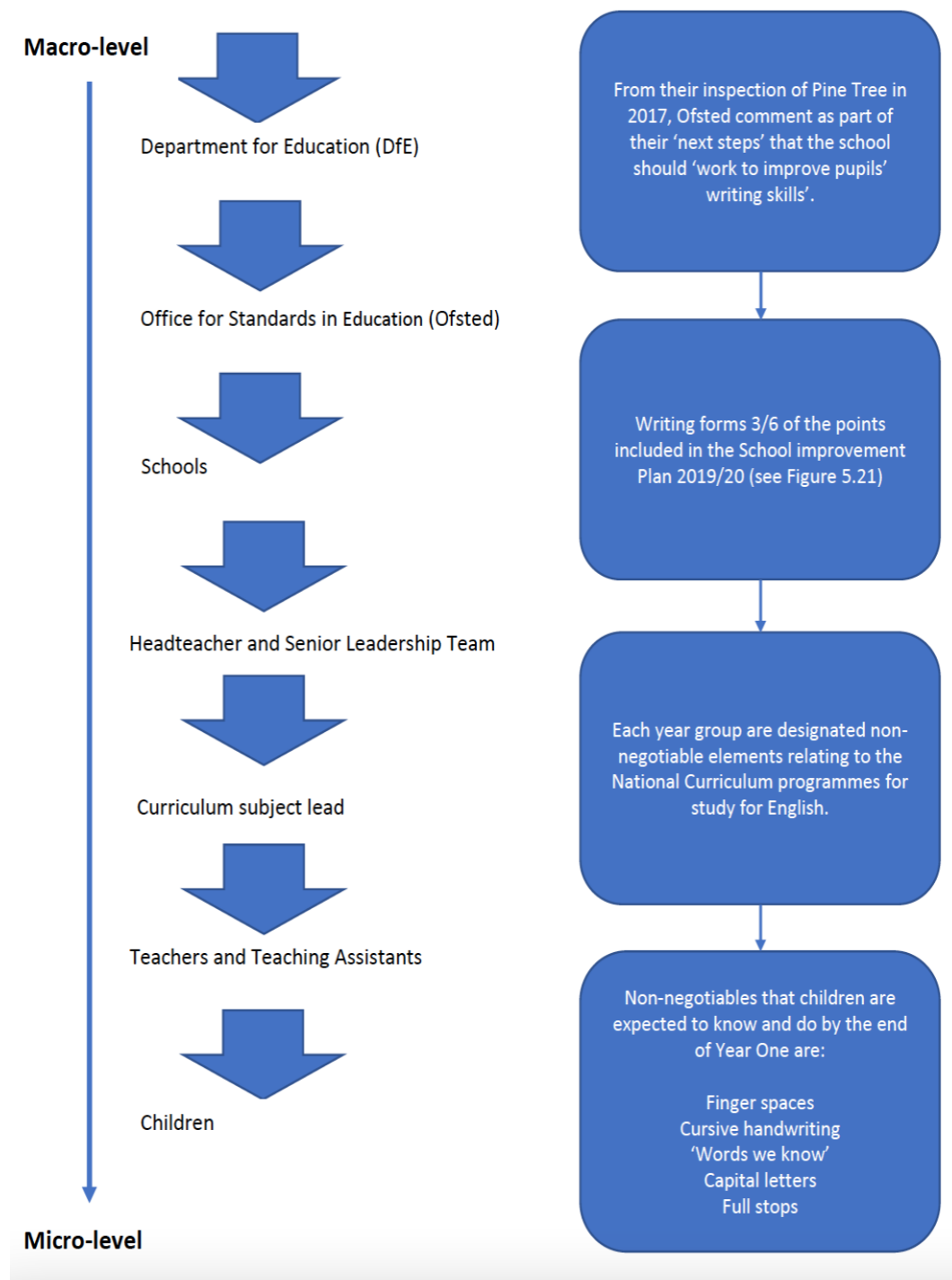
In Reception, the pressure to produce data and achieve prescribed targets in standardised assessments was exacerbated by the role of Ofsted. Despite Ofsted (2019b, p. 1) insisting that ‘data should not be king’, Nadia, in line with the teachers who took part in Roberts-Holmes’ (2015) research, felt significant pressure to produce data for Ofsted. She remarked, for example, that ‘for Ofsted, it is always going to be about the figures’ and ‘it’s data, data, data; that’s what Ofsted wants’. Not only this, but Nadia’s characterisation of Ofsted as ‘tough’ and that their inspectors will not ‘listen to excuses’ and will not allow you to ‘get away with not doing what you should be doing’ revealed a belief that Ofsted hold very fixed and precise notions about what data should look like. This indicates that for Nadia, as for the teachers in Roberts-Holmes’ (2015) research, the generation of ‘correct data’ was a ‘pressing concern’ (p. 307). Securing ‘correct data’ for Ofsted, which Nadia appeared to internalise as reaching the ‘national benchmark’ for the GLD, amplified the need to introduce performance-based principles – tracking, interventions and ability groupings – in Reception. The consequences of not producing the ‘correct data’ for Ofsted can be significant, giving rise to inspection itself or worse, inspection failure (Roberts-Holmes & Bradbury, 2016). The ‘necessity to produce the correct performance data’ for Ofsted (Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021, p. 133) compromised the competence-based principles underpinning Reception and

subsequently aligned it with a neoliberal discourse emphasising control, effectiveness and performativity (Neaum, 2016; Wood & Hedges, 2016).

While in Reception Ofsted played a highly influential role in shaping teaching and learning, it was in Year One where its status as a ‘powerful managerial tool’ (Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021, p. 130) appeared to be most pronounced. Case study visits coincided with Ofsted releasing its new Education Inspection Framework (EIF) (Ofsted, 2019b) and it was possible to see how some of the key concepts included in the Framework – curriculum, teaching, assessment and standards conceived in relation to ‘intent, implementation and impact’ and ‘deep dives’ in a sample of subjects, including at least one or more foundation subjects – had been instantly internalised and permeated the discourse with which teaching and learning were framed in Year One. Here it is possible to see how in rearticulating ‘what is to count as a valuable, effective or satisfactory performance’ (Ball, 2003, p. 216), Ofsted’s new EIF precipitated a recalibration of pedagogical practice in Year One. This ‘ripple effect’ is somewhat inevitable given that Ofsted has acquired a mandate that enables them to not only create but also enforce – through the use of punitive sanctions – dominant discourses (Neaum, 2016; Wood, 2019).

In addition to the quick assimilation of the new Framework, the previous inspection carried out by Ofsted could be seen to have far-reaching consequences for teaching and learning in Year One. The previous inspection at Pine Tree in 2017 judged that the ‘school continues to be good’ but also made a number of recommendations, one of which was to ‘work to improve pupils’ writing skills’. As suggested by Roberts-Holmes and Moss (2021), the inspection, despite being broadly positive, was not a reason for being ‘content’ but instead set the school on a path of being ‘self-reforming, self-improving and ever vigilant in showing progress’ (p. 131). The actions that ensued from Ofsted’s judgement, particularly in relation to writing, could be seen to cascade down a number of the levels included in the ‘delivery chain’, each ‘passing on the pressures to perform’ (Ball et al., 2012, p. 515). Taking the concept of the ‘delivery chain’ (Ball et al., 2012), the impact of this process in Year One at Pine Tree is depicted in Figure 7.2. It shows how the standards demanded by Ofsted at the macro-level (*discourse*) resulted in micro-level teaching

and learning processes (*performance*) in Year One being governed by ‘non-negotiables’.



*Figure 7.2 The 'delivery chain' in Year One at Pine Tree showing how Ofsted inspection impacts classroom practices (adapted from Ball et al., 2012, p. 515)*

The ‘delivery chain’ is effective in showing how the performance priorities of Ofsted moved downward and passed through a number of different ‘hierarchies of expectation’ (Ball et al., 2012, p. 514); creating new standards for the school, leadership, teachers and children to follow. This reveals how Ofsted’s standards and priorities were not only internalised by staff at Pine Tree but were also externalised by them as well, establishing new standards and rules (Lektorsky, 1999, as cited in Daniels, 2004). In this sense, the strong focus on writing in the School Improvement Plan and the creation of ‘non-negotiables’ represented modes of ‘governmentality’, a Foucauldian term to describe:

how we come to embody the dominant discourse so that we govern ourselves according to **its** beliefs and assumptions, **its** desires and practices: in other words, how the dominant discourse or story becomes *our* story, **its** truth *our* truth, **its** desires *our* desires... we discipline ourselves in the service of these “desired effects”. (Moss, 2019, p. 94)

Governmentality was particularly perceptible in relation to the ‘non-negotiable’ elements, with the Year One teachers ‘owning’ their importance, to the extent where they became a central feature of pedagogical practice, both *performance* and *discourse*. The ‘non-negotiables’ – finger spaces, cursive handwriting, ‘words we know’, capital letters and full stops – dominated the focus, scope and desired outcome of teaching and learning, with Helen and Claire unwilling to move beyond them until the children were ‘secure’ in their understanding. In prioritising ‘non-negotiables’ in their teaching, without appearing to challenge or question, it was possible to see Helen and Claire ‘desiring what the dominant discourse desires’ (Moss, 2019, p. 95) and governing themselves in accordance with ‘the values, assumptions and goals of management’ (Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021, p. 132).

### 7.2.3 Community

The values expressed by the wider school community at Pine Tree – namely, the values, beliefs and expectations communicated by the headteacher (Susan) – were generated in an account of pedagogical discourse in both Reception and Year One. Like Nadia in Reception and Helen and Claire in Year One, Susan aligned herself and the school with a postmodern construction of childhood and pedagogy

(Dahlberg et al., 2007), stating that the school recognises children as ‘unique individuals’, are committed to developing the ‘whole child’ and providing opportunities for children to ‘develop their interests and showcase their talents’. These principles denote a commitment at Pine Tree to establishing a context where ‘the meaning of what children are, could be and should be cannot be established once and for all’ (Dahlberg et al., 2007, p. 57). The alignment with a postmodern construction was also apparent in how Susan shared a view that children’s learning and development do not follow upward and linear trajectories. Such a view, encapsulated by Susan commenting how ‘there will be flat lines’, recognises children’s learning as containing ‘fits and starts’, ‘unexpected deviations’ and multiple ‘lines of flight’ (Moss, 2019, p. 71). Crucially, however, Susan was acutely aware of the importance of ensuring ‘rigour within the academic’ part of the school and being held accountable for this. This led to the need to balance a postmodern discourse with a performative one, both of which place significant but also very different demands on pedagogy (Neaum, 2016). This represented a key tension at Pine Tree and meant that the community element of the activity systems in Reception and Year One largely mirrored that of the subject(s); Susan’s (like Nadia’s) values were somewhat reflective of the approach enacted in Reception but (like Helen’s and Claire’s) were in complete contradiction to the approach delivered in Year One.

Given her endorsement of an education premised on postmodern conditions, Susan appeared to view the approach to teaching and learning in Year One, which was firmly rooted within a performance-based paradigm (Bernstein, 2000), with great frustration. For example, she was critical of a number of the practices taking place, relating to, but by no means limited to, children’s work being ‘identical’, learning outcomes being prioritised ahead of learning processes and the passive nature of teaching and learning. Such were her frustrations, Susan indicated how she needed to ‘re-articulate’ her expectations to the Year One teachers, most notably that they were free to ‘organise the learning however they want’. For Susan, there was ‘absolutely no reason why you couldn’t have a much more free-flowing structure of the day and deliver the Key Stage One curriculum’. Yet in practice, embedding such competence-based principles in Year One can prove difficult – even in contexts where it has been endorsed by school leaders (see for example, Nicholson

& Hendry, 2020) – as it tasks teachers with managing the competing demands of ECE and CSE pedagogical traditions (Alexander 2010; Fisher 2011), often without space ‘to share their expertise or to negotiate critical understandings of effective and appropriate educational practice across the transition’ (Dockett & Einarsdóttir, 2017, p. 146). As CSE is the more established and powerful institution, positioned one step higher on the educational ladder, its corresponding performance-based model prevails and competence-based principles give way, succumbing to the ‘gravitational pull’ of CSE (Moss, 2008, p. 225). However, it was possible to see that Susan not only underestimated the pervasive and powerful pedagogical tradition of CSE but that she also contributed to its status as the dominant discourse in Year One. For example, her role in establishing non-negotiables in Year One in response to what she referred to as ‘weak’ standards further strengthened the hegemony of a performance-based model in Year One, restricting the possibility for alternative pedagogical strategies to be enacted. The freedoms that Susan (community) gave the teachers (subject) in Year One – whether perceived or actual – were therefore largely negated by the rules of the activity system; specifically, the desire to raise standards in writing through the enforcement of ‘non-negotiables’. A case of giving with one hand and taking away with the other.

#### 7.2.4 Division of labour

The division of labour – that is, the distribution of tasks among the community (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010) – was also generated as moderating pedagogy in Reception and Year One. From each activity system analysis, similar themes were developed highlighting how the relationship with neighbouring year groups plays a key role in shaping practice.

At Pine Tree it was possible to identify a strong commitment to celebrating, respecting and safeguarding the position of Reception as the sole custodian of ECE within the primary school. This commitment was navigated through striking a balance between ensuring that Reception was recognised as an important and valued part of the school – ‘It’s not a kind of bolt on’ (Susan) – while at the same time permitting it certain freedoms, notably over timetabling and assembly attendance. There was also a strong commitment to resisting ‘schoolification’ and to ensuring that Year One were flexible in adapting their approach to meet the needs



of transitioning children, particularly the '30% who do not meet the GLD' (Susan). These values recognise the strengths of the ECE pedagogical tradition and guard against 'downward pressure from a school-based agenda to teach specific skills and knowledge in the early years, especially with regard to literacy and numeracy' (OECD, 2001, p. 41). They are therefore consistent with the notion of 'a strong and equal partnership' (Moss, 2013; OECD 2001). Yet in Reception, particularly towards the end of the school year, these values were counteracted by a number of cultural and contextual factors. Notably, this was related to the GLD indicator, as identified in the rules of the Reception activity system. However, it was also associated with the pressures placed on Nadia to 'prepare' children for the demands of Year One and the commencement of the National Curriculum.

The need to ensure children left Reception with the knowledge and skills that would enable them 'to access the Year One curriculum as best they can' led to Nadia being 'more focussed' and 'filling and drilling' the 'gaps' in children's learning. The pressure to do this meant that even after the GLD data had been submitted to the Local Authority, interventions and ability groupings remained in Reception, despite the latter of these going against Nadia's beliefs. In this sense, grouping children by ability was 'a necessary evil' (Bradbury, 2018; Bradbury & Roberts-Holmes, 2017) for Nadia in her attempts to ensure children, in her words, left 'Reception with things in-tact'. This was compounded further by how Nadia believed some members of the school community viewed Reception as subservient to the needs of other year groups, a 'place where everything should be thrown' to ensure children possess the requisite knowledge and skills they need to operate and succeed in compulsory school. This view further reduces Reception to that of preparation and places undue responsibility on it to continually adapt to the needs and demands of higher year groups that themselves are one-size-fits-all (Bingham & Whitebread 2012) and therefore 'uncontested' (Moss, 2012, p. 360). The pressures faced by Nadia cohere with a substantial body of research documenting how Reception is subject to top down pressures from the compulsory school sector (Alexander, 2010; Ang, 2014; Faulkner & Coates, 2013; Nicholson, 2018; Pugh, 2010, Rogers & Rose, 2007). Despite the rhetoric of a strong and equal partnership, the relationship between Reception and Year One in reality could be seen to instead represent that of 'readying for school' with Reception tasked with ensuring children were 'ready

for teacher-directed learning and the compartmentalised, subject-centred life of the school regime' (Moss, 2013, p. 23).

The relationship between Reception and Year One was also generated as having a significant influence on teaching and learning in Year One. This centred around the concept of pedagogical and curriculum discontinuity, with Helen, Claire and Susan – in line with a number of studies (Early Excellence, 2017; Ofsted, 2017; Pascal et al., 2019) – all reporting a lack of alignment between EYFS curriculum and assessment and the expectations that accompany the National Curriculum in Year One. They all indicated that even if children achieved the GLD at the end of Reception – doing so is widely recognised as an indicator of children's 'readiness' for compulsory school (Kay, 2018; Hood & Mitchell, 2017; Wood, 2019) – there were no guarantees that children would be at an 'expected' level in correlating areas of learning and development in Year One. The lack of alignment meant that Helen and Claire, despite the requirement to receive each child's Profile (Department for Education, 2020a), took little notice of the EYFSP and whether children achieved a GLD, but instead administered their own assessments. This runs counter to the guidance set out in the EYFSP Handbook (Department for Education, 2020a) which states how Profile data should be used to help 'Year One teachers plan an effective, responsive and appropriate curriculum that will meet the needs of all children' (p. 9). Helen and Claire's reluctance to use the Profile as an indicator of children's ability has been registered previously. Ofsted (2007), for example, reported that only a third of teachers used the Profile to inform planning in the first term of Year One.

In the same way that Reception was subject to top down pressures, Year One also felt the need to 'prepare' children for, and work towards the demands of, the ascendant year group. Indeed, preparing children for SATs and the increased expectations of the Year Two National Curriculum were seen as a one of the key purposes of Year One. This focus encouraged the teachers to clearly demarcate tasks and activities as being the responsibility of certain year groups. This 'simple division of tasks', which Moss (2013) argues is a 'recipe for fragmentation and confusion' (p. 24), established a 'sequence of predefined goals, each needing to be achieved before moving on to the next' (p. 9). This was explicit with Helen stating

how conversations with Year Two focussed on establishing clear and explicit expectations regarding what was and what was not included in their pedagogical remit ('we want them to know this, don't worry about that and that because we can do that'). With both Reception and Year One tasked with the role of equipping children for what is to follow, it is possible to see how the divisions of labour at Pine Tree were hierarchical. Where such a structure is established, Moss (2013) suggests that 'pedagogical ideas and practices cascade down the system, from top to bottom', with the higher educational level becoming the 'frame of reference' for the lower (p. 9). In Reception and Year One, therefore, modernist principles pervaded practice and children were perceived through the lens of 'becoming' rather than 'being' (Uprichard, 2008), valued for what they were to become, rather than where they already were (Dahlberg et al., 2007).

### 7.2.5 Object

In addition to the 'hidden curriculum' of rules, community and division of labour (Engeström, 1998), the object (children) of the Year One activity system was also generated as supporting the enactment of a performance-based model. The cohort of children were identified as assimilating the 'language of [compulsory] school' (Ellis, 2002b, p. 117) extremely well which appeared to validate the approach being implemented in Year One. As a collective, the children were recognised as possessing a number of desirable traits – namely, their ability to 'sit' and 'listen' and high levels of 'motivation' for, 'engagement' with and 'receptiveness' to teaching and learning – to the extent where they were labelled by their teachers as 'very easy to teach' and the 'perfect class'. In being referred to as the 'perfect class' the cohort could be seen to consist of children who, as discussed by Bradbury (2013, 2019b), were 'ideal learners' who had managed to adopt a series of values and beliefs that were consistent with the operational and regulatory norms of the classroom.

Valuing children for their ability to demonstrate these characteristics, particularly their respect for and acceptance of the teacher as a 'privileged voice of authority' (Dahlberg et al., 2007, p. 53), provides stark affirmation of how the *performance* of teaching in Year One was predicated on modernist conditions. The children were

celebrated not for their individuality, creativity or reflexivity but for their ability to conform to, abide by and respect the demands and conventions of compulsory schooling. These features were viewed favourably by the teachers as they created the optimal conditions for which a pedagogy based on imparting a ‘predetermined and unquestionable body of knowledge’ could be enacted (Dahlberg et al., 2007, p, 52). As Manyukhina and Wyse (2019) suggest, the authority, power and dominance of the teacher is central when working within the confines of a knowledge-based curriculum. If children possess the ability to remain what one child referred to as ‘fidget free’ (Child 1) – that is, to have ‘docile bodies’ that can be ‘subjected, used, transformed and improved’ (Foucault, 1977, p. 136) – the task of transmitting knowledge is simplified. Yet, while children’s capacity to remain ‘fidget free’ was evident, a more pressing concern is the educational value of this (Bennett, 2013). In being valued for their ability to demonstrate a series of largely restrictive characteristics, it was possible to see that the teachers’ priorities took precedence over the children’s. This reflects how, in performative environments, ‘pragmatism and necessity trump wider responsibilities towards students’ (Ball et al., 2012, p. 528).

### 7.3 The transition from Reception to Year One at Pine Tree

In making the transition from Reception to Year One at Pine Tree, children and parents had to negotiate a significant level of discontinuity, moving from a primarily competence-based model with some performance-based features in Reception to an unequivocally performance-based model in Year One. The contrasting pedagogic modalities enacted in Reception and Year One and the discourses that underpinned them were instrumental in shaping how these year groups, and the transition between them, were experienced and perceived by children and parents.

#### 7.3.1 Reception

All children included in the sample valued their experiences highly in Reception, echoing the findings reported by Howe (2013) when she followed children on their transition from Reception to Year One. Children’s experiences were also consistent with the research carried out by Sanders et al. (2005) and White and Sharp (2007)

who identified how children were offered a broad range of opportunities in Reception. While most activities were perceived positively, children particularly enjoyed opportunities to direct their own learning (Discovery Time) and socialise with friends. In sharing a predilection for these activities, similarities can be established with the research carried out by Garrick et al. (2010) on children's perceptions on the EYFS. They reported that the children in their study valued 'the range of activities offered to them' but 'particularly appreciated the opportunities for choosing activities with others' (Garrick et al., 2010, p. 18).

Parents were unanimous in affirming that Reception had been a highly enjoyable year for their children and a number of them confirmed how Discovery Time and friendships were central to their experience. As well as their children, parents too seemed to have a positive experience in Reception. This was, to a great extent, related to the efforts made by the Reception staff to establish a strong 'educational alliance' (Dockett et al., 2018, p. 155) with parents, based on constant and reciprocal communication and regular meetings aimed at educating parents about the approach being enacted and what they can do to support this. Strong links between teachers and parents is a long-established and central tenet of ECE (Shields, 2009) and research suggests that the EYFS encourages close 'engagement with parents' (Brooker et al., 2010, p. 66). Indeed, the emphasis on 'positive relationships' and 'enabling environments' as overarching principles of the Framework requires teachers to establish strong partnerships with parents and/or carers (Department for Education, 2017a).

### 7.3.2 Year One

When in Year One, both children and parents recognised and were able to describe how the opportunities provided shifted towards a performance-based model. They indicated how weakly framed opportunities were now all but absent, how teaching and learning focussed on subjects that were organised into discrete lessons and, for the children in particular, how there were more explicit rules governing classroom behaviour. Although most children and parents offered positive perceptions of Year One, they were less congruent than in Reception, with Child 1 and Child 4 sharing views that were characterised by ambivalence and discontent respectively and

Parent 4 and Parent 5 both expressing how their child found teaching and learning in Year One unenjoyable. It was possible to see that as well as families having different experiences and perceptions of Year One, there were also different experiences and perceptions *within* families; in some instances, children shared different perceptions to that of their parents. This reiterates how at times of adjustment and transition, ‘different things are important for different groups of people’ (Dockett & Perry, 2004b, p. 227) and hence, it is possible for children to feel more adjusted to compulsory school than their parents, or vice versa (see for example, Miller, 2015). It also suggests, in line with Orlandi’s (2014) research, that children can respond differently to the same pedagogical approach being enacted in Year One.

Children who suggested that they enjoyed Year One welcomed opportunities to ‘sit and work on the chairs’ (Child 2), practise their handwriting (Child 5 & 7) and ‘learn lots of things’ (Child 6). This was echoed by a number of parents who often referred to how their child enjoyed participating and being successful in specific subject areas of the National Curriculum. In contrast, children who viewed Year One less positively showed concerns over having to do ‘really hard’ and ‘boring’ work (Child 1) and ‘getting bossed around’ (Child 4). Moreover, the parents referenced the loss of Discovery Time (Parent 4) and the pressure to work at desks (Parent 5) as negatively impacting their child’s enjoyment of Year One. This variation in experiences and perceptions of Year One very much aligns with the research carried out by White and Sharp (2007) who reported how some children ‘enjoy new challenges and relished the chance to demonstrate their mastery of “hard work”, [whereas] others were worried about their ability to cope with the workload’ (p. 99).

A key factor of parent’s experiences in Year One, and one that contrasted notably from Reception, was the lack of partnership with their child’s teacher. The majority of parents alluded to how opportunities to communicate and engage with the teachers in Year One were heavily reduced in comparison to Reception. This finding is in line with studies that have identified how parent involvement and communication decreases when children enter compulsory school (Murray et al., 2015; Tao et al., 2019). This change in partnership was more of a concern for some

parents than others. It was the parents who were less positive about their child's experiences in Year One that voiced a desire for more contact. For these parents, as for those in the research carried out by Tao et al. (2019), the decline in communication in Year One was unexpected and disappointing. Given the importance of strong parent partnerships in helping children to navigate the transition to CSE (Dockett, Griebel & Perry, 2017; Margetts, 2002; Yeboah, 2002), it is possible that by not being sufficiently informed about their child's experiences in Year One – certainly not to the level that they had experienced in Reception – the ability for these parents to assist their child's adaptation to a performance-based model in Year One was compromised.

### 7.3.3 Transition

Despite having to negotiate significant discontinuity between Reception and Year One, most of the children appeared to experience a successful transition, defined as them feeling a 'sense of belonging' in their new setting (Bröstrom, 2002). For children and parents for whom this was the case, moving to Year One was a positive experience as it encompassed completing 'more structured work' (Parent 2), being exposed to 'new stages of learning' (Child 6) and 'feeling really grown up' (Parent 6). From their perceptions, it was possible to identify how children had embraced the discontinuity between Reception and Year One, as suggested by Walsh et al. (2008), and viewed opportunities to 'learn more' and complete 'harder work' as 'border markings' that confirmed not only their passage to Year One but also notions of getting older and becoming more 'grown up' (Ackesjö, 2014; Dockett & Perry, 2012; Fisher, 2009).

For other children in the sample, however, it was possible to see that the level of discontinuity between Reception and Year One went beyond their ability to negotiate (Peters, 2000, 2004, 2010). In Phase Two, two parents reported how some of the changes to teaching and learning in Year One – such as, having to sit at a specific space at a table (Parent 5) and the discontinuance of Discovery Time (Parent 4) – were abrupt and came as a shock to their children. This is reminiscent of Graue's (2011) observation of how some children experience 'a kind of whiplash' when moving suddenly to a performance-based environment (p. 15). This appeared

to be exacerbated by these parents moving from having a close relationship with their child's teacher in Reception to having to 'wait by the gate' in Year One (Fisher, 2020, p. 56). By Phase Three, one of the parents suggested that this initial 'culture shock' (Broström, 2007, p. 61) had been successfully navigated by their child who had now 'taken it all in his stride' (Parent 4). It could be suggested that this child had learnt how to participate in Year One, despite disliking aspects of its modality, a concept Formosinho and Formosinho (2018, p. 140) term 'strategic adaptation'. Yet, for one parent, their child's transition was still ongoing by the time of Phase Three, supporting the findings reported by Miller (2015) that the transition to 'formal education may last far beyond the first few days of school' (p. 219). Parent 5 suggested that her daughter – who was the youngest child in the class, and therefore more at risk of experiencing transition difficulties due to 'relative immaturity' (Howe, 2013, p. 29) – was still struggling to come to terms with the 'far higher' workload and expectations in Year One. This was problematic, especially considering that the Year One teachers operated on the premise that all children were responding well to the performance-based pedagogy being implemented.

## **Section Two: Oak Tree within-case discussion**

### *7.4 The performance of teaching in Reception and Year One*

To a great extent, the *performance* of teaching in Reception and Year One resembled what Bernstein (2000) identified as a competence model of education which, rooted in a liberal-progressive ideology, promotes a 'learner-centred orientation to the context and content of learning' (Neaum, 2016, p. 246). Characteristics of the competence model were evident throughout the *frame*, *form* and *act* of teaching (Alexander, 2001) in Reception and Year One. These included:

- (Frame) Few specially defined pedagogic spaces and an absence of boundaries limiting access and movements; a predominantly integrated curriculum with time negotiated between adults and children in the present tense; and, an absence of pupil grouping.



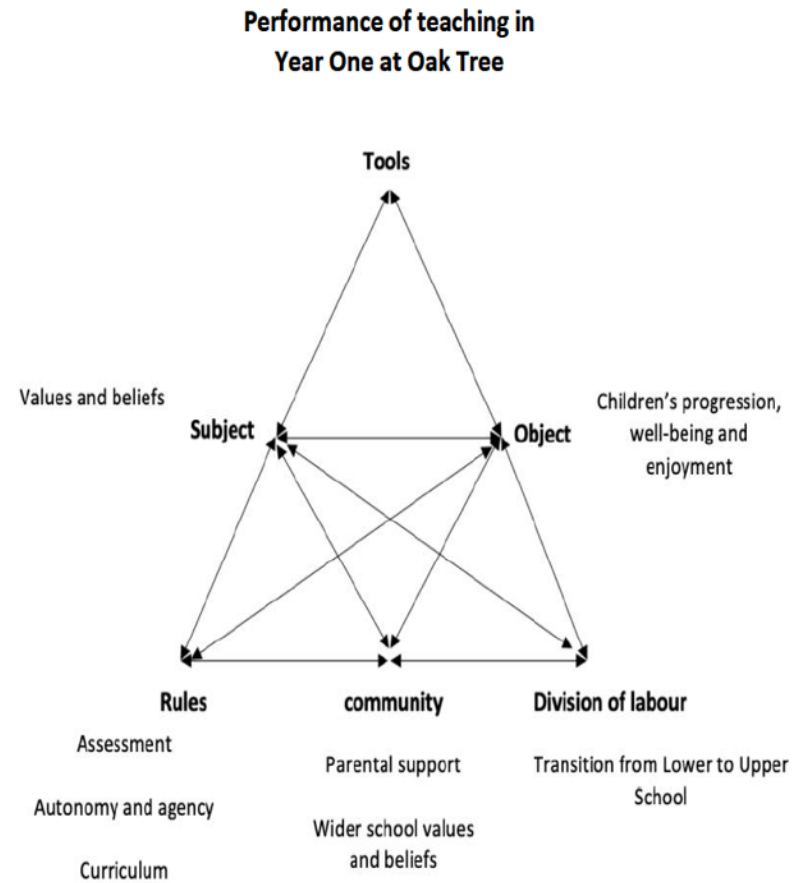
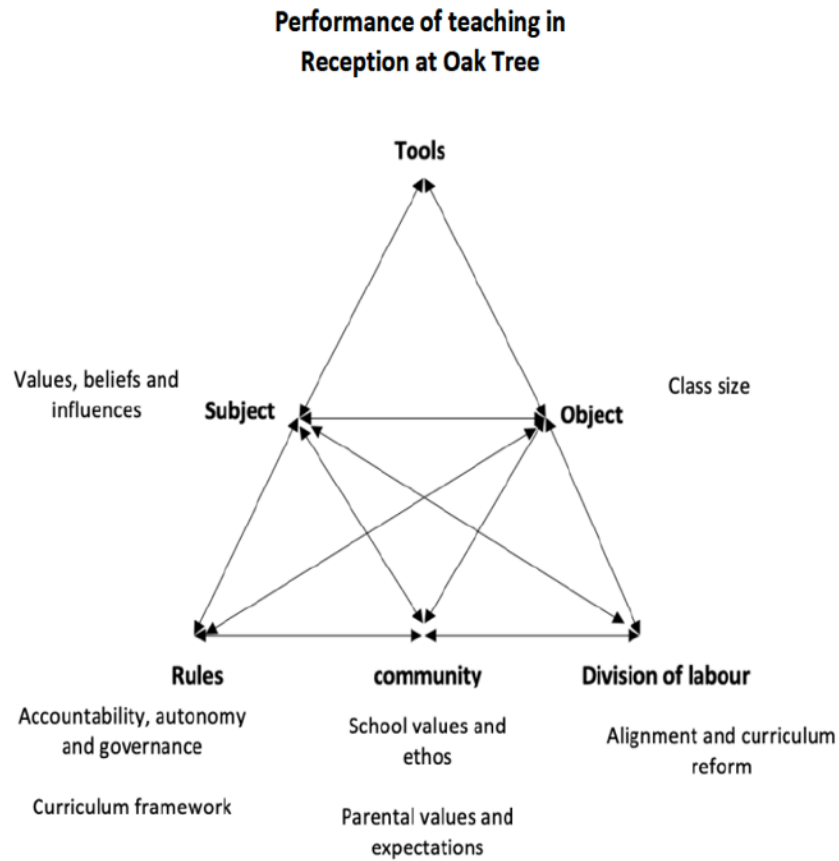
- (Form) Fluctuations in the strength of framing, with significant emphasis on children having some control over factors related to selection, organisation, sequencing, pacing and criteria (e.g. Cross Curricular Activities (CCA) and Choosing Our Own Learning (COOL)).
- (Act) A holistic focus, on both ‘ways of knowing’ and ‘states of knowledge’, achieved through a balance of visible and invisible pedagogies; judgements that foregrounded observations to focus on what was present in children’s learning.

The pedagogic modality observed in Reception contained a number of features associated with the Reception Year in England, including weakly classified spaces that children could ‘flow’ between (Fabian, 2005; Fisher, 2020), extensive use of the outdoor environment (Waite et al., 2009) and a weakly classified timetable with the structure, duration and focus of sessions loosely defined (Fisher, 2020). The framing of activities was also largely consistent with how the majority of Reception teachers in England organise teaching and learning. For instance, in a comprehensive review, Early Excellence (2017) reported how 93% ( $n = 4250$ ) of Reception teachers ‘plan either for mostly child-initiated experiences or a mixture of adult-directed and child-initiated activities’ (p. 10). These shifts in the strength of framing meant that activities manifested the full length of the child- to adult-led continuum (Fisher, 2020), aligning with the recommendation that in the most effective early years settings both adults and children contribute to the learning experience (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002; Sylva et al., 2004). Although a high level of importance was placed on children controlling the selection, organisation, sequencing, pace and criteria of activities – which are key features of the discourse underpinning a competence-based model (Bernstein, 2000) – the strength of framing was constantly negotiated by children and adults, particularly in periods dedicated to CCA (a similar pattern was established for COOL in Year One). Hence, rather than the two points of the continuum being perceived as two ‘distinct entities’ (Pascal & Bertram, 2019), activities containing weak (child-led) and strong (adult-led) framing were often blended, or fused, within the same episode.

The opportunities and experiences provided in Year One, while not identical, followed a similar pattern to that in Reception. However, while a competence-based model is commonplace in many Reception classes, its enactment in Year One is considerably less established (Fisher, 2020). Yet despite this, extending competence-based principles into Year One is widely endorsed, receiving support from researchers (Alexander, 2010; Bingham & Whitebread, 2012; Pugh, 2010), school leaders (Roberts-Holmes, 2012) as well as both Reception (Early Excellence, 2017) and Year One teachers (Fisher, 2011, 2021). Given its support, a number of schools and teachers have extended a competence model into the formative years of compulsory school, examples of which have been documented in English (Fisher, 2011; Hood, 2013, Nicholson & Hendry, 2020), neighbouring UK (Martlew et al., 2011; Power et al., 2019; Walsh et al., 2006) and international contexts (Jay & Knaus, 2018; Nolan & Paatsch, 2017). The findings from these studies present a mixed picture, reporting both advantages and challenges in enacting this approach. However, the fact that the challenges cited in this body of research – such as those related to accountability and legitimacy (Nolan & Paatsch, 2017) and externally imposed targets and outcomes (Fisher, 2011) – did not appear to surface in Year One at Oak Tree, with competence-based principles implemented successfully throughout the year, owed a great deal to the discourse that underpinned the *performance* of teaching.

## 7.5 Pedagogical discourse in Reception and Year One

By situating the *performance* of teaching as the tool element within the activity system (Daniels, 2004), it was possible to generate an in-depth account of pedagogical *discourse* in Reception and Year One, summarised in Figure 7.3 below. The similarities and differences in these discourses will now be considered in relation to each element of the activity system.



*Figure 7.3 Pedagogical discourse in Reception and Year One at Oak Tree*

### 7.5.1 Subject

According to Alexander (2009a), values play a significant role in ‘shaping and explaining observable practice’ (p. 932). This was evident in Reception and Year One at Oak Tree, where the values promoted by the subject(s) of the activity system (Reception: Ann; Year One: Julie and Kayleigh) were identified as having significant influence on the organisation of teaching and learning. In sharing their values and beliefs on children’s learning, Ann, Julie and Kayleigh espoused similar beliefs about children’s learning, making reference to the importance of ‘play’, ‘creativity’, ‘first-hand experiences’, ‘experimentation’, ‘freedom’, ‘exploration’ as well as the importance of ‘processes of learning’. These values indicate that children take an ‘active and creative’ role in the ‘construction of a valid world of meanings and practice’ (Bernstein, 2000, p. 43). Such a construction promotes an image of the child as competent, strong and powerful (Rinaldi, 2006), as possessing ‘unknowable potentiality’ (Moss, 2019, p. 71) and, ultimately, as ‘co-creator, rather than reproducer, of knowledge, identity and culture’ (Dahlberg et al., 2007, p. 54).

A number of researchers (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Moss, 2013, 2019) attribute the child as co-creator image as emanating from the pedagogical tradition that informs the Reggio Emilia approach to ECE. Beyond Ann stating directly that she drew inspiration from this approach, a number of parallels can be observed between the values held by the teachers at Oak Tree and those informing the Reggio Emilia philosophy. For example, values identified as fundamental to Reggio – such as experimentation, unpredictability, relationships, a desire to understand learning processes, inter-connectedness and respect for children’s interests and, with that, their personal rhythms (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Moss, 2019) – appeared to be central to the values held by the teachers in Reception and Year One at Oak Tree. This alignment was particularly illustrated by Ann, Julie and Kayleigh embracing notions of uncertainty – ‘a welcoming of the unexpected’ (Moss, 2019, p. 74) – by indicating, for example, how they do not necessarily ‘have a plan’, want learning to be ‘open-ended’ and allow children to ‘experiment, discover, fail and succeed’ respectively.

It was possible to see that the postmodern construction of childhood espoused by Ann, Julie and Kayleigh had a significant influence on practice in Reception and Year One. As suggested by Dahlberg et al. (2007), their values appeared to determine the ‘pedagogical work’ that they and the children undertook in these year groups (p. 43). In considering why their values and beliefs were highly productive of teaching and learning, it is necessary to consider what Engeström (1998) refers to as the ‘hidden curriculum’ – rules, community and division of labour – in Reception and Year One at Oak Tree. This is important, as the extent to which values correspond with practice is related to the structural/cultural context in which practices are enacted (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Priestley et al., 2015).

### 7.5.2 Rules

The rules of the activity system – that is, the formal conditions that support or constrain activity (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010) – were integral to the way teaching and learning were organised in Reception and Year One. Again, considering curriculum, assessment and pedagogy as three symbiotic ‘message systems’ (Bernstein, 1975) is helpful as it was through their ability to exercise a high level of control over the curriculum and assessment message systems that supported Oak Tree to implement a competence-based pedagogy in both Reception and Year One.

Curricula, and the contents and specifications they include, are positioned as powerful technologies of control (Oates, 2010), exerting significant influence on how teaching and learning practices take shape (Sandberg et al., 2017). Ann confirmed that Reception followed the EYFS curriculum framework (Department for Education, 2017a) and, in line with other teachers working within the Framework (Brooker et al., 2010; Early Excellence, 2017), suggested that it had a strong influence on her practice. An important finding was how the framework appeared to provide validation of, and give credence to, Ann’s values. In particular, its ‘overarching principles’, particularly those promoting the unique child and the idiosyncratic nature of children’s learning and development (Department for Education, 2017, p. 6), dovetailed with the image of the child as co-constructor, as promoted by Ann. In their research on the experiences of practitioners delivering the EYFS, Brooker et al. (2010) reported similar findings, indicating how the

Framework ‘broadly maps on to practitioners’ professional beliefs’, particularly with its child-led focus and ‘freedom and flexibility for following children’s interests’ (pp. 24-25). Early Excellence (2017) also reported this trend, noting how Reception teachers believed the Framework, which they were extremely positive about, enabled them to ‘truly meet the needs of children as individual learners’ (p. 22). These findings are strongly aligned with Ann stating that the Framework provides a ‘really good guide to... thinking about [the] child as an individual... what their interests are and how we can enhance that’.

Although Reception was informed by the statutory curriculum, its counterpart in Year One – the National Curriculum – was replaced by the school’s own framework. Being able to exercise control over curriculum contributed to Oak Tree achieving ‘radical’ pedagogical change in Year One. The knowledge-based National Curriculum is identified as including high levels of prescriptiveness and ‘input regulation’ (Leat et al., 2013) which, according to Manyukhina and Wyse (2019) can be seen to ‘impede teachers and students from becoming co-participants in the process of discovering, exploring, and creating knowledge’ (p. 236). Findings from this study support these observations and indicate how the ‘repetitive’ and ‘regimented’ nature of the National Curriculum was a contributing factor to Year One moving away from its delivery and, in its place, developing a new Lower School curriculum for children aged 2-7. In particular, there was a strong desire to move away from the National Curriculum’s ‘low emphasis on the centrality of the learner’ (Manyukhina & Wyse, 2019, p. 236) and give children greater agency and responsibility over their learning. This was explicit in the drive towards providing more opportunities for ‘exploration’, ‘discovery’ and ‘creativity’ and in the commitment to keeping learning ‘open-ended’, ‘planning in the moment’ and not ‘spoon feeding’ the children. These concepts are the antithesis to the knowledge-based nature of the National Curriculum and are more aligned with a learner-centred curriculum model (Manyukhina & Wyse, 2019). Indeed, the centrality of learners was clear when Maria, Julie and Kayleigh outlined how the Lower School curriculum had been designed with specific children and cohorts in mind, evidenced by Maria stating how they wanted to ensure it was ‘absolutely right for the children’. This supports Smithers and Robinson’s (2008) contention that autonomy over

curriculum affords independent schools greater opportunities to tailor the curriculum to the needs of children.

In addition to curriculum, the assessment message system contributed to the enactment of a competence-based pedagogy in Year One. Although Ann completed the EYFS Profile in Reception, the school did not administer the Phonics Screening Check in Year One or SATs in Year Two (or Six). Maria and Julie both spoke negatively about these assessments and made reference to how their nature (not being ‘about the child’) and impact (resulting in ‘teaching to the test’) were in tension with the approach to teaching and learning they wanted to enact in Year One. This decision appeared highly significant, as such high-stakes assessments have been identified as fundamentally shaping pedagogical practice towards a performance model in ECE as well as the first few years of CSE (Bradbury, 2018; Roberts-Holmes, 2019). The school’s decision is particularly important in the context of extending a competence model in Year One. For example, previous studies documenting this approach have shown that the pressures associated with high-stakes tests constrain the extent to which weakly framed opportunities – such as child-led and play-based learning – can be provided in CSE (Fisher, 2011; Jay & Knaus, 2018; Nicholson & Hendry, 2020). Hence, the absence of ‘strong output’ regulations (Leat et al., 2013) had a profound impact on the approach to teaching and learning in Year One, as recognised by Maria stating that it makes a ‘huge difference’ as it enables Julie and Kayleigh ‘to teach how they want to teach’.

Findings also indicated that the discourses underpinning the *performance* of teaching in Reception and Year One promoted a high level of teacher agency. According to Priestley et al. (2015), agency is something that is achieved by individuals ‘through the interplay of personal capacities and the resources, affordances and constraints of the environment by means of which individuals act.’ (p. 19). A range of contextual factors in Reception and Year One were identified as increasing the teacher’s capacity to achieve agency. Most notably, the removal of strong input (National Curriculum) and output (PSC & SATs) regulations in Year One appeared to increase the extent to which teachers could exercise professional judgement and take responsibility for their work (Leat et al., 2013). Additionally, the relational conditions established between classroom teachers and the school’s

leadership team also appeared to increase teacher agency. These relationships were based on ‘strong horizontal ties’ (Priestley et al., 2015, p. 103), with Maria showing ‘trust’ in, and respect for, professional judgement and giving teachers full control over ‘how they teach and what they teach’. This appeared to be strengthened further by the school’s perception of their inspectorate, the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI), who they believed foregrounded ‘listening to the children’ and took into consideration ‘academic’ and ‘personal development’ instead of focussing explicitly on ‘data’ or ‘evidence’. These ecological and contextual dimensions appeared to support Ann, Julie and Kayleigh to achieve a high level of agency, giving them an active contribution over how their work and its conditions were shaped (Biesta et al., 2015). This was explicit with Ann stating, ‘whatever I choose to do is of my choosing’ and Julie confirming that ‘Maria lets us all be individuals’.

### 7.5.3 Community

The values, expectations and support of the headteacher and parents were generated as an important aspect of the discourse underpinning the *performance* of teaching in both Reception and Year One. The values shared by the headteacher (Maria) and her beliefs about practice were strongly aligned with the teachers in Reception and Year One, meaning that in many ways, these educators had settled on a similar image of the child – child as co-constructor (Dahlberg et al., 2007) – and were working from the ‘same value base’ (Moss, 2013, p. 28). An image of the child as co-constructor was regularly invoked by Maria to describe children and their learning in Reception and Year One, captured by her references to the importance of relationships, ‘awe and wonder’, ‘independence’ and ‘having a go’. This construction was particularly evidenced by her commenting how teachers at Oak Tree ‘are not the oracle’ and that the children ‘teach us new things too’.

In Reception, the alignment between Maria (community) and Ann’s (subject) values were in keeping with the nature of the EYFS curriculum framework (rules). This level of congruence between a number of elements within the activity system meant that Maria appeared to play the role of supporter and advocate of the approach to teaching and learning in Reception. In Year One, however, Maria’s level of influence significantly increased, and her values and support were seen as



integral to facilitating pedagogical change. Indeed, studies concerned with the enactment of a competence-based model in compulsory school have emphasised the influence of headteachers (Fisher, 2011, 2021; Jay & Knaus, 2018). Fisher's (2021) research, for example, reported how the vast majority of teachers (98%  $n = 537$ ) stated that a lack of support from their headteacher was a reason why play is not part of children's everyday experience in Year One. This led Fisher (2021) to conclude that headteachers are one of the main barriers to the inclusion of play-based pedagogy in Year One. Given their status as 'gatekeepers' (Fisher, 2021, p. 1), headteachers play a pivotal role in determining how pedagogies are shaped. This was explicit in Year One in this research, as in many ways it was Maria who was at the forefront of pedagogical change. Her ability and willingness to adapt the rules of the Year One activity system (e.g. curriculum and assessment) in order to continue providing a competence-based model was particularly instrumental. This confirms research carried out by Jay and Knaus (2018) who suggested that a key factor to supporting pedagogical change in the first year of compulsory school was the presence of 'a supportive line manager who deeply understood and was passionate about play-based learning in junior primary classrooms' (p. 119).

The alignment in values between Maria and the teachers in Reception and Year One was mirrored by parents. This was important as parent expectations have been identified as both supporting (Jay & Knaus, 2018) or constraining (Bennett et al., 1997) the enactment of competence- and play-based pedagogies in practice. Parents expressed how principles such as 'play', 'freedom', 'creativity' and learning outdoors were important to them and indeed, a key reason why they chose Oak Tree. Unsurprisingly, therefore, parents appeared to be highly supportive of the approach being delivered in Reception and were happy to see it extended into Year One. This confirms that parents are much more likely to support an approach that resonates with their belief system (Parker & Thomsen, 2019). It could also be argued that parents' positioning as exponents of the education market meant that alignment between their expectations and practice took on an extra level of importance for staff at Oak Tree. Their status as consumers – with the ability and willingness to go elsewhere should they wish – could be seen to give them significant leverage over teaching and learning, or to use Maria's cuisine-based metaphor, power over how they wanted 'their steak to be cooked'.

#### 7.5.4 Division of labour

The decision to integrate Early Years with the Lower School and establish a new curriculum for this phase had a significant impact on teaching and learning in Reception and Year One. Over the course of the case study, a number of factors were identified as motivating these reforms. The first of these related to frustrations over the lack of alignment – described by Maria as a ‘significant gap’ – between the EYFS and Key Stage One curriculum frameworks, an issue that is widely reported in the literature (Early Excellence, 2017; Ofsted, 2017; Pascal et al., 2019). The second motivating factor, in line with the perceptions of other teachers (Early Excellence, 2017; Fisher, 2011) and headteachers (Roberts-Holmes, 2012), was a collective belief that all children up until the age of seven would benefit from a competence-based approach with continued opportunities to direct their own learning and pursue concepts that interest them. The third motive pertains to the transition from Lower (Year Two) to Upper School (Year Three) and the skills, abilities and dispositions – ‘independence’, ‘creativity’, ‘reasoning’, ‘discovering’ and ‘investigating’ – previous children were seen as lacking in making this transition. With the intention of increasing children’s ability to ‘problem solve’ and apply their knowledge and understanding when in Year Three, Maria wanted to move away from teaching that was ‘spoon-fed’ and ‘black and white’ in Year One and Two. This final motive reflects a key recommendation made by the Cambridge Primary Review which stated how extending the EYFS phase would give children greater opportunities to ‘establish positive attitudes to learning and begin to develop the language and study skills which are essential for their later progress’ (Alexander, 2010, p. 491).

Reforming the curriculum in Year One and Two by extending a competence-based model in these year groups represented a firm validation of the approach being enacted in Reception. With Year One and Two following suit, the ‘gravitational pull’ of compulsory school (Moss, 2008, p. 255) – often leading to top down pressures and ‘schoolification’ (Ang, 2014; Moss, 2013) – was resisted, enabling Reception to fully embrace its competence-based pedagogy and reject the discourses of preparation and readiness that characterise children’s transition from

ECE to CSE (Bingham & Whitebread, 2012; Dockett & Perry, 2013; Neaum, 2016). This was further represented in how the decision to establish an extended Lower School phase precipitated a blurring of the boundaries – the divisions of labour – between Reception and Year One and hence, ECE and CSE. Subsequently, discrete and linear constructions of what children should know and be able to do in Reception and then Year One, with children expected to ‘follow predetermined, sequential and predictable stages’ (Moss, 2013, p. 36), were replaced with a fluid perception of children’s development, foregrounding each child’s unique ‘learning journey’ and their multiple and diverse ‘lines of flight’ (Moss, 2019, p. 71). This will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

### 7.5.5 Object

In addition to the hidden curriculum of rules, community and division of labour (Engeström, 2015), factors relating to the children, who for the purposes of this research were positioned as the object of the activity system, were also generated as influencing the organisation of teaching and learning in Reception and Year One. In Reception, the size of the cohort, being just twelve children, was seen to enhance Ann’s ability to implement a competence-based pedagogy. Class size is a longstanding issue in education and has been the focus of a great deal of interest, capturing the attention of economists (e.g. Hanushek, 1999, 2011), researchers (e.g. Alexander, 2010; Blatchford & Russell, 2020; Hattie, 2009) and policymakers (e.g. Schleicher, 2015). Summarising this literature, Blatchford and Russell (2020) state that the argument that class size is relatively unimportant ‘is currently the most dominant view ... and is becoming more and more accepted by many involved in educational policy and planning, think tanks and politics’ (p. 18). However, they point out that such a view has relied disproportionately on the association between class size and academic attainment, a reliance they argue is both ‘misleading’ and ‘limited’ and one that ‘risks seriously underplaying and even misunderstanding the effects of class size (pp. 261-262). In response, Blatchford and Russell (2020) propose that class size has the potential to influence a range of different interconnected classroom processes that in turn contribute to children’s attainment. These processes are depicted in Figure 7.4 below which is developed by the authors.

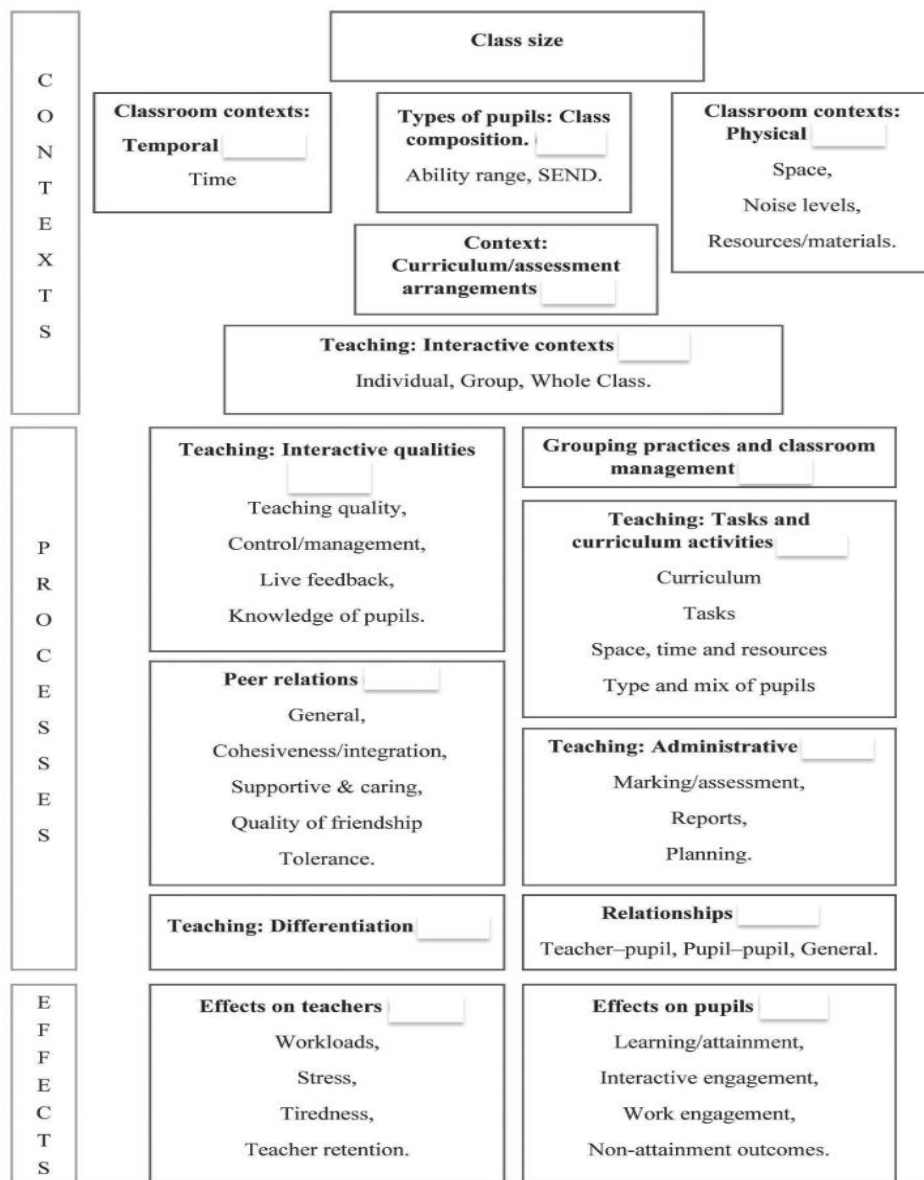


Figure 7.4 Class size and classroom processes (Blatchford & Russell, 2020, p. 263)

The small class size in Reception influenced the vast majority, if not all, of the classroom processes included in Blatchford and Russell's (2020) model; however, some processes could be seen to align with the findings reported in this study more than others. In particular, the small class size, according to Ann, increased the time available for different activities, her knowledge of the pupils and the amount of individual attention children received and enabled her to take a flexible approach to planning and preparation. These factors were seen as enabling a competence model in Reception, as confirmed by Blatchford and Russell (2020) who argue that smaller classes emphasise learning rather than management – and hence, children

rather than the teacher – and include greater potential for teaching and learning to be ‘more varied, more adventurous and more attentive to pupils’ (p. 266).

Class size and the co-teaching arrangement (Blatchford & Russell, 2020) undoubtedly influenced the extension of a competence-based pedagogy in Year One. However, when analysing the data, class size was not generated as a theme of pedagogical discourse in Year One. Instead, the only theme developed within the object element of the activity system related to how children responded to the approach being enacted in Year One. Findings indicated how the Year One teachers and headteacher believed that the children were ‘achieving more’ and making significant ‘steps’ and were ‘relaxed and confident’ as well as ‘happy and engaged’. In addition, the school’s own assessments were identified as providing validation of this way of working, described by Kayleigh as ‘proving that our new curriculum has been successful so far’. This mirrors the perceptions of other teachers who, in extending a competence model in CSE, have identified that this pedagogy has benefits for children’s outcomes (Fisher, 2011) and provides them with an enjoyable and engaging learning experience (Jay & Knaus, 2018). It also establishes a level of congruence with research reporting how the continuation of competence principles in CSE benefits children’s progress, learning dispositions and well-being (Hood, 2013; Power et al., 2019; Walsh et al., 2006).

The progress children were perceived to have made and their high-levels of well-being and enjoyment prompted the teachers to reflect on previous cohorts of children in Year One who were taught under more traditional, performance-based conditions. Julie, Kayleigh and Maria all indicated how they believed it would have been ‘beneficial’ for past year groups to have experienced this approach when in Year One, to the extent where Kayleigh indicated she believed that they had done a ‘disservice’ to those children. Although such perceptions were largely anecdotal and not triangulated against assessment data, tentative comparisons can be drawn with the research carried out by Walsh et al. (2006) who compared a formal, traditional approach which prioritised early academic achievement in literacy and numeracy with an ‘enriched curriculum’ which placed emphasis on play-based pedagogy and child-initiated learning. Walsh et al. (2006) implemented the Quality Learning Instrument (QLI) to evaluate nine quality indicators such as motivation,

concentration, and independence and reported that the enriched curriculum scored higher than the traditional curriculum on all nine quality indicators assessed in the QLI, leading them to conclude that the enriched curriculum provided children with a ‘higher-quality learning experience’ (p. 219). In line with this finding, the benefits of this approach in Year One were stressed by Kayleigh who indicated how she hoped that the school ‘don’t ever go back to formal learning at this age’.

## 7.6 Transition from Reception to Year One

At Oak Tree, a high level of continuity was established between Reception and Year One, with each pedagogic modality rooted within a broadly competence-based model of education (Bernstein, 2000). The comparable approaches enacted in Reception and Year One meant that children and parents experienced and perceived these year groups with great similarity. This appeared to make the transition a seamless process. Although the value of seamlessness is challenged (Peters, 2004) and the importance of change at times of transition recognised (Dockett & Einarsdóttir, 2017), the high level of continuity established at Oak Tree was welcomed and viewed positively by children and parents.

### 7.6.1 Reception

In their research on the transition, Sanders et al. (2005) reported how children participated in a broad range of activities in Reception. Many of the activities referenced by the children in their research – including a variety of play opportunities, both indoor and outdoor, construction activities, numbers and letter work and painting – were also cited by children when describing their experiences in Reception at Oak Tree. All children indicated that they enjoyed being in Reception and, like the children who took part in the research carried out by Garrick et al. (2010), they particularly appreciated opportunities to choose their own activities. The five parents who participated in the research all confirmed their child’s enjoyment and affirmed how regular opportunities to play and spend time outdoors were central to this. Another important aspect of children’s enjoyment, from the perspective of their parents, was the relationships they had established with the teacher and other children. The latter of these, friendships with peers, were generated as being particularly pleasurable, confirming research that identifies how

friendships are strongly associated with positive experiences in Reception (Papadopoulou, 2016). In addition to their children, parents too established a positive relationship with the teacher, based on constant and reciprocal communication. As is reported by Brooker et al. (2010), communication appeared to be supported by the EYFS curriculum framework (Department for Education, 2017a), which informed the ‘Parents as Partners’ policy at the school.

### 7.6.2 Year One

In Year One it was a case of more of the same, with children and parents identifying how a balance of opportunities and experiences continued to be provided. Both children and parents were able to identify activities spanning the full length of the child- to adult-led continuum (Fisher, 2020). This continuation represented a somewhat distinctive experience in Year One, with previous research reporting how opportunities for children to pursue their interests (White & Sharp, 2007), learn through play (Nicholson, 2018) and spend time outdoors (Waite et al., 2009) – activities which children expressed as enjoying – are reduced in Year One. As in Reception, all children perceived this approach to be highly enjoyable, particularly opportunities to ‘play’. This confirms Fisher’s (2020) argument that ‘five- to seven-year-old children love to play, and still need to play’ (p. 64). Children and parents too stated that ‘learning new things’ and progressing in ‘academic elements’ had been enjoyable in Year One. The consensus from children and parents appeared to be that an appropriate balance was struck between opportunities to play and activities that contained academic challenge. This balance is reminiscent of the conclusions drawn by Broström (2019), who, based on his research on children’s views of the transition in Denmark, interpreted what children might hope for when attending compulsory school:

We want a challenging, play-oriented and creative environment, which makes it possible for us to learn to read and write and to do maths – and with lots of outdoor play activities. (p. 95)

Achieving this balance appeared to give children the best of both worlds; that is, to continue to hone their skills as ‘master players’ (Wood, 2007, p. 311) while at the same time advance and challenge themselves academically (White & Sharp, 2007).

Parents also appreciated how all avenues of communication established in Reception remained open in Year One. Being ‘well informed’ about their child’s experiences seemed to increase parents’ understanding of, and subsequently their confidence in, the approach being enacted in Year One.

### 7.6.3 Transition

For children and parents at Oak Tree the transition from Reception to Year One was a seamless process, to the extent where one parent joked ‘what transition?’. Opportunities to play and exercise agency, so often relegated to the periphery of children’s experience in Year One (Huf, 2013; Wood, 2007; Sanders et al., 2005), or used momentarily as a transitory activity (Broström, 2005), were central to children’s participation throughout Reception and Year One. Being able to make the transition with friends with whom the children had established strong bonds appeared to support children’s adjustment to Year One further. This supports research identifying the importance of friendships during the transition (Dockett et al., 2019; Peters, 2003). The high level of continuity established between Reception and Year One appeared to support all children, almost immediately, and certainly by the time of case study visits in Phase Two (November 2019), to be able to participate in the opportunities, requirements and challenges optimally (Griebel & Niesel, 2009) and feel a ‘sense of belonging’ (Bröstrom, 2002) in Year One. These are widely considered to be markers of a successful transition to compulsory school.

## Section Three: Cross-case discussion

### 7.7 Cross-case discussion

The previous two sections in this chapter have focussed on a ‘within-case’ discussion of Pine Tree (Section One) and Oak Tree (Section Two). Hence, the chapter has thus far considered each setting as comprehensive cases in and of themselves (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and focussed on the ‘singular properties and features’ of each (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 663). The final section of this chapter presents a ‘cross-case’ discussion (Miles et al., 2020) where a number of ‘common relationships’ among both cases are explored (Stake, 1995, p. 36).



Given the scope of this research and the volume of data collected, it was possible to compare and discuss a wide range of themes in relation to both cases. However, limitations on word count limit the cross-case discussion to just four:

- The role and influence of values on pedagogy in Reception and Year One
- ‘Giving’ or ‘clipping’ children’s wings in Year One
- The relationship between Reception and Year One: dominant and alternative discourses
- Child and parent experiences and perceptions of the transition from Reception to Year One

These four themes – two of which are concerned with pedagogy and two with transition – have been selected for further discussion as they provide additional insight into the objectives that have driven this research; namely, to understand and explore how pedagogy is enacted in Reception and Year One in schools in different sectors and to understand how these pedagogies influence child and parent experiences and perceptions of the transition between them.

### 7.7.1 The role and influence of values on pedagogy in Reception and Year One

Alexander (2009a) argues that the analysis of values is a ‘*sine qua non*’ for a comparative pedagogy. However, in outlining their centrality, he warns that they ‘spill out untidily at every point in the analysis of pedagogy’ and, as a consequence, research ‘tends to play down their significance in shaping and explaining observable practice’ (Alexander, 2009a, p. 932). In this research, developing an account of teacher values was indeed central to understanding how pedagogical practice was shaped in Reception and Year One in each case; however, rather than spilling out ‘untidily at every point’, activity theory (Engeström, 2015) played a highly effective role in not only containing but also uncovering and pinpointing their influence. Through positioning activity theory elements – subject, rules, community, division of labour and object – as pedagogical *discourse* it was possible to identify the extent to which the values held by teachers (subject) and

headteachers (community) influenced the *performance* of teaching (tool) or whether they were moderated by other elements within the activity system.

All eight of the educators who took part in this research – two headteachers, two Reception teachers and four Year One teachers across two cases – articulated values and beliefs that were broadly inscribed within what Dahlberg et al. (2007) identify as a postmodern construction of childhood and pedagogy. A postmodern construction of childhood and pedagogy places emphasis on giving children ‘opportunities to use their curiosity and creativity, to experiment and take responsibility, to make choices concerning their life and future’ (p. 56). Some of the teachers could be seen to subscribe to a postmodern image of the child more than others, but this was a matter of degree and not direction, as all appeared to reject an education based on modernist conditions; that is, a pedagogy predicated on ‘transmitting to, or depositing within, the child a predetermined and unquestionable body of knowledge, with a fabricated meaning’ (Dahlberg et al., 2007, p. 52). Yet despite all sharing similar values on childhood and pedagogy, the extent to which postmodern values infused the *performance* of teaching in Reception and Year One varied considerably between Pine Tree and Oak Tree. This is because teachers do not operate in isolation but are moderated by the contextual dimensions of the setting in which they work (Bennet et al., 1997; Priestley et al., 2015). As Biesta and Tedder (2007) note, ‘actors always act by means of their environment rather than simply in their environment’ (p. 137); in activity theory terms, ‘human activity always takes place within a community governed by a certain division of labour and by certain rules’ (Engeström, 2015, p. 114).

At Pine Tree, it was possible to identify that teacher values were often in conflict with the approach being enacted; with elements of practice in Reception and, to a great extent, all practices in Year One contradicting teachers’ ‘espoused theories’ (Argyris & Schon, 1974). In both Reception and Year One at Pine Tree, practices that ran counter to a postmodern construction of childhood and pedagogy – such as ability grouping and interventions in Reception and a narrowing of the curriculum, the introduction of non-negotiables, strong framing and regular summative assessments in Year One, with the need to produce, track and analyse data in both – were introduced as a response to constraints within their respective activity

systems. In Reception, this related to the need to maximise performance data for the Good Level of Development (GLD) indicator (rules) and prepare children for the demands of Year One respectively (division of labour). In Year One, pressures were associated with delivering the National Curriculum, working towards high-stakes assessments and improving standards in writing (rules), as well as preparing children for the increased expectations of Year Two (division of labour). These contextual and structural factors – which operated as ‘calculated technologies of performance’ (Ball et al., 2012, p. 518) working to steer teachers, from a distance, towards calculable pedagogies (Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021) – moderated and constrained the enactment of the teachers’ values in practice (Bennet et al., 1997; Priestley et al., 2015). At Pine Tree, therefore, the Reception and Year One teachers could be seen to ‘compromise on the kinds of teaching in which they believed in’ in order to focus on ‘the kinds of teaching demanded by performativity’ (Turner-Bisset, 2007, p. 195). In doing so, they experienced what Ball (2003) refers to as ‘values schizophrenia’, where:

commitment, judgement and authenticity within practice are sacrificed for impression and performance. Here there is a potential “splitting” between the teachers’ own judgements about “good practice” and students’ “needs” and the rigours of performance. (p. 221)

The demands of the performative, neoliberal regime in which the teachers at Pine Tree were operating meant that the teachers ultimately lost ‘possession of their purposes to central governments’ (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 166; Neaum, 2016).

In contrast, it was possible to see how the values held by teachers at Oak Tree were ‘centre-stage’ (Alexander, 2002, p. 12) and had a significant influence on determining how pedagogical practices took shape in Reception and Year One (Dahlberg et al., 2007). At Oak Tree, the freedoms relating to curriculum and assessment meant that teachers not only acted ‘by means *of* their environment’ (Biesta & Tedder, 2007, p. 137) but were also able to act *on* their environment. By not having to deliver the National Curriculum or administer high-stakes assessments, teachers enjoyed a high level of agency and were able to exercise ‘intentionality’, described by Priestley et al. (2015) as ‘the capacity to formulate

possibilities for action, active consideration of such possibilities and the exercise of choice.’ (p. 23). Hence, teachers were able to exert control over and co-construct the contextual and structural components within their activity system to ensure they reflected the postmodern construction of childhood and pedagogy they endorsed. The best case in point being the rejection of the knowledge-based National Curriculum, with its modernist construction of the child as a reproducer of knowledge, identity and culture (Dahlberg et al., 2007) and in its place the establishment of a curriculum embracing postmodern values and a competence-based model of education.

### 7.7.2 ‘Giving’ or ‘clipping’ children’s wings in Year One

The next theme focusses on an aspect of the pedagogies enacted in Year One in each case and in particular the concept of ‘giving’ or ‘clipping’ children’s wings. Interestingly, the metaphor of ‘wings’ was alluded to in the context of Year One by both headteachers, albeit with different, and to some extent conflicting, connotations. A reminder of each quote is presented below:

The danger when they go into Year One is that their wings are slightly clipped because the outcome is more determined. The teacher might plan it [the outcome] to be more important than the process. (Phase Two – Susan, Pine Tree headteacher)

It’s giving them wings of their own... feeling safe enough that they know if it goes wrong it doesn’t matter. I don’t want them to be spoon fed. I want them to explore and discover. (Phase Two – Maria, Oak Tree headteacher)

The quotes presented are a powerful microcosm that serve to illustrate the different discourses underpinning Year One at Pine Tree and Oak Tree. While one is aware that they might be ‘clipping’ children’s wings the other is preoccupied with ‘giving’ children wings; while one is attempting to ‘fill gaps’ and ‘secure the basics’ the other is seeking ‘spirit’, ‘fire’, ‘awe’ and ‘wonder’; while one is concerned with ‘non-negotiables’ the other encourages negotiation. In using the metaphor of ‘wings’, it is argued that both headteachers were alluding to the concept of learner agency and the importance of giving children ‘voice and choice in how they learn’ (Manyukhina & Wyse, 2019, p. 224). However, in the same way that teacher

agency is culturally mediated (Priestley et al., 2015), learner agency too is enabled or constrained by contextual factors (Huf, 2013; Manyukhina & Wyse, 2019).

In response to the performative demands placed on Year One at Pine Tree, teaching and learning took the form of a performance-based model of education, focussed firmly on what was missing in children's learning (Bernstein, 2000). It was a modality driven not by values or beliefs but by necessity and pragmatism (Ball et al., 2012). This meant that the processes of learning were subordinate to its outcomes or products and, as such, teaching and learning took on a utilitarian and instrumental mindset, becoming an 'utterly predictable undertaking' (Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021, p. 137). The headteacher at Pine Tree was aware of, and in opposition to, such a pedagogy; yet, inadvertently contributed to it, most notably through prescribing 'non-negotiables', a set of expectations in writing that all children should know and be able to do by the time they leave Year One. Non-negotiables in Year One were the epitome of 'inauthentic practice' (Ball, 2003, p. 222) and of an education based on following 'rigid lines' (Moss, 2019, p. 54). They encapsulated what Loris Malaguzzi termed a 'prophetic pedagogy', which:

[k]nows everything beforehand, knows everything that will happen, knows everything, does not have one uncertainty, is absolutely imperturbable. It contemplates everything and prophesies everything, sees everything, sees everything to the point that it is capable of giving you recipes for little bits of actions, minute by minute, hour by hour, objective by objective, five minutes by five minutes. This is something so coarse, so cowardly, so humiliating of teachers' ingenuity, a complete humiliation for children's ingenuity and potential. (cited in Cagliari et al., 2016, p. 422)

The 'non-negotiable' elements, which were identified as a mode of governmentality earlier in this chapter, followed a predetermined and rigid structure that governed the type and scope of a large proportion of activities that the children engaged in. Activities that threatened to go beyond their remit, instead of being seen as a process of experimentation or exploration (Moss, 2019), were swiftly curtailed for fear of compromising the real task at hand. This was perhaps most evident when, for instance, one of the Year One teachers at Pine Tree noted how:

We were meant to do letter writing the other week and we looked at each other and thought why are we pushing them to write a letter when we know some of them can't use capital letters, finger spaces and full stops? We just want to really get into the basics. I mean, there is no point asking them to do that if they are not ready. (Helen)

Here it is possible to see how activities that did not immediately acquaint themselves towards predetermined standards and outcomes had limited currency and, as such, were replaced by those that did. When pedagogical practices are closed to such a degree, originality and flexibility are stifled (Moss, 2019) and the ability for children to become 'active, creative, self-guided learners' is significantly reduced (Manyukhina & Wyse, 2019, p. 227). Hence, the headteacher's fear that they might be 'clipping' children's wings in Year One became a reality as the importance of improving standards and maximising performance data took precedence over children's own motivations and interests. Under these conditions, a strongly framed, teacher-led approach itself became 'non-negotiable' as it was perceived by the teachers as carrying the greatest assurances of producing the results upon which they and the children would ultimately be judged.

In contrast, Year One at Oak Tree rejected notions of prescriptiveness, instead opting to align with Reception by continuing to emphasise an open-ended pedagogy that created the conditions for learners to exercise agency, be 'creative', 'curious' and 'experiment' and 'discover'. Rather than seeing uncertainty as a distraction, it was embraced, encouraged, and actively pursued. In many ways, this 'welcoming of the unexpected, the surprising' (Moss, 2019, p. 74) meant that the *performance* of teaching and its attendant *discourse* in Year One at Oak Tree shared commonalities with the postmodern philosophy underpinning Reggio Emilia. For example, a number of the values fundamental to Reggio – such as experimentation, unpredictability and respect for children's interests (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Moss, 2019) – were central features of practice in Year One and indeed, Reception. These values pervaded both the *performance* of teaching in Year One – through weak classification and framing (Bernstein, 1975) – and the attendant *discourse* – through commitments to not 'limiting the child and closing them off' (Julie) but instead giving them space to 'experiment, discover, fail and succeed' (Kayleigh). As Julie and Maria stated respectively, children should not be 'like sheep' and teachers 'are

not the oracle'. The concept of 'giving children wings' in Year One at Oak Tree, therefore, was to value what Moss (2019) – in exploring Reggio Emilia's politics of education – terms 'lines of flight', where learning:

[leads] off in unpredicted ways [and is] provoked by encounters with difference as new connections are made and new theories are tested with others. Rather than a staircase, where one step follows another in sequence, the knowledge that learning constructs is more like a tangle of spaghetti (Malaguzzi's metaphor), with no beginning and no end, but where you are always *in between*, and with openings towards many other directions and places. (p. 71)

How such a view of learning came to pervade teaching and learning in Year One is, to a great extent, related to their ability to reject, reimagine and reconfigure the rules within its activity system. Exercising their right to move away from the controlling technologies through which the dominant discourse exerts its influence (Moss, 2019) – that is, a highly prescriptive and modernist National Curriculum, high-stakes assessments and an inspectorate who, as an antithesis to 'lines of flight', define learning as 'an alteration in long-term memory' (Ofsted, 2019a, p. 4) – increased the potentiality for alternative discourses to emerge. The contrasting discourses informing Year One in each case had a strong influence on the type of relationship that was established with Reception and shaped how the transition was experienced by children and parents.

### 7.7.3 The relationship between Reception and Year One: dominant and alternative discourses

At Pine Tree and Oak Tree, there was consensus among teachers and headteachers that the transition from Reception to Year One is characterised by significant levels of change. This finding is not new but rather confirms and adds to a well-established evidence base reporting systemic discontinuity between Reception and Year One in England (Early Excellence, 2017; Ellis, 2002a; Fisher, 2009; Huf, 2013; Nicholson, 2018; Ofsted, 2003, 2004; Roberts-Holmes, 2012; Sanders et al., 2005). An issue common to both cases was the lack of alignment between the Good Level of Development (GLD) and the expectations of the National Curriculum (NC) in Year One. This closely mirrors a key finding reported by Ofsted (2017) who found

that teachers struggle to ensure pedagogical continuity between Reception and Year One because the Early Learning Goals (which make up the GLD) are not aligned with the increased expectations of the NC. The perceptions of teachers at both Pine Tree and Oak Tree confirmed how the discontinuity between the GLD and the expectations of the NC and their associated pedagogies is, and continues to be, a ‘fundamental problem in England’ (Pascal et al., 2019, p. 41). However, while faced with similar issues of fragmentation and non-alignment, the schools’ respective responses to these issues were the antithesis of one another, with Pine Tree aligning Reception and Year One through the ‘dominant discourse’ of ‘readying for school’ (Moss, 2013) while Oak Tree elected to construct an alternative relationship between these year groups.

At Pine Tree, the relationship between Reception and Year One resembled what Moss (2013) describes as ‘readying for school’. This type of relationship, understood also as a ‘functional linkage’ (Boyle & Petriwskyj, 2014, p. 393) or a ‘pre-primary approach to early education’ (OECD, 2006, p. 61), establishes continuity through attempting to ensure children’s readiness for compulsory school (Dockett & Einarsdóttir, 2017; Moss, 2013). Manifestations of a ‘readying for school’ relationship were clear in how Reception was subject to ‘schoolification’, where the pedagogical ideas and practices of compulsory school – such as interventions and ability grouping – were introduced into Reception to make children ready for Year One. The introduction of such practices was a response to pressures in both the rules and division of labour elements within the Reception activity system; respectively, the need to ensure children met the GLD performance indicator (doing so is regarded a proxy of children’s readiness for compulsory school (Kay, 2018; Wood, 2019)) and prepare children for the demands of the National Curriculum. This meant that Reception was governed not only by the rules included in its own activity system but also by the rules of Year One’s activity system (National Curriculum), the latter exerting its influence through the division of labour. The one-way relationship meant that the competence-based principles enacted in Reception made no contribution to practice in Year One. The strengths underpinning the ECE pedagogical tradition, despite being valued by educators on either side of the transition, were discarded and left unrealised in Year One.



As noted earlier, a relationship predicated on ‘readying for school’ is the ‘dominant discourse’ in England (Kay, 2018; Moss, 2012; Neaum, 2016), described by Moss (2019) as a ‘regime of truth’ that exercises ‘power over our thoughts and actions’ (p. 5). Its status as the dominant discourse in England is, to a great extent, related to how it is the predilection of the state. Of the many relationships that can be established, ‘readying for school’ appeals most as it is inherently positivist (Moss, 2012) and hence, carries the greatest potential for teachers and children to be managed and controlled (Moss, 2019; Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021). As such, a ‘readying for school’ relationship is engineered through the implementation of policy technologies – relating to curriculum, assessment and inspection – all designed with the collective intention of governing teachers towards greater compliance to the goals of management. Being subjected to policy technologies appeared to close down the ability for teachers at Pine Tree to fashion alternatives to that of readying, despite expressing the wish to do so. From this emerged a sense of powerlessness against, and frustration with, the ‘structure of the system’, encapsulated by Susan, the school’s headteacher, stating:

I think it’s obvious, isn’t it? It’s what we have to measure. We measure English, maths, writing, reading and gaps. That is the system we have got. So of course, the structure of the system is going to impact on the skewness of the curriculum and the areas we focus on.  
(Susan, headteacher at Pine Tree)

From this statement, it is possible to infer how the dominant discourse sunk its roots deep into Pine Tree and operated as a ‘dictatorship of no alternative’ (Moss, 2019, p. 8). It imposed a feeling of inevitability; that because of the way the ‘system’ is structured, ‘this is the only reality there can possibly be’ (Moss, 2019, p. 6).

At Oak Tree, a very different relationship to that of ‘readying for school’ was established between Reception and Year One. This relationship was profoundly altered by the decision to reform and extend the Lower School phase to encompass the education of children aged 2-7. This decision meant that Reception and Year One no longer represented the intersection of different phases of education, as was the case at Pine Tree, but were instead two year groups positioned firmly within the same phase. This reform was borne out of a desire – on the part of the Early Years

and Lower School educators, who previously worked in separate phases at Oak Tree (age 2-5 and 5-7 respectively), and the headteacher – to move away from formalised and prescribed experiences in Year One and Two and continue to emphasise play, creativity and flexibility in these year groups. In taking this approach, the educators, in keeping with the arguments put forward by Bingham and Whitebread (2012) and Fisher (2010, 2020), saw no legitimate reason for children’s experiences to significantly change between the ages of 5 and 6, or indeed 7. Instead, they agreed with the views of other educators (Early Excellence, 2017; Fisher, 2011; Roberts-Holmes, 2012) who believe that competence-based pedagogies should be extended beyond the age of 5.

In some respects, it could be argued that educators across the extended and reformed Lower School (age 2-7) arrived at a ‘pedagogical meeting place’; a location where educators from different settings and phases can reflect, analyse and critique their practices (Dockett & Einarsdóttir, 2017) and explore ‘the pedagogical possibilities and risks involved in an integration of the two school forms’ (Moss, 2013, p. 20). The educators at Oak Tree, particularly in the time prior to the 2019/20 academic year, engaged in ‘dialogic interactions’ (Boyle & Petriwskyj, 2014, p. 394) and settled on a ‘similar view of the learning child’ and the type of ‘pedagogical work’ they wanted to enact across the extended Lower School phase (Moss, 2013, p. 28). This was achieved by the Lower School educators through practices such as working ‘closely together’ to ‘share ideas’ (Julie) as well as ‘re-writing the curriculum as a team’ (Maria).

Yet, in seeking to establish a ‘common heritage’ for the extended phase, educators at Oak Tree appeared to focus their attention most on changing the pedagogical thinking and practice of the Lower School phase (previously age 5-7) and bringing it more into line with the thinking and practice informing the Early Years phase (previously age 2-5). This was most explicit in how the extended phase aimed to provide children with ‘seamless’ experiences from Reception to Year One and Two (Maria). Here it is necessary to question whether this complete ‘rethinking of the school’ (Bennett, 2013) was the result of a transformative process – a case of educators in both phases arriving at a meeting place by constructing ‘something totally new together’ (Dahlberg, 2013, p. 82) – or whether it was achieved through

‘upward pressure from ECE’ (Moss, 2013, p. 27), an arrangement that could be described as preschoolification, the polar opposite to schoolification. This is a crucial distinction as while the concept of preschoolification appeals to educators and researchers, particularly in England where ‘readying for school’ exerts considerable influence (Kay, 2018; Neaum, 2016), any relationship where one tradition takes over the other is problematic and, according to Moss (2008, p. 230), ‘must be avoided’. Relationships that attempt to replace rather than reconcile traditions – whether through schoolification or preschoolification – are introspect and myopic and demonstrate a lack of respect for alternative ways of thinking, doing and being (Moss, 2013). They are unidirectional and hierarchical (Boyle & Petriwskyj, 2014) and based on the premise that one partner is incontestable and the other must succumb, adapt, give way and let go. A meeting place, by contrast, is a ‘democratically determined’ (Fielding & Moss, 2011, p. 109) relationship that promotes respectful, dynamic and reflective interactions, with both partners – who are each open to contestation – engaging in permanent deliberation.

The ability to infer whether the relationship between Reception and Year One at Oak Tree was indicative of a ‘meeting place’ or ‘preschoolification’ or, as is perhaps most likely, a combination of both (Haug, 2013), was restricted somewhat by the application of second generation activity theory (Engeström, 2015) where emphasis was placed on exploring Reception and Year One as separate activity systems. The application of third generation activity theory (Engeström, 2015) – where ECE and CSE could be positioned as two interacting activity systems – offers the potential to understand and explore the relationship between these phases in greater depth. This will be explored further in Chapter 8 when considering implications for future research.

What was clear at Oak Tree, however, was that the ‘readying for school’ discourse dominant in England and its concomitant schoolification were actively rejected as a way of forging the relationship between Reception and Year One. The rejection of ‘readying’ was explicit when Maria, the headteacher at Oak Tree, stated:

These kids need us to look at them now. Their learning is happening now. If we keep looking forward, we are not going to focus on the

now and we need to develop the now so that they are secure, rounded and grounded individuals. The whole of society needs early years education to stop focussing on what's next but focus on what's now. (Maria, headteacher at Oak Tree)

Deconstructing the dominant discourse of readying – which, as the statement above implies, the school was acutely aware of – and reconstructing their own discourse through which to align Reception and Year One was seen by Maria as an essential condition of being independent from state control: ‘let’s do our own [curriculum] that’s absolutely right for the children ...Otherwise, what’s the point in being independent?’. Being free from ‘red tape’ appeared to empower, almost compel, Oak Tree to construct their own discourse, one based on a shared understanding within the Lower School of children and teachers as co-constructors of culture and knowledge (Moss, 2013). Hence, while Pine Tree expressed a sense of powerlessness to the dominant discourse, Oak Tree felt a sense of empowerment in resisting it and instead set about constructing an alternative. These contrasting attitudes were attributable to the socio-cultural-political conditions at each school and in particular whether or not they were required to comply with the ‘calculated technologies of performance’ (Ball et al., 2012, p. 518) designed, implemented and overseen by the state. These contrasting discourses influenced how children and parents experienced the transition from Reception to Year One.

#### 7.7.4 Child and parent experiences and perceptions of the transition from Reception to Year One

The final cross-case theme considers how the pedagogies enacted in Reception and Year One and the relationship established between these year groups shaped child and parent experiences and perceptions of the transition. The discourses underpinning Reception and Year One in each case meant that children and parents had very different experiences of the transition. At Pine Tree, the majority of children and parents in the sample were able to navigate the transition with success. However, for some children, the transition was a much more problematic and, in some instances, distressing experience. In contrast, all children and parents at Oak Tree experienced a positive transition to Year One. This confirms how the transition from ECE to CSE is a culturally and contextually bounded phenomenon, ‘experienced in different ways by different people in different contexts’ (Dockett

et al., 2014, p. 3). The nature of their experiences appeared to be shaped by the extent to which children were expected to adapt to the pedagogy enacted in Year One or whether the Year One teachers adapted pedagogy to the children.

As has been discussed, Year One at Pine Tree was premised on a performance-based model of education (Bernstein, 2000) and the teachers were working within a predetermined and rigid structure, one that was consistent with what Malaguzzi termed a ‘prophetic pedagogy’ (Cagliari et al., 2016). This modality operated as a one-size-fits-all approach; a ‘fixed’ pedagogy that children were required to fit into as it stood, ‘with no room for compromise’ (Bingham & Whitebread, 2012, p. 115). For most children, namely those whose knowledge, skills, behaviours and motivations were compatible with the regulatory norms demanded by a performance-based model, the transition from Reception to Year One appeared to be successful. However, for children whose individual characteristics were in conflict with the performance-based environment, the transition was much more problematic. The transition from Reception to Year One at Pine Tree therefore favoured some children ahead of others and, in reflecting the neoliberal conditions upon which it was predicated, created winners and losers (Moss, 2019; Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021).

‘Winning’ children were those able to assimilate the ‘language of school’; namely, the ability to moderate their behaviours in line with school routines and expectations and forfeit their interests in order to follow an adult agenda (Ellis, 2002b). In a performance-based environment, these children were, as Bradbury (2013, 2019b) puts it, ‘ideal learners’. ‘Losing’ children, on the other hand, were those who struggled to reconcile their innate desire to exercise agency and control over their learning – features that were important to their experience of and enjoyment in Reception – with the compliance and conformity demanded by a performance model of education. Crucially, the positioning of children as ‘losers’ and as somewhat deficient was attributable not to inappropriate pedagogy but to children not being able to demonstrate requisite behaviours, skills and knowledge. As suggested by De Lissovoy (2013), under the normative conditions created by neoliberalism and performativity, ‘the losers have no one but themselves to blame for their “inefficiencies”.’ (p. 423). Being a loser, with all the stigma that comes

with such a label, is seen as providing the motivation to join the winning side, or in the context of one child's transition, make a 'strategic adaptation' (Formosinho & Formosinho, 2018, p. 140); that is, to conform to the operational norms of the performance-based environment. This form of neoliberal governance is highly effective, as no one – schools, teachers, children, parents – wants to be on the losing side (Erlandson et al., 2020). Indeed, 'to be a winner is essential, the perils of falling behind the field and becoming a loser to be avoided at all costs' (Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021, p. 117). Such a crude system fails to take into account, and therefore marginalises, those who have not had similar experiences or opportunities for learning (Meisels 1999). It results in a situation where children who are at a disadvantage – in the case of one child at Pine Tree because they were, by some distance, the youngest in their class – are judged against the same expectations as their more advantaged peers.

At Oak Tree, the transition was identified as 'seamless' and both Reception and Year One were committed to competence models of education (Bernstein, 2000). In moving to Year One, children encountered an approach that continued to value open-ended learning opportunities, creativity and uncertainty and that respected and supported their various and diverse 'lines of flight' (Moss, 2019, p. 71). Unlike at Pine Tree therefore where the onus to adapt rested predominantly with the children, the teachers in Year One at Oak Tree saw it as their responsibility to ensure that they were flexible around the social and educational needs of each child. This responsive approach, supported by a small class size, was valued highly by children and parents and appeared to support all children to make a successful transition to Year One. In keeping with the notion of winners and losers, therefore, all children at Oak Tree could be recognised as being winners. However, the impression gained from the school was that being on the losing side, for any child, was not and would never be an option. If, as Bingham and Whitebread (2012) state, children were 'faring poorly', solutions were to be found 'in the school offering' and not the children themselves (p. 115). This was epitomised by the school's commitment to helping all children 'find their thing' that they can 'exceed' and 'excel' in. This was a far cry from the fixed and taken-for-granted status of Year One at Pine Tree, which, given the diversity of young children's learning and development upon entry, inevitably favoured some children ahead of others.

## 7.8 Chapter summary

In this chapter, the findings generated from Pine Tree and Oak Tree have been located within the context of established research. The within-case discussions were considered first, focussing on comparing Reception and Year One in each case. Following this, four themes relating to pedagogy and transition were compared across both cases. Informed by this discussion, the next and final chapter of this thesis considers the main findings in relation to each research question. It then goes on to outline the implications of the research, its contributions to existing knowledge, its limitations and implications for future research.

## Chapter 8 Conclusion

### 8.0 Introduction

This final chapter initially summarises the key findings of the thesis in relation to each research question. Following this, the implications of the research are considered and its original contributions to knowledge outlined. It proceeds by discussing the limitations of the research before concluding with implications for future research.

### 8.1 Findings in relation to research questions

The objectives of this research were as follows:

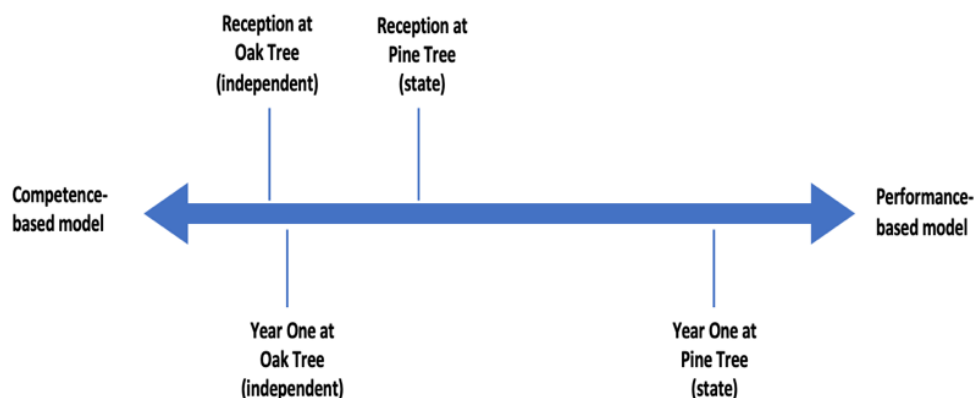
- To understand and explore how pedagogy is enacted in Reception and Year One in schools in different sectors.
- To understand how the pedagogies enacted in Reception and Year One in different sector settings influence child and parent experiences and perceptions of the transition between these year groups.

From these objectives, the research aimed to answer three questions. The key findings relating to each are summarised below.

#### 8.1.1 How do a state-sector primary school and an independent-sector primary school organise teaching and learning in Reception and Year One?

Combining Alexander's (2001) action-based framework (*frame, form and act*) and components of Bernstein's (1975) theory on educational knowledge (i.e. classification and framing) generated rich descriptions of the *performance* of teaching in Reception and Year One in each setting. The synthesis of these concepts meant that it was possible to distinguish between the different pedagogic modalities and, based on the findings generated, it was possible to tentatively plot the *performance* of teaching in Reception and Year One in each case along a competence-performance continuum, presented in Figure 8.1 below.





*Figure 8.1 The performance of teaching in Reception and Year One at Pine Tree and Oak Tree plotted on a competence-performance continuum (developed from Bernstein, 2000)*

In the state-sector case (Pine Tree) the *performance* of teaching in Reception was an eclectic modality, containing elements of both competence- and performance-based models of education. Although drawing on both models, a competence-based model predominated, evidenced by, for example, the lack of defined pedagogic spaces in the learning environment, the allocation of twice-daily opportunities for children to pursue their interests and a focus on ‘ways of knowing’ as well as ‘states of knowledge’. These features, however, were balanced against practices such as ability grouping and interventions, both of which are firmly rooted within a performance-based model. When children moved to Year One at Pine Tree, they experienced an unequivocally performance-based approach. Characteristics of this modality included designated spaces at tables for each child, a collective type curriculum, a predetermined structure comprising lessons, consistently strong framing, a focus on ‘states of knowledge’ and regular summative assessments. The findings identifying Reception as a site of tension that included both competence and performance models (e.g. Neaum, 2016) and the positioning of Year One firmly within the latter (e.g. Fisher, 2020) were aligned with current trends relating to how teaching and learning are organised over the transition from Reception to Year One in England.

In the independent-sector (Oak Tree), in contrast, a competence-based model was enacted in both Reception and Year One. Both year groups operated with few specially defined pedagogic spaces, an integrated curriculum, fluid and flexible

framing and a holistic focus. The extension of a competence-based model into Year One, although widely supported (e.g. Early Excellence, 2017) and recommended (e.g. Bingham & Whitebread, 2012), is a far less established way of organising teaching and learning across the transition from Reception to Year One in England. Research demonstrating where this approach has been taken indicates that it presents diverse challenges for schools and teachers (Fisher, 2011; Nicholson & Hendry, 2020). However, few, if any, challenges to this way of working were identified at Oak Tree and a competence-based model was adopted throughout, with the intention of extending it further into Year Two.

### 8.1.2 What factors influence and shape teaching and learning Reception and Year One in these different settings?

As a way of answering research question two, the *performance* of teaching was placed as the tool element within an activity system and its remaining elements – subject, object, rules, community and division of labour – were positioned as a way of understanding pedagogical *discourse*. In taking this approach, it was possible to identify how the *performance* of teaching was shaped by the socio-cultural-political context in which it was enacted.

The findings generated indicated that moving from Reception to Year One in the state sector in England is a time where different – and often conflicting – theories, beliefs and policies relating to childhood, children and pedagogy confront one another. Through the application of activity theory (Engeström, 2015), it was possible to identify how it was not the beliefs of teachers (subject) or the headteacher (community), nor the needs of children (object), that established a performance-based pedagogy in Year One – and extending downwards into Reception – but instead an array of policy technologies, operating within the rules of each activity system, that had at their core a modernist view of education where children’s learning was expected to follow linear and predictable trajectories. While the influence of each policy technology was considerable, their real power was in how they each assembled to construct a ‘dominant discourse’ (Moss, 2019) that coerced teachers to depart from their pedagogical value base and instead become ‘competent technicians’ (Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021, p. 109) working towards

the outcomes desired and demanded by the state and its neoliberal, performative agenda.

In the independent-sector case – where such policy technologies were not compulsory and, as a result, were mostly discarded – pedagogical discourse was constructed locally and heavily shaped by teachers (subject), children (object), headteachers and parents (community). The teachers at Oak Tree were working in a system of ‘autonomous professionalism’ (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 166), able to exercise agency and intentionality over the rules of the Reception and Year One activity systems. This enabled teachers to reject the dominant discourses of readying and preparation and instead construct an alternative, one that was in line with their beliefs, the educational and social needs of children and the expectations of parents. Rather than being accountable to central government, therefore, teachers at Oak Tree were mainly accountable to the children and families within the school community.

One of the key findings generated in relation to pedagogical *discourse* was how all teachers across both cases viewed children and their learning through a postmodern lens and, as such, were advocates of competence-based principles in both Reception and Year One. However, this research has confirmed, in line with Dahlberg et al. (2007), how an education premised on such principles places considerable demands on the process of pedagogy. While these demands relate to practical considerations – such as class size, resources and the learning environment – they also require that the construction of compulsory schooling as a site first and foremost of strong classification and framing is reconfigured and spaces for the competent, strong and powerful child to engage in processes of co-construction, experimentation and unpredictability are provided (Dahlberg et al., 2007). Yet, such principles conflict with, and are seen as a threat to, a neoliberal regime fixated on children securing ‘predetermined and standardised outcomes deemed indicative of the gradual acquisition of human capital and eventual emergence as a market actor’ (Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021, p. 98). In short, uncertainty and the unexpected jeopardize the need for positivist tenets such as predictability, regularity and objectivity.

From the two cases included in this research, it is possible to conclude that a competence-based pedagogy is possible across the transition from Reception to Year One, but that it might come at a cost that perhaps only those free from state control can afford. Those reliant on state funding – the vast majority of schools in England – are required to reconcile their professional values with the goals, intentions and aspirations of the state which, as has been identified throughout, support pedagogies that are amenable to calculation and control. To consider this important finding further, it is helpful to once again turn to Bernstein (2000):

this idealism of competence, a celebration of what we are in contrast to what we have become, is bought at a price; that is, the price of abstracting the individual from the analysis of distributions of power and principles of control which selectively specialise modes of acquisition and realisations. Thus the announcement of competence points away from such selective specialisations and so points away from the macro blot on the micro context. (p. 43).

This research has identified that where ‘distributions of power and principles of control’ are absent, alternative and localised discourses that reflect the values and beliefs of teachers and which take into consideration children’s individual learning journeys can be constructed. Conversely, where they are present, a dominant, one-size-fits-all discourse is imposed on schools and teachers which determines, to a great extent, the nature of the pedagogies that can be enacted.

### 8.1.3 How do children and parents experience and perceive the pedagogies enacted in Reception and Year One and, the transition between them?

The contrasting pedagogies – *performances* and *discourses* – enacted in Reception and Year One in each setting had a strong influence on how children and parents experienced and perceived these year groups as well as the transition between them. The key finding generated suggests that where socio-cultural-political conditions support responsive and intuitive pedagogies throughout both Reception and Year One – as was the case at Oak Tree – the transition is more inclusive and supports all children to experience a successful start to compulsory school. In contexts where teaching and learning are strongly conditioned by the rules of the activity system – like in Year One at Pine Tree – responsive teaching is restricted and the process of adaptation rests disproportionately with children and their parents.

The performative environment within which teachers and children were operating within Year One at Pine Tree worked to establish a fixed modality, meaning that great emphasis was placed on the adjustment of children and their parents. Children moved from having opportunities to exercise agency in Reception to an approach where learning activities were decided in advance by their teachers and delivered using strongly framed techniques. Hence, whereas some aspects, but certainly not all, in Reception were open to negotiation (i.e. Discovery Time) and the teacher responded to children's individual learning and development, activities in Year One were predominantly and literally 'non-negotiable', with all children required to apply the same methods and work towards the same outcomes. Processes of adjustment and adaptation at Pine Tree therefore rested firmly with children and parents themselves as well as the Reception teacher, who was required to implement performance-based principles to 'ready' and 'prepare' children for Year One. The unidirectional emphasis on children's readiness for Year One (Dockett & Perry, 2009) suited children differently and while the transition was successful for most it was difficult and, in some instances, distressing for others. The move to a fixed and unresponsive performance-based environment in Year One therefore could be seen to create a system of winners and losers, with children who were already at a disadvantage – in this case because they were younger in their year group – more likely to be on the losing side.

At Oak Tree, the enactment of competence-based pedagogies in both Reception and Year One provided children with a seamless transition to compulsory school. Rather than attempting to ensure children's readiness for Year One, emphasis was instead placed on making Year One ready for and responsive to children and parents. Oak Tree was therefore indicative of a 'ready school' which, according to Dockett and Perry (2009), are 'adaptable' institutions that 'recognise the importance of adjusting teaching styles to respond to children, and facilitate parent involvement' (p. 22). Binary constructions of children as either a Reception or Year One child, with all the implications this carries for their learning and development (Ellis, 2002b), were replaced by a focus on each child's learning journey. This meant that there were no sudden pedagogical changes and aspects that were central to children's experiences in Reception – such as opportunities to exercise agency and

learn through play – remained important in Year One. This appeared to support all children in the sample to experience a highly positive and successful transition.

Another important finding related to parent-teacher partnerships across the transition and the influence this appeared to have on parent's ability to support their child's transition. At Pine Tree, parents moved from being valued and well-informed partners in Reception to assuming a more peripheral role in their child's education in Year One; the latter employed a top-down model where, instead of a partnership, parents were positioned as 'novices to the educational "game"' and teachers assumed the role of 'experts who own[ed] the knowledge about schooling' (Doucet & Tudge, 2007, p. 315). This was problematic for many parents but particularly for those who identified their child was finding it difficult to adjust to Year One. In contrast, and in keeping with a relational perspective of transition (Dockett & Perry, 2009), parents and teachers maintained regular communication throughout Reception and Year One at Oak Tree.

This research has identified that schools which retain elements of a competence-based model and continue to respond to individual needs in Year One, rather than enforcing a predetermined, rigid and performance-based structure, are better placed to support the needs of all children as they make the transition to compulsory school. This finding is supported by Peters and Roberts (2015) who suggest that:

There is always a range of age, knowledge, and abilities within any class, and the school that is focussed on being responsive to children, rather than children conforming to particular norms, will embrace what [the child] brings and offer appropriate learning pathways. (p. 4)

A similar point is made by Ang (2014) who argues that children's learning is best supported where the 'human ability to compare, judge and make pedagogical decisions is exercised, not when learning, teaching and practice is conditioned by policy and statutory requirements' (p. 194). Working towards externally prescribed standards based on normative conceptions, this research suggests, can inhibit teachers' capacity to ensure pedagogy responds to the diversity of young children's backgrounds, needs and abilities.

## 8.2 Implications of the research

The inclusion of two different and contrasting cases in this research has provided the opportunity to think critically about pedagogies of the transition from Reception to Year One in England. On the one hand, it has been able to identify and deconstruct how the dominant discourse driving policy influences teaching and learning across the transition. On the other, it has been able to explore alternatives to the dominant discourse and consider what might be possible if schools, teachers and children exercise greater agency over curriculum, assessment and inspection. Central to uncovering and tracing these discourses was the design and implementation of a conceptual framework that has been able to consider and embrace pedagogy in its broadest sense – that is, the *performance* of teaching together with its attendant *discourse* (Alexander, 2001). The model developed has enabled the pedagogies in each year group in each setting to be described, located, theorised and compared with considerable levels of detail. While the findings are highly contextual to each setting and therefore should be generalised with a degree of caution, several important implications have arisen from this research.

This research has provided a unique and detailed insight into how technologies of performance – the mechanisms through which the government seeks to establish conformity to a discourse of readying and preparation – are ‘operationalised’ within the activity systems of Reception and Year One in the state-sector. In the case of Pine Tree, it has shown how these technologies exercised power over teachers’ thoughts and actions, to the point where teachers began to govern themselves in accordance with the neoliberal beliefs, values and practices inscribed within the dominant discourse. The findings generated from Pine Tree provide stark affirmation of the controlling and intervening nature of government, described by Ball (2018, p. 230) as ‘the meddlesome state’. They show, in line with Millar’s (2018) observation, that ‘very little of what goes on in [state] schools is free of central government interference’ (p. 12). The level of insight developed from Pine Tree contributes to ongoing efforts to increase visibility and understanding of how the political ideology of neoliberalism is infiltrating the pedagogical work undertaken by teachers and young children. By increasing knowledge of its *modus operandi* – that is, how it works and to what effects – it becomes possible to more

effectively question, challenge, take a position and, ultimately, construct and explore alternatives (Moss, 2019).

The findings generated at Pine Tree have also further exposed the fallacy that neoliberal policies give schools greater freedoms to make independent operational decisions. By being able to chart the journey of policy to practice at Pine Tree, it was possible to identify a paradox between the rhetoric of autonomy, as promoted within policy documents, and the reality of practices that were tightly governed. Ofsted's insistence that they have no preferred approach to the curriculum (Spielman, 2018) and the guidance contained in the National Curriculum outlining that 'schools are free to choose how they organise their school day' (Department for Education, 2014, p. 6) vaunt freedoms that did not reflect the experiences of teachers at Pine Tree who felt highly restricted by the 'system' within which they were required to operate. The teachers were therefore 'free, in rhetoric and on paper, yet managed, controlled and governed' in practice (Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021, p. 94). The findings encourage teachers and researchers to get behind the 'objective facade' of (Ball, 2003, p. 217), and look beyond the 'illusion of freedom' contained within (Berry, 2012, p. 398), government policy.

These findings also have implications for the academisation programme – which according to recent statistics accounts for 32% of primary schools and 75% of secondary schools in England (Department for Education, 2019b) – and its promise of giving schools 'more control over how they do things' (UK Government, n.d.). As alluring as this might be, the promise of autonomy for academy schools appears, at best, tokenistic. This research has shown that technologies of performance form a whole that is much greater than the sum of its parts; hence, not having to follow the National Curriculum – which is promoted as one of the main incentives for schools to convert to academy status – is largely negated by the requirement to still administer centrally devised assessments and be inspected by Ofsted (see also for example, Mansell, 2016). This giving with one hand and taking away with the other is an effective management tool employed by the state. It is intricately calculated, enabling possibilities of autonomy and freedom to be promoted whilst at the same time ensuring compliance to the dominant discourse is maintained. The promise of autonomy associated with the academisation programme should be met with



caution; such reforms, although promoting de-regulation, are in fact an attempt at re-regulation (Ball, 2003) and employ new and less visible forms of control where ‘the state remains strong despite appearing to dissolve’ (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p. 133).

The implications generated from Oak Tree are nuanced and do not necessarily acquaint themselves as easily to the wider educational landscape in England as those developed from Pine Tree. Very few schools enjoy the freedoms that Oak Tree were granted and given the nature and direction of government policy, it could be this way for some time. Yet, the findings generated from Oak Tree provide a unique insight into what schools might achieve across the transition from Reception to Year One if pedagogy was driven by teachers rather than policymakers. This is helpful because while the political ideology of neoliberalism is currently ‘entrenched in our thinking’ (Sims, 2017, p. 2) and is ‘deeply problematic’ it is also ‘eminently resistible and eventually replaceable’ (Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021, p. 4). It is not, as Roberts-Holmes and Moss (2021) argue, a necessity or an inevitability – although its power lies in its ability to evoke such sentiments, evidence of which was perceptible at Pine Tree – but is rather an ideology, a theory and an answer to a political question to which there are multiple answers (p. 150). Hence, as (and not if) schools and teachers start to navigate ways ‘of warding off the formation of a State apparatus’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013, p. 416), an example of how teachers, who shared the same values and beliefs, had similar levels of experience and held similar qualifications, exercised autonomy and agency over curriculum, assessment and accountability provides an important understanding for constructing alternative discourses. Most teachers at Oak Tree had themselves been subjected to the dominant discourse when working in previous schools and did not take for granted their ability to, as one participant put it, do ‘what is absolutely right for the children’. It could be said that for some of the teachers at Oak Tree, therefore, working within the independent-sector was their ‘politics of refusal’; that is, their way of voicing their renunciation with a neoliberal model of education (Ball, 2016b, p. 1141). The example of Oak Tree, although unique and particular to one setting, contributes ‘new ideas, new ways of looking at things, as well as new ways of doing things’ (Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021, p. 165). Its implications will not *transform* ECE and the first few years of CSE alone but can contribute to the collective effort

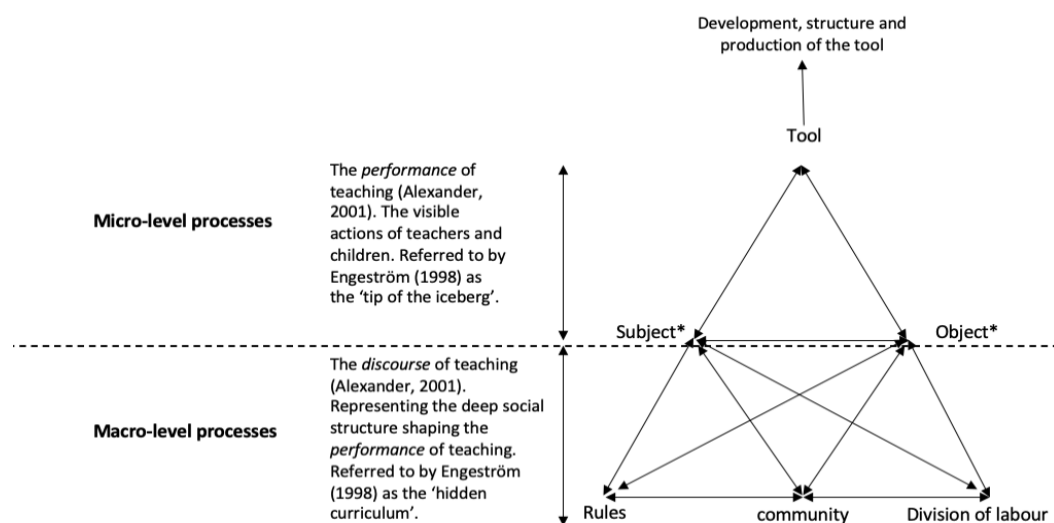
necessary to *transforming* these phases of education and the types of relationship that are possible between them.

### 8.3 Contribution to knowledge

This thesis has synthesised the established areas concerned with pedagogy in Early Childhood Education (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002), pedagogy in primary education (e.g. Alexander, 2001) and the transition to compulsory school (e.g. Sanders et al., 2005) to carry out an in-depth investigation of the pedagogies of the transition from Reception to Year One. In doing so, it has provided an important update to and extension of knowledge on the transition from Reception to Year One in England. These two year groups are characterised by an ever-changing policy landscape in England, making the contribution of a contemporary, in-depth and longitudinal study on how teachers, parents and children experience and perceive their pedagogies, as well as the transition between them, timely. The particular and strong focus on how pedagogies were enacted across the transition is the first of its kind in the context of England and also contributes to, and broadens the work of, the international alliance concerned with Pedagogies of Educational Transition (POET) (Ballam et al., 2017).

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, this thesis is the first study to compare the transition from Reception to Year One in a state and independent school in England. The decision to include a case in the independent-sector was motivated by events in the state-sector and in particular the hegemony of a neoliberal, 'readying for school' discourse (Moss, 2019), imposed and enforced through an assemblage of 'calculated technologies of performance' (Ball et al., 2012, p. 518). Many of these policy technologies are non-compulsory in independent schools and hence, the inclusion of a setting in this sector was seen as providing, but by no means guaranteeing, greater potentiality for alternative discourse to be constructed. The key findings suggest that the requirement to follow centrally devised curricula, assessment and accountability measures has a significant impact on how pedagogies are enacted in Reception and Year One and subsequently, how children and parents experience the transition between them.

The conceptual framework that was designed for the purposes of researching pedagogy in this thesis – as both the *performance* of teaching together with its attendant *discourse* – also makes an original contribution to knowledge. The research objectives necessitated a framework that could explore, understand and compare pedagogy in Reception and Year One across two different settings but do so in a way that negotiated generating rich and detailed descriptions with the need to be concise and bounded. Drawing on the work and established theories of several researchers (Alexander, 2001; Bernstein, 1975, 2000, Daniels, 2001; Engeström, 2015) a conceptual framework comprising of two core components was developed. First, Alexander’s (2001) action-based framework (*frame, form and act*) (the *what*) and components of Bernstein’s (1975) theory on educational knowledge (i.e. classification and framing) (the *how*) presented a framework for intricately describing and distinguishing between the *performance* of teaching in Reception and Year One in each case. Second, by positioning the *performance* of teaching as the tool element within an activity system (Engeström, 2015) it was possible to apply the remaining activity theory elements – subject, object, rules, community and division of labour – to understand the socio-cultural-political factors that produced, structured and influenced its modality (the *why*) (Daniels, 2001). The framework, illustrated below in Figure 8.2, provided a method for connecting ‘the apparently self-contained *act (performance)* of teaching with culture, structure and mechanisms of social control (*discourse*)’ (Alexander, 2008c, p. 3).



*Figure 8.2* The conceptual framework developed for researching pedagogies of the transition from Reception to Year One in two different settings

Additional contributions in the thesis which have the potential to extend current thinking were also incorporated. The synthesis of Alexander's (2001) and Bernstein's (1975, 2000) theories to understand the differences in teaching and learning between Reception and Year One in Chapter 2 presented a highly detailed, nuanced and contemporary analysis that extends thinking beyond binary and unhelpful constructions of these year groups as being either child-centred or teacher-centred. Moreover, the 'question-driven approach' taken to this research – as outlined in Chapter 3 – has challenged and constructed an alternative to the taken-for-granted practice of a 'paradigm-driven approach' where researchers are expected to 'confess' to a particular philosophical position prior to the research process. Being dictated by paradigms and their sharp divisions (Pring, 2015) can make some questions – and hence findings – appear more worthwhile than others and can therefore be seen to limit the type of enquiries researchers are willing to carry out. This can be seen to reinforce dominant discourses and silence alternatives.

## 8.4 Limitations

It is important to note how the research contained a number of limitations. The first, and most significant, relates to the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. School closures in England in March 2020 meant that the Third (and final) Phase of data collection – scheduled over March and April 2020 – had to be moved online. This meant that observations and the generation of documentation, which were particularly crucial to understanding the *performance* of teaching in Phase One and Two, were not possible in Phase Three. An understanding of teaching and learning in Phase Three therefore relied solely on the second-hand accounts provided by teachers and parents in online interviews. Moving online also meant that it was harder to retain participant involvement. In comparison to Phase One and Two, where the participation rate was 100%, 61% (11/18) of educators and parents who were eligible to take part in Phase Three completed an online interview. Given the circumstances, 61% was a positive response rate; however, it meant that some child and parent experiences of Year One were only understood once, during Phase Two of data collection. Moreover, given that this was a time of great disruption for young children, it was decided that it would not be ethically and morally appropriate to include them in the Third Phase of data collection. This meant that it was not possible to understand their current and past experiences and perceptions and

consider these in relation to those of teachers and parents. This was limiting because, as shown in the analysis, child and parent experiences and perceptions are not always commensurate. Hence, in Phase Three, there was an over-reliance on the data generated from teachers and parents to understand children's further experiences of Year One.

The conceptual framework designed and implemented in this research provided a highly effective tool for describing the *performance* of teaching and accessing pedagogical *discourse* in Reception and Year One in each setting. The framework was able to account for a plethora of socio-cultural-political factors that mediated teaching and learning. However, although the framework was powerful and highly effective in answering the research questions, it would be naïve to think that all aspects of the *performance* of teaching and the attendant *discourse* were captured by the framework. Hence, it is important to note how some of the theories from which the conceptual framework was derived, such as the action-based framework (*frame, form and act*) (Alexander, 2001) and activity theory (Engeström, 2015), are intended to be 'descriptive rather than prescriptive' (Alexander, 2001, p. 323) and 'heuristic' rather than 'an ultimate piece of truth about human activities' (Lin, 2007, p. 90) respectively. In this sense, activity theory will not, and cannot, capture every aspect of pedagogical *discourse*.

Limitations were also presented in terms of the volume and richness of the data generated in each case. Limits on word count meant that it was not possible to explore all of the themes generated from the data in detail or honour participants' voices in full. It is hoped that it is possible to grasp the essence of each theme presented in the research, but this would have undoubtedly been enhanced further through the use of even more participant direct quotations. Limitations on word count also prevented a more detailed consideration of the relationship between children's individual characteristics and how these might have influenced their experiences of the transition, despite having collected and analysed data related to this. While the tension between a need for brevity and a commitment to honouring participant voice has been challenging, representing participants' experiences and perceptions at Pine Tree and Oak Tree is an important consideration beyond the thesis.

A further limitation related to data analysis and specifically the way some themes were named in the research. While Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) was highly compatible with a number of aspects of this research – including the types of research questions formulated, the analysis of a rich and complex data set and the ability to analyse research questions independently of one another – Braun and Clarke (2021a) warn that ‘each theme name should convey something of the “essence” of each them; one-word names should be avoided’ (p. 18). In this research, although a RTA was carried out, descriptive and, on occasions, one-word labels were applied to name themes. This was because the conceptual framework designed and implemented in this research necessitated the analysis of data using both inductive and deductive coding logics. Yet, although the naming of some themes in this research can be seen to contradict their guidance, Braun and Clarke (2021a) do acknowledge that the application of RTA is flexible and subjective and that ultimately, researchers need to:

decide on and develop the particular themes that work best for their project — recognising that the aims and purpose of the analysis, and its theoretical and philosophical underpinnings, will delimit these possibilities to some extent. (p. 8)

## 8.5 Implications for future research

This thesis has focussed on the pedagogies enacted in Reception and Year One in two different settings and has explored how children and parents experience and perceive the transition between them. The findings developed from the thesis contain several implications for future research.

While this study applied second generation activity theory to understand Reception and Year One as separate pedagogical activity systems, third generation activity theory also holds significant potential for researching the transition, particularly for understanding but also transforming the relationship between Reception and Year One. Using Engeström’s (2001) concept of ‘expansive learning’, third generation activity theory would facilitate a focus on the intersection of the Reception and Year

One activity systems and create a third space where both year groups ‘meet and interact to form new meanings that go beyond the evident limits of both’ (p. 136). This would encourage teachers in both year groups to ‘understand each other’s backgrounds and think beyond other people’s practices and actions to consider the causes behind them’ (Karila & Rantavouri, 2014, p. 382). The application of third generation activity theory therefore has the potential to help schools and teachers reject and resist the unidirectional dominant discourse of ‘readying for school’ and instead establish a more reciprocal and transformative relationship between Reception and Year One. It therefore provides a means through which a pedagogical meeting place (Moss, 2013) can truly be realised. Given its potential, third generation activity theory should not just be limited to transforming the relationship between year groups within schools but should also be applied to establish networks across schools, including between those in the state and independent sector. Although schools in these sectors work within very different socio-cultural-political contexts, this research has shown that they share a number of commonalities, not least their desire and commitment to provide children with the best possible experiences.

This thesis has provided an example of how the political ideology of neoliberalism, with its roots in performativity and positivism, fundamentally shapes how pedagogies are enacted across the transition from Reception to Year One in schools in the state-sector in England. Yet, while this thesis has made an important contribution to understanding its *modus operandi* in Reception and Year One, there is little room for complacency; neoliberalism is constantly changing and is relentless in its pursuit of more effective ways to manage and control (Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021). At the time of writing, notable reforms to the Early Years Foundation Stage – despite there being ‘no substantiated case’ for ‘significant change’ (Pascal et al., 2019, p. 7) – and the introduction of the Reception Baseline Assessment – despite being widely challenged (Bradbury & Roberts-Holmes, 2019; Roberts-Holmes et al., 2020) and identified as not working in ‘the best interests of children and their parents’ (Goldstein et al., 2018, p. 6) – were coming into force from September 2021. The pedagogical impact of these policies and their contribution to, and interaction with, existing technologies of performance should

be monitored carefully in Reception, Year One and neighbouring year groups in the years to come.

As well as continuing to deconstruct and dissect the dominant neoliberal narrative, future research should also be concerned with constructing alternatives. Oak Tree provided an example of how an alternative narrative might be constructed but it should not be lost that they did so from a position of privilege where they were able to abstract themselves from ‘distributions of power and principles of control’ (Bernstein, 2000, p. 43). Future research that explores alternative narratives but does so from within the state-sector, where schools and teachers are subjected to its managerial apparatus, presents a crucial area for further consideration. Understanding the conditions under which such resistance might be supported has the potential to challenge the current hegemony of a neoliberal discourse and create new possibilities, opportunities and aspirations. There are alternatives; the task must now be to locate, understand and disseminate them.



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## Appendices

### Appendix A: A descriptive summary of some of the key studies relating to the transition from Reception to Year One in England since the introduction of the EYFS (previously Foundation Stage) framework in 2000.

Abbreviated words/terms: YR (Reception); Y1 (Year One); FS (Foundation Stage); EYFS (Early Years Foundation Stage) KS1 (Key Stage One); NC (National Curriculum); LA (Local Authority); PD (pedagogical discontinuity)

<b>Study</b>	<b>Study aims/ focus</b>	<b>Setting(s) and participants</b>	<b>Time Frame</b>	<b>Data collection methods</b>	<b>Key findings/themes</b>
Ellis (2002a)	Assess the introduction of the Foundation Stage (FS) (now EYFS)	FS teachers	Single data collection point	Survey ( $n = 550$ )	44% identified links with KS1 problematic; Lack of continuity between FS areas of learning & NC subjects
Ofsted (2003)	Compare the education of six-year-olds in England (Year One-aged children), Denmark & Finland	12 schools in England, 7 in Denmark and 8 in Finland. Within these settings: headteachers, teachers and parents	One month in Spring term (March)	Documentation Interviews Observation	English teachers caught between FS expectations and impact of testing in KS1; concerns over FS & KS1 curriculum continuity; higher expectations, particular in reading, writing and mathematics on children in England in comparison to Denmark & Finland; English classrooms well-resourced but cramped.

Ofsted (2004)	Children's progress from YR to Y1; The management of transition	28 schools in 9 LA Headteachers Teachers Teaching Assistants	1 <sup>st</sup> visit Spring term (children in YR) 2 <sup>nd</sup> visit autumn term (children in Y1)	Observations 'Discussions' with staff	Insufficient consideration given to FS & KS1 curriculum; need to ensure children make progress and meet standards causes abrupt transitions.
Sanders et al. (2005)	Effectiveness of the transition; how best to support children through the transition	60 schools 70 children and their parents 80 members of staff (various roles) 8 school governors	1 <sup>st</sup> visit summer term (children in YR) 2 <sup>nd</sup> visit autumn term (children in Y1)	Literature review Telephone interviews Case-study visits	Importance of continuity; most children, parents and staff 'content' with transition; difficulties caused by change in pedagogy
Bulkeley & Fabian (2006)	The significance of the transition in children's lives; key factors influencing transition	1 school Reception class Year One class Teachers Parents Children	5 weeks in Spring Term (January & February)	Interviews Observations Questionnaire	Importance of personal, social and emotional well-being; children have to adjust to school culture but also bring their own culture
Ofsted (2007)	A survey of the Foundation Stage standards, achievement and quality. Included a focus on transition	144 settings (overall survey) 48 settings focussed on transition	Summer and Autumn terms	Visits to 144 settings Observations Discussions with educators, children and parents Documents	Only 2/10 settings visited had clear transition guidance for transition from early learning goals to NC; not all settings make use of FS Profile; not enough thought goes in to the impact of transition on

					children's intellectual development
White & Sharp (2007)	Explores the significance of the transition from children's point of view. Data taken from Sanders et al. (2005)	12 case study schools 70 children (66 in follow up visit) 53 parents (46 in follow up visit)	1 <sup>st</sup> visit summer term (children in YR) 2 <sup>nd</sup> visit autumn term (children in Y1)	Semi-structured interviews Child drawings	Most children coped well with transition; children mostly anticipate changes involved; children valued experiences in Reception and regretted loss of play; change in pedagogy impacts enjoyment of learning
Fisher (2009)	Examines the feelings of children, parents and teachers leading up to the transition into Year One; impact of differing pedagogies in the FS and Y1 may have on children's confidence	1 LA 59 schools 2381 children 94 teachers (half Reception/ Year One) 420 parents	1 year	Questionnaire (open ended with 1 question – 'How do you feel about transition from FS to Y1?')	Pedagogical differences between Reception and Year One were 'too pronounced'; teachers felt somewhat 'uncomfortable' about current practices in Year One; gender and birth month impacted child responses; parent response mixed.
Waite, Nichols, Evans & Rogers (2009)	To consider the ways in which children are given opportunities to shape their learning in outdoor environments and the role of staff and students over the period of transition from FS to Y1	1 school 2 FS Teachers 1 Y1 teacher Headteacher		Observations Interviews	Outdoor contexts facilitate forms of creative teaching and learning; FS spend 30% of time outdoors in comparison to 10% in Y1

Fisher (2011)	Reviewing practice in Key Stage 1; How teachers and schools develop 'DAP' in Key Stage 1;	1 Local Authority 18 teachers	Project over a period of time – time frame not specified	Teacher logs Project meetings Classroom videos	Teachers made a number of changes; teacher evaluations showed impact on PSED, speaking & listening and writing; constraints in bringing about change (resourcing, colleague expectations; curricula)
Roberts-Holmes (2012)	Nursery and primary school headteacher's experiences of EYFS	6 geographical areas in England 8 primary headteachers 4 nursery headteachers	6-week time period –	Interviews	EYFS supports existing child-led approaches; primary HT would like EYFS extended into KS1; leaders 'pulled in different directions by the EYFS and the subject-based National Curriculum'
Howe (2013)	How the transition from Reception to Year One affects children's perceptions of school and themselves	1 school (two-form entry) 11 children Parents Teachers	Intensive research over 10 months. Summer term (July) to spring term (May)	Ethnographic case study Mosaic approach Documentation Interviews Observations	Children 'broadly positive'; transition problematic for some children; children's views towards Year One became more ambivalent as time went on
Huf (2013)	How children's agency changes as children transition to compulsory school	A group of children in 1 setting in England A group of children in 1 setting in Germany	2 years (Reception year and Year One). 3-5 days per month	Longitudinal ethnography	Importance of keeping children together during the transition; adults had high control over children's 'choosing time' in Reception in England;

			in each setting (ENG & GER)		
Orlandi (2014)	Exploring children's early experiences at school; impact of experiences	Three schools 3 children in each school (9 in total) Teachers	3 years – from nursery (age 3-4) to the end of Year One (age 6)	Regular observations over time period Interviews	Children responded differently to similar experiences; YR and Y1 teachers felt under pressure to support children to pursue interests and still ensure their progress towards targets and provide evidence
Early Excellence (2017)	Comprehensive review of Reception practice and provision	44 school visits Headteachers Reception teachers		Interview Tour of Reception provision Focus groups Survey ( <i>n</i> = 4250)	79% of participants stated that the requirements of the NC did not build on the outcomes of the EYFS; 'shift from an emphasis on process as well as content in YR to a greater emphasis on the latter in Y1' contributed to significant differences in pedagogy between YR & Y1
Ofsted (2017)	A review of the Reception curriculum	41 primary schools rated 'good' or 'outstanding' by Ofsted	Summer term	School visits Discussion with headteachers and teachers	Transition problematic as early learning goals not aligned with the expectations of the national curriculum.
Nicholson (2018)	Teachers' and pupils' perceptions of pedagogical discontinuity (PD); significance and cause of	1 school 1 Reception teacher 1 Year One teacher 23 children	Single data collection point in November following	Semi-structured interviews Questionnaire	PD significant to YR and Y1 teachers; differences in YR & Y1 curriculum the main cause of PD; bridging transition



	PD; extent to which play-based pedagogy can bridge PD		children's transition to Year One		through play, although recognised as a highly valued and appropriate strategy, is problematic.
Nicholson & Hendry (2020)	Two different approaches to the transition from Reception to Year One Class 1: The extension of play-based pedagogy in Year One Class 2: traditional Year One provision	1 primary school (two-form entry) Headteacher 2 x Year One teachers EYFS Lead Progress Lead	Four school visits over a period of 6 months across Autumn and Spring terms (October to March)	Case study Semi-structured interviews Observations	GLD policy highly problematic measure; Extending play-based pedagogy complex and problematic when positioned as an intervention; support and understanding from wider school community essential.
Fisher (2021)	Explores the place of play in KS1 classrooms.	Year One teachers 11 headteachers		Survey of Year One teachers ( <i>n</i> = 537) Semi-structured interviews (headteachers)	Although KS1 teachers favour play there are a number of constraints. Of 537 returned surveys, 397 teachers wanted to work in a more developmentally sensitive way; barriers to doing this were: not supported by headteacher (97%), senior leadership not understanding (74%) and timetable pressures (32%). Headteachers are therefore 'gatekeepers' to play-based pedagogy in KS1.

					Headteachers interviewed (who work in settings where a play-based approach is enacted in KS1) view play-based pedagogy as effective and appropriate.
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## Appendix B: An example of a Reception teacher interview schedule employed in the study



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**Research working title:** Understanding teaching and learning in Reception and Year One and how children and parents experience and perceive the transition between them

### **Schedule of approximate interview questions for Reception teachers**

- 1) Introductory questions: years teaching, year groups taught, other roles within the school; qualifications
- 2) How do the experiences children are provided with change over the course of the year in Reception?
- 3) How do you think Reception-aged children learn best?
- 4) Could you please tell me a little bit about the ethos in Reception as well as the ethos in the rest of the school?
- 5) Could you please describe your approach to designing and implementing the Reception curriculum?
- 6) How do you assess children's learning in Reception?
- 7) Are there any pressures that you face in Reception? If so, what are they?
- 8) What plans do you have in place to support children's transition to Year One?
- 9) What is the relationship like between Reception and Year One at the school?

## Appendix C: An example of a Year One teacher interview schedule employed in the study



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**Research working title:** Understanding teaching and learning in Reception and Year One and how children and parents experience and perceive the transition between them.

### **Schedule of approximate interview questions for Year One teachers**

- 1) Introductory questions: years teaching, year groups taught, other roles within the school; qualifications
- 2) How do the experiences children are provided with change over the course of the year in Year One?
- 3) How do you think Year One-aged children learn best?
- 4) Could you please tell me a little bit about the ethos in Year One as well as the ethos in the rest of the school?
- 5) Could you please describe your approach to designing and implementing the Year One curriculum?
- 6) How do you assess children's learning in Year One?
- 7) Are there any pressures that you face in Year One? If so, what are they?
- 8) How do you believe children are managing Year One so far?
- 9) What have you put in place to support children's transition from Reception so far?
- 10) What is the relationship like between Year One and Reception at the school? What is the relationship like with Year Two?

## Appendix D: An example of a headteacher interview schedule employed in the study



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**Research working title:** Understanding teaching and learning in Reception and Year One and how children and parents experience and perceive the transition between them.

### **Schedule of approximate interview questions for headteachers**

- 1) Introductory questions: years teaching, year groups taught, other roles within the school; qualifications
- 2) How would you describe the school's ethos?
- 3) What types of experiences do you think it is important to provide for children in Reception?
- 4) Could you tell me a little bit about the approach in Reception at the school?
- 5) What role do the EYFS Curriculum Framework and EYFS Profile play in Reception?
- 6) Can you please describe the how the transition from Reception to Year One is organised at the school?
- 7) What are the similarities and differences between Reception and Year One at the school?
- 8) What are your main priorities in terms of children's transition from Reception to Year One?
- 9) Could you describe what the relationship is like between Reception and Year One at the school?

## Appendix E: An example of a parent interview schedule employed in the study



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**Research working title:** Understanding teaching and learning in Reception and Year One and how children and parents experience and perceive the transition between them

### **Schedule of approximate interview questions for parents**

- 1) How would you describe your child's experience in Year One so far?
- 2) What has your child enjoyed most about being in Year One?
- 3) Are there any aspects that your child has not enjoyed in Year One? If so, what?
- 4) In your opinion, what would you say has been the main focus of teaching and learning in Year One so far?
- 5) Do you think that the approach to teaching and learning in Year One is suiting your child?
- 6) How different would you say Year One has been from Reception with regards to teaching and learning?
- 7) How closely do you communicate with the Year One teachers? How does this compare with last year in Reception?
- 8) How has the transition from Reception to Year One gone so far for your child?
- 9) What are your hopes for you and your child for the rest of Year One?

## Appendix F: An example of a child interview schedule employed in the study



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**Research working title:** Understanding teaching and learning in Reception and Year One and how children and parents experience and perceive the transition between them.

**Task (drawing) and schedule of approximate interview questions for children**

**Task: would you like to draw yourself learning in Reception?**

### **Interview questions**

- 1) What types of things do you do in Reception?
- 2) Can you tell me some of the things you have learnt in Reception?
- 3) Do you like being in Reception? What do you (not) like about being in Reception?
- 4) What is your favourite thing to do in Reception?
- 5) Is there anything you don't like about Reception?
- 6) What types of things are important to you in Reception?
- 7) What areas of the classroom are you allowed to go in?
- 8) Are you happy to be moving to Year One soon? Why/why not?
- 9) What do you think you will learn next year in Year One?

## Appendix G: Additional information relating to online interviews

Appendix G provides additional information on the online interviews carried out in Phase Three of data collection. The information included was originally intended to follow on from the description included in the main body of the text in section 3.4.3.2.

When carrying out online interviews, a key decision is whether to include all the interview questions at once or stagger via numerous episodes (Bampton & Cowton, 2002; O'Connor et al., 2008). Some authors (Burns, 2010; Gibson, 2010) recommend sending participants interview questions across numerous episodes. This can ensure participants are not overwhelmed by having to answer a number of questions in one interview which can be both challenging and time consuming (Bampton & Cowton, 2002). However, given the affective atmosphere created by Covid-19 and the reasons participants gave for choosing an asynchronous interview approach, I believed that an ongoing approach, including numerous episodes, was not a good fit and could risk 'interview fatigue' (Bampton & Cowton, 2002) and subsequently an increased chance of participants 'dropping out' (O'Connor et al., 2008, p. 272). This decision was also based on the research relationship that had been established with educators and parents from previous phases, which meant that there was a reduced risk of participants being overwhelmed by a complete interview schedule. Had there been no prior contact with these participants, a staggered approach might have been more appropriate. Therefore, in an attempt to maximise participation, the interview schedule, which consisted of seven questions, was sent to participants in full and they were asked if they would be willing to answer follow up questions. The interview schedule was sent in the body of an email but was also attached in a word-processed document so that participants had a choice of how to complete the questions (O'Connor et al., 2008).

At the start of the email interview, participants were reminded that there were no right or wrong answers and that they could respond at a time that was convenient. To strike an appropriate balance between encouraging participation but not pressuring participants into responding, especially at a time of unprecedented



change and challenge, a decision was made to only administer one reminder-email per participant after four weeks had lapsed with no response (Bampton & Cowton, 2002). For educators and parents, online interviews were designed to seek confirmation of the insights developed from Phase Two, which was also focussed on the Year One activity systems in each case. This, and the fact that it was online, meant that the interview schedule was more structured than the face-to-face interviews. However, at the end of the online interviews, educators and parents were asked if they would be willing to answer any follow up questions. This was useful because it meant that the researcher could seek clarification or more information about what was discussed in participant responses. The online interview questions and information relating to each role group will now be discussed in more detail below.

#### *Educator online interview*

From the email invitation, the researcher received all four responses from Year One educators indicating that they would be willing to participate in an online interview. However, only three these educators completed the online interview. One of two headteachers responded to the participation email and completed the online interview. The purpose of the online interviews with Year One educators and headteachers was to understand whether the approach to teaching and learning observed and discussed in Phase Two in November was similar or different. Each interview schedule contained some universal questions as well as those more unique to each case and role group. For example, generic questions included in the online interview were: ‘Could you describe the approach to teaching and learning in Year One from January to March?’; and, ‘What would you say was the main focus of teaching and learning in Year One up until the school closure in March?’. The responses to the online interview questions enabled the researcher to gain insight into the nature of the pedagogical approach implemented in Year One in each setting since Phase Two.

#### *Parent online interview*

Ten out of twelve parents indicated that they would be happy to participate in an online interview. Nine of these ten went on to complete the online interview. The

parent online interview was the same across both cases and, similarly to the educators, intended to understand the focus of teaching and learning in Year One since Phase Two. However, it had an additional focus in that it attempted to understand how each parent and child were experiencing Year One. For example, online interviews for parents asked: ‘To what extent has the focus of teaching and learning in Year One suited your child?’; and, ‘On reflection, how has your child found the transition from Reception to Year One so far?’. The responses to the online interview questions enabled me to gain a different perspective of the approach to teaching and learning in each case and further understand parental perceptions and experiences of the transition from Reception to Year One.

Online interviews via email were an appropriate alternative to face-to-face semi-structured interviews because they still enabled the researcher to access the perceptions and experiences of educators and parents (James & Busher, 2011). A significant advantage of online interviews is that they produce ‘ready-made’ transcripts (Burns, 2010; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For example, at the end of each online interview, all responses were simply transferred from the email thread or word document and then stored in a Microsoft Excel document in preparation for analysis. This was extremely useful as the transcription of semi-structured interviews in Phases One and Two took a significant amount of time. However, despite this advantage there are a number of challenges associated with online interviews. The first challenge is the extent to which it is possible to establish rapport with participants when carrying out interviews online (O’Connor et al., 2008). Throughout Phases One and Two, I experienced the benefits of interacting with participants when interviewing them. I believe that a face-to-face process is more engaging and personalised; therefore it has the potential to develop richer and more in-depth insights in comparison to an online approach. A second challenge is that when participants write their own responses in an online interview there is a tendency to write less than they would have said if they were being interviewed face-to-face (Denscombe, 2014). This was evident in this study as the face-to-face interviews were, on the whole, more in-depth in comparison to the online interviews, owing to the fact that prompts, probes and social interaction encourages interviewees to expand on their interpretations.

## Appendix H: Participant information sheet for educators



### RESEARCH INFORMATION SHEET FOR TEACHERS

**Working title of the research project:** Understanding teaching and learning in Reception and Year One and how children and parents experience and perceive the transition between them.

**What is the project about?** This research is an educational research project carried out for a PhD. It aims to understand how teaching and learning are organised in Reception and Year One and consider how children and parents experience and perceive the transition between these year groups. It aims to observe Reception and Year One classrooms and speak to teachers, headteachers, parents and children at various stages throughout the transition. The findings, which will all be anonymised, produced from this study will be presented at academic conferences and in academic research journals.

#### **Who is the researcher?**

Name: Phil Nicholson

#### **Institution:**

Bishop Grosseteste University, Lincoln, United Kingdom LN1 3DY

#### **Contact details:**

Email: phil.nicholson@bishopg.ac.uk Mobile phone: 07\*\*\*\*\* (not shown for the purposes of appendix only)

#### **Supervisor's contact details:**

Dr Phil Wood: email philip.wood@bishopg.ac.uk

Dr Caroline Horton: email caroline.horton@bishopg.ac.uk

#### **What will my participation in the research involve?**

As a **Reception** teacher, your participation would include the following:

- The researcher to carry out participant observations in your class for **five** days. Participant observations are where the researcher participates in the daily routines of the classroom.
- Your participation in **one** interview (approximately one hour). This will take place at the school at a time that is convenient for you.

As a **Year One** teacher, your participation would include the following:

- The researcher to carry out participant observations in your class for **ten days: Five days** in November 2019 and **five days** in April 2020. Participant observations are where the researcher participates in the daily routines of the classroom.
- Your participation in **two** interviews (approximately one hour). The first interview will take place in November 2019 and the second interview will take place in April 2020. These will take place at the school at a time that is convenient for you.

**Will there be any benefits in taking part?**

There are no direct benefits to taking part but the information that will be obtained from the study will help to increase understanding of teaching and learning in Reception and Year One and how this shapes child and parent experiences and perceptions of the transition between these year groups.

**Will there be any risks in taking part?**

There will be no risks associated with your participation. All information will be managed with confidentiality and you will remain anonymous throughout the study.

**What happens if I decide I don't want to take part during the actual research study, or decide I don't want the information I've given to be used?**

You are not obliged to participate in this study should you not wish to do so. If you originally consented, you will be able to withdraw your consent at any point in the project, and this decision will be respected without consequence. If you decide that you would not like the researcher to use the information you have provided, this decision will be respected and acted upon without consequence.

**If I decide to withdraw, how can I let you know?**

You can withdraw from the study at any time. When withdrawing, please let the researcher (Phil Nicholson) know on the contact details provided above. You do not need to provide a reason for your withdrawal, however, if you would like to you can contact the researcher or his supervisors directly (contact details above). If you do not decide to withdraw you can sign the consent form attached to this information sheet.

**How will you try to make my contribution is anonymous?**

All participants will remain anonymous and will be given pseudonyms to protect their identity.

Please note that your confidentiality and anonymity cannot be assured if, during the research, it comes to light you are involved in illegal or harmful behaviours which I may disclose to the appropriate authorities.

## Appendix I: Participant information sheet for parents (and children)



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### RESEARCH INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARENTS (AND CHILDREN)

**Working title of the research project:** Understanding teaching and learning in Reception and Year One and how children and parents experience and perceive the transition between them.

**What is the project about?** This research is an educational research project carried out for a PhD. It aims to understand how teaching and learning are organised in Reception and Year One and consider how children and parents experience and perceive the transition between these year groups. It aims to observe Reception and Year One classrooms and speak to teachers, headteachers, parents and children at various stages throughout the transition. The findings, which will all be anonymised, produced from this study will be presented at academic conferences and in academic research journals.

#### **Who is the researcher?**

Name: Phil Nicholson

#### **Institution:**

Bishop Grosseteste University, Lincoln, United Kingdom LN1 3DY

#### **Contact details:**

Email: phil.nicholson@bishopg.ac.uk Mobile phone: 07\*\*\*\*\* (not shown for the purposes of appendix only)

#### **Supervisor's contact details:**

Dr Phil Wood: email philip.wood@bishopg.ac.uk

Dr Caroline Horton: email caroline.horton@bishopg.ac.uk

#### **What will my participation and my child's participation in the research involve?**

As a parent, your participation will involve three interviews at the following points in time:

- 1<sup>st</sup> interview: The final term before your child leaves Reception
- 2<sup>nd</sup> interview: After your child has completed half a term in Year One

- 3<sup>rd</sup> Interview: After your child has completed two full terms in Year One

The interviews will take place at the school at a time that is convenient for you. Your child's participation will include an invitation to draw a picture and answer some questions about their experiences and perceptions of Reception and Year One. This will take place in school at around the same points in time as identified above for parent interviews.

**Will there be any benefits in taking part?**

There are no direct benefits to taking part but the information that will be obtained from the study will help to increase understanding of teaching and learning in Reception and Year One and how this shapes child and parent experiences and perceptions of the transition between these year groups.

**Will there be any risks in taking part?**

There will be no risks associated with your participation. All information will be managed with confidentiality and you will remain anonymous throughout the study.

**What happens if I decide I don't want to take part during the actual research study, or decide I don't want the information I've given to be used?**

You and your child are not obliged to participate in this study should you not wish to do so. If you and/or your child originally consented, you will be able to withdraw your consent at any point in the project, and this decision will be respected without consequence. If you decide that you would not like the researcher to use the information you have provided, this decision will be respected and acted upon without consequence. Your child will be invited but will by no means be expected to take part in the research. If they indicate that they do not want to take part, this decision will be treated with the upmost respect.

**If I decide to withdraw, how can I let you know?**

You can withdraw from the study at any time. When withdrawing, please let the researcher (Phil Nicholson) know on the contact details provided above. You do not need to provide a reason for your withdrawal, however, if you would like to you can contact the researcher or his supervisors directly (contact details above). If you do not decide to withdraw you can sign the consent form attached to this information sheet. Your child's happiness to participate will be continually monitored throughout the draw-and-talk activity.

**How will you try to make our contribution anonymous?**

All participants will remain anonymous and will be given pseudonyms to protect their identity.

Please note that your confidentiality and anonymity cannot be assured if, during the research, it comes to light you are involved in illegal or harmful behaviours which I may disclose to the appropriate authorities.



Appendix J: Research consent form



## Research consent form

**Working title of research project:** Understanding teaching and learning in Reception and Year One and how children and parents experience and perceive the transition between them.

Name of researcher: Phil Nicholson

By ticking the boxes and signing below:

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above research project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
  
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.
  
3. I agree to take part in this research project and for the data to be used as the researcher sees fit, including publication and other forms of dissemination as appropriate.

For **parents** only:

4. I consent to my child(ren) being approached to see if they wish to take part in this research project and for the data to be used for publication and other forms of dissemination as appropriate.

Name of participant:

Signature:

Date:

Name of researcher: Phil Nicholson Signature:

Date:

Appendix K: Semi-structured transcript of a ‘typical day’ in Reception and Year One at Pine Tree, developed from case study observations

As a way of showing how the strength of framing (Bernstein, 1975) shifted throughout the day, a ‘typical day’ in Reception and Year One at Pine Tree was developed from case study observations. The table below presents a continuum – adapted from Daniels (1989) – that can help locate, situate and distinguish between how strongly different activities were framed in each year group. It is important to stress that this process was not an exact science and by no means included absolute measures; rather it was employed to further support an analysis of the *performance* of teaching in Reception and Year One at Pine Tree. The Reception and Year One transcripts are presented below in Appendix K(1) and Appendix K(2) respectively.

Strong framing	Relatively strong framing	Neutral	Relatively weak framing	Weak framing
F ++	F +	+/-	F -	F --

Adult controls selection, organisation, sequencing, pacing and criteria



Child controls selection, organisation, sequencing, pacing and criteria

## Appendix K(1): A ‘typical day’ in Reception at Pine Tree

Time	Activity	Activity description	Strength of framing
0900	Funky Fingers	One group is with the teacher going through some CVC words in phonics and another group is with the TA creating sentences. There are two independent groups working on fine motor skills such as cutting, colouring and using Play-Doh.	<i>Groups with adults:</i> <b>F ++</b> Adult controls selection, criteria, sequencing and pace  <i>Independent groups:</i> <b>+/-</b> Adult indicates organisation and criteria, but children control selection, sequencing and pace.
0930	Literacy	All children come on to the carpet with their own whiteboard and pen. They also have a worksheet in front of them identifying capital letters. The teacher gives children a range of lower-case letters and asks them to find and write the capital letter.	<b>F ++</b> Adult controls selection, criteria, sequencing and pace
0945	Discovery Time	Children can freely access a range of resources in the learning environment. Activities that children choose to engage with consist of: aeroplane role play area, snakes and ladders board game, colouring, arts and crafts, drawing on the interactive whiteboard, construction area, balance bikes, water tray and sand pit.	<b>F - -</b> Children have some control over choice and selection
1045		Break	
1100	Literacy	Children are on the carpet with the Reception educator. The teacher modelled how to form a number of letters and the children copy on their own whiteboard. The children are also asked to create ‘finger spaces’ between words.	<b>F ++</b> Adult controls selection, criteria, sequencing and pace
1130	Phonics	Whole class activity sat on the carpet with the TA. The TA showed a variety of phonics cards for the children to read out. The TA then played a game of Hangman, inviting different children to suggest a letter and children were asked to put their hand up if they had an idea what the word might be.	<b>F ++</b> Adult controls selection, criteria, sequencing and pace
1200		Lunch	
1300	Dough Disco	Same as Funky Fingers from 0900 but groups switched around. Groups with adults now independent and vice-versa.	See Funky Fingers above 0900
1320	Numeracy	Problem solving activity called ‘Prove it!’ related to doubling and halving. The teacher takes half of the children in the class and the other half go with the TA. Instead of being asked a question, children are told an answer to a question and are asked how they can prove how they know it is the answer.	<b>F +</b> Adult controls selection, criteria and sequencing but children have some control over organisation and pace.
1400	Discovery Time	Same as Discovery Time from 0945 but groups switched around. The two groups who were outside in the morning are required to go inside for Discovery Time and the two groups who were inside this morning are required to go outside.	<b>F - -</b> Children have some control over choice and selection
1445		Break	
1500	Collective Worship	All children come onto the carpet in front of the teacher. The session is organised around one of the school’s values. The teacher reads a relevant book to the value (kindness to others) and children are asked questions about how they can show kindness and help others. Collective worship concludes with singing and turning off the light on the (electric) candles.	<b>F ++</b> Adult controls selection, criteria, sequencing and pace
1530		Home time	

## Appendix K(2): A ‘typical day’ in Year One at Pine Tree

Session/time	Activity	Activity description	Strength of framing
0900 - 0930	Funky Fingers	The children then go to one of four activities depending on what group they are in. One group is with the teacher writing sentences about an Autumn image and another group are reading independent but supervised by TA. There are two independent groups: one group colouring and another group doing a maths activity.	<i>Groups with adults:</i> <b>F ++</b> Adult controls selection, criteria, sequencing and pace  <i>Independent groups:</i> +/- Balance of framing: adult controls selection and criteria but children have some control over sequencing and pace
Session 1 0930 - 1030	Maths –	Adding and subtracting numbers under 20. Teacher distributes laminated apples with sums on around the classroom. Children are tasked with finding and completing the sum on their whiteboards.	<b>F +</b> Adults control the selection, organisation and criteria of the activity but children have some control over pacing and sequencing
1030 - 1045		Break	
Session 2 1045 - 1145	Theme –	The teacher, TA and three parent volunteers take the children on a walk around the village. The adults point out to the children some of the key buildings in the village. The children also gather ‘Autumn Treasure’ to take back to the classroom.	<b>F +</b> Adults control the selection, organisation and sequencing of the activity but children have some control over pacing and criteria
1145 - 1200	Phonics	Whole class activity sat on the carpet with the teacher. They are focussing on the sound ‘ur’. Teacher says the sound and children repeat (‘I say, you say’). Children then use individual whiteboards and their pens and write the sound and then put the sound into words such as ‘burn’ and ‘hurt’.	<b>F ++</b> Adult controls selection, criteria, sequencing and pace
1200 -1300		Lunch	
Afternoon 1 1300 -1400	English	Children select a book to read and are asked to write a sentence about it. Teacher goes round the group and supports children’s learning. She reiterates the importance of the non-negotiables, particularly finger spaces and using the ‘words we know’ and asks the ‘greater depth’ children to identify the nouns and adjectives in their sentences.	<b>F ++</b> Adult controls selection, organisation, criteria, sequencing and pace
1400 -1415		Break	
Afternoon 2 1415 -1530	Handwriting	The focus of the handwriting is on the letter ‘b’. The teacher models how to draw the letter in a cursive way. The children then spend twenty minutes at their table practicing on their own whiteboards. This was extended by the children writing the words ‘be’ and ‘bag’. The children had a go at writing these and joining the letters cursively.	<b>F ++</b> Adult controls selection, organisation, criteria, sequencing and pace
1530		Home time	

## Appendix L: The Characteristics of Effective Teaching and Learning in the End of Year Report for Reception at Pine Tree

Characteristics of Effective Learning based on a child's level of engagement, motivation and thinking skills.

Characteristics	Always	Most of the time	Needs to develop
<b>Engagement – Playing and Exploring</b>			
Finding out and exploring			
Shows curiosity when learning and investigates to find things out	✓		
Draws their own conclusions from what they observe	✓		
Using what they know in their play			
Represents the real world through their imaginative play	✓		
Uses narrative to demonstrate understanding during imaginative play	✓		
Being willing to have a go			
Shows engagement in things which interest them	✓		
Initiates activities themselves	✓		
Embraces challenge and is willing to take risks	✓		
<b>Motivation – Active Learning</b>			
Being involved and concentrating			
Remains focused for an age appropriate period of time	✓		
Shows clear direction in self-initiated ventures	✓		
Keeping on trying			
Perseveres when things become difficult or do not go as planned	✓		
Shows self-belief and determination	✓		
Demonstrates resilience and uses failure as an opportunity to learn	✓		
Enjoying achieving what they set out to do			
Shows pride in their achievements	✓		
Shows intrinsic motivation	✓		
<b>Creating and Thinking Critically</b>			
Having their own ideas			
Thinks of their own ways to do things	✓		
Is inventive in their problem solving	✓		
Using what they already know to learn new things			
Makes links between things they already know and things they are trying to understand	✓		
Uses cause and effect to understand why something is happening.	✓		
Choosing ways to do things and finding new ways			
Is organised in their approach to a task	✓		
Can make sensible decisions about the best way to proceed	✓		
Can revise their approach if and when necessary	✓		

Annual Report Card 2018/2019

Child's Name / Teacher's Name

Appendix M – The Characteristics of Effective Teaching and Learning in the End of Year Report for Year One at Pine Tree

Characteristics of Effective Learning based on a child's level of engagement, motivation and thinking skills.

Characteristics	Always	Most of the time	Needs to develop
<b>Engagement</b>			
Shows curiosity when learning	✓		
Perseveres with tasks before seeking help	✓		
Contributes to class discussions and shares ideas	✓		
Demonstrates resilience and learns from mistakes	✓		
Asks questions to deepen their understanding	✓		
Actively listens to adults and peers	✓		
Completes home learning tasks routinely	✓		
<b>Motivation</b>			
Pays attention to feedback and uses it to improve	✓		
Solves problems and helps others to do the same	✓		
Works well in small groups and contributes ideas	✓		
Takes pride in all of their work	✓		
Settles to tasks quickly	✓		
<b>Thinking</b>			
Have their own ideas	✓		
Finds ways to solve problems	✓		
Finds new ways to do things	✓		
Makes links in their learning	✓		
Uses resources and displays to support their learning	✓		

Appendix N – An example progress tracking document (‘Pinks and Greys’) used in Year One at Pine Tree

**Key Stage 1 Pinks and Greys**  
**Year Group: 1**  
**Boys: 17 Girls: 13 Total: 30**  
**Subject: Reading**  
**Data point: Term 1**

*Note: please ensure academic year is noted in footer and there is a separate page for each subject with subject, year group, pupil numbers and data point indicated. Please ensure all children are included. All children to be coded after name if appropriate. PP: Pupil Premium, SEND: Special Education Needs, SCP: Service Child Premium, LAC: Looked After Child Inward Mobility children need to be coded IM and then the year group they began, e.g. IM3.*

<u>Prior attainment at the end of EYFS</u>	<u>Below Expected Standard</u>	<u>Working Towards Expected Standard</u>	<u>Working at Expected Standard</u>	<u>Working at Greater Depth within Expected Standard</u>
<b>E-1</b> 				
<b>EE-2</b> 				
<b>EEE-3</b> 				
<b>No prior attainment data</b>				
<b>Current data %</b>	10%	23%	67%	0%

Academic Year 2019/20  
 File path: g drive/ assessment/pinks and greys 2019/20/proformas

Appendix O: Semi-structured transcript of a ‘typical day’ in Reception and Year One at Oak Tree, developed from case study observations

As a way of showing how the strength of framing (Bernstein, 1975) shifted throughout the day, a ‘typical day’ in Reception and Year One at Oak Tree was developed from case study observations. The table below presents a continuum – adapted from Daniels (1989) – that can help locate, situate and distinguish between how strongly different activities were framed in each year group. It is important to stress that this process was not an exact science and by no means included absolute measures; rather it was employed to further support an analysis of the *performance* of teaching in Reception and Year One at Oak Tree. The Reception and Year One transcripts are presented below in Appendix O(1) and Appendix O(2) respectively.

Strong framing	Relatively strong framing	Neutral	Relatively weak framing	Weak framing
F ++	F +	+/-	F -	F --

Adult controls selection, organisation, sequencing, pacing and criteria



Child controls selection, organisation, sequencing, pacing and criteria



## Appendix O(1): A 'typical day' in Reception at Oak Tree

Time	Activity	Activity description	Strength of framing
0840	Registration, handwriting & drawing minibeasts	As children enter the classroom, they put their belongings away and then register by writing their name on the whiteboard. After writing their name, children sit down at the table with the teacher with their own whiteboard. The teacher gives the children a number of instructions such as 'Can you draw five ovals that are bigger than your circle?' (caterpillar)	<b>F ++</b> Adult controls selection, criteria, sequencing and pace
0925	Physical Education	Session focussed on striking and fielding and was delivered by the school's P.E teacher. Included exercises such as hitting the ball along the floor and stopping and throwing the ball. The children were then split into two groups, one group were batting and one group fielding. Session required children one at a time to hit four balls off a tee with a cricket bat. Following their fourth shot they had to run between the stumps until the fielding team returned all of the balls to the stumps.	<b>F ++</b> Adult controls organisation, selection, criteria, sequencing and pace
1025	Cross Curricular Activities	Children are permitted to choose and explore in the indoor learning environment. The children engage in a variety of different activities: including building in the construction area, using Lego and blocks, hosting a tea party in the role play area, completing jigsaws and boardgames.	<b>F --</b> Children have some control over selection, criteria, sequencing and pace
1055		Outdoor play	
1120	Cross Curricula Activities	The children are given opportunity to choose and explore the resources in the indoor and outdoor learning environment (these were left out following CCA at 10:25). However, before letting the children go off to choose, the teacher sets them a 'challenge' and explains that at some point during the morning the children need to paint a ladybird. The teacher spends 5 minutes demonstrating how the children can do this and how they might need to mix some colours. The teacher provides all of the resources on the arts and crafts table. Some children choose to do this straight away whereas others leave it until later in the session. Again, children engage with a variety of resources, both inside and outside.	<i>'Challenge' set by teacher: +/-</i> Adult indicates organisation and criteria, but children have some control over selection, sequencing and pace.  <i>Opportunities to choose and explore: F --</i> Children have some control over selection, criteria, sequencing and pace
1250		Lunch and outdoor play	
1345	Cross Curricula Activities	1345 The children are given an opportunity to continue to explore and choose activities in the indoor and outdoor learning environment.	<b>F --</b> Children have some control over selection, criteria, sequencing and pace
1415		The teacher takes the children in to the allotment and they sit on the tyres embedded into the ground. The teacher shows the children cards and they take it in turn to pronounce the phoneme and then subsequently a related word.	<b>F ++</b> Organisation, selection, criteria, sequencing and pace controlled by the teacher
1445		Children are given further opportunities to explore and choose activities. However, during this time, children go in pairs to write a sentence about minibeasts. The children are encouraged by the teacher to use the phonemes and related words covered in the phonics activity previously	<i>+/-</i> When children are given chance to explore and choose, framing is weak; when required to write their sentence, framing is stronger
1520	Story	All children gather in the communal space in front of the teacher for a story. In keeping with the theme, the story is 'The Very Hungry Caterpillar'.	<b>F ++</b> adult controls selection, sequencing and pace
1540		Home time	

## Appendix O(2): A ‘typical day’ in Year One at Oak Tree

Time	Activity	Activity description	Strength of framing
0840	Choosing Our Own Learning (COOL)	Children and their parents enter the classroom. The children write their name on a template and then have the opportunity to choose an activity of their choice.	<b>F --</b> Children have some control over selection, criteria, sequencing and pace
0900	Motor Movers	The teachers deliver a physical activity session aimed at developing agility, balance and coordination. The teachers demonstrate the exercises, and the children follow.	<b>F ++</b> Adults control organisation, selection, criteria, sequencing and pace
0910	Children’s challenges	Before allowing the children to choose their own activities, the teachers remind them about their challenges that they have been set for the week. The teachers explain one of these challenges, creating a picture using Autumn leaves and vegetables, and demonstrate the types of picture the children could design.	<b>+/-</b> Adults indicate organisation and criteria, but children have some control over selection, sequencing and pace.
0925	COOL / literacy	Children are permitted to choose how they spend their time. They can decide to complete the adult-initiated challenges or choose activities and explore resources of their choice. As well as completing the challenges, children engage in a variety of activities: writing letters to friends, drawing, role play, construction activities and block play.	<b>F --</b> Children have some control over selection, criteria, sequencing and pace
		During the COOL session, Anya asks pairs of children to join her to look at three different poems. The children are asked to underline the words in poems that rhyme and then write a sentence describing which of the poems is their favourite and why.	<b>F ++</b> Adults control organisation, selection, criteria, sequencing and pace
1055		Break	
1120	Phonics	The children are looking at the sound ‘ng’ and different words using ‘ng’ (king, wing, angry, ring, bring). The children are given their own sticks with sounds on. They have to stand up when their sound is sounded out by the teacher. The children then get a whiteboard and a pen and practise writing the digraph ‘ng’. They then have to put ‘ng’ into words and are challenged to write as many words as they can in 2 minutes?	<b>F ++</b> Adults control organisation, selection, criteria, sequencing and pace
12:05	COOL	Children are permitted to choose and explore the resources of their choice within the indoor learning environment. As in the previous COOL period, the children complete the adult-initiated challenges and engage in a variety of child-led activities.	<b>F --</b> Children have some control over selection, criteria, sequencing and pace
1250		Lunch	
1350	Group reading	Children come together in the space in front of the manual whiteboard and one of the teachers (Kayleigh) reads a children’s book on ‘Bonfire Night’.	<b>F ++</b> Adults control organisation, selection, criteria, sequencing and pace
1410	Forest school	The teachers place the children into groups of three. They are given around 40-minutes and tasked with making a firework pattern in the ground using natural resources found in the woodland (e.g. leaves and branches). The teachers leave the activity open to the children’s interpretation. The teachers and children then judge each group’s fireworks.	<b>F -</b> Adults indicate criteria, but children have some control over organisation, selection, sequencing and pace.
		Following the group activity, children had around 20 minutes of child-led learning in the forest. The children chose to engage in a variety of activities: playing on the swings, slides and tyres and using the natural resources in the environment to enrich their play.	<b>F --</b> Children have some control over selection, criteria, sequencing and pace
1540		Home time	

Appendix P: An extract from Oak Tree’s Lower School progression document. It shows the progression for Communication, World Languages, Citizenship and Universal Understanding

School  
Nursery to KS1 Curriculum  
2019

Communication, World Languages, Citizenship and Universal Understanding						
0-2 years	2 years	3 years	Preschool- 4years	Reception – 4-5 years	Year 1 – 5-6 years	Year 2 – 6-7 years
<p><i>Early mark-making is not the same as writing. It is a sensory and physical experience for babies and toddlers which they do not yet connect to forming symbols which can communicate meaning.</i></p> <p><i>The beginnings of understanding of People and communities lie in early attachment and other relationships. See Health, Safety, Personal, Social and Emotional.</i></p> <p><i>-Children’s later writing is based on skills and understandings which they develop as babies and toddlers. Before they can write, they need to learn to use spoken language to communicate. Later they learn to write down the words they can say.</i></p>	<p><i>Early mark-making is not the same as writing. It is a sensory and physical experience for babies and toddlers which they do not yet connect to forming symbols which can communicate meaning.</i></p> <p>-</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Uses language as a powerful means of widening contacts, sharing feelings, experiences and thoughts</li> <li>-Holds a conversation, jumping from topic to topic</li> <li>-Learns new words very rapidly and is able to use them in communicating</li> <li>-Uses gestures, sometimes with limited talk, e.g., reaches toward a toy, saying ‘I have it’.</li> <li>-Uses a variety of questions (e.g. <i>what, where, who</i>)</li> <li>-Uses simple sentences (e.g. <i>‘Mummy gonna work’</i>)</li> <li>-Beginning to use word endings (e.g. <i>going, cats</i>)</li> <li>-Listens with interest to the noises adults make when they read stories</li> <li>-Recognises and responds to many familiar sounds, e.g. turning to a knock on the door, looking at or going to the door</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Beginning to use more complex sentences to link thoughts (e.g. using ‘and, ‘because’)</li> <li>-Can retell a simple past event in correct order (e.g. <i>went down slide, hurt finger</i>)</li> <li>-Uses talk to connect ideas, explain what is happening and anticipate what might happen next, recall and relive past experiences</li> <li>-Questions why things happen and gives explanations. Asks e.g. <i>who, what, when, how</i></li> <li>-Uses a range of tenses (e.g. <i>play, playing, will play, played</i>)</li> <li>-Uses intonation, rhythm and phrasing to make meaning clear to others</li> <li>-Uses vocabulary focused on objects and people that are of particular importance to them</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Extends vocabulary, especially by grouping and naming, exploring the meaning and sounds of new words</li> <li>-Uses language to imagine and recreate roles and experiences in play situations</li> <li>-Links statements and sticks to a main theme or intention</li> <li>-Uses talk to organise, sequence and clarify thinking, ideas, feelings and events</li> <li>-Introduces to a storyline or narrative into their play</li> <li>-Maintains attention, concentrates and sits quietly during appropriate activity</li> <li>-Two-channelled attention- can listen and do for short span</li> <li>-Responds to instructions involving two-part sequence.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-listen and respond appropriately to adults and their peers</li> <li>-ask relevant questions to extend their understanding and knowledge</li> <li>-use relevant strategies to build their vocabulary</li> <li>-articulate and justify answers, arguments and opinions</li> <li>-give well-structured descriptions, explanations and narratives for different purposes, including for expressing feelings.</li> <li>-maintain attention and participate actively in collaborative conversations, staying on topic and initiating and responding to comments</li> <li>-use spoken language to develop understanding through speculating, hypothesising, imagining and exploring ideas</li> <li>-speak audibly and fluently with an increasing command of Standard English</li> <li>-participate in discussions, presentations, performances, roleplay/improvisations and debates</li> <li>-gain, maintain and monitor the interest of the listener(s)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-listen and respond appropriately to adults and their peers</li> <li>-ask relevant questions to extend their understanding and knowledge</li> <li>-use relevant strategies to build their vocabulary</li> <li>-articulate and justify answers, arguments and opinions</li> <li>-give well-structured descriptions, explanations &amp; and narratives for different purposes, including for expressing feelings.</li> <li>-maintain attention and participate actively in collaborative conversations, staying on topic and initiating and responding to comments</li> <li>-use spoken language to develop understanding through speculating, hypothesising, imagining and exploring ideas</li> <li>-speak audibly and fluently with an increasing command of Standard English</li> <li>-participate in discussions, presentations, performances, roleplay/improvisations and debates</li> <li>-gain, maintain and monitor the interest of the listener(s)</li> </ul>

## Glossary

A guide to the meanings of terms used in the thesis

<b>Characteristics of Effective Teaching and Learning</b>	A statutory element of the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2017a) that outlines three aspects relating to <i>how</i> children learn: playing and exploring; active learning; and creating and thinking critically
<b>Compulsory School Education (CSE)</b>	A phase of education for children and young people aged 5-16 in England
<b>Core Subjects (National Curriculum)</b>	English, Mathematics and Science
<b>Department for Education (DfE)</b>	Responsible for children's services and education, including early years, schools, higher and further education policy, apprenticeships and wider skills in England
<b>Early Learning Goals (ELG)</b>	17 outcomes based on 'typical development at the age of 5', assessed as part of the completion of the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP)
<b>Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)</b>	The standards that school and childcare providers must meet for the learning, development and care of children from birth to 5

<b>Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP)</b>	A statutory assessment of children’s development in relation to the 17 Early Learning Goals, carried out at the end of Reception
<b>Early Childhood Education (ECE)</b>	A phase of education for children aged 0-5 in England
<b>Foundation Subjects (National Curriculum)</b>	Art and Design, Citizenship (non-statutory at Key Stage One), Computing, Design and Technology, Languages (non-statutory at Key Stage One), Geography, History, Music, Physical Education
<b>Good Level of Development (GLD)</b>	A single, standardised performance measure indicating whether or not children have achieved an ‘expected’ level of learning and development by the end of Reception
<b>Independent schools</b>	Schools that charge fees instead of being funded by the government; often referred to as ‘private schools’
<b>Independent Schools Council (ISC)</b>	A service organisation – consisting of seven associations – promoting and protecting the independent education sector
<b>Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI)</b>	Responsible for inspecting schools who are members of the associations that form the Independent Schools Council

<b>Key Stage One</b>	The first of four stages setting the programmes of study and attainment targets for Year One (ages 5-6) and Year Two (ages 6-7)
<b>National Curriculum</b>	Sets out the programmes of study and attainment targets for all subjects at all 4 key stages that local-authority-maintained schools in England must teach
<b>Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted)</b>	Inspect services providing education and skills for learners of all ages; also inspect and regulate services that care for children and young people
<b>Phonics Screening Check (PSC)</b>	A ‘check’ – consisting of 20 real words and 20 pseudo-words – designed to identify whether pupils in Year One have learnt phonic decoding to an ‘appropriate standard’
<b>Prime Areas of Learning and Development (Early Years Foundation Stage)</b>	Communication and Language, Physical Development and Personal, Social and Emotional Development
<b>Reception</b>	The final year of the Early Years Foundation Stage, attended by children aged 4-5
<b>Reception Baseline Assessment</b>	An ‘age-appropriate assessment’ of early mathematics and literacy, communication and language, administered within the first six weeks of a pupil starting Reception

<b>Specific Areas of Learning and Development (Early Years Foundation Stage)</b>	Literacy, Mathematics, Understanding the World and Expressive Arts and Design
<b>Standards and Testing Agency (STA)</b>	An executive agency, sponsored by the Department for Education, who develop and deliver assessments for children in education between Reception and the end of Key Stage Two
<b>Standardised Assessment Tests (SATs)</b>	Standardised assessments designed to assess pupils' knowledge and understanding of the National Curriculum programmes of study for English and Mathematics, administered at the end of Key Stage One and Two
<b>State schools</b>	Schools who receive funding through their Local Authority or directly from the Government
<b>Year One</b>	The first year of the National Curriculum, attended by children aged 5-6