STARTING CHILDCARE BEFORE THREE:

NARRATIVES OF EXPERIENCE

FROM

A TRI-PARTITE FOCUS

VOLUME 1

Carmen Dalli

1999

To my children

Francesca, George and Peter:

Three big punctuation marks in writing this thesis
and much joy throughout

STARTING CHILDCARE BEFORE THREE:

NARRATIVES OF EXPERIENCE

FROM

A TRI-PARTITE FOCUS

by

Carmen Dalli

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Abstract

This thesis explores the event of starting childcare as experienced by five under-three year old children, their mothers and at least one teacher in the childcare centre attended by each child. Narrative accounts of the adults' experiences were gathered through journal records kept by the mothers and the teachers, and during two semi-structured interviews. The children's experiences were recorded through non-participant observation fieldnotes and video-taped records of three events during each orientation visit by the children and their mothers to the childcare centre, and once weekly for the following six weeks. Narratives of experiences were re-constructed from these data using a combination of methods from grounded theory, narrative enquiry and deconstructivist analysis.

The tri-partite focus of this thesis reveals the experience of starting childcare as an emotional one for all participants, not just for children; it argues that the traditional research focus on the emotional significance of this event for children is an incomplete one. Additionally, starting childcare was an experience of induction: through processes of social canalization and guided participation, the mothers and the children were inducted into the ways of the childcare centre by the teachers and the established children in the centre. Deconstructivist analyses of the adult participants' narrative accounts suggested that both mothers and teachers defined their roles in the children's experience of starting childcare, and their relationships with each other and with the children, against the background of dominant discourses about motherhood and early childhood teaching. For teachers this meant that they expressed their role as subsidiary to that of the mother. The paradox emerged that while teachers saw themselves as less powerful than the mothers in influencing the children's starting childcare experience, the observational data revealed that the teachers' actions determined the way children were 'canalized' into the expected ways of relating to them. Theoretical statements emerged from this study which point to new directions for how the event of starting childcare may be conceptualised in the context of shared care between home adults and early childhood teachers. Implications for enhancing the experience of starting childcare are highlighted.

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Chapter 1

...And off to creche we go: Introducing the study

1.1 Starting childcare: A tri-partite focus on lived experience

This study is about the event of *starting childcare* as an experience which engages not only children but also at least two other main participants alongside whom children's first experience of childcare usually occurs: a home adult and a centre adult.

By *starting childcare* I mean that time of first starting to attend a group early childhood setting outside of the home. I also refer to this time as a period of *settling-in*.

Literature on starting childcare or settling-in is not abundant and research literature on this is even less so (see chapters 4, 6 and 8). Typically, the small body of existing research on this topic has focused on measuring children's levels of separation anxiety and levels of adjustment to a new early childhood setting in relation to a number of psychological variables like attachment status, and the child's temperamental classification (e.g., Ainslie & Anderson, 1984; Mobley & Pullis, 1991; Petrie & Davidson, 1995). A variety of early childhood settings have featured in these studies such as nursery schools in the United States and England (e.g., Blatchford, 1983; Marcus, Chess, & Thomas, 1972), preschools in North America, Israel and Australia (e.g., Klein, 1991; Lewis, 1977; Robbins, 1997), reception classes in England (e.g., Ghaye & Pascal, 1988), and day care/childcare centres in a variety of countries (e.g., Hock, 1984; Pramling & Lindahl, 1991, 1994; Thyssen, in press; Zajdeman & Minnes, 1991). No studies of this event have been undertaken in the NZ context¹. The age of the children whose entry into the early childhood setting has been studied has also varied although, with a few exceptions (e.g., Hamilton & Howes, 1992; Janis, 1964; Meltzer, 1984; Pramling

¹ A study to investigate 2- to 3-year-old children's adaptation to the environment of the day care centre put forward in 1979 by Novitz and Fenton of the Department of Sociology, University of Canterbury, New Zealand, did not proceed (R. Novitz, personal communication 1997).

& Lindahl, 1991, 1994; Thyssen, in press), the focus has largely been on children aged three years and over. Additionally, the focus of research has been on children and any adults involved have participated as informants about the children's adjustment rather than as participants in the experience in their own right.

This dominant focus on children's experience is characteristic of much early childhood research whose strongest disciplinary affiliation, since the child study movement of the late 1880s, has been with child development research (Spodek, 1988a). This focus probably also reflects the widespread view that early childhood services, of whatever form and philosophical orientation, are primarily services for children (e.g., Farquhar, 1991; Renwick, 1989).

Nonetheless, it is surprising that as developmental study has widened its research focus beyond child development to a consideration of development across the life-span (e.g., Berger, 1988; Peterson, 1996; Santrock, 1983), the focus on *the child* as the primary research subject has continued largely unabated with only a comparatively slow uptake of the adult participants, the parents and teachers, as equally legitimate subjects for early childhood educational research.

The relative neglect of parents in early childhood developmental research is particularly noteworthy when one considers that early childhood services have emerged and grown in response to parental needs (e.g., May, 1997). More than ten years ago, Pence and Goelman (1987) commented on this issue in an article in which they called parents the "silent partners" (p.103) in day care research. The paper reported on part of a larger study which focused on the "research triad of parent-child-caregiver" (p.103), thus also making the point that it is important to include teachers/caregivers in early childhood research.

The call to take account of the experience of adult participants in the early childhood setting has recently been voiced in other early childhood literature. For example, commentaries on "waves of research" in early childhood education have

been noting the need to incorporate parental and teacher views, among others, in research on quality (e.g., Farquhar, 1991; Scarr, 1994; Singer, 1993, 1996) with Singer (1996) stating that:

in everyday life good quality means a good cooperation between the three parties directly involved: the children, parents and teachers. But very little research has been carried out into this cooperation. What exactly goes on in childcare situations is, for most researchers, still a black box. (p. 159)

In *reconceptualist* scholarship on early childhood curriculum issues and in literature on teachers' professional practice there has also been an increasing emphasis on the need to explore teachers' thinking about practice by *giving voice* to their stories of practice and experience (e.g., Ayers, 1992; Goodfellow, 1997; Middleton & May, 1997; Miller, 1990, 1992; Silin, 1997; Yonemura, 1986). It is increasingly being argued that the field of early childhood education needs to be rethinking its specialist knowledge base away from an exclusively child development orientation to incorporate knowledge/s and insights from other fields (e.g., Goffin, 1996; Katz, 1996; Silin, 1997; Singer, 1996; Stott & Bowman, 1996). Singer (1993) has additionally argued that most developmental research in childcare settings has been conducted from an unexplored basis in universalistic theories about development with hidden assumptions about the home-bound mother which ignore the realities of the parents and children who use the settings. In her view, "developmental psychologists have no adequate way of understanding shared care" (p. 446); she argued that a need existed for theoretical work in developmental psychology which was "self-consciously situation-specific" (p. 445) and recognised the modern-day realities of the shared care of children.

The tri-partite focus on the experience of starting childcare which I have adopted in this study responds to the issues raised above. By exploring starting childcare as an experience which involves home and centre adults as well as children, this study departs from the traditional focus on children as the primary focus of research attention and thus contributes to the opening up of the "black box" of "what exactly goes on in childcare situations" (Singer, 1996, p. 159).

Additionally, this exploration provides data about initial/developing scenarios of the “shared care” of children about which some theoretical statements have been formulated (see chapter 10) which may contribute to developing the body of “self-consciously situation-specific ... theoretical work in developmental psychology” (Singer, 1993, p. 445). Bruner (1993, March) too has spoken about “situatedness” as one of the “banners of the future” in developmental study.

My focus on the lived experience of starting childcare is another departure from traditional psychological approaches to studying this event (see chapter 8). Through exploring experiences of starting childcare using a qualitative case study approach informed by principles from grounded theory and narrative enquiry, my study allowed the data to frame the way that participants’ experiences of starting childcare are reported. Thus, while the traditional psychological themes of separation and adjustment feature strongly in the stories of experience presented in this research, other less studied themes also emerged as components of these stories. For example, the mothers’ lived experiences of starting childcare appeared marked by deep emotions including self-questionings about their decision to use childcare; the mothers recognised that this decision might be seen as transgressing against deep-seated societal norms about good mothering. The mothers’ stories also revealed a focus on the developing relationships between them and the teachers and a concern with working out the *rules of the game* within the new centre environment. In addition, the mothers all expressed what I have called an *intuitive theory* about their child’s settling-in and spoke about their role during this process as one of *being there* for their child. The teachers’ stories about their experiences of starting childcare also suggested that they had clear views about their role during this event, including ideas about what helped and hindered settling-in, and views about *ideal practice*; I have called these views *theories of practice*. An additional strong theme which emerged from the teachers’ stories of lived experience was that their relationships with the mothers of the children appeared to occur within a taken-for-granted discourse about the primacy of the mother’s role in the child’s life and about the uniqueness of each child; I argue that the teachers’ view of their professional identity appeared to be constructed

within the context of this discourse. Finally, the stories of the children's experiences of starting childcare reveal that learning to deal with the absence of the home adult, usually the mother, was an important issue for the children. However, equally as important were the children's experiences of *learning to fit in*. This theme emerged as an overarching one in the stories of the children's experiences and seemed to operate via the twin processes of social canalization (Hill & Valsiner, 1988; Valsiner, 1985) and guided participation (e.g., Rogoff, Mistry, Göncü & Mosier, 1993) in which the adults and children in the centre acted to induct the new children into the established ways of doing things and to promote these ways above other ones.

1.2 The origins of this study and its aims

Originally this study was to explore the meaning behind the oft-repeated phrase that: Parents and early childhood teachers play complementary roles in children's lives. My initial research questions focused on how children understood the contributions in their life of the parent/s and the early childhood teacher, whether parents and teachers made complementary, divergent or overlapping contributions to children's lives, the sources of complementarity, divergence or overlap and how knowledge in this area could help early childhood teachers in their practice.

Underlying these questions was the notion that the ideal form of non-parental early childhood education should work in partnership with parental care of children. This assumption has underpinned many early childhood research projects which have variously attempted to explore relations between parents and teachers in early childhood settings, the nature, frequency and timing of communication between them and ways in which communication and relations could be improved (e.g., Powell, 1980, 1994; Pugh, Aplin, De'Ath & Moxon, 1987a, 1987b; Renwick, 1989; Smith & Hubbard, 1986). At the time that I first planned this study, the rhetoric of partnership between parents and teachers in the local early childhood sector was frequently voiced, and had recently become part of the political discourse which surrounded the national re-organisation of educational administration in Aotearoa/New Zealand. However, despite these

claims, little was known about the nature of that partnership from a research base (Smith & Hubbard, 1988). I saw my study as contributing to that knowledge base and to exploring in some depth how parents and early childhood teachers interacted within children's life experience. My particular intention was to examine how children understood the role of their parent/s and their teacher/s in their lives through focusing on how children interacted with both home and centre adults during a number of specific events at home and at the childcare centre.

In order to achieve these aims I designed a two-phase project; as I discuss in chapter 3, the first phase of my study involved focus group meetings with teachers in four "good practice" childcare centres. The results of these meetings caused me to re-think my original research questions and re-focus them onto the experience of starting childcare (see also Dalli, 1991). The re-focused aims of my study became:

- i. to explore the lived experience of starting childcare and gain an understanding of the meanings which the different participants constructed of their experiences;
- ii. to gain insights from these meanings which could form the basis of theoretical statements about these experiences; and
- iii. to generate suggestions about how the management of the process of starting childcare could be enhanced at the level of practice in a childcare setting.

1.3 Theoretical and methodological connections

The topic of this study connects it to traditional child development scholarship which, as I noted earlier, frames starting childcare as an experience involving separation and attachment relationships between children and parents (usually mothers), and adjustment to the first setting outside the home (e.g., Belsky, 1986, 1987; Blatchford, 1983; Clarke-Stewart, 1988; Janis, 1964; Petrie & Davidson, 1995; Robbins, 1997). However, this study also departs from this tradition by adopting a deconstructivist stance on this scholarship and thus raises questions about the socially-constructed nature of participants' experiences, and

understandings, of starting childcare. From a critical psychological perspective, these questions are important because they make visible what is taken-for-granted in the way people process life experience.

My departure from traditional ways of viewing the event of starting childcare arose out of my focus on starting childcare as a lived experience. Research in this area, and in the area of people's understandings of experience, is theoretically connected to a wide-ranging literature with epistemological links to the phenomenological movement (e.g., Giorgi, 1992; Moustakas, 1994; Spiegelberg, 1994) which attempts to "determin[e] what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it" (Moustakas, p. 13). The social nature of the lived experience of starting childcare also provides a theoretical link to the symbolic interactionist views of George Herbert Mead who saw meaning as being constructed during social interactions (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1962). Script theory and socio-cultural theories of development similarly posit social interaction as the basis for the development of understanding and of culturally-relevant competencies (e.g., Hill & Valsiner, 1988; Nelson, 1981; Rogoff et al., 1993; Valsiner, 1985, 1987, 1989; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1985; Winegar, 1989); they too form another part of the theoretical landscape within which this thesis is positioned. A fuller discussion of this "landscape" is provided in chapter 2.

This study's tri-partite focus on participants' lived experience of starting childcare creates additional links to theoretical and methodological debates about studying lives, and particularly, women's and children's lives and to debates about *giving voice to*, or *re-presenting the voice of*, women and children (e.g., Alldred, 1998; Ayers, 1989, 1992; Bell, 1998; Ribbens & Edwards, 1998; Silin, 1997; Smith, 1996). The links of this literature to the position of narrative psychology that stories "tell lives" and can contribute to the understanding of common experience within a culture (e.g., Mair, 1988; Polkinghorne, 1988) led to my decision to use principles of narrative enquiry in the analyses and presentation of my data. In the stories of teachers' experiences of starting childcare, my use of the term *theories*

of practice to refer to teachers' views about "ideal practice" during the period of settling-in, builds on Spodek's (1988b) use of the term *implicit theory* which is defined as "a component of teachers' practical knowledge, informed by self-understanding, values and beliefs about teaching and learning as well as by past experiences. Although not necessarily articulated, implicit theories guide teachers' classroom decisions and actions" (Hsieh & Spodek, 1995, p.6). My preference in this study for the term *theory of practice* reflects my emphasis on what the teachers in my study were conscious of as elements of their professional practice; this emphasis in my study contributes to an emerging body of scholarship about teachers' thinking about their professional role as well as marks an innovation in how this phenomenon has been studied.

My use of principles from narrative psychology (e.g., Polkinghorne, 1988, 1995; Sarbin, 1986) connected again to notions from phenomenological methodology through the way I explored the children's experiences of starting childcare by seeking to understand the intentionality of the children as this was expressed in their focus of attention (Pramling & Lindahl, 1991, 1994) during the period of settling-in. This approach was necessary because of the pre-verbality of the infants in my study. My use of a qualitative case study approach and methods from grounded theory combined with these principles to enable an exploration of the participants' experiences of starting childcare; this provided another element of this study that is unusual in research on starting childcare. Further details of how data were collected and analysed are provided in chapter 3.

1.4 Clarification of some early childhood terms

It is useful to clarify some early childhood terms used in this thesis.

As I noted at the start of this chapter I use the term *childcare centre* to mean a group early childhood setting outside the home. In Aotearoa/New Zealand childcare centres are licensed early childhood centres providing care and education for children aged 0 – 5 years and in an average group size of 25 children per centre.

The terms *day care* and *child care* are used interchangeably within the European and North American context and are most closely equivalent to the term childcare in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Preschool is also often used as a catch-all phrase referring to educational services before primary school. In Aotearoa/New Zealand the term preschool used to be the generic term for all early childhood institutions under the administrative responsibility of the Department of Education. Under the early childhood reforms of the 1980s, the term preschool has been superseded by the generic term *early childhood education services*.

Nurseries are part of the British and North American early childhood scene. In Britain, nurseries may be stand-alone nursery schools, or nursery classes, attached to a school. The term is not used in Aotearoa/New Zealand to describe existing early childhood services.

In this thesis I use the term *childcare* whenever I refer to the centres in my study. The other terms are used when they appear in the literature being reviewed.

1.5 The structure of this thesis

This chapter has introduced the topic of this thesis and located its origins firstly within the framework of contemporary early childhood research interests and, secondly, as grounded in an initial desire to explore how children understood the contribution of parents and early childhood teachers to their life experience in the early childhood years². This chapter has also introduced the main theoretical ideas and methodological approaches used in this study; the theoretical landscape in which my study may be located is discussed more fully in chapter 2 while chapter 3 presents the theoretical and methodological approach I used in my study.

² See chapter 3 for an outline of how the early phase of this study led to a refining of my initial research intention on to exploring the lived experience of starting childcare.

Because of the tri-partite focus of this study, three separate literature reviews are included in this thesis, one on parents' experiences of childcare, one on the teachers' experiences and one on the children's experiences of starting childcare. Each of these reviews incorporates quite different theoretical foundations but together they throw light on how the experience of starting childcare has been conceptualised in existing scholarship. Chapter 4 presents the first of these reviews; it focuses on literature on various aspects of parents' experiences in early childhood settings and discusses this from the point of view of how it illuminates parents' experiences of starting childcare. This approach was in response to the non-existence of literature dealing specifically with parents' experiences of starting childcare alongside their children, or settling-in their children.

In chapter 5, data from the current study on the mothers' experiences of starting childcare are presented and discussed in light of the literature reviewed in chapter 4. A central argument of chapter 5 is that the mothers in the five case studies had intuitive theories about what went on for their child during the settling-in time and about their role in the centre during this period. The chapter also argues that the themes present in the stories which the mothers told about their experiences reflect themes which are embedded in the cultural life of our society.

Chapter 6 is the second literature review chapter, this time focusing on teachers' experiences with the event of settling new children into the childcare setting. As with the literature on the parents' experiences, no research-based studies were able to be located on teachers' stories of this event; in the absence of this research-based knowledge, the chapter presents an account of the professional knowledge on this topic available to teachers in professional guidebooks and discusses how the teacher's task of settling children into the centre is constructed in this literature. This chapter also reviews literature on early childhood teaching as a way of illuminating the lived reality of being an early childhood teacher.

In chapter 7, teachers' experiences in the five case studies are presented and an argument made that teachers operated with theories of practice about the event of settling-in; in addition it is argued that the relationships which developed between the teachers and the parents reflected the influence of societal discourses about the nature of motherhood and about early childhood teaching.

Chapter 8 is the last of the literature review chapters and presents research insights about children's experiences of starting childcare from studies carried out within a traditional psychological approach and a social psychological approach. These studies focus primarily on the themes of separation, attachment and temperament with attention being given by some social-psychological work to childcare as a process of socialisation. Some work on understanding children's experiences in childcare is also considered.

The children's experiences of starting childcare are presented in chapter 9 as a series of stories around the three themes of how the children related to the centre adults, the children and the new environment of the childcare centre. Within this structure, stories about individual children are presented which suggest that their experiences were dominated by a process of "learning to fit in". I argue that the related terms of "guided participation" (Rogoff et al., 1993), and "social canalization" (Hill and Valsiner, 1988; Valsiner 1985) emerged as good descriptors of this process.

Chapter 10 concludes this thesis with a statement which pulls together the theoretical statements which emerged from the analyses of the data and some reflective comments about the implications of these statements for future early childhood research and practice.

Chapter 2

The theoretical landscape of the study

The function of research is not necessarily to map and conquer the world but to sophisticate the beholding of it.

Robert Stake (1995) *The Art of Case Study Research* (p.43). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

The “world” this study beholds has been “sophisticate[d]” by a number of theoretical lenses. The tri-partite focus of this study brings together three bodies of literature whose theoretical foundations lie predominantly in the traditional psychological fields of attachment theory and psychosocial theory, both of which have their origin in psychoanalytic views of development. My focus on lived experience brings in literature whose theoretical links are with symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, and narrative psychology. Within literature on teachers’ experiences in early childhood educational settings, an additional theoretical lens derives from a growing strand in curriculum scholarship which conceptualises curriculum as embedded in the thinking and actions of the teacher (e.g., Clandinin & Connelly, 1990, 1996; Miller, 1990, 1992; Silin, 1985). Notions from script theory and socio-cultural theory of development are used in discussions about children’s socialisation as well as in parts of the literature on teachers’ practice with children, while the phenomenological idea of focusing on intentionality as a way of gaining access to lived experience is used in literature on understanding learning from the children’s perspective.

In this chapter I discuss the theoretical landscape sketched above by looking at it through a series of theoretical lenses. This provides the backdrop for the theoretical and methodological approach I used in my study; this is presented in chapter 3.

2.1 The traditional psychological lens

The traditional psychological lens has focused on the experience of starting childcare primarily through the framework of attachment theory (e.g., Ainsworth, 1973; Ainsworth, Bell & Stayton, 1974; Bowlby, 1969/1978). The central notion of this theory is that the formation of children's first emotional relationship with an adult (usually the mother) is critical for children's sense of security and for their ability to attain a sense of autonomy, a concept related also to Erikson's (1950/1974) psychosocial theory of development. Both attachment theory and psychosocial theory have their origin in psychoanalytic views of development.

2.1.1 Attachment theory, psychoanalytic theory and the psychometric view of separation anxiety

The two researchers associated with the development of attachment theory are John Bowlby and Mary Salter Ainsworth whose collaboration over many years, and different continents, brought together insights from psychoanalytic theory, ethological theory and Blatz's (1966 cited in Bowlby & Ainsworth, 1991, p. 333) security theory to develop an "ethological approach to personality development" (Bowlby & Ainsworth, 1991, p. 333). Although Bowlby rejected the psychoanalytic view that children were passively dependent on their mother in favour of a more active conceptualisation of the child-mother relationship, his theory retained Freud's starting point that "the roots of our emotional life lie in infancy and early childhood" (Bowlby, 1979, p. 1).

In the forties and fifties, this Freudian notion had already become associated with the *maternal deprivation hypothesis* proposed by Spitz (e.g., Spitz & Wolf, 1946) whose study of two groups of institutionalised infants convinced him that prolonged separation from the mother led to comprehensive and lasting developmental impairment. Bowlby's own study of 44 juvenile thieves (Bowlby, 1944, cited in Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991), and his report to the World Health Organisation (WHO) on what was known about motherless children (Bowlby, 1953), led him to the same conclusion as Spitz. Subsequent to the WHO report,

Bowlby and his colleagues at the Tavistock Clinic in London concentrated on exploring the links between separation from the mother and mental health, or, as the front cover of the Pelican edition of *Childcare and the growth of love* (Bowlby, 1953) puts it: the “importance of mother-love in the development of the child’s character and personality and the problem of the motherless child”. This theme was explored in projects with populations of children who were separated from their mothers through hospitalisation either of the mothers or of the children themselves (e.g., Bowlby, Ainsworth, Boston & Rosenbluth, 1956; Heinicke & Westheimer, 1965; Robertson & Bowlby, 1952). Many writers have noted that this work was highly influential in modifying hospital practices about visiting rights of parents and children, and in encouraging paediatricians to allow mothers to care for their infants sooner rather than later after birth (e.g., Damon, 1983; Eyer, 1992; Sluckin & Sluckin, 1983).

Bowlby’s focus on understanding separation issues led him to explore ethological ideas and to develop his view that a baby’s attachment behaviours, such as crying, sucking, clinging and following, had a genetic base to ensure survival. In his view, these genetically-based behaviours became focused onto the primary caregiver, usually the mother, to whom the baby became attached. Bowlby believed that the absence of the attachment figure brought on *separation anxiety* which was expressed in three phases. In the *protest phase*, attachment behaviours included crying, clinging and calling for the mother; after about a week of mother’s absence, the *despair phase* set in when children entered a withdrawn state, like being in mourning, in which attachment behaviours included hostility, and appeals for help marked by increasing hopelessness. Bowlby did not see this state as having long-term consequences if the child was then re-united with the mother. However, if repeated long-term separations occurred, he believed that the child would develop a way of coping by remaining in a state of *detachment* (Bowlby, 1973/1978).

Bowlby’s view of separation anxiety has been seen as different to psychoanalytic views of this concept although Bowlby (1973/1978) has argued that “towards the

end of his life Freud was moving towards a formulation [of separation anxiety] not very different" (p. 431) from Bowlby's own. Bowlby (1973/1978) thought that Freud's early work on separation anxiety was limited to seeing infantile anxiety as "an expression of the fact that they [were] feeling the loss of the person they love[d]" (Freud, 1905b, p. 224 cited in Bowlby, p. 426). Bowlby added:

because "children ... behave from an early age as though their dependence on the people looking after them were in the nature of sexual love", and because in a separation situation the child's libido goes unsatisfied, Freud conclude[d] that a child deals with the situation just as an adult would, namely "by turning his libido into anxiety" (p. 426 citing Freud, 1909, p. 25).

In talking about Freud's later work (Freud, 1926, cited in Bowlby, 1973/1978, p. 432), however, Bowlby argued that Freud saw the sequence of separation thus:

anxiety is the reaction to the danger of loss of object, the pain of mourning is the reaction to the actual loss of object, and defences protect the ego against instinctual demands which threaten to overwhelm it and which can occur all too readily in the absence of the object. (p. 432)

Post-Freudian psychoanalytic theorists have taken different positions on the nature of separation anxiety. Most notably, Melanie Klein has argued that separation anxiety arises out of the combined effect of "the child's complete dependence on the mother for the satisfaction of his [*sic*] needs and the relief of tension" (objective anxiety) and "the infant's apprehension that the loved mother has been destroyed by his [*sic*] sadistic impulses or is in danger of being destroyed, and that ... she will never return" (Klein, Heimann, Isaacs & Riviere, 1952, p. 288). In this explanation, separation anxiety is seen as a product of anxiety about external danger as well as a product of the child's own aggressive drives, a view which differs from Freud's original explanation of unsatisfied sexual drive, or his later one of a reaction to the threat of losing a loved object.

Research generated in the 1950s and 1960s on the issue of separation anxiety, including that experienced when a child first started to attend an early childhood setting (e.g., Janis, 1964; see chapter 8 for a full discussion), reflected the strong influence of psychoanalytic theory. However, the ethological ideas introduced by Bowlby also started to have an impact producing such additional research foci as identifying when first attachments were formed and the number of adults to whom children could form attachments. Studies of these issues resulted in the emergence of a consensus in the late seventies that from the age of 7 months, babies appear to react more quickly and intensely to the departure of their mother. In addition, sometime after the beginning of the second year of life, babies' positive responsiveness was found to narrow down to specific familiar people and wariness to strangers appeared to emerge (see Schaffer, 1990 for a review).

The concept of separation anxiety acquired a new application in the 1980s when the term *maternal separation anxiety* began to be used to refer to the symptoms of separation anxiety displayed by mothers (e.g., DeMeis, Hock & McBride, 1986; Hock, 1984; Hock, McBride & Gnezda, 1989; McBride, 1990). The definition of maternal separation anxiety used by Hock et al. (1989) was: "an unpleasant emotional state tied to the separation experience: it may be evidenced by expressions of worry, sadness or guilt" (p. 794). A *Maternal Separation Anxiety Scale* (MSAS) to measure this state was developed which has since become a popular instrument in studies which explore the maternal dimension of separation between mother and infants especially in contexts where the separation is employment-related.

The MSAS consists of three subscales. The first subscale includes measures of the mother's level of worry, sadness and guilt when separated from her infant, the second sub-scale is about mothers' perceptions of separation effects on the child; and the third is about employment-related separation concerns. In discussing the development of this scale, Hock et al. (1989) and McBride (1990) traced the theoretical ideas underpinning the concept of maternal separation anxiety to the psychoanalytic orientation of Margaret Mahler and her associates (Mahler, Pine &

Bergman, 1975) about the importance of the mother in the child's progression through the separation-individuation stages and to Bowlby's ethological views about separation. The focus by these theorists on the primacy of the mother's role in infant caregiving was used to justify in part why Hock et al. limited their instrument to maternal versus paternal separation anxiety. Another part of the justification of their approach was the argument that mothers may have a more intense sense of anxiety at separation than fathers because mothers who work are seen as transgressing against a societal norm which does not exist for fathers. Hock et al. noted that despite this differential societal treatment of parental roles, it is necessary that paternal separation anxiety is also explored if a full understanding is to be gained of what separation means in families.

The awareness which emerges in this argument of the social constructedness of the experience of separation anxiety was another novel – for the time – contribution to the understanding of the phenomenon of separation offered by Hock and her associates. For example, McBride (1990) noted that:

mothers' feelings are ... influenced by cultural expectations Despite the women's movement and the fact that it is now common for a mother of a young child to be employed, traditional attitudes toward motherhood, particularly the belief in exclusive maternal care for infants, continue to be well rooted in our society (Lauer, 1985; Hock, Gnezda & McBride, 1984). This has created a situation where women's current participation in the labor force and traditional American values are at odds (McCartney & Phillips, 1988). Many mothers are returning to work in a climate of ambivalence and without the support of social policies or adequate availability of quality child care. These conditions contribute to a mother's feelings about separation from her infant and to her perceptions of the effects of separation on her child. (p. 54)

In earlier work, Hock (1984) had also argued that it might be wise to treat "the study of the separation setting" (p. 183) as a unique area of study in which consideration should be given to the various components of the transition of the

child to the daycare setting, much as suggested by Bronfenbrenner (1979). This argument is a further indication that this psychometric approach to studying separation anxiety recognises this phenomenon as complex and multi-faceted and influenced by a range of factors.

2.1.2 Security and autonomy: Attachment theory and psychosocial theory

In attachment theory, the view that the child's security derives from the mother is highlighted in Mary Ainsworth's contributions to Bowlby's ideas. Having worked with Bowlby at the Tavistock Clinic, Ainsworth subsequently went to Uganda where she set up a study involving 28 mother-infant pairs in several villages around Kampala. This study was an attempt to empirically test out Bowlby's new ethological explanation for attachment behaviours. The results convinced Ainsworth that the infants used the mother as "a secure base from which to explore the world and as a haven for safety" (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991, p. 337); Ainsworth stated that she:

was impressed by the babies' active search for contact with the mother when they were alarmed or hurt, when she moved away or left even briefly, and when they were hungry – and even then she was struck by their initiative in seeking the breast and managing the feeding. (p. 337)

Ainsworth's work with Ganda babies and their mothers led her to suggest three attachment classifications: *securely attached*, *insecurely attached* and *nonattached* (later changed to *avoidant*). She subsequently developed the *strange situation* procedure to study the interplay between children's attachment to their mother, wariness of strangers and separation anxiety (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970). Ainsworth and Bell defined *attachment* as "an affectional tie that one person or animal forms between himself [*sic*] and another specific one – a tie that binds them together in space and endures over time" (p. 50).

The strange situation procedure involves eight three-minute episodes during which the child's behaviour is observed in response to the new environment, to the arrival of a stranger, and to the mother's departure and return. Children are

classified as securely attached when they play with their mother, are distressed when she leaves and seek contact with her when she returns. On the other hand, if children do not explore when mother is present, if they cling to her and cry when she leaves but are indifferent or hostile when she returns, children are classified as anxiously attached (insecure). Children who explore in their mother's presence, do not cry or fret when she leaves and seem indifferent to her return are classified as having avoidant attachment. Ainsworth, Bell and Stayton (1974) have also argued that the type of attachment classification children fall into is related to the mother's level of sensitivity in responding to her infant's cues with "sensitively responsive mothering" being associated with secure attachment in infants.

Ainsworth et al.'s (1974) view of the mother as the provider of security, through "sensitively responsive mothering" from which children set out to explore the world, is similar to Erik Erikson's (1950/1978) view of the "maternal care" necessary for the development of a sense of trust in infancy. He argued:

let it be said here that the amount of trust derived from earliest infantile experience ...[depends] on the quality of the maternal relationship. Mothers create a sense of trust in their children by that kind of administration which in its quality combines sensitive care of the baby's individual needs and a firm sense of personal trustworthiness within the trusted framework of their culture's life style. This forms the basis in the child for a sense of identity which will later combine a sense of being "all right", of being oneself, and of becoming what other people trust one will become. (p. 241)

According to Erikson, the achievement of a sense of autonomy in the second and third years of life is predicated on the development of this sense of trust, "a sense of being 'all right'" and a fundamental orientation of trust.

The combination of these ideas, together with Bowlby's original concern on the effect of repeated long-term separations from the mother, have had an enormous

impact on the way that children's early social development has been understood both in scholarly discussion as well as in the popular media (Damon, 1983).

2.1.3 The traditional psychological lens and research on starting childcare

In early childhood research, the impact of these views can be seen in the proliferation of North American research in the 1970s on the effects of daycare on children. Much of this research focused on the children's relationship to their mother and compared children in daycare settings against home-reared ones using Ainsworth's strange situation. This research has sometimes been referred to as the *first wave* of early childhood research during which the focus was on answering the question of whether daycare was detrimental for children (e.g., Moss & Melhuish, 1991; Scarr, 1994; Singer, 1993). The expectation was that if daycare was detrimental, the children's attachment status with their mother would be less secure than that of home-reared children. By the early eighties most studies which examined this question had concluded that the use of daycare did not necessarily lead to a negative outcome for the mother-child attachment relationship (e.g., Belsky & Steinberg, 1978; for reviews see Bretherton & Waters, 1985; Rutter, 1981). This included the finding that the relationships which children formed with their caregivers at daycare were not a threat to the primacy of the mother-child relationship since children in daycare continued to show a preference for being close to their mothers rather than their caregivers (e.g., Farran & Ramey, 1977; Kagan, Kearsley & Zelazo, 1978). A subsequent wave of research turned its attention to exploring how specific conditions within the early childhood environment were related to the development of children in daycare, including the type of attachment relationships they developed with the daycare adults (e.g., Ainslie & Anderson, 1984). As indicated in section 2.1.1, in this later wave of research there was also increased recognition that the separation experience was one that affected not only children but also mothers (and fathers).

Studies which focused specifically on the event of starting to use, or attend, an early childhood setting are reviewed in some detail in chapters 4, 6 and 8 and reveal the influence of attachment theory, of psychoanalytic theories and of

psychometric approaches to understanding this event. In particular, they reveal how the theoretical ideas sketched above have led to the event of starting childcare being conceptualised as involving separation between the child and the mother, separation anxiety in both parties as well as the use of processes of identification and defence mechanisms. In addition, the three literature review chapters reveal that these ideas, together with Erikson's psychosocial views about the importance of children's development of a sense of trust and autonomy have had a tremendous impact in shaping the "good practice" advice in practitioner-oriented literature about how this event may be handled (see section 6.1).

2.2 The social-psychological/socialisation lens

Social psychology studies the behaviour of people in a social context, exploring the ways that people affect, and are affected by, other people.

In reviewing literature on the event of starting childcare it became clear that while explicit use of social-psychological theory was very limited (e.g., Feldbaum, Christenson & O'Neal, 1980), this event was often understood as involving the classic social-psychological theme of adaptation, or adjustment, to a new setting with its own rules, expectations, and processes into which the newcomer had to be socialised (e.g., Blatchford, Battle & Mays, 1984; Jorde, 1984, November; Marcus, Chess & Thomas, 1972; Meltzer, 1984; see also chapter 8). The theoretical notions used to study children's adaptation or adjustment to childcare have included the notion from ecological theory that *continuity* between settings eases transitions, the psychological construct of *temperament* and the notion of *scripts for social behaviour*. Notions from socio-cultural theories of development have also contributed to explaining the transition from home to becoming adjusted to this new setting, and the role that adults or more experienced peers play in this process.

2.2.1 Adjustment to a new setting: The ecological theory view on continuity

The focus on adjustment to the early childhood setting as a process of socialisation of the child to a new physical and social setting (e.g., Blatchford et

al., 1984; Mobley & Pullis, 1991; see also section 8.2) is underpinned by the theoretical notion that continuity between different settings, in this case, the home and the early childhood centre, eases the transition between settings.

This view of the importance of continuity is most strongly articulated in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory of development in which one of the hypotheses is that:

the developmental potential of a setting in a mesosystem is enhanced if the person's initial transition into that setting is not made alone, that is, if he [*sic*] enters the new setting in the company of one or more persons with whom he [*sic*] has participated in prior settings (for example, the mother accompanies the child to school). (hypothesis 27, p. 211)

By *mesosystem* Bronfenbrenner (1979) means the cluster of interrelations that exist for a person between the different settings in which that person participates. For Bronfenbrenner, development is a social process that occurs in different settings/contexts which are all interconnected. His theory proposes a number of hypotheses about these interconnections and the conditions under which development is enhanced, including when:

- the role demands in the different settings are compatible and enable the development of mutual trust, goal consensus between settings, and an "evolving balance of power in favor of the developing person" (hypothesis 28, p. 212);
- there are supporting links between settings (such as home and early childhood setting). When links do not exist, or are unsupportive, development is not enhanced because the "mesosystem is weakly linked" (hypothesis 35, p. 215);
- there are "open channels of communication in both directions" (hypothesis 39, p. 217) between settings; and when the mode of communication is personal (hypothesis 40, p. 217);
- before entry into a new setting, there is information provided between settings, and between people within the settings (hypothesis 41, p. 217), and the

information continues to flow once entry into the new setting has occurred (hypothesis 42, p. 217).

These hypotheses suggest that “continuity”, or interconnections, may be sought in a variety of ways. In the practitioner-oriented literature these hypotheses have been translated into many “good practice” suggestions about how teachers can set up and maintain communication with the parents before and after entry into the childcare setting, and how they can work towards developing a sense of trust and partnership (e.g., Balaban, 1985; Kleckner & Engel, 1988; Lane & Signer, 1990).

Research on interconnections between home and early childhood centre has produced an incomplete picture about the significance of continuity and about how interconnections work in various settings. For example, many studies have reported that despite good intentions, there was a lack of, or only limited, meaningful communication between the home and the adults in the early childhood settings studied (e.g., Blatchford et al., 1984; Smith & Hubbard, 1988). Blatchford et al., (1984) have gone so far as to conclude that “the two worlds of the child”, the home and the early childhood setting, “co-exist in parallel” (p. 164; see also Powell, 1978; Renwick, 1988). In others, information given by the parents to their children about their impending departure, was found to assist the children with the leave-taking (e.g., Field et al, 1984; Weinraub & Lewis, 1977, cited in Hock 1984). In reviewing literature on parents as facilitators of a child’s preschool entry, Powell (1989/1994) also noted that children’s transition to the early childhood setting was eased through the practice of verbally preparing a child for the leave-taking and that parents’ explanations of their departures appeared to reduce children’s distress. However, Powell additionally noted that there was “an impressive dearth of research on this topic” (p. 48) and that existing studies had considered a limited set of child outcomes within specialised early childhood programmes, thus limiting the generalisability of their findings. Furthermore, Powell commented that some studies of continuity/discontinuity between children’s home and early childhood educational environment had indicated that “an appropriate level of discontinuity” (p. 35) might be beneficial in

broadening children's abilities to cope with different environments. His conclusion was that "*from a child development perspective, the theoretical grounds [were] significantly stronger than the empirical foundation of rationales for establishing and maintaining cooperative relations between families and early childhood programs*" (p. 51, italics in the original). He suggested that a case existed for systematic examination of widespread practices about how to strengthen relations between families and early childhood programmes.

2.2.2 Adjustment to the group setting: The influence of temperament

Groups involve interaction, shared perceptions and experiences, the development of emotional or affective ties and interdependent roles (DeLamater, 1974). Groups have roles, norms and ways of interacting that provide a framework for the group's functioning (Forsyth, 1983).

The temperament theory developed by Alexander Thomas and Stella Chess (1977) suggests that ease of entry, and adjustment, to new groups differs according to an individual's *temperament*. Temperament is a term used to refer to an infant's characteristic way of responding to the environment. Three temperamental types, the *easy*, *difficult* and the *slow-to-warm* types are distinguished, with each type being made up of characteristic constellations of traits from among the nine dimensions of activity level, rhythmicity, distractability, approach/withdrawal, adaptability, persistence, intensity, threshold of responsiveness and mood (e.g., Marcus, Chess & Thomas, 1972; Thomas & Chess, 1977). Children who have an easy temperament are usually happy and respond to new people and objects enthusiastically. Small discomforts or frustrations do not produce intense reactions in these children who also have regular eating and sleeping habits. They are generally in a good mood and adapt to changes easily. Difficult children, on the other hand, find most things hard; they cry often, have irregular eating and sleeping patterns, adapt slowly to change, are often irritable, withdraw from new objects and experiences and have many expressions of intense reactions. Slow-to-warm children take time to adapt to new people, objects or experiences, they withdraw from unfamiliarity, have low

activity levels and react with low intensity. They also run on moderately irregular schedules.

Temperament classifications were developed from data in the New York Longitudinal Study begun in 1956 by Alexander Thomas and Stella Chess (1977). Thomas and Chess gathered details of the behaviour of 131 infants right through into adulthood using a combination of questionnaire and interview data from the parents and teachers of the children and later from the children/adults themselves. Thomas and Chess concluded that from about three months, a young infant's behaviour could be defined using their nine temperamental traits. They also concluded that there was no evidence that the way that parents handled their babies caused the babies' temperament but rather that this was largely present from birth. They did suggest, however, a "goodness-of-fit theoretical model" (Thomas & Chess, 1986, p. 49) to explain how temperament and the environment interacted to modify the way temperament was expressed. Using qualitative data from their study, Thomas and Chess explained their goodness-of-fit hypothesis as:

whether there was a goodness (consonance) or poorness (dissonance) of fit between the properties of the environment and its expectations and demands and the subject's temperament and other characteristics. In some cases goodness of fit made for continuity of temperament, as when parents approved of their child's easy temperament, or persistence, or high activity level, and reinforced these temperamental characteristics by their responses to the child The same is true of poorness of fit. A parent who responded to her child's tantrums by intense negative outbursts of her own, only reinforced these negative intense mood expressions of her child. And a parent or teacher who discouraged a child's persistent absorption in an activity because it was inconvenient sometimes motivated the child to be less persistent. (p. 49)

In research on children's adaptation to the new early childhood setting, one finding has been that easy children tend to have no trouble adapting to the centre environment irrespective of the way the centre was organised and the routines

used, while difficult and slow-to-warm children needed to be handled in specific ways for their adaptation to be eased (e.g., Marcus, Chess & Thomas, 1972; see also section 8.1.3). Connections were also found between specific temperamental traits, such as activity levels and approach tendencies, and specific behaviours in the early childhood setting, such as high social proximity. The goodness-of-fit hypothesis has also been used to argue that early childhood settings need to be planned so that they provide a “good fit” for a broad range of temperamental types.

2.2.3 Socialisation into the new setting: Script theory and socio-cultural theory

Both script theory (e.g., Nelson, 1981; Schank & Abelson, 1977) and socio-cultural theory posit interaction with more knowledgeable others as the basis for development (e.g., Rogoff et al., 1993; Valsiner, 1985; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1985; Winegar, 1989). There are clear implications from both these perspectives for the way that the experience of starting childcare may be understood.

In script theory, a “script” is a way of describing the knowledge a person must have in order to understand what a given situation demands by way of an appropriate response. Such knowledge arises out of “participatory interaction” (Nelson, 1981). The concept of ‘script’ has appealed to many developmental researchers. According to Hartup, Brady & Newcomb (1983) the concept has now been “elaborated to denote hypothesized, abstract cognitive structures that, when activated, facilitate comprehension of a variety of event-based situations including ongoing social interaction” (p. 86). Collins (1983) talked about scripts or “schemata” as “groupings of actions that are called into play when key parts of the action or characteristic settings are encountered” (p. 121) and Grusec (1983) said that scripts offer a way of understanding how children learn to behave in specific ways. ‘Scripts’ then are understood to include expectations about the sequence of actions; they also specify roles and propose and define obligatory and optional actions (Nelson, 1981).

Users of script theory have emphasised that a script, or script knowledge, is acquired through social interaction. Script theorists see adults as providing the structure which supports children's acquisition of scripts. Nelson (1981, p. 107) reported that Jerome Bruner (1975) recorded detailed observations of mothers engaging in give-and-take games and later structuring request sequences in which the child's part was gradually more demanding. Using babies as his subjects, Kenneth Kaye (1982) described how parents created "frames" in which the infant could function. *Frames* refer to structures that initiate, maintain and support adaptive functioning in the infant and are very similar in concept to scripts. For example, within the "feeding frame" usually established within the first two months of life, the components of the frame, or script, would include the role of the parent who provides the food (action) as well as warmth and tactile stimulation (props). Katherine Nelson (1981) noted that adults outside the home also engage in similar structuring activities with children; she cited a study by Doré, Gearhart and Newman (1978) in which nursery school teachers could be seen to be consciously engaging in structuring situations for children and directing their activities within an overall school script. Nelson suggested that this structuring explains why very little of the day-to-day activity in day-care centres and nursery schools needs to be negotiated afresh. Each child, and adult, gets to know her/his part in the script. In this sense then, scripts may be seen as a mechanism through which children are enculturated into forms of behaviour and of relationships with others. Scripts are thus seen to be a very efficient socialising mechanism. They provide a shared knowledge base on which interaction with both familiar and unfamiliar others can be conducted.

This view is consistent with socio-cultural theories of human development in which all knowledge is seen as embodied in the action, work, play, technology, literature, art and talk of members of a given society (Wertsch, 1985). These elements of a culture are *psychological tools* which children acquire through interaction with those members of society who possess them – the more knowledgeable others, or, to use Jerome Bruner's (1985) term, the "vicars of culture"(p. 32). These notions have epistemological links with the social-

psychological writings of George Herbert Mead (1934) in which the individual's personality is seen as evolving from social experience which is internalised to produce the 'I' – 'me' system:

I talk to myself, and I remember what I said and perhaps the emotional content that went with it. The 'I' of this moment is present in the 'me' of the next moment. There again I cannot turn around quick enough to catch myself. I become a 'me' in so far as I remember what I said. The 'I' can be given, however, this functional relationship. It is because of the 'I' that we say that we are fully aware of what we are, that we surprise ourselves by our own action. It is as we act that we are aware of ourselves. It is in memory that the 'I' is constantly present in experience. We can go back directly a few moments in our experience, and then we are dependent upon memory images for the rest. So that the 'I' in memory is there as the spokesman [*sic*] of the self of the second, or minute, or day ago. As given, it is a 'me', but it is a 'me' which was the 'I' at the earlier time. (Mead, 1934, p. 174)

In Mead's view, the 'I' – 'me' system is the mechanism by which the person relates to society. It is what gives people the ability to be self-reflexive as well as the ability to take on social roles. Mead's view of social interaction, which is generally referred to as the symbolic interactionist perspective (e.g., Blumer, 1962), holds that people do not simply follow a pattern or script specific to an event or situation; they also engage in constructing the situation, the meanings within it, and one's self.

There has been increasing discussion in scholarly literature of the implications of Mead's thinking for any theory, and study, of (social) development (e.g., Light, 1987; Morss, 1996; Valsiner, 1989; Winegar, 1989). For example, Light (1987) suggested that the search to understand social behaviours, such as role-taking, was likely to lead back to social interactionist theories like Mead's rather than to cognitive ones like Piaget's. For studying children's understanding of social events, Winegar (1989) has emphasised that "children are meaning-makers" (p.

46) and that it is important to take account of the "active negotiations between a child and his or her social environment"(p. 47) especially if one is interested in studying children's *understanding* of social events rather than their memory or knowledge of them. Winegar argued that studies which have looked at children's knowledge of social events have typically used methods which have required children to recall events and recount them. The descriptions children have provided of those events can indeed be analysed in terms of script components (see for instance Nelson & Gruendel, 1981; Collins, 1983) and have thus been characterised as flowing from "generalised event representations". Yet, as Winegar (1989) noted, children's recounting of events should more properly be regarded as a verbal expression of their memory of events rather than an indication of their understanding of them.

The implications of these ideas for any study of children's social understandings are numerous. The acknowledgment that, as Mead has long held, meanings are socially constructed, implies that we have to treat "understandings" as similarly socially constructed. In turn, this implies that if we are to study children's understanding of events they meet, then this must be done while children are actually involved in the events. While children sometimes encounter events vicariously, such as through listening to a story or watching a televised incident, more usually, children learn about events through what Katherine Nelson (1981) terms "participatory interaction":

although this is not the only type of learning that leads to script knowledge, it is clearly a very important type. Although adults direct the action and set the goals, they do not necessarily provide direct tuition for the child; rather they provide conditions under which the child fills in the expected role activity. (p. 106)

Winegar (1989) has argued that "participatory interaction" as a type of learning is not restricted to the acquisition of knowledge about events but is a common method for the acquisition of cultural knowledge. Children, he said, learn from interaction with more *expert* others, usually adults but often peers, who may at

times offer explicit instructions and explanations but more usually provide only the minimal information to enable the *novice* to find her or his way. Winegar has described the complementary behaviour that goes on in these social interactions through the terms *differential constraining* and *progressive empowerment*. Until the novice gains expertise in performance, the expert other tends to adjust the level and form of support he or she provides to “empower” the novice to perform in a progressively more socially acceptable manner. The expert’s actions are termed “differential constraining” because they are continually readjusted as the novice’s performance improves. With more experience, novices internalise the environmental supports and constraints originally provided by experts, and eventually become self-constraining. Winegar noted, however, that the internalisation of constraints should not be seen as suggesting a passive replication of the rules of social exchanges in children’s understanding of social events. Work done by Wozniak (1986, cited in Winegar, 1989, p. 50) showed that children constructed their understanding of an event using both information from their environment and understanding from previous experience.

Two other socio-cultural theorists have suggested the terms *social canalization* (Valsiner, 1985; Valsiner & Hill, 1989) and *guided participation* (e.g., Rogoff, 1990; Rogoff, Mistry, Göncü & Mosier, 1993) to describe the same process.

Valsiner has used the term *social canalization* (Valsiner, 1985; Valsiner & Hill, 1989) as part of his theoretical framework for studying children’s socialisation into culturally-acceptable ways of acting in given situations. The framework, like Winegar’s view, is strongly based in the tradition of Vygotsky’s thinking but draws also from the field theory methods of Kurt Lewin (see De Rivera, 1976). In Valsiner’s framework, children’s development of acting and of thinking is explained through the mutually related functioning of three zones. The first zone is called the “zone of freedom of movement” (ZFM), a concept borrowed from Lewin’s field theory. The ZFM refers to the structure of the environment that is functionally available to the developing child at a given time. The limits of this zone are negotiated with the caregivers, and change as the child develops or

moves into an area with a different physical structure. For example the ZFM of a child may be the playpen in the lounge, or the front yard .

The zone of promoted action (ZPA) comprises the set of objects and actions that the child's social environment actively promotes to the child to use and perform. The ZPA may be observed in the parents' and others' people preference structure of the child's different actions. As the child develops, he or she internalises the social expectancies communicated through the promoted actions and thus gains knowledge about the acceptable and expected way of acting in a given situation. Once gained, this knowledge may be used in any way by the child. Valsiner and Hill (1989) give the example of an adolescent who in a social situation knows the rules of courtesy well but decides to not act appropriately and instead "cuts" another (p. 165). Valsiner (1985) calls the ZPA an important "selective canalizer of the child's actions" but also says that the structure of the ZPA can undergo dynamic transformation because it is negotiated in adult-child interaction. (There is a clear parallel in this argument with the notion of Mead and Winegar that the meanings of events are negotiated in interaction.)

The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is a well-known Vygotskian term and refers to the subset of ZPA actions that could be actualised with the help of other people. According to Valsiner (1985), the difficulty with this zone is that often one cannot know which actions actually constitute the ZPD since the existing structure of the ZFM and ZPA may restrict the opportunities of testing the limits of the ZPD. For instance, if the act of holding a fork is not within the ZPA or ZFM of a 16-month-old, it may not be possible to see if the 16-month-old child is physically capable of holding the fork. Thus the ZPD-ZPA relationship is seen to determine what can or can not be performed next by the child.

Rogoff's (1990; Rogoff et al., 1993) term *guided participation* is similar again both to Winegar's process of differential constraining and progressive empowerment and to Valsiner's social canalization process. Guided participation, in other words, is what goes on between the novice and the more knowledgeable,

or competent, other/s as they “communicate and engage in shared endeavors” (Rogoff et al., 1993, p. 6). Rogoff et al. explain that, in addition, the concept of guided participation shifts the traditional focus of research about Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development, away from an emphasis on individual development through joint problem solving activities and onto “an examination of children’s development in the context of routine activities in the early years and in cultural communities that are less tied to didactic schooling and the use of academic discourse” (p. 7) than Western ones. In other words, Rogoff et al. argued that guided participation is a widespread process in human interaction and in cultures worldwide. In a study of toddlers and their caregivers from four cultural communities, Rogoff et al. used the concept of guided participation to explore how children’s involvement in valued activities within their culture led to the attainment of valued goals within that culture. They observed how toddlers and their caregivers interacted during routine activities that presented challenges that needed to be solved through joint activity: operating novel objects and dressing. Their focus was on “understanding the coherence of what people from varying communities *do*” (Rogoff et al., 1993, p. 10; italics in original) rather than imposing their definition of what the “ideal” goals of development should be, or simply determining differences between them. Rogoff et al. concluded that “across communities, guided participation simultaneously involved both similarities (in bridging and structuring) and variations (in goals of development, means of communication, and asymmetries in adults’ and children’s responsibility for learning)” (p. 148).

Among the many implications which derive from these theoretical insights for the study of human experience, two emerge as particularly important for my study of the experience of starting childcare. Firstly, all the theoretical ideas presented in this section emphasise the centrality of participatory interaction for children’s socialisation into their culture. From a social-psychological perspective it can be argued that starting childcare (involving entry into a new group culture with its rules and expectations) is an experience that is structurally not dissimilar from

entry into a new culture. This means that participatory interaction is an appropriate process to study as part of the experience of starting childcare.

Secondly, the ideas from script theory as well as from socio-cultural theories, with intellectual roots in Vygotsky's socio-genetic theory and in Mead's symbolic interactionist perspective (e.g., Valsiner & Van der Veer, 1988), highlight that meanings are socially constructed through a continuous process of negotiation in interaction. The implication of this is that to study the meanings, or understandings, which participants have of their experiences of starting childcare, it is necessary to engage in study while people were actually involved in the experience. This is the approach I have adopted in this study.

2.3 The lived experience lens

In the last two decades, the study of lived experience has emerged as a burgeoning area of research interest largely dominated by methodologies whose theoretical foundations lie in philosophical debates about the nature of knowledge. One philosophical movement which has strongly influenced this research, and qualitative research more generally, has been phenomenology (Kvale, 1996). Additional theoretical influences have come from narrative psychology (e.g., Polkinghorne, 1988; Sarbin, 1986) and from discussions on "giving voice" to research participants and to their perspectives tied to feminist theory, the "children's rights" movement and to a new strand in curriculum theory associated with the reconceptualists. I explore some of these notions in the sections below.

2.3.1 The phenomenological view on lived experience

As a movement, phenomenology has been described as an "elusive philosophy" and phenomenologists as "much too individualistic in their habits to form an 'organised school'" (Spiegelberg, 1994, p. xxvii). Spiegelberg argued that phenomenology's "most characteristic core is its method" (p. 679) which was described as having seven steps. The first of these steps was: "investigating particular phenomena" (p. 682). Spiegelberg stated of this step: "there is in fact no reason why ... the very first step should not be adopted by itself, regardless of the

later ones" (p. 682), thus suggesting that this could well be the most distinctive aspect of the method.

Kvale has described phenomenology as involving "a focus on the life world, an openness to the experiences of the subjects, a primacy of precise descriptions, attempts to bracket foreknowledge, and a search for invariant essential meanings in the descriptions" (Kvale, 1996, p. 38). In Kvale's description, the life world is the "world as it is encountered in everyday life and given in direct and immediate experience, independent of and prior to explanations" (p. 54).

Similarly, Moustakas (1994), following Hegel, described phenomenology as "knowledge as it appears to consciousness, the science of describing what one perceives, senses and knows in one's immediate awareness and experience" (p. 26). Moustakas added that for phenomenologists: "only one source of certainty exists, what I think, what I feel, in substance, what I perceive" (p. 26, citing Lauer, 1967).

Clearly, in the phenomenological viewpoint, what matters for the person is reality as it is perceived by him or herself and not some objectified view of it from the outside. Perception, or the internal experience of being conscious of something, is referred to as *intentionality*. This is explained by Moustakas (1994) as the *directedness* of the mind "toward some entity whether the entity exists or not" (p. 28) or, is real or imaginary. Phenomenologists talk also about the *noema* and *noesis* of intentionality with noema being not the actual object (e.g., a tree, an apple, a landscape) but the appearance of the object in a person's consciousness/perception. The person's perception will vary depending on variables such as the angle from which the object is perceived, the time it is perceived and the person's background experience. For each noematic appearance there is also a noesis, a 'residue' of "'meaning' of some sort, it may be many meanings" (Husserl, 1931, p. 257 cited in Moustakas, 1994, p. 29) which may become more meaningful as further 'residues' of meaning accrue. The object of phenomenological study is thus to understand what the person is directing his or

her consciousness at and gain entry into both the noematic appearance of that consciousness as well as its noetic meaning.

In Kvale's (1996) description of the phenomenological method, he focused on *open description*, *investigation of essences* and *phenomenological reduction*. Talking about open description, Kvale said that what mattered most was "to describe the given as precisely and completely as possible; to describe rather than to explain or analyse" (p. 53, citing Merleau-Ponty, 1962). For the investigation of essences, Kvale suggested that a given phenomenon (perception) should be looked at "freely in its possible forms" to identify what was constant through the various forms; the constant element/s would be the essence of the phenomenon. To attain phenomenological reduction it was necessary to put aside, or "bracket" the "common sense and scientific foreknowledge about the phenomena" (p. 54) through a process of critical analysis of one's own presuppositions so that a faithful description of the essence of the phenomenon would be achieved.

These insights from the phenomenological viewpoint are consistent with the view which emerged in the previous section that in order to study meaning or understanding, one must engage in this while people are actually involved in experiencing those meanings. In the following section, I discuss how these combined insights are also congruent with the central notions from the narrative psychology view on the study of experience.

2.3.2 Narrative psychology and researching experience

Since the mid-1980s, the use of participants' narratives as a way of researching subjective experience has become more widespread (Carter, 1993, 1995; Connolly & Clandinin, 1990; Howard, 1991; Marks, 1996; Plummer, 1995; Polkinghorne, 1995). As Plummer (1995) has noted, while most of this work has been carried out by oral historians, sociologists, anthropologists and cultural theorists, some psychologists have also become keen advocates of this approach (e.g., Bruner, 1987; Mair, 1988; Sarbin, 1986).

Bruner (1986, 1987) has argued that there are two types of thought: thought as an instrument of reason (logical thought), and the kind of thought that goes into the construction of stories or narratives (narrative thought). He has argued that each mode of thought embodies a distinct type of knowledge. Narrative knowledge is what people use when they talk about their life experience and their identity: "we have no other way of describing 'lived time' save in the form of a narrative" (Bruner, 1987, p. 12). Bruner (1987) argued also that narratives are constructed through a reflexive process:

narrative imitates life, life imitates narrative.... Life ... is constructed by human beings through active ratiocination, by the same kind of ratiocination through which we construct narratives. When somebody tells you his [*sic*] life it is a narrative achievement. There is no such thing psychologically as 'life itself'. At the very least, it is a selective achievement of memory recall; beyond that, recounting one's life is an interpretive feat. (p. 13)

In elaborating how the "interpretive feat" is constructed, Bruner (1987) further argued that a process of "cultural shaping" occurs through which people's life narratives come to reflect existing theories in one's culture about the kind of lives that are possible. He stated:

The heart of my argument is this: eventually the culturally shaped cognitive and linguistic processes that guide the self-telling of life narratives achieve the power to structure perceptual experience, to organise memory, to segment and purpose-build the very "events" of a life. In the end, we *become* the autobiographical narratives by which we "tell about" our lives. (p. 15, italics in original)

This view of the connection between lived experience, culture and narratives was echoed by Mair (1988) who said:

Stories are habitations. We live in and through stories. They conjure worlds. We do not know the world other than as story world. Stories inform life. They hold us together and keep us apart.

We inhabit the great stories of our culture. We live through stories. We are *lived* by the stories of our race and place. It is this enveloping and constituting function of stories that is especially important to sense more fully.

We are, each of us, locations where the stories of our place and time become partially tellable. (p. 27)

Looked at from the reverse direction, the argument that life narratives, or stories, are socially constructed also suggests that the narratives or stories which individuals tell about their life experience can make a contribution to the understanding of common experience within a culture, an argument which Sarbin (1986) also has made. Like Bruner (1986) Sarbin proposed that "human beings think, perceive, imagine, and make moral choices according to narrative structures"(p. 8). In his view, human beings use narratives to impose order or structure on the "flow of experience" (p. 9) and for this reason, narratives are central to understanding human conduct. He also argued that "the inclusion of the narratory principle in psychological theory"(p. 15) highlights the relevance of theories, such as G. H. Mead's, which emphasise the role-taking dimensions of people's behaviour and the importance of social interaction for the construction of self-identity. In Sarbin's view, as in Mair's (1988) and Polkinghorne's (1988), identity is an issue of life-story construction.

2.3.3 *"Giving voice" and telling lives: Feminist theory, teaching stories and the children's rights movement*

The notion of *giving voice* or *voicing* is strongly associated with the narrative approach to researching experience (Greene, 1991). Most generally, giving voice refers to the intention to validate the experience of research participants, especially ones from traditionally silenced groups such as women, children, gay people or people of colour, through creating a research situation in which their distinctive perspective is able to emerge (e.g., Alldred, 1998; Oakley, 1981; Ribbens & Edwards, 1998). Methodologically, this means, at the very least, the

assumption of a qualitative approach to the way that the data are gathered, analysed and written up. More specifically, the methods employed include semi-structured or informal interviews, attention to the power relationship between the researcher and the researched, the use of journals or diaries and reflexivity about the production of the research account (e.g., Alldred, 1998; Burman, 1996; Oakley, 1981).

In the foreword to *Stories lives tell* (Witherell & Noddings, 1991) Maxine Greene attributed the “passion evoked by the discovery of ‘voice’” to the “belated recognition of ‘women’s ways of knowing’ (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986)” and celebrated the multiple voices represented in the book around the common theme that “stories – and myths, and diaries, and histories – give shape and expression to what would otherwise be untold about ‘our lives’” (p. x). Burman (1996) also commented on the connection between making visible what traditionally has been invisible, and on “feminist research” as focusing on the relationship between knowledge and power and the notion of reflexivity. She stated:

what identifies feminist research is a commitment to a specific, feminist, epistemology; that is, a theoretical and political analysis that critiques dominant conceptions of knowledge, and poses questions about the gendered orientation of, and criteria for knowledge. (p. 124)

Burman argued also that feminist research was concerned with whose experience was represented and validated, and how the representation of that experience interacted with the notion of the researcher’s reflexivity and accountability. From a feminist perspective these two notions include the need to be clear about one’s analytic methods but also a commitment to highlight and challenge oppressive power relations within social practices, including within the research situation. In this way feminist research increasingly seeks also to be emancipatory and transformative. Burman emphasised that feminist research considered how the research affected what it studied, the necessity to make clear the researcher’s

subjectivity or involvement in the question being researched, and the need to draw attention to the work of producing the written account.

Similar views were expressed by Edwards and Ribbens (1998) who noted that the production of research accounts which were concerned with retaining research participants' 'voice' was marked by a mixture of theoretical and practical dilemmas and challenges, especially when the social world that was being explored was a "private" or "personal" one which was then made public for an academic or professional audience. Like Burman (1996), Edwards and Ribbens suggested that an appropriate response to these dilemmas was to meet "high standards of reflexivity and openness about the choices made throughout any empirical study, considering the implications of practical choices for the knowledge being produced" (p. 4).

These views about 'voicing' have been applied to researching the experience of women mothering (e.g., Bell, 1998; Mauthner & Doucet, 1998; Ribbens, 1994, 1998; Standing, 1998) as well as women teaching (e.g., Ayers, 1989; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Grumet, 1988; Miller, 1990, 1992; Perry with others, 1997, September; see also chapter 6). Studies of teachers' voices include reconceptualist curriculum writing which has used autobiographical narratives as a way of voicing teachers' experiences and including them in pre-existing curriculum discourse (e.g., Beattie, 1995; Carter, 1993, 1995; Clandinin & Connelly, 1990; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Grumet, 1988; Miller, 1992). This new brand of curriculum writing, and writing about teaching, arose out of Elbaz's (1981; 1983 cited in Beattie, 1995) landmark study on how a teacher's reflections on her teaching revealed *images*, *rules of practice* and *principles of practice* as part of *practical knowledge* (see also chapter 6). While Elbaz's concepts focused on the teacher's practical knowledge about teaching, the work of Clandinin and Connelly (e.g., 1990) particularly, has extended this focus to include the teacher's personal private experience of teaching which is invested in the expression of practical knowledge. Another variation of Elbaz' line of research was the emergence of a focus on teachers' thinking about their practice which has resulted in the

emergence of the concepts of "implicit theory" (Spodek, 1988b) and "operational theories" (Bell, 1990). These concepts are discussed further in chapter 6 (see section 6.3.2).

Most recently, researchers have also begun to turn their attention to giving voice to children or to children's perspectives on their experiences (e.g., Alldred, 1998; Marks, 1996; Smith, 1996). Much of this literature is connected to the children's rights movement which argues that "children have the right to say what they think about things that affect them" (O'Reilly, 1997, p. 5; see also Smith, 1996) and that children should be treated with dignity and respect (Tapp, 1997, p. 7). Advocates of children's rights have also argued that reliance on adult views about what children feel and do creates the danger that commonsense perspectives are applied to complex phenomena (e.g., Marks, 1996).

In New Zealand, Smith (1996) has argued that:

children have been an invisible and excluded group neglected by the social sciences just as women were twenty years ago. If children have been studied it is as the objects of the academic gaze rather than as social actors in their own right.... Children need to be reconceptualised as actors in their own right, as contributors, moral interpreters of the world, participants in shared decisions ... this means taking a different approach to research (pp. 5-6).

Smith suggested that the theoretical rationale for studying children's perspective is well grounded in both ecological theory with its focus on attaining a phenomenological perspective on experience, and in socio-cultural theory which emphasises that meaning is socially constructed and children are part of that construction.

Alldred (1998) adopted a similar position in stating that children are "another socially silenced group: their opinions are not heard in the public sphere and they wield little power as a social group" (p. 148); she saw the "discourses of 'giving

voice” as offering “a way of constructing children as active subjects, not objects, and of recognising that they may have distinct perspectives on the world” (p. 150). Nonetheless, she warned against assuming that by talking to children one necessarily achieved an account of children’s experience in their own terms:

For adult-dominated culture, language is, ‘by definition’, reflective and productive of adult power, status and authority. Since the whole frame of reference is adult-centred, it is difficult to see to what extent children could, as ethnographic subjects, present ‘their own’ account of their worlds.... The idea that any ethnographic subjects are free to present their own meaning in any radical sense neglects the ways in which the dominant culture provides hegemonic meanings. (p. 154)

Later, Alldred asked “through what cultural understandings of children are the words of any child heard?” (p. 154).

Alldred’s question brings into focus again the socially constructed nature of interaction and the post-structuralist view which warns against the “fantasy that it is possible to have unmediated direct knowledge of experience” (Marks, 1996, p. 115 citing James & Prout, 1990). Alldred (1998) warned also of “the need to examine the broader context of meanings that will be brought into play” (p. 154) when children’s voices are placed in the public arena thus signalling that words, once spoken, become subject once more to the interpretive processes of cultural meaning construction. Alldred suggested that recognising this dynamic might help prevent researchers from assuming that their work will necessarily result in liberatory outcomes.

In the following section I consider the argument of the social constructedness of knowledge further through considering deconstructivist views on the nature of knowledge.

2.4 Deconstructing the lenses

Patti Lather (1991) illustrated that one could “write science” (p. 123) in different ways by producing four “tales” about the same data base: a realist tale, a critical tale, a reflexive tale and a deconstructive tale. She defined deconstructive tales as ones which “foreground the unsaid in our saying ... stories that disclose their constructed nature” (p. 129). Kvale (1996) defined a *deconstructive reading* of a text as one which “destabilizes, and denaturalizes. The text is read as documentation for its unconscious silences and unspoken assumptions” (p. 227). Seeing deconstruction as a “process of critique” Burman (1994) wrote about her aim of deconstructing developmental psychology as a process of “laying bare, of bringing under scrutiny, the coherent moral-political themes that developmental psychology elaborates ... and take up the broader questions of where these themes fit in to the social practices in which psychology functions” (p. 1).

Deconstruction is a technique of analysis which draws on the relativistic attitude of post-structuralism associated with the philosophers Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida (Morss, 1996). Post-structuralism rejects the modernist claim that definitive meanings exist which can be found through the application of a rigorous form of analysis. Instead, post-structuralism emphasises multiple interpretive possibilities: “the emphasis is on diversity and fragmentation rather than coherence. In terms of the scrutiny of texts, for example, a diversity of conflicting messages is likely to be uncovered rather than one hidden meaning (Parker, 1992)” (Morss, p. 125). Morss sees deconstruction as the textual version of post-structuralism.

In the sections presented thus far in this chapter, I have discussed a number of theoretical lenses which have contributed to the production of ‘knowledge’ about the experience of starting childcare. Using the understandings of deconstruction just outlined, a number of critical psychologists and post-structuralist writers have considered the knowledge/s these theoretical perspectives have produced and subjected them to the processes of “laying bare, of bringing under scrutiny” (Burman, 1994), and of “disclos[ing] the constructed nature” (Lather, 1991) of

what has been said. In the rest of this section I illustrate how these processes have been used to throw light on how knowledge is constructed.

2.4.1 Deconstructing the traditional psychological lens: The case of attachment theory

Themes highlighted in traditional psychological scholarship have particularly come under severe scrutiny from writers using a deconstructivist approach. For example, the socially constructed nature of attachment theory has been commented upon by Jerome Kagan (e.g., Kagan, Kearsley and Zelazo, 1978) who argued that research interest in attachment, and the way that children's behaviours have been interpreted for the purposes of classifying children's security status, reflect time-bound values about childhood. In his view, the children now called securely attached would have been considered "over-protected" in the 1940s and 1950s. Clarke-Stewart (1988) also has questioned the validity of interpreting a non-protesting departure from the mother as evidence of insecure attachment rather than as evidence of ease with a frequently-encountered situation; as Singer (1992) said, for children who regularly used daycare, the strange situation may not be a strange situation at all.

A further argument made by Singer (1992) is that attachment theory posits the mother as the emotional regulator of the child but it "discloses nothing about the way in which the regulation of emotional relationships is associated with questions of power" (p. 135). For example, in attachment theory, the mother's role is to provide security by being available to the child. The child must know, from the mother's judicious organisation of her behaviour, that when he/she explores away from the mother, the mother will remain available. But the mother's organisation of her behaviour must remain invisible: If she is clever at "mood setting", she will never need to impose her will but instead give the child the feeling of being able to control her, so that eventually, the child gains self-confidence. Singer argued that this conceptualisation of the ideal mother-child relationship acts as a philosophy of child rearing which works by rendering invisible the mother's power and by putting a negative light on any (career)

wishes or activities which a mother might have outside of being “the sensitive, responsive mother”. Singer argued also that the attachment theory view of the ideal mother as absolutely available, sensitive and responsive was based on a mother-as-therapist model. However, while most therapists were only expected to keep up a level of concentrated attention for a limited period of an hour or two, mothers were expected to sustain this at all times. The consequence of not doing so was to create the seeds of later criminality and psychopathology, thus “through the child, the mother was made responsible for violence and social chaos in the world outside the family, a world from which she was more or less excluded” (Singer, 1992, p. 99).

Burman (1994) too has foregrounded “moral and political themes” in the ‘knowledge’ created by attachment theory research through highlighting how this theory has positioned the mother as the essential ingredient for the maintenance of social-political order. She argued that the “definition and regulation of what constitutes good, sensitive mothering structured and continues to structure, both discourses of child development and, through these, discourses of childcare provision and femininity” (p. 80). In her view, the discourse of attachment theory legitimated existing social relations and rendered suspect such social movements as the feminist call for free and available childcare services. Burman argued that the influence of attachment theory remains visible in the way that contemporary early childhood research is still dominated by questions which posit day care (or childcare) experience as a risk factor for the mother-child attachment relationship. The discourse of attachment theory is seen by Burman as having acquired a momentum of its own which continues to shape the knowledge constructed about the world we live in. Thus *discourse* and *social practices* are seen to create each other in a dialectical relationship which is self-perpetuating.

2.4.2 Deconstructing life experience: The power of discourses

The view expressed above about the nature of discourse and social practices is not dissimilar to Bruner’s (1986) view of developmental theory as culture. He noted the power of developmental discourse to affect social practices when he stated:

theories of human development, once accepted into the prevailing culture, no longer operate simply as descriptions of human nature and its growth. By their nature, as accepted cultural representations, they, rather, give a social reality to the processes they seek to explicate and to a degree, to the “facts” that they adduce in their support. (p. 134)

As I noted in section 2.3.2, Bruner (1987) also used the term “cultural shaping” to refer to the process by which people’s life narratives come to reflect cultural theories about the lives that are possible within a culture. Bruner further stated that through cultural shaping “we also become variants of the culture’s canonical forms” (p. 15). Bruner (1987) did not then engage in further exploration of the issue of how culture transmits itself (to become subjective experience) seeing this as a topic more properly in the realm of anthropological study. However, a number of deconstructivist writers have engaged with this topic using the notion of discourse/s as an analytic tool.

Morss (1996), for instance, has argued that the post-structural work of Foucault suggests that in a given culture, society or time, there is not one discourse but a multiplicity of discourses which clash and compete. Discourses are the social practices and discursive language associated with the social sciences (Henriques et al., 1984, p. 106). In people’s interactions with each other, their discourses and “systems of knowledge and power” (Morss, 1996, p. 129) intersect to produce the post-modern subjectivity. This subjectivity (individuality and self-awareness) is relative and fluid, “dynamic and multiple, always positioned in relation to particular discourses and practices and produced by these” (Henriques et al., p. 3). Thus, for Foucault, identity or subjectivity, was not coherent over time, it was “produced by and within socially maintained discourse” (Morss, p. 131).

Morss (1996) has noted that the Foucauldian view of subjectivity has raised fears in some post-structuralist writers of the rise of “discourse determinism [where] people would be described as being ‘made’ by discourse or cultural practice in a kind of back-door socialisation theory. The human subject would be conceived of

as passive – as an object rather than a subject” (p. 136). However, Morss argued that post-structuralism treats subjectivity in the same way that it treats social reality: Neither exists as a fixed entity but each exists and is re-constituted in and through interaction with the other. This view of the dialectal relationship between self/subjectivity and societal discourses is, in my view, illustrated in the following statement from Erica Burman’s (1994) introduction to her book *Deconstructing developmental psychology*:

The resources I have drawn upon in writing this book have been feminist and post-structuralist ideas.... the history of my own (multiple and contradictory) subject positionings within developmental psychology discourses – as child, daughter, sister, aunt, child-free, child-less, daughter of single parent, feminist, child-centred, woman-centred and so on – has been instrumental in the elaboration of this account I, as author, am as subject to the power of the discourses developmental psychology produces and reproduces as the putative children and families I discuss in this book. I, like everyone else, cannot stand, or rather speak, outside them. (p. 8)

In Burman’s (1994) writing, the notion of discourse was used to refer to “socially organised frameworks of meaning that define categories and specify domains of what can be said and done” (p. 2). The notion that discourses incorporate the power to define action is clearly carried in this definition; however, Burman’s focus was on how psychological accounts “reflecte[d] and engage[d] with the practices associated with them” (p. 2) rather than with the subjective experience of them.

In early childhood scholarship many writers have used the term “ideology” to refer to dominant cultural ideas. For example, King (1978) wrote about infants’ teachers’ ideas about the nature of children as:

ideologies [which] were seldom explicitly expressed by the teachers because to them they had the status not of ideas but of the truth. What they believed about children and education was integral to what they defined as real in the classroom. (p. 10)

In Rapp and Lloyd's (1989) study, a 15-item "Home as Haven Scale" was developed to measure the "home as haven ideology" with the items being described as reflecting "beliefs about a mother's responsibilities in the home, whether mothers should work and whether non-maternal care interferes with attachment" (p. 427). Beliefs that "construct" ways of thinking is also the implicit definition of "ideology" used by Brannen and Moss (1991) who identified "ideologies" about fatherhood, motherhood, marriage and family life as "powerful influences" (p. 253) on experiences even though they did not see these ideologies as able to "completely determine experiences" (p. 253). Brannen and Moss additionally employed the notion of "discourse" stating, for example, that the mothers in their study "were beginning to create a new *discourse* around maternal employment" (p. 253, my italics). In this usage "discourse" appears to be a reference to a way of talking, and/or thinking, about motherhood.

Polakow (1992) too has made use of both the term "discourse" and "ideology" in arguing that an "antichild ideology of care" exists in the United States where the feminization and infantilization of poverty has created a "discourse of otherness" and of "concealment and invisibility that forms a construct of social-psychological pathology corroborated by an educational discourse of deficiency and remediation" (p. 123).

It is clear from these writings that researching lived experience from the perspective that experience is socially constructed through discourse and "ideology" makes available an additional lens through which to seek insights into the lived experience of starting childcare. In my study I have adopted the use of the term 'discourse' in exploring how societal notions about motherhood and teaching, and the nature of children, appeared to be connected to how the participants in my study experienced the event of starting childcare. I also use the term 'discourse' to refer to taken-for-granted ways of talking that appeared connected to psychological themes embedded in the cultural life of our society.

2.5 Chapter overview

This chapter has presented a survey of the theoretical landscape within which my study of the experience of starting childcare may be located. A number of theoretical “lenses” were identified as having illuminated how this topic may be understood, namely the traditional psychological lens, the social-psychological/socialisation lens, the lived experience lens and the deconstructivist lens.

The traditional psychological lens has contributed to understandings about the experience of starting childcare through constructing it as an experience involving separation from attachment figures, the need to attain security, and independence from the mother. This construction brings in theoretical concepts from attachment theory, psychoanalytic theory and psychometric views of separation anxiety as well as notions of autonomy from psychosocial theory.

Looking at the event of starting childcare from a social-psychological lens involves debates about the desirability of continuity between the home and early childhood environment that derive from ecological theory. The view that starting childcare involves entry into a new group setting draws insights from script theory and from socio-cultural theories about the way that established group members or more knowledgeable others induct the new ones into the culturally-approved way of doing things through guided participation or social canalization.

The lived experience lens was informed by the phenomenological view that what matters for experience is reality as it is perceived by the individual and not some objectified view of it from the outside. In addition, the idea from narrative psychology that stories tell lives was considered as a way of exploring subjective experience together with discussions about “giving voice”, as these have been informed by feminist theory, views on teaching and teachers’ life stories and the children’s rights movement.

Finally, some contributions from post-structuralist thinking about the nature of knowledge were considered, particularly as these have been applied to the analysis of the theoretical positions surveyed in this chapter.

In chapter 3, I discuss how the insights provided by the theoretical ideas considered in this chapter were integrated into my research approach to produce a methodology which may be described as a qualitative case study approach informed by grounded theory and narrative enquiry and elements of deconstructivist analysis. The influence of ideas from script theory and socio-cultural theory (see section 2.2.3) on both the data gathering and data analysis phases of my study is also discussed.

Chapter 3

Re-focusing the lenses: My research approach

I noted in the introductory chapter that my original research questions focused on how children understood the role of their parents and their early childhood teachers in their lives (see section 1.2). This focus led to a two-phase research design which resulted in the re-focusing of my study onto the experience of starting childcare. This chapter starts with an outline of the early parts of my study. The re-focused research questions are then presented. This is followed by a statement of my final research design including a discussion of theoretical influences on my approach, and methods and procedures used in data gathering and analysis. A discussion of methodological issues involved in the presentation of the data then follows.

3.1 Starting out: The early research design

I approached my original focus on exploring how children understood the contributions in their life of parents and early childhood teachers through the theoretical lenses of script theory and socio-cultural theories of development, influenced also by ecological theory. Script theory and socio-cultural theories led me to expect that I could explore the contribution which parents and teachers made to children's life experience by observing children in interaction with parents at home, and with teachers in the childcare setting, and be able to analyse how the different adults contributed to children's life experience in comparable situations. Both script theory and socio-cultural theories suggest that the way that adults interact with children socialises them into appropriate ways of behaving within a given setting (see section 2.2.3). On the basis of hypotheses in ecological theory (see section 2.2.1) I expected also that observational data of children in interaction with home and centre adults would enable me to explore whether continuity or discontinuity existed between the two settings. I expected this analysis to yield insights about whether parents and early childhood teachers played complementary roles in children's lives and on how parent-teacher partnership in early childhood settings might be conceptualised. In the next two

sections, I outline the two-phase research design to explore the original focus of my study.

3.1.1 Phase one: Focus groups

Phase one of the original research design consisted of focus group meetings with staff in four 'good practice' early childhood centres known to myself and to one of my research supervisors. The task was to identify events during which it might be useful to observe the contributions which staff and parents made to children's understanding of those events (see Appendix A). I was particularly interested in routine events which children might meet for the first time in the early childhood setting. During the second phase of the project, I planned to observe child-parent and child-teacher interaction episodes during naturally-occurring instances of the chosen routine events and analyse these in terms of their underlying "script" (Nelson, 1981) and in terms of how adults "canalized" the child's actions within them (Hill & Valsiner, 1988).

The focus group meetings of the first phase yielded an expected list of events (Appendix Bii). During the meetings, I became impressed by how salient the characteristic of being in a group situation seemed for the teachers. At numerous points in the meetings, one or another of the teachers commented on how "being in a group" was possibly the most important thing the child had to become accustomed to on first entry into an early childhood centre. In two of the focus group centres, settling-in procedures were extensively discussed and the point about being in a group situation was even more strongly made. In one centre particularly, the staff were very emphatic about the importance of the parents' attitude to using childcare for how well-settled a child was, and for how children came to view their experience at the centre.

The strong views expressed by the teachers during the focus group meetings caused me to reflect on the best way forward into the second phase of the study. As one aim was to produce knowledge that would be of use in the practice of early childhood education, it seemed appropriate to re-focus the study on to the

event of starting childcare and on to the process of settling-in once started at the childcare centre.

3.1.2 Phase two : Re-focusing the study

When I contacted the supervisors of the centres whose staff had taken part in the focus group meetings with the first phase report (see Appendix Bi & Bii), I requested that I carry out some preliminary observations of children who were settling-in to their centres in preparation for the re-focused study as well as trial my interview schedules. All four centres accepted my request to be in a preliminary study; they agreed to put me in touch with the next family with a child on their waiting list. Six children ranging in age from 12 to 36 months were identified as about to start attending in the four centres. The parent/s of the children were given information about my project by the centre supervisors; they all agreed to be interviewed and for their child to be observed during one session in their first week of attendance at the centre. The supervisors of the centres also agreed to be interviewed about the child's settling-in. The observations and the interviews were all held during the first month of 1993. The participating families were given a copy of the observations made about their child as well as a copy of the notes made from the interviews.

The information gained in the preliminary study provided many useful insights about the event of starting childcare and provided some initial themes as the basis for developing my semi-structured interview schedules with the parent and teacher participants in my study. Some examples of themes from the interviews with the parents (3 mothers and 2 fathers) were:

- i. the parents mentioned a variety of preoccupations as issues, concerns or problems; this suggested that the event of starting childcare was one which affected them as well as their child.
- ii. parents expressed uncertainty about what was expected of them during the process of settling-in; nonetheless they saw themselves as providing "support" and "security" for their child and spoke of settling-in as "getting them used to the place".

- iii. parents were uncertain what they could expect from the teachers during the time of settling-in.
- iv. parents did not appear to have had access to information about this event from outside the centre, and, in five out of the six cases, they were not given any by the centre.

In the teacher interviews it became clear that the four teachers (all women) had very detailed views about the experience of settling-in and what seemed like intuitive theories about how settling-in should be handled. Some examples of other insights gained from the teacher interviews were:

- i. teachers spoke of what happened when new children started childcare, rather than about what the centre policy was about this; and they also spoke about patterns of settling-in with specific children in mind. While procedures existed for handling new children at the centre it appeared that these procedures were not always written up as policies.
- ii. teachers appeared tentative about where the boundary of their responsibility for the children was in the presence of the parents.
- iii. teachers appeared to have difficulty evaluating whether parents knew what staff expected of them during the settling-in time.

My child observation records during the preliminary study confirmed that there was scope for an analysis of how adults contributed to children's understanding of the event of starting childcare and I recorded many instances of behaviour in which the adults acted as the "expert" inducting the "novice" child (see e.g., Winegar, 1989) into the established routines of the centre, such as during routines surrounding hand-washing or morning tea time.

The combination of these insights suggested that beyond the significance which the event of starting childcare was seen to have for the children, the adults interviewed also had stories to tell about their own experience of this event. Even in the brief space of one interview per parent and per teacher, some common themes seemed to be emerging in the stories which the parents and teachers

recounted about these experiences. This realisation resulted in a decision to further refine the focus of the second phase of my study. I would explore the experience of settling-in as one about which adults had stories to tell, not only about the child, but also about themselves. The desirability of this refinement was strengthened when a literature search of work done over the last 20 years revealed that few studies in the English-speaking world had considered the topic of starting childcare (see chapters 4, 6 and 8), none had taken a qualitative approach to exploring this experience over time, and none had taken the tri-partite focus described above. Moreover, as noted in chapter 1, no studies of this event had been undertaken in the Aotearoa/New Zealand context.

The following section describes the re-focused research question and the resulting theoretical and methodological re-positioning of my study.

3.2 Re-focusing the question, re-focusing the lenses

3.2.1 *The (re-focused) research question/s*

The re-focused research question became: how do the different participants in the event of starting childcare experience, and construct meaning out of, this event? Within this question, I identified the following subsidiary questions:

- i. how do the home adults of children starting childcare recount their experience of this event alongside their child?
- ii. how do teachers in childcare centres who are closely involved with a particular child's settling-in, recount their experience of this event?
- iii. how do children experience settling-in, as seen from the viewpoints of the adults involved, including the researcher?
- iv. how do the experiences of parents, teachers and children triangulate to illuminate the event of starting childcare at the level of experience and at a theoretical level?
- v. what light do stories of experience throw on how the process of starting childcare could be enhanced at the level of practice in a childcare setting?

This refinement required also a re-positioning of my study within a broader theoretical landscape and the application of different methodological approaches. As discussed in chapter 2, the focus on starting childcare established connections to literature on separation, and on attachment relationships, between children and their parents, which is informed by psychoanalytic theory and attachment theory. Research in this area has also been informed by ideas about attainment of independence from the mother that derive from Mahler's (Mahler, Pine & Bergman, 1975) views on separation-individuation and from Erikson's (1950/1974) psychosocial theory of development. The focus on lived experience led me to explore phenomenological approaches to studying how experiences are perceived and to theoretical understandings about this from narrative psychology and from post-structuralist views about the nature of knowledge and experience.

From a methodological point of view, the integration of insights from phenomenological approaches to the study of experience with insights from narrative psychology and post-structural thinking meant that an approach was needed which (i) allowed access to participants' perceptions of their experiences (ii) allowed 'understanding' and 'experience' to be studied as they happened and (iii) allowed an exploration of how themes in the participants' stories of experience connected to dominant discourses about the event of starting childcare. The choice of a qualitative case study approach, informed by methods from grounded theory, narrative enquiry and deconstructivist analysis, was made in response to these requirements.

In sections 3.2.2 – 3.2.5, I outline the rationale for the use of these approaches in my study.

3.2.2 Using a qualitative case study approach

As argued by Merriam (1988), qualitative case studies are (i) particularistic (ii) descriptive (iii) heuristic and (iv) inductive. Case studies are "particularistic" because they "focus on a particular situation, event, program or phenomenon" (Merriam, p. 11) and "concentrate attention on the way particular groups of

people confront specific problems, taking a holistic view of the situation” (Shaw, 1978, p. 2 cited in Merriam, p. 11). They are descriptive because their typical “end product” is a “rich, ‘thick description’ of the phenomenon under study” (Merriam, p. 11). “Thick description” is explained as “not complexities objectively described; it is the particular perceptions of the actors” (Stake, 1995, p. 42). Qualitative case studies are “heuristic” because they can illuminate the readers’ understanding of the focus of study by bringing about the discovery of new understandings or meanings, or extending the readers’ experiences as well as by confirming what is known. Finally, qualitative case studies use an “inductive” mode of reasoning through which “generalisations, concepts, or hypotheses emerge from an examination of the data – data grounded in the context itself” (Merriam, p. 13); in this way it is possible to “build theory” (Merriam, 1988, p. 59) through articulating new relationships, concepts and insights. This approach is different from the deductive mode of reasoning characteristic of studies where the goal is the verification of clearly stated hypotheses articulated at the start of a project.

The particularistic, descriptive and heuristic characteristics of qualitative case studies are methodologically and philosophically compatible with my research aims of focusing on the particular event of starting childcare, and gaining an understanding of how different participants constructed meaning out of their lived experience of this event. My aim of using the insights gained from the exploration of these experiences to construct theoretical statements about the event of starting childcare also appeared achievable through the use of the inductive mode of reasoning characteristic of the qualitative case study approach.

3.2.3 The use of grounded theory

Principles of grounded theory were also integrated into my research approach. As both theory and method, grounded theory is another approach whose philosophical foundations lie in the symbolic interactionist tradition of George Herbert Mead (see Hutchinson, 1988) with its emphasis on human communication occurring through the use of symbols whose meaning is communally created and

re-created in social interaction (e.g., Blumer, 1962). Thus, human reality is not something 'out there' awaiting discovery; it is socially constructed and continually being re-constructed. Hutchinson argued that this view of the world is reflected in each step of grounded theory methodology, especially in the data collection strategies of participant observation and interviewing during which the researcher seeks to acquire an understanding of the participants' perspective within the particular situation. Hutchinson said:

The notion of discovery, so fundamental to grounded theory, includes discovering first the world as seen through the eyes of the participants and then the basic social processes or structures that organise that world.

The generation of grounded theory relies on the inquiring, analytical mind of the researcher/theorist. The task is to discover and conceptualise the essence of specific interactional processes. The resulting theory provides a new way of understanding the social situations from which the theory was generated. (p. 124)

Charmaz (1995) wrote about grounded theory methods as providing a bridge between "interpretative analyses [and] traditional positivist assumptions because they are used to discover research participants' meanings; they assume an empirical enterprise, and they provide a set of procedures to follow" (p. 30) which may be used in a range of approaches. At the interpretative end of these approaches are those which

aim to capture the worlds of people by describing their situations, thoughts, feelings and actions and by relying on portraying the research participants' lives and voices.... The researcher seeks to learn how they construct their experience through their actions, intentions, beliefs and feelings. (p. 30)

My study falls within this interpretative constructionist category both by virtue of its aims and by the methods of data collection and analyses which I used. Charmaz (1995) advocated the gathering of "rich detailed data" (p. 33) to produce Geertz's (1973) "thick description" which includes not only what is physically

observed to happen but what the researcher interprets as having happened through the bringing in of cultural knowledge and context. Charmaz nominated the following methods as tools to achieve "thick description":

written descriptions of events observed by researchers, extensive accounts of personal experience from respondents and records that provide narratives of experience (such as transcribed tapes...) participant observers' fieldnotes, interviewers' transcriptions, patient autobiographies, student journals (p. 33).

In my study I have used all but one of the data gathering techniques (patient autobiographies) advocated by Charmaz to produce the "thick description" present in the stories of experience in chapters 5, 7 and 9 . This "thick description" also forms the basis for articulating some theoretical statements about the process of starting childcare; these are presented in chapter 10.

Charmaz (1995) argued that while some grounded theorists assume that the significant issues, and thus the significant data, will be easily identifiable in the field (e.g., Glaser, 1992 cited in Charmaz p. 35), the data are produced in the interaction of the researcher with the researched, and thus so are the "meanings that the researcher observes and defines" (p. 35). Charmaz added: "A researcher has topics to pursue and research participants have goals, thoughts, feelings and actions"(p. 35). She noted that the research questions and mode of inquiry shape the subsequent data and analysis, and advised: "That is why you must become self-aware about why and how you gather your data. You can learn to sense when you are gathering rich, useful data that do not undermine or demean your respondent(s)"(p. 35). Throughout this study I was conscious of the dynamics articulated by Charmaz. In outlining the methods of data collection and analysis used in my study, I describe how I sought to remain reflective about my role in constructing meanings, including in the writing of the final report. I also outline how I responded to ethical dilemmas encountered in the development of this study to avoid "undermining" or "demeaning" the participants (see section 3.3.3.3).

3.2.4 *Narrative inquiry and researching experience*

Polkinghorne (1995) defined narrative inquiry as a “subset of qualitative research designs in which stories are used to describe human action” (p. 5). As I noted in chapter 2, narrative inquiry has gained prominence as a method of psychological study. In educational research, narrative enquiry has become very popular particularly in the area of teacher education and in studies of teacher thinking and practice (e.g., Beattie, 1995; Carter, 1993, 1995; Clandinin & Connelly, 1990; see also chapter 6). Polkinghorne distinguished between two types of narrative inquiry on the basis of Bruner’s (1985) two types of cognition: paradigmatic and narrative modes of thought³. In the first type of narrative inquiry the data consist of narratives or stories which are analysed to produce paradigmatic typologies or categories; in the second type of narrative inquiry, the data consist of “actions, events and happenings ... whose analysis produces stories (e.g., biographies, histories, case studies)” (p. 6).

The approach I used in my study derives its methods primarily from this second type of narrative inquiry which sees a story as the outcome of the analysis, and the researcher’s task as being:

to configure the data elements into a story that unites and gives meaning to the data as contributors to a goal or purpose. The analytic task requires the researcher to develop or discover a plot that displays the linkage among the data elements as parts of an unfolding temporal development culminating in the denouement (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 15).

The outcome of this process is most clear in chapter 9 where individual stories are presented about each child’s experience of starting childcare on a case-by-case basis; these stories have been composed through a process of relating “events and actions to one another by configuring them as contributors to the advancement of

³ According to Polkinghorne (1995): “the power of paradigmatic thought is to bring order to experience by seeing individual things as belonging to a category”(p. 10); “while paradigmatic knowledge is maintained in individual words that name a concept, narrative knowledge is maintained in emplotted stories. Storied memories retain the complexity of the situation in which an action was undertaken and the emotional and motivational meaning connected with it”(p. 11).

a plot” (p. 16). By contrast, in the telling of the adult participants’ stories of starting childcare, a combination of cross-case and case-by-case presentation of stories is used, structured around major themes which emerged in a number of the stories.

The use of narrative inquiry was adopted for an additional reason. Since the experience of starting childcare has become an increasingly common one in Western society, it seemed appropriate to study the lived reality of it through the stories which people tell about it.

3.2.5 Deconstructivist and critical polytextualist analysis

In seeking to ‘discover’ the meanings which participants constructed of their experiences of starting childcare, I started from the position that meanings exist and are continually negotiated in interactions between people. As I noted in section 2.2.3, the theoretical foundations of this view lie in Mead’s symbolic interactionist perspective and connect also to a range of ideas about the nature of social interaction as script learning through participatory interaction (e.g., Nelson, 1981) and the use of processes of social canalization (Valsiner, 1985; Valsiner & Hill, 1989) and guided participation (e.g., Rogoff, 1990; Rogoff et al., 1993). In seeking to discover how meanings were constructed during the experience of starting childcare, my position assumed a social constructionist stance on the nature of meaning (and experience); principles of deconstructivist analyses (e.g., Burman, 1994; Cannella, 1997) and critical polytextualism (Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 1992) were chosen as appropriate in order to explore the connection between the participants’ stories of experience and dominant discourses within which the stories were constructed. Use of deconstructivist and critical polytextualist principles of analysis was made in the presentation of the stories in chapters 5, 7 and 9 (see also section 3.3.5).

In the following section I describe the refined research design which I developed from my theoretical re-positioning and the integration of the four methodological approaches outlined above.

3.3 Using the re-focused lenses: My study design

To explore the re-focused research questions I conducted five qualitative case studies of the experience of starting childcare during 1993 and the early part of 1994. Access to the adults' lived experience of starting childcare was sought during two semi-structured interviews with the home adult/s and with the teachers, and through the analysis of journals which the adult participants kept throughout the fieldwork stage of the study. Access to the children's experiences was sought through pen and paper observations of the children during my field visits during which I also made video-recordings of three events during their session: the arrival, one snack time and the departure. Further sources of insight were my own reflections recorded during the field visits and within 48 hours of each field visit. Narratives of participants' experiences were then re-constructed from pieces of the stories present in these data.

A description of the participants, the research instruments and the procedures of data gathering used in my study is provided in sections 3.3.1 – 3.3.3.

3.3.1 *The participants: Selection and access*

Each case study involved one child, at least one home adult, and at least one teacher from the childcare centre attended by the child. The 5 children, 4 girls and 1 boy, were new to centre-based early childhood services and were aged between 15 months to 25 months at the start of the study. The communication skills of these children were largely pre-verbal. All 5 children lived with both their parents in one household. Only one child, Nina, had another sibling; the other four children were only children to first-time parents.

The invitation to participate in the study was made to the home adult who approached the centre to enrol the child; in all 5 cases this was the child's mother. Thus the mothers of the 5 children were involved as participants in the study; in the case of the one male child, Robert, the father, aunt and grandmother also contributed to the interview and journal data; in all cases the journals were kept by the mothers. I therefore refer to the home adults' experiences as the mothers'

experiences. Where explicit contributions to the data were made by other family members, I make this clear.

One teacher from each of the five case study centres was a participant in the study; a sixth teacher became a participant part-way into the study when it became clear that the case study child at the centre, Maddi, had formed a preference for being with that teacher. The decision to include the second teacher in the study was initiated by the centre teachers themselves. All six teachers were female.

The case study centres were all licensed childcare centres in one of the main cities in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Two of the centres in the study were full-day facilities which opened from 7.30am till 5.30pm. The other three childcare centres were sessional centres which opened either for morning only sessions or for separate morning and afternoon sessions. Two of these were community creches run in a community hall through a parent co-operative management structure and the third was a parent co-operative which operated in rented facilities.

Table 1 sets out the case studies (numbered 1 to 5), the names and relationships among the study participants, and the type of centre in which the 5 case studies were conducted.

The selection of the participants and the research centres started with the identification of licensed childcare centres from an official list (Early Childhood Development Unit, 1992) which were within the researcher's easy travelling distance in a main New Zealand city. When the four childcare centres which had participated in the preliminary study in phase two were excluded, this yielded a total of thirty eight centres. These centres were contacted by phone in the first instance to gauge interest in participating in the study. Among the centres which expressed interest in participating, fifteen said that they might have a child

Case Study	Child's name and age in months (m) at start of study	Mother's Name	Teacher/s' Name	Type of Childcare Centre
CS1	Nina, 16m	Jean	Sarah	Half-day community creche; community hall venue, parent co-operative management
CS2	Maddi, 15m	Helen	Anna & Sam	Sessional community creche; community hall venue, parent co-operative management
CS3	Shirley, 17m	Deborah	Joan	Half-day; parent co-operative management
CS4	Julie, 18m	Lyn	Patti	full-day; incorporated society
CS5	Robert, 26m	Paula	Lorraine	full-day; age-segregated; privately-owned

Table 1. Case studies (numbered 1-5), names of participants, their relationship and type of centre in which case studies were conducted.

starting soon who fitted the criteria; the other centres were either not able to participate or did not envisage taking in any new children within the next few months. The fifteen potential participating centres were sent a letter which explained the aims, background, timescale and methodology of the project. Their participation was formally sought in that letter (see Appendix C).

Follow-up visits to these centres were then made to confirm the centre's continuing interest and to provide the centres with an information sheet about the project which could be passed on to the potential parent participants. At this time the centres also nominated the time when they expected that a new child would be

starting and agreed to provide information about the study to the potential parent and child participants. I provided the centre supervisors with a letter of information for parents (see Appendix D). The letter of information included details of how to contact me for further information and from then on the family and I communicated directly. Six families were contacted in this way; one family agreed to participate but later informed the childcare centre supervisor that they had reconsidered their decision because they did not feel they could commit the time to the project that it would require. Parental consent was obtained for the study using a parental consent form (Appendix E) which guaranteed anonymity for participants in the study.

Once a decision to proceed with the first case study was made, other case studies were initiated on a first-come first-served basis as they fitted in with my existing fieldwork schedule. A total of five case studies were conducted during the ten-month period between June 1993 to March 1994. At this stage a judgement was made that "theoretical saturation" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967/1977, p. 61) had been reached and no further case studies were initiated.

The criteria for choosing the child participants were that the children had to be starting to attend their first centre-based early childhood service and be mobile children aged 15 months upwards who had no special educational needs. Mobile children have more freedom to be active agents and by 15 months most infants have some form of symbolic communication skills which enable an observer to interpret their wishes. During the preliminary study, it became clear that the presence of these two characteristics would be necessary for the type of methodology planned.

In seeking access to centres for the case studies, I requested the participation of "the teacher who would have most to do with the child during his/her first period of being at the centre" (see Appendix C). As I negotiated access with individual centres it became clear that this request assumed that there would be one adult who would bear greater responsibility for the child than the other teachers. In

centres which operated a primary caregiving system, or a “key person system” (Goldschmied & Jackson, 1994), this request was easily met; in other centres, the supervisor discussed the request with the staff and agreement was reached about which of them would be the teacher participant in the study. In these centres, my request clearly created an unusual situation in the centre; I comment on some of the consequences of my request in the narratives presented in chapters 5 and 7.

3.3.2 *The instruments*

The data gathering instruments used in the study were:

1. Interviews
 - i. Parent interview schedule 1(PIS1)
 - ii. Parent interview schedule 2 (PIS2)
 - iii. Teacher interview schedule 1 (TIS1)
 - iv. Teacher interview schedule 2 (TIS2)
2. Parent/Teacher Journals
 - i. Parent journal (PJ)
 - ii. Teacher journal (TJ)
3. The researcher
 - i. Fieldnotes
 - ii. Video records

A description of each of these instruments follows.

3.3.2.1 *The interviews*

Two semi-structured interviews were held with each of the parents and the teachers. A formal interview schedule was prepared for each of these and was used in a flexible and informal way during the interview sessions (Smith, 1995; Kvale, 1996). All interviews were audio-taped with the permission of the participants and transcribed.

Interviews with the parents/mothers

During the first interview with the parents – which in all cases were mothers – (PIS1, see Appendix F), their reason for using childcare, their attitude to starting childcare and their expectations about it and about the childcare staff were explored. Mothers were also asked about their experience to date of starting their child at the centre and to give a description of their child.

The second interview with the mothers (PIS2, see Appendix G) explored their views about how the experience of starting childcare had gone for them and for their child.

Interviews with the teachers

The first interview with each participating teacher (TIS1, see Appendix H) explored the teacher's professional background, the teacher's understanding of the centre's policy on settling-in new children at the centre, the teacher's views about how children settled-in and her views and expectations about the new child's experience of starting childcare.

The second interview with each of the teachers investigated the teachers' views about how the experience of starting childcare had gone for them and for the new child (see TIS2, Appendix I).

3.3.2.2 Parent and teacher journals

Mothers and teachers were asked to keep journal records of the child's day on each of the orientation visits and for each visit during the first six weeks that the child attended the centre unaccompanied by a home adult. The adults were asked to record anything that happened during the day that they thought might be related to the experience of starting childcare. A journal for this purpose was provided to each adult participant together with a note explaining how to use the journal (PJ and TJ, see Appendix Ji for the note that accompanied parents' journal notebook, and Appendix Jii for a sample of the journal layout. Ki and Kii present the equivalent for teachers).

3.3.2.3 The researcher: Fieldnotes and video records

I observed the children in their childcare centre during all their orientation visits when the children spent all, or part of, their time there accompanied by a home adult. The number of the orientation visits differed for each child; once the children started attending the centre on their own, I observed them for one visit a week for a total of six weeks. During my fieldwork visits I used a combination of pen and paper observations, event recording by video, and occasional video-recording of other interactions which appeared particularly salient at the time.

In each centre I asked for a copy of all the documents that might explain how the centre handled the process of starting childcare as well as any written documents such as the centre's parent guidebook and/or charter which the centre made available to the home adults.

In summary, the formal data gathered for each case study were as follows:

- i. 2 interviews with each mother
- ii. 2 interviews with each teacher
- iii. journal entries by mother and/or other home adult
- iv. journal entries by teacher/s
- v. researcher's fieldnotes of all the child's orientation visits (number and length of field visits varied per child) and of one visit each week for 6 weeks
- vi. video recordings of 3 events during each fieldwork visit
- vii. centre documents.

These data were augmented by a number of informal conversations which occurred throughout the fieldwork stage of the case studies as I became more immersed in the action of the childcare centre and "drifted in and out of being a peripheral participant" in the life of the centre (see section 3.4.3). In all cases I kept a record of these 'informal conversations', and of the way I became a peripheral participant, as part of my fieldnotes.

3.3.3 Data gathering procedures: Acting and reflecting

For each case study, data were gathered from the first visit that the child made to the childcare centre. As the researcher, I arrived at the childcare centre in advance of the child's booked time at the centre and was ready to start observing using pen and paper and video-recording from the time that the child appeared at the entrance of the centre. My pen and paper observations were expanded within 48 hours of the field visit to incorporate my reflections at the time of the observation and subsequently. The three video-taped events consisted of the arrival, snack-time and the departure. Occasionally, I also video-taped other events that seemed particularly salient at the time, such as a sudden change in the child's mood at the centre, or instances where the child's behaviour suggested particular achievements had been reached. These were viewed after the field visits and used to fill in detail in the fieldnotes and to inform emergent categories of possible themes to explore in the analysis.

The five mothers who became the parent participants in the study, and the teachers, also started keeping journal records of their view of the child's experience and their own, from the first visit. In discussing their involvement in the study, my request was that they should feel free to write in the journal every time that the child attended in a way that was convenient to them (see Appendices Ji and Ki). This resulted in journal entries that varied in style and depth of detail. Only one teacher participant did not return her journal (see chapter 7).

In each case study, the first interview with the mother and in one case, other family members who were at home, took place in the week that the child started attending the centre unaccompanied by a home adult. The first interview with the teacher was also held within the same week so that the temporal terms of reference of the adults was kept similar. The second interview was held at the end of six weeks of sole attendance by the child at the end of the case study period. All interviews were audio-taped with the permission of the participants and used to amplify the notes I kept during the interviews themselves. The first interviews

were also transcribed and given back to the adults to comment on before the second interview. During the second interview I asked each participant for their response to the transcript as well as followed up questions which had been raised for me by the first interview.

The use of a qualitative case study approach (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995) informed by grounded theory (Charmaz, 1995; Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967/1977; Hutchinson, 1988) and narrative enquiry (Polkinghorne, 1988, 1995) influenced the research procedures just described in a number of ways. For example, data gathering was accompanied by initial data analysis which was also informed by continual interrogation of the literature on the topics of my focus. As the researcher I also was aware that my interaction within the research situation was likely to produce its own dynamics which would affect the nature of the data, and therefore of the meanings, I was seeking to 'discover'. Clearly, this would make the act of 'discovery' also an act of 'creating' or constructing.

In the following sections, I outline how the procedures I used were affected by the theoretical and methodological principles of these approaches.

3.3.3.1 Locating myself in my study

According to Stake (1995), qualitative research:

champions the interaction of researcher and phenomena. Phenomena need accurate description, but even observational interpretation of those phenomena will be shaped by the mood, the experience, the intention of the researcher. Some of these wrappings can be shucked, but some cannot. Research is not helped by making it appear value free. It is better to give the reader a good look at the researcher. (p. 95)

A good look at myself as researcher makes clear that there can be no pretence that this study is value-free. I am a mother of three young children who have all attended a childcare centre on the university campus where I teach and conduct research in early childhood education and human development. I have a

passionate commitment to enhancing quality in early childhood practice and to enhancing professionalism in early childhood services.

Running parallel to the stories of experience reported in this study, there are other stories – in particular there is the story of the enquiry within the context of my own life history. My three children were born, and started childcare alongside me, during the course of the production of this thesis. At the time that I started writing final parts of this thesis, my first child was just starting school. The study therefore was not only a subject of scholarly and professional interest but one that had deep significance for my lived experience as mother. A further story is my involvement in a national project in 1993 and 1994 to develop the early childhood code of ethics for Aotearoa-New Zealand. This gave me both additional work which slowed down the production of this thesis, and invaluable insights into the quality of the lived experience of being an early childhood teacher.

This study does not narrate my own stories, but there can be no doubt that my own life experiences have influenced my meaning-making activity throughout the study. At the least, I believe it made me able to be more sensitive to how the home adults, especially the mothers, may have felt during the process of starting childcare; perhaps even making me more of the sensitive observer from whose insights the generating of theory starts (Glaser & Strauss, 1967/1977).

3.3.3.2 Establishing rapport

It was clear to me during the fieldwork and especially during the interviews, that my status as 'mother' was a help in establishing rapport and credibility with the home adults in the study. The mothers were all interested in the fact that I had a similar-age child already attending a childcare centre; in two of the cases the mothers invited me to take my daughter along to their home for the interviews so that "our two girls" could play together. This worked very well as a strategy for occupying the children while we held our interviews. It also helped to establish a feeling of comradeship and shared experience. Another mother offered to lend me her mail-order catalogue of children's clothes; in most cases the interviews were

held at the mothers' choice in their home environment with one interview being in my own home because it suited the mother's schedule better. The women all had my work and home telephone numbers so that they could contact me at any time if they needed to. In all cases I felt that a non-hierarchical, easy and friendly relationship was established (Oakley, 1981). At the end of the study I provided the mothers with a copy of my video-records of their child as well a copy of a paper based on some of their data (Dalli, 1998, September). I wrote a letter of thanks to all child participants enclosing a story book as a token of my thanks.

Establishing rapport with the teachers in the study was a task that I undertook carefully. I was aware that my professional roles as university lecturer and researcher could be seen both as a positive credential to ease my entry and acceptance in centres, as well as a possible threat. Thus, having negotiated access (see section 3.3.1) I 'listened out' for ways in which I would be least intrusive on the centre programme and on the teachers but at the same time be helpful to the centre. Thus, wherever possible, I arrived at the centres about ten to fifteen minutes earlier than the study children and helped the staff set up the environment for the day. In one centre, I offered the teachers the use of my video-camera when they wanted to observe a curricular area in detail; on another occasion, I provided off-cuts of carpet which they needed to recover an area in the centre and in another centre, I bought fundraising raffle tickets and, on request, provided a reading list from one of my courses for one of the centre teachers. In short, I tried to make myself useful and even when the study children arrived and my main focus shifted onto them, I tried to keep an overall awareness of the whole centre environment. Thus I drifted in and out of being a peripheral participant in the action, becoming involved in 'providing an extra hand' type activities rather than initiating any. It was pleasing to note that when, in the final interview, I asked teachers to comment in any way they liked about their participation in the study, they all made comments which indicated that my presence had not been intrusive and that often they had found my presence helpful.

3.3.3.3 Reflecting about my role in the study and ethical considerations

Becoming a peripheral participant in the life of the centre necessitated some decisions about my stance and actions during the fieldwork phase of the study as well as during the stage of writing up.

As I have noted, as a researcher I was aware that my interaction within the research situation was likely to produce its own dynamics which would affect the nature of the data. While I recognised the inevitability of this process (Charmaz, 1995), I strove to minimise the impact of this dynamic as much as possible through a number of decisions. For example, I decided that while I was engaged in fieldwork, I would try to be as inconspicuous as possible and redirect to others any attention-seeking bids made by the children towards me. I also decided not to intervene in the actions I was observing unless a situation arose which threatened the physical safety of the children (e.g., when a child appeared to be about to hit another child with a hard object – see section 9.3.2).

While, most of the time, these decisions were unproblematic, some opportunities for intervention arose during the fieldwork which produced interesting dilemmas for my combined roles as researcher-mother-early childhood professional. For example, on one occasion, one of the study children was left to sit in a highchair for what I considered an inappropriate length of time. Since I wanted to catch the child's experience as it occurred, I was caught between wanting to nudge the teachers into action and allowing action to unfold in their own course. When the child started to drop off to sleep, my dilemma intensified and I was finally saved from having to take a decision on what to do when one of the teachers also noticed that the child needed attention and provided it.

On other occasions, in different case studies, there were clear indications that the mothers needed guidance about issues like how to organise saying goodbye to their child, or where to find certain items in the centre. Again, I held back from intervening and only made exceptions to this decision when my assistance was

specifically sought, as happened when, during one child's settling-in period, her teachers started to discuss the difficulty which the child and her mother were experiencing in saying goodbye; on this occasion my advice was directly sought and I was happy to provide my view.

In my contact with the mothers, it was also clear that they were very keen to find out my view of their child's experience while they were not present in the centre. Generally speaking, this did not cause any problems and I was able to provide detailed accounts about the children's experience without compromising anyone's integrity or peace of mind. On odd occasions, however, such as in the highchair incident, a full account of my perception of events might have resulted in "undermining or demeaning" the teacher participants (Charmaz, 1995, p. 35), even as, from the mother's point of view, I would be meeting her need for information. On this occasion, I was again able to avoid taking action about this dilemma since I was not asked specifically to give my view of the child's day. These instances, however, highlight that the role of the researcher is not straightforward, as well as the possibilities that exist for the researcher to intervene in creating action, and hence, meaning, in a research situation.

My awareness of the researcher's potential to construct meaning remained heightened throughout the process of writing up this study. In an effort to make visible my interaction, as researcher, with the research situation, I have tried to be explicit about my presence in the text and have consistently used the first person in telling both the stories which appear in chapters 5, 7 and 9 as well as in the rest of the study.

Highlighting my role in the re-construction of the stories in this thesis is important for an additional reason. While the adult participants wrote their own data in the journals and received transcripts of their interviews, which they approved, the final text of the stories in this study was produced four years after the completion of data gathering. This made it unreasonable to ask the participants to validate the final interpretation of the data. Thus the stories are my constructions from

validated data but the stories themselves have not been finally validated by the adults who participated in the study. The same applies for the child participants; in this respect my study is no different to other studies of pre-verbal children.

It is also worth noting that in writing up the study I have been mindful of the promise of anonymity I gave to participants at the time of negotiating access. Primarily, this promise led to the use of pseudonyms for all participants and to a decision to present the data as a mixture of cross-case and single-case analyses. This decision seemed more likely to diminish the chance of identification which is possibly greater in a predominantly case-by-case presentation of data.

3.3.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis began during the data gathering stage of the study and continued through into the writing phase. As I became immersed in the fieldwork and became increasingly part of the social environment of the childcare centres, ideas started to form about the behaviours and social interactions I was observing, and sometimes participated in. These ideas suggested thematic categories into which I could code my observations.

3.3.4.1 Initial categories and case descriptions

The interviews with the adult participants as well as my ongoing informal conversations with the adults contributed to producing emergent categories which included ones such as:

- i. parental activity during visit
- ii. teacher activity during visit
- iii. child activity during visit
- iv. parent-teacher interaction
- v. learning of routines/induction into routines.

As I coded my fieldnotes into these initial categories, I also sought to discover the “main theme” which would explain “what is going on in the data” (Glaser, 1978, p. 94, cited in Hutchinson, 1988, p. 133) using a version of the “constant

comparative method” recommended by Hutchinson. Over the data gathering phase of the five case studies, a set of evolving categories and themes emerged that appeared to have validity across the cases.

At the end of the fieldwork phase of the case studies, I also compiled case descriptions (Yin, 1989) in which all the sources of data, with the exception of the video records, were used to produce an integrated account of the physical happenings, or empirical events, reported by the adult participants in each case study. The video data were viewed on numerous occasions during the data analysis and writing phases of the study primarily as a way of adding detail to the fieldnotes.

These separate processes were also accompanied by constant “memoing” of “elusive and shifting connections within the data” (Hutchinson, 1988, p. 136) which helped elucidate the themes around which the narratives told in this study are structured, and also helped ‘discover’ the theoretical insights about the experience of starting childcare (see chapter 10 for an integrated discussion). At the same time, these processes started to clarify which data elements could be linked and configured “into a story that unites and gives meaning to the data” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 15) around the themes which had emerged through the use of the constant comparative method. The narratives of experience presented in chapters 5, 7 and 9 emerged from these combined processes. As the researcher, I conceptualised these processes of data analysis as a spiral of analytic activity in which one’s first attempts at marshalling order out of the ‘chaos’ of one’s data became increasingly focused and directed towards the synthesis presented in the participants’ stories.

3.3.5 Presenting the data: Methodological challenges in re-constructing narratives

The re-construction of narratives about participants’ experiences and understandings of starting childcare presented some methodological challenges. In (the case of) telling stories about children’s experiences, the main challenge arose

because of the age of the children. At the start of the study, the children were 15 to 26 months old; this meant that their communication skills were largely pre-verbal and thus they were not able to record their own story (or narrative) of their experience of starting childcare and neither was I, as researcher, able to talk to them about this as a way of constructing their narratives.

Daniel Stern (1985) was among the first to comment on the difficulties of gaining access to infants' experiences; he stated:

since we can never crawl inside an infant's mind, it may seem pointless to imagine what an infant might experience. Yet that is at the heart of what we really want and need to know. What we imagine infant experience to be like shapes our notions of who the infant is. These notions make up our working hypotheses about infancy (p. 4).

Stern argued for the construction of hypotheses about children's experience because of the human need to try and make sense of what is observed and because of the clinical application which the hypotheses might have. Stern argued also that adults' knowledge of infants' experiences, and indeed knowledge of 'the infant' are perforce constructions. Elaborating on the origin and nature of the constructions, Stern said:

the observed infant is (also) a special construct, a description of capacities that can be observed directly: the ability to move, to smile, to seek novelty, to discriminate the mother's face, to encode memories, and so on. These observations themselves reveal little about what the "felt quality" of lived social experience is like ... As soon as we try to make inferences about the actual experiences of the real infant – that is, to build in qualities of subjective experience ... we are thrown back to our own subjective experience as the main source of inspiration ... The only storehouse of such information is our own life narratives, what it has felt like to live our own social lives. Here, then, is the problem: the subjective life of the adult, as self-narrated, is the main source of inference about the infant's felt quality of social experience. A degree of circularity is unavoidable. (p. 17)

In constructing narratives of children's experiences of starting childcare I have accepted as inevitable the "unavoidable" problem recognised by Stern and echoed by Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers (1992) who noted that observation only finds out :

what children are doing in a very limited and restricted sense – that which the observer, using a given understanding of children, *says* they are doing. What is revealed are not what children *are* doing, but the observer's accounting vocabularies and working hypotheses. (p. 18, italics in original)

Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers' (1992) response to "the elusiveness of the real" which they saw as the "terminal problem of the orthodox developmentalist" was to become "critical polytextualists" and shift the objective away from trying to discover the 'real' and onto:

an endeavour which seeks merely to discover what we can learn from examining the different stories that are told about children For every story that knowledges children, we need to ask either (or both): what is the function of the story (i.e. what can be done with it?); and/or, what ideology is the story peddling (i.e. what can be warranted by it?). (p. 18)

Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers (1992) considered these questions to be more legitimate and answerable questions and argued, as did Lesnik-Oberstein (1994), that this approach:

attempts to rescue from absolute deconstruction ... the notion that at the moment of telling stories ... we are both seeking the 'reader' and creating for ourselves, small, local, pockets of plausibility. As Shotter and Gergen (1989, p. xi) rightly observe 'any social practice entails the people involved in it treating themselves and one another in particular kinds of ways'. What we would add is that what (social) practices our stories make credible, and what they make incredible, *matters*. (p.14; italics in original)

In the construction of stories about the children's experience, I have presented "working hypotheses" of children's experiences which might be seen as "productive ways of seeing the event" (Marks, 1996, p. 116). In doing this, I have sought to maintain the *critical polytextualist* stance advocated by Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers (1992) in which the focus is on what can be learnt from "examining the different stories that are told about children"(p. 18). Thus, in chapter 9, where stories of the children's experiences are presented from the children's perspectives, I have also included insights into these stories which the mothers and the teachers shared in their own storytelling of their experiences. Additionally, I have sought to preserve the physical happenings of the "experience" as reported by the mothers and the teachers and in my own fieldnotes while at the same time I have sought to remain reflective about the constructed nature of these narratives. In other words, I have attempted to be critically polytextualist in the hope that this would create a text which might heighten awareness of how the stories we create in/through our social practices "*matter*" (Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 1992, p.14).

In terms of re-presenting the adults' experiences, the use of participants' own stories recorded in the journal entries and in the transcripts of the audio-taped interviews, together with my own observational fieldnotes and video records, provided a measure of "data source triangulation" (Stake, 1995). It could thus be argued that the narratives about the adults' experiences were less of a construction than the ones told about the children's experiences. Postmodern social constructionist thinking, however, would suggest that even in this case, what emerges as a story is the product not only of interpersonal negotiation that occurs in a social context (for example the research situation of the interview or that of journal writing for an audience) but also the product of cultural ways of knowing, of "storying ourselves into being" according to the "different stories that we learn as part of our socialisation into different cultures" (Howard, 1991, p. 190).

My sensitivity to this theoretical notion has influenced the way that elements of the adults' stories of their experiences have been presented. In particular, I became aware as the study progressed that meanings about the adults' experiences appeared to be connected to dominant themes in psychological literature which also appeared to have become part of the taken-for-granted discourse about the process of settling-in that went on in the case-study centres. In reflecting on the narratives of participants' experiences, my analyses include a consideration of these themes and of how they "fit into the social practices in which psychology functions" in Western culture (Burman, 1994, p. 1).

3.4 Chapter overview

In this chapter I have described the development of a two-phase study which started with a focus on exploring how children understood the role of parents and early childhood teachers in their lives. Focus group meetings with teachers in four "good practice" childcare centres led to a re-focusing of the original research question onto the event of starting childcare. A subsequent preliminary study led to a further refinement of the research focus onto the experience of starting childcare from the view of the three main participant groups involved in this event: the children, the parent/s and at least one teacher in the centre attended by the children.

The refinement of the research question/s was accompanied by a theoretical and methodological re-positioning of the study. The final research design combined insights from qualitative case study, grounded theory, narrative enquiry and elements of deconstructivist analysis.

This chapter has also outlined the approach to data gathering and analysis used in the study including a discussion of theoretical ideas that influenced the presentation of the data.

In the following chapter literature is reviewed which provides insight into various aspects of parents' (mostly mothers') experiences in early childhood settings; this

provides a background for the presentation of the mothers' stories of experiences in chapter 5.

Chapter 4

Research on Parents' Experiences of Childcare

An extensive search of the literature published in the last twenty years did not yield any studies which dealt solely with parents' experiences of settling their infants into childcare and only three which applied a qualitative approach, or an element of qualitative analysis, in exploring mothers' broader experiences of day care (Bradbard & Endsley, 1980; McCartney & Phillips, 1988; Rolfe, Lloyd-Smith & Richards, 1991; Rolfe & Richards, 1993, 1994). However, several studies published during this period included parents as part of their investigative framework and explored topics like parental views on day care-related issues, the connection between parental characteristics, or behaviours, and children's adjustment to day care, mothers' feelings at separation from their child, sources of concerns and satisfaction with childcare and linkages between the home and day care environment. These studies used a variety of investigative techniques ranging from large-scale pen-and-paper or telephone surveys of parental views, observational studies of parents and children in the centre environment as well as in simulated settings, self-report questionnaires and interviews, and parental measures of children's responses to the early childhood experience using predetermined scales. With a few exceptions (e.g., Bradbard & Endsley, 1980; Ledesma, Fitzgerald & McGreal, 1980; McCartney & Phillips, 1988), much of the data yielded in these studies have been analysed in exclusively quantitative terms. Nonetheless, some light is shed by all these studies on what the lived experience of using childcare services might be like for parents.

Before I proceed further, a point needs to be made about the use of the terms "parents" and "parental" in the rest of this chapter. While the majority of the studies reviewed in this section refer to "parents", most, or all, of the parent participants have been mothers (e.g., Bradbard & Endsley, 1980; Pence & Goelman, 1987; Wylie et al., 1995). In some cases the researchers approached the

“main caregivers” who, in the majority of cases, turned out to be the mothers. This raises the issue of whether the use of gender inclusive terminology – “parents” – in circumstances where the majority of participants are female, keeps invisible the fact that in our society women still bear the prime responsibility for their children’s non-familial childcare. In order to avoid contributing to this invisibility, in the rest of this chapter, I shall make clear the gender base for my use of the term “parents” or “parental”, where this is known.

In this chapter, I discuss studies which have explored “parental” experience and views about a broad range of childcare issues under the eight headings of: deciding to use childcare, choosing childcare arrangements, adjusting to childcare, concerns about using childcare, separation anxiety and childcare, maternal satisfaction and childcare experience, parents’ views of the effects of childcare on children and parents’ relationship with teachers. My discussion highlights themes which connect up with themes in the stories told by the mothers in my study about their experiences of starting childcare alongside their child.

4.1 Deciding to use childcare

Studies are unanimous that the main reason for the use of childcare services is the parents’ need, or preference, for work outside the home. Indeed most research within early childhood educational settings is often justified, at least in part, through reference to the increase in the number of children using childcare services; in turn this is attributed to the increase in workforce participation by women with young children (e.g., Bradbard & Endsley, 1980; Erdwins & Buffardi, 1994; Fagan, 1994; Field, Gewirtz, Cohen, Garcia, Greenberg & Collins, 1984; Fuqua & Labensohn, 1986; McBride, 1990; Melson & Kim, 1990; Roopnarine, Mounts & Casto, 1986; Roopnarine & Hempel, 1988; Shinn, Galinsky & Gulcur, 1990). Occasionally, and notably in Moss and Melhuish (1991), there is an articulation of the awareness that such justifications are “value-based assumptions” (p. 2) which ride on the taken-for-granted view that children are primarily the responsibility of mothers. As Peter Moss and Edward Melhuish pointed out:

While the *issue* of non-parental care has come to the fore because of increased employment among women with young children, the *need* for such care is not the result of maternal employment. If it is assumed that fathers and mothers are equally responsible for the care of their children ... then non-parental care is a consequence of both parents being at work (or undertaking some other activity). (pp. 1-2, italics in original).

In an earlier British study, *New Mothers at Work*, Julia Brannen and Peter Moss (1988) focused on the experiences of 185 mothers going back to full-time paid work within nine months of having a first child. The women were interviewed while they were on maternity leave, within a few months of their return to the workforce and on two other occasions, making this study one of the few that has adopted a longitudinal approach to the study of women's decision-making about childcare-related issues. On the question of why women returned to the workforce, and therefore needed to use early childhood services, Brannen and Moss found that for women in the less well-paid jobs, the main and only reason for going back to work was financial, while for women in professional and managerial occupations, the reasons for returning to paid employment were more often to do with personal preference although financial reasons were frequently mentioned as secondary reasons (e.g., women in paid employment may feel they do not have to worry where every penny goes).

Brannen and Moss (1988) also reported that the women in their study perceived their decision-making about resuming work after childbirth, and therefore to use early childhood services, as a personal choice made with little reference to their husbands or other people. A further aspect of this decision-making process was that the women did not complain about this state of affairs; they saw it as the price for challenging the status quo. The process of deciding was, however, reported to be a lonely experience, and Brannen and Moss commented that the women felt the need of joint responsibility for the consequences of their decisions and for the sharing of childcare and domestic work.

The feelings of loneliness experienced by the British mothers were echoed in a more recent Australian study (Rolfe et al., 1991) in which ten mothers of infants in long day care took part in semi-structured interviews designed to explore in depth aspects of the day care experience of mothers. In a paper on the preliminary data from this study, the writers commented that decision-making about returning to work and choosing childcare was "not a single event" (p. 27) and seldom clear-cut and ready-made. Rolfe et al. commented that the decisions "were commonly presented as very lonely processes with accompanying feelings of incompetence" (p. 28) about knowing what to look for or what to expect. Like their British counterparts, the ten Australian women did not mention any family member, including their partner, as being involved in choosing childcare.

Another strong emotion reported by the women in Rolfe et al.'s (1991) study as accompanying the choice of childcare was a feeling of sadness even when the decision to work was a result of dissatisfaction with the maternal role. Mothers also reported that they felt pulled by competing desires – the desire to be at home with baby and the desire, or need, to work. The writers noted that many women said they would have preferred to go back to work when the baby was older if they had had a choice. Other concerns related to whether the day care staff would be sensitive to the child's temperament and respond sensitively to their child's needs.

In New Zealand, various studies over the last few decades have provided data which confirm that in this country, work is also the main reason for using early childhood services, especially those which do not require regular parental presence during their sessions, as playcentres and playgroups do (e.g., Rosemergy & Meade, 1986; Society for Research on Women, 1975, 1976, 1979; Farquhar, 1991; Podmore, 1994; Wylie, Kerslake-Hendricks & Meade, 1995).

The decision to use early childhood services emerges from these studies as integrally bound with work-related factors. The few studies which have examined how mothers arrived at these decisions also indicated that the decision was usually made by the mothers who experienced this decision-making as a lonely

process which caused sadness and feelings of competing desires; the decision was also often not clearcut and put them under strong emotional pressure.

4.2 Choosing childcare arrangements

Among the early studies which throw light on how choices of specific day care services are made is a telephone interview study by Marilyn Bradbard and Richard Endsley (1980) of 45 white middle-class well-educated North American women who already had children in day care. Bradbard and Endsley found that the women had used both first-hand and second-hand sources of information in their decision-making about day care arrangements. First-hand methods included meetings with staff at day care services, phone calls to services, and observation in centres, while second-hand methods involved looking for information in the *Yellow Pages*, newspaper advertisements, contacting the day care licensing authority in the area and talking with friends, neighbours and non-day care professionals. Bradbard and Endsley argued that it is important for parents to have information that enables them to make choices about day care arrangements based on the quality of the service. Their analysis of the methods used by the mothers in their study revealed that each method had inherent problems. They argued that there was a need for a tested parent guide and described a study they conducted to develop one which they hoped would help parents be "more discriminating day care consumers" (p. 188). They suggested also that research was needed which examined in more detail the process by which parents selected day care as well as research on the psychological impact of the choice on the parent and the child. In elaborating on the possible psychological impact of using day care they said:

For parents, choosing day care is often thought to be associated with the arousal of their anxieties concerning the effects of day care on the children. It is also assumed to arouse guilt among many women who feel that the choice symbolizes an abrogation of their child-rearing responsibilities. (p. 200)

Eleven years later the Australian study by Rolfe et al., (1991) referred to in the previous section, did "examine in more detail" the process of choosing childcare. Interestingly, the Australian researchers reached conclusions similar to those

reported above: mothers in their study mostly portrayed their search for a centre as "hasty and haphazard" (p. 28). The writers commented on this: "a question to be considered is whether such crucial decisions are made haphazardly, or are they portrayed as such because control and competence in deciding to put a child in care fit ill with images of good mothers?" (p. 28). The theme that choosing childcare is transgressive of dominant cultural norms about ideal motherhood appeared here as creating conflicts for contemporary women who find themselves caught between societal norms about good motherhood and the reality of their financial or career situations. This theme is a recurring one in writings about women and childcare and reappears again in later sections (see sections 4.4, 4.5 and 4.6).

Support for the findings that many parents lack assistance to help them make well-informed choices about their childcare arrangements comes from another North American study (Fuqua & Labensohn, 1986). In this study, parents' (mothers' or fathers') choice of childcare appeared to be based on the same sources of information as those used by the parents in the Bradbard and Endsley (1980) study. Selecting childcare was reported as difficult; additionally, while most parents did visit the childcare setting before they started using it, 20% did not. Of the parents who did visit, more than half only visited the one centre they were using leading the writers to conclude that since parents had not seen a range of possible settings, they could not be operating as well-informed or "wise" and "discriminating" consumers.

In a Canadian study by Pence and Goelman (1987), mothers of children aged between two-and-a-half to five years, who were using centre-based care, licensed family day care or unlicensed family day care homes, were asked about their care preferences during structured interviews. The writers concluded that "parents" (i.e. mothers) made choices between types of centres on the basis of "perceived, inherent characteristics of the arrangement" (p. 114), and that user groups of centre care and family day care were more distinguishable by their caregiving philosophy and values and less by socio-economic factors. An area of agreement among the mothers, irrespective of type of service used, was that centre-based

care was seen as more appropriate for the older rather than the younger child. The writers concluded that day care selection appeared to operate as a process of "finding the 'best fit'" and that the 'best fit' was unique for each family.

Within the New Zealand context, Farquhar (1991) has reported that among a group of parents who used either childcare centres, kindergarten or playcentres, convenience, such as vicinity to the home or workplace and hours of operation, was a strong reason for their choice; programme appearance was also found to be very important. Convenience of location was the dominant reason given by the parents or caregivers (female or male) for the choice of their child's first early childhood service in Wylie et al.'s (1995) work as part of the *Competent Children* project. Other major reasons were that the service suited the parents' needs (including employment ones), had a good reputation, or had been a positive experience for older siblings. The cost of the service and the perceived quality of the facilities at the centre were also important. Only a few parents reported that they had had no choice in the centre they used. These findings concur with those of Podmore (1994) which emphasised that patterns of childcare use changed over time to fit in with changed family circumstances. These New Zealand studies indicate that a 'best fit' arrangement such as suggested by Pence and Goelman (1987) operated where decisions about childcare were made in "consideration of fit at many different points: child, parent, caregiver, neighborhood, community, beliefs, and values" (p. 117).

It is harder to read the latter interpretation in the findings of another New Zealand study, this time by Shanee Barraclough and Anne Smith (1996). The focus of this study was on whether New Zealand parents chose and valued quality in their use of childcare centres. Using a national sample of parents with children in one hundred childcare centres, the authors explored the relationship between parental demographic characteristics and research-based measures of quality, and between these quality measures and parental satisfaction with their centre. Their data indicated that 86% of the parents had chosen the centre they were using without having looked at alternatives, relying primarily on the recommendations of friends and family. Parents' evaluations of the quality of the centres and centre quality as

measured on research-based instruments did not correlate at all, leading the writers to conclude that parents did not have the knowledge or awareness of which aspects of quality to look for. They concluded that parents' choice was not a reliable guide to the quality of a centre.

The question of how issues of quality factor into parents' choice of childcare arrangement is one which Shinn et al., (1990) also commented on in a North American study. The role of childcare in mothers' lives was explored through an investigation of how features of the childcare setting were related to satisfaction with various aspects of the mothers' family and work life. This study found that mothers' satisfaction with their childcare arrangements was not determined by features measured by researched-based instruments for gauging quality. Additionally, the features which mothers identified as satisfying their own adult needs were different to the ones which mothers identified as meeting their child's needs. Shinn et al. noted that it was not clear how these two sets of features interacted in the way that parents, or mothers, made choices about childcare arrangements. They suggested that two hypotheses could be worth investigating: one was that cost, hours and location might determine the set of centres parents were willing to consider while quality might determine selection from the set; alternatively, cost and convenience might determine the selection of the arrangement and quality might determine satisfaction. (It is likely that they were referring to "quality as perceived by the mothers" although this is not made explicit. If this is the case, then what Shinn et al. were saying is the same as what Barraclough and Smith, 1996, said later for their New Zealand study.)

In overviewing the results of these studies, a number of points emerge as relevant to this study's focus on the experience of starting childcare:

- i. Qualitative studies of mothers' experience of choosing a childcare centre (Bradbard & Endsley, 1980; Rolfe et al., 1991; Rolfe & Richards, 1993, 1994) have portrayed this event as a last-minute, haphazard and chance event based on information of doubtful reliability and accompanied by feelings of uncertainty and guilt.

- ii. Questionnaire, survey or interview studies which have asked parents why they chose their centre have also supported this portrayal (e.g., Fuqua & Labensohn, 1986). In addition, they have reported that parents have been influenced by factors like convenience of location, cost and the recommendation of friends (e.g., Barraclough & Smith, 1996; Farquhar, 1991; Podmore, 1994; Wylie et al., 1995). Furthermore, very few parents have reported making a selection from a number of alternative centres which they visited.
- iii. Studies which have included a consideration of the relationship between the characteristics of families and characteristics of the chosen childcare arrangement have pointed out the unreliability of parental perceptions of quality as a gauge of quality of centres as measured by research-based instruments (e.g., Barraclough & Smith, 1996; Shinn et al., 1990).

Finally, in reviewing the results of the quantitative studies described in this section (e.g., Barraclough & Smith, 1996; Farquhar, 1991; Pence & Goelman, 1987; Podmore, 1994; Shinn et al., 1990; Wylie, 1995) against the data reported in the more qualitatively analysed studies in this section (Bradbard & Endsley, 1980; Rolfe et al., 1991), it is important to note that the former studies were primarily post-facto ones; in other words they were based on interviews, or self-reports, about past experience. It is likely that a more rational account of experience may be offered by parents looking back than by those still "living through" an experience. This might be a possible explanation for the apparent discrepancy between the "haphazard" and "chance" driven processes of centre selection reported in the qualitative studies reviewed, and the more logical and rational explanations which emerged from the quantitative studies.

In the current study with its focus on the "lived experience" of starting childcare, it was important to avoid the potential problems of post-facto research; thus data were collected continuously while the study participants were still "living through" the process of starting childcare. This has resulted in stories of starting childcare and settling-in which capture the changing nature of this experience.

The light shed by these stories on how the mothers' choice of their child's childcare centre was experienced can thus be considered as reasonably fresh and not subjected to extensive 'rationalisation'.

4.3 Adjusting to childcare

Only one study was traced which dealt directly with parents', or mothers', accounts of their adjustment to childcare in a qualitative way (Rolfe et al., 1991; Rolfe & Richards, 1993, 1994). In their interview study with ten Australian women who had infants in one of three childcare centres, Rolfe et al. reported that adjustment to childcare, like the decision to work and use childcare, was experienced as a process and not as a single event. They added that the mothers' adjustment was also linked to the decision to use childcare: When the decision to use childcare was more ambivalent, adjustment was more confusing for the women. Nonetheless, they also warned that this connection was not always straightforward. Among the elements that affected the mothers' process of adjustment were their own perceptions of the quality of the centre (which did not always coincide with either the perceptions of other women using the same centre or with the researchers' evaluation of it). The writers also found that in the initial period, developing trust in the competence of the staff was a critical aspect of the mothers' adjustment. At this time the mothers really appreciated being encouraged to telephone the centre at will, 'pop in' without warning and being able to introduce their infant gradually to the centre.

Adjusting to the use of childcare aroused deep emotions in the mothers in Rolfe et al.'s study (1991; see also Rolfe & Richards, 1993, 1994). Mothers reported that in the early weeks they were filled with feelings of grief and sadness and experienced bouts of crying. Time did not always resolve the grief. One mother was quoted as having explained her grief and her coping in this way: "heartless as it sounds, to succeed I have to not worry about him during the day" (Rolfe et al., p. 30). The writers noted that the reports of feelings of grief at the beginning of the childcare experience were mostly from women whose children had only just started at the centres, whereas one mother whose child had been in childcare for five months reported that she had difficulty remembering how she felt in the early

weeks. Rolfe et al. highlight this as a problem that could afflict retrospective interview studies which would be less likely than longitudinal ones to allow access to such feelings, and, I would add, to the "lived experience" of the experience.

Rolfe et al., (1991) highlighted the point that the process of adaptation, or adjustment, to care experienced by the ten mothers was "highly personal, with feelings of transition to successive stages in the process emerging at different times for different women" (p. 30). They suggested that future studies would benefit from using a longitudinal approach. The writers also said that "the data illustrate a process of adaptation which can be quite fluid, is often disjointed, is full of unresolvable dilemmas and emotional chaos, but which may in time become increasingly settled in processes we have yet to explore" (p. 31). The diversity and complexity they found in the experience of the mothers in their study led them to make a strong argument for further work of a qualitative nature on how women, as well as children, are affected by childcare. Rolfe et al. saw this as a necessary complement to existing quantitative approaches to such studies. My study has picked up this challenge; the stories recounted by the adult participants in the study do throw light on how women as well as children may be "affected by childcare" and thus start to provide the complement to quantitative knowledge which Rolfe et al. identified as necessary.

4.4 Concerns about using childcare

Information about concerns that parents have reported about childcare comes from studies employing a variety of methodologies. For instance, data from the large questionnaire study of 540 parents of children aged from birth to twelve years carried out by Fuqua and Labensohn (1986) gave a broad view of the types of problems encountered with childcare services. In this group of predominantly female respondents, the majority of whom (499) had children aged less than six years, nearly half the parents reported that they faced problems both in choosing and using childcare. The problems related to using childcare were about care that

they saw as being of inadequate quality, verbally or physically abusive, and not properly supervised or unsafe.

Other concerns reported in survey-type studies have been about turnover of staff (Erdwins & Buffardi, 1994; Shinn, et al., 1990) and fears about whether centre caregivers were attentive enough to children (Erdwins & Buffardi, 1994). The availability of the caregivers, including flexibility at drop-off and pick-up times, and willingness to care for a sick child were also areas of low satisfaction among parents who used day care centres.

In Ledesma, Fitzgerald and McGreal's (1980) questionnaire study of 20 fathers and 23 mothers using a university-based infant day care centre, the majority of parents expressed average to high levels of satisfaction with their centre; when concerns were expressed these were related to matters to do with their child's health, the physical resources of the centre, parent involvement in centre activities and caregiver-infant ratios.

In Pence and Goelman's (1987) interview study with 126 mothers, a distinguishing characteristic between mothers who used centre-based childcare and those who used family day care was that the focus of concern for the former was on negative child behaviour and on negative aspects of peer influence. Mothers appeared to be aware of the trade-offs involved in whatever choice they made. In commenting about "parents' guilt" and "concern for the child's well-being" as negative effects of care, the writers said that these concerns were lowest among centre users in comparison to users of the two types of family day care sampled in their study.

A more indepth discussion of some concerns emerged in two of the studies mentioned at the start of this chapter which departed from the quantitative mode of research enquiry and examined women's accounts in qualitative ways: The first of these is McCartney and Phillips' (1988) chapter on motherhood and childcare which included data from exploratory interviews with mothers, and the second is

the study by Rolfe et al.'s (1991) which was also referred to in sections 4.2 and 4.3.

McCartney and Phillips (1988) argued that women in North American society faced the pressure of the societal ideal that mothers should look after their own infants and, at the same time, the pressure to be in the work force. They argued that this led to role conflict and "guilt", irrespective of the mother's attitude to work, and commented that it was no wonder that research found that employed women reported more guilt feelings and doubts about their child-rearing competencies than women who did not work outside of the home (Birnbaum, 1971 cited in McCartney & Phillips, 1988, p. 172). In reporting on their interviews with six women with various work occupations and using various childcare arrangements, McCartney and Phillips noted that the clearest theme to emerge from their analysis was that of "guilt". Three beliefs were identified by McCartney and Phillips as being at the basis of the women's guilt: (i) working outside the home would undermine their role as primary caregiver, (ii) they would miss out on observing their children's significant developmental achievements and (iii) working outside the home would influence how others perceived their competence as mothers. Women also made statements that indicated fear of the unknown consequences of using childcare even when they had no evidence that childcare was detrimental for children. Seeking the help of family members was sometimes seen as a way of relieving concerns about non-familial care but McCartney and Phillips noted that even this could have its drawbacks – even having an involved father contributed to one mother's feelings of "guilt" and inadequacy.

More contemporaneously, Modigliani (1996) and Daniel (1998) have argued that in using childcare, women are affected by "historical and hegemonic views regarding the 'roles of women'" which result in a "sense of guilt" (Daniel, p. 5) and a sense of loss upon enrolling their children.

McCartney and Phillips (1988) commented that the employed mother's situation is one in which it is very hard to win:

Employed mothers are faced with the task of reconciling two selves. One self believes that a happy mother who works outside the home is better than a resentful mother who stays home. A second self believes or at least fears that one's work somehow hurts one's child. (p. 175)

McCartney and Philips (1988) added that their interview study may have reached the "second self" which was not reached through methodologies like questionnaires; the latter were more likely to reach "the self who has come to terms with the childcare decision" (p. 175). This argument is similar to my earlier one that post-facto research is more likely to present a coherent account, or "storied picture" of an event which is not so easily accessible while one is still "living through" the experience. In this study I have taken the position that it is necessary to use methodologies which will access the lived reality of an experience if one wants to understand it. McCartney and Phillips' (1988) argument lends support to this view.

Rolfe et al., (1991) and Rolfe and Richards (1993, 1994) reported that the Australian mothers in their study were worried about the ability of adults other than themselves to provide sensitive care for their infants and about the adults' ability to correctly respond to their child's temperament and interpret their child's needs. Other strong concerns were about the young age of their children and thus their "vulnerability", and concern about being separated (see section 4.5) and losing control over what happened to their child, a theme also reported by the mothers in McCartney and Phillips' (1988) study. Rolfe et al. commented that "such worries added stress to the decision-making process and the initial period in care but became less of an issue as the baby grew older, especially if at the same time, confidence in the day care staff increased" (p. 28).

4.5 Separation anxiety and childcare

In the last paragraph a brief reference was made to a phenomenon that has had an interesting life trajectory/history in developmental study: separation anxiety. As

discussed in Chapter 2, the term originated in Freud's notion of 'anxiety' as opposed to 'fear' and was first used by developmentalists of an ethological bent to refer to a child's distress occurring during a separation and the anxiety that follows it (Bowlby, 1973/1978). In recent years, this concept has been adapted to describe the same symptoms in mothers through the use of the term "maternal separation anxiety" which is measured using the "Maternal Separation Anxiety Scale" (MSAS) (e.g., DeMeis, Hock & McBride, 1986; Hock, 1984; Hock, McBride & Gnezda, 1989; McBride, 1990; see also section 2.1.1).

In a study in which Ellen Hock and Susan McBride collaborated with Debra DeMeis (DeMeis, Hock & McBride, 1986), 62 mothers completed the MSAS and a maternal role investment scale together with an interview in which the researchers explored how this group of well-educated career women achieved a balance between the demands of motherhood and those of employment. The mothers were interviewed four times over a thirteen and a half month period. The writers concluded that "maternal separation and balancing employment and motherhood are not static issues; rather, over the course of the first year, mothers seem to readdress these issues in order to develop a consistent set of attitudes towards separation, employment and the maternal role" (p. 631). This suggests that longitudinal studies can give a meaningful understanding of how this phenomenon is experienced.

In a later collaborative study, Hock, et al., (1989) reported on their development of the MSAS and on two studies which provided empirical support for the construct. They also emphasised the role of societal norms/ideas about motherhood in how maternal separation anxiety was experienced and noted that these norms helped explain variations in the way maternal separation anxiety was experienced in different ethnic and cultural contexts.

According to McBride (1990), mothers' feelings are further influenced by the availability and quality of non-maternal childcare. McBride reiterated McCartney and Phillips' (1988) analysis that mothers of young children faced a situation

where their participation in the workforce was at odds with traditional American values about motherhood and noted that this contributed to how mothers felt about separation and about the effects of separation on their child.

McBride (1990) provided a very useful review of research which revealed such maternal correlates with the MSAS as mother's level of general anxiety, levels of self-esteem, and investment in the maternal role versus a career orientation. Data were also presented about child determinants of MSAS such as the variables of age, temperament, gender and birth order. Generally, the data indicated that as children got older, mothers' absolute levels of maternal separation anxiety decreased, that MSA levels decreased between the ages of three to nine months when the baby was a girl but increased if the baby was a boy, and that mothers of colicky and fussy babies had higher levels of MSA. McBride noted that this suggested that mothers' separation anxiety tended to increase if for some reason the baby was perceived as more vulnerable. Data on birth order indicated that while mothers' level of MSA was relatively stable across the first-born and across the second-born (as separate measures), overall, mothers tended to be less anxious about the second child.

McBride (1990) noted also that higher levels of MSA have been found to be associated with anxious maternal behaviour, less support for toddlers' autonomy, and age-inappropriate or intrusive mothering which in turn have been linked to non-secure attachment relationships. McBride noted that a study by McBride and Belsky (1988, cited in McBride, 1990, p. 58) indicated that moderate levels of general separation anxiety and higher levels of employment-related separation anxiety may be the best combination to ensure mothers interacted with the children in sensitive and security-promoting ways. McBride also noted a connection between maternal separation anxiety, maternal employment and the quality of care mothers used.

The picture which emerges from these studies is undoubtedly complex and by no means exhausted by research enquiry. One clear indication is that a mother's

feelings at employment-related separation from her child are not static and can vary over time. Hypothesised explanations for the changes in levels of maternal separation anxiety included the possible effects of maternal attributes such as preferred work status or career orientation, and of the quality of childcare service used, with high quality being associated with lower maternal levels of separation anxiety. These hypotheses, however, remain to be further explored. In addition, there do not appear to have been any long term studies of a qualitative nature that would further illuminate these issues.

4.6 Maternal satisfaction and childcare experience

Section 4.4 presented insights on mothers' feelings and concerns reported as associated with using childcare services. Many of the studies which provided that information also threw light on the aspects of their childcare provision which mothers and fathers found satisfying. Thus Fuqua and Labensohn's (1986) survey suggested that while parents (mostly mothers) reported having had problems with some aspects of their childcare arrangement, they also reported they were very satisfied with the centre they chose. Satisfaction was reported both in aspects of the centre that met the child's needs (such as a safe and healthy environment, appropriate activities, qualifications and child-rearing values of the provider, and the way the program prepared the child for school), and in how the childcare arrangement met their own needs for convenience of location, hours of opening and cost of care. Satisfaction was also higher when parents felt able to have some control over the childcare setting and when the childcare personnel listened to them and took their suggestions on board.

In Ledesma et al.'s (1980) study nearly all the parents perceived their children and themselves as having benefited from using day care. The parents saw themselves benefiting from a positive influence on their relationship with their infant, and to a lesser extent from a positive influence on their marital relationship.

Writers have commented that overall satisfaction is a consistent finding across all studies which have explored levels of satisfaction in mothers using a range of childcare services (e.g., Barraclough & Smith, 1996; Kontos, 1992; Pence &

Goelman, 1987; Shinn et al., 1990). The features found to commonly contribute to feelings of satisfaction included outcomes for children (such as enhancement of self-confidence), consistent practices, stable environments, positive personal traits in caregivers, and trained and qualified staff.

Very high levels of satisfaction were reported both by Ledesma et al., (1980) and in the Bermuda Day Care Study by McCartney and Phillips (1988). Ledesma et al., (1980) analysed parents' written commentaries on their ratings of questionnaire items and reported that both fathers and mothers perceived their children to be slightly more competent than their peers on cognitive and physical skills and nearly all parents perceived their child to excel in social skills. McCartney and Phillips (1988) reported that the 95% of the 166 mothers who reported some satisfaction, were likely to focus on the educational value of childcare, and on positive characteristics of their caregivers. The 39% of mothers who reported dissatisfaction primarily focused on concerns about the caregivers and to a much lesser degree on aspects of the centre atmosphere and peers. McCartney and Phillips commented that the fact that caregivers featured centrally in parents' reports of both satisfaction and dissatisfaction indicated the salience of caregivers for parents' feelings about the centre. The writers suggested that mothers "realise that caregivers are viewed by society at large as replacements or mother substitutes and ... this fact underlies much of their inner conflict as well as their conflict with caregivers" (p. 176). A similar awareness that the use of childcare might be seen as a dereliction of a mother's duty was also expressed by some of the mothers, but not the fathers, in Ledesma et al.'s (1980) study. As the writers' commented, the mothers' "struggl[ed] with guilt feelings regarding placement of their infants in group care" (p. 47).

Within the context of family day care research, Kontos (1992) also found that "results of research are totally consistent with respect to parents' satisfaction with their family day care. Parents were uniformly satisfied with their family day care home" (p. 75). At the same time she noted that there was little consistency across studies in aspects nominated by parents as being their main likes or dislikes. Thus, aspects which parents (female and male) liked because they met adult needs

varied from convenience and location of the family day care home, to flexibility of hours, the reliability of the care and a loving environment. Aspects which met their child's needs included perceived benefits to their child's social, cognitive and language development, the amount of individual attention they received, and the home-like atmosphere.

In reporting the overall satisfaction of parents with family day care arrangements, Kontos identified three caveats: first that parents were more satisfied using regulated rather than unregulated care; second, that there was evidence in one study that 62% of parents would choose another childcare setting if they had the option (Fuqua & Schick, 1989 cited in Kontos, 1992, p. 76); and third that satisfaction with care did not necessarily equate with quality in the care setting.

This last caution echoes other studies described earlier which focused on centre-based childcare as well as family day care (e.g., Barracough & Smith, 1996; Erdwins & Buffardi, 1994; Fuqua & Labensohn, 1986; MacCartney & Phillips, 1988; Roopnarine, Mounts & Casto, 1986; Shinn et al., 1990; Wylie et al., 1995). Barracough and Smith commented that there was very little correspondence between researchers' and parents' evaluations of quality; indeed some of the centres which the researchers perceived as of low quality and possibly harmful for children were perceived very favourably by the parents. Barracough and Smith suggested that the reason that parents' perceptions of quality differed from research-based measures of quality could be because parents may "actually deny their own feelings and observations in order to protect themselves from feelings of guilt" (p. 24). These comments highlight again the complex dynamics involved in parents' interaction with their childcare arrangements and raise questions about aspects of this relationship which do not appear to be captured by quantitative studies.

Similarly, Fuqua and Schick (cited in Kontos, 1992) have suggested that parents are likely to believe that their children are in good care, and expressing dissatisfaction with their care would threaten this belief. Shinn et al., (1990) also said:

Although expressed satisfaction has been positive ... it is possible that parental satisfaction may not be as pervasive as indicated by survey results. Parents may find it difficult to admit that they have placed children in care that is not of the highest quality, or with which they are not satisfied. (p. 4)

Erdwins and Buffardi (1994) have suggested that Kontos' (1992) report that there was little consistency across studies about what parents liked about their family day care arrangement could be an indication that parents had "more detailed and varied opinions about their childcare than previous unidimensional measures have been capable of assessing" (p. 42). In an earlier study (Buffardi & Erdwins, 1993, cited in Erdwins & Buffardi, 1994) they also reported that greater parental satisfaction with communication with the caregivers was related to lower levels of separation anxiety in mothers. Shinn et al.'s (1990) study was also referred to by Buffardi and Erdwins as reporting that the higher the level of reported dissatisfaction with childcare, the higher their reported stress level.

Shinn et al.'s (1990) study of 441 mothers with children aged up to five years reported also that maternal satisfaction with the child's experience depended on mothers' perceptions of their child's experience including the child's interactions with teachers, activities, and perceptions of the physical facility, such as safety and security. Satisfaction with the child's experience in the childcare programme then predicted overall satisfaction with the centre and the mother's feelings about having a child in care. The writers concluded that childcare played two distinct roles in the lives of families: one for the child and one for the parents, but the aspects which directly benefited children were not the same ones which helped meet the parents' adult workforce needs. The writers suggested that research needed to consider how the choice of childcare arrangements was influenced by the factors which separately affected maternal satisfaction with childcare quality and maternal satisfaction with how childcare met adult needs.

Clearly there is a similarity in this argument with that of Carol Erdwins and Louis Buffardi's (1994) who suggested that research should explore "the broader picture

of how day care may impact on the working parents and family life as a whole” (p. 42). In their own study they sought to do this by analysing the connections between (a) demographic variables such as mother’s age, educational level and income to choice of childcare arrangement, (b) level of satisfaction with arrangement in relation to different facets of day care arrangement, and (c) measures of other aspects of the mother’s life which may influence her childcare arrangement such as role conflict between being wife, mother and worker, conflict about separation from her child and perceived support from husband and employer. They found that in their sample of 247 women employed in white collar and professional positions, mothers who used day care centres rather than home care (nanny) felt more positively about their children benefiting from exposure to other adults and children, but were less satisfied with the availability and flexibility of the caregiver. Mothers with higher incomes and better education were more likely to choose the greater convenience of someone looking after their child in their own home. However, no relationship was found between maternal levels of satisfaction, separation anxiety and levels of role conflict and type of childcare arrangement, leading the writers to suggest that it may be ‘satisfaction with care’ rather than ‘type of care’ which is important.

In my view the studies I have described provide evidence that parents’ perceptions of their childcare experience operate in very complex ways which are inadequately portrayed through purely quantitative analysis. In continuing to explore some of the issues raised in these studies, it seems timely to seek ways of doing this through methodologies which complement the quantitative ones; the qualitative approach of my study seeks to contribute to this.

Quantitative studies have shown that:

- i. parents/mothers typically report high levels of satisfaction with their childcare arrangements, irrespective of the type of arrangement used.
- ii. there is great variety in the aspects which mothers have reported as satisfying; these may be seen to be meeting two sets of needs, those of the child and those of the adult.

- iii. caregivers have featured centrally in mothers' reports of satisfaction and dissatisfaction; this highlights the salience of the caregivers' role in mothers' feelings about the childcare arrangement.
- iv. mothers typically saw childcare as affecting their children more than themselves and this has raised questions about whether mothers see childcare settings as primarily places for children.
- v. maternal satisfaction with childcare does not equate to quality as gauged on research-based measures. The implications of this are many and include issues about the dynamics operating when parents report feelings of satisfaction.

4.7 Parents' views of the effects of childcare on children

Butterworth (1991) noted that one in five Australian parents who use formal childcare do so because they think it is good for their children. Studies described in previous sections have provided some indication of what parents in some English-speaking parts of the world perceived as "good for children" (see section 4.6). For example, childcare has been reported by parents to enhance children's self-confidence, to have positive social, cognitive and educational effects, to improve language development and to provide opportunities for exposure to adults other than family ones, and to contact with other children. A previous section on parental concerns about childcare has also thrown light on what parents may perceive as negative effects on children such as negative child behaviour and negative peer influence (see section 4.4). Most consistently, however, parents have reported being satisfied with their childcare arrangement.

Rolfe and Richards' (1993) qualitative analysis of spontaneous comments in interviews with 10 Australian mothers indicated that the women spoke with an assumption that childcare had a positive impact on development such as learning to mix with peers and non-familial adults, learning to be independent from mother, assertions about the benefits of a more interesting and stimulating environment and statements about the children getting bored at home.

The mothers in Rolfe and Richards (1993, 1994) study also had different views about the impact of childcare depending on the age of the child and the time the child spent in childcare; ideas were expressed about types of children and the effect of past experience on the child's experience at the centre. Additionally, the mothers expressed views which indicated that they were seeking to work through their own ideas about where they stood on the issue of "mothercare versus day care". A further interesting feature of this study is that the mothers appeared to develop unique understandings of the quality of the centres they used and that different mothers using the same centres reported these understandings quite differently.

These insights were possible because of the qualitative approaches used by the writers. Rolfe et al., (1991) and Rolfe and Richards (1993, 1994), as well as McCartney and Phillips (1988), reported their work through using samples of the mothers' own words which allow access not only to the content of the women's ideas and feelings, but also to the manner in which they articulated them. Thus a sense was able to emerge of how "each woman, in different ways [was] engaged in an ongoing negotiation with dominant ideas of children's needs and mothers' duties" (Rolfe & Richards, 1993, p. 20).

In my study, one of my intentions has been to understand women's accounts as they negotiated meanings for themselves with other participants in the event of starting childcare with their child. The approach to data analysis which I have adopted to achieve this intention is similar to that used by Rolfe and Richards. In addition, I have used a broader range of data gathering methods together with a qualitative case study design which allowed access to participants' changing experiences of starting childcare.

4.8 Parents' relationships with teachers

In 1978 Douglas Powell published one of the earliest studies which set out to "determine the nature of the interpersonal relationship between parents and caregivers in day care centers" (p. 681). Until that time, very little research had

been carried out in this area although Powell noted that “there are data which suggest that parents, upon their child’s entry into kindergarten, experience anxiety and tension surrounding their child’s relationship with the teacher” (Klein & Ross, 1958, cited in Powell, 1978, p. 681).

The theme of tension and anxiety survived in later work. For instance, Powell (1980) commented that “discussions of parent-staff relations in day care can easily reach intense levels of controversy since the main issue here is the degree to which parental authority for child rearing is delegated to nonfamilial persons and institutions” (p. 204). In a similar way, Ellen Galinsky (1988) has seen the tension as a reflection, in part, of the parents’ anxiety about having the product of their childrearing, their child, exposed to others’ scrutiny and judgement; in Ellen Galinsky’s terms, when parents first take their child to a school or day care setting they “may be tense about the teacher’s judgment as to their proficiency as parents” (p. 9). Galinsky has noted that parents’ strong feelings of attachment to their child may lead them to feel possessive of their relationship with their child and to respond to any new separation event, such as transition to day care or school, with feelings of jealousy and rivalry towards the new caregivers. Galinsky commented that for a number of reasons, the parent-caregiver relationship is often marked by tension.

Carolee Howes (1991) has suggested that there are structural difficulties inherent in the parent-caregiver relationship which may account for some aspects of tension in the relationship. These difficulties revolve round the different needs that parents and caregivers have. For instance, caregivers need parents to be on time with picking up the children at the end of the session, to be reliable with payments, to communicate information about the child and to not take the child to the centre when the child was sick. Parents, on the other hand, need staff to be available if the parent has to work late, or is caught in the traffic and cannot get to the centre on time, or to understand if fees cannot be paid on time, or to care for the child if the child is sick and the parent cannot get time off. She reported also that American studies have found that it is common for caregivers to have

negative evaluations of children and their families (e.g., Kontos, 1984; Kontos, Raikes & Woods, 1983; Kontos & Wells, 1986 cited in Howes, 1991; Kontos & Dunn, 1989). When these negative evaluations occurred, they tended to be about children whose parents were divorced, or had childrearing attitudes different to the caregivers' and/or were less communicative with the caregiver than other parents.

If caregivers emerge from these studies as having strong views about some parents, the same appears to hold true for the parents. In section 4.6 it was highlighted that caregivers occupied a central place in mothers' reports of their feelings about childcare. McCartney and Phillips (1988) commented on this that:

mothers realize, quite rightly, that caregivers *are* the center and for this reason when they discuss their feelings about the center, they discuss caregivers. They also realize that caregivers are viewed by society at large as replacements or mother substitutes and that this fact underlies much of their inner conflict as well as their conflict with caregivers. (p. 176)

Galinsky (1988) suggested that possessiveness by mothers, or fathers, can show because of their fear of losing their place in their child's affection. McCartney and Phillips (1988) elaborated on this:

No matter how open the lines of communication are, it is unlikely that a mother will voice a concern she has concerning the strength of her child's attachment to a caregiver, yet this is likely to be a problem for a mother who is beginning to share childrearing responsibilities for the first time. It is important for teachers, especially teachers of young children, to realize the different roles of mother and teacher. (p. 178)

Since the late 1970s and early 1980s, a number of studies (e.g., Ghazvini & Readdick, 1994; Hughes, 1985; Ispa & Thornburg, 1993; Kontos & Dunn, 1989) including New Zealand ones (Podmore & Craig, 1991; Renwick, 1989; Smith & Hubbard, 1988; Wylie et al., 1995) have explored aspects of the parent-caregiver relationship. Much of this work has been carried out against the background of

Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theoretical proposition that elements of continuity help ease transitions between different settings (see section 2.2.1). Clearly, the move from home to an early childhood setting is itself a discontinuity, and ecological theory would suggest that close connections and good communication between parents and caregivers during this event would be beneficial for child development outcomes.

As I noted in chapter 2, however, studies from an ecological theory perspective have indicated that good communication between home and early childhood setting is by no means to be taken for granted. Thus we know from Powell's (1978) early work that if his research findings were to be "used to construct the social worlds of day care children, the image that emerges is one of fragmentation and discontinuity ... it appears [that] the boundaries of the childcare center and the family are sharply defined and narrow in intersection" (p. 687). In a study which involved 212 parents (mostly mothers), and 89 teachers, he found that parent-caregiver relationships had a "detached nature" (p. 687) and that while parents were split about half and half between being satisfied and not satisfied with their communication with caregivers, more than half of the caregivers were more dissatisfied than satisfied with their communication with parents. Powell noted also that most of the communication occurred at "transition points" during the day such as drop-off and pick-up times and that these were difficult times for extended communication. He concluded that if transition time communication constituted the bulk of all the parent-caregiver exchanges, then most of the communication remained superficial in content. Powell also commented that for the parents who had one or two staff persons with whom they consistently communicated, attitudes about communication became more positive; however, for a third of the parents this never happened leading to the suggestion that attention needed to be given by centres to the number and types (role status) of caregivers available at transition times when communication was most likely to occur.

As Endsley and Minish (1991) have noted, many of Powell's (1978) descriptive findings about parent-caregiver communication frequency and timing have been

replicated in other North American studies. In other words, parent-caregiver communication seems to primarily occur at transition times and is typically brief and friendly but not substantive. Most of the communication is about how the child's day has been, with other child-related and family-related topics occurring only sometimes. In Endsley and Minish's own study they also noted a high percentage (43%) of no communication at all between parents and caregivers, especially preschool caregivers.

A New Zealand study of kindergarten and childcare centres by Smith and Hubbard (1988) similarly found that for kindergartens there was a "relatively low level of discussion of substantive issues like centre socialisation practices and programmes, or family-related topics" (p. 185). In childcare centres, however, there appeared to be more willingness on the part of parents to discuss serious issues with staff. This difference in communication style between the two groups of parents was interpreted by the writers as indicating that the relationship amongst the adults in childcare centres and that amongst the adults in kindergarten might be different. They also concluded that overall, in New Zealand, the relationship between homes and early childhood settings may not be as "detached" as in North America. Podmore and Craig's (1991) study found that parents using infant and toddler childcare centres would have liked more information about the centre programme by staff; these parents clearly did not wish for a more "detached" relationship with the caregivers.

These studies have provided descriptions of how parent-teacher communication is managed in a number of day care/childcare settings on a daily basis. In addition, some studies have also raised questions about whether it is continuity between the home and the early childhood setting that is important or whether, alternatively, it is diversity that has value. For example, Erwin, Sanson, Amos and Bradley (1993) have suggested that a "good fit" between the child, family and the day care centre may mean something different to "similarity", and Ispa and Thornburg (1993) likewise have argued that discontinuity between parents and family day care

providers may not have many implications for child behaviour, but the notion of complementarity might.

In summary, the studies in this section reveal a picture of teacher-parent relationships as potentially marked by anxiety and tension, and in which communication largely occurred at drop-off and pick up times. Additionally, these studies have thrown light on the content of communicative interchanges that have occurred between parents and teachers at a given point in time. These studies, however, do not shed much light on how the observed relationships or patterns of communication developed to that point. In my study, I was particularly interested in this aspect of parent-teacher relationships. Thus, I was attentive to the communication which occurred between the mothers and the teachers during the experience of starting childcare in the hope that I would gain some insight into how dynamics of communication become established between these two important people in children's lives.

4.9 Chapter overview

The studies reviewed in this chapter have explored a range of aspects of parents' experiences of childcare. Because my study is concerned with the lived experience of starting childcare, I have focused on studies which throw light on this aspect and highlighted those themes which also emerged strongly within my own data of the mothers' experiences of starting childcare. The studies suggested that for parents (who were mostly mothers), the childcare experience was a complex one affected by many interrelated factors. Most mothers, using a variety of early childhood services, have reported being satisfied with both the choice and the quality of service they used; the aspects of the childcare arrangement which mothers reported as satisfying varied greatly (Fuqua & Labensohn, 1986; Pence & Goelman, 1987; McCartney & Phillips, 1988; Shinn, et al., 1990; Kontos, 1992; Erwin, et al., 1993; Barraclough & Smith, 1996). Shinn et al., (1990) and Kontos (1992) have suggested that these aspects could be seen as meeting two sets of needs, those of the child and those of the adult. McCartney and Phillips (1988) reported that caregivers featured centrally in mothers' reports of satisfaction and

dissatisfaction with their childcare arrangements, a finding which seems to highlight the salience of the caregivers' role in mothers' feelings about the childcare arrangement. Another well-supported finding was that mothers typically saw childcare as affecting their children more than themselves and this has led to the suggestion that mothers see childcare settings as primarily places for children rather than parents (e.g., Renwick, 1989; Farquhar, 1991). Additionally, a number of studies have warned that maternal satisfaction with childcare should not be confused with quality as gauged on research-based measures (e.g., Roopnarine et al., 1986; Erdwins & Buffardi, 1994; Wylie et al., 1995; Barraclough & Smith, 1996).

Other themes which emerged strongly in this review include that the decision to use childcare has traditionally been seen as transgressive of dominant cultural norms about ideal motherhood, and that mothers have expressed feelings of "guilt" and sadness as accompanying this decision (Daniel, 1998; Ledesma et al., 1980; McCartney & Phillips, 1988; Modigliani, 1996; Pence & Goelman, 1987; Rolfe et al., 1991). Using childcare has also been associated with concerns about health issues and about the perceived negative effects of peer interaction (Ledesma et al., 1980; Pence & Goelman, 1987). At the same time parents have also reported developmental benefits for their child from attending childcare seeing these as occurring in both cognitive and social domains (Ledesma et al., 1980; Rolfe et al., 1991; Rolfe & Richards, 1993). Feelings of separation anxiety have been reported in studies which have used the maternal separation anxiety scale as an instrument to explore the maternal side of the separation experience when children start attending childcare (e.g., DeMeis et al., 1986; Hock, 1984; Hock et al., 1989). Furthermore, studies of the relationship between parents and teachers have suggested that these have an inherent potential for tension (Howes, 1991) and that the reality of these relationships suggests that little substantive communication occurred between home and centre adults. In other words, the two worlds of home and early childhood centre "co-exist in parallel" (Blatchford, Battle & May, 1984, p. 164).

Finally, the studies reviewed in this chapter highlight that parents' childcare experiences have primarily been explored through snap-shot type studies which have asked retrospective questions about experience and analysed the data through predominantly quantitative means. These studies have indicated that a qualitative approach to studying parents' experiences of childcare over time would provide a useful complement to existing scholarship and enable access to the "second self", a self which is still undergoing the experience and thus is able to portray its lived reality (McCartney & Phillips, 1988).

In the next chapter, data are presented on mothers' experiences of childcare during the initial period of settling-in. As discussed in chapter 3, these data were gathered in a qualitative study of this experience over time. This starts to provide the complement called for in the studies reviewed above.

Chapter 5

Mothers' Narratives of Experiences

My keenest sense in the writing of this chapter is the many different directions I could have gone with it, the gulf between the totality of possible statements and the finitude of what is actually written or spoken.

Patti Lather (1991) *Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy with/in the Postmodern*
New York: Routledge.

5.1 Setting the Scene

This chapter is about the lived reality of the five mothers in this study as they went through the experience of starting childcare with their children. The focus is on the mothers' experiences as they recounted them during two interviews I had with each of them, and in the entries they made in the journals they kept throughout the study. I present these accounts arranged around themes that emerged from the combined sources of data for the five women. A further source of insight were my own observational fieldnotes, video records and reflections made as I followed each mother and child during all their orientation visits in the centre and then once a week for six weeks while the child attended the centre without the mother.

There are many ways I could have written this chapter; Patti Lather's statement above speaks very eloquently of my experience in writing this chapter. My biggest decision was over whether to tell each woman's story separately and thus preserve the integrity of her experience or to adopt a thematic approach. In the end I decided on a combination of both. Issues of confidentiality and the ethical obligation of ensuring anonymity were important considerations in the way I have reported my data.

As I noted in chapter 3, the mothers in the study were aware of my "mother" role as well as my other roles of doctoral student and university lecturer in education

(see section 3.3.3.2). I noted also that I felt that being a mother in a comparable situation was a major advantage in gaining the trust of the mothers and in accessing their feelings about the process of starting to use childcare. This was important because the process was one about which all the mothers had felt some apprehension or need for reassurance, a phenomenon which was highlighted for me in the way that they all, at some stage, commented that they had welcomed the opportunity to participate in this study because:

Jean: "I saw it as an advantage; Nina could possibly get more attention"

(CS1.PIS2.4.9)⁴

Helen: "It meant someone was watching Maddi when I wasn't there"

(CS2.PIS1.4.9)

Lyn: "I feel I've had some feedback from you as an independent observer-
which is quite useful for me. I would tend to believe you more as an
outside observer than someone working there."

(CS4.PIS2.4.9)

Paula: "We're getting a lot more feedback this way than otherwise."

(CS5.PIS2.4.9)

In a very clear way, these comments emphasised what perhaps was the biggest challenge these women faced as they accompanied their child to the childcare centre during the child's initial settling-in period: overcoming the fear of the "unknown" – the "unknown" experience of the child while the child was away from them and trusting the "unknown quantity" of the teacher to look after their child.

⁴ All references to the data are coded by the case study number (e.g., CS1 stands for Case study 1, and the research instrument (e.g., PIS2 stands for parent interview schedule 2). Additional numbers stand for page and question number or page and line references. Appendix K provides a key to how to interpret all data references.

In Chapter 4, I noted that in Rolfe et al.'s (1991) qualitative study of ten Australian women's experience of childcare, the women's adaptation to childcare was described as "complex and diverse ... often disjointed, ... full of unresolvable dilemmas and emotional chaos" (p. 31). This description has a great deal of resonance with the experiences reported by the mothers in my study. The stories they told in their journals and during the interviews were narratives of self-questionings about whether they were doing the right thing, stories of their vulnerabilities as mothers needing to trust their children in someone else's care, accounts of how they tried to work out what was expected of them during their child's introduction to the centre and stories of how they made sense of their child's experience during this time. In these stories one can discern not only the complexity of the emotions these women faced but also how these emotions reflect the playing out of a number of themes that are embedded in the cultural life of our society. These themes have been the subject of study in developmental psychology, in education studies and in the social sciences more generally. In the rest of this chapter I first introduce the mothers and their choice of childcare centre, and then present their stories around themes which appeared to organise the way the women recounted their experiences. These themes will be discussed in terms of how they also reflect contemporary concerns within developmental and early childhood educational research.

5.2 Introducing the mothers and their choice of childcare centre

Four of the mothers in the study were in their mid-thirties and one, Paula, was in her early twenties; they all lived with the child's father. For four of the mothers, this was their first experience of using an early childhood service; one mother, Jean, had used a childcare centre for her older son and found that an "unsatisfactory" experience. Four of the mothers had tertiary qualifications and one was finishing hers. Four of the mothers used the centres on a part-time basis while one mother, Lyn, used the centre every day for varying lengths of time depending on her work hours.

5.2.1 *Jean*

Jean was the mother of two preschoolers; she had had a satisfying career in the arts industry before the birth of her children. With becoming a mother, she felt that her priorities had changed:

Basically, the most important thing is that my children are happy; their needs are more important than mine at the moment. I've done lots of things for myself in my life. Now I have the kids. You owe it to them.

(CS1.PIS1. 8.12a)

Jean had stopped full time work and only did occasional part-time work. At the time of the study she had just been offered a short-term part-time contract which she decided to accept. She became part of the study through enrolling her second child, Nina, who was then 16 months old, at the local community creche. The centre was open four days a week for morning sessions only and Nina was initially enrolled for one morning a week; this later changed to two sessions per week when another session became available. Jean had chosen the community creche partly because it was conveniently located close to her son's kindergarten; not having to travel long distances between her two children's early childhood centres meant that Jean could make the best use of the time when both children were attending early childhood services. Another consideration had been that she knew parents who used both her son's kindergarten and the community creche so she and the children would meet familiar people there.

The community creche chosen by Jean was not the closest childcare centre to her home – a closer one existed but Jean had used this for her son and described her son's experience there as "not a very positive one" (CS1.PIS1.3.3c); she added that as a first time parent, it was hard to assess what the right thing to do was. Jean said she had persevered with taking her son to the childcare centre for about a year because she felt it would be good for him to learn not to rely on just one person to look after him and she tried to "compensate" for this by taking him only for part-day rather than full day sessions. Jean told me that when she was informed about the study at enrolment she was keen to participate; she said that

she saw the opportunity to participate as a great advantage because it meant Nina would probably get more adult attention.

5.2.2 Helen

Helen was the one mother who remained hesitant about the use of childcare till the end of the case study. My two interviews with her were conducted in her home in the presence of her daughter Maddi who remained close to us vocalising as she played with the various toys around the room. Maddi was 15 months at the start of the study. Helen had enrolled Maddi at the local community creche in a well-to-do city suburb on the recommendation of a friend who had used the creche for her own children. Helen had decided to introduce Maddi to the childcare centre to give herself some time to herself and the possibility of doing some work for the family business (CS2.PIS1.2.1). Helen and Maddi had not had any earlier experience of using other early childhood services but Helen had a friend with a child the same age as Maddi and the two of them “did a swop” for one morning each a week: One morning Helen looked after the friend’s child and the other morning the friend looked after Maddi. The arrangement had started as a socialising event between the mothers but had become an alternating responsibility because of a deliberate intention to help the children become accustomed to being happy with someone else than a parent. Helen felt that since she could not use her own mother to babysit, because her mother worked full-time, she needed to develop an arrangement of this kind with someone else (CS2.PIS1.4.1).

When Helen was asked if she would like to take part in the study she readily accepted; at the end of the study she told me that she had been really pleased to participate because “it meant that someone was watching Maddi when I wasn’t there” (CS2.PIS2.4.9). Like Jean, she elaborated on how difficult it was to know what the right thing to do was when you were first starting to use an early childhood service and wondered if basing a decision on one woman’s comments (as had been her case) was the best thing to do.

5.2.3 Deborah

Deborah had resumed part-time work when Shirley was five months (CS3.PIS1.10.3a) and during this time Shirley had been looked after by a friend. When Shirley was ten and a half months, the friend said she was planning to go back to full-time work herself, so Deborah had started to visit various childcare centres with a view to enrolling Shirley in one of them. Having been to about five centres, Deborah had chosen the parent co-operative centre where the case study took place. Deborah commented that she had seen various centres that she would not have liked to use at any cost. When Deborah and Shirley had first visited the current centre, Deborah had liked the fact that there were not too many older children who would “stomp over the wee ones” (CS3.PIS1.2.2). Deborah added that Shirley had seemed fascinated and very excited by the centre. The only difficulty with enrolling at the time had been that the centre could not offer Shirley a place at the times Deborah needed it to match up with her working hours. Shirley had thus continued to be looked after by friends until more suitable times became available when Shirley was 17 months old. Deborah said that her primary reason for using the childcare centre was to provide childcare for Shirley while she worked but she added:

I'm also keen for her to interact with other children her age – at this age it's good to be with other children- I would have been happy for her to go to the centre even on the days I don't work.

(CS3.PIS1.2.1)

Deborah reiterated these views in her journal where she wrote: “one of the reasons I want her to come here is that it's a non-threatening place where she can feel she can explore comfortably” (CS3.PJ.1.29-31).

5.2.4 Lyn

Lyn was a very busy professional woman who worked half days which often stretched into full days. She had gone back to work when her daughter Julie was four and a half months old. Julie was then looked after by a nanny until she was 16 months old when the nanny left her position. For the following two months

Julie was looked after by a family friend who had two children of her own until a place became available at the centre Lyn had chosen. Lyn said that her primary reason for using the centre was that being a full-day centre it allowed her greater flexibility with her work schedule. Another reason for choosing centre-based care was that it allowed Julie to meet other children; she felt that Julie had been getting bored at home and needed the social stimulation of peers. Lyn also liked the idea that in a centre situation Julie would be looked after by professional caregivers who were “monitored” and this made it a safer option than having a nanny at home. She also added that using a centre was cheaper than having a nanny – this too was a relevant consideration (CS4.PIS1.2.1).

Lyn had chosen the current centre from a total of four that she had visited. She had preferred the chosen centre because it had “mature staff who looked like they knew what they were doing – they had good work histories” (CS4.PIS1.2.2). Lyn thought that the facilities “looked really good” with a good range of activities available and a good outdoor play area. Two of the other centres she had visited had impressed her as chaotic.

5.2.5 Paula

Paula was the youngest mother in the study; my interviews with her were held in the family kitchen which appeared to be the focal point of a warm and close extended family, whose members popped in and out during the course of the interview and stopped for a chat or for a coffee; some even offered their views on the topics of the interview and Paula accepted these or modified them in her own responses. Robert’s aunt, Rebecca, who accompanied Robert for some of his orientation visits to the centre, had been asked by Paula to be present for the whole interview and contributed to the interview when she felt it appropriate. Rebecca was 16 years old and still at school but Paula said that she spent a lot of time with Robert.

Robert had been looked after by a family friend through a licensed family daycare scheme since he was 7 months old but Paula said they had now chosen an out-of-

home service to supplement this so that he could get some interaction with other children. Paula described her son as “shy around strangers but he has a very bubbly personality” (CS5.PIS1.10). Paula had had occasion to become familiar with the childcare centre before Robert started attending and she felt that she would be happy leaving Robert there. She added that the centre was also located conveniently close to home. When I asked Paula if she had any previous experience of early childhood centres she said that she had a cousin who had had a child at family daycare and then at a creche. Paula said that her cousin’s child was a bright little kid and although she did not know if this was the result of having used the creche, she felt that it “might also be helpful for Robert, just in learning new skills and for his language development”, “not just being with one adult all day” (CS5.PIS1.2.3b). Paula said this was very important especially since Robert was an only child (CS5.PIS1.3.3c). Robert was 26 months at the start of the study.

5.2.6 Reflections

This brief introduction of the mothers already identifies some major themes that ran through the mothers’ experiences of starting childcare. Issues surrounding notions of “good mothering”, ideas about doing what is right for the child or meeting the child’s needs, notions about the developmental benefits of early childhood educational experience and the mothers’ need or wish to be in the paid workforce all featured strongly in the way these mothers explained why they were using childcare. Jean, for instance, explained her use of a childcare centre for Nina as something that met her own needs for time to do a short-term part-time contract as well as something that she saw meeting Nina’s interests and need for stimulation. Jean’s explanation of how she had persevered with her son’s attendance at a childcare centre on a half-day basis and “compensated” for his not liking it by looking after him herself for the other half indicated further that she saw the childcare experience as having a potentially beneficial developmental effect in getting her son used to being with other adults than herself even if her son did not seem to like the experience. Jean was also keenly aware that sometimes her own needs and those of her children might conflict and she

emphasised that in those situations, her children's needs would take priority; she constructed this response as a responsibility that went with motherhood. She was very clear that becoming a mother had changed her view of what was important in life, and that "at the moment", at least, her children's "needs" were more important.

Helen's reasons for using a childcare centre were similar to Jean's – she too wanted some time in which to do paid work and also saw the benefits of giving Maddi a chance to get used to other adults than herself by using a childcare centre. What is also interesting is that Helen would clearly have preferred to use her mother as the source of supplemental care, a response in tune with the findings of other studies which show that some women try and resolve the work – childcare dilemma by first seeking assistance within the family (McCartney & Phillips, 1988; Powell, 1980). Since this was not an option, the childcare centre was seen as the next best choice. It is not clear whether Helen's feelings reflected the traditional view that non-familial care is less desirable than care by members of the family, but it clearly would have been less concerning for Helen to rely on her mother and not be worried about having someone "watching Maddi when I wasn't there" (CS2.PIS2.4.9).

The idea that being in a childcare centre had developmental benefits for children was a theme that appeared also in the other women's accounts of why they were using a childcare centre; Deborah, Lyn and Paula all mentioned, as attractions of this arrangement, the opportunities the centre would provide for peer interaction and Paula mentioned also the opportunities for language development as a particular advantage especially for an only child.

Despite the benefits which the mothers anticipated would flow from their child's use of childcare, they experienced clear concerns. These are discussed in the next section.

5.3 “Am I doing the right thing?”: Doubts, concerns, fears and worries

The mothers in the study were recruited as participants at the point of enrolling their child at a childcare centre; their decision to use a childcare centre had thus already been made. On the basis of this, one could assume that any conflicts they may have had about the use of out-of-home childcare services would have been resolved. Indeed, for Deborah, Lyn and Paula, the three mothers who had inflexible work or study commitments and who had also already used some type of home-based care arrangement for their child, the decision to use a centre was not explicitly questioned during the study; their worries and concerns had a different focus. For Helen and Jean, however, the question of whether they were doing the right thing was one they openly reflected on especially when their daughters were clearly having difficulty with leave-takings. In the first interview, Helen expressed her feelings about the leave-takings and Maddi's reaction to them in this way: "It's been a bit hard in terms of feelings. Clearly she'd prefer not to be left; that's the impression I got from her. There's a bit of perseverance required. Hopefully she'll be getting over that phase now"(CS2.PIS1.5.4).

Four weeks later, and two months into starting childcare, Maddi had an "unsettled" day at the centre and Helen's journal entry showed that she was deeply affected by this and full of self-questioning about whether she should indeed persevere in taking Maddi to the centre. She wrote: "I am having second thoughts about leaving Maddi. Perhaps she is still too young and I am pushing her to do something she isn't ready to do" (CS2.PJ.12.7-11).

5.3.1 Age and readiness

The self-questioning was complicated; besides the emotion about the difficulty of separation, Helen was concerned about whether Maddi was "ready" for the childcare experience. Readiness for Helen seemed to be closely connected to age, and her worry was that, at 15 months, Maddi was possibly too young. Jean also went through the same soul-searching about her daughter's young age; when Jean was rung up by the centre to collect Nina early because Nina was finding being at the centre difficult, Jean noted in her journal:

I must say I felt very anxious. I began to wonder if it was all worth it and perhaps if she was a little older it would be better. If it wasn't for this job I am doing I think I would have called it quits.

(CS1.PJ.7.23-30)

In Jean's case the doubts and self-questioning also realised the conflict she had anticipated might arise between meeting her daughter's needs, which she saw as part of her obligations as a mother, and meeting her own need for time to do her work. Now that she had accepted the job, she was committed to a course of action which meant that the conflict had to be survived. As I argue later, the role of Nina's primary caregiver at the centre was crucial to how Jean "survived" (see section 5.4.1.1).

The young age of her daughter was also a source of concern for Lyn who did not report wondering if she had made the right decision in using childcare but who did report relief that her daughter was now "properly settled into the centre after about 2 weeks; I can feel happy to leave her there instead of some guilt concerning whether she is too little for it all and getting over-tired and run down" (CS4.PJ.6.14-17).

These mothers' concern over the children's young age appears 'normal' in light of research findings (e.g., Pence & Goelman, 1987) that parents using different types of early childhood services all judged centre-based care as more appropriate for the older rather than the younger child. Yet one has to wonder whether this 'normal' concern is related to any intrinsic quality to do with age and/or the childcare experience, or whether this concern is to a large extent socially constructed. Eisenhart and Graue (1990) have argued that the term "readiness" is a "legacy of maturational psychological thought ... formulated by psychologists, adopted by educators and remains 'marked' by their uses of it in various contexts" (p. 253). In a study of how the notion of "readiness for school" was used by parents, teachers and administrators within a set of preschools and schools in a North American state, Eisenhart and Graue took the position that "readiness"

covered a “tangle of related, but not necessarily consistent or stable ideas that are constructed (structured or organised) by individuals in a given community as they address kindergarten experiences in a particular school” (p. 254). They added:

readiness, from this perspective, is not a fixed entity with a developmental timetable. Instead, it is situationally specific and inherently social and must be considered in the context of local history, demographic and educational trends, and interpersonal relationships and values. (p. 254)

Within the context of this study it is interesting to apply Eisenhart and Graue’s understanding of readiness in considering the three mothers’ statements about their daughters’ readiness for the childcare experience. For instance, one has to wonder what impact the centres’ own enrolment policies might have had on the women’s ideas about readiness, given that, for example, all three centres had enrolment policies which specified that children had to be mobile at the time of starting childcare. These policies made a clear statement of the centres’ understanding of “readiness for childcare”. Given also the influence that adult peers had on the mothers’ decision to use childcare, it is also worth considering what messages these peers as well as family members might have given about readiness. For instance, Jean clearly valued her peers’ views: “It is hard to assess what is the right thing to do as a first time parent – you use your peers to assess things” (CS1.PIS1.3.3c), while Helen also reported that she had relied on a friend’s advice in deciding to use the local community creche. The media and parent-help books such as the popular book *Baby and Child* by Penelope Leach which Deborah mentioned as her preparation for starting childcare (CS3.PIS1.4.3a), may have been further sources of influence on the mothers’ ideas on readiness. However, in the mothers’ self-questioning about whether their children were ready for childcare, or whether their children were too young, there was no evidence that the mothers were aware that their ideas about readiness might have been socially constructed; instead their statements suggested that they viewed the issue solely in terms of their view of their child’s characteristics which they implied needed to be gauged against some standard notion of readiness.

5.3.2 *"Guilt"*

Another aspect of the complicated emotions about starting childcare which the mothers experienced is highlighted in Lyn's statement that: "I can feel happy to leave her there instead of some guilt concerning whether she is too little for it all and getting over-tired and run down" (CS4.PJ.6.14-17). In this statement, the feeling of "guilt" commented on in the literature (e.g., Bradbard & Endsley, 1980; McCartney & Phillips, 1988), and measured as part of the maternal separation anxiety scale developed by Hock et al. (1983), appeared as an obstacle to be overcome. As I noted earlier, Lyn did not articulate any re-visiting of her decision to use childcare; however, on two occasions during the case study it was clear that she was aware that her work and childcare decisions placed her in opposition to traditional ideas of "good motherhood" and that by those standards she should feel 'guilty' about her decisions. The first of these occasions arose during our first interview when I asked Lyn about Julie's previous experiences of separation from her. Lyn replied that there had been many of those experiences which Julie had "handled really well". She added that:

On one occasion I actually went away for eleven days on holiday – she didn't seem unduly worried; apparently she called 'mummy' every day but it was no real hardship. Some people think that's a terrible thing to do – a neglectful mother but she was fine. My husband's mother came to look after her while I was away.

(CS4.PIS1.10.3b)

It is interesting that Lyn brought this up almost as a way of stating her identity as not being bound by the traditional conventions of what constitutes good motherhood, yet later on, in conversation with Patti, the centre supervisor, Lyn appeared to at least pay lip service to the cultural icon/stereotype of noble motherhood which posits that "the mother's place is in the home" (Daniel, 1998) where they can give their full and perfect attention to their children at all times (Katz, 1980). Patti told me that one morning Lyn "confided" that she was actually not going to work that day but was going to do some gardening; Lyn had added: "isn't it awful?" (CS4.TIS2.4.6). Patti herself said to me that she actually thought

this was the most positive indication that Lyn was happy with using the centre for Julie, so much so that Lyn was also using the centre as a means for getting a break for herself rather than just when she needed to work. It is interesting to speculate what prompted Lyn to make this comment to Patti – her comment did not seem intended to inform Patti of her whereabouts in case she needed to be contacted by the centre during the day; rather, it was a spur of the moment confidence in response to a child's question to Lyn about whether Lyn was on her way to work. One possibility is that Lyn's aside to Patti was an indication that despite behaving in ways which reject the 'hegemony' of traditional views of ideal motherhood (Daniel, 1998; McCartney & Phillips, 1988), the awareness that the views existed still exerted some hold over her, possibly of 'guilt'. It could be that Lyn felt safe articulating her sense of 'guilt' here, in an environment which one would assume was comfortable meeting whatever needs prompted women to use childcare. On the other hand, it is also possible that, by momentarily assuming the traditional value position of 'it's awful to want to have time to yourself rather than have your child with you when you are not compelled to work', Lyn was consciously or otherwise checking out Patti's own value position on the matter.

'Guilt' was named by Helen as an emotion that raised serious questions about her childcare decision; Helen expressed her feelings throughout the settling-in process in this way:

I've enjoyed the sessions I've been to with Maddi. In fact I wondered at one stage whether I should be taking her to a playgroup where the intention wasn't to leave her but to be there with her. I felt very guilty about wanting to leave Maddi. I think motherhood is fraught with guilt. The last time I went (to the centre) there was another mother there and I spent some time talking to her – I was very pleased to do that. Her daughter started at the same age as Maddi and she had a similar viewpoint – just the fact that she'd been through it – she was quite constructive. The thing that I feel guilty about is that I think that I can give Maddi the best care but clearly there are different things that they can do at creche, whether I'd have thought to do them, or been interested to do them, with

her ... so there's things she can do there that perhaps she wouldn't do at home. So she made me feel a lot more positive talking to her about it.

(CS2.PIS1.8.12a)

Apart from the expression of 'guilt', what emerges very clearly from this statement is the strong sense of ambivalence Helen experienced over her use of childcare. Like Lyn, Helen recognised that there is a cultural ideal of good motherhood which encompasses the twin notions that mothers should be with their infants, and that mothers are the ones able to give the "best care". Helen also seemed to recognise that the cultural norm of ideal motherhood was at some level incompatible with her reality. Thus, she identified herself as a mother who could give her daughter "the best care", yet, at the same time, she also recognised that there were different things Maddi could do in creche that "perhaps she wouldn't do at home". While Lyn projected an image of a mother who had come to terms with the dilemma of 'ideal motherhood versus childcare' (e.g., Daniel, 1998), with only occasional slippage into feelings of guilt, Helen still seemed to be struggling with finding a place to comfortably locate herself in relation to this dilemma. In this exercise/struggle, Helen found it helpful to talk to another mother and to discover that she was not alone in this experience vindicating Daniel's recommendation that centres should form "transition teams" to help new mothers deal with their initial anxieties as they start childcare. According to Daniel, the "transition teams" should be composed of childcare staff and currently enrolled mothers who had positive experiences of transition. The sense of needing support in one's decision, or state of being, expressed by Helen, and the feeling of loneliness underlying this need is also reminiscent of the loneliness reported by the mothers in Brannen and Moss' (1988) and in Rolfe et al.'s (1991) study referred to in chapter 4.

5.3.3 Physical Safety and Health

In Lyn's statement about 'guilt' over her daughter's young age, being "over-tired" and "run down" were mentioned as two other sources of this emotion. Lyn also had worries about how the other children would behave towards Julie, fearing that

they might be violent; however, finding herself pleasantly surprised, she said that “the children weren’t violent towards her which is what I feared – they’re really friendly to her” (CS4.PIS1.5.4). In her journal Lyn also noted that she had worried about whether Julie would be “overwhelmed because of the number of adults and children” (CS4.PJ.1.20-22); this fear too was not borne out.

The other mothers expressed worries about similar health and safety issues. For example, Jean wrote in her journal: “My biggest concern is of course that she is happy. There is also some secondary concern as to her physical safety and that she will pick up viruses and infections” (CS1.PJ.1.30-33), concerns which she also brought up in our first interview (CS1.PIS1.9.17) and noted again in her journal two months later when, in the middle of winter, Nina had a series of ear infections and tonsillitis and twice missed her session at the centre.

Deborah and Helen also worried about their daughters’ physical safety in a group of peers. In Deborah’s case, this concern was implied in how she explained her choice of the childcare setting: “I liked the fact that there were not too many children – there weren’t too many older ones that stomp over the wee ones” (CS3.PIS1.2.2). In talking about the same issue, Helen mentioned again her daughter’s young age which she implied contributed to her vulnerability:

I was concerned that Maddi would be pushed around if she was in another child’s way – although it didn’t happen very often. I’m not sure I was happy about Maddi going outside to play without a jacket and hat on. I think Maddi is quite a bit younger than most of the children.

(CS2.PIS1.5.4)

5.3.4 Fear of losing one’s primary place

The mention of the jacket and hat not only shows a concern about health but indicates a beginning awareness on Helen’s part that “some things are done differently here” and that some of the different ways might prove hard for her to accept. It is also possible that noticing the differences might have served to highlight for Helen that in using childcare, she was placing her child in a setting

where adults other than herself had primary control, and, correspondingly, she had less. Given Helen's ambivalence about using childcare, it is possible that she experienced this difference in "doing things" as a threat to her place as primary person in Maddi's life, or at the very least, as a source of added concern about "what happens in the centre when I am not there".

A hint of the phenomenon noted in the literature (e.g., Galinsky, 1988; McCartney & Phillips, 1988; Powell, 1980) that mothers fear they might lose their primary place in the child's life, whether it is in terms of control or affection, was present also in Deborah's story who, reporting her delight that Shirley was very settled at the centre, nonetheless commented lightly: "... sometimes she doesn't even notice that I'm gone. I feel a bit miffed about that but really I don't worry about it at all" (CS3.PIS2.2.3a).

5.3.5 "What happens when I'm not there?"

The mothers' need for reassurance about what happened when they were not with their children has already been referred to as an underlying motivation mothers had in agreeing to participate in this study (see section 5.1). Apart from the comments reported earlier, two of the mothers made other more explicit statements about their concerns over this issue. For instance, in Jean's case this worry was connected to her perception of her daughter's physical skills and to the fact that in a group situation, she would be competing with other children for attention: "I do worry how she gets on when I'm not there to lift her and place her in different places – who will do that for her because of all the other children".

(CS1.PIS1.9.17)

Helen's concern was similar to Jean's but intensified by her perception that while at the centre with her daughter, she and Maddi had been left unattended by the teachers and "not asked to do anything or help in any other way". She added:

when I'm there with Maddi we could easily have spent the time just us two as it were, doing our thing, in total disregard to everybody else, whereas while I'm not there, I guess she can do her own thing but to some

extent she has to fit into the group – the thing I was worried about is – we do our own thing when I’m there but what happens when I’m not there?

(CS2.PIS1.6.7)

The need for knowledge about what went on, which these mothers clearly expressed, appeared connected to their wish to know that their child would be well looked after. In Helen’s case, however, an issue of lack of trust also seemed to be emerging. This issue is discussed further in the following section.

5.3.6 Keeping on side with the teacher

At this point it is also worth noting a comment Jean made in the first interview at the end of a statement about her role at the centre during her daughter’s orientation visits. Having said that she had tried to be as helpful as possible to the staff, she added: “it helps your child as well – it’s a basic human thing” (CS1.PIS1.6.6). This quick almost ‘throw-away’ comment provides an insight into the mothers’ vulnerability as they went through the process of entrusting their child in someone else’s care. There were not many of these comments in my data but the one above, together with another one by Lyn, suggest that an element of “keeping on side with the teacher” was at work as a way of minimizing the mothers’ sense of their children’s and their own vulnerability. The comment by Lyn occurred in the context of her saying that the teachers did not seem to be aware that she would have liked more feedback from them about Julie’s experience at the centre. Talking about the feedback she would have liked, the conversation went like this:

Lyn: I’ve had to drag it out of them.

Carmen: Would you consider doing anything about that so you’d get more feedback?

Lyn: That’s a tricky one; I don’t want to be seen to be criticising.

(CS4.PIS1.7.11)

In my view, Lyn's "I don't want to be seen to be criticising" and Jean's "it helps your child as well" both illustrate the feeling of vulnerability I have described which made them want to keep on side with the teacher as a protective measure for their child. For Jean, "being helpful" was not only a way of fulfilling her role in the centre through sharing in the general tasks; it was a way of 'getting on side' with the teachers, a way of 'winning them over' so that they acquired a positive view of the mother which would also, she hoped, transfer over to her child or "help (the) child as well" (CS1.PIS1.6.6). For Lyn, refraining from appearing to criticise would perform a similar function: that of protecting her child from possible negative reactions (see also section 7.5.2.3). In each case it seems that emotions ran deep in these mothers' experience of starting childcare.

5.3.7 Summary of section

This section has focused on the worries and concerns which mothers reported as part of their experience of starting childcare. The complicated emotional nature of this experience has been illustrated through the mothers' accounts of their self-questionings about whether their child was old enough, or "ready" enough, to attend a childcare centre, their feelings of "guilt" and ambivalence about whether they were doing the right thing for their child and their worries about the child's physical safety and health, about losing their place in their child's affections and about what happened to the child in their absence. I have argued that these concerns reflect themes which in the childcare literature have been associated with dilemmas of 'ideal motherhood versus childcare' with the self-questionings of the mothers appearing to be a way of engaging in a dialogue through which they located themselves in relation to this dilemma. In asking questions about their child's readiness for childcare, the mothers appeared unaware that 'readiness' might be a socially constructed concept rather than a notion with a clear set of norms against which they could gauge their child's characteristics. The mothers' concerns about what happened in their absence, and over different ways of doing things at the centre in comparison to home, together with their concern about keeping on side with the teacher may also be seen as an indication of the vulnerability the mothers experienced at a time when they were entrusting

the well-being of their child into the hands of someone who was a stranger both to the child and to the mothers. This point is further developed in the following section.

5.4 Seeking trust in the teachers

Each mother made positive comments about the teachers in their children's centres. In this respect, the five mothers were no different to the parents in other studies which have shown that parents generally make positive evaluations of their children's caregivers (e.g., Barraclough & Smith, 1996; McCartney & Phillips, 1988; Pence & Goelman, 1987). However, the positive comments did not all have the same meanings in terms of the kind of relationships which developed between the parents and the teachers. In this section I present individual mothers' stories of these relationships in which the underlying themes address issues of developing trust in the teachers. I shall tell these stories as individual mothers' stories in order to preserve the developmental quality of these relationships; however, cross-case discussion is also present at relevant points.

5.4.1 Narratives of steadily increasing trust

Two of the mothers, Jean and Deborah, told stories of their relationship with their child's teacher which suggested that in these relationships there was a steady increase in the mother's trust in the teacher.

5.4.1.1 Jean's story

Jean, whose daughter Nina had Sarah as her primary caregiver at a community creche, spoke of Sarah in glowing terms throughout the case study. The key terms in Jean's story of her relationship with Sarah were: "support", "reassurance" and "trust". Comments about feeling supported and reassured by Sarah first appeared in Jean's third journal entry when, coming back to a happy Nina after having left her on her own at the centre for a trial period, she wrote:

I really couldn't believe she [Nina] had been so happy. I thought Sarah was very good. She seems to be a thoughtful person who is prepared to give Nina the time she requires over this settling-in phase. She has

supported my decision to take the settling-in period slowly. I find her reassuring as I know that in relation to many other mothers I do give my children a lot of my time to the point I worry I am a little over attentive for their own good.

(CS1.PJ.3.18-30)

The next week, Jean wrote of Sarah:

Sarah was in her usual good form – positive and tuned in to the stage we were at and how Nina would be feeling. I found this very reassuring. Nina seemed to cope well with being left again ... Sarah feels I could leave her for the full session next week.

(CS1.PJ.4.17-27)

These two entries show that Jean appreciated Sarah's support for her preferred way of settling Nina in slowly; she was reassured that her own judgement was not going to be sidelined or undermined and, when Nina's behaviour was also reassuring, she noted Sarah's advice about leaving Nina for the whole session the following week and accepted it.

As it turned out, Nina missed her next weekly visit because she was unwell and when she next attended the centre, Jean was somewhat concerned that if she left Nina on her own for the whole session, Nina would not cope. Having discussed her concern with Sarah, Jean noted in her journal that "Sarah assured me that she would be fine and I agreed" (CS1.PJ.5.14-16). This last entry suggests that Jean had moved from being positive about the qualities she recognised in Sarah to a clear respect for, and trust, in her judgement.

After another missed weekly visit, again due to ill health, Jean sought Sarah's advice about whether to leave Nina on her own at the centre. Together, they agreed to proceed but after about an hour of having said goodbye to Nina, Jean was rung up by Sarah who suggested that she pick Nina up early. Jean reported this as having made her feel anxious but she also found Sarah's call reassuring:

Nina cried when I left so I called the creche when I got home to see how she was going. At that point Sarah felt she was a bit tearful but fine. Half an hour later she called me to say she thought Nina had had enough. This made me very anxious as I dashed down. On another level I was reassured that Sarah would call me if there was a problem.

(CS1.PJ.6.23-32)

Another early recall by Sarah the following week again caused Jean to feel anxious; she wrote:

Nina started to cry as soon as she saw her creche bag going into the car so I knew she wasn't going to be that happy. She seemed happier on arrival so I was optimistic ... After a while I felt I could try leaving. She was instantly very upset. I rang Sarah from home after 45 minutes. She felt at this point that Nina was alright but called me half an hour later to say she was ready to come home ... I must say I felt very anxious. I began to wonder if it was all worth it and perhaps if she was a little older it would be better. If it wasn't for this job I am doing I think I would have called it quits.

(CS1.PJ.7.15-19; 7-14; 21-28)

As I noted in the previous section, this incident re-awakened Jean's earliest fears and made her question again the fragile balance she had started to find between her needs and those of her children. It brought to a head a conflict she had hoped to avoid. In this state of mind, it is an indication of Jean's increasing trust in Sarah that she discussed her fears about Nina's distress with her. Again, Sarah's response was reassuring:

she was excellent, very reassuring and said it was fine [that Nina had to go home early that day]. Sarah even suggested that we visit again for half an hour on Friday [to maintain familiarity with the centre].

(CS1.PJ.7.31-32)

There is in these accounts a clear strengthening of the sense of trust that Jean was developing in Sarah. This trust emerged first as an appreciation of Sarah's support for Jean's wish to take the settling-in slowly, then as an acceptance of Sarah's advice and respect for her judgement, and later as an expression of reassurance that Sarah had phoned when Nina was distressed. While the phone calls had made Jean anxious, she also understood them as an indication of Sarah's trustworthiness which had acted as an antidote to Jean's fears. Discussing her fears with Sarah and taking her advice had also helped her survive the conflict between meeting her obligations as a mother and continuing with the job she had committed herself to. Reassurance was a key feeling in Jean's response to Sarah:

I was reassured by the competence of Sarah, I was reassured that she rang when Nina was distressed – because I think that *that* trusting somebody to not let your child get too distressed – if I had not felt that in Sarah, I would have been a lot more anxious about things.

(CS1.PIS1.5.4)

A few days after this entry, during our first interview, Jean again expressed the anxiety she had felt on these occasions as well as the trust she had developed in Sarah:

I must say there was a point when Nina suddenly became very distressed that I wondered if I was doing the right thing ... if Sarah hadn't been as positive as she was, I would have said 'is it worth it?'. But because Sarah was so calmly reassuring, it settled it.

(CS1.PIS1.8.12a)

During the fieldwork Jean also spoke to me about her appreciation of Sarah's help, such as when she commented after an extra visit which Sarah had recommended: "it was a good thought of Sarah to come today" (CS1. Fieldnotes, orientation visit 8/8, 10.13). These experiences seemed to renew Jean's sense of confidence in how Nina's childcare experience was going and she made no more entries in her journal for the next two months until, at the end of the case study, she recorded her final comments thus:

I must say it is absolutely marvellous to be able to take Nina to the creche – to leave her there knowing that she is perfectly happy. It is a great break for me – very relaxing. I think Sarah has been marvellous in the role she has played – and continues to be! I am sure it has been a very fundamental experience for Nina – one of learning self-reliance which will carry on to other areas of her life. I am grateful to Sarah for making it so positive for her.

(CS1.PJ.8.15-29)

It is significant that these final evaluative comments placed such an emphasis on the role that Jean perceived Sarah to have played in Nina's experience of starting childcare. Perhaps, like other mothers in previous studies (e.g., McCartney & Phillips, 1988), Jean saw the experience of starting childcare as primarily one that affected her child more than herself. In this final comment Jean focused on the benefits to Nina of having a successful settling-in and of learning self-reliance. With regards to her own experience, Jean focused on the benefits of Nina's attendance at the creche providing her with "a great break" which was "very relaxing". However, the analysis of Jean's comments over the three and a half months of the study clearly revealed that Sarah not only had a tremendous impact on Nina's experience, but she also had an impact on the way that Jean experienced the process of starting childcare; developing a sense of trust in Sarah was a crucial part of this process.

5.4.1.2 Deborah's story

The second story of steady development of trust in the teacher is that of Deborah. In Deborah's case, trust emerged very early on and continued uninterrupted throughout the study. Deborah used a parent co-operative centre which employed two trained staff. At the start of the study, one of the teachers, Joan, volunteered to be the teacher participant in the study with primary responsibility for settling-in Shirley. In this story communication and information-sharing appeared to be the basis for the development of a trusting relationship which was also helped by the

perception that Deborah quickly developed that her daughter Shirley was settling-in very well.

The journal entry which Deborah made after Shirley's first visit to the centre said:

We were greeted by Joan and introduced to the other adults and some of the children and given a cup of coffee. After morning tea, Joan spent some time going over details etc – (this was) very helpful and I appreciated the time she gave me as she is busy of course. I felt comfortable there.

(CS3.PJ.1. 18-24)

Unlike Jean's story, Deborah's initial comfort at the centre was not disrupted by a sudden change in her child's response to the centre but continued to increase uninterrupted throughout the whole process. After the third visit to the centre, Deborah also felt "a bit more useful" and was able to lend a hand with the centre activities such as helping set up the morning tea table and reading to the other children. Having kept a close eye on Shirley's behaviour at the centre, Deborah noted that Shirley appeared to be having trouble sitting at the table and eating from her lunchbox and had also dropped much of her food onto the floor. She wrote:

I was not happy about Shirley at morning tea and lunch as she is not good at sitting at table and handling a lunchbox. She tended to lose all her food onto the floor. I had to give it back to her or she'd have had nothing to eat. I have said to Joan I would like her to be in a highchair. I think I might pack two boxes – one for morning tea and one for lunch.

(CS3.PJ.3.23-29)

By the next visit, Deborah's suggestion had been adopted by Joan and Deborah noted her satisfaction with this in her next journal entry.

This pattern of good communication continued throughout the whole study; in the first interview, Deborah described her relationship with the two full-time teachers at the centre as "pretty good". About Joan she said: "Joan's pretty good and easy

to talk to ... I've been most impressed by Joan; it's sad that she's leaving to go to university next year" (CS3.PIS1.8.14 and 9.15). Given that this interview was held only three weeks into the experience of starting childcare, it is clear that Deborah had acquired a sense of respect and trust in Joan very early on. Deborah kept up her journal for the duration of the study but she made no further mention of Joan in this, focusing instead on her observations of Shirley's behaviour. In the final interview of the study, however, her statements show that trust in Joan's behaviour towards Shirley, as well as in the behaviour of the other teacher, was well established. Her trust and respect for them both come through in the following comments:

I feel I can ask them anything I want to know and they, to the best of their ability, tell me what they can remember. They are very, very friendly they have both been really good and helpful with information. I really appreciate that they make lots of observations on what she's doing – not just looking at her physical needs but her overall development too. They're doing a profile on each child and we had Shirley's one home for the weekend – we were really pleased with that.

(CS3. PIS2.4.7-8)

In analysing both Jean's and Deborah's stories it is clear that respect and support for the mothers' preferred ways of doing things together with consistent information-sharing and communication were crucial elements in the development of these two relationships. What is also interesting is that in both cases there was one centre adult who had primary responsibility for the settling-in process of the children. In the other three stories, the location of responsibility for the settling-in process was less clear.

5.4.2 A narrative of ambivalent trust

5.4.2.1 Helen's story

In Helen's case, the degree of trust she developed in the teachers was complicated by a number of dynamics which are best described as elements of the structural organisation of the centre. For example, the centre used by Helen and Maddi did

not operate a system of primary caregivers as in the case of Jean's and Deborah's stories; instead the practice was for all the staff to have equal responsibility for all the children. However, when the invitation to participate in the study was extended to this centre and the study methodology explained, one of the teachers volunteered to be the main centre adult to participate in the study. This teacher, Anna, was then introduced to Helen and Maddi as the main teacher responsible for Maddi's settling-in. Half-way into the process, however, another teacher, Sam, emerged as the teacher with whom Maddi was spending most time and she subsequently became a participant in the study at the request of both teachers. I then interviewed Sam alongside Anna as well as separately in substitution for the journal which she was unable to keep. Until this arrangement became clear, however, it seemed to me as observer that there was some ambiguity about which of the two teachers was primarily responsible for Maddi's settling-in.

As far as Helen's comments about Anna and Sam were concerned, these were consistently positive. Her first journal entry sets the tone for much of her later comments about them; she wrote:

I found the staff friendly and quite busy especially at the dropping off stage. They encouraged my questions, for example, that the maximum they were licensed for was 25 children, usually 20 plus the caregivers' children and that they try to maintain a ratio of 4-5 children per adult.

(CS2.PJ. 19-14)

In the second week, Helen wrote: "again the staff were friendly and were interested in Maddi and what she was doing" (CS2.PJ. 2.13-14); and later that week:

I found the staff friendly though the session was pretty noisy. The staff have left me to do pretty much as I please with Kathryn and have talked to me as they were able. There wasn't a cup for Maddi so I was pleased that I had taken hers with me. Anna had her hands full a large amount of the time with a rather upset lad.

(CS2.PJ.3.8-15)

The first statement in this last excerpt was still positive about the teachers and the matter-of-fact tone of the rest of this entry made no overt criticism or complaint about the lack of teacher contact with her and Maddi, or about the lack of provision of a cup for Maddi; indeed Helen showed she had some understanding of the demands Anna faced in looking after an upset child. However, by the following week, the lack of information and guidance was beginning to irk Helen who having unsuccessfully asked for a copy of the centre handbook, noted in her journal: "I was disappointed that the information leaflet giving the rules etc for the centre is still not ready. There is a copy on the wall but I haven't found time to read it" (CS2.PJ.4.13-16). In the absence of this information, during our first interview Helen said that she was "a little confused" about what the teachers might expect of her, adding also the already quoted statement (see section 5.3.5) that "the thing I was worried about – we do our own thing when I'm there but what happens when I'm not there?" (CS2.PIS1.6.7).

Clearly, the lack of information, and the limited contact with the teachers, raised serious questions for Helen about how much she could rely on the teachers to step in to look after Maddi in her absence. While she was empathic in reporting on several occasions that the staff seemed pretty busy, these observations did nothing to alleviate her concerns and throughout the study she remained aware of these structural issues as limiting what she could expect from the teachers; in the first interview she noted that "the ratio was a bit high" and that "it would be nice to have a lower ratio" (CS2.PIS1.9.15), a comment she referred to again in the final interview; she also remained frustrated that even at the end of the study the centre guidebook (one parent's responsibility) had still not been produced.

However, when she did have direct contact with the teachers, Helen's comments continued to be invariably positive and complimentary. This was noticeably so in the journal entry Helen made on the day she first left Maddi alone at the centre for a trial period of two hours.

At the start of this session, which was Maddi's fifth visit to the centre, Anna checked with Helen what time she intended to depart and then remained close to Helen in readiness for the separation event and the handing-over routine. The leave-taking was a prolonged one with Helen making two attempts at saying goodbye, and each time holding back from actually going when Maddi started to whimper in protest. At one stage, Sam intervened and held out her arms to Maddi but Maddi refused to go to her; after about another five minutes Helen asked Anna if it would be a good idea to leave then and Anna encouraged her to do so. Helen then picked Maddi up, gave her a kiss and a cuddle and said "bye-bye". Anna held out her arms for Maddi saying "Come on honey" and took her in her arms. Maddi let out a vigorous cry and Helen became very flushed and took Maddi back in her arms and cuddled her closely. As an observer, it was clear to me that this was a very difficult moment for both mother and child and I wondered if they would go through with the leave-taking. Anna seemed to sense the same difficulty and suggested to Helen that she should leave and pop back to look through the creche window in about ten minutes to see how Maddi was doing. Helen did leave then, surreptitiously wiping away a tear from her eye. Ten minutes after her departure, Helen came back and Sam slipped outside to tell her that Maddi had stopped crying.

Helen's journal entry for this day indicated that she had found both Anna and Sam's behaviour over the leave-taking reassuring:

This was the first time I had left Maddi at the centre. I found leaving her whilst she was upset, difficult and unpleasant. However, Anna's comments helped and checking back after 10 minutes was good as I could see that she was calmer and being looked after. I telephoned approximately one hour after leaving her and was told that she was coping OK, that she had been tearful but had had morning tea on Sam's knee etc which was all quite reassuring and on that basis I left her for approximately one hour more. On arriving, the comments from the staff all affirmed my earlier telephone conversation that Maddi had settled down. I found the staff sympathetic, caring and reassuring. They also had a few

suggestions, for example, to pack a toy of hers or something familiar from home.

(CS2.PJ.5.13-27)

What interested me as an observer was that Helen had not been given any guidance, either verbally or otherwise, about how to handle the separation before the event came up including the suggestion that it would be helpful to pack a familiar thing from home in Maddi's bag. It seemed to me that the teachers were making assumptions about the information, or foresight, Helen had but neither of them had taken responsibility to ensure the knowledge/information existed. In terms of the kind of relationship which was developing between Helen and Maddi's teachers, Helen's journal entry indicates that this event provided some reassurance for her about how Maddi would be looked after in her absence. However, during the first of Maddi's two sessions in the following week, I wondered again at how established this reassurance was; despite very clear encouragement by both teachers, who each approached Helen individually, to try leaving Maddi again for another trial period, Helen did not leave the centre: she simply ignored them and continued with what she was doing. When I questioned her on her reasons for this two days later, Helen said: "We'd had a bad night and I guess I was feeling a bit lazy after that so I didn't feel like making an effort for both our sakes. I felt like enjoying being there with her" (CS2.PIS1.11b.2).

During the next session, Helen was approached by Sam about ten minutes after arrival and they spoke for a while about the difficulty of saying goodbye. The leave-taking occurred about ten minutes after this approach started and while Helen did not look totally relaxed, she did hand Maddi over to Sam at her first suggestion and walked away with a wave to Maddi. Helen did not make a journal entry on this day; however, when we had our first interview later that day she made a number of appreciative comments about Anna and Sam. For instance, Helen recalled that Sam had spoken to her supportively when she first left Maddi at the centre: "I remember I was upset about leaving Maddi – obviously it upset her too; I thought there was some empathy there – that's why I remember it"

(CS2.PIS1.8.13). Helen also said that “both Anna and Sam had gone out of their way [to give me feedback]. I guess the fact that they’re both parents helps. That’s all quite reassuring” (CS2.PIS1.8.12b). She added that her relationship with the teachers was “friendly and easy. Anna is very easy to talk to and Sam seems quite open. They seem quite caring people. I feel happy about them” (CS2.PIS1.8.14).

In these last comments there is a clearer indication that Helen was developing some measure of trust in the teachers. The support they had given her in dealing with the leave-takings was undoubtedly central to this development and it seemed also that their status as parents played some part in enhancing their credibility in her eyes, a finding not unknown in the literature (e.g., Smith & Hubbard, 1988). Nonetheless, the ambivalence Helen had shown about the quality of the care the teachers could be relied on to give her daughter, again appeared two weeks later, when despite Maddi’s seeming “to be having quite a good time pottering about” (CS2.PJ.10.2-3), Helen again decided to stay with Maddi throughout the session because “the staff seem[ed] overloaded with unhappy ones” (CS2.PJ.10.4-5).

This comment highlights that for Helen, the issue of how much trust she could have in the teachers to look after her child was connected to her perception of how the structural elements of the centres interacted with the personal qualities of the teachers. Her concern over the teachers’ “busyness” or workload was mentioned a number of times both in her journal and in her interviews; in her final interview she remained concerned that the teachers were not able to give the children enough time and she commented: “I wouldn’t be happy leaving Maddi there all day” (CS2.PIS2.4.8). Her ability to trust the teachers remained ambivalent (or qualified) to the end.

5.4.3 Narratives of hopeful trust

The stories which the other two mothers in the study, Lyn and Paula, told of their relationship with their child’s teachers were not as detailed as the other three and to a large degree appeared to be based on a *hope* that they could trust the teachers,

rather than on overwhelming evidence that they could. For this reason, I have called these stories, narratives of “hopeful trust”.

5.4.3.1 Lyn's story

Lyn had chosen her daughter's centre partly on the basis that it had a “mature staff who looked like they knew what they were doing – they had good work histories” (CS4.PIS1.2.2). The account which Lyn gave of her feelings about the teachers as the study progressed suggested that she continued to rely greatly on this initial perception for her views about the teachers; she also seemed to place a lot of faith in her view of them as “professional caregivers who are monitored by others” (CS4.PIS1.2.1).

Lyn's journal contained only four references to the teachers. The first of these was made on the day of Julie's second visit to the centre when Lyn wrote: “I'm beginning to get to know who the staff are – I have to keep asking their names as I'm not sure which name on the list (on the noticeboard) is which worker!” (CS4.PJ.2.14-16). The next day she wrote:

I am getting more familiar with Maria, who seems to spend quite a lot of time with Julie. It is a little confusing, not having one specific staff member to relate to, who is with Julie most of the time. Staff all seem very relaxed.

(CS4.PJ.3.17-21)

As an observer of Julie's day even when the mother was absent, it was interesting for me to read this journal entry because of its mismatch with my field observations. Indeed, my fieldnotes showed that on the day of this entry, Julie had only interacted briefly with Maria and that had only been during the lunchtime routine. Another mismatch occurred between Lyn's comment during our first interview that the staff “really try to feed them a lot – and it's a very nutritious diet” and my own perception over the course of the study that, although a balanced meal was prepared each lunchtime, the staff were very conservative in the amounts they served the children and discouraged the children from having

second helpings. Indeed on one occasion, Julie was mildly chided for wanting more. This lack of correspondence between the mother's perception of reality and my own raised questions about the validity of the impressions that this mother was gaining about her child's experience. It also raised questions for me as researcher about whether it was my role to clarify these misunderstandings. As I noted in section 3.3.3.3, my decision was that I would answer any questions the mothers asked me but not volunteer anything they did not specifically ask about. I also had already decided, as part of my general approach, that in my role as researcher I would remain primarily an observer and therefore not intervene in any of the centre activities unless I specifically noted that a child was in physical danger.

Lyn's third entry about the teachers was made in the second week of Julie's attendance at the centre when Julie had started to attend on her own and for longer sessions. On this day Julie had been a little feverish and unwell in the morning and Lyn wrote:

I phoned in at 12.45 and she had been fine and not really grizzly ... I was initially uncertain about whether I should leave her there at all and was prepared to go and pick her up if she was too unsettled. Staff seemed happy to try and cope with her.

(CS4.PJ.5.12-14;16-19)

Clearly Lyn would have appreciated the fact that on this occasion her work day was not disrupted; the following week, her final journal entry mentioned the teachers in a somewhat warmer tone: "I find interaction a bit warmer with staff and this could well reflect my own relief that she is settled" (CS4.PJ.6.12-14).

Despite this warmer tone, however, overall the four entries give a sense of a relationship managed with a degree of interpersonal distance. The difficulty with working out the names of the teachers at the centre and the confusion of not knowing which staff member to talk to about Julie may have been important barriers to a more substantial relationship developing. Certainly, these difficulties

were prominent in Lyn's consciousness because she mentioned both of them during our first interview. Thus, despite the positive comments which Lyn made about having a relationship with the teachers that was "quite good", Lyn also noted "I wish I could remember their names though. I have not been introduced and that could have been a good thing to do" (CS4.PIS1.8). The last issue of names was able to be resolved at the interview when, at Lyn's request, I went through and named each adult at the centre for her; however, the second issue could not be so easily resolved. Julie clearly saw the lack of a single person to communicate with, as also connected to another aspect she was not satisfied with:

I probably expected more verbal feedback from them on how she's actually coping. I have to ask specific questions on food, sleep etc. They don't keep records on sleep times, though I don't think you need a record everyday, especially if the child is there for a long time. Also, they don't have a specific adult allocated to the child so you don't know who to focus your questions to The feedback hasn't been great.

(CS4.PIS1.9)

These two themes of lack of feedback (see also section 7.5.2.3) and lack of an identified teacher with whom to consistently liaise about Julie remained the key points in Lyn's account of her views about the teachers even at the end of the study; this was despite the fact that by then Lyn felt that the process of starting childcare had gone well for Julie. When I asked Lyn what type of feedback she was receiving about Julie's experience at the centre; Lyn said:

It's still not much detail. They say things like "she's had a really good day" but that's about all. She doesn't seem to have had any bad days – which seems a bit surprising! There's not much indication of what she's specifically doing – any advancement or achievement and I'd like that. So we tend to talk mainly about sleeping and eating functions.

(CS4.PIS2. 4.6)

Later in the interview, Lyn also said: "There's still the problem of not being able to relate to one identified person so whoever's nearby, I talk to them"

(CS4.PIS2.8). Hinting again that her trust was somewhat “blind”, Lyn also added that it was good to be involved in the study because: “I feel I’ve had some feedback from you (the researcher) as an independent observer, which is quite useful for me. I would tend to believe you more than someone working there” (CS4.PIS2.4.9).

However, despite these issues, the general positive note which characterised the way that all the mothers spoke about the teachers still came through in this statement which Lyn also made during the last interview:

I think they’re a lot more relaxed with me now; before, I really only related to Patti and Maria; now the others talk to me too about Julie. It’s more of a professional rather than a friendly relationship. Probably later on, they tend to have parent and staff dinner meetings and at working bees – we’ll get to know each other better. But I still have no idea what the staff do outside of the centre.

(CS4.PIS2.4.7)

5.4.3.2 Paula’s story

Paula’s story shared the same difficulties identified by Lyn in the relationship she developed with the teachers in her son’s centre: lack of detailed feedback and lack of a regular person to communicate with about Robert. Nonetheless, Paula’s story shows that she had implicit trust in the adults at her son’s centre. This trust appeared to be based primarily on her previous acquaintance with the centre, and some of its staff, and to a lesser extent on the fact that her son’s grandmother was friendly with the centre’s supervisor.

Paula’s journal made two comments which mentioned the teachers; in her first entry she wrote: “I have been involved with the creche before. I have confidence in the centre and feel very comfortable with Robert starting there” (CS5.PJ.1.8-11). Five weeks later, when Robert was into his first week of sole attendance at the centre, Robert was dropped off at the centre by his father, Michael, and picked

up at the end of the session by Paula. Paula's journal entry for this visit said that "Michael said he felt comfortable with the staff" (CS5.PJ.5.14-15).

The feeling of confidence and comfort were repeated during both interviews I had with Paula and her family. Both interviews were held around Paula's kitchen table which, as I mentioned earlier (see section 5.2.5), seemed to act as a meeting place for Robert's extended family. The first interview happened around the arrival and departure of Robert's father Michael, Robert's aunt Rebecca, and then one set of Robert's grandparents who stayed for a brief chat and then retired to a different room. During the second interview, the grandmother arrived at the start of the interview and with Paula's agreement contributed to the discussion on the basis that she knew the centre supervisor.

In the first interview it became clear that despite the bonds of friendship that existed, Paula was not getting much feedback from the centre staff on how the process of settling-in was going. She said:

They don't say anything really – "just a grizzle" that's about it. I'd like more feedback but I don't know if that's just me – I don't know if everyone feels like that. It would be a lot of work for the staff but it would be nice to have some report every so often. That's why I liked the idea of this study [laughs].

(CS5.PIS1.8.12b)

When I asked her how she would describe her relationship with the teachers she said that it was "good – maybe I'd just like more feedback but that's it" (CS5.PIS1.8.14). She also said that one of the things she was impressed by was the way the staff talked to the children: "I like the way they talk to the kids – they always explain about things – they explain the reasons why" (CS5.PIS1.8.13).

In the second interview held six weeks later at the end of the case study, it was clear that feedback was still a problem and at one stage Paula said about the study "We're getting a lot more feedback this way than otherwise" (CS5.PIS2.4.9). In

describing the feedback they received from the teachers, Michael, who was present at the second interview said:

They tell me that he was good – one asked me last time if Robert talks on the phone. I always ask about lunch and how he went that day. He's happy, he says 'goodbye duck' and 'mickey mouse' [to two big soft toys at the centre]. He's very familiar with things now.

(CS5.PIS2.4.6)

To this Paula added: "I get feedback through Robert's nana – I'm happy with that" (CS5.PIS2.4.6).

Nana was Robert's grandmother who hearing this comment, intervened somewhat less sanguinely than Paula: "I sometimes wonder if they look after him enough. I really have no relationship with the staff; but with Beryll (supervisor) I have, and I ring her up (CS5.PIS2.7).

The reassuring thing for Robert's nana was that she knew the supervisor and was able to get some idea of how Robert was doing through that, but her statement also shows that this did not totally put her mind at rest about the quality of care Robert received from his teachers.

As in Lyn's story, the account of the relationship which Paula and the rest of Robert's family had with the centre raises questions about the substance on which their 'trust' was based. In both stories there was very little feedback about the child's experience at the centre, and the feedback that was given was lacking in specific details. In Lyn's story, Lyn connects up the lack of feedback to the absence of a specific person to communicate with about the child. This connection was not made by Paula or any other member of her family; however, as observer, it was a connection that suggested itself to me on a number of occasions. At the start of Robert's case study, the co-ordinating supervisor had asked one of the teachers, Lorraine, to be the participating teacher in the study. This decision was explained to me as made on the basis that Lorraine seemed the teacher most likely

to still be working in the younger children's area of the centre for the duration of the study. As it turned out, this arrangement was not totally satisfactory because Lorraine's working hours often meant that she missed the arrival and/or departure times for Robert and, as she said at our first interview, this meant that she was not always able to provide feedback to the parent/s on Robert's day. Lorraine also added that although she herself had not been able to provide much information to Robert's parents, the other staff would have done so because that was how it worked with the other children (CS5.TIS1.10.8). My data shows that Lorraine's expectation about her colleagues was not in fact borne out by events and this highlighted for me a reflection I also made during Maddi's case study: When the boundaries of responsibility are not clearly defined, there is a great deal of scope for role ambiguity and breakdown in ideal practices. I revisit this theme in the discussion of the teachers' stories (see section 7.5.2.3).

5.4.4 Summary of section

In reviewing the five mothers' stories of the measure of trust they developed in their child's teacher/s, a number of reflections seem pertinent. Firstly, all the mothers made positive comments about the teachers. Secondly, in analysing the mothers' positive comments about the teachers, what became clear was that these comments did not have the same meaning in different case studies. Two women's stories, Jean's and Deborah's, indicated that their positive comments reflected satisfaction with, and appreciation for, the support they received from the teachers. Both mothers also appreciated the respect which teachers showed for the mothers' preferred ways of doing things and they also expressed substantial appreciation for the information-sharing and feedback of a substantive nature, which the teachers gave about their child. In the other three stories, however, the trust established by the mothers in the teachers was either ambivalent, as in Helen's case, or what I have called "hopeful trust" or "blind trust", that is trust based on very little evidence to sustain it. In Helen's case, the ambivalence was based in her perception of how the structural elements of the teachers' job, such as the low teacher-child ratios, and the "busyness" of the centres, made it difficult for the teachers to provide the "best care" that she herself was capable of offering.

In the case of Lyn and Paula their "hopeful trust" relied either on perceptions of the teachers' professionalism as perceived on the basis of past employment history and lack of chaos in the centre, or on past knowledge of the centre and friendship connections. In both the latter cases there was also a noticeable lack of feedback given to parents as well as the lack of a single consistently available person to talk to about the child; this appeared to hinder the development of a clear trusting relationship which Daniel (1998) has argued is the most important factor in parents' considerations about childcare arrangements. Helen's story also had clear statements about the strategies which she experienced as helpful, including the encouragement of the teachers to ring and/or come back to check that Maddi was fine, the suggestion to pack a familiar object from home in Maddi's bag, the teachers' guidance about how to handle leave-taking and Sam's empathic conversation with her about the difficulty of saying goodbye.

The perception that structural issues such as the ratio of adults to children, the lack of a clearly identified person with whom to regularly communicate about one's child, and the lack of a centre guidebook also emerged in three of the women's stories as factors which detracted from their ability to be totally satisfied about their childcare experience.

In the next section I discuss a related theme to the one of trusting relationships between parents and teachers: the parents' efforts to work out the rules of the game and learn to "fit in" within the new environment of a childcare centre.

5.5 Working out the rules of the game/Learning to fit in

5.5.1 Awareness of rules/need to "fit in"

Like any other social context, a childcare centre has its own set of rules and routines that structure the way it operates and keep intact the fabric of activities within it. The mothers' stories of their experiences in their child's childcare centre indicated that they were aware that rules and routines existed and much of their behaviour in the centres, particularly during their orientation visits with their child, appeared to be driven by the need to discover/uncover these rules. In some

cases, the mothers were quite explicit that 'discovering the rules' was part of their agenda during orientation visits. For instance, Jean said that while she was in the centre she "tried to pick up on a few things and fit in and be as helpful as possible to the staff" (CS1.PISI.6.6). Putting the responsibility for uncovering the rules on the teachers, Helen explained in her first interview that while she was settling-in her daughter Maddi, she had expected the staff to give her an idea of "the rules in place for my child" (CS2.PIS1.7.9). Similarly, Deborah articulated her awareness that the centre had its own culture and routines when she responded to a question about her expectations from the staff during her child's settling-in period by saying that she expected the teachers to:

fill me in on what happened – for example when I should pick her up and when they thought it was good for me to go ... and just general administrative details; to fill me in on this – which they did.

(CS3.PIS1.7)

These comments also indicate that to some degree, these mothers experienced their presence in the centre as a process of working out the rules and/or learning to "fit in".

5.5.2 What happens here? Expectations and experiences

In the mothers' stories it became clear that the mothers had general expectations about what would happen in the centres as part of the settling-in process. These expectations inevitably centred on the teachers' behaviour towards their child; while some of the expectations were realised, others had to be modified or new understandings formed about what would happen. For example, many of Jean's expectations about the settling-in process for Nina were realised:

I was not at all disappointed. I expected that they would give Nina time and attention, that someone would be there to welcome her – at least one person to befriend her and comfort her; just one person who would make themselves available to comfort her, who knew where her baby things – nappy and bottle – were, who knew her patterns and habits. I really like

that. There is a single focus ... I think it's part of the psychological make-up of a child to have a preferred person.

(CS1.PIS1.7.9-10)

Jean expressed great satisfaction with having Sarah as Nina's primary caregiver seeing her as "the kind of person I feel comfortable with" (CS1.PIS1.7.10). Jean's satisfaction with the process, however, unfolded over time rather than was present immediately; while she had been given a circular letter from the supervisor which explained the primary caregiver system she had not seen this as a systematic policy to guide settling-in. As Jean put it: "certainly it [a policy] had not been talked through with me". This does not mean that Jean saw this as a problem. She argued that it was probably a good idea that "there was no 'pattern of the average child' so it doesn't worry you if your child doesn't fit – all children are different" (CS1.PIS1.4.2b).

Helen had not received any written information about the centre's policies at all but she said that from talking with Anna, one of the teachers, she worked out that: "the idea [was] that I should bring Maddi along three or four times before leaving her and then to leave her for slightly longer periods each time after that", adding "I presume this is the policy of the centre" (CS2.PIS1.4.2b). Her expectations from the teachers were that they "would show an interest in Maddi ... to get to know her a little bit and I guess to give me an idea of the rules in place for Maddi" (CS2.PIS1.7.9). Helen would have preferred to have had a full explanation of "the rules" in place before the start of the process; she said:

there wasn't anything they said to me upfront, everything was gradually introduced. When I first started off they didn't say 'we have morning tea at such and such and we wash hands' etc. but I suppose things became apparent as we went along.

(CS2.PIS1.7.10)

In the latter aspect, Helen's experience of the process is similar to Jean's in that it unfolded as she and Maddi attended the centre rather than its being explained at the start.

Deborah's answer to whether the centre had a policy on settling-in was both yes and no, indicating that while some guidance was given, there were still things she had to work out for herself. The guidance consisted of a note in a handout which she received at enrolment: "It says in the handout that you're not supposed to leave them there till the child has settled" (CS3.PIS1.4.2b). Deborah noted that this statement was followed through by Joan who had made sure that Deborah had left her daughter for an hour or two as recommended in the centre handout; this procedure had worked well according to Deborah. Beyond this, Deborah added that she had taken her cue from what her daughter Shirley seemed to want. Deborah had not been disappointed in her expectations from the teachers which were that they would:

spend a bit of time with her during those first few days so she gets used to their faces; to fill me in on what happened and on things like when I should pick her up, when they thought it was good for me to go and just general administrative details – to fill me in on this which they did.

(CS3.PIS1.7.9)

Lyn too had expected the teachers to take an interest in her daughter Julie, to show warmth towards her and to be

willing to hold her and pick her up – they seem to do that and that pleases me. I probably expected more verbal feedback from them on how she's actually coping. I have to ask specific questions on food, sleep and things like that. I don't think you need a written record everyday especially if the child is there for a long time. Also they don't have a specific adult allocated to the child so you don't know who to focus your questions to – I would prefer that.

(CS4.PIS1.7.9)

In terms of a policy for settling-in, Lyn said that she had been given the general idea that one should start attending the centre for a few hours and increase these over a week which is what she had tried to do. Lyn also expressed the view that it might have been a good idea to have had more information about other issues involved in settling-in such as what would be an appropriate age to start group care and so on. The lack of feedback Lyn experienced at the centre appeared to weigh heavily on Lyn who was the least convinced among the mothers that the teachers knew what she expected of them.

Paula, on the other hand, appeared to have received the least information about the centre's policy on settling-in saying she had no idea at all whether the centre had one. She was also very general in her expectations from the teachers saying only that she expected them to look after Robert. Rebecca added that she did not know what to expect because she had never been to a creche before. As I argue in section 5.5.3, for Paula and Rebecca, settling-in Robert therefore became a case of making up their own rules.

5.5.3 *Knowing what the teacher expects*

A striking aspect of the women's accounts about their experiences in the centres was that while, with the exception of Paula, they all expressed some expectations about how the teachers would behave towards their child, they were all hesitant about what they thought the teachers expected of them during their child's settling-in period. This suggests that in fact none of them had received clear guidance on what was expected of them. Indeed, two of the women, Lyn and Paula, expressed exactly this view in saying:

Lyn: I don't know [what they expected]; I sort of wondered if I should have stayed longer with Julie but when I asked a few times if they were happy for me to leave, each time they said yes. I have no idea what they saw my role there as. I find I have to ask them specific questions to find out things – they don't volunteer a lot of information.

(CS4.PIS1.6.7)

Paula: I don't honestly really know – whether they wanted me to 'guard' Robert – to be more involved or not – it would have been nice to know what they expected me to do – for example, should I go to him if he grizzles?

(CS5.PIS1.6.7)

Rebecca, Robert's aunt, who accompanied Paula and Robert to many of the orientation visits, was equally in the dark about what the teachers expected of her; she said: "I didn't know what they expected so if Robert wanted me, I just did what he wanted because they didn't say not to" (CS5.PIS1.6.7), thus expressing a course of action synonymous to making up one's rules as one goes.

Clearly all three women would have preferred to have some guidance from the teachers on how they were expected to behave. Moreover, at the beginning of the process the need for guidance was a particular concern for all mothers including Jean and Deborah who were otherwise quite confident in their role. For instance, in her second journal entry, Jean wrote: "I am not quite sure how obvious I should be making my presence and will speak to Sarah about a strategy for beginning to leave Nina" (CS1.PJ.2.18-19) while Deborah wrote in her first journal entry: "I am keen to be useful – not quite sure how" (CS3.PJ.1.23-24). Helen also reported a similar thought: "I was disappointed that the information leaflet giving the rules and so on for the centre is still not ready" (CS2.PJ.4.13-14); Lyn likewise wrote in her second journal entry: "Still unsure of my role at the centre" (CS4.PJ.2.17) .

The lack of guidance from the teachers about what they expected from the mothers evoked different responses from the five women. For instance, in Lyn's case her response was to directly ask the teachers for guidance about whether she should leave, suggesting that she was unsure whether she would be in the way if she stayed. When the teachers' advice was to leave, she followed it, noting in her journal: "I am still unsure of my role at the centre, but Julie seems happy enough for me to leave her" (CS4.PJ.2.13-18). Her willingness to follow the teachers' advice can be seen as consistent with her view of the teachers as "professionals"

who “looked like they knew what they were doing”. As my fieldnotes show, she subsequently spent very little time in the centre beyond that required for the dropping-off or picking-up routine and Julie effectively attended the centre on her own from her third visit onwards.

In the case of Paula and Rebecca, their response to lack of guidance was to work out an approach to “being there” for Robert which, in analysis, can be seen as consistent with the objective Paula had of providing “security” for her son while at the same time letting him get used to the idea of being there by himself. A fuller discussion of this approach is included in section 5.5.4.

Helen, on the other hand, chafed at the situation of not having guidance and while she likewise focused on ‘being there’ for her child, she did not let go of the concern which the lack of guidance gave her about whether, in her absence, the teachers would “be there” for her child. In responding to the question of what the staff expected from her with: “very little actually. I wasn’t asked to do anything or help in any way” (CS2.PIS1.6.7), there was a definite note of disappointment and concern and a clear wish for things to have been different. As I argued in section 5.4.2, Helen remained ambivalent about her use of the centre till the end of the study.

Jean’s response was different yet again. Saying hesitantly at first that she did not know what the teachers expected of her, she then gave the question some further thought and said: “I guess [they expected] what I did, I suppose”. She laughed slightly referring to her previous comment that:

in that situation you need to try to be helpful. I tried to pick up on a few things and fit in and be as helpful as possible to the staff, they’re so busy with all the children and running on a shoestring – that helps your child as well – it’s a basic human thing.

(CS1.PIS1.6.6)

Jean added that the teachers probably expected her “to be agreeable, not to be too obvious, to be fairly invisible because the child would never adjust otherwise, to be reasonable” (CS1.PIS1.6.7). She also added that she felt absolutely happy about these expectations:

I think it's good – I mean they're exhausted – it's a busy job, there's lots of children, lots of little things to do all the time – I think you learn that with mothering, there are so many trivial little things but they all need to be done. So, if you can pick up the puzzles, it's helpful.

(CS1.PIS1.6.8)

This account of Jean's understanding of the teachers' expectations indicates that in the absence of specific guidance, she had applied herself to “working out the rules” of what was expected from her by putting herself in the teachers' shoes, helped, in her view, by her experience as a mother. The sense of identification with the teacher's role, which “being a mother” seems to have generated in Jean, is interesting to deconstruct. The most obvious interpretation is that the identification reflects the widespread view of early childhood work as akin to mothering, a relationship which has acted strongly to keep early childhood work in a position of low status as a profession and of low resourcing (e.g., May, 1990). From Jean's point of view, of course, the sense of affinity of early childhood work with mothering, was not problematic; if anything it created a sense of empathy and solidarity in her for women carrying out what to her was an essentially important role for children.

It is possible that this analysis applies also in part to Deborah's case. Of all five women, Deborah was the one who had least difficulty in expressing what she saw as teachers' expectations from her. She said:

I think they expected me to stay for those 2 to 3 times and attend to Shirley pretty much solely and not to get under their feet so to speak. But they were very helpful [to us]. That might have changed later so that Shirley could be by herself and me in the background and me to be more like a mother helper. I assumed that. Anyway I felt it was a really good

experience for me to be there before I did a 'mother-help' duty. In fact last Thursday it was almost quite handy that I was there because the reliever who was there wasn't really sure of the routines.

(CS3.PIS1.6.7)

In this account there is evidence that some of the teachers' expectations had to be worked out by Deborah or "assumed" rather than them having become clear through being explicitly explained. In addition, being in the centre with Shirley was seen by Deborah as a good experience before she had to do a mother help duty suggesting that some "working out of the rules" had indeed occurred in that time. However, it is also clear that Deborah had no real difficulty in doing the "working out". It could be that this facility derived to some degree from an affinity which Deborah already had with the role of the early childhood teacher. This interpretation can also be strengthened by a statement which Deborah made in another part of the first interview which shows that she felt attracted to the role of the early childhood teacher: "it'd be quite nice to work in one of those [small] centres I reckon" (CS3.PIS1.6.6). In addition, it can be argued that choosing a parent co-operative centre is a choice for involvement in the early education of one's child to the extent that one is expected to act as "parent-help" alongside the teachers. Alternatively, it is possible, of course, that a strong reason for the ease with which Deborah worked out the rules of the game was the fact that when Deborah first went to the centre with Shirley, Shirley's teacher, Joan, had spent a considerable period of time clarifying how the centre operated including routines like sleep-time, morning tea and lunch arrangements, and how systems like toilet-training and parent-help, booking of sessions and the centre cleaning roster, worked. In a parent co-operative centre, this type of communication is probably more obviously a necessary part of the process of enrolling a new parent and child than in centres which operate under a different structure.

5.5.4 *Knowing what one's role is: "being there" for the child*

Despite the differences in the ways the mothers responded to the uncertainty about what the teachers expected them to *do* in the centre, none of the mothers were uncertain about what they should *be* for their children. The mothers' accounts of their role in the centre while their child was "settling-in" were all very clear: They saw this as providing "security" and "support" in a situation of transition. Lyn explained her presence in the orientation visits as being: "a comforter to Julie if she felt insecure" (CS4.PJ.1.23-24); in the first interview Lyn added: "I saw my role ... to make Julie feel that she wasn't just being dumped there – to keep reassuring her that it was alright for her to be there – that's the main thing" (CS4.PIS1.6.6). Similarly, Paula described her role in relation to her son Robert as being there:

only as security; I didn't want to be involved in what he did except when he asked me, because I wanted him to get used to it by himself. I wanted to stand back ... so he doesn't get used to me being there, to 'going to creche with mum'.

(CS5.PIS1.6.6)

Rebecca, Robert's aunt, described her view of her role as being similar to Paula's and added: "I wanted to reassure him that I'm there if he needs me" (CS5.PIS1.6.6).

Likewise, Helen, Jean and Deborah explained their role as providing "support" and a "security" base for their children in the following way:

Helen: My role was to familiarise Maddi with people and activities a little; to give her an idea of possibilities about what she could do and to give her happy memories of being there so she would remember it as a good place to go and a fun place to be.

(CS2.PIS1.6.6)

Jean: [I was] obviously there for support for Nina in making that transition. The fact that I felt and looked comfortable and relaxed, talked to other people ... children pick up on that.

(CS1.PIS1.6.6)

Deborah: my role was initially to keep Shirley relatively happy – then I thought I'd be more useful doing dishes, trying to prevent children falling off things, putting bits and pieces away.

(CS3.PIS1.6.6)

There are strong influences from both psychological and social discourses in the accounts presented above of how the mothers saw their role in relation to their child's settling-in. For instance, all the statements (uncritically) used the notion of mother as source of "security"; a notion popularised by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth and often used, as Singer (1992) and Burman (1994) have shown, in arguments against the use of childcare because of the perception that group childcare can disrupt the emotional bond with the mother on which hinges the smooth development of later emotional security and well-being (e.g., Belsky, 1984). Clearly, these mothers did not see the use of childcare *per se* as threatening their child's security, but merely that their presence was necessary to ensure the children had a known reference point within an unknown environment. In this it is possible to see that there was a transformation in the use made by these mothers of the original psychological concept, perhaps because this was the only way they could realistically reconcile their modern-day reality of needing to use non-familial care, with the ideal of motherhood recommended by Bowlby. Bowlby's view of proper mothering was that it must eschew all ideas of work or career. Women who use childcare were, in Bowlby's view, "extreme feminists who take the line 'I can have children, I needn't look after them, I'm going to go ahead with my career and I'm damned if I'm going to be handicapped by looking after them'" (Bowlby, J., Figlio, K. & Young, R., 1986, p. 51, cited in Burman, 1994, p. 82).

Nonetheless, despite the apparent transformation of this concept by the mothers, in Lyn's statement that she did not want Julie to feel she was being "dumped there" it is possible to catch the residue of the influence of traditional societal perceptions of childcare services being "dumping" grounds "serving the needs of selfish mothers and probably damaging to the child" (May, 1990, p. 100).

A further aspect of these mothers' accounts of their role, which connects up to psychological accounts of children's development, was the mothers' view that their presence acted as a kind of bridge between the known and the unknown which, in Paula's case was welcomed as bringing, for instance, autonomy or independence, a notion popularised by Erikson (1950/1974) which has become another stalwart goal of Western psychological thinking (see for example Burman, 1994). The notion of the mother acting as "bridge" is also embedded in the socio-historical developmental tradition associated with Lev Vygotsky, a tradition in which the role of the adult is seen to be that of the more knowledgeable other who inducts the less expert or "novice" into more sophisticated ways of knowing and being (e.g., Rogoff, 1990; Valsiner & Hill, 1989; Winegar, 1989). Carried forward on this notion, as well as on the notion of "providing a secure base" or reassurance, is the idea that some continuity between contexts might help the transition, an idea that also has a place in ecological theories of development (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In section 5.6, I explore further this intuitive explanation by the mothers of their presence in the centre.

5.5.5 *Summary of section*

In reviewing this section, a number of points emerge as important. Firstly, mothers showed an awareness that the childcare centre operated by rules which they needed to discover. Secondly, the mothers did not feel that they had received clear guidance from the teachers about the "rules and routines" of the centre or about what the teachers' expectations were from the mothers during the settling-in process. In the mothers' view, the rules and routine unfolded as they went through the process. Thirdly, the mothers would have preferred to receive some guidance especially at the very start of the process before they had had time to "work out

the rules” for themselves. Fourthly, the lack of guidance produced some uncertainty in the mothers in terms of how they were supposed to behave in the centres; the mothers responded to this uncertainty in different ways. Fifthly, the uncertainty of the mothers about what to do in the centres during the settling-in time did not extend to what the mothers felt they should provide for their child by being present, in other words, the mothers all saw their role as one which provided “support” and “security”. Some of the concepts used by the mothers to explain their support and security role can be seen to be connected to concepts within dominant psychological and social discourses about mothers and motherhood.

5.6 “Being there” during the child’s settling-in

In this section, I first explore what mothers understood the “settling-in” experience to involve for their child and, following that, what “being there” meant for the mothers in terms of their actions in the centre. The first part of this exercise is based on data from the parent interviews and journals; the latter part is primarily based on data from my field observations.

5.6.1 Intuitive theories of settling-in: Starting and end points

In talking about going through the experience of settling-in with their child, the mothers all appeared to have started the process with an intuitive theory about what settling-in would involve for their child; as they went through the orientation visits with their children, these theories became elaborated as the mothers constructed meaning out of their child’s responses to the situation.

The starting point of the mothers’ theories was always that “settling-in” into a childcare centre meant that their child would face a number of new experiences. These new experiences were seen either as related to the emotional event of separating from them and to the establishment of new relationships with the people in the new environment, or as tied to the routines and activities associated with being in a new physical setting; often the new experiences were related to both.

In talking about her daughter's need to get used to being apart from her, Jean said:

For Nina, it [starting childcare] meant building up confidence with Sarah, developing trust. She is the type of girl who loves to be with other children, for her that's easy; she has a lot of contact with children. For her, it was just trusting that I'll come back, trusting the other staff there ... me not being there, that's the main thing.

(CS1.PIS1.5.5)

Needing to "develop trust" was a major theme in Jean's view of the challenge which settling-in would pose for Nina, a theme which also ran through Jean's own story of her relationship with Sarah. This theme remained constant even at the end of the case study when, looking back on the experience and deciding that Nina was really settled now, Jean explained this as:

She's developed trust in other adults as well as in me generally. She held out and didn't want to acknowledge that at first but once she overcame her fear she accepted it. She had to become accustomed to it too ... I think it's the consistency of the place that did it – I now know some of the other workers too and I've developed a lot of respect for them as well as Sarah. They're quite a warm lot of people. Initially I only referred to Sarah because she was the one I spoke to most. They are quite a warm group of people.

(CS1.PIS2.2.3b)

At the end of the case study Jean felt that Nina was very happy to be at the centre even if other adults beside Sarah looked after her; and that Nina was also quite happy with other people outside of creche. Jean said that Nina no longer cried when Jean was not in the centre and could even see her off with a smile. Jean saw these as clear indicators that Nina was now fully settled and comfortable in the centre.

Paula likewise saw the issue of settling-in as one of Robert developing trust, and only to a lesser extent, as needing to get used to new routines. She said:

He needs to get used to other people – staff – adults. Adults are authority figures. The eating routine is new for him; he is now sitting at a table – we still use a highchair here [at home]. You noticed the first couple of times he pulled the highchair over. Everything else he does here – he gets all the outdoor things here.

(CS5.PIS1.5.5)

The importance of ‘developing trust’ as a challenge for Robert was clearly the most salient in Paula’s view of Robert’s experience because at the end of the study it was in these terms that she described that he had settled: “He knows those people; he’s developed a sense of trust in those people” (CS5.PIS2.3.3b).

In Helen’s story, settling-in was constructed as a challenge that involved:

having older children around; that is definitely new for her and she wouldn’t be used to that number of children. We go to a couple of groups but there are probably only about eight children at any one time and they’re all quite close in age. She’s not used to sharing either. She’s used to getting a 100% attention.

(CS2.PIS1.5.5)

The number of children at the centre, and the effect she felt this had on Maddi, featured prominently in Helen’s journal entries about her perceptions of Maddi’s day. Her journal descriptions of Maddi throughout the case study contained phrases such as:

“Maddi seemed overwhelmed, even after we’d been there an hour, Maddi didn’t want to be ‘crowded’ or too close to too many children”.

(CS2.PJ.1.1-3)

“She seemed less concerned with other children coming too close”

(CS2.PJ.2.2-3)

“I thought she was crowded and didn’t like it much”.

(CS2.PJ.4.11-12)

“she wasn’t happy to have other children close”.

(CS2.PJ.8.2-3)

Within this view of what settling-in meant for Maddi, and Helen’s perception, mentioned earlier, that the teachers were “overloaded” with little ones who needed attention, Helen’s hesitation at leaving Maddi on her own at the centre gains more meaning. At the end of the case study, Helen expressed the opinion that Maddi had “settled” in a guarded way, using the expression “She’s fine at the moment” (CS2.PIS2.2.1) as though she would not have been surprised at all if things were to change. She then added: “she still cries when you leave her; they say it lasts about 5 minutes. I’m pretty happy leaving her there now. I’d prefer it if she didn’t cry at all when I left though” (CS2.PIS2.2.2).

Helen’s understanding of what had helped Maddi settle included the fact that she had continued to go to the centre on a regular basis and also the fact that by the end of the case study Maddi was a little older.

Getting used to the number of children and adults to relate to was also part of the way Lyn saw the challenge of starting childcare for Julie. Lyn additionally saw starting childcare as being a physically tiring experience which her daughter needed to get used to. At the end of the case study Lyn felt that gaining familiarity with the individual teachers had been a big part of Julie’s settling-in experience. Lyn felt that Julie interacted more happily with the staff and the other children and did not seem in a great hurry to leave the centre at the end of the session; this made her feel that Julie was very settled in her centre.

Deborah also mentioned the number of children in the centre as an aspect of what settling-in involved for Shirley. However, she put most emphasis on the new

routines that Shirley had to get used to as salient features of the settling-in experience:

having snacks sitting at a table – that’s new, here [at home] she eats in a highchair. The sandpit’s new for her and so are the paints, but she loved that ... the steps in the place too are new ... going up is no problem but going down is a bit frightening. Getting used to going right till 1.00pm without a sleep. She seemed to really cope with no direct involvement from an adult – it will be interesting to see how she’ll cope because here [at home] she likes me to be involved.

(CS3.PIS1.5.5)

The awareness of new routines is noticeable also in Deborah’s journal entries which provided a detailed record of Shirley’s response to centre routines which occurred at arrival and departure as well as during the sessions for which Deborah was present. For instance, she reported on the difficulty Shirley had during the first session with having her morning tea sitting down at a low table as opposed to a highchair; in her second journal entry, Deborah mentioned that Shirley was “happy to wash her hands for morning tea” whereas at home she usually had her hands wiped on a flannel; about half way through the settling-in process, Deborah reported on Shirley’s participation in the routine of taking her hat and coat off and showing her Teddy round to everyone and later still how she put her lunch box on the lunch box trolley with Deborah’s help and, eventually, handled all this by herself. In commenting on what had helped Shirley ‘settle-in’, Deborah said that many factors had been involved which she could not prioritise but they included the fact that she had stayed with Shirley for a few of the visits and the fact that:

Shirley is quite a friendly little child; she has fear of strangers but is very friendly and likes people. The teachers look after her when she arrives; they notice she is there and welcome her. Maybe because she’s only there for a morning, that also helps; sleeping at the centre might have been a problem – she’s not very good at sleeping in a different bed.

(CS3.PIS2.3.3b)

In the above exploration of the mothers' views of their child's settling-in, it is clear that their initial construction of this experience was that settling-in was a process that involved one or more of the following challenges: The building of trust by the child in the teacher, becoming accustomed to having more adults and children around, being with older children and learning new routines. At the end of the study, these aspects remained strong features of the way settling-in was understood because they also featured in the mothers' accounts of what had helped their child settle-in.

In the next part of this section, I explore how the mothers' intuitive theories about what settling-in would involve for their children became elaborated as the mothers observed their child's responses to the situation and created new understandings from the dynamics they observed during the process.

5.6.2 Elaborations of theories

The journal entries made by the mothers, and to a lesser extent, my fieldnotes and the interview data, provide clear indications of which aspects of the situational dynamics most strongly affected the mothers' intuitive theories.

5.6.2.1 What hinders settling-in

It is clear, for instance, that the children's behaviour at arrival and departure from the centre greatly influenced all the mothers' understanding of how 'settled' the child was and how successful the sessions were. For instance, in Jean's story of the first four orientation visits, the key terms she used to describe Nina's stance on arrival at the centre were "delighted", "happy" and "relaxed". In the fourth journal entry Jean noted that to start off with, Nina had been a little reserved that day and she put this down to:

She had been ill in the past week and generally been very clingy over this time so I imagine it was a combination of this and the memory of being left last week. She soon settled in however and was happily playing within

10 minutes...when I returned she was very happy though relieved to see me.

(CS1.PJ.4.5-9;13-15)

It is interesting to note the construction of meaning by Jean about the “reserve” which Nina showed at the start of the session; the attribution of the reserve to the previous week’s ill health was quite common not only in Jean’s story but also in those of the other mothers. On another occasion when Jean was recalled to the centre early to pick up Nina, Jean wrote: “because she wasn’t all that well she didn’t cope with the morning very well and dissolved into tears until the staff called me to collect her earlier” (CS1.PJ.6).

Jean also noted on this day that Nina had looked “tired and fragile” in the morning but since she had already missed her session the previous week because of tonsillitis, Jean had been concerned that Nina should not have too long a break from the centre and thus she had taken Nina to the centre as planned.

The idea that long breaks in attendance might hinder settling-in also appeared in the settling-in theory of another mother whose child’s settling-in was interrupted by ill health and holiday breaks. Looking back at the process of settling-in at the end of the case study, Helen wrote: “I feel much happier after today’s session. Perhaps the interruption of the holidays [a total of 4 weeks] put us back further than I’d realised” (CS2.PJ.17).

Helen’s and Lyn’s theories about settling-in both included the notion of ill health as an unhelpful factor; for instance, Helen hypothesised after an “unhappy” session: “she developed a fever that night so may have been coming down with a sore throat then” (CS2.PJ.12.5-6) and Lyn wrote: “[she was] initially very grizzly and clingy and screamed when workers came near her to prise her off me. But she was a bit feverish and unwell” (CS4.PJ.5.10-12). In Helen’s case, and also in Deborah’s, having a bad night’s sleep also featured as a possible explanation for “unsettled” behaviour such as difficulty with leave-taking and feeling

“overwhelmed by the new space”(CS3.PJ.2) and “she wasn’t as happy as she had been the previous time. This may have been due to a bad night’s sleep” (CS2.PJ.14.2-4). On one occasion, Deborah recorded quite a detailed reflection on what for Shirley was an unusual reaction to arrival:

Shirley was keen to get inside, but once inside she seemed confused and cried for ‘mamma’. Took a bit of time to settle I was able to interest her in painting and puzzles but really [she was] quite clingy still ... I was surprised at her reaction upon arrival, but I think she may have forgotten it a bit – [it’s] 5 days since last time [we visited], quite a busy weekend and having been sick may have put it out of her mind? Didn’t eat much but if she is teething may be partly that.

CS3.PJ.5.1-5; 23-28)

5.6.2.2 What helps settling-in

Just as the mothers developed hypotheses about what hindered the settling-in process, so they also developed ideas about what helped this process. The recognition of familiar objects in the new centre environment was one such idea. Jean, for instance, noted that Nina looked happier when “she seemed to recognise the children of a friend” (CS1.PJ.7.4-5) and she earlier noted that Nina “loved the music” at the centre because she was generally quite musical. Helen noted that Maddi “went for several books she has at home as well as a telephone, ... things we have at home” (CS2.PJ.2.3-4), clearly showing that she believed that continuity between the home and the early childhood environment was helpful. The potential of familiar objects from home to help children settle was also highlighted for Helen when the teachers in her daughter’s centre suggested to her that she pack a favourite toy in Maddi’s bag in case she needed comforting. In Deborah’s case, she noted on a number of occasions that Shirley used her Teddy as a companion and her comments about Teddy indicate that Deborah herself gauged Shirley’s mood from the way Shirley used Teddy:

“Shirley was quite happy upon arrival – she seemed to know the place, smiling, showing Teddy to people, sort of saying hello to people”.

(CS3.PJ.6.1-3)

“Shirley seemed quite happy on arrival although was keen to have Teddy”.

(CS3.PJ.8.2-4)

“Quite happy to go in by herself and take hat and coat off. Said hello to some people ... Teddy got put in bag virtually straight away”.

(CS3.PJ.14.1-2;7)

At times, the novelty of activities was commented on in a way which suggests that the mothers saw these as also potentially helping children to settle. For instance, Lyn commented that Julie

got excited in the area outside the centre – she saw the balls, trolleys and swings and wanted to play ... she joined the other children in the sandpit [she’d never been in one before] and happily dug away. She had great fun outside.

(CS4.PJ.1.3-4;13-15)

5.6.2.3 Reflecting on one’s actions

Another type of comment which was also present in the mothers’ journals were self-reflective ones which showed the mothers attempting to integrate their observations into their developing views about the settling-in process. Some of these comments have already been discussed in section 5.3 where I argued that the mothers’ worries and concerns led them to reflect on, and even question, whether they had made the right decision in using childcare. Other reflective comments served not so much to question the decision but more to monitor the mother’s behaviour or to arrive at a clearer statement of what one’s role should be. For instance, when Jean wrote in her journal that Nina had had a small accident which Sarah, the teacher, responded to until Jean arrived and “took over”, Jean added the comment “probably I should have stayed back and let Sarah resolve it” (CS1.PJ.2.11-13). Helen, likewise reflected that “leaving quickly seems to have reduced this [leave-taking] anxiety” (CS2.PJ.17) and on another

occasion she wondered if the way she had handled Maddi's learning to use the slide had affected her response to it.

5.6.2.4 Indicators of being 'settled'

I have argued above that throughout the time the mothers were at the centre, they were actively involved in interpreting the child's behaviour. Without a doubt, this is what people habitually do in the interest of normal interaction with each other. Equally clearly, in adults' interaction with infants or very young children, the requirement of adult interpretation is more obvious (e.g., Stern, 1985). From the specific point of view of trying to understand how mothers constructed their understanding of the settling-in experience, it is useful to now extend the exploration I have begun of these interpretations to a consideration of what the mothers constructed as indicators of "being settled".

While, during the final interviews, the mothers were able to identify some of the behaviours they had observed in their children as indicating that they were settled, these interview accounts appear quite "pared down" in comparison to the behaviours the mothers additionally attended to and commented about in their journal as possible indicators of increasing comfort, or a higher degree of being settled. In the interviews, the mothers said things like:

- she doesn't cry when I leave
- she is able to be comforted by other adults than just her primary caregiver
- she is able to be with other adults than myself even outside of the centre
- she talks about her teacher
- she sings some songs she learnt at the centre
- she doesn't mind when I leave
- she still cries when I leave but is happier to interact with the staff and the other children
- she is not in a great hurry to get away
- this morning he actually ran to the door
- he was very happy when we visited the centre in the evening for a fund raising event

In the journal records, the mothers commented on the indicators which they reported in their interviews but they also attended to other behaviours such as:

- signs of recognition of the centre adults and of the children in the centre
- signs of recognition of centre equipment
- behaviour at reunion
- interest in centre activity areas
- response to adverse happenings such as minor accidents like tripping over
- response to interactional approaches made by peers
- facility with routines surrounding different activities or events, such as handwashing, wearing apron before painting and sitting down for a snack
- whether the child walked in or wanted to be carried
- whether the child greeted others on arrival
- specific mood of the child
- response to being in a group situation
- response to peers' assertive or aggressive behaviour
- distance child kept from the mother; whether the child explored on her own or not
- signs of remembering the centre

It is clear that the mothers were engaging in theory-building about their child's experience; they asked what hindered, what helped, could something have been done differently? I have argued that in seeking answers to these questions they used the behavioural and interactional cues present in the centre environment and thus arrived at more elaborate understandings of the process of settling-in than those they had at the start of the process.

In the next part of this section, I argue that the constructions/understandings of "settling-in" which the mothers had were used by them to translate their role of "being there" for the children into specific action/behaviour during their presence in the centre.

5.6.3 Constructing the meaning of 'being there'

In section 5.5.4, I argued that the analysis of what mothers said about how they saw their role in the centre indicated that they had an intuitive theory that their role during the settling-in period was "to be there for the child" and to act as a bridge from the known to the unknown. My observational fieldnotes and video records of the mothers' presence in the centres during the orientation visits provided evidence that mothers often engaged in specific activities which appeared to be aimed at precisely the outcome of increasing the familiarity of the childcare setting for the child. Thus, for instance, all mothers started out their experience of being in the centre by staying very close to their children and leading them or accompanying them to areas of the centre which appeared to them to possibly hold some interest for their child. Often the choice of a particular area was either based on an interest the child may have shown through, for instance, a purposeful tug in its direction or an intense visual contact with the area, or else through the mother's recognition of an object that might be familiar to the child. New routines, such as putting on an apron before painting and washing one's hands before having morning tea, were usually carried out for the first few times with the assistance of the mother and only later through the help of a centre adult, or by the child alone. Indeed it is easy to apply as I do in chapter 9, an expert-novice analysis, such as that proposed by Rogoff (1990) and Rogoff et al. (1993) in the construct of "guided participation", to the behaviour which mothers engaged in with their children while at the centre. For the moment, however, I want to focus on how, in enacting behaviour of this nature, the mothers were engaged in teaching their children to "fit in" on the basis of their concept of what "settling-in" involved and what they perceived their role to be in this process. To illustrate this point I present evidence from one case study which shows how one mother, Paula, enacted her intuitive theory of her role in the centre during Robert's settling-in experience; using only one case study enables the presentation of how this behaviour was enacted over time.

5.6.3.1 Paula teaches trust in centre adults and independence from mum

Paula expressed her view of Robert's settling-in experience as one in which Robert had to develop trust in the centre adults; she saw her role in the centre as one in which she would provide "security" for Robert but she did not want him to think that she would always be present at the centre with him. Paula and Rebecca accompanied Robert on four orientation visits. The following extracts from my case description of the orientation visits present my story of how the two women behaved during their visits.

Extract from case description account of first orientation visit:

Robert arrived for his first two-hour orientation visit at 10.00am accompanied by his mother Paula and aunt Rebecca. The adults almost immediately sat down on a bench underneath the windows which overlooked the outside play area; they used this location as their base, remaining primarily in the background and responding to Robert when he initiated contact with them. From time to time Paula offered different pieces of information about Robert to each of the four teachers on duty. For instance, Paula told Lorraine [Teacher 1] that latterly Robert had been pulling mashed potato apart at home (10.56am) and that he was treating the dough set out on one of the tables in the same way; later she told Jessie (another teacher) that she had been talking to Robert about creche in the days leading up to the visits to prepare him for the experience (11.10am) and a few minutes later she commented to Lorraine again that Robert had been born a few weeks early so she was trying to see if this was noticeable when he was amongst a group of peers. Instances of direct action with Robert included Aunt Rebecca going over to Robert while he was on the indoor slide to help him jump down onto the bean bag below (10.21am), Paula showing Robert how to use the shakers from the musical corner (10.36am), Rebecca suggesting that Robert might like to do some painting and taking him over to the painting easel (10.47am); mum reinforcing the teacher's suggestion that he might like to do a painting (10.50am); Rebecca responding to Robert's gleeful call when he discovered a ride-on

caterpillar by going up to him and encouraging him to jump up and down on it (10.55am); Paula reinforcing the rule that he was not to walk onto the flowerbeds in the garden (11.04am) and Paula pointing out to Robert that the trampoline in the garden was like theirs at home (11.16am).

(CS5.CD.7)

Extract from case description account of second orientation visit:

As in the first visit, in the second orientation visit Paula (Rebecca not here today) kept very much in the background and only interacted with Robert when he made a direct call on her attention. In this session this happened on only a few occasions, for instance when she responded to Robert's comment that it was cold (12.15pm). Most of Paula's contributions today were primarily to reinforce the messages that the teachers were giving about the rules that governed activities within the centre. For example: Paula reminded Robert to put his apron on before painting (11.51am); Paula supported the centre's rule about putting the apron on and putting the paintbrush back in the pot when not in use (11.58am; 12.05pm).

(CS5.CD.8)

Extract from case description account of third orientation visit:

For the third orientation visit Robert was accompanied by his aunt Rebecca (Paula was unable to attend). Rebecca's behaviour during this session followed the pattern set previously by Paula, that is a pattern of remaining in the background and only interacting with Robert when he made a direct call on her for help, which in this session happened only on a couple of occasions. The journal entry for this session, which Paula informed me she had filled in at Rebecca's dictation, said that Robert appeared "to be feeling a little more comfortable at creche, starting to relate 'going to creche' as being 'kids there', 'painting' and 'yum' (Robert making action of offering food)" (CS5.PJ.3). They also added that Robert was "still clingy", an observation which perhaps referred to the few occasions when Robert sought to be with Rebecca.

(CS5.CD.9)

Extract from case description account of fourth orientation visit:

What was noticeable today was that Paula took a much more clearly distanced position away from Robert as if trying to discourage him from relying on her for assistance and redirecting his demands for her attention towards the teacher. For example, she refused to comply with Robert's request that she go with him to the outside play area (10.17am) and told him instead that he had to wait to go with the other children. When all the children were sunblocked and had hats on and the doors were opened to the outside play area, Robert again approached Paula calling "mama, mama", and indicating he wanted to go outside with her; this time Paula encouraged him to go out on his own (10.26am). Robert did not seem keen on this idea and wandered off around the inside area until he approached Paula again as she was putting some enrolment forms from the centre into Robert's bag. At this point Paula started telling Robert that he was going to be at the centre on his own soon. Robert made no obvious response to this but for the rest of the session he seemed preoccupied as if he was aware that things were going to change soon. It was not immediately clear to the teachers, I feel, what Paula's reasoning behind her 'hands off' approach was, because when Robert did cry for mum, one or the other teacher would direct him, or take him, to Paula (e.g., 11.04am). When this latter incident occurred Paula explained her approach to the teacher who was nearby and to myself saying that she was trying to keep away from Robert today. I realised later (at the first interview) that this behaviour was in line with how Paula saw her role at the centre; however, to the observer her behaviour might well have looked like unresponsive parental behaviour, an evaluation which I have to admit even I found myself considering at times until the interview.

(CS5.CD.9-10)

When these accounts are considered alongside Paula's view of the settling-in experience and of her role in this, it would seem that Paula's behaviour in the

centre was systematically intended to advance her goal of encouraging trust in the teachers and independence from herself. At the start, she appeared to focus on giving the teachers information which would help them interpret Robert's behaviour; at the same time she and Rebecca acted as Robert's guide showing him how to use some of the materials in the centre, a move designed to familiarise Robert with these as well as make him independent in his use of them. At other times the two women reinforced the teachers' messages about the behaviour they expected and later they re-directed the approaches Robert made to them onwards to the teacher, attempting in this way to convey to Robert that it was the centre adults he must now 'trust' and approach for assistance.

5.6.4. *Summary of section*

This section has presented evidence which shows that the mothers in this study engaged in theory-building about what the experience of starting childcare entailed for their child. Central to the theories they built was the notion that the period of settling-in was marked by new experiences which involved "developing trust" in the centre adults, learning to get on with other children and adjusting to new routines. As the mothers went through the experience of starting childcare alongside their children, these notions were elaborated to include ideas about what helped and hindered this process and ideas about the mothers' own role in the process. The phrase "being there for the child" captures the ideas which mothers had about their role which was also described in terms of providing "security" and "support" in a situation of transition. In the final part of the section I also argued that while the mothers were present at the centre, they often engaged in behaviour which seemed aimed at helping the children bridge the gap from the known to the unknown; this argument was illustrated with evidence from my fieldnotes and case descriptions, and thus also represents my story of what was occurring during this period of starting childcare.

5.7 Chapter Overview: Some deconstructivist reflections

In this chapter the lived reality of starting childcare for the five mothers in this study has emerged as an experience characterised by complicated emotions

involving the balancing of a range of feelings including the anticipation of developmental benefits for the child, feelings of apprehension about the new and little known experience of childcare, "guilt" and ambivalence about whether they were doing the right thing, worries about the young age of the child and about health and safety issues and a fear of losing their place in the child's life. I have argued that the mothers' feelings reflected the influence of dominant discourse about ideal motherhood (e.g., Daniel, 1998; McCartney & Phillips, 1988) and that through the expression of their feelings some of the mothers appeared to be negotiating their position on the dilemma of 'ideal motherhood versus childcare'.

The mothers' emotional vulnerability emerged also in the statements they made about the teachers and about the relationships which developed between them. I have argued that for the mothers, the central issue in these relationships was the development of trust and while all the mothers made positive comments about the teachers, it was clear that these comments meant different things in terms of the sense of trust which emerged in each relationship. Some strategies were identified by the mothers as having helped them feel supported and listened to by the teachers, including regular feedback and information sharing and respect for the way they liked to do things with their child; being able to ring the centre to check how one's child was doing; and the recommendation by the teachers to take a familiar object from home. On the other hand, the absence of substantive feedback and structural issues such as not having one person to regularly speak to about one's child, or the perception that there were not enough adults for the number of children, were experienced as unhelpful by three of the mothers.

The "lived reality" of the mothers' experience of starting childcare also included the awareness that the centres had implicit rules and routines which they needed to discover. All the mothers felt that they had not received guidance from the teachers about what the 'rules' and 'routines' were and they expressed the view that it would have been helpful to have had guidance on this at the start of the process. In their view their knowledge of the 'rules' and 'routines' developed incrementally throughout the process of settling-in. The mothers expressed

uncertainty about what the teachers expected of them while they were in the centre but they were all very clear that their role in relation to their child was to "be there" to provide "security" and "support".

This chapter has argued that mothers started the process of settling-in their child with the intuitive theory that the event of starting childcare would entail new experiences for their child involving separation from them, the "developing of trust" in adults other than themselves, getting on with other children, and adjusting to new routines and activities in the centre environment. I have argued that once the process got underway, the mothers' ideas became elaborated to include notions about what hindered and what helped as well as ideas about their own contribution to the process. Additionally, I have argued that the mothers constructed the meaning of "being there" as involving acting as a bridge from the known to the unknown and that my fieldwork records indicated that they operated in ways which appeared to induct the child into ways of doing things at the centre which they would not have been familiar with at home. Finally, I have also argued that the concepts used by the mothers to express their perception of their role are connected to dominant psychological and social discourses about mothers and motherhood suggesting perhaps that these mothers' stories are truly part of the great stories that psychology constructs for and with our culture (e.g., Mair, 1988).

In the following chapter I review literature which throws light on how early childhood teachers might experience the event of starting childcare.

Chapter 6

Research on early childhood teachers' experiences during settling-in

Just as I was unable to locate research-based studies which dealt solely with parents' stories of settling their children into childcare, so also I was unable to locate any studies which dealt solely with the teachers' experiences, or stories, of this event. Most of the references to how this event might feature in the lives of teachers occurred in writings aimed at a practitioner or teacher trainee audience where the event was highlighted as a significant task among the early childhood teacher's responsibilities. The primary focus of these writings was on providing 'good practice' suggestions about how to deal with new children and their parents (e.g., Bailey, 1992; Balaban, 1985; Daniel, 1998; Galinsky, 1988; Godwin, Groves & Horm-Wingerd, 1993; Johnston & Brennan, 1997; Kleckner & Engel, 1988; Lane & Signer, 1990).

A striking departure from this approach is William Ayers' (1989) book *The Good Preschool Teacher* in which Ayers presented one of the six teacher portraits, that of Chana, structured around Chana's view that the separation of the child from the parent was "a critical issue for young children" (p. 46) in childcare. Ayers' treatment of this topic was one of the first to explore the reality of being an early childhood teacher through what he called "listen[ing] to the teacher's voice" (p. 3) and through telling their stories, an approach which has since become more widely used in studies of teachers' thinking and of teachers' professional practice more generally (e.g., Bell, 1990; Carter, 1993; Clandinin & Connelly, 1996; Goodfellow, 1997; Middleton & May, 1997; Perry et al., 1997; Silin, 1997; Spodek, 1988b). Johnston and Brennan's (1997) work also provides an insight into the lived reality of being an early childhood teacher during the process of settling-in new children.

In the first section of this chapter, I consider how this small collection of writings constructs the teacher's task of settling-in new children to the early childhood setting; Chana's narrative is then discussed together with some insights from the

work of Johnston and Brennan (1997). This is followed by an exploration of literature on the lived reality of being an early childhood teacher including research on teachers' thinking and views of their practice, and selected studies on teachers' interactions with children which illustrate how teachers act to induct children into the rules of the childcare centre.

6.1 Settling-in new children: A view from the guidebooks

The most thorough treatment I located of how early childhood teachers could handle the settling-in of new children was in Nancy Balaban's (1985) book *Starting School: From Separation to Independence, a guide for early childhood teachers*. Balaban's book was frequently referred to in other practitioner-oriented writings (e.g., Lane & Signer, 1990) as well as in other research-based writings (e.g., Powell, 1989/1994).

Writing within the North American context, Balaban used the term 'starting school' to refer to 'starting preschool'. Balaban saw this event as involving separation of the child from the parents and the attainment of independence. 'Separation' and 'independence' are both terms with a strong theoretical tradition within Western psychological thinking (e.g., see Burman, 1994). Balaban devoted a chapter to a discussion of the "meaning of separation" which she argued occurs at all times of life and is sometimes eased through ceremonies which mark the transition from one state to another, such as in debutante balls, or weddings. She saw "starting school" as another transition which, however, does not have a culturally-shared ritual to "soften it" (p. 15). Balaban added that in this transition, the aspect of "leaving home" was often a more powerful experience than "entering school", and that "parents, children and teachers are equal participants" (p. 70) in this experience.

In discussing the event of "starting school", Balaban (1985) built her argument about its developmental significance through reference to notions from John Bowlby's (1969/1978) and Mary Ainsworth's (Ainsworth, Bell & Stayton, 1974) attachment theory and concepts of separation anxiety. Talking about the

significance of separation for toddlers, she also drew on ideas from Margaret Mahler's views about the development of a sense of self (Mahler, et al., 1975). Balaban argued that children's responses to separation reflected children's developing awareness of their physical separateness from their parents and, at the same time, a reflection of the children's awareness of their emotional dependence on their parents. These views formed a strong part of the theoretical foundation of Balaban's argument; the other aspect of this theoretical base derived from Erik Erikson's (1950/1974) psychosocial view of development which sees the ability to overcome dependence and achieving autonomy as essential for healthy development.

Balaban (1985) provided descriptions of how children, parents and teachers might be affected by the event of "starting school". She said that teachers might be reminded of their own school entry or of other experiences of separation such as graduation, vacations, changing jobs, moving, divorce, marriage or death or of concerns or conflicts teachers might have had with their own parents. This could produce emotions ranging from excitement at the idea of meeting a new group of children, nervousness about the first few days, worry about possible criers, discomfort at having parents around for a few days, anger at parents for appearing pushy or uncaring, or impatience at wanting the parents to leave as soon as possible. Balaban recounted personal experiences of teachers, who attended a workshop on separation, who associated this experience with the words: fear, anxiety, pain, alone, angry, venturing forth, out of control, rejection, help, distance and unhappy. Among suggestions Balaban made about how teachers could help children and parents adjust to the separation experience, were ideas about the importance of observing children's behaviour, and about working with parents to gain information to help children and parents. Balaban made further suggestions about how "school policies" could acknowledge "the significance of the attachment between parents and children"(p. 96) including:

- having a brochure for parents and a welcoming letter for children
- having a pre-opening 'spruce-up' time
- visits before school opened

- parents' meeting before school opened
- doing home visits
- having a staggered entry of new children
- making adjustments to the school's eating and sleeping routines to accommodate individual children's needs
- having parents in the classroom
- avoiding parents "sneaking out"
- allowing children their security objects
- having a parent-school get together.

Overall, Balaban's (1985) work is a good example of a practitioner's handbook, or guide, grounded in the child development knowledge which until recently held an unchallenged status as the 'specialist knowledge base' of the early childhood profession. For example, Bettye Caldwell (1984) stated of early childhood education that "our field represents the applied side of the basic science of child development" while Lilian Katz (1985), nominated child development as the academic discipline which, for the profession of early childhood, fulfilled the criterion of having a 'specialist knowledge base'. Beyond this, Balaban's work is also a very good example of a text written with a view of education as an "applied science" where theory is conceived of as "a body of knowledge produced by those engaged in academic pursuits" (Carr, 1979, p. 30, cited in Bell, 1990, p. 24). Within this perspective, practice is seen as the translation of theory into specific actions and techniques to deal with reality 'at the chalk face'.

The same assumptions about the relationship between child development knowledge and the practice of early childhood education, and about the relationship of theory and practice underlay the three other writings in this review which are aimed at a practitioner audience. In Kleckner and Engel (1988), "beginning school" was described in terms of "adjust[ing] to a new and unfamiliar environment"(p. 14) and in terms of establishing "a new parent-child relationship requiring separation and increasing autonomy" (p. 14). This article also reported some ways which American nursery schools had found useful in easing children

into the school setting including a gradual period of induction: "This 'gradual start' process involves parental presence and participation in the classroom with the child for decreasing periods of time, until the child is sufficiently secure to 'go it alone'" (p. 14). Kleckner and Engel also suggested that children should be prepared for the new experience of "starting school" ahead of time and they particularly promoted "bibliotherapy", or reading books to children about an impending experience, as a way of achieving this preparation.

Bailey (1992) explained children's different responses to being in an early childhood setting as children's different ways of coping with "psychological separation" through which they "become independent, autonomous individuals" (p. 25). Only some of the theoretical underpinnings of this logic were made explicit by Bailey but the use of the terms "separation", "independent" and "autonomous" indicate that this work was built on the same theoretical understandings as those of Kleckner and Engel (1988) and of Balaban (1985).

Lane and Signer's (1990) work, using Balaban (1985) as one of its sources, provided an extensive discussion of teacher strategies for "helping parents deal with separation in child care". Interestingly, this work appeared as part of a training manual for infant and toddler caregivers specifically aimed at "creating partnerships with parents" thus indicating that for these writers, the issue of separation was one over which the teacher needed to work not only with children but also parents. Four main suggestions were made in this work for easing the separation process:

- i. **assigning a primary caregiver** who would develop a special relationship with the child and parent and be responsible for providing meaningful reports about the child's behaviour. This was intended to reassure the parents that their child was being well looked after.
- ii. **encouraging the parents to prepare their child.** Different suggestions were made for use with children of different ages but all emphasised that the tone of voice used by the parents was as important as the actual words

used for the message which infants and toddlers received about the childcare experience.

- iii. **allowing time for the transition between the home and the childcare program.** Explaining to parents about the importance of a slow induction into the childcare setting, providing a friendly welcome and conversing with the parent and having brief periods of the child being in the centre without the parent were all recommended. The writers suggested that parents who were unable to go through this process could be encouraged to prepare their child through talking to them about the childcare arrangement during commuting time.
- iv. **helping the parent and child with the initial separation.** Lane and Signer emphasised that children understand the emotional tone of the situation very readily and noted that a hurried or harassed parent might make the leave-taking more stressful. The writers recommended that teachers explain to parents that children accept the situation more easily when parents say a cheerful and clear goodbye and depart speedily; they added that it helped to reassure parents that children often stopped crying when their parents were out of sight.

Daniel (1998) too has focused on how teachers can facilitate transitions to out-of-home care for infant and toddler mothers. On the basis of 20 years of experience in early childhood settings, Daniel presented a set of vignettes in which mothers were shown responding to their child's initial experiences in day care. The vignettes illustrated three major themes: mothers' feelings of guilt and loss at relinquishing the care of their child to someone else in a societal context where the "ideology" of exclusive maternal care is still dominant; feelings of lack of trust in the daycare provider; and worries about the quality of the care that their child would receive. Daniel suggested that early childhood practitioners could help mothers overcome these worries through sharing information about the developmental benefits of good quality childcare, sharing information about the increasing numbers of infant and toddler mothers using out-of-home childcare, showing how the service met or surpassed mandatory regulations and establishing

partnership relationships between the providers and the mothers at a practical level. Enabling the mothers to develop trust in the quality of their chosen early childhood service was advocated through ensuring that the premises themselves indicated that healthy and clean practices were adhered to, that information on child: adult ratios and staff qualifications was prominently displayed, and that the centre environment communicated a message of openness to the parents. Other suggestions about how to communicate the high quality of the early childhood service included becoming aware of what parents themselves expected as indicators of quality so that the teachers could act to reassure parents that their expectations would be met. Additionally, Daniel argued that while parents might be able to describe some of the more outward indicators of quality, they were less able to identify elements of the centre organisation, such as staff training and salary levels which are strongly associated with the quality of the programme. On the basis of this she argued, as I also have done (see Dalli, 1997), that early childhood providers should share with the mothers the developmental rationale for their decisions about the programme because this would enable mothers to be stronger partners in the early childhood education experience. Daniel suggested that a way of helping the new mothers to develop trusting relationships with the childcare staff would be to involve mothers who had had positive experiences in using childcare to provide a supportive framework for new mothers.

The picture which emerges from this 'look at the guidebooks' is that the teacher's task of settling-in new children is constructed as one of helping children and parents to deal with the experience of separation. For the child, this experience is additionally constructed as involving the attainment of independence, or a measure of autonomy, which is unquestioned as a desirable goal. Daniel (1998) further highlighted that for the mothers, the experience is marked by "anxiety-provoking concerns" such as a "sense of guilt" and fears about the "health and safety of their children" so that the mothers' experience is constructed as involving the question of "how to know if one can trust the childcare provider" (p. 5). There is emphasis in these writings on the stressful nature of the event for all participants: children, parents and teachers. What is also interesting, but not

analysed in this thesis, is that teachers are always named last in this triad of participants, perhaps suggesting no more than that teachers are the professionals who are meant to be the service-providers rather than the focus of the service provision about which the guidebook advises. The writings reviewed emphasised that it is possible to ease the stress of the settling-in event. Suggestions were offered about how this might be done ranging from ideas for developing appropriate policies like having a planned process of visits, to specific teacher strategies for how to relate to parents and children. In addition, I have noted that the literature reviewed in this section was written within an "applied science" perspective of education where theory, in this case child development theory, is assumed to exist separately from practice, and with the purpose of informing practice. The relationship between theory and practice was seen as linear and unidirectional, with 'practice' being the recipient of the knowledge created by 'theory'.

In the next section, I focus primarily on one teacher's experience of 'settling-in' new children as this is told in one of six portraits of teachers presented in William Ayers' book *The Good Preschool Teacher*; I also draw on insights from a recent Australian study by two early childhood teachers about how the event of settling-in might be experienced by teachers.

6.2 Settling-in new children: Elements of teachers' stories

Ayers' (1989) portrait of Chana provides a rare glimpse into one teacher's experience of settling-in new children into an early childhood setting.

Ayers (1989) described his approach in writing *The Good Preschool Teacher* as based on a "strong belief that it is in the lived situations of actual teachers ... that the teaching enterprise exists and can be best understood." This belief was not unique in the late 1980's but the application of this approach within the field of early childhood teaching was still uncommon. In seeking to give voice to early childhood teachers, Ayers worked with six teachers to produce "co-biographies" or "portraits" which they agreed to refer to as "life-narratives". In composing the

life-narratives, a two-phase process was used which involved participant-observation of teachers teaching in six preschool settings together with a variety of techniques to encourage the six teachers to reflect on how their lives had affected their teaching practice. The data were analysed for meaningful patterns, and portraits were created "of teachers teaching and reflecting on the meaning of their life stories as those stories influenced their teaching" (p. 6).

In Chana's story, the "meaningful patterns" converged around separation as a major theme. Chana was a group family day care provider who resisted being called a teacher. Ayers (1989) quotes her as stating:

Don't call me a teacher ... I run a group family day-care home. People who say they 'teach' kids eighteen months to four years old are doing something I don't do. I don't have a credential and I don't identify with it. I could teach and believe me, life would be easier, but then I would have abandoned something I've fought for years. (p. 40)

What Chana had fought for was creating a family day care home that was a "life raft for other families, something people need" (p. 52) just as she had found a life raft in the baby-sitting co-op she had initiated when her two children were young. Ayers (1989) saw 'family' as "a central theme and metaphor that emerge[d] and re-emerge[d]" (p. 51) in Chana's story. He presented Chana's own family background as an old-fashioned extended Jewish family in which the grandparents looked after the grandchildren while Chana's parents worked. Chana's memory of the daily separations from her mother was that they started "so early and were so natural" (p. 41) that she was not sure that she felt them as separations at all. However, she understood separation. She said:

It is good child development practice to acknowledge the pain and loss of separation for both sides. We do that here easily and naturally. We use pictures, tapes and telephone calls to help parent and child through the experience. Events of the day and photos are posted on the front door – to prepare, build links, remember, remind. The literature is there. Perhaps we reflect our own experiences in the special commitment we give to

whatever part of good practice we really feel. In this sense, I feel well prepared to share in easing separations. I am comfortable with tears, special transitional objects, and talking about anger and loss (p. 49).

The importance Chana attached to the experience of separation was clear in her description of the curriculum of her program:

Separation is the curriculum ... it's the whole program. And I think it's the central issue in childcare. I'm very explicit about it with parents and with other providers. When parents come and see my home, it looks like such a wonderful place to visit, so many interesting things for kids to do, so inviting ... I'm very clear. I'm not promising anything [about academic learning]. They're not going to read; they probably won't know their letters by the time they leave me ... All I commit to, and what I work on, is that children will feel okay here without their parents, that they'll be able to acknowledge the difficulties and still participate fully in life here. That's the whole program. (pp. 45-46)

Ayers (1989) commented on this statement that Chana's thinking about separation and the way she worked with children and parents over this issue was "a classic example of a teacher at work" (p. 46). He described Chana's account of how she talked with the parents about separation, how she provided them with information so that they understood "the tension between connectedness and autonomy" and how she commented on the way parents responded. These elements of Chana's story created an image of her also as a reflective practitioner who was aware of the impact of her practice on the realities of parents' lives, including that some parents' lived reality might not allow them to easily accommodate the approach Chana preferred to follow in her "separation curriculum".

This portrayal of Chana's "life-narrative" or "co-biography" is significant in a number of ways. Firstly, as indicated, it provides a rare and in-depth insight into the meaning of early childhood work within Chana's own life-experience.

Secondly, Chana's life-narrative was constructed through her sharing of her thinking about teaching with Ayers; this collaboration of teacher and researcher is part of what Kessler and Swadener (1992) have called a growing theoretical strand within curriculum studies where diverse paradigms and interpretive forms are used to "reconceptualise" the early childhood curriculum (Bloch, 1992; Kessler & Swadener, 1992; Polakow, 1992; Silin, 1997). In Chana's story, her curriculum "was" separation, it was "being a life raft" and providing a "family" daycare environment which was also her own home, "it happen[ed] where people live[d]"(p. 54), it was about connectedness to her community which she maintained through regular visits to the neighbourhood nursing home with her daycare children and her advocacy work on behalf of group family daycare.

The third important aspect of Ayers' (1989) work derives from its focus on Chana's thinking about her practice. In Chana's story, her statement that "separation is the curriculum" was an image that captured some of her thinking about her practice. Research on teachers' thinking which started to develop in the late 1980s has argued that teachers' thought processes determine the actions that are taken in the classroom (Spodek, 1988b). Clark and Peterson (1986) state that "the purpose of research on teachers' implicit theories is to make explicit and visible the frames of reference through which individual teachers perceive and process information" (p. 287). Ayers' story about Chana's practice is among the earliest research on early childhood teachers' thinking which has recently been combining with "reconceptualist" scholarship, to start producing a body of work that 'gives voice' to the teachers and to their stories (e.g., Ayers, 1992; Bell, 1990; Clandinin & Connelly, 1996; Goodfellow, 1997; Middleton & May, 1997; Miller, 1990, 1992; Perry et al., 1997; Silin, 1997; Yonemura, 1986). In a context where it is increasingly being argued that early childhood education needs to broaden the areas of knowledge that define its specialist knowledge base away from an exclusively child developmentalist paradigm (e.g., Biber, 1984; Goffin, 1996; Katz, 1996; Silin, 1998; Singer, 1996; Spodek, 1988; Stott & Bowman, 1996), it is also being argued that teachers' stories, and teachers' implicit theories and

theories of practice might help this redefinition (e.g., Ayers, 1992; Miller, 1992; Spodek, 1988b).

A further important aspect of Chana's life-narrative was that it also incorporated classic themes about the nature of early childhood work. Chana's resistance of the label "teacher" brings to the fore the old tension between a view of early childhood work as 'care' versus 'education'. Ayers' (1989) story about Chana focused on her account of her "separation curriculum", but other themes also lay beneath the surface of Chana's narration, such as the unrelenting physical demands of the work, the connection between being a family daycare provider and being a mother of young children, and of being a mother and an early childhood teacher, as well as the never-ending battle of trying to gain recognition for work that the broader society does not value very highly and has difficulty recognising equitably. Ayers did not tease out these themes very fully, yet through these themes, Chana's personal narrative ties in strongly with notions about the nature of early childhood work that prevail in contemporary society.

The richness of analytic potential in this account of one early childhood teacher's experience and practical knowledge explains the strong plea that Ayers (1992) made in a later publication for the voice of the teacher to be heard. He claimed :

recovering the voice of the teacher ... is an essential part of reconceptualising the field of early childhood education. There is beginning to be a popular literature that illuminates teachers' lives, insights and knowledge, but the scholarly research and writing fail to make a comparable contribution The question 'What can these teachers tell one another and the world about teaching and about children?' has largely been ignored At some point the goal must become an accurate portrayal of action as teachers themselves experience it, an account infused with immediacy, conflict, and contradiction as teachers actually live it. (p. 266)

An autobiographical note is present also in a report by two early childhood teachers of their study of parents' perceptions of the process of settling-in their infants into a childcare centre (Johnston & Brennan, 1997). The writers positioned themselves as early childhood professionals who were also mothers. They explained:

we came to examine the issue of babies settling into care from an emotional perspective. Both authors have children of their own, have cared for babies in centre-based long day care settings and are concerned that babies, the most vulnerable group in the day care setting, receive the best possible experiences. We also recognise the often fragile emotional state of parents who are leaving their babies in an unfamiliar setting – sometimes for the first time since the baby's birth. (p. 1)

The voice of the teacher, intermingled with the voice of the mother creates what Ayers (1992) would call an "accurate portrayal of actions as teachers themselves experience[d] it." This dual 'voicing' is heard again in Johnston's account of her first experience of settling new babies at her centre:

It appeared to me that the babies took a very extended time to settle into the centre. There were often two or three babies crying at once; parents who were caught between leaving to go to their job and wanting to stay and reassure their baby and staff who followed routines and rosters and met the babies' needs along the way. It was not until nearly half way through the year that the noise levels in the nursery receded, parents appeared less anxious and staff less stressed. (p. 2)

The sense of "conflict and contradiction" mentioned by Ayers as part and parcel of the early childhood teacher's role was clearly experienced by this practitioner-mother who was aware of the needs of the babies, but saw also, as a reflective practitioner, that the routines and rosters were structuring the way the babies' needs were met. One cannot but agree with Ayers that there is great potential in the use of autobiographical accounts for enlightening the practice of early childhood education.

It is against the background of this small, but conceptually rich, body of literature that the inclusion of teachers' voices in the current study was undertaken. My intention was, like Ayers' (1989), to gain an indepth understanding of the meaning teachers created from their work specifically about the event of settling-in new children into their early childhood setting. The scarcity of research focus on teachers' experiences of the event of settling-in validated the need for this aspect of my investigation.

In the next section I consider some studies which have looked at the early childhood teachers' lived reality beyond the specific focus of settling-in new children. This provides a broader perspective on the reality of early childhood work and the discourse surrounding it by way of creating a context within which the teachers' stories of settling-in new children may be located.

6.3 The lived reality of early childhood work: talking and thinking about practice

There are many ways one can discuss the 'reality' within which early childhood teachers function. Some aspects of this reality include the employment conditions teachers work under (e.g., Kelly & Berthelsen, 1997; Nuttall, 1991; Smith, 1995), the nature of the relationships they have with other staff they work with (e.g., Smith 1992), the way they enact the curriculum (e.g., Meade, 1985; Haggerty, 1998; Miller, 1992), the teachers' work in a socio-historical context (e.g., Middleton & May, 1997), their relationships with parents (e.g., Smith & Hubbard, 1988; Powell, 1978, 1980; Renwick, 1989), and the nature of their practice with children (e.g., Balliett Platt, 1991; Hayes, 1989; Parmenter & Waniganayake, 1994; Smith, 1996). For the purposes of this study it seems most important to focus on what the literature reports as teachers' own understandings of their lived reality of being an early childhood teacher. Since the data in my study also revealed that during settling-in teachers engaged in extensive activity to lead the child to "fit in" with the centre's established ways of doing things, reference will

also be made to research which throws light on how teachers have been observed to accomplish this.

6.3.1 Being an early childhood teacher: the discourse of early childhood work

One of the earliest studies that sought to understand the “reality” of being an early childhood teacher was the now classic sociological study by Ronald King (1978) of three infants’ classrooms over a three-year period. It is important to note that this study is now over twenty years old and that it is a study of teachers of what in New Zealand we would call “new entrant” children in primary school. Thus, while the age of the children still places them within the early childhood years, these children and their teachers were institutionally located within the compulsory school system. Nonetheless, the teachers who taught these children were all trained in infant education, an area of teacher education considered separate from the later years of the primary school. Through gathering data as a non-participant observer and applying Max Weber’s “action theory” (p. 6), King sought to describe and explain the ‘world’ of the infants’ teachers and thus understand “the subjective meanings” that they “assigned to their actions” (p. 6).

An important reason for including King’s (1978) work in this chapter is that despite the dissimilarities between the context of that study and that of the current one, its discussion of the teachers’ “ideologies” (pp. 11-23) remains relevant to the understandings, and *discourses*, which still exist in contemporary society about the nature of early childhood work. For example, in elaborating on the nature of the infants’ teacher’s identity, King noted that teachers often made statements which drew parallels between being the infants’ teacher and being a mother: “we are their mothers while they’re in school”(p.72); King reported also that some of the more mature teachers who had grown-up children spoke of the children they taught as taking their place. When King drew some of the teachers’ attention to the fact that some of the chores they did in the classroom like cooking, sewing, tidying and sweeping the floor were also like being a traditional housewife, the teachers agreed.

A further interesting aspect of King's (1978) book was that in his view the teachers' "ideologies" constructed the reality of the classroom for the teacher as well as defined the child and the identity of the teacher. He described the infants' teacher's identity as characterised by the qualities of professional pleasantness, professional affection and professional equanimity. These were exhibited as having "a bright smiling face, eyes stretched open wide, lots of eye contact, walks with a bouncy movement", and behaviours like using endearments such as 'my love', 'dear', 'little one' and 'sweetheart', and in that "remarkable feature" of calm emotional response in the face of such adversities as "paint spilt for the fourth time" (p. 71), the hamster being let out and someone wetting their pants. In describing these characteristics, King additionally commented that the infants' teachers were aware of their infants' teacher manner and were willing to talk about it, indicating a measure of self-awareness of the identity they enacted. Despite the mention of this self-awareness, however, King's depiction of the infant teacher is not far off the stereotype of early childhood teachers as "nice ladies who like children" (Stonehouse, 1994).

The arguments of many writers (e.g., Apple, 1985; Ayers, 1989; Grumet, 1988; May, 1990, 1997) suggest that the affinity of early childhood work with mothering, and therefore also with women's work, may be a primary reason why early childhood work has retained the status of a poor relation within the educational professions. Yet, it seems that it is also this dimension that many early childhood practitioners still find most distinctive about their role. For example, two of the three caregivers in an Australian qualitative study of infant care-giving (Berthelsen, Irving, Brownlee & Boulton-Lewis, 1997) described their role with infants aged four and three months in the following way:

Sally: "... to be loving, to be really loving, to show love and let the kids know you're there for them ; 'cause with Mum going off to work you are the next best thing, and they need to know they can rely and trust you" (p. 6).

Jan: "I feel my role is the second place to the Mum ... my role is just to care for them while they are here without their mum and to be an extension, I suppose of her"(p. 8).

For reconceptualist early childhood scholars, however, the uncritical acceptance of the mother substitute role is problematic. Miller (1992), for example, noted the "pull of social and historical constructions of the early childhood educator as nurturer, mother, caretaker, as well as facilitator, captain, guide" (p. 104) and has argued that it is necessary to "view our educational roles through critical lenses that enable us to focus on social, historical, and political forces that shape and influence our personal assumptions about teaching" (Miller, 1992, p. 104). Miller argued that teachers needed to engage in "analyses of their own teaching practices, assumptions and expectations within these larger contexts" (p. 104) to bring about a transformation of the status quo. While Ayers (1989, 1992) saw autobiographical accounts as a way of telling lives, Miller saw them also as media through which existing societal constructions of teachers' practice could be deconstructed.

In similar vein, Perry et al. (1997) reported on a researcher-practitioner project in which six Australian early childhood practitioners and a researcher began meeting to discuss mutually agreed topics about "the increasing demands arising in their own preschool settings" (p. 1). Perry reported that after eight meetings the teachers appeared to be undertaking a form of "interrogation of their practices" (p. 5); she suggested that although the teachers were not aware in a formal way of the debates occurring in postmodernist and reconceptualist writings, the issues they were highlighting in their discussions about how their practice was being challenged by an increased "diversity among children" starting preschool, were very similar to those in the literature. Perry commented that the teachers were creators of practical knowledge more than consumers of theoretical knowledge; to me as reader, the talk of the teachers in Perry's study suggested that these teachers were also the creators of their own "theories of practice", a notion I discuss more fully in the next section (see section 6.3.2).

In my study I did not attempt to engage with teachers in the type of transformative dialogue that Miller (1992) and Perry et al. (1997) engaged in; however, the

stories I present in Chapter 7 of the teachers' experiences of settling-in, feature themes which have strong connections to the arguments of Miller and Perry et al., both in the discourse that emerged about the nature of early childhood teachers' professional identity, as well as about the nature of the teachers' professional knowledge.

6.3.2 Teachers' thinking about their practice

In section 6.1 I argued that practitioner-oriented writings about the teacher's role in settling-in new children appeared to be written from a view of early childhood education as an "applied science" where child development theory exists in a vertical downward relationship with practice: theory informs and practice applies. In recent years it has become increasingly acknowledged that the relationship of theory to practice is much more complex than in the "applied science" view and there is now more attention given to how teachers' thought processes, including their "implicit theories", and their life experiences, relate to their practice. This literature suggested that it might be possible to gain access to teachers' lived experiences of starting childcare through exploring their thinking about this process.

In the mid-eighties Clark and Peterson (1986) noted that research on teachers' thinking was a young area of study and that a variety of terms was in use to refer to it including teacher's personal perspective, teacher's conceptual system, the teacher's construct system, practical knowledge and implicit theories. Although the terms had slightly different meanings, they all included the notion that teachers' actions made sense and were guided by a personally-held set of beliefs, values and principles.

"Practical knowledge" is a term used by Elbaz (1981) who also distinguished three structural forms for it: "rules of practice", "principles of practice" and "images" (p. 49). A "rule of practice" is described as "brief, clearly formulated statement of what to do or how to do it in a particular situation frequently encountered in practice" (Elbaz, 1981, p.61). A "rule of practice" gets used when

a teacher recognises a situation and remembers the rule. A "practical principle" is "a broader, more inclusive statement than a rule" and "embod(ies) purpose in a deliberate and reflective way" (p. 61). These principles "can be drawn upon to guide a teacher's actions and explain the reasons for those actions" (Clark & Peterson, 1986, p.290). The teacher's use of a "principle of practice" is accompanied by reflection. Finally, "images" are mental pictures held by the teacher about what good practice should look like. Elbaz (1981) describes them as occurring in the teacher's expression as:

brief metaphoric statements of how teaching should be and marshal[s] experience, theoretical knowledge and school folklore to give substance to those images. Images serve to guide the teacher's thinking and to organise knowledge in the relevant area. The image is generally imbued with a judgement of value and constitutes a guide to the intuitive realisation of the teacher's purpose. (p. 61)

"Implicit theory" is a less fine-grained construct than Elbaz's three forms of "practical knowledge". Spodek (1988b) used the term "implicit theories" to refer to teachers' theories of professional practice that have developed "as much from practical experience as from the formal knowledge ... gained in their (professional) preparation" (p. 168). Talking about his study of teachers' decisions, Spodek added: "relatively few of the teachers' implicit theories were grounded in reliable knowledge of child development and learning theory. Instead, the teachers' decisions were often opportunistic and seemed to be rooted in a form of personal practical knowledge" (p. 168). This definition is re-stated in a later work (Hsieh & Spodek, 1995) as "a component of teachers' practical knowledge, informed by self-understanding, values and beliefs about teaching and learning as well as by past experiences. Although not necessarily articulated, implicit theories guide teachers' classroom decisions and actions"(p. 6). Spodek (1988b) added that many implicit theories were about values and deal with what children "ought to be and become" (Biber, 1984, p. 303 cited in Spodek, p. 170). In this way teachers' implicit theories may be seen as statements of professional ethics. Spodek later compared implicit theories to Argyris and Schön's (1975)

concept of "theories-in-use" which govern actions "which may or may not be compatible with [his] espoused theory" or "theory of action"(Argyris & Schön, 1975, p. 7). One would be able to identify a theory of action in the answer someone would give when asked how they would behave in a given situation.

In awareness of the distinction made by Argyris and Schön (1975) between theory of action and theory-in-use, a New Zealand study of early childhood teachers' beliefs about practice by Bell (1990) argued strongly for the use of a different term: "operational theories". Bell said:

if we are to understand the educational process adequately, we cannot explore theory in isolation from the practical context. This is a mistake commonly made by those researchers who have attempted to investigate theory-practice congruency. Certainly it is possible to compare what people say with what they do; the mistake occurs when we assume that what people say, in itself, constitutes their theory (p. 32)

Bell's (1990) answer to this problem was to adopt an approach in which both what was said and what was done were used as contexts for making teachers' "operational theories" explicit. She defined "operational theories" as the "many interrelated beliefs which, rather than existing as a body of propositional knowledge, are immanent in (teachers') practices" (p. 38).

In the current study the focus was not on whether theory-practice congruency existed but rather on how teachers made sense of, or perceived, their experience of settling new children into their centre environment. However, theory-practice congruency is relevant to this study in that it can point out what teachers were conscious of, as, what I call their "theory of practice" by contrast to what an outside observer, such as myself as researcher and the mothers who participated in the study, might have perceived as constituting the teachers' practice. My term "theory of practice" thus refers to the 'theories' that teachers actually articulated as their own versus what 'theory' could be observed operating in their practice; in

this way my term is different to both Spodek's (1988b) "implicit theories" and Bell's (1990) "operational theories".

6.3.3 Teachers teaching 'fitting-in'

My discussion in chapter 2 of the theoretical landscape of this study has outlined how script theory and socio-cultural theory explain the way that children become inducted into established ways of operating within a given culture.

My literature search on teachers' experiences of the event of starting childcare did not locate any studies which explored teachers' perceptions of how they acted to induct children into the centre culture over this time. However, a few studies of early childhood teachers' behaviour with young children, throw light on this. For example, Doré, Gearhart & Newman (1978) noted that the preschool teachers in their study consciously engaged in structuring situations for children and in directing their activities within an overall school script. Nelson (1981) noted that this kind of activity explains why very little of the day-to-day activity in day-care centres and nursery schools needs to be negotiated afresh. According to Nelson, each child and adult gets to know her/his part in the script. In this sense then, teachers' structuring of the situation for children can be seen as a form of teaching children to "fit in" with existing routines and rules of behaviour.

A similar argument was made in a study by Hayes (1989) of teachers' use of control techniques with preschool children during lunchtime. Hayes examined how teachers communicated rules about appropriate behaviour. Using notions from script theory, and the idea of "scaffolding" from socio-cultural theory, Hayes argued that a number of strategies were used by teachers to assist children to control or regulate their behaviour. These techniques included verbalising the appropriate behaviour and prompting with verbal or non-verbal cues, such as turning off the light if children were talking too loudly. Hayes commented that the teachers' responses to the children's rule violations were largely informative and acted to convey information about appropriate alternatives, as well as identifying the inappropriate behaviour so that, over time, children internalised the rules.

The data presented in the following chapter on teachers' experiences of the settling-in process indicate that the teachers in my study were also conscious of their role in helping children to "fit in" with the rules of their new childcare centre. Data in chapter 9 provide further evidence of how the teachers' actions scaffolded/canalized or guided children into the established ways of behaving within the centre.

6.4 Chapter Overview

My review of literature on early childhood teachers' professional practice has ranged from guidebook-type publications aimed at providing 'good practice' suggestions about how to handle settling-in, to a few studies which illuminate teachers' experience of starting childcare, and literature on the reality of early childhood practice more broadly. The inclusion of 'guidebook-type' literature was in response to the absence of research-based studies which deal solely with teachers' experiences of settling-in new children into a childcare centre. In 'guidebook type' literature, starting childcare was constructed as an experience involving 'separation' between the child and the mother and the child's attaining of 'independence' from the mother (e.g., Bailey, 1992; Balaban, 1985; Lane & Singer, 1990). Additionally, this experience was seen as involving the need to adjust to a new setting (Kleckner & Engel, 1988). In offering 'good practice' suggestions for how teachers should deal with this event, the teacher's role was framed as having two foci: one on the child and one on the parent whom the literature portrayed as experiencing feelings of separation as well as of "guilt" and "loss" and as needing to develop "trust" in the teacher (Daniel, 1998).

In this chapter I have discussed one teacher's "co-biography" about how she dealt with family day care children's daily experiences of separation from their parents (Ayers, 1989). This account, together with the report of a practitioner-initiated project on parents' perceptions of the settling-in process (Johnston & Brennan, 1997), suggested that the teachers' talk about their practice was strongly connected to their own life experience.

In reviewing studies done on teachers' experience of early childhood work more broadly than during the settling-in experience, a strong theme was that teachers viewed their professional identity as connected to the role of mothering (e.g., Berthelson et al., 1997; King, 1978). King's study further suggested that this theme was part of an "ideology" which infant teachers shared about their professional role. Other studies have argued that such "ideologies" or "discourses" have historically been responsible for maintaining the low status of early childhood work (e.g., May, 1990; Miller, 1992) and that it is now necessary to make visible these hidden assumptions and expectations about the nature of early childhood practice (Miller, 1992). My review of theoretical concepts about teachers' thinking about their practice led to a decision to use the notion of "theory of practice" as a way of describing how the teachers in my study spoke about their view of how to handle the process of settling-in. Some indication was also given of research findings on how teachers guide new children to "fit in" within the established rules of the childcare centre.

The arguments presented in these studies make clear that a big gap exists in research exploration of teachers' experience of early childhood work during the process of settling-in. In addition, the few studies reviewed in this chapter which have used elements of teachers' accounts of their practice (Ayers, 1989; Johnston & Brennan, 1997) indicated that listening to teachers' stories about settling-in might be an effective way of achieving this objective. The inclusion in my study of a focus on teachers' lived experience of this event makes a contribution to opening up this research area. In the following chapter, the results of this approach are presented.

Chapter 7

Teachers' Narratives of Experience

I chose in this work to discover a lot about a few teachers rather than a little about a lot of teachers. Instead of aggregating teachers in a search for the common teacher, the point here was to celebrate the particular, the uncommon, and the unpredictable. This choice was based on a strong belief that it is in the lived situations of actual teachers – rather than in, for example, the educational commissions, policy panels, or research institutions – that the teaching enterprise exists and can best be understood We do not, of course, end up with the truth, but perhaps more modestly with a burgeoning sense of meaning and knowing grounded in real people and concrete practices.

William Ayers (1989) *The Good Preschool Teacher* (p.4). New York: Teachers College Press.

7.1 Setting the scene

In this chapter, the focus shifts onto the teachers involved in the five case studies and on their lived reality of settling-in a new child into their childcare setting. As in the case of the chapter on the parents' experiences, the main sources of data for this chapter were the two interviews I had with each teacher and the teachers' own journals which they kept throughout the study. My fieldnotes and video records of three events on each visit provided additional data as did the documents I collected from the centres.

One of my early thoughts during fieldwork was that the way the settling-in proceeded in each centre seemed connected to the 'teaching style' of the teachers. As I wrote up the case descriptions and later engaged in further analyses of the data, this early thought became a conscious attempt to understand the 'bits' that made up the 'teaching style'. I listened carefully to the teachers' talk about settling-in, including in the written journals and became aware that these appeared to contain key phrases which somehow 'personalised' the way each of them viewed the process. For example, Sarah frequently referred to the process as "weaning in" (a term used also by another teacher, Joan), Anna repeatedly used

the phrase "you've got to go with the child", Joan spoke of settling-in as being "all about partnership with parents", while Patti regularly wrote her comments on how the session had gone for Julie in terms of whether Julie had "needed extra support". In addition, all of the teachers at one time or another said that each child was different or individual or unique in some way. It seemed to me that these key phrases captured some quality about this experience which for each teacher seemed essential to the way they understood it. This insight led me to the body of literature on teachers' thinking about their practice reviewed in chapter 5 and the realisation began to form that the key phrases I recorded operated in a similar way to the "images" of good practice in Elbaz's (1981) theory about teachers' practical knowledge. Other phrases were more like her "practical principles" or "rules of practice" and sometimes like Spodek's (1988b) "implicit theories". Furthermore, these images, practical principles or implicit theories appeared to form part of a larger understanding individual teachers had about the nature of the settling-in event which functioned like the teacher's own "theory of practice". Sometimes these theories of practice operated as the centre's policy either because they were the only 'policy' that existed or because they were articulated with reference to the formal policy that was set out in the centre documents.

The nature of these insights led me to adopt a somewhat different structure for this chapter to that used in the telling of the parents' stories in chapter 5; while the current chapter still uses a combination of the thematic and case-by-case approach, it is more heavily weighted towards the latter style. This enabled the teachers' stories to be structured around their theories of practice in a more unified way than would be possible in an across-case thematic structure. As in chapter 5, I therefore start with a brief introduction of the six teachers in the study; this is followed by a discussion of elements in the teachers' stories which appeared to be common across the cases. The teachers' theories of practice of settling-in are then presented as stories which I reconstructed from the fragments the teachers recounted in various parts of the interviews and journals. In telling the stories I have worked from the premise of the narrative researcher described by Polkinghorne (1988) that "people strive to organise their temporal experience

into meaningful wholes” and therefore I have seen my task as that of “uniting the events of their lives into unfolding themes” (p. 163). These themes emerged through a process of reading and re-reading of the data, the use of the constant comparative method, memo writing and constant re-visiting of the range of literature reviewed in chapter 6 (Glaser & Strauss, 1967/1977; Hutchinson, 1988). In seeking to capture the “lived reality” of these teachers, my intention has been, like Ayers’ (1989), to end up with a “burgeoning sense of meaning and knowing grounded in real people and concrete practices”.

7.2 Introducing the teachers and their childcare centres

7.2.1 Sarah

Sarah had worked at the community creche attended by Nina for four years. She was a trained primary school teacher who had given up primary teaching when her own children were born. She had no formal early childhood teacher education but thought that bringing up her own children, her experience as a primary school teacher and three years’ work as a Girl Guide’s leader were all relevant to her work as an early childhood teacher; as she explained: “certain basic principles are involved in all this” (CS1.TIS1.2).

The community creche where Sarah worked met in a community hall and was open four days a week from 9.00am till 1.00pm. At other times, the hall was used for other activities so that the creche staff started each day by setting up the hall for all the curricular activities of the day; when all the children left the centre by 1.00pm, all the equipment was cleared away again. The setting-up and clearing away was usually done by Sarah and another member of staff. The centre was managed by a parent co-operative which set the policy and managed the budget of the centre; the staff were responsible for the centre curriculum. The centre was licensed for twenty children and employed four permanent part-time staff. One parent helper was rostered on each day bringing the daily ratio of adults to children to 1:5. At the start of the case study, the centre had just decided to trial a version of the “primary caregiver system” which meant that each member of staff would have primary responsibility for a group of “focus children”. Sarah was very

enthusiastic about the primary caregiver system and said that the centre staff believed that it was better for a child to develop a deep relationship with one person and “then to branch out” (CS1.TIS1.3.2a). She believed that when a child was new, there was a need for “focused treatment” which could not be forthcoming from all the staff. She commented that some of the staff were a little concerned that this would lead the child to rely too much on the primary caregiver but Sarah’s position on this was that in her experience all children reached out to other staff once they were settled in.

7.2.2 Anna and Sam

Anna and Sam were the two teacher participants in the case study of Maddi’s settling-in at the neighbourhood community creche which met in a large hall at the community centre. The centre was open five days a week for morning and afternoon sessions and was licensed for twenty-five children with a maximum of six being under two years olds. At the start of the case study, the centre was attempting to build up the roll for its afternoon sessions and an advertising campaign was underway within the community to achieve this. The centre ran as a parent co-operative with a management committee which set policy and operated the budget. The centre had a full-time supervisor and two other regular teachers; on any one day two parent helpers were also present during the sessions and appeared to be primarily responsible for setting up morning tea and lunch as well as helping with the curriculum under the guidance of the creche teachers. Parents also helped in the running of the centre by having roles such as being equipment officer, enrolment officer or treasurer. At the start of the case study one parent was also re-writing the centre guidebook.

When the centre management committee allowed me access to the centre as a researcher, Anna volunteered to be the teacher participant in the study. Anna had worked at the community creche for two years on a part-time basis. Before that she had worked at another community creche while her children were preschoolers. She was a trained primary school teacher and had given up primary teaching when she started her own family. She had no formal early childhood

teacher education but felt that her experiences as a primary school teacher, and as a mother, were relevant to her work in early childhood. At the time of the study Anna had just increased her hours of work at the centre and become what she called a "regular member of the staff". Anna made strong statements that "each child is unique" and "you've got to go with the child" and used these often in explaining that the centre had a "flexible" policy of settling in new children.

Sam became involved in the study as a teacher participant when it became clear that Maddi was spending much more time with her than with Anna. Sam had been working at the community creche as the centre supervisor for the previous six months and as a trained early childhood teacher for a total of seven years. She had also worked as an adult educator and spent some time at home looking after her children. Sam felt that her experiences as a parent at home, and as an adult educator, had helped her in her early childhood work particularly in understanding the stresses and loneliness, and the need for support, that parents at home experienced. Like Anna, Sam put a lot of emphasis on "going with what the child wants" and respecting the rights of children; she explained her own entry into the research process as a result of noting Maddi's preference to be with her and thus Anna and she had decided that she too should become a participant in the study.

7.2.3 Joan

Joan was one of two full-time co-supervisors in the parent co-operative centre attended by Shirley. Joan had been working at the centre for three and a half months; she had about seven years' experience working as an early childhood teacher and was engaged in upgrading her qualification to three-year diploma level. She also had plans to start a university degree the following year. Her experience in early childhood ranged from working part-time to full-time, being a 'childcare worker' and being a nanny. Joan was very clear about her teaching philosophy and emphasised her conviction that the most important thing in a centre was "partnership with parents" (CS3.TIS1.6.2a).

Joan's centre offered morning sessions for ten children aged from eight months to three years. Decisions about the running of the centre were made at monthly meetings of parents and staff; an information sheet given to parents at enrolment stated that a parent from each family should try to attend those monthly meetings. Parents were also expected to participate in occasional working bees to help maintain the equipment and the centre. A cleaning roster was in place and parents had to undertake a weekend cleaning duty once every 3 months or so. The centre operated in a dis-used public building which had been re-converted into a childcare centre. The group size of children (10) in this centre was the smallest among the case study centres.

7.2.4 Patti

Patti was the supervisor at the full-day childcare centre attended by Julie. On agreeing to participate in the study, Patti initially suggested to me that we needed to work through the idea of having one staff member do the interviews and keep the journal because the centre did not operate a system where specific staff looked after specific children. Instead, the centre had a "firm policy" that all staff looked after all the children "to avoid running into difficulties if one staff member was absent". When I asked Patti how she thought we might be able to overcome this problem, she suggested a meeting with the staff to discuss the issue closer to the time of the actual start of the study. In the meantime, I left a copy of the empty teacher journal with Patti for her and her staff to look at.

When a case study was able to proceed at Patti's centre about six weeks later, Patti told me that she had decided that since she was the one teacher most likely to be present for the duration of the study, she would be the teacher participant. She no longer thought it necessary to hold a staff meeting about this.

Patti's centre was managed by a committee made up of parents and staff. The committee met monthly with minutes of the meetings being distributed to all the parents. The centre was open from 7.45am till 5.30pm and was licensed for a maximum of 24 children, two of whom could be under two years of age. Patti said

that normally their actual roll was twenty-one. There were five full-time staff members of whom one was the supervisor and one the assistant supervisor.

Patti had worked as an early childhood teacher for 15 years; with 12 years of these being at the current centre. Patti had initially trained as a Playcentre supervisor and had later moved on to do other courses so that at the time of the study she held an equivalency certificate to the three-year diploma in early childhood teaching. Patti felt that her experience as a mother gave her a real empathy with parents who used the centre and that a background in commercial business was relevant to the administrative side of her job. Patti emphasised the importance of "experience" to good practice and saw it as essential that the early childhood teacher should be able to "pick up the child's cues" and "to be responsive" (CS4.TIS1.6.2b).

7.2.5 Lorraine

Lorraine was a newly trained primary school teacher who had been working at the centre attended by Robert for 8 months; this was her first position in early childhood education but she felt that her primary teaching degree, her experience as a babysitter and having a three-year-old sister were relevant to this position. Lorraine became part of this study at the request of the centre supervisor who said that although the centre operated on the basis that new children were the responsibility of all staff, it seemed appropriate that the teacher who participated in the study was one who seemed likely to be working at the centre for the duration of the study. As it turned out, this arrangement did not work out as ideally as planned because Lorraine's working hours did not always coincide with Robert's arrival and departure times and she therefore missed out on the opportunity of talking to Robert's parents at these times and on watching these events. An additional problem was that towards the end of the case study, Lorraine's home situation changed and she made a decision to leave the centre and move to another city. Just before she left, Lorraine asked if she could forward her journal onto me from her new address; I agreed to this suggestion but despite numerous follow-up phone calls, the journal was not received.

The centre where Lorraine worked was part of a large complex dedicated to a range of community services. There were two main areas in the childcare centre, one catering for children aged under two-and-a-half years of age and one for over two-and-a-half year olds. The centre provided full day care and was open from 7.30am till 5.30pm. The under-two-and-a-half years area when the case study took place was licensed for 23 children and staffed by four teachers. At the time of the study, the centre had just undergone a period of change in its staffing as well as in the layout of the centre environment. The centre was also revising its publicity material so that none was available to me. Despite various efforts to acquire a copy of the "old" and later the "new" version of this material, I remained unable to do either.

Within this context Lorraine appeared to see herself partly as working within someone else's framework, not one which she herself had set up: She was unable to answer some questions I asked her about the information provided to new parents and appeared unclear about the number of orientation visits that Robert had had. She was also unsure how her colleagues responded to Robert in her absence, suggesting a somewhat detached and uninformed stance within her working environment. At the same time she was strongly aware of the difficulty of giving each new child focused attention, mentioning at the first interview that over the first few weeks of the year there had been ten new children out of twenty-three in the under-two-and-a-half year old area.

7.2.6 Reflections

These brief profiles of the six teachers who took part in this study provide an interesting picture of their professional background. Three of them, Sam, Joan and Patti were trained early childhood practitioners with many years of experience behind them. Sam and Joan had become early childhood professionals through what Sue Bredekamp (1992) has called the "traditional route"; in other words, they had wanted to be early childhood teachers and trained and worked as such. Patti, on the other hand, had come to be an early childhood teacher through the

“parent route”, that is, she had trained for something different, become a parent and discovered early childhood through being a Playcentre mother, ‘got hooked’ on early childhood education and re-trained as an early childhood practitioner. The other three teachers, Sarah, Anna and Lorraine were trained as primary school teachers but only Anna was also doing some early childhood study. In the case of Sarah and Anna, one could say that like Patti, they had come to early childhood through the “parent route”. For Lorraine, working in early childhood appeared to have been an accidental event; her position at the centre was her first job after graduating and she did not have any specific early childhood training. She had come to early childhood work through the “serendipitous route” (Bredekamp), and there was no indication about whether she would stay within it or not.

The varied background of these teachers is not atypical of the early childhood field; what is striking is that in all these teachers’ narratives, a strong connection was made between being an early childhood teacher and being a mother/parent, or, in Lorraine’s case, being a carer of a younger sister. This connection was especially clear in the stories of how Sarah, Anna and Patti came to be early childhood practitioners, with motherhood having been the launching pad for this work. This theme is a strong one in any discussion of the nature of early childhood work and surfaces here as a major one running through the teachers’ stories. Other themes that begin to emerge in these profiles include differing opinions over the use of what in Sarah’s centre was called the “primary caregiver system”, a system clearly championed by Sarah but not by Patti, and the awareness some of these teachers had that daily management issues of the centre impacted on the quality of the teachers’ practice. This was especially evident in Sarah’s justification for the implementation of the primary caregiver system on the basis that teachers could not be expected to provide “focused treatment” for all children *en masse*. In Lorraine’s profile, one can see the influence of management considerations in the way that her working hours meant that she was not present during Robert’s arrival and departure times at the centre. These and other themes will be further elaborated in the rest of this chapter.

7.3 Some common elements in the teachers' narratives

As I noted at the start of this chapter, the teachers' views about settling-in, and therefore their narratives about this event, emerged in a "personalised" way through the use of key images (Elbaz, 1981) which captured some essential quality in the way the teacher constructed this event; however, the stories also contained some common elements. For instance, they all occurred within the context of a centre policy (documented, practised or both) about how to deal with this event. In addition, the stories occurred within the common view that the teacher's role in this event had two foci: one to do with the child and one to do with the parent. Furthermore, all the teachers believed that children had different patterns for how they settled into childcare settings and could articulate a view about what helped or hindered the settling-in. In the rest of this section I explore these common elements as a background against which the different key phrases or images used by the teachers can be analysed within their theories of practice.

7.3.1 *Centre policies and views of settling-in*

In my first interview with each of the six teachers in this study (see appendix H), I asked whether their centre had a policy on how to handle new children at the centre. I then asked about what the policy was or, if there was no policy, how they decided on practice in this situation. I also asked if their early childhood training had dealt with this topic.

The last of these questions is easiest to report on because none of the three teachers who were early childhood trained, Sam, Joan and Patti, could remember whether their training had covered this topic and the other three teachers said their primary school training had not covered issues of settling-in. Patti (early childhood trained) did say, however, that issues to do with separation anxiety had come up in a professional development course she had attended about programme planning. In responding to the question of whether their centre had a policy for handling newcomers to the centre, all the teachers were able to articulate 'a policy' even when they were unclear about whether a formal policy existed in written form.

7.3.1.1 Written policies

Two teachers, Joan and Patti, worked in centres where the centre's policy on settling-in new children was documented in the parents' handbook or in the charter. In Joan's centre, the parent handbook had a section called "Settling in" in which it was stated:

The expectation is that the parents or someone familiar to the child will stay as long as needed by the child concerned. The child can then be left after consultation with the staff as to the amount of time that might be appropriate. The adult leaving the child must be available to be contacted during the settling in period. Parents are invited to contact staff throughout the session if they are feeling at all concerned about their child.

(CS3: centre document: parent guidebook, p. 2, July 1993)

Parents were then encouraged to take to the centre "a toy or piece of sheepskin" to which the child might have a special attachment; parents were also urged to use the enrolment form to provide as much information as possible to the staff about the child's life and routines, and to keep staff informed of any changes in this information.

In Patti's centre, the centre charter had the following statement:

Parents of children who are new arrivals at the Centre, are encouraged to bring the child into regular sessions before formal enrolment. The child is gradually introduced to the routines of the Centre for short periods. The introduction process may take one to two weeks, with preliminary discussions and introductions and with the child coming for a regular period each morning in the week before enrolment. Parents are invited to remain and observe/assist as they are able.

(CS4: centre charter, p. 9)

One other teacher, Sarah, said that her centre had recently introduced a "primary caregiver system" and this explained the centre's policy on settling in new

children. The system had been introduced to parents at a meeting, and through a notice, as being:

a new system of organising staff with the children known as “primary caregiving”. Under this system, each member of staff will have a panel of “focus” children from their time of entry to creche to departure time on a daily basis and over time. The responsibilities will cover: (a) daily basic needs of settling your child into creche, (e.g., toileting, washing hands, lunch-time and departures) and (b) programme planning with observations, and “environmental assessment”.

(CS1.Centre document, letter to parents, 7 June 1993)

Sarah later elaborated on the settling-in policy when she said that although the centre did not as yet have a written policy on this, the staff did verbally “suggest to the parents that they stay with the child for the first, second and third visit, and then perhaps leave the child on their own for half an hour, and then leave for longer”(CS1.TIS1.3.2c).

7.3.1.2 Policies of practice

In the other two centres, the settling-in policy only existed in the practice and talk of the teachers but not in the centre documentation. For instance, Lorraine did not think that her centre had a written policy, and when I enquired about this with the supervisor, I was told that all the centre documents were being re-done; since the supervisor was new to the job and all the old documents had run out, this information could not be checked. As I noted earlier, I remained unable to acquire a copy of either old or new centre documents for this case study. Likewise, the parent guidebook of the parent co-operative centre where Anna and Sam worked was being re-written; the new version of the guidebook was to include their centre’s policy on settling-in, but until then the policy remained a matter of “practice”. Despite this, however, when these three teachers explained the prevailing settling-in practice within their centre, the statements they articulated were remarkably similar to those expressed in the written policies of the other centres. Here is what each of the three teachers said:

Lorraine: There is a definite procedure. Usually one staff member is more responsible for that child till the child is settled, that is, the child is quite happy staying – because it just gives them a bit of continuity. They've got to come in for three sessions with their parents to introduce them before they come in by themselves.

(CS5.TIS1.3.3)

Anna: It's a flexible policy – each child is treated as an individual. We discuss with parents when they visit with the child and we play it by ear – sometimes it depends on their age. We like parents to visit at least once or more often before they start leaving the child. Then, after they've left for a couple of times, they lengthen the time they stay away till the children start attending for their full time.

(CS2.TIS1.3.2c)

In a separate interview, Sam explained the same policy described by Anna as:

Children don't start till they can walk. What would happen is that parents ring the enrolment officer and she usually advises on staying at least twice with the child to settle the child and tells them things like fees and general induction information including their duties as parents in a co-operative. There is nothing in written form that parents get given – this is in the process of being done. They have conversations with the enrolment officer and there are conversations with staff.

(CS2.TIS1.3.2a)

Quite clearly these statements have a very similar view of what the process of settling-in entails: 'settling-in' was seen as a process of gradual induction into a new setting. In Patti's centre, the induction was in part construed as an introduction to the "routines" of the centre. In all cases the parent/s, or a familiar adult, was "expected", "encouraged" or "invited" to accompany the child and their presence was expected to continue either for "as long as needed by the child" (CS3), or "as they are able" (CS4) or, at least, for the mandatory "three sessions"

(CS5). In all cases, it is also either stated (CS3; CS4) or implied (CS1; CS2; CS5) that during this process, information should be exchanged between parents and teachers so that the induction was as smooth as possible. The one area of difference in these policy statements was the emphasis put by two centres on allocating responsibility for the new child to a specific adult – this was explained in one case as a way of organising staff around “focus” children (CS1) and in another as a way of providing “a bit of continuity” for the children (CS5).

7.3.1.3 Reflections on policies

Looking at both written policy statements and policies of practice in light of the practitioner-oriented “guidebook” literature reviewed in chapter 6, it is clear that these were generally in line with the advice offered in these guidebooks (e.g., Kleckner & Engel, 1988; Lane & Signer, 1990). As I argued in chapter 6, these guidebooks were written from a view of settling-in as an event involving the psychologically-defined experiences of separation anxiety and the attainment of a sense of autonomy. Moreover, these guidebooks were written from the ‘applied science’ perspective of education where the ideal form of (early childhood) practice would be seen as that based on (child development) theory. It is interesting, therefore, that while the centres’ settling-in policies were congruent with the practices recommended in the reviewed guidebooks, no mention was made in the policies of the child development knowledge deemed to underlie those practices, nor indeed was there any mention of the terms ‘separation’ and/or ‘autonomy’. This raises some interesting questions about the meaning of this omission:

- i. what was the nature of the knowledge base on which the centre policies relied? In other words, did the omission mean that the traditional developmental knowledge was not the main knowledge base used in creating these policies? If this was the case, what was the knowledge base used? Could the alternative have been a form of Elbaz’ (1981) practical knowledge ?
- ii. it has been argued (e.g., Morss, 1996) that psychology is part of the story of our lives and that the concepts of separation anxiety and autonomy have

- become part of the way we think about our lives (e.g., Burman, 1994; Singer, 1992, 1993); could the omission of the explicit psychological terms simply mean that these concepts have become such an ordinary part of the way we organise our lives that they have become “taken for granted” so that we no longer need to name them?
- iii. does the omission simply reflect the more mundane reason of a reluctance to use terms which might appear jargonistic, so that in reality the policy was based on traditional child development knowledge which was merely not acknowledged? If such a reluctance existed, what was the reason for this?
 - iv. or, does the omission reflect a combination of some or all of the above possibilities?

These questions became more intriguing as I continued to explore different aspects of the stories told by the teachers in this study.

In the next section I explore the teachers’ articulations of how they viewed their role during settling-in; this highlights other common themes in how the teachers construed this event as well as throws light on how the above questions might be answered.

7.3.2 The teacher’s role during settling-in: A dual focus

I have noted that all the teachers in the study construed the settling-in experience as a process of gradual induction into a new setting; thus it is perhaps not surprising that there were also strong similarities in the accounts of the six teachers about how they saw their role in this process. For instance, all the teachers talked about their role as having two foci: one on the child and one on the parent.

“I am Nina’s primary caregiver at creche and thus it is my task to settle her in and follow her development and establish a rapport with her parents” (CS1.TL.1.19-

20), wrote Sarah in her first journal entry at the start of Nina's settling-in experience.

"I'm essentially the bridge [for the child] between mum and the centre" (CS2.TIS1b.10.6); "the teacher's role is supporting the parents in whatever their decisions are, that it's ok to come and go whenever they wish, giving them options and advice"(CS2.TIS1b.10.6) said Sam during our first interview.

Likewise, Sam's colleague, Anna, described the early childhood teacher's role towards the child as that of providing "a transition between home and preschool/creche" (CS2.TIS1a.6.2a) and the teacher's role with respect to the parent as :

helping mother to feel relaxed and welcome so she'd be happy to involve herself with Maddi and with other children – she did do this too – so that she feels part of the creche because it is a parent co-operative. We have to have 2 parent helps for the adult-child ratio.

(CS2.TIS1a.10.6)

For Joan, the dual nature of the teacher's role was captured in her use of the image of having a relationship of "partnership with the parents" and in her emphasis on the importance of putting the parent at ease before putting the child at ease; as well as in her emphasis on being "open to learning and acknowledging that the parents are the primary caregivers of their child"(CS3.TIS1.6.2a). Moreover, Joan focused on "being open-minded and non-judgmental and accepting each parent and child as individuals" (CS3.TIS1.6.2a), an attitude reminiscent of that recommended in the guidebook style literature reviewed in the previous chapter (e.g., Daniel, 1998; Lane & Signer, 1990).

In Patti's view the early childhood teacher's role during settling-in was to give the child "security" which she expressed as providing "an environment that feels comfortable, caring, understanding and secure" (CS4.TIS1.6.2a); in terms of her role while the parent was in the centre, Patti saw herself as "somebody Lyn could

talk to to find out what she wanted to know, to give Lyn good feelings that Julie was going to be well looked after. In relation to Lyn, my role is someone she could relate to" (CS4.TIS1.10.6).

Finally, Lorraine described the role of the early childhood teacher during the period of starting childcare as :

to make sure the child is feeling as comfortable as they can in the environment, to keep them busy, to make sure they have lots to do It's also quite a big thing for the parents too; sometimes they're more upset than the children are. So you have to try and reassure them.

(CS5.TIS1.6.2a)

Clearly, both the child and the parent featured strongly in all the teachers' understanding of what their role entailed. In talking about the child, the image of being a "bridge" used by Sam, captured the common understanding of the teachers that their role was to provide security and comfort while the child was eased into the new setting. In terms of the teacher's role with the parents, the teachers' views emerged as ranging across a broader set of understandings including the notion that teachers had a role to play in making the parents feel welcome, relaxed and happy to be involved at the centre, accepted as individuals, supported and reassured about how well their child would be looked after, and in making the parents feel that the teacher was someone they could talk to. One teacher, Joan, also emphasised the notion that the teacher's role was to act in partnership with the parent. These views were again consistent with the suggestions made in the guidebook style writings reviewed in chapter 6; however, in stating these views, the teachers made no explicit reference to concepts from developmental literature by way of justification. This again raises the questions stated at the end of section 7.3.1.3 and makes it reasonable to hypothesise that the professional practice of the teachers in this study was based on knowledge that did not derive exclusively or directly from formal child development scholarship.

7.3.3 Settling-in: What helps and what hinders

In the reconstruction of the teachers' stories, it became clear that beyond the issue of the centre policies and the dual focus of the teacher's role, all the teachers agreed on the fact that children had different patterns of settling-in. Moreover, they all offered their own theories about what helped children settle, and what hindered, and in all cases the phrase "each child is different" was offered as an explanation for why the patterns were so different. The other point that the teachers emphasised was that many factors were involved in producing the different patterns; in Anna's words: "every child is different and you can't just take the one factor" (CS2.TIS1.6.1d).

7.3.3.1 "Taking all the factors": what affects settling-in

There were great similarities in the factors which teachers nominated as contributing to children's patterns of settling-in. These factors were suggested either as ones which could work to help the process of settling-in or to hinder it, or, more commonly, as factors which could affect the process in either direction. These factors are displayed in Table 2 which was compiled from statements made during the interviews and in the journal entries of the teachers. The factors mentioned were listed and grouped either as family-related, child-related, centre-related and other factors.

Apart from the variety of factors seen to potentially affect the settling-in process, what is interesting to note in Table 2 is that most of the factors nominated by the teachers were ones they perceived to be associated with the child or with the parent, with only one factor specifically mentioning the teacher's role in the process: parent-teacher interaction. The possible interpretations of this observation are rather intriguing. For example, one interpretation seems to be that the teachers did not see themselves as having control over the quality of the settling-in experience of the child and parent; instead they might have seen their influence as secondary to that of the parent and of the child's own characteristics and that their influence only reached the child via the interactions which the teacher had with the mother/parent. This could further mean either that the

	can help or hinder	help/s	hinder/s
Family/parent- related factors			
family routines	✓		
parenting style or attitude	✓		
parents' motivation to use centre	✓		
parental difficulty in 'letting go'	✓		
parents' response to the centre	✓		
parent's behaviour at centre	✓		✓
e.g., lingering at leave-taking		✓	
no lingering at leave-taking		✓	
parent feels settled			
Child-related factors			
temperament/personality	✓		
age	✓		
previous experience of childcare	✓		
no previous experience of childcare			✓
siblings go somewhere else	✓		✓
being an only child			✓
being unwell during the process		✓	
finding things that interests the child		✓	
having good language		✓	
high self-esteem		✓	
contact with other adult caregivers		✓	
going to other playgroups with parent		✓	
having breaks in attendance			✓
Centre-related factors			
sessional vs full-day structure	✓		
dynamics at time of child's entry	✓		
a time of change in the centre	✓		
Other factors			
parent-teacher interaction	✓		
parent-child relationship	✓		

Table 2: Factors related to settling-in mentioned by teachers during interviews and in journal entries

teachers undervalued their own ability to make a difference to the quality of the settling-in experience of the child or, alternatively, it could mean that the teachers were so keenly aware of the role of the mother in the child's life, and/or so committed to the view that each child is different that these two beliefs overshadowed their perception of their own ability to influence the process of settling-in despite their clear ability to articulate a policy of practice (see section 7.3.1). Some of the stories told in the rest of this chapter seem to lend support to the latter interpretation (see sections 7.4.2, 7.4.4 and 7.4.5).

7.3.4 *Summary of section*

In this section I have argued that there were common elements in the stories which teachers told about their experience of the event of settling-in new children. The commonalities can be summarised as an ability to articulate a policy on how settling-in was handled in their centre even in those centres where a policy was not written down, and an articulation of the teacher's role in the process of settling-in as having two foci: a focus on acting as a bridge for the child from the mother to the centre and a focus on supporting, welcoming and providing information and advice to the mother. Another area of commonality was that all the teachers expressed the view that children had different patterns of how they settled-in and that these patterns were affected by a multiplicity of factors. In my discussion of the teachers' stories, I have drawn attention to the fact that the views expressed by the teachers about how to handle settling-in had elements in common with the suggestions made in guidebook type publications about this, yet there did not appear to be any explicit reference to formal child development scholarship in the way the views were expressed. I have suggested that this raises questions about the source/s and nature of the knowledge/s on which these teachers' professional practice was based. This issue is further discussed in later parts of this chapter (see section 7.4.6).

In the next part of this chapter, the theories of practice which emerged in the teachers' stories are explored.

7.4 Teachers' theories of practice

At the start of this chapter I noted that in talking about the event of settling-in, teachers used "key phrases" in a way which appeared similar to Elbaz's (1981) images or mental pictures of good practice. In Elbaz's theory of teachers' practical knowledge, images are seen as the component of the teachers' practical knowledge which is most powerful in organising that knowledge and making an impact on practice. I also stated that these key phrases or "images" seemed to form part of a "larger understanding individual teachers had about the nature of the settling-in event" which I call a "theory of practice", or the teachers' perceptions of their practice during the settling-in process. This concept is different from Spodek's (1988b) "implicit theory" or Bell's (1990) "operational theory" both of which focus on theory-practice congruency (see section 6.3.2).

In this section the teachers' theories of practice about settling-in are presented, structured around the "key phrase" or central "image" in each teacher's theory. Other elements of the teachers' theories of practice are also identified and an account presented of how these elements worked together to create meaning out of the teacher's experience of settling-in the new child in their centre.

7.4.1 Sarah's theory of practice: "Weaning them in"

Sarah's theory of practice of settling-in started to emerge within the context of her description of the recent introduction in her centre of the 'primary caregiver system'. Sarah explained that before this system was formally introduced, the centre had already operated a policy through which each new child was allocated to one staff member for the duration of the settling-in period; Sarah saw the new system as a continuation of the same principle. She said: "we believe it is better for a child to develop a deep relationship with one adult than a superficial relationship with four adults. When they're comfortable with one person, then they'll branch out" (CS1.TIS1.3.2a). Sarah then added:

you can see it (working) with Nina- several people have offered to take her from me for a while and she has gone to them but then, she'll reach out for

me and want to come back. Children have to feel confident with one person at least.

(CS1.TIS1.3.2a)

This statement, offered by Sarah as a validation of the centre's policy, is an example of what Spodek (1988b) would call an "implicit theory" and is reminiscent also of Elbaz's (1981) notion of a practical principle: on the basis of her past experience, and on what appeared to be her belief about children and the early childhood setting, Sarah articulated the principle that children need to feel confident with one person before they can branch out. As will become clear in Nina's story of settling-in (see section 9.2.1), this principle proved to be a significant guide for Sarah's action in the centre.

A related component in Sarah's theory was her belief that an advantage of the primary caregiver system was that it gave the new child "four to six weeks of almost exclusive treatment" adding "you can't expect that focused treatment from all the staff" (CS1.TIS1.3.2a). In Sarah's theory of practice, "focused treatment" was the strategy that would enable the development of the deep relationship which would make the child feel confident and able to then "branch out" to others. Looked at from a deconstructivist perspective this statement has embedded within it the classic Western notion from attachment theory that children need to have a secure base from which to venture out and explore. From this perspective, it is also interesting that this notion existed in the theory of practice of an early childhood educator whose training background was in primary education rather than early childhood. It raises the question of whether the influence of the traditional attachment theory notion originated in Sarah's formal teacher education or whether it simply reflected the reality of her socio-historical context in which developmental theories are part of the great stories of our culture (e.g., Dalli, 1998; Morss, 1996).

The "image" (Elbaz, 1981) of "weaning them in" first emerged in Sarah's theory of practice when Sarah used it in making a firm statement that children had

different patterns for how they settled; she said: "most children who are 'weaned in' to it versus dropped into it, settle quicker" (CS1.TIS1.5.1c). By "weaned in" Sarah meant that parents should ideally be involved in a process of slow induction of their child into the childcare centre. In the interview, "weaning them in" was a recurring phrase in Sarah's story; she explained :

some parents may want to leave them [the children] for the whole day because they look as if they'll settle but more often than not this doesn't happen – no matter the age of the child. We've found that children who've been to other childcare places settle more easily. But children who are new to places like this have to be weaned in – even those who've had a lot of babysitters and are used to their parents going out at night – I have a feeling that they have an edge on the others who haven't. My neighbours' grandchildren won't settle with anyone except grandma and my answer was to take them to a childcare centre – give that child to someone else – let them get used to other people; these children wouldn't go to anyone except their grandparents! I would definitely say 'wean them into it'. But mind you, you see, this is my experience in here – there must be some parents who can't [wean them in]: they've got a job, they start a job and I guess those children just have to start [childcare] straightaway. Some children have done that here too – their parents have just left them and some have been fine. I guess it's all dependent on family routines, attitudes, all sorts of things. I did hear from one of Jean's friends that Jean doesn't let her children cry for any length of time – she responds to them straightaway. Well, I wonder, that might explain why Nina won't sleep at night. If mum goes to her as soon as she cries, it'll be like a reward and she'll never learn to sleep on her own. It's like my daughter who had to be left to cry herself to sleep before she learnt to sleep easily.

(CS1.TIS1.5.1c)

Sarah's statement provides an insight into how the "personal practical knowledge" which Spodek (1988b) suggested as being at the root of teachers' implicit theories, might come to be constructed. As Sarah sought to explain why

children might respond to the settling-in experience in different ways, she engaged in a process of reflection which drew on knowledge grounded both in her experiences as an early childhood teacher as well as on that of being a neighbour and a mother. This experiential/practical knowledge gave Sarah her principle that "children who are new to places like this have to be weaned in". Her professional experience also challenged her, however, to consider why her theory did not account for those children who, while new to childcare, settled-in easily despite not being weaned in by their parents. In response to this experiential challenge to her theory of practice, Sarah hypothesised that perhaps "family routines and attitudes, all sorts of things" might be involved in determining how a child responded to starting childcare. Sarah's statement indicated that a further hypothesis emerged from this reasoning in which Sarah tried to explain why Nina might be having trouble sleeping through the night. In this instance, the knowledge she drew on derived from her own experience with her daughter, even as it connected conceptually to the notion of rewards in learning theory.

This analysis highlights another aspect of Sarah's theory of practice about settling-in: her theory was not a rigid or static one but, as her hypotheses show, retained some fluidity as she sought a way to integrate new knowledge, or perhaps to re-shape the theory, in response to the challenges that her practical knowledge and reflection engendered. This process is described also in Elbaz's (1981) discussion of reflective practical knowledge.

Sarah had more to say about what affected the way children settled:

I don't know that age matters – you can always say it does but then there are exceptions! Maybe it depends also on the parent's attitude and how they cope with the children's reactions. For example Kim took a long time to settle, she had a very difficult time. When her mother was recalled one time because she was crying so much, when her mother found her crying, she was very *angry*. Apparently in China children are just taken to a centre and expected to cope so Kim's mum expected that. It took Kim a very long time, a long, long time with mum's attitude. She couldn't be

distracted – there was nothing I could do – it took weeks and weeks to work out, that's all.

Clearly, Sarah placed a great deal of importance on the mother's attitude and she appeared to see this and other child-related and family-related factors like temperament and being "a single child with mum alone" (CS1.TIS1.6.1d) as of greater significance to the child's experience of settling-in than structural factors related to the centre, such as the size of the group of children which, according to Sarah, "shouldn't matter if all the children are being attended to" (CS1.TIS1.6.1d).

This focus on the parents was again apparent in the importance Sarah attached to "establishing a good relationship with them". It was an important principle in Sarah's theory of practice and in the interests of this she thought it was important to start the settling-in process with giving parents some specific information about:

the weaning-in process: I would prefer it if they weren't just 'dumped'. I let them know of our routines; we don't like the children to be physically disciplined by the parents in the centre. We tell them how we like to handle the children using time-out; most will ask about how we handle aggressive behaviour. We tell them about the primary caregiver scheme, all the routines of the creche, to let us know if the child is not coming. There's a leaflet we give them about the running of creche and about knowing to label clothes, about fees and so on. The supervisor tells new parents coming in about these technicalities, she explains about parent help and about our policy on medication.

(CS1.TIS1.7.4b)

Beyond these "technicalities", Sarah's theory of practice included a belief that full communication with parents was the "best" and only approach:

I communicate quite fully and honestly as well – I think when I first started I was a bit tentative for fear of offending. Biting is one we always

inform on; parents who are settling-in want to know exactly what sort of day it's been – you're not doing any service to anyone by not telling the whole truth.

(CS1.TIS1.7.5)

The principle that comes through in these statements by Sarah is that the mother's place is primary in the child's life. Sarah gave a strong affirmation of this belief in her account of how she saw her role as Nina's primary caregiver:

While mum is here, I'm not the primary caregiver – it's not my place to take over while mum's here- there's a settling-in process for mum as well – I tend to stay in the background and everytime mum's here- even when they settle – it's their time – I shouldn't intrude on it".

(CS1.TIS1.6.2b)

As I argue later in this chapter (see section 7.5.2.1), Sarah's view of the mother's role in the child's life and, therefore, in the settling-in process was a dominant theme in the relationship which developed between Sarah and Nina's mother, Jean, as well as a strong feature of Sarah's theory of practice. In her first journal entry, Sarah wrote about her role as Nina's primary caregiver: "it is my task to settle her in and follow her development and establish a rapport with her parents"(CS1.TJ1.19-20); a later journal entry echoed earlier words from her interview: "Mum stayed with Nina throughout and while this happens she is the primary caregiver" (CS5.TJ.2.18-19).

The analysis of Sarah's journal reveals that in using her journal to record her thoughts about Nina's settling-in, Sarah also kept an account of her interactions with Nina and her mother Jean. This account reported a steady development in the rapport she hoped for and is also an account of how Sarah acted on her theory of practice (see also section 9.2.1).

In summary, then, Sarah's theory of practice was based on the image of "weaning them in" and on the strategy of using a primary caregiver system through which

children were able to receive “focused treatment” from one adult which would enable them to form a deep relationship with that person. The practical principle that “when they [the children] are comfortable with one person they’ll branch out” was the second element of Sarah’s theory of practice which also encompassed the principle that parents should be involved in the process of settling their child into the centre. The third principle that the teacher should try to establish a good relationship with the parent/s, was connected to Sarah’s belief that the mother had the prime place in the child’s life and this meant that when the mother was present in the centre, she remained the primary caregiver and the teacher’s role was to step back. Sarah articulated the practical principle that full communication with the parents was the best approach; this allowed the teacher to gain as well as impart information which would inform her practice as a teacher.

Sarah’s theory of practice about settling-in included ideas about factors which affected settling-in; she nominated the mother’s attitude, the child’s temperament and being an only child at home with mum as examples of such factors. In addition, Sarah’s theory of practice emerged as a dynamic one which mirrored the changes to her thinking as she reflected on the challenges she faced in her daily work reality.

7.4.2 Anna and Sam’s theory of practice: “You’ve got to go with the child”

“You’ve got to go with the child”, “each child is treated as an individual ... we play it by ear”, “every child is different”, “what you do is different for each child”: These phrases appeared repeatedly in Anna’s talk about her view of the settling-in experience and also in Sam’s, the second teacher who became involved in this case study. In Anna’s opinion the child’s individuality meant that the settling-in policy had to be flexible and after discussion with the parents, the approach the centre took was to “play it by ear”. This was their first principle. Within this broad framework, Anna felt that there was a need “to build up a relationship with the child so that you’re not a total stranger when they’re first left at the centre”(CS2.TIS1a.6.2b). Anna elaborated this theory:

What you do is different for each child. Some children, if they're outgoing, don't particularly want to be close to an adult and they don't necessarily latch on to an adult who's been trying to establish a relationship with them. That's why when a new child comes in we each of us [staff] subconsciously try to talk to the child. This is not really a policy but it just tends to happen.

(CS2.TIS1a.6.2b)

It is clear that in Anna's theory of practice, building up a relationship with the child was seen as not wholly dependent on the efforts of the adult; indeed the child was seen to have the overriding influence.

The issue of the child's part in determining which adult she spent most time with became an interesting one in this case study where it was not the policy to allocate the responsibility of inducting a new child to a specific adult. Within this context, the self-selection by Anna to be the teacher participant in the study, as the "teacher who would have most contact with the child during settling in" was an action that put her in an unusual situation relative to her usual practice. By the fourth orientation visit, it had become clear to Anna and to myself as observer that Maddi was spending more time with Sam, another teacher at the centre, than with Anna. During my first interview with Anna, Anna said that she and Sam had discussed this and decided that Sam would start spending more time with Maddi including being the person who handled the "passing over" routine when it was time for Maddi's mother, Helen, to leave. Anna explained this reasoning thus:

She'd seemed happier to go to Sam – when I had her she seemed upset so we thought she might settle more with Sam and she did. So last Thursday we deliberately decided for Sam to have her. Today we didn't actually talk about it but Sam actually assumed she'd look after her – that was OK.

(CS2.TIS1b.12b.3)

Later in the case study, when Maddi had been attending the centre on her own for five weeks, she seemed to be seeking out another adult, Lisa, who was a student

teacher doing some observations at the centre. During the session when this became obvious, both Anna and Sam commented to me that Maddi had “taken a real shine” to Lisa, and Sam said that she was trying to dissuade Maddi from this because the student really needed to focus on her task. However, Maddi continued breaking out into whimpers and was only briefly distracted by the various activities which Sam tried to engage her in. Eventually, Sam took Maddi over to sit on Lisa’s lap and Maddi immediately brightened up and co-operated with all the activities Lisa drew to her attention. At the end of the case study, during my final interview with Anna and Sam, I reminded them of this instance and asked them what they thought about the way Maddi had switched her preference for different adults. The ensuing conversation provided a good illustration of two teachers engaging in negotiating a shared understanding of the situation they had experienced and validating their shared theory of practice. In addition, the exchange served to highlight another principle in their shared theory: The idea that the structure of the childcare setting placed some constraints on following the child’s lead.

Carmen: You said to me that Maddi had a couple of changes of focus in the adults she went to – how do you explain that?

Sam: We respect the rights of children; we also understand that children will form bonds ... (hesitates)

Anna: with different adults

Sam: ... and we want to make life as pleasant and secure as much as possible so you should take the lead from them – it’s a perfectly natural way. Sometimes you feel a bit – you know (she and Anna both laugh and pull a face) you can’t take it personally.

Anna: A lot of children do latch on to another adult, it’s like transferring loyalty from mum to another adult.

Sam: We had another theory that whoever took Maddi from her mother first thing, was out of favour.

Anna: The other day, I don’t know if Lisa was there, she put her arms out to me so she’d gone from me to Sam to Lisa and back to me! So she’s

obviously recognised us all as adults that she feels some loyalty to I guess.

Carmen: You were a bit worried, or at least I sensed some concern, about Lisa being a [teacher] trainee and becoming a focus because of her going away soon; is that what was on your mind?

Sam: We tried to keep her from spending a huge amount of time with her – becoming dependent on her – I was keen to avoid that because Lisa was going away.

Anna: It makes it very hard when they become dependent on only one person. They have to learn to cope without that key adult.

Sam: It does go to show that children do latch onto people – but if they're going away it's good to be aware. Keeping the continuity of staff is very important.

(CS2.TIS2.5b.1)

In this exchange “respecting the rights of children to form their own preferences for adults” emerged as a practical principle in Sam’s theory of practice, while her expression “you should take the lead from them” is a re-statement of Anna’s practical principle of “going with the child”. Clearly, the two teachers shared, or arrived at, the same views about “good practice”. Sam justified her approach on the basis of her and Anna’s common experience with Maddi which she claimed showed that children “do latch onto people”. In this exchange, “settling-in” was constructed as an event which involved a transfer of loyalty from the mother to another adult, and developing a bond with another adult, both of which utilise the same notion of separation and the need for security present in attachment theory. The wish to avoid Maddi developing a dependence on an adult who was not going to be a regular adult in the centre can also be traced to the same theoretical perspective.

The reluctance to allow Maddi to spend “a huge amount of time” with Lisa illustrates a further aspect of the theory of practice which Anna and Sam appeared to share: Their principle of “you’ve got to go with the child” clearly had some

limits which in this case were related to the length of time Lisa was going to be available as a “preferred adult” for Maddi. While the two teachers agreed that the child should be allowed to take the lead, they also agreed that in this case they had a role in guiding where that lead went. This aspect of their view of the tasks involved in settling in a new child was one that the teachers generally downplayed in their talk about the settling-in event. Instead, some of the statements made by Anna and Sam, as well as some of the behaviours I noted during my field visits, created a sense of a ‘laissez-faire’ approach in their practice which seemed to assume that everything would fall into place without making it very clear just how this was going to happen. For example, Anna used the phrases: “we play it by ear” (CS2.TIS1.3.2c) and “this is not really a policy but it just tends to happen” (CS2.TIS1a.6.2b); in the latter instance she was referring to her understanding that when a new child started going to the centre all the staff “subconsciously try to talk to the child”(CS2.TIS1a.6.2b). The occasion when they expected a familiar toy to be in Maddi’s bag illustrated that “we play it by ear” does not always have smooth consequences.

Within this “play it by ear” approach, both Anna and Sam had some hypotheses about the factors which could affect the settling-in process. In Anna’s case, the factors mentioned included the child’s temperament, previous experience of early childhood settings, the age of the child, the mother’s reaction to the settling-in situation and how much the parent really wanted to have time out. Anna’s view was that these factors worked together and that no one single factor could be pinpointed as the sole reason for how children settled. Sam’s view about this issue was very similar but she emphasised also the importance of the centre dynamics at the time of the child’s entry into the centre. She suggested that the nature of the centre itself (e.g., sessional versus full day) may also have an impact on how the process of settling-in developed. In talking during our first interview about how Maddi’s experience of settling-in was going, Sam articulated her awareness of the importance of the centre context: “[it’s going] OK – partly because she came in at a time when we were adjusting to more children – it was a time of change at the centre and that made it harder” (CS2.TIS1.9.3b).

Later in the interview Sam also expressed a clear understanding about how she would know when Maddi was settled; she described the behaviour she expected as:

there might be some distress at separation, say for about five minutes or so, then she'll go and participate in the centre curriculum. Even if she comes and checks every so often to see if you're still there – she'd still be settled.

(CS2.TIS1.10.5)

In discussing this view of being settled during the joint interview at the end of the case study, Sam elaborated that beyond participation in the creche curriculum a settled child would also engage in “choosing what to do” (CS2.TIS2.2.3a) and be happier. Anna added to this that “the other thing I look for is how they react when mum comes back” and illustrated this in Maddi’s experience by saying “Maddi now shows she is pleased to see mum but she continues to eat and doesn’t just abandon everything” (CS2.TIS2.2.3a). Underlying this construction of being settled is the notion that the settled child is the one who has developed some independence from mother and the ability to act with a measure of autonomy.

Further aspects of Anna and Sam’s theory of practice related to their relationship with the new child’s parent/s. One such aspect was that both parents and teachers needed to exchange information. Sam and Anna felt that the parents should give them information about what children liked in terms of activities, their health and dietary needs, as well as information on whether they had already had experience of other early childhood centres. This information was needed because according to Sam it “gives you cues to establish points of common interest so you can make them feel comfortable” (CS2.TIS1.7.4); Anna’s rationale was that she liked to “find out enough so I can talk to the child” (CS2.TIS1a.4a).

Within the area of communication with parents, Anna and Sam’s theory of practice included the view that one should aim for full communication with the parents but at the same time, apply some discretion. For Anna: “the fullness of it

depends on the cues parents give”(CS2.TIS1a.7.5), while Sam said that as a centre they communicated “pretty fully actually – well, some things you mightn’t say, like sometimes you mightn’t describe some of the distress ... Certainly if a child is distressed all the time – say 20 to 30 minutes – we usually ring the parents” (CS2.TIS1b.7.5). Clearly the discretion deemed necessary in this theory of practice was intended to not exacerbate the parents’ worries.

A strategy adopted by both Anna and Sam was to talk to the parents from the basis of their own personal experience as parents. This was also congruent with their belief that part of their role was to support the parents’ decisions and to make them feel relaxed and welcome (see 7.3.2). The strategy also appeared to derive from the view that telling the parents that they had children of their own made parents feel more trusting about leaving their child at the centre. Anna explained this as:

They like to know you’ve had children of your own and that you identify with the different ways of children; if one had early childhood formal training that would be a substitute. I like to make them feel welcome so they feel comfortable leaving their child and ... they feel that you can identify with the child – that you’re going to be able to settle them if they cry and understand what they communicate even without words, just through the way they cry. For example, sometimes a cry is not sad but angry so you can talk to them about what they’re feeling.

(CS2.TIS1a.7.4b)

Likewise, Sam reported during our first interview that in her conversations with Helen she “tried to be empathetic with her and talked about my own experience of separation. It’s a very emotional thing really and I can still cry about it even now” (CS2.TIS1b.11.10). In the second interview Sam again spoke about how hard it was for parents to leave their child in a childcare centre “especially with the first child – and we put ourselves in their shoes” (CS2.TIS2.4.7). The underlying belief in this approach was that sharing the common experience of being parents established a basis of trust, and perhaps also, as suggested by Anna, credibility, as

a fit person to look after children. As I argue later (see section 7.5), these views also raise interesting questions about how these teachers construct the nature of their professional identity.

In summary then, Anna and Sam's theory of practice appeared to be based on the following principles:

- i. that as a teacher, one must 'go with the child', or follow the child's lead, about which adult the child preferred to spend most time with;
- ii. the teacher should be flexible and recognise that the child has an overriding influence in the type of relationship that can develop between the teacher and the child.

Additional elements of the two teachers' theory of practice included the idea that the structure of the childcare setting (e.g., the hours of opening or the centre dynamics at a particular time) placed constraints on the extent to which the child's lead could be fully followed, and ideas about factors which affected settling-in such as the child's temperament and previous experience of using childcare services, what the settled child would look like and views about relating with the child's parent/s. Anna and Sam's view of the settled child was that the child would engage in the centre curriculum and choose what to do within it as well as behave in a way that showed some independence from the mother. In terms of relating to the parent/s, Anna and Sam had a goal of information exchange and full communication albeit tempered with some discretion. Their theory also included strategies such as being empathic with parents and talking to the parents from their own personal experience as parents as a means of making parents feel relaxed and more trusting in their abilities as teachers who would be able to look after their children well.

7.4.3 Joan's theory of practice: "It's all about partnership with parents"

Partnership with parents appeared to be the central principle of Joan's theory of practice about settling-in new children and her expression of this came through in all aspects of our discussions during the interviews.

Joan expressed her belief in the partnership principle as having arisen from her practical experience: “over the last three to four years I’ve learnt that partnership between parents and teachers is essential. The expectations [of partnership] are attainable” (CS3.TIS1.10.8); she also saw partnership as involving a number of elements which can be described as intuitive principles. In recounting the centre’s policy on settling-in, Joan expressed one of these intuitive principles as “I personally think they [the parents] need to come”:

we encourage the parent to come in and spend time with the child and meet us. On the first day the parent or nanny of the child come in and the staff and parent sit down and go through the guidebook. Then we encourage them to spend a good two or three hours with the child – it really depends on what the parents can [do] and feel happy doing. I personally think they need to come. Once the formality of the guidebook is over, the next time it’s a case of interacting with the parent and child, getting to know what the child is like, what they’re interested in and so on. If the child is not clingy, we encourage them to leave for a while and to reinforce that they will come back. We encourage the parents to ring as many times as possible to make them feel comfortable. Shirley’s mum could come in with her – that was really good, but if parents have to work, they can’t so much. We like the parents to tell the child that they are leaving when they are going.

(CS3.TIS1.3.2a)

This account of the centre’s policy was true to the one documented in the guidebook to parents, although Joan was unclear where it was written down. As with her principle of partnership with parents, she described her knowledge of the policy as having been acquired very practically:

It’s something that happens – I learnt about it from watching Cheryll [the other co-supervisor] and observing her over the time I’ve been here *and* my own philosophy and feelings about children. The most important thing is the partnership between the centre and parents. Cheryll and I talk about it too I guess. We had a child a while back who was brought in by the

nanny – I guess he was used to it because she was bringing him up but I felt his mother needed to know where he was. So I rang her up and told her quite firmly that she should come in with her child – the mother wasn't working. She did come in and she was neat. She wouldn't know what the centre was like if she hadn't come.

(CS3.TIS1.3.2c)

In both the statements above Joan's view that parents needed to be involved in settling-in their child is very clear. It is also clear that this view was not only a professional conviction but a personal one based on her "philosophy and feelings about children". Joan illustrated the practical base of her theory by recounting her action in the story of the child brought in by his nanny; the mother's response was seen by Joan to validate her theory.

The basis for Joan's theory of practice in her personal beliefs came through again when Joan explained another of her principles: that honesty of communication was essential in her relationship with parents. She said: "being honest with parents is so important. And a lot of it is my own personal beliefs – what's going on between parents and staff is also so important. I read lots too" (CS3.TIS1.3.4a).

Gathering information about the child from the parents, and reciprocating by providing feedback to the parents, were two strategies Joan said she used which indicated how her principle of "it's all about partnership with parents" would be put into practice:

It's just supporting the families really Gathering information about the child is really important and most centres have that as part of their documentation. It's really important to do this because the parents know the child best. Information helps us to know how to comfort them – there's lots of things you don't know. For example, Shirley really cried when we put sunblock on her, so when Deborah rang, we told her about it and we found out that she really hates things on her face. If we hadn't spoken to

mum about it, we'd never have found that out. Putting oneself in the parent's shoes is a really good thing to do.

(CS3.TIS1.4.5c)

Clearly, "putting oneself in the parent's shoes" functioned as a rule of practice for Joan which she said she used on many occasions. One instance of this was in Joan's account of how she made sure to ask the parents in the first few weeks: "'And how are you?' to parents because the distress hits them as well" (CS3.TIS1.5.1b).

On another occasion Joan reported the delight of Shirley's mother when Shirley waved goodbye to her for the first time and then commented: "you're constantly battling that guilt. We've gained a bit of trust and I think there's respect there too" (CS3.TIS1.12.12b).

There is awareness in both these statements of the state of emotional vulnerability that parents using childcare might experience and there is awareness also of their wish to know that they could trust the teacher to look after their child (see chapter 5, sections 5.3 and 5.4). Thus, an element of Joan's theory of practice about partnership with parents included also the notion of "caring" about parents and checking to see how they were experiencing the process. Later, in talking about the difficulty of estimating the length of time it might take for a child to settle in, and what action would need to be taken if "the distressing hysteria" of the initial settling-in time lasted longer than two weeks, Joan again showed the centrality of parents in her theory of practice: "if it's longer, then you need to tell the parents and re-assess" (CS3.TIS1.3.3). Caring about the parents did not mean 'protecting' them from full information; rather parents were seen as having the right to all information about their child as well as the right to have an input in the decision-making about what would happen next. Providing full information was also a strategy through which Joan saw her principle of "it's vital to be honest" being able to be enacted.

Provision of information was another part of the theory of practice which Joan had about what parents expected of her; she referred to this as “putting my professional performance into action” (CS3.TIS1.10.7). In Joan’s theory, the parent/mother expected her

to inform her of [the centre]; to accept her and her partner and Shirley – especially Shirley; to get to know Shirley and put my professional performance into action and settle Shirley into the centre. She expects me to spend time and talk with Shirley, to make a fuss of her – to cuddle her and love her in a professional way – find out about her and give her information about Shirley – trust really.

(CS3.TIS1.7.5)

It is interesting to note in this statement the elements which Joan saw as making up her “professional performance”; being a professional clearly involved the key roles of being an information exchanger, being willing to give Shirley time and interact with her and “love her in a professional way” (see also section 7.5). This latter idea was clarified in another part of the first interview when Joan said:

what parents want to know, what they look for most are cuddles and hugs; that they [the children] should be liked and loved. I really believe in that especially for our centre age group. Unfortunately, with the current climate many childcare workers have become like robots trying not to cuddle too much.

(CS3.TIS1.5.1b)

This last statement was a reference to concerns raised among early childhood educators at the time that the data for this case study was gathered (late 1993) about the need to protect themselves from allegations of child abuse following a spate of such allegations nationwide (see Duncan, 1998). Clearly, Joan too felt the repercussions of these events which occurred within the broader context outside the centre.

Joan also had a clear view about what she expected from the parents; in relation to Shirley, she expressed this as an expectation that Deborah would:

‘be there’ for Shirley depending on where Shirley was at in the settling-in process and to take her cue too. At times Deborah was talking to me and Shirley pulled off some books from the shelves, so she read her a book and then Deborah said to Shirley: ‘would you like Joan to read to you?’. So I took the cue and did. Deborah did that very well. She was good at joining in and helping with the kitchen – she really did the right things – at times gently weaning herself away – just had fun with her at times.

(CS3.TIS1.11.9)

It is interesting to note Joan’s articulation of how she saw Deborah’s role: She expected Deborah to “be there” for Shirley and she observed that Deborah at times “gently weaned herself away”. As I noted in chapter 5 (section 5.6), “being there” was exactly what all the parents understood their role to be during their child’s settling-in, so in this respect it is clear that Joan had a realistic perception of what she could expect from parents. The use of the expression “weaned herself away” is also worth noting because it is the same expression used by Sarah, the teacher involved in Nina’s settling-in, as her predominant image about what was involved in this experience. It is intriguing that two teachers in different centres, with no connection to each other, used the same metaphor for this event. From a deconstructivist perspective it is also significant that the metaphor is so clearly one derived from the experience of mothering and carries with it powerful connotations of nurturing as well as separation of the child from its primary food supply. The analogy between this image and that of separation from mother as the primary supply of support is further discussed later in this chapter (see section 7.5.2.1).

Apart from these practical principles about partnership with the parents, Joan also operated with a clear view about how to behave towards the child during settling-in. In common with all the other teachers in this study, Joan had a strong belief that each child was different; from this flowed her major strategy about how to

behave towards children: "Taking the child's cue is important – don't smother but be there" (CS3.TIS1.9.3b). My observations and Joan's journal entries indicate that Joan translated this implicit theory into a number of strategies which largely involved observing what Shirley did and building her response around these as well as around the information she also acquired from her interaction with Shirley's mother Deborah. Thus, for instance, Joan noted Shirley's interest in a tupperware shape puzzle, which became a favourite one, and commented in her journal: "Once again Shirley smiled, went 'ooh' and moved towards the tupperware puzzle. I followed her direction and we did the puzzle together; this activity lasted for about 10 minutes" (CS3.TJ.17-20). This example of establishing joint attention and activity (Rogoff, 1990) and focusing on the child's intentionality (Pramling & Lindahl, 1991, 1994) was a common occurrence in this case study.

In summary, Joan's theory of practice about settling-in was built on a central belief in the importance of treating parents as partners; partnership meant that parents were to be encouraged to participate in the process, that there was to be reciprocity and honesty in the sharing of information, that parents' feelings about the process would not be overlooked and that parents would also be involved in decision-making about their child. With regard to Joan's behaviour towards the child, Joan's dominant principle of practice was that she should take her cue from the child and "be there and not smother". All of this behaviour was seen by Joan as an aspect of "putting [her] professional performance into action" at the basis of which was knowledge deriving from her personal beliefs and practical experience as well as her reading.

7.4.4 Patti's theory of practice: Providing "extra teacher support"

Patti's centre policy for settling in new children said that "the child is gradually introduced to the routines of the centre for short periods"(CS4.Centre document: charter, p. 9). In her recounting of this policy during the first interview, Patti further elaborated how she thought this would ideally be done:

Parents should visit the centre before the child starts. This often happens when they enrol which can't happen on the phone. We like the settling-in time to happen over a week. On Monday, the parent goes away for one hour. On Tuesday, the child comes in with the parent/s, the parents leave for one hour, they come back and pick them up. On Wednesday, they stay for a few minutes and the parent goes and child stays till lunch time. The same thing happens on Thursday but the child stays for lunch and is picked up before one o'clock. On Friday, same thing again but the child stays on for a sleep and is picked up at 2.30pm. This provides a gradual build-up and the child has contact with all the staff because we do not attach one adult to the child – it's less stressful on the child in case the one adult has to be away suddenly.

(CS4.TIS1.3.2a)

Patti clearly liked a structured approach to the initial introduction to the centre; she also had a strong belief in the value of routines describing them as a way through which a secure environment was created for children over which they eventually gained control:

We try and give them an environment that feels comfortable, caring, understanding and secure. We tell them what's coming and then when it comes we ... lead them through them – so eventually they've got control over it, so they learn to anticipate what's coming next.

(CS4.TIS1.6.2a)

Patti was aware that "some of the routines might be an issue if children are new" but felt that the centre staff dealt with this problem because "we make allowances for new arrivals – more so for younger children than older ones" (CS4.TIS1.6.1d).

Patti valued order and was disparaging about an early teaching experience she had had in an early childhood setting where "children were allowed to do what they liked without any or much guidance so they missed out on what they chose not to do" (CS4.TIS1.2.4). This statement also indicates a belief that the child's

curriculum was not to be determined solely by the child; the teacher had a guiding, and sometimes an overriding, role in this. A further element of Patti's theory of practice was that the teacher's role during the settling-in experience was "to give them security" (CS4.TIS1.6.2a), comfort, care and understanding. She defined "being settled-in" as:

being comfortable in the centre, arriving and smiling, being happy to be with you but not necessarily participating in everything that's happening and knowing they can make their own decisions; but also as she [Julie] was in the first two days – moving around really independently from area to area.

(CS4.TIS1.8.6c)

Within this framework, Patti's recurring use in her journal of the phrase "she needed extra teacher support", or "she didn't need extra teacher support", can be understood as Patti's evaluation of how well Julie was progressing along the path of becoming more in control of her environment and independent/autonomous in making decisions and in taking action within the structure set up within the centre. For example, when Julie was restless during the group story-reading time, and later during outdoor play moved away from the other children and towards one of the centre adults, Patti reported in her journal: "she needed teacher support during the outside play time" (CS4.TJ.4.11-12). The same comment was made the following day when Julie was also "not so happy outside – she needed support and lots of interaction from Maria" (CS4.TJ.5.11-12). Later in the process, when Julie was more "happy", Patti wrote: "Julie continues to develop her communication skills; she did not need any extra support today. She was happy having her nappy changed and loves to wash her hands. She responded with laughter to her tummy being tickled" (CS4.TJ.22.20-23). The message here was that Julie was more relaxed within the centre environment and had become accustomed to the routines of nappy-changing and handwashing: an element of control over the centre routines had been achieved.

In this analysis, therefore, the view that emerges of the settled-in child is that of the independent, autonomous child, as highlighted in the phrase “knowing they can make their own decisions”, a construction typical of the mainstream Western psychological tradition.

Patti’s theory of practice included the belief in the child’s individuality which also characterised the other teachers’ view of the child; similarly, Patti used this belief to justify the strategy of being responsive and picking up the children’s cues: “the main thing is to be aware that everybody is different and not everything will work with everybody ... you’ve got to go with them – talk to them gently – be ready to pick up their cues” (CS4.TIS1.5.1c) and “be responsive” (CS4.TIS1.6.2b). In Patti’s view this ability was a product of experience: “it wouldn’t matter if you told a new teacher this a million times – it’s experience that gives it to you – you feel what is necessary to help the child” (CS4.TIS1.6.2b). This extract also throws light on the way that Patti constructed her image of good practice in early childhood: Good practice was related to having a “feeling” about what would help the child and this came with experience.

Another aspect of Patti’s theory of practice was that exchange of information with the parents was important; Patti explained her view about what she felt she should tell parents thus:

For parents to feel good they need to know how the day’s gone. For example, today I felt it’s important to tell Lyn that Julie was not well in terms of her health. But if the child’s unhappy during settling-in I do think it’s important to tell them they’ve been unhappy but also the good things that happened. Because parents can’t do anything about it and the only thing they could do is feel stressed if you told them they were distressed all the time. We try really hard to give them some positive things.

(CS4.TIS1.7.4b)

Later, Patti added: “During settling-in time upheavals are usually so short-lived that it’s important not to dwell on them only” (CS4.TIS1.7.5). When I later asked

her what she thought Julie's parents expected from her during the settling-in period, Patti replied:

She wanted someone to give her information, to see that her little girl was going to be in an environment that was caring and stimulating, that things were in control – that the environment was safe and that the children in the environment were happy and doing things together and that her child would be able to be part of that – that's what I would want anyway.

(CS4.TIS1.10.7)

Patti answered this question clearly through a process of placing herself in the mother's shoes and thinking things through from that perspective, a strategy which seemed common among all the teachers in this study. What is different in Patti's answer is that she emphasised the peer group situation in the centre as being a happy and co-operative one. This aspect is striking because, among the five centres in this study, Patti's centre was the one where the children really did seem to work co-operatively and peacefully together and this co-operative peer culture appeared to exist without a great deal of need for adult intervention to define aggressive incidents. This aspect of the centre environment was one that impressed Lyn greatly as well as myself; Lyn said in our first interview that she had feared that the children would be violent towards Julie but this had not happened and the children were very friendly. As the case study proceeded it became apparent that Julie had become a real favourite especially with the older girls who vied with each other to play with her outside with the big doll strollers and generally looked after her and approached to give her hugs and hold her hand (see also section 9.3.1).

When I then asked Patti what she expected from the parents during the settling-in time, her answer was:

I actually don't really expect anything from the parents because I think it's actually quite hard for them to come into the environment so I don't have any specific expectation but I accept what they give and sometimes it's really great and sometimes it's not – for example one Mum brought in her

3 year-old-son for the first time – he was a big boy and he pulled and pushed her – he swung on her and she was so embarrassed and the more we tried to interact with the boy the worse he was. He stayed for the hour and we all agreed he should go. So I said “next time just drop him off and go” and he was fine – so what can you expect? We do have the expectation of them staying over the week but we accept anything.

(CS4.TIS1.10.9)

The morale of this little story appeared to be that, as Patti said elsewhere, “everybody is different” and “you’ve got to go with them”.

In summary, Patti’s theory of practice about the event of settling-in seemed to be constructed around the image of providing “extra teacher support” within a structured secure environment so that the new children eventually gained control. A strong principle within this theory of practice was that each child was different and that the teacher’s role was therefore to pick up the cues from the child about when the support was needed. The ability to pick up cues from the child was seen by Patti as largely acquired through experience. In Patti’s theory of practice it was not necessary for one adult to be allocated primary responsibility for a child’s settling-in; her view was that this approach would be stressful for the child on those occasions when the teacher needed to be absent. Information exchange with parents was a strategy which Patti saw as important particularly to reassure parents that their child was being well looked after. As with the other teachers, Patti explained her thoughts about what parents expected through a process of ‘putting herself in the parents’ shoes’.

7.4.5 Lorraine’s theory of practice

It is not possible to capture Lorraine’s theory of practice in one phrase because a clear image was not articulated by Lorraine in our two interviews. As I noted in section 7.2.5, Lorraine did not return her journal to me despite many follow-up phone calls so that in reconstructing Lorraine’s theory of practice, I have relied on my two interviews with her and my observation of her practice. These indicate

that like the other teachers in the study Lorraine had clear views about how settling-in was best handled. Lorraine was the least experienced of the teachers in this study and was engaged in her first position as an early childhood teacher having just finished a teacher education course for primary school teaching.

I noted in section 7.2.5 that Lorraine spoke about her work as if she were conducting it within someone else's framework in which there were things she would have liked to change. She intimated that the decisions about these were, however, beyond her influence. For instance, she said that she would like to see a few more activity areas set out for the children each morning and a better staff:child ratio. She was very aware that the centre had had ten new children starting within the past few weeks; this was within a total roll of 23 under-two-and-a-half year olds. She found the dynamics of the centre with this number of new children unhelpful to her goal of spending time with Robert:

I tried to be closer to Robert than his mother was, while he was doing an activity and giving him feedback and so on, so that he'd get used to me being there and some other staff did that too – but it was a little bit difficult with all the other children starting as well. Since the beginning of the year we've had 10 new children out of 23 children. This morning we had four new ones, that's basically one for each staff member. I'd like to see a few more activities out for them to do, too.

(CS5.TIS1.10.6)

Lorraine voiced support for the idea of having one staff member look after the settling-in of individual children but was very aware of the constraints occasioned by the centre dynamics on her practice of this policy. Her rationale for supporting the idea of having one person with primary responsibility for the settling-in was that it ensured more continuity for the child; she did not elaborate on her view of why continuity was desirable but employed the same rationale to justify the need for information exchange between the centre and the parents. Another aspect of Lorraine's views about communication with parents was that this communication had to take into account the fact that the parents were probably feeling

uncomfortable. Her belief was that one had to be careful what to report to avoid making things worse for the parents as, for example, in reporting behaviours like “being naughty” (CS5.TIS1.7.5).

In our interviews Lorraine reported being very aware that her goal of providing feedback to parents was not well served by the structure of her working hours which did not coincide with Robert’s arrival and departure times at the centre. She said that, as a consequence, she really could not be sure what Robert’s parents expected from her during the settling-in time or even how the process was going for them.

Lorraine’s views about the role of the parents during the settling-in period were much clearer. She stated that she expected Robert’s parents to be

talking about it with Robert at home – he’s old enough for that, to discuss when he’ll be picked up – to talk about the other children and staff at the centre to make him more familiar with it and make it less hard for him in there. At the centre I expect them to bring him to the room and say hello and maybe stay until he’s doing an activity and then quickly say goodbye and go. The prolonging of goodbyes makes it difficult at times.

(CS5.TIS1.11.9)

Lorraine had other ideas about what made the settling-in difficult for children – she said, for instance that being an only child made things harder because they were “not used to having many children around – it’s all a bit bewildering for them” (CS5.TIS1.6). Lorraine felt also that the length of time it took children to settle depended a great deal on how often the child attended the centre – children who attended every day were usually settled by the end of the first week but those who only attended once or twice a week took a bit longer to settle. She added, however, that “it does depend on the child” (CS5.TIS1.7), here echoing the same view as the rest of the teachers in the study.

Lorraine expressed the idea that the teacher's role was to make the child's experience as close to that at home as possible. Lorraine broke down this goal into a number of specific strategies that a teacher should use:

give the child lots more attention and watch the child; make sure the child is feeling happy and if you feel they are unhappy, act straightaway to calm them down, to distract them from thinking about their parents – it doesn't take too long to do that.

(CS5.TIS1.6)

It is clear from the above that while Lorraine's theory of practice did not have an identifiable image, it nonetheless contained specific practical principles. These included the notion that ideally one staff member would have main responsibility for settling-in a new child and the idea of having information exchanges with parents so that continuity would be ensured for the child. In common with the other teachers, Lorraine expressed the view that each child was different and this determined how the experience went for the child. Lorraine also had clear expectations about what the parents should do while they were in the centre including that they should prepare the child for the centre by talking about the centre at home so that the environment would seem more familiar to the child quickly.

7.4.6 Summary of section

In this section I have presented the theories of practice of the six teachers in this study constructed around a key phrase or image that was dominant in the way the teachers talked about their practice; for one teacher, Lorraine, an image did not emerge from the data so her theory of practice was presented around the set of principles present in her talk. The key phrases used by the teachers were distinctive in that they appeared to somehow 'personalise' the way these teachers construed the settling-in experience, revealing a focus on different aspects of a process which they commonly understood as involving a gradual induction into a new setting. In addition, all the teachers emphasised the importance of communication with the parent/s as an important principle in their theory and they

each seemed to use the strategy of “putting themselves in the parents’ shoes’ as a mechanism to facilitate communication. The strategy of “going with the child” or “taking one’s cue” from the child also emerged as a principle that all teachers espoused as indicating ‘good practice’ during the settling-in experience. The analysis of the teachers’ talk about their practice revealed that they operated with an ideal profile in their minds of the settled-in child; this profile included the characteristics of having some independence from the mother, being able to engage with the curriculum and to choose what to do, being happy and being able to interact with more than one adult in the centre. The teachers’ theories of practice further revealed a picture of professional practice which was articulated with reference to the teachers’ personal beliefs and life experiences as well as to past professional experience; as in previous sections (e.g., section 7.3.1.3) it is noteworthy that the teachers did not refer to formal child development knowledge in articulating their theories of practice. This suggests yet again that the knowledge base for their professional practice needs to be explored beyond the confines of this discipline.

In the next section the relationships between the teachers and parents during the settling-in period are presented as they were constructed in the narratives told by the teachers and through insights gained during my fieldwork observations.

7.5 Teacher-Parent relationships: Constructions within an early childhood discourse

The theories of practice presented in the preceding section have highlighted the expectations which teachers had about the parents, and about the parents’ behaviour in the centre, during the time of their child’s settling-in. In this section, I consider the teachers’ narrative accounts of the relationships which developed during the experience. In telling/reconstructing these narratives what became clear was that the relationships occurred within the framework of the teachers’ theories of practice which themselves appeared to exist within a broader discourse about the nature of early childhood work. I also explore lack of congruence between what the teachers reported as their experience in their relationships with the

mothers and what the parents reported as their experience with the teachers (see also section 5.4). I argue that some of these incongruencies raise questions about the nature of the (power) relationships which existed between parents and teachers within their relationships.

7.5.1 The discourse of the theories of practice

This chapter has already argued that the teachers' narrative accounts of their experiences of settling-in shared common elements. These common elements included that the experiences occurred within centre policies that construed the event of settling-in as a process of slow induction into a new setting; that the teacher's role was seen to have twin foci, one on the child and one on the parent; and that there were commonalities in what the teachers construed as factors which helped or hindered the process of settling-in.

In the presentation of the teachers' theories of practice, it also became clear that some other elements were common across the teachers' theories of practice. For instance, all the teachers used the phrase "each child is different" and generally this phrase was offered as an explanation for the different patterns of settling-in that could be observed in children. In many cases, the teachers also made strong statements that the mother had a primary role in the child's settling-in.

These common elements, and particularly the two notions of "each child is different" and the notion that the mother has a primary role in the child's life, were part of a discourse that functioned much like the teachers' "ideas, or ideologies" in Ronald King's (1978) classic study of three British infants' classrooms. King said:

the infants' teachers' actions were related to the ideas they held about the nature of young children and the nature of the learning process. These ideas, or ideologies, were seldom explicitly expressed by the teachers because to them they had the status not of ideas but of the truth. What they believed about children and education was integral to what they defined as real in the classroom. (p. 10)

It seemed to me that in the stories of the teachers in my study, the two notions operated very much as taken-for-granted beliefs about how the world of the early childhood centre functioned. Part of the discussion which follows about the teachers' accounts of their relationships with parents seeks to make visible the ways in which these notions were indeed elements of a discourse which the teachers used to "define what was real" within the centre settings.

7.5.2 Relationship narratives: Similarities and differences within the early childhood discourse

7.5.2.1 Sarah and Joan: Constructing the teacher's identity

Both Sarah and Joan described the relationship they had with the mother of the new child in their centre in positive terms throughout the case study and a comparison of their accounts of this relationship with the accounts given by the respective mothers also shows considerable congruency in the way the teachers and the mothers understood the relationship. In presenting the parents' narratives in chapter 5, I described both relationships as ones of "steadily increasing trust" (see section 5.4.1).

Sarah's positive view of Jean emerged very early; at the first interview Sarah described her relationship with Jean, Nina's mother, as:

very good – she's forthcoming, and said on several occasions: "I'll definitely be back". I feel confident the right thing is being done. She's confident enough to come and tell me when she's ready to go which some other parents don't know to do yet.

(CS1.TIS1.11.13)

At the same interview, Sarah described Nina's mother, Jean, as "receptive to my ideas, if she doesn't know she asks me and she lets me know ... she's obviously an intelligent and articulate woman and sensible and pretty clued up" (CS1.TIS1.11.11); Sarah also said that Jean gave her "good feedback; she always expresses her feelings – there's good reciprocal feedback" (CS1.TIS1.11.12b).

In her first journal entry Sarah wrote: "Nina's mum is clearly enthusiastic about Nina coming to creche and I found her very personable and communicative" (CS5.TJ.2.18-19). In the next entry, Sarah again wrote:

Mum is very personable and amenable and not backward in coming forward with any ideas or queries. At mum's suggestion, I attempted to change Nina's nappy Mum asked me today whether I thought she should leave Nina for a while. I suggested no; I thought it was still a bit too early, also bearing in mind that they will not be coming again for 2 weeks, so there would be a break. Probably it will be better if she starts leaving her when she is coming each week. Mum was receptive to this idea.

(CS1.TJ.2.43-45; 53-59)

After the fourth orientation visit, Sarah wrote: "She [the child, Nina] is relaxed with me, as is her mother with the creche situation, especially the leave-taking time" (CS1.TJ.4.46-48) and the following entry was: "Nina's mum is very receptive to my ideas, appreciates my opinion, and I respect her good sense" (CS1.TJ.5).

In each of these extracts, there is a clear sense of reciprocity of communication and of respect which continued to the end of the case study when Sarah described her relationship with Jean as having a "good relaxed easy feeling – she tells me anything that is relevant" (CS1.TIS2.4.7). Sarah particularly appreciated the fact that Jean was "forthcoming" whether it was with offering ideas and suggestions or asking questions or just expressing her feelings. She also was pleased that Jean did not "ditch" Nina (CS1.TIS1.11.11) but met Sarah's expectation that parents should "wean in" their children at the centre, being their primary caregiver there while this happened (see also section 7.4.1).

In Joan's story, her positive regard for Deborah also started straightaway; in this case Joan's emphasis was on the relationship being: "a parent-teacher professional relationship based around Shirley. It's perfectly where it should be; we are still

getting to know each other – it's early days but because of the good start Shirley's had, we both feel OK" (CS3.TIS1.12.13). At the end of the case study Joan again described her relationship with Deborah in similar terms saying it was: "a typical parent-teacher relationship – as it should be – very professional and at ease; there's trust and respect and I think it's reciprocal. I don't have any concerns there at all" (CS3.TIS2.4.7).

In some ways, Sarah and Joan described their relationships with the two mothers differently with Joan placing emphasis on the "professional" nature of the relationship, an aspect which Sarah did not specifically allude to. However, in analysis, the terminology they used was the only area of difference in how these two teachers talked about their relationship with the parents; in significant ways, their relationships were very similar.

One way in which there was striking similarity was in how both teachers consistently made complimentary comments about the mothers' handling of their daughters' settling-in throughout the process. Just as Sarah spoke of Jean very highly, so Joan commented about Deborah in the first interview: "when I think of the ideal settling-in experience, that was it" (CS3.TIS1.11.10). As I noted in section 7.4.3, Joan's expectations had been that Deborah would "be there for Shirley" (CS3.TIS1.11.9).

Joan felt happy that her expectations about Deborah's behaviour had been met. This was the time when Deborah skilfully drew Joan into the book-reading activity which Deborah was involved in with Shirley and effectively passed over the activity into Joan's control. Joan saw this incident as an illustration of Deborah's skill in what Joan called "weaning herself away".

The use by both Sarah and Joan of the metaphor of "weaning" was another similarity shared by these two women which I have commented on in section 7.4.3: Sarah spoke of the parent "weaning in" the child and Joan spoke about

Deborah “weaning herself away” with the connotations of gently breaking a primary connection with a source of sustenance.

This extract also illustrates Joan’s construction of the settling-in experience as being “all about partnership with parents”. The book reading story is a good example of how a sense of partnership developed in this relationship. My fieldnotes record many instances of interaction between Joan and Deborah which Joan described as “taking the cue” from each other. The way the two women regularly handled Deborah’s leave-taking at the start of the session typified this partnership behaviour as shown in the following extract from my fieldnotes :

Joan (to Deborah): Anytime you want to go ...?

Deborah: I was just going to say ...

(then bends down to address Shirley who’s riding around on the bike in the outside play area)

Mummy’s going to go for a little while poppet – see you soon – you’ve got your bike and Joan and the sandpit – see you soon . (Deborah waves and walks towards gate and out to carpark which is out of sight).

Shirley: “Na, na”, Shirley whimpers slightly in protest. Joan picks her up and takes her to sit in the sandpit beside her. Shirley looks quite happy – catches sight of mum leaving by the gate, calls out “mama” but settles again to play.

(CS3. Fieldnotes, orientation visit 3 / 8, 11.14)

In addition, Joan’s journal entries typically recorded interactions she had had with Deborah as opposed to the behaviours she observed Deborah engaging in; this suggests that Joan was very attentive to how she and Deborah worked together, as opposed to separately, in the process of Shirley’s settling-in. A few examples of her journal entries illustrate this:

I encouraged Deborah to leave Shirley for 20 minutes so that Shirley starts to understand that mum will leave. Shirley cried for about 5 minutes and was comforted by staff.

(CS3.TJ.4.12-13)

I talked to Deborah about leaving Shirley longer next time – maybe an hour. Deborah felt Ok about this.

(CS3.TJ.4.26-27)

Deborah and I talked about aiming for Tuesday for her real ‘first’ without mummy. Both of us feel positive and feel it’s the next step and Shirley is ready – so is Deborah.

(CS3.TJ.5.24-27)

My interaction with Deborah made me feel positive about telling Deborah to tell me she was leaving so I could support Shirley – I also encouraged Deborah to ring to find out how Shirley’s morning was going. When Deborah returned, I talked through with her about Shirley’s day and discussed sleep-time with her looking at what would work best for Shirley and Deborah.

(CS3.TJ.7.17-25)

Deborah rang to see how Shirley was doing – I talked with her ... about how Shirley was upset [when I tried to put the sunblock on]. I discovered from Deborah that Shirley doesn’t like things on her face.

(CS3.TJ.10.4-5)

This evidence of Joan’s valuing of working in partnership with Deborah did not go unnoticed by Deborah. While Deborah did not use the term “partnership”, she appreciated the way that Joan interacted with her, and particularly the way that her wishes were respected and the way that she received constant feedback. For instance, Deborah commented very favourably on the promptness with which

Joan complied with her request that Shirley use a highchair for lunch. Deborah also appreciated Joan's emphasis on information sharing with her and, as noted in chapter 5 (see section 5.4.1), talked about this very positively in both interviews.

Sarah did not use terms like "working in partnership". However, her behaviour was remarkably similar to Joan's: she too used her journal to record interactions she had with Jean noting when Jean sought her advice, any suggestions which Jean made as well as other general impressions.

In this approach, both teachers revealed a similarity in their view of the mother's role in the centre: They both behaved with the utmost respect for this role suggesting that both subscribed to the same belief in the primacy of the mother's role which constituted part of the discourse of their working environment.

Sarah was very emphatic in her first interview and in her journal entries that whenever Nina's mother, Jean, was present, she was the primary caregiver and Sarah's role was to "stay in the background", saying that "it's not my place to take over while mum's here" (CS1.TIS1.6.2b). One can sense Sarah's stance of utmost regard for the primacy of the mother's role in the following statement:

I'm not a substitute parent – I'm a caregiver-supporter in loco parentis – well yes, a substitute I guess. I don't know – I'm her comfort rock – her mainstay – I'm supposed to love her in the absence of her mother – be an example for her – provide stability for her which I think I do – I'm someone to be comfortable and safe with.

(CS1.TIS1.6.2a)

The struggle Sarah clearly had with articulating the difference she saw between being a "caregiver-supporter in loco parentis" and a "substitute parent" is fascinating to deconstruct. The idea of being a "substitute parent" was clearly unacceptable perhaps because "substitute" suggests too close a similarity of roles: one usually substitutes like with like. Being a parent herself, an aspect of her biography which Sarah used freely in making sense of her work (see section

7.4.1), Sarah had an experiential understanding about how being the early childhood teacher was different to being the parent of a child. On the other hand, “in loco parentis”, “in the place of” seemed more acceptable and the nuance of difference in the meaning of these two terms moved Sarah closer, though still ambivalently, to accepting the idea of being a “substitute”. Nonetheless, she only saw herself as a substitute “in the absence of her mother” because, as she also said: “it’s not my place to take over while mum’s here”. This reflection on the meaning of “substitute parent” suggests two interesting dynamics in Sarah’s thinking. Firstly, there is a sense in which, for Sarah, “being a mother” was tinged with a touch of sanctity: The primacy of the mother’s place was seen as inviolate even when she felt that her work role was to occupy the place of the mother. Secondly, this extract can be seen as an exercise in which Sarah was engaging in the construction of her professional identity; she went on to say:

Creche originally was not for us to be educators – though I know we are now – we were just childminders but we are more than that. It was originally to give mum a break but now we’re definitely into programme planning and observing children and planning the programme on their needs.

(CS1.TIS1.6.2a)

These reflections by Sarah connect to a broader debate within the field of early childhood education about what is mothering and what is teaching (e.g., Katz, 1980), what is care and what is education (e.g., Caldwell, 1991; Dalli, 1990; Smith, 1988). Thus, Sarah’s struggle to articulate her teaching role is also reflective of the discourse and dynamics of the early childhood world where being a teacher exists in a tension with dominant societal discourses in which the early childhood teaching role is seen as somehow second best to, or in competition with, the natural and primary position of the mother in the child’s life. Essentially, this message underlies much of the research carried out on children using childcare in the seventies and eighties where the focus was on whether childcare had detrimental effects on children, such as, for example, in its effect on their attachment classification (e.g., Ainslie & Anderson, 1984).

In Joan's story, her commitment to the notion of partnership can be seen as a valuing of the mother's role comparable to Sarah's. Joan said of her work:

When I go to work I have to be a professional, to put on a role – I also try to be open to learning; acknowledging that parents are the primary caregivers of their child is important; and being aware of the family's and the child's needs.

(CS3.TIS1.6.2a).

Joan's statement highlights that she too saw the parents as the primary caregivers; however, Joan also saw herself as an early childhood professional with a "professional performance" to "put ... into action" (see section 7.4.3). She felt that this was "what every good childcare teacher should be doing" (CS3.TIS1.10.7) as part of their essential role of partnership. In this articulation of the role of the early childhood teacher, the role is objectified as 'out there', it is a part performed in a self-conscious way which Joan later articulated as a set of discrete strategies. Through this objectivisation, Joan appeared to have steered away from the struggle about professional identity which Sarah clearly engaged in, and yet produced a profile of "the good early childhood teacher" in her talk and in her practice which did not disturb dominant discourses about this role.

In summary, the narrative accounts of the two teachers, Sarah and Joan, about the relationships which they developed with Jean and Deborah were congruent with the ones recounted by the mothers. Sarah and Joan, both remarked on the reciprocity of communication and respect they experienced within their relationship with the mothers and their reports about these were marked by compliments about Jean and Deborah, comments which indicated that the mothers had met their expectations about how they should behave to help their child settle in and statements which indicated that they focused on 'taking the cue' from each other. Both teachers also spoke about the role of the mother in the child's life as being of primary importance and they appeared to construct a profile of the "good early childhood teacher" against the background of this belief. I have argued that this belief constituted one of two major principles in what I have called the

discourse of their working environment with the second principle being: "each child is unique". The two teachers' stories were also remarkable for the way they both used the image of "weaning" to capture their view of the style of induction into the centre that they felt would be most helpful for a successful settling-in. This image is strongly connotative of the functions of motherhood and appeared to be another illustration of how the teachers constructed their identity of teachers by reference to dominant discourses about the role of mother. Within this discourse, Sarah struggled to articulate the distinction between being an early childhood teacher and being a mother while Joan was able to express her identity with less difficulty through objectifying the role of the teacher as a professional performance which had to be enacted in partnership with the parent/s.

7.5.2.2 Anna and Sam: Structural constraints

The themes within the discourse about early childhood work which were present in the accounts by Sarah and Joan of their relationships with the parents, reappear also in the stories told by Anna and Sam. However, their stories do not provide the same picture of professional relationships as those reconstructed above.

In chapter 5 (see section 5.4.2), I characterised the story told by Helen, Maddi's mother, about her experience at Anna's and Sam's centre as a story of ambivalent trust. Helen's interview and journal accounts of her experience indicated that despite feeling very positive about the teachers on a personal level, she felt she had not had enough contact with them and not enough information about how the centre worked. These perceptions, together with her awareness of the "busyness" of the teachers, and her view that the ratio of adults to children was not good enough, made her feel unable to trust that the teachers would be able to look after her daughter for the full day.

The difficulties identified by Helen during her experience of settling-in her daughter Maddi, were ones that Anna and Sam showed strong awareness of during their talk about their relationship with Helen. For instance, Anna and Sam were both aware that Helen had probably not received enough information,

especially since the centre guidebook had not been reprinted; as Anna put it: “We probably didn’t do a very good job without the guidebook” (CS2.TIS1a.9.2).

In Anna’s journal there was also a strong awareness that she had not engaged in enough interaction with Helen and her daughter Maddi; she wrote: “because our centre was even more busy than usual this morning, I was not able to spend as much time with Maddi and her mother as I would have liked, or would normally be able to do” (CS2.TJ.11-15).

Sam’s awareness that she too had not spent much time with Helen was apparent in our first interview when she said about Helen:

she’s just getting to know me and vice-versa. It takes a good couple of months to feel familiar with a new parent – I think she’s quite a quiet/shy person – I don’t feel I know her very well. I’ve got reasonably surface impressions so far. I probably spend less time with parents than other staff do. Other staff sometimes spend too much time with parents – although this could be positive. I try to show by example. For example, I seem to be the one to go upstairs with the kids [for play activities in the hall when it’s wet outside]. I’m protective about the programme. This was not part of the planned routine; it just happened.

(CS2.TIS1b.12.13)

The latter part of Sam’s statement needs to be placed in the context of an earlier comment she had made to me that she was the only early childhood trained teacher in the centre and that two of the other four adults were parent helpers; Sam clearly felt that as the supervisor, and the only fully-trained early childhood teacher in the centre, it was her responsibility to ‘lead by example’ and ensure that the centre programme was followed through.

It is clear from these extracts that both teachers were aware that their practice had been constrained by structural issues in the organisation of the centre and that this had impacted on the kind of relationship they had developed with Helen. At the

end of the case study, when Anna and Sam took part in a joint interview, they spent some time talking over their view of Helen and of their relationship with her:

Sam: The feedback we are getting from Helen is pretty positive about the creche – she doesn't go into great lengths about things – mind you I haven't asked her directly. I think she appreciates us telling her about Maddi's day.

Anna: When she comes in the morning we haven't given her much time; but she doesn't volunteer information.

Sam: I've said to her to ring us up but she doesn't do that – maybe she feels confidence in us.

Anna: If she weren't confident she wouldn't bring her.

Sam: She doesn't strike me as unconfident in herself. Once we told her to go [i.e., not linger at leave-taking], she did.

Anna: I wonder if she'd have persevered so long if she were not in the study.

Sam: But she also came in when we had a lot of children come in.

Anna: Although there are more children, you *do* make the time – you have to really.

Sam: The extra kids probably have meant that we've spent not enough time with Helen.

(CS2.TIS2.4.6)

In this excerpt the two teachers were not only exchanging ideas about their view of Helen but, in the process, also arriving at a shared understanding of the situation. They mused on whether Helen had confidence in them and that perhaps it was participation in the study that had kept Helen using the centre and, by implication, not her confidence in the teachers at all. Anna and Sam were clearly uncertain about how to interpret Helen's reserve, although they were in no doubt that lack of time with Helen, and the fact that the centre had experienced a large intake of new children over a short period of time, had interfered with the growth

of their relationship with her. Shortly after this exchange, when I asked the teachers how they would describe their relationship with Helen, Anna said:

She's also quite shy – so if she doesn't volunteer information, it's hard to keep asking questions yourself. She's quite amicable. I'm sure that if she wants information she'll ask. She doesn't strike me as wanting a blow-by-blow account of the day – she accepts it like that.

(CS2.TIS2.4.7)

Sam added to this:

It's a growing relationship – as we get to know her – it'll be easier. She has been quite assertive at times – she's said some quite assertive things, and also she's fitted into our suggestion to leave earlier. She works quite easily in partnership and doesn't seem to take it personally if Maddi is upset. It's hard to leave especially with the first child and we put ourselves in their shoes.

(CS2.TIS2.4.7)

From my vantage point as observer, and privy also to Helen's story in her journal and interviews, this view of Helen seemed like an oversimplification of Helen's perspective. Helen's story indicated that in fact lack of guidance was a major difficulty she experienced during the settling-in process and the lack of the centre guidebook remained a particular disappointment till the end of the study. The teachers' assumption that Helen would ask for more information if she wanted it, or ring to check on Maddi, also overlooked the fact that Helen herself was very conscious of the "busyness" of the teachers' day and thus may have been reluctant to take up any of their time with the children through phone calls and chats. She valued the teachers' time with the children highly and in our final interview she said:

I think it's a shame they still haven't produced the guidebook – the frustrating thing is that it's written and typed – it just needs stapling and distributing. I was talking to a friend who has a child in a daycare centre where they keep notes daily on children: I didn't think they should spend

time doing that rather than be with the children. The children should be the focus rather than me.

(CS2.PIS2.4.8)

Helen's comment seemed intended to put her desire for information in perspective – her message was that she was not asking for too much – as she clearly perceived daily records to be. As observer, my impression was indeed that she did not ask for too much; she made few demands on the teachers' time while at the centre and generally waited for the teachers to indicate to her what was expected of her and of Maddi. As she herself put it, Helen expected the teachers to give her an idea of the "rules in place for Maddi" (CS2.PIS1.6.9). The teachers, on their part, did not appear to be conscious of the degree of guidance Helen would have liked, despite their emphasis that "we put ourselves in their [the parents'] shoes". The "taking of each other's cues" which seemed to work so well in the stories told by Sarah and Joan was missing in this story.

Helen's expectations for guidance were probably also ill-served by the practical principle with which Anna operated: That while the parent was in the centre, the teacher's role was to let the mother 'make the running' in terms of what the mother wanted to do in the centre and in terms of how much contact Helen and Maddi had with her. As Anna explained during our first interview, she had not had much contact with Maddi yet because "when Helen's there she's mostly with her. I don't like to intervene in those situations – I don't like to force it unless the child shows she wants to go away from Mum" (CS2a.TIS1.10.6). Sam likewise saw her role as taking the lead from the parents and expressed this as "supporting parents in whatever their decisions are – that it's ok to come and go whenever they wish, giving them options and advice" (CS2.TIS1b.2a). This approach was similar to that used by Sarah and Joan, and seemed underpinned by the same strong belief in the primacy of the mother's role. However, in this case study, Helen's story suggested that the lack of guidance she experienced, together with the 'stand back' approach used by Anna and Sam, in combination also with the centre's policy of allowing the child to indicate the adult they wanted to spend

most time with, created dynamics in the relationship between Helen and the teachers which left none of the adults totally satisfied.

In summing up, it appears that both the teachers and Helen felt that the experience of settling-in and their developing relationship during this time could have been improved; there also appeared to be agreement between them about the elements of the experience which needed improving. The structural constraints on the way the centre operated featured prominently in the teachers' awareness of these elements. From my perspective as the observer, there also seemed to be some incongruence between the teachers' theory of practice and their actual practice; both the teachers expressed a strong view about the importance of information sharing and yet they failed to provide the guidance which Helen needed. It also seemed that the discourse about the primacy of the mother which Anna and Sam espoused may have been responsible for the teachers' holding back from providing information and guidance on the assumption that the mother would know what to do. Additionally, the teachers assumed that Helen would ask for information if she needed it and, therefore, they did not seek to find out what she wanted. It seemed to me that by defining Helen as the person with primacy in the child's life the teachers found it possible to retreat from taking full responsibility for what happened in the centre during Maddi's settling-in time and, unwittingly perhaps, withheld crucial information that would have supported Helen's experience.

7.5.2.3 Patti and Lorraine: Incongruent perceptions

The stories which Patti and Lorraine told of their relationships with the parents of the new children in their centres were not as detailed as the other teachers' stories. Additionally, their perceptions of their relationships with the parents were incongruent with the perceptions held by the parents about their relationship; the incongruencies seemed to derive from a situation of interpersonal distance.

In Patti's relationship with Lyn, the sense of interpersonal distance probably reflected the fact that Lyn only stayed at the centre with Julie for two visits after

which Julie started attending on her own; subsequently, Lyn was only at the centre at drop-off and pick-up times. In the case of Lorraine's relationship with Robert's parents, Paula and Michael, the relationship remained somewhat distant because Lorraine often did not start work at the centre till after Robert had been dropped off; this meant that Lorraine rarely had contact with Robert's parents.

In our first interview Patti described her relationship with Lyn as "a comfortable relationship" adding that it would develop over time (CS4.TIS112.13). As I noted in an earlier section (7.4.4), Patti also said that in dealing with parents she started from the premise that since it was difficult for the parents to come into the childcare centre environment, she did not expect much from them but accepted what they gave. With this as a starting point, her comments about Lyn's attitude while settling Julie in were very positive:

she was really good – very good with Julie, very positive – on that first day Mum assisted Julie to play with water – a couple of other times with the dough. Lyn said Julie'd never played with dough before and was really supportive with the picking up times – she did what she said she would. And actually today when she picked up Julie, she was really good – she said "Oh you do look spacey" – acknowledging what I'd said but not going over the top. I guess her professional background would help.

(CS4.TIS1.11.10)

The event Patti was referring to here involved Patti passing on the information to Lyn that Julie had not had a very good morning and Patti suspected that Julie was cutting her back teeth. Patti appreciated the fact that Lyn responded calmly to the situation, perhaps because this calm response was in line with her view of the best way to handle the settling-in experience: "the main thing is ... to be calm in yourself – to feel confident because that goes through to the child and to the parent" (CS4.TIS1.6.2b).

As the settling-in process unfolded, Patti's initial positive comments about Lyn continued:

Mum seemed quite happy leaving Julie and collecting her and made arrangements for tomorrow.

(CS4.TJ.4.21-23)

Lyn was very good when she collected Julie, even though I had just told her Julie hadn't had a very good morning.

(CS4.TJ.8.22-30)

The relationship with mum is positive – we see Dad sometimes, briefly, when collecting Julie – he's always friendly.

(CS4.TJ.19.18-20)

Most of Patti's journal entries, which included four made by another teacher, Maria, different teacher while Patti was away, focused however, on observations of Julie's experience, indicating that it was Julie who was most salient in Patti's awareness of the experience of settling-in, not the parent/s. As Julie mostly stayed at the centre unaccompanied by her parents, the contact between Lyn and the teachers was limited and consisted mainly of talk "about sleeping and eating functions" (CS4.PIS2.4.6). By Lyn's account, she found this type of feedback lacking in detail and she saw this as a problem of "not being able to relate to one identified person so, whoever's nearby, I talk to them" (CS4.PIS2.8).

There is no evidence that Patti was aware of the difficulty Lyn was having with the lack of a single person to talk to, or with the limited feedback she was getting. Instead, by the end of the case study, Patti described the relationship as having become more relaxed and friendly over time and that she felt that:

Lyn is a very straightforward person – if there was a problem I feel she'd come and talk to us about it. I feel she's happy bringing Julie in – she talks to the staff readily and *knows* all the staff's names. That's really good because sometimes parents don't pick that up. We felt good when Lyn said the other day that Julie's language had really improved since she's been here. Also, we had a working bee on the weekend and both Julie's parents

offered to come and made alternative arrangements because the weather was bad. That gives you a nice feeling – we're starting to gel nicely.

(CS4.TIS2.4.7)

It is interesting to note here the lack of congruence in the perception of the parent and of the teacher of how things stood between them. In the first parent interview, when Lyn first brought up the issue that "feedback hasn't been great" (CS4.PIS1.7.10), I had followed this up with a question about whether Lyn would consider doing anything about this. Lyn's answer was: "That's a tricky one, I don't want to be seen to be criticising" (CS4.PIS1.7.11).

It is clear in Patti's comment above that she had no idea that bringing up a problem for discussion could be an issue for Lyn; this suggests that Patti saw Lyn primarily as a confident professional woman who would be assertive if need be and did not take into account the state of vulnerability one is reduced to as a mother entrusting a child in someone's else's care (e.g., Galinsky, 1988; see also section 5.3). Lyn was aware that the relationship between them was not evenly balanced: Patti was the one who set the rules, the one in whose power she had just entrusted her child; within this context she was not prepared to be seen to be critical. Also, Patti had no idea that Lyn was not totally satisfied with the quality of the feedback she was getting, or that one of the reasons she did know the teachers' names was that she had taken the trouble to ask my assistance in sorting this out at the first interview. When I shared this last piece of information with Patti at the end of the final interview, Patti agreed with this and said that it might even be a good idea to remind parents in the newsletter from time to time that there was a noticeboard with the photos and names of staff on the wall in the kitchen.

Overall, from Lyn's point of view this relationship appeared to function on the basis of her original belief that the staff at the centre were mature and knew what they were doing; she described her relationship with the staff as "professional rather than friendly". From Patti's point of view, by the end of the case study the

relationship with Lyn had become “more relaxed and friendly”. The way the two adults told their story of their relationship indicates that their perceptions of this did not fully coincide.

In telling Paula’s story of her relationship with Lorraine in chapter 5 (see section 5.4.3), I noted that Paula experienced the same difficulties as Lyn with lack of detailed feedback on Robert’s day and the lack of a single person to talk to about Robert. I noted also that despite these limitations Paula expressed herself as confident and comfortable with Robert going to the centre. This confidence appeared to be based on the trust she had developed in the centre from her previous contact with it and from the contact of other family members with staff at the centre.

When I spoke with Lorraine about her relationship with Robert’s parents, Lorraine seemed aware of the trust that Paula and her partner Michael had in the centre and during the second interview, she described her view in this way: “I’m sure they trust the staff at the centre – by asking questions at the centre they show they’re pleased and interested in what we do. It’s a comfortable positive relationship – with the centre – the relationship seems perfectly fine” (CS5.TIS2.4.7).

From early on in the settling-in process, however, Lorraine clearly saw her own relationship with the parents as constrained by the structure of her work hours and also by the dynamics of the centre during a period when many new children had started within a short space of time. In the first interview she talked about the relationship in these terms:

I’m quite happy with how it’s going, taking into consideration how often I’ve seen them – when I do see them I try to have a conversation with them – but it’s not always easy with all the children there.

(CS5.TIS1.12.13)

Not being able to talk to the parents much also made her unclear about the parents' expectations; she explained her difficulty in answering my question about these:

It's quite hard for me to answer that because I haven't had much time to chat to them mostly because I'm not rostered on at the start and end of Robert's day because I'm not there when he goes. [They expect] to be fairly informed about how he's settling – I'm sure some parents don't expect to know when nappies have been changed or not depending if they've used day care before, but they like to know it when you point it out to them. They'd like to know what he's been doing during the day. I don't know – but that's what I'd like to know if I was a parent anyway.

(CS5.TIS1.10.7)

Within this context, Lorraine emphasised that the parents' relationship was with the centre and not just with her and she noted that in her absence she expected that her colleagues provided feedback to Robert's parents. My observations in the centre, however, did not bear this out; indeed this situation was another example of the phenomenon I noted in section 5.4.3.2 that when the boundaries of responsibilities were not clearly defined, there was great potential for role ambiguity and breakdown in espoused "ideal practices".

Overall, it seemed that the relationships which Patti and Lorraine formed with Lyn and Paula respectively, were marked with a degree of interpersonal distance in which there was incongruence in the perceptions which each party held about the quality of their relationship. In both cases the mothers experienced a lack of feedback which was not addressed. In Lyn's case there was a reluctance to specifically request more feedback because of a concern that this might be interpreted as a criticism; in the case of Paula, requesting more feedback from Lorraine was logistically difficult. These reconstructions of two relationships also highlight the contribution which structural factors can make to the way that starting childcare is experienced. In addition, the relationship between Patti and

Lyn also raises questions about the way that relationships between parents and teachers might be related to who holds the power in centres.

7.5.3 Summary of section

The relationship stories presented in this section suggest that a number of interesting dynamics were operating in the construction of meaning within the interactions of the adult participants during the event of settling-in. The different relationship stories all appeared to have been affected in some way by what I have called the discourse of early childhood work marked by the two beliefs of the primacy of the mother's role in the child's life and by the individuality of each child. I have argued that the first of these beliefs was one which the teachers appeared to use as a reference point in defining their own identity as early childhood teachers (see especially section 7.5.2.1); the same belief was also used as justification for the degree of involvement with the child which was deemed appropriate in the presence of the mother. Thus, this belief appeared to function as a help to teachers to "define what was real" (King, 1978) in terms of their identity and also in terms of their relationships with the mothers.

The relationship stories also provided insights about other factors involved in the development of the different types of relationships. For example, in the stories told by Sarah and Joan, reciprocity of communication and respect, expectations which coincided with how events turned out and a continual process of "taking the cue" from each other, emerged as important factors in the development of mutually satisfying relationships between the teachers and the mothers. In the stories told by Anna and Sam, as well as by Patti and Lorraine, structural constraints on the way the centres were run appeared to limit opportunities for the development of satisfying information exchange and guidance. In the story of Patti's relationship with Lyn, Lyn's reluctance to do something about her dissatisfaction with the lack of feedback illustrated that relationships between teachers and mothers carry a dimension of power, with the power about what happens in centres being tipped in favour of the teacher.

7.6 Chapter overview: Reflections on experience

My intention in this chapter has been to present narrative accounts of the teacher participants' experiences of settling-in the five children involved in this study which illuminate the "lived reality" of this experience, and of the meaning it had, for the teachers.

The "lived reality" presented in this chapter has appeared structured around the themes of commonalities in the teachers' stories, theories of practice about settling-in which emerged for each teacher, and stories which teachers told about the relationships which developed between them and the mothers in the study. In the telling of this "lived reality" a number of aspects emerged as worth highlighting.

Firstly, the stories which the teachers told about their "lived reality" of settling-in new children included a clear articulation of their centre policy for handling this event even in those centres where the policy was one of practice rather than a documented one. All the centres had policies about settling-in which assumed that children were naturally inclined to form an attachment relationship with another adult when the mother was absent. Some centres did not have a deliberate policy, and procedures, to 'scaffold' this happening because it was believed that this would create (management) difficulties whenever a staff member needed to be absent. In these centres it was believed that stress would also be created for the children if their primary caregiver was absent. Those centres which did promote a primary caregiver system did this in the belief that developing a deep relationship with one centre adult would ease children's separation from their mother, smooth the induction into the new setting of the childcare centre and provide continuity for the child. These approaches in the centre policies mirrored those recommended in the guidebook publications reviewed in chapter 6 but the teachers' descriptions of their centre policy did not include reference to formal child development scholarship. I argued that this raises a question about the nature of the knowledge base which informed the teachers' practice in relation to the settling-in event.

A second area of agreement in the teachers' stories was that they all spoke about their role during the settling-in period as having two foci: one on the child and one on the parent, and they were also in agreement that all children settled in differently. It was interesting that the factors mentioned by the teachers as affecting the settling-in experience tended to be parent/family-related or child-related ones rather than ones to do with the teachers themselves; I argued that this suggests that the teachers did not see themselves as having a strong influence on the quality of the settling-in experience for the child and the parent.

My analysis of the way the teachers spoke about their practice with the child suggested also that they understood settling-in as a process of slow induction into a new setting; my analysis further showed that key phrases recurred in the speech of individual teachers which appeared to capture what I have called their "theories of practice" about this event. The theories of practice were justified by the teachers by reference to personal beliefs and life experiences including their life experiences as parents or carers of younger siblings, but not by reference to formal child development knowledge and this again raised the question about the nature of the knowledge base that informed their practice. The strategy of "going with the child" also appeared as a strong element within the theories. Furthermore, the theories incorporated notions about what the settled-in child would look like, including that the child would have some independence from the mother, would be able to choose which curricular activities to become involved in, and would be able to interact with more than one adult.

A notable feature of the teachers' theories of practice in relation to parents was the statement that communication with them was essential. The teachers mentioned a number of strategies which they saw as facilitating this communication including putting themselves in the parents' shoes.

In re-constructing the narratives which the teachers told about the relationships which developed between them and the mothers in the study, two themes emerged

which seemed to “define what was real” about their relationships and the nature of their work: Firstly, the idea that the mother has a prime place in the child’s life and, secondly, the idea that each child is different. I have argued that these two notions were integral to the way the teachers constructed their own identity as teachers and to the way they defined their role in the settling-in process particularly while the mother was present in the centre. In this way these two notions formed part of what I have called the “discourse of early childhood work” within which the teachers’ lived reality of starting new children in childcare was constructed. Issues to do with who had the power to define the situation also started to emerge in one relationship which was marked by a lack of congruence in the perceptions held by the teacher and by the mother about the relationship between them.

Finally, the analysis presented in this chapter suggests, that just as the mothers’ stories presented in chapter 5 may be seen as connected to dominant psychological and social discourses about mothers and motherhood, so too, the teachers’ stories existed, and were constructed within, discourses about early childhood work and about the nature of children and mothers that were also connected to discourses about motherhood and teaching. In this way, the teachers’ stories, as well as the mothers’, may be seen as part of the great stories that psychology and other social sciences construct for and with our culture (see section 5.7).

In arguing that the teachers’ accounts of their centre’s policies, and of their theories of practice, used the discourse of child development scholarship but did not make explicit reference to this scholarship, I noted that it was unclear whether these concepts were gained through formal study or were simply a reflection of the pervasiveness of psychological discourse in everyday language. This argument highlights the need expressed by other writers (e.g., Clandinin & Connelly, 1990; Perry et al., 1997; Silin, 1985; Spodek, 1988b) to explore the source of teachers’ thinking about their practice and how traditional child development knowledge may co-exist with knowledge/s gained in other ways. I

have suggested that in the narratives presented in this chapter, the teachers' life experience as mothers or carers of young children, as well as their reflections on past professional practice, appeared to be dominant sources for the knowledge/s they articulated in their theories of practice.

In the following chapter literature is reviewed which throws light on how children might experience the event of starting childcare.

STARTING CHILDCARE BEFORE THREE:

NARRATIVES OF EXPERIENCE

FROM

A TRI-PARTITE FOCUS

VOLUME 2

Carmen Dalli

1999

Abstract

This thesis explores the event of starting childcare as experienced by five under-three year old children, their mothers and at least one teacher in the childcare centre attended by each child. Narrative accounts of the adults' experiences were gathered through journal records kept by the mothers and the teachers, and during two semi-structured interviews. The children's experiences were recorded through non-participant observation fieldnotes and video-taped records of three events during each orientation visit by the children and their mothers to the childcare centre, and once weekly for the following six weeks. Narratives of experiences were re-constructed from these data using a combination of methods from grounded theory, narrative enquiry and deconstructivist analysis.

The tri-partite focus of this thesis reveals the experience of starting childcare as an emotional one for all participants, not just for children; it argues that the traditional research focus on the emotional significance of this event for children is an incomplete one. Additionally, starting childcare was an experience of induction: through processes of social canalization and guided participation, the mothers and the children were inducted into the ways of the childcare centre by the teachers and the established children in the centre. Deconstructivist analyses of the adult participants' narrative accounts suggested that both mothers and teachers defined their roles in the children's experience of starting childcare, and their relationships with each other and with the children, against the background of dominant discourses about motherhood and early childhood teaching. For teachers this meant that they expressed their role as subsidiary to that of the mother. The paradox emerged that while teachers saw themselves as less powerful than the mothers in influencing the children's starting childcare experience, the observational data revealed that the teachers' actions determined the way children were 'canalized' into the expected ways of relating to them. Theoretical statements emerged from this study which point to new directions for how the event of starting childcare may be conceptualised in the context of shared care between home adults and early childhood teachers. Implications for enhancing the experience of starting childcare are highlighted.

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Chapter 8

Research on children's experiences of starting childcare

This chapter provides a review of studies which have dealt directly with the issue of children's first entry into an early childhood setting. In light of the very limited number of studies which have focused on this event as experienced by children aged less than 3 years, studies of older children starting to use an early childhood service for the first time are also included. The rationale for this decision is that while age might make a difference to the way children experience this event (e.g., Finklestein, Dent, Gallacher & Ramey, 1978; Robbins, 1997; Rutter, 1981), the event itself is characterised by some elements that are constant irrespective of the age of the child, such as, for instance, the fact that the event involves the child's getting used to new adults and children, and getting used to a new physical environment outside the home (e.g., Jorde, 1984; Thyssen, in press). Thus, the inclusion of studies in which the subjects are older than those involved in the current study can prove useful in illuminating the experience of the younger children.

The small body of studies which fall within the framework sketched above have been primarily of two kinds: those working within a psychological tradition which have sought to examine, and sometimes to measure, the effect of a number of variables on the child's level of adjustment to the early childhood setting, and those which have taken a more social-psychological perspective and viewed the experience as a social as well as a psychological one involving a number of interactional processes leading to the integration of the new child into a new social setting.

In addition, in recent years an approach to studying children has started to emerge in which researchers have attempted to understand experiences from the children's perspective. Two Scandinavian studies (Pramling & Lindahl, 1991,

1994; Thyssen, in press) have used this approach in exploring children's early experiences in childcare centres.

The studies reviewed in this chapter represent these three approaches. Given my research objective of presenting an holistic understanding of the 'lived reality' of the experience of starting childcare, I point out how the studies reviewed illuminate this objective. I also highlight those themes which connect up to the narratives recounted in the present study about the children's experiences of starting childcare.

8.1 Studies within the psychological tradition: Themes of separation, attachment and temperament

Within the psychological literature on the subject of starting childcare, the focus of the analysis has often been on one or more of the three classic developmental psychological themes of mother-child separation, attachment relationships and temperamental variations in adaptation.

8.1.1 *Mother-child separation and starting childcare*

Separation from the mother and "separation reactions" were the central themes of Janis' (1964) psychoanalytic case study of two-year old Lottie's entry into an early childhood setting. The case study was conducted over a one-year period and involved direct home observations of Lottie, reports by the mother on the nursery school sessions and on Lottie's home behaviour, and an interview with Lottie's teacher at the end of each term. In Janis' story of Lottie's starting to attend the nursery school she acknowledged the influence on her analysis of John Bowlby's ideas about the significance of separation from the mother as well as the influence of Freudian notions about development in the early years. The story Janis tells about Lottie's entry into nursery school is one of separation which was handled by Lottie through the use of *identification* and *defense mechanisms*. For instance, Janis argued that in the first three months of attending the nursery, Lottie used identification with her five-year old sister, Dorrie, as a defense mechanism to protect herself from the impact of separation from her mother (p. 68); in the

winter term the "successful re-experiencing of school separation" was explained by Janis as having "evolved out of significant developmental changes in her [Lottie's] relationships to her parents" (p. 118) including the contribution to this of Lottie's discovery of her sex identity and the importance this gave her father "in this newly differentiated world" (p. 119).

Janis' (1964) work is particularly relevant to my study because of its use of the case study method. While this method is characteristic of the psychoanalytic theoretical perspective, and is thus unremarkable for a study within this tradition, from the point of view of the current study, Janis' work is significant because it offers a uniquely detailed picture of the event of starting childcare. Moreover, the picture is presented as a narrative, or a story, informed by the views of the adults who participated in the experience as well as by what the observer herself noted and interpreted.

As is evident in the following sections, Janis' study also established a template for some of the themes that recur in later studies of the event of starting childcare (e.g., Murton, 1971; Jorde, 1984). For instance, in addition to focusing on separation reactions, a major hypothesis that emerged was the child's need to acquire familiarity with a new environment in the presence of the mother. Building up a relationship of attachment to, and trust in, the teacher were also commented on as key requirements for Lottie's finally "relinquishing her mother" (p. 122).

The theme of separation from the mother reappeared as the major focus in another psychoanalytic study of the adjustment of an eight month old boy, Simone, this time to a nursery setting in Italy (Meltzer, 1984). As in Janis' study, Meltzer's psychoanalytic interpretation of the separation experience resulted in a discussion of the child's behaviour in terms of defense mechanisms against the "underlying suffering about separation from his mother" (p. 100); the "contrasting ease of separation from father in the seventh observation" was seen as an indication of

“how strongly structured” the defensive system was “against the pains of babyhood” (p. 100).

One of Meltzer’s (1984) key arguments was that psychoanalysts had a clinical need to do more observations of infants in situations such as Simone’s entry into nursery because this experience also represented an entry into a group culture with its own social order (and “tribal mentality”, p. 100) which was different to the one that applied in intimate family relationships. Meltzer analysed Simone’s behaviour in the creche from the point of view of how Simone adapted to the organisational culture of the creche. After Simone’s first day at the creche, Meltzer commented:

here we see Simone’s entrance into the world of his peers, presided over by kindly and protective adults. But it is also apparent that the adults are confused in their values and as a result give conflicting indications, conflicting with one another and inconsistent in themselves from time to time. Mother starts out concerned that Simone should not hurt other children and should meet the expectations of the adults but soon realises that the presenting problem is one of meeting the aggression of the other children. She counsels disengagement but realises that this results in his rage being turned against himself. However, she is even less pleased when his violence comes out more directly and both counsels and provides a substitute for the stolen prize. But when he does find an even more desirable, that is bigger prize, he still ends by hurting himself. (p. 93)

Meltzer (1984) later commented:

I found in his adaptation to the creche and his parents’ dilemma a parable of our confusing times, in which the avowed aim of raising our children in gentleness and an atmosphere of love and trust must be suspected of sending them disarmed into a rough-and-tumble world. This rather sporting definition certainly fits the creche, but in Simone’s adaptation one can see the outlines of a far less benign system, at once political and brutal, or at least incipiently violent. (p. 99)

In Simone's responses to the behaviour of his peers, Meltzer (1984) saw "a sense of hierarchy, identification with authority, sanctimonious punitiveness, arrogant exhibitionism and male chauvinism" (p. 100). According to Meltzer, Simone had learnt the rules of being in the creche very quickly through relying on "primitive social impulses of a clearly tribal sort" (p. 100) and thus Simone had become an "organisation-man" even when this put him in conflict with the instructions of his mother to not hurt other children and to disengage from conflict.

In the analysis of the final observation of Simone, a somewhat more "rounded" and less "tyrannical" (Meltzer, 1984, p. 102) picture of Simone is presented as having "recovered from his brief flirtation with the group culture and the basic assumption [that] 'only babies cry'" (p. 103). Instead, Simone now "regularly registers his grief at being left and his impatience to be collected" and his behaviour towards the staff was one of "co-operative acquiescence rather than obedience" (p. 104); overall Simone was "quite remarkably civilised" (p. 104) within the group setting.

Meltzer's (1984) psychoanalytic analysis of Simone's group experience may seem a somewhat unusual and, perhaps, even controversial way to interpret this event. What the analysis indubitably does, however, is draw attention to the group nature of the nursery setting as a salient part of this experience. In later sections of this chapter, studies using different methodologies to Meltzer's psychoanalytic one (e.g., Blatchford, 1983; Blatchford, Battle & Mays, 1984; Feldbaum, Christenson & O'Neal, 1980; Thyssen, in press) are discussed which have also focused on this aspect of the experience of starting childcare as being one of its defining characteristics.

Hock's (1984) view of the "transition to daycare" is as firmly focused on the theme of separation as the two psychoanalytic accounts presented above. However, as noted in chapter 2 and 4, Hock viewed separation as a phenomenon which affected not only the child but also the mother. Hock reviewed research

which explored the connection between mothers' behaviours and emotions at leave-taking and their infants' separation reactions and concluded that the child's experiences of leave-taking from the mother, whether at first entry to the early childhood setting or more generally, could be modified by the way the mother behaved and felt.

Hock's (1984) work included a set of suggestions about how the experience of separation might be eased for both children and mothers. She argued that it was important to acknowledge maternal separation anxiety and suggested that counselling mothers about their feelings and worries about leaving their child could be a way of easing the transition from home to daycare. She further recommended increasing mothers' understanding of infant separation protest as a strategy which could indirectly reduce maternal separation anxiety.

Other maternal leave-taking strategies recommended by Hock (1984) were:

- i. that mothers provide some information about the impending departure to help the infant adjust after separation, rather than letting the caregiver explain the mother's absence to the child.
- ii. that mothers keep the information about the departure brief; a short leave-taking appeared to reduce infants' distress and thus served to indirectly reduce the mother's separation anxiety.
- iii. that mothers should try to stay calm about the infant's protest at leave-taking and respond to clinging and crying behaviour with comfort and reassurance.

Hock (1984) added also that a number of leave-taking strategies should be avoided including:

- i. hovering about the child,
- ii. trying to distract the child from noticing that the mother was leaving and
- iii. the mother leaving without the child's knowledge.

In addition, Hock stated that specific aspects of the early childhood setting like having continuity in the caregivers (Rodriguez & Hignett, 1981, cited in Hock, 1984, p. 201) maintaining a small group size (Cummings & Beagles-Ross, 1984) and facilitating trust in the substitute caregiver also might help minimize maternal anxiety.

These suggestions by Hock (1984), which arose out of research findings reviewed in her chapter, constitute one of the more valuable aspects of this work where the experience of separation was perceived as a difficult one, but also as one which could be handled positively.

A different approach to understanding separation issues on entry to an early childhood setting was taken by Robbins (1997) in a recent study in Melbourne, Australia, which examined parents' and teachers' perceptions of levels of separation anxiety in 3 and 4-year-old children at the time of commencement at preschool. Analyses were done by age and sex of the child as well as by the child's prior experience of separations. The analyses found no sex differences but age did seem to be an important variable, with 4-year-olds being rated as more fearful than 3-year olds. Robbins commented that it was difficult to understand this finding and suggested that the more mature cognitive functioning of the four year olds, and/or their greater life experience, might be a possible explanation.

Robbins (1997) also reported that parents rated children who were inexperienced with separation as more anxious than those who were experienced, a finding which throws as much light on the way parents might perceive their child's separation experiences as it does on the children's experiences. Since this study relied solely on ratings provided by parents and teachers, it is important to remember that the results reflect adult perceptions of the children's experiences rather than the children's own perceptions of these.

Robbins' (1997) discussion emphasised that a complex pattern of interactions appeared to exist between age, sex and prior separation experience, and she

suggested a list of possible factors which could either weaken or strengthen the separation anxiety displayed by the child. The list included factors to do with the prior mother-child relationship, maternal leave-taking practices, general child-rearing behaviours and factors to do with the preschool environment itself such as the type of activities and experiences provided in the preschool.

Overall, the four studies reviewed in this section have concentrated on separation between the child and the mother as the most significant feature of the child's experience of starting childcare. In the two psychoanalytic studies (Janis, 1964; Meltzer, 1984) the children's experiences were explained in terms of the psychoanalytic notions of identification and defense mechanisms. A focus on the effect of the presence of the mother on the children's behaviour during the separation, together with the importance of building up a relationship with the teacher as a pre-requisite for a successful "relinquishing" of the mother also emerged as strong themes. In Meltzer's study, an additional theme was that of entry into a group culture with its own social order. Hock (1984) discussed separation as an experience that affected both the children and the mothers and a number of maternal leave-taking strategies and other caregiving arrangements were suggested as ways of easing the difficulty of separation for both children and mothers. In Robbins' (1997) study it was concluded that separation anxiety was a phenomenon affected by a complex pattern of factors related to the child, to maternal characteristics, and to the preschool environment.

8.1.2 Attachment relationships and starting childcare

I noted in chapter 2 that the issue of the mother-child relationship and its connection to the child's entry into an early childhood setting is one that has been explored in a vast body of literature (for reviews see Ainslie & Anderson, 1984; Bretherton & Waters, 1985). Most consistently, this connection has been examined from the point of view of whether use of group-based non-familial care has a detrimental impact on the mother-child relationship, a topic whose potential to arouse heated debate and public concern is perhaps most aptly illustrated in the arguments surrounding the 'Belsky controversy' of the mid-eighties (Belsky,

1986, 1987; Clarke-Stewart, 1988; Phillips, McCartney, Scarr & Howes, 1987). This debate re-opened the issue of whether use of daycare in infancy was detrimental to the attachment relationship between the mother and the child⁵.

A few studies have explored the inverse of the above: how the quality of the attachment relationships between the mother and the child might affect the experience of starting childcare, or being in childcare. Petrie and Davidson (1995) reviewed this literature and argued from an attachment theory perspective that "the nature of teacher-child relationships in preschool is inevitably determined in one way or another by the relationship already established between mother and child" (p. 7). Petrie and Davidson cited findings by Bloom-Feshbach (1971, cited in Petrie and Davidson, p. 7) that secure mother-child attachment relationships assisted children in developing a trusting relationship with the teacher which then enabled them to seek out the teacher to help deal with their separation problems, and work by Furman (1986, cited in Petrie and Davidson, p. 7) which suggested that a secure relationship with the parents was essential before children could develop an appropriate relationship with their teacher. The writers noted also that children who were insecurely attached to their mothers might develop bonds with their daycare caregivers by way of compensation (Howes, Rodning, Galuzzo & Myers, 1988, cited in Petrie & Davidson, p. 7).

Studies by Ainslie and Anderson (1984) and Hamilton and Howes (1992) both explored how the relationships between daycare children and their mothers compared with the ones they developed with their teachers or caregivers. They found that infants developed patterns of behaviour towards teachers that were very similar to the patterns of behaviour which differentiate between attachment

⁵ In 1986 Jay Belsky published an article in which he stated that his current reading of the research on the effect of non-maternal care on children under the age of one year led him to conclude that a circumstantial case could be made that early infant care could be associated with increased avoidance of the mother and possibly with insecurity in the relationship. He added also that early infant care may thus also be associated with such negative qualities as noncompliant behaviour, low levels of frustration tolerance, and greater social maladjustment in the preschool and early school years. Opposing Belsky's position in the debate, Phillips et al. (1987) argued that Belsky's argument was based on a selective and misinterpretative reading of the available data and that his position was based on studies carried out with methodological flaws.

classifications to the mother. Both these studies also found that there were a number of notable differences in the behaviours of the infants with each adult which suggested that the social contexts in which the two relationships functioned, and were observed, varied in significant ways. For example, with mothers, the children were observed interacting during separations and reunions while with the teachers, the children were observed during a broader range of activities during the day.

In their own study Petrie and Davidson (1995) conducted observational case – studies to examine the mother’s role during seven 3-year-old children’s first year of preschool. The writers argued that parental involvement in their children’s care and education needed to be “reconceptualised from a developmental and sociological perspective” (p. 15). Petrie and Davidson concluded that their children could be divided into two sub-groups. The first sub-group had three children for whom the transitional home-preschool year was “difficult” and a “socio-emotional challenge” (p. 9); the second sub-group had four children “who adapted readily to the new situation and thrived on it” (p. 9). The three children in the first subgroup were “noticeably shy, introverted children” (p. 9) for whom their mothers’ involvement seemed especially important “in easing separation problems and fostering their sense of security in the nursery school setting”. The four children in the second sub-group were “more outgoing in demeanor, formed trusting and productive relationships with teachers and related to mothers in the increasingly mature ‘partnership’ mode that is expected to evolve naturally (Bowlby, 1979)” (Petrie & Davidson, p. 10). The writers concluded that the nature of the mother-child relationship was crucial to the type of teacher-child relationship that developed and noted a number of principles in their emergent “grounded theory” about the dynamics of these relationships:

- i. that mother-child interactions which were marked by maternal sensitivity and responsiveness were highly correlated with teacher-child relationships characterised by trust and harmony; and
- ii. that when the mother-teacher relationship was more superficial, this was reflected in less close relationships between the children and the teachers.

They added also that in one case where the mother was unresponsive to her child, the child developed a devoted relationship to his teacher and the teacher-mother relationship was poor. Petrie and Davidson (1995) concluded that parent involvement programs might need to be co-ordinated with the attachment needs of children, arguing that parents of shy or introverted children might have more reason to be involved in preschool than parents of other children. From their attachment theory perspective, they also saw teachers as being in a "vital position" to compensate for any "unresolved mother-child attachment issues" and raised a number of questions about the implications this might have for the early childhood teacher's role especially during the "transitional home-to-school experience" (p. 14). They concluded that: "The interaction among parents, teachers and children is of considerable significance in the lives of young children" (pp. 14-15).

My study is based on a strong belief in this last statement by Petrie and Davidson (1995) and this is one of the reasons why I have explored the experience of starting childcare from the point of view of the three people who are the most active participants within it.

The studies reviewed in this section suggested that a connection does exist between the nature of the attachment relationship which children have with their mothers and the relationships which they develop with their early childhood teachers, with secure mother-child relationships being associated with the development of trusting relationships with the teachers. The studies also suggested that while patterns of behaviour between the children and the mothers, and the children and the teachers, appeared similar in quality, there were also some striking differences which reflected the differences in the social context of these interactions.

8.1.3 *Temperament and starting childcare*

Temperament has been one of the dimensions studied in relation to adjustment to the early childhood setting. For example, Marcus, Chess and Thomas (1972) found that individuality of temperament had a significant influence on the adaptation of young children to nursery school with 'easy' children having no trouble in adapting irrespective of the routines used in the nursery schools, the 'difficult' children doing better in clearly structured, consistent and friendly environments than in "laissez-faire" (p. 319) ones, and the 'slow-to-warm' children doing best when they were allowed to adapt at their own slow pace. Klein (1977, cited in Mobley & Pullis, 1991, p. 578) reported that maternal ratings of their children on the three dimensions of activity level, distractability and persistence were significantly correlated with daycare staff's global ratings of adjustment to preschool. In Lewis' (1977) study of the initial adaptation to the preschool setting of 14 children aged 30 – 42-month-olds, the children's social relations with classmates were explored in relation to maternal ratings of children's temperament at home. Lewis reported that activity levels and approach tendencies were correlated with high social proximity in preschool settings; biological rhythmicity and persistence were correlated with higher levels of constructive activity and with verbal communication with classmates; and high levels of distractability were associated with generally erratic social interactions in preschool.

Billman and McDevitt (1980) explored temperament in relation to peer interactions among children aged 34–64 months and again reported that temperament ratings by mothers and observers on the dimensions of activity level, approach/withdrawal, intensity, distractability and sensory threshold were significantly correlated with observational measures of peer interaction behaviours. The children with the "easier" temperament were observed to engage in less rough and tumble and aggressive play than the ones classified as having a "difficult temperament".

The specific temperament dimensions of activity level, approach, and sensitivity were correlated to initial social behaviour with peers in a study by Parker-Cohen and Bell (1988) although these effects were no longer significant by the end of the first term. More recently, Zajdeman and Minnes (1991) found that in a sample of 73 children aged between 12 to 60 months, the most important predictors of adjustment to daycare were the teachers' perceptions of the child's temperament on the dimensions of mood, general activity level and approach/withdrawal behaviour.

It is clear that there is consistency in these studies that, firstly, temperamental traits appear to be connected to children's adjustment to the early childhood setting and secondly that there are specific temperamental dimensions which teachers within North American early childhood settings, have perceived as related to children's adjustment. These specific temperamental traits appear to be the ones usually associated with the profile of the 'easy' child.

Thirdly, in the temperament studies reviewed above, adjustment has been understood as involving social relations with peers and with centre/preschool adults as well as the children's individual and psychological response to the demands of a new environment (e.g., Mobley & Pullis, 1991; Zajdeman & Minnes, 1991).

This view of adjustment is interesting because it clearly incorporates the notion that being in an early childhood setting is an experience that goes beyond unifocal psychological notions of separation from the mother or the jeopardising of the primary attachment relationship; in other words, it acknowledges the multi-dimensional nature of this experience and takes account of the broader social context with which temperament interacts. Marcus et al. (1972) and Thomas and Chess (1977) pointed out the interactive nature of temperament through their "goodness-of-fit" hypothesis. Parker-Cohen and Bell (1988) similarly noted that studies of temperament in early childhood settings need to investigate how a broad range of aspects, such as educational philosophy or programme structure,

interact with temperament since this would throw further light on how goodness-of-fit dynamics operate. Klein (1991) also referred to this idea in reporting that Israeli and North American teachers held different views about what constituted an "ideal temperament". Klein suggested that certain environments may provide a better 'fit' for certain temperament types and further argued that the concept of 'fit' may be a useful one in planning environments which meet the needs of children with a broader range of temperaments.

The broader view taken in the temperament literature on adjustment, or adaptation, as a process involving a multiplicity of interconnecting factors, fits well with the holistic approach which I have adopted in exploring the experience of starting childcare.

8.2 Studies within a social-psychological orientation: Starting childcare as a process of socialisation

The preceding sections have focused on how research within a primarily psychological tradition has approached the study of adjustment to group-based early childhood services. I noted that the experience of starting childcare has often been constructed as one involving issues to do with socialisation. For instance, Marcus et al. (1972) argued that participation in a nursery school meant that children had to "adapt simultaneously to a number of new stimuli: a new place, new children, new adults and new rules" (pp. 218-219). Mobley and Pullis (1991) noted that for many children the preschool was "the first socialization outside of the home" (p. 577) whose novelty "can involve considerable behavioural adjustment" (p. 579) and in Meltzer's (1984) psychoanalytic study of Simone's experience of starting to attend a nursery school in Italy, a strong emphasis was put on Simone's response to being in a group situation (see section 8.1.1).

Within studies which have a more social-psychological orientation, the focus on starting childcare as an experience of socialisation is even more noticeable. In these studies, dominant themes have been that entry into an early childhood setting is an experience of transition which affects many participants (Blatchford

et al., 1984; Jorde, 1984; Murton, 1971) and involves a number of new experiences including becoming part of a new social group (Blatchford, 1983; Blatchford et al., 1984; Feldbaum, Christenson & O'Neal, 1980). Some studies have looked also at the child's acquisition of a new set of understandings about the role of being a pupil (e.g., Amunds, 1989; Fivush, 1984; Ghaye & Pascal, 1988); all have considered it as an event which occurs as a process over time. As with the psychological literature on this topic, most of the studies reviewed in the following sections have been carried out with children older than the ones in the present study. Only the studies by Jorde (1984), Pramling and Lindahl (1991, 1994) and Thyssen (in press) have focused on children younger than three years of age; for this reason, these studies are given fuller coverage than the other studies.

8.2.1 *Starting childcare: A transition that affects more than the child*

The earliest work located which treats the experience of entering a preschool setting as an experience of transition from one social environment to another is a book by an ex-member of Her Majesty's Inspectorate, Alice Murton (1971) entitled *From Home to School*. Murton (1971) based her book on a selection of records kept by teachers in nursery schools in London in the 1960s; these records were sometimes augmented by comments made by parents and in one case by observations made by a lecturer at a college of education. Murton's intention was to describe a wide range of settling-in experiences:

in order to stress variety and contrast, to illustrate different levels of expectation on the part of children and parents, to emphasize individual patterns of growth and development, and to underline the fact that the time required for adjustment to a new environment can be of almost any length in a young child's life. (p. 60)

The focus of the book was on how the procedures used by nursery and infant schools in Britain could be enhanced to ease the children's transition from home. Murton recommended the policy of having a staggered intake of children; she emphasised also the need to avoid fatigue in children and thus recommended

flexibility in the hours that children were in school. Murton further emphasised the importance of establishing a "partnership between parent and teacher [which was] understood and fully accepted" (p. 64). In considering how parents could help the schools in easing their children's transition, Murton strongly recommended that parents should visit with the children and spend time with them in the nursery school until they were settled.

Paula Jorde (1984) provided a more systematic and in-depth look at the meaning for the child of "transition" from home to the new environment of the classroom through using a combination of daily observations of ten children for the first two weeks of school followed by weekly observations for the next three months, parent interviews four months into the process and teacher ratings on a child classroom adjustment rating form. All the children, whose mean age on the first day of school was 27 months, started on the same day in the same class. Jorde's study aimed to identify specific parental behaviours which "minimised separation anxiety and facilitated a smooth transition from home to the new classroom setting" (p. 9). Jorde (1984) referred to entry into an early childhood setting as a "rite of passage" (p. 1), a process which involved separation anxiety as well as adjustment to new experiences with activities, with other children and with new caregivers. Along the way children were seen to need to "develop a sense of trust in their new surroundings and in the teachers who will substitute for their parents" (p. 1). Jorde saw entry into nursery school as a complex process which she discussed with reference to a number of concepts from different theoretical frameworks. These included insights from the theory of attachment proposed by John Bowlby (1969/1978, 1973/1978) and Mary Ainsworth (e.g., Ainsworth et al., 1974) as well as the idea from Erik Erikson (1950/1974) that a sense of trust in the parents needed to develop in infancy from which the child could become more open and responsive to new caregivers and new experiences, and hence achieve a sense of autonomy and independence.

Jorde (1984) put a strong emphasis on the uniqueness of each transition experience as reported by the parent and observed in the child by the parent,

teacher and the researcher. While all the children were reported as having exhibited signs of distress at separation during the first two weeks of attending the school, she noted that individual responses varied from "momentary lapses into sadness" (p. 17), to "fall[ing] apart" (p. 17) or being fine when mum left but later "dissolv[ing] into tears" (p. 18). Seven of the 10 mothers reported that their child insisted on taking some kind of transition object to school each day; on the issue of transition objects Jorde noted also a strategy used by the headteacher to connect the children's new setting to the familiar one of home. The strategy consisted of using a home photo of the child's parents to create a child-parent matching game; Jorde noted that the game seemed to provide the children with a visual reminder of the special qualities of their parents which the children seemed to enjoy but also this activity was particularly touching to the mothers and "probably did more to dissolve any feelings of competition the mothers might have had about their child's new teacher than anything else" (p. 19). Such comments highlighted the importance of considering how the process of transition to pre-school may affect not only the child but also the people closest to the child. This theme was strongly explored in Jorde's study which indicated that there were a number of parental behaviours which seemed associated with the children's adjustment to the classroom. For instance, Jorde noted that eight of the 10 mothers believed, and acted in accordance with the belief, that it was important to be confident, self-assured and in control of the situation at leave-taking so that these feelings would be conveyed to the child; the other two mothers in the study stated they had similar beliefs but their actions were not consistent with their beliefs and they tended to hesitate and seek agreement from their child about whether it was fine for mother to leave. According to Jorde, the children of these two mothers had most difficulty with leave-taking during the first month of school. Jorde concluded that a successful and "smooth" transition depended on the interaction of many factors including the "quality, consistency, and interaction patterns established between parent and child, and the elements of program design, staff composition, and general feelings of acceptance conveyed to the child in the new setting" (p. 21). She emphasised strongly that it would be untenable to claim that

the experience of transition to nursery school involved a set of homogeneous experiences.

Very few studies have examined the experience of entry into an early childhood setting as it progressed over a period of weeks, and of these, only Jorde's (1984) deals with this experience for children under three years of age. In this context, Jorde's study has particular relevance to my study which also adopted a longitudinal approach to the study of this experience. The information which this study yielded about the mothers' experiences of their child's entry into the early childhood setting provides another point of similarity. An area that is not explored in Jorde's study, but is of central interest in my one, which has a tripartite focus, is the area of the teachers' experiences of this event. It is clear from Jorde's findings that an exploration of this kind is warranted especially given Jorde's report that teachers tended to rate the mothers' adjustment as less difficult than the parents expressed it as being. This indicates that "the teachers were not aware of the anxiety that the parent was feeling inside" (p. 15), suggesting that in the area of teacher-parent perceptions, there is potential for mis-communication, or the construction of perceptions that do not co-incide, about the meaning of this experience.

Another study which focused on entry into an early childhood setting as a transition which affects more than the child was carried out by Blatchford et al., (1984; see also Blatchford, 1983). This study was an exploration of the connections which existed between the behaviour of 51 children aged 3 – 4-years on entry to English nursery school and their previous experiences at home. Survey and interview data from parents and teachers, and observational data of the children over the first three weeks and the last week of term were collected. Blatchford et al. concluded that high scores on a measure of the "home as a learning environment" were associated with a high incidence of interactions with other children in the nursery class, with positive behaviour in the staff-directed sessions, with higher scores of conceptual abilities and with less time spent in

solitary and unoccupied activities in free play. However, they also found that after entry, there was a:

lack of meaningful contacts between parents and nursery ... This does not show itself in a hostile attitude in either direction. Far from it. Parents and staff seemed generally satisfied with the child's progress once he [*sic*] had started. Rather it shows itself in a more subtle way that became evident from interviews with parents after entry (Chapter 6) and observations in the nursery settings. All parents seemed to be interested in their child's life in the nursery but most, once they thought their child was coping, neither took, nor searched for, opportunities to obtain a more detailed account. Parents were generally wary of doing anything they believed teachers would find unacceptable and were fearful of being out of their depth with the more 'educational' demands. In consequence, they were interested but acquiescent and uninformed. (pp. 163-164)

Blatchford et al. (1984) concluded that the two worlds of the child seemed to "co-exist in parallel" (p. 164). Thus they echoed Jorde's (1984) sentiments that a teacher-parent relationship marked by better communication was needed; furthermore, they argued, like Murton (1971), that parents and teachers needed to work more closely to achieve an active partnership which would enable the child to bring aspects of the two environments together, give parents confidence in, and knowledge of, the child's life away from home and enable staff to communicate to the parents experiences which they saw as important. Blatchford et al. claimed that their study underlined the "close interdependence of the three parties to transition: children, staff and parents" (p. 162) and that each "corner of the triangle" needed to be "happily situated" and "involved and compatible" (p. 162) for a smooth transition to occur. This statement is an effective summary of the views expressed in the other studies referred to so far in this section. It confirms that the experience of starting childcare needed to be explored from a tri-partite focus, which I have done.

8.2.2 *Starting childcare: Adjusting to new demands*

In Blatchford et al.'s (1984) study, data were gathered on children's behaviour on entry into the nursery class through an adjustment questionnaire on each child completed by staff ten days after entry, a test of children's conceptual ability and observations of the children during free play and during staff-directed sessions. These data throw valuable light on the kind of experiences that the children had during the initial weeks of attending the nursery school.

For instance, Blatchford et al. (1984; see also Blatchford, 1983) reported that on entry, only 15 out of 51 children showed signs of distress mainly through crying or clinging to staff or parents, and by the end of the first 10 days, the number still distressed had dropped to three. The analysis of the children's activities during free play showed that most often children spent time in solitary, rather than parallel or interactive, activities and that contact with children was greater than with adults. In the account of the children's responses to staff-directed sessions like story time, Blatchford et al. (1984; see also Blatchford, 1983) reported that the children's behaviour was seen by the teachers as generally appropriate to the demands of these activities. They further reported that over the weeks, changes occurred in the children's responses which reflected the interaction between increased familiarity with the nature of the activity, its setting and the demands it placed on the children.

Blatchford (1993) noted also that it was important to "not underestimate the complex processes involved in adjustment nor the difficulties of investigating them" (p. 49). Some of these "complex processes" are worth further comment here. For instance, in reporting children's response to staff-directed activities, Blatchford et al. (1984) noted that: "Informal observations indicated to us the extent to which some children found difficult even the most fundamental responses in such relatively controlled situations, like realizing the group had a leader to whom attention is required" (p. 156). Elsewhere, they noted also that the children's experience on entry into nursery involved the additional challenge of entry into an established group setting "with its rules, rituals and power structure"

(p. 157) a comment reminiscent of the "tribal mentality" description which Meltzer (1984) gave to the early childhood setting. Blatchford et al. likened the experience of children in this situation to "being in a room with only one door and not knowing where to find the key" (p. 157). Both these themes have resonance with some of the data gathered in my study. Blatchford's study did not explore the way that these difficulties were handled by the children. In my study, however, these themes are given attention and observational data are used to explore some processes through which the children appeared to gradually come to terms with the challenges offered in the new situation and thus became more knowledgeable, or competent actors in a range of new behaviours.

Processes of adjustment were studied in a smaller study by Feldbaum, Christenson and O'Neal (1980) in which a group of 12 children aged between 3 and 4-years were observed over the period of the first four weeks of entering relatively established preschool groups. The newcomers were described in social-psychological terms as "outsiders" to the established group, a status which generally became clear when "confronted with implicit 'ownership' of classroom resources, traditional host group seating orders, group jargon and ritualistic modes of object play" (Merei, 1949 cited in Feldbaum et al., 1980, p. 498). Feldbaum et al. also described the new child as "without a considerable amount of information possessed by more established group members" (p. 498), a state of affairs which created obstacles to assimilation into the new group.

Through comparing the frequencies of interaction and of social participation of the new children with those of the host children, Feldbaum et al. (1980) provided an "emergent profile of the new child at entry". This profile included high frequencies of spatial isolation, off-task and non-synchronous on-task behaviours, and low frequencies of activities involving mutual goal orientation, division of labour, communication, and synchronisation with the activities of others. The study also found a gender difference with girls remaining spatially isolated from the established group for between two to three weeks longer than the boys. The girls were also more receptive to teacher approaches and attention-giving, while

boys seemed less interested in these and more responsive to their same-sex peers. The authors concluded that during the first week of initial entry into the preschool, the behaviour of the new children was clearly different to that of the established peer group but, as time went on, inclusion into the activities of the established group and increased social participation led to the newcomers' behaviour becoming more similar to that of the established group. Commenting on this development, Feldbaum et al. (1980) said:

it seems plausible that as the newcomer observes his [sic] peers interacting, he [sic] comes to recognize the behavioural contingencies of inclusion, approval and acceptance. By relying on the actions of more knowledgeable hosts and the observable consequences of their behaviour, new children may learn to act appropriately without having to discover what is positively or negatively sanctioned from direct experience (Bandura, 1977) (p. 507).

This interpretation of the process of assimilation observed in the study by Feldbaum et al (1980) is one that relies strongly on the learning theory principles of observational learning. In my study, data of similar nature emerged which is discussed from the perspective of socio-cultural models of development associated with Vygotskian thinking.

8.2.3 Starting childcare: The children's perspective

The studies reviewed thus far have been studies of children's experiences on entry into an early childhood setting as these experiences have been understood by the adults who observed them, or sought to measure them. It could be argued, therefore, that these studies represent adult constructions of the children's experiences rather than the children's own views.

Among the few studies which have explored the experience of entry into an early childhood setting from the children's perspective is Fivush's (1984) interview study with 30 American kindergarten children. Using a script theory framework (Schank & Abelson, 1977; see also section 2.2.3), Fivush interviewed the 5-year-

olds about school-day routines and was thus able to study the "school scripts" which they developed over the first three months of school. Ghaye and Pascal (1988) on the other hand used an action research approach in order to arrive at participant perceptions, including those of the children, of how a group of 4-year-olds became incorporated into two English reception classes. Similarly, Amunds (1989) used the "creative interview" method to elicit responses from a class of 4-year old novice junior kindergartners in America about their earliest experiences during the first week of school. These studies provide interesting insights into what these children's understanding of their experience was; however, in all cases, the children usually also had a variety of previous early childhood experiences. This, together with the age difference, adds a further dimension of dissimilarity between them and the children in my study.

Beyond the above three studies, research on children starting childcare from the children's perspective, does not abound. This is more so for children aged less than three years since the language competence of these children is usually not deemed sophisticated enough to allow access to children's views of their experience. Two recent Scandinavian studies (Pramling & Lindahl, 1991, 1994; Thyssen, in press) have sought to overcome this problem in innovative ways. In both studies the children were infants aged 1 – 3 years and their first experiences in early childhood settings were studied through qualitative observations over the first months of being in daycare. In Pramling and Lindahl's study continuous video records were also used.

Pramling and Lindahl (1991, 1994) argued from a phenomenological perspective that it is possible to access the "lived world" of children's experiences through exploring what children direct their consciousness at; thus they sought to understand children's "intentionality" and to describe how children reacted to the people and objects around them. This argument rested on insights from theoretical discussions which indicate that:

- i. it is the children's direct experiences, not their comprehension, that contributes to young children's creation of an understanding of the world (Stern, 1985 cited in Pramling & Lindahl, 1991, 1994);
- ii. children's thinking and mental life are created from the activities they participate in within their culture (e.g., Wertsch, 1989 cited in Pramling & Lindahl, 1991, 1994);
- iii. it is not possible to distinguish the child's cognitive ability from its awareness or consciousness of the world around it (e.g., Pramling, 1988 cited in Pramling & Lindahl, 1991, 1994) and
- iv. within a phenomenological perspective, "intentionality" is seen as an expression of consciousness. In other words, consciousness does not exist on its own but is always directed towards something in the world around.

In the writers' words, "the child's personal story is formed by the significations created from different experiences. Consequently, it is the experienced reality of children that forms their mental world (Merleau-Ponty, 1962)" (Pramling & Lindahl, 1991, p. 2). Pramling and Lindahl (1991, 1994) analysed continuous video observations of routine situations and of other activities initiated both by the child and the adults, in terms of what children focused their attention on. In this way they explored "what constituted the object of consciousness" among 10 young children who were beginning to use a pre-school setting and illustrated the kind of notions which the children were aware of as they engaged in making sense of their new environment. The children in Pramling and Lindahl's study were aware of a number of dimensions of the pre-school world including "geometric dimensions" such as height, depth, surfaces, space and borders; "motion and power" such as when the children experimented with speed in running up and down a slope in different ways or pretending to feed a teddybear forcefully with a fork; and similarities and differences, and pairs and qualities, referred to in the study as part of the category of "comparisons". Pramling and Lindahl argued that their approach to understanding children's perspectives on their experiences had great potential for enhancing teachers' understandings of how they could support children's learning.

In an ongoing study by Sven Thyssen (in press) similar questions to the ones in Pramling and Lindahl's study (1991, 1994) were asked about children's experiences in the world of daycare, with additional questions being directed at how the children's actions related to the actions of the parents and caregivers. Thyssen's questions were: "How does the child act in the new situation? How do its activities change? How do the child's relations to others, peers and adults change?" (p. 60). Thyssen's project involved qualitative observations of 10 children aged 12 months during the first two months of starting daycare in two high quality centres, and interviews with the parents and the kindergarten teachers in charge of the children during their initial period in daycare. The preliminary results reported by Thyssen relate to four of the 10 children and to their parents and teachers. These indicated that the adults seemed primarily preoccupied by their concern about the child's emotional security. Thyssen reported that the parents tried to encourage security by focusing on being in the centre during the first days of settling-in while the teachers reported placing a lot of importance on expressing liking for the children, for example, by holding them in their arms. Thyssen noted that the children appeared to develop close relations with the kindergarten teacher and communicated with her in a similar way to the way they communicated with the parents, for example, by smiling at the teacher, sitting on her lap and seeking comfort from the teacher when they were unhappy. Thyssen suggested also that the reason for this similarity in behaviour could be the similarity between the caring attitude of the parents towards the child, and the way that kindergarten teachers cared for the children. An alternative theoretical hypothesis made by Thyssen was that perhaps the children's early social co-existence with the parents became a general 'frame' or 'model' for relations with other human beings. Thyssen reported that all of the children in the study had thrived in daycare and seemed happy and eager to take part in the life of the daycare centre. He further commented that there were differences among children in their emotional reactions and in their activities but these had not yet been analysed.

In discussing his study Thyssen suggested that the children's relations to their daycare environment could be conceptualised as their "life world" a concept which Thyssen (personal communication 23/10/98) sees as similar to Kurt Lewin's notion of lifespace in field theory (e.g., de Rivera, 1976). In this *life world*, children relate directly and emotionally to the adult, or another child, when smiling or giving or receiving a hug but relate in a different way when engaged with another human being in a joint object-oriented activity. Alternatively, the relation may be more complicated such as when the child or the adult uses a joint activity to establish an emotional contact. Thyssen proposed a model which could be used to analyse what kind of care is given, what kind of activity the children develop and what relations are communicated between the children and between a child and an adult. The model also allows for conceptualising children's life in the daycare setting as a joint one with adults in whose care children are; at the same time, the children can create a specific children's culture of their own while still being within the care of adults.

It is clear that Thyssen's (in press) work as well as that of Pramling and Lindahl's (1991, 1994), have interesting links with the present study both because of the questions they explored but also because of the methodology they have used in seeking answers to their questions. Insights from both these studies have been used in the analysis of the observational data of the children's settling-in experience. In addition, I have reported my data as narratives around the themes of how the children related to the adults, to the other children in the centre and to the objects in the new environment of the childcare centre. This structural framework for my analysis reflects the way that children's experiences in early childhood settings have been conceptualised in existing literature (e.g., Jorde, 1984; Marcus et al., 1972; Thyssen, in press) as well as the way that the mothers in my study talked about their children's experiences (see sections 5.6.1 and 5.6.4).

8.3 Chapter overview

The studies in this chapter reflect three different approaches to studying children's experiences of starting childcare: the psychological approach, the social-psychological approach and the children's perspective approach.

The psychological approach has been dominated by a focus on exploring starting childcare as an experience of separation between the child and the mother (e.g., Janis, 1964; Meltzer, 1984; Robbins, 1997). In the psychoanalytic studies reviewed, this focus led to suggestions that children needed to develop a strong relationship with the teacher to substitute for the strong relationship with the mother, as well as the idea that entering the group situation of an early childhood centre represented entry into a form of tribal culture for which the child had to learn the rules by relying on "primitive social impulses" (Meltzer, 1984, p. 100). Other studies have viewed separation as an unpleasant experience that is shared by children and mothers during which a variety of strategies could be used to alleviate the "unpleasantness" (e.g., Hock, 1984; Robbins, 1997). The effect of using childcare on children's attachment relationships to their mother has been a popular area of psychological research (e.g., Ainslie & Anderson, 1984; Bretherton & Waters, 1985) while studies of how the attachment relationships between the mother and the child might affect the experience of starting childcare have been very few (e.g., Petrie & Davidson, 1995). These have suggested that the nature of children's attachment relationship to their mother strongly influences the relationship they developed with their teachers.

Psychological studies have also focused on exploring the relationship between children's temperaments and the way that children adjusted to being in an early childhood educational environment (e.g., Marcus et al., 1972; Mobley & Pullis, 1991). In temperament studies, a more multi-dimensional view has been taken of the adjustment that accompanied the experience of entry into an early childhood setting. In these studies, adjustment was understood as involving social relations with peers and centre adults together with the individual child's psychological

response to the new environment. This multi-dimensional view of the experience of starting childcare is consonant with the view I have adopted in my study.

The second approach to studying entry into an initial early childhood educational setting is more social-psychological in orientation. Within this approach, the experience has been framed as one of transition which affects children as well as parents (mostly mothers), and as being primarily an experience of socialisation (e.g., Blatchford et al., 1984; Feldbaum et al., 1980; Jorde, 1984; Murton, 1971). These studies highlighted that children's experiences of transition from home to early childhood centre were not homogeneous. There was agreement in these studies that contacts between parents and teachers were often ineffectual in easing the transition and that better communication was needed (e.g., Blatchford et al., 1984; Jorde, 1984; Murton, 1971) so that all three parties in the experience found themselves "happily situated" (Blatchford et al., 1984, p. 162). These studies confirmed the need for a tri-partite focus on this experience such as the one I have adopted in this study.

The studies which used teachers' and researchers' measures of how children adjusted to the new demands of the early childhood setting reported that at first the new children appeared to lack the necessary information about "rules, rituals and power structure" (Blatchford et al., 1984, p. 157) to participate in high levels of social interaction. However, this situation was reported to have changed very rapidly and even after the first week the behaviour of the new children became more similar to that of the established group members (Feldbaum et al., 1980). Feldbaum et al. explained this learning through the learning theory principle of observational learning. Similar data were collected in my study but my analysis of these data led to explanations which draw from the alternative theoretical approach of socio-cultural theory.

The third approach to studying children's experiences of starting childcare is that of looking at this from the perspective of the children themselves. Studies by Pramling and Lindahl (1991, 1994) and Thyssen (in press) provided examples of

this approach with children aged between 1 and 3 years. Pramling and Lindahl adopted the phenomenological position that intentionality is an expression of consciousness and thus of experience. Using video-taped records of the children's behaviours they studied infants' learning experiences in daycare settings through exploring what children directed their consciousness at. Thyssen sought to explore how infants acted in the "life-world" of the daycare setting by focusing on the children's interactions with the adults, their peers and the environment. My study has drawn on the methods used in both these studies in the way that I have analysed the data as well as in the way that the narratives I tell in the following chapter have been re-constructed.

Chapter 9

Narratives of the children's experiences

Because we cannot know the subjective world that infants inhabit, we must invent it, so as to have a starting place for hypothesis-making.

Daniel Stern (1985) *The Interpersonal world of the Infant* (p.4). New York: Basic Books

It is not that when they are young, children are helpless. When they are young, they are beginning to participate in the exchanges that make a culture possible And it cannot start too young.

Jerome Bruner (1996) What we have learnt about early learning. In *European Early Childhood Research Journal* 4(1), 5-16.

9.1 Setting the scene

In Chapter 3, I described the five children in my study as infants aged between 15 to 25 months and with largely pre-verbal communication skills. The non-verbality, or very limited verbality, of these infants meant that they were not able to tell their own stories (or narratives) of their experiences of starting childcare. Thus, my endeavour to present the children's experiences has had to rely on other sources of information, namely my own observations of the children during their attendance at the centre, including the video records I kept of their time there and what the adult participants in the study told me of their thinking about the children's experiences. Using these sources I have created narrative accounts of the children's experiences which Daniel Stern (1985, p. 4) and Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers (1992, p. 18) might call "working hypotheses" about the infants' lived reality of starting childcare (see chapter 3, section 3.4.5).

Given that this is the chapter where the children's narratives are specifically focused on, I have sought to tell the stories, wherever possible, from the children's perspective and thus I have drawn on the work of Pramling and Lindahl (1991, 1994) for insights on how to use my video data, and the fieldnotes to contribute to the stories presented here. Furthermore, I have, like Thyssen (in

press), looked at the children's experiences of starting childcare as being made up of relations to the adults and children whom they met at the centre, and relations to the new environment with all its objects, whether these were physical ones (such as new equipment at the centre) or objects at the level of ideas (e.g., established routines related to particular activities like painting or having morning tea as a group). This view of the 'components' of children's experiences emerged also from the statements of the mothers in the study that, for their child, starting childcare involved "developing trust" in adults other than themselves, getting used to new children, and adjusting to new routines and activities within the centre environment (see sections 5.6.1 and 5.6.4).

Elements of the children's stories involving these 'components' have already been told in chapters 5 and 7 as part of the experiences of starting childcare of the mothers and the teachers. In this chapter some of these elements are re-visited and discussed from the point of view of how the children may have experienced them. In this way the "working hypotheses" about children's experiences presented in this chapter may also be able to add to the "number of productive ways of seeing the event" (Marks, 1996, p. 116) of starting childcare which have already emerged in earlier chapters.

9.2 Relating to new adults: Stories of separation, attachment and temperament

In the mothers' stories about their experiences of starting childcare, the availability of a specific person to relate to at the centre about their child's settling-in emerged as a strong element in the quality of their experience of this event. My field observations of the children suggested that this feature of the way the centre operated also made a difference to the way the children experienced their relations with the new centre adults. In this section I explore this 'difference' using stories about the interactions which the children had with adults in their centre. Since it is not possible to tell each of the children's stories in the detail that each deserves, I have chosen to focus on the stories of three of the children whose centres operated different policies on the way adults worked with new children. In

the case of Nina, a primary caregiver was allocated to her from the time she entered the centre; in the case of Julie, the centre she attended had a very firm policy that all staff looked after all the children while in the case of Maddi, no particular policy existed about this matter and the teachers operated from a practical principle of "going with the child".

9.2.1 "Coming to terms with the separation": Nina's story

9.2.1.1 Introducing Nina

Nina was 16 months old when she was first introduced to her community childcare centre. The video of her arrival at the centre on her first visit shows her walking in smiling confidently and looking around keenly at the buzz of activity around her. Before morning tea, Nina had explored all of the main activity areas in the main room of the centre going from the painting areas to the collage table, then the puzzles and the collage again, back to the painting easel, the puzzles, the dough and then the rebounder and puzzles again. She also explored an old piano standing against one wall, several rocking horses lined up beside it and attempted to start an interaction with one of the older girls by offering her a puzzle piece as if expecting her to comment on this. Nina circulated among the activities a number of times approaching them mostly by herself although also keeping an eye on her mother's location.

Over the sixteen week period of her case study, Nina's story of starting childcare was told by her mother, Jean, as starting out in "delight" at being at the centre, then going through a period when she suddenly "rejected it quite strongly" and eventually "coming to terms with the separation". For Jean this meant that Nina had developed trust in Sarah as well as in knowing that Jean herself would return (see section 5.6.1). Sarah told a story of Nina's behaviour in the centre with a similar structure; in her story, however, the dominant phrases were ones which reflected her theory of practice about settling-in as "weaning them in" so that children could first "develop a deep relationship with one adult" from which they would "branch out" (see section 7.4.1).

In this story I explore how Nina might have experienced her "lived reality" of starting childcare and how this appeared to have been affected by Sarah's enactment of the principle in her theory of practice of "developing a deep relationship" from which the new child would then "branch out".

Table 3 presents Nina's attendance pattern at her childcare centre over the period of the case study.

Visit	Date	Time	Presence of parent
Orientation 1	Wed 30-6-93	09.15-11.20	whole session
Orientation 2	Wed 07-6-93	09.20-11.16	whole session
Two-week family holiday			
Orientation 3	Wed 21-7-93	09.14-11-20	trial separation
Orientation 4	Wed 28-7-93	09.25-11.00	trial separation
One week away: ill health			
Orientation 5	Wed 11-8-93	09.25-11.00	trial separation
One week away: ill health			
Orientation 6	Tues 24-8-93	09.20-11.00	trial separation
Orientation 7	Wed 25-8-93	09.25-11.00	trial separation
Orientation 8	Fri 27-8-93	09.25-10.30	whole session
Sole attendance 1	Tues 31-8-93	09.25-11.40	nil
Sole attendance 2	Wed 08-9-93	10.05-12.05	nil
Sole attendance 3	Wed 15-9-93	09.25-11.40	nil
Sole attendance 4	Wed 22-9-93	09.30-11.40	nil
Sole attendance 5	Wed 29-9-93	09.35-11.45	nil
Sole attendance 6	Wed 06-10-93	09.30-11.45	nil

Table 3: Nina's attendance pattern at her centre over case study period

9.2.1.2 Getting to know Sarah

Nina's first contact with Sarah occurred a few moments after Nina walked in the door with Jean for her first visit. As Sarah approached to greet them, Nina pulled

her mother by the hand and walked over to me to investigate the camera briefly. Within seconds, Nina was standing at the painting easel, paintbrush in hand and Sarah was saying: "Oh look, the paint's all ready". Jean started to pull a plastic apron over Nina's head and while this was going on, Sarah rolled up Nina's sleeves and talked to Jean about the enrolment process. Nina accepted this contact with Sarah without demur and immediately started to place big dollops of paint on the drawing paper set up on one of two easels. As Sarah left her side to collect a folder with enrolment information for Jean, she also kept an eye on Nina's painting which soon started to merge onto another drawing paper set up on the second easel. My fieldnotes record Sarah's quick action to frame Nina's painting activity thus:

09.24: Sarah, noticing the spillover of painting onto the second easel, leaves Jean's side and goes to the painting area.

Sarah: "Oh, two [paintings] Nina!"; she squats down close to Nina and writes NINA with a thick crayon at the top of one picture and then on the other saying: "Let's write 'Nina' again. Here you go. I think I'll have to get you some more paint and paper in a minute".

Sarah walks back to Jean's side.

(CS1.Fieldnotes, orientation visit 1/8)

Nina remained occupied with painting and Sarah asked another teacher, Michelle, to keep an eye on Nina while she sat with Jean at the puzzle table talking over forms which needed to be filled in and other matters to do with how the centre was organised. A few minutes into this, Nina started tugging at her plastic apron calling "eehk, eehk" in protest and moving away from the painting. Michelle took off Nina's apron and gently steered her to the collage table but Nina headed back to the painting area. Sarah, noticing, went over to Nina saying:

09.30: "Shall we go and wash your hands?" (hands are covered in paint).

Sarah takes Nina's hand. Nina goes with Sarah towards the bathroom but on the way catches sight of her mother sitting at the puzzle table and veers towards her and sits in her lap. Sarah says to Jean: "I'll tell you what: I'll bring a wet towel to her".

Sarah goes off to the bathroom area and comes back with a wet paper towel and, squatting, wipes Nina's hand with this. Nina toddles off to the collage table. Sarah, still squatting, says: "Oh, she's gone now – here, she's back" as Nina comes back to Jean and Sarah holding a gluey paintbrush. "Nina, I think you should have an apron on", says Sarah.

"No" says Nina and toddles off to the painting easel again leaving the gluey paintbrush behind and picking up a thick crayon instead. Sarah says to Jean and other teacher nearby: "I'm just going to let her wander about".

(CS1. Fieldnotes, orientation visit 1/8)

Later, Sarah again tried to suggest that Nina should wear the apron by holding up the apron from a distance of about a metre and proffering it to Nina but Nina shook her head. As Sarah wrote Nina's name on yet another sheet of drawing paper, Sarah commented about the refused apron to another teacher: "She might not want it – I'm not going to force her – I don't want her to be upset" (CS1.Fieldnotes, orientation visit 1/8, 09.34): And after yet another refusal less than an hour later, Sarah said in a calm way: "No. We'll get there in time" (CS1.Fieldnotes, orientation visit 1/8, 10.12).

Apart from Nina's clear eagerness to explore her new environment, these very first interactions between Nina and Sarah, indicate that for the most part Nina appeared receptive to guidance from Sarah: She allowed her to roll up her sleeves and started walking to the bathroom with her even though she subsequently veered off towards her mother. On her part, Sarah established contact with Nina straightaway and immediately followed her cue about what interested her. In the process, Sarah also started introducing some of the "rules" that accompanied the painting activity including putting on an apron and having one's name printed on the drawing paper, as well as the handwashing that followed the painting. Sarah was not prepared to force the issue about the wearing of the apron once Nina had firmly indicated her opposition to this, thus putting her goal of not upsetting Nina ahead of the rule about the apron which she said would fall into place in its own

time. Her wish to not upset Nina was also apparent in her decision to abandon the bathroom trip in favour of the wet paper towel solution. Sarah's activity with Nina thus indicates a balance of guidance and respect as well as a willingness to make some allowances in the routines for the new child.

During this initial session, Nina was involved in numerous other contacts with Sarah including when Sarah defused a potential conflict with an older girl over who had prior claim to a doll's pushchair (09.40) and when she guided Nina through such morning tea routines as washing hands before eating, sitting on a chair to eat her food, not eating food that fell on the floor, and drinking from one's cup (CS1.Video records, orientation visit 1/8). From these behaviours, it is possible to hypothesise that Nina may have understood Sarah's role as being one of mediating Nina's peer interactions as well as of inducting her into a range of rules about centre life.

Nina's response to Sarah's behaviours in these instances was very accepting. During the second orientation visit Nina's acceptance of Sarah's interactive approaches continued to emerge strongly. Early during the second visit Nina's behaviour also suggested that she was beginning to be willing to 'use' Sarah as a source of comfort: When Jean temporarily left the outside play area and Nina started to cry in protest, Sarah approached Nina who promptly raised up her arms towards Sarah to be picked up (09.27). A few minutes later she seemed quite happy to balance herself against Sarah's arm as she got off her rocking horse. These instances appear to support Sarah's journal entry that Nina was "pleased and at ease" (CS1.TJ.2.23-24) to be with her. This made both Sarah as well as Jean feel confident about discussing when to start having some short periods of time at the centre on her own (CS1.TJ.2.53).

The early acceptance by Nina of contact with Sarah and her attitude of general eagerness and receptiveness to her new environment was suggestive of the confident and open attitude which in the temperament literature referred to in chapter 8 would be associated with an "easy" temperament characterised by its tendency to approach rather than withdraw from new situations. This was again

apparent when Nina started having brief periods at the centre on her own. On the first of these occasions Nina was so engrossed at the dough table that she did not immediately notice her mother's departure. In my fieldnotes, I recorded the separation episode in this way:

09.02 "So I'll just say goodbye to her" says Mum to Sarah – she bends towards Nina across dough table and says "Nina, sweetie, goodbye, bye Nina". Nina is very absorbed in dough play however, and does not really look up "bye, bye, ta ta" says mum again. But there's still no response from Nina. Mum says: "I sort of feel I should get some recognition from her that I'm going" and tries again. Mum waves and waves but there still is no recognition by Nina. Mum tries again with no response so Mum leaves without Nina having realised this. Sarah and Nina play at rolling the dough and pretending to eat little balls of it.

(CS1.Fieldnotes, orientation visit 3/8)

For the next few minutes, Nina remained quite happily occupied in dough play with Sarah, sometimes watching with interest, with her left hand on Sarah's knee (09.44), as Sarah made some dough "snakes" and at other times rolling out dough herself. When one of the dough "snakes" fell onto the floor Nina happily complied with Sarah's request to pick it up. Nina gave the first sign that she might be aware of her mother's absence about ten minutes after Jean's departure when she looked up from the table and looked around the room searchingly leading Sarah to comment quietly to me: "Did you see her searching?". The moment passed, however, as Nina's attention was caught by a doll's pushchair, and it was not till three minutes later that she suddenly again appeared to become aware that her mother was absent; I recorded this 'realisation' in this way:

09.52 Nina walks off towards the hallway, a paintbrush in her hand and back again to the easel – Sarah takes the paintbrush off her, picking up an apron and saying "Oh, Nina" looking at her paint-covered hands. Nina turns away and walks off again towards the hallway and on towards the front door.

09.53 Nina starts to cry at the front door and looks lost as if she has just realised that mum is not around. Sarah follows her in the hallway; she picks Nina up and takes her to bathroom to wash the paint off her hands. Sarah talks about the handwashing and the paint coming off as they do this. When they finish, Nina has stopped crying and Sarah puts her down on the floor; but Nina walks back to the centre door and cries again.

09.54 Sarah follows, she picks Nina up and gives her a kiss; Nina stops crying. They walk to the blue carpeted room where an older boy is playing with a toy dog. Sarah talks to the boy and asks if Nina can look at his toy dog. Nina smiles broadly at this and is now distracted by the dog and then the flexi-tunnel and then the Lego firehouse which Sarah starts to play with.

(CS1.Fieldnotes, orientation visit 3/8)

While it is not possible to be sure what Nina's "real" intentions were in going to the centre front door during these incidents, it is difficult to escape the interpretation that Nina had realised that her mother had left the centre and that she possibly wished to follow her. In my fieldnotes this was the interpretation that I noted. Sarah had a similar interpretation both in her comment about Nina's "searching" behaviour and in her immediate actions to distract Nina while washing her hands and in her actions to comfort and distract her again with the affectionate kiss, and playing in the blue room.

What was also interesting in the interaction between Nina and Sarah during the first trial separation session was the change in the behaviour between Sarah and Nina when Jean was not present. As I noted above, Sarah had been involved in a variety of interactions with Nina while Jean had been present, however, true to her principle that "when mum is here, I'm not the primary caregiver" (see section 7.4.1), Sarah had kept largely in the background and had allowed Nina to explore the centre alongside her mother. During this session, however, from the time of Jean's departure to her return, Sarah was constantly at Nina's side. This proximity did not appear to perturb Nina who seemed to easily accept comfort from Sarah

and to let her “take her [Nina’s] mind off mum not being there” (CS1.TJ. 3.43). There were no further obvious signs that Nina was conscious of her mother’s absence during the first trial separation session although the reunion with Jean was, from an observer’s point of view, an emotional one with Jean’s face looking flushed with pleasure and Nina’s face beaming with delight. Sarah’s account to Jean of Nina’s response to the separation was factual in detail and included the evaluation that Nina had been “excellent”. Jean looked at me for verification and I smiled and nodded, wondering, not for the last time, about how much I should become involved in these interactions.

9.2.1.3 Understanding that mum will not stay: The start of a “deep relationship” with Sarah?

The second trial period of separation for Nina was seen as another “successful” day by Sarah and Jean. This time, Nina watched her mother’s departure and looked composed and not at all perturbed by it although in my fieldnotes I also described her as “solemn, as if she understands what’s going on” (CS1.Fieldnotes, orientation visit 4/8, 09.42).

An indication that Nina may have started to feel her mother’s absence came about ten minutes later when, as she watched another mother leave by the front gate, Nina started to cry. Sarah was immediately at Nina’s side saying:

09.23 “Does that remind you of your mum? Let’s go play on the rocking horses.” Sarah picks Nina up and carries her to the blue room; I follow behind carrying a box of blocks for Sarah. Sarah tries to place Nina on a rocking horse but Nina kicks her legs and resists this.

(CS1.Fieldnotes, orientation visit 4/8)

It was noticeable that from then on Nina stayed in Sarah’s arms or on her lap suggesting perhaps that a connection existed between her awareness of her mother’s absence and her desire for proximity to Sarah. This behaviour also seemed to support Sarah’s evaluation of this session as one which indicated that she and Nina were “developing a really happy positive rapport” (CS1.TJ.4.24)

consistent with the "deep relationship" Sarah believed that a good settling-in required. Nina was still at the morning tea table when Jean returned after an absence of forty-five minutes. Nina immediately spotted her and raised her arms with a whimper of request to be picked up; Nina had a long and warm cuddle with her mother, her face beaming with delight and she remained in her mother's arms till they left the centre about ten minutes later.

Both Jean and Sarah again expressed pleasure at Nina's response to this second period of "trial separation" which Jean recorded in her journal as "Nina seemed to cope well with being left again" (CS1.PJ.4.21-22) and this led to the decision that the following visit would be Nina's first one of sole attendance (See Table 3).

However, Nina was unwell and did not attend for her session on the following week and when she returned a week later (orientation visit 5/8), she was quite tearful and had her first period of sustained crying, refusing to be distracted by Sarah's offers of toys or activities. This lasted for about four minutes after which Nina again started taking some interest in activities around her but remained very close to Sarah throughout; by comparison to her stance during earlier sessions Nina appeared quite subdued.

Following yet another week of non-attendance because of ill-health, Nina then had two consecutive mornings (orientation visits 6 and 7) during which she alternated between brief periods of calm and outbursts of tears; in addition, during the time that Jean was still at the centre, Nina showed a determination to keep a firm hold of Jean's hand. This was a new feature in Nina's behaviour in her mother's presence. For example, I wrote in my fieldnotes: "Nina goes back to the painting easel inside. She holds on to mum's hand still as she paints with her other one" (CS1. Fieldnotes, orientation visit 7/8, 09.37) Later I noted: "Just now it seems to me that although Nina's showing her usual interest in everything, she is determined to keep hold of mum's hand which she hasn't seemed worried about on earlier visits" (09.41). Both sessions also concluded earlier than planned when Sarah decided to call Jean to collect Nina early. It was these two sessions that made Jean feel quite anxious that Nina had "suddenly rejected it quite strongly"

(CS1.PIS1.8.13). However, my fieldnotes of these two sessions showed that despite the bouts of crying which Nina experienced, and her reluctance to engage in activities on her own, there were many instances which indicated that Nina was willing to accept comfort from Sarah and her behaviour did not appear to reject Sarah at all. I wrote:

10.05 Sarah takes Nina to dough table and starts rolling out some dough. Nina observes – then she picks up dough cutters and starts cutting up shapes. She's beginning to look more settled now and is still on Sarah's lap ... "Push the gingerbread man down" says Sarah to Nina. Sarah puts her own hand on top of Nina's and helps her press down the cutter – Nina stands up now, looks suddenly lost, she whimpers and Sarah picks her up again – Nina accepts this and now watches older child at the dough table as she continues to play with the dough.

10.15 Sarah carries Nina to the kitchen; Nina gives her first smile since mum left then she looks at me (Carmen) and cries! Another teacher goes up to Nina and pats her hand – but Nina still cries ... Sarah takes Nina back to the dough table and Nina gets involved in this quite happily again.

10.17 Nina's still in Sarah's lap – Sarah says she'll let another teacher get morning tea – "I'd rather make sure she's [Nina's] ok" she says. (Nina in fact seems perfectly fine as long as she is in Sarah's lap but if Sarah tries to put her down she whimpers.) Nina gives a small whimper and Sarah stands up and carries Nina to the morning tea table.

(CS1. Fieldnotes, orientation visit 6/8)

My perception that Nina was able to be comforted by Sarah was shared by Sarah who noted this in her own journal stating also that Nina "kept up her interest in

the children and activities throughout the morning" (CS1.TJ.6.20-34). Nonetheless, Jean and Sarah were both visibly concerned about Nina's experience on these two days and, having talked over the breaks in attendance which Nina had had, they decided that more frequent visits might be helpful; thus they agreed to schedule an extra visit for the following day. My fieldnotes of this visit suggest that Nina's behaviour appeared closer to her earlier explorative and keen style; at the same time she remained determined to retain proximity to Jean whom she pulled by the hand around the various activities in the room. Noting this behaviour, Jean said to me half-way through the session:

Jean: "I'm not getting much distance between us"

Carmen : "No, but she's certainly enjoying all the activities."

Jean: "She was happier getting here this morning."

Carmen: "And her nose isn't running any more either."

(CS1.Fieldnotes, orientation visit 8/8, 09.51)

Jean agreed with this and added that Nina had slept well the previous night for the first time in a long time saying: "It all helps" (CS1.Fieldnotes, orientation visit 8/8, 09.51).

This exchange indicates that both Jean and I were trying to make sense of Nina's behaviour during this session within the context of her earlier experience. Both of us agreed that Nina seemed happier and more active in her environment during this session and it is plausible that improved health and a good night's sleep had an effect on this.

In summary, these observations suggested a "working hypothesis" that over the last few visits to the centre Nina had worked out that she could not assume that her mother would stay at the centre throughout her time there; her grip on her mother's hand may have been Nina's way of saying that she preferred to have her mother remain at the centre with her. Nonetheless, Nina also appeared willing to accept Sarah as a source of comfort in her mother's absence. Nina's behaviour on the following visit lends support to this idea which Jean expressed as Nina needing to "come to terms with the separation" and to develop trust in Sarah.

9.2.1.4 A landmark event: accepting the separation – accepting Sarah?

Nina spent all of the next session at the centre without Jean. When Jean passed Nina over to Sarah, Nina protested with a determined cry; this calmed down somewhat when Jean was out of sight but for the next 15 minutes, Nina continued to break into small crying bouts between periods of interest in different activities. As Sarah carried Nina around the centre trying to distract her from crying, Nina suddenly fell into a sobbing sleep on Sarah's shoulder. Another teacher tried to help Sarah shift Nina's weight from her arm but Nina woke up and gave such a piercing cry that Sarah continued holding her herself throughout the sleep. When Nina woke up half an hour later, she still seemed ready to cry at any moment and refused to leave Sarah's side, showing clearly that she preferred to be with Sarah than with any of the other teachers. However, over the following fifteen minutes, Nina's behaviour slowly changed and, while she did not actively participate in things, she again started to show an interest in what was going on around her, smiling at Sarah from time to time and generally looking quite content. Sarah recorded her thoughts about this session thus:

Just before morning tea she went to sleep in my arms. She obviously felt good enough with me to do that ... when she woke up we were outside ... I felt a difference in her mood and it was not long before she was sitting with me, without crying, enjoying one of the other children's block building she had become a lot more relaxed, closer to the stage she was at before her long break from the centre. She wanted me there ... our relationship is definitely there.

(CS1.TJ.8.29-31; 36-41; 51)

The marked difference in Nina's mood before and after her sleep which Sarah noted in her journal, was something I also noted in my fieldnotes. As I watched Nina sit close to Sarah, swinging her feet on the edge of the sandpit and smile as she observed Sarah pass sand through her fingers, I found myself saying to Sarah:

"It's a real breakthrough now, isn't it" (CS1.Fieldnotes, sole attendance week 1, 11.28). Sarah agreed. For the first time after Jean's leave-taking, Nina appeared to have reached the state described by Jean as "com[ing] to terms with the separation" and to "have developed trust" in Sarah (CS1.PIS1.2.2). This was also clearly in place in Nina's refusal to leave Sarah's side as well as in her definite preference to stay in Sarah's arms while she slept. Following this session, Nina's behaviour in the centre suggested a continuing increase in ease. From maintaining closeness to Sarah as she engaged in activities during the second week of sole attendance, she progressed in her third week to giving up Sarah's attention when Sarah needed to comfort other children, and to initiating interactions with teachers other than Sarah in her fourth week. In the case description, I summarised my fieldnotes from Nina's session during her fourth week of sole attendance in this way:

Nina was so confident and relaxed that it was hard to believe that this was the same child who three weeks ago had to be carried around the centre by her teacher for the whole period she was there. She moved about the centre with great familiarity ... her confidence in interacting with adults was also clearly more advanced than on previous visits: While she still primarily sought out Sarah as her preferred teacher, she also initiated interactions with three of the other centre staff But perhaps most significant of all was Nina's easy acceptance of her mother's departure at drop-off time: She confidently accepted Jean's goodbye kiss and resumed her block play straightaway.

(CS1.case description, p.9)

The story from my fieldnotes of how Nina related to Sarah over the time when she started to be at the centre without Jean, triangulates with Sarah's journal accounts and with Jean's view of events reported in the interviews. Likewise, Nina's experience appeared in line with Sarah's prediction in her theory of practice that through the 'primary caregiver' system children developed a "deep relationship with one adult" from which they later "branched out".

9.2.1.5 Polytextualist reflections or 'How do the stories we create matter?'

It is clear that Jean, Sarah and myself as the researcher, arrived at an understanding of Nina's settling-in as a 'successful' one, and of being 'happy' at the childcare centre, which matched each other's. This shared understanding is worth exploring because it suggests that all three adults were operating from an unspoken, and yet shared, view of what the 'settled child' looked like. Components of this shared view were that the child did not cry, or, if crying occurred, this was able to be soothed; that the child showed an interest in, and participated in, the centre activities; that the child did not need someone to hold her all the time and that the child was able to interact with at least one, and preferably more than one, adult at the centre as well as the children. It can be argued that this shared understanding acted as a kind of unwritten script of 'a good settling-in' against which the adults evaluated how well the settling-in process was going for Nina. One could additionally argue that this script was part of the taken-for-granted knowledge about children that we three adults shared as members of a shared culture operating with the same discourses.

Beyond this agreement, however, it is also important to note that there were some different emphases that emerged in the stories told by Jean and Sarah. In my view, one reason for the different emphases relates to the different roles, and associated functions, which the two adults occupied in relation to Nina. Jean's story focused on gauging whether Nina was 'happy' or not and in tracing the 'ebb and flow' of this happiness. This preoccupation was in line with her stated priority in life at this stage of her life that what mattered most to her was that her children were happy (see section 5.2.1). As I argued in chapter 5, for Jean, this was a responsibility that went with motherhood; it is possible therefore to understand her story of Nina's settling-in as also a story about Jean's motherhood and about Jean's 'motherly' preoccupation with ensuring the happiness of her children. Thus, it could be argued that Jean's story about Nina mattered because whether Nina was happy or not 'mattered' to Jean's view of herself as a mother.

In looking at Sarah's story, a similar argument can be made. In her story, the focus was on how well Sarah saw that the relationship between her and Nina was developing. Like Jean's story, therefore, Sarah's story can be read as a story about a particular role, this time that of being a primary caregiver with the associated function of becoming the person with whom it was desirable that the new child developed a deep relationship. This story would also matter, therefore, because it would be a story about identity, specifically, Sarah's work identity as an early childhood teacher.

Within this framework, it becomes possible to speculate on why, with these sets of preoccupations, and this shared script for a good settling-in, Nina's settling-in did emerge as a successful one despite a period of time when Nina seemed to "suddenly reject it quite strongly".

As the researcher, my hypothesis is that a major reason why Nina's settling-in was considered a success was because for both Jean and Sarah, a match emerged between what they hoped would happen, and what in fact occurred, so that both ended up feeling validated in their respective roles.

What they hoped would happen has been discussed in this section in terms of Jean's aspiration that her child would "come to terms with the separation" and be happy, in terms of Sarah's theory of practice, and in terms of the unspoken script, or discourse, which they shared about a good settling-in. In earlier chapters, I analysed other aspects of what they hoped would happen and argued, in the case of Jean, that her expectations from Sarah during the settling-in process were also fully met and that she developed a relationship with her of "steadily increasing trust" (see section 5.4.1.1). In the case of Sarah, I argued that her relationship with Jean was marked by a sense of reciprocity of communication and respect (see section 7.5.2.1) which she espoused as "ideal" in her theory of practice. In the match which emerged between the expectations and the events, ongoing communication ensured that the match continued throughout the process. Thus, when Nina became unhappy, which Jean described as she "suddenly rejected it

quite strongly", Sarah was able to call on Jean to pick up her daughter earlier and Jean remained open to the suggestions which Sarah made to overcome this issue through an additional visit.

Finally, it also seems plausible that the operation of a primary caregiver system in Nina's centre acted as another contributor to the match that emerged between the adults' expectations and events. Having one person assigned full responsibility for Nina's settling-in was consistent with the view held by both Jean and Sarah that children need a one-to-one relationship in which to develop trust and security. Thus, both of them actively worked to encourage Nina to develop a strong relationship with Sarah; as this story shows, the expected relationship did emerge. In this case, the operation of a primary caregiver system matched both the expectations which the adults had and the dominant discourse about what children need to which both adults subscribed.

9.2.2 Who looks after me here? Julie's story

9.2.2.1 *Introducing Julie*

Julie was 18 months old at the time of the study, the youngest among 21 children aged up to 5 years in a full-day centre staffed by 5 full-time teachers. The centre had a firm policy that all staff were responsible for all the children. At the time of negotiating access to the centre, Patti, the supervisor of the centre who was also the participating teacher in this study, justified this policy on the basis that it avoided running into difficulties if one staff member was absent.

The stories which Julie's mother, Lyn, told about her daughter starting childcare relied very heavily on her observations of Julie at drop-off and pick-up times, since, after the first two orientation visits during which she stayed with Julie, the third visit swiftly became one of sole attendance; Patti and Lyn agreed, twenty minutes after Julie's arrival, that Julie seemed ready to stay for a session on her own. From then on, drop-off and pick-up times were Lyn's main sources of information. In Lyn's narratives of her experience of starting childcare, a strong

theme was the difficulty she had in working out whom to speak to about Julie on a daily basis (see section 5.3.6).

Julie had a full-time place at the centre but for the first three weeks of her childcare experiences, she was at the centre for periods of time which varied in length from five hours to a full day (see Table 4); in her fourth week of sole attendance at the centre she started having regular full days. Julie had had experience of non-parental care at home and Lyn said that Julie was quite used to separations from her. Lyn described Julie as “very easy-going” and “not a shy clingy child” who had “been in a lot of different situations ... and coped with it well”; she was “good at entertaining herself”, had a “fairly long attention span” and was “quite responsive” (CS4.PIS1.10). Lyn also said that Julie was quite open when meeting new people and often went up to total strangers and smiled at them.

Visit	Date	Time	Presence of Parent
Orientation visit 1	Mon 11-10-93	14.20-15.45	whole session
Orientation visit 2	Tues 12-10-93	09.00-11.45	half an hour at start
Sole attendance 1	Wed 13-10-93	08.10-13.15	nil
Sole attendance 2	Wed 20-10-93	08.15-13.15	nil
Sole attendance 3	Wed 27-10-93	08.15-15.40	nil
Sole attendance 4	Wed 03-11-93	08.20-17.05	nil
Sole attendance 5	Wed 10-11-93	08.15-16.20	nil
Sole attendance 6	Wed 17-11-93	08.10-13.15	nil

Table 4: Julie's attendance pattern at her centre over case study period

The image of the “easy” temperament (Thomas & Chess, 1977) created by this description matches the impression gained by Patti, who commented in her first journal entry that Julie was “very happy and easy going” and “quite confident” (CS4.TJ.1.12;17-18). During Julie’s second visit, this view was strengthened and Patti remarked that Julie was:

a happy little girl – she had several ‘topples’ outside when running and she just picked herself up and laughed – she’s confident enough to move from

one place to another without teacher assistance. It's great that she enjoyed morning tea – often children don't want to eat at first".

(CS4.TJ.2.18-23)

The video records and my fieldnotes of Julie's visits to the centre also support this picture; while Julie did sometimes look hesitant on arriving at the centre, within seconds she typically became interested in her environment and from the very first visit she interacted with all the teachers who initiated contact with her. Within the first session, she had spent time with, and accepted direction from, three of the centre adults; for example, she allowed one of the teachers, Heather, to pick her up and take her to the sandpit without complaint and accepted the offer of a bucket and spade from her. Later Julie accepted Heather's suggestion of "going for a walk" and happily allowed herself to be carried to the outdoor slide and slid down it in Heather's lap. A few minutes later Julie allowed Carla, another teacher, to help her get off her trike and later still she went with Patti to the bathroom to wash her hands before afternoon tea. In Lyn's first journal record, she commented that:

after the first ten minutes Julie hardly looked in my direction and seemed quite unfazed by the place. I thought she might find it overwhelming because of the number of adults and children, but it was very relaxed, calm and friendly.

(CS4.PJ.1.25-29)

Julie's response to the centre adults remained open and responsive during the second and third visit and she again interacted with whoever was present or available. In the following week, however, I became aware that a different set of dynamics was operating between Julie and the centre adults; as I shall argue, these dynamics seemed associated with the centre policy that all teachers should be responsible for all the children.

9.2.2.2 *Who looks after me here?*

During the fieldwork session of the second week of Julie's sole attendance I noticed that on a number of occasions, Julie appeared to make approaches to specific adults for attention, especially to Maria and Diane, for whom she seemed to have developed a liking. However, her initiatives were not responded to by the adult to whom they were addressed. For example, when Maria walked into the centre carrying the centre's shopping, Julie looked at her beseechingly and started to cry (09.32) prompting Patti to say "Did Maria remind you of mummy did she?". Maria herself walked on to unpack her shopping. Later, Julie went up to Maria at the net climbing frame in the outside play area and lifted her arms to be picked up; Maria did not pick Julie up and instead re-directed her to the climbing frame by asking her if she wanted to go on (11.48) and helped her to do this. After a brief time there, Julie started to cry and called out for "mummy" so Maria took her off the climbing frame and sat Julie down on the lawn beside her. When another child went up to Maria and had a cuddle, Julie again started to cry, stood up from her place on the lawn beside Maria and then sat on Maria's feet. Maria started to rock her feet so that Julie looked like she was riding on them but Maria did not pick Nina up. Two other approaches for attention which Julie made to Maria during the day were more firmly deflected, once by Patti and once by Diane. On the first occasion, Patti, hearing Julie give a call of delight as she followed Maria, said as she picked Julie up: "It's Maria's lunch break; no Julie, Maria needs her break" (12.38). On the second occasion, as Julie caught sight of Maria in the sleep room and made a beeline to follow her (12.59), Diane picked Julie up and carried her to the bathroom. In addition, Julie spent the first twenty minutes of this session with Diane who, during this time appeared very responsive to Julie but, less than an hour later, when Julie followed Diane to the kitchen crying, Diane ignored her totally (09.52) and it was Patti who picked her up.

All this occurred against what Pontecorvo (1998, September) has called a kind of "backstage stream of talk" during which children are spoken of as an object while they are still present. According to Pontecorvo, this type of discourse is one way through which children are socialised. During this session, the "backstage stream

of talk" which occurred in Julie's hearing included a number of exchanges between the teachers about who was in favour with Julie that day. For example, while Julie was in the kitchen with Diane at the start of the session, Carla, one of the other teachers, arrived and Patti caught her up with where things were at for the day; this included the statement that Julie had fallen asleep after Carla had finished work on the previous day and that Patti had "been out of favour" with Julie, adding a few minutes later: "She only took to Diane yesterday afternoon didn't she?".

A few minutes later, Julie was in the painting room with Diane, doing some paper cutting scissors when Patti joined them. When Diane left the room shortly afterwards, Julie looked up needing some help with the scissors and Patti went over to Julie and helped her hold the scissors correctly. For the next thirty minutes, Julie stayed with Patti, interacting quite happily except for a few instances when she put her fist in her mouth which Patti interpreted as teething problems.

During this time with Patti, Heather, another of the teachers, walked into the room and commented teasingly to Patti: "We're in favour today Patti?". "Well - we've sort of ..." said Patti, "... got an understanding?" said Heather, finishing off the sentence for Patti (CS4. Fieldnotes, sole attendance 2, 09.27) and they talked some more about Julie's teething trouble and Lyn's reports earlier that day of Julie's disturbed nights. Later still, over the lunchtime routine, when Julie refused an additional cup of milk from Patti, Patti commented "Have you gone off me again, have you?" (CS4. Fieldnotes, sole attendance 2, 12.19).

What emerges from these interactions is that the teachers were very aware that children developed preferences for certain adults; indeed they were aware enough to gently tease each other over it. It seemed to me as observer that on that day Patti was making serious efforts to become more accepted by Julie. In the process, it also seemed that Diane was taking care to ease out of being the "preferred caregiver" (hence incident at 09.52), a status only established on the previous day;

Maria's lack of response to Julie might have been similarly motivated (CS4. Fieldnotes, sole attendance, 2, 11.48; 12.38 and 12.59). In a centre with a clear policy about not having specific teachers assigned responsibility for specific children, the accepted rationale for this behaviour by the teachers appeared to be that Julie needed to have a relationship with all the teachers and thus it was undesirable for any individual teacher to cultivate the preferences shown by the children. However, from the point of view of how the child might have experienced these behaviours, one could argue that the child's wishes for whom to relate to were thwarted. At times Julie was stopped from being with the person she would have preferred to be with.

The other message from all this for the child could be that one did not always get what one wanted – the adults set the rules and as a child you were expected to fit in. Julie seemed to learn to understand this because, as the sessions rolled on, the data showed that Julie did gradually fit in with the expected way of relating to the centre adults and accepted all the teachers as ones with whom she happily spent time with. Thus, over the six-week period of the case study, Patti's early journal comments that "she has shown a preference for Maria and Heather, going up to Maria when she was tired and not very happy" (CS4.TJ.4.14-18) and her statement that: "Julie is feeling her way – she has shown a preference for Maria most of the day and sometimes Heather" (CS4.TJ.6.13-15) gave way to phrases like "Julie related well to all the teachers today" (CS4.TJ.9. 18-19) and "she is feeling OK about the staff – going to all of us at different times" (CS4.TJ.10.19-20).

It seems reasonable to hypothesise from this that the "backstage stream of talk" (Pontecorvo, 1998, September) which occurred around the issue of who was in favour with Julie, together with the way that the adults withheld their attention from Julie to allow a 'less preferred' adult to step in, both worked to socialise Julie into fitting in with the centre's expectations for behaviour between adults and children.

9.2.3 “*Latching on to Sam*”: Maddi’s story

9.2.3.1 *Introducing Maddi*

Fifteen month-old Maddi was described by her mother, Helen, as:

on the whole, a happy sort of kid. When something new comes along, her first reaction is to take it all in. I’ve seen that in just little things like when I first took her swimming – she was fairly reserved about it but now she loves it. So when I took her to the childcare centre, I did expect her to be a bit subdued.

(CS2.PIS1.10.1)

The picture of Maddi drawn by Helen in our first interview coincided with the view which one of the teachers in this case study, Anna, formed of Maddi as “a very quiet little girl who may have found the size of the group overwhelming” (CS2.TJ.1.6-7) and “quite a reserved child although she is not timid” (CS2.TIS1.9.3b). It also coincided with my own view of Maddi’s general stance on arrival at the centre as being watchful and intensely observant but distanced from actual involvement with people or activities.

“Watchful” was a word that Helen also used to describe her daughter’s attitude on arrival at the centre; she further described her as “quiet”, “crowded” and “overwhelmed”.

For Maddi, the experience of relating to the centre adults unfolded within the context of her teachers’ theory of practice about settling-in which seemed encapsulated in the phrase “you’ve got to go with the child” (see section 7.4.2). I noted in chapter 7 that Maddi’s centre did not operate a system of primary caregiving and that when access was granted to conduct a case study in the centre, one of the teachers, Anna, volunteered as the participant, seeing the case study as an opportunity to practise her observation skills. However, another teacher, Sam emerged as Maddi’s preferred caregiver and she subsequently became the second teacher participant in this case study (see section 7.4.2). This story is about Maddi’s choice of Sam, as her preferred caregiver, or as Anna put it, about how Maddi “eventually latched on to Sam” (CS2.TJ.5.9-10).

Maddi did six orientation visits spread over four weeks. As Table 5 shows, the fifth visit was the only one during which Helen left Maddi on her own for a short time; during three of the orientation sessions Helen ignored the teachers' suggestions that she could leave Maddi at the centre for short unaccompanied periods. I argued in chapter 5 (see section 5.4.2.1) that Helen found the leave-takings from her daughter emotionally very difficult.

Visit	Date	Attendance	Presence of Parent
Orientation visit 1	Thur 15-7-93	9.00-10.45	whole session
Orientation visit 2	Tues 20-7-93	9.14-11.13	whole session
Orientation visit 3	Thurs 22-7-93	9.10-10.45	whole session
Orientation visit 4	Tues 27-7-93	9.10-11.25	whole session
Orientation visit 5	Thurs 29-7-93	9.15-11.32	trial separation
Orientation visit 6	Tues 03-8-93	9.05-11.35	whole session
Sole attendance 1	Thurs 05-8-93	9.10-11.35	nil
Sole attendance 2	Thurs 12-8-93	9.10-11.44	nil
Two weeks away: holiday and ill-health			
Sole attendance 3	Thurs 16-9-93	9.20-12.05	nil
Sole attendance 4	Thurs 23-9-93	9.10-11.47	nil
Sole attendance 5	Thurs 30-9-93	9.20-11.50	nil
Sole attendance 6	Thurs 7-9-93	9.20-12.15	nil

Table 5 : Maddi's attendance pattern at her centre over case study period

During the first orientation session Maddi and her mother were approached by both Anna and Sam at different times; Anna made contact with them seven times and Sam five times. Anna was the one who greeted Maddi and her mother on arrival and took them on a tour of the premises explaining where the children's bags and coats were kept, where the toileting area was and various other organisational details. Throughout this time Anna addressed herself primarily to Helen and her only direct comment to Maddi was the question "Do you want to find something to do?" as they walked back from the changing area to the main room. Anna then switched back to talking to Helen before she was distracted by

another mother who wanted to have a quick word with Anna before she left. As Anna made a note of something this mother said, Helen wandered off with Maddi around the different activities. Anna approached them again about twenty minutes later when Helen was reading to a group of children around her:

- 09.29 Anna comes over to Maddi and Helen: "How's it going?" she asks. Helen smiles at her but doesn't interrupt the flow of her reading. Anna picks up a wooden threading board and catches Maddi's eyes. Maddi smiles back and Anna asks: "Do you think that's funny? Here you are". She hands the threading board to Maddi and moves away to the table by the front door again. Maddi loses interest in the threading board and looks around.

(CS2.Fieldnotes, orientation visit 1/6)

This brief contact between Maddi and Anna was typical of the way that they interacted during this session: There was no real engagement in sustained interaction. Sam's interactions with Maddi, on the other hand, while fewer in number, were sustained for longer periods and appeared to engage Maddi's interest. For example, in the following excerpt from my video records of the morning tea routine during the same session, Sam took the initiative to provide some guidance for Maddi about the expected behaviour during morning tea time, and later also helped Maddi locate her mother when Maddi looked lost. The excerpt starts at the point when the children had been sitting down having crackers, fruits and drinks but Maddi had left the table and was wandering about in the hallway pushing a cart and eating a biscuit:

- 10.16 Sam leaves her place at the table and goes towards Maddi. She gently picks Maddi up and takes her back to the table. Maddi protests and Sam says: "You put your biscuit down there" and guides her hand in placing the biscuit on the table. Sam then leads Maddi back to the pushcart. But Maddi doesn't want this any more and struggles away from it. "Hard for you to understand, isn't it?" says Sam and takes her back to the table where Helen still is. Sam

gives Maddi's cracker back to her saying: "Here you are – you sit with your food with the other kids."

- 10.18 Sam and Helen chat; mum rubs Maddi's back in a caress. Sam and Helen are squatting; Sam says to Maddi: "I do like your buttons".
- 10.35 Sam now sits down in a chair next to Maddi. Sam chats to the other children nearby. Maddi stands up beside her chair – she is following her mother with her eyes as Helen walks to the kitchen carrying the dirty morning tea plates for washing up. She leaves the table and follows her mother and catches hold of her leg. A few seconds later she walks back down the hallway and into the main room and looks around as if bewildered. Sam notices and calls out her name. Maddi turns around to face her.
- 10.36 Sam walks up to her and holds her hand out to Maddi and points in the direction where mum is. (This is clearly also a request to Maddi to turn back from the hallway and join the other children in the main room.) Maddi seems to understand; she walks to mum (who is now at the table) and hugs her legs.

(CS2. Fieldnotes, orientation visit 1/6)

In this excerpt Sam's attentiveness to Maddi's focus of attention emerges quite clearly. Beyond guiding Maddi into some initial rules about eating at the table and not walking around with food in her hands, Sam also watched what Maddi's interest was and helped her locate her object of attention when it looked like Maddi may have temporarily lost her bearings in relation to Helen.

In the second orientation visit, Sam again spent extended time in interaction with Maddi during which she gave her an empty chocolate box with bottle tops inside it which she explored with interest (09.51), joined in telephone play with her (10.45) and accepted a cup from her and pretended to drink (10.55). By comparison, when Anna approached Maddi and Helen, Anna again mostly spoke to Helen. This pattern of interaction between the teachers and Maddi continued in the following two sessions with Anna generally seeming to direct her contact to Helen and with Sam being more focussed on Maddi. In the first interview I had

with Anna a possible explanation for the way Anna behaved during these sessions emerged in Anna's statement that she saw her role in the centre during the time that Helen accompanied Maddi as "helping mother to feel relaxed and welcome so she'd be happy to involve herself with Maddi and other children" and not liking to intervene when mum was around: "I don't like to force it unless the child shows she wants to go away from mum" (CS2.PIS1.10.6). In analysis, Anna's balance of focus towards more attention to Helen rather than Maddi may have contributed to Maddi developing a more open attitude to Sam rather than towards Anna. This attitude first started to emerge in Maddi during the fifth orientation session when Maddi had her first period of being at the centre without Helen.

The leave-taking during the fifth orientation visit has already been described in detail in chapter 5 as a prolonged and difficult one for both Maddi and Helen with Maddi crying strongly in protest and Helen becoming flushed and surreptitiously wiping away a tear (see section 5.4.2.1). When Helen eventually handed Maddi over to Anna and left, Maddi cried very strongly stretching in the direction of her mother walking away and pulling away from Anna. Two minutes later, Maddi was much calmer and started taking an interest in the book that Anna was reading to her as she also rubbed Maddi's chest and cuddled her. But for the next 25 minutes or so Maddi continued to break out in bouts of crying even though in between these she was able to take a brief interest in a number of different activities to which Anna carried her. During these activities Maddi appeared to be quite accepting of comfort from Anna but her calm times did not last and Anna herself seemed to be feeling unsettled. Anna said to me after about 20 minutes of this: "An hour will seem like an eternity to her mum too ... it's actually difficult when they [the children] don't speak" (CS2. Fieldnotes, orientation visit 5/6, 09.54). I noted in my fieldnotes that this suggested to me that she too was finding this experience difficult.

A couple of minutes later, Sam walked over to Maddi and, opening her arms wide to Maddi, said in an enthusiastic voice and with eyes open wide rather like the personification of King's (1978) infant teacher: "I think I might talk to Maddi; I

like Maddi" (CS2.Fieldnotes, orientation 5/6, 09.57). Maddi went to Sam straightaway and quietened down immediately. Sam kept up a steady stream of distracting talk, reading and other activities with her. After morning tea, which Maddi spent on Sam's knees, Sam took many of the children to the indoor gym in a large hall for some gross motor play because the weather prohibited going outdoors, and this was the beginning of a complete transformation in Maddi's demeanour. Maddi was delighted to explore the balls and the trikes and had a great deal of fun with this equipment. Sam kept a constant eye on her and stayed very close to her but Maddi was even happy responding to other children's approaches towards her. She smiled and laughed happily – a big change from her behaviour before morning tea.

During the following session Maddi retained the increased confidence she had shown on the previous visit; however, on this occasion Helen did not leave the centre for any of the time Maddi spent there. Both Anna and Sam went up to Helen during the session and suggested that she could try leaving Maddi for a short period (see also 5.4.2.1) but Helen ignored these; this caused some concern to Anna and Sam and they both discussed this with me at the end of the session. In response, I wondered aloud whether Helen might appreciate being given a clear recommendation about when it was a good time for her to leave Maddi for a brief period. The lack of guidance Helen had experienced about what to pack in Maddi's bag was very much in my mind as I made this comment (see section 5.4.2.1). Both Sam and Anna were receptive to this suggestion and decided that they would try this tack during the following visit, which was also to be Maddi's first day of sole attendance.

9.2.3.2 Maddi makes her preference known

At the start of the next session it was clear that Sam and Anna had done some further discussion after my last visit and had decided on a change in approach. Anna told me that since Maddi had appeared to respond to Sam very positively during the last two sessions, she and Sam had decided that Sam would be the person who would look after Maddi when her mother left. For a centre which did

not have a formal policy on using a primary caregiver system, this was, I felt, a significant decision; it was also in line with the view expressed by both Sam and Anna that "you've got to go with the child" (see section 7.4.2). As a result Sam positioned herself close to Helen and Maddi from early on in the session and ten minutes later she started to prepare Maddi for the leave-taking saying that mum would have to go soon but that it was alright because Maddi was getting used to them both. After a delay when Sam was called to the phone, Sam initiated the leave-taking by approaching Maddi and talking to her gently suggesting she join her in saying goodbye to mummy. Maddi pulled back towards her mother but, when Sam prompted Helen to "just hand her to me" (CS2. Fieldnotes, sole attendance week 1, 09.36) Helen did, and walked away waving goodbye. This leave-taking was significantly brisker and had none of the vacillation during the fifth orientation session. Maddi's response to her mother's departure was loud and vigorous crying but after about five minutes of crying interspersed with quiet moments, Maddi looked more relaxed and happy and she spent the rest of the session mostly in Sam's arms being intently interested in what was going on around her even if she did not actively participate.

Maddi's decided preference for Sam became unmistakable during the fieldwork visit of the following week when Anna made a number of interactive approaches to Maddi which Maddi withdrew from. By contrast, Maddi was much more responsive to Sam's approaches so that at one stage Anna said to me: "this is embarrassing" (CS2. Fieldnotes, sole attendance 2, 09.33). For the rest of the case study, Maddi's relationship with Sam continued to strengthen even through the short period when Maddi suddenly "took a shine" to a student teacher, Lisa, who was on placement at the centre for a few weeks (see section 7.4.2).

In summary, it seemed that after an initial period of ambiguity about who among the centre adults Maddi would establish contact with, a 'de facto' system of primary caregiving eventually emerged between Maddi and Sam which was initiated by Maddi and followed-up by the teachers. This was despite the centre's policy of not having specific teachers assigned to specific children but was also in

line with the teachers' articulated theory of practice that they would "go with the child" or take the lead from them. For Maddi this meant that from then on it was Sam who met her first thing in the morning and only Sam who handled the leave-takings from Helen. In addition, it was from Sam's lap that she observed the activities of the centre and slowly ventured out to take an active part in them.

9.2.4 Polytextualist Reflections

From a polytextualist perspective, it is possible to read the above stories in a variety of ways. As I noted in chapter 3, a critical polytextualist perspective asks either or both of two questions: "what is the function of the story (i.e., what can be done with it?); and/or, what ideology is the story peddling (i.e., what can be warranted by it?)" (Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 1992, p. 18). In the rest of this section, I attempt to answer some of these questions by looking at the stories from a number of different perspectives.

9.2.4.1 Learning to fit in: a co-constructivist tale

The stories in this section have traced some of the early contacts which three children in this study had with the new adults they met at their first childcare centre. The intention of this was to provide an insight into what the lived reality of this contact was from the child's perspective.

One of the most striking aspects of these stories was the way that the teachers' theories of practice, and the centre's policy on settling-in, influenced the way that the child's interactions with the adults were experienced by each child. In Nina's case the immediate and persistent attention she received from Sarah, was truly the "focused treatment" that Sarah espoused in her theory of practice. In line with her principle of "developing a deep relationship" with Nina, Sarah initiated approaches to Nina, accepted those which Nina made, and did not discourage any of them. Sarah was also consistently tuned in to Nina's cues as to her focus of attention. She followed these cues, at times using them to introduce Nina to some of the centre's rules and to build up an easy and comfortable relationship with her. One instance was at the painting easel, when, introducing the rule about wearing the apron for painting, she was also careful to not make this rule a cause of

conflict. It can be argued that through this focused treatment, the action which was "promoted" to Nina was more direct contact with Sarah, and that this effectively "canalized" (Valsiner, 1985; Valsiner & Hill, 1989) Nina into the deep relationship with her that Sarah felt was required for a successful settling-in.

Similarly, in Julie's case, the centre's policy that all teachers had responsibility for all children, was enacted in the way that the teachers appeared to actively work to discourage Julie from forming lasting preferences with those from whom she wanted to receive attention. In telling Julie's story I suggested that both the direct action of the teachers in deflecting her from following Maria around the centre, and the "backstage stream of talk" (Pontecorvo, 1998, September) that accompanied this, worked to socialise Julie into that centre's ways of interacting with the adults. This too had the effect of "social canalization" (Valsiner, 1985; Valsiner & Hill, 1989); like Nina, Julie gained knowledge about the acceptable ways of acting in the context of her centre and, over time, fell into line with the adults' expectations.

The story I have told about Maddi's experience of settling-in is somewhat different but also similar. In Maddi's centre, there were no clear procedures on how the settling-in process was to be handled apart from the principle of "going with the child". This meant that Anna's electing to be the teacher participant in the study put her in an unusual position in relation to the centre's normal practice of letting things unfold in their own time. The norm in the centre was for all the adults to have equal responsibility for all children with no one child receiving particular attention from any specific teacher. In Maddi's case, what unfolded was a decided preference, over time, to be with Sam, creating what I have called a "de facto" system of primary caregiving which Sam had not sought but which both Anna and Sam supported once they recognised Maddi's preference. The teachers justified their action in terms of respecting the child's right to choose (see section 7.4.2). However, I have also shown that the type of contact which occurred between Maddi and the two teachers differed, and suggested that this difference

may have contributed to Maddi's choice to be with Sam. Thus, my analysis suggests the following insights:

- i. the approach of 'wait and see what the child wants' which operated in Maddi's centre resulted in less clear canalization by the adults early on in the process, about what the teachers expected in terms of interaction between them and the child. For Maddi, this resulted in a somewhat slow and 'bumpy' start to establishing relations with the centre adults, and ambiguity about what generally was expected of her at the centre.
- ii. the more engaged interaction which Maddi eventually had with Sam may have "canalized" her into seeing Sam as the more responsive teacher and led to her developing her preference for Sam.

In this way, therefore, Maddi's story also may be read as a story of canalization: the teachers expected her to show them her preference for which of the teachers she wanted to spend time with, and, despite a slow and 'bumpy' start, Maddi eventually did.

These stories suggest that a connection existed between the children's experience of their interactions with the centre adults and the way that the adults understood their role during the settling-in process. A social constructionist perspective, such as that used by Valsiner (1985) and Pontecorvo (1998, September) can be used to explain the children's evolving behaviour in their first weeks at childcare. The children's relations to the adults can be seen as a co-construction between the adults and the children with the children being seen as having contributed to the process as well as the adults. In the stories told above, the children's contribution was most evident in the choice which Maddi made between the two teachers who actively approached her as possible partners in interaction. In Nina's case, Nina's acceptance of Sarah's attempts to become her primary caregiver can also be seen as an active choice highlighted by her refusal to go to anyone else when she fell asleep on Sarah's arm. The adults' contributions were to set expectations based on policy and/or their theories. To a large extent the children found themselves 'learning to fit in' to these expectations.

9.2.4.2 To have or not to have a primary caregiver: An attachment theory perspective

In the three stories above, the two themes of the children's separation from their mother and of forming new relationships, or attachments, with the centre adults were constant undertones (and/or overtones) in the discourse of the adults involved in the study, including my own discourse in my fieldnotes as researcher.

Looked at from an attachment theory perspective, the stories of how the children formed, or attempted to form, relationships with their preferred adult, can be read as the children's attempt to develop an attachment relationship with a new adult, which would fill the gap left by their mother's absence. There were many elements in the narratives of the three children's experiences which could be used to support such an analysis. For example, all the children swiftly worked out when their mother was not at the centre with them. This was evident in Nina's "searching" behaviour noted by Sarah and myself, and in Julie's crying when Maria walked in the front door which Patti interpreted as an indication that Julie was reminded of her mother. Likewise, the meaning for the child of the mother's absence was clearly an unhappy one: It was difficult to interpret the children's crying at the mother's departure as anything but an expression of this, and of protest at the event. Additionally, for the child, there was a 'sense of loss' from which the centre adults tried to shift the child's attention through using a range of distracting techniques. The construction of the settling-in event as one of separation was clearly evident in Jean's description of the settling-in experience as one of "com[ing] to terms with separation" (CS1.PIS1.2.2). In Sarah's talk about a new child needing to develop a "deep relationship", the idea of the relationship with the teacher being one of a substitute attachment relationship from which the child draws security was clearly expressed.

Finally, it is also possible to read the behaviour of Nina with Sarah, and of Maddi with Sam, after both children attended on their own as being strikingly similar in nature. In both cases, the children had a few sessions when they spent most of

their time in close proximity to 'their' teacher before they eventually started to move away and take part in activities on their own initiative. In the case of Maddi, her behaviour with Sam was also very similar to her behaviour when she was with her mother, Helen. In the absence of her 'primary attachment figure' Maddi appeared to use Sam as her substitute security base and this enabled her to move beyond the state of watchfulness and observation to the beginnings of involvement in the centre curriculum which the teachers saw as signifying that a child was settled.

So, from a critical polytextualist perspective, what is the function of this interpretation? What can be done with it?

Most obviously, the answer to these questions is that an attachment theory perspective on these stories would find an argument in favour of having a primary caregiver system in place. This perspective would see Nina's story as a clear example of how this system worked to ensure that all of Nina's needs for security were met during the time of starting childcare. Maddi's case could be used to argue that having a primary caregiver system in place on a regular basis would avoid the ambiguities which occurred about who would be the best person to guide Maddi and her mother through the settling-in process. Additionally, Maddi's need to actively seek out which of the teachers she preferred to be with would have been obviated. Julie's case, on the other hand could be used to argue that in the absence of a primary caregiver with sole responsibility for a particular child, it was likely that the resulting adult-child relationships would ignore the child's security needs possibly leading to insecure attachments with the centre adults. Thus, from an attachment theory perspective, the different "social practices" used in settling-in the three children in these stories would be seen to "*matter*" (Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers, 1992, p. 14) in terms of making the primary caregiver system a more credible system than the other two options for the enhancement of the child's feeling of security.

9.2.4.3 Relating to the adults: A temperament(al) angle

In chapter 8, reference was made to studies which have explored the connection between children's temperament classification and children's response to starting childcare (see section 8.1.3). For instance, in a study of adjustment to nursery school, Marcus et al. (1972) found that "easy" children adapted without difficulty irrespective of the routines used in the nursery school, "difficult" children did better in more structured and friendly environments rather than in "laissez-faire" ones and the "slow-to-warm" did best when they were allowed to adapt at their own slow pace. Other work (e.g., Center for Child and Family Studies, 1993) has suggested that "slow-to-warm" children need constant attention and a style of handling which involves a recurring cycle of adult behaviour described as "being with, taking to, remaining available and moving away".

The angle which temperament theory would take on the stories above would be that since both Nina and Julie appeared to have temperaments that would be likely to be classified as 'easy', it would be reasonable to hypothesise that they would have settled in any type of childcare environment. With Maddi and her mother, who were both described as quite "reserved", a temperament theory perspective would hypothesise that in their case, a more guided and focused system for settling them in would have been more likely to have been experienced positively. It seems reasonable, therefore, to suggest that from this perspective, the primary caregiver system would also be seen as a social practice that was credible as a way of approaching the experience of starting childcare. This is because a centre policy which assigns responsibility for settling-in a new child to a specific teacher is more likely to enable constant monitoring of how a child responds to the new situation. In turn, one would expect that this would result in more accurate tuning in to the process of "being with, taking to, remaining invisible and moving away" that slow-to-warm children find helpful (Center for Child and Family Studies, 1993).

9.3 Relating to the children: stories of adjustment and induction into the group setting

9.3.1 *Becoming a playmate: Julie's story*

Among the stories told by Lyn and Patti about Julie's experience of starting childcare was one about how she swiftly became a favourite playmate especially among the older children. Lyn's story about this started in her first journal entry where she noted that she had wondered how Julie would react to seeing so many children in one place but that when they were at the centre Julie seemed "quite unfazed by the place" (CS4.PJ.1.26). She noted also that the boy beside whom Julie started to engage in some water play on her first visit was "very tolerant of her" (CS4.PJ.1.9). In our first interview during the second week of Julie's attendance at the centre, Lyn expressed surprise that the children at the centre seemed very gentle and friendly and by the third week of the case study, when Lyn wrote her final journal entry, it was clear that any apprehensions she may have had about how Julie would fare in a group of children were totally allayed and she reported that the older girls "rushed over to Julie and seemed keen to pick her up" (CS4.PJ.6.5-6). At the end of the study during the final interview, Lyn said: "some of the children she appears to know quite well; she's happy to follow them around rather than cling to me" (CS4.PIS2.3.3b) and she saw this as one of the reasons why Julie was so well settled.

Patti's perception of how Julie was relating to the other children in the centre was equally positive; she noted after Julie's third visit to the centre that "Julie played outside and spent time with an older girl – she was quite happy to be directed by her" (CS4.TJ.3.12-13). In the following days Patti also wrote:

Sophie (older girl) started talking to her when Julie went to push the truck Sophie was sitting in. Sophie then helped Julie into the truck and pushed her around. Julie was happy, smiling and saying odd sounds. Julie enjoyed this play. Sophie then held her hand and took her to the slide. Another girl, Elizabeth, talked to Julie and held her hand. Julie walked round with Elizabeth for a while – Julie actually offered Elizabeth her hand.

(CS4.TJ.9.6-14)

We need to watch the older children with her; they like to take her around in the pram and trolley, they forget that she has a will of her own and that she's not a toy.

(CS4.TJ.12.21-25)

Many other journal entries by Patti reported that Julie remained popular throughout the period of the case study and she, like Lyn, noted in our final interview that one reason why Julie had settled so well was that the children "are nice to her – she liked the children very much" (CS4.TIS2.3).

This story of Julie's swift emergence as a favourite playmate which was threaded through in the journals and interview transcripts of Lyn and Patti, emerged in richer detail in my fieldnotes of Julie's experience in the centre. For example, various incidents throw light on how the established children at the centre were "nice" to Julie, and on how she, in turn, was also very open to their approaches to her and often initiated interactions. Other interactions reveal that the established children were clearly acting as the more "expert" others inducting the "less expert" Julie into more knowledgeable ways of being, a process referred to earlier as a process of "guided participation" (e.g., section 2.2.3). The following extracts from my fieldnotes provide an insight into what the lived reality of these interactions might have been like for Julie.

9.3.1.1 Peers being "nice" to Julie

Being "nice" to Julie included instances when Julie was looked after or comforted by another child. In the following incident Julie was shown concern and care by a slightly older girl when she gave signs of being unhappy in her third week of attending the centre:

- 09.15 Diane (teacher) leaves the room and Julie whimpers; an older girl, Alice, puts her arm round Julie to comfort her. Then Alice takes Julie's hand and leads her to the kitchen; Julie goes along – she sees Diane and calls out "mummy" and reaches for her hand.

Alice takes Julie's other hand ... they walk over to the reading table in the kitchen where a mother is reading a story to her son before she leaves.

(CS4.Fieldnotes, sole attendance week 3)

A few minutes later Alice was again "nice" to Julie when she invited her to play in the dress-up room:

- 10.46 Alice now leads Julie over to the home corner. "Come in here" says Alice invitingly as she crawls under the dressing table. Julie follows her. Alice calls out to Jo (relieving teacher): "Can you put a blanket on us?". "Well – I'll leave a little gap 'cos Julie might not like being covered up" says Jo.

(CS4.Fieldnotes, sole attendance week 3)

Later Julie was again included in an extended episode of pretend play by some older girls (Sophie, Nell, Barbara and Elise) who were playing "sisters" in the outside play area. Julie was cast in the role of "baby sister" and quickly became a preferred playmate:

- 11.41 Sophie goes up to a group of girls on the steps of the front door and introduces Julie as her little sister. "This is Julie" says Sophie. "Julie" repeats Julie.

Nell pulls up a pushchair and Barbara sits in it. Nell pretends that Barbara is her baby sister who is also called 'Julie'. Sophie and Nell chat about their 'baby sisters' and push them along. Julie seems happy to be involved in this game.

- 11.44 Now Nell tries to hijack (the real) Julie to her pushchair and pulls her along from the other pushchair. Maria (teacher) intervenes – "Don't drag her along" she says to Nell.

- 11.45 There's more pretend play between Nell and Sophie. As Nell goes through the ritual of introducing Julie, this time to Sophie, Julie says "Julie" and points to her chest.

Nell wheels Julie into the play house in the yard.

(CS4.Fieldnotes, sole attendance week 3)

As they continued to play in the playhouse, Julie found that her attention and favour were being vied for by two groups of older girls until one of the teachers, Maria, intervened:

- 11.48 Julie stands up from the pushchair – Elise gives her a doll. Julie places the doll on the ledge of a semi-circular window in the playhouse. Older girls seem to be vying for Julie's favour giving her various toys as if to please her. She potters about inside the playhouse with the various balls, trikes, dolls and pushchairs inside it.

- 11.50 Julie now manages to squeeze out of the hut having collared a pushchair but walks back inside calling "baby, baby" – however, she doesn't pick up a doll lying on the floor.

Nell picks Julie up and places her on the carpentry table inside the playhouse – Maria (teacher) comes into the playhouse and tells Nell this is dangerous and not to do it.

(CS4.Fieldnotes, sole attendance week 3)

Once outside, Julie ran around freely for a while until Jo (relieving teacher) lifted her onto a trailer which an older boy, Ted, was pulling around. Julie's acceptance by her peers was clear in the way that Ted was very happy to pull her around the yard in his trailer and he did this for almost five minutes when Julie stood up in the trailer and Ted stopped pulling it. In the following excerpts, Julie can be seen taking her place beside her peers and showing also that she could hold her own:

- 11.58 Maria starts calling some of the older kids to go inside to the bathroom; Julie joins them. She dances around in bathroom

gleefully; she goes to the wash-hand basin and pulls stool out from underneath basin and clambers up to wash her hands.

12.00 Andrew goes up to Julie and eyeballs her; she eyeballs him back. Jo (relieving teacher) lifts Julie off the stool and Julie goes to the towel and dries her hands ... "You've washed your hands – go to the kitchen and have your lunch" says Maria. Julie runs to the kitchen (she obviously knows exactly what Maria said!) Heather puts a bib on her and places her in the highchair.

12.05 Sophie's sitting at corner of table beneath Julie's highchair; she says "hello" to Julie who points to her bib and says "bib bib." They play "touch-my-hand" games as Sophie puts her hand on Julie's highchair.

(CS4. Fieldnotes, sole attendance week 3)

The above excerpts suggest that Julie's experience of relating to her peers was far from limited. She emerges from these excerpts as a popular and liked child who despite her status of being a newcomer had already become an accepted member of the peer group. It is also clear that Julie herself felt confident among her peers; this aspect of her experience emerges more clearly in the following excerpts.

9.3.1.2 Julie approaches her peers

Julie's own stance towards her peers appeared open from the start. Thus, even on her third visit in her first week of attendance, when she was at the centre without her mother, she approached two boys playing outside the dolls' house indoors and laughed and made noises which sounded like she wanted to start a conversation. Later that session she approached Alice (an older girl) who was pulling a trailer round the yard and stepped into the trailer in an implicit request to be pulled along (CS4. Fieldnotes, sole attendance week 1, 11.01). When Alice stopped for a pretend telephone conversation with a telephone made from a piece of timber stuck with a nail to a tree so that it swivelled, Julie hurried her up:

09.24 Julie makes complaining noises and pushes her body forward as though hurrying Alice up. One other girl is going round the yard in another trailer and another now climbs in the trailer with Julie. They set off again to the front garden and have to stop to negotiate a 'right of way' with another trailer; Julie grizzles at this delay looking at Alice as if willing her to drive on!

(CS4.Fieldnotes, sole attendance week 1)

In the following extracts from her third week of attendance Julie appears open and confident as well as able to communicate her wishes:

08.39 Victoria (older girl) comes round the kitchen table and sits on chair next to Julie – Julie greets her with an unintelligible noise and a smile.

10.37 Julie rides around the yard acknowledging a couple of other kids' playful manoeuvres around her with a smile.

(CS4.Fieldnotes, sole attendance week 3)

In other sessions, there were also many offers of toys, giving of cuddles, and general easy play between Julie and her peers.

9.3.1.3Peers inducting Julie into the life of the centre

Some of the interactions which Julie had with her peers were remarkable for the way they show how the established children were clearly helping to induct Julie into the centre as they introduced her to equipment and activities. The following extracts from my fieldnotes are examples of such interactions:

09.03 Patti sings a song which ends with a clap as she sings 'and the bubble went 'pop'. She asks Julie: "can you go 'pop'?" (Patti claps on 'pop'). Nell gently takes Julie's hands and makes them clap together to go 'pop'. Julie allows this and Patti nods approval at Nell.

(CS4.Fieldnotes, sole attendance week 2)

09.19 Julie observes as Roy builds a block tower on a stick using blocks with a hole in the middle; Alice shows Julie how to slide the blocks one by one off the stick. Julie has a go.

Heather (teacher), who observes this interaction, asks Roy to roll the doll's pushchair out of Julie's way so that Julie can reach the block tower easily. Roy complies.

(CS4.Fieldnotes, sole attendance week 3)

09.22 Alice (older girl) leads Julie by the hand to the dress-up room. Julie points to a wall board with pockets that open with different devices (e.g., buttons, zips, velcro and so on) and Alice shows Julie how to work a few of these.

(CS4.Fieldnotes, sole attendance week 3)

10.46 Julie has just climbed off her rocking horse and goes to watch Edgar as he rocks on his rocking horse. Edgar gets off without being asked and shows Julie where she can sit; he helps her get on.

(CS4.Fieldnotes, sole attendance week 5)

Julie's acceptance by her peers is very evident in these examples, as is her own acceptance of their approaches towards her. 'Caring and sharing' interactions with her peers such as the above were also part of Julie's process of learning the centre peer culture. For example, Nell guided Julie in clapping her hands in accompaniment to Patti's song, Alice helped Julie work out how to use the blocks on a stick, and later how to open and shut the various devices on the 'fiddleboard' and Edgar modeled sharing of equipment as well as friendship. What was also noticeable was the adults' active encouragement of the 'guiding' and pro-social behaviour of the established children.

The children's role in Julie's induction seemed important in two ways. Their friendly ways conveyed much about the positive culture of the centre, and their tutoring assisted her learning about how things worked. The effect of this

induction into the culture of the centre was brought home when a teacher who was relieving for the day asked me about my study. Having explained that I was trying to “capture the experience of children settling-in”, he exclaimed: “Oh, Julie is settled-in alright”; I could only nod in agreement. This was only her fifth week at childcare.

9.3.2 Establishing one's place in the hierarchy: Robert's story

Insight into the “lived reality” of starting childcare from the children's perspective emerged in the accounts which Robert's teacher, Lorraine, told about Robert's experiences. Robert was aged 26 months when this case study started; he did four orientation visits accompanied by his mother Paula and his paternal aunt Rebecca (see Table 6). Rebecca was 16 years old and still at school but she spent a lot of time with Robert. When Robert started attending the centre on his own, he was dropped off by his father, Michael, and picked up in the early afternoon by either Paula or Rebecca. Paula described her son as “shy around strangers but he has a very bubbly personality” (CS5.PIS1.10); around new people Robert would “look at them and swing his head – if they take an interest in him he's probably alright ... but if not, he won't bother really” (CS5.PIS1.10). As noted in section 5.2.5, Robert had been looked after by a family friend as part of an organised family day care scheme since he was 7 months but since he was the only child there, Paula and Michael had decided to use an out-of-home service to supplement this so he could get some interaction with other children “just for learning new skills and for his language development ... not just being with one adult all day” (CS5.PIS1.2).

Visit	Date	Time	Presence of Parent
Orientation visit 1	Thurs 20-1-94	10.00-12.00	whole session
Orientation visit 2	Thurs 27-1-94	10.30-13.00	whole session
Orientation visit 3	Mon 31-1-94	10.20-12.00	whole session
Orientation visit 4	Mon 07-2-94	10.10-12.15	whole session
Sole attendance 1	Wed 09-2-94	07.40-12.00	nil
Sole attendance 2	Fri 18-2-94	08.00- 12.00	nil
Sole attendance 3	Wed 23-2-94	07.54-12.00	nil
Sole attendance 4	Wed 02-2-94	08.00-12.00	nil
Sole attendance 5	Wed 09-3-94	07.54-12.30	nil
Sole attendance 6	Wed 16-3-94	07.54-13.15	nil

Table 6: Robert's attendance pattern at centre over case study period

In my second interview with Lorraine, she described Robert as “quite a dominant child – if he wants something, he goes up and gets it” (CS5.TIS2.2.3a). Lorraine also said that Robert had “established himself in the hierarchy of the centre”. My field observations provide much evidence in support of Lorraine’s evaluation and excerpts from these are used here to illustrate Lorraine’s emergent story of a child who from the first week of sole attendance was:

fitting in to how things worked well – even in small things like he doesn’t run up to children and take things away. I don’t know if he’s had other childcare before but he seems to know what he can and can’t do to avoid other children getting upset. The visits we had helped. His mum tried to let him go off and do things on his own; so he made his own way.

(CS5.TIS1.9.3b)

I told the story of how Robert’s mother, Paula, “tried to let him go off and do things on his own” in chapter 5 as part of how Paula constructed the meaning of “being there” for her son during the orientation visits (see section 5.6.3.1). I argued then that Paula’s behaviour in the centre was an illustration of how all the mothers tried to ‘do their bit’ to act as the ‘bridge from the known to the unknown’. In Paula’s case she saw her role as being that of teaching Robert to be independent from her because she would not be staying with him at the centre; it was also her way of teaching him to trust the teacher. I argued also that through such behaviours, the mothers engaged in teaching their children to “fit in”, or adapt to the centre environment, using a process of “guided participation” (Rogoff, 1990, 1991; Rogoff et al., 1993). In the rest of this section I present incidents, or cameo interactions, in which action took place between Robert, his peers and sometimes his teachers which illustrates that guided participation was also occurring in the interaction which Robert had with the established children in his new setting; this guided participation clarified for Robert what was acceptable and unacceptable behaviour among his peer group.

9.3.2.1 *Learning the rules of peer interaction*

Object 'ownership' versus 'sharing'

Some of the early rules which Robert was inducted into through his interaction with peers related to object 'ownership' within a group setting.

In the first two cameo sets taken from Robert's first and second orientation visits, some of these rules start to emerge. For example, in the first cameo set, the rules, or lessons which Robert might have drawn from his interactions could have been:

Rule 1: if I try and take an object from someone, they may/will take it back.

Rule 2: if others reclaim an object they originally had, I can do that too.

Cameo Set 1: 'Ownership' rules in a group setting

08.32 Robert is at the dough table sticking bits of twig and flowers into a lump of dough making a 'garden'. Nancy, on Robert's left, stands up from her chair and Robert pulls her chair over to him. Nancy reclaims her chair. Teacher makes no comment.

10.38 Robert and one of the teachers are standing in the dress-up corner. Nancy comes over holding a toy helicopter which Robert had played with earlier in the day. Robert reaches out to the helicopter and takes it from Nancy. Nancy tries to take it back but gets sidetracked to another toy and Robert goes towards mum with the helicopter. Teacher and mother make no comment.

(CS5.Fieldnotes, orientation visit 1/4)

In the second cameo set, the first rule about ownership may have become elaborated as :

Rule 1 (elaborated): the child who first lays claim on an object retains a higher claim on that object and the teacher will support them.

Additionally, Robert may have understood that :

Rule 3: when more than one of a given item is available, it is more acceptable to choose an unclaimed instance of the item from the alternatives.

Cameo Set 2: Elaborating 'ownership' rules

12.10 Robert is exploring a toy truck alongside three other children; looks over at a bigger truck which Hugo is playing with. Robert now pushes a toy pram – he goes over to the large truck which Hugo has just let go of.

Hugo yells: "My truck" in protest to reclaim it and teacher Pam says : "Robert, do you want a truck too? Which one do you want?" Robert chooses another large truck and takes it over to where mum is sitting.

12.31 Robert moves towards a group of children sitting around teacher Pam who is reading a story. He spots the large truck which Hugo had played with earlier and sits on it to listen to the story.

12.33 Hugo walks over to the group, he goes up to Robert on the truck and Robert gets off the truck. Teacher Hilary gives Robert another large truck to sit on.

(CS5. Fieldnotes, orientation visit 2/4)

It is possible to argue that by 12.33 of the second orientation visit, Robert had already learnt to comply with Rule 1 because, on seeing Hugo approach, Robert easily moved off the large truck which Hugo had originally claimed.

Cameo set 3, however, suggests that while Robert may have understood Rule 1, this did not stop him challenging it.

Cameo Set 3 : Testing out 'ownership' rules

11.50 Robert is at the puzzle table; he looks up at the noise of a rocking horse which Bill (15 months) is riding. Robert leaves his puzzle and goes over to Bill on his rocking horse. He watches Bill intently who keeps on rocking. Robert gets on the bouncing bug which is beside Bill's rocking horse; now he moves over to another rocking horse beside Bill's one and rocks this one from behind.

11.54 Bill gets off his horse and Robert immediately gets on it. Bill doesn't like this and protests, pulling at horse's ears. Robert says "No, no" and sits tight and Bill moves away.

(CS5.Fieldnotes, orientation visit 3/4)

08.33 Robert goes over to the dough table and hijacks a chair away from another (younger) boy and sits on it.

(CS5.Fieldnotes, sole attendance week 1)

It is possible, therefore, that in these two interactions, Robert may have understood that he could sometimes get what he wanted; additionally this understanding could have included the component that getting what one wanted was easier if the other claimant was younger, and/or in the absence of a teacher.

In Cameo 4, a further elaboration of the rules of 'ownership' in a group setting may have become apparent for Robert:

Rule 4: some objects (of which only one is available, or which are nominated by the teacher) are to be shared on a turn-taking basis.

Cameo 4: Rules about turn-taking

10.30 Robert watches two children, Danny and Toby, on the see-saw. As Toby gets off one end, Robert races up to the see-saw to get on. Toby cries as Robert has a turn. "It's Robert's turn now" a teacher says to Toby. "You can get on again after Robert".

Toby cries in protest; Robert observes this. The teacher picks up Toby and he calms down. Robert is enjoying his see-saw. When Danny gets off his end of the see-saw, Robert gets off too.

(CS5.Fieldnotes, sole attendance week 2)

Physical aggression

From the fourth orientation visit Robert started to become the focus of attention of one of the older boys, Carl. Later in the case study one of the teachers explained that Carl liked to assert his authority and liked to be the boss (CS5.Fieldnotes, sole attendance week 6, 09.00). In Cameo Set 5, Carl initiated an interaction with Robert which was physically aggressive. The teacher's intervention in three instances clarified two further rules about how peers should behave towards each other:

Rule 5: hitting is not allowed

Rule 6: pushing is not allowed.

During the third cameo in Set 5, (the incident with the bag of clay), what Robert may also have understood is that while physical aggression was not sanctioned when this happened in sight of the teacher, if the teacher did not notice it, physical aggression did happen and could be used to breach Rule 1 about 'ownership'. It is

Cameo Set 5: Rules about aggression

- 10.15 Robert is on bouncing bug; Carl approaches and tries to place Mickey Mouse hat on Robert's head – Robert allows this. Carl now approaches and makes an aggressive smacking movement towards Robert. Lorraine calls out from across the room: "Carl, I'm watching". Carl stops. Robert looks around intently from Lorraine to Carl.

(CS5.Fieldnotes, orientation visit 4/4)

- 08.41 Carl pushes Robert away; Lorraine (teacher) intervenes: "Excuse me, I don't like you doing that and neither does Robert" she says to Carl. Robert moves off and goes to indoor sandpit.

(CS5.Fieldnotes, sole attendance week 1)

- 08.42 Lorraine and another teacher bring a table outside with a bag of clay on it. Robert goes over to the bag of clay and explores it. Carl comes up and pulls bag out of Robert's arms. Robert lets Carl do this and goes off to the see-saw.

(CS5.Fieldnotes, sole attendance week 2)

- 10.15 Robert goes over to the house frame structure inside the main room and swings from one of the horizontal bars. He laughs in enjoyment at this. Robert extends his hand out to Carl but he does not respond. Carl pushes Robert away. Teacher Pam holds down Carl's hands: "You're not being nice to Robert" she says and picks up a book to read to Robert.

(CS5.Fieldnotes, sole attendance week 2)

- 10.55 In the outside play area Robert follows Danny up the slide from the bottom, precariously, and then slides down; he walks off. Robert goes inside and up to the alphabet frieze and points to various items as he says the words for them, then sees Carl on the indoor slide and goes up and butts his tummy not too hard. No reaction from Carl.

(CS5.Fieldnotes, sole attendance week 2)

possible to argue that the understanding that one could break the rules with impunity in some circumstances was one that was operating during the final cameo in Set 5 when Robert head-butted Carl in his tummy without any visible and immediate provocation and, also, without retribution from either Carl or any of the teachers. This incident could again illustrate an attempt by Robert to test out the limits of a recently learnt rule. Additionally, it could mean that alongside the teacher-sanctioned rules for how to conduct oneself in relation to one's peers and the objects in the centre, another set of non-teacher-sanctioned rules was developing for Robert through which he also learnt to operate in the non-teacher-visible action of his peer group.

Additional messages that Robert was likely to have received from the incidents in Cameo Set 5 include the knowledge that his own wish to explore the bag of clay had been thwarted by Carl and that Carl had wanted to hit him. Within such a framework it is reasonable to hypothesise that Robert's tummy butt to Carl was either a way of trying to get back at Carl, or else a way of asserting his determination to not let himself be pushed about, or perhaps both. The last explanation seems plausible when one considers Cameo Set 6 which presents incidents which all occurred during the field visit of the following week. In the first three cameos it is noteworthy that the interactions between Robert and Carl were all peaceful, and, although later in the day, Robert appeared keen to assert himself, his assertiveness was not directed at Carl, suggesting that the head butt might have been the start of a truce between Robert and Carl which during the fieldwork visit in week 3 looked like it was in place.

Further understandings which Robert was likely to have gained from these interactions include the idea that he could fit in alongside his peers in centre activities as well as assert his own intentions over others'. This is evident in the last two cameos in Set 6.

Cameo Set 6: Fitting in and asserting oneself

- 08.24 Robert goes outside straight to the sandpit and then over to the slide frame where Albert is already standing. Robert and Albert stand side by side companionably till Albert slides down. Now Bella and Carl join Albert in sliding down and in a while so does Robert.
- 08.32 Robert is still sliding down with the group of older children.
- 08.46 One of the teachers helps Robert get on to the see-saw and then helps Carl get onto the other end. Robert and Carl see-saw companionably. When they get off, both go to the sandpit together. (Later, at 10.24, Robert also happily takes turns at jumping on the rebounder with Carl).
- 10.11 Robert is swinging from the horizontal bar of the house frame. Albert is crying; he walks up to the house frame where Robert is trying to swing - they struggle physically over who should have the horizontal bar to swing from. Robert wins this tussle and swings on.
- 10.44 Robert runs over to a rocking horse - gets on it. Bella pushes Robert's rocking horse with her foot. Robert gets off his horse and pulls Bella's hat off none too gently and runs outside.

(CS5.Fieldnotes, sole attendance week 3)

9.3.2.2 Fitting in alongside the others

Robert's understanding that he could take his place companionably alongside his peers remained in evidence in the rest of the case study. For example, during the fieldwork visit in the fourth week of sole attendance, Robert helped Jake rock on his rocking horse (08.16) and later did the same with Bill (09.59). He also called out companionably to Kelly (08.36) although, as on previous occasions, to no response from her. During the fieldwork visit of the following week, Robert's peer interactions were noteworthy for the way he frequently called out the children's names either quietly to himself as if practising them, or just to draw attention to them. There were also numerous instances when he clearly just enjoyed doing things with his peers in an easy co-operative or just friendly way. For example, he ran alongside Jake when Jake was pushing a pushchair along, he followed Lara around calling her name three times in succession, he picked up Elsie's painting for her when it dropped onto the floor, he played with Jake in the sandpit, he tried to push Bella in her swing outside in the garden, engaged in an exchange of firehats with Toby and played with Lara and Jake in the flexi-tunnel. Later, Robert and Lara both 'escaped' from the toddlers' room to the bigger end as if in a conspiracy to explore this 'forbidden' land. This behaviour suggested that Robert was getting more familiar with his peers and also more skilled at knowing how to get on with them.

However, alongside the development of these pro-social skills, some of Robert's interaction with his peers also suggested that other dynamics were operating which made use of covert non-teacher-sanctioned rules of peer interaction, rather than the more overt teacher-sanctioned ones, and seemed related to attempts to establish power relationships. I present my "working hypothesis" about these dynamics in the following section.

Attaining a powerful position

Cameo Set 7 presents incidents which occurred early one morning in Robert's week of sole attendance. The incidents show that Robert made quite assertive and

sometimes aggressive approaches towards his peers during which he appeared to be experimenting with the idea that force might get him what he wanted.

Later in the morning, Robert came in for some rough action himself. At 09.24 when Robert was watching the centre pet in the garden, Carl pulled Robert's T-shirt from the back and knocked Robert to the ground. Robert picked himself up easily and ignored this attack; just over half an hour later (10.01), one of the girls, Kelly, caught Robert by his T-shirt and started to shake him. This incident was stopped by one of the teachers and Robert continued on his way to the rocking horse.

At 10.22 Robert initiated another physically aggressive approach towards Albert when he started to hit him with a wooden rattle at the bottom of the slide outdoors; since none of the teachers were nearby, and I felt that a child's safety was threatened (see section 3.4.3.3), I intervened to stop this particular incident. A few minutes later Robert was pushed aside by one of the older girls, Lara, who wanted to take Robert's place in the doorway where he was watching the rain bucketing down outside; it was clear that Robert was in no mood for being pushed around and he moved behind Lara, put his arms on her shoulders and pushed her – not too hard – but firmly. The teacher who was close by intervened with the warning "Gently with Lara, Robert!" and the incident stopped there.

It is intriguing to speculate on how Robert discriminated among which aggressive acts to retaliate to and which to initiate. His response to being pulled to the floor by his T-shirt by Carl was especially interesting. At the start of the final fieldwork visit an incident occurred which appeared to throw light on much of Robert's behaviour throughout the rest of the session, as well as on the dynamics of the relationship between Robert and Carl. Cameo 8 shows how the day started.

Cameo Set 7: Experimenting with force

- 08.28 Robert goes over to the dress-up box and picks out a fireman's hat. He puts this on; then he goes up to Toby and places the hat on Toby's head and pulls Toby down to the floor. Toby does not protest and neither of the 2 teachers present appear to notice what has happened. Robert looks round as if to check whether his actions have been noticed. Walks off to a teacher and asks for the ball tupperware puzzle and plays briefly with this.
- 09.08 Jake walks in with his mother and starts to play with the tupperware puzzle which Robert had used twenty minutes earlier. Robert goes over to Jake and tries to take puzzle off him. One of the teachers intervenes: "Do you want to play with another one?" She gives Robert an identical puzzle from the open shelves. Robert plays with this one for a while and then watches Jake as he plays with a set of plastic cups; he walks up to Jake and starts shaking him by the shoulders. Teacher intervenes and stops Robert doing this.
- 09.14 Robert walks over to the tadpoles in the fish tank. He lunges at Albert who has bent down to take a poi-poi out of a box beside the fish tank. Albert moves off to the slide. Robert follows Albert and pulls Albert's T-shirt and shakes him. (Albert is quite a big boy and it looks rather foolhardy of Robert to physically attack him.) The same teacher as earlier stops them tussling by physically holding Robert still.

(CS5.Fieldnotes, sole attendance week 4)

Cameo 8: Interacting with Carl

11.45 Robert goes over to Carl on the bouncing bug; Carl pushes Robert away. Robert sits down on a chair next to Carl and now pushes Carl back quite fiercely. Teacher Jessie sees this and comes over: "It's Carl's turn" she says and lets Carl bounce some more on the bouncing bug. As she turns away, Robert pushes Carl again. Teacher Jessie notices this and says again: "It's Carl's turn".

(CS5.Fieldnotes, sole attendance week 6)

At this point I offered the information to Jessie (teacher) that it had been Carl who had pushed Robert off for no apparent reason and we discussed the difficulty of picking the first move in these exchanges. The teacher also noted that Robert and Carl seemed evenly matched in terms of assertiveness. Things quietened down between Robert and Carl for the next ten minutes and then Robert again attempted to knock Carl down in an apparently unprovoked way while Carl was about to play with a hammer and pegboard. This time it was Lorraine who intervened and again reminded Robert that everyone needed a turn with the toys – although it seemed to me that there was nothing to indicate that Robert had any interest in the hammer and pegboard at all. Two minutes later Robert was again engaged in a tussle with Carl trying to pull him off Lorraine's back as Carl and another child were playfully climbing onto the teacher's back (08.40). It seemed that Robert was determined to sort things out with Carl and establish that he was not to be pushed around. As the bigger children moved to the kitchen to help Lorraine make scones for morning tea, Jessie (teacher) and I chatted about the interaction between Robert and Carl. This was when Jessie noted that Carl liked to assert his authority and liked to be the boss (09.00) which made me wonder whether Robert had picked up this attitude from Carl and was indicating by his own aggressive behaviour that he was not to be "bossed" around. When a few minutes later

Robert knocked Toby over again for no apparent reason and later tried this also with Bill and Elsie (10.15), I began to wonder also whether Robert was generalising his intent too broadly and perhaps he was now checking out how much he could get away with. Since I was physically closest to Robert when the last two incidents occurred, I reminded him that it was "not ok" to hurt other children so while one of the teachers picked up Elsie and took her away, I firmly said to Robert "no, no hurting". Robert promptly replied "no" and then he said "nice", almost echoing an earlier injunction I had made to "be nice" (!) when he tried to knock Bill over. It is impossible to say whether this worked as a deterrent to further aggression or not but Robert's next approach to Carl was at least a friendly one (10.45); this time they each pressed their noses on opposite sides of a glass door pane and looked each other in the eye. Robert did try to push Carl again a moment after this, but on being reminded "no hurting" by me, Robert said "nice" and gave Carl's face a gentle pat (10.49).

One was left to wonder if a truce had now been established or whether power struggles would be a regular feature of these two children's interaction.

9.3.3 Reflections: Learning to fit in

In this section I have presented narratives about two of the study children's interactions with their peers in their new childcare centre. In both cases, I have used incidents from the children's interactions with their peers to illustrate stories whose theme emerged from the analysis of my fieldnotes but also in the stories which the mothers and the teachers told about the children.

In the case of Julie, the story of 'becoming a playmate' emerged through interactions which appeared to be largely positive; as I noted above, both Lyn and Patti saw these interactions as part of the reason that Julie settled in well into the centre. In looking closely at Julie's interactions with her peers, Julie's experiences of relating to her peers involved being comforted and looked after by the older children, being invited to join in other children's pretend play, being chosen as a favourite playmate, as well as having her own approaches for interaction with

others accepted. In addition, Julie's interactions with her peers emerged as involving numerous instances when she was 'inducted' in the culture of the centre by her peers. Thus she learnt to clap in unison with the other children to a song that was familiar to them all, she was shown how to use some of the centre equipment like the block tower on a stick and the 'fiddleboard', and she also had 'sharing' of resources modelled to her by a peer. From this point of view, it can be argued that the peers in Julie's centre helped to induct her into how to behave in the 'accepted' way within the centre environment, and thus also helped to teach her to 'fit in' as one of the group.

In the story about Robert, the content of the interactions between him and his peers emerged as somewhat different to that of Julie's; Robert's interactions appeared dominated by issues to do with object ownership and sharing, and with working out what one could 'get away with'. The issue of attaining a powerful position among his peers, or, as Lorraine put it, "finding his place [high up] in the hierarchy" also emerged as an important one.

In considering these two children's experiences alongside each other's, another interesting reflection arises. In Julie's centre, children were guiding Julie into ways of interacting in their peer group which were (pro)actively promoted by the adults. In other words, it was possible to identify specific strategies teachers used to promote co-operative behaviours, such as when Patti encouraged Nell to guide Julie in clapping "pop" and Heather suggested to Roy that he move the doll's pushchair out of Julie's way (see section 9.3.1.3). These behaviours can be seen as "promoted actions" within the children's "zone of freedom of movement" (Valsiner, 1985; Valsiner & Hill, 1989; see section 2.2.3). Through this "social canalization", these behaviours then became part of the behaviours which the established children promoted with Julie. In Robert's centre, on the other hand, it seemed that the teachers reactively accepted the children's behaviour and acted to influence it when safety issues arose. In this way, it was primarily the behaviour of the peer group that appeared to provide Robert with guidance about how to fit in within the group setting of the childcare centre. There was also some evidence

that, among the rules he learned about acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, a distinction may have emerged for Robert between rules which were sanctioned by the teachers and ones which were not.

Two points emerge as striking in these stories:

- i. despite the difference in the actual content of these two children's interactions with their peers, in both cases, a process of guided participation seemed to be operating which clarified what the rules of interaction were. In each case, it seemed that these two children's interactions with their peers within a group setting was acting to induct them into "fitting in" with the centre culture, a process which seemed to be operating also in the interactions between the centre adults and the children (see section 9.2).
- ii. the teachers' pro-active versus reactive style of intervening in the children's peer interactions in two different centres appeared related to the nature of the interactions into which the children were inducted as part of that centre's peer culture.

9.4 Relating to the centre environment: Equipment and rules and routines of centre life

The phrase "relating to the centre environment" is clearly a very broad one which arguably encompasses the aspects, discussed in sections 9.2 and 9.3, of relating to the new adults and relating to the children. In this section I use "centre environment" to refer to the physical dimension of the environment with all its equipment and activities, as well as the other non-animate dimension of the rules and routines which keep intact the fabric of centre life. Thyssen (in press) has distinguished between these two dimensions by using the terms "physical objects" and "objects at the level of ideas". So far, the discussion in this chapter has included incidental reference to these two dimensions as part of the way that the children experienced their relations with adults and children. In this section, I bring these dimensions to the fore through telling the story of Shirley's experience of a piece of physical equipment which she met for the first time in the centre

environment and through Julie's story of the new rules and routines she was introduced to as part of her experience of starting childcare.

9.4.1 'Conquering the slide': Shirley's story

Shirley was 17 months when she started attending her childcare centre. From early on, her settling-in experience was seen as "ideal" by both her mother, Deborah, and her teacher, Joan (see section 7.5.2.1). This theme dominated the stories about Shirley told by the adults involved in the study with two sub-themes emerging as additional foci: one on Shirley's Teddy, which accompanied her on all visits to the centre and which everyone learnt to use as a gauge of how Shirley felt about being at the centre, and one on Shirley's increasing fascination, and growing confidence, with the indoor slide. In this section, I focus on this latter aspect of Shirley's experience and tell the story of what I call Shirley's "conquering of the slide".

The indoor slide was set at the back of the main room of the centre in a structure which had two flights of steps and two landings. The top landing was the platform from which children sat down to use the slide. On one side of the first landing there was a dolls' house. I first observed Shirley take an interest in the slide during her third orientation visit when she started to climb up the steps, a task which her mother Deborah perceived as "frightening" (CS2.PIS1.5.5) since Shirley had not used stairs before attending childcare. On this occasion, Deborah guided Shirley into the safe way of climbing first the bottom flight of steps and then the top; however, when Shirley got to the top and approached the slide, she turned back and climbed down the steps again. For the rest of the session, Shirley showed no further interest in either the steps or the slide and during the next session at which I was present she again only approached the slide frame once. This was at a time when the teachers were preparing the children to go outside to play so that Julie's interest in the slide was diverted.

During the fieldwork visit of the second week of Shirley's sole attendance, however, climbing the steps unaided appeared to become a challenge which on

and off preoccupied Shirley throughout the whole session. It also seemed that she attempted to overcome this challenge as part of another goal: that of getting to the top of the slide and sliding down.

Visit	Date	Time	Presence of Parent
Orientation visit 1	Tues 28-9-93	09.50-11.50	whole session
Orientation visit 2	Thurs 30-9-93	researcher not present	
Orientation visit 3	Tues 05-10-93	09.20-13.10	whole session
Orientation visit 4	Thurs 07-10-93	researcher not present	
Sole attendance 1	Tues 12-10-93	09.20-12.35	nil
Sole attendance 2	Tues 19-10-93	09.13-13.36	nil
Sole attendance 3	Tues 26-10-93	09.20-13.10	nil
Sole attendance 4	Tues 02-11-93	09.20-13.00	nil
Sole attendance 5	Fri 12-11-93	09.00-13.00	nil
Sole attendance 6	Fri 19-11-93	09.20-13.30	nil

Table 7: Shirley's attendance pattern at her centre over case study period

Early in the fieldwork session of Shirley's second week of sole attendance, Shirley approached the slide from the bottom:

09.25 "Do you want to go up the slide Shirley?" asks Joan. " 'Up the stairs and down the slide' I should say" says Joan (correcting herself because this phrase functions also as a memory jogger for the children about the recommended way of using the slide). Joan helps another child, Victor, up the stairs. But Shirley does not follow. She kneels on the bottom part of the slide and looks up at Victor who is now at the top of the slide waiting to slide down. Joan comes down the steps and shifts Shirley so that Victor can slide down safely.

09.26 Joan is greeting a child who has just walked in with her mother. Shirley goes back to kneeling on the end of the slide. Cheryl (teacher) says to Shirley: " Shirley, can you move over?" and helps her move out of the way so that other children can slide down.

09.27 Shirley climbs up the bottom flight of steps and down again competently. She watches Cheryl slide down with Neville in her

lap; Shirley cries out in delight and Cheryll says: "It's fun, isn't it?"

(CS3.Fieldnotes, sole attendance week 2)

Shirley appeared keen to explore the slide and the observation of other children successfully sliding down appeared to cause her enjoyment, a response which Cheryll understood and commented on. Shirley then seemed to forget the slide but less than 10 minutes later was back sitting at the bottom of it looking up at the slide. When she next moved, it was to climb up the bottom flight of steps to the first landing of the slide structure and then attempt the top flight:

- 09.40 Shirley tries the second lot of steps on the slide frame. Joan keeps an eye on her and Rose who is also climbing up. Shirley is finding the second flight of steps harder to navigate – she cannot lift her leg high enough to climb up – (these steps are steeper and more open than the bottom flight). She pulls back from the steps and lets Rose overtake her. She tries again to get her leg over the first step – she looks away – now tries again.
- 09.43 The parent on duty today, Neil, approaches Shirley: "Do you want to try the steps? You want to reach the train set up there?" Shirley looks at him; she makes no clear response. Neil's son, Richard, comes up to his father and sits by Shirley's feet.
- 09.46 Richard edges past Shirley and climbs up the top steps – Shirley watches him.
- Now Rose edges past Shirley up the top steps – Shirley watches, a determined look on her face. Richard has had a slide and climbs up the top steps again. Shirley watches still.
- 09.49 Shirley looks down at the book reading corner where Joan is sitting reading to a group of children. As she looks, Joan catches her eye and says: "Let's see if Shirley wants to come over and listen to the story - Shirley would you like a story? Shirley smiles; she turns round and climbs down the bottom set of steps and joins this group.

(CS3.Fieldnotes, sole attendance week 2)

It is clear that the top flight of steps posed a problem for Shirley; one could see from her focused attention on trying to manoeuvre the first step in the top flight that she wanted to get to the top of them. However, on this occasion they proved too difficult; she had a rest for about an hour and then the challenge of overcoming the steps to reach the slide appeared to fascinate her again; this time she attempted a different technique to achieve her goal:

08.33 Shirley walks to the bottom of the slide; she tries to clamber up from the bottom end and stumbles; she picks herself up quite competently and matter of factly – she does not look upset in the least.

(CS3.Fieldnotes, sole attendance week 2)

Three minutes later, Shirley was back again at the bottom of the slide trying to climb up it again until she was briefly distracted by some gleeful play around the home corner and joined this. Four minutes later, back she was at the bottom of the slide and I wrote in my fieldnotes “she has kept coming back to the slide and the steps; it is as if she wants to conquer them!” (10.58). It was difficult to avoid the conquering simile given the repeated attempts which Shirley made to climb the steps. She again went up and down the bottom flight of steps about five minutes later and then switched her attention yet again to clambering up the slide from the bottom. Between 11.17 and 11.20 she tried several times to ascend the slide in this fashion with the final attempt taking her one-third of the way up, from where she then slid down. This was the farthest she had got all morning and she looked very pleased with herself despite the fact that, as she reached the bottom of the slide, Neville followed down upon her swiftly from the top and she ended up tumbling on the cushions at the bottom of the slide; she merely looked up and smiled.

After (what seemed like) this ‘momentous’ event (to me), Shirley did not approach the slide again for the next twenty-five minutes at which stage she went back to the steps and having climbed up the first flight quite easily, also managed to get on to the first step of the second flight. One could hypothesise that her earlier success with climbing up one-third of the slide might have emboldened

Shirley to be more adventurous with the second flight of steps on this occasion; however, she did not continue with this 'adventure' at that time and when she next approached the slide a few minutes later it was to repeat her earlier climb from the bottom of the slide.

Shirley spent another hour and a half at the centre during this session and she did not again try to climb the steps on her own. However, when her mother Deborah arrived to pick her up, Shirley happened to be trying to climb up the bottom of the slide again and Deborah asked Joan and I if Shirley had been going down the slide much. Joan replied that Shirley had been climbing up from the bottom, so Deborah lifted Shirley up in her arms, placed her at the top of the slide and held her as she came down the slide. Shirley chuckled with delight and her face lit up. At this point I volunteered the information to Deborah that Shirley had been practising going up the steps all morning but that she had not managed to climb up the top lot on her own yet. My fieldnotes say:

13.20 I tell mum that Shirley has been practising going up the steps all day but she hasn't managed the top lot on her own yet. Mum helps her up the top three steps and Shirley delightedly runs to slide down the slide (finally!!) which has been her objective all day I'm sure. Deborah and Shirley repeat this a few times.

(CS3.Fieldnotes, sole attendance week 2)

The crowning moment of the day was, however, to unfold in the next few minutes. As Deborah stopped to chat to Joan again, Shirley wandered off by herself to the steps yet again. I wrote in my fieldnotes:

13.25 As mum and Joan talk, Shirley manages to climb up the final two top steps which had defeated her before – and she comes down the slide triumphantly!! (I get all excited that she has managed this and call out to mum and Deborah to note this achievement!) Shirley is climbing up the top flight of steps again; mum and Joan turn round and cheer her on. Unfortunately, Shirley stumbles on the first of the top lot of steps and tumbles down. Deborah goes up

to help and comfort her and she slides down again, her face a picture of delight.

(CS3.Fieldnotes, sole attendance week 2)

On this note, Shirley's session ended and, when I next observed her a week later, she had definitely overcome her earlier difficulties with climbing up the steps to reach the slide. During the following weeks, the slide remained an area of sustained activity for Shirley and became a feature of Shirley's centre experience which Joan regularly commented on in her journal. Shirley continued to enjoy climbing up the slide from the bottom but as time went on she gained more confidence with sliding down from the top of the slide by herself as the following entries from Joan's journal show:

Shirley spent most of the morning before morning tea on the slide climbing up the slide a quarter of the way up then turning around and sliding down. While I was at the clay table, Shirley fell off the bottom of the slide; she cried for about 2-3 minutes and was comforted by Cheryl (other teacher).

(CS3.TJ.12.6-11)

I observed Shirley climb a little way up the slide so, when, after morning tea, Shirley repeated this behaviour, I asked her if she would like to climb up the stairs and go down the slide with me. Climbing up the stairs she kept saying: "Slide Joan, slide Joan, slide Joan". At the top of the slide we talked about lying down on our tummy to slide down. Shirley enjoyed this activity.

(CS3.TJ.13.19-28)

Today Shirley went up the stairs and down the slide from top to bottom with some assistance from me - she really enjoyed this, smiling and saying "ooh, ooh" while sliding down ... Over the past few weeks, I have observed that she enjoys sitting on the bottom of the slide, moving backwards up the slide in kneeling position. Today I encouraged her to walk up the stairs and down the slide on her tummy. Shirley sat on top of the slide for about 3 to 5 minutes feeling unsure about going down the

slide – I sat up the top with her talking to her about being up high and suggesting for her to go down on her tummy.

(CS3.TJ.15.9-22)

Once again, Shirley enjoyed the slide, she was interested in sitting on the bottom of the slide. She went up to the top of the slide with Cheryl and came down on her tummy. She looked a little uneasy about this. She walked up the stairs to the top platform; then stopped and walked down the steps ...

(CS3.TJ.19.5-13)

This story about Shirley's 'relating' to an element in her physical environment illustrates in some detail Shirley's learning of new skills within the centre environment; it illustrates also the delight and enjoyment that this occasioned in Shirley as well as in the adults around her, including myself as researcher. The beginning of Shirley's story of "conquering the slide" emerged as a self-directed action on Shirley's part. However, as my fieldnotes and Joan's journal entries show, Deborah and Joan soon became tuned in to Shirley's focus of attention and, as my fieldnotes illustrated, they provided Shirley with both verbal cues about what to do to climb up the steps and later slide down on the tummy, as well as physical assistance to do this. In observing the interaction of both these adults with Shirley, it seemed yet again that the adults and the child in this case study were engaged in a process which Rogoff et al. (1993) would call "guided participation". In this process, children's development is seen to occur through children's "active participation in culturally structured activity with the guidance, support, and challenge of companions who vary in skill and status" (p. 5). Rogoff et al. noted: "we assume that children advance their understanding in a creative process in which they transform their understanding and become more responsible participants in the practices of their communities as they participate" (p. 6).

9.4.2 “We’ll get you into good habits yet!”: Julie’s story

The following story is about one child’s relating to the “objects in the environment at the level of ideas” (Thyssen, in press). In other words, it is an illustration of one child’s experience of the rules and routines that operated within her centre environment and her increasing facility with them.

The child at the centre of the story is Julie; two stories about Julie’s experience of starting childcare have already been told in this chapter to illustrate how she experienced her relations with the new adults and with the children in the centre (see sections 9.2.2 and 9.3.1). In the discussion of these aspects of her experience I have argued that her lived reality of these interactions appeared to consist of a process of induction by more knowledgeable others into the established ways of operating in her new environment. In the story presented in this section, this process again emerges as a strong feature of Julie’s experience; the story is told to illustrate the diverse areas of centre functioning about which there were “good habits” which Julie had to acquire.

The centre where Julie had her experience of starting childcare had a written policy on settling-in which construed the experience as a time of “introduction to routines” (see section 7.4.4). In chapter 7, I argued that the teacher in Julie’s centre, Patti, often used the phrases “she needed extra support” or “she didn’t need extra support” to evaluate how well she felt that Julie was coping with being in the centre; in particular Patti used one or other of these phrases in talking about how well Julie was coping with the centre routines. As the observer, it seemed to me that an important aspect of the “support” Patti referred to, was contained in numerous statements made by the teachers which sounded like stock phrases used to establish what the rules of the centre were. For instance, “you put the book on the shelf” (CS4.Fieldnotes, sole attendance week 1, 09.08) repeated Patti when Julie had finished looking at a book in the reading room; Patti then said, in an affectionate yet firm tone of voice, “We’ll get you into ...” and left the sentence unfinished leading me to supply the unspoken “good habits yet” in my own mind!! (CS4.Fieldnotes, sole attendance week 1). It was certainly noticeable that

the teachers put a lot of emphasis on establishing clear ground rules for the children, both for safety and hygiene reasons as well as for the smooth management of the day. Below is a list of the messages on rules and routines which were made explicit in Julie's vicinity during the first session which Julie spent at the centre unaccompanied by her mother, Lyn.

Time	Statement	Rule/routine/message
08.52	Teacher to Julie in the painting area: "I wonder if you'll let me put the apron on"	We wear an apron when we paint
08.56	Child said to Julie in reading room: "you're not allowed to squeak"	Squeaking is not allowed here (not clear if only in reading area or generally)
09.08	Teacher to Julie "put the book on the shelf"	Be tidy; put things away when you've finished with them.
09.18	Teacher to Julie after Julie had put her hand in the toilet bowl : "Oh no Julie, we do wees in the toilet – let's wash your hands"	This behaviour is not acceptable because it is unhygienic.
09.21	Teacher to Julie after Julie had gone into the office: "No dear, we don't go in there"	This behaviour is not acceptable. Office is out of bounds.
09.30	Teacher to Julie after Julie tried on some of the other children's jackets hanging in the hallway on hooks: "We don't play with those clothes"	This behaviour is not acceptable. Some clothes are not to be played with; some others could be.

09.43	Teacher to Julie after Julie put the kitchen sponge to her mouth: “No darling, don’t do that – it’s got yucky stuff that makes you sick”	This behaviour is not acceptable because it could hurt you.
11.22	Teacher to Julie after Julie had gone from outside to the kitchen where another teacher was cooking lunch: “Come on Julie, it’s your outside play time; come on outside; I don’t want you to stay by the stove – come on outside” and teacher picks Julie up and takes her outside	This behaviour is not acceptable because (a) it is time for something else and (b) it is not safe.
11.44	Teacher to Julie as she prepares to go down the slide: “Sit down on your bottom” (repeated each time Julie goes on the slide)	This is the safe way to slide down.
11.46	Teacher tells older girl who is in a tyre swing close to the climbing net where Julie was playing: “You know not to swing when someone is under the net”	This behaviour is not acceptable because it is not safe.
12.20	Teacher to Julie after she had not finished eating her sandwich crusts: “You have to learn to eat your crusts”.	We eat our crusts here.

(CS4.Fieldnotes, sole attendance week 1)

These messages were ones which were repeated throughout the case study but seemed to dominate particularly in the first session which Julie spent on her own at the centre creating a very strong impression that these messages of “support” seemed like part of a strong culture of ‘start as you mean to go on’. The rules covered a wide range of activities including behaviours like “no squeaking”, rules about tidiness, hygiene and safety, and rules about food and eating. As the visits went on, the range of things about which there were rules, and the nature of the rules became more elaborated.

During the field visit of Julie’s second week of attendance, the teachers’ focus on reinforcing ground rules still emerged as prominent. The following extract from my fieldnotes illustrates this:

12.32 Julie walks over to Diane, one of the centre teachers, who is sitting on a low chair holding the remains of a plateful of sandwiches; Julie helps herself to a sandwich.

“Now you’ve broken all the rules haven’t you?” says Patti as Julie walks around with the sandwich in her hand (Patti is referring here to Julie having first been allowed to get out of the highchair and is now walking about while eating). Diane looks up at Patti as if for guidance.

“No” says Patti shaking her head at Julie.

12.38 Another teacher, Heather, pulls out a chair for Julie and asks her if she’d like to sit there. Julie sits down and eats her sandwich. She lifts and puts her feet on the table. Patti says “No Julie, take your feet off the table” and goes over and lowers Julie’s feet down to the floor again. Julie walks off; she picks up a piece of bread off the floor and Patti takes it from her saying that she can’t eat it off the floor.

Julie goes back to her chair and picks up the rest of her sandwich – she eats it standing by the fishtank .

(CS4.Fieldnotes, sole attendance week 2)

'No walking about with food', 'no feet on the table', 'no eating of food which has fallen on the floor': These three rules were all articulated in this extract and Julie's learning of them was supported by Patti's own actions (e.g., moving Julie's feet off the table) as well as those of the other teachers who guided Julie in 'fitting in' with what was required. As is clear in the above extract, Julie accepted these rules but also sometimes ignored them. With each session, however, her understanding of, and compliance with, the rules of the centre became steadily more evident. For example, Julie's understanding of, and compliance with (under duress, one could argue), the rule about crusts became very clear two weeks later when I noted in my fieldnotes:

15.36 Julie gets to the crust and plays around with this. One of the teachers, Carla, looks at her from across the room and nods her head at Julie in an unspoken message to eat her crusts. Julie shakes her head; she puts crust aside and makes her action for "more", flexing her fingers in the direction of food. "You finish your crusts first and then you can have another sandwich" says another teacher. Julie works on eating her crusts ...

(CS4.Fieldnotes, sole attendance week 5)

Julie did finish eating her crust in the next few minutes and was able to have another sandwich and, later on, some fruit as well.

Other areas where Julie showed a very early response to the skill-teaching which the teachers promoted, was in learning the routines associated with sitting in a circle for singing time, making some of the actions to accompany the songs, how to spread marmite onto bread for afternoon tea, how to slide down safely, how to crawl through a fixed concrete tunnel in the outdoor area and routines to do with painting and with handwashing after her nappy change. In the following extract from my fieldnotes, the two major rules associated with painting: putting on a plastic apron, and the rule that once one had finished painting, one had to wash

one's hands in a plastic bucket, can be seen to have become part of Julie's way of "relating to her environment":

08.39 "Do you want to do a painting?" asks Heather. Julie offers her arms to have an apron put on. She goes to the painting easel, takes a blue paint brush and drops it. Heather asks her to pick it up, Julie does and starts to paint.

08.44 Julie washes her hands at the bucket at the end of the room. She presents herself to Heather to have her apron removed.

(CS4. Fieldnotes, sole attendance, week 4)

Similarly, by the end of the fieldwork visit of the third week, the handwashing routine at the handbasin in the bathroom after each nappy change, which was introduced to Julie during her first visit, was truly established with Julie being able to accomplish this without any physical assistance:

12.42 Carla changes Julie's nappy; Julie is quite happy to lie down on the changing table and allow this to happen.

"Do you want to wash your hands? Go pull the stool out and wash your hands" says Carla.

Julie goes up to stool, bends down, looks up at Carla for confirmation (Carla nods) and pulls stool out. She washes her hands and walks over to the towel to dry her hands very confidently.

(CS4. Fieldnotes, sole attendance week 3)

Incidents of this kind certainly support Patti's evaluation at the end of the six week case study that Julie had "settled into the centre well" (CS4.TIS2.3). It appeared that as far as the rules and routines of the centre environment were concerned, Julie had learnt to 'fit in' just as she had also learnt to fit in with her peers (see section 9.3.1) and with the expectations which the adults had about how she should relate to them (see section 9.2.2).

9.4.3 *Reflections: Another tale of fitting-in*

The two stories in this section provide an insight into how two children appeared to have experienced an aspect of the physical dimensions of the centre environment, the slide equipment, and an aspect of the non-physical dimension of the environment, exemplified here as the rules and routines which guided behaviour in the centre attended by the child.

Shirley's story of "conquering the slide" highlighted the potential which novel components of the physical environment have to provide both a source of fascination and delight as well as a medium through which new skills can be acquired. The analysis of Shirley's interaction about the slide with the adults around her also suggested that a process of guided participation, or social canalization, was underway through which Shirley learnt about the safe ways of using the slide, a knowledge which was part of the accepted culture, or ways of doing things, at her centre.

In Julie's story of gaining increased familiarity and facility with the rules and routines of her centre, what emerged alongside the story of the acquisition of "good habits", was a story of a child who through the assistance and guidance of her teachers, became inducted into the many rules and routines that made up the accepted code of behaviour in the centre. Thus, as in Shirley's story, the processes of guided participation, and social canalization, may again be seen to have been operating.

The process of learning to 'fit in' which emerged in other parts of this chapter as a strong theme in the children's lived reality of starting childcare, appeared to again be dominant in the way these two children related to their environment.

9.5 Chapter overview and reflections

This chapter has presented narratives about the children's experiences of starting childcare constructed around the three foci of how children related to the new adults in their centre, to the children they encountered there and to the new

environment of the childcare centre. In deciding on which stories to tell, I was guided by the themes which emerged in the stories told about the children by the mothers and the teachers; these themes emerged also in my own fieldnotes and video data thus providing a measure of data triangulation which, given the pre-verbality of the infants in the study, could not be achieved through questioning the children themselves.

In trying to access the lived reality of the children's experience, I have used my fieldnotes and video records as a way of accessing the child's focus of attention; these data formed the basis of my working hypotheses about what the children's experiences might have felt like to them.

In the narratives told about children's experiences of relating to the teachers in the centre I have argued that in each case, the centre's policy on settling-in, and the theory of practice of their teachers, appeared to influence the children's experience of relating to the adults. In each case, the children's relations to the adults involved a process of being introduced to new rules and routines, being comforted when they showed unhappiness at the mother's absence and attempts to distract them from this unhappiness by being taken round to the various curricular activities in the centre to engage their interest. Within this commonality of activities engaged in by the teachers, however, there were differences in each child's experiences that derived from the way that the teachers enacted their theory of practice about how best to settle-in a child. Thus, in Nina's case, where a primary caregiving system was a policy, most of the adult approaches to her came from her primary caregiver, Sarah, and it was with Sarah that Nina spent most time when her mother started leaving her for short periods of time on her own. Over the course of the case study, the "deep relationship" which Sarah worked at developing, from which Nina could later "branch out", did emerge. On the other hand, Julie's story of relating to the centre adults was one in which she was actively discouraged from forming a preference for whom to interact with among the adults, and this was in line with her centre's policy that all teachers looked after all the children. By the end of Julie's case study, it was clear that Julie had learnt to fit in with this policy. In the case of Maddi, where the teachers

spoke about the centre's policy as being to "go with the child" and specific procedures for doing this were not clearly articulated, Maddi's early experience of starting childcare was characterised by un-focused and rather haphazard interactions with the centre teachers until Maddi started indicating a clear preference to be with one of the teachers. I argued that the preference could well have been encouraged, or canalized, by that teacher's engaged and focused manner of interacting with Maddi. From then on, Maddi formed a "de facto" primary caregiving relationship with that teacher and the teachers in her centre responded to support this preference. This outcome was again in line with the expectations which the teachers had that the child would provide the lead.

In reflecting on these stories I have argued that from a critical polytextualist perspective, the three stories could be interpreted in a number of ways. From a co-constructivist perspective, it is possible to see these stories as ones in which the children's experience was affected by a process of social canalization through which the adults promoted certain actions within the child's repertoire of behaviour which they wanted to encourage because it fitted in with what they saw as socially acceptable and desirable (Valsiner, 1985). In this case, what the teachers promoted was their particular view of how the children should relate to them. This interpretation allows space for the child's contribution to be expressed in the interaction; however, it is the adults' (or more knowledgeable others') actions which create the structure within which the children's experiences occur. In turn, this influences the internal model of the world which children create. From this perspective, therefore, the three stories of children relating to adults can be read as narratives about 'learning to fit in' with the expectations of the teachers which they articulated as part of their theories of practice about how the process of settling-in should be handled.

From an attachment theory perspective, and from a temperament theory perspective, the three stories of relating to the adults could be seen as stories of different ways of expressing separation anxiety and temperament. From both perspectives, the stories told about relating to adults could be used to argue in

favour of a primary caregiver system which, through its "focused treatment" would ensure that children's needs for security would be met. From a temperament theory perspective, a primary caregiver system would also be seen as a desirable way of handling children's settling-in particularly for children of a reserved or 'slow-to-warm' temperament, such as Maddi appeared to have. These interpretations would also be in line with dominant psychological discourses about the nature of children and their needs for security in a one-to-one adult-child relationship.

The two stories about relating to other children which I have presented in this chapter provided an indication of the range of interactions that occurred in these two children's peer group life within their new centre environment. What also emerged very clearly from these stories was the insight that the interactions provided a context within which the rules of peer interaction became very clear. This also appeared to occur through the processes of guided participation (Rogoff, 1990, 1991; Rogoff et al., 1993) and social canalization (Valsiner, 1985; Valsiner & Hill, 1989) through which the established children in the centre inducted the new ones into "fitting in"; in this sense, the children's experiences of relating to their peers operated in a similar way to the children's experiences of relating to the adults. The hypothesis was also suggested that the rules of peer interaction learnt by the two children may have been affected by the teachers' style of (pro)actively promoting, or reactively intervening in, the children's peer relations.

Finally, in exploring how the children related to the centre environment I presented Shirley's story of learning to use the slide at her centre, and Julie's story of learning to comply with the general rules and routines in her centre as part of the non-physical dimension of the centre environment. In reflecting on these stories, I argued that, as in the case of relating to the adults and the children, relating to the centre environment at the level of "physical objects" and at the level of "ideas" (like rules and routines) appeared to involve the same processes

of guided participation and/or social canalization; the analysis that the children learnt to 'fit in' appeared to apply yet again.

Indeed the notion of 'fitting in' emerged as the overarching theme in all aspects of the children's experiences of starting childcare. This suggests that the traditional research focus on starting childcare as an emotional experience of adjusting to separation from the mother, is an incomplete one.

Chapter 10

Understanding the experience of starting childcare:

Conclusions and new beginnings

The idea of reaching a conclusion has always been an obstacle to understanding.

Peta Bowden (1997) *Gender sensitive ethics*. London: Routledge. (p. 183).

This statement by Bowden is an apt description of the stance I have sought to maintain throughout this study where the main aim has been to gain an understanding of the lived experience of starting childcare and of the meanings that the main participants within this event constructed of their experience. I have explored this aim through asking the questions:

- i. how do the home adults⁶ of children starting childcare recount their experience of this event alongside their child?
- ii. how do teachers in childcare centres who are closely involved with a particular child's settling-in, recount their experience of this event?
- iii. how do children experience settling-in, as seen from the viewpoints of the adults involved, including the researcher?
- iv. how do the experiences of parents, teachers and children triangulate to illuminate the event of starting childcare at the level of experience and at a theoretical level?
- v. what light do stories of experience throw on how the process of starting childcare could be enhanced at the level of practice in a childcare setting?

⁶ In all cases the main home adult participant was the mother; the father in case study 5 contributed to one interview. For this reason I have reported the narratives in this study as the mothers' experiences. As I noted in section 3.3.1, where explicit contribution was made to the data by other family members, I have made this clear in reporting the data.

My decision to explore these questions through a qualitative case study approach informed by principles of grounded theory, narrative inquiry and deconstructivist analysis made possible a search for understanding that was not constrained by the requirement to reach a conclusion or a set of conclusions; rather it has been possible to maintain an openness to different 'ways of seeing' that is sympathetic with the postmodern-deconstructivist view that there are no absolute truths, no statement or narrative that is a full account of any experience. My focus has thus been on "bring[ing] forth a number of productive ways of seeing the event" (Marks, 1996, p. 116).

The 'conclusion' of a study, however, is a point when some synthesis is appropriate about the insights yielded by one's search for understanding. This chapter provides that synthesis: it brings together insights about the different participants' lived experience of starting childcare. So far, these insights have been discussed largely in terms of the different participant groups of the mothers, the teachers and the children. This chapter integrates these insights into a tri-partite focus and presents some theoretical statements about participants' lived experiences within the event of starting childcare which might be seen as "self-consciously situation-specific ... theoretical work in developmental psychology" (Singer, 1993, p. 445).

This chapter additionally discusses the contribution which my tri-partite focus makes to opening up the "black box" of "what exactly goes on in childcare situations" (Singer, 1996, p. 159). Also discussed are some directions for future research which could extend the insights from this study.

Finally, I also discuss some implications of the insights from this study for how the experience of starting childcare might be enhanced at the level of practice in early childhood settings.

10.1 A tri-partite focus on the lived experience of starting childcare: some theoretical statements about this event

10.1.1 Starting childcare as an emotional experience

Traditionally the event of starting childcare has been seen as having predominant significance for the emotional development of children. By adopting a tri-partite framework, my study has foregrounded the adults' experiences alongside the children's and revealed that this experience was also emotionally significant for the adult participants. Both mothers and teachers were strongly focused on the experience of starting childcare as an experience of separation; they saw children as needing to overcome the separation experience through a process of slow adjustment to centre life accompanied by a home adult.

For the mothers, starting childcare was a time of deep emotions which involved the balancing of positive feelings about the potential benefits to their child from attending childcare and the less desirable feelings of apprehension, 'guilt' and general ambivalence about whether they were doing the 'right thing'. The mothers' decision to use childcare for their under-three year old child brought them face-to-face with deep-seated societal norms about good motherhood against which they were transgressing. The mothers realised they were challenging these norms and needed reassurance about doing this and about the outcome of their decision for their child.

The teachers saw the starting childcare experience as a difficult time for the mothers as well as for the children. In addition, some spoke about the process of settling-in as an emotional one for them as well: It made them re-visit their own feelings as mothers settling their own children into an early childhood service. This empathy with the mothers' situation during the settling-in process was evident also in the way that teachers expressed their role during the settling-in time as having two foci: one on the child and one on the parent. The combination of these insights suggests that the traditional research focus on the emotional significance of starting childcare for the child is an incomplete focus and scope exists for further exploration of this dimension for both groups of adult

participants. At the theoretical level, scope also exists for exploring the significance of this emotional dimension for the relationships that the adult participants build with each other in their roles of 'mother' and 'teacher' in a shared care setting.

10.1.2 Starting childcare as an experience of induction

Alongside the emotional significance of the experience, starting childcare emerged in my study as an experience of induction: Mothers and children were inducted into a new setting with all its established ways of doing things, and teachers (together with the established children at the centre) emerged as agents of induction.

The mothers spoke about needing to 'work out the rules' of the centre. In this process, they became inducted into the explicit rules of centre life and also into an arrangement of shared care for their child about which they expected to receive guidance from the teachers. To different extents, the mothers felt that their expectations about this were not fully met (see section 5.5); they felt that during the time they accompanied their child to the childcare centre, they had to discover the teachers' expectations of them, and the 'rules in place' for themselves and for their child, through their own efforts. The mothers were, however, very clear about their role in the centre in relation to their child and expressed this as "being there" for their child. In the absence of explicit guidance about what was expected of them, the mothers all engaged in behaviour with their child which seemed intended to teach their child to 'fit in'.

For the children learning to 'fit in' occurred through processes of social canalization and guided participation which unfolded as children related to their mothers in the centre, and to the new adults, the new children and the new environment of their childcare centre. Thus, over the period of the case studies the new children became 'settled-in' and competent operators within their new setting.

In the children's experiences of relating to the centre adults, 'fitting-in' occurred in line with the expectations held by the teachers about how the children should relate with them. In this process what seemed to matter was the degree of clarity with which the teachers expressed, and enacted, their centre's policy on handling new children: More clarity in the policy was accompanied by a stronger process of social canalization into the teacher's view of what should happen (CS1 and CS4, see sections 9.2.1 and 9.2.2), and less clarity resulted in a 'lighter' process of canalization as reflected in a more 'laissez-faire' approach by the adults in directing their interactions with children (e.g., CS2, see section 9.2.3; see also CS5 in section 7.4.5). This dynamic appeared also to operate in the way that teachers intervened in the new children's interactions with their peers: Where teachers believed they needed to ensure that new children were not overwhelmed by the approaches of the established children, they acted pro-actively to promote restraint and pro-social behaviour towards the newcomer (CS4, see section 9.3.1); where the teachers had a more 'laissez-faire' approach, they primarily intervened when issues of safety were involved (CS5, see section 9.3.2).

The stories about Julie's and Robert's experiences of relating to other children at the centre highlighted also the importance of peers in advancing the new children's process of learning to 'fit in'. Julie's experience of quickly becoming a favourite playmate further suggests the hypothesis that her sense of security during settling-in may well have derived from the 'caring and sharing' interactions she experienced with her peers as much as from the interactions she had with the centre adults. In Robert's case study, the teachers' 'laissez-faire' approach to mediating in peer interactions suggested the hypothesis that by not providing the pro-active guidance on peer-peer interaction evident in Julie's case study, Robert's teachers left a 'gap' in the range of guidance which they could have provided for him as a new child; this gap was filled by Robert's peers who interacted with him in ways which revealed both teacher-sanctioned, and non-teacher-sanctioned, rules for peer behaviour in the centre environment (see section 9.3.2).

The stories about children's experiences with their peers also highlight the contribution of peers to socialisation in a group care context. This is an aspect to which developmental study has not given enough attention, especially for infants and toddlers. For pre-verbal children such as those who participated in my study, it has been customary to conceptualise socialisation as occurring in the context of one-to-one relationships involving one adult and one child. My study makes clear that more research attention is warranted to how infants and toddlers socialise each other in a group care context.

10.1.3 Discourses about starting childcare

In exploring the understandings of the adult participants in the study about the experience of starting childcare, the connection of themes in their narratives to dominant societal discourses about motherhood emerged strongly. For example, the influence of dominant discourses about ideal motherhood, with the mother at home looking after her infant or toddler (e.g., Daniel, 1998), was evident in the way the mothers questioned, or talked about, their decision to use childcare, and in their expressions of uncertainties about whether their child might be "too young" and perhaps not "ready" for this event, and in their concern about whether their place in the child's life would be affected. The mothers' intuitive theories about what went on for their child during their settling-in time, and about their own role in the centre during this time, also revealed a connection to dominant psychological ways of constructing the children's experience as one of separation from their source of security (see section 5.6). The mothers defined their role in the centre in relation to their child as providing that security, as "being there" as a "support", and as a "comforter" to reassure the children that it was alright for them to be at the centre (see sections 5.5.4 and 5.6).

The teachers too appeared to be affected by dominant societal discourses about motherhood and early childhood teaching and their narratives of experience emerged against the background of these discourses. For example, the teachers took for granted the concept of the mother as source of security and support and incorporated this idea in their articulation of their centres' policies on starting

childcare. This was evident in the requirement that the mother, or other home adult, should accompany the child during a slow induction into the centre. The teachers' views about settling-in, and the way they behaved throughout the process, suggested also that they operated from what I have called a "theory of practice" whose components included a view of what the "settled child" looked like and the two beliefs that the mother had primacy in the child's life and that each child was different. I have argued that these two beliefs functioned as dominant principles behind the teachers' professional practice and also formed part of a dominant discourse about early childhood work. The teachers in my study appeared to define their teaching actions and construct their professional identity through this discourse.

The influence of dominant societal discourses about motherhood and early childhood teaching could also be discerned in the relationships which developed between the mothers and teachers, creating both positive as well as less desirable outcomes. For example, in the two mother-teacher relationships characterised by "steadily increasing trust" (see section 5.4.1), the teachers, Sarah and Joan, held strong views about the primacy of the mother in the child's life, and their action during the settling-in period included constant communication with, and feedback to, the mothers, Jean and Deborah. There was also a respect for the mothers' wishes about how they liked their child to be looked after. Moreover, the teachers provided a significant amount of information to the mothers during the time they were in the centre, both verbally and in the form of written documents, about how the centre ran. The belief about each child's uniqueness was translated by the two teachers in these relationships into a process of constant observation and "tuning in to where the child [was] at".

In the other three relationships, however, the belief espoused by the teachers in the primacy of the mother's role in the child's life did not have these outcomes. For example, in one of the three other centres, it appeared that the belief in the mother's primacy resulted in an almost total 'hands off' or 'laissez-faire' approach to introducing the mother and child to the centre. In this centre, the

mother, Helen, was shown around the centre and then left to work out what to do by herself, this being justified by the teacher, Anna, as “not wanting to intervene” and as a chance for the mother to ‘make the running’ (see section 7.5.2.2). For Helen, this approach was an unsatisfactory experience of lack of guidance especially when coupled with the absence of a centre guidebook. Helen also felt that the teachers were overwhelmed by too many children who needed attention. While her views of the individual teachers were very positive, there remained feelings of ambivalence about the level of trust she could have that her daughter would be well looked after. This was compounded by the ambiguity, at the start of the settling-in experience, about who would emerge as the person Maddi preferred to be with. The mother, Helen, resisted placing trust in the staff until the ambiguity of roles lessened and Sam took the lead.

Comments by the teachers for and against primary caregiver systems also drew on dominant discourses about the nature of children and motherhood: Those ‘for’ wanted a substitute ‘security base’; those ‘against’ argued that since one could not guarantee that the ‘primary caregiver’ could be available at all times, having a primary caregiver would be more stressful for a child when her caregiver had to be absent on some occasions.

The (un-selfconscious) use of these (psychological) concepts by the mothers and the teachers in constructing meaning out of their experience is an indication of the way that psychology ‘constructs’ experience and how psychological and other societal discourses impact to produce stories of our place and time (Burman, 1994; Howard, 1991; Mair, 1988; Silin, 1977; see also sections 2.3.2 and 5.7).

10.1.4 Role relationships: Dimensions of power, influence and control

In some of the mother-teacher relationships, mothers indicated an awareness of power issues which made them want to keep on side with the teachers (see section 5.3.6). The teachers did not indicate they were aware of this as a component of the mothers’ reality. For example, one mother, Lyn, said that she would be unwilling to make clear to the teachers that she would have preferred more feedback

because she did not want to be seen to be critical, yet Patti, the teacher participant in the case study, saw Lyn as a professional woman who would bring up any issue she was not happy with (see section 7.5.2.3). Similarly, Anna and Sam, both appeared to believe that if Helen was unhappy she would let them know.

The lack of focus by the teachers on any power differential in their 'favour' was consistent with their belief in the primacy of mothers, which also seemed connected to their giving little explicit guidance to mothers (see section 10.1.3). The discourse of 'mothers know best' appeared to make the teachers reluctant to behave in ways which might be interpreted by the mothers as 'being told what to do' and thus as a usurping of the mothers' ability to make the appropriate decisions. In the end, however, this discourse disempowered some mothers.

That the teachers saw their own role as subsidiary to that of the mothers, and as less influential than the mothers' in directing the settling-in experience, was also evident in the teachers' view that it was mostly family or parent-related and child-related factors that affected settling-in, and not teacher-related ones. Teachers thought that they were dealing with a situation which would unfold largely under its own momentum. The belief in the primacy of the mother thus also disempowered the teachers.

Nonetheless, my analyses of the parents' relationships with the teachers, and of the children's experiences, have suggested that in fact the teachers' actions did have a determining influence both on the relationships which developed between the teachers and the mothers, as well as on the relationships between the teachers and the children. All the children appeared to fall into line with how the teachers expected them to behave towards them; some mothers felt that 'falling into line' was preferable to being seen as critical of the teachers.

A paradox emerges. It is one which teachers need to be aware of. More awareness by teachers about their abilities to make a difference to how mothers and children experience this event seems called for.

Likewise, more awareness about the power of dominant discourses to affect teachers' practice seems warranted.

10.2 Contribution of this study to opening up the "black box"

Singer (1996) has argued that for most researchers "what exactly goes on in childcare situations" for children, parents and teachers is "still a black box" (p. 159). In focusing on the experience of starting childcare over time, and from a tripartite perspective, my study has attempted to open up the "black box". In addition, by studying this experience with a group of pre-verbal children, my study contributes to opening up the study of lived experience with a population which has been under-researched in this area. As I outline below, a number of outcomes have been achieved through my approach.

10.2.1 Lived experience over time

Through data gathering over a sustained period of time ranging from 6 to 14 weeks, and the use of techniques from narrative enquiry in the construction of narratives of experience, the problems of *post facto* research (see chapter 4, sections 4.2 and 4.9) have been avoided; the experience of starting childcare has been portrayed as it unfolded over time and not as recalled some time after the event.

10.2.2 Access to adult participants' lived experiences

The construction of the adults' stories on the basis of their own statements has allowed access to how the adult participants engaged in making sense of their lived experiences of the settling-in period. This has thrown light not only on the lived reality of their experiences, but also on the dynamics that operated between participants throughout the process. These dynamics have emerged as negotiated in the daily interactions among the participants but also as affected by role relationships that were in large part socially constructed within dominant societal discourses about mothering and early childhood teaching. From a methodological perspective, access to adults' stories as these unfolded during their lived

experience also enabled these to be used as triangulation measures about children's experiences as these were recorded in my fieldnotes and video records.

10.2.3 Perceptions of a quality settling-in.

The adult participants' accounts of their lived experience during settling-in have also thrown light on their expectations during the event of starting childcare; these accounts illuminate the mothers' and teachers' views about the components of a high quality experience of starting childcare. As I noted in section 10.1.2, a strong feature of the mothers' experience of the settling-in process was their sense of needing to "work out the rules of the game". From this position, the mothers clearly valued information sharing and the provision of guidance about 'rules and routines' of the centre as well as continuing feedback about their child. The mothers also wanted to feel that they could trust the teachers to look after their child and they would have preferred to have a specific person to relate to about this (see sections 5.4.4 and 5.5). The teachers, on the other hand, saw a quality settling-in time as involving the support and involvement of a home adult, which in my study was usually the mother. From the children's perspective, the stories told about their experiences suggest that a high quality experience of settling-in would include the components that (i) they did not spend time feeling uncomfortable and (ii) they were helped to "fit in" by teachers and peers who "tuned in to them" (see also section 10.4.1).

10.2.4 Teachers' narratives of their practice

The teachers' narratives of their experience have revealed a picture of professional practice in which teachers emerged as "creators of practical knowledge" (Perry et al., 1997). The theories articulated by the teachers did not appear to use formal child development knowledge to any extent but relied primarily on their practical knowledge as teachers of young children, much in the way of the practical knowledge of Freema Elbaz's (1981) teacher. The teachers' narratives revealed also that they constructed their professional practice, and identity, by reference to their own life experiences as mothers/father and carers of children in their family, as well as by reference to dominant discourses about

motherhood. This makes an interesting contribution to ongoing debates about the nature of early childhood work and of professionalism in this area. Additionally, these insights support the argument that there is a need to reconceptualise the knowledge base of early childhood professional practice away from a pure child development focus and onto a broader interdisciplinary base (e.g., Goffin, 1996; Singer, 1996; Stott & Bowman, 1996).

Ayers (1992) has argued that it is necessary for teachers to tell their stories about teaching because these can "inform other teachers and the world" (p. 266) about teaching and about children. The telling of teaching stories by early childhood teachers is still a fledgling area of scholarship to which this study makes a contribution.

10.2.5 Access to young children's lived experiences

The narratives presented about the children's experiences of starting childcare emerge strongly in this study as narratives of "learning to fit in" (see chapter 9 especially 9.5); this applied in all aspects of their interactions: with the adults, with the children and with the centre environment. This focus has emerged so strongly in my study that I have suggested that the task of 'learning to fit in' could rival that of 'separation' as the dominant task for children to achieve during this time. The narratives of how they 'fitted in' to whatever the policy was about new children in childcare, at a time when they were also adjusting to separation from their mothers, give food for thought. As I suggest in the following section, it seems desirable for future research to explore more fully the significance for the children of 'learning to fit in' within the centre setting.

10.3 Future research directions: New beginnings?

Looking into the future a number of new lines of research seem indicated by the insights gained in this study.

Firstly, the tri-partite focus of this study has opened up some of the stories which unfolded for all participants during the experience of starting childcare. These

stories have revealed the influence of societal discourses about motherhood and early childhood teaching on the way which the event of starting childcare was experienced by adult participants in my study.

Particularly noteworthy was the influence on these discourses of notions from attachment theory about the significance of separation from the mother and about the mother's key role as an attachment figure and the provider of security in the child's life: Both mothers and teachers appeared to take these notions for granted. The evidence in this study that starting childcare was an experience that involved more than separation between mother and child (see sections 5.7; 7.6; 9.5) clearly indicates, however, that attachment theory does not offer a complete understanding of this experience. The stories of "fitting in" which emerged in my study suggest that it is equally important to explore further how social and cognitive processes of learning to "fit in", or being inducted into a new setting, are implicated in this event. For example, given that all the children learnt to 'fit in' and 'be happy' within the rules and routines promoted in their centres through the actions of the teachers and the established children, questions are raised by my study about what is needed for children to attain a sense of feeling 'happy' or 'settled' at the centre. In traditional psychological research on starting childcare, notions of 'being happy' or 'being settled' have typically been constructed around notions of the child developing a relationship of security and/or attachment with an adult. It is clear in my study that an attachment relationship to one adult at the centre was not always encouraged; in some cases this was firmly discouraged. How then did the children in those centres gain a sense of being happy or settled? It seems pertinent to suggest, as others have done (e.g., Clarke-Stewart, 1991; Singer, 1993), that children may have other ways of gaining a sense of security than through forming an attachment relationship with one adult. There is evidence in my study that the children's interaction in their peer group may be one focus through which to seek insights on this question. It may be, for instance, that having learnt to 'fit in' to the group culture provides its own sense of security and competence. In turn, this might make up for any lack of security that might accrue from not having attachment relationships with preferred adults in the centre.

Secondly, given the importance of the peer group for children's learning to 'fit in', scope exists for further research on the dynamics of interaction among very young children. Research in this area for children under three years old is still limited. The reality of increasing use of group care for infants and toddlers justifies a search for greater understanding in this area.

Thirdly, the discourses about motherhood and early childhood teaching present in the stories told by the adults in this study ignore the increasingly common lived reality in contemporary Western countries, of shared care between mothers and teachers during the early years of children's lives. Since starting childcare is the beginning of the shared care experience it seems important to explore the significance of the event of starting childcare for the longer term experience of shared care by the adults as well as the children. Specific questions for further research could include a focus on how the relationships established between parents and teachers during the initial days of shared care develop over time and how they impact on the quality of the children's longer term experience at the centre.

Fourthly, further exploration seems desirable of the suggestion in my study that the teachers did not recognise the power dimension in their relationships with the children's mothers. Given most mothers' awareness of this dimension, it would be useful to explore teachers' thinking about what the mothers reported. Are teachers really unaware of this dimension, or is it possible that they are aware of it but discount it because they trust that their own sense of professionalism would prevent them abusing it? How is the notion of the mother's primacy in the child's life implicated in teachers' views of the power dimension in their relationships with parents?

Fifthly, the related issue of teachers' views of their in/ability to influence the quality of the starting childcare experience of children and their home adults is also worth exploring. My study has suggested that the teachers saw the settling-in

experience as one affected by factors mostly related to the children's nature ("each child is unique") and to their home and other experiences before childcare; this was not supported by the evidence in my study that the teachers' theories of practice effectively canalized the children into the expected ways of acting in the centre. It may be that as a profession, early childhood teachers are as yet unused to reflecting about this aspect of early childhood life, just as most adults, in and out of early childhood centres, appear unaware of the effect of Pontecorvo's (1998, September) "backstage stream of talk" (see section 9.2.2) in socialising children's identity. Further exploration of teachers' thinking about this aspect of the settling-in experience could illuminate teachers' feelings of self-efficacy and how they construct their professional identity. This would contribute to current debates about professionalism in the sector. In addition, further exploration of the "backstage stream of talk" might also result in greater awareness of the messages that are given to children not simply when adults respond to children but also when they do not, or, when they do so at one remove but within the children's hearing. This could also throw light on other aspects of life in early childhood centres such as its emotional culture (e.g. Leavitt, 1995); this is a dimension which has not been discussed in this study but which future studies could do well to explore.

Sixthly, there is also scope for research on how teachers act, and/or can act, to mediate interactions among very young children. In my study a difference was noted in this behaviour for teachers in two different centres and I made the suggestion that where teachers acted to promote a pro-social peer culture, this emerged. Where teacher interventions in peer interactions appeared to be reactive, peers appeared to fill the gap in adult guidance by developing their own norms about what was acceptable among peers. Further research in this area would be able to explore this hypothesis in more detail.

Finally, the stories of deep emotions reported by the mothers and some of the teachers as part of their experiences of starting childcare suggest that it may be

timely that this aspect of the adults' experience be further studied. In particular, the teachers' experiences in this area have been largely ignored by researchers.

The task of opening up the "black box" of "what exactly goes on in childcare situations" and of developing new theoretical understandings in developmental psychology can be pursued from a number of new beginnings.

10.4 Implications for practice: Enhancing the starting childcare experience

Silin (1997) argued that "stories are not abstract fictions separate from the world 'out there'. They link individual lives to particular cultures" (p. 11). This restating of Mair's (1988) statement that "we inhabit the great stories of our culture" suggests that since the experience of starting childcare has become so widespread as to be arguably a "great story of our culture", it is appropriate to reflect on how the insights gained from the stories told in this study may be used to enhance early childhood practice during the experience of starting childcare in centres in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

10.4.1 At the centre level

The mothers' narratives about what they valued about their starting childcare experience suggest that for mothers this experience could be helped by :

- receiving clear information and guidance about the centre and its daily operation, as well as specific information about settling-in procedures
- having information about settling-in conveyed in both printed form as well as verbally
- having a specific teacher, who is available when mothers or other home adults go to the centre, to regularly communicate with about their child
- receiving regular feedback about their child
- having their preferred way of handling their child respected
- seeing their suggestions about their child taken up by the teacher/s
- being given information on how structural issues to do with the running of the centre (such as teacher:child ratios; the number of new children starting at the same time) did not undermine their own child's ability to receive attention

- experiencing interactions with the centre staff which help them to establish a relationship of trust with them.

From the children's perspective, my study suggests that their experience could be enhanced when:

- they do not spend time feeling un-comforted
- they are actively helped to 'fit in' by adults and peers who tune in to their focus of attention
- teachers are clear about the procedures they will adopt to enact their centre's policy about how to handle new children
- teachers take a pro-active approach in encouraging pro-social behaviour among peers.

The implications for teachers' practice include:

- the need for teachers to become much more aware of the impact of their practices on how new children and new parents become inducted into the ways of the centre
- the need to focus much more on building a theory of practice that incorporates principles about dealing with children in a group situation
- the need to become more aware of strategies that would ease the mothers', or other home adults', experiences during the settling-in time.

10.4.2 At the level of teacher education and/or professional development

Two important implications emerge from this study for providers of teacher education and professional development services.

- i. It is clear that the teachers in this study did not fully recognise, or did not fully acknowledge, the impact which their theories of practice had on the way that starting childcare was experienced by the children and their mothers. This suggests that the teachers may not have seen themselves as able to make a difference. Considered against the indications in this study that the teachers' actions did in fact make a difference, the teachers' apparent lack of awareness of this suggests that the teachers were acting

from an unreflective stance. From a teacher education/professional development perspective, it seems important to take account of this anomaly, through, for instance, an action research approach to exploring the implications of this insight for practice. Since this study has shown that teachers can make a difference, it is important that teachers are discerning and self-conscious about the difference which they do make.

- ii. What is also suggested by this study is that professional development and teacher education providers might need to attend to the contribution which contextual features such as societal discourses and beliefs, might make to the meanings that are constructed in the daily practice of teaching. For example, in my study, it became clear that the teachers defined their identity as teachers by reference to dominant discourses about mothering. Professional teacher educators as well as teachers themselves may need to reflect on how this positions teachers in their working relationships with mothers. As Miller (1992) has argued, the societal and historical construction of early childhood teaching as akin to the role of "nurturer, mother, caretaker, as well as facilitator, captain, guide" (p. 104) creates tensions and contradictions which must affect the way early childhood teachers enact the curriculum and think about their practice. Miller argued that these societal constructions of early childhood practice must be deconstructed if teachers are to become "grounded in [their] own sense of authority ... [and] bring about a transformation of the status quo" (p. 106).

10.5 Endnote

On a number of different levels this study indicates that a "transformation of the status quo" may be appropriate in traditional ways of conceptualising the event of starting childcare.

This thesis points to new beginnings for the understanding of starting childcare within the context of shared care.

**Framework for focus group meetings with staff in
good practice early childhood centres**

**Identifying routine events that early childhood teachers see as important
when children first start attending a childcare centre.**

1. Introduce myself as follows:

Hello, my name is Carmen Dalli; I lecture in Education at _____ University and am currently doing a PhD in early childhood education.

My **topic** is: Parents and early childhood teachers, complementary roles in children's lives.

In my study I will be arguing that both parents and early childhood teachers make very important contributions to how children understand their world - **ie** in each interaction of child and adult, the adult is helping the child to make sense of the world.

2. Today's meeting.

I'm very grateful that you have agreed to spend time with me today. What I'd like is for you to help me identify **routine activities** that might be new to children when they first arrive in a childcare centre. I'm thinking of routine activities that you as early childhood teachers engage in with children especially when they **first come to the centre**. If you like it's an attempt to pick your brains about what you feel are the most important of those activities, since you are the people who deal with these children and therefore know best what experience has taught you to focus on.

I've got a few questions I'd like to ask you about this. I should also say that I'll eventually write up what you tell me as part of the analysis of my thesis; I will also write a short separate report on it. I will send a copy of this report to your centre.

3. My questions

- i. What's the broad structure of the programme for a child in your centre?
- ii. Are there routine activities that you think will be new to a child coming from home to a group situation?
- iii. Do you see some of these as more crucial than others?
- iv. Why do you see some activities as more important than others?
- iv. Are there some activities during which the child who has just joined the centre has more opportunity to interact with you more extensively on a one-to-one basis?

The Supervisor
Childcare centre
Address

November 1992

Dear _____ ,

In July of last year, the staff of your centre kindly accepted me as a researcher in your centre to conduct a focus group meeting about routine activities that might be new to children when they first arrive in a childcare centre.

That interview was part of my PhD research on how staff and parents play complementary roles in children's lives.

At that interview I had promised to send your staff a short report on the interview. I apologise for the time it has taken me to provide this. My only explanation is that in November 1991 my baby was born and, as I am sure you'll understand, this has left me very little time for study.

I am now getting back into my PhD work. With this letter you will find the short report I promised your staff and a longer paper I wrote in which I include the results of the interviews in which they took part.

I am very grateful for your centre's help to date and would like you to extend my thanks to your staff for their assistance last year.

I would also like to ask if you and your staff would be interested in having a further input into this project by taking part in the next phase of the project.

This phase will concentrate on how the settling in process is experienced by the child, parent/s and staff member most directly involved with the child when s/he first comes in. I will try to gain information on this by interviewing the adults separately and observing the child during the first week of the child's attendance at the centre.

At the moment I am seeking your assistance for the trialing out of the interview and observation schedule. I hope that this can be accomplished before the end of the year. This means that if your centre is willing to be involved in the trialing of the schedules, you would also have to have a new child/children coming in shortly.

I hope it may be possible for you to continue to take part in this project and will ring you in about ten days' time for a reply. I am very happy to be contacted by you if you wish to talk about the project before you reach a decision. You may reach me either on 495 5168(Wk) or 384 2509 (Hm).

Thank you very much for your assistance to date. I look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely

Carmen Dalli
Lecturer and PhD student

Enc: Report to staff involved in focus group meetings: identifying routine events

...

**Report to staff who participated in focus group meetings:
Identifying routine events that childcare teachers see as important when
children first start attending a childcare centre.**

Introduction

During June and July 1991, you and the staff of three other childcare centres in (name of city) took part in focus group meetings organised as part of my PhD project entitled "Parents and Early Childhood Teachers: complementary roles in children's lives".

The intention of the focus group meetings was to identify events that might provide a useful context for exploring the contribution parents and early childhood teachers make to children's understanding of events around them. I was particularly interested in events which staff thought might be useful contexts for observing the contribution of staff and parents to children's understanding of those events. I therefore asked you to identify events that children might meet for the first time in the group childcare setting.

The idea behind this was that if events were new ones, then in observing child-parent and child-staff pairs within these events, one could expect that the parent and the teacher would each have the same background of experience in that event with the child. I was also interested in events which could occur naturally, or be set up in a naturalistic way, in either the home or the centre situation.

Methodology and Results

Each focus group meeting was tape-recorded and I also took detailed notes of the discussion. I analysed this material and grouped as follows:

A. <u>Events using general social skills</u>	<u>Number of Centres which named the events</u>
leave-taking from parents and staff	3
greeting visitors	1

B. <u>Events requiring knowledge about how to behave in groups</u>	
reading stories in a group	3
mealtimes	4
sharing toys/objects	2
C. <u>Housekeeping Events</u>	
toileting routines	4
hand-washing routines	4
sleep-time routines	3
helping to tidy up	3
D. <u>Events enabling one-to-one interaction</u>	
getting organised for sleep-time	3
when a child is ill	2
times at beginning or end of day	2
nappy-changing	2
dealing with behaviour problems	3
learning a new skill – e. g., using scissors, using puzzles, writing letters	3
putting on items of clothing	2
when a child is upset }	
encouraging eating }	
going out for walks }	1
reading a book alone with adult }	
helping adult in the kitchen }	
E. <u>Other events mentioned in only one centre</u>	
learning appropriate behaviour around different activities e.g.: dough play, sandpit, plastic bars, swings, painting, water play, carpentry	
transferring child from highchair to small chair	
road crossing when out as a group	
behaviour at the library	

visiting the dental nurse
behaviour during evacuation drills
going shopping

Discussion

The four focus group meetings were all held in childcare centres either after hours or, in one instance, as part of the activities during a programme-planning day. There was a great deal of interest expressed by staff in each of the four centres. Over and above the discussion on events, two points came through very clearly during the discussions.

The first relates to the difficulty that staff in all four centres said they encountered in spending time in one-to-one interaction with children. In all four centres staff emphasised that the group situation put definite limits on how much time staff could spend with individual children. Indeed, as the events mentioned in category D above suggest, most opportunities for one-to-one interaction seemed to occur either during compulsory care activities such as in nappy-changing, or in getting children ready for sleep-time, or during 'crisis' situations such as when a child is ill or needs "disciplinary" attention or when, for some reason, the demands of the group have lessened - as when a small group goes out of the centre for a walk.

The other major point that deserves mention is that the staff of two of the four centres emphasised greatly the importance of the settling-in period and how this should be preceded by a period during which children visit with a parent so that both the child and the parent would learn to feel comfortable in the centre. The staff in these centres suggested that the settling-in period might be a good one to study as a context in which the contribution of staff and parents to children's understanding of the early childhood centre experience might be observed.

The way forward

As I stated above the focus group meetings were intended to identify events that might provide a useful context for exploring the contribution parents and early childhood teachers make to children's understanding of events around them. The events identified certainly suggest a number of possible events that would fit the requirements. For instance, any of the following events would be worth following through:

- leave-taking from parents and staff
- greeting visitors
- helping to tidy up
- learning a given new skill
- putting on an item of clothing
- helping adult in the kitchen

However, as the focus group meetings were proceeding, I became increasingly impressed by how salient the characteristic of being in a group situation seemed for staff. During numerous points in the interview, one or another member of staff would comment on how "being in a group" was possibly the most important thing the child had to get used to when it first joined the centre. In the two centres where settling-in procedures were extensively discussed, this point was even more strongly made. In one centre particularly the staff had a lot to say about the importance of both parents' attitude to using childcare for how well-settled a child was, and for how the child came to view his or her experience in the centre.

These strong views have caused me to reflect again on the best way forward into the next phase of the study.

Part of the rationale for this project is that it should produce knowledge that will be of use in the practice of early childhood education. The views expressed in the focus group meetings have suggested to me that the best event to study would be the event of settling-in in the centre. If this event is as important as the staff in the four centres believed it to be, then it seems reasonable to expect that the information that will be gained from a study of settling-in would be of use to pre-service and in-service training institutions interested in facilitating children's experience of being in an early childhood centre. This information would also be of use to any centre seeking to provide quality early childhood education.

In accordance with this, the next phase of the study has been shaped around gaining an understanding of how the settling-in process is experienced by the child, parent and staff member most in contact with the child when s/he first starts attending an early childhood centre.

I am indeed grateful to you all for the valuable contribution you have made in clarifying the most useful area to pursue in the rest of this study.

Carmen Dalli

Lecturer in Education and PhD student

Date

Dear _____

This letter follows up our recent telephone conversation about the possibility that your centre might be able to participate in my research project on children starting childcare.

As I said on the phone I am a lecturer in human development and early childhood education. The research project I am engaged in is part of my PhD study.

The study will involve case studies of children who will be using a childcare service for the first time. The objectives of the study are:

1. to describe the experience of starting childcare from the point of view of the children, their parents and the staff of the centre the children attend and
2. to investigate the role that adults play in helping the child make sense of this experience.

I am seeking to study only one child per centre. The child needs to be mobile, at least 15 months old and attending a centre-based early childhood service for the first time on either a full-time or part-time basis.

I would like to follow the child through its first six weeks of attending the centre by observing her/him for one session a week for six weeks. In addition I would like to be present during any orientation visits the child might make with a parent or caregiver before it starts attending on a regular basis.

Because I'm interested in the adults' view on the child's experience, I would also like to do two interviews each with the child's parent and the staff member who would have most to do with the child during his/her first period of being at the centre. The first interview would take place in the first week of the child's starting at the centre and the second interview would be at the end of the six weeks. Each interview will be about an hour long.

A further request would be that for each day that the child attend the centre, the staff member and the parent keep a record of their thoughts on how they think the day has gone for the child and for themselves as adults involved with the child. I would hope that this record would not be too much in excess of the records that staff would normally keep for the purposes of feedback to parents. I would provide the necessary notebooks for this purpose.

This study is partly funded by a grant from the internal grants committee of my university and will abide by the ethical guidelines of the research committee of the university. A very important aspect of a research project like this is confidentiality. I will be following very strict guidelines about keeping information gained from this project anonymous. This means that the name of your centre, the staff, the parent and the child will not be revealed in any of the publications that may result from the study.

My hope is that the information gained from this study will help increase our knowledge about children's and adults' experiences in early childhood centres. This information has the potential of being very useful for training institutions at both pre-service and in-service levels.

My sincere thanks for the interest you have shown in the study so far. I hope you will find it possible to participate in it. I will contact you by phone within the next 10 days to see if you are able to do this. If you wish to contact me before then, I will be happy to hear from you either on 384-2509(Hm) or 495-5168 (Wk).

Many thanks once more.

Yours sincerely

Carmen Dalli
Lecturer and PhD student

STARTING CHILDCARE:
a research project

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

Dear Parent/s

I am a lecturer in human development and early childhood education. As part of my PhD project I am engaged in a study that is looking at the experience of starting childcare.

The study will involve case studies of children who will be using a childcare service for the first time. The children will be at least 18 months old.

The objectives of the project are:

1. to describe the experience of starting childcare from the point of view of the children, their parents and one member of staff in the centre the children attend and
2. to investigate the role that adults play in helping the child make sense of this experience.

I hope that the information gained from this study will be useful in informing training institutions about settling-in procedures.

I am seeking to study only one child per centre. I have asked the supervisor to approach you as a parent whose child fits the requirements for the study, to see if you are interested in participating in it.

What I would like to do is to follow your child through the first 6 weeks of attending the centre by observing her/him for one session a week for 6 weeks. I would also like to be present during any orientation visits you might make with your child before he/she starts attending on a regular basis. The observations will be by pen and paper and also by videoing three short (about 5 minutes each) events each time I visit.

Appendix D

Because I'm also interested in the adults' view of the child's experience, I would like to do two interviews with you as well as with the staff member who will have most to do with your child in the early period of being at the centre. The first interview would take place in the first week of the child's attending the centre on his/her own and the second interview would be at the end of the six weeks.

Each interview should take about an hour to complete. The interview could be held at the centre or at a place convenient for you.

In addition to this, I have asked that the staff member whom I'll interview will keep a daily 'journal' record of their thoughts on how they think the day has gone for the child and for themselves as adults involved with the child. I would like you as a parent to do the same. I hope that in this way, it will be possible to construct a more complete picture of how the experience of starting childcare is going for all concerned. I will provide the necessary notebooks for this purpose. Should you wish to keep a copy of these records for your own record of your child's growth, I would be happy to assist in any way I can.

This study is partly funded by a grant from the internal grants committee of _____ University and will abide by the ethical guidelines of the research committee of the university. A very important aspect of a research project like this is confidentiality. I will be following very strict guidelines about keeping information gained from this project anonymous. This means that the name of your child, yourself, your child's centre and the name of the staff will not appear in any publications that may result from this study.

I hope you will find it possible to participate in this study. If you wish to talk to me before you make up your mind, I will be happy to hear from you either on 495 5168 (Wk) or 3842 509 (Hm).

Many thanks

Carmen Dalli
Lecturer and PhD student

STARTING CHILDCARE:
a research project

Parental Consent Form

Child's name: _____

Parent's name: _____

Name and address of Centre _____

As the parent of _____ I agree that my child participates in the PhD study called "Starting Childcare". I understand that the information gathered during this study will be reported in a way that keeps the source/s of information anonymous. This means that the name of my child, myself, my child's centre and the name of the staff at the centre will be kept anonymous.

Signature _____

Date _____

CS_PIS1.1

CONFIDENTIAL**PARENT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE 1***Project Name: Starting Childcare*

Date of interview _____	CC centre _____
Name of respondent _____	Type of Centre _____
Relationship to child _____	
Name of Child _____	Child's sex. _____
Child's date of birth _____	Child's age: ____yrs ____mths
Hours of attendance at centre _____	
Time at start of interview _____	Total time of interview _____

INTRODUCTION

As you know, this interview is part of my PhD study on starting childcare.

I am very grateful to you for your help so far. This interview should take us about an hour to get through. The questions are about:

- your use of childcare as a service
- your experience of having a child start childcare
- your child and her/his experience of starting childcare

I hope you'll feel comfortable answering them all but please do feel free to pass on any one you wish not to answer. Also please don't let the questions limit you in what you say: if you wish to elaborate on what I ask, please do. And if anything is unclear at any stage, please do ask me to clarify. What I'm trying to do is understand how you see this experience from where you stand, to understand it as you do.

How does that sound to you? (if ok, move to section A)

CS_PIS1.2

A Use of Childcare Centre

- 1 What is your primary reason for using an out-of home service? (Prompt:
What will you do when your child is at the centre?)

- 2 Can you tell me why you chose this particular childcare centre?

- 3a Have you had any previous experience of children cared for outside of
home?

☐ Yes

Go to 3b

☐ No

Go to B1

- 3b If yes, can you tell me what the circumstances were? (e.g., who children
were, how childcare chosen etc)

CS_PIS1.3

3c How would you describe that experience/s?

Experience 1

Experience 2

Experience 3

CS_PIS1.4

B Parental Experience of having a child starting childcare

1 What preparation for starting childcare have you attempted, if any?

2a Does the centre have a policy on how to settle newcomers to the centre?

___ Yes ___ No ___ Don't know
Go to 2b Go to 3a Go to 3a

2b What is this policy?

3a What information about starting childcare did you have before you started this process with (name of child)? (Probe: from centre/other?) (If none, go to 4)

3b Now that you have gone through the first weeks of starting childcare with _____, are you finding this information useful? ___ Yes ___ No

Go to 3c Go to 3d

CS_PIS1.5

3c In what ways is it useful?

3d Why is the information not useful ?

4 If another parent asked you what starting childcare would involve, what would you say?
(Prompt for {a} specific actions they have to undertake e.g., getting child organised to be at the centre at a particular time, organising one's own timetable around the settling-in schedule and {b} feelings involved in the process e.g., fear of rejection by child, separation anxiety etc)

5 You've just been through the first visits to the centre with _____ ; can you tell me what you think this process means/involves for _____?
(e.g., what does s/he have to get used to? What might be new for her/him?)

CS_PIS1.6

- 6 During the time that you've been going to the centre with _____, how did you see your role at the centre?
(Probe: in what way did your presence at the centre help? (What did you contribute?))

- 7 What do you think that the childcare staff expected of you during this period?

- 8 How do you feel about these expectations? (Did you feel able to meet them? Were they realistic?)

CS_PIS1.7

- 9 What did you expect from the centre staff during this period to help _____ settle in?

- 10 Were your expectations met? Which were /were not?

- 11 Do you think the staff knew what you expected from them?
_____Yes _____No

Would you like to elaborate on that?

CS_PIS1.8

12a How have you been feeling throughout this process?

12b Do you feel you are getting enough feedback on how the process is going so far?

13 Is there an incident that you recall strongly from orientation period at home or at the centre? (e.g., disturbance of usual behaviour at home, difficulty of sleeping at centre etc?)

14 How would you describe your relationship with the staff to date? (Probe: would you prefer anything to be different? Why? How?)

CS_PIS1.9

- 15 Are there any other comments you would like to make on your experience to date of the settling-in process? (e.g., suggestions/compliments/complaints/ preoccupations)

CS_PIS1.10

C Profile of the Child and Child's Experience of Starting Childcare

Finally, I'd like to ask you a few questions about your child.

- 1 Can you give me an idea of what _____'s personality is like? How would you describe her/him?

- 2 How does _____ currently react to meeting new people?

- 3a Has _____ had any previous experience of separation from you? Yes/No

- 3b If yes, how did s/he react on those occasions?

CS_PIS1.11

- 4 How well would you say the experience of starting childcare is going for _____?

Very well well satisfactorily not very well badly

- 5 What do you think are the reasons for this?
(probe: is it causing any problems for you/ your child? Have there been any positive or negative reactions you have observed in the child at home?)

- 6 Would you say that _____ is fully settled now?

____ Yes ____ No ____ Not sure
Stop here go to 7 go to 7

- 7 How will you know when _____ is fully settled?

- 8 How long so you think it will take for this to happen? (i.e, child be fully settled)

Well, that's the end . Thank you very much indeed.

When I go through my notes it is possible that I might find I need to clarify something. Would you be willing for me to give you a call if I need to check something out?

____ Yes ____ No Contact number _____

Time at end of interview _____

CONFIDENTIAL**PARENT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE 2***Project name: Starting Childcare*

Date of interview _____ CC centre _____
Type of Centre _____
Name of respondent _____
Relationship to child _____
Name of Child _____ Child's sex. _____
Child's date of birth _____ Child's age: ____ yrs ____ mths
Hours of attendance at centre _____
Time at start of interview _____ Total time of interview _____

INTRODUCTION

First of all I'd like to thank you very much for your work on the journal – it's been really helpful for me to read it. (Elaborate)

The idea of this second interview is to follow-up what we said in the first interview and try and get an overview of how the experience of starting childcare has gone for _____ and for you.

It's a shorter interview than the first – I've got a few questions to ask you but please feel free to add anything you think is relevant or ask me questions too.

CS_PIS2.2

- 1 At this stage, how well would you say the experience of starting childcare has gone for _____
 very well well satisfactorily not very well badly

- 2 So would you say that _____ is fully settled in now?
 _____ Yes _____ No _____ Not sure
 If yes, go to 3 If no, go to 4 Go to 5

- 3a In our first interview, when I asked you how you'd know if _____ was settled, you said this would be when (*fill in from first interview*)

Are there other things that indicate that she is settled now? If yes, what are they?

CS_PIS2.3

- 3b What do you think are the reasons for _____ being settled now? / How would you explain it? (refer to reasons given interview 1 if appropriate)

Go to 6

- 4a What makes you say _____ is not settled?

Read back indicators of being settled they'd given from 3a and check if these are still valid.

- 4b How would you explain why _____ has not settled?

(Go to 6)

- 5a What makes you unsure that _____ is settled?

CS_PIS2.4

- 5b What reasons have led to this situation? / How would you explain this?
What explanation could there be for this?

(Go to 6)

- 6 What type of feedback are you getting from _____'s teachers now?

- 7 How would you describe your relationship to _____'s teachers now?

- 8 Are there other comments you would like to make on your experience to date with _____'s and her/his teachers?

CS_PIS2.5

- 9 Do you wish to comment in any way on your participation in this study?

- 10 Other questions depending on info in each case-study.

- PS Give respondents an opportunity to ask any questions they may have or comment about the transcript of the first interview.

Well, that's the end . Thank you very much indeed.

When I go through my notes it is possible that I might find I need to clarify something. Would you be willing for me to give you a call if I need to check something out?

___ Yes ___No Contact number_____

Time at end of interview_____

CONFIDENTIAL**TEACHER INTERVIEW SCHEDULE 1****Project Name: Starting Childcare**

Date of interview _____	CC centre _____
	Type of centre _____
Name of respondent _____	Sex of respondent __Female__Male
Position at the centre _____	Age of respondent _____
Name of child _____	Child's sex __Female__Male
Hours of attendance at centre _____	
Time at start of interview _____	Total time of interview _____

INTRODUCTION

As you know this interview is part of my PhD study on starting childcare.

I'm very grateful to you for your help so far. This interview should take us about an hour to get through. The questions in the interview are about:

- your early childhood work
- the centre's policy on starting children at the centre
- your views on children going through the experience of starting childcare and _____'s experience of starting childcare

I hope you'll feel comfortable answering them all but please do feel free to pass on any one you wish not to answer. Also, please don't let the questions limit you in what you say; if you wish to elaborate on what I ask, please do. And if anything is unclear at any stage, please do ask me to clarify. What I'm trying to do is understand how you see this experience from where you stand, to understand it as you do.

How does that sound to you? (if ok. move to section A).

CS_TIS1.2

A Background of Teacher

Can we start with a few questions about your background in early childhood work.

- 1 Could you tell me how long you have been working in this centre?

- 2 In total, how long have you been working as an early childhood teacher?

- 3 What other experience do you have that you think is relevant to your work as an early childhood teacher?

- 4 What formal early childhood training/qualifications do you have?

- 5 Are there other training/qualifications you have that you think are relevant to your job?

CS_TIS1.3

B Centre's policy on children starting at the centre

1a Does this centre have a policy on how to handle newcomers to the centre?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Do not know

If yes, go to 2a If no, go to 3 Go to 3

2a What is this policy?

2b Is the policy written down anywhere?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, go to 2c If no, go to 4

2c If yes, where is it written down? May I have a copy please?

Go to 4

3 If no, how do you decide how to handle a newcomer?

4a Did your early childhood training deal with handling newcomers to the centre? eg identifying distress/separation anxiety; how to best deal with the situation of settling in newcomers? ☐ Yes ☐ No

CS_TIS1.4

4b Can you tell me about this information?

5a In centres that you have worked in before, have there been policies on settling-in?

☐ Yes

Go to 5b

☐ No

Go to 5c

☐ Don't know

Go to 5c

5b If yes, what were these policies?

5c So, how did you deal with newcomers?

1a In your experience, do all children have the same pattern of how they behave when they start childcare?(probe: do they have the same pattern of how they settle?)

go to 1b

go to 1c

[illegible]

CS_TIS1.6

1d What are the reasons for this/these pattern/s?

(Prompt: What factors make a difference to how children settle? e.g.: age of child, parental attitude, size of grouping, having a main caregiver within the centre, child's temperament, child's previous experiences etc)

2a In your view, what role do early childhood teachers have in children's experience of starting childcare?

2b In your view, what steps should an early childhood teacher take to ensure the experience of starting childcare works for a given child?

CS_TIS1.7

- 3 How long would you say it normally takes for a new child to "settle in"?

- 4 What type of information do you think is important
a) for parents to share with you during the time that the child is just starting to attend the centre?

and

- b) for you to share with parents during this period?

- 5 How fully do you communicate to parents how the child behaves when the parent has left? (follow-up by "Why?")

CS_TIS1.8

6a Have you ever had to advise parents to withdraw a child?

___Yes

___No

If yes, go to 6b

If no, go to 6c

6b If yes, what were the circumstances?

6c If no, have you thought of it as an option? Why?

CS_TIS1.9

D _____(name of child)'s experience of starting childcare

The next few questions are about _____'s experience of starting childcare.

- 1 What preparation did you engage in for _____'s starting at the centre?

- 2 What information did you make available to the parents about starting at the centre?

- 3a How well would you say the experience of starting childcare here is going for ____?

Very well well satisfactorily not very well badly

- 3b What do you think are the reasons for this?

- 4 Would you say that _____ is fully settled in now?

____Yes

____No

____Not sure

If yes, go to 6

If no, go to 5

Go to 5

CS_TIS1.10

- 5 How will you know when _____ is fully settled in?

- 6 During the time that _____ has been doing visits with her/his _____, how did you see your role as main person looking after _____ in the centre? (probe: how did you help the child settle? What did you contribute to the child's experience?)

- 7 What do you think _____'s parents expected from you during this period?

- 8 How do you feel about these expectations? (Probe: Did you feel able to meet them? Were they realistic?)

CS_TIS1.11

- 9 What did you expect from _____'s parents during this period to help _____ settle in? (Probe: at home / centre)

- 10 Were your expectations met? Which were/ were not?

- 11 Do you think _____'s parents knew what you expected? ____ Yes ____ No
(Would you like to elaborate on that?)

- 12a How have you been feeling throughout this process?

CS_TIS1.12

- 12b What type of feedback are you getting from parents on how the process is going so far?

- 13 How would you describe your relationship with the parent/s? (Probe: would you prefer anything to be different? Why?)

- 14 Are there any other comments you would like to make on your experience to date with _____ and her/his parent/s?

The end. Thank you very much indeed.

When I go through my notes it is possible that I might find I need to clarify something. Would you be willing for me to give you a call if I need to check something out?

_____ Yes _____ No Contact telephone _____

Time at end of interview _____

CONFIDENTIAL**TEACHER INTERVIEW SCHEDULE 2***Project Name: Starting Childcare*

Date of interview _____ CC centre _____
Type of centre _____
Name of respondent _____ Sex of respondent ___Female___Male
Position at the centre _____ Age of respondent _____
Name of child _____ Child's sex ___Female___Male
Hours of attendance at centre _____
Time at start of interview _____ Total time of interview _____

INTRODUCTION

First of all I'd like to thank you very much for your work on the notebook- it's been really helpful for me to read it. (Elaborate)

The idea of this second interview is to follow-up what we said in the first interview and try and get an overview of how the experience of starting childcare has gone for _____ and for you.

It's a shorter interview than the first - I've got a few questions to ask you but please feel free to add anything you think is relevant or ask me questions too.

CS_TIS2.2

- 1 At this stage, how well would you say the experience of starting childcare here has gone for _____?

Very well well satisfactorily not very well badly

- 2 So would you say that _____ is fully settled in now?

____ Yes

____ No

____ Not sure

If yes, go to 3

If no, go to 4

Go to 5

- 3a In our first interview, when I asked you how you'd know if _____ was settled, you said this would be when:

Are there other things that indicate that she is settled now?. If yes, what are they?

CS_TIS2.3

- 3b What do you think are the reasons for _____ being settled now? / How would you explain it? (refer to reasons given in interview 1 if appropriate)

(Go to 6)

- 4a What makes you say _____ is not settled? (indicators)

- 4b How would you explain why _____ has not settled?

(Go to 6)

- 5a What makes you unsure that _____ is settled?

CS_TIS2.4

- 5b What reasons have led to this situation? / How would you explain this?
What explanation could here be for this?

(Go to 6)

- 6 What type of feedback are you getting from _____'s parents now?

- 7 How would you describe your relationship to _____'s parent now?

- 8 Are there any other comments you would like to make on your experience
to date with _____ and her/his parent/s?

CS_TIS2.5

- 9 Do you wish to comment in any way about your participation in the study?

- 10 Other questions to be written in depending on info in each case-study.

11. Ask for comments about transcript of first interview.

The end. Thank you very much indeed.

When I go through my notes it is possible that I might find I need to clarify something. Would you be willing for me to give you a call if I need to check something out?

_____ Yes _____ No Contact telephone _____

Time at end of interview _____

Dear Parents,

I am very grateful that you have agreed to participate in this study.

As you know, one of the aims of this study is to describe the experience of starting childcare from the point of view of the children as well as their parents and one member of staff at the child's centre.

The idea of this journal notebook is that it will be a record of your thoughts about your child's experience of childcare as well as about your own experience of this.

Each page of the notebook is divided in two. In the top half of the page I'm asking you to record your thoughts about your child at the centre. For example, you may have thoughts about his/her mood when your child left you, who greeted your child, what you expected the day to be like for your child, and anything else that comes to mind about your child's experience on that day at the centre.

In the bottom half of the page I'm asking you to record your thoughts about your own experience of taking your child to the centre. For example, you may have thoughts about the way you and your child were greeted, about your perception of the centre layout, about your role in your child's experience at the centre and anything else that may come up for you on that day related to taking your child to the centre.

I very much appreciate the time you will put into this exercise. I hope that the record you keep will not only prove useful to me but also interesting for you as well. As I said in my letter of introduction if you wish to keep a copy of these records for your own use, I would be happy for you to do this.

Carmen Dalli
Lecturer and PhD student

Date _____

Thoughts about your child's experience at the centre: e.g., arrival at the centre, child's interest in activities, reaction to other children etc.

Thoughts about your own experience of having a child starting childcare:
e.g., your role at the centre, interaction with staff and other parents etc.

Dear

I am very grateful that you have agreed to participate in this study.

As you know, one of the aims of this study is to describe the experience of starting childcare from the point of view of the children as well as their parents and one member of staff at the child's centre.

The idea of this journal notebook is that it will be a record of your thoughts about _____'s experience of childcare as well as about your own experience of this as a member of the staff at the centre.

Each page of the notebook is divided in two. In the top half of the page I'm asking you to record your thoughts about _____ at the centre. For example, you may have thoughts about how the child behaved during the leave-taking from the parent, how the child reacted to a given event during the day or session, what might be affecting the child's behaviour and anything else that comes to mind about the child's experience on that day at the centre.

In the bottom half of the page I'm asking you to record your thoughts about your own experience of looking after _____ at the centre. For example, you may have thoughts about the way the child interacted with you, about your interactions with the parent, about your role in the child's experience at the centre and anything else that may come up for you on that day related to taking your child to the centre.

I very much appreciate the time you will put into this exercise. I hope that the record you keep will not only prove useful to me but also interesting for you as well. As I said in my letter of introduction if you wish to keep a copy of these records for your own use, I would be happy for you to do this.

Carmen Dalli
Lecturer and PhD student

Date _____

Thoughts about the new child's experience at the centre: e.g., arrival at the centre, child's interest in activities, reaction to other children etc.

Thoughts about your own experience with the child at the centre: e.g., your role in the child's day, interaction with parent/s of the child etc.

Key to data references

In-text references to the data are coded by the case study number (e.g., CS1 for case study 1) followed by the name of the research instrument (e.g., PIS1 for Parent Interview Schedule 1). Within each data set, additional references were as follows:

i. Interviews

The format used is: case study number, name of interview schedule, page reference and question number.

Example:

CS1.PIS2.2.1	Case study 1, parent interview schedule 2, page two, question 1.
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Note: In case study 2, the two teacher participants had separate first interviews; the data from each of their interviews is distinguished through the use of the letter 'a' for Anna, and 'b' for John as in the following example:

CS2.TIS1a.7.4b	Case study 2, teacher interview schedule 1, teacher interview 1(Anna), page 7, question 4b.
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ii. Journals

The format used is: case study number, parent or teacher journal, page reference, line number/s.

Examples:

CS3.PJ.1.18-24	Case study 3. parent journal, page 1, lines 18 to 24
CS1.PJ.7.15-19;7-14;21-28	Case study 1, parent journal, page 7, lines 15 to 19, 7 to 14, and 21 to 28.

iii. Fieldnotes

The format used was: case study number, nature of data (fieldnotes), type of visit (orientation or sole attendance), number of orientation visit out of total orientation visits for that case study, or week number of sole attendance visits which in all cases totalled six, and time the observation/field note was made.

Examples:

CS4.Fieldnotes, orientation visit 8/8, 10.03 Case study 4 fieldnotes, eighth orientation visit out of 8, at 10.03 am.

CS4.Fieldnotes, sole attendance week 3 Case study 4 fieldnotes, in week 3 of sole attendance.

Notes:

- 1 Often, the time of the observation record is given at the start of the data cited as in the following example:

12.05 Sophie's sitting at the corner of table beneath Julie's highchair- she says "hello" to Julie who points to her bib and says "bib bib". They play "touch-my-hand" games as Sophie puts her hand on Julie's highchair.

(CS4.Fieldnotes, sole attendance week 3)

- 2 All time references use the 24 hour clock.

iv Video-records

The format used was: case study number, nature of data (video-records), type of visit (orientation or sole attendance), number of orientation visit out of total orientation visits for that case study, or week number of sole attendance visits which in all cases totalled six, and time the observation/field note was made.

Example:

CS1.Video records, orientation visit 1/8	Case study 1, video records of the first orientation visit out of 8.
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v. Case descriptions

The format used is: the case study number, name of data, and page number.

Example:

CS1.case description, p9	Case study 1, case description, page 9.
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vi. Other centre documents

Material from centre documents is cited by case study number, name of the document and by page number in the document.

Example:

CS3, parent guidebook, p3	Case study 3, parent guidebook document, page 3.
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