



# The Impact of Teachers in the Early Years: Professional Identity and Agency

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## Today's focus

- Sources of professional identity for the early childhood teacher and educators
- The complex roles played by the GTCS- registered teacher with a particular focus on the triangle of child development, wellbeing and attainment across the Early Level of Curriculum for Excellence and the place of early years within the wider educational community.
- The importance of voice, agency and advocacy links to the positive contribution of teachers as part of the early childhood workforce, and reasserts the place of their pedagogical input for children's futures.
- The triangle of child development, wellbeing and attainment across the early level
- A number of important national and international publications and examples of good practice in Scotland.

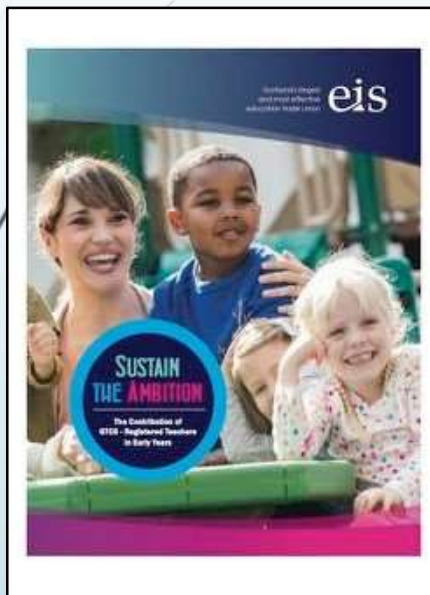


# Complexity in the early childhood teacher's identity, roles and agency

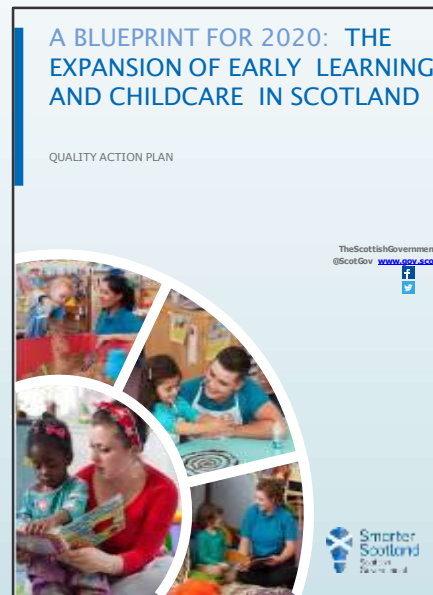
- Teacher agency
  - What is it?
  - The power to act... how actors act (individual efforts, resources, context)
  - Dispositions, resource and force characteristics in context
  - Is it a good thing?
  - How do we achieve agency?
  - Starting with identity
  - Thinking ecologically
  - Shared words: shared meanings: shared practices
  - If a bird has been in a cage for a decade and suddenly finds the door open, it should not be surprising if the bird does not wish to leave (Eisner, 1992, p.617)
  - "An edifice of control and performativity" (Priestley, 2017)
- Complexity of the role
  - Unique complexity of the role
  - Knowledge of the curriculum
  - Understanding of pedagogy
  - Progressing learning
  - Additional support needs
  - Supporting transitions
  - Family and community engagement
  - Leadership and mentoring
  - (from Sustain the Ambition, 2016)

# National publications

An edifice of performativity or the bird let out of the cage?



2016



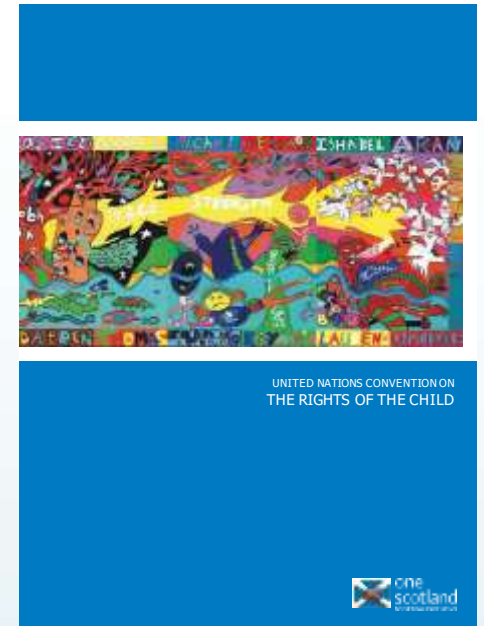
2017



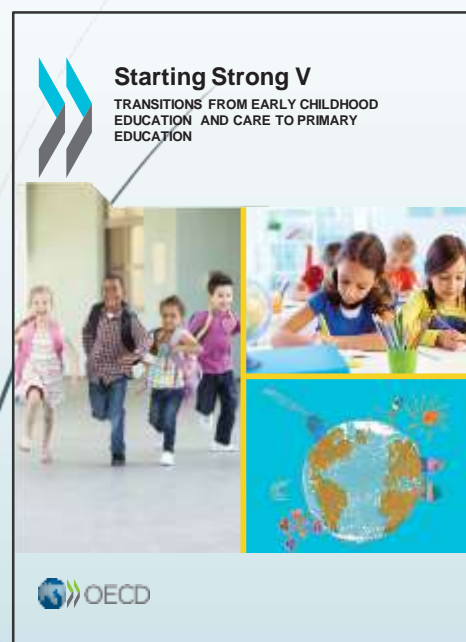
2019



2020



# Insights from early childhood research, policy and practices internationally



2017



2018



2019

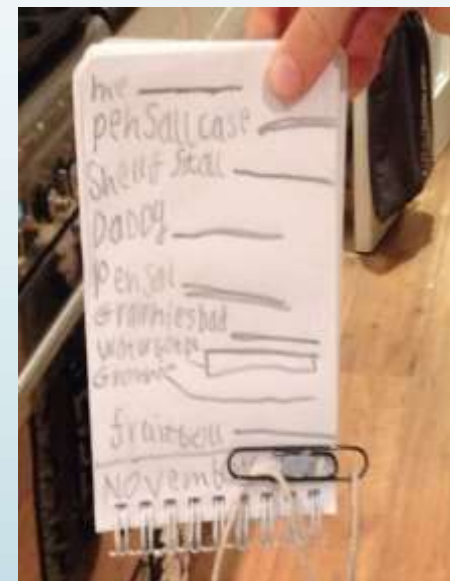
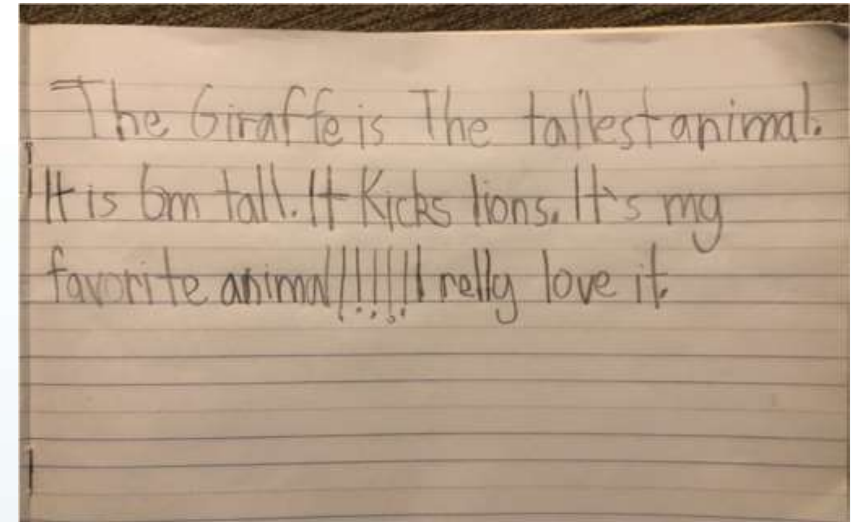


2020

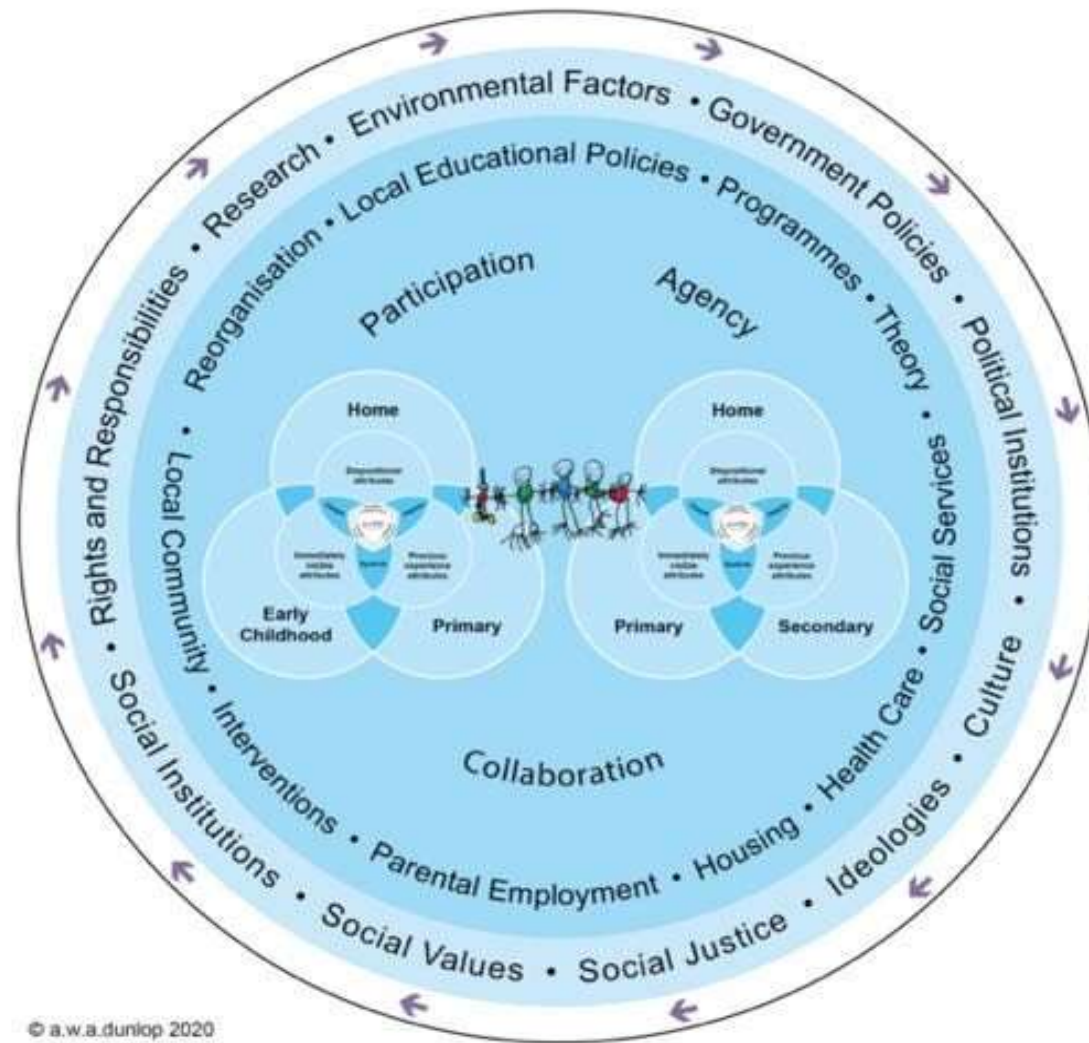


# Agency for children, families and practitioners

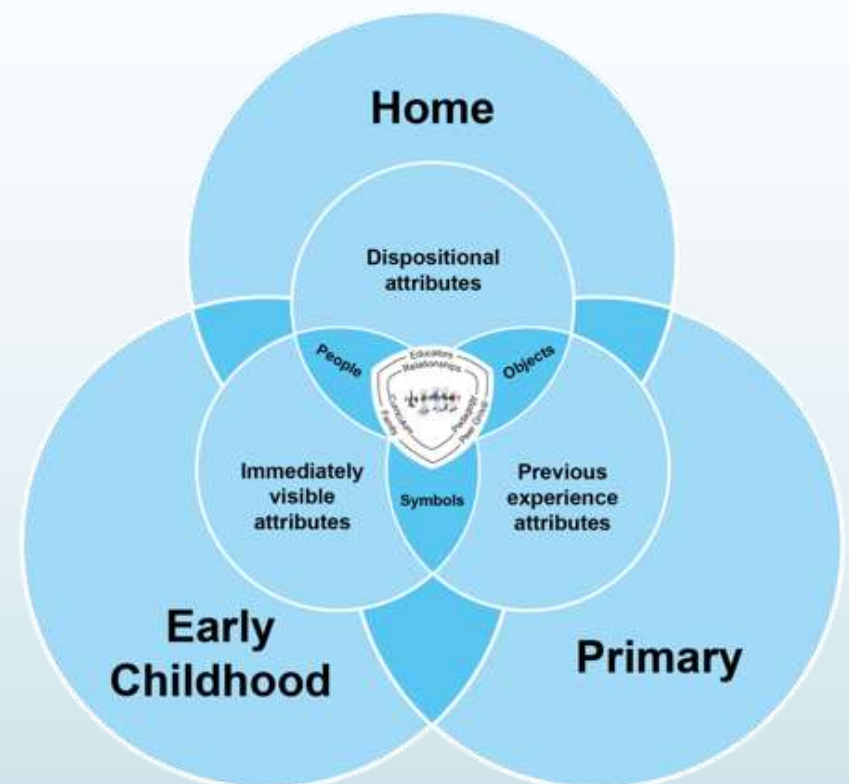
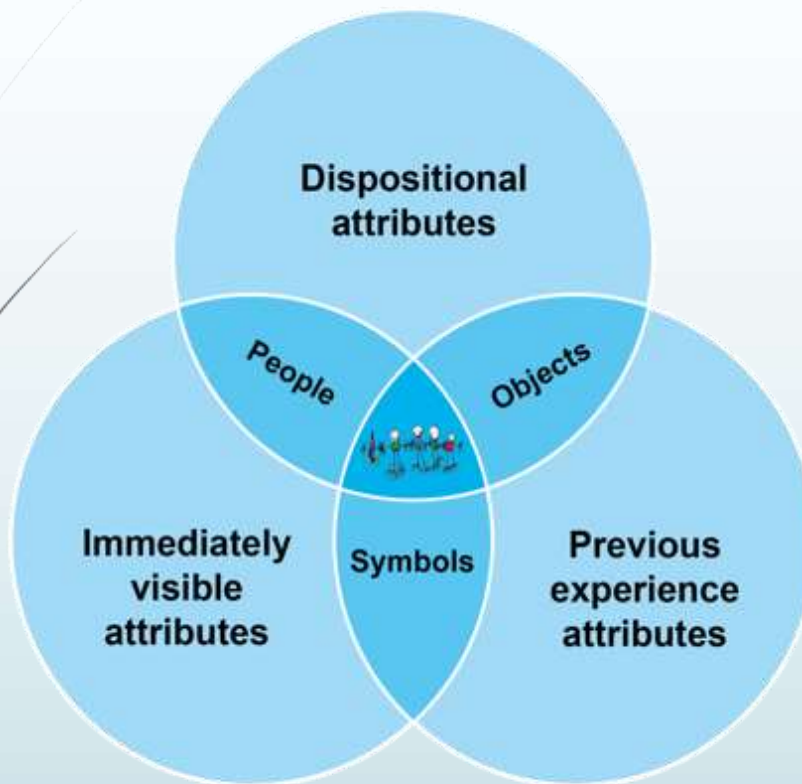
- Reminders of children's varying home experiences – all children bring these experiences to ELC and School
- The importance of what goes before – an continuum of learning – children's agency
- A gift of time - gift of the Early Level
- Contextualising learning and development
- Children's funds of knowledge and working theories
- Working theories about a balance scale relative to weight
- Agency at home



# Thinking ecologically



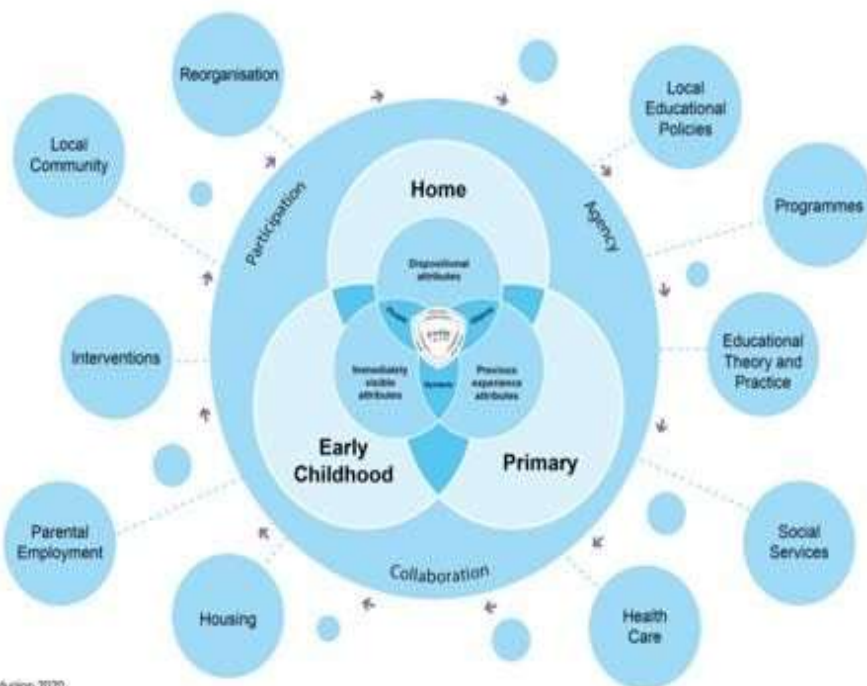
# Layers of thinking and practices





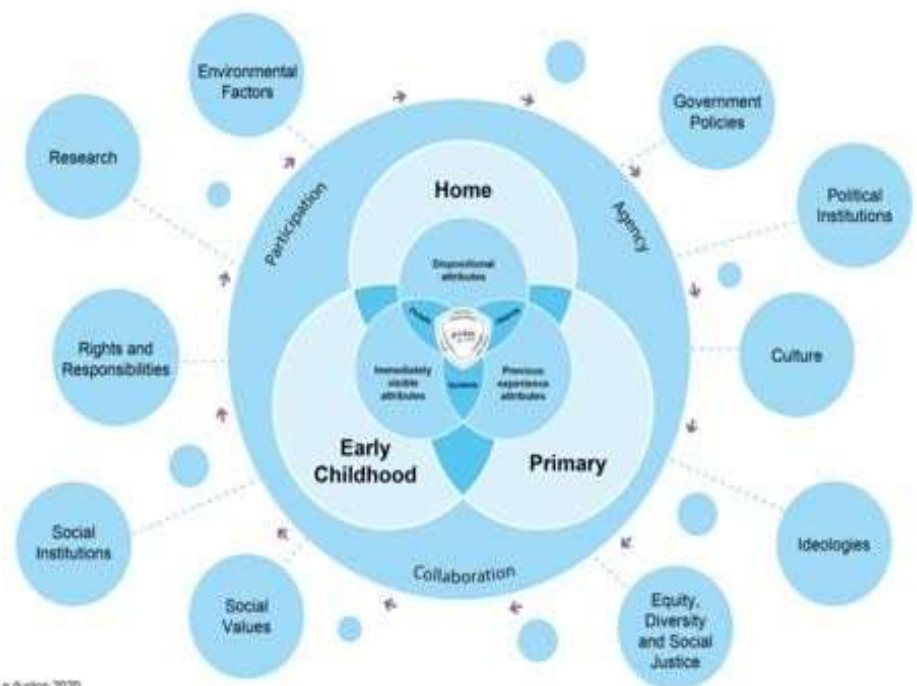
# Identity, agency and role

Immediate Influences on the Early Childhood-Primary Journey



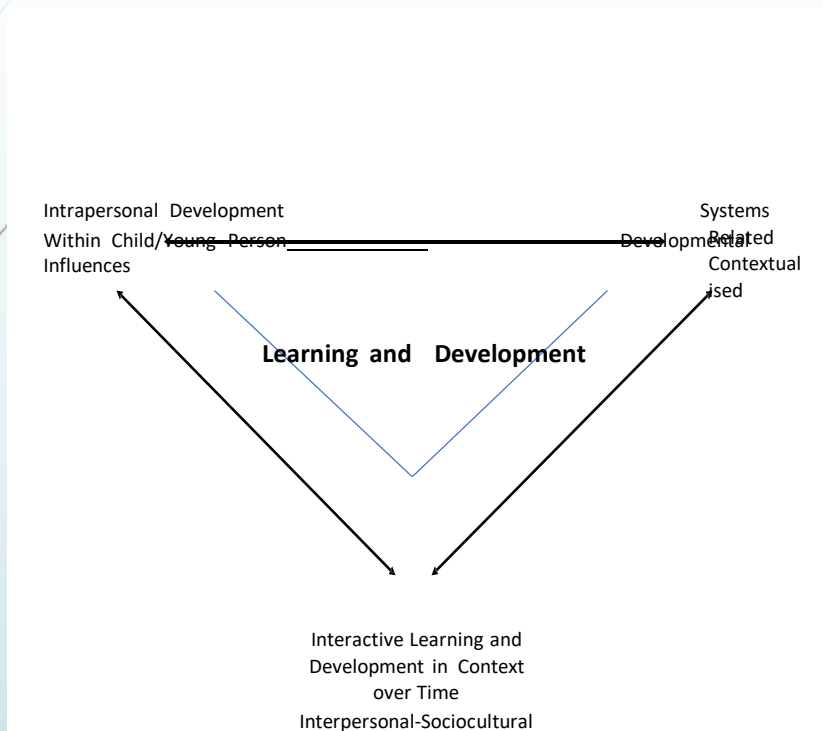
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Wider Influences on the Early Childhood-Primary Journey



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# Shared words: shared meanings: shared practices



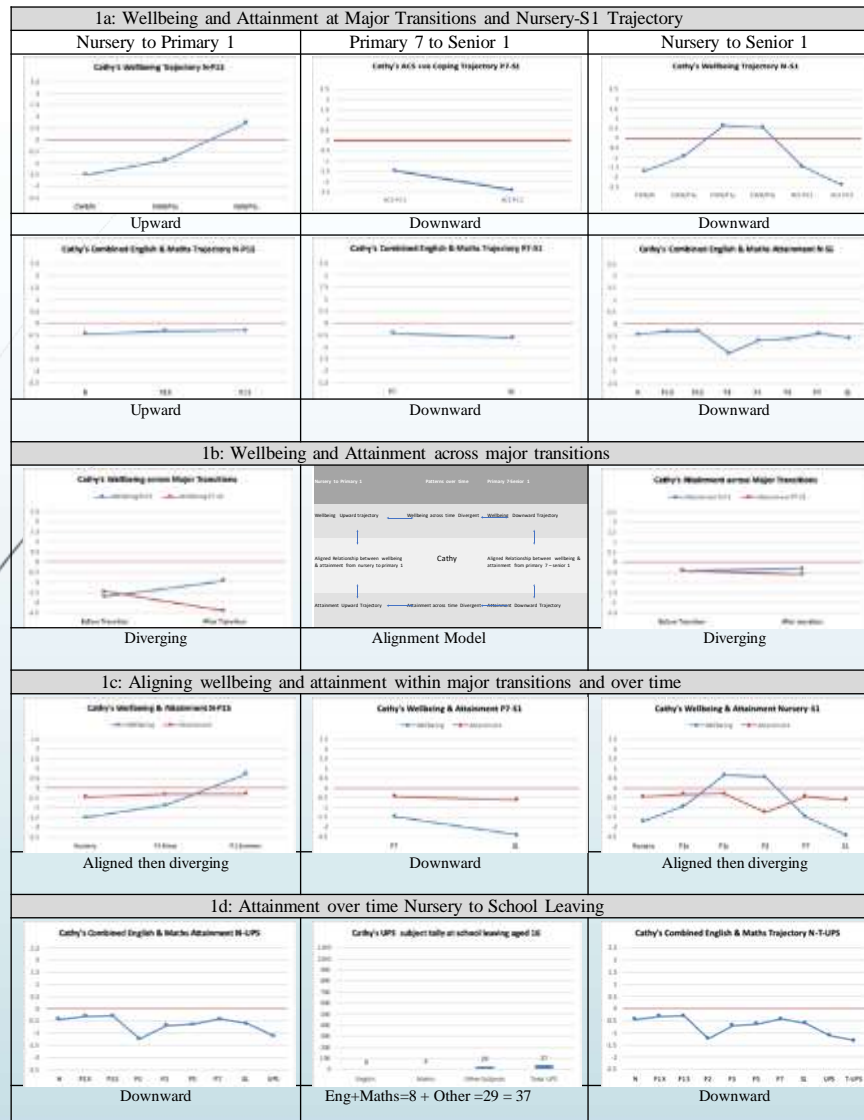
- Despite the similar language used by early educators in early years preschool and primary settings to describe their intentions and motivations for children, there can be major discontinuities between settings, relationships, pedagogy and curriculum and that consequently there are increased challenges for children and for their parents and educators.

**Table 4 Katie's teachers' views.**

Discussion Point	Mrs Drummond	Mrs Devine
<b>Aims and philosophy of teachers</b>	First priority - influence of staff who work with children. Pleasant, welcoming bright environment. Emotional side comes first before you can do any teaching. Broad, well balanced and well thought through - trying to use what motivates children). Make it exciting. Planning, evaluating, leading the team, extending children's learning.	Helping each child to do their best in as stimulating as possible environment to the best of my ability. Being happy, reassured, not going to be asked to do anything outwith capabilities and understanding at the start.
<b>Views on practice, approach and teaching style</b>	Evaluating - what children get out of what's going on. Definitely base don child's interests. Child centred - sounds a bit jargony , but really do start with them. Do of course make decisions about areas. Do act on interests in child, but if there seems to be an opportunity - e.g. now woodwork Interactive. Building on children's interests and needs. Not frightened to teach in response to direction children observed to need or be interested in. Responsive.	Quite structured. Organisation is a key. Have to have a sense of humour. Have to know when to let children speak and knowing when you've got to stop what's in the plan and let instinct take over. Recognising when they've had enough.. Like any stage need time to get to know children and them to know you. Bound to be a settling in time.
<b>Effects of curriculum innovation</b>	Used to a framework: builds on this	Kind of pressure on teachers makes it harder to respond to your instinct. More like a secondary teacher. Clock watching. Got to be seen to be doing it. . Could use time worrying how to complete record keeping to think about "How can I improve the maths groups/make reading more fun! Compartmentalised learning!
<b>Play as a medium for learning</b>	Play as medium of learning. Observation and awareness of children's interests and strengths is important.	Feel strongly about the room: making it attractive for wee ones. Makes me feel quite critical. Construction, jigsaws, water and sand, house area but changing activities - making them more structured to progress. Baking. Art Computer Storytelling group.

Aspect	Preschool Comment
<b>Emotional, personal, social</b>	Has a good self image and inner confidence. Independent in self help skills. Plays co-operatively and shares resources. Takes the lead with other children. Willing to share experiences with others. Negotiates with others. Self reliant. Takes turns.
<b>Communication and Language.</b>	Follows simple and complex instructions. Listens to the sounds of words in stories, songs, music and rhymes. Recounts events or experiences. Makes up a story and tells it with details to small group and listens to other stories. Uses books to find interesting information. Matches labels from shopping package. Can read some signs and logos. Can write first name.
<b>Knowledge and Understanding of the World.</b>	Asks questions, experiments, designs, makes and solves problems. Enjoys technology. Identifies and uses numbers up to 10 during play. Can write numbers 1-10. Uses maths language appropriately. Investigates and seeks solutions.
<b>Primary One Comment</b>	
<b>6 months into school</b>	Katie is a happy little girl who has settled in well to school. She is confident in everything she does and works steadily through any task which she is given. Her reading is coming along nicely and she knows all her vocabulary. She is in the top reading and number group. Her writing skills are good so far. Each letter is correctly formed and well spaced and sized. She is obviously not very fond of colouring in but is beginning to make more effort with it. She enjoys listening to stories and has good concentration. She remembers details well and can put events into the correct sequence. Her phonics skills are very good and she enjoys all kinds of phonological activities. She is confident with her number work and is in the top maths group.
<b>Language. (end of year report)</b>	Katie is an interested and willing pupil who has made a good start with her reading. Her letters are well formed and all her work is neatly presented. She listens attentively to instructions and completes her work accurately. She is a keen participant in all class discussions.
<b>Mathematics. (end of year report)</b>	Katie is very confident with her maths work and tackles everything with enthusiasm. Working at level A.

**Case Study Trajectories (CST) Diagram 1: 'On the Margins'**  
 [Author's note- Vertical axis = standard deviation]



# Wellbeing, attainment and transitions

- Importance of early experience
- Importance of route through transitions
- Links between wellbeing, attainment and "school success"
- Is there such a thing as a good transition?









## Indicative publications

- Dunlop, A-W. (2003). Bridging early educational transitions in learning through children's agency. *Transitions. European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, Themed Monograph Series*, 1, p. 67- 86.
- Dunlop, A-W. (2003). Bridging Children's Early Education Transitions through Parental Agency and Inclusion. *Education in the North*. P.55-6
- Dunlop, A-W. (2003). Bridging Children's Early Education Transitions through Teacher Collaboration. Peer reviewed paper accepted for *New Zealand Association for Research in Education and Australian Association for Research in Education Joint Conference*, Auckland, 29 November- 3 December 2003.
- Dunlop, A-W. (2015). Aspirations and actions: early childhood from policy to practice in Scotland, *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 23:3, 258-273
- Dunlop, A-W (2016). Policy aspirations and workforce reform across the UK: A View from Scotland. *Early Education Journal*, Spring 2016, 78, 10-12 & 15.
- Dunlop, A-W. (2018). 'The Child's Curriculum as a Gift', In Colwyn Trevarthen, Jonathan Delafield-But and Aline-Wendy Dunlop, (Editors) *The Child's Curriculum*. (pp212-234) Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dunlop, A-W. (2020 forthcoming). On the Margins, Getting By, Persevering or Flying High? The intersection of wellbeing, attainment and transitions in a Scottish longitudinal study. Special Issue *Transitions in Education: Frontiers in Education*.



## Links to publications

- EIS (2016) Sustain the Ambition. The Contribution of GTCS-Registered Teachers in Early Years. Edinburgh: The Educational Institute of Scotland and the Child's Curriculum Group. [<http://childscurriculum.org.uk>]
- OECD (2017) Starting Strong V: Transitions from Early Childhood Education and Care to Primary Education. [<https://www.oecd.org/publications/starting-strong-v-9789264276253-en.htm>]
- OECD (2018) Engaging Young Children: *Lessons from Research about Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care*. [<https://www.oecd.org/education/engaging-young-children-9789264085145-en.htm>]
- OECD (2019) Providing Quality Early Childhood Education and Care: *Results from the Starting Strong Survey 2018* [<https://www.oecd.org/publications/providing-quality-early-childhood-education-and-care-301005d1-en.htm>]
- OECD (2020) Early Learning and Child Well-being. A Study of Five year olds in England, Estonia and the United States [<http://www.oecd.org/education/school/early-learning-and-child-well-being-study/early-learning-and-child-well-being-3990407f-en.htm>]
- Priestley, M., Biesta, G. and Robinson, S. (2017). Teacher Agency. An Ecological Approach. London: Bloomsbury
- Scottish Government (2020) Realising the Ambition: Being Me, National Practice Guidance for the Early Years in Scotland. [<https://education.gov.scot/media/3bjpr3wa/realisingtheambition.pdf>]
- Scottish Transitions as Tools for Change Project Group (2019) Scottish Early Childhood and Families Transitions Position Statement. Glasgow: University of Strathclyde Available at [<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Documents/nih105-ScottishEYTransitionsPositionStatement0519.pdf>]