

Parent And Educator Perspectives And Experiences Of Infants' Transition To Childcare

by

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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the transition children experience when moving from exclusive care by their first attachment figure (usually their mother) to centre care. The purpose of this study is to provide an in-depth understanding of how parents and childcare educators experience infants' transitions to childcare and how relationships are built between parents and educators and between educators and children during the settling-in process and beyond it. This investigation is approached relationally using attachment theory as an investigative lens within a qualitative case study design over a 16-month period. Data were collected by participating in theory/practice inquiry meetings, observation at the centre, and individual educator interviews. Four families also shared their experiences with me during in-depth parent interviews and offered information about their expectations, concerns, and fears for the transition process and beyond. Results reveal that parents as well as educators experience social expectations that are culturally based and influence their actions, decisions and feelings, either acknowledged or unconsciously. Educators demonstrated great effort in defining their professional roles as early childhood educators, something that influenced not only their professional understanding, but also their interpretation of the policies and structures of the childcare society, and their personal relationships with both parents and children. Surprisingly, the educators' opinions about attachment to the children in their care as well as their professional roles and relationships varied a great deal from conventional understandings of attachment theory and relational approaches to teaching. Parents' expressed ambivalent views about childcare, revealing the tension between work demands and socio-cultural expectations about parenting. Most prominent for families however was that they experienced trusting and supporting relationships with educators.

Keywords: Transitions; childcare; relationships; primary caregiver model; attachment theory

*In loving memory of my father
John Barrington Hostettler who taught me to
always reach for the stars*

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Chapter 1. Introduction

In the current era, with the majority of Canadian mothers or fathers returning to work immediately after paid parental leave, the transition to out-of-home care is a significant time of change for the whole family that has a widespread impact. Although the importance of transition has been acknowledged and transitions from early childhood programs to elementary school have been well researched (i.e., Magetts & Kiening, 2013; Perry, Dockett, & Petriwskyi, 2014), transitions from home to centre-based care have received less research emphasis.

This topic has interested me both professionally and personally. In my work as a college lecturer for Kindergarten and early elementary teachers, I noted anecdotally that this was a difficult time for parents and an awkward time for teachers. When I became a mother, I started to see the issues from a different and more personal perspective. With the birth of my son my professional interest started to mingle with my personal interest. As I was working on my PhD, new to the country and without any family support, I had no choice but to rely on professional childcare. Finding a childcare solution that would meet my child's as well as my needs was a challenge. For him I wanted consistency; a place where he could build lasting relationships. For me I wanted someone I could trust to take good care of my child. After spending his first months of life together, leaving my child for an extended period of time was hard to imagine. Given my professional background, the expectations I had for my son's start in care included initial shared caregiving, an opportunity for both of us to build a relationship with his caregiver, and gradual separation. What I hoped my son and I would gain from a gradual entry process was an opportunity for both of us to build trust in his caregiver and an opportunity to get comfortable with the separation. Researching transitions to childcare while experiencing them made my work even more meaningful to me.

This study is concerned with the transition children experience when they move from exclusive care by their first attachment figure (usually their mother) to centre care

where there are many other children and more than one educator. This transition, also called orientation, the settling-in process, or gradual entry, for the purpose of this study is defined as the first 1-4 weeks of childcare attendance. In the first few visits to the centre, children are typically accompanied by their parent, who gradually extends the time he or she leaves the child at the centre as the days progress. As maternity/paternity leave policies in Canada allow for 12 months of absence from work, transitions to childcare usually happen around the child's first birthday, a time when attachments to primary caregivers have usually been established or are in the process of being established.

The purpose of this study is to provide an in-depth exploration of how parents and childcare educators experience infants' transitions to childcare and how relationships are built between parents and educators and between educators and children during the settling-in process and beyond it. My thesis will first present the theory underlying this study starting with a focus on relationships. A triangle of care model, as well as the primary caregiving approach will be introduced. Attachment theory will be used as an investigative lens, to deepen understandings of non-parental childcare services. This will be explored through a review of research on nonmaternal care and attachment security. Following the review, research questions for the current study are presented. Next, I present the research design, a description of the setting, as well as methods of data collection and analysis, and then describe the transition process used by the centre participating in this research. My results are structured in a section for parents and one for educators, with a focus on individual, structural, and cultural findings within those groups. In my summary and conclusion I present a discussion of my findings that highlights this study's contributions to the literature and proposals for further research.

While the literature reviewed for this study variously referred to "caregivers", "teachers", "practitioners", and "educators", I have chosen to use the term "educators" for my participants, because the term is typically used in the childcare setting under discussion and throughout the province.

Chapter 2. Theory

Relationships are central to childcare and transitions to childcare are about building relationships among children, parents and childcare educators (Brooker, 2008; Goldschmied & Jackson, 2004; Liebermann, 1993). In this chapter I review strategies for building relationships of care in childcare centres and introduce attachment theory as a lens on children's relationships with their caregivers. Literature concerned with children's attachments to their mothers, as well as literature concerned with young children's attachments to their educators in centre care is reviewed. At the end of the chapter I summarize why this literature is important to consider when looking at transitions to childcare. Further, limitations of these research studies are presented and the current study is introduced.

2.1. A Focus on Relationships

Starting nonmaternal care not only affects the child, but parents and educators as well. During the child's transition to nonmaternal childcare the needs, fears, and expectations of all three parties come together. For parents, educators offer a new perspective on their child. Children spend time in a new environment that offers new possibilities for their stimulation and development. For educators, welcoming a new child into the centre is a regular if unpredictable occurrence as each child reacts differently to the transition, and has different caretaking needs.

In infant and toddler care and education relationships are the heart of best practices. A relationship-based approach is one in which relationship partners respect and value each other within their multiple spheres of interaction. In a childcare setting it is common for multiple relationships to form between and among professionals and other adults who function in the various roles that touch the lives of infants, toddlers and their families (McMullen & Dixon, 2009), but also between the children and the adults caring for them.

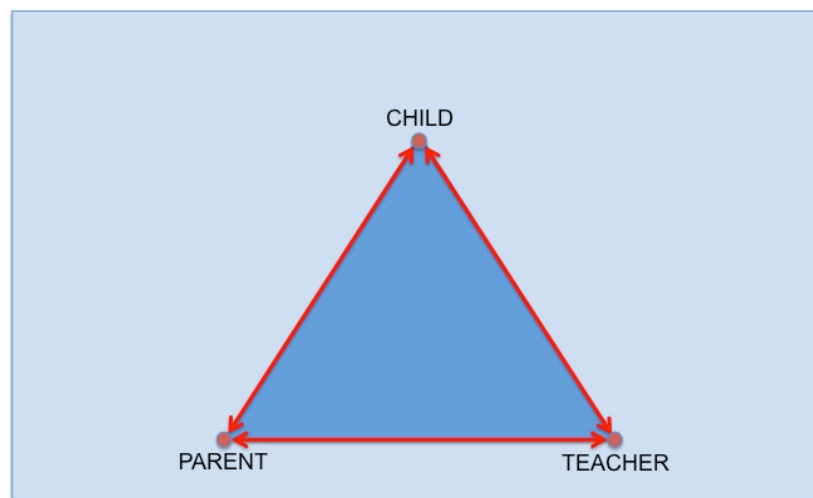
The next section explains the worldview that is foundational to this study, and how the two theoretical perspectives (Vygotskian theory and attachment theory) will be used to investigate and discuss the multiple spheres of interaction occurring in the childcare setting, before introducing a triangle of care model as it relates to family transitions to childcare and the caregiver, parent and child relationships that ensue.

2.1.1. Relationships in a Triangle of Care

From a Vygotskian (1978) perspective, to understand the role of dyadic relationships in the child's development, the larger social structures in which those relationships occur must also be considered. This study is founded on the cultural historical views of Vygotsky who theorized that the development of human thought and cognition are a function of our social context as well as cultural differences (including social relationships and experiences). Vygotsky and his followers consider mediation in the context of social interactions to be the major determinant of children's development. From a Vygotskian perspective, adults play a key role in mediating the development of children's mental processes during social interactions (Karpov, 2005). Vygotsky theorized that the social context influences more than just our attitudes and beliefs, it profoundly influences how and what we think. The social context includes the entire social milieu and everything in the child's environment that is directly or indirectly influenced by culture. Vygotsky (1978) believed that a child's development cannot be separated from his or her social context. In a theoretical approach inspired by cultural-historical theory Vygotsky believed that three levels of the social context should be considered: a) the immediate interactive level of the *individuals* interacting with each other, b) the level of the *social structures of the institutions* (family and childcare), which influence the child, the family, and the educators, and c) the *general cultural or social level*, including features of the society at large (Bodrova & Leong, 2007; Hedegaard, 2009). For the purposes of this study, my main focus of analysis is on: a) the interactive level of individual relationships, including the child, the parents and the professional caregiver, as well as the relationships among them, in what Brooker (2008) refers to as a triangle of care (as discussed below, see Figure 1). The Vygotskian concept of fundamental emotional relationships is very similar to definitions of attachment: whereas attachment theory says that insecure attachments affect the child's emotional state and

that in turn affects his/her cognitive development, Vygotskians believe that insecure attachments also deprive a child of cognitive interactions that are necessary for optimal mental growth, as the interactions between child and attachment figure shape a child's expectations for shared experiences, which are the basis for the acquisition of mental functions, and therefore crucial cognitive experiences (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). Attachment theory is used to investigate dyadic relationships children have with parents and educators; Vygotskian theory takes the social context into account and includes features of the social structure (of family and childcare), as well as features of the society at large (cultural level) when analysing these relationships. Hence, although interactions within the triangle of care will be my focus, the triangle itself must be considered within the context of the broader social structures of the family and the childcare centre, which are influenced by the cultural norms we live with today.

Figure 1: Relationships in a Triangle of Care



Note: Taken from Broker (2008).

Within the triangle of care model, Broker (2008) makes two assumptions: firstly, that relationships are the most important component of a child's centre care experience; and secondly, that childcare educators are charged with establishing good links with families and communities, in order to know more about the child's early life, and to build a partnership that will benefit the child and the family. In literature related to caregiver-parent partnerships, strategies for developing relationships with parents are discussed, for example, inviting parents into the centre and taking them on a tour to let parents

experience what children do in childcare (Goldschmied & Jackson, 2004; Smidt; 2009). Spending time with the family during a home visit, learning about important people in a child's life, about likes, dislikes, fears, and passions can help centre staff to understand the child, the family, and the home environment. Within this paper, the triangle of care model will be used to illustrate the individuals (mothers, fathers, children, and childcare educators) and the relationships among them in the context of the identified social structures.

Triangle of Care – The Individuals. As has been mentioned before, childcare is first and foremost about relationships. Starting childcare is an experience of adjustment in a new social setting for parents and children, offering possibilities for new activities and new social relations (Dalli, 2000). For children, it is about their relationships with their parents, and also about forming new relationships with caregivers and other children. For parents, childcare can be about how to let go, perhaps experiencing waves of hurt and guilt, and developing ways of communicating with the child's caregiver, leading to a solid partnership (Lieberman, 1993). Further, childcare is also about relationships of the professional caregiver, about developing a secure and stable relationship with the child, while at the same time developing an open and trusting relationship with the child's parents.

Child. Through emotional contact and emotional communication in relationships with their caregivers, young children become socialized participants in society. Vygotskian theory emphasizes the importance of children's one-on-one interactions with parents and caregivers as being critical for development. Vygotsky used the Russian term *Perezhivanie* (there is no adequate English translation), to explain the process through which children emotionally respond to a social situation. This term is used to refer to the way children become aware of, interpret and emotionally relate to an event or an interaction in their environment (Mahn, 2003). Vygotsky believed that during infancy all mental functions are shared between the caregiver and child, and only at the end of infancy do some of these processes become appropriated by the child. Early emotional dialogues between caregiver and child provide motivations for later forms of shared activity that become a vital part of the infant's life. These shared interactions become the foundation of the social context that leads to learning and development in a uniquely human way (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). Similarly, Rogoff, Malkin and Gilbride

(1984) explain that the rapid development of babies into socialized participants in society is accomplished through a finely tuned combination of the guidance of more experienced people and the infant's skills. Infant-adult interactional strategies and infant's skills together produce development.

Family. Decisions about the kind and amount of childcare can be influenced by various familial or maternal characteristics, such as availability of childcare subsidy, age of child, maternal attitudes and beliefs about childrearing, or maternal psychological characteristics (McKim, Cramer, Stuart, & O'Connor, 1999). Factors influencing care decisions might also influence parents' openness and willingness to build new relationships with care providers. For example, a mother who would rather stay home with her child than go back to work might be ambivalent about building a strong relationship with the educator. Families are also apt to compare and contrast their own values and attitudes with that of the centre. Trusting relationships between children, parents and centre staff develop more quickly if the families' values are closer to the centres' (Daniel & Shapiro, 1996).

Educators. At the same time as the professional caregiver is developing a relationship with a child, they are developing a relationship with the child's parents. According to Goldschmied and Jackson, (2004), childcare workers should see one of their missions as working to improve the relationship between parent and child. Further, caregivers need to understand the effects of infants' behaviours on their own caregiving, in order to improve their own behaviour towards children in their care (Vallotton, 2009), while acknowledging the importance of their responsibility for children's overall development (Goldschmied & Jackson, 2004). Settling-in is a crucial time for caregivers, as parents seem to be open to information, impressions and possible guidance about how to deal with this transition from the home to the centre environment (Dalli, 1999).

Childcare and Family as Social Structure. Working against these relational and developmental priorities is the structure of many childcare organizations. For example, high staff turnover in childcare centres throughout the year (Russel & Brunson Day, 2010) leads to many changes in caregivers for children, and low levels of adult-child interaction. Another example of inconsistency in care is the practice of changing children from the baby to the toddler room, and then from the toddler to the

preschool room (Goldschmied & Jackson, 2004). Both professional caregivers as well as children need opportunities and time to understand each other's behaviours and cues so that secure, stable relationships can develop (Barnas & Cummings, 1994; Goldschmied & Jackson, 2004; Howes & Hamilton, 1992a, 1992b; Lee, 2006; Ragozin, 1980). In addition, Lee (2006) suggests that when forming relationship, structural factors such as centre philosophy, curriculum, and childcare environment, as well as various kinds of systemic and human support should be taken into consideration as much as possible, to better understand and broaden the focus between all parties involved. This might be done with the strategies mentioned above to welcome the parents into the centre, or by offering a time and place for parent-educator meetings after centre closure to honour parental work place demands. To this end, each family's individual parenting philosophy should be considered along with their childcare priorities and work demands.

General Cultural Level. Childcare after age 12 months is a common cultural trend in Canada due to the current parental leave policy. Following the birth of a child the mother can get up to 15 weeks of partly paid maternity leave which can then be followed by 35 weeks partly paid parental leave claimed by either the mother or the father of the child (Service Canada, 2014). In Canada almost 70% of women with children under the age of 3 years rely on some sort of childcare (data from 2011; as cited in Vanier Institute, 2013). From this, childcare attendance can be assumed to be a consistent trend over time.

As mentioned before, this study focuses on childcare transitions at an individual level and on the relationships between and among individuals, taking the structural as well as the cultural level of the social context into account. On the individual level, to develop strong trusting relationships between all participants, frequent positive interactions between them are needed. One possibility to foster such relationships is the introduction of a primary care or key person model, discussed in the next section.

2.1.2. Primary Caregiver Model

Different childcare settings have different philosophies and practices regarding care responsibility. In some cases, all educators care for all children. An alternate model is the *primary caregiver* or *key person model* (Nutbrown, 2006; Brooker, 2008)

wherein one educator cares for a group of children for whom she has the main responsibility.

The primary caregiver model is supported by research showing that children in distress prefer stable caregivers (Barnas & Cummings, 1994). Stable caregivers are also more effective in providing children with a base from which to explore and source of security. In a primary caregiver model the organization of care must ensure regular occasions when concentrated attention is given by a particular caregiver to a particular child, for stable relationships to form and be maintained (Barnas & Cummings, 1994; Goldschmied & Jackson, 2004; Howes & Hamilton, 1992a, 1992b; Lee, 2006; Ragozin, 1980). However, the primary caregiver model also has potential problems. Parents might be resentful of a close caregiver-child relationship. There may be a need for centre staff to explain to parents that children need a person they can relate to in a special way during the time they spend away from home (Goldschmied & Jackson, 2004). Further, it might be difficult for centres to accurately match the infant to the right caregiver initially.

Despite these possible drawbacks, the primary caregiver model is beneficial in fostering relationships and easing the child's transition to centre-based care (Daniel & Shapiro, 1996). Lally (2010, 2013) also reports that the primary caregiver model enhances children's sense of security. This is done when caregivers are accurately able to read a baby's cues in order to respond appropriately, and to further engage the child in interactive play, as well as back-and-forth communication, all of which require an intimate relationship, and therefore prolonged time together. Primary caregivers are typically responsible for the child's intimate care such as personal care and feeding. In a primary caregiver model educators take the initiative in establishing emotional connections with infants in their care (Karpov, 2005) and use the opportunities of feeding and changing infants to make contact with them and to talk to them. Goldschmied and Jackson (2004) introduced the concept of 'islands of intimacy' in their primary caregiver model to describe a time built firmly into the day's program where a key person for each small group of children gives her undivided attention to each child, a time she/he uses for attending and listening to the child.

From Goldschmied and Jackson's experience working with childcare staff, childcare workers find much more satisfaction in their work when they have a key person system in place, and regular time set-aside for a parent to talk in peace to their child's special person (2004). According to Goldschmied and Jackson this has worked particularly well to establish a partnership between parents and staff, and for considering the best interest of the child. Ebbeck and Yim (2009) support this claim and cite recent research indicating that the primary caregiver system has a positive impact not only on children, but also on parents and childcare staff. But these authors also highlight the need to further refine the primary caregiving system to better help children in their first transition from home to a childcare centre, and to encourage more centres to adopt this primary caregiving approach. According to Brooker (2008), it is likely that the bonds of affection between the child and caregiver developed through intimate interactions define the care relationship far more than physical care. Fostering positive relationships between infants or toddlers and their primary caregivers is of prime importance to the emotional well being of infants and toddlers. The primary caregiving system provides a process and way of giving emotional support to parents, children and caregivers and also of easing the child's transition from home into childcare (Ebbeck & Yim, 2009). Brooker (2008) highlights the relationship between primary caregiver and parent as particularly important component in the transition process:

The relationship between key worker and parents is a key component of the settling-in process. It is the time when the 'expert' knowledge of the parent (of her own child) meets the 'expert' knowledge of the practitioner (of children in general), and when both must learn to trust and respect each other. (Brooker, 2008, p. 42)

The presence of someone who is very well known to the child (usually a parent) during the settling-in process in childcare is highly valued and supported in the primary caregiver model. The focus should be on the parent-child dyad entering the life of the centre, giving parents and child the opportunity to adapt to the new context gradually (Bove, 2001). To do this, care arrangements require consistently applied rules but also situational and individual flexibility for the transition processes. A qualified caregiver should be empowered to assist an infant and his/her parents throughout the home to centre transition process and to continue to do so until the new attachment networks are fully realized (Daniel & Shapiro, 1996).

A strategy for caregivers in childcare centres to foster positive relationships with infants/toddlers is establishing secure *attachments*. Neo-Vygotskians, who set out to refine Vygotsky's theory, see attachment as a direct outcome of infant-caregiver emotional interactions where "primary caregivers use the situations of gratifications of infants' physiological needs to involve them in emotional interactions" (Karpov, 2005, p.80). Building a bond with parents is an indirect way for caregivers to foster secure attachment with infants and toddlers in centre care (Ebbeck & Yim, 2009). Responsive centre staff is critical to the comfort and security experienced by both the parents and infants in building an appropriate network of attachments, associated with high quality care. To achieve this, centres need to be organized with policies, procedures, and facilities in ways that support the development and maintenance of attachment relationships among infants, parents, and their caregiving partners (Daniel & Shapiro, 1996).

In summary this section highlighted how building strong and trusting relationships among children, parents and educators should be a priority in childcare centres. The idea that an understanding and implementation of the primary caregiving model might be beneficial for secure relationships to develop was introduced in this section followed by a discussion of the quality of such relationships/attachments. In the next section, I look at children's relationships with parents and educators. Literature on attachment theory will be reviewed and the theoretical and practical implications nonparental childcare has for both parents and child.

2.2. Attachment Theory

Attachment theory is concerned with relationships between infants and their primary caregivers, and is grounded in the work of John Bowlby and his colleague Mary Ainsworth. John Bowlby, who is considered the father of attachment theory, was trained as a psychoanalyst but drew on concepts from ethology, cybernetics, information processing, and developmental psychology in formulating his ideas about the nature of the infant's bond with his/her mother and its significance for future social emotional functioning. Bowlby highlighted the stress experienced by infants with prolonged separations from their primary caregivers and pointed out the developmental risks

entailed in such separations. Attachment theory posits that all children need a *stable and secure* relationship with at least one caregiver for healthy socioemotional development to occur. A secure attachment relationship develops and thrives when a primary caregiver is perceptive of her child's signals and responds promptly and appropriately to them (Bowlby, 1969).

Further, Bowlby (1969) proposed that the quality of care a child receives contributes to the formation of his/her *internal working model* of self and others. Internal working models are mental representations of the self and other, formed in the context of the caregiver-child relationship. These models consist of expectations about the self, significant others, and the relationship between the two (Johnston, Dweck, & Chen, 2007). They are based on the infant's experience with his or her caregiver, and help individuals to predict and understand their environment, to establish a psychological sense of security, and to engage in survival promoting behaviours. Children with readily available, responsive and reliable caregivers are assumed to develop a representation of the self as acceptable and worthwhile and others as predictable and dependable. Children with inconsistent or unresponsive caregivers are assumed to develop a view of self as unacceptable and unworthy and others as unpredictable, undependable, and potentially unsafe (Bowlby, 1969; Johnston et al., 2007; Pederson, Bailey, Tarabulsky, Bento, & Moran, 2014; Pietromonaco & Feldmann Barrett, 2000). These representations serve as a blueprint for future relationships, as the interactions between a child and the early attachment figure shape the child's expectations for later shared experiences with peers, and other adults (Bodrova & Leong, 2007).

Attachment behaviour refers to the seeking and attaining or retaining proximity to a differentiated and preferred caregiver who the child perceives as better able to cope with the world. Attachment behaviours are activated through real or threatened separation or loss, or unresponsiveness of the attachment figure. Bowlby highlighted that "for a person to know that an attachment figure is available and responsive gives him a strong and pervasive feeling of security, and so encourages him to value and continue the relationship" (2005, p.29f.). Bowlby further emphasised the abundant evidence that almost every child has a preference for one particular person, but in absence of this person that child will choose the next person in his/her hierarchy of preferences. For example, if the mother is unavailable, the father might become the

preferred attachment figure. While attachment behaviour may indeed be shown to a variety of individuals, an *attachment bond*, as an enduring attachment, is confined to very few (Bowlby, 2005). This relationship with the mother or permanent mother substitute should be *intimate, warm, and continuous*, and both mother and child should find enjoyment and satisfaction, for a secure attachment bond to occur (Bowlby, 1951). Bretherton (1992) points out that later summaries of attachment theory often overlook Bowlby's reference to the partners' mutual enjoyment.

The contributions of Bowlby's co-worker, Mary Ainsworth, were highly important and influential in the construction of attachment theory. In her dissertation work Ainsworth discussed the concepts of *safe haven* and *secure base* that she later explored in her naturalistic and laboratory research, and therewith contributed her mentor's William Blatz idea that security and exploratory behaviour are related (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). As soon as infants can crawl or walk, they use their caregivers as a secure base to explore from, and to return to. As an example, in exploring a new playroom an infant uses his mother as a secure base when he glances at her to make sure what he does is okay, or to make sure she is still there. If he becomes frightened or hurts himself, he will return to his mother for comfort. Bowlby later incorporated the notion of secure base as a basic assumption in the attachment paradigm.

Through extensive naturalistic observations in Uganda and later in Baltimore, Ainsworth found striking differences in how promptly, sensitively, and appropriately mothers responded to their infants' signals, and therefore came to acknowledge the crucial role of *maternal sensitivity* in the development of attachments (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bretherton, 1992; van der Horst, 2011). Maternal sensitivity describes a mother's ability to perceive and infer meaning from her infant's signals and respond promptly and in an appropriate way. In Bowlby's view (1969) maternal sensitivity is a key component in fostering relationships in which infants experience the attachment figure (in this case the mother) as a secure base from which to explore and a safe haven to return to under conditions of stress for assurance and comfort.

To test some of Bowlby's ideas empirically, Ainsworth further contributed an innovative methodology called the *Strange Situation Procedure* (SSP). In this structured laboratory procedure the 12-18 month old child is carefully observed playing for 20

minutes while his/her caregiver and a stranger enter and leave the room. The episodes in the procedure are designed to create increasingly stressful conditions for the child to evoke attachment behaviour. Specific observation points are the anxiety the child shows towards the stranger, the child's reaction to the departure of and the reunion with the caregiver, and the amount of exploration shown by the infant. What is most important for revealing attachment quality is the child's behaviour towards his or her mother at reunion. Based on observations of children's behaviours in the SSP, Ainsworth found the children could be grouped in accordance with three attachment categories: secure, insecure-resistant, and insecure-avoidant. Infants are judged *secure* if they are eager to explore the playroom in the presence of their attachment figure but show signs of missing the attachment figure when he or she leaves. Most importantly, on reunion, secure infants actively seek interaction with and are readily comforted by the attachment figure, and soon return to play and exploration. *Insecure-avoidant* infants, in contrast, explore the playroom but show little or no response to leave taking of the attachment figure. They explore even in the absence of their attachment figure and on reunion avoid the mother, look away or turn towards the toys. Infants judged as *insecure-resistant* remain relatively uninterested in exploring the playroom. These infants stay close to their mothers, show great distress on separation, and combine contact resistance and contact seeking on reunion. Further, insecure-resistant infants cannot be easily comforted and remain distressed (Ainsworth et al., 1978; van IJzendoorn, 1995).

In summary, most central to healthy development, according to attachment theory, is that the infant is engaged in a committed caregiving relationship with at least one adult figure. Infants become securely attached to caregivers who act responsively and sensitively in social interactions, and remain consistent over some time. These attachments are seen as the foundation for subsequent social relationships and are specific to the individual infant-caregiver pair (Burchinal, Bryant, Lee, & Ramey, 1992). The experienced patterns of interaction with attachment figures lead to internal working models, which guide a child's perceptions, emotions and expectations in later relationships. Although heavily criticized for the blame potential attachment theory holds, given the implication that it is the mother's responsibility to ensure that adequate bonding and care-giving take place (Corvo & deLara, 2010), Bowlby and Ainsworth have contributed significantly to our ongoing understandings of parent-child relationships and

their work has spawned further research into areas such as attachment behaviours of older children, and attachment relationships to professional caregivers.

In the next section I discuss the usefulness of attachment theory for understanding transitions to nonmaternal care environments, and what implications attachment theory has for families who rely on childcare for their young children.

2.2.1. Implications of Using Nonmaternal Care

As stated above, a growing number of Canadian families rely on nonparental childcare at the end of paid parental leave. Through the lens of attachment theory, the separation of mother and child through the child's entry into part-time or full-time childcare carries the risk of damaging secure mother-child attachment relationships, and has implications for both children and mothers.

Implications for Children. Studies of the transition to nonmaternal childcare have focussed mainly on the effect the child's separation from his or her primary attachment figure has on the attachment relationship. Attachment theory suggests that the first attachment relationship serves as the basis for all other developing relationships. Secure attachments are associated with positive developmental outcomes, and are, in part, dependent on the child's continuous access to the attachment figure. Conversely, insecure attachments are believed to increase the risk for negative developmental outcomes, such as aggression and negative affect (Booth, Rose-Krasnor, & Rubin, 1991; Rose-Krasnor, Rubin, Booth, & Coplan, 1996). When children transition to childcare their first attachment figure is no longer readily available, and they need to build new relationships with new caregiver(s). Further, children need to adjust to a new environment and very likely a different structure of the day. Also, their needs may not be met as promptly as they are used to, due to the number of children in a centre. With more and more children in nonmaternal care arrangements there has been considerable interest in the potential effects of early mother-child separation and as discussed in Section 2.3 a number of studies have investigated these outcomes (Belsky & Rovine, 1988; Burchinal et al., 1992; Daniel & Shapiro, 1996).

Implications for Mothers. Returning to work after giving birth often means a professional caregiver will care for one's child. Leaving one's child in the care of someone else is difficult for many mothers, and hence the transition to childcare is a significant event for mothers as well as children. Mothers may experience a complexity of emotions: expectations of developmental benefits from childcare; self questioning; balancing needs, concerns, hopes, worries, and guilt; as well as fear of losing one's primary place in their child's world (Dalli, 2002). Mothers may be distressed about leaving their child in nonmaternal care, believing that young children profit most from being cared for by their first attachment figure. In addition, parents may have difficulty finding suitable childcare arrangements, as finding childcare space depends on diverse factors such as the child's age, the neighbourhood one lives in, and the number of people on the waitlists. As an example, there were 214 children on the waitlist for the next available Infant/Toddler space at the University where this research project took place (Childcare Society, March 2014). Taken together, the mother's necessary return to work and the accompanying start of nonmaternal care for the infant changes the daily activities of mother and child, affecting their time spent, as well as activities done together. What often occurs is a transition marked by a shift from a close and intense time for the mother and her baby followed by a sudden sharing of the caregiving responsibility between the parents and the childcare educator.

In the following I consider these points in relation to the literature on nonmaternal care and attachment security.

2.3. Literature on Nonmaternal Care and Attachment Security

In this section, I review literature on attachment and nonmaternal care. I first present studies investigating the impact of nonmaternal care on attachment to mothers before reviewing studies on attachment to professional caregivers. Lastly, I discuss why this literature is important for my study, and then conclude with gaps and limitations of the studies reviewed.

2.3.1. Attachment to Mothers

In the early 1980's a number of researchers began investigating the effects of early mother-child separation on attachment formation. A key finding was that routine nonmaternal care in the first year of a child's life was associated with an increased risk of attachment insecurity in infant-mother relationships (see Clarke-Stewart, 1989, for a review of this literature). Moreover, early separation was found to produce relational stress for some children, disturbing the attachment bonds constructed in the first year of a child's life. A variety of questions surrounding the impact of nonmaternal care on young children's attachment security with their mothers have been addressed in this body of research.

For example, Belsky and Rovine (1988) were interested in whether factors such as familial stress, maternal characteristics, and maternal satisfaction might mediate the link between nonmaternal care and attachment relationships. In their study, 149 children from maritally intact working- and middle-class families were investigated. The authors assessed children's attachment status at 12 or 13 months as well as parents' employment status and the child's care arrangement. Information regarding parents' employment and childcare arrangements (specific type and amount of time in care) was obtained during interviews that took place when children were 3, 9 and 12 months of age. The results showed that nonmaternal care increased the risk for insecure attachment, even though half of the children at risk were securely attached. More than 50% of infants with extensive nonparental care (more than 20 hours a week) established secure relationships with one or both parents, despite the significantly elevated risk of insecurity associated with extensive nonmaternal care. This study underlined the differing results of prior studies, as it pointed out that although some children's relationship security seemed to be negatively affected by early out-of-home care, other children's relationships remained secure.

In a study conducted in Italy, Varin, Riva Crugnola, Molina, and Ripamonti (1996) examined whether children's age when entering nonmaternal care influenced their attachment security. Data from 111 children in their third year of childcare were analysed. Age of entry into childcare ranged from 6 months to 29 months. Caregivers assessed social behaviour with the Daycare Adaption Scale, the researchers observed

54 children in reunion with their parents, and rated quality of care in the 6 centres with the Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale (*ITERS*; Harms, Reid, Cryer, & Clifford, 1990, as cited in Varin et al., 1996). The Daycare Adaptation Scale and a checklist were developed specifically for this project and administered using naturalistic observations; the *ITERS* has prior and subsequently been used to assess centre-based care, and has achieved reliable and valid ratings across cultures and regions (Clifford, Reszka, & Rossbach, 2010). Varin et al.'s results indicated that children starting childcare between 6-12 and 18-23 months experienced more frustrations and more frequently displayed difficult reunions with their mothers. The age group that started care from 12-17 months showed the lowest relational distress in coping with the separation. The authors suggest that when children begin to walk their feeling of competence and desire to explore might render temporary separation as less stressful. Further, the authors concluded that age of entry, interacting with other variables, can be relevant for possible effects of childcare. Regarding quality of care, higher rates of play and communication of the caregivers were correlated with easier reunions with mothers, implying that quality of care as well as age of entry had an influence on the reunion behaviours of the children.

Other investigators (Burchinal et al., 1992; McKim et al., 1999; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) Early Child Care Research Network, 1997; Ragozin, 1980) compared the attachments of home-reared children and children in childcare. Burchinal et al. (1992), Ragozin (1980), and the NICHD study (1997) used the SSP to measure attachment security, while McKim et al. (1999) used the Attachment Q-Sort (AQS; as discussed below).

Burchinal et al. (1992) started their investigation prior to a child's birth with recruitment interviews, gathering information on aspects of the infant's home environment. Forty-five children were tested using the SSP when they were 12-months old. Three groups of children were studied: a group attending a research day-care centre (the intervention group, N=17), an exclusive maternal care group, and a routine nonmaternal care (not in the intervention, N=17) group. Children in the intervention group started childcare between 6 and 12 weeks of age, children in the routine nonmaternal care group started childcare before the age of 7 months. These researchers found that secure attachments were not hindered if nonmaternal care started before 7 months. The authors argued that a child who has learned to expect the

mother to provide care exclusively might be more at risk for developing an insecure attachment when starting routine care than a child already in nonmaternal care during the development of the attachment bond. These findings contradict Varin et al.'s (1996) study (that proposed a childcare start at age 12-17 months or after 24 months) by implying that an earlier beginning of nonmaternal care would be beneficial over a later start of routine separation.

Similarly, Ragozin (1980) compared the attachments of home-reared children and children in childcare using the SSP, adding naturalistic observations in childcare (on arrival, immediate post separation, in free play, and at reunion) to support her findings. The 28 participants (14 in childcare and 14 home-reared) were 17 to 38 months old. She concluded that middle-class children in good-quality care showed normally expected attachment behaviour, again highlighting the fact that not only age of children or maternal characteristics but quality of care influences relationships with mothers. Unfortunately Ragozin did not mention how quality of care was measured; she only stated that children attended high-quality, university-area centres.

In a Canadian study, McKim et al. (1999) combined many different instruments including several questionnaires and observations to assess family, child, and childcare measures for centre and family care. Three different care arrangements were studied: home care, family childcare, and centre care. One hundred eighty-three families with children aged 2 to 30 months participated in the study. During home visits 3 weeks before out-of-home care began measures of mother-child interactions and child variables (temperament, health status, distress and sleep patterns), as well as demographic and background information were gathered. One month into care the care setting was rated with either the *ITERS* (Harms, Reid, Cryer, & Clifford, 1990, as cited in McKim et al., 1999) for group care environments or its equivalent the Family Daycare Rating Scale (*FDCRS*; Harms & Clifford, 1989, as cited in McKim et al., 1999) for family day care homes. Phone interviews were conducted every 2 weeks, and 6 months after care began mothers completed the Attachment Q-Sort (AQS; Waters & Deane, 1985, as cited in van IJzendoorn, Vereijken, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & Riksen-Walraven, 2004), an instrument rating children's attachment by sorting a large number of cards (75, 90 or 100), with specific behavioural characteristics of children between 12 and 48 months described on them. The results showed that early, unstable or lower quality care did not

increase the probability of insecure attachment relationships with mothers nor did stable, high quality care contribute to secure mother-child relationships. In this 6 month long study neither type of childcare, stability of childcare, age at entry, or quality of care was related to attachment security, but McKim et al. (1999) reported that consistent with earlier studies, children with less sensitive mothers using out-of-home care extensively were the least secure. This result supports the statement made by attachment theory that a mother's sensitivity is an important factor for a child's ability to develop a secure attachment to her. The McKim study also found that for children with difficult temperaments extensive out-of-home care buffered the effect of insecure mother-child relationships. For temperamentally difficult children, being in childcare for many hours seemed to help prevent insecure attachments to mothers. The authors found comparable quality in unlicensed and licensed family care, but could not compare family care with centre care, as different instruments were used to measure the quality. Overall, more than 90% of participating childcare arrangements were rated 'good' or 'excellent'.

Lastly, the NICHD Early Child Care Research Network (1997) used a variety of instruments in their longitudinal study to compare attachments of home-reared children and children in childcare. These included maternal interviews and questionnaires, and home observations when infants were 1, 6, and 15 months; childcare observations when infants were between 6 and 15 months (using the Observational Record of the Caregiving Environment (ORCE) scale invented for this project), plus the SSP (for 1153 infants) at 15 months. At the 6 and 15-month home visit, 15-minute play sessions between infants and their mothers were observed and coded with the HOME scale (Caldwell & Bradley, 1984, as cited in NICHD, 1997). This large-scale study revealed that nonmaternal childcare by itself constitutes neither a risk nor benefit for infant-mother attachment. However, Belsky (2001) concluded from these results that when mothers provided relatively insensitive care for their infants, features such as more than 10-hours care per week, more than one childcare arrangement across the first 15 months, and lower-quality childcare increased the risk of insecure attachments.

Ahnert, Gunnar, Lamb, and Barthel (2004) investigated whether or not the transition to childcare causes stress to children and therefore influences mother-child attachment relationships. These authors suspected that the stress experienced during

transitions would be reflected in both children's behaviour and raised cortisol activity measured in their saliva. The 70 participants were studied at home before childcare began, during their transition to care (with mothers present), the first 9 days of separation (in childcare without their mother), and 5 months later. At the onset of the study infant and toddler participants were between 11 and 20 months old. Home visits were used to obtain background information about the family's socioeconomic status and the child's development status (using the Bayley (1993) Scales of Infant Development, as cited in Ahnert et al., 2004), measure child temperament with the German version of the Toddler Temperament Scales *TTS* (Fullard, McDevitt, & Carey 1984, as cited in Ahnert et al., 2004), and to collect saliva samples. Mother-infant dyads were observed in the SSP one month before childcare started and again 2-3 months later. Saliva samples were collected 3 times on each childcare assessment day, at arrival, as well as 30 and 60 minutes later. In addition, children were videotaped when they arrived at the centre, during entry into the groups and for the first 30 minutes of group interaction. Ahnert et al.'s results confirmed prior research findings that the transition to childcare did not promote insecure attachment. However, as the authors predicted, the security of mother-child attachment was remarkably unstable over the transition period, and the authors argued this might be because the children continued to adjust their internal working models in response to changes in patterns of received care. Cortisol level results indicated that the onset of nonmaternal care posed a stressful challenge for toddlers, but it could not be concluded that the stress had either positive or negative effects on children. The observed mothers spent between 0 and 30 days adapting their children to centre care. From this observation, the authors suggested that the number of days mothers spent adapting their toddlers to childcare reflected mothers' sensitivity to the challenge this transition posed for their children. They found that attachment remained secure or became secure when mothers spent more days transitioning their child (Ahnert et al., 2004). They did not account for children's different needs in adapting to the new situation. Ahnert et al. (2004) mentioned that because of generous maternal leave policies German children rarely enter childcare before 10 months of age. These maternity policies also explain how German mothers could spend prolonged time transitioning their children into care. In other contexts (see Goldschmied & Jackson, 2004) mothers might not have a choice in how much time they spend transitioning their children to centre care, without fearing for the loss of their jobs.

Results from research on the effects of nonmaternal care on infant-mother attachment are inconsistent. While some authors argued an earlier start date would be beneficial for secure attachment relationships with mothers (i.e. Burchinal et al., 1992), others argued for a later start, or a start at a certain age (Varin et al., 1996). While some found quality care to be essential for a secure relationship (Ragozin, 1980; Varin et al., 1996), others did not find any influence of quality of care (i.e. McKim et al., 1999). Overall, the NICHD (1997) study concluded that nonmaternal care provides neither risk nor benefit for attachment relationships to mothers and seems to summarize this literature, even though Belsky and Rovine (1988) found extensive nonmaternal care to be a risk factor for some children. However, it has to be mentioned that several authors (Ahnert et al., 2004; Belsky, 2001; McKim et al., 1999) referred to maternal sensitivity as an important contributing factor in infant-mother attachment relationships. In the next section I will give an overview on studies concerned with children's attachments to professional caregivers.

2.3.2. Attachments to Professional Caregivers

Studies investigating young children's attachment relationships with professional caregivers have shown that it is possible for children to develop attachment relationships with more than one person. If the childcare arrangement provides responsive and stable alternative caregivers, children may compensate for the stress of separation from the parent by forming attachments to the caregivers (Howes, Rodning, Galluzzo, & Myers, 1988). Some of these studies include comparisons of infant-parent and infant-caregiver attachments (Goosens & van IJzendoorn, 1990; Howes & Hamilton, 1992a, 1992b), infant-caregiver attachment relationships (Ahnert, Pinquart, & Lamb, 2006; De Shipper, Tavecchio, & van IJzendoorn, 2008), attachment formation and the effects of ethnicity on bonding between children and caregivers (Howes & Shivers, 2006), and the relationship between stability of care (time spent together) and caregiver-child attachment relationships (Barnas & Cummings, 1994; Raikes, 1993).

To compare infant-parent and infant-professional caregiver attachments Goosens and van IJzendoorn (1990) observed infants with their mothers, fathers, and professional caregivers in the Strange Situation Procedure (SSP) when infants were around 15 months old. Immediately before each SSP assessment the sensitivity of the

accompanying adult was assessed in a free-play situation. The study included 75 infant participants. Goosens and van IJzendoorn's investigation showed that whereas infants' attachments to mothers and fathers were significantly related, infants' attachments to caregivers were not related to attachments to either parent. These results suggest that it is possible for children to have secure attachments to their professional caregivers, even if they do not have secure attachments at home to either parent and vice versa. Infants with a secure attachment to their caregiver spent more hours in professional care than those who were insecure. Interestingly, the same professional caregiver could have children in her care who were securely or insecurely attached to her, highlighting the fact that the attachment relationship is not a characteristic of either the child or the educator, but rather, is a characteristic of the dyad.

Howes and Hamilton (1992a, 1992b) presented three studies in two reports. A subsample of 47 children aged 13-21 months participated in a longitudinal study over 3 years. Eighty-five percent of the longitudinal study participants were enrolled in centre care as infants, the rest were in family childcare centres. Data were collected at 5 points at 6-month intervals. Caregiver-child relationship and the parent-child arrival and reunion behaviours were assessed with the AQS. Childcare centres were rated with the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (*ECERS*; Harms & Clifford, 1980, as cited in Howes & Hamilton, 1992a, 1992b), a scale developed to rate the environment of 2-5 year old children (from the same developers of the *ITERS* scale mentioned above). The study reported in 1992a used data from 106 children who participated in the SSP at 12 months of age with their mothers, as well as a 2-hour play situation in an unfamiliar environment with unfamiliar peers when they were 48 months. Caregiver data were collected with the same AQS measures for these 106 children. Howes and Hamilton's second report (1992b) was based on this longitudinal sample as well as data for 110 children assessed with their mothers and 403 children assessed with their caregivers. This report further included child and caregiver observations over a 2-hour period. Measures for these observations were conducted using the Arnett Scale for Teacher Sensitivity (Arnett, 1989, as cited in Howes & Hamilton, 1992b), as well as the Adult Involvement Scale (Howes & Stewart, 1987, as cited in Howes & Hamilton, 1992b). Taken together, the two reports of Howes and Hamilton (1992a, 1992b) indicated that when caregivers and children spend more time together, and interact more with each

other, there is a greater likelihood of a secure relationship developing, which in turn positively influences the continued socioemotional development of the children. For children under 30 months, caregiver-child relationship quality was stable if the caregiver remained the same. Children older than 30 months tended to have stable relationship quality with caregivers, regardless of whether or not the caregiver changed, implying that caregiver stability is especially important for younger children under the age of 3 years (Howes & Hamilton, 1992a). Howes and Hamilton's second investigation (1992b) found that children in secure relationships with their caregivers experienced more caregiver involvement than other children. Both these reports indicate that stability (experiencing care and interactions with the same caregiver) is needed for secure relationships to evolve.

In their meta-analysis of 40 investigations of children's relationship security with nonparental care providers, Ahnert et al. (2006) included studies using either the SSP or the AQS as their measurement of attachment security. These authors concluded that a child's relationship with the professional caregiver may be qualitatively different from their attachment to either parent. The formation of infant-caregiver attachment, however, appears to be a similar process to that of infant-mother attachment formation. The authors therefore state that the nature of these relationships can be described using measures of mother-child attachment that assess secure base behaviour, although Ainsworth et al. (1978) did not consider the Strange Situation to be an ideal procedure to compare attachment behaviour toward different attachment figures. In their meta-analysis Ahnert et al. (2006) found secure attachments to nonparental care providers to be less likely when the SSP was used, and more likely when the AQS was used in the study. In group-care settings children were more securely attached if the care provider showed group-related sensitivity, whereas in home-based childcare settings, caregivers' sensitivity to individual children produced more securely attached children. The authors argued that their finding might be due to the fact that relationships in these smaller groups are more like the mother-child attachment bonds that children know from home.

In their study on children's attachment relationships with day-care providers, De Schipper et al. (2008) observed 48 children aged 26 to 50 months for one morning with their professional caregivers, and used the AQS to code the child's attachment security. Primary caregivers completed a questionnaire to rate the child's temperament. The

authors further reported phone interviews with childcare directors, but failed to mention what data were collected through these interviews. De Schipper et al.'s (2008) findings revealed that children were more securely attached when caregivers showed more frequent positive caregiving behaviour. In group-care settings, frequency of caregivers' positive and sensitive interactions might be particularly important for children to gain confidence in the professional caregiver as secure base and safe haven, whereas sensitive interactions alone might not be enough. To effectively stimulate a secure relationship the authors report that positive interactions between a caregiver and child should happen frequently. As stated by De Shipper et al. (2008), "[children] need sensitive caregivers who find the time to display their sensitivity frequently" for a secure caregiver-attachment to take place (p.468). Child temperament as reported by parents and caregivers did not relate to attachment security, nor did it serve as a moderator of attachment security. In caregiver attachment relationships De Schipper et al. (2008) found no significant differences in their attachments to more or less irritable children.

Howes and Shivers (2006) used naturalistic observations of 200 children aged 13 to 70 months entering childcare to examine the process of forming attachments to caregivers. Children's attachment behaviours to caregivers were coded with an instrument they adapted from an earlier study. The first observation took place as close as possible to the child's first full week in the program without a parent. Primary caregivers (as identified in the observation procedure) completed a child behaviour checklist called Children's Behaviour Rating Scale (*CBR*; Howes & Oldham, 2001, as cited in Howes & Shivers, 2006), measuring a child's sociability and social competence (Tarullo, 2003, as cited in Howes & Shivers, 2006), and a short questionnaire regarding the caregiver's background. Six months later the observational procedures were repeated and child-caregiver attachment relationship was measured with the AQS. Howes and Shivers (2006) mentioned findings from prior research (Howes, James, & Richie, 2003) that effective caring is positively influenced by a caregiver's motivation for caring. Children with ethnicities different than the caregivers were not perceived to be more prone to having problems, but re-occurring problems in these children seemed to be more difficult to resolve. A shared cultural/ethnic understanding therefore seems to have a positive influence on secure caregiver-child relationships according to Howes and Shivers (2006).

Similarly, Raikes (1993) investigated the role of time with high-ability teachers in infant-teacher attachment. High ability teachers were defined as those who scored above 44 on the Selection Research Inc. Early Childhood Teacher Perceiver (ECTP; SRI, 1988, as cited in Raikes, 1993) at the time they were hired. The ECTP yields a score recommending a teacher for early childhood care and education. In this study, 61 teacher-child dyads were studied in a setting where children and teachers stay together until the child is 3 years old (with an age range from 10-38 months). Raikes measured the time children spent with teachers, and then teachers were asked to observe the children and sort the AQS. More secure attachments were found when infants had been with their teachers for more than one year, something that is hard to achieve if children change from the infant to the toddler, and then to the preschool group which is the policy in many centres.

Stable caregivers are preferred by children in distress and are also more effective as a secure base and source of security (Barnas & Cummings, 1994). These authors observed caregiver stability for 40 children aged 11 to 27 month old in childcare centers that did not use a primary caregiver system. Stability of caregivers was identified using attendance records, and observations were conducted in distressed and non-distressed contexts. The findings showed that distressed children more often showed attachment-related behaviour towards stable caregivers than non-stable caregivers and that stable caregivers were more effective in quieting these distressed children. In non-distress contexts children initiated play more often with stable than with non-stable caregivers. The authors recommend that caregiver stability should be maximized and childcare centres should aim for a low staff-turnover, as stability fosters the development of attachment bonds between children and their caregivers, and improves the capacity of caregivers to serve as attachment figures for children in nonmaternal care. This is similar to the findings reported by Howes and Hamilton (1992a, 1992b), who found infants with the same caregiver for a year to be more likely secure in those relationships, and stability of care to be most important in promoting secure attachment patterns with children under 30 months.

In summary, studies concerned with child-professional caregiver attachment relationships highlight that this relationship might be qualitatively different from the parent-child attachment relationship, however the formation of the bond seems to work

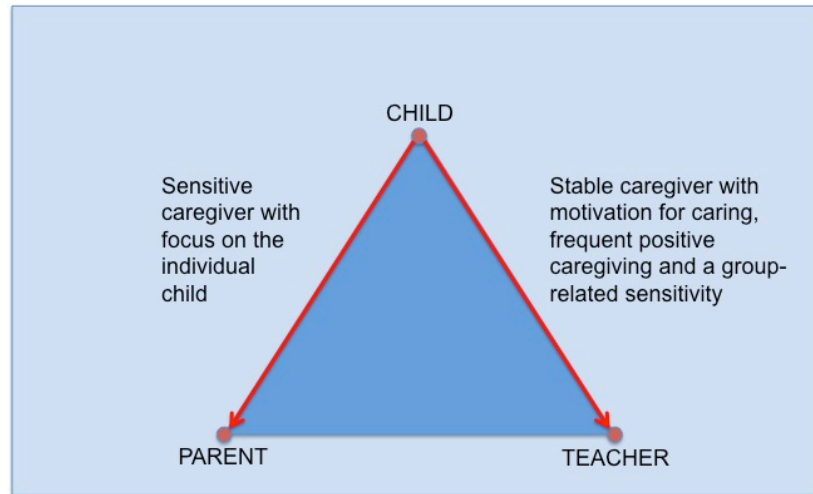
in a similar way. Most importantly, stability of care and time spent together seem to be good predictors of secure relationships, especially for younger children. Whereas maternal sensitivity is most important in mother-child attachment, in caregiver-child attachment a caregiver's motivation for caring, the frequency of positive interactions, and a group-related sensitivity seem to be most important predictors for children's secure attachments. However, it should be highlighted that one caregiver can have children in her care who are secure as well as children who are insecure in their attachments to her. In the next chapter I discuss results and limitations of prior childcare studies and make a case for the study at hand.

2.3.3. Overview and Limitations of the Literature on Nonmaternal Care

In summary, the research on attachment and nonmaternal care has produced mixed findings. Results of the studies reviewed thus far suggest that extensive nonmaternal care can in some cases negatively influence the attachment relationship between mothers and their infants, especially under conditions where other factors such as a less sensitive mother and a low quality childcare arrangement occur. What can be drawn from these studies is that sensitivity of the mother and frequent positive caregiving from a stable professional childcare provider are important to foster secure attachment relationships. Results suggest that mothers need a focus on the individual child whereas professional caregivers need a group-related sensitivity for secure attachment bonds to develop. For professional caregivers it is therefore not enough to react sensitively to one child, but their sensitivity must include the wellbeing of the whole group. Time spent together and the frequency of positive interactions are important, to build a secure relationship.

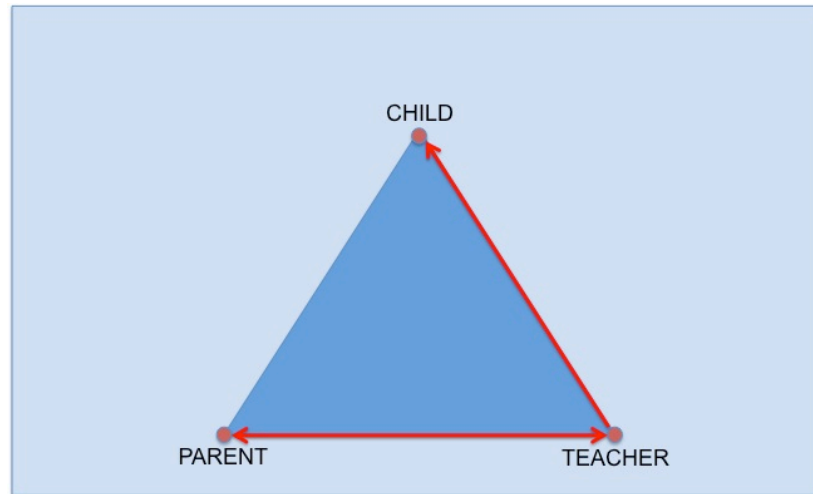
Prior research in the area of nonmaternal care has been focused on risks and possible benefits of childcare by examining relationships between children and educators and children and parents (as shown in Figure 2 below).

Figure 2: Relationships Considered in Studies of Attachment



Moreover, the bulk of the research is quantitative and focused on trends within groups. Although these studies add a great deal to our understandings of factors related to attachment and caregiving they do not provide qualitative information about the experiences of individual families or caregivers. It remains important to address these limitations and gaps to the existing literature particularly in the area of early transitions to nonmaternal care, where the basis for relationships among all participants (mothers, fathers, caregivers and children) is established. The existing research therefore, has yet to address how mothers and fathers interact with professional caregivers and navigate this very important transition. These transition experiences for families and caregivers are therefore taken up in the present study (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: The Present Study



In the present study my research concentrates on the relationships between parents and educators. I will however take into account how educators develop relationships with the children in their care, as well as the philosophies that underlie parents' relationships with their children.

2.4. The Current Study

To contribute to our understanding of transitions to care, parents' and caregivers' experiences of their relationships with one another are investigated using qualitative research methods and case study research design (Creswell, 2009, 2012, 2014; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2003, 2009). This study examines the start of childcare with the theoretical lens of attachment theory and includes the views of parents and childcare educators. As previously stated, starting nonmaternal care not only affects the child, but also parents, and childcare educators. This study focuses on the transition to nonmaternal childcare, to gain a deeper understanding of how the specific types of participants (mothers, fathers, and educators) construct meaning from their experiences. Further, this study explores how the involved participants experience the start of nonmaternal childcare. This is achieved by investigating parents' expectations, concerns and fears, as well as educators' view(s) and images of children, the relationships they build with children and parents, and their experiences with children entering professional childcare. This

investigation of the individuals in childcare approached relationally (parents and educators) broadens the existing literature that focuses more closely on indicators of quality in the structure (quality of childcare setting, age of children accepted, caregiver-child ratio). The research at hand is important, as it adds qualitative insights into the perspectives of all parties involved in the process of starting nonmaternal childcare. These insights will help to illuminate possible problems and/or misunderstandings that might be prevented when understood. Acknowledging the different perspectives might help educators to develop tools to better prepare parents and children for this transition process.

2.4.1. Research Questions

To further understanding of parents' and educators' perspectives and experiences concerning the start of nonmaternal childcare and how participants build these early relationships with each other, research questions posed are:

1. What are parents' expectations, concerns, and fears regarding the start of childcare for their child?

- a. How do the parents' expectations match their experiences?*
- b. What settling-in strategies/techniques are regarded as most effective by the parents?*
- c. What personal experiences help in or prolong the transition?*

2. What are the educators' perspectives on orienting children to childcare?

- a. What settling-in strategies/techniques are used to assist the parent and child in the transition?*

Although these were my research questions at the start of the study, the data I gathered answered many more questions and yielded a much broader discussion than I anticipated. Surprisingly, the educators' opinions about attachment of the children in their care as well as their professional roles and relationships varied a great deal from conventional understandings of attachment theory and relational approaches to teaching. Therefore, my analysis and discussion will include the above questions but will also be broadened to include findings on the perceptions of parents and caregivers.

Chapter 3. Methodology

The worldview this study is based on is social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978). My research focused on the process of interactions among individuals, and on the specific contexts in which people live. As a constructivist researcher I acknowledged how my participants' interpretations are influenced by their own personal, and cultural experiences (Creswell, 2009). I have worked with the assumption that meanings are always socially constructed by human beings engaging in their world and that they are trying to understand their world based on their perspectives of it (Crotty, 1998). These meanings are negotiated through interactions with others, and through cultural and historical norms (Creswell, 2009, 2014).

My research questions were addressed through an inductive qualitative approach. Data were collected through emerging methods and open-ended questions in interviews, observations, and documents (Creswell, 2009). According to Yin (2011), this type of evidence-based inductive approach leads to the emergence of concepts and allows the researcher to build understandings. The intent of this qualitative inquiry is not to generalize to a population but to develop an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). As a researcher I purposefully and intentionally selected individuals and a site that could best help me to understand the phenomenon of starting nonmaternal childcare and develop a detailed understanding of the transition process. My intention was to provide "useful information" that might help people "learn" (Creswell, 2012, p.206) about the phenomenon.

The researcher in an inductive inquiry is considered the primary data collection instrument (Creswell, 2009). As such, it was necessary for me to identify and interrogate my personal values, assumptions and biases. As a former Kindergarten teacher (teaching children aged 4 to 6 years) and research assistant in a Swiss daycare study, I have experiences both as an early years teacher, and as a researcher in an early years environment. Being the mother of a toddler and an infant, I have also experienced

concerns about my children's safety and wellbeing in childcare, as well as the fear of leaving my children with a stranger. My role in this study was one of a participant researcher. I believe that my knowledge of the perspectives of both the family and the teacher in childcare helped me to understand the participants' feelings, expectations, and possible fears. Due to my previous experiences, I brought certain biases to this study. I am aware that the data I collected and the interpretations I made are influenced by these experiences. I made every effort to ask relevant questions and interpreted responses to them carefully. During this process it has been important to be a good listener and not to be trapped in my own ideologies and preconceptions. Further, I have tried to be adaptive and flexible so that I could see opportunities as they presented themselves and to be as unbiased as possible by preconceived notions (Yin, 2009). I played different roles in this case study: I was a teacher, an evaluator, and mostly I was an interpreter, as knowledge is constructed rather than discovered (Stake, 1995). I was aware that through my questions I was drawing attention to the transition process, and in the case of parents also to their expectations and actual experiences.

3.1. Research Design

For the purposes of this study I chose to do a descriptive case study, an exploration of a 'bounded system' (Stake, 2005) using detailed, in-depth data collection from multiple sources over time. This case study focused deeply on the transition of young children to a childcare centre (the case) from the perspective of parents and educators as a significant event. To do this, I collected detailed information through a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time. The data gathering for this study took place from September 2012 to December 2013 allowing me to understand the perspectives of the educators and parents over a sixteen-month period. This long time frame helped me to develop trusting relationships with the educators and the program director as we got to know each other through regular inquiry meetings, as well as through my presence in the centre while observing a focus child. Over this extended time period and through these in-depth relationships I was also able to follow up my findings through verification with the participants at critical points in the investigation. As this is a descriptive case study it was done to present "a complete description of a phenomenon within its context" (Yin, 2003, p. 5). Yin (2003) defines

case study as the method of choice when phenomenon and context cannot be readily distinguished, which is the case in this investigation where the experiences for each child and family will depend on the environment they encounter. Because of the limited number of participants or venues, case studies offer limited generalizability. However, this investigation offers an in-depth view into the event of starting nonmaternal childcare within an institutional childcare setting.

As Creswell (2012) mentions, procedures of qualitative data collection must be administered with sensitivity to challenges and ethical issues of gathering data face-to-face in people's homes or workplace. I was aware that studying people in their work environment could create challenges that might not be present in another kind of investigation. The presence of the childcare manager in inquiry meetings (as educators' boss) for example might have influenced educators' contributions to the discussions. In order to acknowledge anticipated ethical issues (i.e. confidentiality of children or incidents discussed) arising through this study, I informed participants about the purpose of the investigation. All involved parties signed informed consent forms prior to participation. Participants were instructed that they were free to withdraw their permission to participate at any time without any consequences. Participants' names as well as the name of the childcare centre were disguised through use of pseudonyms.

3.2. Participants and Setting

This study had what Stake (1995) called a quiet entry and started without any rush. Educators and their childcare manager invited my senior supervisor into their centre to participate and contribute to their theory-practice inquiry. My senior supervisor offered to take this task on in collaboration with me. What we offered to the staff in exchange for this research possibility was an outside view of their centre and practices, as well as help through discussing and comparing theory and their practices.

The childcare centre is one of 16 centres operated by the University Childcare Society, and one of seven Infant-Toddler centres with 12 full-time spaces available. It is situated within the University Housing Community and many of the children attending the childcare centre live in the buildings surrounding it. The centre itself is a small two-

bedroom apartment that has been converted to the centre. It consists of the main room (half carpet, half laminate floor) where children eat and play, an open kitchen, and the two bedrooms that are play- and nap-rooms. There is a bathroom, a little office, and a bathroom/storage for the educators. Cubbies are located in the entrance area close to the kitchen. The childcare centre has an outdoor space with a little shed, a sandbox, two slides, and a tiny garden box. Surfaces are mainly stone tiles, stairs, and some dirt in the top part of the playground. The entrance door is covered so that strollers can be kept outside even if it is raining. Around the housing complex there are other centres, a school, shopping possibilities and lots of forest.

Four educators work with 12 children in the centre. The lead educator, Emma, who invited us into the centre, is herself a mother with a young toddler attending one of the other centres. She was relatively new in her role as lead educator, having recently taken over from one of her co-workers, who temporarily held this position. The other permanent staff members included Jamie, a middle aged women with grown children attending university and Andrea, a young women studying for her Special Needs and Infant/Toddler Diploma in the evenings. The last teaching position was a permanent part-time position held by Wanda, a middle-aged woman, also with children of her own.

3.3. Data Sources

To collect my data I chose *purposeful qualitative sampling of a case* (Creswell, 2012), using a site that could best help me to understand in detail the phenomenon of starting nonmaternal childcare. The research took place at an infant-toddler childcare centre at a mid-sized university, where the transition of 4 families into the childcare centre was documented. The centre is one of seven infant-toddler childcare centres run by the university's childcare society. The society has 16 centres in total that share the same philosophy and the same approach in childcare transitions (Kirsten, childcare manager, personal communication, September 25, 2012). I restricted my sample to infant-toddler centres only, given that those centres take infants around their first birthday, and therefore are very likely the first non-familial childcare facility the parents have used (as paid maternity/parental leave is 12 months in Canada). It was important in the present study to investigate the first transition process from the family into

professional childcare. The choice fell on this centre as educators showed a deep interest in inquiring into their own practices, and an interest in looking at these transitions in particular. The educators and families involved in this research are considered “embedded units of analysis” (Yin, 2009, p.50), as the information they provided helped me to learn about the phenomenon of starting nonmaternal childcare in this particular centre. This study from Yin’s classification (2009) is therefore an embedded case study design.

In a second step I used *opportunistic sampling*, choosing educators, parents, and children based on their willingness to participate. Fortunately all 4 of the educators at the centre were eager to participate in the study and agreed to take part in weekly inquiry meetings, as well as in-depth individual interviews. Educators sent my questionnaire to all the parents with children at the centre. Further, educators helped selecting participants by encouraging families who had both good and poor transition experiences to participate in the study. In addition, one family agreed to have their child observed and video recorded in her second week of gradual entry. This child’s recorded experience was then used as a way to elicit further responses from the educators and to better understand their perspectives on transitions. Table 1 summarizes the methods used and the participants of the study. Children of the participating parents ranged in age from 20 to 30 months at the time of interviews.

Table 1: Data Collection Overview

	Questionnaire	In-depth Interview	Video Observation	Follow-up Interview	Inquiry Meetings
Child A	Tina	Tina & John	-	-	-
Child B,	Sarah	Sarah & Roy	-	Sarah	-
Child C,	Beth	Beth	-	-	-
Child D,	-	Judy & Mike	2 days	-	-
Child E	Mother	Cancelled	-	-	-
Child F	Mother	Cancelled	-	-	-
Educator Andrea	-	Face-to-Face	-	-	(bi)-weekly 10 months
Educator Emma	-	Face-to-Face	-	-	(bi)-weekly 10 months
Educator Jamie	-	Face-to-Face	-	-	(bi)-weekly 10 months
Educator Winnie	-	Email	-	-	(bi)-weekly 10 months

In the following section the data gathering tools are described:

1. **Weekly educator inquiry circle.** For 10 months, weekly (in the beginning) and then biweekly educator inquiry meetings were conducted during the children's naptime. During these meetings, the four educators and I discussed a variety of topics including the theory and practice around the triangle of care model (Brooker, 2008), the model of primary caregiving (Barnas & Cummings, 1994; Brooker, 2008; Daniel & Shapiro, 1996; Goldschmied & Jackson, 2004; Lally, 2010, 2013) the centre's preferred model of 'child-selected care' (as discussed later), as well as transitions to care. These discussions helped draw out the educators' concerns, values, ideas and beliefs about families' transitions into the centre and their approaches to supporting the child and family. Each meeting was audio taped and comprised over 264 transcribed pages of dialogue that

- were then analyzed as an unstructured open-ended interview. As part of the verification process (Stake, 1995) educators reviewed the transcriptions and were invited to clarify or deepen understandings during subsequent meetings.
2. **Educator interviews.** In addition to the unstructured open-ended inquiry circles educators were individually interviewed about their experiences and views on transitioning children into the centre. All four educators agreed to participate in a one-on-one semi-structured interview with the researcher. These interviews were audiotaped, transcribed and reviewed by the educators for verification (see Appendix C for interview protocol).
 3. **Parent interviews.** In an attempt to understand parents' perspectives on their child's transition to professional care, seven parents were interviewed after their children entered nonmaternal care. Interviewees chose a time and location for the interviews (see Appendix B for interview protocol). Individual parent interviews were done to reveal parents' expectations, fears, and feelings about the transition to nonmaternal care for their child and themselves. Originally interviews were planned with mothers only, but after receiving feedback on a conference proposal that suggested including the perspectives of fathers I decided it made sense to do so. These one-on-one interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview protocol where each parent was asked the same guiding questions. Parents were able to independently interpret each question therefore, responses varied in length and emphasis. Each interview was audiotaped, transcribed and reviewed by the parents. One mother agreed to do a follow-up interview after her son's transition to preschool. This added to the depth of understanding of this mother's experience over time and enabled me to clarify her initial statements during her first interview.
 4. **Video recordings and observational notes on a child.** In addition to the interviews with educators and parents, one focus child (selected by educators) was unobtrusively observed / videotaped during transition times in the second week in the new centre. The observational notes and video recordings were analysed for patterns and themes in order to document the child's transition processes and importantly, as discussed below, used as images to elicit follow

up discussions with the educators at the centre. The records were not used to assess the child's attachment behaviours in any way.

5. **Group video discussion with educators.** Educators selected a typical child (as described in 4. above) demonstrating healthy attachment behaviours, and with parental consent this child was observed and videotaped in her second week of transitioning to the centre. Sequences from these video recordings were then used for a focus group discussion with the educators to elicit deeper understandings of the transition process. This discussion was then audiotaped, transcribed, and reviewed by educators.

3.4. Data Collection

As the weekly inquiry meetings were taking place during the naptime of their children parents were informed about them via email. Inquiry meetings started with a discussion of attachment theory and the introduction of the triangle of care model. While educators had heard about attachment theory in their training, the triangle of care model was new to them. This approach was chosen to discuss theory and practice and to draw out the educators' perspectives on attachment models of care. Questionnaires for parents (Appendix A) were used to gather and verify information related to the educator inquiry meetings. Questions were geared towards parental childcare selection and transition expectations and experiences. Further, I added questions educators were interested in, regarding how parents would like to be involved in the centre. These questionnaires were reviewed with the participants of the inquiry meetings and then emailed and handed out to parents. I also attended one of the centre's regular potlucks to introduce myself to the parents and answer any questions parents might have. Educators encouraged parents to take part in the research and collected questionnaires for me. Information gathered through the questionnaires helped me to develop a semi-structured interview guide for the parents (Appendix D). My purpose in using a semi-structured interview was to allow individual experiences of each participant to be reflected, using an interview style that captured the unique experiences of each person. In order to test my questions I interviewed a friend who had recently transitioned her child to a childcare centre as a small pilot study. All the parents who indicated they were

interested in being interviewed were contacted by phone or email. Two mothers changed their mind when I called them and said that they didn't have time to do an interview after all. After each maternal interview I asked mothers if they felt their spouse might be interested in being interviewed too. All but one mother gave me their spouse's email address. Questions for fathers needed a few adjustments in wording, but otherwise stayed the same. One mother whose interview answers were very thorough and in-depth was selected as a key informant and asked for a follow-up interview. A semi-structured interview guide (Appendix F) for this follow-up interview was developed after coding all parental data.

After reading through the interview transcripts and reviewing the information that parents had given me, I developed another semi-structured interview guide for interviews with educators (Appendix E) in which I presented a summary of what parents had told me to the educators. After reading these summaries I was careful to give the educators some time to react to the statements. These summaries were included as educators mentioned at various times during inquiry meetings how they wondered what parents had to say about the centre and them as educators. I chose to provide summaries in order to maintain the confidentiality of parents. As educators were eager to hear what parents had said they usually commented on parental statements. Educators' comments on the other hand helped me understand if their expectations of parents were met. Data about the childcare society were gathered through personal and email communication with the childcare manager, and were also taken from their website. The review of documents served as a substitute for records of activity that I could not observe directly (Stake, 1995).

3.5. Analysis

The theoretical propositions and orientations presented in the literature review guided the data analysis of this case study (Yin, 2009). Following Creswell (2014) I read parental interview transcripts as a whole, made margin notes, and then formed provisional codes according to the questions asked. Radnor (2002) called this *topic ordering* as the questions I asked formed the framework from which my analysis was generated.

In my first coding cycle I used *in-vivo coding*, where a code refers to a word or short phrase in the transcript. In-vivo coding is an appropriate first cycle coding method for studies prioritizing and honouring the participants' voices (Saldana, 2013). I organized my topics as headings and wrote the in-vivo codes beneath each topic, as Radnor (2002) proposed for organizing data. The follow-up interview with one of the mothers helped me to verify these codes and add information that she didn't mention in her first interview. In a second coding cycle I used *pattern coding* for the development of major categories from the data. In pattern coding similar codes are assembled together to analyze their commonality and to create a pattern code (Saldana, 2013). In a further step, I chose categorical aggregation (Stake, 1995; Creswell, 2012, 2014) and reduced these pattern codes to *themes*, defined as I was going along (Stake 1995), for better understanding of the case (see Table G1 in Appendix G). I used the same coding methods (in-vivo and pattern coding) for the educator interviews, and then added their information to the themes derived from the parents. I further took Stake's (1995) advice that case studies need both categorical aggregation and direct interpretation of individual instances in that I pulled data apart and put them back together in more meaningful ways, in an effort to make sense of things. Thus I ended up with nine categories falling under three themes, as shown in Table 2. These themes allowed me to make generalizations about the case as I could compare and contrast them with published literature (Creswell, 2014).

Table 2: Themes and Categories from Parent & Educator Interviews

Theme 1	Parenting Philosophy
<i>Categories</i>	Parent-Led Parenting Child-Led Parenting Support for Parenting Philosophy
Theme 2	Childcare Expectations
<i>Categories</i>	Programming Relationships Transition Expectations
Theme 3	Childcare Experiences
<i>Categories</i>	Parental Challenges Positive Childcare Experiences & Educator Support Suggestions for Improvement

Transcripts from the inquiry meetings were thematically coded at the phrase level, as they related to my research questions, and this information was mainly used to compare the theoretical concepts explained in this study with the daily practices of educators in the centre. I tried to maintain flexibility in my overall pursuit of understanding the information I gathered and over time tried to develop naturalistic generalizations (Creswell, 2014) in that I pointed out what can be learned through this case. My thesis presents an in-depth and detailed analysis of the case through case and theme descriptions (Creswell, 2014) using narrative, tables, and figures. What I present is my interpretation and pursuit as a researcher to make sense of certain observations by watching as closely and thinking as deeply as possible. These interpretations are, as Stake (1995) points out, greatly subjective, and I acknowledge that multiple interpretations exist (Creswell, 2012), such as those of readers and participants in the study. I present a description of the 'lessons learned' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; as cited in Creswell, 1998) from my research, including a summary of my findings, comparisons to the literature, and limitations.

Findings from this study were validated using data triangulation. As case studies need extensive verification Stake (1995) suggests *triangulation of information*, especially for “dubious and contested description” (p.112). Triangulation is generally considered a process of using multiple perceptions to verify the repeatability of an observation or interpretation; hence to clarify meaning by identifying different ways the case is being seen. Triangulation helps to identify the different realities; even the multiple realities people live in (Stake, 2005). In this process data from different sources (parents, educators, child observations, childcare policies), and data gathered through different methods (questionnaire, inquiry meetings, in-depth interviews, (video-) observations, documents) were used to validate the findings. Further, findings were verified with participants in the study, in this case parents and educators, to confirm the accuracy of my account. In a last step, my supervisory committee acted as an external audit to verify the conclusions of the study. These three validating processes are the primary forms typically used by qualitative researchers (Creswell, 2012).

Description of the Transition Process

After parents are offered a childcare space for their child, they are invited to visit the centre without their child. Educators take turns leading these first visits, showing the parent(s) the centre and explaining the schedule. Parents are asked to bring clothing, diapers, wipes and bedding. Educators explain the orientation schedule and equip the parents with tools and strategies for the child’s first visit and the initial separation. The information package parents get from educators explains that crying is expected and normal during the transition, and parents are encouraged to hand their child over to an educator when they are ready to leave. Further, some helpful sentences for parents to tell their children are offered. On the first day of childcare parents bring a questionnaire to the educators with information about their child’s eating, sleeping, and playing habits. Parents are also asked about their worldviews, beliefs and hobbies in order to acknowledge annual celebrations and to involve them in the program through their areas of interest. Other questions about the child concern languages spoken at home, their health, their bathroom habits, as well as how parents feel about their child starting childcare and their hopes about what their child will gain from childcare (Childcare Centre Information Package, 2013).

Chapter 4. Results

In this section I present my data for the two groups of parents and educators divided in three levels to reflect the identified social context: culture, social structures of family and childcare, and individual relationships (Bodrova & Leong, 2007; Hedegaard, 2009). Whereas individual relationships were most prominent for parents, educators seemed to be most heavily influenced by socio-cultural expectations. I address my research questions throughout this section and provide a summary and discussion of my findings in chapter 5.

4.1. Parents

When analysing parent interview data what was most prominent for parents were relationships. I start however on a cultural level and present examples of tension between parental work demands and socio-cultural expectations on parenting. On the level of social structures of the family I consider their parenting philosophies and provide answers on how parents' expectations match with their actual experiences. Lastly, on the individual level parents talked about relationships between educators and children, as well as between educators and themselves. Further, parental expectations for the transition process as a means to building those relationships are presented. This section answers the question about parents' expectations, concerns and fears regarding their child's start in childcare.

4.1.1. Cultural Expectations for Families

As mentioned before this study is based on a cultural historical worldview stating that the social context influences our attitudes and beliefs, as well as how and what we think (Vygotsky, 1978). The cultural norms we live with today influence parental expectations, concerns and fears. Some of the parents' statements made me aware of the socio-cultural expectations parents were facing when using nonparental childcare.

Even though all parents interviewed were relying on childcare for their children, some of them expressed ambivalent views about childcare, which seemed to be consistent with prevailing social expectations that young children's care and development is the responsibility of the parents (Belsky, 2001; Richardson, 1993; Wall, 2010). For Judy being torn between this social expectation and her decision to work shows in the following quote, where she describes her fear that childcare might not be the best choice for her children, while at the same time defending her decision to send her children to childcare.

I think like most moms I worry that... down the road (laughs) something will go terribly wrong, I think it's this disturbing grain, that to moms especially in Canada, that you know, putting your kids in childcare is not the best choice. That's sort of what's in the back of my head, but what I know and actually do feel strongly about is that the childcare experience is good for them, especially kids that are... Actually I do feel strongly about having kids in childcare especially if you have... I mean the girls are pretty advanced for their developmental age. In term of speaking and social interactions, and especially as they get older... and [OLDER DAUGHTER] I can tell she really benefits from being in an environment where there's lots of activities and opportunities to learn, and stimulation, because she is a 100% into that right now. And she loves being home with us and being with mom and dad, and spending time with us and that's important. But I think that she really benefits of sort of being in the early educational atmosphere. And I think because we have a pretty good idea of how we want to be as parents, and how we want to structure our home life, I don't have any concerns about there being any difference between them and kids who'd have stay-at-home parents the whole time. I'd always known that I would be someone who would work, outside of the home. Because [HUSBAND] and I were both very career oriented before we had a family (Judy, July 22, 2013).

The following quotes from Sarah point in a similar direction. She felt that her child benefited from being in a childcare setting, however, she could not imagine having her child in childcare all week.

Like I can't imagine what it would have been like to have [CHILD] every day and then the next week start work Monday to Friday and be without him 5 days a week. Like... that in retrospect, I cant, I don't know how mothers do that. To me, that would be the hardest thing in the world (Sarah, March 1, 2013).

In a follow-up interview after her second child was born Sarah emphasised again that full-time care was not something she wanted for her children as she wanted them to have enough time to socialise together.

... one of the reasons I don't want [CHILD] in daycare full time with [BABY] is that I want them to socialise. Like I want... I want them to spend time together and, and that is the same reason why I don't want [CHILD] on full-time or [BABY] in full-time either, is that I want them to spend time with his brother, and I want his brother to spend time with him and I want them to be their own social interaction as well (Sarah, follow-up interview, September 25, 2013).

This points to another interesting dimension of the social expectation to raise children in the family environment, as Sarah is concerned that attending childcare will diminish her sons' relationships with each other.

John, whose child had trouble adjusting to childcare for several months, mentioned how now was the most important time for his child, and that he would readily spend this time with him. The family adjusted their schedules to accommodate the needs of the child, even though there was a tension between the parents work demands and their child's adjustment. The family had to change their plans and dropped the child from full-time care to 3-days a week, which meant that John had to stop working on his own research projects.

This is a really important part of his life and you know we wont get these years back and stuff too, so we wanted him to be happy and enjoy them with him as well. [...] I didn't want to look back at the time and say: you know, that was time that I could have spent with my son when it would have been important for him and for me too, and I didn't (John, February 26, 2013).

Lastly, Beth mentioned that she really didn't like to take care of little children but she still spent one day a week at home with each of her children alone as well as one day with both of them for their sakes.

I don't actually like looking after little kids every day, like that's part of why I sent them to daycare, because I needed a break (Beth, April 16, 2013).

It seemed that no matter if children were in centre-based care full-time or part-time, parents held mixed feelings about childcare and what is good for young children. This made a mother who would rather spend less time with her young children spend time with them anyways, it compelled a father to step back and abstain from his career possibilities at the moment to take care of his son, it made a working mother defend her choice of working full-time, and it made a mother with a flexible schedule be thankful that she could manage to take care of her children most of the time and give them ample time to socialize together. I was slightly surprised that even though these parents chose centre-based childcare for their children, their views on its merits were still mixed reflecting prevailing socio-cultural expectations about parental responsibility for young children's care and development (as further discussed in 5.1.1). In the next section I present results concerning the social structure of the family.

4.1.2. Social Structure of the Family

For the purposes of this investigation the family as a social structure includes the parents' respective parenting philosophies, their expectations for their child's childcare experience, and their actual experiences (both challenging as well as positive). In this section, I address the parents' expectations and the match with their actual experiences, as well as experiences that helped in or prolonged the transition.

To qualitatively assess the goodness-of-fit between the parents' and the childcare centre, the parents were asked to describe their parenting philosophy. This was then compared to the philosophy of the childcare centre. Parental answers were sorted into two categories, philosophies that could be categorized as parent-led parenting, and those that could be categorized as child-led parenting. All of the parents' philosophies incorporated aspects of both parent- and child-led approaches but overall they could be placed into one or the other category according to the philosophy that was the most apparent. A further question asked was if parents' felt their parenting philosophy was consistent with and supported by the childcare centre.

Parent-led parenting philosophy was characterized by the provision of structure and routine, offering activities and stimulation (defined as exposing children to different things, providing opportunities for learning, exploring and outdoor time, and enrolling

children in programs like swimming, gymnastics, music, and arts), as well as providing clear boundaries and using discipline. Child-led parenting philosophy included giving the child autonomy and agency (e.g. freedom to play and explore, not to be inhibited or stopped by anything, and to be fearless about life), spending quality time with children, as well as showing attention and affection, letting the child know that s/he is loved, and being open with feelings. For example, Roy and John described centering their lives on the child, which for them meant that they now focus on the child and family rather than on their own wants and needs.

While Judy stated she and her husband had a pretty good idea of how they wanted to be as parents, Roy and John agreed that they were still working on their parenting philosophies. One couple, Sarah and Roy, agreed that they wanted to be “on the same page”, but had troubles achieving this. Five out of 7 parents felt the childcare centre supported their parenting philosophy, and the rest felt theirs was at least partly supported. Overall, those parents who felt fully supported in their parenting philosophy tended to have philosophies that were consistent with the centre’s philosophy (including joy, relationships, exploration and experience, communication, to name a few). As the childcare society’s philosophy (what they call core values) can be found on their webpage it is safe to say that parents were knowledgeable of it before they put their child on the waitlist. It is therefore no surprise that most of the parents reported fairly consistent philosophies to the one of the centre they chose for their child.

When asked about childcare expectations all participants mentioned learning and/or education. Parents clearly distinguished between centre-based care in an institutional care system where they expected educational components to be included from private care by a nanny or in a family home, where learning and education was less expected. All but one parent explicitly mentioned activities and stimulation as an important expectation they had for their child’s childcare experience, often intertwined with learning and education. For most parents activities and stimulation clearly meant some sort of routine, structure, and educator-led activities that exposed children to different things including intellectual (mainly language) as well as creative (arts, crafts, and music) stimulation, and time for free play.

It is therefore safe to say that what these parents expected from centre-based childcare is some sort of routine that offers diverse activities and stimulation for the children, through which they learn and are educated mainly in language, arts, crafts, and music. In discussing their own parenting philosophies parents mentioned that they believed in providing activities and stimulation and opportunities for learning for their children. What they were looking for regarding learning and education in a childcare centre therefore was consistent with what they were also providing to their children in the home environment through extra-curricular activities.

When talking about expectations all parents mentioned the good or enhanced quality of care (e.g. safety and health standards, educated educators) they expected from centre-based care in a recognized university setting. Regarding parental fears Beth said she feared her child was too young for a group-care environment and might not like it there. This fear was based on an experience one of her friends had with her child. John's concern was regarding language and "mental" development. He hoped that intellectual stimulation would take place in childcare. Taken together, parental expectations showed that parents had a good level of understanding about centre-based childcare, but also experienced fears about sending their children to centre-based childcare.

Childcare experiences parents reported could be sorted in two themes: challenges and positive experiences. Sarah experienced an unexpected challenge, as it was much harder for her to leave her child at childcare than she had anticipated. Even though she was hoping for a smooth transition, it turned out to take several weeks for her son to transition to part-time childcare in the centre. This made her fear that she would not be able to concentrate at work and would have to look for a childcare spot all over again, as she wanted her child to be happy in childcare.

That means that we would have to start the process over somewhere else and look for a different system. And that was hard enough the first time (laughs) so trying to do this all over again would be really tricky. The logistical side of it but also just of course if he's unhappy then; I mean I can't concentrate at work and all of those (inaudible) things (Sarah, March 1, 2013).

The same mother mentioned how challenging it was to participate in the gradual entry process and not be able to work, a fact that she wasn't aware of until she was in the middle of transitioning her child into childcare.

Ok, so at first it was, it was a challenge because, like you sort of have to be there. I mean it's not like you can, you are working so you have to do it in time, like if I was still on maternity leave, I would have to do it during my maternity leave. And that actually was, as far as time goes, it is a big commitment. So for him it was at least three weeks, I think. And because he was only two days a week, they say it takes them longer to adjust. If he was every day it would have been probably done in a week or two at the most. But, ok, so that part of the gradual entry at the beginning was challenging, because I was like, well I'm really lucky to have this time but I would have had to account for that time, and I am not sure... either the childcare didn't make that clear or I didn't think it through. But somehow I was thinking, wow if I actually had to be back at work I couldn't. Like you have to enrol your child before you actually go back to work, and start that process before you go back to work, which was a bit of a shock to me. So that's one thing I would tell a new parent in the future, make sure you still have like two weeks off (laughs) because that transition is not easy and it's only like 2 hours at a time sort of thing. Well I guess it kind of depends on the institution but... yeah, so it took time, but I felt fully supported (Sarah, March 1, 2013).

For Tina and John it was an unexpected challenge that their child had difficulty adjusting for several months. This boy was with his mother for the first 2 years of his life and had showed previous troubles when taken to care outside the home. Both parents expected him to take longer to transition into childcare, but thought he would adjust within a few weeks.

I thought he would come around faster. I thought I would be maybe four weeks or something, I didn't think it would be five months. So I mean, after like the second month every day we were trying to figure out what else we could do... and still keep our jobs (laughs), so we took one step and dropped him down to 3-days a week (deep breath). Because we felt like we were torturing him. Not the teachers, it had nothing to do with that, just the situation he wasn't adapting (Tina, February 22, 2013).

Challenges parents reported were things they did not expect to happen. The one mother who described her issues with leaving the child was convinced she would be fine with it. Spending time at the centre for gradual entry was a challenge for her because

she wasn't aware of it in advance. In that case the mother's schedule was very flexible so she could account for the time she needed for transitioning her child. In the case the other child who showed problems transitioning to childcare, the family had to change their plans and dropped the child from full-time to 3-days a week, which meant that the father had to stop working on his own research projects. This underscores the issue of unexpected adjustments when children need a longer time to transition to childcare. These circumstances can be challenging when considering parents' workplace demands. Whereas required participation during orientation to childcare could be mentioned on the website of the childcare society, the exact time for settling-in of each child cannot be determined beforehand, and therefore is difficult to prepare parents for.

Once the adjustment to the centre was made, all participants reported childcare experiences that were positive. Looking closely at the comments parents made when talking about positive childcare experiences it became obvious that their expectations were met at the centre. Children were happy and comfortable at childcare (and did not want to leave the centre at the end of the day), educators were professionally trained and engaged children in activities (singing, arts, projects, as well as outdoor time and play based learning). Taken together parents were happy with their childcare situation, and while for John this happiness was related to a comparison with other centres that he considers of lesser quality, for Sarah this childcare situation was pretty close to ideal.

In summary on a social structural level of the family it can be said that the parenting philosophies of the families influenced their expectations for childcare, and that parental expectations for the most part matched their experiences.

4.1.3. Parents' views on Relationships

During the interviews parents were forthcoming about their views on relationships. Relationships between educators and children were important to parents, as were relationships between educators and parents. Further, relationships were discussed in answer to questions about transition expectations and educator support.

Almost all parents voiced the expectation that educators have positive interactions with children with parental expectations ranging from educators being

passionate about young children and happy to be in the centre, to being engaged in activities like playing with children. Interestingly all three fathers explicitly stated how they expected the educator-child relationship to be. John wanted his child to be attended and responded to while Mike hoped for a mutually warm and affectionate relationship and felt it was okay for his daughters to show their affection to the educators.

That they [his daughters] feel that they are wanted, and we have no problem if they want to express love to teachers or something, some sort of affection to them, if they are hugging them or anything, we don't have problems with it. We believe in that, we don't want sort of cold detachment (Mike, July 22, 2013).

Together with Roy, Mike further wanted his two daughters to experience a feeling of being loved by, or have a special bond with their educator. The third father, Roy explicitly mentioned that he wanted educators to treat his son as though he were their own. In these examples all fathers' expectations for educator-child relationships were very high ranging from children being attended and responded to, to children experiencing affection and warmth, to children feeling loved and being treated by educators as though they were their own offspring. Collectively parents wanted their children to experience social interactions with the educators as well as social interactions with other children. While some parents mentioned they expected their children to interact with others (children and educators) and enjoy socializing, others said they hoped their children would learn to put their own desires off for a while (as educators would not be constantly available).

Three parents expressed relationship concerns; that there would be negative relationship issues either among the children or between educators and children in childcare. Mike was concerned his daughter may have problems with being bullied, picked on, or not getting along with other children, as he described his daughter as distant in relationships with other children. Two more parents described fears related to educator-child relationships. Tina was worried that her child would be perceived as annoying by the educators because he displayed separation anxiety. Similarly, Sarah was concerned educators would lose their patience with her son. Notably, this latter

mother expressed how her own relationship with educators might impact the educators' relationship with her child:

So, being a good parent (laughs), in that sense, an easy parent for the educators. Cause I feel like (laughs) if the educators job is hard, and.... then they are not gonna give the best quality of education to [CHILD] right? But if their job is easier, so if I make their job easier then now... that will be reflected in how they treat [CHILD] (Sarah, March 1, 2013).

She was the only parent who mentioned that her own behaviour could influence the relationship her child had with the educators, or the level and quality of care her child received from educators. When asked about this statement educators showed surprise and found it interesting, but only Andrea reacted by saying that was not the impression she wanted the parents to get.

Overall, parents expected their children to experience positive relationships in childcare, to look forward to going, to be happy there, and to have fun. For Judy and Mike, having childcare in their own community was important. This family moved to campus in order to establish relationships in the neighbourhood and to have a peer network close by for their children to grow up in.

Regarding educator-parent relationships, five parents said they expected these to be positive, in that they could trust the educators to take good care of their children. The following quote demonstrates how this mother developed a trusting relationship with the educators over time.

I feel that now that I have been with [UNIVERSITY CHILDCARE] for a long time [15 months], like I feel like there is a real level of trust that has been built up as [CHILD] has been there. It's not something that could have been there immediately but through my experience with them I think that fear for safety is definitely diminished because I really do trust their judgement and what they do with the children every day (Sarah, March 1, 2013).

Trusting relationships need time to build, but even Judy and Mike who had just transitioned their child into care expressed confidence in educators, based on what they had experienced so far. These parents trusted that the educators would take good care of their children.

Transition Expectations and Educator Support

In an attempt to find out what parents expected for the transitional period and therefore the start of their relationships with educators, they were asked what they expected of the gradual entry process, and if they had hopes and fears for their child's transition to childcare. To determine what strategies/techniques the parents regarded as most effective in helping with the transition, parents were asked: What support did you experience from the educators?

Even though only one mother mentioned that she hoped for a smooth transition it is safe to assume that the other parents had the same hope, as all but one parent mentioned fears regarding separation anxiety or that their children wouldn't like centre-based care and wouldn't be happy there. Two pairs of parents expected separation anxiety issues for their children to become a challenge in the transition to childcare. Both of these families said they were nervous about the transition and how it would influence the child.

That it would really disrupt more of her life, that I'd notice a difference when she comes home. That she would be more anxious, or wouldn't sleep as well (Judy, July 22, 2013).

While for one family this fear became reality and their child had troubles adjusting to childcare for a long period of time, the other family was astonished at how well the transition went for their daughter, and that they didn't notice any changes in her usual demeanour.

Three of the seven parents explicitly noted that they expected gradual entry to be a time for their children to get to know the centre and what happened there, as well as getting used to mom and dad leaving and coming back. Interestingly, even though some parents mentioned that staying for orientation was challenging for them, most of them said that they enjoyed getting to know the centre and what was going on there. This was surprising information for some educators, as they frequently experienced parents to be "unhappy" about staying for orientation.

Parents also commented on educator support during gradual entry as well as the support they received later around parenting issues. All parents mentioned that

educators were supportive, while some parents stated they had confidence in educators and trust that they would receive support when needed. In general, parents found educators to be knowledgeable and reassuring. Educators were assessed as providing good recommendations, tips and tricks.

... they would give me little tips, like warn him, you know in a couple of minutes I'm going to hand you over and then I'm gonna go. And not to keep saying it, so a couple of times I did that, I would say soon I'm gonna go, soon. And then, so they kind of taught me some tricks about be really consistent and when you say you leave just leave (Tina, February 22, 2013).

Three participants mentioned educators were good at touching base with them at the end of the day and communicating what was going on. Roy mentioned he particularly liked the documentations educators sent out periodically via email, as he did not go to the centre regularly. This way he felt he still got information about what was going on in the centre.

Judy and Mike who had just transitioned their child expected educators to be proactive in mentioning potential problems to them right away, and they felt they had all the support they needed for the gradual entry process. Mike specifically mentioned that the educators were an important part of raising his children. Therefore he was concerned with educator turnover, especially if his children formed an attachment to those educators. He appreciated enough transition time when educators left the centre for his children to say goodbye to one educator and get to know the new one.

There was only one participant, Tina, who felt educators did not give as much support as she had expected, and that the nurturing and care for her child were not enough. This was the mother of the child who showed great distress while settling-in to childcare. She further critiqued that there was no systematic communication, updates or progress reports during her child's transition to childcare.

Communication. Like a systematic communication. Just let me know how he is doing [...] And then maybe, I am sure I could come up with like a sheet, a checklist. Like he lay on the floor all day? Yes or no! You know what I mean? Did he talk to other kids, or did he just mope, did he have a frown on all day? Was he laughing? Do you engage him in books? Is anything helping him around or is he just like depressed when he is there (laughs)? [...] If there is any progress he made. I had

no idea, it seemed to me there was none being made [...] just communication. I just wanna know. Ya, like right now, I feel like ok he is happy there, you know, I don't need, really need to know any... it would be nice to know what they are doing, and to get like a little update every now and then (Tina, February 22, 2013).

It is interesting that it was the mother whose child had a hard time transitioning who felt she did not get enough support and information about her child's day at childcare and if any progress was being made. It would seem that the amount of support and information educators offered to parents was enough when children were transitioning easily or only minor problems during settling-in occurred. Most interestingly however, in the one case where the child showed transition issues, the parents disagreed about the educators' ability to communicate with parents. While the mother felt communication was the one thing that needed to be improved most in the centre, her husband felt educators were pretty good at communicating. This example makes it clear that goodness-of-fit between the parent and educator is individual, and that even couples might not agree on every detail. It shows how challenging it is for educators to meet the individual needs of all parents and children.

In summary, parents' expectations for childcare were met for the most part, as they experienced positive educator-parent relationships (i.e. trusted educators to take good care of their children and experienced educator support), as well as positive educator-child relationships (i.e. children did not want to leave at the end of the day). Structural expectations were met through activities and stimulation offered in the centre. However, parents remained ambivalent in their feelings about childcare, a fact that was demonstrated in contradictions that surfaced during the in-depth interviews.

The next section presents results regarding educators.

4.2. Educators

While relationships were the most prominent feature in parent interviews, educators' answers appeared to be influenced by the socio-cultural expectations they experienced. This showed in their efforts to define their professional roles as early childhood educators, something that influenced not only their professional

understanding, but also their interpretation of the policies and structures of the childcare society, and their personal relationships with both parents and children. I therefore first present socio-cultural expectations educators' experience (cultural level), then the social structure of the childcare (structural level), before discussing educators' relationships with parents and children (individual level).

4.2.1. Cultural Expectations for Educators

Sensitivity about how others perceived their work was a strong feature observed during the inquiry sessions and in-depth interviews and was evident in the educators' comments. For example, they mentioned that families and friends often perceived them as playing with children all day long. These educators expressed that their profession is considered by others to be of lesser social status than that of educators of older children. As shown below, educators commented that they knew elementary teachers received better pay due to higher education but they still could not understand why parents in their centre had the impression they were just babysitting their children.

This has probably a lot to do with academic learning versus child-minding. It's nothing that I care about. But sometimes, the way that we are spoken to by parents in regards to their child sometimes feels like they are kind of, staging us as: you are just watching my child. You have to take my kid because, you know, that's your job (Emma, December 11, 2012).

Educators felt this showed a lack of respect for and appreciation of their profession. They also noted that such comments tended to surface during difficult situations, i.e., when parents were asked to pick up their child because they were sick (interrupting the parent's plans for the day). In delicate situations like this, educators felt parents sometimes reacted disrespectfully. Being respected and respectful is one of the educators' main professional values.

Well, just because I think, you can't really get anywhere if you are not respected or respectful. So even if you want to say something, or you want to put an input, it'll make things easier, make life a bit easier to be respected and respectful (Emma, December 11, 2012).

Other professional values educators mentioned were feeling valued, optimistic, and confident, all of which relate to how others (including parents) see them. The lack of appreciation and respect educators perceived from parents might explain why they wished to be acknowledged as professionals, and tried to distinguish their personal from their professional self. As will be shown below this distinction also influenced the structure of the childcare.

4.2.2. Social Structure of the Childcare Centre

On a social structural level educators working in a licenced early childhood environment need to know the policies and regulations of the childcare society they work for. Childcare centres work with varying philosophies and pedagogical approaches. Educators of the participating centre work within a play-based approach and with emergent curriculum derived from Reggio Emilia pedagogy. The childcare society's vision is to value children as the heart of a respectful, collaborative and reflective community by providing them with a place to develop their potential through freedom to explore and to engage the world around them. As their mission they claim to provide the highest quality of childcare services for children in their community. Core values of the childcare society are joy, relationships, freedom, exploration and experience, communication, responsibility, accountability, and respect. In their Toddler centres (10-36 months¹) the childcare society values a warm and nurturing environment, stimulating and developmentally appropriate daily activities, and outdoor spaces with opportunities for physical development. The childcare society's website (February 17, 2014) stated that all of the educators working in the centers are certified Early Childhood Educators, meaning they have a minimum of 477 hours training in course work plus a minimum of 425 hours practicum, and at least 500 hours supervised work place experience in a licensed childcare centre before they became certified. Further, the educators participating in this study hold or are working on their Infant/Toddler certifications with another minimum of 250 hours course work plus a minimum of 200 hours practicum (Early Childhood Educator Registry of British Columbia, April 7, 2015).

¹ Even though the website currently states 14-36 months, the practice is that children younger than one year are accepted in the Toddler centres, as they are licenced for 0-3 years.

Educators employed at this centre are part of a union. This gives them certain rights and privileges that influence the social structure of the centre. One of these negotiated rights is that educators can take time off if they work over-time. Full-time employees change weekly between an opening shift, a middle shift and a closing shift. The part-time educator's work time is handled more flexibly, according to the number of children in the centre at certain times. Educators working the middle shift typically work over-time every day. Time off taken as over-time compensation leads to enhanced absences from the centre.

Another practice that was discussed in the inquiry meetings is the provision for educators to do their practicums for the Infant/Toddler certificate program in one of the centres of the same childcare society and be paid for it, instead of being sent to a practicum site at another childcare centre. This is accomplished through an educator exchange, so that the practicum educator takes another educator's position. As these practicums can be up to five weeks long, when this occurs children experience educator absences of up to five weeks for practicums in addition to absences for vacations, overtime, professional development, and sickness. For example, at the very beginning of my study one of the educators was absent for six weeks, as she did her five week practicum and then took one week of vacation afterwards. These practices can be advantageous as they contribute to the prolonged employment of educators in the same society however they also create other structural inconsistencies within the program that impact relationships with parents and children. In the infant and toddler centre these practices may mean that children experience frequent changes in caregivers and the need to build new relationships that may not last long. Across time, children experience many practicum educators and casual educators (to cover regular educators' absences) who come and go. Even though educators appreciated the privileges the union provides them, from an attachment perspective the frequent changes in caregivers seem problematic, as they disrupt relationship building with children and with parents (i.e. De Shipper et al., 2008). Parents also noted a feeling of discomfort in leaving their children with educators they didn't know (i.e. casual educators).

In interviews and during the inquiry meetings educators talked about childcare centre characteristics. They mentioned the philosophy, the policies and structures of the childcare society they work in. When asked in their interviews why they felt parents

should send their child to their centre, all of them mentioned 'care in the community', which referred to the centre's physical proximity to where most families lived. They found the centre's location close to home and being in care with other children in the community that children will most likely meet again in other centres or later in school to be one of the advantages of their childcare centre. In her interview, Andrea said that she felt the centre's philosophy was attractive for families. However, she also mentioned that individual educators had individual interpretations of this philosophy.

[The university has] a policy and procedures and their vision, or whatever. But I don't think that's necessarily the educators'. Like obviously we are hired because we say that that's our vision. But as you work, you show that it's not necessarily your vision, right? We all have different philosophies, different visions, different... beliefs and what not (Andrea, June 5, 2013).

When asked if it was hard to work with a philosophy that is given to you, Andrea said that each educator had her own interpretation of what this philosophy should look like in practice. Discrepancies between individual educators' philosophies also appeared during inquiry meetings when educators talked about their individual relationships with each other, and occasional incidents of disagreement and miscommunication that happened between them.

Educators also provided information about the centre's transition policies, strategies, and techniques they used to transition children to their centre. In the educator interviews, participants explained the centre's policy of orientation. Families get a childcare spot in their centre and then are contacted by the educators and invited for a tour of the facility. These tours happen while the centre is operating and educators take turns showing the facility to parents and answering their questions. Parents are given an orientation package with a questionnaire to fill out and bring back on the first day of orientation. When asked if they could get the questionnaire before orientation started, educators found this not to be possible as it would be a 'hassle' for the parents to send the questionnaire. However, all educators agreed that there was not enough information about the child before orientation begins. Further, all educators agreed that it would be desirable for parents and children to visit the centre one or several times before orientation starts, but they agreed that childcare society policies regarding the adult-child ratio would not allow for this.

That's the problem that we have a license for 12. So we cannot accommodate really other kids at the same time [even if parents are present] (Jamie, July 15, 2014).

In her interview Andrea mentioned that many parents had asked if they could visit the centre beforehand, and that she suspected these visits were not allowed because parents had not started paying yet. In a personal communication with the childcare manager about orientation practices at the centre (Kirsten, personal communication, June 9, 2014) she was astonished that the educators of the centre made this statement. In her opinion families were welcome to visit the centre any time before the transition process started, and the centre should actually encourage families to do that.

Concerning educators' expectations for parents all educators agreed that parents were expected to ask questions and provide information about the child's likes and dislikes, or special requirements. In unison educators agreed that those expectations were not well communicated to the parents. For transition times into the centre Andrea said it should be made clear to parents that the whole process might take up to one month, whereas Emma and Jamie agreed that for part-time children it was usually one month long. For children attending full-time childcare educators were more prone to shorten the orientation process if children were doing well.

To answer the questions on educators' individual perspectives to orienting children into childcare, educators were asked specifically about their ideas to improve the orientation process. Andrea felt it would be better not to have a set schedule for everyone, and maybe re-evaluate the process after 2-3 days with the parents. She also felt that parents should be made aware of the fact that it could take up to one month for some children. However, three of four educators did not see a need to change the orientation process, as it seemed to be working. Emma and Jamie both said they never really thought about it, as it was policy and they just did it. One educator made some interesting comments when she said:

I think it works great. On other hand because we still have other kids who are still in the centre and they are in the centre for a year or a year and a half and for them it's a change too. So for example (laughs) their need for attention, yes? When we have orientation our

attention is more on those new kids, [so] we can give more attention to the other kids in the afternoon. They are seeking this too, yes? So have some balance? So there is a big plus in it too, yes? So we can know them for maybe 2, 3 hours and then see okay, I noticed he was really into balls or she loves to cook, so [we] can adjust the program for the next day so there is more stuff for cooking this week, because I said I noticed that she was really into cooking, yes? So this kind of adjustment we have time to do it, prepare. It's not hectic like... (Jamie, July 15, 2013).

In her interview this educator valued the shorter times new children spend at childcare during orientation. She was aware that she has to divide her attention and felt that having to negotiate relationships between the new children and children who have been there for some time to be challenging. This would speak for the educator's focus on the benefit of the group rather than on the individual child, which is supported by research findings reported in the literature review (Ahnert, Pinquart, & Lamb, 2006), highlighting that sensitivity to the group enhanced child-educator attachment.

Educators' reliance on childcare policies and structures that they have to follow while at the same time emphasising how flexible and accommodating they are to every family's needs is a contradiction found in the educators' statements. Their refusal to allow family visits before their orientation is based on their understanding that the ratio would not allow it. This seems to be a policy focussed approach or a 'one size fits all' model rather than the flexible and adaptable model educators had referred to.

Another contradiction was found in the video analysis done with educators. From their descriptions of how they welcome children in the morning it sounded like educators' and parents' care would overlap to help children with daily transitioning.

For the teachers to make it a point to talk to the parent – I think when a child observes a parent and a teacher talking, [they think]... she's ok, kind of safe, you know, when my mom is talking to her, it's ok for me to talk to her, you know, they observe everything and you know, just pick it up from there (Emma, October 2, 2012).

In discussing my observations on handing over the child in the morning from the father to the educators however it became clear that educators viewed their role as taking over responsibility for care once parents were about to leave and not before. Educators explained to me that children would not want to interact with them as long as

their parents were present, and parents would usually leave as soon as educators stepped in. Educators therefore waited for the parents' signals to step in and take over caregiving from them. This approach contradicts the 'overlapping care model' educators explained during inquiry meetings and implies that in practice educators are present to supervise but only enter the child's proximity and extend their support to the child once parents leave the centre. This implies that communication between educators and parents could be improved to explain to parents how a gradual transition from parent to educator (as in overlapping care) could be achieved if that is what is intended.

In summary, I found it noteworthy that some educators said they never thought about the practice of orientation but rather simply followed the policies of the childcare society. This contradicted their continuous mentioning of flexibility and adaptability for each family, and in contrast highlights that they work with a policy focussed approach to transition families into the centre. The educators' references to policies and regulations to explain their practices can be linked back to their uncertainties regarding their status as professionals. Educators use these policies and regulations to standardize practices, often without questioning them. It seems however, that educators interpreted these policies and regulations flexibly. This became apparent when they argued that visiting families could not be accommodated in the centre due to ratio regulations, while at the same time explaining how sometimes one of the educators needed to do clean up or laundry, while the other two educators took care of the 12 children. The issue of the child-educator-ratio and housekeeping duties was also mentioned by the couple spending a lot of time in the centre while transitioning their child. Educators on the other hand only referred to ratio problems in regards to visiting families, not in regards to everyday operations of the centre. The childcare manager Kirsten (personal communication, June 9, 2014) explained that the daily structure, work shifts and duties each shift entails were discussed and implemented in consultation with the educators. It was also the educators' choice to change shifts every week. The manager further mentioned the morning shift to be the most popular, as educators get to leave early. Therefore, even though childcare society policies and regulations are structures of the childcare centre, the educators themselves defined many of these structures. As was mentioned by Andrea in particular, some of these structures underlie individual interpretations of the childcare society philosophy.

The next section will highlight relationships between educators and parents, as well as relationships between educators and children.

4.2.3. Educator Relationships

In this section I discuss relationships from the educator's perspective beginning with educators' relationships with each other, then educators' relationships with parents. Following this I look at children's transitions to childcare and the building of educator-child relationships, before discussing educators' attachment assumptions and the care model educators work with. This will be addressed to answer the question: Which strategies / techniques are used to assist the parent and child in the transition?

During the inquiry meetings personal conflicts between educators became apparent. Their different personalities and philosophies sometimes resulted in misunderstandings. The part-time educator, Wanda, did not mention relationships between educators in her interview, whereas Andrea, one of the three full-time educators, clearly stated she felt the team did not work well together. The two remaining educators, Emma and Jamie, on the other hand, highlighted their strengths as a team.

... the team itself is really, we work well together, and we listen and we communicate with each other (Emma, June 13, 2013).

The fact that two educators felt they work well as a team while one said nothing and another clearly stated that there are tensions between them underscores their different perceptions of the situation. This was also apparent in educators' answers regarding relationships with parents.

Relationships with parents were one of the main topics discussed in the inquiry meetings as well as in the interviews with educators. The educators' main concern was building and maintaining relationships with families. They highlighted the importance of building professional relationships with parents, and explained how they worked daily on improving or keeping these relationships. When asked how they started building these relationships, educators said they started right away during orientation by asking and answering questions daily at pick-up and drop-off, emailing documentations of the

children's work in the centre and at the occasional potlucks the centre organizes for the families.

Just getting to know them, asking questions, and making sure that if they have any questions, that our door is always open, you can come to anybody and you know, just communication basically... You have to gain not only their children's trust but their parent's trust as well. That just makes everything more open and then they start talking and we start talking, and asking questions, and that just makes it [the relationship with parents] stronger (Emma, October 30, 2012).

Educators agreed that it is easier to build relationships with some parents and harder with others. They also agreed that in their experiences, parents have differing expectations for different educators.

I think that certain parents ease into the relationship faster and then that builds our relationship with them a lot stronger. Where then there is some parents who haven't really started to really show their trust in us, and the relationships aren't as strong. I think this is always going to happen. And they trust each one of us differently too, because we all have different personalities as well (Andrea, November 13, 2012).

They [parents] have different expectations too... from us (Jamie, November 13, 2012).

These differing expectations showed in problems the youngest educator Andrea experienced. She stated that parents would talk to her about little things concerning their children, but would not discuss important information or concerns with her. She felt this happened given that she wasn't a mother herself. This made it hard for her to establish a trusting relationship with parents. Further, she did not feel she could offer parenting help or support to the parents in the absence of a trusting relationship. She and the other educators also mentioned that many parents chose to talk to the lead educator only.

Sometimes when I am opening and [CHILD]'s mom will come up to me, she won't ask me any questions, she will wait until Emma [LEAD TEACHER] gets here. Even though Emma will be like: "Oh, we will talk about it in the group and then we will get back to you". Emma always says that and this mom always goes right to Emma (Andrea, November 27, 2012).

The lead educator Emma added that she tried hard to create relationships between the parents and all of her colleagues, and endeavored to make sure to tell parents that they work as a team. Even so, these attempts often fail.

Even if I push it: "You can talk to or ask Andrea, I wasn't here yesterday". Or: "Ask Jamie, I am not closing today, just talk to them about it. They're my team, we talk about everything together". Even if my colleagues try [to connect], the parents just kind of step back (Emma, November 27, 2012).

Educators speculated about possible reasons as to why parents prefer to talk to the lead educator, but no clear answer was apparent in the discussions. As a relationship building activity educators emphasised their open-door policy continuously, and that parents could talk to them about anything. The lead educator especially mentioned that the centre would try to accommodate the families' needs.

I guess just verbally keep telling them that our door is open door policy, if they have any questions, we are very accommodating and flexible to you know, whatever it is your child needs... (Emma, June 13, 2013).

Parents were encouraged to email, come in or call anytime. Interestingly, Andrea mentioned that when one mother took them up on that offer and emailed or called regularly, educators found it interrupted their workday and they had to find a solution that worked for both sides.

... you know, we always say: call if you want or email if you want, but we never actually think that they are gonna do it (laughs)... so when she started doing that we were like: oh my god, why is she calling so much! He is fine! But I guess cause we offered it, so... I mean we have to take it, right? (Andrea, June 5, 2013).

This honest response of this educator showed that there is some ambivalence about really being in a partnership with the parents because of the demands the relationship places on educators' time. This surfaced a tension between the needs of an individual and the needs of the group. Taken together, when educators built trusting relationships with parents, their strategies and techniques relied on communicating with them during orientation, and later during drop-off and pick-up times. Educators felt that

building this relationship is easier with some parents and harder with others, and that certain educators were better able to build such relationships with parents than others.

In response to being asked how they transition children into the centre, and how they build relationships with them, educators mentioned that they read the questionnaires parents bring back the first day of orientation. This helped them find out what the child is interested in and provided them with guidance as to adjusting the environment and their interactions appropriately. Providing toys the child likes and observing the child in the new environment helped them make these early connections. Educators made themselves available and observed which educator the child chose to look at, smile at, or pass a toy to.

Making sure you're available and just giving the space to that the child can explore, just find themselves, and who they're really drawn to, and then, for the teachers to make it a point to talk to the parent. [...] and not being pushy, but being available (Emma, October 2, 2012).

Educators explained that the educator that the child chooses helps the child adjust to the new environment, and also tries to make a connection with the parents. All of the educators observe the child and share their observations during the day. Initially, if the child wants to be cared for by this one person only, educators try to accommodate that need and change their shifts accordingly (a detailed discussion about how educators handle these preferences follows below). Educators mentioned that usually children are really open to being cared for by all educators quite soon after orientation, as their centre is quite small and the number of educators limited.

When asked about difficult transitions to childcare, educators emphasised that although they are rare, they do happen. Educators said they tried to distract the child with a favourite toy or with a task. All of the educators mentioned that their policy is that the parents say goodbye before they leave and do not sneak out on their children. Educators explained they looked for cues from the parents that they are ready to leave and then take the child and hold them, if children want this. Children who get upset and angry when parents leave are left alone for a few minutes before educators try to interact with them. If children are inconsolable and educators aren't able to distract them at all

they call the parents for ideas to distract or support the child. In rare cases they ask the parent to come and pick-up their child.

The next section I explain the educators' chosen model of care in comparison with the model of primary caregiving.

Attachment Assumptions and the Primary Care Versus Child-Selected Care Model

In discussing educators' relationships with children it was important to investigate the attachment assumptions, values and beliefs educators held, as well as how paradigms like the primary caregiver model mapped on to the educator's practice.

Through these discussions it became evident that educators made clear distinctions between relationships with childcare children and relationships with their own children. They distinguish their professional self from their personal self, and they all agreed that it is necessary to be professional with each other and with families to establish and maintain trust. In a professional relationship educators are concerned that close attachment relationships with children (from children to them, as well as from themselves to children) are unhealthy.

At some points, sometimes I had the impression that the child is so attached for example to me, (inaudible) to myself, that it is almost like mother-son or mother-daughter relationship. It shouldn't be. So it's also important for the team members, like co-workers to point it out too. Because sometimes we do not know (Jamie, November 13, 2012).

To counter what the educators feel are unhealthy attachment relationships, during orientation a child is observed and supported by a single caregiver of the child's choice, and offered an opportunity to form an attachment. Later, the child is encouraged to interact more flexibly with other caregivers in an attempt to create more capacity in the child's relational care with other educators. The educators felt very strongly about this and explained that this procedure is important given the frequent changes in caregiver availability in the centre due to shifts, illness, vacations, and other absences of staff. These structural factors (discussed in detail in chapter 4.2.2) create a need for flexibility in caregiving and a professional approach to relational care, where various educators can care for a child. Therefore, educators are concerned with 'over-attachment'; a term

coined by them during the inquiry meetings, to describe when a child becomes reliant on one caregiver. They also felt that over-attachment could happen to the educator, if the educator becomes too involved with a child and this relationship begins to influence their professional judgment and subsequent relationships with other children or other educators.

A further barrier to close attachment relationships is the fact that educators do not always feel strongly connected to the children who become attached to them. This creates a difficulty in reciprocity between caregiver and child that is not mentioned in the triangle of care model. Educator Jamie explained it like this:

I really dislike that feeling. I feel guilt and so when it happened a few times, in all the years, so I just ask my colleagues, like I need a little bit of a break from this child, to work on my feelings. Because it is not fair. Slowly, in small steps, I involve this child with little things. Not maybe jump over this child because he or she chose me. But for me I think like separate myself, calm down, it's so not fair, because they can read us (Jamie, October 2, 2012).

Educators saw it as their professional responsibility to make themselves available as attachment figures. When it did not happen naturally, educators approached the relationships from this professional stance, took their time to work on their emotions and then tried to offer themselves as attachment figures even though it took more conscious effort to do so.

Another obstacle educators mentioned was that parents might choose another caregiver to relate to rather than the one that works most closely with their child. As has been mentioned before, many parents chose the lead educator as their contact person. This created problems of communication and affected the educator's ability to enter into and sustain a relationship with the parents. Lastly it was noted that some parents commented on educator-child relationships in a way that made educators feel parents were not welcoming of relationships that were too close. As Emma put it:

You can sense that, when parents come in, you know, the little sly comments about: "Oh yeah, he was talking about you all weekend!" Or: "I think maybe he should be your baby" (Emma, October 2, 2012).

Jamie mentioned an experience she recalled with a parent asking that educators would not hug her child before pick-up time, so the child would be eager for physical contact when the parents arrived.

I still remember the parent that asked us not to hug the child half an hour before the mom comes to pick the child up, because she wanted her child to be all over her. So we were not allowed to pick up the child (Jamie, November 13, 2012).

Although this was a single incident it had a lasting impression on this caregiver and created a concern that parental reluctance regarding close relationships with educators might be heightened if a primary caregiver model were in place at the centre. However, as Goldschmied and Jackson (2004) have stated, it is important to explain to parents that it is beneficial for children to have a person they can relate to in a special way during the long hours they spend in the centre. Taken together, the five factors educators felt are obstacles in forming close caregiver-child attachment relationships are a) caregivers' fear of an unhealthy 'over-attachment', b) structural factors like frequent absences of educators, c) a child's attachment to an educator if it is not reciprocated, d) a lack of relationship with the child's parents, as well as in some cases e) the educators' feeling that close relationships are not valued by the parents.

To avoid over-attachment and to adapt to the children's needs educators in this centre work closely as a team, in a model that from their description I have termed 'child selected care', whereby the child selects a caregiver and the other members of the team initially support that relationship. Later they again work as a team towards handing off roles and responsibilities between members. As Emma explained it:

Well, I think it is important that a child, when they first come in to a new space, that they develop a teacher-child relationship with one, one specific. And you can always tell, already, in their environment, who that child would be drawn to. And, after they've developed that trust, and confidence, and safety, and protection feeling. I would say [then] it's safe to introduce that kind of same feeling with other teachers. So that, if that one teacher isn't there, he will still feel safe, and you know, protected, with the other people. That's what we do here...that's kind of our goal (Emma, October 2, 2012).

In this model a primary caregiving relationship is created but then this relationship is expanded to other educators. As attachment theory claims, a secure relationship with one responsive caregiver serves as blueprint for later social relationships. In this context, these educators use this first educator attachment as foundation for the interactions with other educators with the end goal being relational harmony across all members of the community. This child-selected care model might be advantageous, as the initial caregiver-child matching is not done based on available space of the caregiver to take on another child in her primary care. Rather the child as the active agent seeks out the caregiver he or she feels drawn to make a connection with. Distributing relationships seems to be in the interest of a harmonious approach across caregivers and children especially if we consider the attachment literature that tells us a caregiver in a childcare centre needs a group-related sensitivity and needs to consider the perspective of the group interest over individual needs (Ahnert et al., 2006). One of the disadvantages of the model, however, is that the parents do not know who will be responsible for the care of their child when the settling-in process starts and will tend to seek out (as is the case in this centre) the lead educator. Another disadvantage of the child-selected care model is that educators feel a need to hand over a child to other educators if 'over-attachment' is perceived. To prevent or correct so called over-attachment during child-selected care the educator withdraws and is replaced by other educators at the centre. Structural factors such as absences of the main attachment figure may also inadvertently loosen the attachment bond. Either way, this process is not based on a child's readiness to expand his or her interests to the other caregivers, but based on the educator-perceived crisis of over-attachment. Although educators believe that preventing over-attachment is important, this approach has the potential to be difficult for both parties involved in the relationship. Not only is it difficult for the child to understand why the educator suddenly is less available, it might also be hard for the educator to abruptly loosen the bond with the child.

In summary, the educators' quest for professional status (on a cultural level) also influenced the structural level of the social context of childcare, as well as (on an individual level) their relationships with children and with parents. As educators' strived towards professionalism they sought harmony across the whole group and wished to be respected, valued, and appreciated as professionals. To be professional in their

relationships with children, these educators sought a child selected care model, where relationships that are too individually focused (i.e. between the educator and the child) are actively avoided or re-routed toward whole group involvement.

Chapter 5. Summary and Conclusions

In this chapter I discuss the findings of my study on a cultural-historical background and in the light of attachment theory and the triangle of care model. In the last section I highlight my contribution to the literature and propose further research in the area.

5.1. Discussion of Findings

Findings are presented first on the cultural and structural level of the social context regarding parents and educators, before discussing relationships between parents and educators, and finally children and educators on an individual level of the social context.

5.1.1. Cultural and Structural Findings Regarding Parents

Even though nonparental childcare is widely used in Canada (with almost 70% of families with children under 3 years relying on it), parents who participated in this study showed ambivalence towards their use of childcare, or as one mother voiced her concern “that childcare might not be the best choice for [her] children”. This ambivalence was also found in Brooker’s (2010) study where parents revealed a gnawing tension over their own decisions to place very young children in childcare. Even though parental experiences with the childcare centre were in all but one instance positive, parents seemed to remain unsure about potential risks for later negative outcomes. Bowlby’s (1969) tenets of attachment theory still remain active, and historically the cultural expectation is that children are supposed to be attached to their parents, mainly the mother. As Belsky (2001) stated in his lecture about risks of early childcare, most parents of children under five years remain convinced that full-time parental presence at home is what’s best for young children. Richardson (1993) affiliates these beliefs with continuing systems of beliefs informing women that they are

responsible for the care of their child, and that going out to work will be damaging and detrimental to their relationship with their child. These expectations about responsibility for childcare remain even if women are engaged in full-time employment outside the home. Even though more and more women have entered paid employment in recent years there is strong social pressure not to do so if they have children (Richardson, 1993). In my study care for children was not entirely the responsibility of the mothers, but it still seemed to be the responsibility of the parents. What has changed for today's parents are the social expectations of parenting, as the idea took hold that spending time playing with one's children is important and valuable (Clark, 2010), and that contemporary parents are responsible for their child's intellectual, social, and emotional well-being (Richardson, 1993). Parents have become responsible for more and more aspects of children's behaviour and outcome (Clark, 2010). In the age of intensive and child-centred parenting parents plan, manage and control the lives of their children and have a duty, and the ability to shape and control their child's life (Wall, 2010). It seems that parents are still afraid that attending a childcare centre might negatively influence the developmental outcome of their children, due to separation from the main attachment figure. While the one mother mentioned above called social expectations "what's in the back of my head", others did not explicitly make that connection, but their decisions for childcare clearly pointed in the same direction. For example, focussing on the child right now, spending time with your children even though you do not actually enjoy it, or preferring part-time care are indicators that there is a contradiction between the parents' work demand and the socio-cultural expectation that young children are best cared for by their parents. This is particularly interesting as it puts the focus on the nuclear family, the predominant family model in the West (Clark, 2010), where not so long ago in our history it was typical for extended family to look after and care for children. Changing family structures have the effect that many parents no longer have extended family living close enough for help and support (Clark, 2010). In my sample, none of the families could rely on extended family to help with childcare, as extended families lived too far away. Both parents and educators in my study emphasised how this childcare centre served the community, and that children connected to other children they meet again in programs for older children, or in school. According to Clark (2010) community can be understood as the physical neighbourhood / local environment, but also as something more intangible relating to social networks and a sense of belonging.

One family even moved to campus so that their children were able to grow up within this community. It seems that for families in my study community care could potentially make up for what got lost through the absence of care by the extended family.

Parents in my study did not know who would be mainly responsible for the care of their child when transitioning their children to childcare. Their need for reassurance that someone knows their child intimately and gives them reciprocal, receptive attention (Brooker, 2010) was therefore not met. The lack of an identified key person and changing educators' shifts made it difficult for parents to see how their emerging attachment relationships with their children are supported in childcare. When transitioning their children to childcare parents might fear to lose the primary place in their child's world (Dalli, 2002). Using an attachment theory lens, it is also interesting that the father who wanted to be an attachment figure for his child did not expect the same from childcare staff, but wanted his son to be attended to and responded to in childcare. This highlights again that attachment relationships are conceived as something happening within the nuclear family, and the belief that young children profit most from being cared for by their first attachment figures. In Dalli's (2002) study on transitions to childcare mothers had similar expectations of developmental benefits from childcare, as parents in the current study, and showed similar concerns, hopes, and worries. One father in my study acknowledged his children's attachments to educators, and he noted he would prefer slow transitions when educator turnover happens. This hints at the idea that educator turnover is a concern when children do attach to educators, and might be a possible reason that parents don't want their children to get too close in their relationships with educators. These examples present potential tensions that will impact the relationships within childcare. The assumption within the triangle of care is that relationships are formed without interference, whereas in these examples parents are actively constructing the child's experiences and might even be disrupting the natural relationship formation. In their desire to cultivate and sustain close parent-child attachment relationships these parents may need further support during this transition period to share the responsibility for the child, as this is a very fragile time of uncertainty from an attachment perspective.

On the structural level of the social context parents' expectations for centre-based care are congruent with their parenting philosophies. Expectations for educators

are high as educators chose this profession, and are therefore expected to be passionate about young children, be happy to be in the centre, enjoy taking care of children, and if possible never lose their patience. Parents reported positive childcare experiences when their expectations were met. Challenges on the other hand were mentioned when unexpected problems occurred, ranging from the challenge to spend time for orientation, to having to adjust work schedules in order to help a child adjust in a nonparental care environment or pick up a sick child.

Implications: In summary, relationships between parents and educators could be improved if educators understand families' perspectives and needs. It may help educators to realize that parental childcare decisions are influenced by socio-cultural expectations for example that childcare might not be the best choice for young children. It may also help educators to know what parents expect from them in regards to their characteristics and of the type of relationship parents expect educators to have with their children. Communication in this area would help open up discussion about the possible ambivalent feelings that parents have about educator-child relationships, and give educators a chance to explain benefits of relational care. Further, it would be beneficial for parents if educators were aware of their potential challenges in regards to their work demands, and make their expectations about such things as the transition process known in advance. It has been shown that families have an important role to play in the readiness of their children to succeed in transitions (Langford, 2010). It is therefore in the educators' interest to make sure that parents are as ready for the transition as children are. This may mean that meetings with parents before and during transition time outside of centre hours might be required.

5.1.2. Cultural and Structural Findings Regarding Educators

For educators, socio-cultural expectations are related to how the profession of Early Childhood Education is perceived in North American culture. Early Childhood Educators work in a profession that has traditionally been underpaid, underappreciated and underrepresented in spite of the enormous importance of the work it undertakes (Shaker, 2009). The provision of high quality and effective early childhood education has gained popularity in North American political agendas, as research has shown its short-term ability to enhance school readiness, as well as its long-term potential to close

achievement gaps, improve the school and life success of children from low-income families, and lessen crime rates (Ryan & Whitebrook, 2012). The same authors state that a large majority of early childhood programs are inadequate in achieving these tasks and therefore ask for ongoing professionalism in the field. Similarly, Bredekamp and Goffin (2012) plead for a professionalization of the early childhood workforce through degree requirements and appropriate compensation for educators to stay in the field longer, participate in ongoing training, and therefore meet the challenges of ever-changing requirements in this field. Manning-Morton (2006) in her study on personal and professional awareness of educators concluded it to be a major professional challenge for early childhood practitioners to engage closely with young children, as it touches deeply held personal values and often deeply buried personal experiences. The level of emotional demand in responsive relationships can lead educators to take on a defensive position, often expressed through the view that getting too close to children is not professional (Manning-Morton, 2006). This is exactly what the educators in this study expressed, and they emphasised their professionalism in relation to distinguishing their personal from their professional self, and their relationship with children in childcare from the relationships with their own families. They agreed on the importance of being professional with each other, as well as with families to establish and maintain trust. This identity in favour of professionalism was also found in other research studies. Harwood, Klopper, Osanyin, and Vanderlee (2013) for example reported findings where educators narrated stories that juxtaposed different versions of professional self versus personal self. These authors concluded that educators appreciated the plurality of roles as educators and individuals illustrated in these oscillating identities.

Another emerging aspect of professionalism in early childhood education discussed by Dalli (2006) and Page (2011) is the term 'professional love'. These authors see professional love as a pedagogical tool, something educators can consciously use as pedagogical strategy (Dalli, 2006) and that in no way diminishes children's love for their parents (Goldschmied & Jackson, 2004). The concept of professional love would acknowledge the expectations for love that fathers in this study expressed, and stands in contrast to what educators described as too close and therefore unprofessional relationships.

Looking at the structural level of the childcare, as noted earlier it is important to consider that the educators are part of a union. Young (2009) cites a study that showed that unionized providers overall have more access than their non-unionized counterparts to in-service training and off-site professional development, which supports the educators' professionalism. Young highlights that unionized centres positively contribute to the quality of early learning and childcare programs through lower staff turnover rates, fewer problems to recruit and retain good staff, quality program support, and higher ratings on program quality than non-unionized centres (2009). Despite these claims the centre under study still had significant staff absences due to illness, holidays, educational leaves and so forth, which were evident through educators missing inquiry circle meetings, sometimes for several weeks in a row. These educator absences and their replacement with casual childcare workers imply a lot of changes in caregivers for children enrolled in the program. In a triangle of care model these frequent educator absences make it harder for all parties involved to build relationships with each other, as the model requires possibilities of regular interactions between the individuals. From an attachment perspective these frequent absences confound the educator's ability to read infants' or toddlers' cues and respond accordingly (Lally, 2010, 2013).

To examine how people make sense of and craft their work Ryan and Whitebrook (2012) argue for an inquiry into the dynamic nature of relationships between workers and their workplace. They highlighted that job crafting is learned through socialization into a community of practices constructed through the individuals who work in this particular context. The authors admit that there is limited research, but that this kind of research might help to understand how process and structural elements in the workplace interact with the agenda of the teaching staff (Ryan & Whitebrook, 2012). My study adds to this body of literature as it shows that educators do indeed have individual interpretations of the philosophy, policies and regulations of the childcare society they work in, and that these interpretations can lead to misunderstandings and conflict. However, through socialization into the community of practice these educators also came to a shared understanding and they interpreted policies flexibly when it suited them (shifts and schedules), but not when it was not convenient for them. As pointed out by the Program Director, it seems like educators do indeed follow their own agenda with their weekly changing shift schedule, and the tasks accompanied by them (i.e.

preparing snack, lunch, diaper changes, nap room duties, etc.). These ever-changing shifts and schedules make it hard for children and parents to expect who will be present at drop-off or pick-up time, or who will be taking care of the children's various needs. From an attachment perspective this practice makes it difficult for children to discover a routine in their care, as well as for educators to provide the stable and intimate care for children who are attached to them. And it makes it hard for parents to know whom to turn to if they have questions or concerns and therefore hinders consistent communication with a particular centre staff member (Powell, 1978).

Educators used their interpretation of policies and structures to explain why they did things in a certain way and to defend why they did not take up some practices such as the primary care model. In regards to transitioning children into the centre two of these educators argued they never thought about the process as it is what they were doing and it seemed to work. This clearly contradicted their statements about being flexible and adaptable, and seems to indicate that what they work with is a one-size-fits-all policy approach that is neither child- nor family-focussed.

Implications: In summary, early childhood educators work in a field with low socio-cultural status and low pay. They are aware of the move toward heightened professionalization of their field and reflect this by distinguishing their professional from their personal selves. Even though educators work for a childcare society and are members of a union, their individual understandings and interpretations of policies and procedures sometimes lead to misunderstandings and conflicts between them. By discussing these issues educators could reach a shared understanding of these policies and structures and the impact these may have on families. This in turn could lead to changes in their everyday practices, shifts and schedules that may be more accommodating to the families and children in their care and may in the long run alleviate some of the communication issues between parents and educators. Adopting a primary caregiver model for example with two (a primary and a secondary) preferred caregivers (Theilheimer, 2006) as attachment figures might help moderate some of the negative implications of frequent educator absences in the centre.

5.1.3. Parent-Educator Relationships

On an individual level, parents talked about parent-educator relationships, the trust they had in educators, the support they got from them (i.e. tips and tricks), and the communication (i.e. touching base) at the end of the day that was highly valued. Taken together, as long as there weren't too many troubles (i.e. prolonged separation anxiety), parents were satisfied with educators' work and their relationship with them. However, in the case of the mother who's son took a long time adjusting she did not feel he got the nurturing care he deserved, nor did she feel supported enough as a parent. From her perspective, she missed adequate communication strategies and a continuous progress report. Educators did realize this mother's heightened need for communication and offered her to call or email them anytime if she wanted to hear how her child was doing, without expecting her to actually take action. When she did take up their offer they realized it wasn't feasible for them to answer regular calls or emails during the day and they had to reach a compromise by sending her an email after lunch to inform her about how the child's day was going. Educators had to find a way to prioritize the needs of the group, while at the same time address this mother's concerns. Another very interesting point was made by one mother feeling that she had to be "a good parent to make the educators' job easier", so her child would get the best care and education from educators. When I presented this statement to educators, only one of them felt this was not the signal she wanted to give to parents, and maybe their communication with parents would need to be improved. This educator felt it was necessary to look at educators' use of verbal and non-verbal messages towards parents, and she admitted that educators do sometimes think that transition difficulties are more a parental problem than one for children. She felt however, that parents should not be getting the feeling that educators have this opinion. It should be mentioned though, that pleasing every parent is indeed a hard job, given the range of individual and cultural differences. As noted there was also disagreement among one couple about the educators' communication skills. This points out the difficulty of arriving at common understandings and agreement.

Educators continuously pointed out how important trusting relationships with parents are for them. But they felt that building this relationship is easier with some parents and harder with others, and that certain educators were better able to build such

relationships with parents than others. Reasons for this according to the educators are that many parents preferred to talk to the lead educator only, and the youngest educator suspected it had to do with her lack of experience with children of her own. Taken together, these relationships with parents from an educator's view are clearly professional relationships where educators are experts and not partners of parents, which stands in contrast to what Goldschmied and Jackson (2004) ask for in parent-educator partnerships. Clark (2010) confirms that practitioners often view themselves as possessing expertise, emphasising the need to teach parents the appropriate way to interact with their children. She further states that under such circumstances it is not surprising that some parents resist moves toward parental involvement. Educators in my study acknowledged the importance of building a bond with parents, but different than educators in Ebbeck and Yim's (2009) study on primary caregiving, they did not realize this as an indirect way to foster secure attachments with the children in their care. It rather seems that educators are, as Ebbeck and Yim (2009) suspected, ambivalent about involving parents in their programs and that the knowledge-power relationship between them may further hinder the development of an effective bond. Another interesting factor I found was that expectations for parents are not communicated to them. Parents were not informed that they are expected to ask questions and provide information during orientation, nor were they informed that educators would like to use 'overlapping care' (the joint caretaking and then gradual handing over of the child from parent to educator) to make transitions easier for children. Educators depended mainly on drop-off and pick-up times to communicate with the parents, while mentioning how little time they have during these transitions to talk to parents individually. This time seems limited for educators to learn about parents' childcare expectations, parenting philosophies, and workplace demands; all of which are important factors influencing the parent-educator relationship. Even though educators continuously highlighted their availability for parental requests and concerns, there seldom seems to be time to actually enter into such conversations. These results are consistent with Powell's (1978), findings that much of the interpersonal exchange between parents and caregivers is superficial in content, and that parents have difficulty accessing and communicating with a particular centre staff member who is responsible for their child. It seems that the dynamics in educator-parent relationships reported by Powell (1978) still

continue to operate, informing a lack of congruence between educator's and parental views.

Implications: Despite educators' frequent reference to their open-door policy, this seems rhetorical given that the educators don't actually expect parents to take them at their word. These childcare educators do realize that relationships are the most important components of a child's childcare experience (Goldschmied & Jackson, 2004; Smidt, 2009), but see themselves as experts rather than partners of parents, perhaps as a response to the development of their professional selves. Clark (2010) points out that the establishment of truly equitable and collaborative relationships requires a confrontation of power differentials, where parents are the experts for their specific child (Brooker, 2008), which can be challenging for the professional identity of practitioners. Despite this, the trusting relationship educators wanted to build with parents seems to be happening (as parents reported trusting these educators and taking their suggestions seriously), and what they offer as support and communication seems to be enough for most of the parents. To improve the parent-educator relationship and parental involvement in the centre it would be important for educators to inform the parents about their expectations and accept that not all parents will be available for this sort of collaboration. Powell (1978) suggested to pay attention to the number and type (role) of educators available for parents to talk to during transition times (drop-off and pick-up times), defining what educators' tasks and demands are during these times, and to make sure the physical environment allows for parent-caregiver interactions to take place. From an attachment perspective it would be important that educators acknowledge that trusting parent-educator relationships are an indirect way to foster attachments with children (Ebbeck & Yim, 2009). Looking at the relationship between parents and educators in a triangle of care model it seems that educators succeed in their goal of building trusting relationship with most of the parents, even though this is not the case for all educators and parents. During inquiry circles they often mentioned that it would be helpful to know what parents think about them and their work in the centre. From a parental perspective however the same is true, as it would be beneficial to know what educators' expectations of the parents are in terms of both relationships and day-to-day interactions at the centre. Both sides would therefore benefit from improved communication, another factor that speaks for additional parent-educator meetings.

5.1.4. Transition to Childcare and Building of Educator-Child Relationships

When building their relationships with children the educators in the present study make themselves available to children in a model of 'child-selected care', before gradually introducing the child to the care of other educators. This unique style of care is different from the traditional primary care model in that it lets children pick their preferred caregiver to build a relationship, before introducing the child to care by other educators. An advantage of the child-selected care model over a primary caregiver model is that the child can pick a caregiver of his choice to attach to, and does not need to attach to the one caregiver based on availability in her group. However, if educators perceive this first attachment as too close or taking the form of 'over-attachment' a term coined by the staff, the child is directed toward other caregivers. This is done to avoid an attachment between the caregiver and the child that is too dependent on care by one specific caregiver only. Educators have to balance their attention between the new child and the children attending for longer, and are in constant ambiguity between the needs of the individual and the needs of the group. If educators need to consider the perspective of the group interest over individual needs, distributing relationships seems to be in the interest of a harmonious approach across caregivers and children.

Noddings's (1984) concept of mutuality upholds that the caring teaching-learning relationship is reciprocal between educators and children. This mutuality, also a tenet of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1951), would be an example of why educators felt they could potentially be over-attached to a child, even though they were resisting calling the relationship between themselves and children an attachment. Even though they weren't using attachment to describe their relationships with the children, they were using the word 'over-attachment' to describe the intense interdependency between the educator and the child. Ebbeck and Yim (2009) mentioned that building on Bowlby's theory, researchers began to enrich and refine definitions of attachments as ability to form and maintain lasting relationships over time and distance, as well as an emotional bond between two people with an expectation of care and protection. Attachment has been interpreted in nonparental care settings as strong bond with special people that lead to a feeling of pleasure when interacting with them, as well as comfort in times of distress (Ebbeck & Yim, 2009). In this sense, educators were right in questioning if their

relationship with children really is an attachment. Even so, they were convinced that over-attachment could happen if an educator would start to neglect the needs of other children in her care in favour of one child. Educators stressed equitable treatment of all children in their care as their goal. Even though they did not want to call their relationship towards children attachments, they called it instead “over-attachment of educators” or “favouritism”, and considered these relationships as “unhealthy”. In Bowlby’s (1969) attachment theory, children are attached to their caregivers, not the other way around. This is also more consistent with the educators’ statement that their relationships with children are professional relationships. Educators prefer a distributed approach to attachment relationships, with harmony across all members in the childcare as opposed to one-on-one attachment relationships. This is supported by the findings of Ahnert, Pinquart, and Lamb (2006) who found group-related sensitivity to be an important predictor for childcare educators who were secure attachment figures for children. It does however stand in contrast to relational pedagogy promoting sensitive responsive one-on-one caregiving to optimize development by relying on attunement and intersubjectivity (Dalli, 2014; Lally 2010, 2013). Other authors further emphasised that frequent positive interactions (De Schipper, Travecchio, & van IJzendoorn, 2008) with a stable caregiver (Barnas & Cummings, 1994; Howes & Hamilton 1992a, 1992b) were necessary factors for secure caregiver-child relationships. In a distributed approach to attachment relationships where it is not clear who is in charge of the needs of whom, regular one-on-one interactions (Mahn, 2003) and finely tuned guidance (Dalli, 2014; Rogoff, Malkin, & Gilbride, 1984) is not assured for all of the children.

Many researchers agree that the primary caregiver model is beneficial to foster relationships and a smooth transition to childcare (Brooker, 2008; Daniel & Shapiro, 1996; Ebbeck & Yim, 2009; Goldschmied & Jackson, 2004; Lally, 2010, 2013). The primary caregiver model assures that there are regular occasions when a particular caregiver’s attention is given to a particular child for a stable relationship to occur. These relationships enhance the child’s sense of security, and enable the educator to read the child’s cues and respond accordingly (Lally, 2010, 2013). Primary caregivers are generally responsible for intimate care of infants and toddlers, like feeding and changing routines, and offer regular individual attention to the children in their care (Goldschmied & Jackson, 2004; Mahn, 2003). Ebbeck and Yim (2009) found a positive

influence of the primary caregiver model on children, parents and educators, and in their study on the implementation of primary caregiving both parents and childcare staff were in favour of the system. They agreed that this working system enhances not only infants' and toddlers' well being and their establishment of secure attachment with adults, but also strengthens parents' trust in childcare workers.

Educators in this study listed several factors as working against the primary caregiver model, and in favour of what I termed 'child-selected care', in which attachments are first supported, but then care is distributed between the educators in the centre. On the structural level these educators were concerned with frequent absences from the centre (i.e. overtime compensation, sickness, practicums, etc.), as well as with their weekly rotation of shifts and therefore work schedules. Their frequent absences would make it hard to provide these regular occasions of attention to each child in their care, and they would need to have at least one other person as second-choice attachment figure for each child (Dalli, Kibble, Cairns-Cowan, Corrigan, & McBride 2009). Depending on the shift educators work, their schedules include food preparation, diapering, nap room duties, etc. If a primary caregiver system were to be implemented in the centre, these schedules would no longer be working, and educators would need to do most of these tasks for the children in their care. On a relational level educators were concerned with over-attachment of children, as well as favouritism on their part. Their understanding of primary caregiving clearly points to exclusive care of one educator for selected children. In their research report Dalli et al. (2009) explain a primary caregiving approach that requires a sensitive responsiveness to colleagues and builds a respectful and supportive team structure, contradicting the prevailing assumption that primary caregivers work in isolation. As a further argument against primary caregiving, educators in my study mentioned that a child's attachment to them might not be reciprocated, which makes it harder for them to make themselves available for the child. Indeed Goosens and van IJzendoorn (1990) reported that the same caregiver can have children in her care that are securely attached to her, as well as children who are insecurely attached to her. In general, attachment theory does not take up the feelings on the part of the educators, as the focus is the child's attachment to the caregiver. Goldschmied and Jackson (2004) propose that structural as well as personal support should be given to the caregiver in a situation like this to enhance the relationships with

children, or the primary caregiver might be changed for a child. However, the problem of missing reciprocity might also arise in a child-selected model, when the child chooses the caregiver. Two further arguments against a primary caregiver model educators mentioned had to do with parents. First, parents might choose another educator to attach to than their child; second, educators felt some parents would not appreciate close relationships between educators and children. It is true that parents might choose a educator to build a relationship with if they are not aware who the primary caregiver for their child is. This might be overcome if it is made clear from the beginning which educator the family is working with most closely. If parents show difficulties accepting an attachment relationship between their child and his/her educators it might be helpful to explain to parents that it is beneficial for their child if they have a special person to turn to during the long hours they spend in childcare (Goldschmied & Jackson, 2004). Even though Ebbeck and Yim (2009) argued that a primary caregiver enhances professionalism of the early childhood field, they also highlighted that there is a need to further refine the primary caregiving system to better help children's first transition from home to a childcare centre, as well as to encourage more centres to adopt this primary caregiving approach.

Implications: Educator absences cannot be avoided in centre-based childcare. However, a relationship-based approach where educators and parents respect and value each other and the implementation of a primary caregiver model in this infant/toddler centre might lessen the negative influences related to frequent educator absences for children. In a team of three full-time and one part-time educators each child will have his or her hierarchy of attachment figures (Bowlby, 2005). If educators take a child-directed focus on care and show some flexibility, it should be possible that one of the two most favoured educators could be available for the child throughout the day. The implementation of a primary caregiver model might also help the parents, as they would have a person to talk to about their expectations, concerns, and fears. For educators the primary caregiver model offers new possibilities to build relationships with parents, which might help those educators who felt left out by parents. In situations where children show problems adjusting it would be helpful for parents to know whom to turn to. Lastly, educators' perception of a primary caregiving model might change once they investigate its application to their everyday practice. Further, if educators would

consider the concept of professional love this might change their perception on professionalism in relationships with children.

The fact that educators in this centre share responsibilities for all children explains why educators felt the triangle of care model was very abstract compared to their practice. When three full-time and one part-time educator have relationships with a child and with the child's parents, there are multiple connections between them, not just one. Educators therefore felt this triangle would not sufficiently depict their relationships and did not know how it could help in their everyday teaching. Brooker (2008) intended her triangle of care model to be applied to group settings with primary caregiving in place. This model does not consider individual perspectives of both parents in the triangle. Instead it is limited to one parent accompanying the child to the centre. In the present study many families shared this task and therefore relationships with both parents, mother and father need to be considered. In addition, it would be beneficial if communication with parents through parent meetings could be held with both parents present to prevent misunderstandings. In the triangle of care model, this would require an amendment to include both parents rather than one.

5.2. Contribution and Further Research

In this next section I highlight the contributions of this study to the literature on nonparental childcare and attachment relationships, discuss limitations, and add an addendum to briefly describe events occurring at the centre since I finished my data collection. Following this I discuss further research.

5.2.1. Contribution to the Literature

The present study addressed how families and professional caregivers navigate the very important transition from care by one of the parents to care in a group-care setting. It highlighted that parent-educator relationships could indeed be improved if both sides acknowledged what socio-cultural influences the other side is experiencing and what expectations they bring to these developing relationships. It might not be obvious to educators that parents might be torn between their decision to use childcare

and socio-cultural expectations about parenting (Belsky, 2001; Richardson, 1993; Wall, 2010). On the other hand, parents have high expectations for educators but might not be aware of the tensions educators experience between working in a low paid and low social status profession, and the raising demand for professional development and higher education to professionalise the field. The goal of the study has been to focus on the transition period relationally, to broaden the existing literature, and gain an in-depth understanding of childcare transition practices and lived experiences of the people involved in this one particular centre. Acknowledging the different perspectives will help educators to develop tools to better prepare parents and children for this transition process. Findings show that enhanced communication between parents and educators could help to achieve a shared understanding of what is needed to improve the relationship to a partnership between educators and parents. This enhanced communication however also requires a higher time investment (i.e. in home visits and parent-educator meetings) possibly after childcare hours.

While attachment theory looked at the dyad of mother-child or educator-child relationship, the triangle of care model introduced triads of relationships including parent, educator and child. My study has shown that even these triads are not accurately depicting the reality of relationships in childcare centres. My study adds to these perspectives as it involved multiple professionals' as well as fathers' views. Fathers in this study took an active role in transitioning their children to care, through direct involvement or through their expectations and more sporadic experiences in the childcare centre. However small the involvement of one of the parents might be it must be taken into consideration in a care arrangement to ensure the needs of all parties involved are considered.

From an attachment theory perspective the implementation of a primary caregiver model is proposed to help children, parents, and educators achieve changes in everyday practices, shifts and schedules that will make the transition to care smoother for everyone involved. However, consistent with Ebbeck and Yim (2009) I argue for further research in this area, as it is not yet clear what a primary caregiving model in a centre like the one participating in this study could look like in practice. What needs to be considered for this childcare centre is how educators can take responsibility for certain children while at the same time maintaining a group-related sensitivity. There

seems to be agreement on a relational approach to childcare however many details need further investigation. I therefore argue for a further theory-practice inquiry with these educators into their practice and how the concept of professional love as well as primary caregiving could be implemented at their centre.

Generalization of the findings of this study is somewhat limited as this case study depicts the lived experiences of individuals involved in one particular childcare centre and my interpretations of these experiences. However, this investigation offered an in-depth view into the event of starting nonmaternal childcare within an institutional childcare setting, and findings were supported by recent literature.

5.2.2. Ongoing Professional Development in the Childcare Centre

In order to learn what happened following my data collection and to verify my findings I had conversations with the two program directors for the infant toddler centres of the childcare society. In these discussions I learned that the society has started to offer open houses for people to come and see the centres after hours, talk to educators and ask questions. These open houses give parents an opportunity to see the centres before applying for childcare. The society has also changed their infant centre to an infant/toddler centre, meaning that all infant/toddler centres are now open for children from 0-3 years, as defined by licencing. This new practice embraces an attachment perspective in that the transition from infant centre to infant/toddler centre is no longer necessary.

5.2.3. Further Research

Findings of this study highlight certain areas where further research is needed. One of these areas is how community care relates to care by extended family. It would be interesting to learn more about family conceptions of community and what types of community support are meaningful for families. In concordance with Ebbeck and Yim (2009) I argue for a refinement of the primary caregiver model. My study highlighted that for educators to develop a relationship with both parents is a necessary step in the development of a secure and stable educator-child relationship. Further research might therefore yield other details regarding how such a model can be implemented in a

childcare centre, and how a child-focus can be combined with educators' agendas. These would be helpful implications for practice, and help other childcare centres take on the challenge of implementing such a care model. Most importantly for the childcare centre where this research took place however, further research is need on fostering parent-educator partnerships and communication strategies including possible scenarios of parent-educator meetings.

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Appendices

Appendix A.

Questionnaire on Transition to Childcare

1. What criteria were you using to select childcare? (i.e. close to home/work, small size, good reputation, recommendation by family/friends).
2. What did you know about the centre before your child started childcare?
3. How long did you expect the orientation process would take for your child?
4. How would you describe your child's transition into the centre?
5. What kind of information about your child's day in the centre do you like to get from childcare educators?
6. What are your hopes for your child's childcare experience?
7. What are or were your fears (if any) for your child's childcare experience?
8. In what ways are you involved in your child's program?
9. In what other ways would you like to be involved with your child's centre?

Please add any other comments:

Are you willing to participate in an additional face to face interview (about an hour in length) time and location to be arranged at your convenience?

YES, I can be contacted at _____

NO, not at this time

Appendix B.

Interview Protocol Parents

1. Parents who agreed to be interviewed in the questionnaire were contacted via their chosen form of contact (email or telephone).
2. Parents chose a convenient date, time and place for the interview (at least one hour).
3. Before starting the interview I thanked the parents for agreeing to be interviewed, asked them for permission to tape our discussion, explained my main question, and had them sign the consent form.
4. After each question I gave parents ample time to reply and asked back for clarification if needed.
5. After the interview I thanked the parents and asked if I could get back in touch if I needed to clarify something or had further questions.
6. After interviewing the mothers I asked if they would ask their partners if they would agree to be interviewed too.
7. After each interview I wrote a reflection or taped a verbal reflection.

Appendix C.

Interview Protocol Educators

1. Educators chose a convenient date, time and place for the interview² (at least one hour).
2. Before starting the interview I thanked the educators for agreeing to be interviewed, asked them for permission to tape our discussion, explained my main question again, and had them sign the consent form.
3. After each question I gave educators ample time to reply and asked back for clarification if needed.
4. I included summaries of parental answers to the educators (as they had asked to know what parents thought about them) and gave them ample time to react to these summaries.
5. After the interview I thanked the educators and asked if I could get back in touch if I needed to clarify something or had further questions.
6. After each interview I wrote a reflection or taped a verbal reflection.

² One educator chose to be interviewed via email as she felt her language abilities were not good enough for an in-person interview. The questions were emailed to her and she typed her answers between the questions and sent the document back.

Appendix D.

Parental Interview Questions

Main Question: ***What were parents' expectations, concerns, and fears regarding the start of childcare for their child?***

1. Can you tell me how you experienced your maternity leave and how much time you took? *Did you take any parental leave?*³
2. Can you explain why you chose to enrol your child in a childcare centre?
3. Can you tell me what criteria you were using to choose the childcare centre your child is enrolled in now?
4. What is your parenting philosophy?
5. What did you expect of the gradual entry process?
6. Please describe your child's transition to childcare.
7. What are your hopes and fears for your child's childcare experience?
8. What are your future childcare plans?

If time allows:

- What would you like the educators to know about your child and family? Is there anything that you don't feel comfortable sharing with the educators?
 - What kind of information about your child's day in the centre would you expect to get from childcare educators?
 - Do you expect other parenting help/support from childcare educators? Would you appreciate that?
 - How would your childcare situation ideally look like in the future?
9. I have been wondering if the perspectives of the fathers would be distinguishable from that of the mothers. Do you think your partner would be interested in being interviewed, either on his own or together with you?

³ This one question was adjusted for fathers.

10. The following background questions will help me to understand the home environment of your child:

- What is your cultural background?
- Age?
- Marital status?
- Education?
- Current occupation?
- How would you describe the childcare costs relative to your family's income?
- Does your child have any siblings?
- What is the age of your child?

11. Do you think you would have participated in this study if I had asked you before the orientation started?

12. Is there anything you would like to add?

Appendix E.

Educator Interview Questions

Main Question: ***What were parents' expectations, concerns, and fears regarding the start of childcare for their child?***

1. What do you think characterises the childcare centre you work at? Why would you recommend to parents they send their child here?
2. This childcare centre has a gradual entry process called *orientation*. In your opinion, what are the advantages, and/or possible disadvantages of the orientation process?
3. At what point are parents informed about orientation and that they have to be present?
4. What do you expect from the parents during orientation?
5. What information do you have about a child and his/her family before orientation starts?
6. What kind of help and support can you offer to parents during orientation?
7. In your experience, how do parents interact with their child during orientation?
8. What do you do with a child who cries when the parent leaves him/her at childcare?
9. Sometimes orientations are extended because the child has not transitioned well. What are possible reasons to extend it, and are there also reasons to shorten it?
10. Do you have ideas on how to improve or change orientation?
11. In our inquiry circles we talked about relationships with parents and how important good communication with parents is for you as educators. When and how do you work on building this relationship?
12. Do you offer any parenting help and support to parents other than during orientation?
13. Background questions on the educators:
 - What is your cultural background?
 - Age?
 - Education?
 - Current occupational status at the childcare?
 - How long have you been working at this centre?

- Do you have children of your own? If yes, what age are your children?

14. Is there anything you would like to add?

Appendix F.

Follow-up Interview Questions

1. I am in the process of data analysis right now, and I have some clarifying or verifying questions. My first question is in regards to your parenting philosophy. I understood your philosophy in a way that you provide structure, like the stage for your child to grow, learn and experience on. And your child gets the autonomy / agency and affection from you to do that.
 - Am I on the right track?
 - What I want to inquire about is how and maybe how much attention for or social interaction with your child is embedded in this philosophy?
 - Would you say the focus lies with your children right now? Or is it more like a balance between your needs and the children's needs?
2. My second question is about childcare expectations. I was wondering if you could tell me what you expected the educator relationship to be.
3. Overall you seemed very happy with your experience at the centre. But if you were to improve the experience for other families what would you do to change or adjust things in the areas of transitions, programing, relationships, or educator support?
4. You described your child as having a unique personality in that he loves attention and affection, movement and stimulation. How do you think his personality influenced his childcare transition experience?
5. What can you tell me about your child's transition to the Montessori-Preschool?
6. What transitions are coming up for your children?

Appendix G.

Coding Strategy

Table G1: Themes, Categories and Codes Emerged Through Coding

Theme 1: Parenting Philosophy	Codes:
<i>Parent-Led Parenting</i>	Structure & Routine Activities & Stimulation Discipline / Boundaries Good idea versus no formal philosophy
<i>Child-Led Parenting</i>	Focus on child Attention & Affection Autonomy & Agency
<i>Support for Parenting Philosophy</i>	Fully supported Partly supported
Theme 2: Childcare Expectations	
<i>Programming</i>	Learning & Education – Activities & Stimulation Quality of Care Cost Fears
<i>Relationships</i>	Positive educator relationships Social interactions Positive experience & Community
<i>Transition Expectations</i>	Hope for smooth transition Fear of separation anxiety Time to get to know the centre
Theme 3: Childcare Experiences	
<i>Parental Challenges</i>	Harder than expected to leave child Challenging to participate in gradual entry process Difficulty adjusting
<i>Positive Childcare Experiences & Educator Support</i>	Happy & Comfortable Programming expectations met Educator support

Suggestions for Improvement

1:4 ratio

Educator engagement

Shape of the day