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ABSTRACT

This case study used a phenomenological approach to explore the experiences of three children starting child care, the adult who accompanied them to the center during the settling-in period, and one of the child caregivers. Data were collected by means of field notes, videotapes, interviews with the mother and teacher, journal entries by the mother or other adult at home and by teachers, and child care center documents and other parent materials. A striking finding of the study was the consistency with which the patterns of interactions the children established seemed to fit the expectations their teachers held about how the pattern would unfold. The stories each are structured around a key phrase that emerged from the data as capturing the central theme of their story: (1) "Coming to terms with separation"; (2) "Who looks after me here?"; and (3) "Latching on to Sam." The stories are further analyzed from a co-constructionist perspective, an attachment theory perspective, and a temperament theory perspective. It was concluded that the stories illustrate a connection between the children's experience of their interactions with adults and the way that adults understood their role during the settling-in process, that children attempted to form relationships with a preferred adult to fill the gap left by their mothers' absence, and that a system of assigning to a specific teacher responsibility for settling-in is a credible way of approaching the experience of starting child care. (Contains 39 references.) (KB)

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Starting childcare:
what young children learn about relating to adults in the first weeks of settling into a childcare centre

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Introduction

This paper presents data from a case study project in which I explored the event of starting childcare as an experience which affected not only the child but also the two adults who were most involved in the event alongside the child: the home adult who accompanied the child to childcare during the settling-in period, and at least one teacher from the childcare centre attended by the child. In this paper I focus on the experiences of three under-three year olds who took part in the study as they learnt to relate to the new adults at their childcare centre. In telling the children's stories of these experiences, I also discuss the teachers' contributions to these experiences.

Literature on starting childcare is very limited and research-based literature on this is even less so. Typically, the focus of research has been on children and any adults involved have participated as informants about the children's adjustment rather than as participants in the experience in their own right. A variety of early childhood settings have featured in these studies such as nursery schools in the United States and England (e.g., Blatchford, 1983; Marcus, Chess, & Thomas, 1972), preschools in North America, Israel and Australia (e.g., Klein, 1991; Lewis, 1977; Robbins, 1997), reception classes in England (e.g., Ghaye & Pascal, 1988), and day care/childcare centres in a variety of countries (e.g., Hock, 1984; Pramling & Lindahl, 1991, 1994; Thyssen, in press; Zajdeman & Minnes, 1991). No studies of this event have been undertaken in the NZ context[1]. The age of the children whose entry into the early childhood setting has been studied has also varied although, with a few exceptions (e.g., Hamilton & Howes, 1992; Janis, 1964; Meltzer, 1984; Pramling & Lindahl, 1991, 1994; Thyssen, in press), the focus of research has largely been on children aged three years and over.

In the small body of existing research on this topic two approaches have dominated: the traditional psychological approach which sees the experience of starting childcare as one involving separation from the mother, and the social psychological approach which considers the experience as one of adjustment to a new social setting.

Traditional psychological studies have primarily used notions from psychoanalytic theory, attachment theory and temperament studies to explain their findings. Thus psychoanalytic studies (e.g., Janis, 1964; Meltzer, 1984; Robbins, 1997) have suggested that separation from

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

the mother on entry into childcare results in a need for children to develop a strong relationship with the teacher by way of a substitute. In addition, entering the group situation of an early childhood centre has been seen from a psychoanalytic perspective as representing entry into a form of tribal culture for which the child has to learn the rules by relying on "primitive social impulses"(Meltzer, 1984, p.100). Other studies have viewed separation as an unpleasant experience that is shared by children and mothers and whose impact could be reduced through various strategies (e.g., Hock, 1984; Robbins, 1997). Studies from an attachment theory perspective have focused on studying the effect of using childcare on children's attachment relationships with their mother (e.g., Ainslie & Anderson, 1984; Bretherton & Waters, 1985), Studies of how the attachment relationships between the mother and the child might affect the experience of starting childcare have been very few (eg., Petrie & Davidson, 1995).

Studies from a temperament theory perspective which have explored the relationship between children's temperaments and their adjustment to being in an early childhood setting (e.g., Marcus et al., 1972; Mobley & Pullis, 1991) have generally understood adjustment as involving social relations with peers and with centre adults together with the individual child's psychological response to the new environment. Thus, they have provided a more multi-dimensional view of the experience of starting childcare than that offered by psychoanalytic studies of starting childcare.

Within the social-psychological approach to studying entry into childcare, the focus has been on this experience as one of socialisation. Two studies within this perspective (Blatchford et al. 1984; Feldbaum et al. 1980), for example, studied children's experience of this event through examining teachers' and researchers' measures of children's adjustment to the new demands of the early childhood setting. From these adult perspectives of this experience, the researchers concluded that while the new children appeared at first to lack the "necessary information about rules, rituals and power structure" (Blatchford et al., 1984, p.157), this situation changed very rapidly and the behaviour of the new children became more similar to that of the established group members even after the first week (Feldbaum et al., 1980). In addition, Blatchford et al. (1984), Jorde (1984) and Murton (1971) saw entry into an early childhood setting as an experience of transition which affected children as well as parents (mostly mothers) and their studies highlighted that children's experiences of this transition were not homogeneous. They further noted that in their studies, contacts between parents and teachers were often ineffectual in easing the transition and that better communication was needed if all three parties in the experience were to find themselves "happily situated" (Blatchford et al., 1984, p.162).

In recent years, a third approach to studying children's early experiences of childcare has emerged in two Scandinavian studies which have sought to understand children's first experiences in daycare from the perspective of the children themselves (Pramling & Lindahl, 1991, 1994; Thyssen, in press). Pramling and Lindahl adopted the phenomenological position that intentionality is an expression of consciousness and thus of experience. Using video-taped records of the children's behaviours, they studied infants' learning experiences in daycare settings through exploring what children directed their consciousness at. Thyssen sought to explore how infants acted in the "life-world" of the daycare setting by focusing on the children's interactions with the adults, their peers and the environment.

The approach to data gathering and analysis I used in my study drew on the insights gained by these studies. In particular, I noted the need for a tri-partite focus on the experience of starting childcare highlighted by Blatchford et al. (1984) and the potential of methods used by Pramling and Lindahl (1991, 1994) and Thyssen (in press) for the exploration of the lived reality of starting childcare from the children's perspective.

The research approach

The overall study on whose data this paper draws, used a qualitative case study approach informed by principles from grounded theory(e.g., Charmaz, 1995; Hutchinson, 1998), narrative inquiry (Polkinghorne, 1988, 1995; Sarbin, 1986) and deconstructivist analysis (e.g., Burman, 1994). Five case studies were conducted in five licensed childcare centres in a major city in Aotearoa/New Zealand over a total period of 10 months. The duration of each case study varied between 8 to 16 weeks depending on the number of orientation visits which each child had. The participating centres were chosen from an official list of licensed childcare centres (Early Childhood Development Unit, 1992) on the basis of travelling distance for fieldwork purposes, the centre's expression of interest in participating in the study and availability in that centre of an under-3 year old child about to start childcare for the first time. Selection on these grounds yielded a list of 15 centres from which 5 centres were chosen on a first-come-first-served basis. Two of these centres were full day centres, and three offered morning-only sessions or separate morning and afternoon sessions.

The children who participated in the overall study, four girls and one boy, were aged between 15 to 25 months at the start of the study and all lived with both their parents in one household. Four of the children were only children to first time parents and one child, Nina, had an older

sibling who was also a preschooler. The invitation to participate in the study was made through the centre supervisor to the home adult who enrolled the child at the centre. In all cases, this was the child's mother. Thus, the mothers of the 5 children were involved as participants in the study. In the case of the one male child, Robert, the father, an aunt and one grandmother also contributed to the data.

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

[Insert Table 1 about here]

For each case study, the data gathered consisted of:

i. fieldnotes of all the child's orientation visits (number and length of field visits varied per child) and of one visit each week for 6 weeks
ii. video recordings of 3 events during each fieldwork visit (the child's arrival, the departure and one snack-time)
iii. 2 interviews with the mother, one at the start of the child's period of sole attendance at the centre and one 6 weeks later
iv. 2 interviews with the teacher most involved in the child's settling-in period, one at the start of the child's period of sole attendance at the centre and one 6 weeks later
v. journal entries by the mother and/or other home adult
vi. journal entries by the teacher/s
vii. centre documents which explained the process of settling-in and other written material made available to parents.

These data were augmented by a number of informal conversations which occurred throughout the fieldwork stage of the case studies as I became more immersed in the action of the childcare centre and drifted in and out of being a peripheral participant in the life of the centre. I kept a note of these conversations as part of the fieldnotes.

Data analysis occurred continuously throughout the project from initial data gathering to the final writing stage. Initial ideas about "what was going on in the data" (Glaser, 1978, p. 94) led to a list of thematic categories which evolved through constant "memoing" of "elusive and shifting connections within the data" (Hutchinson, 1988, p. 136) into a set of main themes that

appeared to have validity across the cases. These themes formed the structure around which my stories of the participants' experiences have been constructed.

In gathering data about the children's experiences, the limited verbality of the children in my study meant that they were not able to tell their own stories of their experiences of starting childcare. Thus, the stories presented below have been constructed from my own observations of the children during their attendance at the centre, including the video records I kept of their time there, and what the adult participants in the study told me of their thinking about the child's experience in their journals and interviews. In seeking to gain an understanding of the experience of starting childcare from the children's perspective, I have drawn on the work of Pramling and Lindahl (1991, 1994) for insights on how to use my data and have created narrative accounts of the children's experiences which Daniel Stern (1985, p. 4) and Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers (1992, p. 18) might call "working hypotheses" about the infants' lived reality of starting childcare. In discussing the possible implications of my data for enhancing early childhood practice, I have also drawn on the critical polytextualist ideas of Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers who have argued that since it is not possible to discover what is "real", or the truth, about any story that is told about children, or life in general, the best one can do is to shift attention onto:

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

Narratives of children's experiences

The stories I present in this paper are stories of children learning to relate to the adults in their centre. In focusing specifically on the children's interactions with the centre adults, what emerged most strikingly was the consistency with which the patterns of interactions which children established with the centre adults appeared to fit in with the expectations which their teachers had for how this pattern would unfold. These expectations were part of what I have called the "theories of practice" of the teachers (see Dalli, 1999) in which they articulated their view of best practice during the process of settling-in. Since it is not possible to tell each of the participating children's stories in the detail each deserves, I have chosen to focus on the stories of three of the five children in the overall study whose centres operated different policies on the way adults worked with new children. This will illustrate how the teachers' theories of practice

were implicated in what the three children learnt about the centre adults during the first weeks of starting childcare.

Relating to the new adults at the centre: three children's experiences

The three children whose stories I tell here were Nina, Julie and Maddi. Nina started childcare in a centre where she was immediately allocated a primary caregiver called Sarah. In the case of Julie, the centre she attended had a very firm policy that all staff looked after all the children, while in the case of Maddi, no particular policy existed about this matter and the teachers operated from a practical principle of "going with the child".

The story of each of these three children is structured around a key phrase that emerged from the data as capturing the central theme of their story; in the case of Nina and Maddi's stories, the phrase was one used by one of the adult participants who talked about them. The title of Julie's story emerged from a synthesis of the data about how she learnt to relate to the teachers in her centre.

Nina's story: "Coming to terms with separation"

"Coming to terms with separation" was how Nina's mother, Jean, described her daughter's experience of starting childcare. However, this phrase was also central to how Nina's teacher, Sarah, understood Nina's settling-in experience. Jean and Sarah in fact told Nina's story in quite similar ways. For example, both women saw Nina's initial two visits as a great success, they both agreed that throughout the process, the initial "success" appeared threatened by three breaks in Nina's attendance and both agreed that at the end of the process, Nina had settled in very happily. In each of the two women's stories, there was also much positive comment on the way the other was handling the experience of Nina's settling-in. Beyond these similarities, however, there were some different emphases which in my view related to the different roles, and associated functions, occupied by the two women in relation to Nina. Thus, Jean's story focused on gauging whether Nina was happy or not and in tracing the ebb and flow of this happiness. Sarah, on the other hand, focused on how well she judged the relationship between her and Nina to be developing.

In the observational data on Nina's interactions with the centre adults, it is clear that the focus in Sarah's story on the developing relationship between her and Nina was closely related to her theory of practice about settling-in. This theory of practice emerged for the first time in the context of Sarah's description of the recent introduction in her centre of the primary caregiver

system. Sarah explained in our first interview: "we believe it is better for a child to develop a deep relationship with one adult than a superficial relationship with four adults. When they're comfortable with one person, then they'll branch out" (CS1.TIS1.3.2a). Sarah also believed that the primary caregiver system gave the new child "four to six weeks of almost exclusive treatment" adding "you can't expect that focused treatment from all the staff" (CS1.TIS1.3.2a). In Sarah's theory of practice, "focused treatment" was the mechanism through which a deep relationship would develop which would make the child feel confident and able to then "branch out" to others. Another aspect of Sarah's theory of practice was the notion that the teacher's role in settling in a new child was to "wean them in"; in her view, if children were "weaned in" as opposed to being "dropped into it" or "just dumped", they settled quicker (CS1.TIS1.5.1c).

The observational data in my fieldnotes, as well as the video records, showed that Sarah's theory of practice started to be enacted from Nina's first visit at the childcare centre. For example, it was Sarah who immediately welcomed Nina and Jean and became the main person to guide them around the centre and follow Nina's cues about what interested her. It was also clear that many of the interactions Nina had with the adults in the centre were occurring through the opportunities which Sarah either set up or allowed to unfold. In the process, Sarah also started introducing some of the centre "rules" about different activities. Note, for example, how in the following extract Sarah's actions provided guidance about how painting was done at the centre. Sarah had just noticed that Nina's painting activity on one easel was spilling over onto a second easel nearby:

> 09.24 Sarah leaves Jean's side and goes to the painting area.
> Sarah: "Oh, two [paintings] Nina!"; she squats down close to Nina and writes NINA with a thick crayon at the top of one picture and then on the other saying: "Let's write 'Nina' again. Here you go. I think I'll have to get you some more paint and paper in a minute". Sarah walks back to Jean's side.
>
> (CS1.Fieldnotes, orientation visit 1/8)

Later, noticing that Nina no longer had her apron on and was heading back to the painting area, Sarah went over to Nina saying:

> 09.30: "Shall we go and wash your hands?" (hands are covered in paint). Sarah takes Nina's hand. Nina goes with Sarah towards the bathroom but on the way catches sight of her mother sitting at the puzzle table and veers towards her and sits in her lap. Sarah says to Jean: "I'll tell you what: I'll bring a wet towel to her".

> Sarah goes off to the bathroom area and comes back with a wet paper towel and, squatting, wipes Nina's hand with this. Nina toddles off to the collage table. Sarah, still squatting, says: "Oh, she's gone now - here, she's back" as Nina returns to Jean and Sarah holding a gluey paintbrush. "Nina, I think you should have an apron on", says Sarah.
>
> "No" says Nina and toddles off to the painting easel again leaving the gluey paintbrush behind and picking up a thick crayon instead.
>
> Sarah says to Jean and other teacher nearby: "I'm just going to let her wander about".
>
> (CS1. Fieldnotes, orientation visit 1/8)

Later, Sarah made another attempt to entice Nina to wear the apron by holding up the apron from a distance of about a metre and proffering it to Nina but Nina shook her head. As Sarah wrote Nina's name on yet another sheet of drawing paper, Sarah commented about the refused apron to another teacher: "She might not want it - I'm not going to force her - I don't want her to be upset" (CS1.Fieldnotes, orientation visit 1/8, 09.34). After yet another refusal of the apron less than an hour later, Sarah said in a calm way: "No. We'll get there in time" (CS1.Fieldnotes, orientation visit 1/8, 10.12).

Apart from Nina's clear eagerness to explore her new environment, these very first interactions between Nina and Sarah, indicate that for the most part Nina appeared receptive to guidance from Sarah: she allowed her to roll up her sleeves and started walking to the bathroom with her even though she subsequently veered off towards her mother. On her part, Sarah immediately followed her cue and also started introducing some of the "rules" that accompanied the various activities such as putting on an apron and having one's name printed on the drawing paper, as well as the handwashing that followed the painting. Sarah was not prepared to force the issue about the wearing of the apron once Nina had firmly indicated her opposition to this, thus putting her goal of not upsetting Nina ahead of the rule about the apron which she said would fall into place in its own time. Her wish to not upset Nina was also apparent in her decision to abandon the bathroom trip in favour of the wet paper towel solution. Sarah's activity with Nina thus indicates a balance of guidance (into the ways of the centre) and respect as well as a willingness to make some allowances in the routines for the new child.

During this initial session, Nina was involved in numerous other contacts with Sarah including when Sarah defused a potential conflict with an older girl over who had prior claim to a doll's

pushchair (09.40) and when she guided Nina through such morning tea routines as washing hands before eating, sitting on a chair to eat her food, not eating food that fell on the floor, and drinking from one's cup (CS1.Video records, orientation visit 1/8). From these behaviours, it is possible to hypothesise that Nina may have understood Sarah's role as being one of mediating Nina's peer interactions as well as of inducting her into a range of rules about centre life.

Over the following weeks, this pattern of constant attention from Sarah to Nina's focus of attention was maintained and Nina's response continued to be accepting of Sarah's approaches. Early during the second visit, Nina's behaviour also suggested that she was beginning to be willing to 'use' Sarah as a source of comfort: when Jean temporarily left the outside play area and Nina started to cry in protest, Sarah approached Nina who promptly lifted her arms towards Sarah to be picked up (09.27). Sarah's response to such approaches from Nina was consistently warm and accepting and she wrote about such instances in her journal as indicating that Nina was feeling "at ease" with her (CS1.TJ.2.23-24).

Nina's early acceptance of Sarah and Sarah's continuous attentiveness to Nina's cues were again apparent when Nina started having brief periods at the centre on her own. On the first of these occasions, as soon as Jean indicated that she was ready to leave, Sarah positioned herself close to Nina at the dough table and waited for Jean to initiate the departure. In my fieldnotes, I recorded the separation episode in this way:

> 10.15 "So I'll just say goodbye to her" says Mum to Sarah - she bends towards Nina across dough table and says "Nina, sweetie, goodbye, bye Nina". Nina is very absorbed in dough play however, and does not really look up "bye, bye, ta ta" says mum again. But there's still no response from Nina. Mum says: "I sort of feel I should get some recognition from her that I'm going" and tries again. Mum waves and waves but there still is no acknowledgement by Nina. Mum tries again with no response so Mum leaves without Nina having realised this. Sarah and Nina play at rolling the dough and pretending to eat little balls of it.
>
> (CS1.Fieldnotes, orientation visit 3/8)

For the next few minutes, Nina remained quite happily occupied in dough play with Sarah, sometimes watching with interest, with her left hand on Sarah's knee (09.44), as Sarah made some dough "snakes" and at other times rolling out dough herself. When one of the dough "snakes" fell onto the floor Nina happily complied with Sarah's request to pick it up. Nina gave the first sign that she might be aware of her mother's absence about ten minutes after Jean's departure when she looked up from the table and looked around the room searchingly. This led

Sarah to comment quietly to me: "Did you see her searching?". The moment passed, however, as Nina's attention was caught by a doll's pushchair, and it was not till three minutes later that she suddenly again appeared to become aware that her mother was absent. I recorded this 'realisation' in this way:

> 09.52 Nina walks off towards the hallway, a paintbrush in her hand and back again to the easel - Sarah takes the paintbrush off her, picking up an apron and saying "Oh, Nina" looking at her paint-covered hands. Nina turns away and walks off again towards the hallway and on towards the front door.
>
> 09.53 Nina starts to cry at the front door and looks 'lost' as if she has just realised that mum is not around. Sarah follows her in the hallway; she picks Nina up and takes her to bathroom to wash the paint off her hands. Sarah talks about the handwashing and the paint coming off as they do this. When they finish, Nina has stopped crying and Sarah puts her down on the floor; but Nina walks back to the centre door and cries again.
>
> 09.54 Sarah follows, she picks Nina up and gives her a kiss - Nina stops crying - they walk to the blue carpeted room where an older boy is playing with a toy dog. Sarah talks to the boy and asks if Nina can look at his toy dog - Nina smiles broadly at this and is now distracted by the dog and then the flexi-tunnel and then the Lego firehouse which Sarah starts to play with.
>
> (CS1.Fieldnotes, orientation visit 3/8)

While it is not possible to be sure what Nina's "real" intentions were in going to the centre front door during these incidents, it is difficult to escape the interpretation that Nina had realised that her mother had left the centre and that she possibly wished to follow her. In my fieldnotes this was the interpretation that I noted. Sarah had a similar interpretation both in her comment about Nina's "searching" behaviour and in her immediate actions to distract Nina while washing her hands and in her actions to comfort and distract her again with the affectionate kiss, and playing in the blue room.

What was also interesting in the interaction between Nina and Sarah during the first trial separation session was the change in the behaviour between Sarah and Nina when Jean was not present. As I noted above, Sarah had been involved in a variety of interactions with Nina while Jean had been present, however, true to her principle that "when mum is here, I'm not the primary caregiver" Sarah had kept largely in the background and had allowed Nina to explore the centre alongside her mother. During this session, however, from the time of Jean's departure

to her return, Sarah was constantly at Nina's side. This proximity did not appear to perturb Nina who seemed to easily accept comfort from Sarah and to let her "take her [Nina's] mind off mum not being there" (CS1.TJ. 3.43). There were no further obvious signs that Nina was conscious of her mother's absence during the first trial separation session although the reunion with Jean was, from an observer's point of view, an emotional one with Jean's face looking flushed with pleasure and Nina's face beaming with delight. Sarah's account to Jean of Nina's response to the separation was factual in detail and included the evaluation that Nina had been "excellent". Jean looked at me for verification and I smiled and nodded, wondering, not for the last time, about how much I should become involved in these interactions.

Understanding that mum will not stay: the start of a "deep relationship" with Sarah?

The proximity to Nina which Sarah maintained consistently in Jean's absence during the first trial separation period was repeated during the second trial period of separation which was seen as another "successful" day by Sarah and Jean. This time, Nina watched her mother's departure and looked composed and not at all perturbed by it although in my fieldnotes I also described her as "solemn, as if she understands what's going on" (CS1.Fieldnotes, orientation visit 4/8, 09.42).

An indication that Nina may have started to feel her mother's absence came about ten minutes later when, as she watched another mother leave by the front gate, Nina started to cry. Sarah was immediately at Nina's side saying:

> 09.23 "Does that remind you of your mum? Let's go play on the rocking horses." Sarah picks Nina up and carries her to the blue room; I follow behind carrying a box of blocks for Sarah. Sarah tries to place Nina on a rocking horse but Nina kicks her legs and resists this.
>
> (CS1.Fieldnotes, orientation visit 4/8)

It was noticeable that from then on Nina stayed in Sarah's arms or on her lap suggesting perhaps that a connection existed between her awareness of her mother's absence and her desire for proximity to Sarah. This proximity was also welcomed by Sarah who wrote of this session that she and Nina were "developing a really happy positive rapport" (CS1.TJ.4.24) consistent with the "deep relationship" Sarah believed that a good settling-in required. Nina was still at the morning tea table when Jean returned after an absence of forty-five minutes. Nina immediately spotted her and raised her arms with a whimper of request to be picked up; Nina had a long and

warm cuddle with her mother, her face beaming with delight and she remained in her mother's arms till they left the centre about ten minutes later.

What Nina learnt

It is possible to hypothesise from these observations that Nina had learnt to relate to Sarah as the adult who would provide her with help and comfort in the centre environment. Likewise it is possible to hypothesise that Sarah's intention to become the one person with whom Nina developed the initial deep relationship from which she could later branch out was being achieved. This hypothesis / interpretation was supported during the following visit when after Jean left, Nina was quite tearful and had her first period of sustained crying, refusing to be distracted by Sarah's offers of toys or activities. This lasted for about four minutes after which Nina again started taking some interest in activities around her but remained very close to Sarah throughout.

This pattern of behaviour was repeated two weeks later when Nina on two consecutive visits had difficulty saying goodbye to her mother and seemed determined to keep hold of mum's hand. On both occasions, Nina cried strongly at Jean's departure and she subsequently remained close to Sarah throughout the session, fluctuating between bouts of tears and periods of calm. Both sessions concluded with Sarah deciding to call Jean to collect Nina early. These two sessions made Jean feel quite anxious and that Nina had "suddenly rejected it quite strongly" (CS1.PIS1.8.13). However, my fieldnotes of these two sessions showed that despite the bouts of crying which Nina experienced, and her reluctance to engage in activities on her own, there were many instances which indicated that Nina was willing to accept comfort from Sarah and her behaviour did not appear to reject Sarah at all. I wrote:

> 10.05 Sarah takes Nina to dough table and starts rolling out some dough. Nina observes - then she picks up dough cutters and starts cutting up shapes. She's beginning to look more settled now and is still on Sarah's lap ... "Push the gingerbread man down" says Sarah to Nina. Sarah puts her own hand on top of Nina's and helps her press down the cutter - Nina stands up now, looks suddenly lost, she whimpers and Sarah picks her up again - Nina accepts this and now watches older child at the dough table as she continues to play with the dough.
>
> 10.15 Sarah carries Nina to the kitchen; Nina gives her first smile since mum left then she looks at me (Carmen) and cries! Another teacher goes up to Nina and pats

her hand - but Nina still cries ... Sarah takes Nina back to the dough table and Nina gets involved in this quite happily again.

10.17 Nina's still in Sarah' lap - Sarah says she'll let another teacher get morning tea –"I'd rather make sure she's [Nina's] ok" she says. (Nina in fact seems perfectly fine as long as she is in Sarah's lap but if Sarah tries to put her down she whimpers.) Nina gives a small whimper and Sarah stands up and carries Nina to the morning tea table.

(CS1. Fieldnotes, orientation visit 6/8)

My perception that Nina was able to be comforted by Sarah was shared by Sarah who noted this in her own journal stating also that Nina "kept up her interest in the children and activities throughout the morning" (CS1.TJ.6.20-34). Nonetheless, both Jean and Sarah were concerned about Nina's experience on these two days and, having talked over the breaks in attendance which Nina had had, they decided that more frequent visits might be helpful; thus they agreed to schedule an extra visit for the following day. My fieldnotes of this visit suggest that Nina's behaviour appeared closer to her earlier explorative and keen style; at the same time she remained determined to retain proximity to Jean whom she pulled by the hand around the various activities in the room. Noting this behaviour, Jean said to me half-way through the session:

Jean: "I'm not getting much distance between us"

Carmen : "No, but she's certainly enjoying all the activities."

Jean: "She was happier getting here this morning."

(CS1.Fieldnotes, orientation visit 8/8, 09.51).

In summary, these observations suggested a "working hypothesis" that over the last few visits to the centre Nina had worked out that she could not assume that her mother would stay at the centre throughout her time there; her grip on her mother's hand may have been Nina's way of saying that she preferred to have her mother remain at the centre with her. Nonetheless, Nina also appeared willing to accept Sarah as a source of comfort in her mother's absence. An incident during Nina's next visit to the centre lent support to this idea which Jean expressed as Nina needing to "come to terms with the separation" and to develop trust in Sarah. In Sarah's eyes the incident appeared to mark a "turning-point" and subsequently acquired the status of a landmark event.

A landmark event: accepting the separation – accepting Sarah?

Nina spent all of the next session at the centre without Jean. When Jean passed Nina over to Sarah, Nina protested with a determined cry. When Jean was out of sight this calmed down somewhat but for the next 15 minutes, Nina continued to break into small crying bouts between periods of interest in different activities which Sarah carried her to around the centre. Suddenly Nina fell into a sobbing sleep on Sarah's shoulder. Another teacher tried to help Sarah shift Nina's weight from her arm but Nina woke up and gave such a piercing cry that Sarah continued holding her herself throughout the sleep. When Nina woke up half an hour later, she still seemed ready to cry at any moment and refused to leave Sarah's side, showing clearly that she preferred to be with Sarah than with any of the other teachers. However, over the following fifteen minutes, Nina's behaviour slowly changed and, while she did not actively participate in things, she again started to show an interest in what was going on around her, smiling at Sarah from time to time and generally looking quite content. Sarah recorded her thoughts about this session thus:

> Just before morning tea she went to sleep in my arms. She obviously felt good enough with me to do that ... when she woke up we were outside ... I felt a difference in her mood and it was not long before she was sitting with me, without crying, enjoying one of the other children's block building .... she had become a lot more relaxed, closer to the stage she was at before her long break from the centre. She wanted me there ... our relationship is definitely there.
>
> (CS1.TJ.8.29-31; 36-41; 51)

The marked difference in Nina's mood before and after her sleep which Sarah noted in her journal, was something I also noted in my fieldnotes. As I watched Nina sit close to Sarah, swinging her feet on the edge of the sandpit and smile as she observed Sarah trickling sand through her fingers, I found myself saying to Sarah: "It's a real breakthrough now, isn't it" (CS1.Fieldnotes, sole attendance week 1, 11.28). Sarah agreed. In both our eyes it seemed that for the first time after Jean's leave-taking, Nina appeared to have reached the state described by Jean as "com[ing] to terms with the separation" and to "have developed trust" in Sarah (CS1.PIS1.2.2). The sense that Nina had learnt to "trust" Sarah emerged clearly in Nina's refusal to leave Sarah's side as well as in her definite preference to stay in Sarah's arms while she slept.

Following this session, Nina's behaviour in the centre suggested a continuing increase in ease. From maintaining closeness to Sarah as she engaged in activities during the second week of sole

attendance, she progressed in her third week to giving up Sarah's attention when Sarah moved to comfort other children, and to initiating interactions with teachers other than Sarah in her fourth week. In the case description, I summarised my fieldnotes from Nina's session during her fourth week of sole attendance in this way:

> Nina was so confident and relaxed that it was hard to believe that this was the same child who three weeks ago had to be carried around the centre by her primary caregiver for the whole period she was there. She moved about the centre with great familiarity ... her confidence in interacting with adults was also clearly more advanced than on previous visits: while she still primarily sought out Sarah as her preferred teacher, she also initiated interactions with three of the other centre staff .... But perhaps most significant of all was Nina's easy acceptance of her mother's departure at drop-off time: she confidently accepted Jean's goodbye kiss and resumed her block play straightaway.
>
> (CS1.case description, p. 9)

The story from my fieldnotes of how Nina related to Sarah over the time when she started to be at the centre without Jean, triangulates with Sarah's journal accounts and with Jean's view of events reported in the interviews. Likewise, Nina's experience appeared in line with Sarah's prediction in her theory of practice that through the 'primary caregiver' system children developed a "deep relationship with one adult" from which they later "branched out". Thus it seemed that Sarah's enactment of her theory of practice acted as a strong "canalizer" (Valsiner, 1985; Valsiner & Hill, 1989) of Nina's behaviour into the ways of interacting with the centre adults which Sarah expected and guided Nina towards.

Julie's story : Who looks after me here?

Julie was 18 months old at the time of the study, the youngest among 21 children aged up to 5 years in a full-day centre staffed by 5 full-time teachers. The centre had a firm policy that all staff were responsible for all the children. At the time of negotiating access to the centre, Patti, the supervisor of the centre who was also the participating teacher in this study, justified this policy on the basis that it avoided extra stress on children if 'their' staff member was absent. At the same time, Patti saw settling-in as a time when children needed "extra teacher support" within a structured secure environment so that the new children would eventually gain control.

The stories which Julie's mother, Lyn, told about her daughter's settling-in relied very heavily on her observations of Julie at drop-off and pick-up times. This was because, after staying with Julie during the first two orientation visits, the third visit swiftly became one of sole attendance

when Patti and Lyn agreed, twenty minutes after Julie's arrival, that Julie seemed ready to stay for a session on her own. From then on, drop-off and pick-up times were Lyn's main sources of information. In Lyn's story of her experience of Julie starting childcare, a strong theme was the difficulty she had in working out whom to speak to about Julie on a daily basis. As an observer, it seemed to me that the lack of one consistent person to regularly relate to was also, for a time, a strong feature of Julie's settling-in experience. The observational data from my field visit during Julie's second week of sole attendance illustrated this strongly with many instances recorded when Julie seemed confused about which of the adults would be the best person to approach for assistance or comfort. These data provided the phrase which I have used as the title of Julie's story.

Julie had a full-time place at the centre where she quickly became seen as:

> a happy little girl - she had several 'topples' outside when running and she just picked herself up and laughed – she's confident enough to move from place to another without teacher assistance. It's great that she enjoyed morning tea - often children don't want to eat at first"
>
> (CS4.TJ.2.18-23).

The video records and my fieldnotes of Julie's visits to the centre also support this picture; while Julie did sometimes look hesitant on arriving at the centre, within seconds she typically became interested in her environment and from the very first visit she interacted with all the teachers who initiated contact with her. Within the first session, she had spent time with, and accepted direction from, three of the centre adults; for example, she allowed one of the teachers, Heather, to pick her up and take her to the sandpit without complaint and accepted the offer of a bucket and spade from her. Later Julie accepted Heather's suggestion of "going for a walk" and happily allowed herself to be carried to the outdoor slide; she subsequently slid down it in Heather's lap. A few minutes later Julie allowed Carla, another teacher, to help her get off her trike and later still she went with Patti to the bathroom to wash her hands before afternoon tea. In Lyn's first journal record, she commented that:

> after the first ten minutes Julie hardly looked in my direction and seemed quite unfazed by the place. I thought she might find it overwhelming because of the number of adults and children, but it was very relaxed, calm and friendly.
>
> (CS4.PJ.1.25-29)

Julie's response to the centre adults remained open and responsive during the second and third visit and she again interacted with whoever was present or available. In the following week, however, I became aware that a different set of dynamics was operating between Julie and the centre adults; as I argue, these dynamics seemed associated with the centre policy that all teachers should be responsible for all the children.

Who looks after me here?

During the fieldwork session of the second week of Julie's sole attendance I noticed that on a number of occasions, Julie appeared to make approaches to specific adults for attention, especially to Maria and Diane, for whom she seemed to have developed a liking. However, her initiatives were not responded to by the adult to whom they were addressed. For example, when Maria walked into the centre carrying the centre's shopping, Julie looked at her beseechingly and started to cry (09.32) prompting Patti to say "Did Maria remind you of mummy did she?". Maria herself walked on to unpack her shopping giving no indication that she had noticed Julie. Later, Julie went up to Maria at the net climbing frame in the outside play area and lifted her arms to be picked up; Maria did not pick Julie up and instead re-directed her to the climbing frame by asking her if she wanted to go on (11.48) and helped her to do this. After a brief time there, Julie started to cry and called out for "mummy" so Maria took her off the climbing frame and sat Julie down on the lawn beside her. When another child went up to Maria and had a cuddle in Maria's lap, Julie again started to cry, stood up from her place on the lawn beside Maria and then sat on Maria's feet. Maria started to rock her feet so that Julie looked like she was riding on them but Maria still did not pick Nina up. Two other approaches for attention which Julie made to Maria during the day were more firmly deflected, once by Patti and once by Diane. On the first occasion, Patti, hearing Julie give a call of delight as she followed Maria, said as she picked Julie up: "It's Maria's lunch break; no Julie, Maria needs her break" (12.38); on the second occasion, as Julie caught sight of Maria in the sleep room and made a beeline to follow her (12.59), Diane intercepted her and carried Julie to the bathroom. In addition, Julie spent the first twenty minutes of this session with Diane who, during this time appeared very responsive to Julie but, less than an hour later, when Julie followed Diane to the kitchen crying, Diane ignored her totally (09.52) and it was Patti who picked her up.

All this occurred against what Pontecorvo (1998, September) has called a kind of "backstage stream of talk" during which children are spoken of as an object while they are still present. According to Pontecorvo, this type of discourse is one way through which children are socialised. During this session, the "backstage stream of talk" which occurred in Julie's hearing

included a number of exchanges between the teachers about who was in favour with Julie that day. For example, while Julie was in the kitchen with Diane at the start of the session, Carla, one of the other teachers, arrived and Patti caught her up with where things were at for the day; this included the statement that Julie had fallen asleep after Carla had finished work on the previous day and that Patti had "been out of favour" with Julie, adding a few minutes later: "She only took to Diane yesterday afternoon didn't she?".

A few minutes later, Julie was in the painting room with Diane, doing some paper cutting when Patti joined them. When Diane left the room shortly afterwards, Julie looked up needing some help with the scissors and Patti went over to Julie and helped her hold the scissors correctly. For the next thirty minutes, Julie stayed with Patti, interacting quite happily except for a few instances when she put her fist in her mouth which Patti interpreted as teething problems.

During this time with Patti, Heather, another of the teachers, walked into the room and commented teasingly to Patti: "We're in favour today Patti?". "Well - we've sort of ... "said Patti, " ... got an understanding?" said Heather, finishing off the sentence for Patti (CS4. Fieldnotes, sole attendance 2, 09.27) and they talked some more about Julie's teething trouble and Lyn's reports earlier that day of Julie's disturbed nights. Later still, over the lunchtime routine, when Julie refused an additional cup of milk from Patti, Patti commented "Have you gone off me again, have you?" (12.19).

What emerges from these interactions is that the teachers were very aware that children developed preferences for certain adults; indeed they were aware enough to gently tease each other over it. It seemed to me as observer that on that day Patti was making serious efforts to become more accepted by Julie. In the process, it also seemed that Diane was taking care to ease out of being the "preferred caregiver" (hence incident at 09.52), a status only established on the previous day; Maria's lack of response to Julie might have been similarly motivated (11.48; 12.38 and 12.59). In a centre with a clear policy about not having specific teachers assigned responsibility for specific children, the accepted rationale for this behaviour by the teachers appeared to be that Julie needed to have a relationship with all the teachers and thus it was undesirable for any individual teacher to cultivate the preferences shown by the children. However, from the point of view of how the child might have experienced these behaviours, one could argue that the child's wishes for whom to relate to were thwarted. At times Julie was stopped from being with the person she would have preferred to be with.

The other message from all this for the child could be that one did not always get what one wanted – the adults set the rules and as a child you were expected to fit in. Julie seemed to learn to understand this because, as the sessions rolled on, the data showed that Julie did gradually fit in with the expected way of relating to the centre adults and accepted all the teachers as ones with whom she happily spent time with. Thus, over the six-week period of the case study, Patti's early journal comments that "she has shown a preference for Maria and Heather, going up to Maria when she was tired and not very happy" (CS4.TJ.4.14-18) and "Julie is feeling her way - she has shown a preference for Maria most of the day and sometimes Heather" (CS4.TJ.6.13-15) gave way to phrases like "Julie related well to all the teachers today" (CS4.TJ.9. 18-19) and "she is feeling OK about the staff - going to all of us at different times" (CS4.TJ.10.19-20).

It seems reasonable to hypothesise from this that the "backstage stream of talk" (Pontecorvo, 1998, September) which occurred around the issue of who was in favour with Julie, together with the way that the adults withheld their attention from Julie to allow a 'less preferred' adult to step in, both worked to socialise Julie into fitting in with the centre's expectations about how children should relate to the centre adults.

Maddi's story: "Latching on to Sam"

Fifteen month-old Maddi was described by her mother, Helen, as:

> on the whole, a happy sort of kid. When something new comes along, her first reaction is to take it all in. I've seen that in just little things like when I first took her swimming - she was fairly reserved about it but now she loves it. So when I took her to the childcare centre, I did expect her to be a bit subdued. (CS2.PIS1.10.1)

The picture of Maddi drawn by Helen in our first interview coincided with the view which one of the teachers in this case study, Anna, formed of Maddi as "a very quiet little girl who may have found the size of the group overwhelming" (CS2.TJ.1.6-7) and "quite a reserved child although she is not timid" (CS2.TIS1.9.3b). It also coincided with my own view of Maddi's general stance on arrival at the centre as being watchful and intensely observant but distanced from actual involvement with people or activities.

"Watchful" was a word that Helen also used to describe her daughter's attitude on arrival at the centre; she further described her as "quiet", "crowded" and "overwhelmed".

For Maddi, the experience of relating to the centre adults unfolded within the context of her teachers' theory of practice about settling-in which seemed encapsulated in the phrase "you've got to go with the child". Maddi's centre did not operate a system of primary caregiving and the interviews with Maddi's teachers revealed that the centre's policy on settling in existed in the practice and talk of the teachers but not in the centre documentation. The teachers described the policy as a flexible one which treated each child as an individual. Their practice was to "play it by ear" (CS2.TIS1.3.2c) and they described this also as "following the child's lead". When I sought access to the centre for the purpose of the case study, one of the teachers, Anna, volunteered as the teacher participant, seeing the case study as an opportunity to practise her observation skills. However, as the case proceeded, another teacher, Sam, emerged as Maddi's preferred caregiver and she subsequently became the second teacher participant in this case study. This story is about Maddi's choice of Sam, as her preferred caregiver, or as Anna put it, about how Maddi "eventually latched on to Sam" (CS2.TJ.5.9-10).

During the first orientation session Maddi and her mother were approached by both Anna and Sam at different times; Anna made contact with them seven times and Sam five times. Anna was the one who greeted Maddi and her mother on arrival and took them on a tour of the premises explaining where the children's bags and coats were kept, where the toileting area was and various other organisational details. Throughout this time Anna addressed herself primarily to Helen and her only direct comment to Maddi was the question "Do you want to find something to do?" as they walked back from the changing area to the main room. Anna then switched back to talking to Helen before she was distracted by another mother who wanted to have a quick word with Anna before she left. As Anna made a note of something this mother said, Helen wandered off with Maddi around the different activities. Anna approached them again about twenty minutes later when Helen was reading to a group of children around her:

> 09.29 Anna comes over to Maddi and Helen: "How's it going?" she asks. Helen smiles at her and continues reading to the children. Anna picks up a wooden threading board and catches Maddi's eyes. Maddi smiles back and Anna asks: "Do you think that's funny? Here you are" – she hands the threading board to Maddi and moves away to the table by the front door again. Maddi loses interest in the threading board and looks around.
>
> (CS2.Fieldnotes, orientation visit 1/6)

This brief contact between Maddi and Anna was typical of the way that they interacted during this session: there was no real engagement in sustained interaction. By constrast, Sam's

interactions with Maddi, while fewer in number, were sustained for longer periods and appeared to engage Maddi's interest. For example, in the following excerpt from my video records of the morning tea routine during the same session, Sam took the initiative to provide some guidance for Maddi about the expected behaviour during morning tea time, and later also helped Maddi locate her mother when Maddi looked lost. The excerpt starts at the point when the children had been sitting down having crackers, fruits and drinks but Maddi had left the table and was wandering about in the hallway pushing a cart and eating a biscuit:

10.16 Sam leaves his place at the table and goes towards Maddi. He gently picks her up and takes her back to the table. Maddi protests and Sam says: "You put your biscuit down there" and guides her hand in placing the biscuit on the table. She then leads her back to the pushcart. But Maddi doesn't want this any more and struggles away from it. "Hard for you to understand, isn't it?" says Sam and takes her back to the table where Helen still is - she gives Maddi's cracker back to her saying: "Here you are - you sit with your food with the other kids."

10.18 Sam and Helen chat; mum rubs Maddi's back in a caress. Sam and Helen are squatting; Sam says to Maddi: " I do like your buttons".

10.35 Sam now sits down in a chair next to Maddi. Sam chats to the other children nearby. Maddi stands up beside her chair - she is following her mother with her eyes as Helen walks to the kitchen carrying the dirty morning tea plates for washing up. She leaves the table and follows her mother and catches hold of her leg. A few seconds later she walks back down the hallway and into the main room and looks around as if bewildered. Sam notices and calls out her name. Maddi turns around to face her.

10.36 Sam walks up to her and holds her hand out to her and points in the direction where mum is. (This is clearly also a request to Maddi to turn back from the hallway and join the other children in the main room.) Maddi seems to understand; she walks to mum (who is now at the table) and hugs her legs.

(CS2. Fieldnotes, orientation visit 1/6)

In this excerpt Sam's attentiveness to Maddi's focus of attention emerges clearly. Beyond guiding Maddi into some initial rules about eating at the table and not walking around with food in her hands, she also watched what Maddi's interest was and helped her locate her object of attention when it looked like Maddi may have temporarily lost her bearings in relation to Helen.

In the second orientation visit, Sam again spent extended time in interaction with Maddi during which she gave her an empty chocolate box with bottle tops inside it which she explored with interest (09.51), joined in telephone play with her (10.45) and accepted a cup from her and pretended to drink (10.55). By comparison, when Anna approached Maddi and Helen, she again mostly spoke to Helen. This pattern of interaction between the teachers and Maddi continued in the following two sessions with Anna generally seeming to direct her contact to Helen and with Sam being more focussed on Maddi. In the first interview I had with Anna a possible explanation for the way Anna behaved during these sessions emerged in Anna's statement that she saw her role in the centre during the time that Helen accompanied Maddi as "helping mother to feel relaxed and welcome so she'd be happy to involve herself with Maddi and other children" and not liking to intervene when mum was around: "I don't like to force it unless the child shows she wants to go away from mum" (CS2.PIS1.10.6). In analysis, Anna's balance of focus towards more attention to Helen rather than Maddi may have contributed to Maddi developing a more open attitude to Sam rather than towards Anna. This attitude first started to emerge in Maddi during the fifth orientation session when Maddi had her first period of being at the centre without Helen.

The leave-taking during the fifth orientation was a prolonged and difficult one for both Maddi and Helen with Maddi crying strongly in protest and Helen becoming flushed and surreptitiously wiping away a tear (see section 5.4.2.1). When Helen eventually handed Maddi over to Anna and left, Maddi cried very strongly stretching in the direction of her mother walking away and pulling away from Anna. Two minutes later, Maddi was much calmer and started taking an interest in the book that Anna was reading to her as she also rubbed Maddi's chest and cuddled her. But for the next twenty five minutes or so Maddi continued to break out in bouts of crying even though in between these she was able to take a brief interest in a number of different activities to which Anna carried her. During these activities Maddi appeared to be quite accepting of comfort from Anna but her calm times did not last and Anna herself seemed to be feeling unsettled. Anna said to me after about 20 minutes of this: "An hour will seem like an eternity to her mum too ... it's actually difficult when they [the children] don't speak" (CS2. Fieldnotes, orientation visit 5/6, 09.54). I noted in my fieldnotes that this suggested to me that she too was finding this experience difficult.

A couple of minutes later, Sam walked over to Maddi and, opening her arms wide to her, said in an enthusiastic voice and with eyes open wide rather like the personification of King's (1978) infant teacher: "I think I might talk to Maddi; I like Maddi" (CS2.Fieldnotes, orientation 5/6,

09.57). Maddi went to Sam straightaway and quietened down immediately. Sam kept up a steady stream of distracting talk, reading and other activites with her. After morning tea, which Maddi spent on Sam's knees, Sam took many of the children to the indoor gym in a large hall for some gross motor play because the weather prohibited going outdoors, and this was the beginning of a complete transformation in Maddi's demeanour. Maddi was delighted to explore the balls and the trikes and had a great deal of fun with this equipment. Sam kept a constant eye on her and stayed very close to her but Maddi was even happy responding to other children's approaches towards her. She smiled and laughed happily - a big change from her behaviour before morning tea.

During the following session Maddi retained the increased confidence she had shown on the previous visit; however, on this occasion Helen did not leave the centre for any of the time Maddi spent there despite suggestions by both Anna and Sam that she could try leaving Maddi for a short period. Helen's ignoring of these suggestions; this caused some concern to Anna and Sam and they both discussed this with me at the end of the session. In response, I wondered aloud whether Helen might appreciate being given a clear recommendation about when it was a good time for her to leave Maddi for a brief period. Both Sam and Anna were receptive to this suggestion and decided that they would try this tack during the following visit, which was also to be Maddi's first day of sole attendance.

At the start of the next session Anna told me that since Maddi had appeared to respond to Sam very positively during the last two sessions, she and Sam had decided that Sam would be the person who would look after Maddi when her mother left. For a centre which did not have a formal policy on using a primary caregiver system, this was, I felt, a significant decision; it was also in line with the view expressed by both Sam and Anna that "you've got to go with the child". As a result Sam positioned himself close to Helen and Maddi from early on in the session and ten minutes later she started to prepare Maddi for the leave-taking saying that mum would have to go soon but that it was alright because Maddi was getting used to them both. After a delay when Sam was called to the phone, Sam initiated the leave-taking by approaching Maddi and talking to her gently suggested that Maddi join her in saying goodbye to mummy. Maddi pulled back towards her mother but, when Sam prompted Helen to "Just hand her to me" (CS2. Fieldnotes, sole attendance week 1, 09.36) Helen did, and walked away waving goodbye. This leave-taking was significantly brisker and had none of the vacillation during the fifth orientation session. Maddi's response to her mother's departure was loud and vigorous crying but after about five minutes of crying interspersed with quiet moments, Maddi looked more

relaxed and happy and she spent the rest of the session mostly in Sam's arms being intently interested in what was going on around her even if she did not actively participate.

Maddi's decided preference for Sam became unmistakable during the fieldwork visit of the following week when Anna made a number of interactive approaches to Maddi which Maddi withdrew from. By contrast, Maddi was much more responsive to Sam's approaches so that at one stage Anna said to me: "this is embarrassing" (CS2. Fieldnotes, sole attendance 2, 09.33). For the rest of the case study, Maddi's relationship with Sam continued to strengthen even through the short period when Maddi suddenly "took a shine" to a student teacher, Lisa, who was on placement at the centre for a few weeks.

In summary, it seemed that after an initial period of ambiguity about who among the centre adults Maddi would establish contact with, a 'de facto' system of primary caregiving eventually emerged between Maddi and Sam which was initiated by Maddi and followed-up by the teachers. This was despite the centre's policy of not having specific teachers assigned to specific children but was also in line with the teachers' articulated theory of practice that they would "go with the child" or take the lead from them. For Maddi this meant that from then on it was Sam who met her first thing in the morning and only Sam who handled the leave-takings from Helen. In addition, it was from Sam's lap that she observed the activities of the centre and slowly ventured out to take an active part in them.

Discussion: Some critical polytextualist reflections

The stories in this paper have traced some of the early contacts which three children in this study had with the new adults they met at their first childcare centre. The intention of this was to provide an insight into what the lived reality of this contact was from the child's perspective.

From a critical polytextualist perspective, it is possible to read the above stories in a variety of ways. As I noted in chapter 3, a critical polytextualist perspective asks either or both of two questions: "what is the function of the story (i.e., what can be done with it?); and/or, what ideology is the story peddling (i.e., what can be warranted by it?)" (Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 1992, p. 18). In this section, I attempt to answer some of these questions by looking at the stories from a number of different theoretical perspectives: the co-constructionist perspective, an attachment theory perspective and from the perspective of temperament theory.

A co-constructivist tale: Learning to fit in

One of the most striking aspects of these stories was the way that the teachers' theories of practice, and the centre's policy on settling-in, influenced the way that the child's interactions with the adults were experienced by each child. In Nina's case the immediate and persistent attention she received from Sarah, was truly the "focused treatment" that Sarah espoused in her theory of practice. In line with her principle of "developing a deep relationship" with Nina, Sarah initiated approaches to Nina, accepted those which Nina made, and did not discourage any of them. Sarah was also consistently tuned in to Nina's cues as to her focus of attention. She followed these cues, at times using them to introduce Nina to some of the centre's rules and to build up an easy and comfortable relationship with her. One instance was at the painting easel, when, introducing the rule about wearing the apron for painting, she was also careful to not make this rule a cause of conflict. It can be argued that through this focused treatment, the action which was "promoted" to Nina was more direct contact with Sarah, and that this effectively "canalized" (Valsiner, 1985; Valsiner & Hill, 1989) Nina into the deep relationship with her that Sarah felt was required for a successful settling-in.

Similarly, in Julie's case, the centre's policy that all teachers had responsibility for all children, was enacted in the way that the teachers appeared to actively work to discourage Julie from forming lasting preferences about which of them she wanted to receive attention from. In telling Julie's story I suggested that both the direct action of the teachers in deflecting her from following Maria around the centre, and the "backstage stream of talk" (Pontecorvo, 1998, September) that accompanied this, worked to promote to Julie the centre's preferred ways of interacting with the adults. This too had the effect of "social canalization" (Valsiner, 1985; Valsiner & Hill, 1989); like Nina, Julie gained knowledge about the acceptable ways of acting in the context of her centre and, over time, fell into line with the adults' expectations.

The story I have told about Maddi's experience of settling-in is somewhat different but also similar. In Maddi's centre, there were no clear procedures on how the settling-in process was to be handled apart from the principle of "going with the child". This meant that Anna's electing to be the teacher participant in the study put her in an unusual position in relation to the centre's normal practice of letting things unfold in their own time. The norm in the centre was for all the adults to have equal responsibility for all children with no one child receiving particular attention from any specific teacher. In Maddi's case, what unfolded was a decided preference, over time, to be with Sam, creating what I have called a "de facto" system of primary caregiving which Sam had not sought but which both Anna and Sam supported once they recognised

Maddi's preference. The teachers justified their action in terms of respecting the child's right to choose. However, I have also shown that the type of contact which occurred between Maddi and the two teachers differed, and suggested that this difference may have contributed to Maddi's choice to be with Sam. Thus, my analysis suggests:

i. the approach of 'wait and see what the child wants' which operated in Maddi's centre resulted in less clear canalization by the adults early on in the process, about what the teachers expected in terms of interaction between them and the child. For Maddi, this resulted in a somewhat slow and 'bumpy' start to establishing relations with the centre adults, and ambiguity about what generally was expected of her at the centre.

ii. the more engaged interaction which Maddi eventually had with Sam may have "canalized" her into seeing Sam as the more responsive teacher and led to her developing her preference for Sam.

In this way, therefore, Maddi's story also may be read as a story of canalization: the teachers expected her to show them her preference for which of the teachers she wanted to spend time with, and, despite a slow and 'bumpy' start, Maddi eventually did.

These stories indicate that a connection existed between the children's experience of their interactions with the centre adults and the way that the adults understood their role during the settling-in process. A social constructionist perspective, such as that used by Valsiner (1985) and Pontecorvo (1998, September) can be used to explain the children's evolving behaviour in their first weeks at childcare. The children's relations to the adults can be seen as a co-construction between the adults and the children with the children being seen as having contributed to the process as well as the adults. In the stories told above, the children's contribution was most evident in the choice which Maddi made between the two teachers who actively approached her as possible partners in interaction. In Nina's case, Nina's acceptance of Sarah's attempts to become her primary caregiver can also be seen as an active choice highlighted by her refusal to go to anyone else when she fell asleep on Sarah's arm. The adults' contributions were to set expectations based on policy and/or their theories of practice. To a large extent the children found themselves 'learning to fit in' to these expectations.

An attachment theory perspective :To have or not to have a primary caregiver:

In the three stories above, the two themes of the children's separation from their mother and of forming new relationships - or attachments - with the centre adults were constant undertones (and/or overtones) in the discourse of the adults involved in the study, including my own discourse in my fieldnotes as researcher.

Looked at from an attachment theory perspective, the stories of how the children formed, or attempted to form, relationships with their preferred adult, can be read as the children's attempt to develop an attachment relationship with a new adult, which would fill the gap left by their mother's absence. There were many elements of the three children's stories which could be used to support such an analysis. For example, all the children swiftly worked out when their mother was not at the centre with them. This was evident in Nina's "searching" behaviour noted by Sarah and myself, and in Julie's crying when Maria walked in the front door which Patti interpreted as an indication that Julie was reminded of her mother. Likewise, the meaning for the child of the mother's absence was clearly an unhappy one: it was difficult to interpret the children's crying at the mother's departure as anything but an expression of this, and of protest at the event. Additionally, for the child, there was a 'sense of loss' from which the centre adults tried to shift the child's attention through using a range of distracting techniques. The construction of the settling-in event as one of separation was clearly evident in Jean's description of the settling-in experience as one of "com[ing] to terms with separation" (CS1.PIS1.2.2). In Sarah's talk about a new child needing to develop a "deep relationship", there was a clear expression of the idea that the relationship with the teacher was one of a substitute attachment relationship from which the child drew security.

Finally, it is also possible to read the behaviour of Nina with Sarah, and of Maddi with Sam, after both children attended on their own as being strikingly similar in nature. In both cases, the children had a few sessions when they spent most of their time in close proximity to 'their' teacher before they eventually started to move away and take part in activities on their own initiative. In the case of Maddi, her behaviour with Sam was also very similar to her behaviour when she was with her mother, Helen. In the absence of her primary attachment figure Maddi appeared to use Sam as her substitute security base and this enabled her to move beyond the state of watchfulness and observation to the beginnings of involvement in the centre curriculum which the teachers saw as signifying that a child was settled.

So, using a critical polytextualist stance, what is the function of this interpretation? What can be done with it in terms of enhancing practice in early childhood settings?

Most obviously, the answer to these questions is that an attachment theory perspective on these stories would find an argument in favour of having a primary caregiver system in place. From this perspective Nina's story is a clear example of how the primary caregiver system worked to

ensure that all of Nina's needs for security were met during the time of starting childcare. Maddi's case could be used to argue that having a primary caregiver system in place on a regular basis would avoid the ambiguities which occurred about who would be the best person to guide Maddi and her mother through the settling-in process. Additionally, Maddi's need to actively seek out which of the teachers she preferred to be with would have been obviated. Julie's case, on the other hand could be used to argue that in the absence of a primary caregiver with sole responsibility for a particular child, the child's relationship with adults would be likely to ignore her needs for security possibly leading to insecure attachments with the centre adults. Thus, from an attachment theory perspective, the different "social practices" used in settling-in the three children in these stories would be seen to "*matter*" (Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers, 1992, p. 14) in terms of making the primary caregiver system a more credible system than the other two options for the enhancement of the child's feeling of security.

A temperament(al) angle on relating to the adults

Looked at from the perspective of studies which have explored the connection between children's temperament classification and children's response to starting childcare, the stories of Nina, Julie and Maddi also have potential bearing on the issue of whether or not to have a primary caregiver. For instance, in a study of adjustment to nursery school, Marcus et al. (1972) found that "easy" children adapted without difficulty irrespective of the routines used in the nursery school, "difficult" children did better in more structured and friendly environments rather than in "laissez-faire" ones and the "slow-to-warm" did best when they were allowed to adapt at their own slow pace. Other work (e.g., Center for Child and Family Studies, 1993) has suggested that "slow-to-warm" children need constant attention and a style of handling which involves a recurring cycle of adult behaviour described as "being with, taking to, remaining available and moving away".

The angle which temperament theory would take on the stories above would be that since both Nina and Julie appeared to have temperaments that would be likely to be classified as 'easy', it would be reasonable to hypothesise that they would have settled in any type of childcare environment. On the other hand, with Maddi and her mother, who were both described as quite "reserved", a temperament theory perspective would hypothesise that in their case, a more guided and focused system for settling them in would have been more likely to have been experienced positively. It seems reasonable, therefore, to suggest that from this perspective, the primary caregiver system would also be seen as a social practice that was credible as a way of approaching the experience of starting childcare. This is because a centre policy which assigns

responsibility for settling-in a new child to a specific teacher is more likely to enable constant monitoring of how a child responds to the new situation. In turn, one would expect that this would result in more accurate tuning in to the process of "being with, taking to, remaining invisible and moving away" that slow-to-warm children find helpful (Center for Child and Family Studies, 1993).

Conclusion

One of the intentions of the overall study from which this paper has drawn its data was that it should illuminate how the process of starting childcare might be enhanced at the level of practice in early childhood settings. The data presented in this paper is only a small part of the picture which emerged in the overall study. Nonetheless at least one major indication emerges from these data. It is clear in these stories of how children learnt to relate to the centre adults that what the teachers did, in terms of relating to the new children, had an impact on the kind of relationships which developed between the teachers and the new children. In other words, what teachers did, as well as what teachers did not do, made a difference.

In the context of seeking ways to enhance early childhood practice during the period of settling-in this suggests that teachers need to be aware that their actions matter. This will enable them to be self-conscious about the difference that they do make.

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