



Relational expertise in preschool–school transition

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ABSTRACT: The complex and constantly evolving challenges of working life require individuals, groups and work communities to cooperate interprofessionally across sectors and institutional boundaries (Edwards, 2017). In this study, preschool–school transition is a context in which culturally and historically constructed institutional boundaries form an arena for professional learning. In interprofessional work, professionals' different interpretations of the purpose of collaboration can bring challenges. However, common understanding can be achieved through relational expertise. The aim of the study is to examine what kind of organizational and professional issues can be identified in the development towards relational expertise in the context of transition. By studying the organizational narratives around boundary work, we seek to understand the nature of the processes involved in acquiring relational expertise. This study examines the development of relational expertise over a one-year period of interprofessional collaboration within the context of the boundary work of two institutions – preschool and primary school. The case study data consists of videoed authentic interprofessional planning and evaluation discussions (22.5 h) and was analysed drawing on organizational narratives. The findings of two different organizational narratives provide important information on the issues involved in achieving relational expertise and of the possibilities for and obstacles to its development.

Keywords: *preschool–school transition, relational expertise, common knowledge, organizational narrative*

Introduction

The complex challenges and demands of working life require professionals to have the ability to cooperate interprofessionally across sectors and institutional boundaries (Hakkarainen, Hytönen, Vekkaila, & Palonen, 2017). Preschool–primary school transition is a context that challenges both preschool and primary school professionals' ability to collaborate in such institutional boundaries. This article examines the preschool–school transition in the Finnish school system from institutional and professional perspectives. It takes place in a context in which the fluent transition from preschool to primary school is supported by developing joint lessons for preschool and primary school children. In this study, transition is seen as a context in which culturally and historically constructed institutional boundaries form an arena for professional learning.

Boundary work is challenging; it is not easy to make one's own expertise visible and available to others and ensure that the resources made available are used (Edwards, 2017). Such boundary work demands the ability to negotiate everyday activities and decisions concerning intersecting practices (Edwards, 2011). Working relationally across institutional and professional boundaries helps professionals to identify and solve problems and offers a base on which to build common knowledge (Duhn, Fler, & Harrison, 2016). In this process, the professionals from different institutions and with different educational backgrounds come together to create a 'new form of professionalism' (Edwards, 2010, 1).

In the transition phase under study, professional collaboration across institutional and professional boundaries is essential in order to create a supportive learning environment for the children transferring from preschool to primary school. The creation of effective transition practices and professional collaboration in the transition phase has recently been also on the international agenda (OECD, 2017), and it has been widely reported that professional collaboration in educational transition phases is a key factor in improving continuity in children's learning and pedagogical practices (Dockett & Perry, 2014; Hopps, 2014; Moss, 2008).

Fluent, high-quality transition is defined in terms of continuity in pedagogy, professionalism, curricula and learning (OECD, 2017; Dockett, Petriwskyj, & Perry, 2014). To achieve this, collaboration between preschool and primary school must be carried out regularly and systematically (Ahtola, Silinskas, Poikonen, Kontoniemi, Niemi, & Nurmi, 2011). According to the OECD (2017), fluent transition includes building continuity so that professionals share a common understanding of the most important issues related to the transition. Firstly, the pedagogies of preschool and primary school should support shared understanding about the children's individual differences and ways of learning (Ahtola et al.,

2011; Margetts, 2007; Hopps, 2014). Secondly, practices need to be congruent with respect to the evaluation and support of the children's development (Dockett & Perry, 2006).

The transition from preschool to primary school is not a universal phenomenon; it takes place in a certain socio-cultural context. In Finland, preschool and primary school differ in terms of premises, curricula, traditions and cultures (Ahtola, 2012; Karikoski, 2008; Karila & Rantavuori, 2014). Professionals therefore work at the boundary of two culturally different institutions: preschool and primary school.

In Finland, preschool education is provided free of charge for all six-year-olds and has been compulsory since 2015. Preschool is considered part of early childhood education and can be situated in day-care centres or schools. Learning through play is considered essential along with exploration, physical activity, artistic experience and self-expression. Children enter primary school in the year they turn seven. The curriculum for primary education emphasizes the objectives and core contents of different subjects (Ministry of education and culture, 2017). The municipal authorities formulate the local curricula within the framework of the national core curriculum. Teachers are highly qualified: primary school teachers (class teachers) are required to have a master's degree in education, and preschool teachers at least a bachelor's degree in education. Nursery nurses work alongside preschool teachers, but are qualified at a lower level and the preschool teacher is responsible for pedagogy. In Finland, the aim is to provide special needs education primarily within mainstream education (Ministry of education and culture 2017, 7). Special education teachers work alongside other teachers, sometimes via their own special education classrooms. Qualification as a special education teacher requires a master's degree.

In Finland, preschool and primary school have previously been under separate administration and steering. Today, pedagogical continuity is highlighted in the curricula as well as collaboration between ECEC and primary school staff (Finnish National Core Curriculum for Pre-primary Education, 2014).

Relational expertise as a means to address preschool–school transition

Investigations into how professionals work relationally have been carried out across a wide range of working life contexts (Edwards, 2017). The conceptual tools used in this study are relational expertise and common knowledge (see Edwards, 2011; 2017; Duhn et al., 2016). Relational expertise involves the ability to discuss and make joint decisions about different kinds of issues emerging from the object of activity (Edwards, 2011).

Working relationally, i.e. exercising relational expertise, can be defined as bringing one's own expertise into collective use and recognizing that of others (Edwards, 2010; 2011; 2017). If professionals learn to work relationally and pay attention to what other professionals consider important, they can broaden their interpretations of the common object of activity. This process requires shared time in interprofessional meetings and the ability to understand and be sensitive to others' values when different interpretations of the common object of activity are discussed (Karila & Rantavuori, 2014). In order to create a fluent transition for children from preschool to school, the abovementioned relational expertise is required.

Through relational expertise, professionals can achieve common knowledge (Edwards, 2011; 2017) and in the process of building common knowledge, the participants need each other's support. This is achieved through regular and resourceful collaboration and respect for other institutions and professionals. It is essential to understand the viewpoints underpinning others' practices (Edwards, 2010) and to have a common language and an understanding that knowledge mobilization across boundaries is possible (Carlile, 2004; Duhn, et al., 2016). The most demanding aspect of the relational nature of knowledge at a boundary is that each professional must learn to construct his or her knowledge with others (Carlile, 2004, 557).

Our previous studies show that different cultural manuscripts and institutional backgrounds can present obstacles to relational expertise in preschool to school transition (Rantavuori, Karila & Kupila, unpublished manuscript). The cultural manuscript can be seen as the order of interaction in a certain context, including who is acknowledged as an expert and what kind of knowledge and practices are seen as respectable (Gutierrez Rymes, & Larson, 1995; Lipponen & Paananen, 2013; Tan, 2015). In the learning process, the professionals must first identify the culturally and historically based aims of the institutions, the expertise that is brought by different professionals, and the issues that are important to them in relation to the children (Rantavuori, Karila, & Kupila, unpublished manuscript).

In this study, we explore the organizational narratives that illustrate the development of relational expertise in a specific transition context. If professionals are able to build common knowledge concerning fluent transition, they will better understand how to create a supportive learning environment. When learning relational expertise, professionals do not respond only to the things they see from their own personal point of view, but rather are able to engage in productive collaboration by incorporating common interprofessional knowledge and interpretations (Edwards, 2010). This leads to collaborative boundary practices that are holistically beneficial to the children. In a fluent transition context, this means that knowledge from both preschool and primary school will be utilized.

Methodology

The phenomenon of the study is explored using qualitative research methods. As a case study, we investigate complex social phenomena within their real-life contexts (Yin, 2014). We explore relational expertise and its development process at the organizational level. In authentic, real-life situations, we investigate how relational expertise develops at the boundary spaces of two different institutions. More specifically, we focus on the organizational narratives concerning interprofessional development towards relational expertise. By examining the organizational narratives around boundary work, we seek to understand what kinds of issues are needed to acquire relational expertise.

We define our research question as follows:

What kinds of organisational and professional issues can be identified in the context of preschool to primary school transition?

The context of the study

The study was conducted as part of the municipal development project ‘The Flexible Preschool and Primary School’. The aim of the project was to develop flexible learning content in child group that are grade-independent. According to the municipal-level strategy plan of the development project, in order to reduce discontinuity in preschool and school transition, the project was grounded with the aim of creating joint learning activities for preschool and school children (Karila & Rantavuori, 2014). The aim of these joint practices was to make the transition from preschool to school as fluent as possible. In the municipality under study, the aim in future is to develop practices for the transition phase that enable children to start primary school flexibly based on their individual competencies and flexible age of transition (Karila & Rantavuori, 2014). Likewise, the aim is to create a common culture for preschool and primary school education by fortifying cooperation between personnel and combining the resources of professionals regularly, several days per week. The preschool and school professionals plan and execute activities in cooperation, utilizing common facilities and forming grade-independent child groups. The professionals carry out flexible preschool and primary school education 4–6 hours a week and plan the activities in interprofessional teams 1–2 hours a week.

Data

Two primary schools and two preschools involved in the municipal development project were asked to participate in the study. The schools and preschools form two cases, two organizational level preschool–school collaboration units. The cases, as the unit of analysis, represent two different institutions in which professionals collaborate across institutional and professional boundaries. The choice of the cases enabled the investigation of boundary work in a context in which professionals from preschool and school work together.

Case one (1) is an inner city school that has two preschool groups: one located in a separate early childhood education building, the other in the main school building. The preschool, primary school class teachers and the nursery nurses worked in interprofessional small teams. A special education teacher also occasionally joined in with the teams' activities with children depending on her schedule, although she did not participate in the weekly small team planning meetings. All of the professionals – the day care centre director and school head as well special education teacher, preschool and primary school class teachers and nursery nurses attended overarching planning and evaluation seminar days held quarterly. The preschool teachers and primary school class teachers did not know each other before the project. In autumn 2013, three new professionals joined the project. In case one, the variation of professionals during the project was more notable than in case two.

Case two (2) is a preschool school unit in a rural area. The preschool and primary school are located in the main school building. The preschool, primary school and special education teachers and the nursery nurse were already professionally acquainted with each other prior to the project. The special education teacher is regularly involved in joint activities and weekly planning practices. Case two includes a preschool group and a combined class containing children from both first and second grades. The flexible lessons for the children were held regularly from four to six hours per week during the school year. The preschool and school professionals attended a weekly one-hour joint planning session. They also participated in the quarterly one-day planning and evaluation seminars. In case two, the professionals participating in the study were the same throughout the data collection period.

Data was collected in the academic year 2012–2013. Three types of material were used: (1) an electronic questionnaire (n= 10) before the project started in 2012, (2) video recorded and transcribed interprofessional discussions (22.5 hours) from authentic planning and evaluation meetings and seminars, and (3) individual diaries written by the professionals (n=14) during the course of one academic year.

The questions of the electronic questionnaire were related to the assumptions, objectives and concerns that the professionals had regarding the Flexible Preschool and Primary School -project. The questionnaire comprised 10 open-ended questions.

The video-recorded data was collected at weekly meetings in which professionals worked in small teams during one academic year. The professionals attending the meetings included nursery nurses, preschool teachers, primary school class teachers and special education teachers. In the meetings, the professionals planned and evaluated joint activities for preschool and primary school children. The school head and the day care centre director organized the work shifts and timetable so that the professionals were able to attend the joint planning meetings despite the different work time systems of the institutions. The professionals were allowed to decide on the topics, aims and content of the small group discussions themselves.

The primary school class teachers and special education teachers are obligated to work with the ECE professionals two times per week in addition to attending a weekly joint planning meeting. The school head and day care centre director participate in overarching planning and evaluation in quarterly seminars. The focus of the seminars is to establish extensive aims and a common framework for pedagogical principles and practices for the academic year. The abovementioned weekly joint planning meeting is an hour long and is attended by the preschool and primary school class teachers and nursery nurses. A special education teacher also occasionally attends the meetings. The intended purpose of the meetings is to enable the professionals to plan the children's weekly learning activities together. A total of 19 participants produced the data, and their professions and institutional backgrounds are outlined in Table 1.

TABLE 1 The participants in the study

<i>INSTITUTION</i>	<i>PROFESSIONAL</i>	<i>CASE 1</i>	<i>CASE 2</i>
Primary school	Class teacher	2 + 2*	1
	Special education teacher	1 + 1*	1
	School head	1	1
Preschool	Preschool teacher	4	1
	Nursery nurse	2	1
	Day care centre director	1	-
Total		14	5

*From beginning of the autumn 2013

The ethical requirements of the study were fulfilled by ensuring the institutions' and professionals' anonymity and obtaining their informed consent.

Analysis

In order to gain knowledge of the organizational development we drew on organizational narratives in our analysis of the two cases. The organizational narratives are conceptualized as those “*made and remade by participants as they together attempt to make meaning in a changing landscape of working practices. The narrative tool holds together the collective and creative envisioning of the future that shapes versions of the present*” (Edwards & Thompson, 2013, 1). Recent studies of organizational narratives highlight the importance of paying attention to the voices of employees to ensure their participation (Edwards & Thompson, 2013).

In this study, organizational narratives are jointly made when the professionals together build new collaboration practices. We examined the transcript texts and identified the sub-themes that illustrate the partly linear and partly parallel development trajectories that had taken place during the project. We analysed the sub-themes from various perspectives. First, we looked at the professionals' resources to work relationally, focusing on their interpretations of the purpose of the development project, sensitivity to others' expertise and capacity to share knowledge and expertise in decision-making situations. We also examined the challenges and possibilities that emerged related to relational expertise. The data was analysed in parallel using Edward's (2011) and Duhn et al.'s (2016) theory of relational expertise and common knowledge. After gaining a holistic view of the cases, two key organizational narratives were identified.

Results

The results present two different organizational narratives identified in the analysis. In the following, we describe the main sub-themes contained in these two organizational narratives. We start by describing the sub-themes of narrative one, the *Missing collaboration narrative*. The sub-themes are (1) Purpose of the project is missing; (2) Common working practices are missing; and (3) Shared understanding is challenging. After presenting the sub-themes of narrative one, we continue with the sub-themes of narrative two, the *Smooth boundary-crossing narrative*. The sub-themes contained in this narrative are (1) Shared purpose of the project; (2) Joint planning practices; and (3) Common knowledge as a resource.

Missing collaboration narrative

Sub-theme 1: Purpose of the project is missing

The first sub-theme concerns the missing purpose of the project and was constructed as a starting point of the *Missing collaboration narrative*.

To begin with, the municipal-level aim of the project was to develop transition practices that make fluent transition from preschool to school possible for all children. For the process to become successful, it is essential that the professionals create the purpose of transition practices together. This turned out to be challenging in Case 1. First, the preschool and school professionals' interests in the collaboration differed. The analysis revealed that the preschool and primary school class teachers' and nursery nurses' institutional and professional backgrounds shaped their work interests. This was problematic when the purpose was to discuss joint interests and aims for interprofessional collaboration. The professionals were able to set aims within their own institutions, but had difficulty establishing a common purpose of the project. Problems particularly arose during the seminar days in which the primary school class teachers, preschool teachers and nursery nurses were supposed to set a common long-term purpose for the whole year.

When the professionals discussed the purpose, their discussion focused on the contents and themes of their pedagogical practices. The following excerpt is from a discussion between a primary school class teacher, preschool teacher and nursery nurse regarding their pedagogical aims goals. The excerpt is from a seminar planning discussion in which the professionals are setting the aims for pedagogical practices for the forthcoming academic year. One purpose of the seminar day was to produce an official written document concerning these aims. The excerpt drawn from the planning seminar day data illustrates how the professionals' focus on the themes and content of their practices, but fail to set a common aim based on the children's needs:

Class teacher: If we could just talk through this [document] now; what shall we write down and how? We should begin of course with the aims. What could they be? Shall we use these same aims (class teacher points to the computer screen) or should we discuss the purpose in more detail?

Preschool teacher 1: These are topical now. These same aims: good friendships, the KiVa stuff [an anti-bullying programme in Finland] and me and my environment. (--)

Preschool teacher 2: Time and space were the major themes [of the children's learning]. Another theme was spring. (--)

Nursery nurse 1: The first theme was winter.

The professionals discuss the contents of their activities, but they do not discuss the purpose of the project or the aims of their pedagogical practices. The class teacher refers to the computer screen where the contents of the activities are written, and asks if the contents of their activities comply with the official aims that they are meant to create.

Their critical stance towards the importance of the transition practices carried out in this project is revealed in the following quotation:

It is very busy on the school side to achieve all the aims of the [national] curriculum. Especially nowadays, when 20% of children's time at school is spent in preschool. Preschool activities centre around what each preschool lady likes to do.

(Class teacher, questionnaire)

In the above excerpt, collaboration is constructed as a waste of time resources, indicating the professional's lack of awareness of the aim of the transition activities. The institutional background of the class teacher shaped her work interests, as revealed by her emphasis on the aims of the national curriculum for primary education. She describes the aims of the curriculum as being important to her and that the learning activities in the preschool do not support the learning aims of the national curriculum.

Sub-theme 2: Common working practices are missing

Although the professionals met regularly one hour per week to collaborate, planning of pedagogical practices was not carried out jointly. In the regular meetings, they discussed the division of tasks or the content of practices already implemented with the children. Then, based on their designated work distribution, each professional individually planned their own activities and transition practices for the children.

The following excerpt illustrates how planning practices remained divided throughout the year of cooperation and how the divided practices were maintained by stipulating them also to new group members:

Class teacher [new group member]: *What are we planning together on Thursdays? Are we all planning our own workshops for the children?*

Preschool teacher: *Yes.*

Class teacher (new): *But shall we decide it together?*

Preschool teacher: *We'll negotiate it together and divide the planning parts. We'll allocate your planning part.*

Class teacher (new): *And shall I plan it?*

Preschool teacher: *You'll plan your own part. You'll plan it alone.*

Class teacher (new): *Yes.*

Preschool teacher: (---) *when we have our meetings on Thursdays, and then we'll discuss how the workshops have been and what you've done. (---)*

(Planning seminar day)

The preschool teachers and primary school class teachers thus did not engage in joint planning. They met regularly, but did not plan together, and neither did they build a common understanding of the children. The topics of their interprofessional discussions concerned the contents of their workshop activities: *'we'll discuss how the workshops have been and what you've done'* (preschool teacher).

Sub-theme 3: Shared understanding is challenging

The sub-theme *Shared understanding is challenging* involves episodes in which professionals discuss the child-group formation. Although the professionals held interprofessional planning meetings, the preschool teachers and primary school class teachers did not share their thoughts in relation to the children's learning or their interpretations of children's problems across institutional and professional boundaries.

The next excerpt is taken from a planning practice meeting in which the professionals discuss their shared understanding of the group formation:

Preschool teacher 1: *Both of the girls are quiet...or calm*

Preschool teacher 2: *They will have support [from each other]*

Class teacher: *I think that I'll take Matthew (child's name changed) out of that group and replace him with your new pupil*

Preschool teacher 1: *Yes*

Class teacher: *Only because ... then there will be the same number.*

(Small group planning meeting)

The above excerpt illustrates how the professionals described their understanding of the child-group formation. The excerpt is from an interprofessional planning meeting in which the professionals are allocating the children into pedagogical groups. Here, the preschool teachers describe the children's personal attributes as *'girls are quiet or calm'* and the preschool and primary school class teachers discuss the kinds of changes they should make to the group. The primary school class teacher makes her own decisions on how to divide the groups and refers only to one of her own pupils, by name. She does not take into account the other professionals' notions about the preschool girls' personalities and their possible needs for support.

The above section described the organisational narrative concerning Case 1. Next, we will explain the organisational narrative of Case 2.

Smooth boundary-crossing narrative

In Case 2, a smooth boundary crossing narrative was built. This was achieved by crossing professional and institutional boundaries in the planning discussions. The professionals had the opportunity to jointly construct the purpose of the project and they utilized both institutions' curricula side by side. The following excerpt describes the importance of the curricula in their planning:

Class teacher: *We succeeded [in the project] because we used the contents of the curricula. This has supported teaching, learning and our work.*

Preschool teacher: *The curricula are in constant use. We use both the preschool and the primary school curricula all the time.*

(Small group planning meeting)

The continuity between the curricula and jointly built understanding about the aims made the planning focus clear. Hence, the participants had no doubts about how the joint planning time should be used or how the children would benefit from the activities. This made their collaboration smooth and the boundary crossing easy.

Sub-theme 1: Shared purpose of the project

The starting point of the *Smooth boundary-crossing narrative* is the professionals' fluent engagement in a common project. The joint planning meetings were highly valued by the professionals. The *shared purpose of the project* refers to the professionals' shared understanding of the purpose of the project, i.e. to support the children through the transition phase.

In the next excerpt, the professionals (preschool teacher, primary school class teacher and special education teacher) discuss how their jointly negotiated purpose of the project would become visible in different situations. The teachers seem to have a common understanding of the positive effects of the project:

Special education teacher: *These everyday routines. Every one of us, no matter whether you're old or young, after you've been working for a time, you start feeling a bit like a 'stick in the mud'.*

Special education teacher: *But if I throw myself into working in another way every now and then, that brings me much more variety.*

(--)

Class teacher: *And how you get joy from the children; when I have the courage to give, I also get a lot back.*

Preschool teacher: *Yes, that's the best thing of all.. And one aim here: How can we together help these children in their need for special support? This has been confirmed in my own experience in practice by how well the children adjust [to the group].*

(Small group planning meeting)

The episode shows that the children are at the centre of the discussion. It is also notable that the teachers participate equally in the discussion. The preschool teacher and the special education teacher discuss what kinds of benefits the children with special needs should get if they are placed in flexible that are grade-independent groups during the project lessons. The preschool teacher also describes how children needing support do not stand out from the rest of the group. The professionals are pleased to collaborate, with one teacher mentioning how it brings positive variation to their work. This positive stance towards collaboration was extensively present in the professionals' talk in sub-theme 1.

Sub-theme 2: Joint planning practices

Once a common purpose of the project to which all the professionals are committed was constructed, the collaboration practices succeeded smoothly. Sub-theme two, *Joint planning practices*, emphasizes shared understanding. One of the aims of joint planning is to modify current practices based on the needs of the children. The next excerpt shows how joint understanding of the aims of the pedagogical practices became visible through sharing aspects of pedagogical practice that are understood to be best for the children:

Preschool teacher: *Yes, and how important we see play as for the children.*

Class teacher: *Well, it is super important.*

Preschool teacher: *Yes.*

Class teacher: *It is perhaps one of the most important areas. It is the best way and situation [playing] for children to practice their interaction skills. When they are free to make [social] contact and join in with others. When they join in with games, or start creating something of their own with someone.*

(Small group planning meeting)

Also, the preschool teacher's use of the form 'we see' indicates the shared nature of the professionals' interpretations; similarly, the preschool teacher describes play as a joint aim of pedagogical practice. In support of this, the class teacher highlights the aims of play-led pedagogy and emphasizes play as a way to develop interaction skills and social skills.

New common practices resulted from the joint planning, with play-led pedagogy becoming part of the preschool's and primary school's joint pedagogical culture. This is seen in the next excerpt, in which the professionals express their readiness to change their practices according to the children's wishes:

Preschool teacher: *Okay, now we heard about the children's wishes. Today the first lesson was an adult-led activity and the other lesson was free play.*

Class teacher: *And probably (-).*

Preschool teacher: *I think it's wonderful that we are able to listen to the children's voice in the middle of our concerns, [listen] to what they want..*

Class teacher: *Yes, this is important. They would probably do it [play] more than we can allow. Maybe it would be good to keep this as a regular feature. This kind of free play format.*

(Small group planning meeting)

In their joint planning, the professionals show their ability to discuss the children's needs together and develop their activities based on their shared understanding concerning the role of play. At the same time, the professionals allow the children's participation to determine their activities. The teachers recognize this themselves: "*we are able listen to the children's voice*".

Sub-theme 3: Common knowledge as a resource

The final sub-theme of the *Smooth boundary-crossing narrative* focuses on *common knowledge as a resource*. It involves recognizing the knowledge of other professionals and the use of various types of knowledge as a common resource. In the following diary excerpt, the preschool teacher highlights the meaningfulness of knowledge construction with the special education teacher:

The special education teacher has been working with me in my [project] lessons. I discuss my concerns [regarding the children] with her. In some cases (children), this has strongly supported my professionalism. We can observe the children together and reflect together whether any of the children need special support and how we could help them in the best way.

(Diary, preschool teacher)

The preschool teacher describes how shared observations and reflections with the special education teacher support her professionalism. The best interest of the child has been considered together, which has been essential when discussing so-called 'challenging children', as in the following excerpt:

Special education teacher: *And then our challenging children. I have been so happy during the year to see how well they have got along and have had opportunities to*

shine. They have had positive experiences especially when they play, every one of them, every time, I believe.

Preschool teacher: *Like Sanna [the class teacher] has her so-called 'special children' with special needs. We can see how well we have succeeded and how they have liked this [the activities] and have become part of the group.*

(Small group planning meeting)

The successful collaboration and “*children’s positive experiences*” as described above are the results of the professionals’ ability to learn how to create fluent transition activities together. Without a common aim or joint planning practices, their activities would have been divergent. The teachers state that the transition activities have helped their ‘challenging’ children and that these children have become part of the group.

In the *Smooth boundary-crossing narrative*, opportunities to create better practices for the children increased through the development of relational expertise. Common knowledge was built through joint planning practices and a shared pedagogical aim. The teachers created a child-led pedagogy in the transition context based on a new, expanded understanding of play. At the same time, they created pedagogical continuity between preschool and primary school, which is key to successful transition. In this organizational narrative the challenges of different professional and institutional boundaries were fundamentally met due to the participants’ commitment to a shared purpose of the project.

Discussion

Our research question sought to identify organizational narratives related to the construction of relational expertise in the context of preschool to primary school transition. Based on our analysis, two different organizational narratives were identified. The results further our understanding of the issues involved in achieving relational expertise and of the possibilities for and obstacles to its development.

The limitations of the study include the small sample (two cases) and the low number of participants, which limit transferability. Every community is a unique social unit that is case-specific, so the processes are not straightforwardly transferable. However, as a case study, the findings from the data provide opportunities to generate knowledge needed for the boundary work of organizations and institutions. The purpose of the case study is to broaden and develop the theory or ‘analytical generalization’, as opposed to ‘statistical generalization’ (Yin, 2014).

The identified *missing collaboration* narrative highlights the challenges and problematic collaboration that different backgrounds might cause in interprofessional and inter-institutional collaboration. In contrast, the *smooth boundary-crossing* narrative represents the issues that may lead organizations towards relational expertise in spite of their differences. Our findings regarding the challenges of professional collaboration showed that development of interprofessional planning practices can be problematic. In preschool, professionals are used to interprofessional collaboration. In contrast, in primary school class teachers are used to working alone (Karila & Rantavuori, 2014). However, by identifying the key issues involved in interprofessional and inter-institutional boundary work, the practices or issues required for learning relational expertise can be revealed.

Table 2 below summarizes the findings of our analysis. The organisational narrative 1 and organisational narrative 2 columns provide a summary of the results, as well as the key differences of the narratives concerning the purpose of the project, working practices and knowledge of the professionals. In our study, negotiation of the aims of joint activities seems to be a crucial, foundational element.

TABLE 2 Summary of the results

<i>Sub-themes</i>	<i>ORGANISATIONAL NARRATIVE 1</i>	<i>ORGANISATIONAL NARRATIVE 2</i>
Purpose of the project	unclear: problems in constructing a purpose of the project	purpose is clear and jointly built
Working practices	differentiated: planning practices was not carried jointly	common work practices
Knowledge	shared understanding is challenging	common knowledge as a resource

In Case 1, the professionals did not utilize each other's curricula; neither did they recognize how their planning practices failed to promote fluent transition. Instead, they planned their activities separately and individually after the joint meetings. In this way, they did not engage in collegial discussions concerning pedagogy or gain the support of other professionals. By contrast, in Case 2 the curricula of each institution were integrated into the planning and the professionals used both curricula smoothly during their collegial planning practices and discussions. This helped them to construct the purpose of the project jointly. However, because the purpose of the project and joint work practices are foundational issues that first need to be constructed, the process of developing relational

expertise takes time. Our study shows, however, that it was possible to achieve relational expertise within one academic year.

Joint planning sessions that enabled the construction of common knowledge was a key element in the relational expertise learning process. Without joint planning and evaluation, reflective talk would not be possible. Duhn et al. (2016) describe this as a foundational phase for relational expertise: finding out about each other's offerings and engaging in a common experience. The presence or lack of such joint planning was the key difference between the two organizational narratives identified in our study.

Making each professional's own knowledge available for the use of others is essential to the common knowledge construction process (Edwards, 2010). For organizations and institutions, this requires giving sufficient freedom to the professionals so that the institutions do not set too narrow aims. At the same time, the professionals need to be managed to enable object-oriented collaboration. This is facilitated if the directors recognize when the professionals have not set a common aim for collaboration. The key finding of this study was that organizations and professionals need to view the purpose of collaboration in terms of achieving a fluent transition for children – that the essence of collaboration is in working relationally in the best interests of the children.

This study increases knowledge of the development of relational expertise at the organizational level and offers a better understanding of how to build fluent transition for children in educational contexts through collaboration across institutional and professional boundaries.

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