Chapter 7
Connected Dynamics: Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives on Family Life and the Transition to School

Dominik Krinninger and Marc Schulz

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we address key concepts that define the German-language educational policy discourse on the transition to school. One of our core arguments is that consideration of the family within the research on transition is not only an empirical undertaking. It is also essential to put empirical research into the context of the public, institutional and private interests that are articulated and addressed within the discourse. In this respect, the key concepts outlined are ambivalent with regard to the family, which is seen as one of the main resources for academic achievement. However, the key concepts do not take into consideration the shifting between family and public education that accompanies the increase in the family's responsibility. This forms an important background, and research on families and the transition to school needs to address it.

7.1.1 Family as an Original Sphere of Education

The professional and political consensus is that the family can be seen as an educational environment of its own. Families are, from both a sociological and a pedagogical perspective, a discrete educational entity with different inner-familial practices and decision-making patterns, so they also develop individual educational strategies and convey their own educational content (Büchner 2011). They should

D. Krinninger (✉)
Department of Educational Science, University of Osnabrück, Osnabrück, Germany
e-mail: dominik.krinninger@uos.de

M. Schulz
Cologne University of Applied Sciences, Cologne, Germany

not be seen exclusively as providers of formal educational processes. Nonetheless, the role played by the family in school pupils' academic success is always vehemently debated when, for example, international comparative studies of school performance are published. In Germany, the transformation in welfare state structures has led to individual provision and care – and their corresponding competencies – replacing state provision. In this context, public and political attention is turning to families and the contribution they make to their children's academic success and therefore future employability (Richter and Andresen 2012). Parents are supposed to feel co-responsible for giving children the best possible support in their educational attainment. At the same time, families in a socio-economically precarious position come under particular critical scrutiny. Many believe that the contribution these families make to their children's "learning outcome" needs to be supported and supplemented further.

Two concepts in particular are emphasised in the bid to prevent educational inequality: first, a spatio-temporal measure that aims to interlink and overlap educational entities ("networking landscape"), and second, an interpersonal measure that deepens and consolidates communication structures between families and the institutions of the education system ("partnership"). Thus, public institutions address families as being involved in these institutional transitions, and they should therefore receive support both in the transition into, and cooperation with, the public institution. This apparently "normal" context, however, produces a specific ratio. It sets up a reciprocal relationship between the actors and institutions under the premise of "learning", as we discuss further.

7.1.2   Good Education in a Networking Landscape

Spatial models have found their way into discourses on education. Concepts such as "education landscape" (Kruse 2003) locate educational institutions in a network of reciprocal relations.[1] Terms such as "all-day education" in turn emphasise the temporality of this concept of the network, for instead of classifying time zones – such as school lessons – as educational time, they classify the whole day – including free time or family time – as such. These spatially broad-scoped models are based on the idea that different places of education and different learners are positioned within a cooperative network in the sense of participative 'learning communities' (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (BMFSFJ) 2006, p. 194). In these discussions, the models of a networked education landscape are almost always seen as positive, and the administrative organisation of this education landscape is combined with individual flexibility in terms of managing and optimising educational processes.

---

[1] In the American context we find comparable terms such as "overlapping spheres of influence" (Epstein et al. 2009).

Learning within an education landscape on an all-day basis means the children move around within a flat and permeable landscape – for example, between family and school. This embedding of institutional transitions in such landscapes goes hand in hand with the view that they should be organised on an institutional and administrative basis. In this connection, "education" functions as a gravitational cipher, bringing these actors into reciprocal relation within a homogenous education landscape, and facilitating territorial transitions. However, such concepts of spatial integration, which emphasise the connection between territorially separate locations, also produce and manifest social boundaries (Reutlinger 2008). Making conceptual connections between different social locations without locating them within a social topography masks possible social distances between the different actors and institutions.

7.1.3   Optimising Education in Close Relationships

There has been a programmatic demand for a stronger reciprocal relationship between public (nursery, pre-school, school) and private (family) institutions and actors. This is called a "partnership". The term "Erziehungs- und Bildungspartnerschaft"[2] is widespread (Betz 2015) and inflected towards the maxims of cooperation, transparency and equality, where the latter is often described as "being on a par" (Haase 2012).

Typically, this key concept lacks definition and is rarely used systematically. Inherently, though, it not only aims to facilitate cooperation at the organisational or administrative level, but calls directly upon children, parents, and professionals as actors within the process of children's education. The concept describes the nature of parental participation in (public) education and raising of children as 'overlapping responsibility for student learning. This marks a fundamental change from traditional separate-sphere conceptions of parents and teacher roles' (Nawrotzki 2012, p. 73). The necessity of partnership and parental engagement, as well as the continual work to improve this partnership, are therefore not offered to parents without obligation. It is standard to call upon parents to engage more with their children's learning. Experts generally agree that public institutions may, and indeed should, demand this increased engagement from parents, too, for the sake of children's future educational success.

Families are therefore expected to conform to this standardising logic of mutual facilitation of children's learning outcomes, regardless of their inner-familial practices and decision-making patterns. On the other hand, the public actors, such as nurseries or schools, appear to define the "product" of this cooperation. Accordingly, this requirement for increased cooperation, focused on education as a transfer of pedagogical norms to the family, can also be seen as ambivalent. The normalisation

---

[2]The term refers to the two poles of education typical in the German context: "Erziehung" for upbringing or training and "Bildung" for education. In English-speaking contexts we find comparable terms such as "parent participation" or "family involvement" (Grant and Ray 2015).

of the parents' educational responsibility plays a crucial role in the relation between the family and the educational system. Families develop, perform and display specific forms of "responsible parenthood" in response to the respective policies and practices of the educational system they live in.

7.2   Case Study: Shaping the Transition to Primary School Within the Family

Within the international debate there is a consensus that the institutional transition from nursery to primary school is an important event for all involved (Dockett and Perry 2007; Margetts and Kienig 2013). This discussion is focused on successfully shaping the transition as a cooperation between child, day-care institution and school, with the participation of families and communities. At the same time, empirical perspectives on parents dealing with the transition to school are relatively new, even though from a discourse analysis perspective there have for a long time been references to the intention within family policy to switch the family "from function to competence" (Gillies 2012). The German empirical research studies on this relation between parents and educational institutions can be divided into two categories: First, there are studies which address parents' ideas and perspectives in the form of interviews (Andresen et al. 2015; Graßhoff et al. 2013; Griebel et al. 2013). Their common key finding is that the transition radically changes families' daily lives, and that parents of other schoolchildren are perceived as an important source of support. At the same time, parental participation in the transition process differs significantly across families because of socio-cultural differences in practices of raising children, educational orientation and paradigms of childhood. These studies, however, offer little information about the practice of reciprocal address and the mechanisms of institutional integrations and exclusions. Observation-based studies address this gap. Using recordings of natural interactions and conversation situations in institutional contexts, these studies analyse how parents are addressed (Urban et al. 2015). In so doing, they demonstrate that parents participate in the institutional transition process only in a fragmentary way.

There is still, however, a lack of empirical knowledge about what happens within families in the face of the expectations placed upon them, how the families deal with the new requirements practically, and how they integrate the transitional phase into their daily lives. The research project *Shaping the transition to primary school within the family*[3] focuses on these questions.

---

[3] The project is based at the University of Osnabrück. It is running from 2014 to 2017 and is financed by the DFG, the German Research Foundation. The project is led by Dominik Krinninger, and the project staff are Kaja Kesselhut and Richard Sandig. Marc Schulz is a cooperating partner in the project.

7.2.1   Theoretical Framework

The project examines the family from a pedagogical perspective. What is significant in this is the focus on the family's original potential for educating children, as well as on specific forms of executing familial education. To this end, the family is considered in its social contexts, which include the institutions of the educational system. We do not, however, ask whether the family does justice to the demands placed upon it, for example, in terms of school requirements. We are interested in how the handling of the transition is embedded in the everyday practices of the family, in what ways family life is organised around this, and which specific experiences it enables its children to access. It is also essential to this focus on the family's perspective that we describe the families under study using horizontal differentiation and do not carry out vertical hierarchisation.

   The project's research interest is framed by a model of the family as an "educational configuration" (Krinninger 2015; Krinninger and Müller 2012). This concept, which builds on Norbert Elias' figuration theory approach (Morrow 2009), comprehends the family as a constellation of actors with relative autonomy. The family is a social figuration connected to other social figurations, for example, within the education system, and can therefore also be described as a configuration. On the one hand, the educational world of the family is conditioned by its external world. On the other, the dynamic integration of multifaceted relations, as well as of the given social, economic and cultural conditions, into a specific shape and an inner order can only be carried out by family actors. This means the respective "family style" becomes relevant as a fundamental mode in the production of this order. This category combines practices typical to the family that have developed through communal living as well as through dealing with the differences inherent in this. Thus, the theoretical framework of the project also draws upon concepts that highlight how the family is shaped by everyday practices (Jurczyk 2014; Morgan 2011). Finally, from a pedagogical perspective, the family-specific "educational gestus" is of particular interest as a subdimension of the family style. This category targets the particular forms in which cultural content and personal dispositions become an issue between children and parents. Here, we are not only concerned with the explicit, rationally discursive forms of such intergenerational issues, such as verbal regulations. We also cover a broad spectrum of forms of familial education, including the use and configuration of multifaceted physical, material and practical arrangements in the familial environment. Implicitly, this also brings practical forms into focus.

7.2.2   Methodological Aspects

The participating families who agreed to be accompanied through their child's transition to primary school were recruited via flyers in nursery schools, so they approached the project on their own initiative. Our sample consists of twelve cases:

the families are situated differently in terms of social structure; the number of children varies from one to four; single mothers, patchwork constellations and married couples are included. In total, five research visits take place within the families, from around 3 months before the start of school up to around 6 months afterwards. These visits involved carrying out participatory observations, making notes, and conducting interviews with parents and children. In addition, the families produced photographic and videographic self-documentation in which particular scenes from everyday life were recorded – such as departing for school in the mornings or doing homework. Of course, this is not direct access to the families' "authentic" daily lives. The thematic focus and the presence of field research, also represented by the camera, imply that families portray themselves for the camera. In this respect, we have here a specific case of displaying family (Finch 2007). This should not, however, be seen as a distortive feedback effect. The fact that the families portray themselves to the project as they wish, and the way in which they do this, allows us to infer their representational paradigms and their respective self-perception. Moreover, it gives us the opportunity to reconstruct in detail any correlations between the different types of empirical material, in order to explore significant structures in family life. This reconstructive orientation of the analysis also aims to comprehend structural contexts by comparing cases, and compensate for the restricted possibilities of participatory observation through the extensive analysis of select focus files. We combine this process with ethnographic elements. This includes not least the fact that we address the familial actors as experts in their way of life, according their self-descriptions an integral significance within our case descriptions.

Below, we will show how the transition to school is shaped by the family in a specific way by presenting two contrasting cases. Whereas we can see an almost complete match between familial practices and resources and the requirements accompanying the transition in one case, in the second case we see an increasing distance between family and school. To avoid misunderstandings, we would like to emphasise that the two cases have been chosen to provide a strong contrast in order to generate cross-case hypotheses. The intention is not to show how the transition should be dealt with "properly" within the family.

7.2.3   The Feltz Family

7.2.3.1   Portrait

The Feltz family consists of parents Fritz (28) and Frauke (32) and their son Finn (6); the second son Fridolin will be born shortly before Finn starts school. Fritz is a pharmacist and works full-time in a pharmacy. After her Masters degree in primary school teaching, Frauke studied for a diploma in pedagogy. She holds a temporary part-time position at a family education centre. The family lives in a rented house for a single family on the outskirts of town. The property, which is located in rural surroundings and is well maintained, suggests the family are in a secure

socio-economic position. They are well connected to the town centre via a nearby country road and a bus route into town. Various strands are interwoven within the family milieu: we find elements that are rooted in the family biography, such as weekly meal planning or the family's religiousness. These give the pedagogical conditions a certain traditional slant. Furthermore, we also find elements that can be classified within the context of the newer middle-class milieu. This includes a parental responsibility for upbringing that is emphatically based on parity and a clear educational orientation. The latter is not only apparent in the way the parents intensively support Finn as he starts school. In the child's bedroom, for example, there are two book shelves; one with books which are currently being read, and one with books which will be read next, as Finn explains when showing us his bedroom. Finn could have started school last year, but at that time the parents felt he was not yet ready for it. Meanwhile, they think he has actually outgrown the nursery school. This is also why he has been going to flute lessons for half a year; *so he can get used to learning* says his mother in conversation. In addition, he takes part in children's gymnastics, an extra-curricular activity. Overall, the Feltz family is characterised by a high level of cultural confidence, which on the one hand is fuelled by their secure social situation. On the other hand, the family's values – apparent in its educational affinity and religiousness – also contribute to its positive, stable self-perception.

7.2.3.2   Familial Practices as Practices of Transition

The family's daily life reveals a pragmatic-functional orientation as a primary element of the family style. The pragmatic organisation of family life is supported, for example, by different kinds of lists. As well as the family calendar, this includes shopping and meal planning and, for example, the "wish lists" Finn writes for his birthday. The division of care duties between the parents according to practical considerations (primarily the different working hours) likewise contributes to the pragmatic structuring of daily family life. However, we also see a functional moment in the father's and son's shared liking for a technical construction toy, which they play with together very meticulously. The way the family deals with the transition to primary school combines this pragmatic-functional orientation with the educational orientation of the family, resulting in a significant adaptation of school precepts within the family. Both the parents and Finn make these adaptations. This is illustrated in the arrangement of Finn's bedroom, which in part appears to be an exact reproduction of a classroom. The photo is a still from one of the family's home-recorded videos (Fig. 7.1).

The following artefacts reflect the equipment of a classroom: the desk is placed, without a desk lamp, in front of the window, simulating the arrangement of working conditions that exist at school, and the table takes up a prominent place in the child's bedroom. After completing his homework, Finn closes his school bag and hangs it – as he would do at school – on a hook on the side of the table. In the background there is a blackboard, which is another carrier of school practices and representations of "content". On it, we see a magnetic strip with the letters of the alphabet and
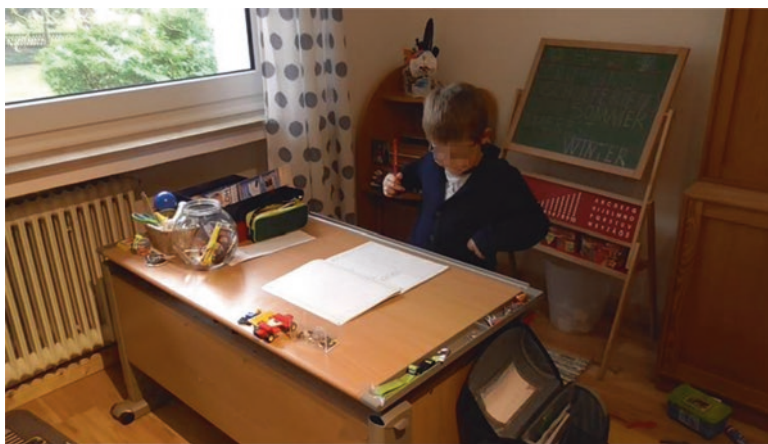
Fig. 7.1 Finn doing homework (Reproduced with permission of the copyright holder)

the numbers from 1 to 10. On the blackboard, the words "Spring", "School Holidays", "Summer", "Autumn" and "Winter" are handwritten in capital letters, indicating the rhythm of the "school year". These material furnishings lend school a permanent presence in Finn's bedroom.

To what extent Finn has already internalised the school requirements can also be seen in how he does his homework. After lunch, he practises reading with both parents at the table, then he works through the second part of the homework (addition within the number range 1 to 10) alone in his room. The video sequence which shows Finn doing this, and from which the above still is taken, is 22 min long. In the course of this, Finn demonstrates some prominent physical gestures that appropriate the material equipment, as he is taking social cues from it: he moves his body several times back into position after having sunk down, bringing himself into an upright working position on his desk chair. He scratches his head and presses his lips together, which can be read as an expression of cognitive exertion, or he props up his head with his hand in a contemplative gesture. He sighs and blows out through his mouth, making his exertion clear, and he also regulates himself via brief self-commentaries (*stupid axe*). Not least significant is the self-discipline Finn shows when doing his homework. It is only after 8 min that he loses concentration for a moment: Finn looks briefly out of the window and independently finds his way back into the work process. Even the jar of sweets – to which Finn may help himself – remains untouched during the recording. When Finn completes the work and shouts *Ready!*, his father comes and checks through the completed tasks together with his son. The parental supervision of the homework is therefore not orientated towards doing the homework. Relevant organisational issues or aspects of concentration and discipline are not directly addressed; these aspects are a habitual part of the familial milieu. The explicit parental interest is focused instead on the results and therefore on a function that is also integral to the monitoring of homework by the school. In this respect we can see Fritz referencing school practices. At the same time, though,

he flags up (for his son and for the research project symbolically present via the camera) his superiority over the school requirements by criticising one of the tasks as *not very clear*. The family's secure educational affinity, reflected here, is already expressed by the father in a parental conversation during the first research visit when he comments, *It's only primary school, after all*.

In summary, it is clear that the Feltz family's adaptation of school requirements builds on a series of prerequisites. These include socio-structural factors, such as the family's income and the parents' educational status, but also factors related to the family's inner milieu which emerges in a specific combination of social pre-structuring and familial practices. When the research contact is concluded, the parents believe Finn's experience of starting school has gone well, and they have no anxieties about the future. This is, from the family's perspective, just as much down to familial resources and practices developed within the family as to Finn's content-edness at school. In this, the Feltz family shows it is not only on a secure path through the education landscape, but is already on this path even before school actually makes an entrance. The education landscape appears to be the quasi natural habitat of the family.

7.2.4   The Carter Family

The circumstances are different for the Carter family. In their case, breaches and distances between family and school, as well as the accompanying strains on the family, played a prominent role.

7.2.4.1   Portrait

Carolin Carter (42) is a single mother with three children: Chloe (18), Calvin (15) and Chris (6), who now attends primary school. Chris was diagnosed as having multiple special needs (physical-motor, social and learning). He attended an inclusive nursery school and now goes to a special school for children with physical and motor development needs. The family has no contact with the father of Chloe and Calvin, and loose contact with Chris's father. Carolin lives with her sons and a dog in a four-room flat in a house containing two flats in a rural community. Chloe lives in a youth residential community for supportive housing approximately ten kilometres from the flat. She often spends time with the family and appears to be well integrated in the family community. The rooms in the flat are relatively small and equipped with low-cost furniture. When there is a build-up of mould in Chris's bedroom, a bed is made up for him in his mother's room and three boxes of toys are moved into the living room.

Upon taking up contact with the project, Carolin emphasises that her motivation is to draw public attention to her situation and the stress it causes her family. On the first visit, we notice the mother demonstrates a particular attitude. The three children

are supported by the youth welfare service. Carolin sees this support as a resource and not, in fact, as a stigma, and she derives from this, in terms of her self-perception, a fundamentally positive view of her family and her role as a mother. In other areas of life, however, she is disillusioned: as regards going back to work or looking for accommodation, she has resigned herself to a permanent dependence on state support systems. Overall, it is clear that the Carter family are under certain pressures. The family reacts to this with strong inner solidarity; its relations with the outside world, with neighbours as well as school, prove, however, to be fragile.

7.2.4.2 Familial Practices and the Transition to School

It is not surprising that this constellation creates problems for the family. However, we do not intend to infer the orientation of familial practices or the course of events during this family phase from specific frame conditions. Instead, we are interested in the typical profile of familial practices that ensues from the family's situation but is also shaped by these practices. Furthermore, we ask to what extent these practices can be employed in dealing with the transition.

A specific defensiveness can be identified as a key motif of the family style. Faced with excessive pressures, Carolin tries to avoid further pressures and, along with these, also new challenges, for she cannot find the resources she needs to deal with these. The caution resulting from this fragile family statics is evident, on the one hand, in recurring situations involving Chris, for example, in Chris's dinnertime routine, which is fastidiously observed. The mother's interactions with Chris are rarely stimulating. She mostly reacts to disruptions and then tries to re-stabilise the situation. Overall, Carolin gives the impression of being intent upon avoiding conflicts and agitation in daily life, too.

This family style becomes relevant when Chris starts school. The fact that his transition to primary school was perceived by the family as beset with crisis must also be seen in the context of Carolin's mistrust of school. In an interview conducted a few weeks after the start of school she says: *It's a shame; he is just starting; I am very very sad about it. I'm also very disappointed with the school. There is no trust left on my side*. In this interview she also refers to a therapeutic measure the school is providing for Chris (he has to wear a vest filled with sand for a short time to promote his sensorimotor attention). When she asked a professional from the youth welfare service and he judged the measure to be outdated, Carolin wrote to the school, forbidding it to continue the therapy. This anecdote points to Carolin's social vulnerability, which must be understood in the context of her experience of social marginalisation. In her dealings with the school she has a low level of social recognition, and she vehemently demands this recognition where she believes herself to be in the right, thereby setting up a pedagogical opposition to the school.

The mother's increasing lack of trust leads to the family's alienation from the school. In the course of the research contact, Chris, too, takes on his mother's defensive attitude. This process is clearly apparent in the conversation with mother and

son. When asked about her experience when the school asked her to change the snack Chris brings from home, a conversation develops between Carolin and Chris:

Carolin: At nursery they were allowed to, and now I'm supposed to make him change; it doesn't happen that quickly. We take it slowly step by step… And it was the same with drinking. He wasn't allowed to take drinks in cartons with him anymore because it was a lot of work for the teachers at school to cut them open and just pour them into a cup. (…)
Chris: What they are doing with the drinks in cartons, that I'm not allowed to, it's just daft.
I1:   And how do you do it now with drinks at school; what do you have to drink there?
Chris: At the moment just…apple juice with fizzy water. But not in a carton anymore, and I'd actually like to drink from a carton, but they don't like that. But, but if they don't do that they are just daft. (…)
Carolin: Everything, they want to change the way he does everything, so I said: it's gone far enough now.
Chris: Yes, and change from two hands to doing one hand, it's just daft. But I'd like to do both hands.
Carolin: You can keep doing it with two hands.

Chris subsequently takes up again this question of which hand to use for writing:

I1:   Have you ever felt angry at school when they said you had to do something you didn't want to do?
Chris: Yes, from two hands to…
Carolin: And what on earth are they doing? Because otherwise I'll take him straight out of there and get a doctor's note; then it's an issue for me; then I'll go to the head and then I'll go to the public, because it's not right. They can't just go over my head.
Chris: But they said I have to change from two hands to one.
Carolin: They said that?
Chris: You have to practise it every day, but it's just stupid and daft.
Carolin: And how did you do it today? How did you write at school today?
Chris: Well, with both hands…
Carolin: Because mummy has said something about it now, too; you're allowed to write with both hands; you're allowed to write whichever way you can do it. And when you are writing with your left hand, for instance, they can show you how you can place your book, and, when you write with your right hand, how to place your book so you can write with both hands in the way you can do it best. Okay?

Carolin insists on her maternal competence and responsibility in her dialogue with both the school and her son, and she shows a tendency for escalation. She tends to generalise the way the school deals with general organisational aspects, such as rules around eating, turning this into a fundamental criticism of the way Chris is treated. Emotionally, she also goes far beyond not approving of school work

processes, contemplating instead the possibility of an official complaint to the school and even a public scandal to highlight her interactions with the school.

This development ensues, significantly, in an interview sequence that is structured less by the researcher's questions and more by an interaction between mother and child. Carolin lays claim to the primacy of pedagogical care for her son by belittling the institutional measures. This battle for recognition as a mother is verbally supported by Chris. He calls his teachers or their measures *daft* a number of times. This gives rise to the problematic constellation of a reciprocal solidarity within the mother-child-relationship, which is bought at the price of a familial "othering" vis-à-vis the school.

By the end of the research contact Carolin appears to be resigned, but she also shows the will to persevere. She says she is searching for a new school that will handle her son "properly" and "care" for him. *This ordeal will soon be over. Mummy will take care of it.* This is by no means easy for her, but she *went down this route with all three children, and there are ways, and you can do it*. To the question of whether she is getting enough help this way, she replies in the negative, expressing her desire for *a bit of relief (…) just a bit more time for myself*. At the same time, she derives a high degree of self-esteem from the situation:

> Raising the children on my own with these health issues, and so on and so on. The problems that come with this… I would like to see anyone else do that! (…) It's an ordeal, yes, but on the other hand, I know who I am. I know what I can do. (…) I won't let anyone mess me about.

From the Carter family's point of view, the relationship between family and school has become one of opposition. The process of changing pedagogical institutions reveals a gap in the family's support within this constellation. This gap arises out of the subdivided support structures observable within the Carter family. Overall, this is not atypical. Attendance at an institution is supported by the institutions themselves (nursery, school), and the educational support provided by the youth welfare service is child-centred. This means no structurally comprehensive perspective is applied to the family as an actor community in its social context. The Carter family is meanwhile not in a position to bridge or close this gap through its own resources or with recourse to familial practices it has developed. The defensiveness the family has developed from within its socially marginal position cannot, it seems, be transformed into an adaptation to the new requirements – at least, not by the family alone.

7.2.5   Cross-Case Theses and Findings

Different constellations emerge in the cases presented above. In the Feltz family, the child appears as the pupil, and the family moves within the education landscape surrounding it as a matter of course. In the Carter family, the confrontation experience leads to a continued distancing of the family from the school. At this point it should be noted that the two case studies end with the end of the research contact.

We therefore cannot say how the processes continued. In any case, the reconstructed circumstances do not simply ensue from a causal relationship whereby the socio-cultural position anticipates the familial order which, for its part, would then just have to be "executed" in familial practices. The family forms an educational configuration in the first place only via the familial actors linking the different levels together practically. This gives the families room for manoeuvre.

This basic approach shows that the families adapt to the new requirements within the framework of practices already functioning within the family. The familial practices therefore emerge as relatively stable. Over the course of the research contact we noticed that at least the parents started to think early on about issues related to the imminent transition that will affect the family (such as by asking questions regarding homework supervision or communication with the school).[4] Compared with this rather rapid convergence on the discursive level, the dynamic level clearly takes longer to develop on the practical. If closer relationships with fellow pupils, contact with other parents, or practical confidence in dealing with the new requirements do materialise within the families under study, then this occurs only towards the end of the research contact.

This asynchronous adaptation suggests two aspects. Firstly, the transition appears to be a complex phenomenon in an inner-familial sense, too, for differentiations must be made around *who* in the family does *what* to contribute to the transition. In this, we see both substantial participation by parents and children and mutual responsiveness between parents and children. For example, through his competent utilisation of the familial learning arrangement Finn supports, to a significant extent, the Feltz family's educational gestus, which forgoes direct and explicit regulations. In turn, Chris is an important interlocutor for Carolin; she articulates her self-esteem as a mother vis-à-vis him, and he plays a part in producing the defensive position towards the school connected with this. The familial handling of the transition is fuelled by a broad spectrum of forms of knowledge: how the familial environment is equipped, the familial practices, the attitudes and mindset of the family members, but also their explicit reflections. Only against a correspondingly complex background does it become clear that the crisis-laden process experienced by the Carter family does not derive from, for instance, a lack of intelligence or an absent sense of responsibility. Instead, we see a double bind situation in which the family's fortress mentality is a stabilising force in the preservation of the family's – in this case – very important, positive self-perception, and simultaneously poses massive obstacles to the support for Chris's education.

Secondly, the asynchronous adaptation sheds new light on the crucial importance of the families' resources and practical knowledge. The families fall back on the means they have at their disposal. This temporary self-sufficiency is strengthened as the transition is experienced as a distinctive change in pedagogical cultures; new communication channels and new responsibilities mean that clarity around expectations and processes emerges only gradually (Andresen et al. 2015; Graßhoff et al. 2013). The Feltz family bridges this phase competently. The Carter family, however, falls through a gap.[5]

---

[4] This is, at the same time, also an artefact of our specific sample.

[5] See also Dockett et al. (2012) on this gap in support for families in need of assistance.

7.3   Conclusion

In the context of our findings, we propose a differentiated consideration of the transition process on the levels of empirical research and theoretical modelling. The following aspects can, however, also contribute to raising awareness of inherent involvements and paradoxes in relation to pedagogical support for the transition.

Firstly, it is important to consider the transition as a complex and dynamic process. We believe the merging of two rivers is a helpful metaphor for describing the transition. Both have their own flow forces which, upon converging, overlap each other and form new flow conditions. Similarly, families are not just a place where children and parents deal with the transition. Instead, families themselves as social figurations are exposed to new dynamics in the transition by virtue of being interwoven with the school order. They integrate new requirements into their existing structures, which keep on working but are also given new directional impetus.

Secondly, the analysis of the transition needs to acknowledge multiple perspectives. Nursery, school and family all do have a duty, or intention, to ensure that the transition to school is "successful". However, in terms of what this means for each of them, we see different perspectives and, to a certain extent, also latent or explicit contradictions emerging. On the one hand, this is significant with regard to questions of social recognition. When, for example, it is argued that a congruence of rules and orientations between family and primary school supports a positive process of transition (Walper and Ross 2001), this casts a problematic perspective on forms of familial life in which this kind of congruence either does not exist or exists to a lesser extent. The normatively uncritical operationalisation of a successful transition from a pedagogical-institutional perspective is in danger of contributing to the reification of pedagogical normative notions and reinforcing structural discrimination within the education system. In terms of the two cases presented above, this means that the families' relation to school can be seen as ambivalent. While this is quite obvious in the case of the Carter family, it also applies to the Feltz family. The congruence between family and school is not only a resource but could also make it difficult to deal with problems Finn might have in school someday. Furthermore, different perspectives also interfere in the family itself, which absorbs different requirements from different contexts. The family should therefore not be seen as a homogenous unit but as a constellation of actors addressing differences.

Thirdly, the analysis of transition processes requires reflexivity. This means familial practices or institutional structures must not only be described but also analysed in their discursive context and with respect to their normative framing. This includes identifying the power relations between the actors, determining practices of addressing, and identifying discursive attributions. All actors involved in the transition not only carry out the tasks it entails; they are also involved, each in their own way, in producing the transition as a social construct. In addition to our figuration theory perspective, the pedagogical approaches within actor-network theory (Fenwick and Edwards 2010), for example, would be suited to the analytical work necessary for this.

In summary, this means – from both a scientific and a pedagogical-practical per-spective – we should not only be asking *how* the transition is executed, but also *what* it is that defines how it is executed.

References

Andresen, S., Künstler, S., & Seddig, N. (2015). Von Adressatinnen und Nutzerinnen: Eltern in Kita und Schule. In M. Urban, M. Schulz, K. Meser, & S. Thoms (Eds.), *Inklusion und Übergang – Perspektiven der Vernetzung von Kita und Grundschule* (pp. 63–75). Bad Heilbrunn: Klinkhardt.

Betz, T. (2015). *Das Ideal der Bildungs- und Erziehungspartnerschaft. Kritische Fragen an eine verstärkte Zusammenarbeit zwischen Kindertageseinrichtungen, Grundschulen und Familie*. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung.

Büchner, P. (2011). Familie als Bildungsinstanz. In H. Macha & M. Witzke (Eds.), *Familie. Handbuch der Erziehungswissenschaft 5* (pp. 153–175). Schöningh: Paderborn.

Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (BMFSFJ). (2006). *Familie zwischen Flexibilität und Verlässlichkeit. Perspektiven für eine lebenslaufbezogene Familienpolitik. Siebter Familienbericht.* http://www.bmfsfj.de/doku/Publikationen/familienbericht/download/familienbericht_gesamt.pdf. Accessed 7 Sept 2015.

Dockett, S., & Perry, B. (2007). *Transitions to school. Perceptions, experiences and expectations*. Sydney: University of New South Wales Press.

Dockett, S., Perry, B., & Kearney, E. (2012). Family transitions as children start school. *Family Matters, 90*, 57–67.

Epstein, J. L., Sanders, M. G., Sheldon, S. B., Simon, B. S., Salinas, K. C., Jansorn, N. R., et al. (2009). *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press.

Fenwick, T., & Edwards, R. (2010). *Actor-network-theory in education*. London/New York: Routledge.

Finch, J. (2007). Displaying families. *Sociology, 41*, 65–81.

Gillies, V. (2012). Family policy and the politics of parenting: From function to competence. In M. Richter & S. Andresen (Eds.), *The politicization of parenthood. Shifting private and public responsibilities in education and child rearing* (pp. 13–26). Dordrecht: Springer.

Grant, K. B., & Ray, J. A. (Eds.). (2015). *Home, school, and community collaboration: Culturally responsive family engagement*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Graßhoff, G., Binz, C., Pfaff, A., Schmenger, S., & Ullrich, H. (2013). *Eltern als Akteure im Übergang vom Elementar- in den Primarbereich*. Wiesbaden: VS.

Griebel, W., Wildgruber, A., Held, J., Schuster, A., & Nagel, B. (2013). Partizipation im Übergangsmanagement von Kitas und Schulen. Eltern als Ressource. *bildungsforschung 10*(1). http://bildungsforschung.org/index.php/bildungsforschung/article/view/160/pdf_6. Accessed 7 Sept 2015.

Haase, K. (2012). Erziehungs- und Bildungspartnerschaft von Familie, Schule und Kinder- und Jugendhilfe im Kontext von Schulentwicklung. Kooperation auf "gleicher Augenhöhe" – realistische Leitvorstellung oder unerfüllbare Vision. *Pädagogische Rundschau, 66*(1), 29–44.

Jurczyk, K. (2014). Familie als Herstellungsleistung. Hintergründe und Konturen einer neuen Perspektive auf Familie. In K. Jurczyk, A. Lange, & B. Thiessen (Eds.), *Doing family. Warum Familienleben heute nicht mehr selbstverständlich ist* (pp. 50–70). Weinheim/Basel: Beltz Juventa.

Krinninger, D. (2015). Family life as education. Ethnographic perspectives on how familial education emerges in families and in educational family research. In S. Bollig, M.-S. Honig,

S. Neumann, & C. Seele (Eds.), *MultiPluriTrans. Emerging fields in educational ethnography* (pp. 297–314). Bielefeld: Transcript/New York: Columbia University Press.

Krinninger, D., & Müller, H.-R. (2012). Die Bildung der Familie. Zwischenergebnisse aus einem ethnographischen Forschungsprojekt. *Zeitschrift für Soziologie der Erziehung und Sozialisation, 32*(3), 233–249.

Kruse, W. (2003). *Lifelong learning in Germany – Financing and innovation: Skill development, education networks, support structures*. Report of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) for the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) on "Good practice in the financing of lifelong learning" within the framework of the project "Co-financing Lifelong Learning". http://www.bmbf.de/pub/lifelong_learning_oecd_2003.pdf. Accessed 28 Aug 2015.

Margetts, K., & Kienig, A. (Eds.). (2013). *International perspectives on transition to school: Reconceptualising beliefs, policy and practice*. London: Routledge.

Morgan, D. H. J. (2011). *Rethinking family practices*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Morrow, R. (2009). Norbert Elias and figurational sociology: The comeback of the century. *Contemporary Sociology, 38*(3), 215–219.

Nawrotzki, K. D. (2012). Parent-school relations in England and the USA: Partnership, problematized. In M. Richter & S. Andresen (Eds.), *The Politicization of parenthood. Shifting private and public responsibilities in education and child rearing* (pp. 69–83). Dordrecht: Springer.

Reutlinger, C. (2008). Bildungsorte, Bildungsräume und Bildungslandschaft im Spiegel von Ungleichheit – Kritischer Blick auf das "Räumeln" im Bildungsdiskurs. In P. Bollweg & H.-U. Otto (Eds.), *Räume flexibler Bildung. Bildungslandschaft in der Diskussion* (pp. 51–69). Wiesbaden: VS.

Richter, M., & Andresen, S. (Eds.). (2012). *The politicization of parenthood. Shifting private and public responsibilities in education and child rearing*. Dordrecht: Springer.

Urban, M., Cloos, P., Meser, K., Objartel, V., Richter, A., Schulz, M., Thoms, S., Velten, J., & Werning, R. (2015). *Prozessorientierte Verfahren der Bildungsdokumentation in inklusiven Settings*. Opladen: Barbara Budrich.

Walper, S., & Ross, J. (2001). Die Einschulung als Herausforderung und Chance für die ganze Familie. In G. Faust-Siehl & A. Speck-Hamdan (Eds.), *Schulanfang ohne Umwege* (pp. 30–52). Frankfurt: Grundschulverband.