Chapter 10
A Sociocultural Approach to Children in the Transition from Home to Kindergarten

Mei Seung Lam

10.1 Introduction

Early childhood education refers to the provision of education and care to young children by child care centres, kindergarten-cum-child care centres, and kindergartens in Hong Kong. Child care centres provide services to children below the age of three. Kindergartens and kindergarten-cum-child care centres provide services for children from 3–6 years old. Most kindergartens operate on a half-day basis and offer three levels: nursery classes (3–4 years), lower kindergarten (4–5 years) and upper kindergarten (5–6 years). Moreover, many kindergartens run extracurricular activities such as Kumon maths, English oral, drawing, ballet and musical instrument classes for their pupils after school or on Saturday mornings, which are well received by many parents.

In 2007, a Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme was launched in Hong Kong to provide a direct subsidy to parents who choose to send their children to non-profit kindergartens that offer a local curriculum and charge tuition within the required ranges. In addition, many parents have high aspirations for their children's education, perhaps relating to the Chinese ethos of "wishing the son to become a dragon" and the hope that preschool education gives their child a competitive edge for later schooling. Due to the different settings and functions of the early childhood sectors, Hong Kong parents in general have a perception that kindergarten is a place of learning and acquiring the 3Rs (reading, writing and arithmetic). Thus, many parents choose kindergarten for their children so that they receive early childhood education at the age of three.

The transition to kindergarten is the first educational transition for most 3-year-old children in Hong Kong. In making this transition, children cross a cultural boundary between home and kindergarten and begin to make sense of school as a

M.S. Lam (✉)
Hong Kong Institute of Education, Hong Kong, China
e-mail: mlam@ied.edu.hk

B. Perry et al. (eds.), *Transitions to School - International Research, Policy and Practice*, International perspectives on early childhood education and development 9,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-7350-9_10,

place to learn and of themselves as pupils. Home and kindergarten are different social contexts with their own unique functions, expectations and practices. In the transition between the two, children move from a more family-controlled setting to a cultural context specifically designed for the education of children. In the process, they face many new situations, new learning experiences, new relationships and new expectations.

The transition involves a change of social context and a shift of status from child to pupil while adapting to the expectations of being a kindergartener (Fabian 2002; Lam and Pollard 2006). In Vygotsky's view, the historical, cultural and institutional context shapes children's individual development, and children are active agents in the process of adaptation. Children may feel a great deal of tension between their personal characteristics, experiences, ways of doing things and the knowledge they have obtained at home and their new experience in the classroom. They may build on their existing biographies and personal needs to devise their own creative responses or strategic actions in order to cope with the demands of the new classroom environment such as physical environment, rules and routines, relationships, play and learning activities.

This chapter aims to present a reconceptualised framework (Lam and Pollard 2006) illustrated by a case study of a 3-year-old girl (Lam 2005, 2009). The case shows the interrelationships between cultural processes at home and in kindergarten during the child's adaptation process. Finally, in light of the conceptual framework, future directions for transition research will be discussed.

10.2 Theoretical Perspectives

10.2.1 A Sociocultural Approach to Transition

The conceptual framework is developed from sociocultural theory and select literature on rites of passage and pupil career. Vygotsky's sociocultural approach makes an important contribution to the development of the conceptual framework, which perceives children as active agents in coping with various classroom situations during the transition to kindergarten within the wider context of Hong Kong society. The major elements of the framework include van Gennep's (1960) notion of rites of passage, which describes children's transition from home to kindergarten as a process of changing context and social status, including preliminal, liminal and postliminal stages, and Pollard and Filer's (1999) notion of pupil career, which explains children's preparedness for kindergarten in the preliminal stage and adaptation in the postliminal stage. It highlights the relationships between children's strategic actions and layers of cultural and institutional context, stages of transition and adaptation outcomes for understanding children as agents during the passage from home to kindergarten. The conceptual framework is depicted in Fig. 10.1.

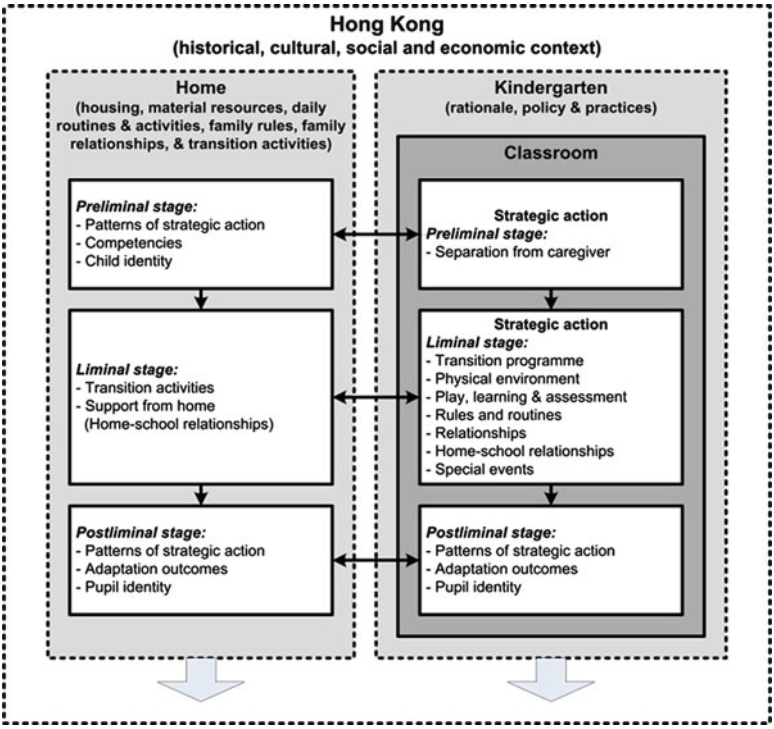

Fig. 10.1 A sociocultural approach to transition (Reconceptualised from Lam and Pollard (2006))

In the following paragraphs, the theoretical foundations – sociocultural theory, rites of passage and pupil career – of the conceptual framework and their implications will be elaborated.

10.2.1.1 Sociocultural Theory: Understanding Transition as a Mediated Process

In Vygotsky's (1978) view, historical, cultural and institutional contexts shape a person's view of the world, and consequently, a child's individual development (biography) should be understood in their situated social context. He claimed that all higher mental functions are mediated processes and that "human action, on both social and individual planes, is mediated by tools (technical tools) and signs (psychological tools)" (Wertsch 1991, p. 19). Mediated process refers to a series of transformations, including the following: (1) an operation that initially represents an external activity is reconstructed and begins to occur internally; (2) an interpersonal process is transformed into an intrapersonal one; and (3) the transformation of an interpersonal process into an intrapersonal one is the result of a long series of developmental events (Vygotsky 1978).

Wertsch (1991, 1998) extended Vygotsky's idea of mediation to develop the notion of mediated action. He explained that "action is mediated" and "cannot be separated from the milieu in which it is carried out" (Wertsch 1991, p. 18). This concept emphasises that human actions are not isolated and do not occur in a vacuum, but are mediated by cultural tools such as language, concepts, objects, routines, forms of expression and ways of doing things in a cultural context (Anning and Edwards 1999; Wertsch 1991, 1998).

Through social interaction, we learn how to use the cultural tools available to us. Consequently, the term "agent" is redefined. It is not only the individual as agent – that is, the person who is doing the acting (who does it) – but rather the agent is the "agent-acting-with-mediational-means" (how he or she does it) (Wertsch 1998, p. 24). To analyse mediated action, Wertsch specified that the agent, the mediational means, the action, the scene and the purpose should all be considered. Moreover, Wertsch characterised the relationship between the agent and meditational means in two forms: internalisation as mastery (ability) and internalisation as appropriation (willingness). Mastery refers to the ability to know how to use meditational means, whereas appropriation refers to the process of "taking something that belongs to others and making it one's own" (Wertsch 1998, p. 53). He claimed that people could have mastery without appropriation or appropriation without mastery (Wertsch 1998).

In light of sociocultural theory, children are considered as active agents (active and cultural learners) in the process of adaptation. When crossing the cultural boundary from home to kindergarten, they bring with them what they have developed and learned at home to make sense of classroom situations in order to adapt as kindergarten pupils. The classroom situations (mediational means) include physical environment, rules and routines, relationships, play and learning activities.

In response to the classroom situations, children may experience different degrees of familiarity or unfamiliarity, since they come from different families. They may suddenly find that their knowledge and established ways of responding (strategic biography) are no longer appropriate or that their experiences have not prepared them for knowing how to act in the new environment. They may be confronted with a totally different cultural model. When they face these cultural variations, they may feel culture shock. They may have different purposes that may conflict with the embedded goals of the mediational means in the classroom and so may respond in different ways in order to adapt.

As Pollard and Filer (1999) stated, "Individual children will respond to this in different ways. By drawing on their accumulated experience and biographical resources, they will act strategically in accommodating to the demands of the new situations" (p. 25). Children may master or appropriate the cultural tools, transform the tools into new forms ("spin-off", in Wertsch's words) or misuse the tools by borrowing from their prior home experience or by using the tools for a different purpose from that which the teachers intended. Children may get to know their teachers' expectations but will also test their skills and abilities to resolve the tensions and contradictions. Similarly, teachers have strategies for responding to children's strategic actions. As a result, new meanings may be created in unpredictable ways.

Children's strategic actions are the results of their interactions with the mediational means in the situated classroom. In brief, children may communicate effectively through non-verbal behaviour, altering their own social environments and the people with whom they interact.

In fact, there is tension between children and the mediational means in the classroom. This is an interactive and dynamic process of negotiation between teachers and children, as well as parents and children, from their different standpoints, concerns and interests, until they arrive at a working consensus (Pollard 1985; Pollard and Filer 1999). In other words, children may mediate (produce) and are mediated (reproduce) until they settle into the teacher's and the school's expectations, or there is mutual acceptance of each other over time. Eventually, it becomes "legitimate peripheral participation" as they move towards full participation in the community and become part of the "community of practice" (Lave and Wenger 1991). Thus, some children may experience more stress, take longer and exert more effort to adapt or create (reproduce) new ways to participate in the collective activities and become members of the classroom.

Moreover, as children commute between home and kindergarten, they have to maintain their dual identity and perform appropriately in the two settings. This does not mean that their family values are replaced once they learn the new ways and values of the kindergarten. Their family values and practices may be modified by the kindergarten or remain separate from the kindergarten classroom. Thus, the conceptual framework takes a parallel perspective (i.e. children commute between home and kindergarten every day) as well as a linear perspective (i.e. children go through the stages of transition) in the rites of passage.

In order to understand how children make sense of, interact and settle into kindergarten, it is necessary to understand their biographies at home and observe how they interpret and interact with the mediational means in the classroom and what strategic actions they employ for using these mediational means. It is also necessary to look into the wider context that influences both the home and school contexts and practices (Bruner 1996; Pollard and Filer 1996).

10.2.1.2 Rites of Passage: Understanding the Stages of Transition

The use of sociocultural theory in understanding the contextual elements (milieu) affecting children's strategic actions and adaptation during the transition to kindergarten has been elaborated above. The temporal element (stages) of the conceptual framework comes from van Gennep's notion of "rites of passage". Van Gennep's (1960) notion implies that children's transition from home to kindergarten is a process of change in context and social status. He claimed that transition is the process of habituating to the new expectations of a new social status in a new world, as distinct from the old status in the old world. He categorises rites of passage into three stages: preliminal rites (rites of separation), liminal (or threshold) rites (rites of transition) and postliminal rites (rites of incorporation). Turner (1969) focused on the intermediate phase of rites of passage as the most

consequential. He introduced the concept of "liminal space". Liminal means transitional, which is "betwixt and between". It represents a period of ambiguity, a marginal and transitional stage. The liminal stage is where the core experiences of transition take place. Moreover, van Gennep (1960) found that different people move through each stage with different speed and intricacy with regard to individuals incorporating into groups.

The preliminal stage refers to children's separation from their caregivers at home (in the old world) as they move away from their parents and are positioned alone in the classroom to learn to be pupils (in the new world). The transition programme is the start of the liminal stage, in which children set out to learn to become pupils in kindergarten. The transition activities are not only a spatial (physical) passage but also a status passage; this passage is the symbolic meaning of the "legal position" that is the children's pupil status (van Gennep 1960). Children are viewed as "candidates for kindergarten" when the parents prepare them for the transition in various ways, such as talking about the kindergarten and buying new school uniforms. When children participate in transition activities such as school visits or pre-entry classes for newcomers, it is clear that they are physically in the new world – kindergarten. At this time, the expectations associated with being a pupil start to be placed on children by both parents and teachers, even though their official pupil status does not start until they enter the classroom on their first official day of school. As "candidates for kindergarten" or "kindergarten beginners", they are expected to follow the practices of the school and fulfil the expectations required of pupils. Children need to cope with the rituals of the classroom, including the daily ritual of separating from caregivers, engaging in play and learning activities, following rules and routines and establishing relationships with others. This is a transition process of learning to become a pupil and is a period of ambiguity, marginality and transformation. The children are not yet integrated into their new pupil status. The postliminal stage is the end of the process of transition. At this point, children have learned and adapted and have completed the transition to their new pupil identity during their first year in kindergarten.

The stages of transition provide an understanding of how children may go through contextual changes, progressing from the preliminal (rites of separation) to the liminal (rites of transition) and postliminal (rites of incorporation) stages. This is a process of habituation through which children may adapt to kindergarten over periods of time that differ in length and intricacy. It tells us that some children may adapt easily whereas other children may take a few days, a few weeks or even longer or require more effort to adapt to their new pupil status.

10.2.1.3 Pupil Career: Understanding Children's Readiness and Adaptation

The conceptual framework adopts Pollard and Filer's (1999) notion of "pupil career" to understand children's competencies for starting kindergarten in the

preliminal stage and adaptation outcomes in the postliminal stage for transitioning to kindergarten. They provide a holistic view with respect to the goal of discerning children's preparation and adaptation – how well children are prepared for starting kindergarten and how well they incorporate themselves into the pupil status. They claim that pupil career is a social product, and they identify three components: patterns of strategic action, patterns of outcomes (learning competence and learning dispositions) and pupil identity.

Patterns of strategic action can be understood as strategic biographies that refer to children's preferred and relatively coherent repertoires of actions in response to the classroom situations. These actions may change over time due to the tension between the individual child and their teachers or peers in successive settings. To understand children's patterns of strategic action, Pollard and Filer (1999, pp. 27–28) identified four dimensions of action:

- Conformity: being compliant to the school structures and teacher expectations and integrated into mainstream classroom life; conformity to others' agenda
- Anti-conformity: refusing to conform through deviance; having an oppositional agenda
- Nonconformity: being independent with respect to formal school expectations, having own agenda
- Redefinition: negotiating, challenging and pushing the boundaries of the school norms and expectations, influencing the shared agenda

"Patterns of outcomes" include formal (academic) and informal (social) outcomes. The major type of formal outcome is school curriculum attainment (i.e. learning competence; e.g. in Hong Kong, nursery-class (3-year-old) children are expected to recognise Chinese words, the English alphabet from A to Z, numbers 1–10), whereas informal outcomes are social and status outcomes (i.e. learning dispositions and identity). Learning dispositions include self-confidence, motivation, autonomy (self-regulation) and relatedness (sense of belonging) (Bronson 2000; Brooker 2002; Carr 2001; Dowling 2010; Grolnick et al. 1999; Pollard and Filer 1999). The assumption is that in real-life situations children not only adapt to the learning context but also to the social context of the classroom. Regarding the evolving pupil identity, Pollard et al. (2000) drew attention to the learning dispositions that children adopted in coping with the learning challenges.

10.2.2 A Case Study Illustrating the Conceptual Framework

To illustrate the conceptual framework above, this section presents and analyses a 3-year-old girl's behaviours during the transition from home to kindergarten in terms of three stages: preliminal (readiness), liminal (the home-school transition itself) and postliminal (adaptation). A brief description of the home and classroom sets the context for better understanding of her behaviours.

10.2.2.1 Setting the Context: Home Context and Experiences

Yan was a 3-year-old girl from a single-child working-class family who was taken care of by her Indonesian domestic helper. The family lived in a 700 sq ft two-bedroom rented flat in a village. Her father was a foreman on a construction site and her mother was a dental assistant. They worked 6 days a week and had long working hours. They came home from work after 8 pm. Yan had free and relaxed daily routines that revolved around her. Her daily activities consisted of playing with her favourite toys – toy kitchen and dolls, watching TV or videos and listening to songs. On weekends, the whole family usually went to the supermarket and to visit grandparents.

Her mother told Yan that she was going to enter kindergarten without describing it in advance and only showed her the school uniform and schoolbag before she started kindergarten. Her parents tended towards strict discipline and the discipline method was explanation followed by firm order. They had no clear education aspirations for her, as she was their first child. They did not put academic pressure on her but wanted her to feel loved and have a happy childhood. However, after Yan started kindergarten, her mother struggled with the conflict between hoping for a happy childhood and having a good start academically that was mediated from the milieu. Her mother supported her learning at home by supervising Yan's homework and revision of words and numbers after dinner, despite being tired after a long working day. This was a shift from a relaxed and intimate parent–child interaction to a more academic-oriented parent–child interaction.

10.2.2.2 Preliminal Stage: Patterns of Strategic Actions, Competencies and Identity

Through interaction with the materials, cultural and language resources (mediational means) at home, Yan gradually developed strategic actions in response to her home situations. She persisted in playing with her favourite toys, initiated and negotiated with her caregivers while playing, and, at times, was influenced by them. She was used to free routines and asked for immediate help when she needed it. She negotiated her wants or the home rules with her mother at first and then usually conformed when her mother was firm. She was afraid of her father because her father was very strict and did not play with her. Her predominant strategic actions at home were redefinition and conformity.

Regarding her evolving sense of identity and kindergarten readiness, her mother described her as a happy child, good tempered, expressive, friendly and loving to help others. She was competent, confident and persistent in playing with her toy kitchen. She enjoyed free play, free movements and free routines. She was not ready for self-care as her domestic helper did all the self-care for her. She had a close rapport with her caregivers and could get along with her peers. She had been given little information about going to kindergarten from her parents. She had little experience with literacy, drawing and educational toys.

10.2.2.3 Setting the Context: School Context and Experiences

Yan entered a kindergarten that adopted a story approach to learning. The two class teachers incorporated stories into the curriculum or used the stories as the main strand in designing structured activities. The learning activities were grouped into whole-class learning activities and group activities. The whole-class learning activities included theme time, language time (English and Putonghua), music and structured physical play activities. Group activities included academic-related activities (e.g. prewriting exercises and teaching aids for learning 3Rs) and free play in activity centres. The whole-class learning and academic-related activities were teacher directed in order to accommodate the curriculum, and free play was child directed.

After a month, the teachers changed the rotation method of group activities from a group basis to an individual basis. This was because the teachers found that some children had a different pace of doing an activity and consequently drifted around and caused chaos while waiting for the whole group to finish. The rotation methods showed that learning was viewed as standard or collective regardless of an individual child's interest, habits and the level of persistence in activities. Children were viewed as passive in the ownership of learning. The change of rotation method also showed that the children were successfully negotiating with the teachers. The teachers' values of collective learning and classroom order, rather than the individual child's learning pace, were challenged by children's collective and consistent responses. In effect, by their behaviours, the pupils had effectively modified their teachers' strategies and hence the overall classroom environment.

The timetable was the meditational means for delivering curriculum and pedagogy. The timetable mediated what the kindergarten and teachers expected of the children in relation to how and what they learned. The daily timetable was arrival, registration and prayer, theme time, language activities, toileting, music, group activities, toileting, snack time, physical play and dismissal (Table 10.1). The daily schedule of the class seemed tightly programmed.

10.2.2.4 Liminal Stage: Strategic Actions to Classroom Situations

Yan brought with her personal characteristics, competence, knowledge about kindergarten and preferred strategic actions to cope with the situations in the kindergarten classroom. Yan's strategic actions in response to the classroom situations of (1) separation from caregivers (preliminal stage), (2) classroom environment, (3) play and learning, (4) routines and rules and (5) social relationships were as follows. The numbers indicated in the paragraphs below are for plotting the diagram of patterns of strategic actions of Yan.

- Separation from Caregivers

Yan was brought into the classroom by her domestic helper. She looked apprehensive while sitting on her assigned seat. She *refused* to separate from her

Table 10.1 Daily schedule of the class

Time	Mon Thu	Time	Tue Wed Fri
8:45–9:00	Arrival and free play		
9:00–9:20	Assembly Exercise	9:00–9:10	Registration and prayer
9:20–9:45	Registration and theme time	9:10–9:35	Theme time Bible
9:45–10:05	English	9:35–9:55	English Putonghua
10:05–10:10	Toileting	9:55–10:00	Toileting
10:10–10:30	Music	10:00–10:20	Music
10:30–11:30	Group activities	10:20–11:20	Group activities
11:30–11:55	Physical play	11:20–11:25	Toileting
11:55–12:00	Toileting	11:25–11:45	Snack time
12:00–12:25	Snack time	11:45–12:00	Story time
12:25–12:30	Getting ready to go home and dismissal	12:00–12:05	Getting ready to go home
		12:05–12:30	Physical play and dismissal

domestic helper by asking her to stay with her and holding her domestic helper's hand only on the first day. Starting from the second day, Yan did not ask her domestic helper to stay with her in the classroom. Perhaps she found that physical attachment with her domestic, a familiar person, could provide her a sense of security and a starting point to understand this new place. Her earlier experience of attending all seven pre-entry classes with her domestic helper might also have assisted her make sense of this new classroom.

- Classroom Environment

The classroom was a rectangle, roughly 17 ft × 24 ft, and it was crowded to accommodate activity centres for 30 children. Yan passively reconstructed the classroom by *watching* and looking for familiar toys – toy kitchen in the home centre – for 30 min before responding on the first day (2a). As she was interested in playing with the toy kitchen in the home centre, she tried different strategies to get into the home centre. She knew that she had to get a place in order to play in the home centre (i.e. four children were allowed to play at a time and their shoes should be placed on one of the labels on the floor). She did not conform to the teachers' established rules for entering the home centre, nor did she ignore the rules. She negotiated with the teachers continuously. Her responses included moving a child's pair of shoes from a label on the floor and putting her shoes on the label; shouting at the children who were playing in the home centre "tidy up, I'm gonna play"; leaning her body into the home centre in order to play with the toy kitchen; standing close to the home centre and watching and waiting for a place; taking out the toys from the centre and playing on the table; and, while playing, using her hands to hide her face and saying, "don't let the teachers see".

In short, she *re-territorised* the spatial routines (2b) and attempted alternative ways to *tap* the rules of entering the activity centres from peripheral actions to legitimate participation (2c) so that she could operate in the classroom. Her actions ranged from passive to active and from peripheral action to legitimate action. After a series of negotiations, she followed the rules of going to the home centre.

- Play and Learning

During whole-class activities, children were required to sit in an orderly manner, being quiet and attentive in listening for collective learning as a class of 30 children. Yan *withdrew* from theme time (3a) and language time (3b). She was passive and *withdrew* from answering questions and *refused* to be called out to answer questions in front of the class (3c). She was *slow to respond* to new learning situations (3d) but she was *involved* and enjoyed music activities from the beginning (3e).

In group activities, she had two distinct approaches to academic-related activities and free play. She *avoided or withdrew* from academic-related activities (e.g. prewriting exercises and teaching aids), whereas she was eager and devoted to participation in free play (e.g. artwork and toys) regardless of the rules or time allowance.

With respect to her favourite activities – free play, during the period of rotation of activities on a group basis, she *ignored* the assigned sequence of activities and shifted to her preferred activities (3f1). If she were "discovered" by the teachers, she would *negotiate* with the teacher to continue with her preferred activity and to play longer (3f2). Most of the time, the teachers asked her to go back to her group. When the teachers changed the rotation of group activities on an individual basis, she would *ignore* teachers' request to change activities and keep on playing (3f3). Sometimes, she refused to stop playing and move on to the next activity by replying directly that she had not finished and wanted to continue (3f4).

In contrast, Yan was reluctant to complete academic-related activities that she disliked or did not fully understand. She tended to be *slow at completing* (3g1). She looked around, talked and *redefined* the prewriting exercise as drawing (3g2). When the teacher sat with her and monitored her progress, she would *smile and tell the teacher she did not know how to do it*, and sometimes she would lean on the table (3g3). Once she had managed to do the exercise, she would ask to do it on her own. When she had the autonomy to choose the activity sequence, Yan *withdrew* from prewriting activities by *putting them off* till the last and, at times, after free play (3g4). She showed reluctance to do prewriting exercises and teaching aids by *drifting around* (evasion) (3g5). She started to become concerned with evaluative feedback on her prewriting exercises by seeking verbal recognition and receiving *more stamps* as reward (negotiation) (3h).

- Routines and Rules

As indicated in the timetable, there were frequent transitions between activities in the classroom, and the transitions always went with tidy-up and lining up as a class. The transition methods were more collective moves rather than personalised to individual children. Yan i*gnored* the transition routines by keeping on playing (4a1) and *avoided* these by drifting around until the teachers "caught" her (4a2).

She successfully *negotiated* the seating arrangements in theme time (4b). The teachers compromised and allowed her to sit on a chair as she wished instead of on the floor as assigned. She managed to *help herself* in snack time (4c). She *resisted* defecation in school by crying and refused to allow adults to help her (4d).

- Social Relationships

The teachers' preferred classroom interactions focused on empathy, order, fairness and safety, and the classroom atmosphere was supportive, relaxed and secure in intellectual and social learning. Yan was gentle in dealing with peer conflicts and was socially accepted by her peers and at times bossy (5a). She had informal rapport with Miss Chan and always succeeded in negotiating her wants with Miss Chan (5b).

- Home-School Relationships

Yan's case exemplifies that a child's transition from home to kindergarten may be hindered or helped by the total home environment as well as the school environment. Yan seemed to be disadvantaged in academic learning at the start because the meditational means available at home were relatively unfavourable for preparing her for the transition to kindergarten. There were discontinuities between home activities and the classroom practice. Discontinuities in learning experiences forced her to attempt a variety of strategies to cope with the new situations in order to adapt to pupil status.

In order to support Yan's comparatively low interest and confidence in her ability to work on prewriting exercises and teaching aids, the teachers' strategies were to approach her cheerfully, encouraging her and patiently accompanying her to try the activity by holding her hand to teach her and appraising her writing by giving stamps as a reward. The teachers created a supportive, relaxed and secure atmosphere to encourage Yan to experience success in prewriting activities and using teaching aids. All their pleasant attempts were aimed at helping Yan do what she did not want to do. This demonstrated that the teachers were sensitive to Yan's needs and were helping her to meet the academic demands of the kindergarten.

Moreover, Yan's mother supported her learning by supervising Yan doing homework and revision of words and numbers after dinner, despite being tired after a long working day. With the help of her mother and the teachers, eventually, Yan mastered these activities even though she was reluctant to appropriate them. This showed the joint efforts by herself, the teachers and her mother in supporting both the transition and learning. It is important to note that though Yan's behaviours were not consciously planned, focused or verbalised as an adult might cope with, say, entering into a new job, she was nonetheless an effective agent in her own transition from home to school.

10.2.2.5 Postliminal Stage: Patterns of Strategic Actions, Adaptation Outcomes and Pupil Identity

When plotting Yan's strategic actions in response to context-specific situations in the classroom (Fig. 10.2), it appears that her strategic actions fell into the dimension

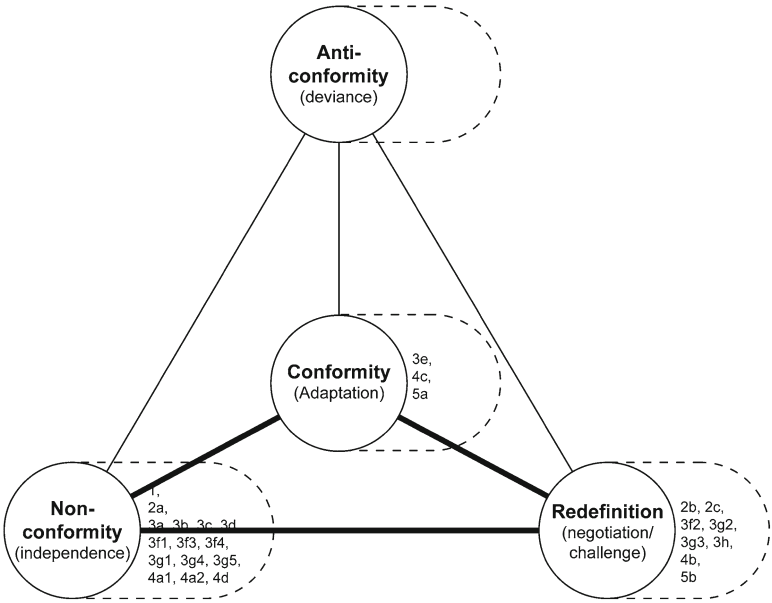

Fig. 10.2 Plotting Yan's patterns of strategic action

of nonconformity, redefinition and adaptation but mainly nonconformity. She went through an ongoing dynamic process of construction and reconstruction to regulate her responses until they were mutually accepted by herself and the teachers and thus "adapted" to the classroom. She exhibited a sequence of strategic actions in response to most of the situations in the classroom. Her preferred strategic actions were watching, being slow to respond, ignoring (non-verbal, passive construction and reconstruction), gently refusing, negotiating, operating in alternative ways (verbal, active reconstruction and negotiation) and following the practice and expectation of the class (regulation and conformity).

In sum, her negotiation strategy in class was consistent with her strategic actions at home. However, her evasion in academic-related activities might be because she was not confident in these new learning experiences. As she had limited formal learning experience at home, this might be her response to stressful new learning activities. This showed her academic learning ability had faced challenges.

Yan's strategic actions reflected her adaptation outcomes and pupil identity. Yan was described by teachers as cheerful, always in a good temper and loving to play with and help others. She showed initial anxiety but soon adapted to the separation from her domestic helper. She was involved in free play, particularly in the home centre at the start. She adapted to most of the whole-class learning activities in 2 months time, but she took a longer time to adapt to teaching aids and prewriting exercises. At the end of the year, she had made steady progress and enjoyed moderate academic achievement.

She became more confident in learning, but often needed encouragement. She favoured a low-risk approach to learning and was extrinsically motivated by the attractiveness of activities and reward. She developed a wider interest in, and was devoted to, free play. She adapted to the classroom physical environment. She showed awareness of rules, first negotiating and then conforming. She developed self-regulation and required less external regulation from the teachers. She was competent in interacting with others and was, at times, bossy. She was socially accepted by peers and developed informal rapport with Miss Chan.

Yan's case consolidates the theoretical framework in understanding how children go through the transition process and context. The duration and adaptation outcomes of children during the transition from home to kindergarten are affected by the continuity of the two settings and the support from both teachers and parents. These confirm the previous studies that continuity between settings contributes to children's successful adaptation (Anning and Edwards 1999; Brooker 2002; Cleave et al. 1982; Graue 1999).

10.3 Conclusion

10.3.1 Challenges and Issues

The conceptual framework presented above draws on sociocultural theory and the notions of rites of passage and pupil career. The sociocultural approach to transition offers a comprehensive contextual and process model for studying the transition from home to kindergarten. It assists in understanding how children experience and cope with various classroom situations as they adapt to becoming pupils in a new school. The case study showed that children are active and creative participants in their own transition, rather than passive receivers as adults often perceive them to be. When facing new and challenging situations in the new kindergarten classroom, they use their biographical resources (characteristics, abilities, accumulated experiences) to help them cope. There are interactions between children and their parents and children and their teachers in the context of the home and kindergarten. Children may assimilate or appropriate others' expectations of them as pupils into their ways of coping, and they may influence adults' practices to arrive at a working consensus.

Thus, adaptation is an interactive and dynamic process of negotiation and change between the goals and actions of an individual child and the situated contexts in which they take place. It also offers a comprehensive concept of transition – agents, contexts, process and adaptation.

Agents: Children are active and creative agents in negotiating their transition.
Contexts: The cultural practices and continuity of the transition contexts of home and kindergarten are influential to children's adaptation.

Process: Transition is a relational process and its duration is subject to the individual child and his or her situated transition contexts.

Adaptation: Children's adaptation can be assessed not only by their academic attainment but also by their development as independent learners.

10.3.2 Future Directions

The theoretical framework set out in this chapter highlights that the agent-context-process-adaptation model can be further explored, examined and modified with respect to understanding children's transitions in early-years settings, thus contributing to further research into transition in different countries. As children are the agents in their kindergarten transition, it is appropriate and necessary to conduct research with children rather than on them (Clark 2010; Clark and Moss 2001).

However, in Hong Kong, children's first-hand experiences and views about their lives are often neglected in transition research in a Chinese context. Children are perceived as too young (i.e. age of ignorance) and considered unable to articulate or speak for themselves and thus are regarded as an unreliable source of data. However, in my studies, observing children's strategic actions in response to different classroom situations has helped me understand which aspects are easier to adapt to and which aspects are more difficult. Even at the age of three, children are able to "voice" their views about going to kindergarten, their favourite activities at home and in school and their understanding of the classroom routines and teachers' requirements. This provides a user perspective on transition practices that are culturally appropriate in the Hong Kong context.

This chapter shows how awareness of children's behaviours can have important consequences in understanding their transition from home to kindergarten – consequences in particular for teachers and parents who all too often assume that because children cannot conceptualise their feelings, needs and objectives in words, they are not effective agents of change in their own lives and environment.

Finally, researching the 3-year-old children's perceptions of their lived experiences at home and in school is new in Hong Kong, as well as in other countries, and may yield a new conceptualisation of childhood that may change adults' views of what children can do.

References

Anning, A., & Edwards, A. (1999). *Promoting children's learning from birth to five: Developing the new early years professional*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Bronson, M. (2000). *Self-regulation in early childhood: Nature and nurture*. New York: Guilford Press.

Brooker, L. (2002). *Starting school – Young children learning culture*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Bruner, J. (1996). *The culture of education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Carr, M. (2001). *Assessment in early childhood settings: Learning stories*. London: Paul Chapman.
Clark, A. (2010). Young children as protagonists and the role of participatory, visual methods in engaging multiple perspectives. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 46*(1–2), 115–123.
Clark, A., & Moss, P. (2001). *Listening to young children: The mosaic approach*. London: National Children's Bureau and Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
Cleave, S., Jowett, S., & Bate, M. (1982). *And so to school*. Windsor: Education Foundation for Education Research.
Dowling, M. (2010). *Young children's personal, social and emotional development*. London: Paul Chapman.
Fabian, H. (2002). *Children starting school: A guide to successful transitions and transfers for teachers and assistants*. London: David Fulton.
Graue, M. E. (1999). Diverse perspectives on kindergarten contexts and practices. In R. C. Pianta & M. J. Cox (Eds.), *The transition to kindergarten* (pp. 109–142). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.
Grolnick, W. S., Kurowski, C. O., & Gurland, S. T. (1999). Family processes and the development of children's self-regulations. *Educational Psychologist, 34*(1), 3–14.
Lam, M. S. (2005). *Transition from home to kindergarten: Case studies of young children's strategic actions*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Cambridge, UK.
Lam, M. S. (2009). Crossing the cultural boundary from home to kindergarten in Hong Kong: A case study of a child's strategic actions. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 17*(1), 125–145.
Lam, M. S., & Pollard, A. (2006). A conceptual framework for understanding children as agents in the transition from home to kindergarten. *Early Years: An International Journal of Research and Development, 26*(2), 123–141.
Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
Pollard, A. (1985). *The social world of the primary school*. London: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
Pollard, A., & Filer, A. (1996). *The social world of children's learning*. London: Cassell.
Pollard, A., & Filer, A. (1999). *The social world of pupil career*. London: Cassell.
Pollard, A., Triggs, P., Broadfoot, P., McNess, E., & Osborn, M. (2000). *What pupils say: Changing policy and practice in primary education*. London: Continuum.
Turner, V. W. (1969). *The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
van Gennep, A. (1960). *The rites of passage*. (B. V. Minika & G. L. Caffee, Trans.). London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. (Original work published 1910)
Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. (M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner & E. Souberman, Eds. & Trans.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Wertsch, J. V. (1991). *Voices of the mind: A sociocultural approach to mediated action*. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
Wertsch, J. V. (1998). *Mind as action*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.