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**“All the Stuff” is Different:
A Mixed Method Study of Continuity and Discontinuity During the
Transition to School in New Zealand**

A thesis
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of
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Abstract

This study investigated multiple perspectives on continuity and discontinuity during the transition to school in New Zealand. The transition to school has been identified as an important time in the life of a child which has the potential to impact social, emotional, and academic outcomes. Starting school involves a shift into a new environment where change must be navigated. Earlier studies have investigated the discontinuities between prior-to-school and school contexts, and it has been suggested that increasing continuity is a way to ease the transition experience. However, policies and practices change over time, therefore the continuities and discontinuities children experience when starting school may differ from those experienced in previous time periods. This research sought to explore the continuities and discontinuities children experience on transitioning into play-based new entrant classrooms in New Zealand, identify which may be significant, and investigate practices teachers use to support transitioning children.

The study adopted a social constructionist framework and used a sequential, explanatory, mixed method research design. Phase one consisted of an online survey of early childhood and new entrant teachers which collected both qualitative and quantitative data. Preliminary statistical and thematic analysis of this data informed planning for the second phase of the study which involved case studies in three schools. Each case study included the perspectives of parents, children, and new entrant teachers. Parent perspectives were gathered through questionnaires and teachers' views through interviews. Child perspectives were elicited through paired child led tours and photographs taken by children. Data from case studies were analysed thematically. Findings from both phases were used to inform the answers to the research questions and the discussion of how the research objectives were met.

Findings revealed three key themes relating to the continuities and discontinuities children in this study experienced on transitioning into the play-based new entrant classrooms. These themes were: people and relationships, teaching and learning, and expectations, structure, and environment. Each of these aspects of continuity and discontinuity interacted with and influenced the others, highlighting the importance of paying attention to all three aspects when considering how best to support transitioning children. Data revealed that there were differences between the perspectives of participant groups, particularly between the views of teachers and children. This may mean that teachers are not aware of what matters most for children during this time of change and may not put in place strategies that address these aspects of continuity and discontinuity. The study also identified a range of influences on teacher practices which impacted on what happened in the classroom. These included factors in the wider school and national environment such as intake policies and expectations

for showing children's progress against standards. It was found that while teachers espoused a belief that schools should be ready for children, they held underlying beliefs about child readiness which influenced both their practice and the reasons for their practice. The study highlights the importance of new entrant teachers knowing about each child and of teachers in each sector having relationships with and knowledge of the other sector. Teachers can then understand how to prepare children for the changes they will experience when transitioning and plan induction programmes which are relevant and purposeful.

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Glossary of Abbreviations, Words and Terms

Aroha	Māori word defined as “to love, feel pity, feel concern for, feel compassion, empathise” (Moorfield, 2003-2023).
ECE	Early childhood education.
ECE service	While a range of terms are commonly used to refer to early childhood providers in New Zealand the term “ECE service” has been used throughout this thesis for consistency. The exception is within quotes from participants where the term used by the participant has been used.
Kahui Ako/Community of Learning	“A group of education and training providers that form around children and young people’s learning pathways, and work together to help them achieve their full potential” (Ministry of Education, n.d.-c)
Kai	Māori word defined as “food, meal” (Moorfield, 2003-2023).
Kura/Kura kaupapa	Māori medium school
Kohanga reo	A form of Māori medium ECE service under the umbrella of the Kohanga reo national trust
Mana	Māori word defined as “prestige, authority, control, power, influence, status, spiritual power, charisma - mana is a supernatural force in a person, place or object” (Moorfield, 2003-2023).
Manaakitanga	Māori word defined as “hospitality, kindness, generosity, support - the process of showing respect, generosity and care for others (Moorfield, 2003-2023).
NE teacher	New entrant teacher.
New entrant	Common term used in New Zealand to refer to a child who has just entered school.

Parent	The term parent has been used to refer to adult participants who had a parenting/guardianship role to a child in the case studies.
Tiakitanga	Māori word defined as “guardianship, caring of, protection, upkeep” (Moorfield, 2003-2023).
Turituri	Māori word defined as “hush! be quiet!” (Moorfield, 2003-2023) and used by teachers in Case Study Two to mean ‘quiet’.
Whānau	Māori word for “extended family, family group, a familiar term of address to a number of people - the primary economic unit of traditional Māori society. In the modern context the term is sometimes used to include friends who may not have any kinship ties to other members” (Moorfield, 2003-2023).

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the Thesis

This thesis examines the continuities and discontinuities children encounter when starting school in New Zealand. Starting school is a significant time when children enter a new context which traditionally involves a more formal approach to learning than that experienced at home or in early childhood settings. This means children may need to engage with learning in new ways and learn to participate fully in the classroom. Starting school involves encountering a new learning culture where, for some children, there may be many discontinuities with previous experiences. There may also be continuities. The level of continuity and discontinuity differs for each child depending on their prior experiences. Some children navigate the similarities and differences with ease and thrive in the new context, while others experience a degree of difficulty and need support to fully engage in school life. It is important therefore to consider the balance of continuity and discontinuity (Dockett & Einarsdottir, 2017). In the context of this study, discontinuities are defined as differences between the prior-to-school and school educational contexts, including changes in approaches to teaching and learning and differences in the social, physical and structural environments (Fabian, 2002). Continuities are regarded as aspects that are similar to, or connect with, what children have encountered during their early childhood education (ECE) experiences. This study contributes to understanding the complexity of children's transition to school by investigating the role of continuity and discontinuity and how children's transitions can be supported.

Successfully navigating the continuities and discontinuities involved in the transition to school is important because experiences during this period have been linked to educational and social outcomes for children (Bellen, 2016; Cook & Coley, 2017; Dockett & Perry, 2007b, 2013b, 2021a; Education Review Office, 2022; Peters, 2010) and the quality of children's early educational experiences are associated with later educational, health, social and employment outcomes (OECD, 2020). Therefore, there is considerable interest from policy makers internationally in working out how best to support successful transitions to school (Dockett & Perry, 2014, 2021a; Huser et al., 2016). It has been argued that increasing continuity and reducing discontinuity is one way to improve the transition experience and reduce disruption to learning, but less attention has been given to the

notion of change (Dockett & Einarsdottir, 2017). Thus, this thesis investigates the influence of both continuity and discontinuity during the transition to school.

1.2 Rationale for the Study

Although starting school is not problematic for all children (Cronin et al., 2022; Dockett, 2014; Peters, 2004a), the ease of this transition is associated with social, academic and emotional outcomes for children (Brooker, 2008; Cook & Coley, 2017; Dockett & Perry, 2007b; Education Review Office, 2022; Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2010; Magnuson et al., 2016; OECD, 2020; Peters, 2010; Phair, 2021). For instance, Ahtola et al. (2011) found that transition practices were associated with academic achievement and it has been noted that children can develop a negative attitude to literacy when there is a poor transition to school literacy (Mackenzie, 2014; Mackenzie & Petriwskyj, 2017). This is a concern because when early experiences of literacy at school are not successful this can lead to a “Matthew Effect” where children fall further and further behind those who have had more successful literacy experiences (Stanovich, 2000, 2009). Changes in learning and teaching practices when children transition to school can also impact on children’s self-esteem and feeling of self-worth which is associated with peer acceptance (Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2010). Additionally, how children experience transition affects their emotions and wellbeing and influences later transitions (Booth et al., 2019; Dunlop, 2021; Fabian & Dunlop, 2007; Hedegaard & Munk, 2019; Schürer et al., 2022). Transition can be seen as a positive and important part of life (Dunlop, 2014) so research which helps identify strategies which will aid children to have positive experiences of transition is useful.

The importance of the transition has been highlighted by various reports and policies in New Zealand, for example *Ka Hikitia* (Ministry of Education, 2008a), the *Ten Year Strategic Plan for Early Childhood* (Ministry of Education, 2002), the *Pasifika Education Plan* (Ministry of Education, 2009a) and the *Early Learning Action Plan* (Ministry of Education, 2019). The Education Review Office (2015) report *Continuity of Learning: Transitions From Early Childhood Services to Schools* reinforces the importance of a positive move to school and stresses the value of continuity of learning during this time. When the ECE curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996, 2017), was updated links with the school curriculum were strengthened (McLachlan, 2017). The *Report of the Advisory Group on Early Learning* (Ministry of Education, 2015) stated that while there was a good body of international research related to the transition there was a need for more New Zealand research to inform practice. The current study addresses this need. It contributes to understanding about the experiences of children and teachers in new entrant classrooms in the New Zealand context.

Previous literature has identified a range of discontinuities that children experience on school entry (Boyle, Petriwskyj, et al., 2018; Einarsdottir, 2007; Fabian, 2013; Hedegaard & Munk, 2019; Peters, 2004a, 2010). The contextual environments of schools and ECE services change over time, however, and these changes impact on the continuities and discontinuities children experience. Changes in the New Zealand context such as the implementation of the *New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007), the introduction, implementation and subsequent withdrawal of *National Standards* (Ministry of Education, 2010b), schools being able to implement cohort entry (Ministry of Education, n.d.-b) and the changing nature of learning environments in schools are likely to have impacted on the continuities and discontinuities which new entrants experience.

Stipek et al. (2017) contend that most writing on continuity assumes that continuity is positive and does not consider which aspects should be continuous and which changes over the transition might be appropriate. Increasing teacher awareness of the continuities and discontinuities children face on school entry and which ones may be most significant can assist teachers in ECE and school contexts to reflect on how children can best be supported during this time. Similarly, Vitiello et al. (2022) argues that not enough is known about how discontinuity impacts on outcomes for children. For these reasons there is a need for research which explores the continuities and discontinuities children may currently experience on entry to school in New Zealand, which are significant, and what teachers can do to support children during this time.

My personal interest in the transition to school has developed over many years. I first became aware of the importance of a smooth transition during my first year of teaching as a new entrant teacher. This awareness was deepened during later work in the ECE context and as my own children began school. During my postgraduate studies I focussed on the transition to school as a topic of interest in university courses and continued to deepen my interest and understanding of this topic as I completed my Master's thesis that investigated the role of peers in supporting new entrant transitions (Hayes, 2013). My interest reignited shortly before I commenced this study when I was invited to speak at a transition to school meeting for ECE providers, facilitated by a regional branch of the Ministry of Education. At this meeting a Ministry of Education presenter spoke of the perceived "gap" between ECE and school-based education. She suggested that with the supposed increased continuity of curricula and the movement towards modern or innovative learning environments and play-based pedagogies in schools the gap may no longer exist, or at least be very much reduced. This provoked my interest, and I began to think about the nature of the "gap" and to wonder what is known about the differences between the various contexts in New Zealand and how recent changes in curriculum and learning environments impact on the continuities and discontinuities children experience. I also

considered that children may look forward to the changes that occur when they start school and might be disappointed if school experiences were very similar to those of ECE settings. I was aware that children may have very different experiences prior to school entry and so the continuities and discontinuities may differ for each child. I reflected on the importance of critically analysing the “gap” from a range of perspectives to increase awareness of which continuities and discontinuities are significant, what help children may need to navigate discontinuities of significance and how continuity could be increased in ways that are beneficial to children. It was from this thinking that the focus and design for this study emerged.

1.3 Starting School in the New Zealand Context

Since 1877, children in New Zealand have been entitled to free, secular education. The ages at which schooling is compulsory have varied over the years but today it is compulsory for children to attend school between the ages of six and 16 (New Zealand Government, 1989). Despite the compulsory age of starting school being six, children are able to attend school from the age of five and it is common practice for children to start school on their fifth birthday or as close to it as possible (H. May, 2011). This approach of allowing multiple entry points to schooling (continuous entry) differs from that in other parts of the world where children commonly start as a cohort at one or more stipulated times during the year (Education Review Office, 2022). Just before this study began a law change enabled schools to implement a form of cohort entry so that children enter school in groups twice a term, rather than individually, one at a time as they turn five (Education Review Office, 2022; Ministry of Education, n.d.-b). In response some schools have implemented cohort entry policies, while others have chosen to maintain the traditional continuous entry. Both approaches are represented in the case studies in this thesis.

Children are classified into year groups depending on the month when they start school in New Zealand. Those who are under six and start between July and December are usually classed as Year Zero students and become Year One students the following year. Those starting in the first half of the year enter as Year One students. Children who are in Year Zero or One of schooling are commonly referred to as ‘new entrants’.

Schools have flexibility to decide how they will organise the student groupings into individual classrooms. This means that in some schools, new entrants enter a classroom where they are only with other new entrants. Other schools may have composite classes where the classroom contains new entrants and older children, most commonly year two children. In the past this composite arrangement was most frequently implemented in smaller schools where there were not enough new

entrant students for a full class. More recently, changes to some school environments have resulted in larger classroom spaces where year groups may be combined. These spaces are often referred to as 'modern' or 'innovative' learning environments. Two case studies in this research are classrooms which have only new entrants, the other is a composite class. There has also been a shift to including play-based learning in new entrant environments (Aiono, 2017; Hedges, 2018). This study focuses on the transition of children into three different play-based learning environments.

1.4 Objectives of the Current Study

This study employed mixed methods to gather data about teachers', parents', and children's perspectives of the discontinuities and continuities children experience during the transition to school and how these might impact on children. A survey of ECE and NE teachers was followed by case studies in three schools designed to explore the following question:

- What are current understandings about how continuities and discontinuities influence transition to school in New Zealand?

By exploring this question, the study aimed to meet the following objectives:

- Compare teachers' perspectives on continuities and discontinuities children experience on school entry and how these influence the transition experience;
- Identify continuities and discontinuities of significance to children, parents, and teachers during the transition to school; and
- Identify how children might be supported to navigate discontinuities which are of significance.

In meeting these objectives, the findings increase awareness of what it is like to transition to schools in New Zealand, the continuities and discontinuities that may exist, and which ones may be of significance. Strategies that support positive transition experiences are presented. This study adds to the growing body of literature about the transition to school in New Zealand which can inform practice and policy decisions in schools and ECE services and at a national level.

1.5 Structure of this Thesis

This introduction outlined the topic of the thesis and provided a rationale for this study. An overview of my interest and experience related to the transition to school was included before an explanation

of transition to school in the New Zealand context was given. The aims and objectives for the study were presented before this outline of the organisation of the thesis.

The following chapter, Chapter Two, presents a critical review of literature associated with the transition to school. Literature which provides evidence of the importance of the transition is reviewed and the topic is situated within New Zealand policy. The review then discusses theoretical perspectives on starting school, before considering what literature has to say about continuity and discontinuity during the transition and strategies that may be employed to promote positive transitions.

In Chapter Three, the study's epistemology and theoretical framework are described. The mixed method methodology employed in this two-phase study is then described and justified. The use of an online survey tool during phase one of the study is explained, followed by a description of the methods used to collect data from teachers, parents, and school children in the three case study schools. This chapter also explains how data were analysed and the ethical procedures and considerations involved in conducting the research. The participants and settings involved in the study are then presented.

Chapter Four presents and discusses the findings from the first phase of the study. Data from an online survey of 130 NE and ECE teachers is used to examine and compare ECE and NE teachers' perspectives on continuity and discontinuity during the transition to school.

The next four chapters present and discuss findings from the three case studies. These findings are organised by themes that emerged from the analysis. Chapter Five explores the theme of people and relationships. Chapter Six centres around teaching and learning and Chapter Seven examines similarities and differences in expectations, structure, and environment. Chapter Eight investigates perspectives about the importance of continuity and practices teachers might employ to promote continuities that enhance transition and support children to navigate discontinuity.

In Chapter Nine, the findings from the survey and case studies are synthesised and discussed in relation to the extant literature. This chapter answers the main research question and demonstrates how the research objectives were achieved. It concludes with a discussion of the interconnections between continuities and discontinuities and the contextual influences on these.

Concluding the thesis, Chapter Ten reflects on the strengths and limitations of the methodology, with suggestions for further research. Implications for teachers, schools, ECE services, policy and recommendations for practice are also presented.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The transition to school has been the focus of considerable attention in research literature, government policy and theoretical academic writing as it has been identified as a key point in children's educational journey which can impact on later outcomes for them (Brooker, 2008; Broström, 2019; Cook & Coley, 2017; Dockett & Perry, 2007b; Dunlop, 2021; Education Review Office, 2015, 2022). When this study began a review of literature was therefore conducted to inform the choice of research topic, the refinement of the research question and objectives, the development of the research methodology, the research tools and methods of analysis used. This review was added to, revised, and rewritten throughout the course of the study to ensure recent literature was included that would help make sense of the research findings, inform the discussion, and position the study within the existing literature. This chapter is the result of that review.

A range of strategies were used to locate relevant literature to review. These included searching the University of Waikato library databases for books and articles from databases such as Academic Search Complete, ERIC, ebook Collection, Proquest, Springer Online Journals, and Taylor and Francis and the physical book collection. Key search terms used to find literature included "transition to school", "starting school", "continuity", "discontinuity", "school readiness", "early childhood", "primary school". These terms were used alone and in different combinations and combined with other search words which the research findings suggested might be useful to help explain what was being seen. For example, combining "literacy", "mathematics", "outcomes", "rules" or "emotions" with the key search terms. While literature which concentrated on the transition to school was the focus of the search, some literature which addresses childhood transitions more generally has been included where this was seen to be relevant. The search sought to locate literature that was published since the year 2000, although some earlier literature was included if it was regarded as seminal or highly relevant. As well as utilising the university library, the reference lists of books and articles read were examined for material which might prove useful; colleagues and the supervisors of this project also suggested relevant literature. Additionally, the Ministry of Education and Education Review Office websites were searched for relevant publications. The review therefore includes a broad range of different types of literature such as books, book chapters, theoretic articles, empirical studies, policy documents, theses, and literature reviews.

To assist in managing the plethora of literature, and identifying the key themes that emerged from it, an excel spreadsheet was developed. This spreadsheet included details such as the type of reference material, the research methods, who participated and the size of the sample. A summary of key points and findings was included and the main themes within the piece were also captured. This spreadsheet helped identify key themes that were present across the range of literature which could then inform the writing of the review, forming sections and paragraphs within sections.

The chapter begins by establishing what research has found about the importance of the transition to school and the impact that it may have on outcomes for children. Following this section, a review of the New Zealand educational policy context is presented before theoretical approaches taken to transition are examined and critiqued. Attention is then given to the concepts of continuity and discontinuity and themes in the literature related to these concepts.

2.2 The Importance of the Transition to School

It has been claimed that starting school is a critical time in a child's life because the success of the transition can have implications for children's social, emotional and academic outcomes (Brooker, 2008; Cook & Coley, 2017; Dockett & Perry, 2007b, 2013b, 2021a; Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2010; Peters, 2010). Quantifying successful outcomes can be problematic as views on what counts as success and how success will be measured may differ (Dunlop, 2021). For example, children, parents and teachers can have different views on what a good transition looks like (Margetts, 2014; Peters, 2010; Ward et al., n.d.). It can therefore be difficult to compare the findings of studies which may define success differently. Nevertheless, research does show that the transition to school can have implications for children's outcomes.

While some children appear to start school with little distress or difficulty, there are some for whom the transition proves more problematic. The time it takes for a child to appear 'settled' or 'adjusted' to school can vary and for those who take longer there is often some emotional disturbance. A longitudinal New Zealand study found that 20% of mothers reported their child was still experiencing difficulties related to the transition six months after starting school (Morton et al., 2018). Similarly, a small study in Scotland found that five out of 20 parents reported that their child struggled with the transition (Hannah et al., 2010). These findings suggest that, at least in the short term, some children are negatively affected in some way by the transition and the time it takes individual children to 'settle' or feel comfortable at school can vary, impacting on their emotional wellbeing.

Supporting these findings is evidence that while many children have positive emotions associated with starting school, some children also experience negative emotions such as anxiety, nervousness, fear or sadness (Booth et al., 2019; Dockett & Perry, 2012; Hedegaard & Fler, 2019; Kaplun, 2019; O'Rourke et al., 2017; Schürer et al., 2022; Tatlow-Golden et al., 2016). These negative emotions can persist over time as Harrison and Murray (2015) found. These researchers carried out a study involving 101 children in New South Wales, Australia, which explored the challenges encountered during the first year of school. The researchers used the Pictorial Measure of School Stress and Wellbeing interview (Murray & Harrison, 2005) where line illustrations of common classroom situations are used as the focus of questions. While most children in this study expressed positive emotions, some had negative feelings which persisted over the year; other children's emotions became more negative as time passed. While this study did not measure how children's feelings related to the ease or quality of their transition experience, it does provide evidence that the challenges children face during their first year of school impact on their emotional wellbeing.

Further evidence that transition can influence children's wellbeing over time is provided by Dunlop (2021). Children's wellbeing before and after starting school was assessed in this longitudinal study using the Leuven Involvement Scale for Young Children (Laevers, 1994). Of the 22 focus child participants, nine experienced a drop in wellbeing after starting school, while the remaining 13 children's wellbeing trajectory was upward. A later assessment found that 16 children's wellbeing trajectories showed an overall drop between the assessment before starting school and the end of the first year at school. Additionally, the academic attainment of some children also dropped. This longitudinal study also mapped attainment and wellbeing using Frydenberg and Lewis's (1993) Adolescent Coping Scale over the child's transition to secondary school and found that for some children there was a relationship between findings for the earlier transition to school and the later transition. This finding could indicate that the success of the transition to school influences later transitions. Dunlop acknowledges that it is simplistic to assume that changes in wellbeing and attainment can be attributed merely to transition, as there are additional factors that can have an impact, such as the child's individual attributes, the classroom environment, the pedagogical approach, the child's self-image, and learner identity. However, she concludes that "the ways in which children make the transition from early childhood into full time schooling is likely to have long lasting importance and may be mirrored in the next vertical transition" (Dunlop, 2021, p. 23). When the transition to school goes well, children learn skills which help them to cope with later transitions and thus accumulate 'transition capital' (Dunlop, 2007; Ward et al., n.d.). Social and cultural experiences that are successful can act as 'capital' which has value in similar situations (Bourdieu, 1986). An example can be found in a small-scale study involving eleven children which found that these children

were able to detail strategies they had learned during the transition to school which supported them during later transitions to new classrooms (Schürer et al., 2022).

Early educational attainment is associated with later educational outcomes, reinforcing the importance of a positive start to school (Magnuson et al., 2016; OECD, 2020). Curriculum is cumulative so a poor start to learning may have a long-term impact (Entwisle et al., 2005). Some studies have found an association between children's attainment, characteristics, and dispositions in the first year of schooling and later outcomes such as years of schooling and qualification achieved (e.g. Entwisle et al., 2005; Magnuson et al., 2016). Entwisle et al. (2005) used longitudinal data which showed the importance of the early years for long term educational outcomes (measured by years of schooling and attainment of tertiary qualifications). However, these studies do not show how transition experiences impact on outcomes. What these studies do show is that early education experiences do matter for later success. Thus, early experiences such as the transition to school have the potential to influence later life outcomes.

Evidence of the importance of positive early school learning experiences is also found in research about literacy learning. Positive early school literacy experiences are critical because if children have poor literacy experiences on school entry, they may experience frustration, develop a negative attitude to literacy, and avoid engaging in literacy (Mackenzie, 2014; Mackenzie & Petriwskyj, 2017). Stanovich (2000, 2009) writes of 'Matthew effects' related to literacy learning where children who enjoy and engage well in early literacy experiences at school progress more quickly than those who have less positive engagement. Those children who have less successful early engagement with school literacy tend to make slower progress, resulting in a widening gap between those who achieve well and those who do not. Stanovich details how children who find literacy easy or enjoyable are likely to engage more often in reading which contributes to developing vocabulary and understanding of language, skills underpinning literacy achievement and essential for ongoing development. Those who struggle will read less and fall further behind; thus, demonstrating the 'Matthew effects' wherein the 'rich get richer and the poor get poorer'. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) reports show that there is a wide gap between those who achieve well at literacy and those who do not in New Zealand (May et al., 2018) so this is a concern.

There is some evidence that actions taken by teachers before, during and after children start school can impact on children's outcomes, providing further evidence that what happens during the time of transition matters. The implementation of transition practices and events has been shown to assist in the transition to school and be associated with outcomes for children (Ahtola et al., 2011; Margetts, 2007a; Schulting et al., 2005). Ahtola et al. (2011) used multi-level latent growth modelling to find out

whether transition practices impacted on skill development in reading, writing and maths. This Finnish study found greater skill development in children where more transition practices were employed by schools. Margetts' (2007a) Australian study involving 155 parents across four schools also found a correlation between the number of school transition events children and families were engaged in and academic competence. Margetts found that attending more transition events was also related to higher levels of self-control and better social skills. However, Margetts noted that some communities tended to participate less often in these priming events and concluded schools need to consider how to engage appropriately with families who are underrepresented in these events. Schulting et al. (2005) analysed data from 992 schools in the United States of America (USA) and found an association between the number of school-based transition practices and academic achievement scores at the end of kindergarten. The greatest impact of these practices was on those children who came from low-income families. In a more recent study Cook and Coley (2017) investigated transition practices used to support 4,900 children starting school in the USA and whether they were related to children's social and academic adjustment to school. They found that participation in more transition activities predicted more prosocial behaviour in children but was not associated with academic outcomes. However, practices that were targeted to involve parents did have a positive impact on children's academic skills.

In contrast to these studies, Little (2017), also researching in the USA, found that there was no relationship between the number of transition practices offered by schools and children's executive function (higher level cognitive skills) or academic achievement. He did, however, find that rather than having all children start at once, having intakes of small groups of children was associated with increased reading achievement and cognitive flexibility. Little speculates that this may be because entry in small groups enabled more individualised relationships to form between children, teachers, and peers. This proposition that the formation of relationships through transition activities may be beneficial, is supported by findings from a recent Education Review Office (2022) evaluation of cohort entry in New Zealand. Similarly, although Zulfiqar et al. (2018) found no evidence that academic outcomes were directly affected by transition experiences, they did find that where transition activities led to greater closeness between teachers and children there was a positive impact on academic and behavioural outcomes. Ward et al. (n.d.) caution that while studies show the number of transition experiences may have a positive impact on outcomes, it is important to consider the purpose, nature and quality of transition activities and concentrate on ones which are effective, something not considered in many of these studies.

On balance, it appears that the transition practices schools put in place can make a difference to outcomes for children. ECE services also have practices in place to support children's transition to school however there is a lack of research investigating whether these make a difference for children (Lehrer et al., 2017). Certainly, both internationally and nationally, there has been considerable attention given to this period in children's education and governmental policy has reflected this interest. The following section situates transition within policy in New Zealand, reviewing documentation and reports from governmental bodies such as the Ministry of Education and the Education Review Office and associated literature, research, and evaluations.

2.3 The New Zealand Policy Context

At a government policy level in New Zealand, there has been an increasingly strong focus on the transition to school for some time. For example, in 1994, the policy document *Education for the 21st Century* set out a vision for a "seamless education system" (Ministry of Education, 1994, p. 6). The document proposed that the desired outcome of ECE was children who were emotionally, intellectually, and socially prepared to engage successfully in schooling. At this time the draft of the ECE curriculum *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1993) was out for sector consultation and the Ministry of Education (1994) contended that the anticipated curriculum document would aid teachers from both school and ECE sectors in supporting school transitions by highlighting commonalities between the ECE and school curriculums. More recently, both *Kahikitia* (Ministry of Education, 2008a, 2013b) and *The Pasifika Education Plan* (Ministry of Education, 2009a, 2013c) acknowledged the importance of an effective transition to school and the Ministry of Education's (2014, 2016) *Statement of Intent 2014-2018* and *Four Year Plan 2016-2020* both speak of pathways through the education system being coherent and supported. The current Ministry of Education (2019) action plan for early childhood education continues this focus by including actions which are designed to support positive transitions for children and whānau (extended family). More recently the strategy and action plans for literacy, communication, and maths (Ministry of Education, 2022b, 2022c) incorporate a focus on transition and tools are being developed to help teachers to identify and support learning in foundational areas as they transition to school (Glogowski, 2021).

The original version of the ECE curriculum document, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996), was published in 1996 and acknowledged that the learning environments in ECE and school contexts were different. While *Te Whāriki* advised that the curriculum was designed for children from birth until school entry, it also recommended that the strands and principles of *Te Whāriki* continue to apply after school entry, thus pointing to a potential way of providing continuity. However, research indicates that few primary school teachers were familiar with the ECE curriculum (Education Review

Office, 2015; Mitchell et al., 2015) so it is unlikely that many NE teachers increased continuity by implementing this document. As anticipated, included in this curriculum were links with the essential skills and learning areas of the previous national school curriculum. Each strand of *Te Whāriki* listed what children who were starting school would be likely to be able to do or know (Ministry of Education, 1996). McLachlan (2008) contends that while *Te Whāriki* advocated for planning carefully for coherence over the transition to school, it lacked guidance on how this was to be achieved. For example, she argues that the curriculum did not provide sufficient guidance to ECE educators about how and what to teach with regards to literacy which would ensure a continuous pathway of learning.

Despite the links between *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) and the *New Zealand Curriculum Framework* (Ministry of Education, 1993) concerns were raised about the significant differences between the two documents. These differences were perceived by some to limit opportunities for continuity. Mawson (2006), for instance, argued that the differences between curricula were a barrier to creating seamless transition experiences and that there were significant differences in the ways the documents defined curriculum, how learners were viewed, and what was seen to be the purpose of education. Belcher (2006) also said that the school and ECE curriculum did not enhance continuity, claiming that *Te Whāriki* was child centred and learning is assessed holistically, contrasting with the school curriculum which contained aims and objectives against which children were to be assessed.

A need for increased continuity was indicated by the findings of two reports commissioned by the Ministry of Education which highlighted the mismatch of experience that could occur for some children on school entry (Phillips et al., 2002; Turoa et al., 2002). The discourse in the ten year strategic plan for ECE also highlighted the need for improved continuity between educational contexts (Ministry of Education, 2002). This plan aimed to enhance links between ECE services and schools, so that educational coherence was increased. Strategies for accomplishing this focussed on helping teachers in both sectors understand more about the links between the two curriculum documents and the teaching approaches used in each context. The vision included the forging of close relationships between ECE services and schools and teachers from each sector meeting to discuss how transition could be managed. The plan did not make clear how time for teachers to meet and forge productive relationships would be funded and there is still work to be done to achieve these goals (Education Review Office, 2015; Ministry of Education, 2015; Mitchell et al., 2015). The promotion of relationships between sectors and the strengthening of links between curriculum documents to enhance continuity of learning are actions included in the recently released *Literacy, Communication and Maths Action Plan* (Ministry of Education, 2022b) confirming that the aims of the earlier reports have not been achieved.

The development and launch of a new school curriculum, *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) presented the opportunity for greater alignment with the ECE curriculum (Peters & Woodhouse, 2021a). The key competencies for the school curriculum were aligned to the strands of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996), enhancing the opportunity for learning continuity to occur (Carr, 2006). The new school curriculum included guidance to schools about how to foster successful transition experiences. It was suggested that schools pay attention to the building of relationships and the affirmation of children’s identity, building on prior learning experiences and making families and whānau welcome. It is clearly stated in *The New Zealand Curriculum* that the early phase of compulsory schooling should connect with early childhood experiences. The explicit links between *Te Whāriki* and the school curriculum have been commended by the OECD as smoothing the transition to school (Tagmua et al., 2012). However, the OECD report notes that despite the links there are often disconnections between the pedagogy and practices used in the two settings. There is evidence that teachers have not always understood how the documents align or how to work with the alignment (S. Peters et al., 2015; Peters & Woodhouse, 2021a).

This disconnection might be reduced if teachers in each sector had a greater awareness of the approaches to teaching and learning that occur in the other sector (Education Review Office, 2011a, 2015; Hartley et al., 2012). However, while there has been frequent reference over the years to the importance of NE and ECE teachers learning about the pedagogy employed and the curriculum used on both sides of the transition (e.g. Education Review Office, 2011b; Ministry of Education, 2002; Ministry of Education, 2008a), there is still work to be done to achieve this. This issue has been highlighted in more recent reports that continue to recommend that strengthening teachers’ knowledge of pedagogy and curriculum on both sides of the transition would be beneficial to children’s transition and help teachers understand how continuity can be enhanced (Education Review Office, 2015; Ministry of Education, 2015; Mitchell et al., 2015).

A review of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) has been completed as recommended by the advisory group on early learning (Ministry of Education, 2015) and the revised document was released in 2017 (Ministry of Education, 2017). One of the aims of this review was to strengthen links between the ECE and school curriculum documents (Haggerty & Loveridge, 2019; Kaye, 2017; McLachlan, 2017). The updated *Te Whāriki* includes a section entitled “Pathways to School and Kura” (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 51) which sets the expectation that teachers from both sectors, parents, whānau, and support services will work together to support continuity of learning as children transition to school. This section details how the revised ECE curriculum links to both the *New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) used in English medium schools and *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa*

(Ministry of Education, 2008b) which is used in Māori language medium schools. This is shown by highlighting the similarities between the vision of *Te Whāriki* and the visions and principles of the two school curriculum documents. Examples of how each strand of *Te Whāriki* can be linked to aspects of the school curriculums are included along with the expectation that ECE teachers make connections with the school curriculum documents when writing assessments. In these ways it is expected that continuity of learning can be supported (Ministry of Education, 2017). Peters and Woodhouse (2021b) contend that the updated *Te Whāriki* supports teachers to understand the links between school and ECE curriculums by giving examples of how the learning outcomes from *Te Whāriki* can be linked to aspects of *the New Zealand Curriculum* and *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa*. However, it has become apparent that ECE services have been slow to engage with and implement the revised *Te Whāriki* (Education Review Office, 2018a, 2018b, 2019; McLachlan, 2017) which may mean the potential alignments between curriculum documents are not being realised. Peters and Woodhouse (2021a) state that connections between the documents are only potential; to bring them to fruition requires teachers to be actively exploring connections between the documents and making connections which will enhance learning pathways as children transition. In comparison to *Te Whāriki*, *The New Zealand Curriculum* provides only a small section of guidance about how the curriculum documents link (McChesney & Carr, 2021). However, *The New Zealand Curriculum* and *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa* are currently undergoing a refresh (Ministry of Education, 2021a) so there is potential for the alignment between ECE and school curriculums to be further strengthened.

Given the evident interest in continuity during the transition to school, it is interesting to note the absence of references to continuity of learning and assessment over the transition to school in *Kei Tua o te Pae/Assessment for Learning: Early Childhood Exemplars* (Ministry of Education, 2004-2009). The resource mentions that the key competencies of the *New Zealand Curriculum* are dispositional and align with the strands of the ECE curriculum. However, it does not explain why this alignment is important and nor is guidance given about how to incorporate or acknowledge these links when assessing children. Mention of continuity of learning and assessment over the transition to school are also sparse in the kaupapa Māori assessment exemplars in *Te Whatu Pōkeka*, although one case study context refers to the use of the same assessment framework within the nearby primary school (Ministry of Education, 2009b). Resources provided on the *Assessment Online* platform to support primary teachers with assessment practices also do not refer to continuity of learning over the transition to school or how teachers can utilise assessment information from ECE services to plan for, connect with, or build on prior learning (Ministry of Education, n.d.-a). More recently, acknowledgement has been made of the role assessment can play during the transition to school with the Education Review Office (2013) evaluating the usefulness and use of assessment information

during this time. This evaluation found that effective practices such as sharing children's assessment portfolios, meetings between ECE and NE teachers, reciprocal school visits, and ECE services evaluating the usefulness to schools of their assessment information were used by some ECE services. The report noted that there was variability in practice and the quality of assessment information shared by some services was also poor.

A report to the Ministry of Education which investigated assessment practices in ECE and the first years of schooling also commented on how assessment can bridge the transition to school (Mitchell et al., 2015). This research project used a nested case study approach to find out about the assessment practices of schools and ECE services. The investigation found that assessment in ECE services was generally in the form of learning stories focused on dispositions. In contrast, schools concentrated on assessing curriculum areas, particularly literacy and mathematics, as well as key competencies. Only two of the participating 19 ECE services made links in assessment to the key competencies and two of the eight schools made links to *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996). The usefulness of assessment data provided to schools was variable. Some NE teachers had difficulty interpreting the information provided and some said they did not find it useful. The report concludes that having a shared language for learning would increase the usefulness of assessment data during the transition to school. Furthermore, the effectiveness of assessment as a bridge was concluded to be dependent on relationships between ECE and NE teachers and support for transition practices from leaders in both settings. While this report highlights some important considerations, it may not give a clear picture of what is actually happening in many schools and ECE services because the participating services and schools were selected on the basis of their 'thoughtful' practices related to assessment over the transition to school. A national scenario is conceivably closer to the diversity of practices identified by the Education Review Office (2013); a potential focus for further research.

In a review of how well schools and ECE services were supporting children during the transition to school, the Education Review Office (2015) found that there was variability in the extent to which educational contexts were supporting children. Only half of the ECE services were supporting transitions well or very well and 30% of schools employed a one-size-fits-all approach that lacked responsiveness. The report recommends that enhancing continuity of learning between contexts would support children to have positive transition experiences, setting them on the pathway to educational success. The report also recommended building relationships between sectors, the sharing of information and knowledge between contexts, and increasing teacher knowledge of the links between the curriculum documents used in each sector. The importance of knowing about the child, their culture and prior learning and using this information to plan for learning was also

highlighted. It was concluded that key to achieving continuity over the transition to school was effective leadership that understood the importance of transition and the regular self-review of transition practices.

The OECD (Tagmua et al., 2012) suggests that rather than focussing on the readiness of the child for school, the emphasis in New Zealand has shifted to the expectation that schools connect with each and every child. However, reports commissioned by the Ministry of Education (e.g. Ministry of Education, 1996, 2013c; Mitchell et al., 2016) indicate that the idea of children being ready for school is still deeply embedded in educational discourse in New Zealand. This is reinforced by Barback (2014) who states that a common challenge for NE teachers is when a child is not ready for school, which indicates that teachers often have an image of what school readiness looks like. However, she does not provide evidence to support this claim. Approaches to transition and theoretical frameworks which influence such concepts as the 'ready child' and 'ready schools' will be the following section's focus. These approaches and the underpinning theories influence research, practice and policy related to transition to school.

2.4 Approaches to Transition

It has been argued that educational achievement in terms of children's development and learning, school completion and success as an adult are impacted by school readiness (UNICEF, 2012). However, there are different ways of looking at school readiness and the way readiness is viewed has implications for how the transition to school is approached. Educator's beliefs influence their decisions about how teaching and learning happens and are influenced by cultural, historical, political and social discourses (Kervin & Mantei, 2021) such as theories of development and learning. While there appears to have been a shift from taking a maturational view of school readiness involving notions of the ready child towards the idea of schools being ready for each individual child (UNICEF, 2012), it has been argued that readiness continues to be a focus of transition to school research (Dockett & Perry, 2013; Bellen, 2016). The following discussion confirms that child readiness perspectives are still prevalent in literature and teacher practice. Bartholomaeus (2016) contends that the developmental discourses, on which readiness perspectives are based, have become accepted as 'truths' which then limit teachers from considering other perspectives and theories. Foucault's (1975) notion of 'regimes of truth' is useful in this analysis, as it helps to explain why some discourses are resistant to change due to how these regimes are influenced, formed, and sustained by those people and institutions who hold power.

2.4.1 Maturation Theory: The Ready Child

Historically approaches to the transition to school have been influenced by the maturational theory of child development related to the child study movement of the early 20th Century that correlated age with patterns of development (Graue & Reineke, 2014). Theorists such as Arnold Gessell and G. Stanley Hall used observations of children to map development against age (Graue & Reineke, 2014; Spodek & Saracho, 1999). A maturational approach sees development to be primarily genetic and to unfold with age; a child must therefore be 'ready' before they will benefit from instruction (Graue, 1993; Spodek & Saracho, 1999). This perspective on transition leads to the assumption that there are key physical, social and intellectual indicators of development that assist children in meeting the requirements of school life (Peters, 2003b). A perspective based on readiness could result in children who were thought to be unready being held back from starting school (Graue, 1999; Hannah et al., 2010; Peters, 2003b). Dockett and Perry (2013b) found school readiness was a prevalent theme in literature about the transition to school in a wide-ranging review of 300 research articles. Across the literature searched, 76% discussed some aspect of school readiness and there was a strong focus in the literature on individual children's preparation for school.

This focus on child readiness is problematic because concepts of school readiness are social constructions (Bloch & Kim, 2015; Graue & Reineke, 2014; UNICEF, 2012), therefore there are differing opinions as to what the indicators of readiness are (Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood, 2008; Graue, 2006; Rouse et al., 2020). Internationally research has demonstrated a range of views. For instance, findings from an Australian study involving 5019 teachers showed that school teachers valued academic skills more highly than ECE teachers who were more concerned about social-emotional readiness. Teachers from both sectors said that child readiness was important and there was little evidence that teachers considered the role of the school in being ready for children (Rouse et al., 2020). Also in Australia, King and Boardman (2006) used questionnaires to reveal the skills that Tasmanian teachers and parents thought were important at school entry. The findings showed that parents and teachers had differing views. Parents expected children to have more advanced social skills, whereas teachers recognised that these skills were still developing and would continue to be learned in the school context. Another Tasmanian study exploring the perspectives of 39 parents from disadvantaged areas found that aspects of school readiness considered to be important included: physical, behavioural, social-emotional, language and communication, and literacy and numeracy readiness. These parents said the ability to operate independently in the unfamiliar school environment was important (Jose et al., 2020). In Ireland, data from 250 ECE and NE teachers demonstrated that various groups of teachers value indicators of readiness differently

(O'Kane & Hayes, 2006). While both groups of teachers considered that social skills, independence, communication skills and the ability to sit still, listen and concentrate were important, ECE teachers placed greater value on academic skills, while NE teachers valued skills that would help children comply with the rules and routines. Noel (2010) interviewed teachers in one school in Queensland, Australia. In this school the most highly valued attributes were social-emotional traits. Similar to the findings of O'Kane and Hayes (2006), these teachers did not think that pre-academic skills were strongly linked to readiness. However, in a larger Australian study in Melbourne involving 153 teachers, cognitive and academic skills were the most frequently mentioned readiness factors alongside self-care skills (Serry et al., 2014). Academic skills were also seen to be important in a small qualitative study involving ECE teachers and parents in Canada (Lehrer et al., 2017). Participants in this study supported children to learn self-care skills so that they would be ready for the demands of the school day. A study comparing the perspectives of parents in China and Australia found that the Chinese parents placed more emphasis on academic preparation for school entry than Australian parents (Liu et al., 2022).

Another contrasting perspective of readiness is described in a research project undertaken in the USA. Teachers at this kindergarten saw a child's 'readiness for learning', shown by habits of mind, as more important than the acquisition of narrow skill sets and basic concepts (Recchia & Bentley, 2015). Habits of mind were defined as life skills that "encapsulate children's ways of seeking, acquiring, and responding to knowledge and their ways of being in the world" (p. 144) and seen to support children in navigating the school context and curriculum. Interviews with parents established that engagement with self, social adeptness, flexibility, and reading and navigating environments were important to engaging in the school classroom. Hedegaard and Munk (2019) hold a similar view, stating that early childhood contexts can enable children to develop competencies that they will need throughout life, including at school. Similarly, in the New Zealand context, Peters (2004a) and Carr et al. (2009) contend that children who have developed learning dispositions can draw on these to engage with the learning experiences of school as they know how to approach learning situations.

There are few studies which investigate which skills children see as useful when starting school. An exception is a study in Ireland where the 'draw and tell' technique was used to gather data from 88 children (Hanniffy & Millar, 2019). Findings of this qualitative case study showed children thought that having skills to make friends, to be able to engage in school learning experiences and to be physically independent were important. Children in a small Australian study in one preschool highlighted the value of being able to follow the rules at school and having academic skills and knowledge (Hugo et

al., 2018). In contrast parents in this study emphasised social-emotional skills which included interpersonal skills, having self-confidence, and being resilient.

Views about school readiness based on maturational theory are also prevalent in New Zealand. A study which used observation and interviews to investigate what teachers expected of children in mathematics at school entry found that teachers in the five participating schools expected children to know letters and numbers, be able to sit on the mat and be focussed (Sherley et al., 2008). Similarly, a qualitative study in a low socio-economic area in Auckland found that ECE and primary school teachers thought that it was important for children to enter school able to participate in the routines (Timperley et al., 2003). Teachers participating in a more recent Ministry of Education commissioned project identified skills they saw as being important to the transition to school (Mitchell et al., 2016). These included oral and listening skills, the enjoyment of reading and writing activities, counting skills, being able to identify letters, and writing their own name. It is evident that there are competing perspectives on the factors that may indicate a child is ready for school. The findings of the studies reviewed in this section support Graue's (2006) contention that there are contrasting opinions about which skills are important for the transition to school.

Some studies have sought to find a quantitative correlation between readiness factors and success at school. Data from a meta-analysis of research in Britain, Canada, and the USA was used to assess any association between the skills and behaviours of children during early childhood and their later academic achievement (Duncan et al., 2007). Researchers collected test scores, teacher achievement ratings and assessment against readiness indicators from one British, one Canadian, and four schools in the USA. Prediction of later achievement was strongly related to math and reading assessment on school entry and moderately related to attention skills. Behavioural problems and social skills were not found to be related to later academic achievement. The studies varied in how and when the data was collected in each location and did not assess other indicators of success at school such as relationships with teachers and peers, engagement in learning experiences or adjustment. While the authors contend the findings show that social skills are not related to later academic achievement, other research in the USA indicates that social skills might be important during the early period at school. Robinson and Diamond (2014) found that children's interpersonal skills were associated with competencies valued at school and adjustment to school in a quantitative study involving 23 classrooms and 133 families in areas of poverty. Lack of social competence and poor receptive vocabulary tended to be related to difficulty transitioning for these children. Robinson and Diamond (2014) concluded that early social skills are an important part of school readiness. A Swiss study by Martarelli et al. (2018) also provides evidence of the benefit of social skills. This study assessed 123

children's executive function and social skills on school entry and found that higher executive function was positively related to academic achievement and school adjustment as assessed after a year at school. Results also showed that social skills appeared to compensate for having lower executive function particularly in relation to school adjustment.

The notion of school readiness has been critiqued. One issue is that readiness tests have not accurately predicted outcomes for children and may falsely identify children as not ready for school (Graue, 1993; Meisels, 1999). Additionally, relying on readiness tests as predictors of later achievement implies that the child is the only factor involved and ignores the impact of contextual factors such as school practices (Dockett & Perry, 2009) and the role of the educator (Meisels, 1999). There is also an equity issue as some children may not have had the opportunity for experiences that contribute to development of the readiness skills that are valued (Meisels, 1999). An alternative perspective of readiness which focusses on learning dispositions or habits of mind might therefore be useful (Peters, 2003b; Recchia & Bentley, 2015). Graue (2006) questions whether a readiness view is equitable as there is variation in the quality of early childhood education and rates of development which are outside children's control.

The notion of the ready child is socially constructed; therefore, views of what readiness means differ depending on the community and time within which they are formulated (Bloch & Kim, 2015; Graue, 2006; Graue & Reineke, 2014; UNICEF, 2012). Thus, there is no universal definition of readiness for school. Readiness is typically linked to the measurement of children against standards or attributes which are seen to be desirable (Dockett & Perry, 2009). The assumption underlying these standards is that children are homogenous or that there is a 'universal' child, yet the definitions of readiness on which children are judged may not incorporate some aspects of learning and development (Dockett & Perry, 2007b; Meisels, 1999) and may not include wider considerations such as health, wellbeing and safety (Graue, 2006). Approaches to readiness may assess a child's readiness for school as a set of skills rather than viewing the child holistically (Mortlock et al., 2011; L. Peters et al., 2015). The focus then becomes on what a child can or cannot do, resulting in a deficit view of children who do not fit what is considered the norm (Rouse et al., 2020).

The desired attributes of school readiness models and entry tests tend to reflect the norms and characteristics of the dominant culture. For example, a school entry test implemented in Western Australia was found to reflect white middle class culture and did not recognise the knowledge and skills of aboriginal children (Taylor, 2011). Similarly, Tamarua's (2006) doctoral research showed that school entry literacy tests in New Zealand schools did not incorporate the different social and cultural literacies that Māori children might have developed; which confirmed findings from an earlier report

which stated that the diverse skills and experiences that children from cultural and ethnic minorities brought to school were not always identified in school entry literacy tests (Phillips et al., 2002). A deficit view of indigenous children or minority groups can result from normalised readiness views (Falchi & Friedman, 2015; Taylor, 2011). Graue (2006) asserts that perceptions of readiness are based on assumptions about certain types of parenting and early education experiences that are likely to reflect the practices valued by white middle class society and she argues that because readiness is difficult to define, assessing or measuring it is problematic.

In Perry's (2014) opinion breaches of social justice occur when measures of readiness are pre-determined, and some groups are judged more ready than others. Teachers' views about readiness "shape the classroom climates they create and significantly affect the perceived competence and success of children and families" (Dockett & Perry, 2007b, p. 150). These readiness views position some groups as in need of support, especially those who are disadvantaged or vulnerable (Dockett, 2014), and do not show value for diversity (Petriwskyj et al., 2014) or differing cultural conceptions of childhood (James & Prout, 2015). Moss (2013) agrees, arguing that the readiness discourse is based on a conceptualisation of education as hierarchically staged development with aims that are normative and performative. Like Peters (2004b), he is concerned that pedagogical and curriculum pushdown can result from what he sees as the dominant discourse of readiness. This may well be so as Dockett and Perry (2007b) contend that calls for more academic teaching in early childhood education are the result of readiness views. Such dominant discourses are hard to shift because of the way they are influenced by and developed through power relationships embedded in systems (Foucault, 1975) such as national education systems.

The expectation that children will come to school 'ready' results in practices such as delayed entry, grade retention and interventions being designed to fill the gaps (Graue, 1999; Peters, 2003b). In the USA targeted programmes such as Head Start were developed as awareness of the impact of factors such as poverty on educational performance grew (Graue & Reineke, 2014). In Scotland parents may choose not to transition their child to school if the child is thought to be unready, although evidence does not demonstrate that delayed entry has long term benefits (Hannah et al., 2010). Practices put in place as a response to readiness concerns may have a detrimental effect if the focus shifts to blaming the child rather than considering how the curriculum can be more inclusive or build on what children bring to school (Graue, 1999; L. Peters et al., 2015; Petriwskyj, 2014).

Approaches to transition which focus on readiness for school view the success of the transition being dependant on the child's competence, emphasising the strengths and weaknesses of the child (Dunlop, 2014). The implication is that the child must adjust and change to meet the needs of school

(Dunlop, 2007). The principles of “equity, diversity, inclusion and social justice” are not considered (Hopps, 2019, p. 3). However, readiness does not reside purely within the child; a range of literature has argued that schools, families, and communities also contribute to readiness (e.g. Christensen et al., 2022; Dockett & Perry, 2007b; Graue & Reineke, 2014). Meisels (1999) suggests an interactionist approach to transition which sees the key issue as being whether schools are ready to meet the individual needs of children rather than whether children are ready for school. An increasing body of literature suggests that rather than focusing on maturational theory and child readiness, schools should reflect on their own readiness to receive diverse children (Dockett & Perry, 2009; Graue & Reineke, 2014) as will now be discussed.

2.4.2 Bioecological and Sociocultural Theories: Ready Schools and Communities

Maturational theories are not sufficient to explain the complex phenomena of development (Vygotsky, 1978a) and thus transition. Accordingly, many people think that both maturation and experience contribute to a child’s learning (Spodek & Saracho, 1999). Therefore, rather than concentrating on children’s readiness for school it may be useful to consider a perspective that recognises the importance of context (Mayer et al., 2010) and acknowledges the relative and individual nature of the transition experience (Dockett, 2014). Perry (2014) suggests that approaches to transition should value what children bring to school. This approach sees schools and communities as being ready to provide the resources and experiences that will enable each child to have a successful transition (Dockett & Perry, 2007b, 2009; Noel, 2010), based on bioecological (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) and sociocultural theories (Vygotsky, 1978a). Rather than considering the child’s individual characteristics as the sole influence on transition it is valuable to consider interactions within and across the contexts that impact on the child’s transition (Peters, 2014) and implement a collaborative process for supporting children through change (Noel, 2010; Petriwskyj, 2014).

Increasingly, contemporary perspectives on transition have shifted from a maturational approach focusing solely on the child, to taking an bioecological approach, acknowledging and including the ways all stakeholders in the transition are engaged and involved and share responsibility for transition experiences (Graue & Reineke, 2014; Hughes, 2015). The importance of the “social interconnections between settings” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 6) is recognised. Bronfenbrenner and Morris’s (2006) bioecological model includes consideration of people, processes, contexts and the influence of time in which learning and development occur. The interactions and reciprocal relationships between the different settings and people within the child’s ecosystem are seen to be important in this model. It recognises the importance of the child within a range of social contexts and the impact of interactions

with people and contexts over time (Dockett, 2014). The bioecological model highlights the importance of relationships, interactions, characteristics and resources children and families bring to school and the need to consider the diversity of contexts and systems within which they are located (Dockett et al., 2014). It acknowledges the importance of relationships during transition and the active role children play in shaping their own experiences and the experiences of others (Dockett & Perry, 2007b; Murray, 2014).

Bioecological theory is a useful place to start when thinking about transitions, but it is also useful to consider the influences of other theories or lenses which may be helpful (Dockett et al., 2014). A complementary way of theorising about transition is to consider how children's participation in sociocultural activities changes during the transition to school (Rogoff, 2003) and how those involved in the transition can support and scaffold increasing participation school activities (Vygotsky, 1978a). Sociocultural theorists focus on development in context and the interrelatedness of context and development (Dunlop, 2014; Vygotsky, 1978a). Vygotsky (1978a) argued that the social situation is important to transition. The transition to school results in changes in the social situation and a new period of development starts (Mahn, 2003). It is during this time that children become aware of the expectations of schooling and their ability to meet them (Bodrova & Leong, 2003). While there are some accomplishments which might assist children in navigating this time of change (Bodrova & Leong, 2003), Mahn (2003) contends that a Vygotskian approach is one where children's prior experiences, interests and development are the basis for learning and teaching. Thus, the onus in transition is not on the child alone to change and adjust to school. Adults and other children can support children to have understandings and experience which can help them engage in the social situation of school. Like bioecological theory, this perspective recognises the agency of those who are involved; as children, families and teachers all have an impact on school activities, just as school practices impact on children (Rogoff, 2003). One way this agency can be enacted is through the process of 'observing and pitching in' (Rogoff & Mejía-Arauz, 2022) where children actively observe what is happening at school and over time are able to participate more fully in school activity.

Research suggests both bioecological and sociocultural theories are helpful in thinking about transition. For instance, Margetts (2014) recommends that research about transitions considers "the shared influences of the child as well as the influences of family, school and community contexts" (p. 80). She contends that such research should not take a deficit view where particular groups are seen as problematic. It is therefore helpful to include a critical theory perspective that considers issues of power, questions who is positioned as ready or unready for school, and the impact of this positioning. A perspective which acknowledges diversity, rejects deficit views, builds on strengths, and recognises

agency would enable transition to be seen as a time of opportunity and relationship building where support can be provided that is relevant, contextual and which takes into account the individual nature of the transition experience (Dockett, 2014). This strength-based perspective would involve schools and communities in reflecting on how they can build on the strengths children and families bring to school and thus be ready for individual children. In taking a strengths-based perspective it is important to ensure that children with particular needs are not overlooked. A critical perspective recognises that all who are involved in the transition are experts in their own experience and bring both strengths and challenges to the transition experience (Dockett et al., 2014). There is a growing body of research which is underpinned by critical theory.

If these perspectives are applied to transition the focus becomes not on child readiness but rather on how prepared each school and community is to accommodate the transition of each child. According to Dockett and Perry (2007b, 2009) community responsibilities include supporting the wellbeing and health of children, access to quality ECE environments, and providing the infrastructure to support children. They note that the support required may differ due to individual or community needs and contexts. Similarly, in Noel's (2010) research teachers suggested that the role of government and community is to support provision of early childhood education, provide financial support to families to ensure the wellbeing of children and to align curriculum and assessment.

It is simply not enough for communities to be ready. Schools must also be prepared for the children and families who enter their gates. Dockett (2014) posits that one feature of 'ready schools' is that they work with people to plan support rather than making decisions for or about them. Ready schools reflect on how capable systems and teachers are to adapt and change to accommodate individual children (Dunlop, 2014; Graue, 2006; OECD, 2017b). Consideration is given to the difference between environments, how adjustments might be made to curriculum, and there is a focus on relationships (Dockett & Perry, 2009; Dunlop, 2014; Graue & Reineke, 2014) and communication with families (Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood, 2008; Fabian, 2010). Ready schools are inclusive (Graue, 2006) and recognise that a 'one size fits all' approach is not helpful (Dockett & Perry, 2009). Teachers need to know where to start for each child and, as each child may come to school with different prior experiences and from a range of settings, it is important to be familiar with each child's prior learning (Education Review Office, 2015; Fabian, 2010). Knowing about children's prior experiences and learning assists schools to plan culturally responsive transitions (Ministry of Education, 2013a) and put in place a range of transition practices to support and engage children and families as they move into the school environment (Dockett & Perry, 2007a; Graue & Reineke, 2014). If schools are to be ready for children, they must recognise the diversity of children and their rights to

participation “through changed organisation, supportive transition practices, stronger relationships and more inclusive curriculum and pedagogy” (Petriwskyj, 2014, p. 203). By being flexible to the child’s need for support and scaffolding, each child is able to take the step into school regardless of age, developmental stage or perceptions of readiness (Peters & Woodhouse, 2021b).

A report by the Education Review Office (2015) in New Zealand examined how responsive schools and ECE services were to children during the transition to school. It found that there was variability in the responsiveness of schools and services. It was reported that factors contributing to positive transitions and continuity for children included teacher knowledge of the links between ECE and school curriculum and the provision of experiences which had meaning and created continuity for individual children. Teachers who had knowledge of the interests, strengths and learning dispositions children brought to school were able to capitalise on these. Schools which were seen to be ready for individual children also built strong partnerships with whānau, helped children and families develop a sense of belonging and were culturally responsive. Strong leadership, which recognised the importance of transition, contributed to provision of continuity during this time of change. However, the report identified that more needs to be done to ensure all schools and services are responsive and can create continuity for individual children. Thus, there is a need for more research about continuity and discontinuity in the New Zealand context to assist educators in being ready for all children. These issues will be explored next.

2.5 Continuity and Discontinuity

Considerable attention has been paid to the concept of discontinuity in literature concerning the transition to school. The notion of ready schools is based on the understanding that the culture of schools differs from that of prior contexts, thus creating discontinuities that children experience and must adjust to when they enter the school classroom. The different learning settings have differing objectives, traditions of practice, and activity settings that place new demands on children (Hedegaard & Munk, 2019) and different kinds of activities and knowledge are valued (Dyson, 2018). School differs from anything children have previously experienced (Dockett & Perry, 2021a). Children must navigate differences in social relationships, pedagogical approaches, the curriculum experienced, rules and expectations and the physical environment.

Navigating these discontinuities involves integrating into a new culture where the values, beliefs, and practices may not match those of children’s earlier experiences (Fabian, 2007). Where there is a mismatch, children’s prior learning may be not useful (Brooker, 2008; Dockett & Perry, 2007a; Margetts, 2013; McNaughton, 2002); they may not have accumulated the social and cultural capital

which is valued at school (Bourdieu, 1986). These discontinuities can worry children (Peters, 1999) leading them to experience discomfort when they are expected to engage in unfamiliar experiences (Dockett & Perry, 2012; Fabian, 2007) and may result in children being unable to display their knowledge in the school context (Dockett & Perry, 2007b). Hagan (2005) suggests that before children can concentrate on the content of learning they have to learn about the culture of school.

Because there is little empirical evidence of the impact of discontinuity on outcomes for children, Vitiello et al. (2022) investigated whether differences experienced during the transition to school impacted on outcomes for children. This study measured the difference between teacher-child interactions, teacher-child closeness, the quantity of teacher structured activity, and whether differences in these variables were associated with children's social-emotional skills and self-regulation. Data showed that a decrease in teacher-child interactions and teacher-child closeness was associated with lower social-emotional skills and self-regulation particularly in the early part of the year. The amount of time spent on teacher structured activity was not related to these two outcomes. Vitiello et al. (2022) conclude that, while more research is needed to confirm these findings and investigate other discontinuities and child outcomes, differences in educational environments have implications for children's outcomes.

Boyle and Wilkinson (2018) argue that in the past the transition to school has been framed around discourses of discontinuity and that more recently research has shifted to focus on continuity. They suggest that this may be a more helpful way of framing the transition to school. This would involve a focus on continuity practices during the transition (Boyle, Petriwskyj, et al., 2018). Similarly, Haggerty and Loveridge (2019) argue that educational discourse in New Zealand has shifted "from the use of the term *transition*, which invokes the idea of moving between entities that embody quantitative *differences*, to the use of the term *continuity*, which is concerned only with *sameness*" (p. 94). They warn that this shift should be seen in the political and international neoliberal context focused on education for economic good, rather than education for individual benefit.

There are different conceptions of the term continuity, as Boyle, Grieshaber, et al. (2018) found in their review of transition to school literature published between 2000 and 2015. Like Haggerty and Loveridge (2019) some literature presents the concept of continuity as the opposite of discontinuity; similarities between the environment and practices of prior to school contexts and the school classroom (Dockett & Einarsdottir, 2017). When thinking of continuity in this way teachers who want to increase continuity for children would focus on practices which involve replicating what happens in the other context.

However, continuity does not just mean ‘the same’ (Dockett & Einarsdottir, 2017; Stipek et al., 2017) and an alternative way of viewing continuity is to consider how teachers can implement “experiences and learning that build on what has gone before” (Dockett & Einarsdottir, 2017, p. 133) and thus to promote continuity of learning (Education Review Office, 2015). When teachers see continuity in this way, they are committed to valuing children’s previous learning and understanding how each child learns best so that they can make connections to what has gone before (Ward, 2022). They may also support children to understand how to engage in school activities (Hedegaard & Munk, 2019) thus building social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). This makes sense, as learning is the main purpose of educational settings and continuity and discontinuity impact on children’s learning journeys (Wilder & Lillvist, 2018).

Bioecological theory would define continuity as “the smooth intersection of different systems” (Dockett & Einarsdottir, 2017, p. 137). Transition practices which provide more similarities between contexts, thus reducing discontinuity, can be beneficial in providing a ‘smooth intersection’ as can putting in place practices to support ongoing learning by building on previous learning. In doing so, Boyle, Petriwskyj, et al. (2018) propose that attention should be given to continuities related to children’s development and to the contextual and structural arrangements of school and ECE services. Dockett and Einarsdottir (2017) agree adding that continuity in the philosophical and curricula approaches used in the different contexts are also of significance.

Transition is a dynamic process involving both continuity and change and extends over the time before and after school entry until children have a sense of belonging (Dockett et al., 2017; Dockett & Perry, 2014). Therefore adults involved in the transition need to consider the balance of change and continuity (Dockett & Einarsdottir, 2017) and how schools and communities can be ready to support children as they navigate aspects that are unfamiliar to them (Peters, 2010). It is also important to understand which continuities and discontinuities are important to children (Dockett & Perry, 2012) and to consider how best to support and scaffold them as they engage with the school context (Peters, 2000, 2004a). The following sections discuss themes that emerged from literature relating to continuity and discontinuity during the transition to school.

2.5.1 Social Relationships

The move to school results in social discontinuity as children enter into a new community, are often separated from their preschool friends and have to build new relationships (Ackesjö, 2014; Ackesjö, 2019; Dockett & Perry, 2012; Fabian, 2010; Joerdens, 2014; Ladd et al., 2006; Wilder & Lillvist, 2018). Continuity of relationships is important but can be difficult to achieve because “transitions are all

about relationship break-ups and relationship building processes” (Ackesjö, 2019, p. 53). Children must form relationships with new teachers and peers, and this can result in social unrest as children miss their old friends and may find older children in the class threatening (Sandberg et al., 2014). Some children struggle with the social and emotional challenge of interacting with new peers and teachers (Ladd et al., 2006) and becoming part of a new peer culture (Chowby & Barley, 2022). Reflection on this is important because peer acceptance is related to academic success through increased classroom engagement (Bossaert et al., 2011). Uncertainty about relationships can also be a stressor during the early days at school (Tatlow-Golden et al., 2016) and continuity in social relationships has been identified as important to children’s adjustment (Dockett & Perry, 2007b).

Children in Ireland described negative emotional responses to challenges related to friendships when they started school (Booth et al., 2019). When presented with scenarios such as having no one to play with or joining other children at play, children in this mixed method qualitative study reported feeling negative emotions. Children also identified missing family members as significant. Having friends was found to be supportive of children’s emotional regulation and developing a sense of emotional wellbeing. Broström (2019) also found friendships were important in his Danish study involving interviews with 22 preschool children which sought to establish children’s expectations when starting school. Children in this study wanted to make new friends and maintain prior friendships at school. According to Ackesjö (2019), children may not understand that starting school may result in permanent separation from familiar people and she concludes that teachers should prepare children for the permanent nature of the transition. She contends that many transition events do not address social discontinuity.

Children have identified social discontinuity as a key aspect of their transition to school in several Australian studies. In a Queensland study involving 162 child participants from urban and regional settings, children said that the best thing about starting school was meeting old friends and making new ones (Danby et al., 2012). Children in this study were concerned that they might not have friends at school and that they would have to meet new people and a new teacher. They found it helpful when existing friends moved with them to school, a practice also endorsed by Fabian and Dunlop (2007). Older friends and siblings at the same school also provided some social continuity (Danby et al., 2012). Older children can provide companionship, support, and advice to help bridge the transition (Dockett & Perry, 2013a; Schürer et al., 2022). Dockett and Perry (2012) also found that Australian children were concerned about continuity of friendships during transition. Some of the 40 children in this study noted that making new friends was a positive aspect of the transition, some children were anxious about not having friends. Children were concerned by some of the social aspects of schooling

that seemed unfamiliar, such as fighting. Similarly, a strong theme in Margetts (2006) study investigating what children thought new entrants needed to know when starting school reflected the children's desire for continuity of relationships and to have friendship making skills. Children also wanted to know how to deal with negative interactions with peers. Children in this Australian study also suggested that it would be helpful to know about the teachers before starting school. Joerdens (2014) also found that relationships with the teacher were important to the children in her study. These relationships and the development of friendships with other children contributed to a sense of belonging for transitioning children.

In New Zealand, where children usually start school on their fifth birthday rather than as a cohort, Peters' qualitative doctoral study found that children who were already at school had established friendships and it was difficult for new entrants to break into these friendship groups (Peters, 1999, 2004a). Further data from this study indicated that having friends at school could provide children with motivation to go to school, but observation and interviews with parents and children showed that when children did not have friends lunch and play times became difficult (Peters, 2003a, 2004a). Peters (2004a) found that when prior friendships existed these could contribute to learning; the friend could provide scaffolding that helped the new entrant engage in unfamiliar learning tasks. The benefits of continuity of friendships were also observed in one of Hayes's (2013) case studies in New Zealand primary schools where a friend made in ECE was observed supporting a new entrant to learn what to do and how to learn at school. Similarly, Belcher (2006) found that school activities often required children to work together and that children thought friends were important and could help them when they were unsure what to do. Children in a study involving two schools and three ECE services said that friendships were important and were particularly concerned about having no one to play with (S. Peters et al., 2015). Parents in this study valued practices which supported children to develop relationships, especially with other children. Former relationships with other children at school such as siblings or cousins were also found to be significant.

While relationships with peers features extensively in literature, children also need to form relationships with teachers and the closeness of these relationships has significance (Ladd et al., 2006). Zulfiqar et al. (2018) found that the closeness of teacher-child relationships was related to academic and behavioural outcomes in a study involving 730 children. They propose that transition practices, such as visits to school, allow children to become more comfortable with teachers and develop a sense of security which impacts positively on learning. Transition practices can enable teachers to get to know and understand children before they start (Zulfiqar et al., 2018).

Social adjustment is one indicator of success at school (Dockett & Perry, 2007b) and the ability to interact in positive ways with peers impacts on engagement in the classroom and academic success (Ladd et al., 2006). Therefore, reflection on strategies to support continuity of relationships and to help children cope with social discontinuity is important. Relationships help children to feel safe and build a sense of belonging in the new context (Education Review Office, 2022; Hopps, 2019) and therefore teachers must support children to maintain existing relationships and build new ones (Hopps, 2019). Transition practices before starting school that give children opportunities to interact with others who will be in their class can be useful (Dockett & Perry, 2007b; Education Review Office, 2022; Kaplun et al., 2017) as well as chances to meet school children outside class time (Dockett & Perry, 2007b; Peters, 2003a). Play dates can help children develop and consolidate peer relationships (Chowby & Barley, 2022). Teachers can help by introducing children to each other and scaffolding the formation of relationships (Dockett & Perry, 2011; Fabian & Dunlop, 2007; Hayes, 2013). It can also be helpful for children to have opportunities to interact with children who are in their class before they enter school and for schools to promote shared activities in the playground (Peters, 2003a). Placing children in the same class as a friend can be a supportive strategy (Bulkeley & Fabian, 2006; Mortlock et al., 2011), although, even when children have friends at school, it can still be difficult for them to break into the play culture of school (Mortlock et al., 2011). The Education Review Office (2022) suggests that starting school in groups, rather than alone, better supports relationship building as children may be able to start alongside children they know and can build relationships when visiting school with other children who will start at the same time. ECE teachers can help children learn skills for joining groups to prepare them for joining new groups at school (Danby et al., 2012; Ladd et al., 2006). Teachers, parents, and peers can assist children to successfully contend with the social discontinuity of leaving old friends and teachers and building new relationships. Strategies such as these are important in supporting children's learning journeys and helping children re-engage after the transition (S. Peters et al., 2015).

2.5.2 Pedagogical Approaches

On school entry, in addition to encountering new people with whom they must build relationships, children are faced with approaches to teaching and learning which differ from those of ECE (Belcher, 2006; Education Review Office, 2015). The philosophical basis of learning and teaching on which practice is based differs reflecting differences in the histories and purposes of the sectors (Dockett & Einarsdottir, 2017). Belcher (2006) contends that the socio-cultural approach to teaching characteristic of ECE contexts in New Zealand is very different from the approaches used in schools. In Bennett's (2013) opinion ECE is a place where discussion and the construction of knowledge takes

place, contrasting with the approach in many schools where children are expected to learn and reproduce prescribed subject knowledge. Bennett (2013) claims that ECE generally has a tradition of being child centred and following children's interests, whereas in schools the content of learning is usually determined and organised by the teacher and interaction is dominated by teachers as they aim to transfer knowledge that can be assessed against prescribed learning outcomes. Bennett (2013) does not consider that each school and ECE service may differ in their approach. Similarly, it has been argued that schools are likely to employ a more teacher directed pedagogy and agenda (Bennett, 2013; Bossaert et al., 2011; Fabian & Dunlop, 2007) where the style of classroom interaction differs from that of ECE contexts, being more structured and focussed on academic subjects (Shuey et al., 2019). This pedagogical change can lead to confusion for children (Fabian & Dunlop, 2007; Stipek et al., 2017) and Bellen (2016) argues that pedagogical discontinuity during the transition to school is a contributing factor to children's adjustment and academic success.

School is often seen as the place for formal learning, whereas early childhood is typically perceived as a time for informal play-based learning (Cullen, 1998; Shuey et al., 2019). The formal approach to learning is more academic in orientation and involves different kinds of learning experiences which often involve more sitting still than children are used to (Bossaert et al., 2011) and longer concentration spans (Fabian & Dunlop, 2007). Opportunities for play may be more restricted at school (Mackenzie, 2018b) and there is often a clear distinction between what counts as play and what is regarded as work and thus prioritised by teachers (Peters, 2015). Internationally research capturing child perspectives demonstrates that children are aware of this difference, perceiving school as a place where they are involved in work instead of play (Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood, 2008; Corsaro & Molinari, 2008; Dockett & Perry, 2007b; Einarsdottir, 2007). Interviews with 15 children from six Singaporean schools found that children noticed the sudden change in teaching style when they entered school; there was more play and choice in ECE in contrast with the formal approach and academic nature of learning in school (Ebbeck et al., 2013). Margetts' (2006) Australian research showed that the 54 child participants noticed the difference in learning and teaching in subject areas. The importance of children knowing the academic skills children would need on school entry was referred to 68 times in data collected from the children. In contrast to these studies, Tatlow-Golden et al. (2016) found that children in an Irish school did not mention a reduction in access to play. They attribute this to the inclusion of play within the school classroom curriculum. They found that play gave children a sense of competence which supported children to be resilient. As international school contexts may differ from those of New Zealand there is a need for up-to-date research capturing children's perspectives in this area.

Research capturing adult perspectives has similar findings. For example, responses to questionnaires from 176 Swedish parents of children who were soon to start school showed that parents expected school would involve a change from play to learning and many parents were concerned about the higher academic demands they thought would be placed on children. A study in Victoria, Australia found that four ECE and three NE teachers said there were significant areas of inconsistency between contexts (Hunkin, 2014). The most common aspects mentioned related to methods of teaching and learning. Frequent reference was made to how the play-based curriculum of early childhood contrasted with the compartmentalisation of play at school and differences in assessment. These differences were also noticed by preservice primary school teachers in New South Wales, Australia (Lord & McFarland, 2010). The three participants in this study visited an ECE service and noticed the way children learned through play and the individualised nature of the teaching, which contrasted with the approaches they were taught in their teacher education programme. Lord and McFarland conclude that the training of primary and ECE teachers differs significantly and that primary teachers often have little knowledge of the foundations of learning that occur in ECE which impacts on the provision of continuity. The findings of these small scale, qualitative studies are reinforced by Perry and Dockett (2005) who used observation, and analysis of documents to establish that, in Australia, school learning involved more use of whole class teaching, less choice for children, and more comparison of children than prior-to-school contexts. While some schools are now implementing forms of play-based learning in new entrant classrooms (Aiono, 2017; Hedges, 2018), there is a lack of data from New Zealand in this area and a dearth of larger scale research involving multiple perspectives about the pedagogical continuities and discontinuities children may experience on starting school.

Within the teaching of curriculum subjects approaches to learning and teaching may lack continuity. For instance, while children may engage in rich literacy experiences prior to school entry, these may not match well with the approach taken to literacy at school (Mackenzie, 2018b; McNaughton, 2001). Internationally research has shown that written language teaching in prior-to-school contexts is usually embedded in play, while schools emphasise the code of writing and the connection between letters and sounds (Sandberg et al., 2014) and divide literacy instruction into discrete parts, which are taught separately (Mackenzie, 2014). Children may experience more structured literacy lessons which teach literacy skills in isolation from meaning or the social situation (Dyson, 2018). An Australian study found that although teachers in each sector worked with children of similar ages and had similar qualifications, they differed in their understanding of how to support progression in writing (Mackenzie & Petriwskyj, 2017). Teachers in this study also had little understanding of how literacy was taught in the other sector. New Zealand schools also employ a more formal approach to reading,

writing and oral language learning and teaching than that of ECE services (McLachlan, 2008). This discontinuity can result in disruption to literacy learning when children encounter different methods of supporting them (Mackenzie, 2014; Mackenzie & Petriwskyj, 2017). The Education Review Office (2011b) reported that there were few links between how literacy learning was supported in ECE and the literacy teaching taking place in schools. They also found that there was little evidence that schools considered children's prior literacy experiences when planning the literacy programme.

Considering prior experience is important because "there is a disjuncture between the literacy experiences of children from minority backgrounds and those they encounter on school entry" (Maher & Bellen, 2015, p. 9). Kervin and Mantei (2021) call for schools to adopt a pedagogical approach to the first year of school which embraces and capitalises on the experiences, beliefs, and literacy dispositions of learners. This is only possible if teachers know about the prior experiences of children and consider these in planning for the next learning steps (Cronin et al., 2022). Based on the findings of their work to develop a culturally appropriate literacy programme with aboriginal elders in Australia's Northern Territory, Maher and Bellen advocate for literacy programmes to connect with home and community experiences. Brooker (2002) also found discontinuities between home and school literacy experiences when she carried out case studies of two English boys who started school on the same day, in the same classroom. In her study the child from a minority background came to school with literacy experiences that did not match well with those of school, resulting in discontinuities which affected his ongoing engagement with literacy. Kervin and Mantei (2021) analysed literacy experiences in both a school and ECE setting. They found that even where the purpose of the literacy experiences were similar, the ways children were expected to engage differed and resources that might be familiar were used in different ways. This could result in children struggling to connect the literacy of school with their prior experience. They conclude that teachers must consider how children learn to meet the differing demands of learning at school. As well as teachers considering children's prior literacy experiences (McLachlan, 2008; McNaughton, 2001), increasing teacher awareness of the way literacy is taught in each sector would enhance teachers' abilities to provide continuity for children (Mackenzie, 2014; Mackenzie & Petriwskyj, 2017; Mayer et al., 2010). Teachers also need to have the pedagogical content knowledge to teach effectively (Cunningham et al., 2004). There may be a need to provide professional learning to support teacher practice in this area. However, Cunningham et al. (2004) have found that teachers do not always identify their level of pedagogical content knowledge accurately, tending to overestimate their pedagogical content knowledge and so are not always aware of the need for further learning.

Mathematics is another area where children often experience discontinuities in learning and teaching. Interviews and observations of five New Zealand NE teachers showed that mathematics in these classrooms was teacher directed and usually involved teachers working with children in small groups while the rest of the class worked independently on practice tasks (Sherley, 2011; Sherley et al., 2008). This contrasts with the mathematics teaching in ECE where children's interests are followed, and mathematical learning occurs in the context of free play (Sherley, 2011). In Australia, Perry and Dockett (2005) noted that school mathematics is taught in segmented categories in contrast with ECE where all aspects of mathematical learning are integrated into play. Children in this study displayed different levels of mathematical ability in the two contexts with some children showing less advanced mathematical understandings at school than they had demonstrated before school entry. The authors conclude that children may be unable to display the learning they bring to school when maths is segmented into discrete units. The increased focus in the updated *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017) on intentional teaching in ECE services and the development of progress and practice tools as part of the action plan for early childhood (Ministry of Education, 2019) may increase continuity in mathematics learning.

On the basis of these studies, it can be argued that increasing pedagogical continuity may be beneficial. One way continuity can be promoted is by planning learning experiences in ECE which mirror those of school and replicating some ECE learning experiences in school (McLachlan, 2008; Timperley et al., 2003). However the Education Review Office (2011b) suggest that care is needed to ensure that attempts to create continuity do not result in ECE teachers adopting inappropriately teacher directed practice which does not align with the curriculum. Stipek et al. (2017) agree, stating that pushing down or pulling up practice is not a solution to discontinuity. They recommend change in both directions is more effective because continuity of pedagogy promotes feelings of familiarity, self-confidence, and self-efficacy.

Discontinuities in approach can stem from different views of the image of the child, resulting in approaches to discipline in schools that involve unfamiliar practices, such as awarding house points, giving children coloured cards, or writing their names on the board (Dockett & Perry, 2007a). Children in a Singaporean study commented that teachers at school had a friendly, firm approach to behaviour management, but would scold naughty children (Ebbeck et al., 2013). While it was concluded that this may be one area of discontinuity for children, it is difficult to establish the validity of this finding as no evidence was presented to show what the children thought of the ECE teachers' approach to discipline.

Assessment tools in school differ from those used in ECE services. ECE teachers typically base assessment on observation of children, whereas schools often use tests which may be prescribed (Mackenzie, 2014). Children may transition from an environment where different levels of knowledge are accepted to a place where children are tested and judged on benchmarked skills (Dyson, 2018). In New Zealand, narrative approaches involving a ‘notice, recognise and respond’ framework accompanied by notes and photos are the main approach in ECE services. These assessments focus on dispositions and usually include more contributions from families than those of schools (Cameron, 2018, 2022; Mitchell et al., 2015). In contrast, common methods of assessment used in schools include running records, achievement ladders, teacher constructed tasks, narrative accounts, portfolios, diagnostic tests, teacher comments and teacher judgements (Ministry of Education, n.d.-a).

Some teachers think that the introduction of *National Standards* (Ministry of Education, 2010b) led to a narrow, less holistic way of assessing (Mitchell et al., 2015). Although teachers still feel pressure to report against predetermined outcomes (Peters & Woodhouse, 2021a), assessment against *National Standards* is no longer mandatory which may give NE teachers more flexibility to assess children more holistically (Peters & Woodhouse, 2021b). The implementation of the numeracy project in New Zealand resulted in performance based assessment of mathematics in schools using narrow goals and checklists (Peters, 2004b). The difference in assessment methods may be significant as Wager et al. (2015) have found that different results can be gained in assessing mathematics depending on whether children are assessed by narrative approaches or by the use of more formal methods. Discontinuity of assessment practice could result in children’s capability not being understood by teachers.

Many children look forward to starting school and would be disappointed if nothing changed (Dockett & Perry, 2007a). However, increasing pedagogical continuity could build a bridge between the familiar and the unfamiliar which would unlock in new entrants an “awareness of the goals and rules of different activities” and enable the “applicability of different forms of expertise to develop” (Turoa et al., 2002, p. 12). Disruption to learning pathways may also be reduced as continuity of learning is more likely to occur (Education Review Office, 2015).

Research has established that one of the difficulties for teachers seeking to increase pedagogical continuity is that they may have little knowledge of what happens in the other sector (Belcher, 2006; Dockett & Perry, 2007b; Lord & McFarland, 2010; Margetts & Phatudi, 2013; McKenzie, 2006; OECD, 2017b). For example, Mackenzie (2014) found that of the 23 ECE teachers in her study few had visited school classrooms to observe and learn about what happens there. They relied on what they learned in their own training or experiences with their own children. When teachers know about what happens

in the other sector, they can take steps to increase continuity (Education Review Office, 2015; Mayer et al., 2010; Ministry of Education, 2013a). It is recommended that increasing communication between sectors and teachers understanding of how learning happens before and after school entry will help teachers understand how discontinuities can be reduced for children and continuity of learning increased (Education Review Office, 2015). Hedegaard and Munk (2019) argue that through cross-sector discussion teachers can identify how their practices relate to each other without having to replicate what happens in the other sector. An example of how increased knowledge of pedagogy used in other sectors can be beneficial comes from a research project in New Zealand. In this study Hohepa et al. (2017) sought to identify effective transition practices to support children moving from kohanga reo (Māori medium ECE) to kura (Māori medium school). They found that when teachers spent time observing in each other's settings they became more aware of how the differences in practices and programmes impacted on children. This led teachers to reflect on the way children's behaviour was interpreted and responded to during the transition period.

A recent trend in New Zealand is for junior school classrooms to implement play-based learning (Aiono, 2017; Hedges, 2018; Peters & Woodhouse, 2021a) which could increase pedagogical continuity and continuity of learning. Fabian and Dunlop (2015) argue that play enables children to participate, integrate, draw on prior learning and build on this to "embrace the demands of accommodating the new" (p. 174). Countries such as Scotland and Ireland have also included more play in the early years of school (Martlew et al., 2011; Tatlow-Golden et al., 2016; Walsh et al., 2010). The reasons for including play in the classroom are not always about continuity, however. There can be a perception that children are not ready for a more teacher centred pedagogy, particularly in countries where children start school at younger ages (Hedges, 2018). Including play can "allow for early childhood-like experiences to continue in schooling" and may address concerns about readiness (Hedges, 2018, p. 61). Bellen (2016) agrees: she investigated primary school teachers' beliefs about play-based pedagogy in her Australian doctoral study and found that teachers were influenced by readiness perspectives. Teachers' beliefs about play influenced their practice. Play was not always seen as an effective pedagogy for meeting curriculum objectives and some teachers saw play and learning as different constructs. Therefore, teachers used play as a time for children to have fun, socialise or as a reward for finishing other work, rather than as a vehicle for learning. She found that play acted as a bridge, providing continuity during the transition to school, although teachers' understanding of what a play-based pedagogy involved differed between sectors. Bellen concluded that while teachers may value play, their practice is constrained by external factors such as targets for achievement, parent expectations, school timetables, adult:child ratios, and the environment. She

states that teachers may have had limited professional learning about play-based approaches and recommends teachers strengthen their understanding of play-based learning.

Play can also provide a space for children's interests to be included in the curriculum (Peters, 2015). Davis (2015) documents the journey of teachers in one New Zealand school to increase continuity for new entrants by including play in the curriculum for a period every morning. Findings of this study revealed that teachers saw an increase in child engagement and thought that children settled more quickly into school. Teachers got to know children better and could highlight connections to other parts of the curriculum. There were fewer behavioural concerns with children. Davis concludes that play can be a valid part of the primary classroom, but states there is more to learn about how continuity of learning can be promoted. A pilot project involving 100 schools in Northern Ireland also aimed to use a play-based learning approach to increase continuity for new entrants (Walsh et al., 2010). The evaluation of the project showed that play was valuable. The play-based context enabled more teacher interactions with individual children, which enabled better assessment of needs. Positive dispositions were enhanced, children appeared to enjoy school more than previous cohorts and were more eager to learn. Professional learning was needed to support teachers to embed learning in play, particularly literacy learning. Data from child participants showed they liked the degree of continuity provided by play, but also valued new experiences and challenges. A later study, also in Ireland, showed that the inclusion of play contributed to child resilience (Tatlow-Golden et al., 2016).

While there is potential for schools to increase continuity by using a play-based approach to learning, the way play-based learning is implemented varies widely (Aiono et al., 2019; Martlew et al., 2011) and so the degree of continuity would vary. A New Zealand doctoral study found that many primary teachers lack experience or training in how to support learning through play and that school leadership may question whether children's progress is sufficient when time is spent playing (Aiono et al., 2019). There was tension between teachers feeling they needed to be accountable and drive children's progress in academic learning and the play-based learning approach. Similar findings emerged from small-scale research in Scotland (Martlew et al., 2011) and Australia (Jay & Knaus, 2018). Teachers in these studies also experienced this tension and lacked the knowledge to fully implement a play-based approach. Hedges (2018) agrees that there can be an issue with the knowledge base of teachers and advocates for a research-based approach to the implementation of play-based learning in schools. These suggestions are supported by Peters and Woodhouse (2021a) who add that to implement play-based learning, NE teachers need to understand how children learn through play, how to recognise the learning and how to facilitate learning in authentic play contexts. Work may also be needed to

help parents understand the value of play in school contexts (Fabian & Dunlop, 2015). Broström (2019) contends that children expect to play at school and that teachers in both sectors should design play-based curriculum which balances continuity and discontinuity. This would mean that children are challenged by new tasks, but a sense of competence is maintained as they engage with familiar tasks. More research in this area is timely as many schools have begun to include play as part of the programme for new entrants and this may involve employing different pedagogical approaches from those of the past.

A lack of communication between sectors can lead to educational discontinuity (Ackesjö, 2014). The Education Review Office (2015) states that transitions are best when there are good relationships and effective communication between schools and ECE services. They contend that communication assists NE teachers in learning about the children's strengths, interests, and dispositions so they can be used as a bridge to new learning. Increasing communication between sectors is a focus of transition to school literature internationally as it assists teachers in gaining information which will assist in creating continuity of learning (Hopps, 2014). Sharing assessment information has been found to be one of the most effective ways to support continuity of learning during the transition to school (Ahtola et al., 2011). Unless teachers know about children's prior learning and experiences they will not be able to make connections to school learning (McLachlan et al., 2022). There is no mandatory requirement for ECE services in New Zealand to share assessment information with schools and often this does not happen (Cameron, 2018). An example of how this sharing of information can occur is described in a New Zealand action research project (Hartley et al., 2014). Teachers in this research created transition to school portfolios for children which contained information that it was thought would be useful to the NE teacher. It was found that the portfolios acted as a resource which helped the teacher learn about and get to know the children. Some Australian states are using 'transition statements' to share information between settings. Dockett and Perry (2021b) report on findings from two qualitative studies which found that some ECE teachers only completed the statements because they were mandatory, which suggests they may not have seen the value in this practice. Some schools found the information shared to be useful, while others felt the information provided did not help them understand what knowledge children brought to school. This aligns with findings from New Zealand where it has been found that NE teachers do not always use or find useful assessment information shared by ECE services (Mitchell et al., 2015). This may be because many assessment narratives document what children are doing rather than assessing the learning which is demonstrated (Cameron, 2018, 2022). Although there is work to do to ensure a shared understanding between sectors of what information will be useful when children transition, sharing key threads of children's learning with schools before the child's first day can assist NE teachers to understand how to provide

an environment in which the child will feel comfortable and be able to find familiarities with prior contexts. Additionally, this information can help teachers make connections for children between prior and new learning (Peters & Woodhouse, 2021a). When teachers do not know about children's past experiences and learning they may not realise when children's learning is negatively impacted by discontinuities they are struggling to adjust to (S. Peters et al., 2015) and be unable to put supportive strategies in place which respond to the individual needs of children.

Gaining understanding of approaches to learning and teaching in each sector depends on effective cross sector relationships. The exchange of information about children is also easier when there are relationships between ECE and NE teachers, although Dockett and Perry (2021b) contend that the effectiveness of professional networks focused on the transition to school is limited if they merely facilitate the sharing of assessment information. It is recommended that such networks develop relationships within which teachers share transition practices and develop shared understandings (Dockett & Perry, 2021b; Hopps, 2019). This does not always happen as a study involving 12 early learning centres and 11 schools in Australia showed. It was found that most relationships between schools and ECE services were functional and focused on the exchange of information rather than an equal partnership within which understandings about transition could be co-constructed (Nolan et al., 2021). Similarly, schools in a study by Noel (2011) described the nature of their relationship with ECE services as being about the one way sharing of information. An example of effective collaboration comes from a mixed method research project in New Zealand where teachers from ECE and school contexts worked together as a cross-sector research team (S. Peters et al., 2015). Case studies of the learning journeys of 30 children during the transition to school were undertaken. Mini action research projects were developed with input from teachers in both sectors. While there were initially tensions due to the differing histories, philosophies and curricula used by the participants, the authors contend that the key to effectively collaborating was taking time and making the effort to understand each other's perspective. Through this collaboration new understandings were generated about effective practices to support transition.

Building and maintaining relationships within which effective communication occurs is not always easy (Hopps, 2014; Mackenzie, 2014; Noel, 2011; Nolan et al., 2021). Using a range of qualitative methods, Hopps (2014) collected data from 213 preschool and school educators in Australia. It was found that building relationships and communication between sector teachers was valued by the educators. However, time and stability of staff were barriers to this occurring and there was a perception by teachers in both sectors that there was often a lack of communication in both directions. Teachers in MacKenzie's (2014) study also listed time as a barrier to meaningful communication and noted that

when ECE services fed into multiple schools it is even more difficult. Similar barriers were found in the study by Nolan et al. (2021) where half of the 12 ECE services reported finding it difficult to connect with local schools. It is important when developing collaborative networks that teachers from both sectors are viewed as having equal status and equally valuable contributions to make (Dockett, 2018; Nolan et al., 2021). Otherwise it is unlikely new knowledge and understanding will be generated and deeply held beliefs, attitudes and expectations will not be questioned resulting in limited change (Dockett, 2018). Overcoming the barriers and increasing communication and relationships between teachers in each sector would enable shared planning for transitions, the sharing of assessment information, and teachers could learn more about what happens in each sector and consider ways to create pedagogical and curricula continuity (Belcher, 2006; Dockett & Perry, 2021b; Ministry of Education, 2002, 2013b; Peters & Woodhouse, 2021b). Teachers would also understand more about how the ECE and school curriculums link, the importance of which has been highlighted by literature reviewed in the next section.

2.5.3 Curriculum Documents

Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 2017) defines curriculum as including “all the experiences, activities, and events, both direct and indirect, that occur within the ECE setting” (p. 7). Thus, curriculum includes both what teachers plan for children and also spontaneous experiences and learning that may not have been planned or intended (Arthur et al., 2012). However, the content of and approaches to teaching and learning are underpinned and guided by relevant curriculum documents. While it is posited that “curriculum frameworks which bridge pre-school and primary education strengthen pedagogical continuity” (Fabian & Dunlop, 2007, p. 6), the alignment of curriculum documents is an area where greater continuity can be gained (Dockett & Perry, 2007b; Shuey et al., 2019).

In a report for the OECD, Shuey et al. (2019) contend that alignment between ECE and school curriculum documents can support continuity during transition. As discussed earlier in this review, there is potential alignment between aspects of the *New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) and both the original and the refreshed *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996, 2017) although there is a lack of evidence of alignment with *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa* (Hohepa et al., 2017), the curriculum for Māori medium schools. Carr (2013) contended that the key competencies of the *New Zealand Curriculum* and the strands of the original *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) aligned. Writing soon after the release of *The New Zealand Curriculum*, Carr et al. (2008) argued that as the key competencies became an established part of learning and teaching in schools, changes in pedagogy were likely to result. However, research is still needed to establish whether the links

between curriculum have made any difference in practice; internationally there is little evidence of the impact of curriculum alignment (Shuey et al., 2019). A New Zealand study has demonstrated how dispositions assessed in ECE that link with the strands of *Te Whāriki* align with the key competencies. This project describing a case study of one child showed that the child's dispositions demonstrated in kindergarten could be linked to the key competencies of the school curriculum (Davis et al., 2015). Efforts to increase curriculum continuity in New Zealand continue. As discussed earlier in this review *Te Whāriki* has been updated and the new document includes strengthened links with the *New Zealand Curriculum* (Haggerty & Loveridge, 2019; McLachlan, 2017; Peters & Woodhouse, 2021a, 2021b), as recommended by the advisory group on early learning (Ministry of Education, 2015).

Although curriculum documents are becoming more closely linked and supportive of continuity, it depends on teachers, whose values and beliefs may differ from those of the curriculum documents, to put this continuity into practice. Teachers also need to understand how to use the alignment in practice (Peters & Woodhouse, 2021a). May (2011) contends that while the *New Zealand Curriculum* made it clear that schools must make links with children's prior knowledge, rather than expecting children to be ready for school, this emphasis is not always put into practice by teachers. Peters (2014) also comments on the closer alignment of curriculum since the introduction of the *New Zealand Curriculum*, saying that the aspirations of *Te Whāriki* sit well with the vision in the school curriculum. However, Peters suggests that alignment of curriculum will only benefit children if teachers in both sectors work to "create a bridge" (Peters, 2014, p. 110) which turns the potential alignment of key competencies and strands into reality. The OECD (2017b) agrees, commenting that while ECE and school curricula in New Zealand are explicitly aligned, this alignment is not sufficient to provide continuity.

If a bridge is to be created, teachers from both sectors must be familiar with both the school and ECE curriculum documents and aware of the links between them (Ministry of Education, 2002). As earlier discussed, progress is still needed in New Zealand to ensure teachers on both side of the transition to school engage with all the curriculum documents (Education Review Office, 2015; Ministry of Education, 2015; Mitchell et al., 2015). However, a project involving ECE and NE teachers in a small town in New Zealand shows how teacher can work as a community to enhance transition processes (Bond et al., 2019). An initial survey of the 25 teachers established that each sector had insufficient understanding of each other's curriculum document. Through professional development teachers gained confidence to use both documents when analysing learning. Through working together teachers deepened their curriculum knowledge and their understanding of pedagogical approaches used in the other sector.

2.5.4 Structural and Physical Aspects

Early studies of transition focussed on the structural differences between school and ECE such as the environment and staff ratios (Cullen, 1998). These and other structural discontinuities continue to be raised in research. For instance, a body of research has found that a significant aspect of the transition from children's perspectives relates to learning the rules and routines of school which can be very different from those of ECE contexts (e.g. Booth et al., 2019; Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood, 2008; Corsaro & Molinari, 2008; Dockett & Perry, 2007b; Ebbeck et al., 2013; Morton et al., 2018).

An example is Margetts' (2006) Australian study in which children said it was important for new entrants to know what good and bad behaviour at school was and the consequences of bad behaviour. They thought it was helpful to know the school rules and routines. Examples given by the children included knowing what to do and where to do it, the routines involved with toileting, where they were not allowed to play, and the routines and procedures of the classroom. Margetts concluded that knowing the rules and procedures of school seems to provide a sense of safety and wellbeing for new entrants. Similarly, Dockett and Perry (2007b) noted children's concern about knowing the rules of school, such as the areas which are out of bounds, so they can avoid punishment. They suggest that children see adjustment at school as being about learning the rules and how to function at school. Ebbeck et al. (2013) found similar perspectives in Singapore. Children in their research noticed the new school rules and explained that they needed to learn to line up, raise their hands if they wanted to speak, and ask the teacher if they wanted to go to the toilet. A mixed method study in Ireland found the demands of school meant children needed to regulate their emotional, cognitive and behavioural responses (Booth et al., 2019). The perspectives of 57 children were captured in this study, which found that knowing the rules and being familiar with the routines of school was important to children as it helped them know what to do, gain rewards, avoid punishment, and meet the demands of the classroom. The benefits of being familiar with the rules and routines of school were also highlighted in a yearlong study in an Australian Catholic school (Joerdens, 2014). Children who were familiar with the rules were more able to cope with the unexpected and participate in the classroom. They experienced less stress and developed a strengthened sense of belonging. Knowledge of the Catholic rituals counted as social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) in this classroom. Knowing the rules was significant for the children involved in this study.

The organisation of time at school also creates a discontinuity for new children (Education Review Office, 2015; Mackenzie, 2018b). Data from Einarsdottir's (2010) qualitative research project involving 20 children in Iceland showed that children noticed the more rigidly timetabled structure of school

which was regimented by the bell. Children mentioned time spent waiting and said play had become something that occurred only in recess time. Peters (2000) suggests that children need to learn about the practices at school such as the various messages given by the ringing of the bell.

Mawson (2006) states that that in ECE contexts teachers generally work in teams, while at school there is usually one teacher in a single cell classroom. Since he wrote this article however, the physical and structural environments of some classrooms have changed. There has been a shift towards more modern/innovative learning environments incorporating play-based learning which may have multiple teachers working in the same space and more flexible timetables (Aiono, 2017). While there is some research investigating aspects of modern/innovative learning environments (e.g. Everatt et al., 2019; Fletcher & Everatt, 2021; Mackey et al., 2018) research is needed to evaluate how well these environments meet the needs of children and families transitioning to school.

The ratio of adults to children in prior-to-school learning contexts is higher than those that children usually encounter on entry to school (Mackenzie, 2018b; OECD, 2017b), resulting in the expectation that children will be able to utilise self-care skills at school as there will be fewer adults available to assist them (Dockett & Perry, 2007a). In Sherley's (2011) New Zealand research it was found that along with differences in the structure of the day, there is an increased focus on classroom management and organisation in schools. In the school classrooms in this study teachers spent 95% of time organising and directing children, in contrast to the 50% observed in the ECE context. It is possible that the increased time spent on classroom management and organisation could relate to the lower adult to child ratio in schools. Carr et al. (2009) comment that primary school teachers need structures and routines in place to organise the classroom due to the number of children they are teaching.

The physical environment of school can differ significantly from prior-to-school contexts (Cullen, 1998; Dean & Delaune, 2019; Dockett & Perry, 2012; Education Review Office, 2015). Peters (2000) notes that the size of the buildings, number and size of other children, and differences in the playground are some of the environmental discontinuities children may encounter. The playground environment can be daunting for new entrants as they may have a larger area in which to play with less teacher direction (Dean & Delaune, 2019). Changes in toileting environments, including the lack of adult supervision and presence of older children in toilets, have been shown to cause distress to new entrants (Peters, 1999). Dockett and Perry (2007b) assert that children find schools are bigger, the toilets are different and they notice that there are unfamiliar areas, such as the sick bay. It can be helpful to consider where the environments can be similar. Bulkeley and Fabian (2006) argue that when the new learning environment contains elements which are familiar, children's confidence and sense of control are supported and there is a positive impact on wellbeing. Visits to school before starting can support

children to become familiar with environmental differences and to understand the rules and routines of the classroom (Hoffman & Sam, 2020; Hopps, 2019).

Logically it might be thought that increasing the structure and amount of teacher direction in ECE settings might benefit children by creating more continuity with school. However, Peters' (2000, 2004a) case studies of seven children in a large urban school demonstrated that increased structure in ECE does not necessarily translate into a smoother transition experience. Some of the children who transitioned from the more structured kindergarten in her study experienced difficulties adjusting to the school context. Others who transitioned from a less structured kindergarten had a smooth transition. Peters concluded that there are many other factors that influence the transition, and these differ for each child. An evaluation of an ECE service's transition to school programme judged by the Education Review Office as too teacher directed found that while parents felt the programme gave children a head start at school, the NE teachers said they did not notice any difference between the children from this centre and those from other centres (Benade et al., 2017), further bringing into question the value of more structured, teacher directed programmes in ECE services. The next section will highlight how the reality of school life may differ from children's expectations.

2.5.5 Children's Expectations

Children expect and look forward to some change when they start school (Fabian, 2010) and while they may be capable of managing change, their expectations of the changes involved in starting school can differ from reality (Dockett & Perry, 2012). Di Santo and Berman (2012) found that the Canadian children in their research lacked some understanding of the discontinuities they would experience on school entry. Focus groups with 105 children from 42 classrooms showed that most children expected that play would remain a significant part of their experience. Few expected academic work to be part of the curriculum. Almost half the children said that the rules of school and preschool would be the same. Children in this study thought that teachers would continue to help them with self-care skills at school, whereas research shows that children are often expected to already possess self-care skills on school entry (Noel, 2010; O'Kane & Hayes, 2006; Serry et al., 2014). Similarly, research carried out in Wales and Lapland showed that while children did expect some things to be different, they mistakenly expected learning at school to involve similar experiences to those of the ECE context (Fabian, 2010).

Dockett and Perry (2012) also found that Australian children's expectations of school may not be realistic. They used drawings and conversations with 40 children from six schools to explore what children liked and disliked about school. Children identified several differences between school and ECE contexts, but for some there was a disconnect between what they expected school to be like and

what they experienced. Dockett and Perry found that these children sought continuity of friendships and play pedagogy over the transition and recommend that more research is needed to establish what children are seeking in terms of continuity and how this can support their engagement with education. Having these insights will contribute to the development of appropriate transition practices (Dockett & Perry, 2012) as “children who do not expect differences might find the transition difficult” (Fabian, 2010, p. 473).

Activities which help children become aware of what school is like, such as pre-visits to school, can support children to have realistic expectations of school (Ackesjö, 2014; Fabian & Dunlop, 2007; Kaplun et al., 2017; Peters, 2015; S. Peters et al., 2015). Care needs to be taken when planning school visits, however. Dockett and Perry (2012) warn that one reason there might be a disconnect between children’s expectation and the reality of school is that when children visit school, more attention is often given to identifying similarities with children’s prior experiences rather than making sure children are aware of the differences. They recommend that NE teachers ensure that unfamiliar activities are introduced during school visits. Parents in Hannah et al.’s (2010) study said more than one school visit was necessary so that children could begin building a relationship with the teacher. Peters and colleagues (2015) found that parents wanted flexibility in the number of visits to school to suit the child and family. Talking to children about what school will be like can also help them to be prepared for the changes involved (Kaplun et al., 2017).

Artefacts which help children learn about the school context can support children in understanding what school will be like and thus support continuity (Hartley et al., 2012). A kindergarten in New Zealand worked with two schools during an action research project to create artefacts that would help children to learn about school routines, practices, and language (Hartley et al., 2014). Artefacts such as photo boards with information about schools and teachers, a welcome to school DVD and school visit books created with children supported children to become familiar with the school context. These artefacts were complemented by other strategies such as school visits, information packs for parents and having older school children buddied with kindergarten children and visit the kindergarten regularly. The project showed that these initiatives “paved the way for competent participation in the new setting” (Hartley et al., 2014, p. 37).

Another New Zealand action research project used weekly skype session to build relationships between a kindergarten and a new entrant classroom (Glass & Cotman, 2014). The school children shared stories and work they had done with the kindergarten children. It was found that the initiative gave the kindergarten children insights into what happened at school and resulted in other transitional practices which increased children’s familiarity with school such as visits to the school to celebrate

special events. Peters and Woodhouse (2021b) suggest that ECE and NE teachers consider creative ways to use digital technology to increase children's understanding of what school will be like such as making short video clips showing what happens at school or children dealing with challenges and unfamiliar things that happen at school.

2.5.6 The Individual Nature of the Transition

There are a variety of interpersonal and intrapersonal factors that influence experiences of transition (Harrison, 2014) so no two transitions are alike (Dean & Delaune, 2019). Each child comes to school from different family contexts and having varied ECE experiences. In addition, the features of the classroom, the relationship with the teacher, parents' attitude, the characteristics of the teacher, the socio-economic situation of the family and the temperament of the child all contribute to how a child experiences transition and the continuities and discontinuities encountered (Harrison, 2014; Margetts & Phatudi, 2013; Niesel & Griebel, 2007). Einarsdottir (2007) argues that while her review of literature from a range of countries found that there were common discontinuities, each child's experience of discontinuity differs due to their unique prior experiences. This was illustrated in a four-year longitudinal study of two boys in a socially marginalised community of Australia, where the discontinuities each child experienced were influenced by their family and individual backgrounds (Bell-Booth et al., 2014). While this was a small-scale study from a very specific context, which is not easily generalised, other research has also indicated that discontinuities will not be the same for each child.

Grey's (2013) qualitative research involving the transition of seven gifted children from one preschool into three classrooms in Australia established that although some teachers had strategies in place intended to support continuity, these practices were not supportive of continuity for the gifted children. For six of the participants assessment on school entry was limited to normative expectations of children and did not measure learning beyond what was expected. The NE teachers therefore had limited knowledge of the children's ability from which to plan appropriate learning experiences and some of the children indicated frustration with the lack of new learning at school.

Continuity of learning may differ for children from different cultural groups as the Education Review Office (2015) found. The Education Review Office reported that for Māori and Pasifika children responsiveness to their home language, culture and identity may change during the transition to school and that continuity can be supported when teachers are able to use a child's home language. A small exploratory study in New Zealand involving three children transitioning from a Kohanga Reo into three different primary school settings (Māori medium, bilingual, and mainstream English

speaking settings) supports this finding (Rona & McLachlan, 2018). McNaughton (2001) asserts that some discontinuities that occur on school entry are associated with differences in culture and belief. He comments that parents' beliefs about learning and teaching may differ across cultures and from those of teachers and this can result in a discontinuity between a child's prior home experiences of learning and those of the school.

Another example of how individual circumstances may affect children in transition comes from research by De Gioia (2017) involving refugee and immigrant families. Parents in this study highlighted the importance of schools understanding different cultures so that they can better understand children. De Gioia (2017) concludes that refugee and immigrant children may be starting school and adjusting to other major life changes concurrently and may also be learning about the culture of their new country. In these cases, children may not have social and cultural capital that would help them fit into the dominant culture (Bourdieu, 1986) as teachers expect.

While Dunlop (2007) suggests that while children experience "shifts in culture, identity, role and status as well as daily experience" (p. 156) during transition, the degree of shift for each child differs so what can be done to address discontinuity may be different for each child. Diversity in children's backgrounds and prior experiences mean that each child will experience transition differently (Margetts & Phatudi, 2013). Children come to school with different needs (Dean & Delaune, 2019) and some children will vary in the degree to which they have developed skills and characteristics such as social competence, resilience and agency that will support them during the time of transition (Fabian, 2007). Being ready for each child therefore involves finding out about the experiences children have had prior to school entry (Fabian, 2010; McNaughton, 2001) and providing scaffolding where required (Peters, 2010). However, it has been argued that while in New Zealand there is room to tailor transition processes to individual needs, constraints such as standardised procedures and limited communication between settings can be barriers to this occurring (Dean & Delaune, 2019).

2.6 Conclusion

Starting school is not only a "transition to a new physical context, but also an entry point to a new 'culture' where aspects of learning and assessment are different, and hence what it means to be a learner is constructed differently" (Peters, 2004b, p. 2). Children will encounter a range of continuities and discontinuities associated with this change in culture and it is the responsibility of ready schools and communities to help children navigate the changes. Although much literature advocates for creating continuity during transition, some literature reminds us that change is important; children expect and want school to be different and change promotes development by offering children

challenges and opportunities which contribute to learning (Ackesjö, 2014; Dockett & Einarsdottir, 2017; Dockett & Perry, 2007a; Hedegaard & Fleer, 2019; Ma et al., 2021). The key to whether the developmental potential of transitions is realised or whether there are negative effects is how transitions are managed (Ma et al., 2021). Stipek et al. (2017) contend that teachers need to reflect on which changes contribute to continuity of learning and which disrupt the learning pathway. The aim should be to have a good balance between continuity and discontinuity and to know about the likely discontinuities so that teachers, families, and communities can provide appropriate scaffolding for children as they engage with the changes (Dockett & Einarsdottir, 2017; Peters, 2010).

While there is no process for transition that is perfect for each child (O'Connor, 2018), there is general support for implementing a range of transition practices which provide this scaffolding. Effective practices include strategies which allow time for children to adjust, inform NE teachers about the child and their learning, enable children to become familiar with the environment, rules, routines and people in the new environment and form relationships. It is also important for teachers from both sectors to understand what happens in the other context. It is recommended that schools know which transition practices are effective for their community and reflect on how well their transition events meet the needs of all groups (Dockett & Perry, 2013b; Margetts, 2007b, 2014). According to Dockett (2014) transition practices should not be seen as a list of activities to be delivered to all and she recommends that the diversity of families and experiences be considered in planning a combination of transition practices to cater for diverse needs. She states that support during transition must be relevant, contextual, changing and based on shared decisions with all involved.

The Advisory Group on Early Learning report states that although there is an abundance of international literature on the transition to school and continuity of learning much of it “does not speak directly to the New Zealand context” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 12). The current project aimed to fill this gap by exploring the range of discontinuities and continuities that children may encounter during their transition to school in New Zealand and how these might be significant. The project also sought to establish how teachers can support children to navigate the transition. In this way, awareness of the impact of continuity and discontinuity associated with school entry can be raised so that schools and communities can be ready for each child. The next chapter describes and justifies the research design and methodology that was used to meet these aims.

Chapter Three

Research Design and Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Researchers bring philosophical assumptions to the research in which they are engaged (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). A researcher must therefore consider their beliefs and assumptions about the nature of knowledge and reality as these will inform the approach they take and way they conduct a research project (Crotty, 1998). This research is underpinned by the view that humans influence, and contribute to, the creation of the social world and may perceive this social world in different ways (Cohen et al., 2007). This chapter will explain how this view guided decisions about the design of the research project and the methods of data collection and analysis which were used to investigate current understandings about how continuities and discontinuities influence transition to school in New Zealand. In doing so the objectives were to compare teachers' perspectives on continuities and discontinuities that children experience on school entry and how these influence the transition experience; identify continuities and discontinuities of significance to children, parents, and teachers during the transition to school; and identify how children might be supported to navigate discontinuities which are of significance.

The first section of the chapter will describe the epistemological and theoretical perspectives which underpin this research. The methodology of the mixed method research design is then described and justified, explaining the methods used to collect data from different participants and the processes used to analyse the data. Ethical procedures and considerations are then discussed, before the settings and participants of the study are described.

3.2 Epistemological and Theoretical Perspectives

3.2.1 Epistemology

The research was informed by a constructionist epistemology which views meaning and reality as constructed from engagement with the world, rather than being a truth waiting for discovery (Crotty, 1998). What we know and how we gain knowledge are human constructions (Phillips, 1995), which may vary because different people have different experiences and construct meaning in different ways (Crotty, 1998). The constructionist epistemology is influenced by educational philosophers such as Dewey (1859-1952), who challenged traditional ideas of absolute truth and contended that there are

multiple realities that may change as a result of interactions between a person and the environment and other humans (Guttek, 2011; Phillips, 1995).

There are several forms of constructionism which may inform research design (Crotty, 1998; Phillips, 1995). The theoretical framework underpinning this research was social constructionist. A social constructionist theoretical framework is based on the assumption that meaning is influenced by cultural and historical understandings and constructed from engagement with the world and from interactions between people and then “developed and transmitted within a... social context” (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). People perceive things in different ways depending on the historically and culturally constructed interpretations of the world in which they have been immersed. There are, therefore, multiple and varied meanings attributed to an experience or phenomena. So, within a social constructionist framework, the researcher seeks to elicit participants’ views and to make sense of the meanings that participants give to their experiences (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). Thus, it was important for this research to enquire into the perspectives of a range of people involved in the transition to school and from a range of new entrant contexts.

3.2.2 Theoretical Framework

The transition to school is shaped by the actions taken by all who are involved in the transition experience including children, parents, and teachers. Each person’s experience of transition may differ, as will their views of what is significant during the transition. The study therefore took an interpretivist approach because it was designed to find out about the perspectives of those who are involved in the transition and acknowledged differing perspectives (Hibberts & Burke Johnson, 2012; O'Hara et al., 2011). An interpretivist approach searches for interpretations of the social world that are historically situated and culturally derived (Crotty, 1998). It strives to understand the subjective world of human experience by understanding what matters for individuals rather than imposing the preconceived ideas of the researcher (Cohen et al., 2007). Rather than trying to prove a theory, the researcher seeks to generate theory from the meanings and purposes of the participants and understands that what happens in one time and place may differ from what occurs in other times and places (Cohen et al., 2007).

The research drew on the interpretivist approach of symbolic interactionism which is based on pragmatist philosophy and has its roots in the work of philosophers such as Mead (1863-1931) who argued that social forces shape behaviour (Crotty, 1998). Pragmatist thinkers challenged traditional perspectives of there being an ultimate reality and one absolute truth and viewed the world as “pluralistic, tentative, open and challenging” (Guttek, 2011, p.351). An early pragmatist, Peirce (1839-

1914), posited that the world is everchanging and that we can never be certain how individuals will act but there is the probability that people will respond to a situation in the same way they have in the past. Peirce's work influenced the thinking of James (1842-1910) and Dewey (1859-1952). James argued that humans choose to act based on their beliefs. These beliefs underpin ideas about right and wrong that guide the choices humans make and may change as a result of different experiences. Dewey took a naturalistic approach which viewed meaning as being created through the associative participation of individuals in the community – learning by doing. He also had a pluralistic conception of culture (Gutek,2011). This research therefore recognised that there is no one truth but multiple ways to interpret the world (Gutek, 2011; Phillips, 1995). As a researcher it is important to acknowledge that what is presented to the reader is my own interpretation of the perspectives of participants.

Pragmatists such as Dewey, James and Pierce contended that the approach taken should be that which best addresses the problem under study (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018; Gutek, 2011). A pragmatic approach was therefore taken whereby methodologies and methods were selected which arguably would provide the best evidence to answer the research questions (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018; Hibberts & Burke Johnson, 2012; Punch, 2009). Thus, the research design was not constrained in the choice of research methods to those traditionally associated with a particular paradigm, but instead considered which methods would best gather the data needed to answer the research question (Punch, 2009). It was therefore possible to use mixed methods to collect quantitative data as well as the qualitative data traditionally associated with the constructionist paradigm (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018; Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

The research design drew on the theories of Vygotsky (1978a, 1978b), Bronfenbrenner (1979), Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) and Rogoff (2003) in shaping the research and interpreting and making sense of the data. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model locates the child in the centre of a series of nested circles that represent the contexts within which the child lives and with which the child interacts and the wider community, cultural and societal factors which may also impact on the child's life experience and their learning and development. A later development of the model recognises the influence of time and processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). When a child transitions their position within this ecological environment is changed (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Dockett et al (2014) argue that Bronfenbrenner and Morris's (2006) bioecological model "provides potential to explore issues of continuity and change, in terms of the individuals, the nature of experiences and interactions they have, the people with whom they interact and the contexts within which they are located" (p.4). Understanding how the interactions within and between settings can

influence children's positioning can provide useful insights (Peters, 2014). This research involved the intersections and interactions between home, school and ECE therefore drawing on bioecological theory is appropriate. The research was therefore designed to include multiple perspectives and involved a range of participants who were likely to have differing views depending on their prior experiences and background (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). People experience and perceive the physical environment in different ways (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006; Dockett et al., 2014); another reason why it was important to capture a range of perceptions.

Sociocultural theories have also been drawn on in this research. Vygotsky (1978b) argued that psychology is historically shaped and culturally transmitted; that what is known is socially constructed, another reason for including multiple participants. He also posited that there is a "zone of proximal development" (p.86) which represents the difference between what a child can accomplish on their own and what they can do with guidance or in collaboration with adults or more experienced peers. When applied to the transition to school the notion of a zone of proximal development suggests that others with more experience can provide scaffolding to children to support the transition process as was found to be the case in my earlier research (Hayes, 2013). This research therefore looked for ways in which others could provide support for transitioning children and ensure that what was required of children was within their zone of proximal development.

Another sociocultural theorist, Rogoff (2003), contends that children participate in cultural communities and develop within their everyday experiences in these communities. Through a process of guided participation children participate in cultural activities such as schooling. The concept of guided participation emphasises the contributions of individuals, including children, and the community. Children are active participants in shaping cultural activities, and this happens within an environment where the learning opportunities that are afforded depend on community definitions of childhood, ideals of what is valued learning and how this is best acquired, and community values and practices. These cultural beliefs and values are not static. Children and other social actors have agency and in relationship contribute to adaptations, ruptures, opportunities, and possibilities in a constantly evolving historical process (Rogoff, 2003; Rogoff & Mejía-Arauz, 2022). Participants in this study are therefore regarded as active participants in the educational context who have agency. This is why it was important for the research to include child participants and focus on their lived experience and how they participated in the settings in which they live, so that their lives could be understood in context (Rogoff et al., 2018). Children from three different schools were included as participants in the research so that more could be understood about their "lived experience" (Rogoff et al., 2018, p. 5) of navigating the transition to school in different settings.

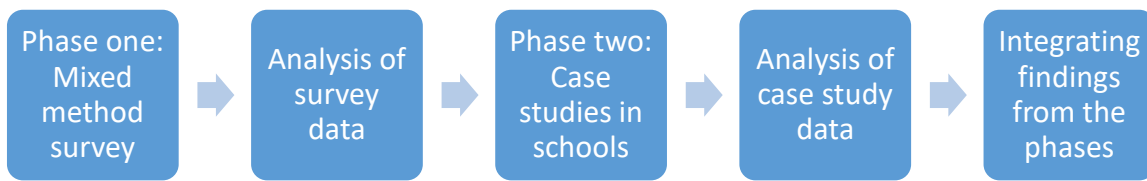
The methods for collecting data were designed to help me understand the experiences of the participants and the meanings they constructed from these experiences. The research design therefore included quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection which gave participants the opportunity to explain their perspectives and an inductive method of analysis was employed whereby meaning emerged from the data and patterns in phenomena could be identified (Rogoff, 2016). The methods used to collect data will now be presented.

3.3 Methodology

This study used a sequential, explanatory, mixed methods approach (Cresswell, 2015; Punch, 2009) to critically analyse the continuities and discontinuities children experience when starting school. Mixed method research collects and analyses both qualitative and quantitative data within a single study (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018; Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The study was based primarily on qualitative data, with the quantitative data playing a supportive role (Punch, 2009). The first phase of data collection gathered both quantitative and qualitative data. A second phase followed where further qualitative data was collected to help illuminate issues raised in the first phase and to provide an in-depth understanding of the research from a range of perspectives (Cresswell, 2012, 2015; Johnson & Christensen, 2012).

In the first phase of the study, a survey was used to collect quantitative data from ECE and NE teachers to find out about and compare their perspectives on the continuities and discontinuities between school and prior-to-school contexts. The survey also collected qualitative data to help explain these perspectives. Following this survey more qualitative data was gathered through multiple cases studies in new entrant classrooms to enable the perspectives and lived experiences of children, parents, and teachers to be explored. The rationale for this approach was to gain a general understanding of the research problem from the quantitative results and analysis, which could be expanded on and refined by the qualitative data (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011). A design which used both qualitative and quantitative methods was chosen for pragmatic reasons which recognise that different types of data collection may be needed to answer different questions (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Punch, 2009). Figure 1 shows the different phases of the study.

Figure 1
Diagram of Research Methods



A mixed method design appreciates that both objective and subjective information is useful to understanding the world (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Using a mixed method design enabled a greater understanding of the topic to be gained than would have resulted from using either a quantitative or qualitative approach alone (Cresswell, 2012; Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018; Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011). By using mixed methods, the strengths of both approaches were utilised to improve the quality of the research (Cresswell, 2015; Johnson & Christensen, 2012). For example, the inclusion of a survey meant that data from a greater number of teachers could be captured than could be achieved through the case studies. A sequential study was chosen so that the qualitative case study data could enrich and deepen the findings from the mixed method survey by exploring the topic in greater depth (Cresswell, 2015) and enable multiple perspectives to be captured.

Quantitative data enables the findings to be more easily generalised (Cresswell, 2015) as they were gathered from a larger sample and included teachers from diverse schools and ECE services, which would not be possible with the use of qualitative case studies alone. The quantitative data also enabled comparisons between the ECE and NE teachers. The qualitative data provided the opportunity to incorporate alternative perspectives and find out about the lived experience (Cohen et al., 2007) of those involved in the transition to school, thus enhancing the quantitative findings (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Using both quantitative and qualitative data contributed to a bigger picture of the issues and allowed meta-inferences to be drawn from the data (Hibberts & Burke Johnson, 2012).

The following discussion details the methods used to collect data during the different phases of the study. A description of how data were analysed follows.

3.3.1 Methods

Phase One: Mixed Method Survey.

The study began with a survey sent out to 367 schools and 433 ECE services in the Bay of Plenty and Waikato regions which were on the Ministry of Education national databases. It was decided not to

include all services in New Zealand to keep the amount of data manageable and results specific to the context in which the case studies would take place. Schools and ECE services were asked to forward the survey to NE and ECE teachers in their organisation. Surveys are useful for gathering opinions, behaviours, or characteristics of a population (Cresswell, 2012; Fraenkel et al., 2015) and as this research sought the views of teachers a survey was appropriate. In this way a large number of teachers in both sectors could be invited to participate from a range of ECE service types and school contexts. It was important to survey teachers from both sectors as they may hold different views on the topic and gathering data from both groups would enable these differences to be analysed (Cresswell, 2012) and implications for each sector to be explored. For similar reasons it was important to attempt to access a range of settings using multiple case studies.

Teachers were asked to complete a survey asking about their perceptions of the continuities and discontinuities children experience when moving from ECE to school, which of these might be significant, and why teachers thought these were important. The survey was conducted using Qualtrics (2017), an online survey tool, as online surveys can provide greater access to a range of participants and there are features which can be utilised during the data analysis (Fraenkel et al., 2015; Minnaar & Heystek, 2013). Online surveys were also chosen as they are less expensive to administer because there is no need to print and post the survey, although they can have a low response rate (Minnaar & Heystek, 2013).

The survey included closed ended questions to enhance consistency of response and for ease of scoring (Fraenkel et al., 2015). Closed ended questions can limit the breadth of response, so open ended questions were included to allow for increased freedom of response (Fraenkel et al., 2015). Rating scales are a useful way to gather data relating to opinions and attitudes (Croasmun & Ostrom, 2011; Minnaar & Heystek, 2013) so the survey included items which utilised a rating scale to gain an understanding of the degree of importance participants attached to aspects of continuity. Themes from the literature review were used to inform the development of the survey questions.

It was important to test the survey to make sure that it was measuring what was intended and that the questions would be easily understood by the participants (Etchegaray & Fischer, 2010; Minnaar & Heystek, 2013). The first draft of the survey was trialled with a group of postgraduate ECE teaching students using a paper format. This trial resulted in some adjustments to the wording of some questions for greater clarity. The survey was then uploaded to Qualtrics before a second online trial was conducted. The link to the survey was sent to colleagues, family members and the supervisors of the project, with some of them asked to answer as ECE teachers and some as NE teachers. In this way each branch of the survey could be trialled. A few typos were identified, and a progress bar was

included on the suggestion of these trial participants. The link to the survey was then sent to schools and ECE services from the chosen Ministry of Education regions. The survey questions are included in Appendix One.

Data from the survey were analysed so a picture could be gained of NE and ECE teachers' perspectives on the discontinuities and continuities children encounter when they start school and the impact of these on children. Preliminary findings from this part of the study informed planning for the subsequent qualitative data collection phase (Cresswell, 2015; Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011). For example, teachers in the survey indicated in quantitative data that one of the most important areas to provide continuity in related to social experience however this did not feature in qualitative survey data. This suggested that the quantitative question may have prompted this response, but social aspects of transition may not have been something teachers consciously considered. As a result, it was decided not to ask questions when collecting case study data which might prompt any aspect of continuity or discontinuity, such as social discontinuity, to be discussed. I also sought to avoid asking leading questions which might prompt participants to talk about things that I thought important or that the survey findings indicated may be significant to avoid influencing the data. I reflected on the preliminary findings and considered which things I needed to know more about to fully meet the research objectives. I wanted to know more about the reasons for teachers' views than was evident from survey data so made sure to prompt teacher participants for the reasons behind their practices. The methods used to collect case study data will now be discussed.

Phase Two: Case Studies.

Following the survey, further data were collected using case studies in three schools, a number recommended by Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2007) as appropriate and sufficient to achieve data saturation for case study research. Case studies provide data from "real people in real situations" and acknowledge the importance of context to behaviour (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 253). Therefore, case studies are useful to research which is informed by a constructionist epistemology and uses a social constructivist theoretical perspective. As this research sought to provide insight into a phenomenon rather than merely describe what happens an instrumental, multicase approach involving cross-case analysis was appropriate (Stake, 2006). Schools were purposefully selected (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007; Stake, 2006) to ensure that each differed in the physical and organisational arrangements for their new entrant classes. This enabled the research to consider and highlight the impact of context on the findings and the implications of this for teacher practice. Another consideration in the selection of schools was location, to keep travel time to the locations manageable and affordable.

Children's Perspectives: Child Led Tours.

Since the release of the United Nations (1989) Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC), which safeguards children's rights to have input into decisions concerning them, there has been a growing body of research which includes children's perspectives (Fargas-Malet et al., 2010; Greig et al., 2013). New Zealand has been a signatory to UNCROC since 1993, so including children's perspectives in this research honours New Zealand's commitment to children's rights. Merewether and Fleet (2014) contend that changing views of the image of the child associated with sociocultural theory have also contributed to the increasing awareness of the importance of including children's perspectives in research concerning children's experiences. They contend that sociocultural theory has drawn attention to the agency of children and the role children play in the construction of knowledge. Adults are no longer viewed as the sole holders of knowledge, children's capabilities are being recognised, and there is a growing interest in considering child voice (Veraska & Sheridan, 2018). Thus, children are positioned as of importance in the research process because they are seen as having ideas and opinions of value to contribute (Merewether & Fleet, 2014) which can help adults understand how children are affected by policies and practices (Bourke et al., 2017). Children's views may differ from those of adults (Greig et al., 2013) and as "different voices may tell different stories", transition research must include children's voices (Petriwskyj, 2014, p. 210). While internationally transition to school research has followed this trend to include children's perspectives (e.g. Dockett & Perry, 2011; Einarsdottir, 2010, 2013; Margetts, 2013) and there is some New Zealand research including children's voices on other aspects of transition (e.g. Belcher, 2006; Hayes, 2013; Mitchell et al., 2016; Peters, 2004a), there is a dearth of recent New Zealand research which captures children's views on the continuities and discontinuities associated with starting school. Therefore, this project sought to include data reflecting children's views.

Children's perspectives on the continuities and discontinuities they experience on school entry were gained through child-led tours around the school and classroom. Pairs of school children were invited to help me learn more about how school differs from ECE by showing me around the school, thus positioning children as having information that is valuable (Merewether & Fleet, 2014). The aim was to include at least six pairs of children from each school to participate in the research. The number of children participating from each school ranged from 12 to 15, with one child tour only involving one child. Before data collection commenced, a trial tour was conducted with my niece and her friend who had both recently begun school to enable me to try out the approach and ensure the equipment to be used was fit for purpose. Following this trial, it was decided to provide a recorder for each child and to organise the recorders so they could be hung on a lanyard around children's necks to ensure

optimum clarity in the recordings and that both children's voices could be heard. Prior to data collection beginning in each case study, I visited the classroom and was introduced to the children. I talked to the children about the study and asked for their help. I shared with them that it was a long time since I started school, so I needed their help to understand how it felt to start school and how school was the same or different from their ECE service. The aim was to position children as the knowledge holders and ensure they understood their views were valued and important.

During these tours, children were asked to take photographs showing things that were different about school. As children showed me around and took photos, I engaged them in conversation about the things that were similar and different from their earlier experiences. The conversations were recorded and transcribed, and notes were taken to ensure that the photographs could be matched with the conversation that was occurring when they were taken. These photographs and conversations formed the data sets for analysis of children's perspectives.

Tours were chosen as the tool for data collection because research with children should seek to use methods which make participation interesting to children (Fargas-Malet et al., 2010) and less traditional methods are needed to enable children's rights to be respected (Veraska & Sheridan, 2018). Merewether and Fleet (2014) have found child-led tours accompanied by photography to be an effective way of gaining children's perspectives. The use of photographs can help build rapport and capture and sustain children's attention (Fargas-Malet et al., 2010) and photographs taken by children have proved to be useful data in previous research involving children (e.g. Einarsdottir, 2010; Sairanen & Kumpulainen, 2014). Accompanying children on the tours and instigating conversation was a strategy employed to allow rich conversation to take place because when children have something to do while talking, conversation is enhanced (Merewether & Fleet, 2014). Tours involved pairs rather than individual children because young children engage more easily in conversation, find it more fun and are more confident when interviewed with others (Greig et al., 2013). This also provided opportunities for children to respond to the thoughts of others, allowing for the social construction of knowledge (Merewether & Fleet, 2014; Vygotsky, 1978b). Thought was given to planning conversational approaches which would lead to rich conversation. For example, Merewether and Fleet (2014) suggest that using phrases such as "tell me about..." as conversation starters can stimulate discussion rather than using questions that might imply there is a right or wrong answer. Strategies were employed to reduce the tendency of any individual child to dominate the pair (Greig et al., 2013) so that both children had the opportunity to voice their thoughts and views.

Parents' Perspectives: Qualitative Interview Questionnaire.

Sociocultural theory has highlighted that adults and children think and understand the world differently (Greig et al., 2013). Therefore, it was important to gain the perspectives of both adults and children in this research. Parents are key adults in the child's bio-ecological system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) and as transitions are socially constructed by all those involved (Peters, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978a), parents' views were of value in this research.

The research aimed to collect data through a questionnaire from at least 12 parents in each case study (See Appendix Two), a sample size recommended by Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2007), although in case study one it was not possible to collect data from this many parents. This was because most parents in this school did not come to the classroom to drop off or collect their child, so it was difficult to make contact with them. The research used volunteer sampling to select participants (Cohen et al., 2007) as it was recognised that not all parents would wish to be involved or have time to participate. It is acknowledged that this may mean that the sample of parents was non-representative of the population. Parents were informed of the research in writing and notified that I wished to capture parents' views and might approach them when they were at school to ask whether they could spare time to fill out a questionnaire with me. When approaching parents, I asked them whether they wished to participate and gained verbal answers to the questionnaire which I filled out with their responses. This enabled any parents with limited literacy skills to be included because a limitation of written questionnaires is that they can be off-putting to respondents who are not able to fill them in easily (Cohen et al., 2007). It was important when approaching parents to be mindful that pick up and drop off times at school can be very busy and parents may have other commitments. After receiving written notification of the project a few parents contacted me asking for the questionnaire to be emailed to them, as they wished to participate, but work commitments meant that they did not come to the classroom. The questionnaire was emailed to any parent who requested this to reduce barriers to participation.

Teachers' Perspectives: Semi Structured Interviews.

Each case study concluded with an interview of the classroom teachers. While teachers' perspectives had previously been captured through the survey, it was important to gain more detailed information about the experiences of teachers in the case study classrooms. Teachers were made aware that their participation was voluntary, and they did not have to be interviewed if they did not wish to. All teachers chose to participate. In two settings the teachers in each classroom were interviewed as a group (Patton, 2015). In the third setting the two teachers elected to be interviewed separately due

to the logistics of finding time to be interviewed together. The teachers' perceptions of the continuities and discontinuities between ECE and the classroom in which they taught were explored during the interviews, as were their views of the impact of continuity and discontinuity. Teachers discussed strategies they thought were important in supporting children in the transition. A flexible outline of possible interview questions was used to ensure these topics were covered during the interviews (see Appendix Three).

Semi-structured interviews with teachers allowed for in depth data to be collected and provided flexibility to probe for more detail and gain greater clarity of the participants' answers when needed (Cohen et al., 2007; Patton, 2015). Validity was enhanced as semi-structured interviews provided the opportunity to check that the meaning of responses was understood (O'Hara et al., 2011). The intention was that where multiple teachers worked in the same classroom a group interview would be conducted unless the teachers chose otherwise, because discussions can develop during group interviews which may yield a wider range of responses (Cohen et al., 2007). During the group interviews care was taken to ensure all participants' views were heard and that one person did not dominate (Cohen et al., 2007; Patton, 2015). Informal conversations can also elicit worthwhile data, so field notes were made following informal conversations with teachers and checked with them to ensure they were comfortable for these conversations to form part of the data sets.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed to ensure accuracy and to allow me to concentrate on the conversation rather than taking extensive notes (T. May, 2011). Two recording devices were used for each interview as a safeguard against the failure of technology. Participants were invited to member check the transcriptions of their interviews to ensure the transcripts accurately reflected their views (Cohen et al., 2007). No transcripts needed amending post member checking.

Data Analysis.

Data analysis occurred sequentially with data from the survey being analysed first and used to help shape tools for the second phase (Onwuegbuzie & Combs, 2011). Quantitative data from the survey were analysed using quantitative methods and qualitative methods of analysis were used with qualitative data collected through both the survey and case studies. As the research was concerned with people's perspectives, an inductive approach to qualitative analysis was chosen to avoid limiting the meanings that emerged to predetermined categories (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). It is acknowledged that true inductive analysis cannot be achieved because the researcher will always be influenced by their own prior knowledge and experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018).

Analysis of Survey Data.

Features of Qualtrics (2017) and IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 26) were used in the analysis of quantitative data from the survey. Firstly, descriptive statistical analysis occurred using data analysis tools embedded in the Qualtrics programme used to collect data. Data could then be analysed, described, and presented (Cohen et al., 2007). This enabled comparisons between the total number of teachers responding in a certain way to a question and the number of teachers from each sector who responded that way. Percentages were also able to be reported and described. Descriptive statistics could not establish whether any apparent differences between how teachers in each sector responded were significant. Relationships between responses to different questions were also unable to be identified. Data was therefore exported to SPSS so that the data could be further interrogated to find out where differences between participant groups were significant and whether answers between different questions correlated. Because the data were non-parametric it was important to use tests appropriate to this type of data such as the Mann Whitney U test and Spearman's Rank Order Correlation (Field, 2018).

Qualitative data from open ended questions were coded into themes within each question using NVivo (QSR International, 2012). This involved reading through the responses and categorising responses that related to similar themes. Later some categories were split into subcategories to reflect different perspectives on the same theme. Sets of data from the ECE teachers were examined separately from those of the NE teachers to enable any differences between the responses to be found. Thematic analysis was chosen as this can result in "a rich and detailed, yet complex account" and is appropriate for research which is embedded in a constructionist paradigm (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78). For the same reason thematic analysis was employed when case study data were analysed.

Analysis of Case Study Data.

Qualitative data from the case studies (transcripts and photographs from child-led tours, parent questionnaires, teacher interviews) were also analysed into themes and categories using an inductive approach (Cohen et al., 2007). While the initial literature review indicated some areas of continuity and discontinuity that earlier research had identified, these were not used as predetermined codes or themes. Rather codes and themes that were present in this data were identified. This minimised the researcher being biased towards confirming the research of others and to ensure that the I remained open to new and different themes being identified (Braun and Clarke 2006). However, it is likely that some unconscious bias may have influenced the data analysis. It was anticipated that the themes

which emerged for each case study could differ, so it was important to analyse data from each case separately.

As data were gathered, notes of impressions gained during the collection of data were kept because tentative analysis often begins with thoughts that occur to the researcher during the data collection phase (Watling et al., 2012). Formal data analysis for each case study began with reading and re-reading the transcripts of what teachers and children said and the questionnaire responses and reviewing the photographs children took to identify information which was relevant to the research objectives. This enabled familiarity with the data to be gained. Notes were made in the margins of transcripts and questionnaires to record thoughts that arose during this reading which helped to identify patterns in the data and keywords against which to code data. Data was then loaded into NVivo (QSR International, 2012) with each transcript or questionnaire loaded separately so that it would be easy to compare data from the different data sources or participant groups by using NVivo's queries function. Photographs taken by children were also loaded into NVivo. Each excerpt of data which related to the research question or objectives was coded using key words identified when reading the data or new keywords when an appropriate code did not already exist. This grouped data which related to common topics. Photographic data was considered alongside the transcript of what was said when the photograph was taken and also coded in this way. Once this initial coding was completed consideration was given to how codes might be related to each other and "combine to form an overarching theme" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.89). For example, codes based on key words such as making friends, losing friends, teachers, older children, siblings were grouped together to form a broad theme relating to people and relationships. Once these overarching themes were identified a somewhat messy stage began where themes and codes were examined, reviewed, and refined. Further examination of the data within each broad theme enabled subthemes to be identified (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Cohen et al., 2007; T. May, 2011) and labelled using phrases or words to attach meaning to the themes (Watling et al., 2012). Some codes were discarded, others were combined and renamed. Data within themes were also re-examined to ensure that all excerpts clearly related to the theme.

Attention was then given to analysing the data within each theme or subtheme. This involved identifying the essence of each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and considering what the data was saying about the participants' views on the continuities and discontinuities children experience when they start school. Notes were made relating to the meanings presented by the data in each theme and consideration given to ensuring the names of themes captured the essence of the theme. Data within and across categories and codes, types of data and participant groups were interrogated to provide

more depth in the analysis. This involved asking questions of the data such as: Whose perspectives are present in this code? Whose are missing? Are all views similar within this code or do some differ? If so, whose and how do they differ? How common/frequent was the code? In doing so it was important to be mindful that although the frequency of codes may indicate significance (Cohen et al., 2007), the significance for the overall group may not capture what was significant for individuals. What is significant for the individual matters too, so it was also important to ask which codes were less frequently occurring and consider contextual impressions of significance from tone and field notes.

Each case study was written up separately as coding was completed so the case could be understood as a whole. This was an important part of the analysis as it helped to identify what was unique about each case (Stake, 2006) and to uncover what was significant to participants in each case. The analysis and write up of each case study into draft chapters was completed before the analysis of the next case study began so that I could focus on understanding each case study on its own. While the same process of familiarising myself with the data, using keywords to establish initial codes, clustering codes into broad themes etcetera was used, consideration was given to using the same names for themes where data was similar. New themes and subthemes were also present in the data so new codes were developed.

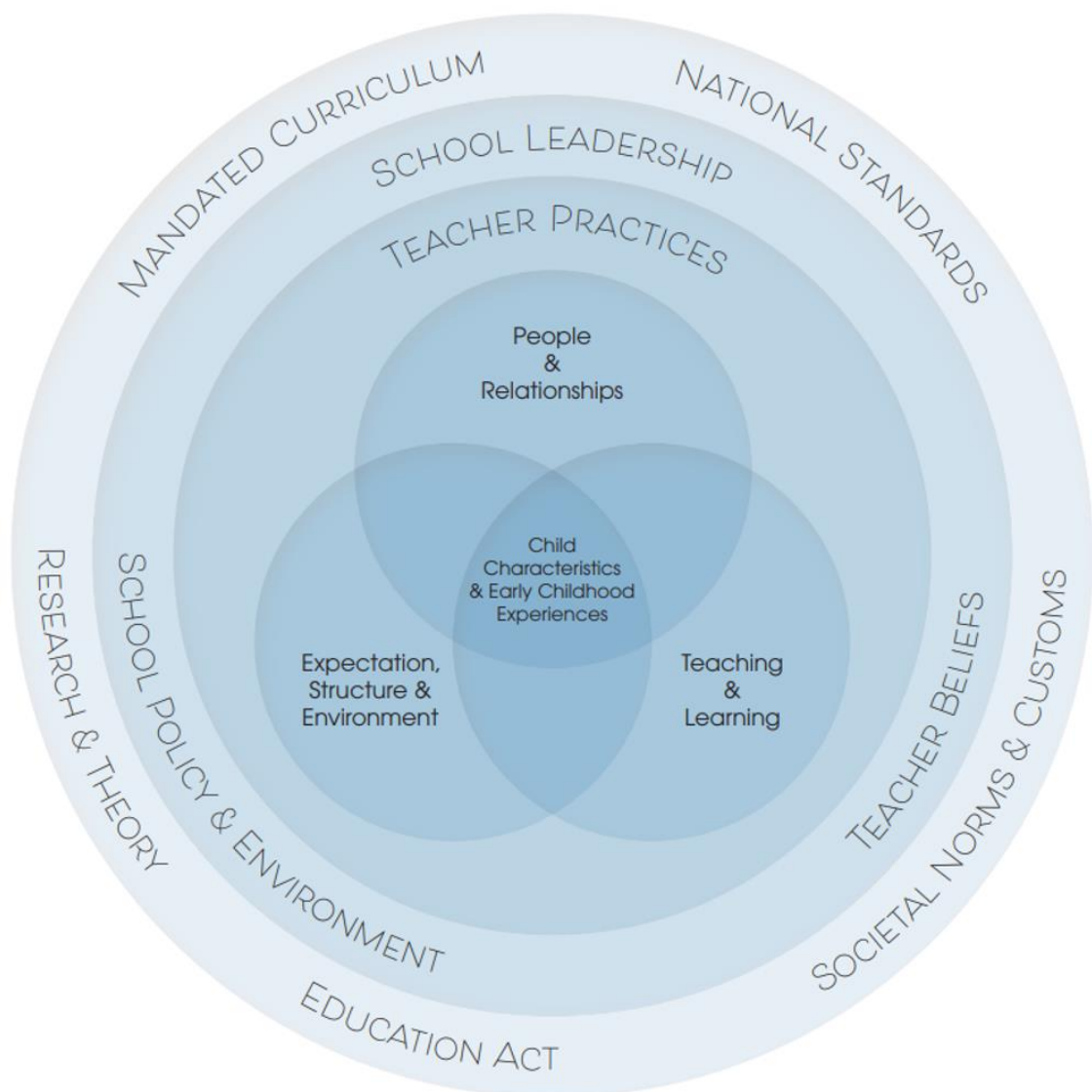
Once each case study had been analysed and understood, attention was given to considering how the cases related to each other (Stake, 2006). It was important to be mindful that it was not only commonalities across cases which were of importance and to also notice where cases differed (Stake, 2006). Queries were run in NVivo to illuminate which themes and subthemes were present in each of the case studies. The chapter drafts were also read and compared to assist with understanding the differences and similarities between cases. In doing this it became clear that the chapters were very repetitive as in some cases the same theme was present in all of the cases. The decision was made to write up the data in chapters based on the broad themes. Themes and subthemes were therefore compared and contrasted across cases to inform the final case study findings chapters. Some revision and renaming of themes occurred at this point to assist in telling the 'story' (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Consideration was given to selecting data excerpts which clearly illustrated the meanings that the narrative encapsulated. Attention then turned to examining how the case study findings related to the survey data.

Analysis of Key Themes Across Both Phases of the Study.

In mixed method research the researcher must integrate findings from the different data collection methods (Cresswell, 2015). Therefore, once survey and case study data had been analysed and the

findings from each phase written up, attention was given to considering how the themes that emerged from the two phases of the research related to each other and in combination answered the overarching research question and met the objectives of the research. A table was constructed showing themes that had emerged from both phases and different participant groups which showed where data intersected and helped inform further discussion of the data. A model was then developed to make sense of where the themes overlapped and how other factors influenced the key themes (Figure 2). In this way data from both phases was integrated to answer the research question

Figure 2
Model of Findings



3.4 Ethical Approval

The ethics of this research proposal were considered and approved by the University of Waikato Ethics Committee (Approval reference FEDU068/17, See Appendix Four).

There were a number of ethical considerations which were addressed when planning and carrying out the research project. Consideration was given to being fair, respectful, trustworthy, and honest (Graue & Walsh, 1998). The rights of participants were respected and potential participants were fully informed of their rights to choose not to participate, withdraw at any time and have confidentiality maintained (Cohen et al., 2007; Graham et al., 2013). Consent was gained from schools in which data collection was to occur (Bourke et al., 2017) and from teacher participants. Although parental consent may be considered to be sufficient (Mackey & Vaealiki, 2011), this research gained the children's informed assent (Bissenden & Gunn, 2017) to any part of the process in which they were involved, thus honouring the intent of article 12 of UNCROC (Graham et al., 2013; United Nations, 1989). The parent/guardian's consent was also gained. During the gathering of data consideration was given to the ongoing nature of assent (Cowie & Khoo, 2017; David et al., 2001) and attention given to aspects of body language, eye contact and patterns of verbal response to ensure that children's assent was ongoing (Bissenden & Gunn, 2017; Graham et al., 2013). When it was judged that children were showing signals that they wanted to conclude the child led tour they were asked whether they wanted to stop and do something else and the tour was ended, if appropriate.

In preparation for the collection of data, ethical dilemmas which could arise were considered, such as the researcher seeing or being told something inappropriate or issues arising from doing research with children such as a child wanting to be involved when the parent had not given consent (Graham et al., 2013; T. May, 2011). The supervisors of the research project were available to be consulted should any ethical dilemma occur. No such dilemmas arose.

3.5 Participants and Settings

3.5.1 Survey Participants

Phase one began with an invitation being extended to teachers from ECE services and schools in the Bay of Plenty region to participate in an online survey. The invitation was later extended to the Waikato region to increase the number of respondents and thus the meaningfulness of the findings and to enable correlations to be identified within the data (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). The Ministry of Education databases of ECE services and schools were used to source email addresses to which the

invitation was sent. The data base was cleansed to remove duplicated email addresses which occurred where one organisation was the contact point for several ECE settings.

Invitations were sent to email addresses linked to 433 ECE services and 367 schools. As the email addresses were for the contact point for the ECE service or school, the covering email requested that the survey invitation be forwarded to teachers within the organisation. This meant that the person responsible for clearing emails had a gate keeping role and it is possible that some invitations were not passed on to teachers. In total 136 people commenced the survey, however, only 130 of these proceeded past the demographic data collection point to answer the first question about the research topic, a response rate of 16.25%. A low response rate is not uncommon in online surveys (Minnaar & Heystek, 2013), however the number of responses were sufficient for statistical analysis (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). As the survey progressed the number of participants decreased indicating that some participants did not answer all survey questions, a common difficulty with online surveys (Cohen et al., 2007).

Participants included ECE and NE teachers from a range of contexts. Not all participants identified their sector or context, likely because some had dropped out of the survey before this question was asked as it was not asked until part way through the survey where the survey branched depending on their reply to this question. This accounts for what looks like discrepancies in the data where the total number of participants does not equal the number of ECE teachers added to the number of NE teachers. From the 107 participants who answered this question about their sector, 29 (27.1%) identified themselves as ECE teachers and 78 (72.9%) as NE teachers. Tables 1 and 2 provide a breakdown of information about the different contexts teachers indicated that they taught in.

Table 1
ECE Teacher Contexts

Context	Kindergarten	Kohanga Reo	Pasifika	Private	Not for Profit	Playcentre	Other
Number of teachers	5	0	2	11	7	1	3
Percentage	17%	0%	6.9%	37.93%	24.14%	3.45%	10.34%

Table 2
NE Teacher Contexts

Context	Traditional	Modern/ Innovative	Kura Kaupapa	Bilingual	Mainstream	Other
Number of teachers	31	35	4	0	21	13
Percentage	29.81%	33.65%	3.85%	0%	20.19%	12.5%

NE teachers were able to select more than one descriptor for this question to enable them, for example, to choose both a modern learning environment and a kura kaupapa. On reflection it may have been better to have a separate question for whether the environment was modern or traditional and force teachers to choose the descriptor which best described their environment and then another question asking whether it was mainstream, bilingual or kura kaupapa, as some teachers selected both traditional and modern. This meant that further analysis to identify whether teachers who taught in different types of contexts held different views was not possible.

All respondents recorded that they had a tertiary qualification of some kind. The qualifications identified ranged from Diploma level to Masters. Almost all respondents were fully registered (88.97%) or provisionally registered (7.35%), but a few were not registered (3.68%). Teachers had a range of service lengths; as shown in Table 3. The greatest proportion of respondents (60.29%) had been teaching for more than 15 years. This could be because the person who forwarded the email invitation sent it to the person responsible for the junior school or the head teacher of the ECE service who is likely to have greater length of teaching service and they responded without forwarding to other teachers.

Table 3
Teacher Length of Service

Length of service	0-5 years	6-10 years	11-15 years	15+ years
Number of participants	14	24	16	82
Percentage of participants	10.29%	17.65%	11.76%	60.29%

Ethnicity included 10.37% (14) Māori, 78.52% (106) Pakeha/NZ European, 2.96 (4) Pacifika, and 8.15% (11) Other. Those who selected other were asked to specify their ethnicity and answers included the

following: both NZ European and Māori, Australian, Swiss, NZ Māori, Irish, New Zealander, Dutch, European, Kiwi and Canadian.

3.5.2 Case Study One Setting and Participants

Case Study One took place in an integrated Catholic primary school with a roll of 160 students in a regional North Island town. The school was rated as decile four; decile being a measure of the extent to which the roll of the school is drawn from low socioeconomic communities (Ministry of Education, 2021c). Schools with lower decile ratings draw more students from lower socioeconomic communities. Data collection took place in term two 2018 and at that time the latest Education Review Office (ERO) report from 2015 showed the school as having the following demographic makeup:

Table 4
Case Study One Demographics

NZ European/ Pakeha	55%
Māori	35%
Asian	3%
Pacific	3%
Indian	2%
Other European	2%

The school had a flexible transition process at the time of data collection, whereby parents/caregivers met the Principal and a teacher prior to entry and had the opportunity to discuss the child's needs. The school encouraged pre-entry visits to the classroom and was flexible in planning these, allowing families to decide how many visits might be needed. Children in this school generally started on or close to their fifth birthday, as is traditional practice in New Zealand.

Children transitioned into a modern learning space shared by new entrant and year two children. The learning space included a large open space with tables of varying height for children and teachers to work at, couches in a library area, iPads, and a small room with computers in it. Children experienced a programme which included both traditional teaching methods including whole class and small group structured teaching, independent work at tables and plenty of opportunities for play. Opportunities for play tended to occur once the children had completed 'learning tasks' (the term used by teachers)

or while teachers were working with other children, rather than as part of the planned learning. Children had access to a range of play equipment including the outdoors sandpit.

Two teachers worked in this space. S1T1 was an experienced junior primary school teacher. S1T2 usually worked with older children in the school but was covering the secondment of the other usual teacher to the acting principal role. The teachers agreed to be interviewed together.

There were 32 children in the class when the data collection took place. Children were very keen to participate in the research, with nearly all the children expressing the desire to 'help Joanne understand what starting school is like'. As only 15 consent forms were received from parents, it was decided to allow all those children to participate rather than to include 12 and exclude only three children. This meant that there were seven paired and one single child led tours. Children ranged in age from five to seven years old. Table 5 records the codes, gender, and age in years for each child participant.

Table 5
Case Study One Child Participant Details

Tour	Child identity	Sex	Age
1	S1C1	female	6
	S1C2	female	5
2	S1C3	female	5
	S1C4	female	7
3	S1C5	female	7
	S1C6	female	5
4	S1C7	female	7
	S1C8	female	6
5	S1C9	female	6
	S1C10	male	5
6	S1C11	female	5
	S1C12	male	5
7	S1C13	male	6
8	S1C14	female	7
	S1 C15	male	6

Five questionnaires were completed by family members. It was found that many parents dropped children off at the school gates and did not come to the classroom, hence the low number of participants. One parent requested the questionnaire via email and emailed her responses back. One questionnaire was conducted with a grandmother who is guardian to a child and another with both parents. The remaining participants were mothers.

3.5.3 Case Study Two Setting and Participants

Case study two was located in a decile seven, Catholic character primary school in a regional town in the North Island. Data was collected in term three 2018 and the latest ERO report from 2015 showed the school roll as including 426 children at that time and recorded the school demographic makeup as:

Table 6
Case Study Two Demographics

NZ European/ Pakeha	43%
Māori	20%
Asian	20%
Pacific	4%
Other	13%

Prior to school entry parents were invited to bring their children on Wednesday mornings to visit the classroom and participate in classroom activity. Multiple visits were encouraged with most children visiting between four and six times. As is customary in New Zealand, most children started school on the day they turned five or the first school day after that date.

New entrants transitioned into a large learning environment which, at the time of data collection, included 96 new entrant children and five teachers. This space had recently been designed and built to enable play-based learning to be part of the curriculum. Children were divided into groups with a 'whānau' teacher for organisational purposes, but mostly were able to move throughout the large area as they chose, unless they were working with a teacher on planned academic learning tasks.

Provocations were set out to stimulate play-based learning while teachers worked with small groups, usually in more structured activities related to literacy or maths. These provocations were resources or activities for which teachers had specific learning outcomes in mind. Children were also able to self-select play materials to engage with. Children could access an outdoor area during class time, which included sand and water play. The classroom was a big open area with breakout rooms which could be used to work with small groups or for specific purposes, such as art or cooking. The children and teachers had moved into this teaching space eight weeks before data collection commenced so

routines and practices were still being refined. Previously the children had been in single cell classrooms with their individual teacher.

Data was collected from 12 parents. Ten questionnaires were conducted verbally and two were received via email due to parent preference.

All five teachers agreed to be interviewed as a group. The team consisted of a group of experienced female teachers, two of whom had recently taught in ECE contexts. Teaching in a large, shared space was a new experience for this group of teachers.

Children were very interested in the study when it was discussed with them. Although children had been told that the first 12 children who returned signed permission forms would be selected to participate, it was decided to extend the number to 14 children. This was because only two extra children returned the signed forms, and it seemed unkind to exclude only two children. Table 7 records the details of child participants.

Table 7
Case Study Two Child Participant Details

Child led tour	Child identity	Sex	Age
1	S2C1	female	5
	S2C2	male	6
2	S2C3	female	5
	S2C4	male	5
3	S2C5	female	6
	S2C6	male	5
4	S2C7	male	5
	S2C8	female	5
5	S2C9	female	5
	S2C10	male	5
6	S2C11	female	5
	S2C12	female	6
7	S2C13	male	6
	S2C14	female	5

3.5.4 Case Study Three Setting and Participants

Data for Case Study Three was collected in term one 2019 from a decile nine primary school situated in a regional North Island town. At the time of data collection, the most recent ERO report from 2016 recorded the school as having 701 children enrolled made up from the following groups:

Table 8
Case Study Three Demographics

NZ European/ Pakeha	64%
Māori	20%
Asian	5%
Pacific	2%
Other	9%

The school had recently instated a form of cohort entry where small groups of children started school together. Prior to their first day children visited the classroom they would be placed in once a week in the group they would start with. The group then started school on the same day.

Data was collected from two adjoining classrooms where two experienced teachers taught 44 children evenly divided between the classrooms. Each teacher planned for their own class and ran their own classroom programme. The classrooms were connected across a cloakroom and when not involved in formal, structured learning experiences children were able to move between the classrooms. They also had access to the outdoor play area for most of the day. Teachers planned for learning both through more traditional structured methods and also during some play experiences. Additionally, resources were provided for children to develop and follow their own interests in play. Both teachers regarded the daily visits to an adjoining “bush” area as an important part of the programme where children were able to explore the environment, play and learn following their own agenda and direction. The teachers also based a portion of their teaching on following the children’s interests.

While a larger number of children verbally expressed interest in helping with the research only 11 permission slips were returned by children. Consent was gained for a twelfth child to participate when his parent agreed to participate in answering the questionnaire and stated she had meant to return the form but thought it was too late. Thus, six child led tours took place in this school.

Table 9
Case Study Three Child Participant Details

Child led tour	Child identity	Sex	Age
1	S3C1	female	5
	S3C2	male	5
2	S3C3	male	5
	S3C4	male	5
3	S3C5	female	5
	S3C6	female	5
4	S3C7	male	5
	S3C8	female	5
5	S3C9	female	5
	S3C10	female	5
6	S3C11	male	5
	S3C12	male	5

The parent questionnaire was completed verbally with 13 parents, exceeding the number that the research aimed to include. This is because when the twelfth parent was answering the questionnaire another parent was present and expressed interest in participating.

Both teachers were experienced teachers. Each teacher was interviewed on her own due to the difficulty of establishing a time which suited all parties for them to be interviewed together.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has described the epistemological and theoretical underpinnings of this research. The methodology and associated data collection and analysis methods have been presented and the

settings and participants for each phase of the study were described. The following chapter presents and discusses the findings from the first phase of the study; the survey of ECE and NE teachers.

Chapter 4

Survey Findings and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

The study commenced with a survey of ECE and NE teachers which aimed to investigate teachers' perceptions of continuity and discontinuity during the transition to school. The findings from this first phase of data collection are presented and discussed in this chapter which presents both quantitative and qualitative data. When considering these findings, it is important to be mindful that in quantitative data rounding of percentages means that at times totals do not add to 100. Additionally, some apparent discrepancies in the data are due to teachers opting to finish the survey before answering the question requiring them to classify themselves by sector. This means that for some questions the total for teachers is greater than the sum of ECE and NE teachers.

The chapter begins by describing participants' perspectives of how important continuity between ECE and school contexts is and why they think it important. Data is then presented about which aspects of practice teachers think are the most important to provide continuity in. Data describing the degree of continuity teachers think there is between curriculum documents is reported before teachers' perception of the degree of similarity and difference between school and ECE contexts is investigated. Strategies teachers employ to provide continuity and to support children who find discontinuity challenging are described before the findings are discussed in relation to the extant literature.

4.2 Findings

4.2.2 The Importance of Continuity

The following section presents data showing that continuity for children during the transition to school was regarded as important by the teachers who participated in this survey. Aspects where continuity was seen to be particularly important included the opportunities provided for social engagement, the approaches to learning and teaching, and the types of learning experiences provided. Teachers thought that having ECE and school contexts that were similar would ease children's transition experience, benefit their wellbeing, and be developmentally appropriate.

The Importance of Supporting Continuity.

All teachers attached importance to supporting continuity for children during the transition to school although there was some variance in how important teachers thought this was, as demonstrated in Table 10. A five-point scale ranging from 'extremely important' to 'not at all important' was used to establish teachers' perspectives of how important it was to promote continuity during this time. More than half of the teachers (58%) indicated that they thought it was extremely important, with a further 34% saying that it was very important. No teachers thought supporting continuity was not at all important and only one teacher said that it was slightly important. ECE teachers appeared to attach more importance to supporting continuity during the transition to school, with 74% indicating that this was extremely important in comparison to 52% of NE teachers. However, when the Mann Whitney U test was conducted comparing the ratings from ECE and NE teachers, the results indicated that the difference between participant groups was not statistically significant ($U=1222, p=0.69$).

Table 10
Teachers' Views on the Importance of Continuity

	% of all teachers	Number of teachers	% ECE teachers	Number of ECE teachers	% NE teachers	Number of NE teachers
Extremely important	58%	59	74%	20	52%	39
Very important	34%	35	19%	5	40%	30
Moderately important	7%	7	7%	2	7%	5
Slightly important	1%	1	0%	0	1%	1
Not at all important	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0
		102		27		75

When asked to give reasons for their response, teachers said there were positive benefits to children's learning and emotional wellbeing when continuity was supported. These two aspects were often linked by teachers who said that if children were not feeling stressed or anxious, they would be able to learn or continue their learning journey. Several teachers commented it was important to provide

continuity because a positive experience when starting school would be beneficial to children's attitudes towards future transitions. Continuity was seen by others to ease the transition. These perspectives are represented in the following quotes from survey data:

"Children must feel a sense of belonging and trust in an environment and with the people around them before they are able to learn. By throwing a child into a new situation that is foreign to them, it will take them more time to settle and feel comfortable" (ECE Teacher).

"...brain research tells us stressed children do not learn. We do not want our five-year-olds to be stressed out by an unfamiliar environment" (NE teacher).

"If they and their whānau/family transition well and they feel that they belong and are comfortable by the time they start, then school is just a continuation of their exciting learning journey" (NE teacher).

"If support is given during transition time, it will be a positive experience for children, their families, and the teachers. This supports a mindset that changes are positive, and if you can plan these, they are not so scary, they are exciting and special" (ECE teacher).

"It makes the transition easier, especially for children with learning delays or vulnerable children" (NE teacher).

Supporting continuity was thought to impact on children's sense of belonging and ability to learn at school. Data revealed that by supporting continuity teachers thought that they were serving the best interests of children and creating a positive environment for them to learn in. One teacher explained:

"We want NE to love school, love learning, love their teacher and have fun with their friends just like in an ECE setting" (NE teacher).

The priority for teachers from both sectors was to ensure that children experienced a transition where there was sufficient continuity to support a positive transition and reduce disruption to the child's learning journey.

Teachers' Opinions About How Similar or Different the Contexts Should Be.

Teachers were asked to rate how similar or different they thought ECE and school contexts should be on a scale ranging from very similar to very different. The majority of teachers (84%) responded that the contexts should be somewhat similar, similar or very similar (Table 11). This contrasted to 16% of respondents who answered that contexts should be somewhat different, different, or very different.

Only two teachers said that the contexts should be very different indicating that a vast majority of teachers attach importance to having some degree of similarity between contexts. When results were separated by sector, similar results were found for ECE and NE teachers. A Mann Whitney U test confirmed that there was no statistically significant difference between the responses of ECE and NE teacher groups ($U=1033.5, p=0.478$).

Table 11
Teachers' Views on How Different or Similar School and ECE Contexts Should Be

	% of all teachers		Number of teachers	% ECE teachers		Number of ECE teachers	% NE teachers		Number of NE teachers
Very different	2%	16%	2	3.5%	14%	1	1.5%	13%	1
Different	2%		2	3.5%		1	1.5%		1
Somewhat different	12%		14	7%		2	10%		8
Somewhat similar	27%	84%	32	21%	86%	6	32%	87%	25
Similar	28%		33	31%		9	27%		21
Very similar	29%		34	34%		10	28%		22
Total			117			29			78

Spearman's rho was used to establish whether teacher responses to this question correlated to the responses given when they were asked how important it was to support continuity. Unsurprisingly, results showed that there was a significant relationship ($r= -.271, p= .006$). Teachers who ranked supporting continuity as more important were more likely to indicate that the contexts should be more similar. This result indicates a consistency of response across questions.

Quantitative data showed that only two teachers thought the contexts should be very different (Table 11). One of these teachers justified her opinion saying that there are different expectations of children in the contexts because:

"...ECE expect key competencies, new entrants expect fine motor skill... form letters of name and count, know some alphabet letters..." (NE teacher).

The other, an ECE teacher, commented that the difference in structural aspects such as teacher ratios and timetables meant that it was not possible to provide similarity. These responses may indicate that these teachers think that different environments are necessary because of the different expectations

and arrangements of school life, rather than that they think it is best for children. This is supported by other data which reveals a perception from some NE teachers that there were constraints on their ability to promote continuity. For instance, as the following quote suggests, some teachers indicated that the requirements of testing and meeting standards for literacy and numeracy meant that school had to be different.

“We do not concentrate on learning through play as much as we should because we often feel we should report per National Standards” (NE teacher).

The impact of expectations for children’s progression in academic domains impacted on this teacher’s freedom to provide play-based learning which might provide more continuity with children’s ECE experiences. The need to report against *National Standards* (Ministry of Education, 2010b) and ensure that children met these inhibited this.

I was interested to see whether length of service was correlated to responses, which might help understand whether views differed depending on how experienced a teacher was or when they may have trained. Some differences were found by length of service (Table 12), but there did not appear to be any pattern to responses as teachers’ length of service increased. The numbers in some groups were small so a Kruskal Wallis test was performed to see whether the differences found were significant. The differences were not found to be significant ($p= .077$). Likewise, statistically significant differences were not found by teacher ethnicity ($p= .344$).

Table 12
Teachers’ Views on How Different or Similar Contexts Should be by Length of Service

	0-5 years service		6-10 years service		11-15 years service		15+ years service	
Very different	0%	9%	0%	25%	0%	0%	3%	17%
Different	0%		0%		0%		3%	
Somewhat different	9%		25%		0%		11%	
Somewhat similar	18%	91%	5%	75%	15%	100%	37%	84%
Similar	55%		30%		38%		22%	
Very similar	18%		40%		46%		25%	
Total number of teachers	11		20		13		73	

Why is Continuity Important?

To further explore teachers' opinions about how different the contexts should be, qualitative data was collected and analysed thematically. Four themes emerged from this data and were present in responses from both ECE and NE teachers: easing the transition process; children's developmental needs; play; and wellbeing.

The most common reason teachers from both sectors gave for their answers related to easing the transition experience for children, making it less sudden and easier to navigate. It was acknowledged by some teachers that similarity between contexts would make the change more gradual and that children would have time to adjust.

"If the children are familiar with aspects of the environment because it reflects the environment they come from then it should in theory make the move to school less daunting" (NE teacher).

"It will help with transition and also continuity of learning... Eases children into structured learning" (ECE teacher).

Teachers also thought that continuity between contexts was supportive of children's development. Some teachers noted that there is only one day difference between being in ECE and starting school so the developmental needs of the children would not significantly differ. A NE teacher said that increasing "...age is not a reason to change their learning environment. Developmentally their needs need to be met." Teachers said that having similar environments would be more developmentally appropriate and align with brain development. Some teachers from both sectors commented that brain research shows children may not be ready for formal learning until around the age of seven. An ECE teacher followed her statement about this by questioning "*Why are we demanding more of them than they are developmentally able to give?*", arguably reflecting a maturational view of learning and development.

A discourse about the value of play to children's learning during the transition to school was present with responses from both sectors advocating for play-based learning in NE classrooms. This was often connected to opinions about the types of experience that are developmentally appropriate for five-year-olds as the following responses show:

"I believe children should be given free play opportunities that continue to support learning without so much focus on learning to read and write. I think this is inappropriate for most children developmentally" (ECE teacher).

“(the) focus is on the holistic development of the child in Te Whāriki, nothing changes from four years 11 months 29 days ... the five-year-old still requires learning through play” (NE teacher).

These kinds of statements may indicate that for some teachers including play in the school curriculum gives children time to be ready for a different type of learning experience. Others said that play could be *“a connecting factor” (NE teacher)* during the transition or that as children get used to the school environment *“learning can gradually become more structured” (NE teacher)*.

It was seen to be in children’s best interests for contexts to have some similarity. Aspects of children’s wellbeing such as their happiness and comfort were mentioned by teachers as being enhanced when contexts were similar. Several teachers commented that it would be less stressful for children to be in an environment which was familiar to them as this quote shows:

“Changing from ECE to school can cause enough anxiety in children, to then have to deal with a different approach... the change can be overwhelming” (ECE teacher).

Although teachers were advocating for contexts to be similar, they did not seem to be suggesting that the contexts should replicate each other. Some degree of difference was seen to be desirable to enable ongoing learning and development as the following data illustrates.

“The student is moving into a time when their brain development and educational needs are changing requiring changes in how learning happens. There needs to be a link between ECE and NE but there is also the need for children who have been frustrated by the learning in ECE to grow” (NE teacher).

Some teachers signalled that the individual needs of children for continuity may differ, and adaptations should be made to suit the child. One teacher explained:

“There is no “magic switch” that happens as children turn five and start school. Schools must cater for the needs of the child arriving in their classes, rather than the child needing to ‘adapt’ or ‘grow up’ just because they’ve started school” (NE teacher).

This teacher recognised that each child would have different needs and thus the degree of continuity required may differ. The school and teacher should be ready to respond to the needs of the child during this time rather than expect the child to be ready for school.

Teachers were asked to rate how strongly they thought the degree of continuity was related to a range of outcomes for children (Table 13). More than half the teachers thought that the degree of continuity

was moderately or strongly related to all outcomes they were asked to rate. Almost 70% of teachers felt that the degree of continuity was strongly related to emotional outcomes for children. The majority of teachers (65%) said it strongly impacted on the time taken for a child to settle at school, while 62% agreed that the degree of continuity was strongly related to social outcomes for children. Fewer teachers said the relationship between academic achievement in the first or later years of school and how much continuity was provided was strong, but most teachers thought there was some relationship.

Table 13
Teachers' Views on the Relationship Between Continuity and Outcomes for Children

	Strongly related		Moderately related		Slightly related		Not at all related		Total number of teachers
	% of teachers	Number of teachers	% of teachers	Number of teachers	% of teachers	Number of teachers	% of teachers	Number of teachers	
The time it takes for a child to become settled	65%	66	26%	26	8%	8	1%	1	101
Academic achievement in the first year	43%	43	39%	39	15%	15	4%	4	101
Academic achievement during the primary years	34%	34	40%	40	21%	21	6%	6	101
Social outcomes for children	62%	63	31%	31	6%	6	1%	1	101
Emotional outcomes for children	69%	70	24%	24	6%	6	1%	1	101

The survey asked teachers what other impacts the degree of continuity might have. The strongest theme that emerged from this data was related to whānau/family. Teachers thought that the degree of continuity impacted on the ongoing engagement of whānau with the school and the child's education. Some commented that whānau were also experiencing a transition and continuity was important in helping them to transition successfully. How whānau experienced transition was linked by several teachers to ongoing whānau engagement and to how children experienced the transition as the following comment demonstrates:

“How a whānau feels/is received by the new New Entrant environment impacts directly on the tamaiti and their ability to achieve/succeed” (ECE teacher).

Some teachers associated the degree of continuity with children’s ongoing perceptions of themselves, particularly their perception of themselves as learners. For one NE teacher, this was connected to possible long-term consequences such as youth suicide. In the following quote a teacher explains the potential impact on children’s self-image:

“Children develop perceptions of themselves, either positive or negative. To see themselves as someone who is confident and knows what to do or has the courage to try something new without fear of failure, sets them up as feeling positive about themselves as school kids. If they lose this on beginning school, it is so difficult to reclaim a positive view of themselves as learners” (ECE teacher).

Teachers in this study indicated that continuity is important to children during the transition to school for a range of reasons related to children’s wellbeing, development, and social and emotional outcomes. However, it is important to understand which aspects of continuity may be most significant so that those involved in planning transitions can consider where to focus attention. The following section presents teachers’ perspectives on the aspects of continuity which are most important.

Which Aspects of Continuity are Most Important?

Teachers were asked to rate the importance of providing continuity in several aspects during the transition to school. The aspects included in this survey question were drawn from themes that had been identified in the literature review. Continuity in opportunities for social engagement was the aspect rated most frequently by teachers as being extremely important to provide to new entrants (Table 14). Continuity in this aspect was rated by 86% of all teachers as extremely important or very important and only one teacher felt this was not at all important. Continuity in the approaches to learning and teaching and the types of learning experiences provided were also seen as highly desirable, as was continuity of rules and routines, with each of these three aspects being rated by over 70% of teachers as extremely important or very important. All aspects listed were seen as important with over 90% of respondents rating continuity in all aspects as being of some degree of importance.

Table 14
Teachers' Views on the Importance of Continuity in Different Aspects of Schooling

	Extremely important		Very important		Moderately important		Slightly important		Not at all important	
	% of teachers	Number of teachers	% of teachers	Number of teachers	% of teachers	Number of teachers	% of teachers	Number of teachers	% of teachers	Number of teachers
The physical environment	21%	21	27%	28	35%	36	14%	14	3%	3
The playground	17%	17	27 %	28	34%	35	15%	15	7%	7
Approaches to learning and teaching	32%	33	45 %	46	21%	21	1%	1	1%	1
Types of learning experiences	30%	31	45%	46	21%	21	3%	3	1%	1
Assessment practices	22%	22	29 %	30	32%	33	13%	13	4%	4
Opportunities for social engagement	50%	51	36%	37	10%	10	3%	3	1%	1
Structure of the day	20%	20	39 %	40	31 %	32	8%	8	2%	2
Rules and routines	31%	32	40%	41	23%	23	4%	4	2%	2

When Mann Whitney U tests were performed to establish whether there were statistically significant differences between the responses of ECE and NE teachers it was found that there were some differences that were significant. Significantly different responses were found in the following categories: approaches to teaching and learning ($U= 1357.500, p=.005$); types of learning experiences ($U=1398.500, p=.002$); and assessment practices ($U=1396.500, p=.003$). ECE teachers rated each of these practices more highly than NE teachers. While there are differences in the degree of importance teachers from the different sectors attribute to these factors, both groups do think continuity is important in these practices. The average rating in all three of these aspects was extremely important for ECE teachers and very important for NE teachers.

Qualitative questions were also asked to gain insights into why providing continuity in these areas was thought to be important. Teachers were asked what the most significant differences were for children and why they thought these differences were significant. While teachers tended to explain more about

what the difference was, rather than expanding on why the difference might be significant, there were some interesting points raised in the data.

The most common theme in qualitative data for teachers from both settings related to the change in routines and degree of structure of the setting, although teachers did not explain why this might be of significance for children. This is of interest and somewhat surprising given that quantitative data showed that ensuring continuity in opportunities for social engagement was most frequently rated as extremely important by all teachers and that social continuity did not feature in the qualitative data at all. It is possible that if social interaction had not been included in the quantitative question design, then social discontinuity may not have featured in teacher responses as an area that would benefit from continuity. This may indicate that teachers from both sectors do not consciously consider social continuity as important for children in transition.

Several teachers said that ECE routines were more flexible and contrasted to the more structured routines of the school contexts, where bells dictated a timetable to the day. The increased structure of the school environment was linked by some teachers to the lower teacher to child ratio, as one explained:

“Child to teacher ratios are bigger in New Entrant school so classes need routines and may have a more fixed timetable imposed on them” (NE teacher).

Teachers from both sectors commented that in school the demands of the timetable meant that there was less choice for children; that rather than being able to engage in free play where they choose what they want to do and when, children *“will be required to join in” (NE teacher)* at school. An ECE teacher described their perception of the change from their ECE service this way:

“We have a free play philosophy. The tamariki are free to follow their own interests for the majority of the day. In the middle of the day we have a mat time... and then serve and eat hot lunch. At school, the majority of the day is routine after routine centred around mat times, all teacher (government) led learning. It has to be structured or they won't get through the curriculum as they have 25 kids to one teacher where we would have three kaiako for that number” (ECE teacher).

The demands of *National Standards* (Ministry of Education, 2010b) were mentioned by several teachers, including one ECE teacher, as a reason why schools had greater structure than ECE contexts. The need to concentrate on teaching literacy and numeracy in schools was mentioned by several other teachers and it is possible their response may also have been influenced by the need to report against

National Standards which was still a requirement when this data was collected. Engagement in literacy and numeracy was seen by many NE teachers as a significant difference for children starting school. This was not specifically mentioned by ECE teachers, although one ECE teacher did comment that the school focus was on academic outcomes rather than *“qualities such as perseverance and patience.”*

Teachers from both sectors said that the difference in the type of learning experiences children were engaged in was of significance for children. The school environment was seen to include more formal learning experiences. Many teachers from both contexts mentioned that children were likely to go from a programme which was play-based and more active, to a programme where they were expected to engage in learning experiences which involved a lot of sitting still. Some NE teachers explained that while they included play in their classroom programmes, there were also formal learning and teaching experiences which may be unfamiliar to children.

“The main difference... is the amount of play in learning. I aim to provide an environment where children new to school life are able to develop cooperation, social, oral and physical development skills through their play. Unfortunately, not all school pedagogy or environment (resourcing) support this. National Standards is also a barrier for play as it is a constant reminder of what children need to be doing in order to meet standard - even if they are not ready for it” (NE teacher).

Data revealed a perception from ECE teachers that children went from an environment where learning and teaching was child led, to one where the learning experiences were teacher led. Some of these teachers explained that this change was of significance because they felt that a child led programme increased children’s motivation and engagement in learning, implying that motivation decreased within a teacher led programme.

Assessment was another area of difference which teachers thought was of significance to transitioning children, although teachers did not specify why this was of significance. Teachers in both sectors noted that the ways in which children’s learning was assessed differed. One teacher described the difference, saying that in ECE contexts:

“Assessment is based on building on what a child already knows and can do, rather than a standard that says ‘at this age they should be doing this’” (ECE teacher).

Data showed some NE teachers shared this view as they noted that assessment at school was against standards and progressions.

Section Summary.

Both ECE and NE teachers in this study viewed continuity as important to new entrants, although findings indicate that change can also be important. Teachers said that how much continuity children encounter was related to social and emotional outcomes for children, as well as how easily a child settled into the new context. Fewer teachers thought that continuity was strongly related to children's academic outcomes. Few significant differences were found between the views of ECE and NE teachers.

The following findings address teachers' perceptions of the degree of continuity there is between sectors. Firstly, teachers' views about the extent to which the curriculum documents used by the different sectors are similar are examined, before teachers' perspectives of the degree of similarity or difference between ECE and school contexts are reported.

4.4.3 Teachers' Perceptions of the Degree of Continuity

Curriculum Continuity.

Schools and ECE services in New Zealand are required to base their programmes on mandated curriculum documents. *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017) must be used in licensed ECE services and may be used in the first year of schooling. Curriculum documents for schools include the *New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) or *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa* (Ministry of Education, 2008b) depending on whether the school is English or Māori medium.

Teachers were asked to rate the degree of similarity between the documents. Firstly, teachers were asked to compare *Te Whāriki* with the *New Zealand Curriculum* using a rating scale ranging from very different to very similar (Table 15). Teachers were also able to respond that they did not know; four NE teachers responded in this way. Presumably, they were familiar with the curriculum used in their own sector so this likely indicates that they were unfamiliar with, or did not have sufficient knowledge of, *Te Whāriki* to answer the question. Teachers who indicated they did not know were removed from the data to get a clearer picture of responses from those who felt able to rate the similarity.

Results show that 67% of all teachers assessed the curriculum documents as somewhat different, different, or very different, with different being the most common response. Only two teachers thought the documents were very similar. Results did not vary greatly between sectors and a Mann Whitney U test showed any difference was not significant ($U=1191.500$, $p=.664$).

Table 15
Teachers' Views on the Similarity Between Te Whāriki and the New Zealand Curriculum

	% of all teachers		Number of teachers	% ECE teachers		Number of ECE teachers	% NE teachers		Number of NE teachers
Very different	13%	67%	14	10%	62%	3	14%	68%	10
Different	30%		32	38%		11	26%		19
Somewhat different	24%		26	14%		4	28%		21
Somewhat similar	21%	33%	23	24 %	37%	7	20%	32%	15
Similar	10%		11	10%		3	11%		8
Very similar	2%		2	3%		1	1%		1
			108			29			74

Teachers were given the opportunity to add comments about the degree of similarity between these curriculum documents. These data revealed that, although quantitative data showed teachers saw more difference than similarity between the documents, several teachers could see a link between the documents through the key competencies of the *New Zealand Curriculum*. Those teachers who articulated that the documents could be linked through the key competencies held different views about which aspects of *Te Whāriki* these competencies aligned with. Some said that the competencies aligned with *Te Whāriki's* strands, while others thought there was alignment with the principles or dispositions. It was clear that the key competencies were seen by some teachers as creating continuity between the curriculum documents of the two sectors. One teacher observed that:

The key competencies are a bridge between the two documents. This is crucial as these are the lifelong learning skills valued in both sectors. If we can agree as to what this looks like and sounds like we have excellent foundations that link the two curriculums. Schools need to read TW [Te Whāriki], it is valuable in developing our pathways to school, building onto learning not starting again (NE teacher).

This teacher points out that the key competencies have the potential to provide some continuity between the contexts. However, unless NE teachers are familiar with the ECE curriculum, they may be unable to connect with the prior learning experiences of children and create continuous learning pathways.

Interestingly, some NE teachers commented that they had only recently engaged with learning about the ECE curriculum and that this had been useful to them. It is possible that for some teachers a shift toward play-based learning may have prompted them to become familiar with *Te Whāriki*, as the following comment indicates.

“Until recently (I am starting to look at PBL [play-based learning]) I haven’t ever considered looking at Te Whāriki” (NE teacher).

A few teachers commented on the difference saying that the *New Zealand Curriculum* concentrates on academic outcomes in contrast to a focus on holistic learning in *Te Whāriki*. A teacher connected this contrast to *National Standards*, writing that:

“Te Whāriki promotes socially mediated learning led by the child’s interests. The NZC is outcomes focused driven by National Standards” (ECE Teacher)

As *The New Zealand Curriculum* was developed and mandated before *National Standards* it is likely that what this teacher is noticing is the influence of the standards on the way the school curriculum is delivered and assessed, rather than the curriculum document itself.

Fewer teachers were able to contribute to data about the similarity or difference between *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa* and *Te Whāriki*. Almost half of teachers surveyed (45%) said “don’t know” when asked about the degree of similarity between the two documents. This is possibly because they did not teach in a Māori medium school and so were not required to use *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa*, or perhaps had not looked at this document in their initial teacher education programme, or for ECE teachers, did not have children transitioning to Māori medium schools and therefore had not engaged with it.

Table 16 shows that of teachers who were able to answer this question, 56% rated the documents as somewhat different, different, or very different, while 44% rated them as somewhat similar, similar or very similar. It would appear that teachers felt that *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa* is more similar to *Te Whāriki* than the *New Zealand Curriculum*. This could be because *Te Whāriki* is a bicultural curriculum, and that this creates greater similarity. Again, there were no significant differences between the responses made by the different sectors ($U=1183.000$ $p=.701$).

Table 16
Teachers' Views on the Similarity Between Te Marautanga o Aotearoa and Te Whāriki

	% of all teachers		Number of teachers	% ECE teachers		Number of ECE teachers	% NE teachers		Number of NE teachers
Very different	7%	56%	4	13%	50%	2	5%	59%	2
Different	24%		14	31%		5	21%		9
Somewhat different	25%		15	6%		1	33%		14
Somewhat similar	31%	44%	18	50%	50%	8	23%	42%	10
Similar	10%		6	0%		0	14%		6
Very similar	3%		2	0%		0	5%		2
			59			16			43

Few teachers made comments following their assessment of the degree of similarity between *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa* and *Te Whāriki*. The five comments made were similar to the comments made about the links between *Te Whāriki* and the *New Zealand Curriculum*. Teachers said that *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa* was less holistic in its approach than *Te Whāriki*, more focused on academic outcomes and that the links between documents depended on the school and ECE service making those links. One NE teacher detailed how the revised ECE curriculum has prompted their school to consider “*adapting and changing our approach... to be much more child centred learning*”.

At the time data were collected *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) had been revised and a new version, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017) had just been released. When considering the results reported here it is important to be mindful that the sectors were in the early stages of adopting the 2017 version. Clearly some teachers had not yet engaged with the revised curriculum as comments included “*Te Whāriki needs to be reviewed*” (NE teacher) and “*it has been five years since I looked at Te Whāriki....*” (NE teacher), while others mentioned “*the new updated Te Whāriki*” (ECE teacher). It is therefore impossible to tell which version teachers are basing their views on.

Whichever version of *Te Whāriki* teachers were referring to, it was recognised by some teachers that the degree to which links between the curriculums are enacted or present in practice depends on choices made by teachers, centres, and schools. For example, a teacher explained that:

“Te Whāriki can be used in New Entrant classes, so if teachers are open and reflective, there is the potential for continuity of learning... as children transition into schools. This is up to the individual school, however” (NE teacher).

Although there are some ways the school and ECE curriculums align and some teachers are aware of this alignment, teachers do not perceive the documents to be very similar. There are also teachers who have no knowledge of the curriculum document used in the other sector. Additionally, although there is potential for the links between documents to support continuity of learning, the extent to which this happens is dependent on the actions of teachers and the contexts in which they practice. The next section will explore how similar or different teachers perceive ECE and school contexts to be.

Teacher Perceptions of the Similarity and Difference Between Contexts.

School and ECE contexts are perceived by most teachers as having a greater degree of difference than similarity New Zealand wide (Table 17). This is interesting when compared to the earlier finding that showed that teachers thought the contexts should be more similar than they are different (Section 4.2.2) signalling a disconnect between teachers' espoused beliefs and their practice. When asked to rate the similarity and difference between the contexts on a six-point scale, 77% of all teachers felt the contexts were somewhat different, different, or very different. This compares to 86% of ECE teachers and 77% of NE teachers. A quarter of participants (25%) expressed the view that the contexts were very different. It is interesting to note that no ECE teachers judged the contexts to be similar or very similar, while some NE teachers (11%) did think the contexts were similar or very similar. However, a Mann Whitney U test shows there is no statistically significant difference between the responses of ECE and NE teachers ($U=1225.500, p=.495$) so this difference may not be meaningful.

Table 17
Teachers' Perceptions of Similarity or Difference Between ECE and School Contexts New Zealand Wide

	% of all teachers	Number of teachers	% ECE teachers	Number of ECE teachers	% NE teachers	Number of NE teachers
Very different	25%	32	24%	7	27%	21
Different	27%	35	34%	10	24%	19
Somewhat different	25%	32	28%	8	26%	20
Somewhat similar	16%	21	14%	4	12%	9
Similar	5%	6	0%	0	6%	5
Very similar	3%	4	0%	0	5%	4
Total		130		29		78

When NE teachers were asked to rate the degree of similarity between their own school context and ECE contexts the results were quite different from their views of the situation New Zealand wide. Just over half of the teachers (53%) thought their own classroom was very different, different, or somewhat different from prior-to-school contexts. This compares to 77% of NE teachers who gave these ratings to the difference New Zealand wide, indicating that these teachers were more likely to think their own school context was more similar to ECE than other schools in New Zealand were.

ECE teachers were also more likely to rate their own context as more similar to a new entrant classroom than they rated the similarity between contexts New Zealand wide. The difference was not so marked as with the NE teachers, with 76% of ECE teachers thinking their own context was very different, different, or somewhat different compared to the 86% who gave these ratings to the difference across New Zealand

The data suggests that NE teachers' beliefs about the value of continuity influence their practice or their intended practice. A Spearman's rho test showed there was a correlation between how similar NE teachers thought the contexts should be and how similar to ECE contexts they thought their own classroom was ($r=.328, p=.004$). NE teachers who said the contexts should be more similar were more likely to say their own classroom was more similar. It is likely that teachers who rated the importance of continuity highly took steps to provide a greater degree of continuity for children transitioning to school.

In contrast there was no significant relationship between how similar or different ECE teachers think the contexts should be and how similar they rate their own context when the Spearman's rho was calculated ($r=.003$, $p=.987$). It appears that beliefs about the importance of continuity may not influence the degree of continuity ECE teachers provide.

Teachers were asked to rate the degree of similarity or difference of a range of aspects of ECE and school life in New Zealand (Table 18). The majority of teachers think that all aspects surveyed are somewhat different/different/very different. More than half of teachers think that assessment practices (61%) and the structure of the day (56%) are very different in schools than they are in ECE contexts. Opinions about the nature of the opportunities for social engagement were most divided with 60% of teachers thinking they were somewhat different/different/very different and 39% thinking they were somewhat similar/similar/very similar. The views of the different sectors were quite similar. The only statistically significant difference found using a Mann Whitney U test were in opinions about how different or similar the physical environment is. ECE teachers were more likely to rate this as very different and NE teachers as different ($U=1423.000$, $p=.035$).

Table 18
Teachers' Views on the Degree of Similarity or Difference of Aspects of ECE and School

	Very different		Different		Somewhat different		Somewhat similar		Similar		Very Similar	
	% of teachers	Number of teachers	% of teachers	Number of teachers	% of teachers	Number of teachers	% of teachers	Number of teachers	% of teachers	Number of teachers	% of teachers	Number of teachers
The physical environment	32%	37	26%	30	25%	29	12%	14	5%	6	1%	1
Approaches to learning	27%	32	32%	38	24%	28	13%	15	3%	3	1%	1
Types of learning experiences	20%	23	34%	40	31%	36	13%	15	1%	1	2%	2
Assessment practices	61%	71	21%	25	12%	14	4%	5	2%	2	0%	0
Opportunities for social engagement	12%	14	21%	25	27%	32	25%	29	9%	11	5%	6
Structure of the day	56%	66	23%	27	15%	18	5%	6	0%	0	0%	0
Rules and routines	32%	38	30%	35	19%	22	15%	17	4%	5	0%	0

Section Summary.

Teachers in this study indicated that the curriculum documents of the school and ECE sectors have few similarities. It is therefore unsurprising that they also said that the contexts of ECE and school are more different than they are similar, as mandated curriculum influences the environment, teaching approaches and learning experiences teachers provide, as well as the structures, rules, and routines they put in place to support the pedagogies employed. However, some teachers said that the degree to which continuity between curriculum documents could be realised was dependant on the actions of teachers. The following section examines the practices teachers said they used to promote continuity for children transitioning to school and supportive measures they take to assist children who find adjusting to the changes difficult.

4.2.4 Teacher Practices

How Teachers Support Continuity.

Teachers were asked an open-ended question to generate data about the practices they employed to increase continuity for children during the transition to school. Table 19 records the categories that resulted from this data and examples of practices teachers gave. Some of the strategies that were mentioned did not directly increase or support continuity, but provided opportunities for relationship building and increased familiarity with the school context and what happens at school.

Table 19
Transition Practices

Category	Number of teachers	Specific practices listed by teachers
Visits to school	54	School visits by child and parent ECE teacher attending visits ECE services visit schools School library visits by ECE Children visit classroom they will be in/teachers they will have Taking photos during visits to take back to ECE or share online ECE teachers invited to visit with children

		Children's visits include play/lunch time
Visits to ECE	27	<p>NE class or group visits to ECE service</p> <p>NE teachers or Deputy Principal visit ECE centre to meet children/parents</p> <p>NE teachers visit ECE to understand what ECE is like</p> <p>NE children visit ECE to read and share what school is like</p> <p>NE teachers attending ECE parent information evening</p> <p>NE teachers visiting ECE centres of high needs children.</p>
Relationships between contexts	21	<p>ECE and NE teachers attend transition to school meetings</p> <p>Relationships with feeder schools and NE Teachers developed by ECE</p> <p>Termly meetings between NE and ECE teachers to share knowledge about play-based learning</p> <p>Cluster meetings between ECE and NE teachers</p> <p>Inviting ECE teachers to information evening at school to discuss programme</p> <p>Schools holding evenings for ECE staff to learn how children are taught literacy at school</p>
Parent involvement	18	<p>ECE Whānau encouraged to participate in school setting</p> <p>ECE teachers discuss starting school and encourage parents to attend school visits</p> <p>ECE teachers talk to parents about where children are at and challenges they may have</p> <p>Parents invited to school information evening</p> <p>Deputy Principal meets with parents to discuss school and how parents can help children at home</p> <p>Schools build strong relationships with parents</p> <p>Regular dialogue with parents</p>

		<p>School meeting with parents to gain profile of the child so can plan the transition</p> <p>Parents encouraged to sit in through the transition process</p>
Prestart programme	14	<p>ECE services withdrawing older children for transition to school programme</p> <p>Schools running a prestart programme for children over a number of weeks</p>
Play based programme in schools	11	<p>Including opportunities for oral language development</p> <p>Part of day in school is play-based</p> <p>Classroom set up for play</p>
Sharing information	9	<p>Portfolios sent to school</p> <p>NE teachers reading portfolios</p> <p>Providing schools with a report of children's strengths and needs</p> <p>NE and ECE teachers discuss child and their learning profile</p>
School-like experiences/preparation in ECE	7	<p>Encouraging correct pencil grip</p> <p>Promoting rich oral language</p> <p>Encouraging risk taking</p> <p>Supporting resilience, looking after belongings, and name recognition</p> <p>Lunchbox day and mat time</p> <p>Finding out which school a child will attend so ECE teachers can talk about it and the types of things that happen at school</p> <p>More focus on literacy and numeracy during play</p>
ECE Centres included in school events	6	<p>ECE services attend school events such as sports days or assemblies</p> <p>Joint activities with school classes</p>

		Skype with a school
Older buddies/mentors	3	ECE buddy programme with school Peer mentors visit children in ECE prior to start to build a relationship and make a transition booklet Older school children visit centres to read to children
Other		Reception class School open day Employing ECE trained staff in school Allowing NE children to opt out of experiences they find scary Not expecting formal engagement in academic activity until settled and happy Using <i>Te Whāriki</i> indicators for NE Rolling starts and kai at school Parents and younger siblings welcome at school Providing familiar equipment at school Inviting children to bring items from home to school which link with learning programme Aroha, manaakitanga, tiakitanga (See glossary) School working with ECE services to co-construct a “how to give my child a great start to school” document for parent

Visits between contexts were mentioned by 54 teachers as a strategy they employed. Teachers in both sectors encourage parents to take the child to visit the school before the child is due to start, although the number of visits schools allowed varied. In some contexts, children visit schools with their ECE teacher. Additionally, some ECE services participate in school events which provide further opportunities for children to familiarise themselves with the school context. Twenty-seven teachers described how NE teachers and/or children make visits to ECE services. These visits were seen to give children and NE teachers the opportunity to meet each other and help NE teachers to understand more about the context from which children are transitioning and the kinds of things which might be

unfamiliar to them. One NE teacher said that they returned *“to ECE with past students to build continuity/ reassurance for children.”*

Some teachers see value in developing relationships and communicating with staff in the other context. A few teachers commented that this is not always easy and that barriers were sometimes encountered. A NE teacher wrote of how meeting with the ECE teachers had enabled them to co-construct information to give to parents about how to support their child to have a good start at school. Another had found the relationship with the ECE services helped them in implementing play-based learning in the classroom, which was also seen by some teachers to support continuity. Sharing information about children such as their assessment portfolios was also mentioned as a way to support continuity. There were teachers from both sectors who said they had experienced negative responses when they had reached out to develop relationships.

Attention is given by teachers from both contexts to involving whānau/parents in the transition to school. This included ensuring whānau had information and were prepared for the transition as well as involving them in transition activities such as school visits. This indicates that teachers see whānau as playing a role in supporting children during the transition. Indeed, some teachers also commented that attention should be given to transitioning parents, not just children.

Both sectors provide opportunities for children to become familiar with school-like activities. Many schools offer programmes children attend prior to starting school and some ECE teachers mentioned running a programme for children who are nearing the transition point. Other ECE teachers said that they deliberately focused on things like pencil grip, taking responsibility for belongings, or talking about what school might be like to support continuity for children.

School and ECE teachers appear to take a multifaceted approach to supporting positive transitions for children. Most teachers listed several strategies they used to support continuity, increase familiarity with the new context before the transition and build relationships, as the following quote demonstrates.

“It depends on the ECE. Some hold us off at arm’s length and do not want to participate but where it goes well the child is visited at the ECE several times by the NE teacher and peer mentor students from our peer mentor student group. They make a relationship with the student and make up a transition booklet for the child. Teachers talk about the child and their learning profile. The child also visits the school several times with their parent/caregiver. The ECE also visits the NE classroom with their nearly five-year-old students and they work with the NE class on activities. This takes time energy and resources but most of all a will to see it

work. Our older students also visit the ECE and read to the children there. So much is possible, but we have some ECE who do not want a transition programme” (NE teacher).

Although the teacher notes that they have encountered some difficulties in putting in place strategies to support continuity and a positive transition, the teacher clearly sees value in providing several ways for the children who transition to her classroom to have experiences that will help them be familiar with school.

Supporting Children Who Have Difficulty Navigating Discontinuity.

Although most children may appear to cope well with the transition to school, there are some children who have more difficulty navigating the changes involved. Survey participants were asked how schools and ECE services could support these children and it was found that teachers put in place additional practices to support children who have difficulty during the transition. There was some repetition of the strategies mentioned in the previous section in their responses, but also some modification to these strategies. For instance, some teachers suggested that more visits to school could be helpful if a child was likely to have difficulty with the change and that NE teachers could visit children in the ECE services before school started, although they noted it was not always possible for teachers to be released to carry out these visits.

Time was a common theme in responses; more time to adjust to school or more time in the ECE services. It was suggested that taking more time over the transition could be beneficial. This could mean focusing on social and emotional adjustment, rather than academic learning, or not expecting the child to engage in structured learning experiences during the early days at school. For example, one teacher suggested *“being flexible with their learning programme, especially if the child is not ready for formal learning” (NE teacher)*. In some teachers’ views taking more time could also involve a graduated transition. For example, children might be transitioned more slowly *“by only coming for the first part of the day, and then gently building it up to a whole week at school” (NE teacher)*. An alternative suggestion was that a child might attend both school and ECE, a model which is not currently funded (Ministry of Education, n.d.-d). For instance, one teacher advocated for *“...flexibility for children in regard to attendance at school. Children having difficulty might attend school for the morning then return to ECE for the afternoon...” (ECE teacher)*. Several teachers suggested that it would be beneficial to give the child more time in the ECE service by not starting them at school until they were older, arguably reflecting a ‘gift of time’ maturational view of children’s development based on school readiness concepts.

The influence of the concept of 'school readiness' was also reflected in the view from a few NE teachers that it would be helpful for ECE services to teach school skills to children who may have difficulty. This is reflected in the following excerpts from the data:

"ECE should teach kids to at least write their name, count to 10 and know how to hold a pencil correctly. It is such a hard habit to break if a child holds their pencil wrong" (NE teacher)

"Only one preschool in the 10 I visited had any kind of mat time or shared reading time... children in most centres were not asked to clean up their activities... no fundamental skills such as letter sounds, correct formation of letters or counting to 10..." (NE teacher)

It would appear that in these teachers' opinion the ability to cope with the discontinuities involved in starting school could be minimised by ensuring children have skills to support them in engaging with the academic learning experiences of the classroom. It is interesting that the examples of school readiness skills given focus on aspects related to academic performance and do not include a more holistic range of skills and understandings.

The value of increased communication and relationship building between the NE teachers and parents was highlighted in the data. Getting to know the parents of the child could help teachers understand more about the child, find out if any difficulties were anticipated, and to plan for the child's transition. A teacher outlined how their school made time for this to happen:

"We have a 3/4 hour interview with parents before each child enrolls at our school where we discuss what is coming up in Year 1, what the parents can tell us about their child and... run through a few activities with the child to show parents what their kid is like in a learning situation. It gives us a heads up too with children we think might have a problem starting school in some way" (NE teacher)

Similarly, another stated that *"no child should feel unwelcome or not part of a class"* so if there were difficulties teachers should take time to develop relationships with families because *"problems don't disappear"* and two-way communication was the key to establishing

"what sparks their child, what can hook the child into learning? ...After all we are a community, and we want everyone to be valued and everyone brings something special to school. It is just finding out what that something is" (NE teacher).

Teachers in this study recognised that parents know their child well and can provide information which can help teachers understand how best to support their child. Information of this kind could also be

gathered from the ECE service the child attended. Only two NE teachers and no ECE teachers suggested that sharing assessment documentation could help NE teachers understand and plan for the transition of children who might have difficulty navigating discontinuity.

Section Summary.

Teachers said they employ a range of practices to support continuity or to help children become familiar with the school context before they started school although it was evident that there are some barriers which impact on the practices teachers are able to implement. The most common practices involved either children visiting school or visits to ECE services. Teachers also took additional measures to support children who found navigating discontinuity difficult, responding to the individual needs of the child. In doing this the importance of working with families to gain information about the child so that appropriate strategies could be put in place was highlighted.

Data from the survey shows that teachers see continuity as an important factor during children's transition to school. Continuity is seen to be linked to outcomes for children socially, emotionally, and academically. The following section discusses the findings and how they relate to earlier research and literature.

4.3 Discussion

This study found that teachers from both the ECE and school sectors regarded continuity as an important factor in children's transition to school. This finding is not surprising as national reports and research by educational bodies which set the direction of policy and practice in New Zealand, have advocated for increased continuity between sectors and a focus on continuity of learning during the transition to school (Education Review Office, 2015; Ministry of Education, 2004-2009, 2017; Mitchell et al., 2015). In addition, research has been completed both internationally and within New Zealand investigating the continuities and discontinuities children experience when starting school (Dockett & Perry, 2012; Ebbeck et al., 2013; Einarsdottir, 2007, 2013; Hunkin, 2014; Peters, 1999, 2000; Vitiello et al., 2022). Interestingly, there were no statistically significant differences between the views of each sector on the value of continuity. Where significant differences were found in the quantitative data, the differences were in the degree of importance attached to factors or outcomes associated with continuity rather than differences about whether these things were important. Therefore, while individuals may have differing views, the survey revealed that, overall, the views of the two sectors were similar.

4.3.1 Why is Continuity Important?

Continuity is important for a range of reasons. When there are fewer discontinuities for children to navigate, teachers said that the transition experience was eased, making it easier for children to settle into school and having a positive impact on social and emotional outcomes. When there are fewer differences, it can take less time for children to become familiar with the new environment resulting in a smoother and faster transition. Encountering fewer differences also impacts positively on the level of anxiety, stress, and worry children may experience (Dockett & Perry, 2012; Fabian, 2007; Peters, 1999, 2004a). Therefore, continuity can promote children's wellbeing, as these teachers indicated. This is important because Bulkeley and Fabian (2006) advise that children's social and emotional wellbeing impacts on their ability to engage in learning when they start school. Studies have also documented the effect of transition experiences on children's self-image (Dockett & Perry, 2007a; Fabian, 2002; Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2010) and how they approach transitions in later life (Dunlop, 2021). These were also concerns raised by teachers in this study. Where children struggle with the degree of change, this could impact negatively on their view of themselves whereas when there is consistency in approaches, feelings of familiarity, self-confidence and self-efficacy are promoted (Stipek et al., 2017). Reducing anxiety associated with navigating discontinuity may also benefit children's learning. When children are in a state of anxiety and giving their attention to adjusting to significant differences, they may not be able to engage in learning. Hagan (2005) found that when children start school, they must become familiar with a new culture where things are done differently and that, until children have adjusted to these differences, they may not be able to focus on learning. Where there is significant discontinuity children may not understand how to apply their knowledge and skills in the new context. Thus, by ensuring the level of discontinuity is not too great there will be less disruption to learning pathways.

Survey participants thought it was developmentally appropriate to provide continuity with ECE services. In New Zealand there may be only a day's difference between children attending ECE services and starting school and teachers said for this reason children would not be developmentally ready for something completely different. Participants also referred to unspecified brain development research showing children were not ready for structured learning until they were older. For these reasons, providing continuity was seen to support development. Play was mentioned as a strategy used by schools, but it was not clear in the data whether teachers saw play as a way to provide continuity or whether they wanted to provide play because they thought children were not ready for more structured learning experiences (Bellen, 2016; Hedges, 2018). Teachers also spoke of teaching school skills in ECE services as a strategy they had implemented. While it is possible teachers were doing this

to try to provide some continuity, it could also be that this practice was influenced by school readiness perspectives. There is a danger that curriculum pushdown can result from such perspectives (Falchi & Friedman, 2015; Moss, 2013). These findings provide evidence that teachers' views of the importance of continuity were influenced by maturational and developmental perspectives and ideas about school readiness (Graue & Reineke, 2014; Peters, 2003b, 2010). Readiness views reflect the community's perspectives (Graue & Reineke, 2014), and the influence of readiness perspectives on the thinking of teachers in this study are a reflection of the time and place in which this data was gathered (Bloch & Kim, 2015). The influence of readiness perspectives on teachers' thinking is not unexpected as readiness continues to be a focus of international research and discourse (Bellen, 2016; Dockett & Perry, 2013b).

Although many teachers indicated that providing similarities between contexts was supportive of development this did not mean that they thought the contexts should be exactly the same. It was acknowledged that a degree of difference was needed to support ongoing development. Some change is important because change promotes development by offering different challenges and opportunities from what children have previously experienced (Ackesjö, 2014; Dockett & Einarsdottir, 2017; Dockett & Perry, 2007b; Hedegaard & Flear, 2019; Ma et al., 2021). Children expect change when they start school (Ackesjö, 2014; Dockett & Perry, 2007a) and may look forward to school being different (Fabian, 2010). They may be disappointed if school is too much like the ECE service with which they are familiar. Some degree of difference is therefore desirable.

These perspectives of the impact of continuity on development remind us that the degree of discontinuity a child can easily navigate depends on the child and their previous experiences. Where the differences are within the child's ability to easily navigate, the changes will support and contribute to ongoing learning and development. However, if the child encounters a degree of discontinuity that is too great and not within their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978b), development could be slowed. Children are unique and have differing experiences of ECE, home life and community engagement, thus the continuities and discontinuities will be different for each child (Brooker, 2002, 2008; Education Review Office, 2015; Einarsdottir, 2007; Harrison, 2014; Margetts & Phatudi, 2013; McNaughton, 2001), as will the child's resilience to cope with change (Fabian, 2007; O'Connor, 2018). Teachers in the current study recognised that the experience would be different for each child and that schools should adjust their approach in response to the needs of individual children. This means that teachers need to consider how they can increase continuity for some children and present more difference to others. Consideration of which strategies will work best to support individual children to navigate discontinuity is also important (Dunlop, 2007; O'Connor, 2018). Knowing about children's

prior experiences is key to being able to identify the level of support individual children may require and the most appropriate strategies to employ. Thus, it appears that in addition to being influenced by concepts of school readiness, teachers were also influenced by the concept of ready schools (Dockett, 2014; Dunlop, 2014; Graue, 2006) where schools put in place measures to ensure every child can transition successfully (Hannah et al., 2010).

4.3.2 Which Aspects of Practice Benefit from Continuity?

The aspects of continuity that teachers indicated were most important related to social engagement, learning and teaching, and rules and routines. Continuity in opportunities for social engagement was the aspect teachers were most likely to rate as extremely important, although teachers did not explain why social engagement might be significant for children or mention this aspect in qualitative data. This may indicate that their recognition of the importance of social continuity may have been prompted by the item appearing in the options for responses rather than being something they were highly conscious of. Earlier research has documented that social discontinuity, particularly related to friendships, is significant when children start school and recommends teachers employ strategies to support children in traversing social discontinuity (Ackesjö, 2019; Bossaert et al., 2011; Broström, 2019; Carr et al., 2009; Danby et al., 2012; Dockett & Perry, 2012; Einarsdottir, 2010; Fabian, 2010; Joerdens, 2014; Ladd et al., 2006; Margetts, 2006; Peters, 2004a, 2010; S. Peters et al., 2015). With such a volume of research indicating the importance of social relationships during the transition and that continuity in opportunities for social engagement were rated as important, it was surprising that teachers in this study did not identify strategies which would provide continuity in this aspect of practice. Broström (2019) argues that what teachers know about transition is not always transformed into practice and this may be the case here. While teachers in this study acknowledge that social discontinuity can be significant, they may not consciously use strategies to address this aspect of transition.

Continuity in the approaches to learning and teaching and types of learning experiences was also thought to be important, echoing earlier research and writing on transition (Belcher, 2006; Bellen, 2016; Di Santo & Berman, 2012; Dockett & Perry, 2012; Education Review Office, 2011c; Hunkin, 2014; Mackenzie, 2018b; Mayer et al., 2010; Sandberg et al., 2014; Stipek et al., 2017; White & Sharp, 2007). Children may have difficulty accessing the curriculum the school affords if the differences are too great and adequate support is not given to help them learn how to engage with school-based learning experiences and pedagogy (Gibson, 2000). Where there is too great a pedagogical mismatch in the teaching of literacy on school entry children can become frustrated, avoid literacy, and their attitude to literacy can be negatively affected (Mackenzie, 2014), leading to “Matthew effects” where the rich

get richer and the poor get poorer in terms of literacy (Stanovich, 2000, 2009). Additionally, Stipek et al. (2017) recommends that continuity in pedagogical practices can increase feelings of familiarity, self-confidence and self-efficacy. However, teachers are cautioned to avoid curriculum pushdown when looking to increase pedagogical continuity as this can lead to the use of inappropriate practices in ECE services (Education Review Office, 2011c; Stipek et al., 2017).

Children can find the routines and structure of school differ significantly from those they are familiar with (Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood, 2008; Cullen, 1998; Einarsdottir, 2010; Margetts, 2006; Morton et al., 2018) and teachers in this study indicated that providing some continuity in these areas was beneficial. While teachers did not say why they thought these aspects important, Joerdens (2014) found that when children are familiar with routines they are better able to cope with other things that are not expected, are less stressed, and participation increases. Margetts (2006) suggests that children's sense of safety and emotional wellbeing are supported when routines are known.

4.3.3 Teacher Practices

With teachers' responses indicating they think continuity is important during the transition to school it is unsurprising that they listed a range of practices they said they implemented to support continuity. Interestingly, most of the strategies teachers listed did not directly increase continuity or reduce discontinuity. Rather, most practices mentioned, such as school visits or teacher visits to ECE, increase children's familiarity with the school context and the people in it. While these practices may be beneficial to children starting school, they do not reduce discontinuity. What visits to school may do is help children find out how school might differ from ECE contexts and to be prepared for these differences (Ackesjö, 2014; Fabian & Dunlop, 2007). Children would also become familiar with some aspects of school life and begin to adjust to the changes before starting school, thus reducing the number of discontinuities they needed to navigate on the first day. This would only be possible if school visits involve experiences which reflect the usual school programme and if multiple visits are organised (Hannah et al., 2010). Visits to school and by the NE teachers to the ECE service can also facilitate the development of relationships with people who will be at school, which is also beneficial. These practices do not increase continuity, but they do help children to navigate discontinuity. Teachers from both sectors may benefit from professional development which supports them to understand and implement appropriate practices to increase continuity.

Other practices appeared to be addressing the readiness of children for school, rather than promoting continuity. For instance, ECE teachers said they taught skills children would need at school and

recommended holding children back from starting school if they thought they would find the discontinuity difficult to navigate. These practices can be based on a deficit view of children where the emphasis is on there being something wrong with the child or the child being to blame for not meeting readiness expectations (Graue, 1999). There is a lack of evidence that interventions such as delayed entry and programmes to upskill children judged unready benefit children's learning and therefore it may be more effective to ensure curriculum is inclusive and to deliver individualised instruction in schools (Graue, 1999, 2006). Vygotskian theory suggests that school readiness is only formed after a child starts school because children can only really learn about what school is like by experiencing it (Bodrova & Leong, 2003), so delaying entry may not be effective. A child readiness approach can also result in curriculum pushdown and a narrowing of the ECE curriculum to focus on a limited set of readiness skills which does not reflect what is known about how children learn best in early childhood (Dockett & Perry, 2015; Falchi & Friedman, 2015).

Some teachers in both sectors are finding ways to build relationships and work together or are open to doing so. Increasing communication and developing relationships between teachers in each sector has been recommended for some time in New Zealand (Education Review Office, 2015; Ministry of Education, 2002, 2015; Mitchell et al., 2015), so it is encouraging to find that teachers are doing this. Relationships between contexts have the potential to help teachers understand more about the practices employed in each sector and thus to reflect on which ones may be appropriate to replicate (Ackesjö, 2014; Hedegaard & Munk, 2019). Moss (2013) recommends finding a meeting place between sectors where the balance between continuity and discontinuity can be found. This would involve learning more about each other, creating shared understandings to find common ground and each sector making adaptations. However, as some teachers in the current study noted, building relationships for communication can be difficult due to barriers such as time and turnover of staff (Hopps, 2014; Mackenzie, 2014; Nolan et al., 2021). Some teachers experienced difficulty in gaining a response from ECE services or schools when they reached out, as Noel (2011) also found in her Australian study.

Sharing information is also easier when there are relationships between contexts and few teachers referred to assessment data being shared between contexts. Sharing information is important because continuity of learning is facilitated when teachers build on the knowledge and prior experience children bring to school (Hopps, 2019). It has been found that assessment portfolios for children are often not shared with schools (Cameron, 2018; Mitchell et al., 2016; Morton et al., 2018). When they are shared, assessment information may not always be used or useful (Cameron, 2018; Education Review Office, 2013; Mitchell et al., 2015). There has been some research which has looked

at ways to share information which is appropriate and useful (Hartley et al., 2014; Hartley et al., 2012; Hoffman & Sam, 2020). However, currently in New Zealand there is no formal mechanism or requirement for information to be shared between sectors, although the roadmap for the upcoming review of the *New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, n.d.-e) mentions records of learning being developed which might help fill this gap. Detail about this is yet to be released so it is not yet clear whether these will involve records being passed from ECE services to schools.

It has been argued that there has been an increasing alignment in pedagogy across sectors (OECD, 2017a) and there is some evidence of this in the current study with some teachers saying they employ a play-based curriculum to create continuity. While, as discussed above, teachers' motivations for including play in the programme were unclear, play in schools does provide experiences which are familiar to children and this can be beneficial (Bellen, 2016; Davis, 2015; Peters & Woodhouse, 2021a; Walsh et al., 2010). Earlier research has found access to play to be a significant difference between schools and ECE services (Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood, 2008; Corsaro & Molinari, 2008; Ebbeck et al., 2013; Einarsdottir, 2007; Hunkin, 2014; Lord & McFarland, 2010).

Implementing play-based approaches may be useful, as children seek continuity in play-based approaches to learning when they start school (Dockett & Perry, 2012). Play-based approaches enable teachers to get to know children better and children appear to settle into school more quickly (Davis, 2015; Walsh et al., 2010). It is also more likely that children will be provided with familiar resources when play is included in the programme. Care needs to be taken when introducing play-based learning to new entrant classrooms however, as primary trained teachers may be unskilled at teaching in this way (Aiono et al., 2019; Bellen, 2016; Jay & Knaus, 2018; Martlew et al., 2011). This may be why one teacher responding to the survey recommended schools employ ECE trained teachers in new entrant classrooms. As well as being familiar with play-based approaches to learning and teaching, an ECE teacher would be familiar with practices and routines commonly embedded in ECE which may be appropriate to replicate in the school setting. When thinking of employing ECE teachers in schools however, it is important to be mindful that professional learning may be required to support them in implementing the *New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) given that research indicates that teachers may have little understanding of how teaching happens in the other sector (Belcher, 2006; Margetts & Phatudi, 2013; OECD, 2017b). Initial Teacher Education programmes that cross sector boundaries might be beneficial in addressing this issue, however New Zealand no longer has any such programmes.

NE teachers who thought the contexts should be more similar rated their own classroom context as more similar to ECE contexts than teachers who thought the contexts should be less similar. This

correlation may indicate their practice is influenced by their beliefs; if they believe that similarity between contexts is important, they actively work to provide greater continuity. In contrast there was no correlation between how similar ECE teachers thought the contexts should be and how similar they thought their own context was to school. Historically the ECE sector has been concerned about curriculum pushdown (Bellen, 2016; Mitchell, 2019) and this concern may impact on their willingness to adjust their practice to include experiences that will be familiar to children when they start school. It may be that they think creating continuity to be the work of NE teachers. Attention may need to be given to advancing ECE teachers understanding of how continuity can be increased in appropriate ways. When considering this finding it is important to note that teachers were self-rating their own context and there are no independent data assessing how similar the contexts are.

There appears to be a disconnect between what teachers think should be done and the reality of practice in New Zealand. While 15% of teachers thought the contexts **should be** somewhat different/different/very different, 76% of teachers thought the contexts **were** somewhat different/different/very different. This means that teachers think schools and ECE services should provide more continuity than is currently happening. There could be several reasons for this disconnect between espoused and actual practice (Spodek, 1988). It could be that while teachers say they think continuity is important they hold underlying beliefs which do not align with this (Spodek, 1988). These beliefs may be shaped by 'regimes of truth' related to developmental theories (Bartholomaeus, 2016) which are resistant to change and thus dominate practice (Foucault, 1975). Alternatively, some teachers may be unsure of how to increase continuity for children in appropriate ways or think it is someone else's job to do this. For these reasons it would be beneficial for there to be more dialogue in New Zealand about how best to gain an appropriate level on continuity between sectors. There are also some barriers to increasing continuity which may impact on teacher practice, which are examined next.

4.3.4 Barriers to Increasing Continuity

While teachers said continuity was important, data revealed that there were barriers to being able to provide continuity in some of the ways teachers would like to. Actual and perceived affordances such as mandated curriculum, policies and practices impact on teachers' practices (Carr et al., 2009). For instance, the teacher:child ratio in school is a lot lower than in ECE and teachers said that in addition to being a discontinuity for children, this also meant they were unable to provide some familiar experiences. Changes to ratios and group sizes on school entry lead to pedagogical changes and differences in the nature of interactions and there is less time for individual attention from teachers (Dockett & Perry, 2007a; Mackenzie, 2018b; OECD, 2017a).

Some NE teachers in this study had no knowledge of the curriculum used in ECE services. Additionally, similar to the findings of S. Peters et al. (2015), some teachers from both sectors had a limited understanding of the links between curriculum documents. A lack of knowledge of the curriculum documents used in the other sector can be a barrier to providing continuity. Understanding the curriculum document gives teachers important information about how learning happens and what is taught in each sector. This knowledge can help them identify and implement appropriate strategies for increasing continuity. Additionally, there is potential for *Te Whāriki* to be used in schools, until children turn six (Ministry of Education, 2017) which could increase continuity, as one teacher said. In considering whether it is appropriate to continue to use *Te Whāriki* in school, it is important to think about any implications there might be for children's progress into the later years of schooling and whether it might be more effective to merge the use of both curricula during the new entrant year. Knowledge of how the documents link and align is also important to understanding how continuity might be gained. It might be anticipated that teachers would have become more aware of these links between the curriculum documents since the study by S. Peters et al. (2015) because the updated version of *Te Whāriki* was released in April 2017, just months before this data was collected. One of the aims of the review was to strengthen links with the curriculum documents used in schools (Kaye, 2017; McLachlan, 2017). However, it was apparent from the data that some teachers had yet to engage with the updated *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017); a finding supported by research by Education Review Office (2018a, 2018b, 2019) and McLachlan (2017). This lack of engagement means that it is likely some teachers were not aware of the strengthened alignment of curriculum documents. Regardless of the strengthened alignment, there was already an alignment between the competencies of the *New Zealand Curriculum* and the strands of *Te Whāriki* (Carr, 2006), so it might be expected teachers would have some understanding of how the documents aligned. However, many teachers were unclear about how *Te Whāriki* linked with the *New Zealand Curriculum* and few teachers were knowledgeable about links with *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa*. There is a need for more attention to be given to the alignment between curriculum documents in initial teacher education and for ongoing professional development for teachers. The new progress and practice tools currently under development (Ministry of Education, 2022a) may strengthen practice in this area if sufficient professional development is provided to support teachers in using them effectively. Use of tools such as *The Literacy Learning Progressions* (Ministry of Education, 2010a) to support learning when using either curriculum would also be supportive of continuity.

The requirement to assess children against *National Standards* (Ministry of Education, 2010b) featured as a constraint on teacher practice. The need to ensure children made progress and met standards impacted on the programme teachers provided to children, how much play was included,

and the structure of the learning environment. It has been argued that while the school curriculum allows for flexibility, *National Standards* prioritises attention to literacy and mathematics and may implicitly devalue other curriculum areas, leading to a narrowing of curriculum (Crooks et al., 2016; Thrupp, 2008, 2017). It has also been found that the use of *National Standards* in New Zealand has affected both what is taught and how teaching happens (Bonne, 2016). While it is not clear from the data in this study that the curriculum was narrowed, it seems clear that the requirement to report on literacy and mathematics achievement influences some teachers to implement structured pedagogical approaches to the teaching of these subjects. Teachers also said providing continuity through play was affected by the need to prioritise literacy and mathematics. This may reveal a lack of understanding of how to teach literacy and numeracy in play-based learning environments (Aiono et al., 2019; Hedges, 2018; Jay & Knaus, 2018; Martlew et al., 2011; Walsh et al., 2010) and indicates an ongoing need for upskilling the teaching workforce in this area and including play-based approaches in initial teacher education for primary school teachers.

4.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented findings from the first phase of the current study which sought to explore ECE and NE teachers' perspectives about continuity and discontinuity during the transition to school. Results indicated that teachers from both sectors held similar views. Both sectors saw value in promoting continuity for transitioning children and in having in place practices and strategies to address discontinuity and prepare children for change, although there were some barriers that impacted on their practice. The areas that teachers said were of most importance to provide continuity related to social interactions, the pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning, and rules and routines; aspects that also emerged as themes in the second phase of the research. Teachers also noted that change could stimulate development and therefore some differences are important when children start school. It is therefore important for teachers to consider how to balance the degree of continuity and discontinuity so that children's learning journeys are optimised as they adjust to the new context. This may mean differentiating their practice for different children.

The preliminary findings from this phase of the study informed planning for phase two, where further data was collected from teachers, parents, and children to deepen and enrich the findings. This second phase involved Case Studies in three schools. Findings from these Case Studies will be presented in the next four chapters which are organised around the themes which emerged from the data. The next chapter presents and discusses findings related to continuity and discontinuity in people and relationships.

Chapter Five

Case Study Findings and Discussion: People and Relationships

5.1 Introduction

This is the first of four chapters that present and discuss findings from Case Studies in three schools. The Case Studies were undertaken to ensure that the 'lived experiences' of children and how they participate in everyday life was captured (Rogoff et al., 2018). The Case Studies illuminate the perspectives of children, parents, and NE teachers on the continuities and discontinuities involved in starting school. Examining the perspectives of those involved in the transition experience can assist those who plan transitions to understand which continuities and discontinuities are significant. Consideration can then be given to reducing aspects of discontinuity which may be significant, promoting continuity and providing the kind of support which can help children navigate the changes involved in starting school.

Firstly, in Chapters Five, Six and Seven, the continuities and discontinuities identified by child, parent, and teacher participants and their perspectives on these issues are reported. These chapters are organised around three key themes that emerged from the analysis of the data. These themes were associated with continuities and discontinuities in relationships and people; in teaching and learning; and in expectations, structure, and environment. Following these chapters, Chapter Eight focuses on whether continuity is thought to matter and on the practices teachers employ to promote continuity and to support children to navigate change.

When children start school, they enter a new community where there are new people with whom they must form relationships (Fabian, 2010; Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2010; White & Sharp, 2007; Wilder & Lillvist, 2018). Thus children experience social discontinuity as they say goodbye to people who have been part of their social network in ECE and meet new adults and children in the school context. This chapter reports children's, parents', and teachers' perspectives on the continuities and discontinuities in people and relationships that occurred as a result of the transition to school.

5.2 Findings

When children start school there are new people to meet and relationships to form with unfamiliar children and adults who are part of the new environment. This disruption to relationships was noticed by parents, teachers, and children in all three Case Studies as being an area of discontinuity that

children needed to navigate. As one of the parents said:

S2P8 For my child there was a discontinuity of relationships when he started and also the Modern Learning Environment being so big means there are constantly changing faces moving in and out.

This discontinuity of relationships engendered feelings of nervousness, worry or anxiety for the majority of children who participated in the research. For example, when asked how he felt on the first day of school one of the children explained:

S2C2 I was nervous.

J What were you nervous about?

S2C2 About that I had different teachers and different friends. But two of my friends I knew.

While S2C2 had some concern about the unfamiliar teachers and children at school, he noted the continuity of relationships he experienced through having some friends at school. This continuity was also mentioned positively by other children with one saying “...it was really fun. My brother was here and (lists names)” (S2C12).

For some children with additional needs this social discontinuity was particularly challenging. One parent (S2P8) said that her child’s dyspraxia made forming relationships more difficult. Her child found the transition very difficult, and he had been very unsettled and anxious to the extent that he vomited or hid his shoes some school mornings. She reported that it was not until relationships with children and teachers had formed that things improved.

The following sections report data showing that social continuity and discontinuity were seen as significant by parents, teachers, and children in this research. Children moved from a familiar social setting and were immersed in an environment where new friendships needed to be developed, old friends were rediscovered, and other friends were left behind. They encountered new teachers with whom they had to form relationships and other unfamiliar school staff. Siblings and other children known from out of school contexts provided some continuity and support during the early days at school, as could older children in the school or classroom. Findings highlighting that continuity and discontinuity of friendships are significant are presented first.

5.2.1 Friends

A strong theme emerged from the data which related to friendships. Child and parent participants in all three schools spoke of the impact of the transition on children's friendships. As a result of the transition new friendships were made, children met up with former friends, and established friendships were disrupted. This theme on the importance of child friendships was not something discussed by teachers in any of the Case Studies, aligning with findings from the earlier survey of teachers, where friendships also did not feature in data from teachers.

Having No Friends at School.

In Case Studies One and Two children expressed concern about meeting new children, making new friends, or not having any friends when they started school, and this was associated with feelings of anxiety, worry, nervousness or fear. When asked if she could remember what it was like on her first day at school S1C11 described how she felt:

S1C11 Yep. I was scared.

J You were scared. What were you scared about?

S1C11 In case, in case, actually, I was a little bit afraid.

J You were a little bit afraid. Yeah? Was there anything in particular that you were afraid of?

S1C11 In case anyone would not even be my friend.

Similarly, S2C8 said when she started school she was scared and nervous because "I didn't know, like, everybody" and S2C5 stated that she didn't know anyone, and she was scared because she had "no one to play with." Another child was afraid that other children might not respond positively to her attempts to make friends. She said:

S1C5 And I'm scared and I was nervous because I'm scared to make new friends. Like say (pause) 'Hi, I'm (name) and I'm just new and I, I, I want to be your friend' and I'm scared that they're going to say 'No, you can't be our friend'.

The thought of not knowing other children at school or not having friends was associated with negative emotions and was the most frequently expressed concern of child participants in Case Studies One and Two.

In contrast to the other Case Studies, in Case Study Three there were no children who indicated they had been concerned about making friends or not having friends when they started school. The only child who noted that she had to make new friends said she missed *“playing with my friends at preschool”* and did not know *“anybody, except my friends that I met”* (S3C8). She did not indicate any concern or negativity about not knowing anybody, stating it simply as a matter of fact. When asked if anything worried her when she started school, she shook her head. It is possible that this difference was related to the different intake policies of the schools. Case Study Three had a form of cohort entry operating which differed from the continuous entry policies of the other two schools, so children were joining the class as part of a group rather than as individuals.

Children’s perspectives show that the question of whether they will have friends at school impacted on children emotionally, engendering feelings of concern. Parents recognised the impact of this concern for children, particularly in Case Studies One and Two. S2P4 said that not many children from her child’s ECE service had come to the school and that for her child the hardest thing about starting school had been meeting new people. Another parent said that it took time for her child to make new friends and spoke as follows of the impact of the discontinuity of relationships:

S1P1 (Child’s name) would come home upset from school that she did not have any friends. It did interfere with her learning, especially reading.

S1P2 noted that her child knew no one at school and had difficulty separating from her parents in the morning until she began to form friendships with other children in the class. In contrast to other parents, S2P6 saw some positive benefits in the changes to his daughter’s circle of friends. He said that his child’s biggest fear when starting school was that she would have no friends. However, he felt it was *“good for her to have a change of friends”*, commenting that now that she had developed new friendships at school she was *“better for it.”* These parents noticed that worry about having friends at school was something that had affected their child in some way. This concern was not as strongly reflected in data from parents in Case Study Three. In this Case Study only three parents noted that there was a change in friendships on school entry and these parents did not describe any negative impact from this discontinuity. Two of these parents who commented on the change in friendships also said that there were some children their child already knew from ECE in the class. This could indicate that they viewed having a familiar peer in the class as a protective factor.

Disruption to Existing Friendships.

As well as experiencing concern about not having friends at school, some children expressed feelings of grief at parting from friends that they had made in ECE. This could happen when they left the service

to start school, or when older children started school before them, and they remained in the ECE context. In the following excerpt it is clear that both children experienced feelings of loss due to the discontinuity of friendships. When asked what they missed about their ECE services, S2C10 said he missed his friend and described how he felt about his friend leaving childcare to go to school. Similarly, S2C9 noted that when she went back to visit her friends they had also gone to school and expressed sadness that she was no longer able to see them, as follows:

J Did he go to school before you?

S2C10 Yeah...

J ...How did that make you feel?

S2C10 I cried when it was the end of the day when I got home.

S2C9 I had a visit at daycare but my old, my friend at daycare had gone to school like me...

J ...And do you still see them sometimes?

S2C9 No (sounding sad)... Only for their birthdays...

Fabian (2010) contends that when starting school children must cope with the loss of old friends as this data exemplifies. Both children articulated the impact of starting school on their friendships with children in their ECE service. This social discontinuity affects not only children who start school but also children who remain behind because it is not yet their time to start school. Children have limited control over whether, or how, to keep in touch once the transition has occurred and so the continuance of previous friendships is dependent on the adults in their lives.

Meeting Old Friends and Making New Friends.

Starting school resulted in some children being able to re-establish friendships with children who entered school before them and had attended ECE services with them or whom they knew through other avenues. While they could be apprehensive about having to make new friends, some children looked forward to reconnecting with children who had previously been in their ECE setting, as S1C12 said, when he started school, he was "*Hoping (name)'s coming here*".

For children in this study having a friend who was already at school was associated with positive feelings. Children expressed pleasure that children they already knew were at school. For example, when asked how she felt about starting school S3C5 described herself as feeling happy and associated

this with playing with a friend she had known in her ECE service. The child she was being interviewed with (S3C6) also ascribed positive emotions to knowing someone at school, as the following quote shows:

S3C5 Happy.

J You were happy, were you. What were you looking forward to at school?

S3C5 Mmm, my friend was playing with me and she was nice.

J ...So was that a friend that you already knew?

S3C5 Yeah. She was at kindy with me.

J So you already knew someone at school.

S3C5 Her name is (name).

J Right, and what about you, S3C6? Did you know anyone at school, when you came to school?

S3C6 Yeah, (name).

J And did (name) come from your kindy?

S3C6 Yeah.

J Yeah, she came from (ECE centre name) as well. How did it feel to know someone at school?

S3C6 Good.

Similarly, S2C8 recalled that school was fun when she first started because her friend was at school, although this was not a friend that she had made in her ECE service but a child she had met at dance class.

Attending a school where there were familiar peers created a continuity which was valued by children and reassuring for them. Data from parents indicated that they also felt that entering a class where their child had friends from prior-to-school contexts was beneficial to their child and created some continuity. Some parents noted that one of the similarities between the school and the ECE service was that some of their child's friends were at the school. One of them spoke of the continuity created

when there were children from the ECE service at school, saying there was a “*familiarity as lots of children from the same kindergarten gave some continuity*” (S3P5). It was also thought by some parents to make the change easier for children. For example, S2P11 said “*two of (name)’s kindy mates are now in his class. This made the transition easy for him*” and another parent noted that while there was a discontinuity in friends initially, later “*a child started from the same childcare which was cool*” (S3P11). S1P4 described how having friends from ECE already at school helped her child separate from her. Another parent (S2P5) commented that, while her child missed her friends from ECE, it was helpful that she started school with a child from the same service. Having friends already at school was seen by parents as supporting the child in settling into the new environment and providing a continuity which was helpful.

As well as engendering worry and sadness, discontinuity of friendship led to positive experiences for some children as they met new children and made new friends. One child (S2C9) recalled this as a positive part of her early days at school saying that:

S2C9 I liked playing with my friends.

J Did you have a friend when you came to school?

S2C9 No I... I just... I getted a friend. We just metted each other...

Similar responses were made by other children when asked to talk about what they liked about school. Children in all three cases also spoke of school being somewhere they liked their friends and liked playing with them. Although they may miss children from prior-to-school contexts, they valued the friendships they had made at school.

Data reported in this section highlight the significance of friendships to children when they were transitioning to school. However, there are other changes in relationships which occur on school entry. New entrants had to form relationships with other significant people in the new setting. As reported in the next section, relationships with teachers were also regarded as significant by teachers and parents.

5.2.2 Teachers

Starting school involves a change in teaching staff. Thus, children need to form a relationship with a new teacher or team of teachers. While friendships with peers was a key aspect raised by parents and children, teachers spoke of the importance of relationships between children and teachers, rather than the importance of friendships.

The Importance of Teacher/Child Relationships.

Developing teacher/child relationships was seen to be more important than worrying about ensuring the environment provided continuity for S1T1. She said:

S1T1 ...the environment is the environment but I think it comes down to the individual teacher. ...you could teach under a tree but it's how your teacher greets you and the personality of that teacher which makes the difference to whether you feel loved.

In her view, the way the teacher interacted with the new entrant made a difference to their transition to school. Similarly, other teachers recognised the importance of relationships between teachers and children. One said, *"Relationships are the most important thing"* (S2T4) and her colleague explained:

S2T2 They all keep saying that to us. Management, ... Different professional people are saying 'relationships are the key'... It goes back to what Nathan Wallis [a neuroscience educator] was saying... He said for the kids to be socially and emotionally well rounded and to achieve well they need a strong dyadic relationship. You know, some of them will get that in those first three years but some of them won't. But if, during school for the first two years they have the same teacher... they can still form those bonds with them.

The teachers in this Case Study went on to say that it was important for there to be support from the leadership of the school to promote continuity of teacher/child relationships over the first year or more of schooling. Previously the school had employed a model where children were moved on from their first classroom after about six months and children could have as many as three different teachers within 18 months of starting school. In the teachers' view this meant that relationships were disrupted when they had just formed. They preferred the current model where new entrants stayed together and there was greater opportunity for *"familiarity with their teacher and the environment"* (S2T1) for a longer time. The teachers in this school were aware that the transition process takes time and that thought needs to be given to ensuring children have time to complete the transition process and become settled before a further transition occurs.

Parents also regarded relationships with teachers as having significance to children during the time of transition. One parent noted that a similarity for her child was the way teachers in both contexts were open, loving and encouraging. She also said that one of the teachers:

S1P5 ... has a similar personality to a childcare teacher, (child's name) was close to her and able to make the connection. This was a comfort as he needed closeness and could get it.

She commented that school visits provided teachers with the opportunity to get to know children by observing them in the classroom and thus be able to start building a relationship which would be useful when the child started school.

In contrast S1P1 observed that one of the biggest differences for her child were the types of interactions with the teachers at school and that it took her child time to adjust to these changed types of interactions. She agreed that relationships with the teachers were important during the transition, as she stated:

S1P1 It's really important, children have a feeling of being very safe and comfortable with teachers they know.

Relationships with NE teachers can begin before children start school and, as S1P1 observed, contribute to a child's feeling of safety on entry to school. This view was shared by the teachers who commented that opportunities to meet children before they started school were useful. They saw these as ways to create a familiarity or continuity of relationship for the children. This could occur through children attending school visits to the classroom they would be in or through the teacher visiting ECE settings as will be discussed in Chapter Eight.

Social continuity with teachers can occur when children and teachers know each other from out of school contexts. One parent spoke of the positive impact for her child of knowing one of the teachers before starting school. She said that one of the teachers attended the church her family attends and that for her daughter *"that connection helped the transition"* (S2P4). For this child, having a familiar face in the school environment provided one aspect of continuity when she was navigating several discontinuities.

In addition to missing their peers when they start school, children can miss the teachers from their ECE service. A parent explained that her child *"had an attachment to one of the daycare teachers"* (S2P5) and that the biggest challenge about starting school for her child was missing that teacher. Although only one child (S3C11) specifically mentioned missing their ECE teacher, S2C1 said that *"now, when I come to school my teachers miss me from kindy."* It could be that this child did miss her teachers and was assuming her teachers felt the same way.

For children, relationships with the NE teachers appeared to be of less significance to their memories of starting school than relationships with friends, although there was some data which implies that for a few children there were some aspects of the teacher/child relationship that did matter to them. This appeared to be concern about what the teacher might be like. One child described having been scared on her first day at school because she did not know what the teacher would be like or look like. Another child said she was concerned that the teacher might be “mean” (S1C2) but found that the teacher was nice to her. A third child was afraid the teacher might “tell me off” (S1C5).

The Role of the Teacher.

Although children did not speak of the impact of having to build new relationships with adults in the school environment, some children explained that teachers in the new environment take on a different role from that of ECE teachers. Children held different opinions about what the differences were and this is likely because each ECE service weaves its own curriculum and therefore practices differ (Ministry of Education, 2017). Similarly, each school context differs depending on structural and organisational arrangements and the approach of the teacher/s (Dockett, 2014). Children’s differing opinions make sense when considering how people, processes, contexts, and time influence children’s lives (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Although there were different views on how teachers were different, a theme emerged around the role of the teachers in teaching children. When asked whether NE teachers were like their ECE teachers S2C4 stated that the teachers were “much differenter” and S2C3 said this was “because they actually learn and daycare teachers don’t.” In saying this S2C3 voiced a commonly articulated view of children in Case Studies One and Two; that teachers at school are involved in helping children learn, but ECE teachers are not. The perspective that NE teacher’s role is to support learning is also highlighted in the following data excerpt where a pair of children described the NE teacher’s role as being involved in academic teaching of reading and writing. They went on to observe that teachers at school can “growl” and for one child this was seen as being a difference from his ECE teachers:

J Tell me about your teachers. What are the teachers like at school?

S1C15 Fun.

S1C14 Fun, grumpy.

J What do they do? What’s their jobs?

S1C14 Teaching and teaching and teaching.

J How do they do the teaching?

S1C15 Umm, they are fun, they growl and they ...

S1C14 Pretty much what I said.

J And the teachers at kindy were the same or different?

S1C15 Different

S1C14 Different. They never growled at me.

Many children in these two cases associated the words 'teach' and 'learn' with their NE teachers, but these words were not used in relation to their ECE teachers. In their view the role of the teacher in each context was different, although one child noted that NE teachers "teach us more" (S2C11), perhaps recognising that in ECE her teachers had a teaching aspect to their role.

In Case Study Three there were also children who thought that the teachers were different from their ECE teachers. However, only one child mentioned anything relating to academic learning at school, saying that the teachers did reading and writing with them. Two children at this school noted that the teachers played with children and that this was different from their ECE teachers. When asked whether the teachers were the same or different from her ECE teacher one of them said:

S3C11 Definitely different.

J Yeah, do you know how they're different?

S3C11 Oh, yeah. Because the kindy teachers don't play...They just talk around to the other teachers.

It is possible that the increased emphasis on play as part of the planned curriculum in this school meant that the teachers spent time engaged in play with children and this was noticed by children. Play was also more purposefully used as a vehicle for learning in this school, reinforcing the connections between play and learning for children.

Teachers and parents in this study spoke of the discontinuity in relationships between children and teachers and the need for children to form positive relationships with their new teacher. While children did not speak of the disruption to teacher/child relationships they were aware of some differences in the role of the teacher. However, teachers are not the only adults in the school

community who were identified as important. The next section will discuss the significance of other school adults for children who are new to school.

5.2.3 Other School Staff

Members of staff other than teachers were seen to be of some significance to some children. Several pairs of children in Case Study One talked about and introduced the caretaker and others mentioned the duty teachers and teacher aides. Photos were also taken of a teacher aide and the caretaker. What seemed significant to children was the role these adults took on in the school. For instance, one pair of children explained the teacher aide's role and how she works with the children in some detail:

S1C1 Yup a teacher aide sees how children learn. Like they go 'he he he, is is is is, the the the' and they learn the words.

Another pair talked about the duty teachers and Principal, explaining that the Principal's job is to:

S1C8 ...look around at how things are going. If there's a problem they go straight in there.

S1C7 Yeah, and there's duty people... and they... just walk around to see if the kids are doing naughty things or nice things.

Similarly, S2C2 pointed out the Principal's office and commented that *"the Principal growls if somebodies kicking someone"*, adding that the Principal's job was also to talk to parents and that he had toys and a TV in his office. He also introduced the lady whose job was *"doing the mahi [work] in the office."* It seems that children notice that there are a range of adults who have roles and responsibilities that differ from those that they observe in the ECE setting.

For one child having a mother who worked at the school appeared to play a supportive function during his early days at school. His mother said that school visits did not go well as he had not wanted her to leave him. She was uncertain about how the transition would go but found that he was fine. She said that it was *"reassuring for him" (S3P1)* that she worked at the school and when he first started he would come and walk her to the staff room. Data from the child led tours aligns with the mother's view, as her child took a photo of the school gymnasium where she worked and twice said that what he liked about school was that his mother worked there. In ECE he would not have been able to see his mother during the day, so it may have been that he enjoyed the chance to do this. Another child also talked positively of having a mother at school, pointing out the classroom she worked in. When asked how he felt on his first day at school he said he felt happy *"Because I could go to my brother's classroom and my Mum's" (S1C15)*. For these two boys having a mother at school led to opportunities

to see her during the day and this would have provided a continuity of relationship between home and school.

Schools employ a range of adults in roles that may differ from those children are familiar with from the ECE environment. Children in this study spoke of and took photos of such adults. This suggests that these adults have some significance to the children, which may be because children need to build relationships with these adults and know what their roles are. It was also found that when a parent worked at the school this could provide some continuity of relationship. Another way continuity between home and school relationships occurs is when other family members attend school alongside them, as reported in the next section.

5.2.4 Relationships with Other Children

At school there are many children to interact with, including children from other classrooms. This means children may already have relationships with children such as siblings or cousins and will also encounter older children. These other children in the school community can play a role in supporting new entrant transitions, but can be perceived to have a less positive influence as the following sections describe.

Siblings and Relatives.

Some of the children had siblings or older relatives attending the school which appeared to provide some continuity during their transition to school. Several parents mentioned the benefit of having older siblings at school as this meant the new child *“knew what to expect”* (S2P6), *“had some familiarity with school”* (S2P9) and *“slotted in really easily”* (S1P4). The teachers also said having older siblings at school could help in reducing discontinuity. Although teachers appeared to expect that having an older sibling already at school would support the child’s transition, they noted this was not always the case and that other factors could impact on the ease of transition, as reported in the following example:

S2T2 Last year we had one little boy who probably for six or seven weeks hid behind S2T1’s desk and he’d just do something on a whiteboard or just be behind there but when he felt comfortable he would come and out and join us.

S2T1 Yeah, we made him a little nest, we just let him do his stuff...

S2T3 That was surprising because he had siblings here too.

J So you think siblings are significant?

S2T2 I think it goes in play with how ready they are for school. Because that one, he could have used another six months at kindy, he just wasn't ready for school...

The teachers recognised that having a sibling at school could be a factor which impacted positively on a child's transition, creating some continuity by being a familiar face and providing opportunities for the child to become familiar with the school environment before starting school. They understood that this did not guarantee the child's transition would be smooth; each child has different prior experiences and characteristics that would affect the transition. They also noted that, while there were positive aspects to children having an older sibling at school, at times this could get in the way of them forming relationships with their same age peers. As they said:

S2T4 ...siblings can be a hindrance because at morning tea they come and find them.

S2T2 They just don't leave them alone.

S2T4 ...let them find their own friends... let them find someone in their classroom.

This was a concern that was also shared by a parent. S3P5 commented that her child had liked to play with the older sister when he first started school and had to learn to make and play with his own friends.

For one child an older cousin provided support, which the teachers said helped her get used to school:

S1T1 ...she spends a lot of time just watching over her and coming in, visiting, questioning. This kiddie, she didn't have any pre-school visits, so it's been really hard for her whereas some of them have had lots of visits....

Although the child had not visited the school before entry, which the teachers saw as a disadvantage, the presence of the older cousin provided something familiar or continuous for the child during her early weeks at school. Several children spoke positively of cousins being at school, supporting the teachers' view that it was helpful for children to have cousins at school.

Several children pointed out their older sibling's classroom which may indicate that having an older sibling at school was important to them. There were few comments from children about whether it was helpful to have an older sibling at school. However, one child (S3C7) pointed out the classrooms of his brothers saying that his older brothers would protect him from being beaten up. Another pair of children had differing opinions about the value of having older siblings at school. They pointed out

the classroom their sisters were in and when asked whether their sisters helped them when they started school responded:

S1C4 My sister was very mean.

S1C3 ...My sister takes care of me... my sister is nice.

These children had differing perspectives of how helpful it was to have a sibling at school. However, it is likely that when children have a sibling already at school the child may have had opportunities to become familiar with the school environment when dropping off or picking up their sibling or attending school events. This cannot be taken for granted to have occurred, however, as ECE services often have longer hours than schools, so children may be dropped off before school starts and picked up after their sibling.

One child experienced a discontinuity in his relationship with a younger sibling when he started school. When asked how school and early childhood were different, he said:

S3C2 ...when I went to kindy my brother was there...My little brother. He's 2.

J Right. And do you miss him now that you're at school?

S3C2 He miss me. But I a little bit miss him.

Some ECE settings are structured so that children of different ages are grouped together. This provides an environment where sometimes siblings are in the same learning environment. When S3C2 started school, he had to become used to not seeing his brother during the day and he missed this and so did his brother.

The familiarity of seeing a brother, sister or cousin created a continuity of relationship which was a positive part of the transition to school for children in this research. Other older children at school also featured in the data, as the next section reports.

Older Children at School.

Another discontinuity that emerged from the data was that children go from being the oldest at the ECE service to being the youngest at school. This results in a change in status involving children in *“going from being the big fish at kindy to being the small fish at school”* (S3P5). This can have a positive impact, according to one parent, who said the children go *“from being the biggest to the smallest and [school] has older children who they can observe as a model of what is coming next”* (S3P2). She said

that the new entrants *"look up to the older kids"* and that her child had made friends with older children at the school. In contrast another parent commented that her child had to *"...adapt to the social hierarchy at school... The big kids are not interested in the little kids and don't want to play with them"* (S2P12).

Case Study One was a composite class which included children from new entrant to year two and this meant that when they left ECE, children shifted from being one of the oldest to being one of the youngest. Teachers said this could be a big change for children. Teachers and children in this case talked about the role of the older children in the class in helping newer children. The teachers saw this as an advantage of the change to a larger learning environment where what had previously been two separate classes were combined into a modern learning environment. S1T1 commented that she liked the bigger environment because *"the older ones can look after the younger ones"*.

In the following data excerpt, the children talk about how the year two children help the younger children. One of them explains that in her home-based ECE setting she was the big kid who helped the others. Thus, starting school resulted in a change in positioning for her from being the helper to needing help:

S1C2 *...the year twos work with the year ones and the years ones kind of work with the year twos.*

S1C1 *Yeah.*

J *Sometimes the year twos teach the year ones?*

S1C1 *Yeah....*

J *And at childcare the big kids didn't help the little kids?*

S1C1 *No because there was no big kids.*

J *No big kids at yours.*

S1C1 *Well the only big kid was me.*

J *So did you help the little kids?*

S1C1 *Yeah, I helped the little kids.*

In addition to older children helping younger children in the classroom, bigger children in the school also had some significance for new entrants in this Case Study. Older children in the school were identified as friends by some children and generally spoken of positively, however one child said that when she started school, she had felt scared of the big children. A teacher described how one child had been affected by older children in the school:

S1T1 So we've got one kiddie who is really shy and she doesn't like going to the toilet because there might be big kids there. So they feel intimidated by the bigger kids even though the kids... are all really good but they're just bigger... bigger people, so they just feel a little bit lost.

While the bigger children could be intimidating to new entrants, older children in the school could play a positive role during children's transition. The teachers in Case Study One described the system the school implements to support new entrants with the unfamiliar playground experience:

S1T1 The older ones in the school they are called guardian angels and so they are given a younger person to look after so that in the playground... if they can't find a teacher on duty or they are unhappy, they go and find their guardian angel.

Some of the children also talked about the guardian angels caring for them and helping them if they got hurt in the playground.

This section has highlighted the role older children and relatives can play when children start school. Having an older sibling or relative at school could have a positive impact on new entrant transitions, providing some social continuity. However, the teachers and parents noted that this positive impact could not be guaranteed, and, in some cases, they perceived there to be negative effects. The role of older children in supporting children within the classroom and in the playground also featured in the data, although older children could also be a source of anxiety to children. The presence of older, more knowledgeable children created a change in role for children who went from being the oldest, and arguably most knowledgeable, in the ECE service to being one of the youngest children at school with the least knowledge.

Findings in this chapter have demonstrated that children experience both continuity and discontinuity in relationships when they start school. As they engage with new people, they must also learn about the different roles that people take on in the school context. It is clear that social continuity is a positive factor in transitions; knowing other children or adults at school was of benefit to children. While social discontinuity could impact on children negatively, causing feelings of anxiety and fear,

there could also be positive outcomes of this discontinuity in the new friendships that resulted. The findings will now be discussed in relation to the existing literature.

5.3 Discussion

Data from this study reveals that discontinuities and continuities in people and relationships were regarded by children, teachers, and parents as significant during the transition to school. This is expected as bioecological theory highlights the importance of relationships to school transitions (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Dockett & Perry, 2007b) and sociocultural theory posits the relationship between social interaction and learning (Vygotsky, 1978a). Adjusting socially supports positive transition experiences (Mirkil, 2010) and social skills enable children to participate more fully in the school curriculum (Fabian, 2002). Thus, friendships are important at this time.

5.3.1 *The Importance of Friendships*

Discontinuity of Friendships.

Friendship relationships were significant to children in this study, and this was recognised by parent and child participants, confirming the findings of earlier research (Ackesjö, 2019; Booth et al., 2019; Broström, 2019; Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood, 2008; Danby et al., 2012; Dockett & Perry, 2007b; Einarsdottir, 2007, 2013; Ladd et al., 2006; Peters, 2003a, 2004a, 2010; S. Peters et al., 2015; Schürer et al., 2022). The disruption of friendships and the need to make new friendships engendered strong feelings of concern and worry for children in the current study which they named during data collection. Children also articulated feelings of grief and loss due to the discontinuity of child friendships. Similarly, parents spoke of emotions their children felt which were caused by the discontinuity of friendship. These findings align with earlier research which reported that concern about not having friends at school can cause distress for children (Ackesjö, 2019; Booth et al., 2019; Danby et al., 2012; Dockett & Perry, 2012; Peters, 2015; Schürer et al., 2022) and that children have to cope with the loss of friendships when they leave ECE and start school (Ackesjö, 2019; Fabian, 2010). Engel (1995) suggests that children remember high emotion events more clearly than events which cause less intense emotion. Given that children in this study remember the emotions they felt about the possibility of not having friends or having to make friends when they started school, these are aspects that were likely of considerable significance to them at the time. Children in past studies have said that teachers should help children make friends when they start school (Dockett & Perry, 2011; Margetts, 2006) and the current study supports that suggestion as a worthwhile way of helping children navigate transition. Supporting the building of friendships and giving time for children to meet

and begin to form relationships with their peers could help children view the transition more positively. Attention to supporting relationship building during transition visits may go some way to alleviating children's concerns that when they start school, they won't know anyone. The provision of opportunities for play at school may also support friendships to develop (Fabian & Dunlop, 2015) an area which could benefit from further research.

Impact of Cohort Entry on Friendships.

Findings reveal that while children in the Case Studies One and Two expressed worry and concern about discontinuity of friendships, this theme was not present in data from child and parent participants in Case Study Three. A possible reason for the difference in findings is that children in Case Study Three entered in cohort groups and attended school visits together. While the group of new children often join an established class, it may be that the discontinuity of friendships is reduced because there is an overlap of relationships. They begin to build new friendships with other visiting children before starting school and while they are still interacting with friends in the ECE service. This contrasts with practice in the other two schools where children are likely to be the only child starting school on their first day.

When proposing to allow cohort entry in New Zealand, the Ministry of Education's (2016) *Regulatory Impact Statement* said that research evidence about the impact of cohort entry on children's educational outcomes was lacking. However, the statement suggested that cohort entry may impact positively on the development and maintenance of friendships during the transition; a suggestion which is supported by these findings and by findings from a later evaluation of cohort entry by the Education Review Office (2022). Principals and teachers who participated in this evaluation reported that children's social and emotional wellbeing was improved in comparison to when the school followed a continuous entry policy. Parents also thought that friendships were better supported with cohort entry and children were perceived to show less anxiety during this time. There may be some feeling of solidarity in starting as a group with others who are new, rather than being the only new child. When children start in groups it is also more likely more attention will be given to planning for the transition (Peters, 2010). There may be value in schools considering these findings when evaluating their intake policies and the arrangements for children to undertake pre-visits to school. This project did not seek to understand the benefits or drawbacks of cohort entry so further research is needed to establish the impacts of cohort entry on new entrant transitions.

Teachers May Underestimate the Importance of Friendships.

In contrast to the concerns expressed by child and parent participants about the discontinuity of friendship, this was not something mentioned by any of the teacher participants in the Case Studies. Teachers also did not talk about any other aspect of friendship. Data from teachers focused on the importance of the teacher/child relationship during the transition. This could indicate that teachers underestimate the importance of friendships to children during the transition to school. Therefore, teachers may not be aware of how discontinuity of friendship impacts on children at this time or of a need to pay attention to supporting friendships for transitioning children.

This difference in findings between teacher and parent/child views draws attention to the importance of including multiple perspectives in research about the transition to school. Greig et al. (2013) and Petriwskyj (2014) remind us that different participant groups may have different views, as this and other studies about transition to school have found (Dockett & Perry, 2007b). Listening closely to children's voices can help adults to understand children and look at things in a different way (Clark, 2005; Engel, 1995). In this case it can highlight to teachers that in addition to paying attention to their own relationship with children, there is a need to consider how to support children to build relationships with peers, particularly during their visits to school.

School Offers Opportunities for Relationships to Continue or Develop.

As well as causing concern, the discontinuity of friendships had positive impacts on children and were also associated with affirmative feelings for children. Starting school was an opportunity to make new friends and play with these new friends, an aspect of starting school that children spoke positively about, echoing the research of Danby et al. (2012) and Dockett and Perry (2012). Children also expressed pleasure at meeting up with friends from prior-to-school contexts, something that was also discussed by parents. It has been established in earlier studies that prior friendships can have a positive impact on transition (Bulkeley & Fabian, 2006; Danby et al., 2012; Dockett & Perry, 2007b, 2012; Fabian, 2007; Hayes, 2013; Morton et al., 2018; Peters, 2003a). Furthermore, Broström (2019) contends that children want school to be a challenging and friendly environment which allows space for making new friends and maintaining relationships with old friends. Prior friendships can mean that more experienced friends can scaffold children through new experiences and act as role models (Dockett & Perry, 2013a; Hagan, 2005, 2007; Hayes, 2013, 2014; Peters, 1999, 2004a, 2014). In addition, this study suggests that established friendships with children who are already at school could be a protective factor and provide continuity for children, making it easier for them to adjust to the new context. The presence of other family members at school has also been found to play a supportive

function during the transition to school (Danby et al., 2012) and the findings of this study support this claim.

5.3.2 Teacher Relationships and Roles

Teachers and parents in these case studies valued opportunities for teachers to form and build relationships with children before and during the transition to school. The formation of positive teacher/child relationships is important when children start school as these relationships are associated with increased wellbeing and engagement in learning for children (Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood, 2008). Academic and behavioural outcomes have also been found to be associated with the closeness of teacher/child relationships during the early days at school (Zulfiqar et al., 2018).

By creating relationships and showing genuine interest in children, teachers can get to know them well and use what they learn about children to inform individualised instruction within the zone of proximal development (Schrimsher & Tudge, 2003; Steen, 2011; Tudge et al., 2012). Teaching should connect to children's prior experiences, their interests, and their development (Mahn, 2003) and teachers need to build relationships with children so that they can make these connections. Teachers can also use information such as assessment portfolios provided by ECE services to help them to get to know children and their interests, although only one teacher in the Case Studies spoke of using these as will be discussed in Chapter Six. By understanding more about children, their experiences and backgrounds teachers can also gain insight as to where the changes involved in the transition may be too great and more support be needed (S. Peters et al., 2015).

Teacher/Child relationships can begin to develop before children start school when children visit school or when teachers visit the ECE context. Thus, a sharp discontinuity can be avoided as relationships in the ECE context can be maintained while relationships in the school setting begin to develop.

While children in this study were less concerned than the adults with the discontinuity of relationships with teachers, children talked about differences in the role of the teacher in each setting. Some children said school was a place where teachers engaged children in learning and that this was not the role of ECE teachers. It is likely the perception that NE teachers 'teach' and ECE teachers do not teach is influenced by the more formal opportunities for learning that were provided for learning at these schools when typically ECE services provide learning experiences embedded in play (Ministry of Education, 2017). The types of learning experiences provided in the different contexts call for the use

of different teaching strategies to support learning, with NE teachers likely to take on a more directive pedagogy (Bossaert et al., 2011; Dunlop & Fabian, 2007). The next chapter will further explore participants' perceptions of the nature of learning and teaching in the different contexts.

5.3.3 Why Relationships are Important.

Starting school involves both continuity and discontinuity of social relationships and this is of significance to children. Social discontinuity is inevitable because transitions involve the disruption of old relationships and the formation of new ones (Ackesjö, 2019), so it is not possible to remove social discontinuity from the experience of starting school. However, it is important for teachers to consider how they can support children to cope with the changes in their social worlds because relationships are important in supporting children's wellbeing and participation in the curriculum.

While social discontinuity is associated with negative emotions for children (Ackesjö, 2019; Booth et al., 2019; Danby et al., 2012; Dockett & Perry, 2012; Peters, 2015) and can cause stress to children (Tatlow-Golden et al., 2016), it has been found in this study that where there are continuities of relationship these can be a supportive factor. Having friends at school has been found to impact positively on emotional regulation and wellbeing (Booth et al., 2019), to be a positive factor in adjustment (Dockett & Perry, 2007b), and to motivate children to go to school (Peters, 2004a). Forming relationships with adults and children at school helps children to form a sense of belonging at school (Education Review Office, 2022; Hopps, 2019). Thus, paying attention to supporting continuity of past relationships and the development of new relationships can ease children's transition to school.

On starting school children need to enter and establish "membership in a community of practice" (Joerdens, 2014, p. 12) where learning is embedded in social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978a). Earlier research in New Zealand has found that peer interactions can support learning in new entrant classrooms (Hagan, 2005, 2007; Hayes, 2013, 2014; Peters, 2004a). Additionally, participation in learning experiences at school is associated with social skills (Fabian, 2002) as often children are required to work together (Belcher, 2006). Peer relationships help children to learn about what to do and what not to do at school (Hayes, 2013) thus helping children to access the curriculum and meet the expectations of behaviour. Children experience discontinuities in teaching and learning (Education Review Office, 2015) and therefore building relationships is important to support children to engage with unfamiliar learning experiences. Strong relationships between teachers and children can help teachers better understand how to connect with prior learning, promoting continuity of learning.

Paying attention to the development of relationships at this time may therefore assist in promoting continuous learning journeys for transitioning children.

5.4 Chapter Summary

The findings reported in this chapter point to the importance of relationships during the transition to school. Starting school resulted in social discontinuity which was noticed by children, parents, and teachers, but participants also spoke of relationships which continued or were re-established. Children had to interact with a range of adults and children at school, some of whom were known and provided a continuity which could be useful and some with whom children had to build new relationships. On starting school children experienced social discontinuity which led to feelings of grief and loss due to relationships with adults and children in the ECE context ending. Children expressed strong feelings of apprehension about forming new relationships at school in two Case Studies. In contrast, positive feelings were associated with making new friends and rediscovering past friends in the school environment. Of note was the difference between teacher and child perspectives, indicating that teachers may overlook things that are of significance to children. Relationships are connected to the ease with which children transition to school and supporting them to cope with the different teaching and learning approaches used in schools and learning about the rules and routines of school. The next chapter will focus on continuity and discontinuity in teaching and learning.

Chapter Six

Case Study Findings and Discussion: Teaching and Learning

6.1 Introduction

Previous literature has indicated that when children start school, they enter a context in which they encounter unfamiliar pedagogical approaches (Belcher, 2006; Bennett, 2013; Shuey et al., 2019). These different pedagogical approaches make different demands on children in the way they engage with learning. This chapter will present and discuss findings from the three Case Studies related to continuities and discontinuities in learning and teaching which emerged as key themes from the data.

6.2 Findings

Educational settings such as schools and ECE services are places where teaching and learning occurs. However, how this happens may vary; learning experiences and teaching pedagogy may differ between sectors (Belcher, 2006; Bennett, 2013; Education Review Office, 2015). Children in this study were aware of this difference, finding few continuities between how learning happened in ECE settings and what they experienced at school. For them, the discontinuities were more evident, as they were for this child:

J *Is school very different from daycare or quite similar?*

S1C13 *Very different.*

J *So what are the big things that are different that you have to do?*

S1C13 *All the stuff.*

For S1C13 everything he did at school appeared different from his ECE experience and he was not able to identify anything that was similar or the same, even though it is likely there were some similarities.

The following sections report findings showing that participants identified differences in what was learned and how learning occurred. These differences meant children were not always able to connect the learning that had happened in ECE to the learning experiences of school, and this affected their attitudes to school learning. Two Case Studies took place in Catholic schools and findings that emerged around the Catholic character are reported. This is followed by data showing that play provided

continuity for children in transition. Finally, the impact of assessment regimes on NE teachers' practice is reported before the findings are discussed.

6.2.1 Differences in What is Learned and How Learning Happens

Despite both schools and ECE services being places where learning is the intended outcome, some children in these Case Studies held the view that learning happens in schools, but not in ECE settings. For example, when talking about her ECE experiences S1C7 explained "*We didn't learn about bees or, like, anything*" and S1C3 said that "*we could just go to kindy and do nothing*". This view that learning did not happen in ECE was particularly prevalent in children from Case Studies One and Two. Only one child from Case Study Three articulated this view.

Data from children showed that they usually associated school learning with academic subjects. When asked what kinds of things they did at school a child from Case Study Two said:

S2C3 We do learning and writing and reading.

J Learning and writing and reading...

S2C3 Oh, and maths.

J Is that the same as at kindy? You're shaking your head, no?

S2C3 Yeah 'cos they can't even do any learning... no, we didn't even do learning at kindy...

J ...What did you do at kindy?

S2C4 Just played.

S2C3 And go outside and wear sun hats.

As well as thinking that learning began at school, these two children associated learning at school with academic subjects such as literacy and numeracy. Similarly, S1C11 said that in school they did maths, but in ECE "*we only did playing*." This association of learning with academic subjects was a common theme in the data from child participants in Case Studies One and Two and less evident in Case Study Three. In Case Study Three, only one child expressed this view, saying that in ECE children "*can do anything but we don't learn*" (S3C2). It may be that this child, and other children who said there was no learning in ECE, experienced difficulties in linking the learning experiences in the ECE services with

the learning that happened at school; they experienced a discontinuity of learning. Therefore, they thought that in one context there was learning and in the other, there was no learning.

Although many children said they had not learned in ECE, there were some children who spoke of the learning that happened there and how learning was different at school. A few children said they had done some reading or counting in their ECE service. One child exclaimed *“There’s something the same too. We grow plants at kindy”* (S2C14). He went on to describe the learning he had done about plants and insects in ECE. Another child also recalled learning in ECE:

J How do you learn at school?

S1C5 Oh, um, by the teachers pointing and drawing stuff and we have to figure them out.

J Yep, and did that happen at kindy? Childcare?

S1C5 Nope.

J No. Did you do learning at kindy?

S1C5 Yeah, just about Matariki [Māori new year festival] and other stuff. Yeah.

J What about the things you do in the classroom, are they like what you do at kindy or are they different?

S1C5 They’re different.

J So tell me how they are different.

S1C5 Like, we have to do like phonics and reading.

While S1C5 was able to identify learning that had happened during her time in ECE, she saw the learning at school as quite different from the learning that happened previously. It seemed that learning in her ECE setting was in the context of a topic, while learning at school was seen to be more skill based than content based.

Interestingly, in contrast to the other Case Studies, when asked what kinds of things they learned about at school some children in Case Study Three referred to aspects of learning which were not academic. Children in this Case Study spoke of learning about poems, writing, how to do things, numbers, monkey bars, reading and playing tag. Children also said that at school the teachers *“teach us how to live and do stuff”* (S3C8) and that *“we learn... to show aroha [love]”* (S3C6). This more holistic

view of learning is also reflected in data from the teachers in this school. They highlighted that while there was a definite focus on academic aspects of learning, efforts were made to implement a curriculum that would more closely match *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017), through providing a play-based curriculum alongside the academic programme. Teachers in this school also followed children's interests and worked with small groups on topics of interest at times. A key difference, one teacher said, was in the amount of emphasis placed on key competencies in the two sectors. She stated:

S3T2 Te Whāriki is a lot more 'key coms' focused. So we are trying to bring that into our play-based learning. Having the aroha, that's our values, having that as more important than reading writing and maths. But... we are accountable, we really have to do reading, writing and maths. So that's the differences.

This teacher was aware of an alignment between *Te Whāriki* and the key competencies of the school curriculum that can provide continuity (Shuey et al., 2019). However, she saw a tension between finding time to focus on these competencies and accountability for ensuring children made progress in academic subjects, a view her colleague and teachers from the other Case Studies also expressed. Additionally, the influence of *National Standards* (Ministry of Education, 2010b) was mentioned by teachers in all three Case Studies as having an impact on what happened in the classroom, even though schools in New Zealand were no longer expected to report against these when this data was collected (Hipkins, 2017).

Data from teachers indicated that while teachers may be aware that some learning occurred in ECE services, they saw school as having a much stronger academic focus than children encountered in ECE. Another discontinuity teachers identified was that there was more structure around learning at school. For example, children could not choose to opt out of learning experiences in school. One teacher said there was discontinuity in:

S2T1 The expectation that there will be learning here, so that's probably the biggest difference... and like... the structure around learning. We are going to do writing. We are going to do reading. So there's the expectation that they will.

In her view in ECE children could choose not only what learning experiences they wanted to engage in but also whether to engage in learning at all. This may reveal a lack of understanding of the learning that happens through play in ECE contexts and a view that structured learning about writing and reading are of greater value than other aspects of learning, a view also captured when a teacher said that a difference for children was being able to play "*when they're not with us for learning*" (S2T2).

Like children, parents seemed to equate school with learning and ECE with play, although again this association was not as strong in parents from Case Study Three. For instance S1P2 said *“daycare did not focus on learning, they play.”* In contrast only one parent in Case Study Three articulated this perspective and several parents said that a similarity for their child was that both contexts implemented play-based learning. This could indicate that these parents understood that children were learning through the play-based experiences of ECE as well as at school. A common view held by parents was that although there should be similarities, schools should differ by having a stronger focus on learning than ECE services. Parents thought this was important as children were developmentally ready for learning. One said her child had been *“...getting bored, frustrated, itching for something new”* (S1P2) and another that the difference was important for *“better intellectual growth of kids”* (S3P4). Parents commented that there was more structure and formality to learning at school. One parent said that academic learning was new for her child and that the way this occurred where the child was *“actually working with a teacher rather than the teacher being in the background”* (S2P7) was one of the biggest differences. Like some of the children and teachers, parents spoke of school being the place where literacy and maths began. When asked what things were different for her child another parent responded:

S2P9 (Centre name) is loving and has a focus on the child and what they want to do. They learn about science etc through experiments sand/water, hands on. Children help with meal preparation etc. so are independent. They have specific days for certain activities... so children learn to manage time. School is about reading and writing which they don't do at (Centre name) except story time. Certainly, no formal learning of reading and writing.

As will be discussed more fully in Chapter Eight, some parents thought it would be helpful if there was a slower introduction to more structured learning experiences when children start school. In this way greater continuity could be experienced during the transition which may support children to develop positive attitudes to learning.

6.2.2 Attitudes to Learning

Children had varying opinions about whether learning, which they mainly defined as related to literacy or maths, was a good thing about school. In Case Study One some children expressed a liking for reading and for one child this was what they had looked forward to when they started school. In contrast other children in this Case Study thought reading was a hard part of coming to school and one of the parents agreed:

S1P5 Reading was difficult as he is a very creative boy, so the structure of reading was difficult for him.

S1C7 and S1C8 both agreed that reading was something they did not like when they started school and spoke of another child who would hide at reading time because they did not like it. As the conversation progressed it seemed that S1C7's dislike of reading had centred around her feeling of being positioned as being unable to read and write, whereas she had seen herself previously as a reader and writer. She was unable to show this in the school context, as the following excerpt suggests:

J What was the hardest thing about starting school.

S1C7 I felt like I couldn't read, I couldn't write. But I could read and write.

This child was unable to connect the literacy experiences of school with her previous literacy learning which created a discontinuity of learning. As a result, she was positioned as not knowing and not being competent, something she still remembered at the age of seven when the data was collected. As a result of this positioning her attitude to reading and writing experiences at school was affected. Teachers in Case Study One said that the focus on learning could be difficult for some children and these teachers showed some awareness of there being a discontinuity in literacy experiences for children. They said that writing could be a big change for children. They thought this because they had not observed writing happening when they visited ECE services. These teachers' view of school as focusing more on learning and of writing being new to children is supported by data from children from their class:

S1C3 It would be good if we were babies and we wouldn't need to do anything and we could just go to kindy and do nothing...

J ...What kind of stuff do you have to do that you don't like having to do at school?

S1C3 I don't like...

S1C4 Writing.

S1C3 Yeah writing's sooo bad.

J Why don't you like writing?

S1C3 Because like, it's always so boring.

It is possible that what the children were noticing were differences in the pedagogical approach to the teaching of literacy; literacy is usually embedded in play in the ECE context. Despite teachers in this Case Study saying that learning writing was a discontinuity which might be difficult for children, they did not think that it was a good idea to create continuity by expecting ECE teachers to teach writing. This could mean that they did not understand the progression of early reading and writing and how this is best supported in the play-based context of ECE. As one teacher explained:

S1T1 I don't think that children should be writing at preschool... They've got the rest of their life at school so when its preschool let them be children... Some of the kids know how to write their names but not correctly so I wish they wouldn't do it.

It may be that NE teacher's knowledge of literacy progressions could be strengthened to deepen awareness of the importance of supporting the early writing attempts of children and how to build on these to facilitate further development.

Negative views about learning at school were not expressed by children in Case Studies Two and Three. Children in these cases seemed to view learning as something that was different, but not in a negative way. While one child in Case Study Two said that the hardest thing about school was maths, *"because sometimes I forget some of the math stuff"* (S2C5), there was no other evidence that children disliked or found learning at school difficult. Indeed, some children spoke of enjoying learning at school:

J Tell me the best thing about school.

S2C3 I know. How you learn.

J You like learning do you?

S2C4 Yeah.

Children in this study noticed the different ways learning happened and, in some cases, this impacted on how they felt about different disciplines at school. For children attending the special character schools there were also continuities and discontinuities experienced when they encountered religious experiences as part of the curriculum, as the next section shows.

6.2.3 Religious Education

Both Case Studies One and Two occurred in Catholic integrated schools and aspects of this special character were noteworthy during children's early days at these schools. For some children, this was something that was different about the learning programme. For example, one child said that a difference about school was that the school's patron saints, Jesus and Mary, "wasn't at kindy" (S2C8) and noted that they did not have to pray at the ECE service. For other children religious education was something that provided a continuity with their previous experience. This was the case for S2C14 who said that at her ECE service she "learned about the bible and Mary and Jesus and God", which she also learned about at school. A parent noted that for her child, who had attended an ECE service with a Christian philosophy, this created a continuity. She said that the shared values of the school and the ECE service were familiar to the child and helped him feel safe. Another also said the values were similar for her child as was the practice of praying before meals. S2C2 took a photo of the church and explained that while at home he was used to doing prayers at dinner time, he did not like going to church to say prayers at school because church was "so long."

Figure 3
Prayer Table (S1C7/S1C8)



Children took photos of things in the school environment that related to religious education such as a prayer table, pictures of religious figures, the adjoining church and the 'Mary Garden' which "makes us remember about God" (S2C4). In Case Study Two the Mary Garden was frequently photographed,

as were images depicting the saint who was instrumental in setting up the school. Learning about this saint was new to children, as S2C10 commented “*at daycare we don’t care about (saint’s name).*” The prevalence of discussion and photos of the school patron saint may have been influenced by the fact that the school was celebrating that saint’s day later in the week during which data collection took place. However, it appears that for some children the story of the founding of the school and the Mary Garden were things they saw as special about starting school.

Figure 4
Mural of School Patron Saint (S2C9/S2C10)



Data reported in the previous sections show that some children struggled to see connections between ECE learning and learning at school. Where discontinuity of learning existed, children’s attitudes to, and engagement in, learning was affected. As reported in the next section, these classes all included play in the curriculum, and this could have positive benefits for children during transition.

6.2.4 Benefits of Including Play in the School Curriculum

All three schools described their new entrant programmes as being play-based, but the way each school implemented a play-based curriculum at the time data was collected differed. This is not surprising as the shift to including play in new entrant programmes was a new one in many New Zealand schools and the schools were at different stages of implementing this approach. In Case Study One unstructured play occurred when children were not working with the teachers or not required to

complete tasks the teachers set. Similarly, in Case Study Two children played when they were not working with the teachers, although all children were usually able to play during the first part of the day. Teachers in this school set up what they called 'provocations', which were play experiences planned with learning outcomes in mind. Children were able to choose whether to engage with these experiences or to select their own play materials. In Case Study Three, play was more fully integrated into the learning programme across the day. Most mornings included visits to the 'bush' next to the school where children engaged in unstructured, open-ended play. S3T2 said these visits followed "*a child directed rather than adult directed agenda.*" She said that this allowed children to "*show how well they can problem solve and take responsibility.*" Teachers in this school also planned small learning projects related to children's interests which were identified through observing play. Children played or worked with teachers on these projects when not working with teachers on structured academic tasks, but teachers also interacted in children's play and planned for learning within play.

Regardless of how each school implemented their play-based programme, there appeared to be benefits for including play as a regular part of the curriculum. The provision of play provided a continuity with previous experiences which teachers and parents said was useful. Play was valued by children as an enjoyable, fun, or favourite part of being at school that was similar to what had been experienced in ECE. For example, S1C1 said that playing at school was "*heaps of fun... and that's kind of the same because we always used to play at our kindys.*" Children did not speak of missing play when they started school.

When asked what similarities there were between school and ECE, common responses from parents included play or play-based learning. Some parents said that one way the contexts should be similar was that they should both include play and some parents described how the inclusion of play at school had been beneficial. For instance, S3P11 said that play-based learning "*has benefited my child so much, it is hands on learning which suits his learning style.*" The mother of an Indian child shared the view that "*play should be included... so children do not get bored and are always happy to come*" (S2P5). She went on to say that she was pleased her child was in New Zealand rather than India because the school included play which "*made it easier and she learns a lot from play.*" Another parent commented that play was helpful as her child "*thrived in less structured environments*" (S2P4). Some parents suggested that schools could reduce discontinuity by providing lots of play when children started school, gradually increasing the amount of structure. However, a few parents had a different perspective, listing the formal learning opportunities as one of the similarities with their child's ECE service. Because children attended different ECE services which have different philosophies and practices and develop their own localised curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2017), it is likely that

children will have experienced different ways of learning and teaching during their early childhood education, and this is reflected in the findings. Therefore, the continuities and discontinuities were different for each child.

Teachers also spoke of the benefits of the play-based programmes in providing continuity and not making the change so abrupt for children. Teachers from Case Study Three spoke of the learning children gained from the inclusion of play, which they said provided a similarity with previous experiences. As one of them commented:

S3T2 Well with play-based learning there is more similarity... so they get a chance to do the whole curiosity, choice of what they want to do in that first hour especially. So that's similar, I feel with the play-based learning, there's that nice connection of choosing what their interests are, exploring their environment.

She explained that they tried to follow children's interests by connecting the interests identified in play to what they saw as academic learning. An example of this was some work done with a group of children who demonstrated an interest in seeds:

S3T2 They brought it to us. I never had the whole class wanting to do the seed. I had a little group that wanted to plant the seed and find out about the seed. So it's not, "oh everyone, you've got to learn about the seed today". But if you want to plant, if you want to find out what happens, stay here.

The teachers in this Case Study said that providing a play-based curriculum involved a change in mindset for teachers, especially for those who were trained with no understanding of learning through play. S3T2 said it could also be difficult for teachers who may have trained when *National Standards* (Ministry of Education, 2010b) were used, where the focus was strongly on literacy and numeracy. Case Study Three teachers said it could take time for long held understandings and practices to change and this could get in the way of fully implementing a play-based curriculum. One teacher explained:

S3T1 I think from what I've seen they go from a lot of free play, or child-directed play to quite a structured system at our school, which is moving towards the play-based ethic. But I think there is a strong academic push within our junior schools which we are working at changing the mindset anyway before we can make those changes.

Although teachers in all three Case Studies said that including play in the programme created some continuity, they realised that there was a structure around play that was not present in the ECE context. The following example illustrates the difference:

S1T1 When they see the dolly corner or the green room full of all the blocks it's like 'well this is familiar. I'm used to building, I know what to do'.... what I think is hard is that they get going and then the bell goes. I think that's quite different for them, so the bell goes, and they've got to stop because we all have morning tea.

Children also notice that there is a different structure around play at school. This was particularly evident in data from children in Case Study One, where children understood play to be what you do at playtime and lunchtime and when the work is finished:

J ...you like lunchtime as well?

S1C9 Yes. We get to have a long play.

J You get a long play. Right and you get to play in class?

S1C10 Yes.

S1C9 Sometimes when we finish our work.

S1C10 And sometimes when it's raining.

J When it's a rainy day you get to play.... At lunchtime inside. Yeah. And what about when its school time and it's not lunchtime do you get to play then.

S1C9 After when we have finished our work.

Other children commented on not always being able to play and noticed that the times you could play outside were restricted at school, as was playing in the rain. This was a difference for some children whose ECE contexts allowed them to choose where they played, even if it was raining. While children noticed that play was at times restricted, there is no data indicating that this distressed them. It is likely that the access to play was providing a continuity which was helpful to children as it was something they enjoyed about school.

The teachers commented that as well as providing some continuity for children, including play in the school curriculum was supportive of children's learning and development. This was often linked to children's readiness for more structured learning experiences as the following excerpt reveals:

S1T2 You can see which children need it.

J The play?

S1T2 Yeah.

J How do you see that? What does that look like?

S1T2 Still in that baby stage.

S1T1 Yeah. They can't sit and... like hold a pen... but they will have a great concentration for connecting blocks and building the towers ... And talking to the others.

J And they need a bit more of that?

S1T1 Yes.

S1T2 More of that oral, that talking, using their imagination ...

J Right.

S1T2 But give them a pencil

S1T1 They're not just there...

S1T2 They are just not ready.

S1T1 And I think we are more open to it as teachers because once upon a time we used to say they're five now and at school, boom, boom, boom, whereas now it's coming to be a bit more responsive to the children and accepting that they're at different stages of development you know, and that they're not going to get it all at once.

In these teachers' view there were children who were not ready for a more formal learning context and the play context allowed them to develop skills that would be useful and transferable to other learning, a view consistent with maturational theory (Graue & Reineke, 2014).

Providing continuity through play was linked by one teacher to having fewer problems with behaviour. When asked about the impact of providing continuity through play she said:

S3T2 I think because it's a play-based learning... behaviour just isn't, it's not a major, behaviour, except one or two who stick out. But previously when I've had a new entrant class there would be a lot more behaviour issues.

She explained that in her view children were less likely to refuse to do the more academic work required of them because they were able to also participate in more familiar play experiences where they could have success. Her colleague commented that less support was needed for new children since play had been introduced because children were engaged in play and showed less concern at separating from their parents.

In addition to providing continuity, one teacher said that having play in the classroom provided experiences in which all children could feel successful. As she commented:

S3T2 It's not a, "this is the only thing you do when you come to school." It's not such a, "I'm a failure, I can't do it, I don't know what I need to say, I can't write my name"... the focus isn't only on curriculum. We want them to learn, of course, we want them to progress, definitely. But it's not the only focus we have. It's about this little individual becoming a great little citizen, a proud little (school name) child. That's our most important focus.

For this teacher, play gave children opportunities to engage with familiar experiences, but also ensured children were able to be successful at something at school, even if they struggled with academic requirements initially. Within play children could also learn other important things about how to participate in the school and in the world.

Play provided some continuity for children in all three Case Studies, even though each setting included play in the programme in different ways. However, findings presented in the next section highlight the influence of assessment regimes on the extent to which teachers felt able to include play in the programme.

6.2.5 The Impact of Assessment and Progression Expectations

The school and ECE sectors in New Zealand have different approaches to assessing learning (Carr et al., 2009; Mackenzie, 2014; Mitchell et al., 2015) and this was a theme that emerged from data from teachers in all Case Studies. Case Study One teachers said that the school had recently revised their

philosophy on the assessment of new entrants. They said that previously there was a more rigorous approach to assessment that created discontinuity for children, but recently changes had been made to reduce this discontinuity and to include more observation in assessment methods. The teachers commented on this change, stating:

S1T1 From the child's perspective it was like 'oh, I have to go into... somewhere else', you know a quiet room and it's all these different tasks to do... Our school we're trying not to do quite as much testing and assessment as we used to do. It's like if you're doing it why are you doing it? Are you going to use the information because... a few years ago it was test, test, test and you were so busy testing, marking, recording it. You had no time to analyse it and by the time you had done everyone, the information was old so why did we do it?

S1T2 It was quite overwhelming for the kids.

Teachers in Case Studies Two and Three said that school requirements to assess children against national or school standards impacted on the programme that could be provided for new entrants and thus on their ability to provide continuity even though *National Standards* (Ministry of Education, 2010b) were no longer mandatory. Teachers from these cases said that they were accountable for children's achievement and progress. A teacher from Case Study Two said that because of *National Standards* and the resulting progression targets of the school, *"the expectation on us from community, from the board, from senior management is that we get these children to a certain level"* (S2T1). The teachers explained that this expectation impacted on their practice and could constrain how teachers were able to provide continuity:

S2T2 So that impacts on how you interact with them and manage the day because you're constantly [assessing]... And it's from day one... There's no 'oh let's just get you nice and settled for a few weeks and then we'll hit your learning', by the time you do that they are already behind, technically.

S2T1 Really, what would you like to do? You'd like to read a big book with them, do an oral language experience, you'd love to do an art thing. You know, you'd like to do this thing centred around literacy.

S2T2 Around that oral language development.

S2T1 Yeah and we're sort of ...

S2T5 *Constrained.*

S2T1 *Bound to a timetable... you must teach x amount of literacy x amount of numeracy... And all that time you're looking at achievement, achieving a standard, a certain standard which I think there shouldn't be for the first two years of school.*

J *Right and do you think there would be more continuity if you were less assessment driven?*

S2T1 *For them? I think so.*

Teachers in Case Study Three made similar points. As one stated:

S3T2 *We expect them to reach certain levels, don't we? But we are lucky because we've got a play-based learning environment to do this in, but we still have to gather data, we still have to teach reading, writing and maths.*

Her colleague observed that she thought there should be more focus on assessing what children were learning through play, but she found that documenting this was time consuming. She said some teachers still held underlying beliefs about what learning is valued, particularly if they had trained during the time when assessment against *National Standards* (Ministry of Education, 2010b) was required. She explained that this got in the way of teachers seeing and understanding the learning that occurred during play and this could impact on the provision of play as learning, as it could be less valued than structured academic learning. She saw these underlying beliefs and values as hard to change.

The pressure to ensure children met certain standards appeared to act as a barrier to providing a curriculum which provided more continuity with ECE experiences. Teachers commented on the demands of *National Standards* and the impact on the content and approach to teaching even though assessing against *National Standards* was no longer required by the Ministry of Education (Hipkins, 2017) at the time the interviews took place, confirming findings from the survey data reported in Chapter Four.

Findings reported in the previous sections have shown that children experience discontinuity in approaches to teaching and learning which can impact on their attitude to learning at school. Including play in the curriculum was found to have positive benefits for children. Despite these findings on the benefits of play in the new entrant curriculum, teachers said there was pressure to show children's progress in academic subjects which constrained the extent to which play was integrated into the

programme. Despite this, data indicates that the inclusion of play as part of the curriculum provided a continuity that was useful. These findings will now be discussed in relation to the extant literature.

6.3 Discussion

It has been argued that children experience differences in learning experiences and pedagogical practices when they start school (Belcher, 2006; Bennett, 2013; Education Review Office, 2015; Shuey et al., 2019; Tagmua et al., 2012) and that increasing continuity of curriculum would enhance transition experiences (Fabian, 2007; Shuey et al., 2019). Recently in New Zealand the use of play in new entrant classrooms has increased, with many teachers implementing what they term a play-based programme (Aiono, 2017; Hedges, 2018; Peters & Woodhouse, 2021a). It has been argued that the inclusion of play in the school curriculum can enhance continuity (Davis, 2015). All three schools in this study called their curriculum 'play-based' and findings indicate that although the inclusion of play in the school curriculum provided a continuity that was useful, children still experienced discontinuity of learning as they transitioned to school.

6.3.1 The View that Learning Starts at School

This discontinuity of learning was particularly evident in Case Studies One and Two where data highlighted the view of child participants that learning started at school and that children had not engaged in learning while attending ECE services. Similarly, children in research undertaken by Dockett and Perry (2012) also held this view and Carr et al. (2009) found that children did not make explicit reference to their learning in ECE once they had started school. One explanation for this view that learning starts at school is that on school entry children may have experienced discontinuity in learning and teaching practices. These discontinuities may have resulted in them being unable to connect the learning from the two contexts, leading to the belief that learning did not happen in their ECE context. It is likely that the difference that is being noticed is in the way learning occurs at school and the structure around learning.

Some parents also viewed school as the place that learning started and did not articulate any recognition of the learning that happened during ECE. Even where they did not articulate this view, a strong theme in data from parents was that there should be an increased focus on learning in school and that the approach to learning should be more structured than occurs in ECE services. A common belief of parents was that children are 'ready for learning' when they start school. These findings could reveal a lack of understanding of the learning that is embedded in the play experiences provided in quality ECE services and reflect beliefs about what counts as learning. It is possible that parents give

more value to academic learning in disciplines such as mathematics and literacy. Planning for, and assessment of, these disciplines is often more evident in schools than in ECE services where there is more of a focus on holistic and dispositional learning (Ministry of Education, 2017). It could also signal that there is poor communication from ECE services of the learning that is occurring in the assessment and planning documentation shared with parents and schools as was found by the Education Review Office (2015). ECE services could better support parents understanding of children's learning in ECE by ensuring they use the language of learning in assessment documentation and that assessments analyse learning, rather than just reporting what children are doing (Cameron, 2018).

Also influencing this perspective could be the discourse used by teachers in each setting. It has been found that New Zealand ECE assessment documentation often records the activities children participate in and what children are doing rather than the learning that occurs (Cameron, 2018, 2022; Education Review Office, 2015). If learning is not being highlighted in assessments, it is possible that some ECE teachers may not talk with children or parents about learning or use the word learning often so children may not see themselves as learners during their ECE years. In contrast, NE teachers may use this discourse more frequently.

Careful consideration needs to be given to the language used with children in schools so that differentiation between some school activities as learning and others as not learning is not made or implied. For instance, if a teacher calls a group of children who are engaged in play to come and do reading by saying "its learning time" this implies to children that play is not valued as learning and therefore that play in ECE was also not learning. This kind of language was heard during data collection visits to the classrooms, but because the data collection did not include formal observation, the frequency of these comments cannot be established. Interestingly, this view that school was the place where learning happens, and that ECE did not involve learning, was less commonly expressed by children in Case Study Three. This may be because the programme in this school included more play and employed a more project-based approach to some learning experiences which was familiar to children.

6.3.2 Children Experience Discontinuity of Learning on School Entry

Children in this study did not articulate similarities in learning between ECE and school contexts. It could be that there were similarities, but these were not noticed by children because they occurred in a different environment and with different people; the social situation of learning differed (Vygotsky, 1978a). Vygotsky (2017) contended that while there may be similarities, learning at school differs fundamentally from children's prior experiences. Consequently, children may be unable to

identify the similarities or know how to demonstrate their knowledge at school (Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood, 2008; Dockett & Perry, 2007b; Perry & Dockett, 2005).

Although “children’s learning begins long before they attend school” (Vygotsky, 1978b, p. 84), prior-to-school learning is not continuous with school learning (Vygotsky, 2017). This proposition was confirmed in the current study. This disconnect between the learning that occurs in ECE and the learning experiences of school can result in children being positioned as ‘not knowing’ or not being competent, negatively affecting a child’s view of themselves as a learner. The findings described in this chapter illuminate one child’s changing view of her ability to read and write. Before school entry she saw herself as a literate being who could read and write. She came to feel that she could not read and write when she encountered school-based literacy practices which did not match her earlier experiences. She was unable to connect the emergent literacy experiences of ECE with the more formal literacy experiences she was having at school. This child still remembered this feeling of being positioned as ‘not knowing’ at the age of seven, indicating this was a significant experience for her (Engel, 1995).

This finding is concerning because transition is a time when self-worth and perceptions of competence and self can be affected (Dockett & Perry, 2007a; Education Review Office, 2015; Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2010), as happened for this child. Additionally, “an unhappy transition to school literacy may lead to frustration, avoidance and an ongoing negative attitude towards school literacy” (Mackenzie, 2014, p. 93). At the time children are transitioning to school they are also often transitioning from sign creation (informal use of signs), to sign use (producing text in conventional form) (Mackenzie, 2018b). Mackenzie (2018b) argues that some children may need more time to explore sign creation in play-based contexts when they start school rather than being expected to engage in sign use immediately. She argues that there are often contrasting curricula and pedagogical approaches used in the different sectors which create discontinuity of learning. In contrast to practices in ECE settings, children are expected to engage in more formal and structured literacy experiences which may teach various literacy skills separately rather than connecting literacy to meaningful situations (Dyson, 2018; Mackenzie, 2014). There is evidence that in New Zealand this can be the case. The Education Review Office (2011b) found few explicit links between literacy practices in schools and ECE services and that there was little evidence of schools finding out about children’s prior experiences or adjusting practices to match these. It is important to reflect on how teachers can connect with children’s prior learning and provide positive and meaningful literacy experiences because poor early literacy experiences contribute to “Matthew effects” where children who do not enjoy literacy continue to fall further behind due to lower engagement in literacy (Stanovich, 2009). A disconnect between

pedagogical approaches can disrupt the continuity of children's learning as children take time to become familiar with the different ways teachers support literacy learning in the different sectors (Mackenzie & Petriwskyj, 2017).

6.3.3 The Importance of Teacher Knowledge

This example of a child experiencing pedagogical discontinuity also brings into question the extent of NE teachers' understanding about how literacy is taught in ECE contexts; important knowledge to be able build on the literacy knowledge children bring with them and thus ensure continuity of learning. Knowing about how literacy is developed in ECE settings enables teachers to support children in transferring their skills and knowledge to the school context. Some teachers may not have sufficient pedagogical content knowledge to support learning pathways during this time as it has been found that only two thirds of year one to three teachers teach literacy effectively in New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 2022c) and some teachers in this study appeared to lack understanding of the literacy learning progressions (Ministry of Education, 2010a). However, these skills can be learned through professional development (Arrow, 2018). Cunningham et al. (2009) have written of the importance of teacher knowledge and knowledge calibration to the teaching of literacy. They contend that the focus of teacher education is on how to teach reading and writing in the formal context of school. This may mean that NE teachers do not have a strong understanding of emergent literacy and are unable to create continuity with children's earlier experiences and to differentiate teaching for individual children (Arrow, 2018). Knowledge of how sign making develops is central to understanding how to teach children to write (Mackenzie, 2018a; Vygotsky, 1978b). Without this knowledge teachers may be unable to ensure literacy experiences are relevant and recognisable to new entrants. Teacher knowledge may also be important in other disciplines such as mathematics (Ministry of Education, 2022c).

Where teacher knowledge is lacking, children may not experience continuity of learning and beliefs about themselves as a learner may be affected (Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2010). Children's attitudes to certain learning experiences may be affected and children may say they dislike reading, maths, or writing, as some children in this study did. It is to be hoped that implementation of the recently developed *Literacy & Communication and Maths Strategy* (Ministry of Education, 2022c) which seeks to deliver excellence and equity in literacy and maths teaching, and to build cohesive learning pathways which sustain children's progress during transitions, will be successful in ensuring teachers have the knowledge to effectively support continuity of learning over the transition to school.

6.3.4 Not All Learning is Valued Equally at School

Interview data from teachers in this study implies that certain types of learning are more highly valued at school. These teachers' perceptions may be influencing the parents' views about learning at school that were discussed previously. Teachers in this study spoke of school as being the place where learning starts. While teachers said they were implementing play-based learning, there are indications in the data that greater value was given to literacy and mathematics. Language used by teachers in this study revealed that learning through play had a lower status at school than time spent with the teachers engaged in more formal learning experiences. Including play in school environments has been a recent development in New Zealand (Aiono, 2017; Hedges, 2018; Peters & Woodhouse, 2021a). It can be difficult to shift paradigm; teachers' beliefs and values can be based on older theories and understandings (Rogoff, 2016) which may act as 'regimes of truth' which are shaped by those in power and thus resistant to change (Foucault, 1975). Teachers can therefore have difficulty in blending play-based pedagogy with traditional teaching practices. As a result children may be provided with opportunities for free play rather than teachers employing a pedagogy where intentional teaching through play occurs (Aiono et al., 2019). Thus, more value may be attached to formal, teacher directed, academic learning experiences, despite the rhetoric of valuing play.

The view that formal academic learning was more important appeared to be unconscious for most teachers in this study; they said that they valued play-based learning. Some teachers have not encountered play-based learning during their initial teacher education or may not have had any professional learning to support them in implementing this approach (Aiono et al., 2019; Walsh et al., 2010) as some teachers in this study acknowledged. This may mean that teachers do not fully understand the value of play-based learning or know how to implement it in the primary classroom. It takes time for people to change their ways of thinking and practice (Foucault, 1975). As a result, practice does not always match what teachers say, or think, they do (Smith, 2020). The implicit theories and beliefs of educators influence children's pedagogical experiences (Salamon et al., 2016) and the climate of the classroom (Dockett & Perry, 2007b), so it may be helpful for schools to spend time unpacking teachers' underlying beliefs and theories about play-based learning to expose the assumptions and beliefs which are influencing practice. More professional learning is needed to assist teachers in incorporating play-based teaching pedagogy in their practice (Peters & Woodhouse, 2021a) and balancing this with more teacher directed methods of teaching.

6.3.5 Reasons to Include Play in the School Curriculum

Although it was clear that there were still significant discontinuities for children's learning, teachers in this study thought that continuity was created by the provision of play in the programme. There were indications from children that this was the case. Previous studies have documented a concern from children that in ECE they were able to play, but at school they have to work or that play was only available in break times (Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood, 2008; Corsaro & Molinari, 2008; Dockett & Perry, 2012; Einarsdottir, 2007, 2010). This concern was not raised by children in this study. Although children in this study noticed there was more structure around when and how they could play, children did not say that they missed playing. Despite each school including play in the programme in differing ways, it appeared that having regular access to play as part of the curriculum did provide a continuity which was useful for children.

While teachers recognised that the provision of play was providing continuity for children, play was not necessarily providing continuity of *learning* for children but rather giving children experiences which are closer to those of ECE and so more familiar. Interview data from teachers revealed that while they recognised play provided some continuity, there was an underlying purpose in providing play to give children time to be more ready for formal learning experiences. Play was seen to mediate readiness for school. Hedges (2018) contends that one of the reasons play-based learning has been included in new entrant classrooms is because there can be perceptions that children may not be ready for school and play is seen to address this. This is confirmed by data in this study, which showed that teachers had underlying beliefs about readiness for school that were influencing them. The view that children were '*just not ready*', as one teacher said, implies that teachers saw play as giving children time to become ready for the demands of schooling rather than providing continuity of learning. This is reflective of a maturational view of development where development is seen to unfold naturally (Graue, 1993; Peters, 2003b; Spodek & Saracho, 1999). Bartholomaeus (2016) argues that such developmental discourses have become 'regimes of truth' (Foucault, 1975) which pervade discourse and limit opportunities for alternative perspectives to influence practice.

Including play in the curriculum enhanced the transition experience for children by providing opportunities for all children to have successful experiences at school. There were also fewer concerns with children's behaviour in the play-based learning environments than had been noticed in teachers' previous experiences of more traditional classrooms. Similar findings were reported by Davis (2015) whose study showed that the provision of play supported children to settle more easily into school and reduced instances of behavioural problems. This may be because children's level of engagement

is higher in play-based environments (Martlew et al., 2011) and that they have a greater degree of choice; something this study did not examine.

6.3.6 Tensions for Teachers in Implementing Play-Based Learning

Previous studies have found that when schools shift to play-based learning there can be tension for teachers between being able to demonstrate to school leadership that children are making sufficient academic progress (Aiono et al., 2019; Jay & Knaus, 2018; Walsh et al., 2010), a finding confirmed in this study. Teachers articulated feeling challenged between wanting to embed learning in play and do things differently from how they had been done previously, and what they saw as the requirements of school management to show significant progress in children's literacy and mathematical learning.

The impact of having to report against *National Standards* (Ministry of Education, 2010b) also constrained teachers in some cases, even though the legal obligation to report against these was no longer required (Hipkins, 2017). Walsh et al. (2010) argues there is a need for further professional learning and for including learning about play-based environments in primary initial teacher education programmes. This may help teachers and school leaders better understand how to integrate literacy and numeracy learning into play and go some way to alleviating these concerns. However, it is likely this tension will continue to exist until research is able to quantify the long-term impact of play-based programmes on children's academic outcomes.

6.4 Chapter Summary

While including play-based learning in new entrant environments can provide a continuity that is helpful, there can be a discontinuity of learning and teaching which impacts on children. For some children the degree of change can mean it is difficult to see the connections between school and earlier learning experiences and this can impact their view of themselves as learners and on their attitude to the curriculum provided at school. While teachers said they valued play-based learning, the demands of assessment and school expectations of children's progress in academic spheres was perceived as a constraint on their freedom to align with play-based pedagogy more closely.

To be able to participate in the learning experiences of the school classroom children also need to know the 'rules of engagement', the norms and expectations of behaviour and engagement. The next chapter will report child, parent, and teacher perspectives on continuities and discontinuities new entrants may encounter in the expectations, structure, and environment

Chapter Seven

Case Study Findings and Discussion: Expectations, Structure and Environment

7.1 Introduction

On school entry children enter a new environment where there are different rules and routines and different organisational arrangements from what they experienced in ECE (Booth et al., 2019; Ebbeck et al., 2013; Morton et al., 2018). Therefore, there are different expectations of the ways children will behave and participate in the classroom.

This chapter will begin by presenting data showing how expectations of behaviour changed over the transition to school as did the strategies teachers used to manage children's behaviour. Children's, parents', and teachers' perspectives on practices used to organise the programme and daily routines are then described. Finally, aspects of the physical environment which appeared to have significance for children starting school are reported. The findings are then discussed in relation to existing literature.

7.2 Findings

In addition to the structure around learning and playing discussed in the previous chapter, there were other aspects of daily classroom organisation which were mentioned by participants. These included discontinuities in what was expected of children, in the routine of the day, organisation of the classroom, and rules children needed to follow. Aspects of the physical environment also differed. When asked what was different for children, the teachers in Case Study Two touched on many of these things, saying:

S2T1 Oh the uniform, the timetable.

S2T4 The bell ringing...

S2T2 The fact that they can't just go and get something to eat or...

S2T1 The rolling kai.

S2T2 The structure around eating.

S2T1 And the structure around learning... there's that expectation that they will. Behaviour probably as well, the golden rules, the walking feet, the inside voices. So, there's more of a firm sort of expectation that they will behave in a certain way when they're in the school environment.

Children and parents were also aware of these differences that children needed to learn about and adjust to. The following section presents participants' perspectives on the continuities and discontinuities children experience in the expectations of behaviour and how these were managed.

7.2.1 Behaviour Expectations and Management

Each learning context has particular expectations of how children will behave. This means that the rules and expectations of children at school differ from those of earlier contexts in which children have been involved. The ways teachers manage the behaviour of children can also be different as will be reported in the following sections.

The Importance of Knowing the Rules.

Of significance to children were the expectations of behaviour; the rules that they needed to comply with at school. Children indicated that it was important for new entrants to know the rules of school. S2C6 said that on the first day of school it was *"kind of hard 'cos I don't actually, I don't know the golden rules"* and that sometimes you might forget the rules. When asked what children need to know when starting school, a child said it was important to know *"how to be good"* (S3C4) and explained that being good included knowing where you were allowed to play. Knowing where not to play was talked about in all three Case Studies and was the most frequently mentioned rule in Case Study Two. During five of the six child led tours in this school children pointed out or photographed signs (Figure 5) telling children not to go on particular areas of grass or spoke of places they were not allowed to play. Some children were also keen to ensure that we followed these rules during the tour. They said:

S2C5 You have to keep on the path 'cos that's the rules.

S2C6 There's a sign over there and it says please don't go on that.

Figure 5
Sign (S2C1/S2C2)



There appeared to be a contrast with their experiences of ECE where, rather than there being rules about where children cannot play, areas children should not access are usually inaccessible to children. One of the teachers from Case Study Three spoke of the significance of knowing where to play and the rules around when you were allowed to play in certain places. She said:

S3T2 "Can I play here? Because at curiosity time I'm only allowed to be in this area that I can see you." "Morning tea and lunch time, can I go to the field?" So all those new little routines that are different for them. But they get into their routines because then they know what to do, it gives them a bit of ownership.

For this teacher knowing where to go and when contributed to the child's sense of belonging in the new environment.

Some children described rules that related to their interactions with other children. They listed several rules of this kind. For instance when asked what children starting school needed to know one pair said:

S3C5 No hurting people, or hitting.

S3C6 *Or no punching people... And no kicking people.*

S3C5 *Or no saying a naughty word.*

S3C6 *Like 'Shut up.'*

J *Oh, like swearing words. Anything else children need to know about school to make it easy when they come to school?*

S3C6 *You need to be kind and showing aroha.*

Another child said the expectation that children will be quiet at school was different for her. She stated, *"teachers at daycare don't tell us off when we are loud 'cos the teachers don't care"* (S2C9). Other rules children mentioned mainly related to things they were not allowed to do at school such as skipping or running inside, fighting, bullying, punching, saying naughty words, and leaving children out. There were a few things that children said you had to do at school including sitting up with legs and arms crossed and putting your hand up if you want to talk.

As explained in the following excerpt, children thought knowing the rules was important because there were consequences to not following the rules at school:

J *If there was a new kid coming to school what do you think they need to know to help them get used to school?*

S2C11 *Everything.*

S2C12 *I know. They have to learn about the golden rules. There are golden rules up there (pointing to the sign on the wall)... if some one's forgotten the golden rules they have to go to turituri [quiet] time.*

S2C11 *And then no one's allowed to visit there.*

J *And when you go to turituri time where do you go, what do you do.*

S2C12 *You have to go by the sign (there is a sign by the board with turituri written on it).*

S2C12 *If you're running like this in the classroom you have to go to turituri time (demonstrates).*

S2C11 *Yeah, like this (runs around).*

S2C12 *If you step like this (demonstrates big stomping steps) you'll be in turituri time... Or if you hop... or if you do a big voice you have to sit down here... and then the time goes.*

Similarly, children from Case Study One talked about what could happen if a child broke the rules. They described a form of 'time out' that occurred at school which they called being put 'in the zone'. When children were *"naughty... you walk with a teacher around the playground until you don't be naughty again or you sit on the staff room steps"* (S1C2). While these forms of time out appeared to be new to most children who mentioned them, for one child there appeared to be a continuity as S1C13 said that time out happened both at school and in ECE.

As well as children thinking rules are important because of the consequences of not following them, it could also be because of comments made to them before they start school. S2T1 explained that *"a lot of parents put on pressure"* saying things like *"You're going to school"* and *"you won't be able to do that at school."* In this teacher's perspective parents could add to children's anxiety about starting school and complying with the rules in the way they spoke of school and in their efforts to prepare children for the expectations of school.

One parent said that there were differences in the boundaries and how they were enforced at school. For her child who had additional needs, this had a significant impact, as communicating with him about the expectations was difficult, and no one at the school was aware of strategies which were effective in managing his behaviour. She felt this contributed to a difficult transition for her child.

Differences in the Way Behaviour was Managed.

As well as there being consequences for not following the rules, strategies were in place for rewarding certain behaviours at school and several children from each Case Study discussed these. S2C6 spoke of a shield awarded at assembly and a cabinet containing prizes to be awarded at assembly was pointed out by S2C7 who said you could be given a prize for *"being nice and quiet."* Other strategies included prizes for completing reading logs and children's photos being put up on the office wall (Figure 6). S1C7 and S1C8 spoke of certificates and trophies being given out as rewards during assembly in the hall where the class who *"is the most beautiful sitting up"* would win an award.

Figure 6
Photos on the Office Wall (S2C1/S2C2)



Other children described systems used in the classroom for positive reinforcement of appropriate school behaviour. For example, several children talked of being given tickets to a lucky draw which happened at the end of the day as a reward for good behaviour. Similarly, another classroom had a large picture of a mountain on the wall and a child explained:

S1C7 If you are really good, the teacher will say 'move yourself up the mountain' and we would take our little star with our name on it and we could move it up to the next level.

Giving rewards such as these was a way of positively reinforcing the behaviours valued at school and bringing these to the notice of children. By doing so it was more likely children would repeat those behaviours. This was also a way to communicate to new children that these behaviours are desirable and appropriate in the school context. In this way the rules of school were more visible to new entrants.

Taking Responsibility for Themselves and their Belongings.

Teachers in all three case studies spoke of having an expectation that children would take responsibility for themselves and their possessions at school, and this was echoed by one child who explained that children needed to “*know how to be responsible*” (S3C4). Teachers said that some children found it difficult to adjust to this expectation and that parent behaviours and expectations

could impact on how quickly children adjusted. In the following data excerpt, in response to being asked which changes are hard for children to adjust to, teachers discuss the difficulty they said most children experience in being expected to look after their own belongings:

S1T1 Having to look after their own book bag... Because (name) found it really hard, Nan would... make sure his bag was in the box and then it was reading time when he said he didn't bring it. It was because... he wasn't putting it in the box himself.

S1T2 He wasn't being responsible.

S1T1 ...And our expectations are you look after it yourself because then you know where it is... it's your job to bring it in the morning ...

J So there's some different expectations ...

S1T1 For most of them. Well reading bags is new for all of them isn't it so it's having to bring it in after reading ...put it out.

S1T2 But even being responsible for their own jerseys.

S1T1 The jerseys and the shoes and the socks (Laughs). Putting your newsletter away...

A teacher said that as well as having to look after their belongings, children had to take responsibility for their own wellbeing at school, independently caring for their needs.

S2T1 ... there's no one checking where's your water bottle, make sure you finish your water bottle, have you been to the toilet.

This teacher's perception was that in ECE teachers would have more oversight of the children's wellbeing, monitoring and giving more direction to wellbeing routines. A similar perspective was held by another teacher who observed that from her visits to ECE services she had formed the opinion that:

S3T1 There's a lot of adults doing stuff for kids, and I don't think they are as independent, or pushing those key competencies... as much as they say they are. Now that's only from two or three visits but I feel [its] quite adult oriented and... I would question the amount of independence that has been nurtured...

When teachers spoke of independence, they appeared to be referring to children being able to do things for themselves and follow the classroom routines. While teachers acknowledged that most

children adjusted quickly to these demands to be increasingly independent, they said that some children did not. Teachers expressed the view that parents and ECE teachers could support continuity for children by encouraging them to begin looking after themselves and their belongings and teaching self-help skills such as dressing themselves before they started school. While S2T1 said that they did not want parents and ECE services to “*get kids ready for school*” they wanted children to come to school “*life ready*” (S2T1). This would mean that there were similar expectations of taking responsibility for themselves in each context and the children would only need to learn the tasks that were specific to the new environment such as putting their book bags away.

Parents in all the case studies noticed this change in expectations, commenting that children needed to be more responsible and independent at school. One said that one of the biggest changes for her child was learning the classroom routines and expectations “*like having to organise his book bag in the right place and get it when needed*” (S1P5) and S2P7 said that this was a good thing. Another parent suggested that schools and ECE services should have similar expectations of children.

Teachers are not the only ones who have different expectations of children when they become a school child. S2T1 explained how parents’ expectations may be conveyed to children:

S2T1 I think the parent’s expectations act on the child quite a lot... with that transition. It’s like ‘you’re not at kindy... you’re going to school now’. You hear a lot of parents say ‘you’re a big school boy now’, you hear that when they are actually transitioning them in on their first day. ‘You’re a school boy now’ so I think that probably affects their mana quite a lot, children.

In this teacher’s view, parents have different expectations of children once they have started school and that this can affect the child’s view of themselves and their identity.

Children need to navigate changing expectations from teachers and parents when they start school which impacts on their identity. A school child is expected to behave differently from a preschool child and there is a need for new entrants to learn the rules of the new context. NE teachers may employ different strategies from those used in ECE contexts to encourage acceptable school behaviours and to punish unacceptable ones. In addition to learning about these new rules and expectations and adjusting to how teachers manage these, children must adapt to different routines, timetables and arrangements put in place to help the classroom run smoothly. The following section will discuss these structural and organisational arrangements.

7.2.2 Structure and Organisation

At school children encounter new routines to which they need to become accustomed as they navigate the school day. They may also have to deal with differences in the length of the day, the types of choices they have and the arrangements for eating.

Routines and Organisation of the Day.

Teachers in this study recognised that there were discontinuities in routines that children would need to adjust to on school entry. The use of a bell to regulate the day is one routine or system which was unfamiliar to children, according to teachers. One of them said:

S3T2 Differences... there's bells ... it's a lot of questions of "is that morning tea?" "Is that big play?" "Is that lunch? Is it lunchtime now?... So systems. Knowing the systems.

Children mentioned the bell as something that differed from their ECE experience. S2C4 described his puzzlement when the bell rang on his first day of school saying "I didn't know why a bell rang", adding that he hadn't known school had a bell. Adding to this, his peer noted that the bell had many different meanings. She said, "it's for lunchtime and coming inside and playing" (S2C3), reasons also given by the following child:

S2C2 It was different because [in ECE] we got to eat our lunch when we played but here its different 'cos here we have to wait for one bell to go play and then another one bell to eat our lunch. But we didn't have a bell and even if it was raining we got to go outside cos we had raincoats... so we can still play outside. But at this school we have to stay in our classes if it's raining and even if there's three bells, we have to go in our class cos that's when it starts raining.

The school bells reinforced the routines of the day and regulated how time was divided during the day, leading to a more structured environment than occurs in most ECE services, and confusion for children who did not understand the various meanings of the bell.

Teachers and parents shared the view that when children started school the timetable of the day differed. Some parents said the day was more structured at school than in ECE. However, this may not be the case for all children. One parent said that the school routine was less predictable than the routine of her child's ECE service where the same things happened every day. Another parent said that her child needed structure due to his additional needs. She was aware that the school had a play-based curriculum and was not as structured as the ECE service he was attending, so she moved him to

a less structured service six months before he started school, so he could get used to less structure. In this way she was trying to increase continuity for him.

A teacher who had previously worked in ECE reflected as follows on the impact of the daily timetable and how it created further discontinuities for children's play:

S2T4 One of the ... discontinuations would be... the music comes on after the play time and if a kid's doing something, they're expected to pack it away where in early childhood you can leave them out and you can come back to it 'cos there's not 'you have to come to the mat' and what have you.

Based on this teacher's experience of working in ECE, the timetable followed in school resulted in further discontinuities because of the routines that were in place to support the organisation of such a large space with so many children. While discussing this discontinuity during the interview, the teachers started to think of ways to avoid children having to pack away play materials if they were deeply engaged with them so that children could come back to their play and continue the learning which might have been occurring. Conversations about the discontinuities therefore prompted reflection on how these might be reduced or mitigated.

Figure 7
Chart Children Use to Show They are at School (S3C1/S3C2)



Children spoke of routines that were of new to them, particularly ones that needed to be completed at the start of each day. Photos were taken which reflected some of these routines such as the place to put your name to show you are at school (Figure 7), where to put your book bag, the chart where you put your picture to show you want milk at lunch time and the place to hang your bag. Children took photos of the library (Figure 8) and one child described in detail the routines involved in selecting and checking out a book from the school library. She said:

S1C1 They pick a book, they come and read it quietly and there's someone at the desk and they scan it... we can't touch these (gesturing to a shelf), the year ones can't touch these, these are the senior books...

J Right and when the person scans the books does that mean you can take them to your classroom?

S1C1 Yeah... so there's a little yellow book bag you can put it in and it says your name and you carry that and then you need to... put your book into that and they scan it and it says a book and a book and a book, like three books or five books.

Figure 8
The Library (S1C3/S1C4)



Of significance to one child were the routines associated with emergency drills in the classroom. When asked what he found strange when he started school he said *"It was strange cos there's alarms... and*

I don't like the alarms... we had to have practice but at my kindy you didn't" (S2C2). He went on to say that the fire alarm practice had been "scary" and that he had not known what to do. While it is likely he had participated in a fire drill at his ECE service because this is a regulatory requirement (Ministry of Education, 2021), the drill that he experienced at school was unfamiliar and unexpected to him, resulting in him feeling scared. Emergency drills are not a daily occurrence in schools and may happen without advance warning to children. If they have not previously experienced a fire drill at school or had any warning or discussion of what happens in such an event this may lead to feelings of fear and may result in children not knowing what to do and endangering themselves or other people in a real emergency.

Differences in the Length of the Day.

The length of the school day was something that parents and teachers described as different for most children. For some children the day was longer and for some it was shorter, depending on the hours the child was enrolled in an ECE service. One parent spoke of having deliberately enrolled her child in ECE for the same hours as school ran so that the child would be used to the hours. A common theme in data from parents, including those for whom the school day was shorter, was that children found school more tiring than they had found ECE. Some parents said this impacted on behaviour at home, and that there was the opportunity for children to rest in ECE, but not in school. Similarly, teachers in Case Study One commented that some children at school got very tired and that an ECE service they had visited had space for sleeping. They thought that some children might be used to having a sleep during the day which did not happen as a regular part of the school routine. However, if they noticed a child was tired, they allowed them to lie down in an adjoining room. Some children noticed that at school there was no place to sleep, whereas in ECE they could have a nap and as one child said, "*I get tired at school*" (S1C9). Children spoke of the little beds that were provided for sleeping in their ECE setting. For some children sleep was an accepted part of the routine in ECE as S1C4 explained "*...at kindergarten you always got to play, and sleep after what you did.*" For this child not being able to sleep at school was one way school was different from her earlier experience.

Differences in the Choices Children Have.

Teachers and parents said that one way that these schools provided some continuity with children's ECE experience was by providing opportunities for children to choose what they wanted to do. However, parents spoke of restrictions on when children could choose as a difference. They also said that children could not choose whether or not to participate in certain activities, usually academic ones. For example, one said that there were things that children had to do at school, but that in ECE

they “could write their name if they wanted but didn’t have to. There was choice” (S1P2). While most participants indicated that school provided less choice than children were used to, one of the teachers shared a different perspective, which acknowledged that the experience might be different for each child. She had visited some ECE services and said:

S2T2 I think that some of the similarities are they get to choose where they want to go and what they want to do. It’s not as constricting as some childcare centres because we know some early childhood centres are very worksheet driven and whatnot. But a lot of them, they slot in so easily because it’s just like being at early childhood. You know there’s lots to do, there’s big spaces and it makes that transition a whole lot easier for most of them, I think.

Because ECE services differ in the programme they provide, it is likely that there are differences in the amount of choice that children experience prior to entering school and this is reflected in the data from this teacher.

Teachers in all three cases identified that a continuity between the contexts was the provision of some choice, but they recognised that children were not always able to choose what they wanted to do at school and that for some children this was a discontinuity. While they recognised that choice was restricted by other routines and demands, teachers said that providing choice was something they did which was beneficial in providing some continuity for children:

S2T2 I think having the choice when they’re not with us for learning.... Having the choice to do what interests them, is pretty cool too. It keeps that continuity up.

Children noticed differences in the kinds of choices they have at school and that choice was not available all the time. They said that at school there was more structure around choice and that there were times when their choice was limited. As one child explained:

S3C2 We get to go outside. But we have to come in when the teacher says. But we can just stay outside at kindy.

Similarly, in Case Study Two, children said that they were not able to choose to play outside or in the sandpit and mud kitchen at certain times. There was some confusion about this, with one child saying they could play in these areas “only at play time” (S2C11), and another “only if you’ve been with Mrs (name) and done reading and writing you’re allowed out here and only in the sandpit” (S2C12). In contrast a teacher in this school said that one of the similarities the classroom had with ECE was “the

indoor/outdoor availability where they can go indoors or outside when they want” (S2T4). It appears that in this matter, teachers’ perceptions about what choice was available and the meaning of ‘when they want’ differed from children’s interpretation; this resulted in the teacher thinking there was continuity when children perceived things differently.

Eating at School.

As discussed previously, there were aspects of the way lunch time was organised that differed for children such as the bells signalling eating and play times. Some children and parents also mentioned that bringing a lunch box to school was something which was new because the ECE service had provided meals, while others said that this was something familiar. Even when children were used to bringing their own lunch, there were differences in how eating was managed at school, which caused anxiety for some parents. One parent commented that it was new for her child to be responsible for their own lunch, choosing what to eat, and remembering to save food for lunch. She said her child was used to more direction from teachers in this matter, for example ECE teachers *“telling children what they had to eat first” (S2P12).* Other parents also had this concern and some worried that children may not eat enough at school due to the reduced direction. Teachers also spoke of the routines and responsibilities around eating being different and the shift to children being responsible for their own eating:

S2T3 And it’s adjusting the parents as well because sometimes you might get a parent that comes and says their child came home with their lunch box all full and I said ‘well, you know it’s up to the child now to sit there and eat their food.’

Teachers commented that some children were used to a ‘rolling kai’ in ECE where they could eat whenever they wanted, while at school this was not possible. Parents and children also commented on the restriction to eating at specific times as something that could be unfamiliar to children. For example, S3C2 commented that *“I don’t get to eat when I want to eat”* and S3C5 said that *“we could eat any time we want,”* but at school they could only eat at set times. Some parents commented that the structure around eating could be difficult for their children. One said for her child this was of such significance that he *“tells his baby brother that when he goes to school, he will not be able to eat all the time” (S3P1).* Since this data was collected there have been changes to the licensing criteria for ECE services which now require access to food to be at designated times (Ministry of Education, 2021b), rather than centres allowing children to eat at any time they choose. Although this regulatory change was put in place for safety purposes, it may additionally support continuity for children around food times.

In Case Study One there were specific routines around eating to cater for a child who had severe allergies. This meant that for all children there were new and strict routines around eating and what they could bring to eat. Due to these allergies the child had previously only attended ECE outside meal-times and the mother said that one of the biggest concerns the child had at school entry was *“fear about her allergies” (S1P3)*. The school had worked with the parent to develop routines which would help keep the child safe. These eating routines were noticed by the other children as something that was different for them about coming to school

Routines and structures put in place to organise the school day can be unfamiliar to children when they start school as can aspects of the physical environment. The next section will detail discontinuities in the physical environment that featured in the data.

7.2.3 Physical Environment

Children enter a new physical context when they transition to school where aspects of the environment differ significantly from what they have been accustomed to. Aspects of the classroom, the playground, and the number of people in the environment differ. However, these differences can mean that children are able to have different experiences which they enjoy.

Playgrounds.

For many children the playground was a positive factor in starting school. When asked what the best part of starting school was, several children said it was the playground. For example, one said that starting school *“feeled a bit cooler because it had a lot of playground” (S2C4)*. Children spoke of the school playgrounds as being different from the ones at their ECE services and playgrounds were the thing children most commonly photographed during the child led tours (e.g. Figures 9 and 10). They said there were more playgrounds at school, playgrounds were bigger and that there were playgrounds for children of different ages. Some children mentioned the challenges the more advanced playgrounds presented, showing pride in having mastered these challenges or commenting that things such as the monkey bars were ‘tricky’ when they started school. A less positive view was expressed by S2C1 who said that while she liked the playground, a tricky part of starting school was that in the playground *“I can’t even see where my friends are.”* This was an issue also noted by one of the parents who said:

S3P13 At school the kids have so much more space and different playgrounds to play at that sometimes she couldn’t find her friends to play with so walked around the school to

find them. Whereas at preschool the kids all play together in a much smaller play space.

So, while the playgrounds at school were a positive feature for many new children, they could be large and there could be multiple spaces for play. There could also be numerous children from different classes playing in the playground. Consequently, it could be hard for children to locate their friends.

Figure 9
The Playground (S1C7/S1C8)



Figure 10
The Older Children's Playground (S2C5/S2C6)



In some schools, children were permitted to have different kinds of experiences in the school playground which they enjoyed, such as climbing trees, using scooters, and playing ball on the school courts. For instance, S2C5 said *"I like playing on the playground with my friends and climbing trees."* Additionally, the playground afforded opportunities for different activities such as netball, rugby, soccer, and hockey which children had not previously experienced. As S1C15 explained, there is more space at school which provided opportunities for different experiences whereas, in ECE, *"there was only a small space for us."*

Starting school can provide some new experiences which are valued by children. The playground, while different from those experienced in the ECE environment, was seen to be a positive part of starting school which afforded opportunities for experiences children enjoyed. There were also continuities and discontinuities about the classrooms that participants described.

Classrooms and Classroom Resources.

Several aspects that related to classrooms were evident in the data. Children noticed that school had several classrooms (Figure 11) which appeared to contrast with their ECE experiences, where services may have one learning area for all children, or be divided into a smaller number of spaces than there were in these schools.

Figure 11
Lots of Classrooms (S1C13)



Some children in Case Study One commented that the classroom was much bigger than what they had experienced in ECE. S1C7 said the classroom was “ginormous” and a pair of children agreed the ECE services they had attended were smaller than the classroom and proceeded to demonstrate this visually by indicating how much space inside the school classroom their services would have taken:

S1C3 My kindly it was about from here, plus from over here (moving around to show the proportions).

J That’s a tiny kindly alright!

S1C4 Mine was like here to down about here (indicating the size by walking around and pointing).

J So yours was a bit bigger, but kindly is smaller than school. Is that what you’re saying?

S1C3 Yeah.

Teachers in this school also spoke of the difference in size:

S1T2 I think that the difference too is the space. ...this space is bigger than any of the day-cares that I have seen...

The teachers acknowledged that their knowledge of what ECE contexts were like was limited, as they had not visited many ECE services, but commented that the ones they had seen appeared to provide access to a bigger variety of resources than they were able to provide in the classroom. One teacher commented:

S1T1 When we were visiting, they had lots of choice, they had really good workstations where they could choose and I was, we were, quite jealous as we thought 'oh man this looks so good' because there were so many things that kids could use and be creative...

A barrier to providing more resources was seen to be funding and they said that while the school was still working on resourcing their play-based learning environment, the ECE services had been set up with that in mind. While in the teacher's view this was something children might find different, it was not something that children mentioned.

The focus of children in all three Case Studies seemed to be the equipment and resources the school had, rather than what they didn't have. The provision of play materials was a positive aspect of starting school for some children. For instance, several children said that they liked the toys at school and for S1C6 the toys were something that was positive about school saying she felt "great" on her first day because there were "lots of toys". Some children talked about resources which were similar to those in their ECE services and parents also commented on this. S2C10 said that what he liked when he came to school was playing with the Lego, although he wished there were Lego people like his ECE service had provided.

Children took photos of and talked about a range of things in the classroom which were different from what had been in their ECE environment (e.g Figures 12 and 13). These included furniture, iPads, computers, white boards, storage equipment, bookbags, and resources such as dress ups. There was no evidence from the data that the physical differences in the classroom environment were of great significance to children. Children merely listed them as things which were different. Of more significance was the number of people in the new environment as will be discussed in the next section.

Figure 12
Whiteboard (S1C13)



Figure 13
Bags (S1C1/S1C2)



The Number of People.

The number of children at school was far greater than what children had experienced previously. For some children this was mentioned as a difference which they expressed no concern about. For instance, one child said that there were “*more children and more bags and more... a cloak bay and stuff*” (S1C5) but said that this was a good thing and had not worried them. For other children the thought of so many children engendered feelings of nervousness or fear. When asked how he felt on his first day of school one of them said:

S2C4 It’s really scary when I started school.

J Was it? What were you scared about S2C4?

S2C4 All the people because I was just a baby (service name) school.

Parents in all three Case Studies identified the greater number of children at school and/or in the classroom as being a way school was different from their child’s ECE context. This was a theme which was particularly prevalent in data from parents in Case Study Two, with half the parents in this case mentioning it. This is not surprising as the classroom in this school was the largest, containing 96 children in one space. According to parents, some children took this in their stride, while for others this could be difficult. S2P2 said that the larger number of children had led to her child having anxiety attacks, while another parent explained:

S2P8 School has a lot of kids in a big group which is too much sensory for (name). Needs the calm for learning and school can be chaotic with so many children.

In contrast, other parents from Case Study Two commented that this was a difference but did not identify it as being of significance for their child or causing any anxiety. That the large number of children had not bothered her child was a surprise to one of the parents who said:

S2P12 When I first saw the number of children in the class, I wondered how he would cope, but he settled really well, and the teachers manage the space well.

Teachers in this Case Study were aware that the large space and number of children could cause parents concern but thought that parents soon changed their perceptions. One of them said that when parents came in for visits:

S2T4 *...at first they sort of think 'what's this here, this whole big classroom', but then when they're actually here, when you talk to them the second time... they're like 'Ohh yeah. It works.'*

The teachers in Case Study One also spoke of the larger number of children at school and thought that this could be of concern for some children. They said the number of children and greater child to teacher ratio was something children needed to adjust to because of the impact on the availability of the teacher's attention as the following quote shows:

S1T1 *The numbers are bigger too for, you know, like preschool they might have a roll of like 40 – something like that and coming to a school that has 100 or something or in other cases you know they've got more, 200 kids.*

S1T2 *Overwhelming for some, for some it's not.*

S1T1 *I think for a lot of the kids it's that difference of just one teacher, or in our case two, but I mean there's one child and often one or two teachers, but you can't always give that attention instantly, like, perhaps you can react to children more quickly in the... early childhood setting.*

Similarly, a teacher in Case Study Three commented as follows:

S3T1 *I would say seven children to one adult ECE, maybe one adult to ten children max, when they come to school one adult to 22 - and that's serious. That impinges on what children can do and the time that they can do it because you don't get there in a timely enough fashion.*

Parents also mentioned that the number of children in the classroom impacted on the teacher:child ratio, and as a result children had to get used to having fewer teachers and larger groups. In ECE children would be used to having a minimum of one teacher to ten children (New Zealand Government, 2008), whereas in schools there may be only one teacher to 20 or 30 children. This would result in greater waiting times for children and less opportunity for interaction with a teacher.

Having an ECE Service on School Grounds.

Parents and teachers in Case Study Three said that there were benefits for children who attended an ECE service which was located on school grounds. They said that children were more familiar with the physical environment of school and opportunities for collaboration were greater. A local kindergarten

had relocated temporarily to the school grounds the previous year. For children who had been relocated, it was thought by parents and teachers to have created a familiarity with both the environment and the teachers which was useful. One of these parents said that for her child, a similarity between contexts was having the same building and surroundings. She said her daughter “usually takes a lot of time before she does anything unknown” (S3P4) but had adjusted to school more quickly than expected. A teacher said that for children who had attended the kindergarten while it was on school grounds:

S3T2 The similarity was that they came from this place as their kindy. But obviously there are a lot of differences, because there used to be a fence around here, they couldn't use that playground, they had their own little playground in here. So that made it a little bit easier for them, because they could see their brothers and sisters, mum and dad came to one place, and so that was pretty similar. And it was nice for us because we could get to see them in our Kakano [prestart] programme...

Her colleague also said that this was an arrangement which created continuity and that there were benefits for children in ECE services being located on site at schools.

Findings reported in this chapter have highlighted the significance of school rules and routines to children starting school and the resulting expectations of children's behaviour. Children in this study experienced unfamiliar strategies teachers used to encourage compliance with school rules and there was an increased expectation that children take responsibility for themselves and their belongings. While the physical environment of school differed from earlier contexts this did not appear to impact negatively on children, differences in the playground were mostly seen to be a positive part of starting school. However, for some children the increased number of children at school caused some anxiety and teachers and parents were aware there was a resulting decrease in teacher time and attention for each child. These findings will be discussed in the following sections.

7.3 Discussion

Children starting school enter an environment which may look very different from their ECE service and where they are expected to know and follow rules and routines which are new to them. The following discussion highlights the significance of knowing the rules and routines of the classroom before explaining why this knowledge is important to transitioning children. It concludes by drawing attention to how the new environment may afford different experiences and limit others.

7.3.1 The Significance of Knowing the Rules and Routines

Every learning environment has its own culture with its own ways of doing and being. When children start school, they need to learn the different rules and routines that are part of how things are done in that classroom, in that school, in the new learning environment. Unspoken rules are embedded in school culture which children must become aware of and adjust to (Margetts, 2007a). A consistent theme in research investigating children's perspectives on the transition to school has been that they see the rules and routines of school as being different from those of ECE and that this matters to them (Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood, 2008; Di Santo & Berman, 2012; Dockett & Perry, 2007; Ebbeck, Saidon, Rajalachime, & Teo, 2013; Einarsdottir, 2007; Joerdens, 2014; Margetts, 2006).

Consistent with this earlier body of research, this study shows that knowing - or not knowing - the rules was something that mattered to children when they started school. Not knowing the expectations of behaviour caused children uncertainty and they worried about whether they were doing the right thing. When rules were broken, there were consequences for children. For most children, these consequences appeared to be different from what they experienced in ECE contexts. If children start school not knowing the rules there is a risk that they will not be able to comply with teachers' requests (Fabian & Dunlop, 2007). This could mean consequences might be enforced for behaviours children did not know were unacceptable at school as the rules and expectations differed from what they were familiar with.

Children in this study also had to become familiar with routines and strategies used to organise and structure school life. As found in earlier studies, the school day was regulated by bells which had different messages, there were new routines around eating, and restrictions on when children could eat and when they could access the outdoors, which differed from the practices experienced in ECE (O'Connor, 2018; Peters, 1999, 2000). Children were also busy all day and there was no provision for them to sleep. Unfamiliar routines can be unsettling for children and cause distress (Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood, 2008; Joerdens, 2014; Peters, 1999).

The play-based environments in these Case Studies included opportunities for child choice which was seen to provide some continuity for children. However, some school experiences were compulsory for children, most commonly academic experiences. Teachers had the expectation that children would engage in these experiences. For some children, this expectation was seen to be a discontinuity. The degree of continuity and discontinuity of choice differed for each child depending on the philosophy and programme provided by their ECE service and the programme of the classroom into which they transitioned. Previous research has highlighted that starting school involves an increase in structure

and less choice for children (Ebbeck et al., 2013; Einarsdottir, 2007, 2010; Huf, 2013). However, it appears that play-based environments can provide opportunities for children to have choice which provides a degree of continuity for children, even when choice is limited to certain times. Aiono (2017) suggests that in play-based school environments there may be more flexible timetables. This flexibility can allow room for increased child choice.

7.3.2 Why Knowing the Rules and Routines is Important

Being unfamiliar with the school rules and routines caused uncertainty for some children. This is not surprising as earlier studies have shown that knowing the rules and routines is important during this time. For instance, Dockett and Perry (2007) contend that teachers think that being able to follow school routines and be independent is of importance for children starting school. Understanding the norms of behaviour is important to developing a sense of belonging in a setting (Dyson, 2018). This is reflected in *Te Whāriki* which expects ECE teachers to ensure children “know the limits and boundaries of acceptable behaviour” so that they can develop a sense of belonging (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 32). Until children know the rules and routines of school, they may have difficulty adjusting as they need this knowledge to be able to function. (Dockett & Perry, 2007; Joerdens, 2014). Knowledge of the routines and rules can support children to cope with the challenges they encounter during the early days at school (Harrison & Murray, 2015). Children may not know how to engage appropriately in the learning experiences provided if they do not have this knowledge. If they are unable to engage appropriately in the school curriculum their learning may be impacted. Learning the rules has also been shown to facilitate peer acceptance and relationships (Fabian, 2010; Joerdens, 2014). Being accepted by peers is important because having friends at school impacts on engagement in learning (Hagan, 2005, 2007; Hayes, 2013, 2014). Until children understand the expected behaviours of school and are therefore able to function at school, they will not feel secure and thus that they belong to the new community they have joined. Knowing the rules and routines of school can provide a sense of safety and emotional wellbeing (Margetts, 2006) which impacts on the child’s ability to learn (Bulkeley & Fabian, 2006).

The importance of knowing the rules and routines at school has been demonstrated in this study and data from children showed that they did not always understand the rules and routines at school until they did something wrong. These findings indicate that teachers need to consider how children can become familiar with the expectations that apply in the school setting as quickly as possible. It is also important to consider how new entrants can be supported to learn about the organisational systems that are in place such as school bells and, importantly, to induct them in health and safety aspects such as what to do during a fire drill. The current study did not focus on how children came to learn

the classroom rules and routines. However, earlier research has shown that when there is a continuous school entry policy it can be left to children's peers to support new entrants in learning the classroom rules (Hayes, 2013, 2014). Peters (2000) argues that continuous entry can exacerbate discontinuity as arrangements for orientation may be minimal compared to what is possible to arrange for a larger group of children who start together. When children enter school as a cohort, teachers can plan time to work with the new children and teach them about the rules and routines of school; it is easier to plan a programme of induction (Education Review Office, 2022). Not all schools are implementing cohort entry and cohort entry may not suit all communities (Education Review Office, 2022). Therefore, where children enter school individually, teachers should ensure that transition programmes help children to understand the expectations of behaviour and become familiar with the structure the routines of the classroom. How children can be supported to become familiar with these aspects of school life is a worthwhile focus of future research.

7.3.3 Affordances and Limitations of the New Environment

Anyone who has been to both a school and an ECE service would notice that the physical environments differ. It might be assumed that this would be noticed by children and be a factor in the ease with which they transition. Children, parents, and teachers in this study talked about aspects of the physical environment which were different. Children were able to point out buildings, resources and other unfamiliar parts of the school environment and took photos of things that were different for them. However, contrary to Dockett and Perry's (2007) suggestion that children may be overawed by the physical differences in the school environment, most of these differences were not spoken of as things that were positive or negative, or of having had an impact on children during their transition. They were pointed out simply as things that were different. However, it is likely that having some familiarity with the differences in the school environment before starting school could benefit children by decreasing the discontinuities they need to contend with.

Children pointed out resources and toys with which they were familiar. According to O'Connor (2018) one way to provide some continuity is to ensure there are familiar resources and materials provided for play. When there are familiar resources children are able to find something that they know how to engage with and they can be pleased to see things they are familiar with. In addition to being pleased about having familiar resources, children in this study also liked finding there were different 'toys' provided for them to play with.

Differences in the outdoor playground environment featured as something that impacted positively on children. Dockett and Perry (2007) found that children can find the school playground challenging;

something children in this study also identified. However, children in this study regarded the playground as one of the best things about school and spoke of the increased challenge in a positive way. Gibson (2000) argues that an environment provides resources which a social actor can make use of and that each environment affords certain kinds of experiences. Aspects of the physical environment of school, differing rules and the availability of different resources afforded different kinds of experiences from those children experienced previously. This was particularly evident in the school playground. For instance, children expressed pleasure at being able to engage in experiences such as climbing a tree and playing games like hockey and rugby which had not been available at their ECE service. Consequently, differences in the physical environment may afford different kinds of experiences which can be welcomed by children as something positive about school. Gibson (2000) proposed that to act on an opportunity that is afforded, a person needs to perceive that the opportunity exists, and the experience is available to them. Whether a child recognises these new experiences and opportunities may depend on their prior experience or whether they are supported by teachers or others to understand and access the experience that is afforded.

Conversely, an aspect of the environment which can be of concern for children is the increased number of children in the environment. Most ECE services which fed these schools have smaller groups of children in each room than were present in the classrooms in Case Studies One and Two. There were also fewer children in the entire ECE service than there were at any of these schools. Children can find being in an environment with so many children worrying (Peters, 2000) and can find it difficult to find their friends in the large playground where so many children are playing (Peters, 2015). There has been a recent trend in New Zealand for schools to shift to larger 'innovative' or 'modern' learning environments. While there is some research which addresses this shift (e.g. Everatt et al., 2019; Mackey et al., 2018), there is a need for further research which assesses the impact on children starting school.

As well as having more children in these school contexts, there are different adult:child ratios (Mackenzie, 2018b; OECD, 2017b). In ECE the minimum ratio of four-year-old children to adults is 1:10 (New Zealand Government, 2008), whereas children may be in a school classroom where the ratio is 1:20 or more. This can mean children have to become used to less adult time, less supervision, and may have to wait for longer periods when they want the teacher's attention. The difference in ratio may be one thing that impacts on the expectation of teachers that children become more responsible for themselves and their belongings. There is simply no capacity for the teachers to do as much for children.

Teachers and parents in Case Study Three said there were benefits for children who attended an ECE service located on the school site. Having the service on site was seen to have provided some continuity for children as they had to walk through the school to get to their service. This meant they were familiar with the environment of the school and had opportunities to become familiar with people from the school, as discussed in Chapter Five.

7.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented and discussed data showing that starting school involves continuities and discontinuities in the expectations of how children will behave, how teachers manage behaviour, the organisation of the classroom and the environments in which children learn. While children did not seem to be very concerned about discontinuities in the physical environment, the findings highlight the importance of inducting children to the routines of the classroom and the expectations of behaviour. Knowing the rules, routines and norms of school behaviour provides children with a sense of security and supports them to access the curriculum and to function at school. Teachers must therefore include information about these aspects of classroom life in their transition programmes and scaffold children's understanding of these during their early days at school.

The next chapter will report perspectives on whether discontinuity and continuity during the transition to school matters, before describing strategies which were employed to support children in navigating discontinuity.

Chapter 8

Case Study Findings and Discussion: The Importance of Continuity and Teacher Practices

8.1 Introduction

The changes involved in starting school mean that children in these Case Studies experienced discontinuities in people and relationships, differences in relation to teaching and learning, and had new expectations of behaviour, routines and environments to engage with, as reported in the previous chapters. While some discontinuities can cause concern for children in transition, other changes are welcomed, as children expect some degree of change when they start school (Ackesjö, 2014; Dockett & Perry, 2007b). Although some discontinuity is inevitable when entering a new environment, there have recently been calls to examine how continuity can be increased for children starting school (Education Review Office, 2015; Ministry of Education, 2015). There may also be a need to provide support for children to adjust to the inevitable discontinuities they will experience.

This chapter begins by examining how participants viewed the importance of continuity and establishes that a degree of continuity was seen as helpful to transitioning children. Strategies that assist in creating continuity and helping children cope with the changes involved in starting school are then presented and discussed.

8.2 Findings

8.2.1 Does Continuity Matter?

Both continuity and discontinuity may be important during the transition to school. Data discussed in the previous chapters showed that some of the discontinuities of starting school were welcomed by children, whereas other discontinuities were more problematic. Similarly, there were some continuities which appeared to be of significance. Parents and teachers in all Case Studies agreed that providing some continuity had a positive impact on transition. However, it was recognised that the amount of similarity needed may differ for each child. In one parent's opinion continuity was *"less important if the child is looking forward to it."* (S2P9). In her view children may be looking forward to starting school and the changes that were involved.

Parents in all three Case Studies said that similarities between contexts were important. Parents were asked to rate how important similarities between ECE and school were on a scale of one to five, with one being extremely important and five being not important. Of the 16 parents who answered this question, 12 gave a rating of one or two and no parents rated it as a five. Some parents did not give a rating but commented instead. Common reasons given by parents for the importance of similarities between the contexts were that continuity eased the transition, helped children adjust more quickly, reduced children's fear or anxiety and made the change less of a shock. The following data excerpts exemplify these views:

S2P2 Helps settling and reduces anxiety.

S3P11 Very important so it's not too drastic and they don't freak out, so they are still familiar with what goes on.

S3P12 Children do well with routine, it helps ease them in.

S1P4 So the shock is not there. School can be scary so if they feel it is a little like daycare it takes away the fear.

S2P7 Some grounding of familiarity so the transition is an adventure, not a trauma.

Similarly, teachers in all three Case Studies believed that continuity could make the transition easier for children. When asked if it was important to provide continuity teacher responses included:

S2T2 Very much so... If they're coming into an environment that's similar to their preschool it's not such a big change. I mean it's still a big change but there are some things that are familiar in the way we run stuff so it's not so freaky...

S3T2 Well, that's why we've got play based learning. Because it was such a big - it was a big difference.

Teachers in Case Study One said that they were working towards increasing continuity and they said this reduced the time it took for children to settle into school. When asked about the benefits of providing continuity, S2T1 speculated that there could be long term benefits to children's mental health:

S2T1 I do think there's something in that first two years of school that can affect a child's mana so much, they will travel through school into high school with deep seated

emotional and social issues and I think if you spend that first two years of school making them feel socially and emotionally safe. I mean that's my goal...

S2T2 *Much better outcomes.*

S2T1 *We'd get away from a lot of the problems, teenage suicide, yeah, I think we would.*

In this teacher's view continuity was associated with children feeling socially and emotionally safe and thus could have long term implications. S3T1 associated continuity with the ease of transition which she said was important because there was a *"high positive correlation between successful transition over a period of time and actually hitting the domain."* A successful transition was seen to correlate to children meeting required academic standards. Therefore, in her view continuity contributed to academic achievement by facilitating a more successful transition.

When parents were asked how important it was for there to be differences between ECE and school, they expressed differing opinions. Some parents said that difference was not at all important or that differences needed to be introduced gradually. Others said difference was important to support continued development and learning. For example, S2P4 said that discontinuity led to *"growth, development and learning"* and a similar view was that *"children need to stretch, not stagnate"* (S2P7). Some parents' responses to this question indicated that they saw school as the beginning of formal learning. S1P4 held this view: she said that while it was important to have some similarities there was also a need for there to be differences so that children *"know it is time to knuckle down and learn"* (S1P4). It also seems that some parents viewed learning as happening in structured situations, rather than through play. These parents thought differences were needed to introduce a structure in which learning would happen. S2P12 shared her thinking about this, saying *"It is good to have similarities, but you need differences for the learning, you need the structure."*

Some discontinuities can be upsetting for children, and it is not always possible to predict which ones will be significant. For instance, one child was upset that the children did not wash their hands before eating at school, as had been the routine in his ECE service. His mother said that he came home upset about it and talked about it for a long time after starting school. As discussed in Chapter Five, data showed that children linked social discontinuity with feelings of worry, fear or nervousness. They also mentioned positive emotions related to social continuity. Chapters Six and Seven also highlight other significant aspects of discontinuity for children such as differences in teaching and learning approaches which could result in some children being unable to transfer their previous learning to the school context, and differences in rules and routines.

When children start school some degree of change is inevitable, as one parent acknowledged, saying that “*school is different to kindy and it does need to be transitioned at some point*” (S3P3). Teachers also said that there would always be a difference between the two contexts. However, they had different opinions about how important it was for schools to differ from ECE contexts. While one teacher said that the contexts should be as similar as possible her colleague said that change was important, so children learned to adapt. Another stated that the organisation of school meant that there had to be discontinuities, so difference was inevitable.

Children, parents, and teachers in all three Case Studies were able to identify ways in which school differed from, or was similar to, the ECE contexts children had previously attended. Data showed variation in which aspects were considered to be similar or different, as might be expected with each child coming to school with unique past experiences and with each school context being different. Although some continuities were found these were mainly identified by teachers and parents with few children discussing aspects of school that they thought were similar to ECE. Several children said that everything at school was different as this data excerpt shows:

J Are there any ways that school is the same as kindy?

S1C15 No

S1C14 No.

J It’s completely different is it?

S1C14 Yeah.

It is possible that even though there are some aspects that teachers and parents see as providing continuity, children are not able to see these things as similar because the context in which they are happening is different. It is important to keep in mind that while we think we are providing continuity, children may not see things this way and it will still feel different to the child. Additionally, children may not identify the continuities as they are more focused on the differences. However, it is evident that while children may not think there are many continuities, they do not necessarily see this as a negative thing. For example, S1C7 saw the differences in a positive light:

J What about the things you do at school, are they the same as the kinds of things you did at kindy or different?

S1C7 different

J *uhuh*

S1C7 *very, very different*

J *in what way?*

S1C7 *...in a cool way*

While discontinuity is inevitable and, according to teachers and parents, can be beneficial to children's learning and development, teachers and parents agreed that there are benefits to providing some continuity between contexts. Teachers in all three Case Studies saw benefits in actively working towards increased continuity. Each Case Study school implemented strategies that aimed to reduce the discontinuity children might experience when transitioning to school and support children in coping with the inevitable discontinuities as will now be reported.

8.2.2 Teacher Practices Which Support Transitioning Children

Teachers in this study employed a range of practices which they said supported continuity for children transitioning to school. They also detailed ways they supported children to navigate discontinuity. The following sections will describe data highlighting these practices.

Visits to School.

Teachers and parents spoke of visits by children to school as providing opportunities for children to become familiar with the school context. In this way children could become aware of the discontinuities that would be experienced and begin to adjust to these. In particular, school visits were spoken of as a way to support children to develop relationships with teachers before they started school. This view is reflected in S1P5's view that school visits were a "*good opportunity for the teacher to observe and get to know the child*". All three schools encouraged parents to bring children for school visits and teachers thought these visits eased the transition experience. Teachers said that when children did not have school visits the time of change was more difficult for children to navigate.

Teachers in Case Studies One and Two said that it was important for children to visit the actual classroom they would be in rather than have transition visits in another place. This was thought to be important so that children experienced what school was really like and met the teachers and children who would be in their class. When asked what contributed to a successful transition, teachers in Case Study Two responded:

S2T2 *I think if they've been in for visits... And been around the school especially if they've got a brother or sister already here so they are familiar with the school.*

S2T1 *And I think it's the foundation of those visits. These are the toilets, this is where you can get a drink of water, that familiarity with the school without all the children around. So, doing the tours... letting them know where the nooks and crannies are around the school. Just getting them familiar with the place.*

S2T3 *And the nice thing is now... Once upon a time Miss (teacher's name) used to take just a group in the staff room.*

S2T1 *It was hideous.*

S2T3 *Just for the afternoon and... they had a look around the school, but they never were in the classroom. But now, they are actually part of our class routine in the morning... And it's nice now. When they come in, they're actually like one of the other school kids. And they do, what is it now? Five or six weeks before...*

S2T1 *And its good for the parents, they talk to the other parents and they sort of relax a little bit and you can see the shoulders sort of go down a little bit... You know the kids who came through (name of teacher from previous 'preschool' class) were petrified on their first day because they got a 10-minute visit with them on their last visit and then, hey ho, you've started school. There's your classroom. Where are the toilets? How can they get a drink of water? All of those things they're big concerns for a five-year-old.*

By visiting the actual classroom, it was thought that children would know what discontinuities to expect and start to get used to them. As these teachers from Case Study Two discussed, the school had previously run 'preschool classes' for children in another room with a different teacher who would not be in the classroom when they started school. The teachers said that the current visiting arrangements where children spent time in the actual classroom were more effective. A parent whose child had visited the actual classroom during school visits had an older child who had experienced the old way of doing school visits and she shared a similar view:

S2P12 *The way they do school visits now is much better and helps with transitioning. The children visit the actual class instead of having a session in another room with a different teacher. They get to meet the teachers and kids.*

Visiting the classroom enabled children to begin to form a relationship with the teachers who would be teaching them as well as providing the chance for them to gain familiarity with the environment. In this way there was an overlap of relationships where the relationship with the NE teacher and other school children began before the child started school and relationships with teachers and children in the ECE services finished. It was also noted by teachers that this appeared to benefit by helping parents feel more relaxed about the transition.

Teachers in Case Study Three spoke of how school visits could help children develop a sense of belonging at school. In this school, a group of children would visit the classroom for several weeks before they started school. This group would then start school on the same day. Teachers would prepare for visits by providing a seat and place for children to keep their belongings so they would have a place they felt was their own before their first day. This was proposed as a way to create belonging. A teacher explained a little about what happened during children's visits to school, as follows:

S3T2 So they've got a little place, a little sense of belonging, and then, this is where you'll be going to the toilet, you'll be using those toilets... Show them the whole school, that's the hall, that's the library, we took them to the playgrounds, that's the big field... That's the very first day when we meet them, we go for a walk. We go meet Mrs (Principal's name), we go meet (name), because she's going to be the one getting all the plasters and doing all that kind of stuff.

Teachers in the other Case Studies also spoke of the importance of children being shown around the school. S3T1 added that during school visits she was able to "look at their learning journals" and provide "similar sorts of pursuits but different activities" for the child. Reading the portfolios from children's ECE service helped this teacher identify how she could create continuity by knowing the interests of the child and providing activities which linked to these. Children were not asked specifically about school visits, but one child volunteered that he knew about school having visited his sister at school and that "I always had a look at it" (S3C11). This could indicate that it was important to him to know about the environment into which he would be moving.

Parents also spoke of visits to school being an important transition activity which gave children the opportunity to meet the children and teachers who would be in their classroom. Parents valued visits to school saying they helped children to become familiar with the routines and children experienced some new practices before starting school. One parent felt that more visits would have benefited her child, and another said that the ECE teacher had brought her child to visit, and she felt that this had

meant the child “*didn’t rely on Mum when she started*” (S2P5). S2P8 suggested that when children start at the beginning of the year after the long summer break there may be a need to think about the timing of visits. She said “*Because he started school at the start of the year it was a long time since his visits. He needed longer to form relationships with the teacher before he started*”. Teachers agreed that the visits were valuable and said that it was important for school managers to allocate and value the time that was needed to ensure visits were well organised and that a teacher had time to work with the visiting children.

Teacher Visits to Early Childhood Contexts or Having an ECE Service on Site.

Several Case Study teachers had recently had the opportunity to visit some ECE services as part of Communities of Learning/Kahui Ako (Ministry of Education, n.d.-c). They spoke of the value of this practice as they were able to start to connect with children and become more familiar with the types of environments from which children were transitioning. As one described:

S1T1 I would like teachers to have the opportunity to go to the preschool so we could see where the children come from. It was good to go to some preschools and see the children in their environment... The teachers would say “we think that one’s coming to you” so I was able to make a point of saying “hello” or whatever and “I hope I might get see you again I’m at the school down the road. What’s your name again? I’m Mrs (name).”

J So if money wasn’t an object, you think that would be a really useful way of providing continuity?

S1T1 Yes because then they’re seeing the face so when some of the kids came for their visits... they recognised me... and so it was “ahh hello” and they couldn’t remember the name, but they recognised the face and I knew who they were... So again, it’s that relationship, that opportunity to build the relationships... that’s really important.

Teachers spoke of time and cost being barriers to visiting ECE services but said that if they could be released on a regular basis to visit services this would be of benefit. Similarly, one of the teachers from Case Study Three spoke of visits to ECE services providing an opportunity for children to become familiar with her face. She added that that having the kindergarten on site the previous year had a similar benefit:

S3T1 ... you're a familiar face. And that became well backed up by having that preschool unit as part of our school. Most of those kids knew who we looked like, they knew that we were relatively safe and could be trusted... And that's important.

As discussed in previous chapters, in this school the local kindergarten had been temporarily relocated on the school grounds and this teacher recognised how this had provided a way for children to become more familiar with the teachers at the school and thought this had a positive impact. Children were more familiar with the physical environment of school and opportunities for kindergarten and NE teachers to communicate were greater.

Her colleague also said that this was an arrangement which created continuity. She said there were benefits for children in ECE services being located on site. She shared her vision:

S3T1 In my world there would be learning hubs and they would involve everything from two-year-olds through.

Parents in this Case Study whose children had attended this kindergarten when it was on the school grounds agreed that this arrangement had provided continuity. They commented that children were familiar with the buildings and environment. A teacher from Case Study Two held a similar view. She thought that there would be increased continuity for children attending an ECE services on the school grounds and said that *"having a kindy right next door where they can pop over the fence and come in, dip their feet in, I think that would be the ideal world (S2T1)."*

Time to Settle Children into School.

Teachers in Case Study Two thought it would be useful to have more time to ease children into the routines and expectations of school so that the discontinuity was not so great or so sudden. Currently they felt that pressures to demonstrate children were making sufficient academic progress meant that there was little time to settle children in and gradually introduce them to new expectations and ways of learning. They explained:

S2T2 And it's from day one you know. There's no 'oh let's just get you nice and settled for a few weeks and then we'll hit your learning', by the time you do that they are already behind, technically. So...

S2T1 Really, what would you like to do? You'd like to read a big book with them, do an oral language experience, you'd love to do an art thing. You know, you'd like to do this thing round centred around literacy.

S2T2 *Around that oral language development.*

Similarly, some parents suggested that schools should slowly introduce children to structured and formal learning over time to increase the similarities between the contexts. For example, S3P9 said that *“changes need to be made over time ... rather than a huge change as soon as they start school”*. Similarly, S2P8 advocated that having *“Free play at school and easing into structure over time is better than children going into a structured environment cold turkey. A slow easing in”*. Slowly increasing structure would help children ease into school rather than experiencing a sharp, sudden change.

A more gradual introduction to formal learning experiences would also enable more time for social relationships to develop. S2P12 said that in her view it was important for there to be a similar approach between ECE services and schools to enhancing social relationships as it *“puts them in good stead to move forward”* because if children felt *“secure socially other stuff is easier for them to deal with”*. More time to settle children into the new environment may enable teachers to support children to establish new social relationships.

Supporting Social Continuity.

Data from both parents and children indicated that the social continuity that was provided by having friends from prior-to-school contexts in the same class was valued. For instance, one child said she was pleased to know that another child was going to be in her class at school. She continued:

S2C14 *I knew she was here cos her mum told my mum.*

J *Right.*

S2C14 *And we have graduations at kindy.*

J *Yeah.*

S2C14 *And then they tell, and the, and the kids tell what school they're going to...*

For this child meeting up with the friend who was already at school was something she looked forward to about starting school. There are various ways children can become aware of the children who will be attending the same school as them. In this case, the graduation ceremony at the centre and the child's mother talking to the child about who would be at her school was remembered by the child as helping her look forward to school and reduced the feeling of social discontinuity. A further way parents can reduce the social discontinuity is by helping children keep contact with the friends they have made in ECE who have gone to other schools or who have not yet started school. One parent

said that, for her child, starting school with a friend from ECE meant that the transition was not “*too big a thing*” (S2P5) and that she had taken the child back to the ECE service to visit her old friends. Similarly, S1C14 said she missed her friends but could still go back and see them. Placing a child in the same classroom as former friends from ECE is another way to support social continuity. As reported in Chapter Five children attributed positive feelings to having a friend in the same class and S3P5 commented that “*lots of children from the same kindergarten gave some continuity*” for her child. In these ways the social discontinuity can be reduced.

Adjusting Teaching and Learning Approaches and Routines to Provide Continuity.

Using *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017) in schools could increase continuity for children according to teachers from Case Study Two. These teachers were beginning to use *Te Whāriki* alongside the *New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007). To assist with this, the school had recently appointed two teachers with ECE teaching experience who were familiar with working with *Te Whāriki*. It was expected that, as well as being familiar with *Te Whāriki*, these teachers would be conscious of the discontinuities children needed to navigate and so help to reduce these and put in place supportive strategies. Also, their experience of teaching in the play-based environment of ECE would contribute to providing continuity for children through play-based learning.

As reported in Chapter Six, parent and teacher participants agreed that the implementation of play-based learning in these schools provided a continuity that was beneficial. Teachers said the driver for the inclusion of play in the programme had been to increase continuity, although they also said that it supported development for children who were not ready for more structured learning experiences. Play appeared to provide an opportunity for children to engage with something familiar and to be successful, as well as making the change to the more formal school environment less sharp and sudden. Children found play at school to be fun, but noticed there was a different structure around play.

Schools are fed by many diverse ECE services, so children arrive at school with different past experiences. This can mean the discontinuities and continuities differ for each child. Teachers recognised this and noted the impact it had on children when they arrived at school:

S2T1 But probably the discontinuity might be in the early childhood centres. You know that sort of school readiness group that they usually get together... I've been into lots of ECEs and they all have a different idea of what that 4 and a half class should look like... the big things we've noticed is those children that come in from centres that have handwriting, that have them write their names in the morning, those children across

the board have very bad social and emotional skills and the ones that come from the kindys from that free play environment, beautiful social and emotional skills but... they don't know the letters of their name and are not very good at looking after their things... we don't want to get kids ready for school but we want them sort of life ready, you know those check points in life by the time you hit four years old you should be able to put your socks on by yourself, you should be able to put your shoes on...

The teachers acknowledged the work ECE services do with children when they are close to starting school and noted the disparity in approaches which results in children entering school with different skills and differing prior experiences. As this quote suggests, this teacher considered that the focus of ECE should not be on getting children ready for school, but on teaching children the things that will help them in their daily life. There is also an implication in data from this teacher that it might be useful for centres to reflect on the work they do with children who will soon start school and provide a balance between the acquisition of academic skills and social and emotional learning. Teachers in Case Study One also commented on the programmes ECE services provide for children nearing school age, saying that these programmes should not push children to read and write. S1T1 justified this by saying that it was developmentally important for children to have plenty of play during their ECE years in readiness for school because:

S1T1 It's the only time when they can be children and do all that imaginative stuff

S1T2 All the imaginative stuff ...

S1T1 ...I feel if they don't get it out of their system or they don't get that opportunity they need to do it, so they'll just do it when they get here.

However, some parents held a contrasting opinion. For example, one expressed the opinion that the programme for older children in her child's ECE services provided a similarity between the contexts. In contrast, another parent felt that the ECE service was not doing enough to prepare her child academically, so she had worked with her child at home, providing further evidence of the variability of ECE provision and of parent perceptions. These data indicate that some parents perceive that it is useful to teach academic skills prior to school entry and that doing so will support children to engage with the school environment and arguably provide some continuity.

Teachers in Case Study Two had adjusted the beginning of the day to respond to the needs of children who were new to school and may not be used to having eating times restricted. They said that one

way they aimed to make it easier for children who were starting was to allow them flexibility around eating times, as the following quote suggests:

S2T1 ... have a rolling kai. So those first couple of weeks when they come in if they are hungry, they can eat... If they're thirsty they can just go.

S2T2 'Cos we've noticed some kids get up super early like our little (name) last year. He was a 5 o'clock riser so by the time he got to school it's been 4 or 5 hours since he's eaten... so he'd need to graze in the morning.

S2T1 Just being really relaxed for them when they come in... they'll go with the flow eventually because they've got that huge peer group... sort of driving them.

Teachers in this case study were willing to adjust the routines of the classroom for children to create greater continuities for a time but expected that children would eventually follow the example of their peers and fit into the classroom routines.

8.2.3 Identifying and Supporting Children Who Might Struggle With Change

The importance of providing some degree of continuity over the transition to school was understood in all three Case Studies. A range of practices were employed to ensure discontinuity was not too great and that children had some familiarity with the new context. However, each child has different prior experiences and this impacts on the degree of continuity they experience on starting school. For some children there is a greater degree of discontinuity or they have difficulty navigating change. For these children there may need to be a greater degree of support before, during and after starting school. Ways teachers identified and supported children who needed additional help are now described.

Gathering Information About Children.

Meeting with parents during the enrolment process helped teachers identify whether a child was likely to need additional support. Teachers saw these meetings as opportunities to find out more about the child and to consider how best to assist the child and their family to adjust to school. S1T1 described this:

S1T1 We see this as a partnership... (teachers name) is really good, she's really gentle and she seems to draw people out and people seem to kind of open up to her. So that just provides an opportunity for information sharing to make it an easier transition...

Parents bringing their child to school visits provided an alternative opportunity for teachers to engage parents in discussion that could alert them to possible difficulties the child might experience. In addition, teachers were able to observe children during visits and identify if they thought the child may have difficulty with the transition. In the following excerpt, teachers from Case Study Two discuss how they used observation during school visits to watch for indicators of how the child feels about school.

S2T1 You're pretty good at observing them when they come into the environment. I think it's important that when they're doing the transition visits they are coming into the classroom with their teacher so the teacher knows: am I getting a relationship here or are they sitting on Mum's lap, are they sort of keeping their distance. So, I think it's a pretty good way to gauge how they're feeling.

S2T2 Some parents might talk about their anxiety or whatever... They might tell you he's never been away from me... It's that informal... when they're mixing in with the playtime in the morning in the Wednesday visits you've got time to talk to parents.

Another teacher said that observations during school visits and the early days at school enabled teachers to identify children who were struggling. She gave an example of a child who had experienced significant discontinuity on the transition to school and was finding the transition difficult:

S3T2 The "dis" is obvious. Isn't it? ...(name), he started three weeks after the rest. It's a big change. I just feel, he's going to be fine, but no letter sounds, didn't go to kindy, went to a playgroup maybe twice a week, can write the letter R (first letter of his name), can't do the rest, has no idea what a letter is, he knows a book has got a story... and parenting. Separate homes. So, the one where Dad keeps forgetting to do a little bit of extra reading as well, just to create that love for reading... using his hands a lot. So, he stands out. Didn't go to kindy, didn't know the other kids, that makes a big difference.

The fact that the child described had not been to an ECE service was seen to have impacted on the degree of discontinuity for him. The teacher had observed that he was unfamiliar with aspects of literacy that were valued at school and didn't have familiar peers at school. Where there were challenges like this, she said there was a need to find "another way of reaching that little person..." to get them learning. She went on to describe how she had adjusted her practice with one child:

S3T2 I sat in a sandpit, because... he doesn't like to sit and come down and do circle time... And it worked because we were in the sandpit. So, it's all these different strategies that we have to come up with, things work, things fail, change things, change the environment.

This teacher highlighted the benefits of teachers providing differential instruction depending on the needs of the individual child. She was also aware that not all strategies would be successful with all children, and that teachers may need to keep trying different things until they found what worked for the individual child.

Teachers in Case Study One said that opportunities to meet with parents and for the child to visit school can be particularly important when there is a complex home situation or there are other challenges which need to be planned for. S1P5 agreed with this view stating that she felt supported during this process which had resulted in making a safety plan like they had in ECE. Thus, the arrangements for the child's custodial safety were continuous. Similarly, a parent of a child with life-threatening allergies said that the school had been supportive in developing and implementing routines to ensure her child could attend school safely. This had not been the case in all schools she visited before deciding where to enrol her child. She said she:

S1P3 ...went to lots of schools and the support was not there, got told "it's not in my budget". Open policy helps here, and the family orientation helps children adjust to changes.

In her opinion the school's orientation process was supportive of children's adjustment to the changes they might encounter.

While visits give the opportunity for plans to be put in place where challenges are anticipated, there may be a need for other support to begin before the transition. A parent said that it is important for children who had specific learning difficulties to be identified before entering school so that appropriate strategies could be in place to support the transition. If this happened, there could also be greater consistency and continuity in the way the teachers interacted with the child and addressed behaviours over the transition. This had not happened for her child, as she explained:

S2P8 Neither the kindy or the school had a handle on the specific difficulties and the labelling was incorrect which did not help. EI (Early Intervention) team should be targeting children's needs before they start school, but he was not referred by the centre.

In her view, there were additional challenges for her child during the transition because he had not been referred for support with his specific difficulties by the ECE teachers.

Adjusting Strategies to the Individual Needs of the Child.

Once teachers have identified that a child may be struggling to navigate the discontinuities of starting school, they need to decide how best to support the child to adjust. Teachers in this study recognised that the support needed would be different for each child as each child is unique and children have diverse ECE experiences. S3T1 said that when a child appeared to be struggling, she would start by “*looking to see what is happening and why*” as understanding this provided the “*keys to what we need to do.*” Similarly, S2T2 said that teachers had to work out what to do to make the child feel “*comfortable.*” She felt that by taking time to understand why a child was taking time to settle the teacher would be able to put in place supportive measures. These measures did not have to be complex, as she described:

S3T1 So if they're coming in and they're upset about the transition... then you just have to spend as much time with them as you can while trying to move with the others and often that is seating them by you, by being with them, buddying them up... I would be working on the key competencies.

She went on to say that since the school had included play in the curriculum there had been less need to support children in these ways.

Similarly, teachers in Case Study One acknowledged that not all children came to school with the same past experiences and recognised that some children would take longer to settle into school. This meant that there might be the need to respond to children differently. According to S1T1 there was more acceptance than in past years of the different characteristics of children. She said there was now a focus on being ready for children, rather than children having to be ready for school:

S1T1 And I think we are more open to it as teachers because once upon a time we used to say they're five now and at school now, boom, boom, boom, whereas now it's coming to be a bit more responsive to the children and accepting that they're at different stages of development... and that they're not going to get it all at once.

One of the ways this school had tried to be more responsive to children was to create some continuity by including play in the programme. However, teachers said that sometimes there was a need to put together a specific plan for a child if they appear to be finding the transition challenging. When this

happened, teachers worked with the parents to put a plan in place. For one child this meant that he attended school for shorter days. At other times teachers said they have recommended parents keep a child home for a day or bring them in later if they have observed the child has become tired. In other cases, parents have been welcomed to stay for part or all of the day. This could support some continuity of relationships if the child was finding it difficult to separate from the parent and be left with adults with whom they were less familiar. In some instances, this strategy was used to support parents who may have been struggling to feel comfortable leaving their child. The teachers said that this had a positive impact as the child will be more settled if the parent is happy.

Keeping the Child in ECE for Longer.

Teachers in Case Study Two said that it can be beneficial for some children to wait and start school when they are older. They made sure parents are aware that legally children do not need to start school until they are six. This meant that if parents were unsure whether their child would cope well with the change, they were aware that they could wait until their child was older, and in the teachers' view, might be more ready for the change. Teachers were aware that some parents might be reluctant to do this because of the cultural expectation in New Zealand that children will start school when they turn five. Teachers discussed how this expectation might influence parents, saying that parents will be questioned if they wait to enrol their child:

S2T5 But that's an expectation too... like, if you say 'I'm not starting my child till they're six...'

S2T1 Why isn't your child at school?

S2T5 Well why not...

S2T1 ...You know "you are a five-year-old, where do you go to school?" "I don't go to school yet" "Why aren't you going to school yet?"

These teachers went on to discuss the possible benefits of cohort entry. They were in favour of this if it meant that children were older when they started school. One of them also suggested that the age of school entry should be raised to six because:

S2T2 You look at all the kids that come in at five that A) aren't ready for school, B) struggle in that first year and then between six and seven everything catches up and everything's all honky dory. Well, if they started at six you could reduce all of that

anxiety and you know having to tell the parents that the kids are below and all that negative stuff, start when you're six when you're developmentally ready and go for it.

The teachers appeared to think that the older children were when they started school the less anxiety they would feel and the better they would be able to navigate the discontinuities. The current cohort entry policy will not necessarily result in children being much older when starting school, as children can start anytime there is a cohort entry after their fifth birthday and schools must provide two entry points per term (Ministry of Education, n.d.-b). However, as suggested previously, cohort entry may benefit children's social adjustment to school and make it easier for teachers to focus on helping children learn the expectations, rules, and routines of school.

Regardless of the age at which they start school, once children are at school some may need support to settle into the new environment and get used to the differences. Parents whose children had experienced some difficulties with the transition spoke about how their child had been supported. A parent said that they were blessed because the teacher *"acknowledged (child's name) was not ready for school"* (S2P10) and tried many different strategies to motivate her child. She said the outcome was for her son *"to enjoy his day and school and if academic learning happened, that was a bonus."*

Building Resilience in ECE.

Resilience was thought to be important in supporting children to adjust to the changes involved in starting school. One teacher said attending an ECE service could support children during transition if they were taught to be resilient and to solve problems without adult intervention. This would enable them to bring those skills to school by either *"standing back and watching or leaping in and making mistakes"* (S3T1). However, if children had not built resilience, she said they may show this by *"acting out."*

Talking with parents and observing children during visits and in their early school days are strategies teachers used to identify whether children were likely to need additional support to navigate the discontinuities experienced on starting school. Using these approaches, teachers were able to gather information which enabled them to work out what strategies would best support children to adjust to the changes they experienced on school entry.

Findings have been presented highlighting the importance that participants attached to the concept of continuity during the transition to school. While it was acknowledged that some degree of change is inevitable and may support ongoing development, data from all three participant groups indicates that reducing discontinuity can be beneficial to children. A range of strategies can support continuity

during this time and findings highlight the importance of teachers getting to know children so that appropriate and relevant support can be given for children to navigate changes when they are having difficulty. A discussion of these findings follows.

8.4 Discussion

8.4.1 Both Continuity and Discontinuity are Important

Teachers and parents in the current study agreed that continuity is of benefit to children starting school, although they also thought that some discontinuity facilitates continued development, as has been argued by Vygotsky (1978a) and Brooker (2008). Adult participants thought children's emotional wellbeing was impacted when there was not sufficient continuity between ECE and school contexts, but there was a recognition that some discontinuity was inevitable and desirable to ensure ongoing learning pathways. Data from children confirmed that some children experienced negative emotional feelings during the transitions as earlier research has also established (Booth et al., 2019; Dockett & Perry, 2012; Hedegaard & Flear, 2019; Kaplun, 2019; O'Rourke et al., 2017; Tatlow-Golden et al., 2016). While Kagan (2013) contends that it is necessary for children to have continuity in their lives, a degree of discontinuity that is navigable can help children to develop skills for coping with future transitions (Walsh et al., 2010; Ward et al., n.d.). The success of early transitions can influence later transitions (Dunlop, 2021), so ensuring the degree of discontinuity is not too great is important.

It was thought by adult participants that where the discontinuity is too great there may be short- and long-term implications for children's adjustment, the image they have of themselves and their academic learning. While the long-term impact of discontinuity was not measured in this study, this view aligns with earlier research which indicates transition is a time when self-image can be impacted (Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2010) and that when teaching and learning approaches are not familiar, learning can be disrupted (Mackenzie, 2018b). According to O'Connor (2018) the changes associated with the transition to school can trigger progress, if the new setting is what is needed by the child at that point in time. If not, progress can stall. It has been found that too great a degree of discontinuity can affect children emotionally, make it difficult for them to engage in classroom life as expected and result in prior learning not being transferred to the school context (Dockett & Perry, 2007a, 2007b, 2012; Fabian, 2007; Margetts, 2013; Peters, 1999). Further, increasing continuity between school and ECE contexts has been advocated as a strategy for supporting positive transition experiences for children and continuity of learning pathways (Education Review Office, 2015; Mitchell et al., 2015).

8.4.2 Transition Practices Must be Responsive to Individual Needs

While both continuity and discontinuity appear to be important, there is no perfect recipe for gaining the right balance of continuity and discontinuity for each child. Teachers used a range of strategies and tailored them to suit the needs of individual children. The degree of continuity a child can easily navigate depends on the child and their previous experiences; the degree of change needs to be within the child's Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978b, 2017). Each of the schools in these Case Studies drew from a range of ECE services and, in New Zealand, each service weaves its own curriculum and develops its own practices (Ministry of Education, 2017), thus children entered the schools with diverse ECE experiences. In addition, children came from different home contexts, had different experiences in the community, and each child brought their own personality and characteristics to school. These factors influenced the level of continuity and discontinuity each child experienced when they started school and also how they responded to change and uncertainty (Tudge et al., 2012). Where there were additional complexities such as family issues, learning difficulties or medical issues, continuity or additional support during the transition could be even more important. What this means for teachers is that finding out about each child and their prior experiences can make a difference in planning for transitions (Fabian & Dunlop, 2015; Noel, 2010; S. Peters et al., 2015; Schrimsher & Tudge, 2003; Tudge et al., 2012), something recognised by teachers in this study.

Just as the extent to which a child will experience discontinuity depends on their prior experiences and other factors, the strategies which will be effective in supporting a child who is struggling with change will differ. Therefore, the practices employed should be tailored to the individual, which can be difficult when there are standardised transition procedures (Dean & Delaune, 2019). Teachers spoke of the importance of tailoring strategies to the individual child's needs. For example, at times teachers encouraged shorter days or the occasional day off. Parents were also informed that children could legally remain at an ECE service until they turned six. Buddies could be allocated to children and teachers could make a point of spending more time with a child. Teachers agreed that the important thing was to work out what kind of support was needed and the strategies which would be helpful for each particular child.

Teachers said that to enable them to adjust practice to individual children's needs they needed to know about children, their past experiences and where they were at with their learning (Fabian & Dunlop, 2015; S. Peters et al., 2015; Schrimsher & Tudge, 2003; Tudge et al., 2012). This information helps teachers to connect school learning to learning that has happened in prior-to-school contexts and thus provide continuity of learning. It also helps teachers to identify where additional support may be needed for children to adjust to the differences involved in starting school. This information

was gathered through a range of means including NE teachers meeting with parents before the child started school, observations during school visits and the first days at school and meeting with ECE teachers.

Sharing assessment information between contexts is also a key strategy; a practice found by Ahtola et al. (2011) to be one of the most effective in supporting ongoing learning during the transition to school. This is because, in order to understand where connections may be made with prior learning, it is helpful for NE teachers to know about the learning that has happened in prior-to-school contexts and the knowledge, skills and understandings each child brings to school (McLachlan et al., 2022). In a report for the OECD Shuey et al. (2019) stated that in New Zealand school teachers use children's portfolios from their ECE service to help them learn about children's strengths and interests. Gaining insight into children's capabilities and prior experiences can help NE teachers to plan for engaging the child in the learning experiences of school (McLachlan et al., 2013). It was surprising, therefore, that there was little recognition from teachers in these case studies that there might be value in using assessment information from the ECE context to help teachers plan for the transition and connect to children's prior learning. Only one teacher spoke of using children's ECE learning portfolios to assist her in planning for children in their early days at school. Data from the teacher survey reported in Chapter Four also indicates teachers may make little use of assessment data from children's ECE period. These findings align with findings from earlier New Zealand research showing that assessment information is not always shared between sectors (Cameron, 2018; Hoffman & Sam, 2020) which means that NE teachers do not have the opportunity to use this information. Some research has indicated that when this information is shared, NE teachers do not find assessment data from ECE services useful (Hoffman & Sam, 2020). The quality of information shared is often not high (Education Review Office, 2013), bringing into question how fit for purpose the assessment processes used to assess those transitioning to school are, the capabilities of ECE teachers to effectively assess children, and whether initial teacher education programmes provide sufficient guidance to support teachers to learn how to effectively assess learning. Cameron (2018) found that assessment of four-year-olds often documented what children were doing rather than assessing their learning. McLachlan and Arrow (2015) found that ECE teachers lacked knowledge of the literacy skills and knowledge that are useful on school entry and that *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) and the Ministry of Education's (2004-2009) assessment exemplars did not provide sufficient guidance to support teacher practices in this area. They argue that ECE teachers lack understanding of literacy progressions and that initial teacher education programmes may not prepare students sufficiently to assess these. It seems that there is work to be done in New Zealand to support ECE teachers' understanding of how to recognise and assess knowledge, skills and understandings and present this information in ways

that are useful to NE teachers. It is also likely that NE teachers need support to understand and interpret the forms of assessment used by ECE services and so to make use of the information (Cameron, 2018). If this is so, it is likely that teachers may be unaware of their lack of technical knowledge (Cunningham et al., 2009) and that there is work to be done to bring to awareness the need for professional learning to assist teachers in both sectors to effectively assess learning and interpret and make use of assessment information during the transition to school.

The assessment regimes of school and ECE services differ and NE teachers can have difficulty interpreting and using the information contained in children's portfolios (Mitchell et al., 2015). Further, Mitchell et al. (2016) found that school assessment tasks can be unfamiliar to children and that NE teachers sometimes underestimate children's abilities when data from the ECE service indicates a greater level of competence. Different results can be gained from assessments depending on who carries out the assessment and the method of assessment used (Wager et al., 2015). This may mean that children's performance on school assessment tasks may not demonstrate what they can do in a different context, further pointing to the value NE teachers might gain through paying attention to what ECE teachers know about children. While there is some action research indicating that early childhood portfolios can be tailored to be useful during transition (Hartley et al., 2012; Hartley et al., 2014) there is more to learn about the use of assessment information from ECE contexts by NE teachers.

8.4.3 Opportunities to Become Familiar With School

School visits featured in this study as a practice teachers and parents valued and there is a wealth of literature which supports this view (e.g. Ackesjö, 2014; Dockett & Perry, 2007b, 2011; Fabian, 2002, 2010; Fabian & Dunlop, 2007; Hannah et al., 2010; Hartley et al., 2012; Hoffman & Sam, 2020; Mitchell et al., 2016; Noel, 2010; O'Connor, 2018; Peters, 1999, 2000, 2015; S. Peters et al., 2015; Serry et al., 2014; Tudge et al., 2012). Through visiting school children can become familiar with the context into which they will transition in advance. If children can learn about the environment, routines, and practices of the school, they know what the differences will be and may be more prepared for them. They may also notice continuities which will reassure them.

Visits to the actual classroom the child would be placed in were perceived to be of most value. A reason given for this was that classroom visits allowed the child to meet and begin to form relationships with their teacher, as well as to become familiar with the environment. It is not surprising teachers valued the opportunity to get to know children when you consider the finding reported in Chapter Five of the importance teachers attach to teacher/child relationships. Children would also

meet other children in the class and begin to get to know them, although teachers did not mention this or speak of their role in supporting peer relationships. This would mean that the new set of school relationships began to develop before relationships with people from ECE ended, avoiding a sharp discontinuity occurring where some relationships ended and others began. Through the development of relationships, a sense of belonging could start to be fostered, particularly when teachers also ensured children had a space for their own belongings and became familiar with the school environment and rules. It is important therefore for ECE teachers to educate parents about the value of school visits and in situations where these may not take place to consider facilitating other ways for the child to meet with their new teacher such using online platforms (Peters & Woodhouse, 2021b).

By visiting the actual classroom children also started to encounter the discontinuities which were present so they could be more prepared for the changes. This makes sense, as each teacher will have their own ways of being and doing so each classroom will differ. If children do not visit the actual classroom and teacher where they will be placed, they may not gain a realistic perception of what school is like and Fabian (2002) warns that visits should not mislead children. For this reason, care should be taken when planning for transition visits to ensure that children experience the usual activities of school, as research has found that visits often focus on activities similar to the ECE context (Dockett & Perry, 2012). As a result, children may not have a chance to find out about the differences they will encounter. Thought should be given to the timing of school visits to ensure children get to experience a range of school-like activities and also to how to provide for children who start school after the long summer break and whose school visits may have taken place several weeks previously. Bodrova and Leong (2003) argue that children can only learn about school by participating in school activities at school, so it is not surprising that visits to school were seen as important.

8.4.4 The Benefits of NE Teachers Visiting ECE Services

Teachers in this study spoke of finding visits to ECE services useful, particularly when they met children who would be in their class. When this happened it provided a further opportunity to build relationships with children before their first day at school. Visiting ECE contexts could also help by increasing NE teachers' understanding of the contexts from which children were transitioning. There can be a lack of awareness of what happens in different education sectors (Belcher, 2006; Mawson, 2006) and a body of literature highlights the importance of this knowledge (Education Review Office, 2013; Hartley et al., 2012; Hopps, 2019; Margetts & Phatudi, 2013; Ministry of Education, 2002; Skouteris et al., 2012). This knowledge is important in increasing awareness of the discontinuities involved in the transition and in helping teachers identify how continuity can be increased (Mayer et al., 2010), as these teachers found. Teachers cannot put in place strategies to support the navigation

of change if they do not know what children are likely to find unfamiliar or if they make assumptions about this. These visits increased teachers' understanding of the wide range of different approaches in the ECE services and that this meant that the discontinuities for each child would differ. Teachers also found that, where they were able to meet children who were coming to their school during these visits, there was a further opportunity for relationship building. Teachers can be uncertain about how best to support learning in play-based environments (Aiono et al., 2019; Hedges, 2018) and visits to ECE contexts may also benefit by increasing this understanding.

Teachers wanted to be able to continue with these visits to ECE contexts. A lack of funding for these cross-sector visits was a barrier to doing this. Funding had been available to release teachers for these visits through Kahui Ako initiatives (Ministry of Education; n.d.-b), but the funding for this purpose was not ongoing. Many schools are fed by numerous ECE services, which creates difficulties in finding time to connect with them all. Finding a way to fund cross sector visits, including visits by ECE teachers to schools, would be useful in supporting teachers' understanding of continuity and discontinuity and their role in supporting children during the transition to school. Where a large number of ECE services feed into a school, teachers may be able to use technology to facilitate connections.

8.4.5 The Influence of Ready Child Perspectives on Practice

Findings presented in this chapter provide further evidence to that presented in Chapters, Four and Six that although teachers said they held the view that school need to be ready for children, they were also strongly influenced by what they thought a 'ready child' looked like. On the one hand, teachers said they were putting in place strategies to increase continuity, such as including play in the curriculum, and were ready to put in place supportive practices to help children who were taking time to adjust to change. Conversely, discourse used by teachers reveals there were underlying values and beliefs that were influencing these changes and that, to some extent, they viewed the inclusion of play in the curriculum as giving children time to be ready to 'hit the learning' rather than for the purpose of increasing continuity. This could mean that they may not be seeing the learning through play that could be fostered. When discussing children who found the transition difficult, there was an implication in what teachers said that the problem was that the child was not ready, rather than a consideration of whether there were sufficient continuities for the child to engage in learning at school. Teachers also suggested that it might be better for some children to start school when they were older, further evidence that judgements were being made about whether children were 'ready' for the school context. Although some research focuses on schools being ready for every child, readiness perspectives are still present in research and literature about the transition to school (Dockett & Perry, 2013b), so it is not surprising teachers are still influenced by these views. It can take

time for underlying beliefs and values to change. For example, O'Connor (2018) has found that in the UK policy makers are still influenced by readiness views even though the curriculum for early years states that children are not being prepared for the next stage of schooling. Chapter Nine will further discuss the beliefs that influenced teachers' practice.

8.4.6 Adjusting Pedagogy

Some parent participants associated increased learning with a structured learning environment and concluded that there needed to be an increased level of structure in the school environment to facilitate learning. However, there was a view from both parents and teachers that schools could introduce children to more structure over time for two reasons: to reduce discontinuity, and because some children were seen to be unready for the increased structure. By allowing more time for children to 'ease into' the structure and routines of schooling, time would be given to allow children to adjust to the new environment before they needed to adjust to more structured methods of teaching and learning. Additionally, there were suggestions that ECE contexts could introduce more structured learning experiences as Peters (2000) also found. While replicating some school-like activities in ECE can be helpful, care needs to be taken to ensure practices are appropriate, as sometimes this results in curriculum pushdown or inappropriate practices such as skill and drill activities or the use of worksheets (Education Review Office, 2011a). While the impact of different types of ECE programmes was not measured in this study, Peters (2000, 2004a) found that more structured early childhood experiences do not necessarily lead to smoother transition experiences for children. In her research, children who attended an ECE service with a more structured programme did not transition to school more easily than children who had attended services with less structure.

Some schools in this study were in the early stages of learning to use *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017) to support their practice. It was thought that this would be one way of providing greater continuity. Teachers' familiarity with *Te Whāriki* and how it links with the school curriculum has been advocated as being important to supporting pathways for learning and positive transitions (Ministry of Education, 2002; Shuey et al., 2019). Employing teachers with ECE teaching experience was one way a school sought to support the use of the *Te Whāriki* and also to help them increase their understanding of the differences between the environments and to support changes in practice to increase continuity. Davis (2015) has documented how employing ECE teachers in new entrant contexts can help primary trained teachers to understand more about how to support play-based learning, and thus increase continuity for children.

8.5 Chapter Summary

While adults in this study could see that there were both continuities and discontinuities involved in starting school, children said that everything was different. Discontinuity is inevitable as the context is different and even familiar practices may seem different when there are new people, new places and the new environment to contend with. It must be remembered that encountering discontinuity is not necessarily a negative experience for children, however. Some children spoke of the differences positively. It may be that whether children see the differences in a positive light depends on how well equipped they are to cope with the discontinuities, not something this study measured. How well supported children are to navigate the discontinuities may also affect how positively they see the differences. It is therefore important that schools and ECE services have knowledge about what happens in the other sector so they can consider where continuity can be usefully created and how individual children can be supported as they engage with the changes involved in starting school.

This chapter and the preceding four chapters have presented and discussed findings from the survey of ECE and NE teachers and from three case studies. In doing this the perspectives of children, parents, ECE teachers and NE teachers were included. The next chapter will consider how the findings answer the overarching research question and relate to the objectives of the study. A model of continuity and discontinuity that makes sense of the findings will then be presented and discussed.

Chapter 9

Discussion

9.1 Introduction

This mixed methods study investigated how continuities and discontinuities influence the transition to school. The methods included a survey of teachers from both sectors, which was followed by case studies in three schools in one region. In this chapter, the resulting data are discussed in relation to the research objectives and the extant theory and research. The overarching research question that guided the study was:

- What are current understandings about how continuities and discontinuities influence transition to school in New Zealand.

The objectives of the study were to:

- Compare teachers' perspectives on continuities and discontinuities children experience on school entry and how these influence the transition experience;
- Identify continuities and discontinuities of significance to children, parents, and teachers during the transition to school; and
- Identify how children might be supported to navigate discontinuities that are of significance.

The chapter is organised around the research objectives which collectively help to answer the research question. A model of how the key findings interact is presented, which then concludes the chapter.

9.2 Current Understandings About How Continuities and Discontinuities Influence Transition to School in New Zealand

Research and scholarly literature has identified and discussed the discontinuities children experience during the transition to school and the impact of these on transition (Dockett & Einarsdottir, 2017; Dockett & Perry, 2012; Education Review Office, 2015; Einarsdottir, 2007; Hunkin, 2014; Mitchell et al., 2015; Peters, 1999, 2000, 2004a, 2010). Attention has also been given to the role of continuity and how this can be increased (Aiono et al., 2019; Davis, 2015; Education Review Office, 2015; Mayer et al., 2010; Ministry of Education, 2002). However, over time changes in legislation, policy, and practice impact on what happens in educational settings and therefore on the experiences of children. It is likely that changes in the New Zealand education sectors in recent years mean that the transition

experience has changed over time. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) argued that the contextual influences on children's development includes time, and this has implications for research, meaning that at times we need to revisit what is happening for children and the impact of current practices. The following sections discuss what this study has identified about current perspectives on the influence of continuity and discontinuity on transition to school in New Zealand.

9.2.1 Teachers' Perspectives on Continuities and Discontinuities Children Experience on School Entry and How These Influence the Transition Experience

This research began with a survey of ECE and NE teachers which gathered data about their views on the continuity and discontinuity children experience when transitioning between ECE and school contexts. It was important to include the views of teachers from both sectors because teachers from both sectors are directly involved in the transition experiences of children. The perspectives of NE teachers were also further investigated through the case studies that followed. It was not possible to gain further understandings of ECE teachers' perspectives as the size of the study needed to be kept manageable. Exploring ECE teachers' perspectives in more depth is an avenue for further research.

This section will consider how teachers' views and practices were shaped by conscious and unconscious theoretical stances which were sometimes in conflict. Key themes that arose from ECE and NE teacher participant data are then discussed.

Influences on Teacher Perspectives and Practice.

When considering the perspectives of teachers, it is important to acknowledge that the views they hold are influenced by both espoused and unconscious theories, values, and beliefs. These perceptions and beliefs about learning and teaching drive the decisions teachers make and the actions they take in the classroom (Kervin & Mantei, 2021; Robinson & Timperley, 2007; Spodek, 1988). Different theories suggest different ways of supporting children and their learning and influence which learning experiences are thought to be appropriate (Kervin & Mantei, 2021; Spodek & Saracho, 1999). Teachers' beliefs therefore influence the transition practices they employ and thus impact on the transition experiences of children (Bellen, 2016; Peters, 2004a). It is important then to understand not only what teachers do, but the thinking that underpins their actions (Bellen, 2016; Spodek, 1988).

In thinking about continuity and discontinuity during the transition to school, survey and case study data from ECE and NE teachers indicates that their thinking and practices are influenced by both maturational (Graue & Reineke, 2014) and bioecological (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) theories of development. These underlying beliefs are associated with different ways of thinking about the

transition to school. Maturational theory is associated with concepts of children needing to be 'ready for school', while bioecological theory underpins perspectives where schools are viewed as needing to be 'ready for every child' regardless of the skills and understandings they hold (Peters, 2003b).

While these two theoretical standpoints may appear to be mutually exclusive and are eclectic, some teachers in this study appeared to be influenced by both these theories at the same time, although they did not appear to be conscious that this was the case. Teachers are not always conscious of the beliefs that underpin their practice (Smith, 2018) and this was evident in the case study findings. Teachers said that they adjusted their practices to the needs of individual children, adjusting the environment to support the needs of the child, thus employing practices influenced by bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Peters, 2010). However, while teachers espoused the view that ECE services should not get children ready for school, and adjusted their practice to individuals, they did in fact have underlying views about school readiness which also influenced their practice. For instance, as discussed in previous chapters, data from teachers in both the survey and case studies indicates a key reason they valued the provision of play in new entrant classrooms is because they saw it as giving a 'gift of time' to those children who were deemed to be unready for school. Play was perceived by teachers to provide continuity by continuing practices children had experienced in ECE and thus giving time for children to be ready for more structured and formal learning experiences (a maturational perspective), rather than play providing a way of connecting to familiar ways of learning and thus contributing to continuity of learning (a bioecological perspective). Planning for learning through play may not be a priority when teachers see it as a gift of time rather than a way to connect with prior learning through intentional teaching. As a result of a lack of intentional teaching through play, children may experience a discontinuity of pedagogy and may not connect prior learning with the learning that is expected at school.

It was clear that some NE teachers felt conflicted between believing children needed to be school ready and the belief they should support the individual needs of each transitioning child. While they put practices in place to support children who might struggle during the transition, some teachers also said that if children were not 'ready' they should not be at school. Similarly, survey findings showed that ECE teachers recommended children be held back from starting school if they thought they might struggle to navigate the discontinuity, a practice associated with maturational theorising where children are kept in ECE services until deemed 'ready' for school (Graue, 1999; Peters, 2003b). Recent Australian studies also found that teachers in both sectors had a child centric view of readiness where readiness was seen to be inherent in the child (Bellen, 2016; Rouse et al., 2020).

It is likely that teachers were influenced towards articulating a 'ready schools' perspective by fairly recent publications (e.g. Dockett & Perry, 2014; Education Review Office, 2015; Lehrer et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2022; Ministry of Education, 2007, 2017; Mitchell et al., 2016; OECD, 2017a; Peters, 2010). However, there is still considerable literature published that comes from a maturational 'ready child' perspective (Dockett & Perry, 2013b) which will also be influencing teachers' beliefs. Additionally, while the Ministry of Education seems to favour a 'ready school' approach (Ministry of Education, 2007, 2017), policies such as *National Standards* (Ministry of Education, 2010b) where expectations of children's learning and development are outlined, impacted on teachers' expectations of children on school entry and the practices they employed. The flexibility in New Zealand educational policy for children to start school any time between ages five and six (Ministry of Education, n.d.-b) also implies that children may not be ready at five and so more time in ECE might be of benefit for some children. Aspects of the school and national environment influence how teachers see their role, as does initial teacher education (Howe et al., 2012). It is therefore not surprising that teachers are influenced by both theoretical perspectives.

It is clear that maturational perspectives of transition related to the notion of the 'ready child' continue to influence teachers' thinking (Mackenzie, 2018b), despite advice and research evidence that the focus should be on schools being ready for children (Dockett & Perry, 2014; Education Review Office, 2015; Graue, 2006). An approach based on readiness involves images and judgments of what normal development and learning looks like and helps to create deficit perspectives of certain groups or children (Falchi & Friedman, 2015; Peters, 2004a; Taylor, 2011) which can be seen in the data presented in this thesis. Such dominant paradigms and discourses about children and their learning operate as 'regimes of truth' (Foucault, 1975). It takes time and is not easy to change people's long held beliefs and embedded practices (Howe et al., 2012). As Foucault (1975) argued, certain 'truths' are maintained by the power structures of society, including schools, and are therefore resistant to change. Additionally, people may only have experience of these beliefs and have been embedded in them throughout their lives (Rogoff, 2016).

Schools, ECE services and teachers are required to critically reflect on their values and beliefs and whether these are leading to equitable practices which have positive outcomes for all groups of children (Ministry of Education, 2020, 2021b), which is a focus of Education Review Office evaluations (Education Review Office, 2020). Despite this requirement, there is work to be done in New Zealand to ensure teachers have professional learning and support to become conscious of the theories and paradigms that influence their practice and to align their practice to approaches which do not position children or groups of children as lacking or disadvantaged during the transition to school.

ECE and NE Teachers' Perspectives.

As discussed in Chapter Four, findings from the survey showed that the views of NE and ECE teachers did not differ to a statistically significant degree. Continuity was said by both groups of teachers to be important for children starting school for several reasons, which aligned with the views of the Case Study teachers. Continuity was linked to the emotional wellbeing of children and thus their image of themselves, and with their ability to engage with the learning experiences of school, thus minimising disruption to children's learning journeys. The transition was said to be easier when there were similarities between contexts and therefore children would not take as long to settle into school. There was a strong theme in the data from both sectors that continuity, particularly in relation to the inclusion of play in the school curriculum, would help ensure that practices were developmentally appropriate for children starting school and therefore it was important to ensure the degree of difference was not too great.

The transition to school involves children entering a context where the environment and people differ from previous contexts so, as some teachers acknowledged, some degree of discontinuity is inevitable. Discontinuity is not necessarily a bad thing, however. Findings revealed that although teachers in this study saw value in there being similarities between school and ECE contexts, some degree of difference was thought by teachers to promote development, as argued previously by Ackesjö (2014) and Dockett and Perry (2007b). Children can only learn about the social situation of school by being at school, so the important thing is to ensure the changes involved in starting school are within the child's zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978a, 2017) and can thus be navigated with appropriate support (Peters, 2004a). Schools draw children from a range of ECE services with differing philosophies and teaching practices and each child has different home experiences and characteristics, so the zone of proximal development differs for each child. It is therefore important for NE teachers to think about how they can learn about each child so they can understand where continuity can be increased to support individual transitions. Learning more about children and their past experiences will also help teachers consider how best to support each child's transition (Fabian & Dunlop, 2015; S. Peters et al., 2015; Schrimsher & Tudge, 2003).

A difference did emerge between teachers from the different sectors in how similar teachers perceived their own context to be in comparison to how similar they thought the contexts should be. NE teachers who thought the context should be more similar rated their own classroom as more similar ($r=.328$), whereas ECE teachers' responses to these questions were not significantly related ($r=.003$). This could indicate that NE teachers' views influence their intended practice, whereas this may not be so for ECE teachers. It is possible that ECE teachers do not seek to provide continuity, even

when they think it important, because they are unsure of how to increase continuity without implementing learning experiences that are perceived as inappropriate in ECE or they may lack understanding of the how teaching happens in the school sector. This suggestion is supported by the findings of Mackenzie and Petriwskyj (2017), who found that teachers from both sectors may have little understanding and knowledge about the approaches to the teaching of writing used in the other sector. If teachers are unsure of how teaching happens in the other sector this may inhibit their ability to promote continuity. Spending time in the learning environments of the other sector can deepen teachers' understandings of how teaching and learning happens in the different sectors (S. Peters et al., 2015). Further research investigating how continuity can be enhanced by ECE teachers is an implication of these findings.

Quantitative data from the survey showed that teachers from both sectors thought that the most important areas for there to be continuity were in opportunities for social engagement, approaches to learning and teaching, and in the types of learning experience provided. Qualitative survey data revealed that while teachers had rated the routines and structure of school less highly in the quantitative questions, these were also areas where they thought continuity could be helpful. These themes also emerged in Case Study data as being important to children and parents. The next section illuminates what has been learned about these themes by including the voices of multiple participant groups in the study.

9.2.2 Continuities and Discontinuities of Significance to Children, Parents and Teachers

While findings indicated that all participant groups valued continuity, as expected, the aspects of continuity and discontinuity that emerged as significant were not always the same for different participant groups or for individual participants. The previous chapters have already described in some detail the perspectives of different groups of participants and how these differed or aligned. This section illuminates the value gained from including multiple perspectives, settings, and data collection tools in research on the transition to school (Cresswell, 2015; Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018; Hibberts & Burke Johnson, 2012; Punch, 2009). The key themes that emerged from children, parents and teachers in the case studies related to people and relationships, teaching and learning, and expectations, structure, and environment; aspects also highlighted by ECE and NE teachers who participated in the survey. The next discussion will address how key differences and similarities between perspectives for each of these aspects enrich the findings.

People and Relationships.

Starting school involves some relationships ending and others beginning as children move from a context where they may have developed friendships and are familiar with the teachers and other people to a new environment where there are unfamiliar people. This study found that relationships with peers, teachers, other school staff, and older children at school could be significant during this time.

Relationships featured as important to all participant groups in the case studies, including teachers, as can be seen in Table 20. It was surprising therefore that this theme did not feature within the survey data from ECE and NE teachers. While survey findings showed teachers rated opportunities for social engagement as the most important area in which to provide continuity for children, relationships did not appear in the qualitative data from this survey. This may indicate that consideration of social engagement being important may have been prompted by the question but may not be something teachers would have considered without the prompt; a limitation of the survey design.

Table 20
Overview of Perspectives: People and Relationships

Category	Key findings	Case Study 1	Case Study 2	Case Study 3	Survey
Relationships	Children need to form new relationships	Children Parents Teachers	Children Parents Teachers	Children Parents Teachers	
Friends	Concern about having no friends/meeting new people	Children Parents	Children Parents	Parents	
	Discontinuity of friendships/missing friends from ECE	Children	Children Parents	Children Parents	
	Reconnecting with old friends	Children Parents	Children Parents	Children Parents	
	Making/playing with friends		Children Parents	Children	
Teachers and school staff	Relationships with teachers	Teachers Parents	Teachers	Children Parents	
	Beginning the teacher/child relationship before starting school	Teachers Parents	Teachers Parents	Teachers	
	Teacher's role	Children	Children Parents	Children	
	Other school staff	Children	Children		
	Missing ECE teachers		Parents	Children	
	Number of teachers in the class		Teachers	Children	

	Mother who works at school			Children Parents	
Older children and siblings	Change in role/social hierarchy	Children Teachers	Parents	Parents	
	Older children help the younger in classroom and the playground	Teachers Children			
	Fear of older children	Children Teachers			
	Impact of siblings, cousins, older known children	Children Teachers Parents	Children Parents Teachers	Children Parents	
	Missing sibling			Children	

There were differences between the perspectives of different case study participant groups as to which relationships were significant (Table 20). Children spoke of the importance of friendships during the transition to school. They associated discontinuity of friendships with negative feelings of grief and loss and continuity of friendships with positive feelings, reinforcing earlier research findings (Booth et al., 2019; Broström, 2019; Danby et al., 2012; Sandberg et al., 2014). Parents also noted the benefits of children knowing others at school and that the disruption to friendships could cause challenges for children. There were seen to be some positive aspects of this social discontinuity as children needed to make new friends, which some children and parents saw as a positive part of being at school. In contrast, teachers saw relationships between themselves and the child as important during this time of change. Given that one of the *Standards for the Teaching Profession* (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, n.d.), which all New Zealand teachers need to meet to gain and retain teacher certification, is titled ‘Professional Relationships’ and requires teachers to “Establish and maintain professional relationships and behaviours focused on the learning and wellbeing of each learner” (p. 18), it is not surprising that teachers view the building of relationships between themselves and transitioning children as important.

What was interesting, and somewhat surprising, was the lack of data showing teachers understood the importance of friendships to children during this time of change. This was surprising because the importance of friendships during this time has been written of extensively in literature concerning the transition to school (e.g. Booth et al., 2019; Broström, 2019; Chowby & Barley, 2022; Dockett & Perry, 2012; Fabian, 2010; Joerdens, 2014; Peters, 2003a, 2004a, 2010; Sandberg et al., 2014; Tatlow-Golden et al., 2016; Wilder & Lillvist, 2018). This finding may indicate that research findings are not being disseminated in ways that are accessible to practitioners or that initial teacher education programmes are not sufficiently focussing on the importance of peer relationships to children. This finding also reveals that teachers may not be aware of what children find important and this may inhibit them

from putting in place strategies which may help children to build new peer relationships and maintain old friendships when they start school as teachers did not mention any practices that they used to support this. My earlier research showed that some teachers do implement strategies that support peer interaction (Hayes, 2013), but the current study brings into question whether teachers consciously plan to do this. Including child and parent perspectives in this study may bring to teachers' attention that peer relationships are important at this time and prompt them to consciously plan to support these.

There are differences between case study findings that demonstrate how contextual and structural features of the school impact on the transitional experiences of children. For example, Table 20 demonstrates that findings related to the impact of older children at school are more evident in Case Study One. In Case Study One there was a 'guardian angel' system in place where an older buddy from the senior class has a role in supporting the new entrant. New entrants in this school also join a composite class where there are children from more than one year group. Children and teachers in this school valued the help that older children in the class and school could give during this time of change, a finding that was less evident in the other case studies, and thus validating the use of more than one case study (Cresswell, 2015).

As previously argued, it is important to acknowledge that each individual has a different experience of transition which is influenced by a range of factors including their past experiences, the characteristics of the contexts they have been immersed in, their own characteristics and the features of the contexts into which they are transitioning (Dean & Delaune, 2019; Einarsdottir, 2007; Harrison, 2014; Margetts & Phatudi, 2013). This is exemplified by considering the finding that children can miss siblings that have remained in ECE or at home. This was something raised by only one child in the research, but the way the child spoke of missing his sibling showed that, for him, this was a significant discontinuity he was experiencing. As Peters (2010) proposed, any child may be at risk during the transition to school if the match between the familiar and the new is too great. It is therefore important for those involved in planning transitions to be mindful that what is significant for one child, may not be for another and thus to find out what matters to individuals.

Teaching and Learning.

The perspectives of study participants relating to the theme of teaching and learning are captured in Table 21. Schools and ECE services are likely to have different approaches to teaching and learning (Belcher, 2006; Bennett, 2013; Education Review Office, 2015; Shuey et al., 2019) which can be significant to children starting school. This appears to be the case as there was evidence in this study

that differing approaches meant some children were unable to connect what was learned in ECE to school learning and this impacted on their attitudes to learning and resulted in discontinuity of learning. That the transition to school could affect continuity of learning was acknowledged by parents in one case study, teachers in another and both NE and ECE teachers in the survey. Data from children in two case studies also related to this theme.

Most child participants viewed learning as beginning at school, but this view was only shared by one child in Case Study Three. Teachers in Case Study One also expressed this view, as did parents in two of the case studies. There was also a view from some participants that the focus at school was on academic learning. Survey and case study teachers also reported that assessment played a significant role in constraining teacher practices, as will be discussed in Section 9.2.3.

Table 21
Overview of Perspectives: Teaching and Learning

Category	Key findings	Case Study 1	Case Study 2	Case Study 3	Survey
Learning	Learning happens in school and not in ECE	Children Parents Teachers	Children	Parents Children	
	Learning at school is about literacy/numeracy	Children	Children		NE teachers
	Stronger academic focus at school			Teachers	NE teachers
	Discontinuity of learning	Children	Children Parents	Teachers	NE teachers ECE teachers
	Attitudes to school learning	Children	Children		
	Religious education	Children Parents	Children		
	School should focus more on learning than ECE	Parents Teachers			
	Learning experiences are compulsory		Teachers		NE Teachers
	Connecting with/implementing Te Whāriki at school		Teachers	Teachers	
	Play	Play provides continuity	Parents Teachers	Teachers Parents	Teachers Children Parents
Structure around play		Teachers Children		Children Teachers	NE teachers

					ECE teachers
	Play supportive of developmental stage	Teachers			NE teachers ECE teachers
	Mindset/training/beliefs about learning and teaching		Teachers	Teachers	
	Play linked with fewer behaviour problems			Teachers	
Assessment	Different assessment methods		Teachers	Teachers	NE teachers ECE teachers
	Assessment requirements restricting ability to provide continuity		Teachers	Teachers	ECE teachers NE Teachers

Data from teachers and parents showed that the inclusion of play in the school curriculum is providing continuity for children, and contrary to earlier studies (Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood, 2008; Corsaro & Molinari, 2008; Dockett & Perry, 2007b; Ebbeck et al., 2013; Einarsdottir, 2007), children in this research did not say that they missed playing when they started school. The absence of this view in data from children arguably indicates that, where play is a regular part of classroom activity, continuity is increased. What children did notice was more structure around the opportunities for play, something also noticed by case study and survey teacher participants.

Both ECE and NE teachers who participated in the survey spoke of the value of play in reducing discontinuity and ensuring the programme was, in their view, developmentally appropriate. The inclusion of the case study data enabled more to be understood about the value of play-based learning. For example, it was found that although the schools included play in very different ways, regardless of the way it was included, play provided a continuity that was of benefit. It was also found that initial teacher education and teachers' beliefs impacted on how play was valued and implemented in the classroom.

Expectations, Structure and Environment.

Children enter a new environment on school entry where there are different norms of behaviour and ways of doing things. While aspects of the physical environment were raised by participants as being different, it seemed that the physical environment did not cause significant concern to children, although the playground proved to be something children valued. What was significant were the rules,

routines, and organisational arrangements with which children were not familiar, which reflects the findings of earlier studies (Booth et al., 2019; Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood, 2008; Corsaro & Molinari, 2008; Dockett & Perry, 2007b; Ebbeck et al., 2013; Morton et al., 2018). The differences meant children were unsure how to engage appropriately in school activities at times. The way that teachers managed children’s behaviour could also be unfamiliar to children. An overview of perspectives on the theme of expectations, structure and environment are presented in Table 22.

Table 22
Overview of Perspectives: Expectations, Structure and Environment

Category	Key findings	Case Study 1	Case Study 2	Case Study 3	Survey
Behaviour expectations and management	Expectations of behaviour change/ new rules	Children	Children Teachers	Children	NE teachers ECE teachers
	Children expected to take responsibility /be more independent	Teachers Parents	Teachers Parents	Children Parents Teachers	
	Behaviour management practices	Children	Children	Children Parents	
Structure and organisation	Not always able to choose/restrictions on where and when can play /timetable/more structure	Children Teachers Parents	Children Teachers Parents	Children Teachers Parents	NE teachers ECE teachers
	Bell/uniforms/ systems for showing you are present etc		Children Teachers	Children Teachers	
Routines	New routines	Children Teachers Parents	Children Teachers Parents	Children Teachers Parents	NE teachers ECE teachers
	Helpful for there to be similar routines	Teachers Parents		Teachers	
	Different routines around eating	Children Parents	Children Teachers Parents	Children Parents	
	Tiredness/Sleep/length of day	Children Teachers Parents	Parents	Parents	
Playground	Playground is a positive part of school	Children	Children	Children	
	Similarities and differences between playgrounds	Children	Children		
Classroom	More classrooms	Children			
	Size of classroom	Children Teachers	Teachers		

	Different resources/similar resources	Children Teachers	Children Parents		
Library	New to children	Children	Children		
ECE service on school site	ECE on site provides continuity		Teachers	Teachers Parents Children	

While rules and routines were rated by teachers who participated in the survey as the third most important area in which to have continuity, there was limited opportunity within the survey to gain an understanding of what the significant differences in rules or routines might be or how continuity could be provided. However, case study data from children showed that not knowing the expectations of behaviour and the new rules associated with these could result in children behaving in ways that were not considered appropriate at school, and at times, being punished in ways they were also unfamiliar with. This highlights the need for teachers to reflect on how children can be better supported to understand the norms of behaviour expected in the culture of school.

Teachers in Case Study Two expressed the view that it would be ideal to have ECE services on school sites as children would have more opportunities to connect with school and to find out what happened there. They did not have an ECE service on site and had not experienced working in a school where this was the case, so this view was based on their opinion. However, Case Study Three involved a school which had experienced having a kindergarten on site the previous year. Data from children, parents and teachers in this school provided evidence that there were benefits to having ECE services co-located on the school site as children became familiar with the environment and some of the people at school.

The findings from this study highlight the value of a research approach aligned with bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) that enabled the views of different participant groups from different contexts to be heard. Experiences of transition are highly individual as each child's journey is influenced by the different elements in their ecological network. An environment which suits one child may not be hospitable to another; children's past experiences influence their interpretation of current events (van der Veer, 2007) and "almost any child is at risk of making a poor or less successful transition if their individual characteristics are incompatible with features of the environment they encounter... However, this is not inevitable" (Peters, 2010, p. 2). The key is to ensure the level of discontinuity is within the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978a) for each child. To do this, teachers must be able to establish which aspects of discontinuity are likely to be difficult for which children and have supportive strategies in place. The next section will

discuss how teachers can put in place practices to support transitioning children before, during and after their first day at school.

9.2.3 How Children Can be Supported to Navigate Discontinuities which are of Significance

The specific strategies and practices that participants in the survey and case studies described as being useful to support children to navigate discontinuity have been discussed in detail in Chapters Four and Eight respectively. The findings described in those chapters reinforce the importance of using a range of practices to ensure an appropriate level of continuity is provided and to support children to navigate discontinuity. Implementing a higher number of transition practices has been found to positively impact on academic outcomes and social adjustment for children (Ahtola et al., 2011; Cook & Coley, 2017; Margetts, 2007a; Schulting et al., 2005; Zulfiqar et al., 2018).

While contextual factors may impact on teachers' practices, teachers should consider implementing a range of transition practices or activities that will enable the following: prepare children for the changes involved in starting school; induct children to school practices; promote continuity and further support children who find the transition challenging; aspects discussed in the forthcoming sections. Also considered is the need to provide appropriate scaffolding for individual children, as children's needs for support differ depending on their past experiences and individual characteristics (Peters, 2010). Factors teachers perceive to constrain their practice will then be considered.

Preparing Children for Change.

Transition is a process that happens over a period of time and thus the transition to school begins before the child's first day at school (Ackesjö, 2019). Teachers recognised this and there were practices they employed before children started school with the intention of supporting the process of transition to go well. As discussed previously, it was clear that some practices were designed to ensure children are 'ready for school', however, taking a bioecological and sociocultural theoretical approach, this study suggests that it may be more helpful to think about which strategies help prepare children for the changes involved in starting school (Ackesjö, 2019). Change is inevitable, so children should be prepared for discontinuity (Wilder & Lillvist, 2018).

Ensuring children have opportunities to become familiar with the new context and the people in it (S. Peters et al., 2015) prior to school entry can help children gain awareness of the continuities and differences they will encounter and what to expect at school. Visits to the school are a common way teachers from this study supported this to happen as it is only by being at school that children can understand what school is really like (Bodrova & Leong, 2003). Multiple visits at different times and to

the actual classroom children will enter enables them to become familiar with the environment and the people in it, experience some key classroom routines, and prepares them for the changes they will need to navigate (Hannah et al., 2010; Hoffman & Sam, 2020; Hopps, 2019). Visits must strike a balance between introducing children to things that are new and connecting to familiar things so that children know what differences to expect, but also that there are things about school that will be familiar (Dockett & Perry, 2012). Parents or ECE teachers who visit with children also notice things about school which they can talk with children about before they start school. Inviting ECE services to school events is another way to promote familiarity with the school context and the kinds of events that happen there. Peters and Woodhouse (2021a) suggest that digital technology can be used to support children to become familiar with the school context. Teachers could develop resources or provide virtual visits where there are barriers to actual school visits. Familiarity with the new context and the people in it will also help children engage fully in the classroom so that there is less disruption to learning (S. Peters et al., 2015).

It is clear from this study and earlier research that the discontinuity of friendships children may experience during the transition is of significance to children (Ackesjö, 2014; Ackesjö, 2019; Booth et al., 2019; Broström, 2019; Danby et al., 2012; Dockett & Perry, 2012; Margetts, 2006; Peters, 2003a, 2004a, 2010; S. Peters et al., 2015). As previously discussed in Chapter Eight, teachers in this study did not describe measures they took to foster continuity of friendships or the making of new friendships during the transition. However, opportunities for social interaction and friendship building could be planned into school visits to help children begin to make connections with peers and build friendships, helping them prepare for the discontinuity of social relationships. Where cohort entry is in place, the children who are starting on the same day could visit together so that they may get to know each other and provide a network of support. It can also be helpful for parents and ECE teachers to make children aware of friends and children who have already gone to the same school who they will be able to reconnect with. Starting with a friend or being placed in the same class as a friend can also be beneficial (Bulkeley & Fabian, 2006; Mortlock et al., 2011). These practices may help to reduce some of the anxiety children feel about starting school, particularly the fear of not knowing anyone or having anyone to play with, a concern expressed by children in this study. Similarly, school visits and visits by NE teachers to ECE services provide the opportunity for relationships with the new teacher to begin developing, something teachers in this study thought was significant.

Implementing school-like practices in the ECE services can be seen as a way of readying children for school by ensuring they have the skills and knowledge that are seen as important in the school context. These skills and understandings act as social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) which is of value in

the school setting because children who possess these are able to more easily adjust to the cultural and social expectations of the classroom. However, care should be taken to avoid implementing practices which are overly structured and not suitable for ECE contexts (Education Review Office, 2011a).

Putting another lens on these practices, we could frame them as preparing children for change. With this lens teachers would consider what skills, knowledge and experiences will help children to navigate change and would be of value at school. The focus might then be on equipping children with the skills and dispositions that will help them be resilient to change and to engage in school-based learning. Rather than replicating school practices, Hedegaard and Munk (2019) suggest that ECE services focus on developing the competencies children need for life, as these competencies are important in enabling children to engage in school activities. For example, supporting the development of self-regulation helps children to adjust to the new rules and structure (Booth et al., 2019) and fostering social skills can help children cope with discontinuity of friendships. Ensuring ECE teachers have the pedagogical knowledge to teach literacy and mathematics in play contexts is also important. For example, teachers of young children need to understand how to teach both constrained and unconstrained literacy skills (Snow & Matthews, 2016). Considering how the strands of the ECE curriculum and the competencies of the school curriculum are aligned (Shuey et al., 2019) will support ECE teachers in implementing practices that develop skills, knowledge and dispositions that will be useful at school. The updated *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017) provides examples of these links and also highlights links with the learning domains of the school curriculum that can support ECE teachers to understand what learning will be helpful. Developing cross sector relationships where discussion can be had about teaching and learning in each sector and a shared vision of what is important developed (Dockett & Perry, 2021b; Hopps, 2019) will enable ECE teachers to consider how best to prepare children for change and help NE teachers to be prepared for each child.

Induction to School Practices and Expectations.

Practices such as visits to school begin the process of inducting children into the environment and culture of school, but transition is an ongoing process and giving attention to how to support children to understand what to do and how to engage in school activities during their first days at school is also important. Therefore, it was surprising that strategies that directly addressed teaching children about the routines, rules and expectations of school did not feature in the data from the case studies or survey. Children said they did not always know about things such as what to do in a fire evacuation or what the rules were (until they broke them).

Planning ways to help children understand more about the cultural norms of school behaviour and learning could be of benefit as school can present challenges for children when they do not have cultural capital that assists them to understand the expectations of behaviour (Booth et al., 2019; Bourdieu, 1986). It is possible that the traditional New Zealand practice of continuous individual school entry means teachers are unable to focus on fully inducting new entrants as they have limited time to attend to the new child while teaching a whole class (Peters, 2004a) and may leave children to learn these things from their peers (Hayes, 2013, 2014). Cohort entry may make it easier for teachers to help children learn what to do at school as teachers may have more time to work with the group of new children. Identifying what children need to know to engage appropriately in school learning and considering how to help them learn this is worthy of reflection for teachers.

Promoting Continuity.

Increasing continuity between ECE and school contexts has been recommended as a way to make the transition less challenging for children (Boyle, Grieshaber, et al., 2018; Dockett & Einarsdottir, 2017). All three schools in this study described their programmes as play-based although, as described in Chapter Six, they each integrated play in the curriculum quite differently. Teachers and parents saw these play-based programmes as increasing continuity for children and having positive benefits for children during their first year at school, as did survey participants. Children were happy to find familiar play materials at school and, as one teacher explained, play could provide opportunities for children to feel successful and that they know what to do, when other school experiences might leave them feeling less successful. The loss of opportunities for play seemed to be of less concern for children in this study than in some earlier research (Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood, 2008; Corsaro & Molinari, 2008; Dockett & Perry, 2007b; Einarsdottir, 2007), arguably indicating that the inclusion of play in the school classroom has increased continuity.

What was not strongly evident in the findings from this study was how teachers promoted continuity of learning during the transition to school to minimise disruption to learning pathways. It might be expected that using play as a medium for learning would increase opportunities for continuity of learning. However, although teachers spoke of implementing play-based learning, not all teachers appeared to actively plan for learning through play. This is not unexpected as it has been found that NE teachers may lack understanding of the role of a teacher in facilitating learning in play-based contexts (Aiono et al., 2019). Teachers may need support and professional development to realise the full potential including play in the new entrant classroom has for children's learning (Bellen, 2016; Walsh et al., 2010). Additionally, while teachers say they value play-based learning, they are constrained by pressures to progress literacy and numeracy (Bellen, 2016), as discussed below. There

can be an incongruence between what teachers value and the societal and political demands which influence their practice (Hedegaard & Munk, 2019).

To ensure continuity of learning, teachers need to know about children and how and what they have learned in the past (Wilder & Lillvist, 2018). This helps teachers to connect to prior learning and to employ pedagogies that are recognisable to children. If teachers know about children's previous learning, they can verbally connect the new learning to the prior learning by reminding children of learning that had happened in the ECE service. However, there was little reference by NE teachers in the survey or case studies to using assessment information from ECE services or having discussions with ECE teachers to find out about children's prior learning and then planning to build on this. Teachers also did not speak of having discussions with parents to find out about children's language, culture and identity and what children bring to school from their home culture and environment. It was disappointing to find this, as over several years there have been recommendations that sharing (and using) assessment data from ECE would support continuity of learning and positive transition experiences (Dockett & Perry, 2021b; Education Review Office, 2015; Mitchell et al., 2015). There have also been several studies detailing successful initiatives implemented to share useful information (Hartley et al., 2014; Hartley et al., 2012; Hoffman & Sam, 2020). It appears there is more work to be done in New Zealand to establish ways of sharing useful data about children's skills, knowledge and capabilities that can be used by NE teachers as the basis of planning and providing continuous learning pathways.

When NE teachers visited ECE contexts they gained some insights into how teaching and learning happens in ECE and survey data showed that some teachers have participated in cross sector meetings, both promising practices for increasing understanding of how connections can be made between ECE learning experiences and those of school (Bond et al., 2019). This is important because data from children showed that they did not always know how to show their skills and understandings at school which could lead to them feeling disempowered. This is likely because the pedagogical approach differed and was unfamiliar. Observations of practice in other sectors has been found to support teacher understanding of how differences in practices and programmes can impact on children (Hohepa et al., 2017).

Gradually increasing the amount of structure was proposed by parents and teachers as a way to increase continuity for transitioning children. In this way children would encounter fewer differences when they first started school and the teachers could gradually increase the structure and formality of learning experiences, keeping within children's zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978b). This may be difficult to do in schools where continuous entry is the norm. It may not be practical to

have differing expectations for different children and cause further confusion for children who are expected to comply with expectations of greater structure while others in the classroom have more freedom. However, this may be more achievable in schools which implement cohort entry.

Some degree of continuity is desirable and supportive of continuous learning pathways and the ease of transition; but promoting continuity for continuity's sake is not the answer (Stipek et al., 2017). Some degree of difference facilitates development (Ackesjö, 2014; Brooker, 2008; Ma et al., 2021; Wilder & Lillvist, 2018). When a child "meets new artefacts and appropriates new competences... he or she thereby gets new possibilities of relating differently to the world" (Hedegaard, 2007, p. 262). Children also look forward to school being different (Fabian, 2010). Discontinuity is inevitable when a new context is entered so it impossible to remove discontinuity, even if this was desirable. What teachers need to do is to understand which continuities and discontinuities are most significant for children and their learning and ensure that practices address the ones that matter (Stipek et al., 2017). This may differ for individual children and families because change which may cause damage to one child can facilitate development in another (Ma et al., 2021).

As this research has found, what children think is significant can differ from what teachers or parents think matters. Evaluating transition programmes and including parent's and children's perspectives in evaluative processes will help teachers know what matters for their community of children and families and to put in place practices that respond to the needs of the community (Wilder & Lillvist, 2018). Regular evaluation of programmes is important because what matters may change over time and for different groups. Teachers will then be able to identify which differences children look forward to and value and ensure there are not too many discontinuities that may prove problematic. Wilder and Lillvist (2018) recommend teachers asking evaluative questions about the impact of continuity and discontinuity on children's learning journey and considering which continuities are most important from the child's perspective. Rather than trying to make things the same, it may be more appropriate to ensure things are not so different that children cannot see connections between the contexts and practices so that the familiar can be connected to the unfamiliar (McNaughton, 2002). Reframing transition discourse around the concept of continuity rather than focusing on discontinuity may also be helpful (Boyle, Grieshaber, et al., 2018; Boyle, Petriwskyj, et al., 2018).

Supporting Children Who Find the Transition Challenging.

There are complex factors which shape each child's transition to school and even children who appear confident may struggle, while others transition with ease (S. Peters et al., 2015). Both the features of the new context and the characteristics and past experiences of the child influence the degree of

continuity and discontinuity a child will encounter and how easily the child navigates the transition (Peters, 2010). Survey findings showed that teachers used a range of strategies to support children who find navigating discontinuity challenging. Further exploration during the case studies about how to help these children established that there was no one strategy or range of strategies that worked for all children. The strategies used for each child differed depending on the child, their prior experiences, personal characteristics and so forth. Teachers gathered information that would help them identify whether more targeted support might be useful through talking to parents and observations during visits and during children's early days at school. Teachers therefore adjusted their practice depending on the child and how easily they were navigating the changes.

Once teachers become aware that a child may need additional support to navigate change, they need to make decisions about how best they can help. The first thing to understand is what may be causing the child to have difficulty and to select measures that can be put in place to address the reasons. Because the reasons why a child may struggle vary, strategies that are used to support those who struggle must be tailored (S. Peters et al., 2015). For instance, for one child a more gradual transition may be appropriate, while another may benefit from additional visits to school or having a quiet place to retreat to at school when feeling overwhelmed. It is beneficial to involve families in making a collaborative plan of how best to support the child. How crises of transition are managed are critical to determining whether the developmental potential of change is realised or whether there are negative effects (Ma et al., 2021).

Perceived Constraints on Practice.

Findings showed that teachers were aware of a range of practices that could promote continuity, support children to cope with discontinuity and help children adjust to school. However, it was clear that there were factors teachers saw as limiting the practices they were able to employ.

One of the strongest themes that emerged within the findings from both the survey and the case studies was the impact of *National Standards* (Ministry of Education, 2010b) on teachers' practices. Even though *National Standards* were rescinded in 2017 (Hipkins, 2017), and data from the case studies was collected after this date, case study teachers spoke of the constraint they felt due to these standards and the continuing use of these within schools to judge and measure progress. Teachers said that having to show that children were meeting these academic standards a short time after children started school limited their ability to provide continuity for children, include more play in the curriculum and take more time to get to know children. They would have liked to take more time before requiring children to engage in a lot of structured, academic learning experiences. These

findings validate concerns from academics about the negative consequences of *National Standards*. Before the standards were mandated Thrupp (2008) warned that they could result in a narrowing of the curriculum as he argued had been seen in international examples. After 10 years of implementation of the standards he confirmed this to be the case, finding a narrower focus on reading, writing and mathematics in schools (Thrupp, 2017). Evidence that *National Standards* impact on practice is also found in the findings of an NZCER survey which found that they were seen by principals and teachers “to shape what schools do” (Bonne, 2016, p. 2). This occurred through a narrowing of the curriculum where attention was diverted to maths and literacy at the expense of other curriculum areas, as the teachers in this study were feeling the pressure to do. The NZCER survey found that *National Standards* affected both what was taught and the pedagogical approach and resulted in a tension with the possibilities present in New Zealand to develop localised curriculum. Crooks et al. (2016) wrote that while there is an international uniqueness in the alignment between the key competencies of the school curriculum and the strands of the ECE curriculum in New Zealand which offers flexibility to teachers and schools, this was curtailed by the introduction of *National Standards* for reading, writing, and maths impacting on how much time was allocated to these areas. They argue that while the standards did not explicitly devalue other curriculum areas, they did “strongly nudge the balance of the school curriculum towards some goals, and by implication suggest less attention be paid to other goals” (p. 62). This could be the case, as Mitchell et al. (2015) contend that teachers perceive a focus on *National Standards* leads to less holistic assessment. Moss (2013) has argued that a system based on standards can lead to a focus on child readiness which puts the blame on the child and on ECE services for any difficulties children experience. When there is a focus on children being ready for school, ECE services may adopt practices commonly used in primary classrooms which are inappropriate in the ECE setting (OECD, 2017a). *National Standards* therefore may have influenced the readiness views that teachers in this study held.

Time emerged as a factor which affected what teachers were able to do. For instance, while NE teachers saw value in visiting ECE services, they lacked time to do this, as they were not always able to be released from the classroom. ECE teachers may also benefit from being able to visit schools but may be constrained for the same reason. Similarly, it can be difficult for ECE teachers to take children on school visits. Lack of time and differing timetables make it difficult for teachers from each sector to meet and form relationships which will support the sharing of information about transitioning children and the development of a shared visions and practices. Funding for these kinds of activities would be beneficial in helping teachers to maintain knowledge of the approaches local schools and ECE services take to teaching and learning and increasing awareness of the continuities and discontinuities children may experience when transitioning. They could then reflect on how best to

support transitions. There is currently no indication that there will be a shift in funding or policy to allow this change to happen.

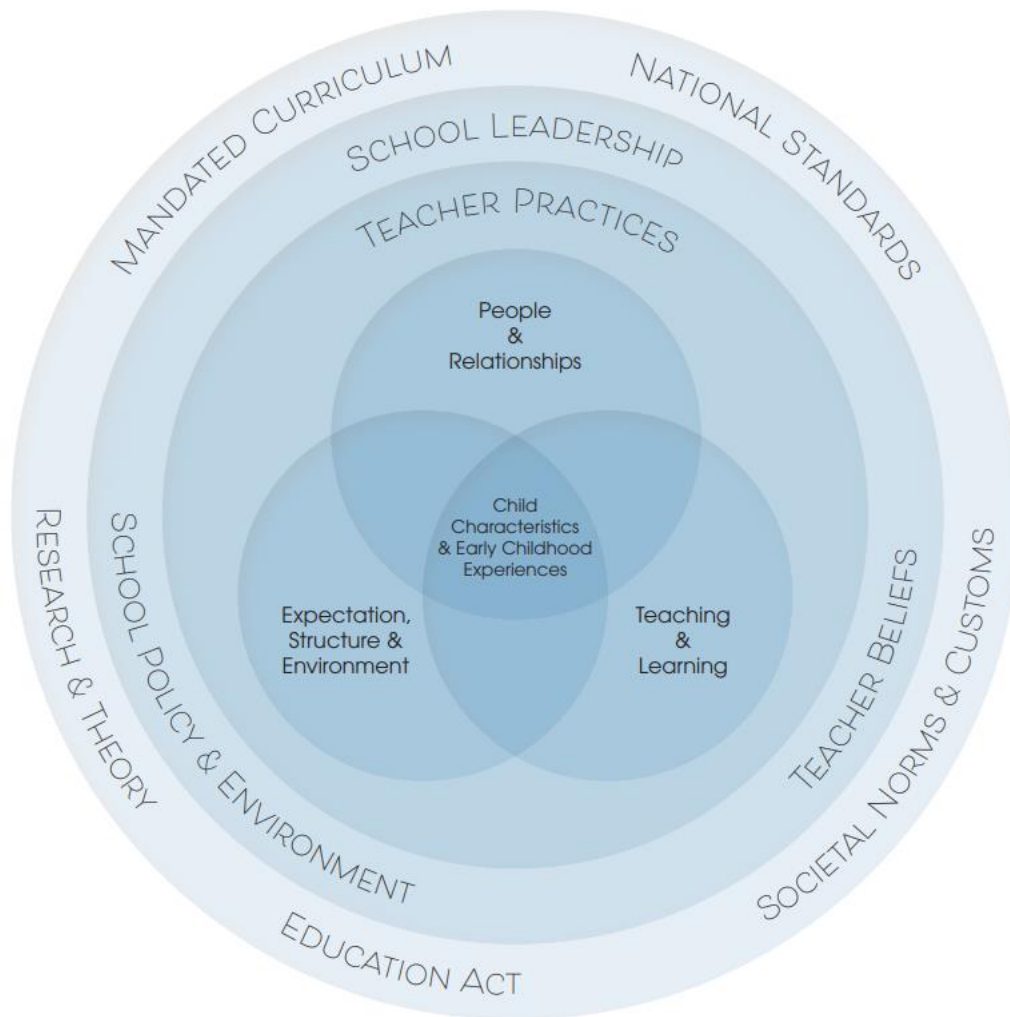
The organisational arrangements schools have in place may afford some practices teachers can use to support transitioning children and limit others. The intake policy of the school, the classroom size and configuration, the number of teachers in each classroom, the school timetable and school wide events are organisational arrangements which impact on what happens in the new entrant classroom. Teachers will employ different practices if children start in cohorts than if there is a continuous entry policy. It may be difficult to find time to spend with each new child ensuring they are inducted to the rules and routines of school when there is continuous entry, whereas cohort entry may enable teachers to devote more time to introducing these to the new group of children. The school timetable with bells ringing to signal play and lunch times means teachers are unable to adjust the flow of the day to be more like that of ECE services which may be less timetabled. The ratio of teachers to children also impacts on what teachers can do and the extent to which they can address issues of continuity of learning (OECD, 2017a). Teachers said that they were unable to implement some practices in schools to provide greater continuity because of the ratio of teachers to children. For example, allowing continuous access to the outdoors was not possible as there were not enough teachers to ensure safety both inside and outside.

These constraints teachers perceived to impact on their practice draw attention to how factors in the ecological environment impact on the transition to school. The next section provides a model that explains how different factors impact on continuity and discontinuity during the transition to school and how the different themes that have been discussed previously interact.

9.3 The Interaction of Continuity and Discontinuity During the Transition to School

No continuity or discontinuity is significant on its own, the wider picture of how continuities and discontinuities interact with each other and with other factors in the educational system must be considered to understand how they might impact on children. Each aspect of practice impacts on, and influences, other aspects of practice. How these factors, continuities and discontinuities intersect with each individual child's experience and characteristics determines the extent of the change the child experiences and how significant any discontinuities are for the child. Additionally, each context is located within a wider school, community, and national context. Values, beliefs, and practices in these wider contexts impact on practices in the school affording or limiting what happens in the classroom. The diagram in Figure 14 demonstrates these relationships and interactions.

Figure 14
Model of How Continuities and Discontinuities Intersect and are Influenced by Factors in the Ecological Environment



The model in figure 14 shows that the child is at the centre of the transition and comes to school with individual and unique characteristics. Each child has also had different early childhood experiences including experiences of diverse ECE and home contexts. These characteristics and experiences combine to influence how similar or different the school context is for the child and how resilient the child is to change. Thus, the degree of continuity or discontinuity differs for each child. Additionally, these experiences and characteristics impact on how a child responds to the continuities or discontinuities that are present when they start school.

The overlapping circles in the next level of the diagram represent the continuities and discontinuities a child will experience during the transition to school. The research identified continuities and discontinuities in three key areas: people and relationships, teaching and learning and in expectations, structure, and environment. The circles are shown as overlapping because aspects of each area influence other areas. For example, continuities and discontinuities in relationships will impact on

teaching and learning because of the social nature of the learning process (Vygotsky, 1978a). Both Hayes (2013) and Peters (2004a) have documented how continuity of friendship can support children to navigate discontinuities in teaching pedagogy, helping them to engage with unfamiliar learning experiences and learn what to do at school. Additionally, the teachers' expectations of children, the rules and routines, the types of learning experiences and how children are grouped either afford or inhibit different types of interactions, therefore impacting on the formation of relationships which can affect how well children navigate discontinuities of friendship. Structural aspects of the school and classroom and expectations of how children behave impact on teaching and learning. Rules and routines are put in place to enable teachers to enact the learning experiences they think are worthwhile for children and are required by the curriculum. Knowing the rules and routines enables children to engage in the learning experiences school affords in expected ways and thus to access the school curriculum. Peer acceptance is related to academic success through classroom engagement (Bossaert et al., 2011), thus being able to engage as expected in school learning experiences influences the impact of social discontinuity on children.

The continuities and discontinuities that the child experiences in these key areas and the success with which they navigate these are influenced by the practices of teachers. These practices are represented by the central circle surrounding the areas of continuity and discontinuity. These practices can support the child to get used to discontinuities which they find difficult to navigate. Other practices may be put in place to provide more continuity. The decisions teachers make about how they prepare children for the changes involved in starting school; induct children to school practices; promote continuity and further support children who find the transition challenging impact on the degree of continuity and discontinuity children experience and how easily they navigate the transition.

Impacting on both the strategies teachers enact and on the continuities and discontinuities children experience are factors such as school leadership and policies, the environment, and teachers' beliefs. For instance, teachers' beliefs about what counts as learning influence the discourse used around learning and the child's ability to see how the learning in ECE connects with school learning. Teachers' practices are strongly influenced by their beliefs (Bellen, 2016; Kervin & Mantei, 2021; Robinson & Timperley, 2007; Spodek & Saracho, 1999) and also by the decisions made by those in leadership positions (Education Review Office, 2015). The influence of power relationships on teacher beliefs mean that these beliefs can resist change (Foucault, 1975). Decisions about such things as the intake policy for the school or the make-up of classes will affect both teacher practices and the continuities and discontinuities experienced.

The outer circle of the diagram shows some of the factors which influence all the levels within the diagram. National legislative requirements can inhibit what is taught and what is valued, as the influence of *National Standards* (Ministry of Education, 2010b) identified by participants in this study demonstrates. Teachers' interview data showed that these influenced their decisions about learning that was prioritised. Research and theory, both new and old influence teacher beliefs about teaching and learning. These beliefs, in turn, influence the practices teachers put in place and the discontinuities and continuities children experience. A rising awareness of the benefits of a play-based curriculum in new entrant classrooms has led to the three schools in this study including more play in their programme. However, teachers remain influenced by maturational theory which impacts on how they implement play in the classrooms and their reason for doing so.

9.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has discussed how key findings from this study illuminate current understandings about how continuities and discontinuities influence transition to school in New Zealand and presented a model explaining how continuities and discontinuities interact and are influenced by factors in the bioecological system (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Teachers in this study were influenced by both bioecological (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) and maturational (Graue & Reineke, 2014) theories of development that helped to shape their understandings of transition and which could be resistant to change (Foucault, 1975). Teachers from both sectors held similar views, valuing both continuity and discontinuity during the transition to school. Child and parent perspectives also highlighted the importance of both continuity and discontinuity. While the research highlights three key areas of significance, it is also clear that the areas of significance differ for each child, depending on the social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) a child brings to school, which is shaped by their early childhood experiences. Thus, the findings point to the importance of knowing each child and what their previous experience has been like so that teachers are able to meet children where they are at, connecting with and building on their existing ways of knowing, being and doing. In this way continuity of learning can be facilitated for each child and support given to children for whom the changes are challenging.

The next and final chapter will summarise the overall conclusions of this study, outline the implications, suggest avenues for further research and acknowledge the limitations and strengths of this research.

Chapter Ten

Conclusion

10.1 Introduction

This study sought to investigate continuity and discontinuity during the transition to school in New Zealand. This focus was chosen because previous research indicated continuity and discontinuity were important factors for children during the transition (Brooker, 2008; Dockett & Perry, 2007a; Einarsdottir, 2007, 2010; Margetts & Phatudi, 2013; Peters, 1999, 2004b; Vitiello et al., 2022). Children's experience of transition can impact on later social, emotional, academic outcomes (Brooker, 2008; Broström, 2019; Cook & Coley, 2017; Dockett & Perry, 2007b; Dunlop, 2021; Education Review Office, 2015, 2022). Therefore, research which would help to identify how continuity and discontinuity influence transition and how children can be better supported to navigate the changes involved in starting school would make a useful contribution to the body of research addressing the transition to school.

A mixed method study was designed which was underpinned by a social constructionist epistemology and an interpretivist approach. The theoretical framework was influenced by the work of Vygotsky (1978a, 1978b), Bronfenbrenner (1979), Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) and Rogoff (2003). The perspectives of different people were therefore valued as a way to gain an understanding of the experiences of those involved in the transition and the meanings participants constructed from their experiences (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). The study involved two phases, commencing with an online survey of ECE and NE teachers which gathered both quantitative and qualitative data. Following this, qualitative case studies in three schools were employed which used child led tours, photographs, interviews, questionnaires, and field notes to gather the perspectives of children, parents, and NE teachers. This data was then examined to identify evidence which would address the research objectives.

This chapter will summarise the key findings and conclusions that have been drawn from the data before discussing the implications of the findings for educational communities seeking to better support the transition of children to school. Suggestions for further research are then made before the strengths and limitations of the research design are presented. The thesis concludes with some final comments.

10.2 Conclusions

In common with earlier studies, it was found that the transition experience will vary for each child (Dean & Delaune, 2019; Einarsdottir, 2007; Harrison, 2014; Margetts & Phatudi, 2013; Niesel & Griebel, 2007); the extent to which each child experiences continuity and discontinuity differs depending on a range of factors. These factors can relate to the child, their individual characteristics and past experiences and features of the ecological environment. However, although what matters for each child may differ, there are some aspects of continuity and discontinuity that have emerged from the findings as worthy of consideration because they appear significant. Knowing what these are means we can plan to reduce discontinuity in these areas or implement strategies to support children to navigate common discontinuities which may be of significance. We can then focus on identifying and working out how to support individual children who may need additional attention during this time.

Continuity and discontinuity were both valued by participants in this study. Rather than attempting to provide and increase continuity for the sake of it, teachers must strive to find a balance between continuity and difference that is within the child's Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978a) which can only be achieved by being informed about each child. It is also helpful to consider which continuities matter for the children in the particular school community, which changes may cause disruption to children's learning (Stipek et al., 2017), and how children can be supported in the areas of importance.

This study indicates that there are three key areas it is important to consider. The first of these is supporting children to cope with social discontinuity, particularly in relation to building new friendships and maintaining existing ones. Secondly, reflecting on how to minimise disruptions to learning pathways through the inclusion of opportunities for play within the curriculum and connecting to children's prior knowledge and learning experiences is important. Thirdly, helping children learn about the differences they will encounter and how the rules and routines of school will be different can support children to be able to engage appropriately in the learning opportunities that school affords. However, it is important to be mindful that each of these aspects of continuity and discontinuity influence each of the others. If we want to ensure that there is as little disruption to learning pathways as possible then it is important for teachers to attend to all aspects. It is also important to be mindful that discontinuity is inevitable during the transition and to therefore consider how children can be prepared for the changes involved and inducted into school practices which are new to them.

The transition to school occurs within a wider ecological context (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) and therefore there are constraints and influences from the wider context which impact on teacher practices in relation to transition. These include the beliefs and values of teachers, schools and communities which shape what is thought to be right or important. Additionally, the real and perceived constraints of national and school policies and practices impact on what teachers do.

The conclusions discussed in this section have implications for policy makers, teachers in both sectors, schools, ECE services, parents and all those associated with the transition to school. These will now be presented.

10.3 Implications for Managing Transitions

In seeking to understand more about current perspectives on the transition to school and how children might be supported to navigate the continuities and discontinuities that are involved, this study has identified some recommendations for policy and practice. These implications include actions which support children as they prepare for the transition and as they adjust to change. Recommendations are also made which assist teachers in both sectors to understand more about children's experiences both before and after school entry that will support them in reflecting on how they can promote continuity of learning during the transition. There are also implications for initial teacher education providers, teacher professional development and for policy makers at all levels of our education system.

The current study highlights the usefulness of practices which prepare children for the changes involved in starting school. It is important to consider the purpose of such practices and to ensure that these purposes are addressed within transition programmes. Key areas of focus include supporting children to become familiar with the physical environment, the rules and routines, and how learning happens at school, as well as supporting the development of peer and teacher/child relationships. In planning for school visits teachers would therefore ensure these take place in the actual classroom the children will be placed in and that visits happen while regular classroom experiences and routines are occurring. Consideration would be given to facilitating the development of peer relationships during the visits and to enabling time for the teacher to spend with the transitioning child or children. ECE teachers would support parents to plan for the transition and to understand the importance of priming events, such as visits, in helping children be prepared for the changes they will encounter. They would also talk with children about what school will be like and provide resources which help support this understanding. To do this they need to know about the practices and environments of

local schools. Technology can also be used to support children to learn more about the school they will attend through virtual visits or other creative means. These can also be useful when visits have not been possible, such as during the recent pandemic.

Attention must also be given to inducting children to the expectations, rules, and routines of the classroom, to helping them to engage with teaching and learning experiences and to consciously supporting the development of peer relationships. The findings from this research imply that it is worthwhile schools investigating whether cohort entry would make it easier for teachers to allocate time for these purposes. Children who visit and start in groups may also benefit from the social support of starting together, thus reducing some of the social anxiety they may feel about not having friends at school. Similarly, it can be helpful to place children in a class where they already know other children.

In planning transition programmes and children's induction to school, it is important to be mindful that each child's transition will be different depending on a range of variables. Knowing about each child and their previous experiences can help teachers understand what might be important for individual children at this time and plan accordingly. Transition programmes must therefore be flexible and able to respond to individual child and family needs. As each child responds differently, this means that where children struggle with the transition the approach involves finding out what is difficult for them and targeting support and scaffolding to meet their individual needs.

Regular review and evaluation of preparation and induction practices that incorporate multiple perspectives is essential. Regular review is important because over time community needs and dynamics may alter, school and ECE practices and policies may change, and changes may be made to national policy. As this study has shown, the inclusion of multiple perspectives can help give a deeper understanding of what is happening and what is significant. As new research is disseminated that adds to the body of knowledge about the transition to school, this can also inform the evaluation of transition practices.

There is value in providing time and funding for teachers to visit each other's sectors. Such visits would mean that there are additional opportunities for children to meet their NE teacher before the transition, resulting in an overlap of relationships beginning and ending rather than a sharp discontinuity where the relationship with one set of teachers ends at the same time as a new set of relationships begins. Such visits would also enhance understandings of how and what children learn in the different contexts, providing avenues for teachers to understand the changes involved in starting school and how continuity can be enhanced, particularly pedagogical continuity.

Greater familiarity of teachers from both sectors with each other's curriculum documents and the links between them would be beneficial to enhancing understanding of pedagogical approaches used in the different sectors and thus how continuity can be enhanced. It would be useful for initial teacher education programmes to include information about teaching and learning and the curriculum documents used in the different sectors, particularly to support understanding of how children access literacy and numeracy learning in both settings and how continuity of learning can be promoted. It may also be useful to revisit the notion of initial teacher education programmes covering birth to eight years of age, so that teacher knowledge is broader and more inclusive of both sectors.

It is worthwhile schools considering taking a gradual approach to the introduction of more structured academic learning activities for new entrants. This may involve using some of the pedagogical approaches used in ECE services that will be familiar to children initially and slowly introducing more formal experiences. The visits by NE teachers to ECE services previously recommended would enhance NE teacher knowledge of these approaches. Additionally, ECE teachers must intentionally teach the knowledge and skills that will support future academic learning. Professional learning support may be needed to help ECE teachers strengthen practice in this aspect.

Including play-based learning in the new entrant curriculum is one way of doing this and further supporting continuity of learning. However, it is important that NE teachers bring intentionality to their teaching in play-based contexts. While play appeared to be of benefit to transitioning children regardless of how it was included, this research suggests that when teachers plan for learning within play, continuity of learning may be increased. Professional learning may be required to help NE teachers who have not had any training in play-based learning approaches understand how literacy and numeracy learning can be embedded in play and the role of teachers in supporting learning through play. This is also an aspect that should be included in initial teacher education programmes for primary teachers as should teaching in innovative/modern environments (Fletcher & Everatt, 2021).

Supporting continuity of learning involves teachers from both sectors reflecting on how they talk to children about their learning and how to connect the learning children do in ECE with school learning. ECE teachers can talk to children about their learning, using the discourse of learning so children recognise themselves as successful learners while they are in ECE. Attention to ensuring assessments capture and articulate the learning that children are experiencing in ECE services is critical in increasing awareness from children and parents of the learning that has happened. When shared with schools this would also enable NE teachers to understand and use the assessment information to help them connect children's ECE and school learning pathways through intentional pedagogy. Initial teacher

education programmes must ensure prospective ECE teachers have strong skills in assessment and some ECE teachers may benefit from professional learning which supports them to write assessments that highlight learning rather than recording participation (Cameron, 2022). The progress and practice tools currently under development to support ECE teachers to notice, recognise and respond effectively to children's learning (Ministry of Education, 2022a) may assist with this if sufficient professional development to support their use is provided. In these ways the learning that happens in ECE contexts can become more visible and valued and children will be positioned as competent learners when they start school. It would be useful for ways for schools and ECE services to share this assessment information to be developed and time to be funded to enable this sharing to happen.

This research provides further evidence to support earlier calls from literature for teachers from both sectors to build collaborative relationships (Dockett & Perry, 2021b; Hopps, 2019; S. Peters et al., 2015) and to learn more about what happens in each sector. However, to enable teachers to build relationships there is a need for funding so teachers can be released to meet. NE teachers in this study benefited from some funding through the local Kahui Ako (Ministry of Education; n.d.), which enabled them to visit ECE services and meet ECE teachers. However, funding for this purpose was not ongoing and not all Kahui Ako have chosen to use funding in this way. Policy and funding changes are needed so this can happen, particularly in the ECE sector where it is common for teachers to have only two hours per week of non-contact time. Involvement in Kahui Ako has not been available to all ECE services and there are financial barriers to services participating. Ensuring ECE services can participate fully in local Kahui Ako would facilitate further collaboration between sectors at a local level.

Teachers' reflection on their practice and how this is influenced will support meaningful changes to practice. This includes understanding the influence of 'regimes of truth' (Foucault, 1975) and how espoused practice may not match actual practice. While these 'truths' may be hard to change, it is only by being aware of their influence that teachers can become conscious of them and challenge their influence on their practice. Reflection on where practice can be strengthened is also important so that teachers can seek professional learning that is of benefit.

While the research study was focused on investigating the continuities and discontinuities children experience and related teacher practices, these were directly impacted by factors in the wider ecological system (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Assessment regimes, school intake policies and mandated curriculum documents are examples of factors which impacted on teacher practices. It is important therefore that in the development of both school and national policy sufficient consultation take place with key stake holders such as teachers, parents, and children. This will help ensure that consideration is given to practical implications and any constraints on teacher practice that may result

from policy change. Such changes should be evidence based. The following section will recommend some avenues for further research which would help inform decisions about policy.

10.4 Implications for Further Research

As the research progressed, data were analysed and the findings emerged and were synthesised with existing literature, it became evident that further research would be beneficial in a range of areas. These include:

- There is limited research on the benefits and drawbacks of cohort entry in New Zealand. While this research suggests some benefits from children entering school in cohorts, further research is needed to confirm this suggestion and to look at this practice in more depth.
- There is more to learn about the use of assessment information from ECE contexts by NE teachers in New Zealand. It would be useful to have more up to date research particularly from the school perspective that could inform the development of assessment tools which would provide information that was valued and useful during the transition to school.
- Many schools in New Zealand have shifted to including play in the new entrant curriculum. It will be important for research to establish the impact of this shift and to identify effective pedagogical approaches to play-based learning in schools. Additionally, research which investigates how the inclusion of play in schools can support the development of friendships during the transition to school would be useful.
- While there is research detailing the importance to children of knowing the rules and routines of school (e.g. Booth et al., 2019; Ebbeck et al., 2013; Joerdens, 2014), less attention has been given to understanding how best to induct children to these. How children can be supported to become familiar with the routines and rules of school could be a worthwhile avenue for research.
- There has been a recent trend in New Zealand for schools to shift to larger 'innovative' or 'modern' learning environments (Fletcher & Everatt, 2021) and it would be useful for more research to be done assessing the impact of this shift on children, including children starting school.
- This research did not include the perspectives of ECE services and teachers in the Case Studies. There is more to learn about the role they take in preparing children for transition. More research from the ECE sector perspective would enhance understanding of how to support children's transitions to school.

There is an ongoing need to continue to research the transition to school to ensure that decisions are made at national, community, and school level that are relevant to the current time and context. However, in considering the findings of research, it is important to be mindful of the strengths and limitations of the research design. The limitations and strengths of the current study will now be considered.

10.5 Limitations and Strengths of the Research

There are limitations of which readers should be mindful when considering the findings of this study. Firstly, it is important to remember that research can never be free from bias. A researcher is never impartial, bringing their underlying values, beliefs, and assumptions to the research. However, there were several ways the impacts of researcher bias were addressed in this study. My background and motivations for embarking on this research have been described so the reader could consider how these may have impacted on the research findings. Additionally, I sought to be open to different views and constructions of meanings through discussion with colleagues, reading relevant literature and paying attention to feedback from the research supervisors which often encouraged me to look at alternative interpretations. For example, I began this research with a view of continuity and discontinuity as opposites, with continuity defined as similarities between contexts and discontinuity seen as differences. However, through the development of a robust literature review, discussion, and feedback, I became aware that the concepts are much broader than my original interpretation. I came to understand that continuity includes not just similarities, but also ways of connecting with the child's familiar ways of knowing, being and doing. It involves making the unfamiliar familiar (McNaughton, 2002). Transcripts of teacher interviews were member checked to ensure they accurately captured the perspectives of the teachers. Actual quotes from data sources were used when presenting the findings to provide evidence of how the findings and conclusions were reached. Although researcher bias can never be removed, in these ways the impact of bias was reduced, and the research was strengthened.

Due to sampling decisions, not all voices were heard. For instance, children may have been more likely to volunteer to participate if they felt comfortable or confident at school. This may mean that the voices of children who had more difficulty with the transition were not heard. Approaching parent participants at school drop off/pickup may mean that parents who did not come to the classroom were not represented. This issue was partially addressed by inviting email submissions. While this study included the perspective of ECE teachers in the mixed method survey, they were not included in the case studies. This means that there was no opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of ECE teacher perspectives and experiences or to probe for more detail. The research was also a small study

limited to a particular area in New Zealand. Readers should take these factors into consideration when thinking about how the findings may be applied to their own settings.

The methods chosen also have limitations. The tools used to collect data mean that the findings were informed by what teachers said they did. Observations of practice were not included, although some field notes were made. This means that there may be differences between what teachers said they did and their actual practice.

Strengths of this research include the involvement of multiple participant groups and settings and the mixed method research design. This research was designed to include multiple perspectives and ensure the voices of different participants in the transition to school were able to be heard and considered. This was important because research on starting school has shown that the perspectives of teachers, parents, and children and what is most important to them can differ (e.g. Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood, 2008; Dockett & Perry, 2003; Fabian, 2010; Margetts, 2014). Case studies in three different schools were also included which enabled contextual influences on the transition to school to be identified. Including multiple participants from multiple settings was important to ensure a fuller understanding of issues relating to continuity and discontinuity during the transition to school. The value of mixed method research can also be seen in this study. The Case Studies provided the opportunity to dig deeper and learn more about some aspects that had emerged from the survey (Cohen et al., 2007; Cresswell, 2015), thereby enriching the findings. The tables included in section 9.2.2 demonstrate how including a range of participants, settings and mixed research methods enabled a broader understanding of key themes (Hibberts & Burke Johnson, 2012). This thesis will now conclude with a few final comments.

10.6 Concluding Comments

Discontinuity during the transition to school is inevitable and for children it may feel like “all the stuff” is different, even where adults perceive there to be many continuities. Most children will cope with the changes involved in starting school but that does not mean that we should not seek to make the transition more positive as this study showed that many children experience some distress during the transition. However, the answer is not necessarily to make school more like ECE or ECE more like school. What is important is to understand what the differences and similarities between contexts are, to know which ones are significant for children and to consider how to support children to be ready for change and to be inducted to the differences as they navigate the transition to school.

This study has identified peer and teacher relationships to be important during this time of change. Attention to connecting with and building on the learning that has happened prior to school entry is also a key factor, as is supporting children to learn about the rules and routines of the new environment. When children are supported with these aspects of transition their ability to engage fully in the learning experiences of school is enhanced and disruption to their learning trajectory can be minimised.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Survey Questions

<p>I have been a teacher for</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="radio"/> 0-5 years<input type="radio"/> 6-10 years<input type="radio"/> 11-15 years<input type="radio"/> More than 15 years
<p>My highest qualification is (comment box)</p>
<p>I am</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="radio"/> A provisionally registered teacher<input type="radio"/> A fully registered teacher<input type="radio"/> Not a registered teacher
<p>I describe myself as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="radio"/> Maori<input type="radio"/> New Zealand European<input type="radio"/> Pasifika<input type="radio"/> Other (please specify)
<p>Thinking about new entrant (NE) and early childhood education (ECE) contexts across New Zealand, overall what degree of similarity and difference do you think there is between contexts?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="radio"/> Very different<input type="radio"/> Different<input type="radio"/> Somewhat different<input type="radio"/> Somewhat similar<input type="radio"/> Similar<input type="radio"/> Very Similar <p>How similar or different do you think NE and ECE contexts in New Zealand should be?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="radio"/> Very different<input type="radio"/> Different<input type="radio"/> Somewhat different<input type="radio"/> Somewhat similar<input type="radio"/> Similar<input type="radio"/> Very Similar <p>Give reasons for your answer (comment box)</p>

Thinking about new entrant (NE) and early childhood education (ECE) contexts across New Zealand, in general, what degree of similarity and difference do you think there is between the following aspects:

The physical environments are...

Approaches to learning are...

Types of learning experiences provided are...

Assessment practices are...

Opportunities for social engagement are...

The structure of the day is...

Rules and routines are...

(6 point scale for each aspect)

- Very different
- Different
- Somewhat different
- Somewhat similar
- Similar
- Very Similar

Thinking about the Early Childhood Curriculum (Te Whāriki) and The New Zealand Curriculum, what degree of similarity is there between the documents

- Very different
- Different
- Somewhat different
- Somewhat similar
- Similar
- Very Similar
- Don't know

Comment box

Thinking about the Early Childhood Curriculum (Te Whāriki) and Te Marautanga o Aotearoa, what degree of similarity is there between the documents

- Very different
- Different
- Somewhat different
- Somewhat similar
- Similar
- Very similar
- Don't know

Comment box	
I am <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ An early childhood teacher/educator ○ A primary school teacher 	
The context in which I work is best described as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kindergarten • Kohanga reo • Puna reo • Bilingual (Maori/English) centre • Pasifika language centre • Private • Trust/ Not for profit • Playcentre • Other 	The context in which I work is best described as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A traditional style classroom • A modern/innovative learning environment • A kura kaupapa • A bilingual classroom/school • A mainstream school • • Other (please specify)
<p>Think about the early childhood centre in which you work.</p> <p>What degree of similarity and difference do you think there is between the centre at which you work and school?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very different • Different • Somewhat different • Somewhat similar • Similar • Very similar <p>Thinking about your centre and the schools to which children transition, what degree of similarity and difference do you think there is between the following aspects?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The physical environment is... • The playground is... • Approaches to learning and teaching are... • Types of learning experiences provided are... • Assessment practices are... • Opportunities for social engagement are... 	<p>Think about the classroom and school in which you work.</p> <p>What degree of similarity or difference do you think there is between your school and ECE contexts?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very different • Different • Somewhat different • Somewhat similar • Similar • Very similar <p>Thinking about your school and the centres from which children transition, what degree of similarity and difference do you think there is between the following aspects?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The physical environment is... • The playground is... • Approaches to learning and teaching are... • Types of learning experiences provided are... • Assessment practices are... • Opportunities for social engagement are...

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The structure of the day is... • Rules and routines are... <p>Six point scale for each aspect:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very different • Different • Somewhat different • Somewhat similar • Similar • Very similar <p>What are the most significant differences for children and why do you think these are significant?</p> <p>Comment box</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The structure of the day is... • Rules and routines are... <p>Six point scale for each aspect:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very different • Different • Somewhat different • Somewhat similar • Similar • Very similar <p>What are the most significant differences for children and why do you think these are significant?</p> <p>Comment box</p>
<p>How important do you think it is to support continuity for children during the transition to school?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extremely important • Very important • Moderately important • Slightly important • Not at all important <p>Give reasons for your answer</p> <p>Comment box</p>	
<p>How important do you think it is to provide continuity of the following aspects over the transition to school?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The physical indoor environment • The playground • The approaches to learning and teaching • Types of learning experiences • Assessment practices • Opportunities for social engagement • Structure of the day • Rules and routines <p>5 point scale for each aspect</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extremely important • Very important • Moderately important • Slightly important • Not at all important 	

How strongly do you think the degree of continuity/ discontinuity is related to:

- **The time it takes for a child to become settled at school**
- **Academic achievement in the first year at school**
- **Academic achievement during the primary years**
- **Social outcomes for children**
- **Emotional outcomes for children**

4 point scale for each outcome

- Strongly related
- Moderately related
- Slightly related
- Not at all related

What other impacts might the degree of continuity have?

Comment box

What practices does your ECE centre/ school employ to increase or create continuity for children transitioning to school?

Comment box

How can school and/or early childhood teachers provide support for children who are having difficulty navigating discontinuity during the transition to school?

Comment box

Appendix 2: Parent Questionnaire.

Begin with a short reminder of the research project and my interest, chat about their child's name etc

Child's name and birth date

When did your child start school?

Did your child attend childcare/kindy before coming to school?

If so, what service did they attend? (for how long and how frequently)

On a scale of 1-5 (with 1 being very similar and 5 being not at all similar) how much similarity is there between the school and the early childhood centre your child attended?

What things are similar for your child/yourself?

What things are different?

What do you think has been the biggest change for your child about starting school?

How have they adjusted to the changes/differences?

Have there been any changes or differences which have been difficult for your child?

How has this affected them and their learning?

On a scale of 1-5 (with 1 being extremely important and 5 being not important) how important is it that there are similarities between ECE and school? Why do you think this?

On a scale of 1-5 (with 1 being extremely important and 5 being not important) how important is it that there are differences between ECE and school? Why do you think this?

In what ways should early childhood and schools be similar? Why?

In what ways should schools and early childhood services be different? Why?

Any further comments

Appendix 3: Teacher Interview Outline

To discuss before the interview:

Welcome and thanks for time commitment and sharing experience and views with me

Remind that do not have to answer all questions, may ask to turn off the recorder at any time, will get to review transcript etc (review consent)

Tentative questions

1. What similarities and differences/continuities and discontinuities to their early childhood context do you think children encounter when they enter your classroom? (Tease out aspects depending on results of the survey)
2. What impact do these have on children? Tell me about any examples of this (Maybe highlight some things brought up in the survey and ask whether she/he has noticed this)
3. Is it the same for all children? Examples?
4. What have you noticed about the relationship between continuity and the ease of children's transition? Is the transition easier for children who find greater continuity between school and their prior-to-school context?
5. ERO have written about the importance of providing continuity over the transition to school. How similar do you think ECE and school should be? Why?
6. In what ways do you plan to promote continuity for children? Why do you think these are important aspects in which to provide continuity?
7. How do you find out which children might experience the greater discontinuities? How do you assess which children might need support to navigate these? How do you support children to navigate discontinuities?
8. Which discontinuities do you think are the most difficult for children to navigate? Why? What impact does this have on children and their learning?

After the interview

Thank you for your time. When the information has been analysed and written up I will provide you with a summary. I would also like to come back in a couple of weeks and share a little about what I found out from the child led tours and my talk with you and the parents with the children. Would that be alright with you?

Ethics Research Application



Unpacking the gap: A mixed method study of continuity and discontinuity during the transition to school in New Zealand

Joanne Hayes
Education Faculty

Overview

Principal Supervisor

Professor Claire McLachlan

Research Team

Associate Professor Sally Peters

Interest in Topic

My personal interest in the transition to school has developed over many years. I first became aware of the importance of a smooth transition to school during my first year of teaching as a new entrant teacher. This awareness was deepened during later work in early childhood and as my own children began school. During my postgraduate studies I focussed on the transition to school as a topic of interest in papers and continued to deepen my interest and understanding of this topic as I completed my Master's thesis that investigated the role of peers in supporting new entrant transitions (Hayes, 2013). My interest reignited recently when I was invited to speak at a transition to school meeting for early childhood providers that was facilitated by the local branch of the Ministry of Education. At this meeting one of the Ministry of Education presenters spoke of the perceived "gap" between early childhood education and school-based education and suggested that with the supposed continuity of curricula and the movement towards modern or innovative learning environments in schools the gap may no longer exist, or at least be very much reduced. This provoked my interest and I began to think about the nature of the "gap", to wonder what is known about the differences between the various contexts in New Zealand and how recent changes in curriculum and learning environments impact on the continuities and discontinuities children experience. I also considered that while many children may look forward to the changes that occur when they go to school, they might be disappointed if school experiences were very similar to those they had in early childhood settings. I was aware that children may

have very different experiences prior to school entry and so the discontinuities may differ for each child. Therefore, it is important to critically analyse the “gap” so that teachers can be aware of what help children will need to navigate the discontinuities.

Details of the Project

Research question(s) and relevance

This research will use a mixed method design to investigate the continuities and discontinuities children experience during the transition to school from a range of perspectives. The ease of transition to school has been associated with social, academic and emotional outcomes for children (Brooker, 2008; Dockett & Perry, 2007, 2013; Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2010). Therefore there is a need for research which explores transition so that educators and policy makers can make informed decisions about policies and practices which can support children to navigate the transition.

This study intends to address the following question:

- What continuities and discontinuities do children experience when transitioning to school in Aotearoa New Zealand?

The objectives of the study are to:

- Compare the perspectives of early childhood and schoolteachers on the continuities and discontinuities between school and prior-to-school contexts
- Explore the perspectives and experiences of children relating to the continuities and discontinuities between school and prior-to-school contexts
- Explore the perspectives and experiences of parents relating to the continuities and discontinuities between school and prior-to-school contexts
- Explore the experiences of new entrant teachers relating to the continuities and discontinuities between school and prior-to-school contexts

Justification

When children start school they are faced with the task of learning how to fit into the new environment and how to learn in new ways (Dockett & Perry, 2007; Peters, 2010). Over the last few years the importance of this time has been highlighted by various reports and policies in New Zealand, for example Ka Hikitia (Ministry of Education, 2008), the Ten year strategic plan for early childhood (Ministry of Education, 2002) and the Pasifika education plan (Ministry of Education, 2009). The report by the Education Review Office (2015) *Continuity of learning: Transitions from early childhood services to schools* reinforces the importance of a positive move to school and stresses the value of continuity of learning during this time. Thus, the transition to school is currently a topic of significance in New Zealand.

A positive start to school is important because research demonstrates that a poor start at school can have a negative impact on learning trajectories and social outcomes (Brooker, 2008; Dockett & Perry, 2007, 2014). For example when children start school and their past experiences of literacy are not well matched with those of school a 'Matthew effect' can occur, where those who are rich in literacy learning get richer and those who are poor get poorer (Tunmer, Chapman, & Prochnow, 2003). Data shows that some children in New Zealand lag considerably behind others in academic achievement and that the gap between the highest and lowest achievers

is of concern (S. May, Flockton, & Kirkham, 2016). The most recent PIRLS and PISA studies have found that, in New Zealand, Maori and Pasifika children lag behind others in literacy, science and maths achievement and those from less advantaged backgrounds are also over represented in the group of low achieving students (Chamberlain, 2013; S. May et al., 2016). Identifying ways children can be supported to have a successful transition to school through increasing continuity could contribute to improving outcomes for these groups.

The Early Childhood Advisory Group Report (Ministry of Education, 2015) states that while there is a good body of international research related to the transition there is a need for more research in the New Zealand context to inform practice. Some international research has explored both children's and adults perspectives on the continuities and discontinuities children experience (for example Ebbeck, Saidon, Rajalachime, & Teo, 2013; Einarsdottir, 2013; Hunkin, 2014; Lord & McFarland, 2010; Perry & Dockett, 2005) and earlier studies in New Zealand also explore this topic (for example Cullen, 1998; Peters, 2004). However, the contextual environments of schools and early childhood services change over time and these changes impact on the discontinuities children experience. Changes in the New Zealand context such as the implementation of the New Zealand Curriculum and National Standards and the changing nature of learning environments in schools are likely to have impacted on the discontinuities experienced in the new entrant classroom and there is a lack of recent research investigating this aspect of transition in New Zealand. Therefore, there is a need for research exploring the discontinuities children may currently experience in the early days at school. The proposed research addresses this need as it will contribute to understandings about the experiences of children and teachers in new entrant classrooms in the New Zealand context.

Procedure for recruiting participants

The research will involve two phases: a survey followed by case studies. Selection of survey participants will be by email invitation. National data bases will be used to locate details of early childhood and new entrant teachers/schools. The survey will be emailed to all early childhood and new entrant teachers/schools and teachers will self-select whether they wish to respond.

It is not yet known in which schools and classrooms the research will be conducted as schools will not be approached until ethics approval is received. Participating schools will be purposefully selected to ensure that each differs in the physical and organisational arrangements for their new entrant classes. Another consideration in the selection of schools is location, in order to keep travel time to the location manageable and affordable. The selection of classroom will be negotiated with the school principal and the teachers in the school.

Case study teachers will be selected after permission is received from the Principal to approach the teacher. As it is unlikely that I will know the teachers, I will request the assistance of the principal in introducing me to the teachers in the school. I will

then explain the research and ask whether the teacher(s) would like to be involved. At least one teacher in each school will be interviewed. Where teachers work alongside others in one classroom all teachers will be asked whether they agree for the research to take place in their class. They will also all be invited to be participants. It may be that some teachers in this situation choose not to be interviewed. If no teachers in the school wish to be interviewed the research will not take place in that school. Another school will be approached.

Pairs of children will be selected from a new entrant class in each school. The research will be explained to children who will then be asked for informed consent if they wish to participate. The ongoing nature of children's assent will be monitored with the researcher taking note of children's body language and verbal interactions for signs the child no longer wishes to participate. Children will also be verbally asked for assent before the tour in which they were to be involved. If children indicate they no longer wish to continue the researcher will cease data collection from that point. Parental consent for child participants will also be gained. At least six pairs of children from each school will be selected (unless there are less than 12 children in the class). If more children from each classroom wishes to participate a fair process will be undertaken to select pairs of children to participate, for example pulling names from a hat. In this way the choice of participants will be open and fair for all.

The research will aim to collect data through a questionnaire from at least 12 parents in each case study classroom. The research will use volunteer sampling to select participants (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007) as not all parents will wish to be involved or have time to participate. It is acknowledged that this may mean that the sample of parents is non-representative of the population.

Procedures in which research participants will be involved

This research will consist of two phases.

Phase one: Survey of early childhood and new entrant teachers.

A link to an online survey tool such as SurveyMonkey will be emailed to early childhood and new entrant teachers from the national data base with an explanation of the project and its aims. It is anticipated the survey will take 10-15 minutes of time. Draft survey is provided with this application and a finalised survey can be provided

Phase two: Case studies in three schools.

Children's perspectives on the continuities and discontinuities they experience on school entry will be gained through child-led tours around the school and classroom. Pairs of children will be invited to help me learn more about how school differs from early childhood by showing me around the school, thus positioning children as having information that is valuable (Merewether & Fleet, 2014). During these tours children will be asked to take photographs showing things that are different about school. As children show me around and take photos I will engage children in conversation about the things that are similar and different from their earlier

experiences. The conversations will be recorded and transcribed and notes will be taken to ensure that the photographs can be matched with the conversation that was occurring when they were taken. These photographs and conversations will form the data sets for analysis of children's perspectives. The length of time these tours will take will depend on the engagement of the children involved. However it is anticipated that these will take no longer than 30 minutes. I will be responsive to children's body language and indicators of engagement and draw the activity to a close when indications of disengagement occur.

The research will aim to collect data through a questionnaire from at least 12 parents in each case study classroom. The researcher will gain verbal answers to the questionnaire which she will fill out. This enables any parents with limited literacy skills to be included as a limitation of written questionnaires is that they can be off-putting to respondents who are not able to fill them in easily (Cohen et al., 2007). It is important when approaching parents to be mindful that pick up and drop off times at school can be very busy and parents are often rushing off to after school appointments. Parents may request to fill in the questionnaire in written form if they do not have time to respond verbally. It is anticipated that each questionnaire will take only 10-15 minutes. It is likely that only one questionnaire will be able to be filled in per visit so the interviewer would need to visit the school a number of times to collect the data.

Each case study will conclude with a semi structured interview of the classroom teacher(s). While teacher perspectives will have been captured through the quantitative survey it is important to gain more detailed information about the experiences of teachers in the case study classrooms. If there is more than one teacher in the classroom then the teachers may be interviewed as a group. It may be that not all the teachers in a multi-teacher classroom will wish to be interviewed in which case only those who agree will take part. The teacher's perceptions of the continuities and discontinuities between early childhood education and the classroom in which they teach will be explored as will their views of the relationship between dis/continuity and school failure. The interviews will be recorded and transcribed to ensure accuracy and to allow the researcher to concentrate on the conversation rather than taking extensive notes (T. May, 2011). Participants will be invited to member check the transcriptions of their interviews to ensure the transcripts accurately reflect their views (Cohen et al., 2007). Interviews are likely to take 30-40 minutes and checking of transcripts 15 minutes.

Informal conversations may also elicit worthwhile data so notes may be made following informal conversations with teachers and checked with teachers to ensure they are comfortable for these conversations to form part of the data sets.

Questionnaires and interview protocols are to be developed using the survey data so are not available with this application

Please collate all supporting documentation such as questionnaires, interview schedules, observation processes, collection of work samples etc. into a single PDF and upload here

File Attachment : [Draft questions for Survey \(docx\)](#)

File Attachment : [Tentative interview questions for teachers \(docx\)](#)

File Attachment : [tentative questionnaire for parents \(docx\)](#)

Procedures for handling information and materials produced in the course of the research. (Must be kept for five years)

All data, consent forms, transcripts and documentation relating to this project will be stored for a five year period in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher's home. Electronic data will be stored on a password protected computer. Data will be removed from the computer and transferred to any new device if the computer is replaced.

Ethical Issues

Access to participants

National data bases collated by the Ministry of Education will be used to identify possible participants for the survey. Permission to use these data bases will be requested before they are utilised and the researcher will abide by the principles of Ministry has in place for the use of these data bases.

The researcher will need to request permission from all three school Principals to conduct this research. Informed consent will need to be gained from teachers, parents and children in the case study schools

Informed consent

Informed consent will be gained from all case study participants. School Principals will be approached and the research will be explained to them. If they agree for the research to proceed teachers will be approached and the research will be verbally explained to them along with the benefits, costs and likely outputs. They will also be informed of their rights as research participants. An information sheet and consent form will be provided along with time to consider their involvement before they sign the consent form.

I will be guided by the school principal and the teacher in the best way to approach and gain informed consent from parents and children. It is envisaged that this may involve a newsletter being sent out to parents informing them of the project, asking them to discuss participation with their child and consider participating themselves. They will also be asked to contact me if they do not wish images of their children to be used in the research outputs, as it is possible photos taken by children may contain images of other children. Written informed consent will be gained from parents of any children selected to participate in a child led tour of the school. Parents will be approached by the researcher when dropping off or picking up children and asked whether they would agree to complete the questionnaire with the researcher. It is possible they will prefer to fill out a written form of the survey instead. Agreement to answer the questions will be taken as consent.

The research will be verbally explained to all children in the classroom by the researcher. If the process above is agreed with the school this will occur on the day the newsletter goes home to parents so that parents can discuss with children whether they would like to take part. The researcher will provide a child friendly information sheet and return the next day to gain official informed consent from children who wish to participate. The researcher is aware of the ongoing nature of informed consent and the need to check with children during the stages of data gathering that they still consent to participate. She will also monitor the children's body language and participation for unspoken signals that consent has been withdrawn.

Please attach (as PDF only) copies of any introductory letters,

information sheets and consent forms, and make reference to them here.

File Attachment : [3 transcript release teacher \(doc\)](#)

File Attachment : [4 Transcriber confidentiality agreement \(doc\)](#)

File Attachment : [7 child information and consent form \(docx\)](#)

File Attachment : [10 Principal consent form \(doc\)](#)

File Attachment : [11 Cover emails for survey of teachers \(docx\)](#)

File Attachment : [12 information sheet for survey participants \(docx\)](#)

File Attachment : [2 information sheet for principal amended \(docx\)](#)

File Attachment : [5 Information Sheet teacher amended \(docx\)](#)

File Attachment : [6 information sheet parent amended \(docx\)](#)

File Attachment : [letter to school amended \(docx\)](#)

File Attachment : [8 parent consent form amended \(doc\)](#)

File Attachment : [9 teacher consent form amended \(doc\)](#)

Anonymity/ Confidentiality

Pseudonyms will be used for the name of the school, teachers, parents and children involved in the study to protect their identity and maintain confidentiality. The researcher will endeavour to omit any identifying features from Photographs taken by children and the description of settings and participants in any research outputs. For example any photographs showing the name of the school will be omitted from publications. However, while every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality, this cannot be guaranteed as original quotes and photographs may be used in publications and participants will be informed of this in the information provided to them. Data will be shared through the research outputs but the identity of participants will remain confidential.

A transcriber will be employed. Identifying details will not be provided to the transcriber but it is likely that names may be mentioned in the recordings provided of transcriptions. The transcriber will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement before the transcription commences (attached with consent forms)

Potential harm to participants

It is not anticipated that any harm to participants will eventuate from this research. Participants will not be coerced or persuaded to participate and there will be no payment or similar inducement to participate. When researching with child participants there is a power imbalance. The researcher seeks to reduce this power imbalance by positioning the children as the holders of knowledge and as having ideas and opinions which are of value (Merewether & Fleet, 2014)

Participants' right to decline to participate and right to withdraw/withdraw data

Participants will be informed that they may decline to participate in the research and that they may withdraw from the research at any time up until data collection in their school is complete.

Arrangements for participants to receive information

Teachers will review, amend and approve transcripts of interviews

Children will review photos taken and approve which ones may be used. They will also receive a copy of photos they have taken.

The researcher will return to the classroom and verbally report back to children the themes that eventuate from the research.

Parents and teachers will be provided with a summary of findings once data analysis from their case study is completed.

Parents and teachers will also be informed of how to access a copy of the thesis once it is completed.

Use of the information

Data from this research will be used in the writing up of a Ph.D thesis. They will also be used in scholarly presentations and publications.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest anticipated in this research. I am not employed by any school and currently am not employed in a role which would create any conflict of interest. If my employment circumstances were to change any potential conflict of interests would be discussed with the supervisors of this research.

I am acquainted with some teachers and principals in the district. I do not anticipate that my acquaintance with any teacher or principal will create a conflict of interest.

Procedure for resolution of disputes

In the event of a concern about the research this should be raised with the researcher in the first instance. If the concern is not addressed to the satisfaction of all parties the supervisors of this research can be contacted. Details of supervisors are included in the information sheets

Other ethical concerns relevant to the research

Ethical dilemmas which may arise could include the researcher seeing or being told something inappropriate and issues arising from doing research with children such as a child wanting to be involved when the parent has not given consent (Graham, Powell, Taylor, Anderson, & Fitzgerald, 2013; T. May, 2011). Any ethical dilemmas that arise will be discussed with the supervisors of this research project

Cultural and Social considerations

At this point in time the social and cultural backgrounds of participants is not known. I have consulted with experienced Maori research colleagues about the suitability of the proposed research process and will gain advice from the kaupapa Maori research representative on my own institute's central research committee if needed during the research (Dr Tepora Emery). The kaumatua of my own institute is also available for consultation if needed. Appropriate advice will also be gained if any other social and cultural considerations become apparent during the research from the supervisors of this research and/or members of my institute's research committee or any recommended groups or people.

Legal Issues

Copyright

The researcher will hold the copyright of any scholarly publications produced from the research.

Ownership of data or materials produced

The participants will own their own raw data and the researcher will own the thesis and any scholarly publications and/or presentations that arise from it.

Any other legal issue relevant to the research

N/A

Place in which the research will be conducted

Data collection will take place in three schools. Schools are yet to be selected but will be selected to ensure that they differ in the physical and organisational arrangements for the new entrant classes. Another consideration is location in order to keep travel costs and time manageable and affordable. Schools will therefore be located in, or near Rotorua

Has this application in whole or part previously been declined or approved by another ethics committee?

N/A

For research to be undertaken at other facilities under the control of another ethics committee, has an application also been made to that committee?

N/A, although I am required to notify my own organisation that I am conducting this research.

Is any of this work being used in a thesis/dissertation to be submitted for a degree at the University of Waikato*

Yes. This research is being used in a Ph.D thesis. This application is for preliminary approval prior to the oral proposal presentation for confirmed enrolment and any changes following that presentation will be communicated to the ethics committee as advised by my supervisors

Research Timetable

Proposed date of commencement of data collection:

30 August, 2017

Expected date of completion of data collection:

6 December, 2019 to allow for data collection in different case study sites- this is a part time enrolment

Informing Relevant Departmental Chair/s

Is your proposed research about papers or programmes within the University of Waikato Faculty of Education?

No

If yes, have you informed the relevant Head of School?

N/A

Applicant Agreement

Please include a signed PDF containing your supervisor's signature

File Attachment : [supervisors support \(pdf\)](#)

Approval Date: 7 September, 2017
Chair: Linda Mitchell