



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**WAIKATO**  
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato*

Research Commons

<http://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz/>

## Research Commons at the University of Waikato

### Copyright Statement:

The digital copy of this thesis is protected by the Copyright Act 1994 (New Zealand).

The thesis may be consulted by you, provided you comply with the provisions of the Act and the following conditions of use:

- Any use you make of these documents or images must be for research or private study purposes only, and you may not make them available to any other person.
- Authors control the copyright of their thesis. You will recognise the author's right to be identified as the author of the thesis, and due acknowledgement will be made to the author where appropriate.
- You will obtain the author's permission before publishing any material from the thesis.

**Successful transition from Early Childhood Education to Innovative  
Learning Environments:**

**The experience of transition to school from the perspectives of key  
stakeholders**

A thesis

submitted in partial fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree

of

**Master of Educational Leadership in Faculty of Education**

at

**The University of Waikato**

by

**Christina-Anne Wakeman**



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**WAIKATO**  
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato*

2019

## **Abstract**

The New Zealand education system has gone through a substantial paradigm shift, moving away from single cell classrooms and towards Innovative Learning Environments. This has presented challenges in the transition to school process as the two contexts are very different in terms of both physical space and the underpinning pedagogies.

This thesis presents the findings from a research project that examined the perspectives of learners, their parents/caregivers, primary teachers and early childhood teachers in what they feel to be a successful transition to school from Early Childhood Centres to Innovative Learning Environments. The findings contribute to the development of a transition to school programme.

This research project was a case study, with the data gathered through a mixed methods approach. Quantitative data was collected through the use of questionnaires sent to 10 parents of learners who had recently transitioned into the ILE context. Qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews with three early childhood teachers, four primary teachers and from within three focus groups held with 10 learners. This data was analysed to identify key themes from the perspectives of these participants.

This study indicates that there are many factors that need to be taken into account when transitioning a child from ECE to ILE. These include: Developing a sense of belonging within the ILE context, the role of reciprocal relationships, the transition of the parents/caregivers within the transition to school process, school readiness and cross sector development between ECE and primary. Further, this study is in a position to inform transition to school programmes from Early Childhood Education to Innovative Learning Environments.

## **Acknowledgements**

Firstly. I would like to express my gratitude to all those who have showed unwavering support and encouragement while I have been on this journey.

Thank you to all the participants who gave up their time and openly shared their views and perspectives with me. Transition to an ILE context was an unpaved journey and your assistance has been integral in establishing positive transition procedures from ECE to ILE.

Next, I'd like to thank my supervisor Sara Archard. Your constant support, guidance, cups of tea and sense of humour did not go unnoticed. You have been central in shaping my resilience throughout this research project and opened my world up to endless opportunities. For this, I will be forever grateful.

To Lee, Lavenie and Rachael thank you for your understanding throughout this journey. You have all showed true compassion and I couldn't have achieved this without your constant motivation to get me out of the office and back into the squad.

To Marcus Freke, you inspired me to begin this journey and your encouragement over the past three and half years was greatly appreciated. My colleagues at Endeavour School your genuine interest in this topic and understanding has been incredible. In particular, I would like to mention my right-hand woman Emma, without your support this would have been impossible.

Paula, thank you, thank you, thank you. Your eye for detail, support and assistance at all times of the day and night did not go unnoticed. I am truly grateful.

My partner Todd, your patience is commendable. Throughout this journey you have never wavered, your constant encouragement and support has kept me going and I will be eternally grateful. My daughters, Stella-Grace and Kora-Nieve, you can have Mum back now! Thank you for your patience, your beautiful faces are what kept me going long after you were

asleep each night. I hope that my work has inspired you to be the best that you can be – anything is possible.

And finally, to my Mum, Peta-Maree and my Nana, Della, you are both incredible women who have inspired me beyond words. This thesis is dedicated to you.

# Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>i</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>ii</b>
<b>List of Figures and Tables</b> .....	<b>vii</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Rationale.....	2
1.3 Background.....	2
1.3.1 Staffing structure of the school .....	2
1.3.2 The transition to school programme .....	4
1.3.3 Observations of transition to school programme.....	5
1.3.4 The identified need.....	6
1.4 Objective of study .....	7
1.5 Research questions .....	8
1.6 Significance of research.....	8
1.7 Thesis outline.....	9
<b>Chapter 2: Literature Review</b> .....	<b>11</b>
2.1 Overview .....	11
2.2 Introduction.....	11
2.3 Defining ECE environments, ILEs and single cell classrooms .....	12
2.3.1 ECE environments.....	12
2.3.2 Single Cell Classrooms .....	13
2.3.3 ILEs .....	13
2.4 Wellbeing/belonging .....	17
2.5 Reciprocal relationships.....	19
2.6 School-readiness .....	23
2.7 Parent/caregivers perspectives on transition to school .....	25
2.8 Strengthening knowledge of pedagogical practice between early childhood education contexts and primary education contexts.....	27
2.9 The links between Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa Early childhood curriculum and The New Zealand Curriculum .....	30
2.10 Conclusion .....	32
<b>Chapter 3: Methodology</b> .....	<b>33</b>
3.1 Introduction.....	33
3.2 Research Paradigms and Methodology .....	33
3.3 Methods of Research.....	35
3.4 Case studies.....	36
3.5 The Research Paradigm and Methodology for this Research Project .....	37
3.6 Selection of participants.....	38
3.7 Research Process - Data Collection Tools .....	40
3.7.1 Semi-structured Interviews.....	40
3.7.2 Questionnaires.....	42
3.7.3 Focus Groups .....	43
3.7.4 Data Analysis .....	44
3.8 Ethical Considerations .....	46
3.8.1 Maintaining Quality and Validity.....	46
3.8.2 Reliability, Validity and Creditability .....	46
3.8.3 Relationship with the participants.....	47
3.8.4 Researching Children .....	48
3.9 Cultural Considerations.....	49

3.10 Informed Consent .....	50
3.11 Conflict of Interest.....	51
3.12 Confidentiality/Anonymity.....	51
<b>Chapter Four: Findings.....</b>	<b>53</b>
4.1 Overview of chapter .....	53
4.2 Developing a sense of belonging.....	54
4.2.1 Developing a sense of belonging from a parental perspective .....	54
4.2.2 Developing a sense of belonging from the student’s perspective .....	58
4.2.3 Developing a sense of belonging from a primary teacher’s perspective... 60	
4.2.4 Developing a sense of belonging from the Early childhood teacher perspective .....	62
4.3 Reciprocal Relationships .....	62
4.3.1 Parental perspectives on relationships .....	62
4.3.2 Learner perspectives on relationships.....	66
4.3.3 Primary Teacher perspectives on relationships .....	67
4.3.4 Early childhood teachers’ perspectives on relationships.....	69
4.4 Parents/caregivers perspectives on successful transition .....	70
4.5 School Readiness.....	72
4.5.1 Findings of research from the perspectives of the Primary Teachers.....	72
4.5.2 Findings of research from the perspectives of the Early Childcare Education Teachers.....	73
4.6 Cross sector development.....	77
4.6.1 Parent/caregivers perspectives on cross sector development.....	78
4.6.2 Primary teacher perspectives on cross sector development .....	79
4.6.3 ECE teacher perspectives on cross sector development.....	80
4.7 Conclusion .....	82
<b>Chapter 5: Discussion .....</b>	<b>83</b>
5.1 Introduction.....	83
5.2 Developing a sense of belonging within the ILE context.....	83
5.2.1 Communication and Information sharing – funds of knowledge.....	83
5.2.2 Trust.....	86
5.2.3 Transition to School visits.....	87
5.3 Reciprocal Relationships .....	89
5.3.1 Home – School Partnerships.....	89
5.3.2 Developing student – teacher relationships.....	90
5.3.3 The influence of peer relationships when transitioning to school .....	92
5.4 Transitioning the parents/caregivers into a new identity within the school context.....	93
5.4.1 Communication of information.....	93
5.4.2 The influence of parent/caregiver’s personal experiences in single cell schooling.....	94
5.5 ECE and Primary perspectives on school-readiness .....	95
5.5.1 School readiness from the perspectives of the ECE teachers.....	95
5.5.2 School-readiness from the perspectives of the Primary teachers .....	97
5.6 Developing mutually beneficial cross-sector relationships between early childhood teachers and primary teachers to support the transition to school process.....	97
5.7 Conclusion .....	99
<b>Chapter 6: Implications for practice, limitations of study, recommendations for future research and conclusion .....</b>	<b>100</b>
6.1 Overview of chapter .....	100
6.2 Implications for practice .....	101

6.3 Limitations of study.....	104
6.4 Recommendations for future research.....	105
6.5 Concluding comments.....	105
<b>References .....</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>124</b>
Appendix 1: Permission letter for Principal of the school.....	124
Appendix 2: Permission letter for ECE Centre Managers.....	126
Appendix 3: Participant information sheet for potential participants - Colleagues .....	127
Appendix 4: Participant information sheet for potential participants - ECE Teachers .....	129
Appendix 5: Participant information sheet for potential participants - Parents and students .....	130
Appendix 6: Interview Questions - Colleagues.....	131
Appendix 7: Interview Questions - ECE Teachers .....	132
Appendix 8: Google Forms Questionnaire - Parents .....	133
Appendix 9: Informed Consent Form - Children .....	134

## **List of Figures and Tables**

Figure 1: Staffing structure of School .....	3
Figure 2: The Micro-, meso-, exo-, macro-systems .....	22
Figure 3: Components of Data Analysis: Interactive Model .....	45
Figure 4: Children Building Relationships with Teachers.....	65
Figure 5: Children Building Relationships with Peers .....	66
Table 1: Teacher to student ratios by year levels and roll type.....	16

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

In February 2015, a flagship Innovative Learning Environment (ILE) school opened in Hamilton, Waikato, New Zealand. This was the first of its kind within the Waikato. I was in an extremely privileged position as a foundation staff member and leader within the school to be an integral participant in developing the vision and design of innovative, future focussed teaching and learning programmes within the school. The teaching and learning programmes were quickly developed focussed around developing 21<sup>st</sup> century learners equipped with adaptive expertise extending the learners academically, socially and emotionally aligning with the school's vision of 'Learning without limits'. However, I noticed that the transition to school of parents/caregivers and learners was not as successful at aligning with the vision of the school and that they were faced with some challenges.

My interest in these challenges arose because "effective transitions are critical to the development of children's self-worth, confidence and resilience, and ongoing success at school" (Education Review Office, 2015. p 1). This statement reflects that the transition to school from early childhood education is one of the most significant transitions that a child will ever embark upon throughout their life, therefore, it is critical that the transition to school process is successful. In the primary sector, there are two contexts for how classrooms are designed and organised. The most common is the traditional single cell classroom. Single cell classrooms were designed during the industrial revolution when students were equipped with basic skills to be part of a large workforce (Barlow, 1967). Single cell environments have one teacher and up to 30 students. Innovative Learning Environments (ILEs) were designed as part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning revolution where the focus has shifted to developing adaptive expertise (Centre for Educational Research and Innovation CERI, 2008). ILEs are large, open and flexible spaces that promote and foster flexible approaches to teaching and learning. This research project seeks

to identify how the transition to school process from Early Childhood Education Centres (ECE centres) to ILEs can be successful for all key stakeholders.

## **1.2 Rationale**

This research project was conducted within one school to identify ways in which the transition to school process can be successful for all key stakeholders involved in the transition from ECE to ILE contexts. The key stakeholders within this process are, the child/learner, their parents/caregivers, the ECE teachers and the Primary teachers. With ILEs being a relatively contemporary phenomenon, few researchers have considered the way in which the differences in environments in primary schools (these being traditional single cell environments and ILE contexts) can have effects on the success of the transition for the child, their parents/caregivers, the primary teachers and the early childhood education teachers. The intention is that contributing to the research in this area could inform us about how transition can be successful for all stakeholders. This information can also inform how to design and implement transition to school programmes within ILE contexts that are successful for all key stakeholders.

## **1.3 Background**

This section will outline the background of the research project. It will discuss the staffing structure of the school, the transition to school programme within the school, observations of the transition to school programme and identified needs.

### **1.3.1 Staffing structure of the school**

The staffing and leadership of the school was structured very traditionally, with the key difference lying in the number of teachers per learning community. A learning community comprises of approximately four to five single cell classrooms; however, they are structured very differently. Learning communities are a large open space with breakout spaces for smaller group work and a wet area for messy play/art activities. Within the

school there are six learning communities, each designed to accommodate up to 100 students. The school is managed by a Principal who is supported by two Deputy Principals. The school is split into three teams, the junior team (year 0-2), the middle team (year 3-4) and the senior team (year 5-6). Each team has a team leader and deputy team leader and 6-10 staff members per team (See Figure 1). Each team member, including the team leaders and the deputy team leaders has a group of students attached to them, these are called Ako groups. The word Ako is Māori and based on the principles of learning or inquiring, the concept of ako being reciprocal learning with the learner as the teacher and the teacher as the learner (Te Kete Ipurangi, 2018). Within this school context, for ease of the students being able to identify between different groups, the Ako groups were named after New Zealand native birds, for example Ako Hoiho. Ako groups were assigned to teachers who then became the first point of contact for parents/caregivers and ensured that the pastoral care needs of each student within their group were being met. This overall structure is shown in Figure 1 below.

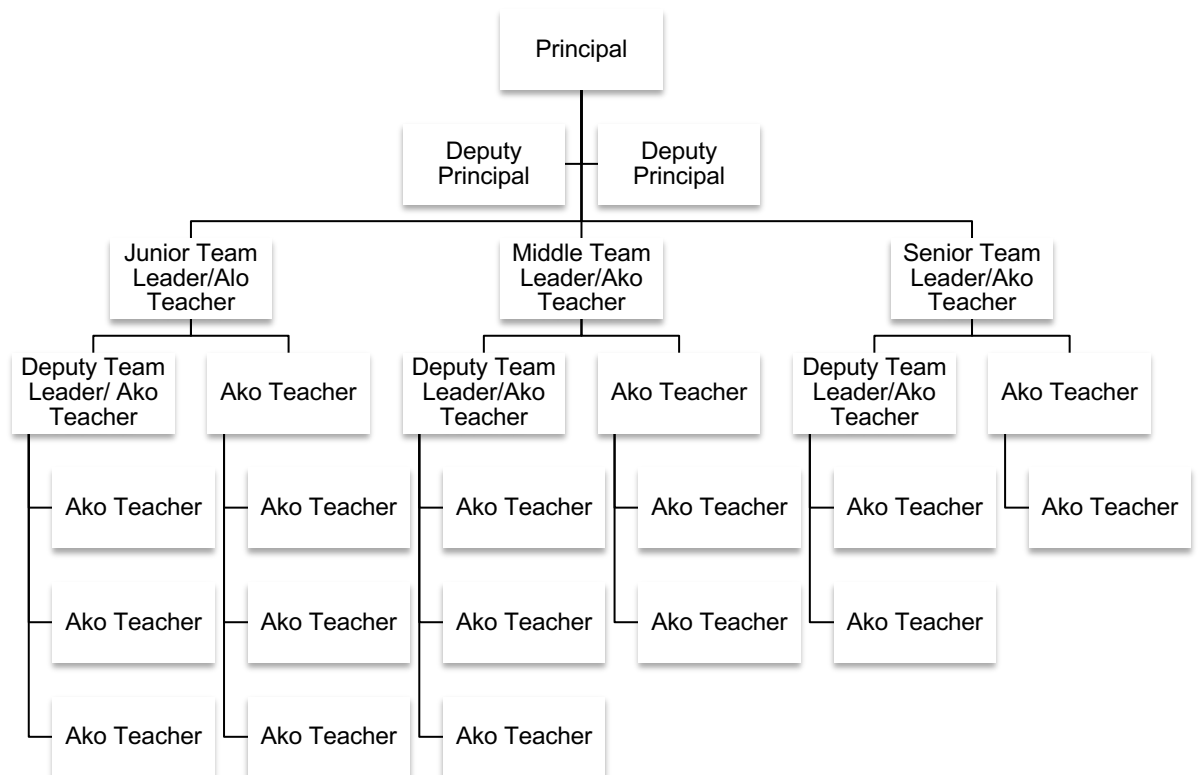


Figure 1: Staffing structure of School

### **1.3.2 The transition to school programme**

Currently, the transition to school programme implemented in the school was developed based on experience and research of single cell contexts. Existing research shows that school visits are one of many important components of a transition to school programme (Peters, 2010). School visits are a key component of this schools transition programme. Within this school context, the school holds three transition to school visits. The parents were notified of the visits four weeks in advance via an email addressed to the learner. The email outlined all important administration information such as the learner's Ako group, Ako teacher, their house and house colour. The duration of each visit was one hour and ran from 9.15-10.15am on three consecutive Monday mornings.

The first visit was a school tour with the team leader of the junior team. The parents stayed with the learners for the duration of this visit. This was then followed up by going into the learning community for around 15 minutes where the learners had the opportunity to participate within the discovery learning programme. The discovery learning programme was a play-based programme developed to explicitly teach the Key Competencies outlined in the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007). The key competencies are Thinking, Relating to Others, Using Language, Symbols and Texts, Managing Self and Participating and Contributing (p. 12-13). This was a time where students had full and complete agency over their learning. They practised self-management skills through making their own decisions about the activities they would like to engage in throughout the morning. To enable this, teachers set up different provocations and the learners were supported to inquire, problem-solve and explore. Student agency is a shift in the ownership of learning and is defined as "...when learning involves the activity and the initiative of the learner, more than the inputs that are transmitted to the learner from the teacher, from the curriculum, the resources and so forth" (Core Education Tātai Aho Rau, 2014. Para 2). Holding school visits

during this time allowed the parents to observe and begin to develop an understanding of what the programme looked like.

During the second visit the learners were expected to come into the learning community without their parents and participate in the discovery learning programme. While the learners were engaged in the discovery learning programme, their parents went with the team leader to the staff room for an information session. During this time, the team leader met with the parents and discussed with them what learning looks like within an ILE and the underpinning philosophy. Parents also had the opportunity to ask any questions.

During the third visit the learners were expected to come into the learning community alone and participate in the discovery learning programme. The parents spent the time with a representative from the school's parent/teacher association in order to form connections to the school.

### **1.3.3 Observations of transition to school programme**

As a leader, I identified that a transition programme designed and built upon the premise of transitioning into a traditional single cell context was no longer meeting the needs of the key stakeholders. I found the challenges that the different stakeholders were experiencing interesting and wanted to further investigate this to identify how transition from ECE to ILE could be successful. I observed that parents/caregivers appeared anxious and unsure about their learners beginning school and were often reluctant to leave them in the care of the teachers. Along with this, many of the learners who were beginning school were not coming into the space confidently. I observed that many of the learners were often upset and hugely reliant on their parents and appeared unsure of expectations and routines. I noticed that there was a lack of communication between the school and the contributing early childhood centres. This meant that when the learners began school, the school had very little information of the child's history within the education sector.

Further contributing to the unsuccessful transition from ECE to ILE, the primary teachers receiving the learners within the learning environment had very little opportunity to form relationships with the learners. This was a contrast to previous experiences I had transitioning students into a single cell environment. Within the single cell environment parents were confident, had one point of contact and displayed that they were positive about the transition to school process. Learners who were beginning school generally appeared confident and happy and the transition process appeared seamless.

Due to the fact that I was working within this ILE I sought research in the area of transition to school from ECE to ILE. However, I was unable to locate any research that was relevant to the ILE context. It became apparent that, due to the relatively new concept of ILEs, there was a gap in the research regarding how to best support stakeholders in their transition from the different ECE contexts into the ILE context within a primary setting.

#### **1.3.4 The identified need**

Ultimately there is a need to design and construct a transition to school programme that engages and meets the needs of key stakeholders when transitioning from ECE to ILE. This is so that when the learners begin school they feel comfortable, safe and secure. This requires a transition to school programme that strives to cater to the learners needs as an individual. This would also align with the school vision 'Learning without limits' extending learners academically, socially and emotionally. Whilst also aligning with the Principles which are the foundation of Te Whāriki curriculum these being; Empowerment, Holistic Development, Family and Community and Relationships (Ministry of Education, 2017c. p. 11).

Peters (2010), highlights the importance of the impact that the transition to school has in ensuring that learners succeed within our education system, stating "Research shows that no matter how academically capable a child is, unhappiness over lack of friends, problems in the playground or toilets, a poor relationship with the teacher, inappropriate challenges, low

expectations and so on, have negative consequences on their learning” (p. 1).

As ILEs are a new phenomena in New Zealand, research about transition to school has tended to be about single cell environments which differ significantly from the ILE context. This research is being undertaken to investigate and discover ways in which transition between ECE and ILE in primary settings can be more successful by investigating the perspectives of the key stakeholders. These key stakeholders are the learners, their parents/caregivers, the primary teachers and the ECE teachers.

#### **1.4 Objective of study**

ILEs are different from the traditional, single cell classroom, however, similarities can be drawn to early childhood education contexts. This is because of the design, in the way that they are large, open spaces with multiple teachers and also the way in which teaching and learning is organised. Teaching and learning programmes in ILEs are designed significantly differently to single cell teaching and learning programmes. Within a single cell environment there are clear physical and pedagogical differences. Unlike the ILE context, single cell environments are generally designed traditionally with four walls and in a square box configuration. Along with this, single cell environments have one teacher so learning programmes are different in the way that it is one teacher teaching all aspects and relevant levels of the curriculum. Bolstad, Gilbert & McDowall (2012), discuss the central focus of teachers and learning within an ILE context as being the “development of learners’ dispositions, capacities or competencies to deal with new situations and environments, including those with high degrees of complexity, fluidity and uncertainty” (p.13). The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2015) further emphasises this, highlighting that we need to develop learners to be collaborative with people from all cultural origins and link knowledge, understanding different perspectives and working through this.

Essentially, when working within an ILE, programmes are designed on the basis that learners are not vessels to be filled, rather candles to be lit.

Consequently, with the differences in the physical design of learning spaces and pedagogical approaches between a traditional single cell context and an ILE, it is identified from experiences that traditional transition to school approaches cannot successfully be applied.

## **1.5 Research questions**

The overarching question of this research project is: What is a successful transition from ECE to an ILE in a primary school setting? This research project was underpinned by the following guiding questions to help identify the key themes:

What is regarded as a successful transition from ECE to primary ILEs?

What role do relationships play in the transition process from ECE to an ILE in a primary setting? What do parents/caregivers think is important for a successful transition from ECE to an ILE in a primary setting?

How can the needs of all learners be met during transition from ECE to an ILE in a primary setting?

In what ways can teaching teams across sectors initiate and develop effective relationships during the transition process between ECE and ILEs in a primary setting?

## **1.6 Significance of research**

This research has taken place at an advantageous time due the extensive paradigm shift within the New Zealand education system as outlined by Osborne (2016). This research is significant as it strives identify a guideline for the transition to school process from ECE to ILE for key stakeholders. This guideline would then be adapted to suit the personalised needs of each context and the transitioning learners. Earlier research has shown that transition needs to be focussed not around academic subjects and assessing learners on what they can or cannot do, but rather focussed around the learners as a whole. For educators, this

means identifying that learners will not always fit the theoretical views of what learners at a certain age should be like as (Peters, 2003).

The shift within the New Zealand education sector from the traditional single cell model to the ILE model is being driven by worldwide trends and has been embraced by the Ministry of Education. It is outlined in the Ministry of Education (2011) School Property Strategy that all schools will move towards innovative learning by the year 2021. Going forward, the property strategy proposal has significant implications for both the primary sector of education and also the early childhood education sector. This suggests that there are two main parties interested in the outcome of this study. The first is New Zealand primary schools that are working towards making the physical and pedagogical changes to their teaching and learning environments. The second is early childhood centres who are aligning their four-year-old readiness programmes and working collaboratively with schools to ensure a smooth transition for their learners.

## **1.7 Thesis outline**

This thesis will be organised into six chapters. Chapter one is the introduction chapter. This chapter outlines the research project, the rationale, the background of the research project and the objective of the research project. It also brings forward and discusses the significance of the research project.

Chapter two is the Literature Review that has been undertaken for this research project. This chapter explores and reviews literature in relation to the overarching question of this research project. Firstly, it explores and defines ILE, single cell environments and ECE environments in order to ground the research project. It then reviews and explores the literature on the following key themes: developing a child's wellbeing/belonging in the transition to school process, reciprocal relationships within the transition to school process, school readiness, the perspectives of transition to school from the lens of parents/caregivers, strengthening knowledge of pedagogical practice between ECE and the primary sector and links

between Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 2017c) and The New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007).

Chapter three explores research paradigms and methodology and then identifies and discusses the research paradigm and methodology that this research project is grounded in. Further, it seeks to identify and discuss key ethical considerations, cultural considerations, participant selection, conflicts of interest and the confidentiality/anonymity of the participants within the research project.

Chapters four and five present and discuss the key findings of the research project. Chapter four extrapolates the data and identifies key themes. Chapter five further discusses the key findings in relation to the literature.

Chapter six provides a summary overview of the research project and presents the conclusion that has been drawn from undertaking this research project. This chapter also presents recommendations for future research.

The following chapter will explore literature relevant to this research project.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Overview**

This research project focuses on the successful transition of learners and their parents/caregivers from ECE into ILEs. This is of interest because ILEs are a relatively contemporary phenomenon and despite extensive research of online databases there is limited literature available on this topic. This indicates that to date, this is an under researched area of education. There is however, worldwide literature exploring the transition from early childhood settings to single cell traditional classrooms. This research offers some insightful ideas into transition to school programmes and the impacts and effects these have on key stakeholders.

This literature review will identify and discuss literature on how transition from ECE to ILEs can be successful for all key stakeholders. To establish the basis of this literature review, first, ECE environments, ILEs and single cell classrooms will be explored and defined. It is acknowledged that despite the different contexts, successful transition to school involves a wide range of key stakeholders. These include the early childhood teachers, the parents/caregivers, the primary school teachers and at the centre of the transition, the child.

The literature review will then go on to explore the key themes of transition to school from early childhood education. These will include: Wellbeing/belonging; Reciprocal relationships; School readiness; parents/caregivers perspectives on transition to school; Strengthening knowledge of pedagogical practice between early childhood education contexts and primary education contexts and the links between Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 2017c) and The New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007).

### **2.2 Introduction**

Transition to the primary context from ECE is one of the most significant transitions that a child will make in their lifetime (Peters, 2010). It is a defining moment for learners and parents/caregivers and has a lasting

impact on the child's learning trajectories (Peters, 2003). The changes that learners experience during this time are significant, with entry into a formal schooling context shaping the way in which the child participates within their community and family context (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2002). Rogoff (1997) states that learning strategies to cope with transition is important, this includes learning to manage varying expectations, identities and roles and is a fundamental aspect of development. Horschelmann (2011) further emphasises the importance of a successful transition from ECE stating transition points are "always a process of becoming" (p. 379).

## **2.3 Defining ECE environments, ILEs and single cell classrooms**

### **2.3.1 ECE environments**

ECE environments are designed to nurture students (Education Review Office, 2016). The physical spaces within each context vary in size, however, ECE has high teacher to student ratios to ensure the needs and the safety of all students is met (Education Review Office, 2016). The Education Review Office (2016), states that a high quality ECE environment "should be attractive and stimulating inviting curiosity and exploration" This point is supported by Core Education Tātai Aho Rau (2015) highlighting the influence the physical environment has on the development of the learner's aesthetic senses being nurtured within the first few years of their education. In terms of teaching and learning, Fraser & Gestwicki (2002), discuss the student led approach that ECE environments employ, ensuring that the physical spaces encourage the learners to explore different resources and materials. Building upon this student led approach, Edwards, Gandini, & Foreman (1998) discuss the flexibility of the ECE environment stating:

*"In order to act as an educator for the child, the environment has to be flexible: It must undergo frequent modification by the children and the teachers in order to remain up to date and responsive to their need to be protagonists in constructing their knowledge. All the things that surround people in the school and which they can use —*

*the objects, the materials, and the structures — are not seen as passive elements, but on the contrary, are seen as elements that condition and are conditioned by the actions of the children and adults who are active in it.” (p.177).*

### **2.3.2 Single Cell Classrooms**

Murphy (2016) defines a single cell classroom as “...a generic curriculum with universal delivery” (p. 16). These are the traditional models of classrooms that have been present within our education sector for decades. Research shows that single cell classrooms comprise of four walls and ratios of up to 30 learners to one teacher, with a large proportion of New Zealand schools being constructed during the 1950s and 1960s (Ministry of Education, 2011). Grey (as cited by Wilson, 2015), affirms this elaborating that single cell classrooms were very much a square box. The literature depicts that traditionally, learning has largely been focussed around memorising facts. Teaching and learning within these types of traditional environments is seen as formal and teacher directed with programmes being designed to meet the needs of the post war baby boom (Ministry of Education, 2011). Cooper (1993) and Ertmer & Newby (1993) discuss the underpinning traditional learning theories of a single cell context. Cooper (1993) highlights that the design of instructional learning is based on behaviourism, cognitivism and constructivism. Bolstad et al., (2012) challenges this highlighting that we have an inability to predict what students need to know within today’s society, given the rapid pace that our world is evolving.

### **2.3.3 ILEs**

Osborne (2014) highlights the significant paradigm shift that the New Zealand primary education system has been undergoing over the past five years. This paradigm shift is the change from working within traditional single cell contexts to working within ILEs (formerly known as modern learning environments). Osborne (2014) indicates that this has been influenced by global trends.

The literature portrays that the shift is occurring due to the evolution of learning theories, in order to meet the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century learners through both philosophical shifts and a revolution in the way in which schooling is organised (Murphy, 2016). Bolstad, Gilbert, McDowall, Bull, Boyd and Hipkins (2012) support this bringing forward that the central focus of education, in order to be both relevant and engaging to 21<sup>st</sup> century learners, should be the “development of learners’ dispositions, capacities or competencies to deal with new situations and environments, including those with high degrees of complexity, fluidity and uncertainty” (p. 13). This is further affirmed by New Zealand Treasury (2012), highlighting that New Zealand has high levels of variation amongst student achievement therefore adopting this change in design of learning and the environments that learning takes place in is being responsive to this need.

Ministry of Education (2017b), discusses that an ILE can be defined as flexible learning spaces where learning is driven through student agency. Student agency is the concept that learners are empowered to take ownership and steer their learning journey. This is described as when “learners move from being passive recipients to being much more active in the learning process, and actively involved in the decisions about the learning, then they have greater agency” (Wenmoth, 2014). Ministry of Education (2017b) emphasises the learner-focused environments where the type of learning that occurs can be defined as ‘just what I need’ rather than ‘just in case’ learning. Osborne (2016) affirms this view.

In an ILE learners’ educational experiences are delivered through an authentic context, derived from individual students interests (Ministry of Education, 2017b; Osborne, 2016). These agentic spaces “...provide opportunities for learners to have a voice in the what, why, where, how and with whom of learning...” (Osborne, 2016. p. 6). Kedian (as cited by Wilson, 2015) highlights that ILEs are a movement away from smaller, confined spaces to open spaces where multiple students and teachers can interact, promoting a more creative way of teaching and learning.

The ILE context can be compared with ECE settings as ILEs have larger, more open spaces and multiple teachers to larger groups of students. Wagner (2014) sees information as being freely available with the purpose of education being more about developing skills. Timperley (2015) further discusses this highlighting that these flexible spaces are built on the foundations of both historic and contemporary learning theories with the overarching philosophy of equipping the students with a set of adaptive expertise. Adaptive expertise is the ability to apply knowledge and skills both flexibly and creatively in any type of situation within an ever evolving world. Barrett, Zhang, Davies, & Barrett (2015) acknowledges this, highlighting that;

*Inclusive learning environments acknowledge that all learners learn in different ways, and at times learners may need to work together, or alone, in silence or with noise, standing or sitting, passively or actively, with technology and without it, indoors and outdoors. Inclusive flexible, responsive environments are those that provide opportunities for these activities” (p. 28).*

Creating lifelong learners is a goal set out by the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) and Leadbeater (2006) highlights that with students in control of the direction of their learning, they are more likely to become lifelong learners as they understand how to learn. The focus then becomes on applying these lifelong skills within any context.

Timperley (2015) and Osborne (2016) see relationships and relational trust at the centre of ILEs. Osborne (2016) poses the need for these environments to be inclusive of the needs and aspirations of all learners. The size of classes between single cell environments and ILEs differs as a result of this. As aforementioned, within a single cell context there is one teacher with up to approximately 30 students, within an ILE there is up to 100 students with the relevant number of teachers according to the Ministry of Education curriculum staffing guidelines.

This is outlined in Table 1. below adapted from The Ministry of Education (2018):

Table 1: Teacher to student ratios by year levels and roll type

Year of schooling	Maori Immersion teacher to student ratio	Non-Maori Immersion teacher to student ratio
Year 1	1:15	1:15
Year 2-3	1:18	1:23
Year 4-8	1:18	1:29

Research shows that the one-size-fits-all model is no longer relevant (Osborne, 2016). ILEs reflect this as the larger number of teachers within a space allows students the opportunity to form relationships with multiple teachers. ILE's portray a strong value being held in Ako where tuakana/teina relationships are highly regarded and fostered throughout all year levels (Osbourne, 2016). This is defined by the Ministry of Education as "an integral part of traditional Māori society, provides a model for buddy systems. An older or more expert tuakana (brother, sister or cousin) helps and guides a younger or less expert teina (originally a younger sibling or cousin of the same gender)" (p. 28).

The Ministry of Education (2017b), defines ILEs as "learner-focussed and emphasises valued learner outcomes. They encourage collaboration and inquiry, both for learners and teachers, and allow teachers to teach in the style that best suits the needs of diverse learners" This definition is underpinned by the extensive research carried out by the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), which recommends seven principles for innovative learning as follows: fostering engagement through making learning central with learners; understanding what it is to be a learner; promoting collaboration and social learning; understanding the learners as individuals both emotionally and in terms of prior knowledge; setting high expectations for the learners; utilising assessment processes that align with these aims and provide formative feedback to

foster self-reflection and, developing a coherent curriculum through horizontal connectedness and ubiquity (OECD, 2015).

## **2.4 Wellbeing/belonging**

Literature shows that developing a sense of belonging is an important component to a successful transition to school (Brooker, 2008; Peters, 2010). Broström (2002) indicates that this is because there are links between feeling part of an environment (suitable) and a learner's learning experiences and development. The literature highlights that building upon a learner's funds of knowledge is evident tool in developing the learner's sense of belonging within the transition to school process (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2009). The concept of Funds of Knowledge, brought forward by Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez (1992). Funds of Knowledge is the recognition that each and every individual comes to school with their own story and their own enrichment from both cultural and family experiences. Within transition to school this necessitates a focus on ensuring that each individual child feels a sense of wellbeing/belonging and builds a sense of trust that they build their own identity within this context (Peters, Hartley, Rogers, Smith, & Carr, 2009).

Rutherford (2017) highlights that it is important that parents/caregivers work to create a sense of belonging for the learner within their new context. This literature shows that transition to school visits play an important role in connecting a child to their new context which is a component of developing a sense of belonging (Dockett & Perry, 2004; Hartley, Rogers, Smith, Peters, & Carr, 2009; Margetts, 2003; Peters, 2004). Rutherford (2017), highlights the importance of the transition to school visits being individualised for each child, with some students needing more or less visits than others. Nueman (2002, as cited in Peters, 2010) also supports this individualistic approach to transition to school. Further supporting this, Peters (2010) states "No evidence was found of any information regarding the exact nature or ideal number of visits" (p. 53). Margetts (2007) also brings forward the notion of flexible and relevant visits. Peters, (2004) highlights that these visits assist in developing the

parents/caregivers sense of belonging of those transitioning to school with some parents using these visits to connect with other families in order to support their child in developing friendships within the school context. Further, Peters (2010) highlights that “The opportunity for parents to visit as well as children is important. Where parents were prevented from visiting the school they felt disempowered and unable to help their child...” (p. 53). It is identified that creating opportunities to find out about school prior to starting is part of the development of belonging for the individual learner (Peters, 2010). Dockett & Perry (2004) support this stating that learners who attend transition visits are more likely to understand the realities of school. This aligns with the notion of building multiple supports for both learners and parents/caregivers to ensure that learners adjust to their new school setting positively (Daniels, n.d.).

Utilising the learner’s early childhood education portfolios as a tool to create a sense of belonging has proven successful by (Peters et al., 2009). These portfolios consist of learning stories which are assessment for learning and encompass the child’s strengths and interests and provide a platform for conversation with peers and teachers (Carr, 2001; Jones, 2006). They are a taonga that is special and unique to the individual, the portfolios allow the learner to share their identity and provide authentic assessment through the recording of observations and progress (Grace, 1991).

Peters, Paki, & Davis (2015) discuss the use of portfolios from a parent/caregiver perspective, stating “parents and whānau wanted teachers to know their child well, what they could do, their culture and where they came from.” (p. 1). Keeping portfolios within the classroom builds on the concept that they have a grounding or space within the new context that is special and important to them and strengthens the concept of them belonging to this new space (Peters et al., 2009; Grace, 1991).

Peters et al. (2009) also states that portfolios enable teachers to connect with the learners and build upon their funds of knowledge, acknowledging what they have already achieved and working in a partnership with the

child to extend this. This is also supported by Gonzales, Moll, & Amanti (2005) who emphasise the importance of teachers getting to know the students, stating “the educational process can be greatly enhanced when teachers learn about their students’ everyday lives” (p. 6). Corsaro & Molinari (2005) discuss that building relationships between teachers and students creates a sense of belonging as the teacher is able to identify with the child. Further Corsaro & Molinari (2005) state that the use of the child’s portfolio both within their ECE setting and then within their new school setting empowers the learners to be able to form relationships and become part of the group culture within the new entrant school context. Tringham (2006), agrees with this stating that through regular visits and the use of portfolios to connect and make links, learner moving from early childhood contexts into school were more positive and confident.

Pianta (2004), highlights that it is positive to start communication with the learner’s family a year prior to them starting school and continue this throughout the learner’s first year of school. Peters (2004) affirms this, highlighting that the information provided to parents must occur in a timely manner. Pianta (2004) further emphasises the way in which this information needs to be personalised in order to have the desired effect of connecting the parents/caregivers within the new school context. Fabian (2002) discusses schools transitioning parents/caregivers and students with a virtual experience where the learners at the school create a video and the teachers have the opportunity to introduce themselves. Hartley et al. (2009) and Lee (2005) bring forward a similar concept of developing a book about the school where different areas of the school are documented such as the playground, the toilets, the classroom, the staffroom alongside some written material. These forms of communication are also helpful for parents/caregivers in terms of empowering them to support their child (Lee, 2005).

## **2.5 Reciprocal relationships**

Mutual and respectful relationships play an integral part in a successful transition to school for all key stakeholders (Lee, 2005). The importance of

these reciprocal relationships is evident throughout the literature, and Fletcher, Fa'afoi, Tufulasi Taleni, & O'Regan (2009) state that the home-school partnerships "is the most powerful way for schools to understand and meet the needs of diverse students" (p. 26). At the core of the reciprocal relationships concept within the transition to school process is the child undertaking the transition, with four key relationships surrounding them. These relationships are: friendships, the new teacher (primary), the old teacher (ECE) and parents/caregivers. Dockett & Perry (2002), affirms this highlighting the importance of all stakeholders involved in the transition developing relationships.

The literature shows that friendships between transitioning students and their peers within the school context are a dominant theme in a successful transition to school (Belcher, 2006; Bulkeley & Fabian, 2006; Denham, 2006; Dockett & Perry, 2005; Ladd, Herald, & Kochel, 2006; Peters, 2004, 2010). Peters (2010) affirms this stating that "...having friends and making new friends was associated with positive feelings about school..." (p. 18). Building upon this, Belcher (2006) identifies the extent that these peer relationships play in this process, stating "whilst grappling with their role as a learner in a new environment, ways of relating to others were uppermost in children's minds" (p. 46). Further, Ladd et al., (2006) and Denham, (2006) discuss studies which identify links between unsuccessful transition to school experiences with peer and friendship issues. The literature also shows that parents/caregivers need to actively support the development of friendships, highlighting that "Those who are able to form friendships are likely to be advantaged" (Peters, 2010. p. 67). Bourne (2007) further elaborates on this bringing forward the idea of using extra-curricular activities to foster friendships in the lead up to the transition to school process.

Belcher (2006); Murray, Waas, & Murray (2008); Harrison, Clarke & Unger (2003, as cited in Peters, 2010) all discuss the key role that the teacher – learner relationship plays in a successful transition to school. Rietveld, (2008) builds upon this highlighting that learners transitioning between contexts have a desire to feel a sense of inclusiveness.

Bourne (2007), discuss the important of developing positive and equitable relationships with all stakeholders in order to develop an understanding of the child. Affirming this, Gallagher (2005) discusses the effects that not building these relationships has on parents/caregivers. This includes experiencing a lack of trust and negativity which led to the parents exploring other avenues for support, where the teacher should be providing this support platform (Gallager, 2005). Peters (2004) builds upon this discussing the way in which parents appreciate opportunities to engage with their child's teachers, but that this is not always reciprocated which leads to lack of trust or lack of relationship building. Research illustrates that learners who view and are involved in positive home-school partnerships "gain a sense of community and of being cared for and experience a trusting and secure environment in which they can learn and grow" (Whalley & the Pen Green Centre Team, p. 95., as cited in Mitchell et al., 2006). This development of trust is fundamental to successful transition (Peters, 2010). Hughes & MacNaughton (2002) argue that in order to develop these mutually respectful relationships teachers and parents/caregivers must each develop an understanding of the other, stating "communication cannot improve relationships between staff and parents unless it addresses the politics of knowledge underpinning them" (p. 247).

Shifting away from an individual perspective, the concept of ecological perspectives, as shown in Figure 1 below, is based on the work by Bronfenbrenner, (1979). This shows interactions of changes between the organisms within a changing environment. Within the realms of transition to school, Bronfenbrenner, (1979) has brought forward the micro-, meso-, exo- and macrosystems within the child's environment and discusses the ways in which the micro-, meso-, exo- and macrosystems contribute to and influence the development of the child. Within reciprocal relationships "the mesosystem comprises the interrelationships between the microsystems" (Peters, 2003. p. 16). The microsystems in this period of transition are the ECE, home and the new school context.

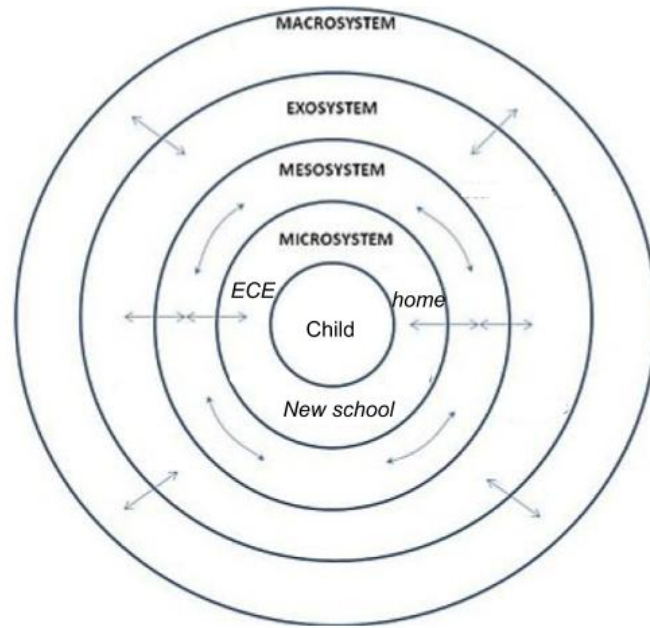


Figure 2: The Micro-, meso-, exo-, macro-systems

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979)

Smith (1998), discusses the connections between the mesosystems within the transition to school period, highlighting that these connections are made through people who are present in both the home and school microsystems. This research demonstrates that as a result of the connections and in order to promote a positive transition to school, it is imperative that there are clear lines of communication with Smith, (1998) stating that “warm, reciprocal and balanced relationships between preschool and school teachers the transition will be supportive of development” (p. 14). This communication is also fundamental between school and home (parents/caregivers and the teachers).

Positive home – school relationships are at the forefront of a successful transition to school programme (Burgon & Walker, 2013; Peters, 2010). Dockett & Perry, (2007) discuss the importance of establishing what it is that parents actually want from a home – school partnership and utilising this information for “establishing strong, positive relationships.” (p. 83). Bryk & Schneider (2002) highlight the ways these home – school partnerships mirror the concepts of relational trust. The elements of relational trust being social respect, personal regard, perceived

competence and perceived integrity. Linking relational trust to the role of transition to school and forming partnerships with parents/caregivers can be further defined as:

*“Social respect – recognising that many people play important roles in children’s education and valuing the contributions made by these people;*

*·Personal regard – recognising that home-school relations involve issues of power and vulnerability and seeking situations where genuine discussion can occur;*

*·Perceived competence – where families regard teachers as competent, and where teachers regard families as competent. The everyday knowledge parents have of their children is respected, as is the professional knowledge of teachers; and*

*·Perceived integrity – where all parties in the relationship are consistent in what they say and do” (Dockett & Perry, 2007. p. 83).*

These elements offer transparency in forming and maintaining a successful partnership between teachers and parents. It is important for teachers to not only allow, but encourage parent voice, as the parents are a child’s first educator and hold the key to valuable information that can further support and enhance their experiences (Burgon & Walker, 2013; Peters, 2010).

## **2.6 School-readiness**

In New Zealand the legal age that a child must start school by is six years. However, it is more common that learners begin school on their fifth birthday as this has typically been a rite of passage for New Zealand learners (Boereboom & Tymms, 2018). Boereboom & Tymms (2018) highlight that internationally it is the most common age to begin school is six, however, Suggate (2009, as cited in Peters, 2010) argues that on an international scale, even at the age of six, New Zealand learners are deemed to be young when starting school. This is in comparison with

other Western countries in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) study where it was identified that out of 56 countries there were only four which had a school entry age under six years (Suggate, 2009, as cited in Peters, 2010). This study went on to further identify that in terms of academic achievement learners who began school under the age of six years had no long term benefits and that there were potential negative effects of beginning school so young.

Historically within New Zealand, beginning school could happen anywhere from a child's fifth birthday and for many students this means beginning school alone, walking into an already established group and being expected to participate in large group activities (Ledger, 2000, as cited in Peters, 2010). Nueman (2002 as cited in Peters, 2010) supports individual transition to school highlighting that "starting on the child's birthday provides a more individualised and personal event for the child" (p. 7). However, in 2017 the New Zealand government amended the Education Act 1989 to allow schools to adopt cohort entry in consultation with their community, staff and contributing early childhood centres. The philosophy behind the amendment to allow cohort entry is to enable smoother transitions through promoting relationship building with peers who begin school on the same date (Ministry of Education, 2017).

School-readiness is a well-researched area of education. The literature demonstrates that there are clear disparities between different stakeholders in terms of the definition of school readiness. An example of this is where teachers focus on organisational adjustment and parents focus on interpersonal adjustment (Dockett & Perry, 2002). Dockett & Perry (2002) define the differences between organisational adjustment and interpersonal adjustment. Organisation adjustment is "children's ability to adjust to school context by fitting into the group, listening, taking turns, sitting still and making their needs known" (p. 79). Whereas interpersonal adjustment is where the child would "know how to talk to the teacher; would they make friends; separate easily; would someone get to know their child individually; or would their child 'stick out' as different?" (p. 79). Heavside, Farris, & Carpenter (1993) highlight that important factors of

school readiness are being healthy, well-nourished and having the ability to articulate verbally their thoughts and ideas and wants and needs. Along with this is the confidence to approach new activities. Dockett & Perry (2002) further substantiate this discussing what is identified as not important, these things are the “ability to identify primary colours and basic shapes, knowledge of the alphabet, ability to count to 20” (p. 77).

Peters, (2003) discusses the way that through Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development, each and every child is ready for school. The Zone of Proximal Development is defined as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Through taking this approach, rather than waiting for a child to meet certain development targets which indicate school readiness, “adults and peers stimulate development by challenging the child within the zone of proximal development” (Peters, 2003. p. 16). This is a concept supported by Crnic & Lamberty (1994), who concluded their literature review on school readiness very succinctly stating that “...we currently have no theory or credible empirical evidence which identify a skillset that exemplifies school readiness” (p. 96). This research supports the point that there is no tangible phenomenon or point in time that can be identified as school readiness, rather the individual needs to be supported through transition to school in a way which is personalised to meet their needs (Peters, 2003).

## **2.7 Parent/caregivers perspectives on transition to school**

Transition to school not only effects the child transitioning but also the parents/caregivers of the child transitioning (Westcott, Perry, Jones, & Dockett, 2003). Research shows that many parents feel unprepared to transition their children to school and require support and guidance (Harper, 2015; Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011). Parents and families are the central support system for learners transitioning to school and this support network and continuity is critical (Harper, 2015). Research shows that

“Parents draw on their own experiences, expectations and perceptions as they negotiate their role as an educator of their own children and as a participant in their children’s school education” (Dockett & Perry, 2007, p. 77). This is a point also affirmed by Harper (2015). It is further discussed that “All responses to starting school are linked to social, cultural and political histories” (Dockett & Perry, 2007, p. 93). Adjusting to school for both the parents and the learners is highlighted as a common concern for parents as they navigate the changing roles and expectations of beginning school (Harper, 2015).

Throughout the transition to school process, parents must also transition into a new identity, this being the parents of a school learner. Griebel & Niesel (2003), discuss transition as a process of change, these changes occurring in identity, roles, relations and settings. Three levels of changes are identified and considered, these being:

*“...changes on an individual level – changes of identity, coping with strong emotions, development of competencies; on an interactive level – building new relationships, changing existing relationships including loss and new roles and on a contextual level – integration of two environments or microsystems, different curricula, and, sometimes coping with additional family transitions”* (Griebel & Niesel, 2003. p. 27)

Throughout the journey of transition, the changes and focus is on the child going through the transition with very little consideration or emphasis put on the parents (Dockett & Perry, 2007). Dockett & Perry, (2007) discuss the way parents feel at the individual level, interactive level and at a contextual level. It is highlighted that many parents describe the strong emotions they feel as their children start school (individual level), as well as the importance of building relationships with other parents of children starting school and with teachers at the school (interactive level), and the changes required to balance work and home/school commitments (contextual level) (Dockett & Perry, 2007). Consideration of the individual level, interactive level and contextual level provides insight into how

parents feel during the transition to school process and how schools and early childhood education providers can work together collaboratively to better the transition process for the parents and parents/caregivers of the learners (DeCaro & Worthman, 2011). This draws connections to the importance of parental efficacy, where parent/caregiver involvement is dependent on the participation being seen to make a difference (Dockett & Perry, 2007).

## **2.8 Strengthening knowledge of pedagogical practice between early childhood education contexts and primary education contexts**

In 2011, the Education Review office (ERO) identified that there were inconsistencies between ECE centres and a lack of knowledge about how to adequately prepare four-year-olds for school. Barback (2014) brings forward that “In 2011, the Education Review Office (ERO) looked at the various transition programmes run by ECE centres and found that, while many were excellent, some were well below standard and involved inappropriate skill and drill teaching that wasn’t meaningful to children” (p. 1). Further, Barback (2014) discusses the notion of ECE centres focussing on learning dispositions “by noticing, recognising and responding to individual children’s interests and strengths within a broadly enabling curriculum” (p. 2).

Developing a synergy between teachers within each context would eliminate the differing views and expectations This issue is discussed by Timperley, McNaughton, Howie, & Robinson (2003) who highlight that “despite a commitment to collaborate, teachers from the two sectors (ECE and primary) had very different expectations of each other and most were dissatisfied with the current arrangements” (p. 55). Within Early Childhood Education the National Curriculum document - Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 2017c) the curriculum is represented by a mat. Kellaway (2013) discusses the concept of the mat coming together with the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) intertwining and sharing some strands to create a gentle transition where there is coherency and consistency rather than a huge leap for the learners. Working together to

ensure that there is a continuity in curriculum is regarded as a foundational element of the transition to school process (Howie, 2001; Margetts, 1999; Peters, 2000, as cited in Wright, 2017). Further, it is identified that in order to effectively ensure a continuity of the curriculum from ECE to primary, teachers must develop an understanding of both Te Whariki (Ministry of Education, 2017c) and The New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) as well as the underpinning pedagogies employed in both sectors (Broström, 2002; Hartley et al., 2009; Peters, 2005).

There are many connections between Te Whāriki Early childhood curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2017c) and the New Zealand Curriculum, (Ministry of Education, 2007) which ensure a smooth transition across curriculums. A key connection that parallels the curriculums are the learning outcomes in Te Whāriki, (Ministry of Education, 2017c) and the New Zealand Curriculum, key competencies (Ministry of Education, 2007). Both the learning dispositions and the key competencies maintain a coupled focus on the how and what of learning. Further, the literature identifies that there is value in sharing resources, discussing issues and sharing practices in order to develop shared understandings around practice and terminology used in both sectors (Wright & Molloy, 2005).

A lack of communication between ECE centres and schools was further identified by the Education Review Office (2011). Barback (2014) highlights that

*“...communication is complicated by the fact that most schools draw their children from many early childhood education services. In many cases, these may be located nearer to children’s parents’ workplaces than where they live and will go to school and hence the relationship between an early childhood education service and a school may be minimal and occur only through the parents.”*  
(p. 2).

Stephen & Cope (2003) bring to light the need for both early childhood and primary teachers to adapt their practices in response to difficulties faced

prior to transitioning rather than detect issues when they occur in the child. Within transition to school, this means teachers working collaboratively across sectors to form a synergistic approach to ensure that when learners begin school they feel capable and confident in their abilities to cope within the different environment (Timperley et al., 2003).

There is a genuine benefit in strengthening the knowledge of pedagogical practice between ECE contexts and primary contexts (Timperley et al., 2003). All parties involved in the transition to school process are working towards the shared goal of the transition to school being successful for each individual child, therefore the need to work together and communicate effectively is paramount (Wright, 2009). This is a concept supported by Barback (2014) who discusses the importance of there being a wraparound service which works to support the child in their learning journey and ensure that this continues positively. Barback, (2014), further explains this by stating that “Ideally this means the ECE services and schools communicate about the children in their communities and how best to support good transitions” (p. 2).

This aligns well with the concept of communities of practice which is brought forward by Wegner (1998). A community of practice is described as a model where all stakeholders acknowledge the diversity of each other, yet strive to inaugurate a synergetic relationship that is clear amongst all of the contributors. The communities of practice then “underpin the whole notion of working on mutually interesting projects” (Hartley, Rogers, Smith, Peters, & Carr, 2010). These communities of practice align with the Kāhui Ako initiative set up by the government which is described as “A community of learning/Kāhui Ako is a group of education and training providers (early learning, schools, kura, and post-secondary) working together to help students achieve their full potential” (Ministry of Education, 2018a). Overall, it is identified that the stakeholders in the communities of practice all have a “...shared commitment to cooperating” (Barback, 2014, p. 7), therefore, a commitment to working collaboratively to scaffold and support the children within the transition

process (Dockett, 2001; Howie, 2001; McGee, 1997; Phillips, 2002 as cited in Wright, 2017).

## **2.9 The links between Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa Early childhood curriculum and The New Zealand Curriculum**

Te Whāriki has recently been updated to reflect changes to contexts, theories and practice and ensure early learning continuity. Te Whāriki, indicates that “The early childhood curriculum provides a foundation for learners to become confident and competent and, during the school years, to be able to build on their previous learning” (Ministry of Education, 2017c, p. 93). The New Zealand Curriculum echoes this expectation, stating “This new stage (transition from early childhood to school) in children’s learning builds upon and makes connections with early childhood learning experiences” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 41).

*“Te Whāriki is underpinned by four key principles that guide both pedagogy and practice within early childhood education centres throughout New Zealand. These principles are:*

*Empowerment – Whakamana. Early childhood curriculum empowers the child to learn and grow.*

*Holistic Development – Kotahitanga. Early childhood curriculum reflects the holistic way children learn and grow.*

*Family and Community – Whānau tangata. The wider world of family and community is an integral part of early childhood curriculum.*

*Relationships – Ngā hononga. Children learn through responsive and reciprocal relationships with people, places and things” (Ministry of Education, 2017c, p.18-21).*

The New Zealand Curriculum principles are set out as follows:

*“High Expectations: The curriculum supports and empowers all students to learn and achieve personal excellence, regardless of their individual circumstances.*

*Treaty of Waitangi: The curriculum acknowledges the principles of the treaty of Waitangi and the bicultural foundations of Aotearoa New Zealand. All students have the opportunity to acquire knowledge of te reo Maori me ona tikanga.*

*Cultural diversity: The curriculum reflects New Zealand’s cultural diversity and values the histories and traditions of all its people.*

*Learning to learn: The curriculum encourages all students to reflect on their own learning processes and to learn how to learn.*

*Inclusion: The curriculum is non-sexist, non-racists, and no discriminatory; it ensures that students’ identities, languages, abilities, and talents are recognised and affirmed and that their learning needs are addressed.*

*Community engagement: The curriculum has meaning for students, connects with their wider lives, and engages the support of their families, whanau, and communities.*

*Coherence: The curriculum offers all students a broad education that makes links within and across learning areas, provides coherent transitions, and opens up pathways to further learning.*

*Future focus: The curriculum encourages students to look to the future by exploring such significant future-focussed issues as sustainability, citizenship, enterprise, and globalisation” (Ministry of Education, 2007. p. 9).*

Each of these documents displays similarities showing a distinct continuity of education throughout the transition from ECE to primary context (Wright, 2009). Te Whāriki and The New Zealand Curriculum share a

synergistic approach to the outlined visions for their students. Te Whāriki aspires for learners engaged in the curriculum to be:

“competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society.” (Ministry of Education, 2017c. p. 5)

The New Zealand Curriculum outlines a vision for young people who are:

“confident, connected, actively involved, lifelong learners and who in their school years will continue to develop the values, knowledge and competencies that will enable them to live full and satisfying lives” (Ministry of Education, 2007. p. 8)

## **2.10 Conclusion**

This literature review set out to identify and evaluate research that related to how transition to school from ECE into an ILE can be successful for all key stakeholders. The themes identified and explored in relation to transition to school are: Wellbeing/belonging, Reciprocal relationships, School readiness, parent/caregivers perspectives on transition to school, Strengthening knowledge of pedagogical practice between ECE contexts and primary education contexts and the links between Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 2017c) and The New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007). Throughout this review it is evident that there are key elements within transition to school that are similar whether transitioning to single cell contexts or ILEs. However, it also evident that there are gaps within the research in terms of how transition to ILEs from ECE and how this can be successful for all key stakeholders.

The following chapter will present the methodology of this research.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This research (which will be referred to as the 'research project') is focused on how transition to school can be successful for young learners and their parents/caregivers from early childhood contexts into an Innovative Learning Environment (ILE). It includes key stakeholders involved with the transition process, these being the child transitioning, the parents/caregivers of the child, the primary school teachers and the early childhood teachers. This chapter sets out the research methodology used within this study. In order to develop an understanding of the appropriateness of the methodology and design of this research project it is important to firstly explore the different research methodology and design that underpin educational research. The research methodology applied to this research project will be presented. Then, the participant selection will be discussed, followed by the research process (data collection tools). This chapter will also consider ethical issues within research and bring attention to the identified ethical issues and practices that were identified and addressed in this research project. Further, this chapter will present the cultural considerations, informed consent and conflict of interests that were identified and addressed within this research project.

### **3.2 Research Paradigms and Methodology**

Cresswell (2005) defines research as a means in which data are collected and analysed to build a more robust understanding of a specific topic or an issue. There are three widely utilised paradigms that underpin research these being positivist, interpretive and critical theory (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2008). Tolich & Davidson (2011) discuss the way in which these paradigms are varying ways of viewing the world. They state that the paradigms are based on beliefs and are influential as they indicate the philosophical perspectives of the research. These paradigms act as a guide for the researcher and inform all aspects of the research process

from selection of the methods undertaken to gathering the data, to the analysis and interpretation of the data collected.

Bishop (1997) highlights that a positivist paradigm is structured, predictable and measurable. Kaboub (2008) elaborates on this further stating “The positivist paradigm asserts that real events can be observed empirically and explained with logical analysis” (p. 343). The positivist paradigm is of an empirical nature and is not frequently used in the study of human behaviour (Bishop, 1997). Tolich & Davidson (2011) discuss the often-flawed views of common sense suppositions about the world. This is in both a physical and social sense. From a positivist stance, it is therefore necessary to gather proof and conduct tests to inform the reality. The positivist paradigm is underpinned by the understandings of natural sciences and assumes that there is an objective reality, revealing the true nature of how society operates.

The interpretive theory is frequently utilized within educational studies due to its humanistic focal point and is discussed by Radnor (2001) as being utilized to “clarify how interpretations and understandings are formulated, implemented and given meaning in lived situations” (p. 4). This indicates that this theory is used to develop a greater understanding or construct meaning within the realm of the research project. This point is affirmed by (Cresswell, 2009) suggesting that when engaging in interpretive research, the aim is to “generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meaning” (p. 8). Whilst this theory relies on viewing the world through the participants’ lens, Cohen, Manion, & Morrison (2000) bring forward the notion that this type of research can be influenced by the researcher’s views or understanding of the research topic and therefore gathering data that are both reliable and valid can present as an issue. However, the interpretive theory aims to explore the social realities of participants, exploring within their experiences and from this drawing new knowledge and developing a greater understanding from a human perspective, a point highlighted by Cohen, et al. (2000).

A third paradigm is critical theory, this differs significantly from both the positivist and the interpretive paradigms (Cresswell, 2009). Critical theory is focused not on seeking an understanding but on developing change (Kemmis, 2001). This is a concept supported by both Creswell (2009) bringing forward that when utilising a critical theory paradigm to underpin research projects the researchers are aiming to change situations, not merely understanding participants' views and experiences.

### **3.3 Methods of Research**

Mutch (2005) highlights that there are three approaches to research, these being quantitative, qualitative and a mixed method approach. Each approach is unique, underpinned by a particular paradigm and is selected in relation to what the researcher is wanting to achieve or discover through the research.

A quantitative approach is a linear process where a series of steps are followed to prove a theory is correct or not correct, essentially, the researcher begins with a hypothesis and sets out to validate or invalidate the hypothesis. Bryman (2004) highlights that the quantitative research method is "... the collection of numerical data and as exhibiting a view of the relationship between theory and research as deductive..." (p. 62). Throughout the process, the researcher moves from theory to conclusions. Stokes (2011) discusses the way in which quantitative methods gather numbers and statistics and utilise this data to draw conclusions, and states that this approach is underpinned by the positivist paradigm. Creswell (2009) further supports this stating that quantitative research is "a means for testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables" (p. 4). The quantitative approach has come under criticism by qualitative researchers as discussed by Bryman (2004) indicating that "These criticisms tend to revolve around the view that a natural science model is inappropriate for studying the social world." (p.81).

Utilising a qualitative approach to research differs significantly and focuses on "... seeing through the eyes of the research participants" which sits in the interpretivist approach (Bryman, 2004. p. 289). Gubrium & Holstein

(1997) identify that there are four traditions of qualitative research, naturalism, ethnomethodology, emotionalism and postmodernism. Bryman (2004) discusses these concepts in greater detail highlighting that “Naturalism endeavours to comprehend people through social reality, ethnomethodology delves into human interactions and how this shapes social order, emotionalism seeks to develop an appreciation of the inner workings or experiences of humans whilst postmodernism is highlighted to focus around social realities and the differing ways the social reality can be composed” (p. 267). This type of research is open ended and results in the emergence of a concept as indicated by Bryman, (2004). It is a research method that Creswell (2009) states as having “the importance of rendering the complexity of a situation” (p. 4).

Creswell (2009) and Tolich & Davidson (2011), agree that utilising both qualitative and quantitative methods can be a strength. This is known as the mixed methods approach and can also be considered as a triangulation (Cresswell, 2009; Kervin, Vialle, & Okley, 2006; Mutch, 2005). A triangulation utilises the best aspects of each method to develop a clearer understanding, as well as enabling the researcher to check the quantitative data against the qualitative data (Cohen et al., 2008). A commonality within research is to either prove something true or false or develop an understanding on a particular subject or within a particular field. This is underpinned by the necessity of the research to be credible and valid, a concept supported by Menter, Elliot, Hulme, Lewin, & Kevin (2011). Employing a mixed methods approach increases the researcher’s ability to develop more of an understanding about the research questions posed, ensuring greater validity and credibility of a concept Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle (2006).

### **3.4 Case studies**

When a researcher is wanting to take an in-depth view or closely examine a particular issue or instance a case study approach is applied (Bell, 1999). This research strategy is also considered as an in-depth inquiry (Cresswell, 2009; Yin, 2003). Further, Yin (1981) brings forward that case

studies are a more focused approach to research rather than experimental, as it is researching the case within its real-life context. Stake (2003) discusses that there are three types of case studies. He describes these as intrinsic, instrumental and collective. An intrinsic case study is a study where the researcher wants to closely examine the uniqueness of the actual case (Mills, Durepos, & Wiebe, 2010). An instrumental case study is where the researcher aims to identify an issue, build a theory or challenge generalisations (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe, 2010). Lastly, a collective case study is a study across multiple cases (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe, 2010). Stake (2003) identifies that it can be difficult to distinguish between an intrinsic and instrumental case and Mills, Durepos & Wiebe (2010) highlight that “the key in both the intrinsic and instrumental case study is the opportunity to learn” (p. 2).

### **3.5 The Research Paradigm and Methodology for this Research Project**

This research project is considered to be a collective case study. This is because it seeks to investigate the multiple perspectives of key stakeholders within the transition to school process by describing and comparing them in relation to this particular issue of an ILE context (Creswell, 2009). These stakeholders are the child undertaking the transition, the parents/caregivers, the primary teachers and the early childhood teachers. The case study uses a mixed methods approach underpinned by an interpretive methodology and predominantly gathers qualitative data with some quantitative data.

The mixed methods approach is relevant to this research project as it strives to understand the varying perspectives of all key stakeholders in the transition to school process by quantitative and qualitative means. This meaning that an interpretive approach was required in order to develop the emergence of a concept and understand the reality of the situation from varying perspectives. The selected methodology increases the researcher’s ability to understand the view points and experiences of

people directly related to and involved in the educational and social situation of the research project.

Specifically related to this research project are the key stakeholders of the transition to school process within an identified ILE context, these being; the child, the parents/caregivers, the primary school teachers and the early childhood teachers. However, as Creswell (2009) advocates, quantitative and qualitative methodology should be observed on a scale with the mixed methods approach being at the centre, including elements of both, to develop a more in-depth knowledge and understanding of the given research question. This research study follows what is highlighted by Kervin, et al. (2006) as being a mixed method approach i.e. qualitative data were collected through open ended questions alongside data gathered through a questionnaire that has been analysed quantitatively. Utilising a mixed method approach ensured that the research was strengthened by the underpinning interpretive paradigm. This is a humanistic approach to understanding the social world through the view or experiences of the individuals immersed in the setting being researched (Cohen et al., 2000).

### **3.6 Selection of participants**

To begin the research project, permission was sought from the Principal of the school which was selected to participate due to the ILE nature of the teaching and learning spaces (see appendix 1). Permission was also sought from the centre managers of three Early Childhood Education (ECE) centres (see appendix 2). These centres were selected to participate based on the high numbers of learners that they have transitioning into the selected school, therefore there were strong links established between the school and the centres.

Once permission was given from the Principal and the three centre managers, the research project then moved into the next phase of identifying and inviting the specific participants to take part in the research project. To begin, four colleagues at the school were invited to participate based on their on-going and current experience of the transition to school

programme. Ten parents/caregivers of recently transitioned learners into the school were also invited to participate in the research. From the ECE centres the lead teachers of the transition to school programmes were invited to participate, giving a total of three.

To select four participants from the school each of the teachers within the junior learning communities were given a participant information sheet. This included a space to add their name, report on perceptions of the current transition to school programme and circle yes or no to indicate if they were interested in participating in the research (see appendix 3). All forms were then collected. The intention was that four teachers were to be selected to participate. If more than four teachers indicated that they would like to participate then the most appropriate group of teachers were to be selected based on their experience with the current transition programme. A range of experiences and perceptions was intended to be reflected within the final sample.

The head teacher of the transition to school programme in each of the ECE centres was provided with a participant information sheet. The participant information sheet included a space to add their names and a space to indicate whether they were interested in participating in the research (see appendix 4).

To select ten parents/caregivers who had recently transitioned into the ILE, each parent/caregiver of children who had recently transitioned was given a participant information sheet (see appendix 5). The sheet included a space to add their name, a space to indicate whether they were interested in participating in the research project and whether they were interested in their child participating in the research. If more than ten parents agreed to participate, a selection of parents/caregivers would occur based on different transition rounds from July – September to ensure a balanced spread was achieved.

### **3.7 Research Process - Data Collection Tools**

In order to effectively inquire into the given research question of ‘What does successful transition look like for all key stakeholders from Early Childhood Education to Innovative Learning Environment.’ The purpose of this study was to combine quantitative data and qualitative data in a mixed method approach in order to gain a broad understanding of how all key stakeholders (the child, the parents/caregivers, the primary teachers and the early childhood teachers) can be better supported to ensure successful transition. The mixed methods approach enabled this multifaceted research question to be explored and a broad understanding established. The research project design needed to accurately represent the humanistic nature of the research and as Bryman, (2004) highlights, an understanding can be developed “...of the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants” (p.266). To achieve this, within this research project, three strategic data collection tools were employed.

#### **3.7.1 Semi-structured Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were selected as a key data collection tool within this research project as they gather qualitative data. As Drever (1995) states semi-structured interviews are fluid and flexible allowing the interviewee to express their views and experiences freely. This was considered to be important due to the humanistic nature of the research project. The aim of the semi-structured interview was to assist in capturing the ways in which the key stakeholders of the transition to school process interpreted experiences and relationships throughout this process and it is identified that the research project relies on “participants’ views of the situation being studied” (Cresswell, 2003. p. 8). This developing knowledge of reality is a concept described by Walsham (2006) as the “social construction by human actors” (p. 320).

The semi-structured interviews were designed asking open ended questions that allow the participants to express their views and feelings which were then analysed (Cresswell, 2005). The semi-structured

interviews were carried out with both the early childhood teachers and the primary teachers (see appendix 6 and 7). The questions were developed to enable the participants the freedom to shape their thinking and capitalise on the dialogue and informal conversation (Tolich & Davidson, 2011). The questions were pre-designed however, the participants were not given a copy of the questions prior to the interview to ensure that the conversations remained natural, with the researcher utilising the questions as a general guide to elicit the data required for this research project. A probing technique was utilised to gain clarity and to invite participants to elaborate on responses to enrich data collected. To ensure that the participants' ideas, thoughts, anecdotes and experiences were recorded correctly, the interviews were recorded on an iPhone and later transcribed by the researcher. As part of the participation agreement, the researcher sent the transcribed interviews to the participants within one week of the interview, the participant then had the opportunity to add, delete or alter their answers and return the transcribed interview to the researcher for analysis.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with both primary school teachers from the participating ILE School and the three head teachers in charge of the school readiness programmes from the three participating ECE centres. Each interview lasted up to 30 minutes and took place at a time that was convenient to the participant. The semi-structured interviews of the primary teachers took place at the school in the private board room, ensuring confidentiality. Two of the semi-structured interviews with the early childhood teachers took place in private rooms at their centres, while one early childhood teacher opted to have the interview at the participating school location in the private board room. All interviews were conducted face-to-face. Prior to the interviews, as part of the informed consent process, all participants were provided with a letter outlining the purpose of the research project and the role in which they would participate, should they choose to. The participants were provided with an opportunity to accept or decline the invitation to participate in the research project (see appendix 3 and 4).

### **3.7.2 Questionnaires**

The second key data collection tool utilised was questionnaires. A questionnaire can collect both quantitative and qualitative data through the carefully selected questions posed to the participants, a point that is raised by Cohen, et al. (2000). Within this research project, the questionnaires were intentionally designed to be rich in data collection, collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, which is where the mixed methods approach to the research project was utilised (See appendix 8). The overarching aim of the questionnaire was to collect data and understand the transition to school process through the lens of the parent/caregiver of the child transitioning to school. The questionnaire sought to identify how parents/caregivers felt during their child's transition to school and whether they felt that the transition to school programme was comprehensive enough to support their special taonga. The questionnaire gathered rich quantitative data through asking the parents to rate the importance of different aspects of the transition to school process, enabling the researcher to analyse numerical data and move from theories regarding transition to school to conclusions. This was a deductive process gathering empirical data as outlined by Bryman (2004).

Parents/caregivers of students who had transitioned to school within the past three terms were invited to participate in the questionnaire process. A total of ten parents/caregivers were selected to participate. These were carefully selected to ensure that the scope included parents/caregivers from a varying range of transition groups over the three terms. The participants were provided with information about the research project prior to agreeing to participate to ensure that informed consent was gained (see appendix 5). The questionnaires were sent out to the participants through Google Forms, utilising the Google platform which was identified as being a tool that the participants were confident and competent in using. Google forms is a secure tool and all information is stored securely and is password protected. The Google form was a pre-designed form that allowed the parents/caregivers that participated in the research to fully be a part of the research project without it having a burdensome time impact,

identifying that these participants were extremely time-poor. They were able to review their answers before they submitted them, however, once submitted, they were unable to change any answers.

### **3.7.3 Focus Groups**

Focus groups are identified as "... a form of group interview that capitalises on communication between research participants in order to generate data" Further, Kitzinger (1995) highlights three critical advantages of utilising a focus group approach within a research project:

*Do not discriminate against people who cannot read or write*

*Can encourage participation from those who are reluctant to be interviewed on their own (such as those intimidated by the formality and isolation of a one to one interview)*

*Can encourage contributions from people who feel they have nothing to say or who are deemed "unresponsive patients" (but engage in the discussion generated by other group members)*

*(p. 300).*

Within the realm of an interpretivist paradigm, a focus group supports the researcher's ability to get in tune with the participants fully supporting the humanistic approach. Krueger (1998) further explores this discussing that in utilising a focus group approach the interviewer is able to explore the reality of the interviewee in a more authentic way.

Within this research project focus groups were held with a group of ten students who had recently transitioned to school, with equal proportions of genders represented. The prerequisite to having recently transitioned was important to ensure that the focus group was made up of participants who shared similar experiences, which in turn allows the group to shift from personal explanations to the "exploration of structural solutions" (Kitzinger, 1995, p. 300). Given the age and stage of the participating students, the focus group approach was taken to ensure that students were able to "explore and clarify their views in ways that would be less easily

accessible in a one to one interview.” (Kitzinger, 1995, p. 299). Prior to commencing, informed consent was gained from both the parents/caregivers of students participating and the students participating. It was ensured that all precautions were taken to ensure that the students had a clear understanding of what they were consenting to (see appendix 9). The students participated in three focus groups over a period of three weeks, each taking approximately 30 minutes in total. The focus groups followed a clear agenda of questions or discussion points (see appendix 10). The questions or discussion points were carefully planned to elicit as much rich information from the students to assist in shaping the findings of the research project.

To minimise the risk of identifying the participants it was assured that no personal details would be published to ensure that all participants were protected. Students who participated in the focus groups did so in a separate room within the school during school hours. To safeguard all students, focus group data were not available for review due to the data containing others student’s contributions. This process ensured that all participants were secure and the risk of potential harm was minimised.

#### **3.7.4 Data Analysis**

Miles, Huberman, & Saldana (2014) identify the three concurrent flows of activity in qualitative data analysis which are data condensation, data display and drawing conclusions. Data condensation is a continuous process throughout the research project in terms of coding data and identifying emerging themes. This is part of a transformational process until the research project is complete. Data display is when data are compressed and the information allows for conclusions to be drawn. Drawing conclusions is the period in which the researcher is able to verify their research question and this assists in assuring the validity of the research project.

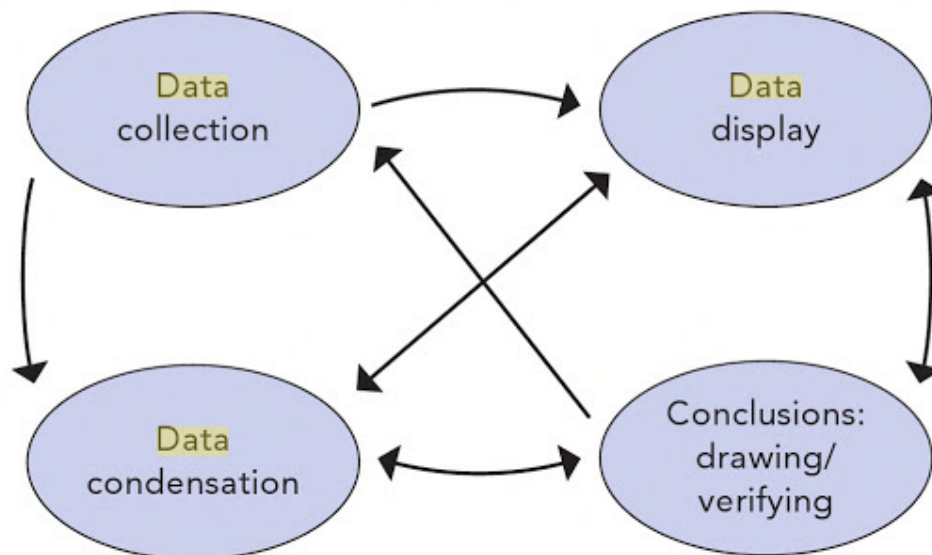


Figure 3: Components of Data Analysis: Interactive Model  
(Miles & Huberman, 1994)

This type of data analysis can also be described as “thematic analysis” (Mutch, 2005, p. 176). A key element of a thematic analysis approach is that the themes emerge as the research progresses as opposed to other qualitative data analysis where there is a set of predetermined categories. Ultimately, through the data, patterns and themes will become apparent, a point supported by Braun & Clarke (2006) and Mutch (2005). Within this research project the research question accompanied by the data collection methods employed, semi-structured interviews, questionnaires and focus groups lent towards adopting the thematic analysis of the data. Through a combination of all three data collection methods, the key themes were drawn and explored, ensuring that this research project was well placed within the interpretivist paradigm.

In acknowledging that this research project adopted a mixed method approach it is important to also discuss the quantitative data analysis. Tukey (1961) defined data analysis as

*"Procedures for analyzing data, techniques for interpreting the results of such procedures, ways of planning the gathering of data to make its analysis easier, more precise or more accurate, and all*

*the machinery and results of (mathematical) statistics which apply to analyzing data.” (as cited in Jones, 1986, p. 393).*

Although this was a small portion of the research project it was integral in contributing to the drawing of key themes emerging from the data. The numerical data gathered through the questionnaires can be defined as exploratory data. These exploratory data were used to support the summary of the important themes within this research project and are displayed through visual graphs.

Ultimately, this research project was planned as a mixed method approach to research underpinned by the interpretivist paradigm. The data collection tools employed were semi-structured interviews, questionnaires and focus groups. The data collected through each of these tools, despite being qualitative or quantitative data, were analysed using a thematic approach to ensure that the data were relevant in developing an understanding of the guiding research question and fitting with the research paradigm.

### **3.8 Ethical Considerations**

#### **3.8.1 Maintaining Quality and Validity**

When designing and carrying out a research project it is imperative that the researcher considers the validity of the research, ensuring that the research is reliable, that the data are collected in an appropriate way and that the research project is safe for participants. It is highlighted by Cohen, et al. (2000), that “Ethical concerns encountered in educational research in particular can be extremely complex...” (p. 49). This section will discuss the ways in which this research project maintains quality and will place it within the educational research context.

#### **3.8.2 Reliability, Validity and Creditability**

When undertaking a research project, the quality of the project is carefully considered and actions are put in place to ensure the reliability, validity and credibility of the project. As McMillan & Schumacher (1993) highlight, this lies in the researcher’s ability to accurately record, analyse and interpret the participants’ perspectives. In order to do this, it is vital that

ethical approval is gained and that the researcher has a clear understanding of how to carry out an ethical research project to ensure the safety of all participants.

To ensure reliability and validity, this research project will uphold the regulations and guidelines within the agreements made under the Ethical Conduct in Human research and Related Activities Regulations (University of Waikato, 2009). These guidelines ensure that the researcher has a clear understanding of their ethical responsibilities within the research project. Further, ensuring a triangulation utilising a mixed methods approach is vital especially when studying human behaviour. Cohen et al. (2008) highlight that "... triangular techniques in the social sciences attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour from more than one standpoint and, in doing so, by making use of both quantitative and qualitative data" (p. 141). Bell (1999) discusses the way in which research underpinned by the interpretivist paradigm is at risk of being influenced by the researcher's views and bias. This is further supported by Malterud (2001) who states that "A researcher's background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions" (p. 483-484). It is assured that the researcher remained unbiased throughout the research design and, over the course of the research project, the researcher has ensured that the project is transparent in the analysis of data and reporting of findings.

### **3.8.3 Relationship with the participants**

The researcher carrying out this research project was employed at the participating ILE school within a senior role therefore, the primary teachers interviewed were colleagues of the researcher. It is acknowledged that the teachers could potentially have felt obligated to participate within the research project and that this relationship could have been subjective in the participating teacher's responses to the questions. It was made clear from the outset that confidentiality and anonymity were at the forefront of this research project to ensure the participants were protected. The

participants were well aware that they were entering into the research project voluntarily, had the right to withdraw from the research project at any time without explanation up until the analysis of the data and could discuss any concerns directly with the research supervisor.

### **3.8.4 Researching Children**

Researching children can raise ethical concerns however, it is vitally important as “An interest in researching children’s experience can, therefore, be allied to a moral perspective on the role and status of children which respects and promotes their entitlement to being considered as persons of value and persons with rights” (Greene & Hill, 2005. p. 3). This research, conducted through an interpretivist paradigm was committed to ensuring the safety of all participants. Markula & Silk (2011) highlight that in research conducted through an interpretivist paradigm there are varying perspectives captured with no one response being any more correct than any others. All participants were made aware of this approach. The research followed the guidelines indicated by (Lewis, 2002) to ensure that all participants both adults and learners have the same ethical entitlements.

The six points that were adhered to were:

1. Access/gatekeepers
2. Consent/assent
3. Confidentiality/anonymity/secretcy
4. Recognition/feedback
5. Ownership
6. Social responsibility.

This highlights the importance of ensuring that the learners are in control as to whether or not they participate within the study and of voicing their

experiences throughout as they are the gatekeepers of their own information.

This research project was designed with the learner's voice being equal to all participating stakeholders' perspectives and a critical aspect of this research project. James (1995) has developed a model which envisages "children as research subjects comparable with adults, but understands children to possess different competencies, a conceptual modification which permits researchers to engage more effectively with the diversity of childhood" (p. 14).

Throughout the focus groups, the strengths of the learners were drawn on in order to create an equal ground where learners are actors in the research, rather than subjects of research ensuring that they are able to communicate their experiences in meaningful ways (Mason & Danby, 2011). To ensure the safety of the learners, parents and learners were well informed about the research and this information was carefully designed to be age-appropriate to the learners. This research followed the notion of ethical symmetry put forward by Christensen & Prout (2002), this meaning that "the ethical relationship between researcher and informant is the same whether he or she conducts research with adults or with children" (p. 482).

### **3.9 Cultural Considerations**

In order for research to be successful it is important that the researcher is understanding of the cultures participating and ensures that steps are taken to maintain the safety and respect of participants. Guillemin & Gillam (2004) discuss that researchers must be reflexive in their practice. In being reflexive, the researcher must be considerate of the participants and their abilities to fully comprehend what is being asked, for example, considering whether English is a second language and ensuring steps are taken so that all participants are equals within the research project. Within this research project, the parents/caregivers and students that participated come from a variety of cultures and backgrounds. Because the researcher is a teacher, cultural competencies have previously been developed to

ensure that the researcher was culturally considerate of all participants, developing mutual respect and ensuring that the research project provided equal opportunities for sharing for all participants. This is discussed by Connelly & Clandinin (1990) as being integral in maintaining a culturally considerate climate throughout the research project.

### **3.10 Informed Consent**

Cohen et al. (2008) discuss the importance of all participants giving informed consent through being provided with clear information about expectations and therefore enabling them to make informed decisions. Further, Cohen, et al. (2008) discuss the participants' rights through the following lenses: competence, voluntarism, full information and comprehension. In order to ensure that all participants were well informed about the role that they play within the research project these four key elements remained at the forefront of the informed consent process as this was viewed as being imperative in safeguarding the participants and the research project.

All participants received a participant information sheet outlining the purpose and intent of the research with their role clearly indicated. In order to participate in the research project, all participants needed to sign a written informed consent form before any data were collected. Due to the ethics surrounding researching learners, to ensure that the learners were able to give informed consent a thorough consent process took place. Once the parents had indicated whether or not they would like their child to participate in the research, the learners were then talked through the research and what is involved and then shown the consent form that their parents received. As part of this process, the consent forms were discussed in terms of what they meant and any questions that the learners had surrounding this were answered. The learners were then guided through a consent process, they were asked to colour in a smiley face with the word yes if they want to participate or a frowny face with the word no if they did not want to participate. This ensured that consent had been gained from the learners in a meaningful and contextual manner.

In following this consent process, learners also had the right to decide not to participate even if their parents have given their consent. Protecting the researcher is also an important aspect of the research design. Cohen, et al (2000) note that “Consent protects and respects the right of self - determination and places some of the responsibility on the participant should anything go wrong in the research” ( p.51). Therefore it is imperative that informed consent is gained in order to also protect the researcher.

### **3.11 Conflict of Interest**

In a research project a common conflict of interest that can occur is the relationship between the participants and the researcher. Throughout this research project, the researcher continued to have normal contact with the students and their parents as well as colleagues. This was through the researcher’s role as both teacher and Associate Principal of Learning within the ILE school. However, in recognising this, it is identified that there are potentially power relationships between the researcher and the participants that need to be counteracted in order for the research participants to feel comfortable disclosing information. This is a point brought forward by Kervin, et al. (2006). Relationships play an integral part in this research project and whilst it is positive that trusting relationships are already formed between the participants and the researcher, participants were made aware of the researcher’s subjective and unbiased views on the research topic. Crossley & Vulliamy (1997) highlight this point, stating “... the process of familiarity which makes conversation – rather than interrogation possible” (p. 154). The conversations ensured a safe place to foster openness and share information and experiences.

### **3.12 Confidentiality/Anonymity**

Confidentiality/anonymity is paramount to ensuring the success of this research project. Kervin, et al. (2006) describe anonymity as “when the identity of the participant is unknown to anybody including the researcher” (p. 5) while confidentiality is “when the researcher is aware of the identity of participants by does not reveal their identity in reporting data” (p. 5).

Due to the qualitative nature of this research anonymity could not be guaranteed as in order for the research to be successful, the participants needed to share their personal experiences within the transition to school process. All steps were taken to minimise the risk of identifying participants through ensuring that any personal details including their names were not disclosed at the point of reporting the data. To further reduce this risk and safeguard the anonymity of the participants where necessary further steps were taken to ensure the anonymity of the participants, for example through the use of pseudonyms. It has also been assured that the school and the contributing centres are not named.

The following chapter will present the findings of the research project.

## Chapter Four: Findings

### 4.1 Overview of chapter

This chapter will examine and analyse the data that was gathered in student focus groups, parental questionnaires and interviews with primary teachers and early childhood teachers. This research was investigated under the following research question:

What does successful transition from Early Childhood Education (ECE) to an Innovative Learning Environment (ILE) in a primary school setting involve?

To further guide the process, the following questions underpinned the research project:

What is regarded as a successful transition from ECE to primary ILEs?

What role do relationships play in the transition process from ECE to an ILE in a primary setting?

What do parents/caregivers think is important for a successful transition from ECE to an ILE in a primary setting?

How can the needs of all learners be met during transition from ECE to an innovative learning environment in a primary setting?

In what ways can teaching teams across sectors, initiate and develop effective relationships during the transition process between ECE and ILEs in a primary setting?

The gathered data about the transition to school process are from the perspectives of learners, parents/caregivers, early childhood teachers and primary school teachers. This chapter will be arranged using the key themes drawn from the data. These are; developing a sense of belonging, reciprocal relationships, the transition of the parents/caregivers, school

readiness and cross sector development. I have included quotes to ensure that the perspectives and voice of the participants were captured.

The interviews with both the Primary and ECE teachers sought to understand their perspectives on the transition to school process (see appendix 1 and 2). These interviews were semi-structured and data were drawn from asking planned and spontaneous questions. A total of seven semi-structured interviews were held. Three interviews were held with the heads of the school readiness programmes at the Early Childhood Education Centre's (centre A, centre B and centre C) and four interviews were held with colleagues within the participating school.

A total of ten parents filled in the Google forms questionnaire that sought their perspectives about transition to school for their children. The parents who answered the questionnaires were the parents of the children taking part in the three focus groups.

## **4.2 Developing a sense of belonging**

### **4.2.1 Developing a sense of belonging from a parental perspective**

Given that Innovative Learning Environments are a relatively new phenomenon there is uncertainty about how ILEs operate from day to day. Therefore, the need for strong systems and communication is essential in assisting parents in developing a sense of belonging. The responses to parental questionnaire indicated that parents held strong views on the need for prompt communication that allowed them plenty of time to be organised.

*“A bit more communication in the lead up so we had a clearer idea of what to expect with visits/timing” (Participant A questionnaire data)*

*“Leading up to the transition visits it would have been good to get notice about what to expect during each of the three transition visits” (Participant I questionnaire data)*

*“I would have preferred more communication from the school a few months out from visits starting (for planning purposes and peace of mind)”* (Participant A questionnaire data)

*“Potentially contact could have been made with us a little earlier to arrange time of work etc. for the school visits”* (Participant D questionnaire data)

Parents stated that they would like to have more written information about the school and how teaching and learning works, to enable them to develop an understanding of the ILE.

*“Information about the school would be great. Specific information about the junior school and the way in which it is structured would be helpful too”* (Participant C questionnaire data)

*“Some better written collateral around helping parents understand the differences between day care and school along with some more practical information about what you and your child will encounter...The school visits were certainly helpful but could have been backed up better with some additional written material about how things worked and how the school days would likely differ from daycare”* (Participant F questionnaire data)

Building upon this, the regularity of visits in order to become more comfortable with the environment was a common theme drawn from the parental questionnaire. It was highlighted that parents see a need for their children to participate in at least three transition to school visits. Parents highlighted that they felt the current number of visits was a good number, however, they would have preferred if the visits became increasingly longer to allow their child more experiences of the school day before beginning school.

*“I think 2-3 visits is probably fine”* (Participant A questionnaire data)

*“We attended 2 visits – perhaps more would have been good as a lead in (they were available, I wasn’t very organised)” (Participant C questionnaire data)*

*“My child had one school visit with her daycare centre and then two school visits with her parents before starting which was really good to ease her into the ‘school’ way of life. Perhaps having the school visits slightly longer on the second and third visits might be beneficial. One hour didn’t seem like long enough” (Participant D questionnaire data)*

*“School visits were scheduled for the same session of the day. It would be helpful for the children and parents if the visits are at different times during the day so that we can experience different routines of the day. For example, 1<sup>st</sup> visit morning session, 2<sup>nd</sup> visit around lunch time, 3<sup>rd</sup> visit – afternoon session” (Participant G questionnaire data)*

*“I liked that they had 3 sessions to interact with the teachers & other children in the school... I would have liked for my child to spend more time for each subsequent visit after the first” (Participant H questionnaire data)*

#### *4.2.1.1 Barriers to developing a sense of belonging*

One barrier to developing a sense of belonging reported by parents was that some parents were busy and working and their children were in before and after school care. As a result, the parents themselves did not often get opportunities to stop and engage in conversation with the teachers.

*“My husband and I both work fulltime so making it in to see the teachers face to face is very hard” (Participant E questionnaire data)*

Parental feelings on the first day has an impact on the child’s confidence and therefore the child’s ability to feel comfortable and connected to their

new environment. When parents were asked how they felt on their child's first day of school, 2 out of 10 parents surveyed reported experiencing negative emotions and used words to describe feelings such as being anxious, teary, nervous and worried. This was indicated by the following parental comments when describing how they felt on the first day:

*"Initially awful"* (Participant D questionnaire data)

*"Anxious, nervous, teary and worried"* (Participant E questionnaire data)

Additionally, 2 out of 10 parents reported that they felt positive emotions which they described using words such as confident and excited. However, the strongest feelings expressed by parents were feelings of mixed emotions, with six out of 10 parents reportedly feeling both happy and sad. They described their feelings as:

*"loss and sadness"* (Participant C questionnaire data)

*"I was very proud of my little girl as she was very confident and so ready to start school. I was also a little nervous for her"* (Participant B questionnaire data)

*"Happy, excited, a bit teary... nervous"* (Participant F questionnaire data)

*"Happy, excited, a bit teary"* (Participant G questionnaire data)

*"I was a bag of emotions on the first day"* (Participant H questionnaire data)

*"Mixed emotions – happy, sad, worried, excited, feeling old"* (Participant J questionnaire data)

The data gathered indicated that there were contributing factors for parents in feeling these emotions. These included time constraints when dropping their child off, concern that their children were aware of the

physical environment and routines of the school and that their child would make friends and not be lonely. For example, Participant E stated that:

*“As parents, we just wanted to be sure that she knew what she needed to be doing and when, practical and social things like where the toilets are”* (Participant E questionnaire data)

Findings highlighted that the physical and social environments were very important to parents when initially leaving their children. Parents feeling comfortable within the environment has a follow on effect to the learners feeling more comfortable and therefore their ability to develop a sense of belonging within the environment is increased. The large classroom combined with more than one teacher being present was described by participants as being a barrier to feeling comfortable for the parents. For example, Participant D described this as:

*“...walking into a huge room and not having that one point of contact to walk immediately to settle (child’s name) was hard. I think we got passed around three teachers before we found his one, this was unsettling as I was used to the old classroom setting with my older son of a smaller room and one teacher”* (Participant D questionnaire data)

It was interesting to note that parent’s emotions were evoked by the actual transition between the early childhood centre and school with some parents feeling ‘old’ (Participant J) and experiencing a sense of loss or grief in leaving their child’s previous education setting. This is evident when Participant A commented:

*“Honestly, my strongest emotion was one of loss and sadness for him leaving his kindy”* (Participant A questionnaire data)

#### **4.2.2 Developing a sense of belonging from the student’s perspective**

During the focus groups the learners were asked to describe what was important for them to know before beginning school, thus indicating the development of a sense of belonging within the new context. It was

recorded that 10 out of 10 learners showed a desire to know the rules and expectations of the Learning Community. Further, all learners expressed the importance of feeling part of a group, for example:

*“I wanted to know who my Ako teacher was before I started”* (Child A focus group)

All learners agreed that this was important to them. Further, it was expressed

*“I wanted to know what groups I was in”* (Child I focus group)

It is recorded that all other learners then agreed that they would have also have felt more positive about the experience if they were equipped with the information about what Ako group they were joining and who the teacher of the Ako group was. The data collected also indicated that all the learners showed a strong affinity towards the importance of knowing where key areas of the school were. Upon further probing these key areas were identified as the playground, the toilets and learning resources that are needed to be successful within the new environment

*“I wanted to know where learning games and toys were for can do time”* (Child C focus group)

*“I didn’t know where the toilets were when I was at the playground”*  
(Child F focus group)

#### *4.2.2.1 Barriers to developing a sense of belonging*

Developing a sense of belonging is highlighted as important in terms of feeling settled and positive towards the first day of school. The majority of students indicated that they had negative feelings about their first day of school. The data show that 8 out of the 10 learners described their feelings on the first day with words such as scared, sad and nervous. Examples of these are.

*“I was nervous”* (Child B focus group)

*“I was a little nervous”* (Child D focus group)

The data shows that parents leaving contributed to these feelings with 5 out of the 10 learners highlighting that these feelings were because their parents left them. An example of this is Child F highlighting that:

*“I was sad because my Mum and Dad left”* (Child F focus group)

It would appear that contributing factors for the learners feeling negative emotions on their first days can also be attributed to social needs. This is demonstrated through Child J and Child D’s comments:

*“I was sad because I had no friends”* (Child J focus group)

*“I was sad because there was lots of people”* (Child D focus group)

It is interesting to note that the two learners who were not scared, upset or nervous were boys who shared:

*“I was happy because I like reading and writing”* (Child A focus group)

*“I was happy”* (Child I focus group)

#### **4.2.3 Developing a sense of belonging from a primary teacher’s perspective**

In order to gather data from the perspective of the primary teachers, the teachers were asked to describe in semi-structured interviews the current transition to school programme. Through this dialogue, the teachers have outlined the key ways that both the learners and the parents/caregivers develop a sense of belonging.

The data show that becoming familiar with the environment is critical in developing a sense of belonging as outlined by Teacher A:

*“...they get to see a lot of the school they see the class programme, they see outside, they get the tour, they know the lay of the land”*  
(Teacher A interview)

Further, Teacher C reiterates the importance of becoming familiar with the new context. It is discussed that it is imperative due to the differences between what education was like for the parents/caregivers as opposed to what it will be like for their learners.

*“The parents get to see what learning within the learning community looks like because it is very different from their own schooling experiences. They get to view the facilities of the school they get an indication of what their child’s day and learning will look like within our learning community. They get information about assessment and reporting structure” (Teacher C interview)*

Teacher B further adds to this point by highlighting that the parents becoming familiar with the new context is equally as important as the process for the learners. This is because the parents also need to develop a sense of belonging. Teacher B discusses the three contributing factors that the transition to school programme need to possess in order to develop the parent’s sense of belonging:

*“The first one is the localisation, feel good environment transition morning. The parents are localised in learning community one, the parents can stay and immerse themselves into discovery learning with their transitioning student. The second one is where the learners are in the community without the parents there. The team leader meets with the parents and takes them through the power point where she explains what the school is all about. She takes them through everything from the teaching and learning programmes in learning community one to uniforms, stationery and anything else they may need at this time. This is also an opportunity to ask questions... then they end with the last visit which is a meet and greet with our friends of Endeavour. This enhances their sense of belonging with other parents and is an opportunity to ask any further questions regarding life at school” (Teacher B interview)*

Being able to address the learners by their names was useful assisting in developing a sense of belonging. Teacher D discusses this:

*“I will try and sort of get to know them, learn their names and begin forming a relationship with them”* (Teacher D interview)

#### **4.2.4 Developing a sense of belonging from the Early childhood teacher perspective**

The data showed that all three early childhood teachers emphasized a desire to link in with the school and have regular visits with the participating school. Their dialogue shows that they feel regular visits would ultimately assist with the learners in their care becoming familiar with their new school context and therefore assist in developing a sense of belonging. It is highlighted that the reasoning behind this is the notion of being able to prepare learners for the differences in environments. An example of this is the teacher of Centre A stating:

*“I guess you can’t prepare a child for that unless they were going to see you... I think those visits are really valuable, even if the children are only getting to go to one or two it’s still an insight for them”*  
(Teacher, Centre A interview)

### **4.3 Reciprocal Relationships**

This section will discuss the data gathered from the research project that foregrounds the theme of reciprocal relationships as being useful during the transition to school process from ECE to the ILE. These are discussed from the perspectives of parents, students, primary teachers and early childhood teachers. The relationships that are brought forward are parent – teacher relationships, child – teacher relationships and peer relationships.

#### **4.3.1 Parental perspectives on relationships**

##### *4.3.1.1 Parental perspective on parent - teacher relationships*

The data show that all 10 parents who completed the questionnaire felt that they had formed a relationship with their child’s Ako Group teacher. Parents used words such as comfortable, approachable and welcomed in

describing the attributes of the teachers that were important in the development of relationships. An example of this are:

*“... all the teachers are warm, open and friendly”* (Participant G questionnaire data)

*“warm, open and friendly”* (Participant A questionnaire data)

*“...very welcoming”* (Participant C questionnaire data)

*“...friendly and welcoming”* (Participant B questionnaire data)

And,

*“lovely”* (Participant E questionnaire data)

Further, five parents also described the teachers as

*“Approachable”* (Participants D, F, I, J questionnaire data)

Two participants discussed the way in which time plays a role in the developing of relationships with the teachers, stating

*“As a parent, I am still developing a relationship with the teachers”*  
(Participant G questionnaire data)

*“I would prefer having more time spent one on one with teachers to build the relationships but had enough time to approach them about any questions”* (Participant H questionnaire data)

Further, two participants also brought forward the fact that the parents predominantly spent most of the transition time with the Team Leader during the transition to school programme. They reported that they felt most comfortable with the Team Leader. This was due to most of their contact during the transition to school phase being with the Team Leader. They reported:

*“I felt very welcomed by the Head Teacher who made a point of speaking to me personally”* (Participant C questionnaire data)

*“Probably more so the lead teacher Ms Wakeman as she ran the transition programme” (Participant D questionnaire data)*

The data also brings forward that these relationships have the potential to be strengthened during the transition to school process with one parent highlighting that:

*“...the transitions to school would have been the best time to get to know his ako teacher (which I understood as the go to teacher for any issue)” (Participant E questionnaire data)*

This is also affirmed by other participants, sharing their views of how this could have been better approached from their perspectives during the transition to school programme. It is highlighted that the parents place importance in the teachers greeting them when they come into the school and initially that they take the time to introduce themselves. The parents highlight that:

*“I would prefer having more time spent one on one with the teachers to build relationship but had enough time with them to approach them about any questions. I would also prefer if the teachers could take some time to introduce themselves to us during visits and after transitions (during first week of school for instance) & to advise me of which one of them had my child in their various learning workshops” (Participant H questionnaire data)*

*“A few teachers didn't make a big effort in greeting parents as they entered the learning space - so perhaps a collective welcome and introduction would be helpful. Even a video welcome which could be played in the staffroom before entering the learning space could be helpful. Takes the pressure off the staff to have to meet and greet while teaching” (Participant C questionnaire data)*

Parents reported that meeting the child's Ako teacher during the transition to school visits would have better supported the transition to school in the development of relationships.

*“Meeting his ako teacher to share some information about him”*  
(Participant G questionnaire data)

*“A full introduction to the teachers”* (Participant D questionnaire data)

*“It would have been nice to have met the ako teacher first as the first day felt quite unsettling not knowing who to see”* (Participant E questionnaire data)

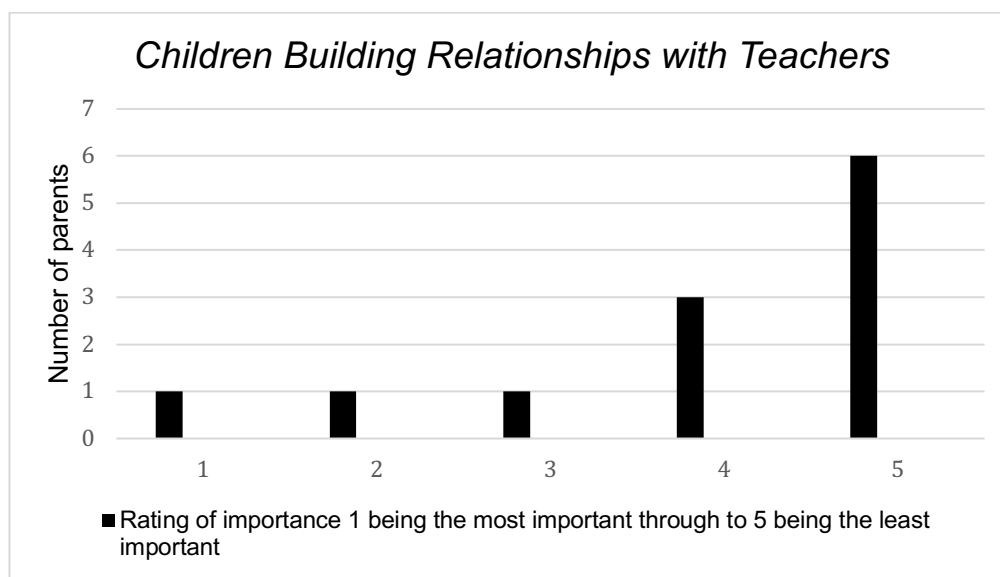
Another constraint discussed was the differences in ratios between ECE and the primary context. An example of this is Participant F stating:

*“The ratio of students to teachers is much higher than day care to begin with, then there's less opportunity to interact with you as teachers”* (Participant F questionnaire data)

#### 4.3.1.2 Parental perspective on Child – Teacher relationships

Table 1 shows that out of the 10 parents surveyed, one parent rated their child forming relationships with teachers as being the most important factor, while six parents rated this as being the least important factor in the transition to school process.

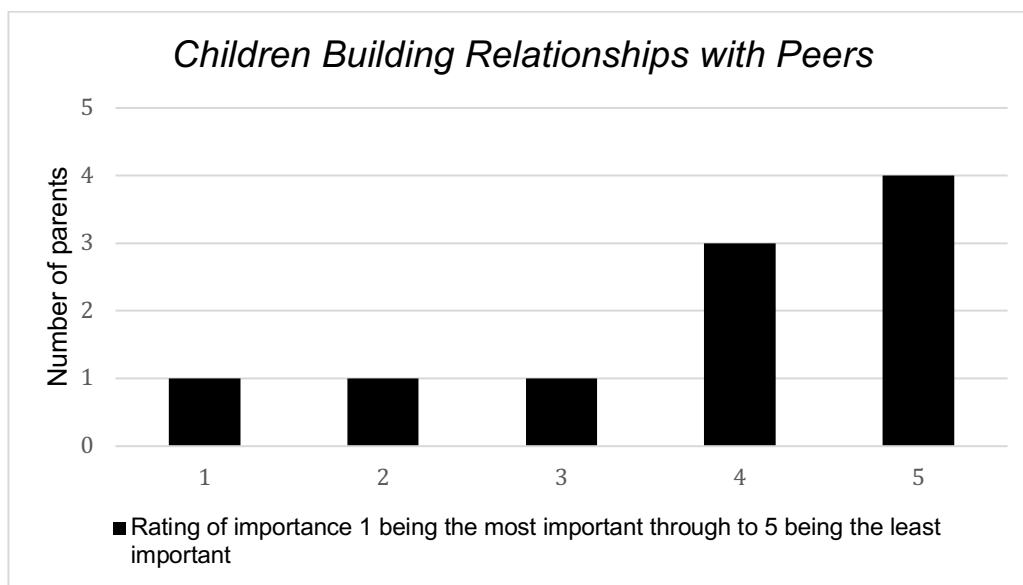
Figure 4: Children Building Relationships with Teachers



#### 4.3.1.3 Parental perspectives on peer relationships

Table 2 demonstrates that parents did not place high value in their children forming relationships with peers.

Figure 5: Children Building Relationships with Peers



#### 4.3.2 Learner perspectives on relationships

##### 4.3.2.1 Learner perspectives on Learner – Teacher relationships

During the focus group the learners were asked to draw a picture of all of the teachers that they knew before beginning school. The data show that all of the learners drew the Team Leader of their learning environment. This was the teacher who led their transition to school process. All students also drew the Principal of the school. When questioned how they knew the Principal before beginning school, a strong theme that was evident was that their parents had talked to them about the Principal and showed them who the Principal was on the website, or pointed him out during school visits. Out of the 10 participants, two learners drew pictures of their Ako teacher.

##### 4.3.2.2 Learner perspectives on Peer relationships

All of the participants in the focus groups reported the strong desire to have formed relationships with their peers prior to starting school. They discussed how it was positive when they knew students attending the school. It was highlighted that different ways that they knew peers prior to

starting school was through such places as dancing, swimming and from attending the same ECE centres. When probed further, learners discussed the way it made them feel safe and comfortable.

### **4.3.3 Primary Teacher perspectives on relationships**

#### *4.3.3.1 Primary teacher perspectives on Teacher – Learner relationships*

All teachers reported a strong affinity towards the development of relationships with learners during the transition to school period. A key theme that has been drawn from the primary teachers' interviews is that relationships with the learners are integral to them having a successful start to school. All teachers were unanimous in their beliefs that creating opportunities to get to know the learners, including learning their names and forming connections with them and their families, is imperative to the transition programme being successful for all learners. The following quotes highlight the Primary teachers' perspectives on Teacher – Learner relationships.

*“Relationships are huge I think, getting to know the children. You’ve got to build the relationship to earn the respect and to make them feel comfortable, but not only just with the children but with the parents and its building that rapport you know giving them that welcoming feeling” (Teacher A interview)*

*“So basically, relationships are paramount to a successful transition to Endeavour School. It is essential to build strong relationships with the parents, their learners and any people connected to our school. The “village raising the child” which aligns to the collaborative way we teach” (Teacher B interview)*

*“Relationships are more important than anything else because as a parent that is all you care about especially with your first child. Because all you want is for your child to be happy because if those relationships are not strong your child is not going to settle and they’re not going to learn” (Teacher C interview)*

*“I think it is really important the children getting to develop relationships with us the teachers” (Teacher D interview)*

#### 4.3.3.2 Primary Teacher perspectives on Teacher – Parent relationship

Three teachers highlighted the importance of developing relationships with the parents of transitioning school prior to the learner beginning school.

Teacher A discusses that she believes the parents have opportunities to meet a range of key stakeholders in their learner’s education during the transition visits, from classroom teachers through to senior management. This teacher also states that if parents feel they have built strong relationships within the school, this will filter down to the learners and play a role in them feeling more comfortable and secure within the school context.

*“I think the parents think it's great at our school because they get to meet such a range of our staff so they do get to meet management, they get to meet the team leader they get to meet us as the classroom teachers so I think it's important all of those relationships with the parent and then for the child - I guess if the parents are comfortable in the school the child, that will kind of wear down to the child as well, so um yeah, I have definitely noticed the parents who are feeling more comfortable the children have a smoother transition ” (Teacher A interview)*

Teacher B builds upon this and further discusses the shared responsibility of forming relationships within ILE type contexts.

*“So, I guess it is connections with the parents, certainly a connection with the student and the environment. This is a collective responsibility and not just left up to the team leader. We all have a role in ensuring that the child connects with the teachers and the environment” (Teacher B interview)*

Teacher C discusses the way that parents need to be thoroughly informed about how relationships within the school work, in order to understand and

feel comfortable within the context. This teacher also identifies the difficulties that parents might have within these contexts as there are multiple stakeholders as opposed to one key teacher.

*“The parents need a clear idea about how the day looks like in regards to what is the role of the ako teacher is, how the child has workshops with a variety of teachers who their first point of contact is for questions issues and concerns. It’s not just on one teacher, it’s the community that will look after your child not just one particular teacher. Some parents probably find that quite a hard concept because they want “a person” and that’s not how we operate here”* (Teacher C interview)

This data demonstrate that the teachers have an awareness and understanding of the difficulties parents face in terms of building relationships with teachers within an ILE context.

#### **4.3.4 Early childhood teachers’ perspectives on relationships**

##### *4.3.4.1 Early childhood teachers perspectives on Teacher – Parent relationships*

During the semi-structured interviews, the Early Childhood Teachers were asked to discuss how they form relationships with the parents of learners within their care. This is relevant and important to the transition to school process as parents place high trust in the Early Childhood Teachers and their perspectives and views of their learners.

Centre A has a strong focus on culture and understanding the learner’s and parent’s culture in order to form genuine, respectful relationships with the parents.

*“We talk more about their culture and their background because we realized that that was something that was missing. Because they came from another room we already knew that information but actually we need the parents to feel like they have a place and actually bring in their cultural side as well and also their family side”* (Teacher Centre A interview)

Centre B keeps the learner's educational needs at the forefront and discusses the way that relationships are formed through a shared understanding and commitment to accelerating learners to achieve the parents' aspirations.

*"...what we have been doing for this past year (to build relationships with parents) is increasing more of an understanding of what their aspirations are for their children" (Teacher Centre B interview)*

Centre C draws similarities to Centre A in terms of developing a strong understanding of the parents and their backgrounds in order to develop reciprocal relationships.

*"Well it's kind of like a cornerstone part of what we do, building relationships with our families, our four key values that we have that run through our philosophy is caring, educational, structured and fun so the caring aspect runs not only for our children but for all of their families. So, we make a point of being very welcoming to our parents when they come into the centre each day. We like to find out about the whole family so that we have got aspects to talk to parents about so that it is not just about their child it is about their whole families as well" (Teacher Centre C interview)*

#### **4.4 Parents/caregivers perspectives on successful transition**

Parents outlined in the questionnaire that they found the transition to school programme useful or key in supporting transition to school. Parents/caregivers were generally very positive towards the transition to school programme and the way in which it met the needs of their learners. One important aspect of this was becoming familiar with the environment, parents highlighted that:

*"I felt the transition to school programme ensured that she had gained a sense of belonging within the school" (Participant I questionnaire data)*

*“As parents, we just wanted to be sure that she knew what she needed to be doing and when, practical and social things like where the toilets are etc” (Participant B questionnaire data)*

*“Being invited into the school for assemblies, grandparent’s days etc. also helps you feel part of the school as a family” (Participant A questionnaire data)*

*“Before School induction programme for child/parents was good and interaction with the school was good which helped put us at ease” (Participant B questionnaire data)*

*“My child enjoyed the visits and loved all the different activities they explored” (Participant H questionnaire data)*

One parent highlighted the need for a buddy programme to support peer relationships

*“...it appeared there was no buddy system in place – which may have helped us feel more comfortable in the first few days of her attending school” (Participant B questionnaire data)*

Regular and ongoing contact with parents was brought forward as necessary in order to assist with parents feeling more comfortable within their identity as the parent of a school learner.

*“Have a catch up with new parents probably around the 4-6-week mark to actually talk about how their child is settling in” (Participant B questionnaire data)*

*“I like to get regular updates about my child’s progress at school” (Participant G questionnaire data)*

*“It would have been nice to have more regular in-person feedback (during drop off or pick up times) about how my child was doing in those early weeks at school” (Participant H questionnaire data)*

Making connections with other stakeholders in the transition to school process was highlighted as a positive aspect of the transition programme. This is because it allowed them to be immersed in a different facet of the school community.

*“Having a member of the PTA running through everything all the admin and events and being there to answer any questions was really great”* (Participant E questionnaire data)

*“PTA president’s discussion was informative (everything from joining sports teams to where to get uniforms from)”* (Participant A questionnaire data)

*“... good to get parent and teachers perspectives of the school and meeting other mothers of children starting at the same time”* (Participant I questionnaire data).

## **4.5 School Readiness**

### **4.5.1 Findings of research from the perspectives of the Primary Teachers**

All Primary teachers who participated in this research project demonstrated a shared understanding of what they believed to be key components of the preschool skill set of a learner transitioning to school. These are focussed around the development of fine and gross motor skills, self-management skills, as well as social skills. This is evident within Teacher A’s comments:

*“I definitely think their gross motor skills are a high priority I definitely don’t think they need to be sitting down and doing lots of focussed activities before they start school so the more gross motor skills activities the better. Communicating so talking and listening and sitting still on a mat. Follow a simple instruction, being able to pack their bag and self manage some of their belongings. Go to the toilet, wash their hands, hold a pen and maybe write their name or recognise their name”* (Teacher A interview)

Teacher B brings forward the concept that the learners need to feel confident within the environment and within themselves. This is evident within the comment:

*“Also, they are okay with mum going. They know who they are and they are okay. This place is okay, mum is okay with it and they are all good to go”* (Teacher C interview)

Learners having developed some early social skills is also an evident theme throughout the interviews. An example of this is from Teacher D:

*“The ability to share and take turns, I think having social skills, so small group work pre-coming to school so they do know how to ask and answer questions and some of those things along those lines.”* (Teacher D interview)

#### **4.5.2 Findings of research from the perspectives of the Early Childcare Education Teachers**

Drawing on the data gathered from the interviews with the Early Childhood Teachers, four key elements of ensuring that learners were prepared for school were discussed. These were: them as the teachers understanding ILEs, developing foundational skills, developing social competencies and developing self management skills.

A key belief of these professionals is that in order for the transition to school process to be successful for all learners, the ECE teachers need to have a developed understanding of the environment that the learners are transitioning into. The teachers at each centre acknowledged the differences in the environments compared to the regular single cell contexts that they were used to preparing learners for.

A second key theme that was evident within the data was the need to develop the learner’s foundational skills in order for them to succeed in any environment.

*“...foundation skills obviously, their memory, their visual, their body control fine and gross motor skills - that makes up foundation skills”*  
(Teacher Centre A interview)

Each teacher also highlighted the importance of working with the learners to develop their social competencies.

*“I want them to go in there feeling confident that they’ve got the tools to ask for help, when their angry to know what to do with themselves because they’ll continue to learn that but to be able to have something that they can turn to”* (Teacher Centre A interview data)

*“...kindness those kinds of attributes we find really important”*  
(Teacher Centre B interview)

*“...just to have those social concepts down pat too, you know, sharing, taking turns, working with others”* (Teacher Centre C interview)

The last key theme evident within the data is the development of self-management skills.

*“And self-management is a big one for me and independence because if they can’t look after themselves or manage themselves they’re going to really struggle”* (Teacher Centre A interview)

*“I think hugely is those self help skills. Putting their things away, knowing what’s theirs, recognising their name is massive, I think it’s really important they can put their shoes on, take their jerseys off if they are hot or cold”* (Teacher Centre B interview)

*“They can look after their own belongings, that they can ask for help if they need it. Which is really important because they get to school and it’s this big place”* (Teacher Centre C interview)

The data showed that there were mixed feelings about providing academic-based activities for the learners in order to prepare them for school.

Centre A displayed a relaxed view on academic based activities, instead focussing on developing the learner in a more holistic way.

*“I think yeah body control, confidence, self-management, social competencies, those are our big things and what our program is around. Maths and literacy are the bottom of my pile, I’m just kind of like you’ll get the hang of that”* (Teacher Centre A interview)

Centre B discussed having a literacy and numeracy focus due to parental demand.

*“We do a letter of the week that has been very successful we have started merging a little bit with number of the week as well so instead of just doing a letter we try to do a number as well trying to get that terminology of those patterns to five, those facts to five and things like that so that’s been quite successful as well. This is a lot of what our parents have been asking for”* (Teacher Centre B interview)

Centre C had a heavy academic influence and highlighted that their beliefs were that developing early literacy and numeracy skills were imperative to a successful start to school.

*“I would think that pencil control, being able to hold a pencil and being able to write legible letter shapes, I think that it is important that they can write their name and count to 20 and sequence it. Know some letters and sounds because the more they know the better start they are going to have and the easier it is going to be. And a lot of our kids do know sounds and are starting to blend them before they start school”* (Teacher Centre C interview)

#### 4.5.2.1 School Readiness Programmes

All three centres who took part in the research had current 'School Readiness Programmes' to support learners with their transition to school. The Head Teachers interviewed were asked to describe these programmes. One finding of note is that two out of three programmes were driven by parental requests, rather than driven by the beliefs held by the centres and educators or curriculum. This has led to heavily academic-based programmes in the Early Childhood Centres. The following dialogue describes the School Readiness Programmes from the Head Teacher's perspectives.

*"It is 3 different activities over the week so we have a library program, they choose a library book and they fill out their library card. There is no pressure on them though if they are not sure how to write their name yet we just encourage them to practice holding a pencil to do some marks or pictures and they we do a literacy activity with them. We do just basic counting, how many friends we have got and then when we leave, can anyone tell me how many friends we had? And then we count backwards just to bring in a bit of numeracy as well and teaching them how to stay in a line and things like that, then we go back down the stairs. The second activity is group time and we try to base it all around foundation skills so it is the physical activities. So, it's about teaching them to remain balanced because obviously sitting is the hardest form of balance for a child. So, we do activities where they can slow their bodies down. Then our final activity that we do is lunch box day"* (Teacher Centre A interview)

*"We have been setting up for the children to write their names, we have a sign in sheet and they are very much asked to do it for their art work and things like that as well. We do a letter of the week that has been very successful we have started merging a little bit with number of the week as well so instead of just doing a letter we try to do a number as well trying to get that terminology of those patterns to five, those facts to five and things like that so that's been quite*

*successful as well. This is a lot of what our parents have been asking for” (Teacher Centre B interview)*

*“Our programme is called B4 5 and that originally it started before I started here but the programme came out of a need from parents, they were wanting a little bit more for their children before they were heading off to school. So, um yeah, the programme started when children hit six months before school starts, so they hit four and a half and then they’ll start this programme. So, the programme has definitely evolved over time and the premise behind it really is that readiness for school. Working with small groups and a teacher doing lots of that role modelling for each other, working together, lots of practical games and activities which are geared towards more of a literacy and numeracy base. So, we have the children partake in this twice a week They have probably a 20 minute session depending on what the activity is. So, it could be anything, it could be geared towards letters and sounds it could be geared towards writing, it could be geared towards blending of sounds, it could be looking at counting, shapes and numbers” (Teacher Centre C interview)*

#### **4.6 Cross sector development**

Within Education there are differing sectors. These are Early Childhood, Primary, Secondary and Tertiary. In order for transition to be successful, it is important that the differing sectors work collaboratively in order to achieve the best outcome for the students. Within this context there is a need for the ECE centres to work closely with schools and schools to work closely with the ECE centres. This is because in order to effectively equip students with the skills needed to be successful at school, ECE centres need to be aware of the different types of environments that the students are transitioning into and it is equally as important for the school to understand the ECE environment that the student has come from.

#### **4.6.1 Parent/caregivers perspectives on cross sector development**

The data gathered from the parent survey shows that 9 out of the 10 parents had identified that there was a disconnect between ECE centres and school through a lack of communicating or information sharing.

*“I think it would be ideal to see a closer link with the playcentre”*  
(Participant A questionnaire data)

One parent acknowledged the Team Leader’s attempt at bridging that gap, stating:

*“It was really good that they wanted to see his kindy portfolio the week he started”* (Participant G questionnaire data)

One parent highlighted that it was disappointing that when her child’s centre did share information with the school the school did not make the time to discuss this information with them as the parents.

*“I know that our daycare/kindy that our child transitioned from, provided a 1 page information sheet to the school about our child – however this was never acknowledged by the school or teachers, which I found disappointing as we had no idea if they read it, or the information got passed onto the teachers in her learning community”* (Participant B questionnaire data)

Other parents expressed views on wanting to see more links between the ECE centres and school.

*“Centres have spent often years with a child and their whānau and are often asked to support whānau with the transition process. It would have been nice to know that on paper the new teacher knows the personality of the child before they arrive”* (Participant E questionnaire data)

*“During the months before transition to school more interaction/preparation for those children”* (Participant F questionnaire data)

*“School or centre visits”* (Participant G questionnaire data)

*“I feel it would be important for the early childhood centres to provide as much information as possible to the school... in the hopes that this would give the teachers at school a better picture of where my child’s learning ability/level was prior to starting school”*  
(Participant H questionnaire data)

One parent identified that the ECE centre and the school already had a strong link which supported her child’s transition to school.

*“They are already linked, (the centre) did school visits which I thought was great”* (Participant D questionnaire data)

#### **4.6.2 Primary teacher perspectives on cross sector development**

Three out of four teachers interviewed discussed that they would like more communication from Early Childhood Centres about the learners that are transitioning. Some key points to include would be information around development and self-management skills. An example of this is Teacher D’s comments:

*“I think any information around their development and where they are at - can they hold a pencil; can they read and write their name or recognise the letters. Can they pack their bag like if the parents pick up can they do those things? And I think also around confidence of shyness levels”* (Teacher D interview)

Another aspect that teachers highlighted as important to gather information on is learner’s interests and their family. Teacher B comments on this:

*“I quite like the one page they send around the child’s interests, things that they like. A little bit about their family. If they are struggling to settle you can connect with something on there and then start to make connections with them. Early childhood visits, they get to visit schools and make connections and links with the school and the early childhood centre”* (Teacher B interview)

Teacher A brings forward the notion of teachers being time poor and the need for any information that teachers receive to be reflective of this.

*“Something really succinct, so we don’t have a lot of time so it’s really good when we get their big folders but often it’s hard to read through them. I know from my personal experience as a Mum, a short paragraph about my son was emailed to the school, which I think would be really helpful just a short little thing to read, just the basics about anything that is a concern or an interesting point”*  
(Teacher A interview)

#### **4.6.3 ECE teacher perspectives on cross sector development**

All three Early Childhood Centres that participated in this research shared vastly different views on the value of communicating with the transitioning learner’s school, with only one out of the three Centres actively handing over information.

Centre A creates learning summaries for the learners. These learning summaries link to Te Whāraiki and the New Zealand Curriculum. This clearly indicates to the parents and the Primary Teachers the progress the learner is making within their learning journey. However, it was highlighted that time constraints meant that these learning summaries were not always relevant or delivered to the school in a timely manner.

Centre B had no current means of handing over information to contributing schools. This Centre also discussed having no communication strategies in place with schools. However, this Centre does encourage the parents to take their child’s portfolios to school. The learner’s portfolios are a collection of learning stories which show the development of the learner throughout the learning journey.

Centre C reported that there was no connection between contributing schools and the Centre. They do not hand over any information or communicate with the schools that the learners are transitioning to. They do create learning journals for their students, however, they did not actively encourage parents to take them into school.

The Early Childhood Education Teachers that were interviewed all commented on the importance of forging links with the school through regular visits.

Centre A currently has visits with the school twice each term. The teacher discusses the way that these visits can help the learner and their parents to get a feel for the school and make decisions around whether and ILE context is right for their learner:

*“I guess you can’t prepare a child for that unless they were going to see you guys every week for however long. I believe that as a parent you should know your child and know what kind of environment they are suited to and if they aren’t suited”* (Teacher Centre A interview)

Centre B is geographically further away from the school and Teachers are unable to walk to the school because of the distance. This Teacher also notes the difficulties in centres feeding into many different schools:

*“I mean geographically we are a little bit further away, it’s hard because we leak into so many different schools, I think that we have like eight (schools) on our board. I would like to set up that maybe we do come over once a term or even twice a term. We don’t have a centre van or anything like that but that’s something we can borrow. Especially with the kids that are maybe going to attend this school. With it (the environment) being so different (to a traditional classroom) it would be nice for those kids to maybe get a chance to come over. I find that would be incredibly beneficial. And I mean like with the working communities, the community of learners, it would be nice for us to understand how professionals work in other places, you know the terminology you guys use within your curriculum”* (Teacher Centre B interview)

Centre C is within the closest proximity to the school and discuss the importance of the early childhood teachers and primary teachers and

learners getting to know each other and making links between the contexts:

*“I definitely think that finding a way for that information sharing and a little bit like making that the children at school know who we are and our kids know who you are and lots more visits that go both ways, so we can come and see you and you can come and see us”* (Teacher Centre C interview)

This data shows the way that reciprocal visits would contribute to teachers across sectors making links in order to contribute to the success of transition to school.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has analysed the data through extrapolating key themes evident for all key stakeholders throughout the transition to school process from ECEs to ILEs. The key themes identified are: developing a sense of belonging, reciprocal relationships, the transition of the parents/caregivers, school readiness and cross sector development.

These key findings will be discussed further in Chapter five.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter will discuss the findings drawn from the data gathered in this research project alongside the literature reviewed in chapter two in relation to the research question: What is successful transition from early childhood education (ECE) to an Innovative Learning Environment (ILE) in a primary school setting?

This research project enquired into the perspectives of the transitioning learner, their parents/caregivers, the primary teachers and the early childhood teachers. The research project investigated what these key stakeholders viewed as important in order for the transition to school process to be successful.

There are five key themes that have been identified in the findings that will be discussed within this chapter. These are: Developing a sense of belonging within the ILE context, the role of reciprocal relationships, the transition of the parents/caregivers within the transition to school process, school readiness and cross sector development between ECE and primary.

### **5.2 Developing a sense of belonging within the ILE context**

Research shows that developing a sense of belonging during the transition to school process contributes to the learner feeling a sense of suitability and links to the learner's positive progress at school (Brooker, 2008; Broström, 2002; Peters, 2010). The data drawn from this research project found clear themes on developing a sense of belonging within an ILE context these are: communication and Information sharing – funds of knowledge, the development of trust and the transition to school visits. These themes will now be discussed.

#### **5.2.1 Communication and Information sharing – funds of knowledge**

This research showed that communication is an imperative aspect of the transition to school process, particularly in developing a sense of

belonging within the new ILE. The questionnaire data collected by the parents/caregivers displayed strong views on the need to ensure that communication processes were in place in order for them to feel more comfortable within the ILE context, so that they were able to better support their children. This is further substantiated by Daniels (n.d.) who indicates that the more communication the better as this assists the teacher in ensuring that the environment supports the learner. The data displays clear synergies across all key stakeholders showing that each stakeholder holds valuable information that needs to be communicated with the teachers within the new context. This aligns with the concept of funds of knowledge brought forward by Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez (1992) and Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti (2009). This is further substantiated by Peters (2010) highlighting that in order to effectively draw on the learner's funds of knowledge, strong communication systems need to be in place.

The literature identifies that a key tool for this communication is the learner's portfolio as it is a way for the learner to share their identity (Peters et al., 2009). Portfolios provide an in-depth view into observations of the learner's personal preferences, important family information to be aware of, their interests, passions and skills and things that they find challenging or difficult (Grace, 1991). It is interesting however, that the use of portfolios as a tool to assist within the transition to school process was not a point elaborated on by the early childhood teachers. Yet, all early childhood teachers expressed a desire to set up systems to enable clear and transparent information sharing to promote a smoother transition for both learners and their parents/caregivers. Utilising portfolios as a tool to enhance the learner's sense of belonging throughout the transition to school process is a key point discussed by Peters (et al., 2009). Out of the three early childhood teachers interviewed, it is noteworthy that only one discussed the portfolios as a tool for the transition to school process. The teacher from centre C reported that she encourages the parents to take the portfolio to school and share the portfolio with the teacher/s. It is interesting that from the ECE perspectives portfolios as a tool to enhance a sense of belonging appeared to be almost forgotten whereas, the data

indicated that the parents/caregivers felt strongly about sharing information between ECE centres and the new school context. The literature supports this, highlighting that parents wanted the teachers to know their child well (Peters, et al., 2015). Whilst one primary teacher indicated she preferred to start with a clean slate, the majority of primary teachers highlighted how important this information is as this assists them with their initial relationship development. Further, the data displays that without the information in the portfolios being transferred, the primary teacher effectively starts from the beginning. Therefore, it is important that primary teachers are receptive to receiving the portfolios and using them in ways to support transition. This is supported by literature which indicates that developing an understanding of the learner and working collectively to connect them to their new environment is beneficial in developing a sense of belonging (Peters et al., 2009; Grace, 1991, Tringham, 2006).

Whilst the early childhood teachers held similar views in that communication between sectors is important, the data shows that due to time constraints the early childhood teachers don't find that effective communication is possible the majority of the time. The literature supports this with Barback (2014) indicating that information sharing is challenging for early childhood centres due to the fact that they contribute to many different schools. The data collected within this research project affirms this, with only one of the three centres currently actively handing over information to the schools. Whilst it is acknowledged that this research project shows that the communication between home, the early childhood centre and school plays a huge role in developing a sense of belonging, the challenges around this prevent it from happening for two of the three centres. Data indicated that this was due to three key reasons: lack of time, feeling as though they have little to no relationship with the school and changes in staffing leading to inconsistencies within the programme. Dockett & Perry (2002), discuss the importance of having built strong relationships in order to develop an effective transition to school programme. As a result of this lack of communication early childhood

teachers from two of the three centres also highlighted that they felt a disconnection with the school. These findings suggest that this disconnection needs to be bridged in order for consistent, clear communication to be established and therefore assist in developing a sense of belonging (Whalley & the Pen Green Centre Team, p. 95., as cited in Mitchell et al., 2006).

### **5.2.2 Trust**

Hughes & MacNaughton, (2002) discuss the notion of developing trust within the transition to school process, highlighting the importance of teachers and parents/caregivers developing an understanding of each other. The findings of this research project align with this, as parents/caregivers discuss that they are entrusting their most precious tāonga/treasure with the teachers.

As a result of needing to establish trust within the relationship, the data displayed clear key attributes that parents/caregivers expect teachers to possess. These attributes are being friendly, open, warm and making an effort to approach parents and begin forming relationships during the transition to school phase. These findings are affirmed by the literature with Kemp (2003) and Wilson-Burns (2009) stating that teacher attitudes, enthusiasm and confidence are rated highly as important within the transition process by parents. It is interesting to note that the data showed parents/caregivers felt most comfortable with the team leader, however, the teacher that they would be interacting with the most during their child's first year at school would be their child's Ako teacher.

Within the transition to school programme, the Ako teachers did not get an official opportunity to meet the parents/caregivers. This acts as a barrier to developing a sense of belonging because the initial trust has not been built prior to the learner starting in the new environment. This finding indicates the need for the other teachers within the learning community to play a more active role in the transition to school process. This is supported by Burgon & Walker (2013) and Peters (2010) who highlight the importance of home – school partnerships within the transition to school process.

Along with this, the data drawn from the student's perspectives highlight that 8 out of 10 students expressed negative feelings about their first day of school, describing their emotions with words such as scared, sad and nervous. Their reasoning was predominantly because of the separation between themselves and their parents/caregivers. These negative feelings experienced by the students show that for the students, trust had not been effectively developed during the transition to school process. Peters (2010) discusses the development of trust as being fundamental to a successful transition to school and the development of a sense of belonging.

### **5.2.3 Transition to School visits**

Transition to school visits allow an opportunity for the students to become more familiar with their new environment and begin to develop a sense of belonging and connection to the new context. These visits are a key component of the transition to school process (Dockett & Perry, 2004; Hartley, Rogers, Smith, Peters, & Carr, 2009; Margetts, 2003; Peters, 2004). It is identified throughout the literature that ensuring that there are opportunities to make connections with the new school environment prior to beginning school is imperative in order to foster the learner's sense of belonging (Peters, 2010). A key finding drawn from the data is that the learners would like to know the rules and expectations of the environment prior to beginning school as well as be able to identify key places within the school (for example; the playground, the toilets and where to put their school bags). This indicates that learners need to develop a sense of belonging in order to feel that they can be successful within their new environment. The only way of knowing this information and in turn, begin to develop a sense of belonging, is to be immersed within the environment (Dockett & Perry, 2004; Peters, 2010).

Building upon this Peters (2010) highlights that unhappiness around toilets and issues in the playground are detrimental to the transition to school process as it effects the learner's ability to feel settled within their new environment. Feeling unsettled within the environment means that a sense of belonging has not been effectively developed. This literature also aligns

with the key points that both the primary teachers and early childhood teachers raised, where the data show the importance of regular school visits is critical to a successful transition. This is a point also supported by (Margetts, 2007; Neuman, 2002; Peters, 2010; Rutherford, 2017). All primary teachers agreed that it was important that the visits occurred over a series of consecutive weeks with the parents/caregivers being alongside the learner during the first visit and then the learners coming into the learning community independently during the next two visits. The teachers elaborated on this, highlighting that it was important in order for the learners to get to know the teachers on their own without having the safety net of a parent/caregiver with them. This is supported by the literature where it is highlighted that it is important that parents do have the opportunity to participate in the transition programme in order to best support their learners (Peters, 2010). The data indicates that this is true from a parental perspective too, with parents/caregivers believing that more is better in terms of the number of visits and the duration of the visits. This point is supported by Daniels, (n.d.). Parents/caregivers indicated that they would like the visits to get increasingly longer each time, to ensure that their learner experiences 'school life' and building their confidence in different areas throughout the day. The literature supports this, highlighting that there is no evidence of an optimal number of visits (Peters, 2010).

A one size fits all model is not relevant within transition to school visits, instead, a more individual approach must be taken (Neuman, 2002; Rutherford, 2017). This also aligns with the perspectives of the early childhood teachers, with the data showing clear similarities between all three early childhood teacher's perspectives on developing a sense of belonging for example, the importance of learners having opportunities to visit the school before beginning. These findings align with the literature that suggests that transition to school visits assist in connecting the learner and their parents to their new environment, which aids in developing a sense of belonging (Dockett & Perry, 2004; Hartley et al., 2009; Margetts, 2003; Peters, 2010).

### **5.3 Reciprocal Relationships**

Pinata, et al. (1999) state that transitions are a “process of relationship formation” (cited in Brooker, 2008, p. 151) and this is further affirmed by research which highlights that reciprocal relationships between all stakeholders are foundational to a successful transition to school (Dockett & Perry, 2002; Mitchell, Haggerty, Hampton, & Pairman, 2006). The data drawn from this research project displayed interesting themes in terms of reciprocal relationships. The three most important relationships identified were home – school partnerships, the developing student – teacher relationships and the influence of peer relationships when transitioning to school.

#### **5.3.1 Home – School Partnerships**

The data drawn from this research project show that all parents/caregivers experienced positive interactions with teachers in the initial stages of relationship building. However, the data also show that there are some areas of relationship building that need strengthening in order for parents/caregivers to feel truly comfortable. This point is supported by Hughes & MacNaughton (2002) who highlight that “communication cannot improve relationships between staff and parents unless it addresses the politics of knowledge underpinning them” (p. 247).

This notion is further supported by Gallagher (2005), where the need for parents to develop trust with the teachers is discussed as imperative to a successful home – school partnership. The parents/caregivers who participated in the questionnaire in this research project raised the key point of forming more personal relationships with all teachers within the learning community. The data show that parents/caregivers acknowledge a barrier to forming relationships with their child’s teacher. The parents identify that due to time constraints and working full time, their ability to fully engage with the teachers or find opportunities to build these relationships is limited. Peters (2004) indicates that in order to address this it is important that specific time is set aside to allow opportunity for working towards developing these relationships. The data highlighted that

parents/caregivers ideally would like to spend more one-on-one time with the teachers during the transition to school period. This finding is supported by Peters (2004) who discusses that parents would appreciate more opportunities to engage with their child's teachers.

The data also identified that the parents/caregivers would like to have an opportunity for the teachers to introduce themselves. One parent acknowledged the logistical issue that this would present during the transition to school process and proposed the idea of doing this through a presentation. Literature shows that this is successful tool Fabian (2002) and would support the parents/caregivers in empowering their child with their transition to school. This perspective is also shared by the primary teachers, with all teachers discussing the importance of ensuring that there are opportunities to 'touch base' with parents/caregivers. They described this relationship development with such words as comfortable, shared understandings and community. It is important to note that one teacher discussed that if the parent/caregiver feels comfortable with the teacher and displays a trust for them, this will filter down to the learner and assist in them feeling more comfortable in the care of the primary teacher within the new ILE context. This is supported by Whalley & the Pen Green Centre Team (as cited in Mitchell et al., 2006).

These findings show that that despite the differences in learning environments, developing strong home – school partnerships is important. This is supported by literature, with Dockett & Perry, (2007) and Fletcher, Fa'afoi, Tufulasi Taleni, & O'Regan (2009) who discuss the importance of building strong home – school partnerships during the transition to school programme in order to develop an understanding of the learner.

### **5.3.2 Developing student – teacher relationships**

Learners forming positive relationships with their teachers is integral to the success of the transition process (Harrison, Clarke, & Ungerer, 2003; Murray et al., 2008). It is stated that learners who form these relationships develop trust and feel secure within their new context (Whalley & the Pen Green Centre Team, as cited in Mitchell et al., 2006). The data gathered

strongly indicated that the parents/caregivers have very different perspectives on relationship building compared to their learner's perspectives. Parents portrayed that they value the importance of themselves forming relationships with the teachers, however, they indicated that they place little value in their child forming relationships with their teachers during the transition to school phase. In fact, the data show that only one parent indicated that this was of importance to them. This is an interesting finding as the learners felt very strongly about forming a relationship with the teachers and in particular, their Ako teacher. Peters (2010) supports this, discussing that in building relationships, the teachers are able to engage the learner in relevant learning contexts. Further, literature shows that the development of teacher – student relationships has a significant effect on the learner's transition to school experiences (Belcher, 2006; Harrison et al., 2003; Murray et al., 2008). This indicates a need to change parental perceptions of relationships between their learners and teachers during the transition to school.

Both primary and early childhood teachers interviewed shared the same view as the learners in forming relationships and discussed the critical element that building relationships with their students play in the transition to school process. The primary and early childhood teachers discussed the shared approach they take to relationship building within their respective collaborative learning spaces. All teachers identified that they are aware that their ability to build relationships with the learners transitioning has a flow on effect on the learner's ability to settle into their new environment (Peters, 2010). Within this research study all learners who participated in the focus groups came from contributing ECE centres. This indicates that they had experienced being separated from their parents for sustained periods of time before beginning school. Therefore, it is interesting that the data show that there were significant numbers of learners who were anxious or worried about being separated from their parents. In addition to this, the numbers of learners who described feeling nervous, scared and sad are substantial given that all of these learners had actively participated in a transition to school programme. These

findings indicate that during the transition to school programme there was not enough emphasis placed upon getting to know the teacher that was in charge of the pastoral care needs of the learners, something that is bespoke to an ILE context. The literature shows that fostering the learner's relationship with their teacher is critical in supporting effective transitions (Ministry of Education, 2007). Further, the literature highlights that this relationship is key as it not only gives the parents a key person and a familiar face to discuss their learner with, it also helps the learner in developing their identity (Ministry of Education, 2007; Peters, 2010).

This point is supported by the literature when discussing the learner's microsystems and mesosystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The research project findings and the literature show the parents and teachers both sit in a learner's micro system and the mesosystem links these relationships. Therefore, strengthening the mesosystem between parents and teachers supports the learning and development of the learner (Peters, 2010).

### **5.3.3 The influence of peer relationships when transitioning to school**

Literature shows that for the learner involved in the transition process peer friendships are integral in ensuring that school is a positive experience (Belcher, 2006; Brooker, 2008; Bulkeley & Fabian, 2006; Denham, 2006; Dockett & Perry, 2005; Ladd, et al., 2006; Margretts, 2006; Peters, 2004). The data drawn from this research project affirms this, with all learners expressing a desire to have established friendships before beginning school. It was highlighted by the learners in this research project that they felt more confident when they already had a friendship with another learner at the school (established through places such as their early childhood centre, swimming, dancing and other extra-curricular activities), a point which is supported by Nueman (2007, as cited in Peters, 2010) and Bourne (2007). The data drawn from the parent/caregiver questionnaire showed that parents did not share this view. It identifies that the parents who participated in the research placed little value in their children forming friendships before starting school. These findings are a contrast to what the literature shows. With Peters, (2010) highlighting that that parents were proactive in assisting their learners in developing

friendships in order to ensure a smoother transition. It is interesting that both the students and the parents/caregivers who participated in this research project had starkly different views on the importance of peer relationships and the impacting influence that peer relationships have on the transition to school. Peters (2010) highlights the negative impact that having poor peer relationships at school can create for students. The transition to school process needs to encompass an element of friendship forming with other learners starting school and also with peers who have already established their identity within the environment (Peters, 2010).

#### **5.4 Transitioning the parents/caregivers into a new identity within the school context**

Transition to school is a process not only for the learner, but for the parents/caregivers too (Brooker, 2008; Broström, 2002; Peters, 2010) (Westcott et al., 2003). Peters (2010) brings forward the notion of parents/caregivers needing specific support from teachers and the school in order to transition into their new identity. The data drawn in this research project identify these as communication of information and the influence of personal experiences in single cell schooling.

##### **5.4.1 Communication of information**

Dockett & Perry (2007) discuss the notion of ensuring that there are supports in place to enable parents to feel confident and secure in their transition into their new identity as parents of a school learner. They highlight the importance of being able to judge what parents can deal with at specific points in time. Initial communication is the first part of this process. Within the research project, parents/caregivers brought forward their need for communication to be thorough and timely and including all important information. An example of this is the expectation that initial communication will include transition dates, Ako group information and teacher information. These findings align with Peters (2004) study which indicates that the timing of information is important to parents. These findings show that the parents/caregivers need to build their confidence that within an ILE context their child won't get lost and that the school has

a personalised approach to transition rather than sending a generic letter with no specific information. To parents/caregivers a personalised approach shows that there are strong systems in place and ensures that they feel secure in their decision to send their child to an ILE school.

#### **5.4.2 The influence of parent/caregiver's personal experiences in single cell schooling**

Beginning school is notably one of the most important transitions that a learner will ever go through within their life (Peters, 2010). In order for the transition to school process to be successful it is critical that parents/caregivers feel secure. It is interesting that parents/caregivers who participated within the questionnaire were egocentric and focussed on their journey and expectations. This egocentric view does however align with Westcott, et al. (2003) who highlight that transition to school effects the learner and the parents/caregivers. The data show that the parents placed significant emphasis on the importance of their transition into being a parent within the school context as opposed to their child's transition to school.

Personal experiences can play a big role in a parents' preconception of school. For example, if a parent/caregiver has had a negative experience on their first day of school, this can impact how they feel about their learner starting school. Whilst two out of ten parents/caregivers reported feeling negative emotions and two out of ten reported feeling positive towards the transition into school, the data show that the strongest emotions that parents/caregivers felt on the first day was that of mixed emotions. To further elaborate, their reasoning was due to feeling nervous for their child. One parent/caregiver further focussed on their own feelings highlighting that their child beginning school made them feel old. This links to the literature where Dockett & Perry, (2007) highlight that we all have preconceived ideas or history surrounding school and more specifically all people have social, cultural and political preconceptions or an ideal of how they believe school should be. This also aligns with the primary teacher's perspectives discussed, where the context for teaching and learning is not

only physically different but pedagogically different from how parents experienced school.

Primary teachers identified the importance of parents/caregivers also being 'transitioned' into the school context in order for them to feel comfortable and connected to the different style of school context. These findings support the point discussed by Dockett & Perry (2007) and Griebel & Niesel (2003) that parents must adjust to school life on an individual level, an interactive level and a contextual level. The findings display that there is a need to put in place support for parents/caregivers during the transition to school process because parents/caregivers need an opportunity to understand the school context better. This point is supported by Dockett & Perry, (2007) and Harper (2015).

## **5.5 ECE and Primary perspectives on school-readiness**

Whilst generally traditional primary schools adhere to a more prescribed curriculum, ILE primary schools are much more aligned with a hands-on, learning through a play based curriculum, showing a synergy between primary school and ECE (Ministry of Education 2007; 2017). The data drawn from the interviews with both the early childhood teachers and the primary teachers showed distinct disparities around what it means to be a 'school-ready' learner. Literature identifies that "...we currently have no theory or credible empirical evidence" which identify a skillset that exemplifies school-readiness" (Crnic & Lamberty, 1994. p. 96). This aligns with the concept brought forward by Peters (2003), that through targeting students within their zone of proximal development, all learners are ready to begin school. The pedagogical philosophy that underpins the ILE context is a personalised approach, this therefore aligns well with the zone of proximal development concepts discussed by Peters, (2003).

### **5.5.1 School readiness from the perspectives of the ECE teachers**

The literature shows that there are disparities within the ECE sector around what school-readiness is and how to best prepare four-year-olds for the next step in their learning journey (ERO, 2011). The data show that all three early childhood teachers interviewed discussed the pressure that

they receive from parents to include more academic-based components to their programmes, such as literacy and numeracy. Because of this pressure, the school-readiness programmes within ECE centres are heavily shaped by this parental influence. This means that they have an academic element to them which does not allow for the ECE centres to focus on critical aspects of learner development such as developing foundation skills through engaging in sensory, language and physical experiences. This does not align with the key principles outlined in Te Whāriki, which are Empowerment, Holistic development, Family and Community and Relationships (Ministry of Education, 2017b, p.18-21).

The early childhood teacher at centre A highlights that the approach they take to their school-readiness programme is to focus on developing gross motor skills, social skills and self-management skills. Whereas the teachers at centres B and C discuss the structured learning programmes they teach within their school-readiness programmes, with a lens on numeracy and literacy. Centre B highlights that this is because of pressures from parents who have an expectation that the programme is academic-based, although often, parents have limited understanding around learner development. Further exploring what the programmes encompass, the data gathered show that these programmes focus on fine motor skills in the form of name writing, development of phonological knowledge through a letter of the week activity, numeracy skills through developing strategies to solve facts to five, as well as writing lessons. What is noteworthy is that each teacher highlighted the importance of developing foundation skills through engaging in sensory, language and physical experiences further describing that these foundational skills are an essential element in developing learner's memory, visual skills and, fine and gross motor skills and body awareness. Each of these fall under the goals outlined in Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 2017b). However, these engaging learning activities were secondary to academic activities within two of the centres school readiness programmes because of parental pressures.

### **5.5.2 School-readiness from the perspectives of the Primary teachers**

Learners beginning school as healthy, well-nourished individuals with the ability to communicate and seek help if needed in order to problem solve are what research identifies as being truly important components of school-readiness (Heaviside et al., 1993). This aligns with the findings of this research project. The data show that all primary school teachers were heavily focussed on the development of self-management skills, communication and social skills as well as gross motor skills. These findings show that there is a clear continuity within the curriculums from ECE through to primary as outlined by Wright (2009). The primary teachers have identified that in possessing these skills the students were better equipped to cope within an ILE context. Essentially these early skills assist in the learner's ability to socialise, follow instructions, look after their belongings and be confident and secure in themselves as learners when they enter into a new context (Peters, 2003). Further, the literature shows that school readiness should be focussed on the individual learner through their zone of proximal development (Peters, 2003). The data on school-readiness show that there is a clear barrier which inhibits the ECE teachers ability to equip students for school. This is because there are disparities between what ECE teachers believe is important for learners, what ECE teachers deliver due to parental obligations and what primary teachers believe is important before starting school.

### **5.6 Developing mutually beneficial cross-sector relationships between early childhood teachers and primary teachers to support the transition to school process**

Research shows that there are inconsistencies and a lack of knowledge and understanding between early childhood education centres and primary schools (ERO, 2011). This is evident throughout the literature and Timperley, et al. (2003) discuss this point further, bringing forward the notion that teachers are committed to collaboration, however crossing the boundaries of the sectors, teachers had significant misunderstandings of each other. The data discussed in the previous section affirm this point

and bring to light the importance of this cross-sector collaboration because it shows the level of disparity and the effects this has on the transition to school process. Given these disparities, the data show that gaining consistency and clarity across sectors and across teaching teams is imperative to the success of transition to school programmes as it would ensure a continuity of curriculum (Howie, 2001; Margetts, 1999; Peters, 2000). Transition to school is all about the stakeholders coming together and working towards a shared goal which is that the learners and their parents/caregivers enter the new school context ready for the next part of their learning journey. This is affirmed by Peters (2010). From the research, the data show that the communication between the ECE centres and the primary schools was minimal and that there was certainly no cross-sector development happening. The implementation of Kāhui Ako (Communities of Learning) throughout New Zealand raises the question: will these provide an opportunity for ECE centres and primary schools to more closely collaborate in order to develop a shared understanding and ensure a continuity in curriculum?

Understanding the context that learners are transitioning into is critical in order to equip them with the skills that they need to cope within their new environment (Peters, 2010). Stephen & Cope (2003) bring forward the notion of adapting practices to ensure that teachers are able to respond to challenges within learners before they present within the new context. The data drawn from the early childhood teachers in the research project affirm this, showing collective agreement in wanting to understand the ILE context and the pedagogy that underpins the teaching and learning more deeply. Each early childhood teacher discussed the importance of reciprocal visits, these being times where the ECE centre learners and teachers come to visit the primary school within a small group and the primary school take small groups of learners to visit the contributing ECE centre. This is highlighted as being important in terms of all stakeholders understanding the ILE context. This is particularly important for the ECE teachers to ensure that they understand how to best prepare the learners in their care for their new environment. The data show that currently only

one of the three early childhood centres that participated in the research project had reciprocal visits with the school up and running. However, the other two centres highlighted how valuable they felt this would be and displayed that they would support this beginning within their own centres. This synergistic approach shows a shared responsibility in ensuring that the students begin school confident and comfortable in their new environment (Timperley et al., 2003).

## **5.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has explored and discussed the findings drawn from the data within this research project. It has discussed five key themes extrapolated from the data. These are developing a sense of belonging within the ILE context, the role of reciprocal relationships, the transition of the parents/caregivers within the transition to school process, school readiness and cross sector development between ECE and primary. Existing research and recommendations are still relevant to transition to school, however the research shows that these might need to be developed in different ways, with a different focus in order to reflect the differences in ILE contexts and single cell contexts. This will be further explained in chapter 6. Chapter 6 will conclude this research project. It will present the implications for practice, the limitations of the study, recommendations for future research and concluding comments.

## **Chapter 6: Implications for practice, limitations of study, recommendations for future research and conclusion**

### **6.1 Overview of chapter**

The title of this research project is Successful transition from Early Childhood Education to an Innovative Learning Environment in primary school for key stakeholders. The research question that has been investigated throughout the research project is: What is successful transition from Early Childhood Education to an Innovative Learning Environment (ILE) in a primary school setting? The research project was then underpinned by the following guiding questions:

What is regarded as a successful transition from ECE to primary ILEs?

What role do relationships play in the transition process from ECE to an ILE in a primary setting? What do parents/caregivers think is important for a successful transition from ECE to an ILE in a primary setting?

How can the needs of all learners be met during transition from ECE to an innovative learning environment in a primary setting?

In what ways can teaching teams across sectors, initiate and develop effective relationships during the transition process between ECE and ILEs in a primary setting?

The research project was carried out with the aim to use the findings to underpin the planning and development a successful transition to school programme that reflects the signature practices of an Innovative Learning Environment.

In chapter 5, this research project identified and discussed clear themes about what constitutes a successful transition to school programme for all key stakeholders. These were identified as; Developing a sense of belonging within the ILE context, the role of reciprocal relationships, the transition of the parents/caregivers within the transition to school process,

school readiness and cross sector development between ECE and primary.

This chapter will outline the implications for practice that are evident as a result of the findings of the research project. It will also discuss the limitations of the research project. Further, this chapter will outline recommendations for future study that have arisen as a result of this research project. Finally, this chapter will present concluding thoughts on the topic of transition to school from ECE to ILE.

## **6.2 Implications for practice**

This research project identified some key approaches that could be applied to transition from ECE to ILE. This was investigated in order to promote best practice and ensure that the needs of the learner, their parents/caregivers, the ECE teachers and the primary teachers are being met within the process. The findings will also contribute to the development of a transition programme that would aim to provide a wraparound service and ensure that the learner begins school, happy, confident and connected to their new context. It is however, interesting to note that the existing research concerning transition to school from ECE is still relevant. These factors are; developing a sense of belonging, reciprocal relationships, transitioning the parents/caregivers and cross sector collaboration between ECE and primary. However, in order to be successful in transitioning from ECE to ILE additional planning and thinking pertinent to the ILE context would need to take place. It is identified that there is not a one size fits all model, therefore transition to school programmes would and should look different in each context.

Some implications for practice for this school are that: Relationship building across all key stakeholders is integral with both parents/caregivers and the learners needing to form relationships with multiple teachers. Ensuring that parents are well equipped with information about how teaching and learning works assists with alleviating stress for the parents with the research identifying that this has a flow on effect to the child feeling more positive about their school experiences.

Developing a sense of belonging is evident as a very strong theme in order for the transition to school process being deemed successful. For ECE teachers, this means ensuring that all information about the learner is handed over to the primary teachers, including, the learner's portfolio and that the primary teachers are receptive to this information. This is because it is the starting point for the primary teachers to begin to form a picture of the learner that is beginning school. In having this information, the primary teachers are more able to shape learning programmes to suit the personalised needs of their students and are better placed to support their learners. For parents/caregivers and students this is about localising with the new environment, working together to feel more comfortable within the ILE environment. An aspect of this is identifying key areas of the school such as the playground, toilets, where to put school bags and different parts of the ILE context such as where learning resources are kept. Building upon the importance of the learner's portfolios in the transition to school process, literature, and this research shows that the learner's early childhood portfolios are a key tool that are largely underutilised. These journals of learning stories allow the learner to feel confident and draw on their funds of knowledge, sharing and relating to their new context whilst also allowing the teachers to make connections with the learner. It is therefore integral that allowing time for portfolio sharing time during the transition to school visits is hugely important. Additionally, developing an area where the learners can bring their portfolios to school, display these and have opportunities throughout the day to sit down with peers and look through these assists in further grounding the learners within their new environment.

Parents/caregivers are essentially the central support system for the child within the transition to school process. Therefore, it is essential that the parents/caregivers are assisted in their transition into their new identity as the parents of a school learner. As identified, the parents experience going through three levels of changes; changes on an individual level, changes of an interactive level and changes of a contextual level. Through the transition to school programme it is therefore important that parents are

exposed to groups within the school community, for example the Parent Teacher Association as well as having an opportunity to learn about how teaching and learning works within the different context. It is also important that within the transition process the parents have the opportunity to ask any questions that they have. It is identified that parents/caregiver's personal experiences effect their perspectives on transition to school. In ensuring parents/caregivers have the opportunity to learn and understand the ILE context the negative effects that their personal experiences play within this process could be greatly minimised. This is because they will have developed a better understanding of how teaching and learning works within this different context, as well as identified their role within this process.

Building reciprocal relationships is identified as being critical to a successful transition to school programme. The research shows that there is a huge emphasis on parents engaging with the primary teachers prior to beginning school. This is part of the trust building process. In terms of putting this into practice, this could be in the form of regular parent – teacher meet and greets or afternoon teas throughout the term for the parents of children transitioning into the school. This low pressure and relaxed type of meeting allows parents to come along and form the initial relationships with teachers and further, it allows them to put a face to the name before their child begins school. This has a flow on effect to the learners that are transitioning, as it is likely that the parents will then go home and begin starting the korero or discussion with their child about their new teachers. Within this development of reciprocal relationships, the data displays the importance of ECE centres and schools coming together and forming relationships through reciprocal visits. This allows the learners to experience the new environment as well as show their new teachers around their current ECE environment. It would also assist in the ECE centre passing on any information about the learner to the school and enables the school to better meet the needs of the learner.

The data shows that it is critical that the ECE teachers understand the type of environment that their learners are transitioning into. This enables

them to ensure that they are preparing the learners and their parents and are able to better support throughout the transition to school process. The first step of this is as simple as the ECE teachers asking the question “What type of environment is this learner transitioning into?” This cross-sector collaboration between ECE and primary is important to close the gap in inconsistencies of knowledge and understanding and allows parents to see that teachers work together towards the shared goal of equipping the learners with the skillset they need to cope within their new environment. The impact of this would then be that ECE teachers and primary teachers would then be more confident in utilising Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa Early childhood curriculum and the New Zealand curriculum together in a more seamless way to ensure a smooth transition pathway for learners.

Transition visits are obviously an integral part of the transition to school process. These visits allow the learners and their parents/caregivers to connect with the new school context. All stakeholders have identified the need for visits that increase in the length of time to allow the learners to participate in different parts of the school day. This assists in developing the learner’s routines and understanding of how school works. This also begins positive learning dispositions where they view themselves as learners who are confident and connected.

### **6.3 Limitations of study**

There are limitations within this research project that must be identified and taken into consideration. This research project was one case study and worked with a small pool of people. In total, this research project worked with three early childhood centres, four primary teachers, 10 students and 10 parents/caregivers. To gain a better insight into the research question researching the same number of people within another ILE school context might have given a better insight into transition to school from ILE to ECE. Therefore, this would give a greater range of data to draw from, as well as the ability to compare and contrast across the different schools. To gain more clarity into different aspects of transition to

school, I feel that following up the semi-structured interviews with both the ECE teachers and the primary teachers with a questionnaire would have also added depth to this research project. Further, this research project researched a school still in its infancy so it would be interesting to broaden the findings through also carrying out this research project within an established school. Another limitation of this research project is that the school in which the research was carried out was a high decile school (decile 10). It would be beneficial to carry this research project out in schools with different decile ratings in order to get a broader view across the demographic.

#### **6.4 Recommendations for future research**

Transition to school is a well-researched area of education. However, given the lack of research in transition from ECE to ILE this particular research topic of transition to school from ECE to ILE plays a critical role in the future of transition to school programmes within these types of environments. I would be very interested to repeat the research project more thoroughly after having the opportunity to disperse the recommendations for future practice across the ILE schools that have since opened across New Zealand. Widening the scope of the research project across different socio economic areas would be interesting in order to assess whether the recommendations do ensure that transition to school from ECE to ILE is successful for all key stakeholders.

#### **6.5 Concluding comments**

This was an incredibly interesting research project to undertake as it is relevant to my work of designing and implementing a transition to school programme within an ILE context. This research project set out to understand more around how the transition to school process could be successful for all stakeholders. The data shows the fundamental elements of transition to school remain the same within any type of environment. However the way in which we approach the process is significantly different given the differences in the environments. It all comes down to whanaunatanga; “Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi, engari he toa takitini. My

strength is not mine alone, but comes from the many” Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi, The University of Waikato, & The University of Auckland, 2016). Essentially, transition to school is about people working together, collaboratively, towards the shared goal of ensuring that the learner has positive learning pathways where they are confident and connected to their new environment.

## References

- Barback, J. (2014). The Transition between ECE and School. *New Zealand Education Review*, 5(1), 4–7.
- Barlow, M. L. (1967). *History of industrial education in the United States*. Peoria, Illinois: Chas. A. Bennett Co., Inc.
- Barrett, P., Zhang, Y., Davies, F., & Barrett, L. (2015). *Clever Classrooms - Summary Report of the HEAD Project*. Retrieved from <http://www.salford.ac.uk/cleverclassrooms>
- Belcher, V. (2006). *“And my heart is thinking”: Perceptions of new entrant children and their parents on transition to primary school numeracy* (Master’s Thesis). University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand. Retrieved from <https://ir.canterbury.ac.nz/handle/10092/1970>
- Bell, J. (1999). *Doing your research project* (3rd ed.). Buckingham, England: Open University Press.
- Bishop, R. (1997). Interviewing as collaborative storytelling. *Education Research and Perspectives*, 1(24), 28–47.
- Boereboom, J., & Tymms, P. (2018). Is there an optimum age for starting school in New Zealand? *21*(2), 32–44.
- Bohan-Baker, M., & Little, P. (2002). *The transition to kindergarten: A review of current research and promising practices to involve families*. Harvard Family Research Project. Retrieved from <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.470.6636&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

- Bolstad, R., Gilbet, J., McDowall, S., Bull, A., Boyd, S., & Hipkins, R. (2012). *Supporting future-oriented learning and teaching - a New Zealand perspective* (Research Report). Ministry of Education. Retrieved from <https://www.nzcer.org.nz/research/publications/supporting-future-oriented-learning-and-teaching-new-zealand-perspective>
- Bourne, L. (2007). A story of transition to school. *Kairaranga*, 8(1), 31–33.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Brooker, L. (2008). *Supporting Transitions in the Early Years*. UK: McGraw-Hill Education.
- Broström, S. (2002). Understanding Te Whāriki from a Danish perspective. In J. Nuttal (Ed.), *Weaving Te Whāriki. Aotearoa New Zealand's early childhood curriculum document in theory and practice* (pp. 215–242). Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.
- Bryk, A. ., & Schneider, B. (2002). *Trust in schools: A core resource for improvement*. NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Bryman, A. (2004). *Social research methods* (2nd ed.). USA: Oxford University Press.
- Bulkeley, J., & Fabian, H. (2006). Well-being and belonging during early educational transitions. *International Journal of Transitions in Childhood*, 2, 18–31.

- Burton, J., & Walker, J. (2013). *Transition from early intervention to school-age special education services – an overview of the literature*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.
- Carr, M. (2001). *Assessment in early childhood settings: Learning stories*. London: Paul Chapman.
- Centre for Educational Research and Innovation CERI. (2008). *Innovating to learn, learning to innovate*. Paris: OECD.
- Christensen, P., & Prout, A. (2002). Working with Ethical Symmetry in Social Research with Children. *Childhood*, 9(4), 477–497.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2000). *Research methods in education* (5th ed.). New York, USA: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2008). *Research Methods in Education* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York, US: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.
- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (1990). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, 19(5), 2–14.
- Cooper, P. A. (1993). Paradigm Shifts in Designed Instruction: From Behaviorism to Cognitivism to Constructivism. *Educational Technology*, 33(5), 12–19.
- Core Education Tātai Aho Rau. (2014). Ten Trends 2014. Retrieved from <https://core-ed.org/research-and-innovation/ten-trends/2014/learner-agency/#resources-explain>
- Core Education Tātai Aho Rau. (2015). Considering the environment as the third teacher. Retrieved from <http://blog.core->

ed.org/blog/2015/03/considering-environment-as-the-third-  
teacher.html

Corsaro, W., & Molinari, L. (2005). *Compagni: understanding children's transition from preschool to elementary school*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Cresswell, J. W. (2005). *Educational Research. Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. New Jersey, US: Pearson Prentice Hall.

Cresswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: CA: Sage.

Cresswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design. Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). London, UK: Sage.

Crnic, K., & Lamberty, G. (1994). Reconsidering school readiness: Conceptual and applied perspectives. *Early Education and Development*, 5(2), 91–105.

Crossley, M., & Vulliamy, G. (Eds.). (1997). *Qualitative educational research in developing countries. Current perspectives*. New York, NY: Garland.

Daniels, D. H. (n.d.). Supporting Early School Success. *Educational Leadership*, 68(7), 18–22.

DeCaro, J. A., & Worthman, C. M. (2011). Changing family routines at kindergarten entry predict biomarkers of parental stress. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 35(5), 441–448.

Denham, S. (2006). Social-emotional competence as support for school readiness: What is it and how do we assess it? *Early Educational &*

*Development*, 17(1), 57–89.

[https://doi.org/10.1207/s15566935eed1701\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15566935eed1701_4).

Dockett, S, & Perry, B. (2004). Starting school: Perspectives of Australian children, parents and educators. *Journal of Early Education Research*, 2(2), 171–188.

Dockett, S, & Perry, B. (2005). Researching with children: Insights from the Starting School research project. *Early Childhood Development and Care*, 175(6), 507–521.

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

Dockett, S, & Perry, B. (2002). Who's ready for what? Young children starting school. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 3(1), 67–89.

Drever, E. (1995). *Using Semi-Structured Interviews in Small Scale Research. A Teacher's Guide*. Edinburgh: Scottish Council for Research in Education.

Education Review Office. (2015). *Continuity of learning: transitions from early childhood services to schools* (pp. 1–76). Wellington, N.Z. Retrieved from <http://www.ero.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/ERO-Continuity-of-Learning-FINAL.pdf>

Education Review Office. (2016). What to look for in an early childhood education service. Retrieved from <http://www.ero.govt.nz/publications/early-childhood-education-a->

guide-for-parents/what-to-look-for-in-an-early-childhood-education-service/

Edwards, C., Gandini, L., & Foreman, G. (1998). *The Hundred Languages of Children: The Reggio Emilia Approach- Advanced Reflections*. Greenwich, USA: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

Ertmer, P. A., & Newby, T. J. (1993). Behaviorism, Cognitivism, Constructivism: Comparing Critical Features from an Instructional Design Perspective. *Performance Improvement Quarterly*, 6(4), 50–72. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1937-8327.1993.tb00605.x>

Fabian, H. (2002). *Children starting school: A guide to successful transition and transfers for teachers and assistants*. London: David Fulton.

Fletcher, J., Fa'afoi, A., Tufulasi Taleni, L., & O'Regan, B. (2009). Pasifika students: Teachers and parents voice their perceptions of what provides supports and barriers to Pasifika students' achievement in literacy and learning. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 25, 24–33.

Fraser, S., & Gestwicki, C. (2002). *Authentic Childhood: Exploring Reggio Emilia in the Classroom*. Albany, NY: Delmar - Thomson Learning.

Gallagher, G. (2005). *"They didn't stretch my brain" Challenged by chance: factors influencing transition to school for gifted children*. (Unpublished Masters in Gifted Education thesis). Flinders University, Adelaide.

Gonzales, N., Moll, L., & Amanti, C. (2005). *Funds of knowledge: theorising practices in households, communities and classrooms*. New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc.

- Gonzalez, N., Moll, L., & Amanti, C. (2009). *Funds of Knowledge: Theorizing Practices in Households, Communities, and Classrooms*. Taylor & Francis.
- Grace, C. (1991). *The Portfolio and Its Use: Developmentally Appropriate Assessment of Young Children*. Urbana, IL.: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education.
- Greene, S., & Hill, M. (2005). *Researching Children's Experience: Methods and Methodological Issues*.
- Griebel, W., & Niesel, R. (2003). Successful transitions: Social Competencies help pave the way into Kindergarten and school. In *Transitions. European Early Childhood Education Research Monograph Series*. (pp. 25–34).
- Gubrium, J. F., & Holstein, J. A. (1997). *The New Language of Qualitative Method*. Oxford University Press.
- Guillemin, M., & Gillam, L. (2004). Ethics, reflexivity and “ethically important” moments in research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 10(2), 261–280.
- Harper, L. (2015). *Supporting Young Children's Transitions to School: Recommendations for Families*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-015-0752-z>
- Harrison, L., Clarke, L., & Ungerer, J. (2003). The role of child-teacher relationships in children's adjustment to the first year of school. In *Proceedings of the Continuity and Change*. Sydney, Australia.
- Hartley, C., Rogers, P., Smith, J., Peters, S., & Carr, M. (2009). *Across the border: a community negotiates the transition from early childhood*

- to primary school*. Centre of Innovation final report to the Ministry of Education.
- Hartley, C., Rogers, P., Smith, J., Peters, S., & Carr, M. (2010). Building relationships between early childhood and school: mutually interesting projects. In *Dispersing Waves. Innovation in early childhood education* (pp. 19–26). Wellington, N.Z.: NZCER Press.
- Heaviside, C., Farris, E., & Carpenter, J. (1993). *Public School Kindergarten Teachers' Views on Children's Readiness for School*. Washington DC: US Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement.
- Hörschelmann, K. (2011). Theorising life transitions: Geographical perspectives. *Area*, 43(4), 378–383.
- Hughes, P., & MacNaughton, G. (2002). Preparing early childhood professionals to work with parents: The challenges of diversity and dissensus. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 28(2), 14–20.
- James, A (1995). 'Methodologies of competence for a competent methodology', paper delivered at conference on Children and Social Competence, University of Surrey, 5±7 July 1995
- Jones, C. (2006). *Continuity of learning: Adding funds of knowledge from the home environment* (SET Research Information for Teachers No. 2) (pp. 28–31).
- Jones, L. (1984). *The collected works of John W. Tukey. Philosophy and Principles of Data Analysis: 1949-1964* (Vol. 3). London, UK: Chapman & Hall.
- Kaboub, F. (2008). Positivist Paradigm. In *Encyclopaedia of Counselling Psychology* (Vol. 2). Thousand Oaks: CA: Sage.

- Kellaway, K. (2013). Transition from E.C.E. to Primary School. Retrieved from  
file:///Users/chrissy.wakeman/Downloads/Karen%20Kellaway%20S  
abbatical%20Report%202013%20-  
%20Transitioning%20from%20ECE%20to%20Primary.pdf
- Kemmis, S. (2001). Exploring the relevance of critical theory for action research: Emancipatory action research in the footsteps of Jurgen Habermas. In *In P. Reason & H Bradbury (Eds.), Handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice* (pp. 91–102). London, UK: Sage.
- Kemp, C. (2003). Investigating the transition of young children with intellectual disabilities to mainstream classes: an Australian perspective. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 50(4), 403–433.
- Kervin, L. K., Vialle, W. J., & Okley, A. D. (2006). *Research for Educators*. South Melbourne, VIC: Thomson/Social Science Press.
- Kitzinger, J. (1995). Introducing focus groups. *BMJ*, 311, 299–302.  
<https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.311.7000.299>
- Krueger, R. A. (1998). *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*. London: Sage.
- Ladd, G., Herald, S., & Kochel, K. (2006). School readiness: Are there social prerequisites? *Early Educational & Development*, 17(1), 115–150. <https://doi.org/115-150>. DOI: 10.1207/s15566935eed1701\_6.

- Leadbeater, C. (2006). The future of public services: personalised learning. *Schooling for Tomorrow: Personalising Education*, 101–114. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264036604-8-en>
- Lee, A. (2005). Case study five: Our school book. In M. Carr & S. Peters (Eds.), *Te Whāriki and links to the NZ Curriculum Research Projects* (pp. 7–126). University of Waikato.
- Lewis, A. (2002). *Interviewing children and young people with learning disabilities: guidelines for researchers and multi-professional practice*.
- Lodico, M. G., Spaulding, D. T., & Voegtle, K. H. (2006). *Methods in Educational Research: from Theory to Practice*. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley.
- Malterud, K. (2001). Qualitative research: standards, challenges, and guidelines. *Qualitative Research*, 358(9280), 483–488.
- Margetts, K. (2003). Does adjustment at preschool predict adjustment in the first year of schooling? *Australian Research in Early Childhood Education*, 10(2), 13–25.
- Margetts, K. (2007). Understanding and supporting children: shaping transition practices. In H. Fabian & A.-W. Dunlop (Eds.), *Informing Transitions: Bridging Research, Policy and Practice* (pp. 107–119). London: Open University Press.
- Markula, P., & Silk, M. (2011). *Qualitative Research for Physical Culture*. Palgrave Macmillan.

- Mason, A., & Danby, S. (2011). Children as Experts in Their Lives: Child Inclusive Research. *Child Indicators Research*, 4(2), 185–189. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12187-011-9108-4>
- McMillan, J. H., & Schumacher, S. (1993). *Research in education: A conceptual introduction* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Harper Collins College.
- Menter, I. J., Elliot, D., Hulme, M., Lewin, J., & Kevin, L. (2011). *A Guide to Practitioner Research in Education* (1st ed.). London: Sage.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: CA: Sage.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: CA: Sage.
- Mills, A., Durepos, G., & Wiebe, E. (2010). *Encyclopaedia of Case Study Research, Volumes I and II*. Thousand Oaks: CA: Sage.
- Ministry of Education. (2007). *The New Zealand curriculum*. Learning Media.
- Ministry of Education. (2011). *The New Zealand School Property Strategy 2011-2021* (pp. 1–14). Wellington, N.Z. Retrieved from <http://gdsindexnz.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/The-New-Zealand-School-Property-Strategy-2011-2021.pdf>
- Ministry of Education. (2017a). *Ed Act Update 2017 - Enabling Schools to introduce cohort entry*. Ministry of Education.
- Ministry of Education. (2017b). *Innovative Learning Environments*. Retrieved from <http://ile.education.govt.nz/>

- Ministry of Education. (2017c). *Te Whāriki He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa Early childhood curriculum*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.
- Ministry of Education. (2018a). Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako. Retrieved from <https://www.education.govt.nz/further-education/communities-of-learning-kahui-ako-information-for-postsecondary-education-and-training-providers/>
- Ministry of Education. (2018b, February 27). Curriculum Staffing.
- Mitchell, L., Haggerty, M., Hampton, V., & Pairman, A. (2006). *Teachers, parents, and whānau working together in early childhood education*. Wellington: NZCER Press.
- Moll, L., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Qualitative Issues in Educational Research*, 31(2), 132–141.
- Murphy, C. (2016). *Making the Shift: Perceptions and Challenges of Modern Learning Practice* (Masters). University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/10289/10523>
- Murray, C., Waas, G., & Murray, K. (2008). Child race and gender as moderators of the association between teacherchild relationships and school adjustment. *Psychology in Schools*, 45(6), 562–578. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.20324>.
- Mutch, C. (2005). *Doing educational research. A practitioner's guide to getting started*. Wellington, N.Z.: NZCER Press.

- Neuman, M. J. (2002). The wider context. In H. Fabian & A.-W. Dunlop (Eds.), *Transitions in the early years* (pp. 8–22). London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- New Zealand Treasury. (2012). *Treasury's Advice on Lifting Student Achievement in New Zealand: Evidence Brief* (pp. 1–6). Retrieved from <https://treasury.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2012-03/sanz-evidence-mar12.pdf>
- OECD. (2015). *Schooling Redesigned: Towards Innovative Learning Systems*. Paris: OECD Publishing. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264245914-en>
- Osborne, M. (2016). *Innovative Learning Environments* (pp. 1–10). Core Education. Retrieved from <http://blog.core-ed.org/files/2017/01/Innovative-Learning-Environments-FINAL-web.pdf>
- Osborne, Mark. (2014). Inviting innovation: leading meaningful change in schools. *Set*, 2, 3–8.
- Peters, S. (2003). Theoretical approaches to transition. *SET: Research Information for Teachers*, (3), 15–20.
- Peters, S. (2004). *“Crossing the Border”: An interpretive study of children making the transition to school*. University of Waikato, New Zealand.
- Peters, S. (2010). *Literature review: Transition from early childhood education to school: Report to the Ministry of Education*. Wellington, N.Z.: Ministry of Education.

- Peters, S., Hartley, C., Rogers, P., Smith, J., & Carr, M. (2009). Early Childhood Portfolios as a Tool for Enhancing Learning during the Transition to School. *International Journal of Transitions in Childhood*, 3, 4–15.
- Peters, S., Paki, V., & Davis, K. (2015). *Learning journeys from early childhood into school*. Teaching & Learning Research Initiative. Retrieved from [http://www.tlri.org.nz/sites/default/files/projects/TLRI\\_%20Peters\\_Summary%28v2%29%20%281%29.pdf](http://www.tlri.org.nz/sites/default/files/projects/TLRI_%20Peters_Summary%28v2%29%20%281%29.pdf)
- Pianta, R. (2004). Transitioning to school: Policy, practice, and reality. *The Evaluation Exchange*, X(2), 5–6.
- Radnor, H. (2001). *Researching your professional practice. Doing interpretive research*. UK: Open University Press.
- Rietveld, C. (2008). Contextual factors affecting inclusion during children's transitions from preschool to school. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 33(3), 1–9.
- Rogoff, B. (1997). Evaluating development in the process of participation; theory, methods and practice building on each other. In *Change and development: issues of theory, method and application* (pp. 265–285). New Jersey: Erlbaum.: Mahwah.
- Rutherford, R. (2017). *Transition to school best practice* (Sabbatical Report). Taranaki, NZ.
- Smith, A. B. (1998). *Understanding children's development*. (4th ed.). Wellington: Bridget Williams Books.

- Stake, R. E. (2003). Case studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Strategies of qualitative inquiry* (2nd ed., pp. 134–164). Thousand Oaks: CA: Sage.
- Stephen, C., & Cope. (2003). An inclusive perspective on transition to primary school. *European Educational Research Journal*, 2(2), 262–276.
- Stokes, P. (2011). *Palgrave Key concepts: Key concepts in business and management research methods*. Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan Publishers Ltd.
- Te Kete Ipurangi. (2018). The concept of ako. Retrieved October 22, 2018, from <http://tereomaori.tki.org.nz/Curriculum-guidelines/Teaching-and-learning-te-reo-Maori/Aspects-of-planning/The-concept-of-ako>
- Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi, The University of Waikato, & The University of Auckland. (2016). Student Voice: Understanding the Implications. Retrieved from <https://kep.org.nz/assets/resources/site/Experiencing-the-power-of-whanaungatanga.pdf>
- Timperley, H. (2015). *Adaptive Expertise*. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2pE7lbvgTfw>
- Timperley, H., McNaughton, S., Howie, L., & Robinson, V. (2003). Transitioning children from early childhood education to school: teacher beliefs and transition practices. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 28(2), 32–40.
- Tolich, M., & Davidson, C. (2011). *Getting started: an introduction to research methods*. Auckland, N.Z: Pearson.

- Tringham, K. (2006). Transition to school. *NZ Education Gazette Tukutuku Korero*, 85(5), 11.
- University of Waikato. (2009). Ethical conduct in human research and related activities regulations. Retrieved from <https://calendar.waikato.ac.nz/assessment/ethicalConduct.html>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). Interaction between learning and development. In *Mind in society* (pp. 79–91). Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Wagner, T. (2014). *The Global Achievement Gap*. Basic Books.
- Walsham, G. (2006). Doing interpretive research. *European Journal of Information Systems*, 15(3), 320–330. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.ejis.3000589>
- Wegner, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning and identity*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Wenmoth, D. (2014). Trend 1: Learner Agency. Retrieved from <http://core-ed.org/legacy/thought-leadership/ten-trends/ten-trends-2014/learning-agency>
- Westcott, K., Perry, B., Jones, K., & Dockett, S. (2003). Parents' transition to school. *Journal of Australian Research in Early Childhood Education*, 10(2), 26–38.
- Wildenger, L. K., & McIntyre, L. L. (2011). Family concerns and involvement during the kindergarten transition. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 4(20), 387–396.
- Wilson, L. (2015, February 21). Modern learning environments in Waikato schools. *Waikato Times*. Retrieved from

<http://www.stuff.co.nz/waikato-times/news/66478065/modern-learning-environments-in-waikato-schools>

Wilson-Burns, G. (2009). Kindergarten or bust. *Practically Primary*, 14(1), 21–23.

Wright, J. (2009). *Collaborative relationships and sharing responsibility (Transitions in ECE)*. University of Caterbury.

Wright, J. (2017). Collaborative relationships and sharing responsibility (Transitions in ECE). Retrieved from <https://www.education.govt.nz/early-childhood/teaching-and-learning/transitions-in-early-learning/collaborative-relationships-and-sharing-responsibility/>

Wright, J., & Molloy, S. (2005). Case study nine: Cross-sector professional development – what can we learn about relationships? In M. Carr & S. Peters (Eds.), *Te Whāriki and links to the NZ Curriculum Research Projects* (pp. 179–191). The University of Waikato.

Yin, R. K. (1981). The case study crisis: Some answers. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 26(1), 58–65.

Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and Methods (Applied social research methods, Volume 5)* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: CA: Sage.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Permission letter for Principal of the school

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

As you are aware, I am currently studying my Master of Educational Leadership at The University of Waikato. The working title for my research is 'Successful transition from Early Childhood Education to an Innovative Learning Space in primary school for key stakeholders.'

Since [School Name] opened in 2015 it has become increasingly obvious that traditional transition to school programmes designed to prepare learners for life within single cell contexts do not adequately prepare our learners coming into our state of the art innovative learning environments. In this research project, I will be exploring how transition to school from Early Childhood Education to an Innovative learning space can be successful from the perspectives of the early childhood teachers, colleagues who are a part of the transition to school programme and the parents and the children who are transitioning.

My hopes are that my findings will guide the design and development of an outstanding transition to school programme that caters to the needs of all stakeholders of the transition to school process. I seek your permission as the Principal of this school to work with colleagues, students and their parents throughout this research project. This research would involve four colleagues, 10 parents and their children who have transitioned during the first three terms of the 2017 school year. Colleagues will be invited to participate in semi-structured interviews with a 30 minute duration. Students will be part of three focus groups. Parents will be invited to participate in an online survey. The interviews will be conducted face to face and the parent survey will be sent out via google forms. It is also anticipated that participants will spend up to 20 minutes checking transcripts from the interviews. Participation is voluntary and participants have the right to withdraw from the research project up until the commencement of analysis by contacting me via email or phone. Any data collected from the google form will not be able to be reviewed or withdrawn by participants. All data will be treated confidentially and stored securely. The primary use of the data that I collect will be to contribute to my thesis.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Your sincerely,

Chrissy Wakeman

Junior Community Leader

[School Name]

## **Appendix 2: Permission letter for ECE Centre Managers.**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am the the Team Leader of the Junior Learning Communities at [School Name] and within my role I design the transition to school programme. I am currently studying my Master of Educational Leadership at The University of Waikato and am undertaking a research project to complete my thesis. The working title for my research is Successful transition from Early Childhood Education to an Innovative Learning Space in primary school for key stakeholders.

Since [School Name] opened in 2015 it has become increasingly obvious that traditional transition to school programmes designed to prepare learners for life within single cell contexts do not adequately prepare our learners coming into our state of the art innovative learning environments. In this research project, I will be exploring how transition to school from Early Childhood Education to an Innovative learning space can be successful from the perspectives of the early childhood teachers, colleagues who are a part of the transition to school programme, the parents and the children who are transitioning.

My hopes are that my findings will guide the design and development of an outstanding transition to school programme that caters to the needs of all stakeholders of the transition to school process. I seek your permission as the Centre manager of \_\_\_\_\_ to work with the head teacher of your school readiness programme. They will be invited to participate in a semi-structured interview with a 30 minute duration. The interviews will be conducted face to face. It is also anticipated that participants will spend up to one hour checking transcripts from the interviews. Participation is voluntary and participants have the right to withdraw from the research project up until the commencement of analysis by contacting me via email or phone. All data will be treated confidentially and stored securely. The primary use of the data that I collect will be to contribute to my thesis.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Your sincerely,

Chrissy Wakeman  
Junior Community Leader  
[School Name]

### **Appendix 3: Participant information sheet for potential participants - Colleagues**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

I am currently undertaking a research project for my thesis called - Successful transition from Early Childhood Education to an Innovative Learning Space in primary school for key stakeholders.

I will be exploring how transition to school from Early Childhood Education to an Innovative learning space in primary schools can be successful from the perspectives of the early childhood teachers, colleagues who are a part of the transition to school programme, the parents and the children who have transitioned.

This letter is to invite you to participate in this research project, should it be something that you are interested in. It will outline how the research will proceed and how the information will be used.

Your participation in this research would involve you taking part in a semi-structured interview that would take approximately 30 minutes. Within two weeks of your interview, you will have the opportunity to review the transcript and make any amendments that you feel necessary. It is anticipated that you will spend up to 20 minutes reviewing the transcript. The interview will be conducted at a time and place that is convenient for you.

Participation is voluntary and participants have the right to withdraw from the research project at anytime until data has been analysed by contacting me via email or phone. All data will be treated confidentially and stored securely. The primary use of the data that I collect will be to contribute to my thesis. If at anytime any issues arise that you do not wish to discuss with me, you are able to contact my supervisor, Sara Archard at The University of Waikato email [sara.archard@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:sara.archard@waikato.ac.nz) or tel: 07 838 4466 ext 7777

My name is: \_\_\_\_\_

I am interested in participating in this research project: yes / no (please circle).

If you are interested in participating in this research, please briefly share your perceptions of our transition to school programme:

---

---

---

---

---

If you would like further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Chrissy Wakeman  
Junior Community Leader  
[School Name]

## **Appendix 4: Participant information sheet for potential participants - ECE Teachers**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

I am currently undertaking a research project for my thesis called - How can transition be successful from Early Childhood Education to an Innovative Learning Space for key stakeholders.

I will be exploring how transition to school from Early Childhood Education to an Innovative learning space can be successful from the perspectives of the early childhood teachers, colleagues who are a part of the transition to school programme, the parents and the children who have transitioned.

This letter is to invite you to participate in this research project, should it be something that you are interested in. It will outline how the research will proceed and how the information will be used.

Your participation in this research would involve you taking part in a semi-structured interview that would take approximately 30 minutes. Within two weeks of your interview, you will have the opportunity to review the transcript and make any amendments that you feel necessary. It is anticipated that you will spend up to 20 minutes reviewing the transcript. The interview will be conducted at a time and place that is convenient for you.

Participation is voluntary and participants have the right to withdraw from the research project up until the commencement of analysis by contacting me via email or phone. All data will be treated confidentially and stored securely. The primary use of the data that I collect will be to contribute to my thesis. If at anytime any issues arise that you do not wish to discuss with me, you are able to contact my supervisor, Sara Archard at The University of Waikato email [sara.archard@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:sara.archard@waikato.ac.nz) or tel: 07 838 4466 ext 7777

My name is: \_\_\_\_\_

I am interested in participating in this research project: yes / no (please circle).

If you would like further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Chrissy Wakeman  
Junior Community Leader  
[School Name]

## **Appendix 5: Participant information sheet for potential participants - Parents and students**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

I am currently undertaking a research project for my thesis called - Successful from Early Childhood Education to an Innovative Learning Space for key stakeholders.

I will be exploring how transition to school from Early Childhood Education to an Innovative learning space can be successful from the perspectives of the early childhood teachers, colleagues who are a part of the transition to school programme, the parents and the children who have transitioned.

This letter is to invite you to participate in this research project, should it be something that you are interested in. It will outline how the research will proceed and how the information will be used.

Your participation in this research would involve you taking part in a google forms survey which will take approximately 25 minutes to complete.

A key element of this research is capturing the voice of the students. This will be done through three focus group with the students that will last for approximately 30 minutes each. If you are interested in your child participating in this research project, I would love to hear from you. This will all take place during school hours.

Participation is voluntary and participants have the right to withdraw from the research project up until the commencement of analysis by contacting me via email or phone. All data will be treated confidentially and stored securely. The primary use of the data that I collect will be to contribute to my thesis. If at anytime any issues arise that you do not wish to discuss with me, you are able to contact my supervisor, Sara Archard at The University of Waikato email [sara.archard@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:sara.archard@waikato.ac.nz) or tel: 07 838 4466 ext 7777

If you and your child are interested in participating in this research please reply to this email indicating your interest. Please also include a brief statement indicating your perceptions of the transition to school programme that your child was a part of.

If you would like any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Chrissy Wakeman  
Junior Community Leader  
[School Name]

## **Appendix 6: Interview Questions - Colleagues**

1. Tell me about our current transition to school programme.
2. In what ways do you think the role of relationships play within our transition to school programme?
3. What relationships do you see as important to develop before the child starts school?
4. Think about the skills that you feel are necessary for our learners to develop before beginning at school. What are these?
5. What information do you feel it would be beneficial to receive from the child's Early Childhood Centre before they begin school?

## **Appendix 7: Interview Questions - ECE Teachers**

1. Tell me about your current school readiness programme.
2. In what ways do you build relationships with your parents?
3. In what ways do you currently handover information about your children to their school? What value do you see in this?
4. How do you feel our school and your centre could work better together to support the children's transition to school?
5. What skills do you feel are necessary for children to have before beginning school?

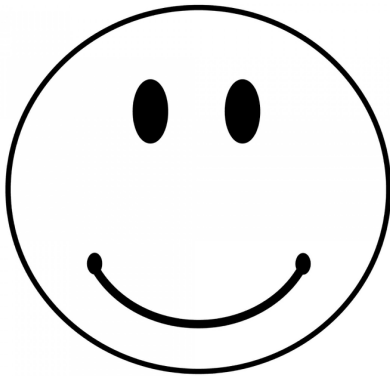
## Appendix 8: Google Forms Questionnaire - Parents

1. Thinking back to your child's transition to school, what were the positives, minus' and interesting points of the transition to school programme?
2. How do you feel your child coped with the transition to school?
3. Thinking of your child, rate these things in order from important to not as important (1 Being the most important - 5 being the least important).
  - Building relationships with other children
  - Building relationships with teachers
  - Learning about the environment (for example, where to put school bags, where the toilets are),
  - Learning the routine of school the school day.
  - Being able to manage themselves
4. In what ways would you like to see your child's early childhood centre link with your child's school?
5. After your child's transition to school, did you feel that you had built a relationship with any of your child's teachers? Would you feel comfortable approaching them?
6. Describe how you felt on your child's first day of school
7. How do you think that the transition to school programme could've better supported you in your child's transition?

## Appendix 9: Informed Consent Form - Children

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Ms. Wakeman has explained to me what is involved in this research and I have asked any questions that I have about this.



Yes



No

## **Appendix 10: Focus Group Questions**

### **Focus Group 1: Before beginning school**

Brainstorm together - Before I started school the important things I wanted to know were...

Using the felt tips, draw a picture for me of how you were feeling on your first day of school. (Record)

### **Focus Group 2: Relationships**

Using the felt tips and paper, draw for me the teachers that you knew when you began school. If you need anything at school, or you are sad, is there a specific teacher you will go and see?

Tell me about your friends - Who was your friend on the first day of school? Do you have a buddy?

When you come to school in the morning, how do you feel? Draw a smiley face if you are happy, a line face if it's ok/you are a bit nervous, a sad face if you don't like to come to school.

### **Focus Group 3: Learning at school**

Brainstorm together

- Our favourite things to do at school are...
- I learn best when...

## Appendix 11: Informed Consent Form Parents

### Informed Consent

Your signature below indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided. You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep, along with any other printed materials deemed necessary by the researcher.

**Name (Please print clearly)** \_\_\_\_\_

- I have read the participant information sheet and understand the purpose of this project.
- I understand that participation in this research means that
  - I will be asked to participate in a Google Forms survey.
  - My contributions will be anonymous.
  - My participation is voluntary and I can withdraw from this project up until the commencement of analysis without explanation by email or phone.
  - All information will be kept confidential.

I understand that ethical approval for this research has been received from The University of Waikato, Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee and that if I have any concerns regarding this project I can contact Chrissy Wakeman on 027 256 7859 or [chrissy.wakeman@endeavour.school.nz](mailto:chrissy.wakeman@endeavour.school.nz) If I want to talk about concerns to someone else in the university I can contact Sara Archard at The University of Waikato email [sara.archard@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:sara.archard@waikato.ac.nz) or tel: 07 838 4466 ext 7777

Participant's Name (print):

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 12: Informed Consent - Early Childhood Educators

Name (Please print clearly) \_\_\_\_\_

- I have read the participant information sheet and understand the purpose of this project.
- I understand that participation in this research means that
  - I will be asked to participate in one interview.
  - My contributions will be anonymous.
  - I will have the opportunity to review a transcript of the interview and to request changes to anything I said.
  - My participation is voluntary and I can withdraw from this project up until the commencement of analysis without explanation by email or phone.
  - All information will be kept confidential.
  - Access to recordings/transcripts of the interviews and focus group discussions will be restricted to Chrissy Wakeman as the researcher, and Sara Archard in her capacity as the the research supervisor.

I understand that ethical approval for this research has been received from The University of Waikato, Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee and that if I have any concerns regarding this project I can contact Chrissy on 027 2567859 or [chrissy.wakeman@endeavour.school.nz](mailto:chrissy.wakeman@endeavour.school.nz) If I want to talk about concerns to someone else in the university I can contact Sara Archard at The University of Waikato email [sara.archard@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:sara.archard@waikato.ac.nz) or tel: 07 838 4466 ext 7777

Participant's Name (print):

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 13: Informed Consent - Colleagues

Name (Please print clearly) \_\_\_\_\_

- I have read the participant information sheet and understand the purpose of this project.
- I understand that participation in this research means that
  - I will be asked to participate in one interview.
  - My contributions will be anonymous.
  - I will have the opportunity to review a transcript of the interview and to request changes to anything I said.
  - My participation is voluntary and I can withdraw from this project up until the commencement of analysis without explanation by email or phone.
  - All information will be kept confidential.
  - Access to recordings/transcripts of the interviews and focus group discussions will be restricted to Chrissy Wakeman as the researcher, and Sara Archard in her capacity as the the research supervisor.

I understand that ethical approval for this research has been received from The University of Waikato, Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee and that if I have any concerns regarding this project I can contact Chrissy on 027 2567859 or [chrissy.wakeman@endeavour.school.nz](mailto:chrissy.wakeman@endeavour.school.nz) If I want to talk about concerns to someone else in the university I can contact Sara Archard at The University of Waikato email [sara.archard@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:sara.archard@waikato.ac.nz) or tel: 07 838 4466 ext 7777

Participant's Name (print):

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

