Exploring teacher transition in New Zealand primary schools: The impact of changing class levels on teacher professional learning.

A thesis

submitted in fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree

of

Doctor of Philosophy

at

The University of Waikato

by

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THE UNIVERSITY OF

WAIKATO

Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

2016

Abstract

This thesis provides an in-depth understanding of teacher transition and the impact of this on teacher professional learning. The focus is on the transition that occurs when a teacher changes from teaching in one class level to another in New Zealand primary schools. Of particular interest is learning more about how teachers' perceptions of transition are developed, the outcomes that are generated for them and other stakeholders, how teachers negotiate transition, and the role of school leadership in teacher transition.

This research uses case study methodology, and although it is primarily qualitative in nature, a mixed methods approach was applied to gather both qualitative and quantitative data. Data were collected from 536 teachers via an online survey and from four teachers by means of a semi-structured interview. By converging and comparing broad numeric trends that emerged from the quantitative data with the detail from the qualitative data, I was able to gain a more in-depth understanding of teacher transition and the impact of this on teacher professional learning.

Findings from this study suggest that there are significant benefits for teachers and other stakeholders when teachers transition. These highlight that transition has a very significant impact on teacher learning, and stimulates the interplay between a teacher's professional learning and professional identity which can result in changes in practice and pedagogy. The influence from these changes is shown to strengthen a teacher's professional identity, bring about more effective teaching and extended professionality. Those theories which suggest that teacher development occurs in sequential stages and that all teachers progress through these stages in a linear fashion as they become more experienced, are challenged, and the suggestion that teachers require opportunities, such as transition at different times during their careers for professional development and learning, is supported.

There are four major implications for teacher education that have emerged from the findings of this study. First, they suggest that cognisance be taken of the opportunity that transition provides for teacher learning and that transition is conceptualised as a form of professional learning and development. Secondly,

they indicate that when tensions are acknowledged and clearly understood, teachers are better placed to see transition as a positive opportunity for professional learning and development. The third set of implications concern teachers being given sufficient opportunities to prepare, both mentally and physically, for transition. Finally, the study shows that the success of teacher transition is fundamentally dependent on the action of school leadership to ensure that school cultures and systems are conducive for teachers to change class levels successfully.

The new information from this study gives support to initial teacher educators, student teachers, teachers, school leaders, schools, Boards of Trustees and policy makers to ensure all teachers can successfully transition. In an effort to build knowledge about teacher transition, this study advocates that all teachers are given the chance to take full advantage of the unique opportunity for rich professional learning and development that transition between class levels offers.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people who, without their support, this thesis would not have been possible. A very special thank you goes to Professor Christopher Branson. I am sincerely grateful that you started this journey as my chief supervisor and then so willingly remained as my second supervisor for the last part. I feel extremely privileged to have worked with you as my supervisor, mentor and colleague. Your attention to detail, engagement with my writing and detailed feedback has helped me to develop as a writer. Your wise guidance, encouragement, approachability and subtle challenging have all been deeply appreciated.

My thanks also go to Associate Professor Garry Falloon. I consider myself very fortunate to have worked with you, firstly in your capacity as second supervisor, and then as chief supervisor. I have enjoyed working with you, and have valued your pragmatic approach. I am sincerely grateful for the way you have helped me to gain clarity with many ideas and challenged me with questions to dig deeper and optimise the richness of the data. Your expertise and guidance, in particular with the quantitative aspect of the study, helped me to demystify this type of research. In addition, your wealth of knowledge regarding research methods in general has been invaluable.

I also acknowledge Russell Yates who started this journey as my third supervisor and offered useful feedback and direction early in the study, and then again with proofreading in the final stages. The mentoring and ongoing belief you have had in me has given me the courage to complete both my Masters and PhD research. Your friendship, guidance, genuine interest and encouragement have been appreciated.

I am grateful to the large number of teachers who took the time to complete the online survey and the four teachers who each participated in an interview. Many thanks for so generously and openly sharing your very personal experiences, perceptions and beliefs about transitioning between class levels. I hope that your honest descriptions will help others gain a better understanding about transition and ensure the process is managed more carefully in schools.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

The impact that change has on teachers and teaching is a topic of national and international debate. Even though change is constantly occurring in education, change does not necessarily always have a positive impact on teachers or teaching. Educational reforms and changes in policy shift priorities for teachers and undermine the consolidation and sustainability of any changes that are already in progress in schools (Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2008). This makes it important that all change in schools is understood and managed carefully in order for teachers and students to benefit. Hence, in order to provide deeper understanding of its influence upon teachers, this research explores teacher transition as a form of change that is not uncommon in primary schools.

More specifically, the focus of this research is on the transition that occurs when a teacher changes from teaching in one class level to another. Although teachers changing class levels may be perceived to be a regular occurrence in New Zealand primary schools, this could be considered to be taking a somewhat simplistic view. Arguably, this view only acknowledges the observable activity of physically changing class levels but does not recognise the transition and the potentially more problematic aspects of this phenomenon. Changing class levels is not just one isolated practice but is a complex endeavour which encompasses both a physical and psychological transition that affects teachers in a number of ways (Bridges, 2009). Thus, although some say transition is simple, others disagree; it is this difference that I see as the problem.

Furthermore, the impact transition between class levels has on teacher professional learning is of particular interest in this study. It is not surprising that teachers are continually seeking professional learning that will ensure they maintain effective practice and pedagogy, given that teacher effectiveness is shown to have the greatest influence on student learning (Hattie, 2009; Timperley et al., 2008). While there is no disputing that all teachers require professional learning at different times during their careers, debate does exist about how and when this may occur. One area of concern is the quality and effectiveness of some

1

professional learning that has been offered to teachers, and another is the failure to consider that teachers' learning is embedded in their everyday practice.

Given these concerns, the close attention to finding ways of promoting teacher professional learning and development, which result in positive outcomes for students' learning, is understandable. The *Teacher professional learning and development: Best evidence synthesis iteration (BES),* a large scale New Zealand review of studies of teacher professional learning and development that have resulted in substantive student outcomes, has provided some useful insights (Timperley et al., 2008). This review reported that two key elements for teacher learning were (1) teachers making changes to their practice, and (2) inquiring into the impact of their teaching on their students' learning. The review proposed that in order for teachers to achieve these elements they require time to engage with key ideas, and school leaders need to actively create the infrastructure which will support them to do so. While these findings are useful, it seems that little attention has been given to opportunities such as changing class levels, which currently exist in schools, for teachers to be able to engage in this kind of professional learning.

The next section provides the rationale for this study and explains my interest in teacher transition. This description is then followed by a discussion of the New Zealand context and an outline of the structure of this thesis.

1.1 Rationale for this study

This study takes an interpretive approach to investigating the phenomenon of teacher transition, and, in particular the impact that changing class levels has on teacher professional learning. A case study methodology is used and although the research is primarily qualitative in nature, a mixed methods approach is taken to gather both qualitative and quantitative data. The following research questions were constructed to guide this study:

Research question:

What impact does teacher transition between class levels have on teacher professional learning?

Guiding research questions:

1. How are teachers' perceptions of transition between class levels developed?
2. What outcomes are generated for teachers and other stakeholders from teacher transition between class levels?
3. How do teachers negotiate the transition between class levels?
4. What place does leadership have in teacher transition between class levels?

My interest in teacher transition between class levels in primary schools developed from personal experiences and observations as a parent, class teacher, school leader and teacher educator. These experiences and observations led me to wonder what it was that makes some teachers more effective than others and what (if any) impact teaching different class levels has on teacher effectiveness.

My career path was typical to that of many teachers as I followed a traditional vertical path of development from novice, to advanced beginner, then to competent, proficient and ultimately to expert (Berliner, 1994). While I did not make a conscious decision to stay teaching at the same class level, when I did seek out a change I found that it was difficult to find a suitable replacement in the class level I was teaching so as to enable me to transition. This posed a professional dilemma for the leaders in the school in which I was teaching and raised the question of whether schools should focus primarily on solving administrative problems or consider the professional needs of individual teachers with regard to changing class levels.

This dilemma became more pertinent when I was in a primary school leadership position where it became apparent that a number of teachers in the school had been teaching in the same class levels for significant periods of time. These teachers seemed to have become complacent and were implementing the same teaching techniques and learning experiences each year, with little or no variation to cater for different students. The leadership team in this school believed that the teachers were at the stage in their professional development where they needed renewal and refreshment (Katz, 1995), and we considered that changing class levels would provide new opportunities for them. In some cases we moved

teachers to different class levels who were still reluctant and, even though it was done with every goodwill and good intention, the benefits were not initially appreciated. Developing a common vision amongst the staff about transition took time and effort; nevertheless, when this was achieved, the leadership team observed that teachers became more open to changing class levels and receptive to change in general. Many of the teachers grew personally and professionally, and experienced a renewed interest in their teaching when they transitioned to different class levels.

My own experiences of transition included changing from teaching in a senior class to a junior class within the same school. Although at the time I was an experienced teacher and in a leadership position, I found the transition difficult, and my prior teaching skills and knowledge did not guarantee me a smooth transition. The difference in student age initially presented a number of challenges around communication, expectations and relationships, which made my learning difficult.

Parallels can be drawn from my mixed experiences of transition with the findings of Seah (2003), who summarised the kinds of differences teachers transitioning between different sites may experience as discipline-specific, general educational and organisational. Managing these differences and adapting to the new (junior) culture caused me to experience "culture freeze" (Seah, 2003, p. 7). The junior school culture was unfamiliar to me and I felt somewhat vulnerable as I struggled to learn how things were 'done' in my new class level. Nevertheless, the transition provided me with a new and rich context for my professional growth and learning, which was an alternative to the more traditional vertical path I had previously followed. This form of teacher development can be referred to as horizontal development and consists of the transformation or creation of a new relationship between individuals and social activities (Engeström, 1996). Changing classes required me to establish relationships with junior students and their parents, which I learnt were different from what I was familiar with. In addition, my relationships with the teachers in the junior classes changed as I became 'one of them'. I sought support from my colleagues to help me manage the transition between classes and, as I developed into a more critically reflective practitioner, I experienced

some of the most enriching personal and professional growth and learning as a teacher and leader.

These experiences were the impetus to undertake research into teacher transition, and my Masters study explored the experiences of four primary school teachers who had transitioned between class levels. This research highlighted some significant benefits for teachers when they transition. The findings revealed that all four teachers benefitted in terms of personal and professional growth, professional development and learning, knowledge of the curriculum and teaching practice (Carlyon, 2011). In addition, although the teachers demonstrated that they were critically reflective practitioners prior to changing class levels, their critical reflection became much more refined after their transitions.

Following this study I undertook further research with a colleague to explore transition between class levels in primary schools from a principal's perspective. We were interested in finding out what informs principals' decision-making in relation to assigning teachers to class levels. Eight primary school principals were interviewed to learn how they managed the process of assigning teachers to classes and what the implications were when teachers were required to change class levels. Among other findings the research revealed that the principals all viewed teacher transition between class levels as an "opportunity for teachers to engage in their own inquiry, gain breadth of knowledge about students' learning needs and become highly proficient practitioners" (Carlyon & Fisher, 2012, p. 78). Although the principals in the study were strategic in their management of assigning teachers to class levels they also valued supportive school cultures where teachers were encouraged to transition between class levels (Carlyon & Fisher, 2012, 2013).

While exploring teacher transition from different perspectives enhanced my interest in transition, it raised more uncertainties and questions that required exploring. It was important to find out if the findings from my prior research were typical of a large number of teachers and to identify any trends that pertained to teacher transition between class levels. I was interested in exploring how teachers' perceive transition, and if this influences teachers to change class levels or not. It was also important to explore the reasons why some teachers have not

experienced transition and to identify if, like in my case, this was associated with being unable to find a suitable replacement that allowed them to change class levels, or if other reasons were evident. I became increasingly interested in learning more about how teachers negotiate transition and the kind of school leadership and culture that supports teachers to successfully transition.

A review of the literature revealed that there is a limited amount of research on teacher transition and, in particular, on the transition from one class level to another. Of those studies which have been undertaken on teacher transition, most have been small scale projects with few including a large number of participants, or providing a mixture of both quantitative and qualitative data. In general, studies have focussed on how teachers manage and adjust to change rather than investigating the impact of transition on teacher professional learning.

In attempting to add to this body of knowledge about teacher transition, both qualitative and quantitative data were gathered from an online survey and semi-structured interviews to give a better understanding of the complexity of teacher transition. In all, 536 teachers completed the online survey and four teachers participated in interviews. Trends and patterns identified from the quantitative data were able to be explored and expanded on in greater depth in the interviews. This process provided critical insights into teachers' perceptions of changing class levels, particularly in regard to the impact of transition on teacher professional learning. Findings from this study will add to the current knowledge of teacher transition and, as such, will be of interest to initial teacher educators, student teachers, teachers, school leaders, schools, Boards of Trustees and policy makers.

1.2   New Zealand Context

The focus for this study is the transition between year levels 1–8 (curriculum levels 1–4) in New Zealand primary schools. Shown in Figure 1.1 below are those schools which include year levels 1–8. Figure 1.1 illustrates that students in years 1–8 may be included in all or some of the full primary, contributing primary, intermediate and composite colleges. This has significant implications for teachers in terms of the opportunities that exist within different schools for teachers to change class levels. For example, a teacher who is employed in an intermediate school would only have the option to teach in a year 7–8 class, while a teacher

employed in a full primary school, we could assume, would have the option to teach in any year level from 1 –8.

	Contributing primary schools				Intermediate schools Composite colleges		
	←————— Full primary schools —————→						
Curriculum level	1		2		3		4
Age of student	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Year level	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

Figure 1.1. Schools in New Zealand which include year levels 1–8

In New Zealand schools, *curriculum level* relates to the expected level of the curriculum that students should be working at with regard to their chronological age. Classes are commonly referred to as *junior*, *middle* and *senior* classes or *year levels,* and also align with the length of time students have been attending school. Figure 1.2 below, which has been modified from the *New Zealand Curriculum (NZC),* illustrates the correlation between year level, age of students and curriculum/class level (Ministry of Education, 2007a, p. 45). This guide illustrates how year levels typically connect to curriculum levels. An example of this is that a year 3 and 4 class would include students who are typically aged between 7 and 8, and while it would be expected that the majority of these students would be working at curriculum level 2, there could well be students working at lower and higher curriculum levels. This has significant pedagogical implications regarding teacher practice and how this might differ between class levels. Factors, such as teaching resources, behaviour management strategies and teaching practices, need to be adapted and adjusted to suit the students from each year and curriculum level.
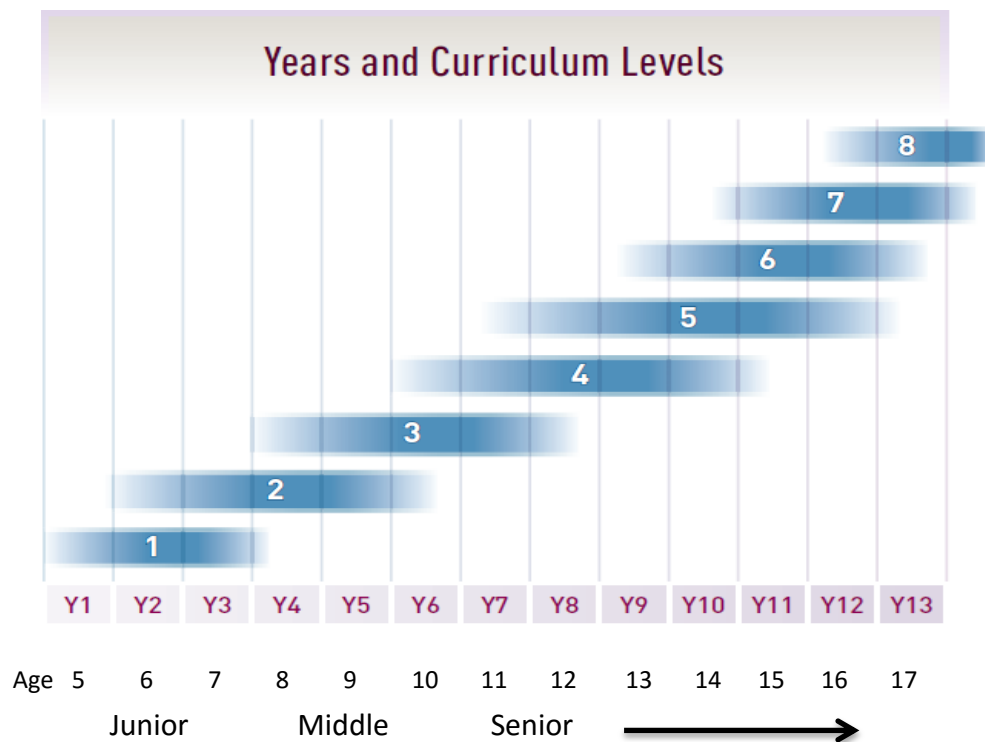
Figure 1.2. Year/curriculum levels and student age

To ensure all teachers in primary schools are able to meet the needs of students from different class levels, guidelines, such as the *Graduating Teacher Standards* (New Zealand Teachers Council, 2007) and the *Registered Teacher Criteria* (New Zealand Teachers Council, 2009), are set out by the New Zealand Teachers' Council. However, once teachers graduate from their initial teacher education course, there are no formal requirements to teach a range of different class levels. As a result, in New Zealand, while there are teachers who frequently transition between different class levels, others do so less often, and some teachers do not transition at all during their teaching careers.

The restructuring of the New Zealand school system under *Tomorrow's Schools* in the late 1980s included changes that impacted on teachers and schools with regard to assigning teachers to schools and class levels. As a result of this restructuring, schools were given more autonomy regarding which teachers they employed, and beginning teachers were also given the freedom to choose and apply for the teaching positions and classes most suitable for them (Codd, 1993). This has often resulted in greater longevity in one school and in one class level for some teachers, despite some teachers and principals having a view that it is beneficial for teachers to transition. While it could be considered to be inadvisable

8

for a teacher to remain teaching in one school and/or one class level, in building knowledge about the phenomenon of teacher transition, this study will provide more information upon which decisions can be made about this and other potential problems associated with teacher transition between class levels.

1.3   The structure of the thesis

This thesis is made up of five chapters. Chapter 1, this chapter, introduces the overall focus of this research and presents details about the New Zealand Context where this study is located. It also explains my interest in teacher transition and outlines my rationale for undertaking this research.

Chapter Two: The Literature Review. In this chapter the terms *change* and *transition* are defined and explored. Subsequent to this I review and critique the literature that relates to the following topics: professional identity, the outcomes of teacher transition, professional learning and development, school culture and climate, and leadership.

Chapter Three: The Research Design. The theoretical framework for this study is presented and explained. Decisions concerning epistemology, research paradigms, methodology and methods are discussed and justified. In this chapter I also discuss the research process, provide details about the selection of participants and how ethical issues have been considered. An explanation of the data gathering and analysis process is provided and an outline of how trustworthiness and credibility were maintained is presented.

Chapter Four: Findings. This chapter analyses data gathered from the online survey and the four interviews. An overview is provided of data, including a brief profile of each of the four teachers who participated in the interviews. Data are presented under the following three categories: explanations for teacher transition, outcomes of teacher transition and challenges of teacher transition. Under each category statistical data and short responses from the online survey are presented in table format. An explanation of each table is provided, and further data from the four interviews are presented to elaborate and expand on the trends and patterns that have emerged.

Chapter Five: Discussion. In this chapter a discussion of the findings is presented under four headings which directly respond to the research questions. The first

section discusses teachers' perspectives of transition and how these are developed. The second and third sections explore the outcomes of transition, including the impact of teacher transition on teacher learning and how teachers can strengthen their professional identities through transition. In the final section the place of school leadership and culture in teacher transition are discussed.

Chapter Six: Conclusion. The final chapter comprises a summary of the key points from this study. The four major implications for policy and practice are discussed. An outline of the limitations of the study and suggestions for further research are presented, which is then followed by a brief summary of the chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This study focusses on building knowledge and understanding about the phenomenon of teacher transition. Of particular interest is the transition between class levels in primary schools in New Zealand, and how this change impacts teacher professional learning.

Despite an extensive search of databases, such as informit, ERIC and ProQuest with respect to transition between class levels in primary schools, the lack of literature would indicate that this practice is under-researched. Although I was able to draw on my earlier research, which describes the experience of transition, how teachers are assigned to class levels and the impact of school leadership on teacher transition, these studies were all small scale projects (Carlyon, 2013, 2014, Carlyon & Fisher, 2012, 2013; Fisher & Carlyon, 2015). Even though these studies suggest that there are significant benefits from transition between class levels, they highlight that there are also many challenges.

Two sources of literature by Hobbs (2013) and du Plessis (2013) that focus on *out-of-field teaching* have been useful to this research. Teaching out-of-field refers to teachers who are assigned to teach subjects and class levels for which they are not suitably qualified. In her work Hobbs conceptualises out-of-field teaching as a boundary crossing event and explores how teachers respond to this in a variety of different ways. On the other hand, du Plessis focusses on the interrelationships between lived experiences and out-of-field teaching and what it means for teacher dispositions, practice, pedagogy, leadership strategies and the wider school community. Gaining an understanding of what it is like teaching out-of-field is useful for this study because it draws attention to the fact that not all transitions are initiated by teachers themselves and that there are times when teachers are assigned to new class levels by school leaders.

Other literature pertaining to teachers changing contexts, such as between schools and from country to country, provide useful insights about teacher transition

(Bullough, 2008; Feldman, 2005; Newell, Tallman, & Letcher, 2009; Seah, 2003). Although much of this work refers to *change* rather than *transition*, there are some useful ideas which indicate that transition involves much more than just a change in context. Transition includes changes which include professional re-orientation (Feldman, 2005), professional socialisation (Seah, 2003) and boundary pushing (Bullough, 2008).This is confirmed by Newell et al. (2009), who specifically refer to transition as being a complex process that requires a teacher to transfer their teaching tools as well as construct new knowledge, new ways of teaching and new relationships. This means that if a teacher is to successfully transition between class levels they need to have the skills to adapt their existing practices and learn new ones, while at the same time develop new relationships in a new context. It is important, then, that this research finds out more about these skills, knowledge and dispositions and how they can be developed to support teachers in their transitions.

Although this literature is useful, it highlights that there is a need for more information about teacher transition between class levels. This justifies the inclusion of literature about teacher transition in general for this review. Therefore, it should be noted that although this research focusses on one particular form of teacher transition, the limited literature available about this topic necessitates drawing on transitions such as changing curriculum areas, classrooms, schools or from country to country.

This chapter is divided into seven sections. The first section differentiates between the two key terms *change* and *transition,* explains why transition is the more appropriate term for use in this research and explores how individuals respond to transition. Section two discusses professional identity and justifies why this is a key concept in the process of teacher transition. In section three the literature, specifically about teacher transition, is reviewed and both the positive and negative outcomes from transition are highlighted. Section four presents and critiques the general literature that is relevant to professional learning and development. This is followed by sections five and six which highlight the kind of school culture and climate, and leadership that are conducive to teacher transition between class levels. This is followed by the final section which summarises the

literature and outlines the relevance of this research. These sections are organised under the following headings:

- Exploring change and transition
- Professional identity
- Outcomes of transition
- Professional learning and development
- School culture and climate
- Leadership
- Summary

This research uses constructivist and sociocultural theory as a lens for understanding teacher transition. These theories draw on the work of Dewey, Piaget, Vygotsky and Bronfenbrenner who, although to different extents, all focussed on the way in which our social, cultural and historical backgrounds and experiences shape our learning. Constructivist theory refers to the idea that learners individually and socially construct meaning as they learn, while socio-cultural theory considers the important contribution that culture has on a learner's development (Duchesne, McMaugh, Bochner, & Krause, 2013). Concepts including teachers being active participants who self-regulate and monitor their own learning, as well as acknowledging the place of social interaction within schools, are necessary to consider when reviewing the literature about teacher transition. As chapter three explains in more detail, using a constructivist and socio-cultural theory lens will help me to gain an understanding of how individual teachers construct their reality of transition between class levels.

2.2   Exploring change and transition

In order to more fully understand this phenomenon, it is necessary to first explore the terms *change* and *transition*. Bridges (2004, 2009) posits that change and transition are not the same thing and suggests that change is situational and transition is, in fact, psychological. Change is often thought of as a move to a new place, a reorganisation or a revision to something, and transition as a process that people go through as they internalise and come to terms with their new situation that the change has brought about (Bridges, 2009). For a teacher changing class levels, this would mean working with different students, colleagues, school

leaders and parents/caregivers, and sometimes in a different classroom and/or school. However, it would also mean a transition for a teacher in the way that they mentally process how to work in a new class level and with all these different stakeholders. From this we can conceptualise change as being the physical move of a teacher reorganising themselves and transition as the internal process that they go through as they find ways to respond and adapt to their new context.

Beach (2003) offers a further definition of transition and suggests that it is "the concept we use to understand how knowledge is generalised or propagated, across social space and time" (p. 42), and Vogler, Crivello and Woodhead (2008) describe it as "a 'fresh start', something to work toward, to feel more mature in mastering, and to expand social, academic, and personal horizons" (p. 234). Although the latter description is about student transition, it aligns well with this study because transition between class levels requires teachers to adjust to new settings, cultures and relationships. In addition, Beach's (2003) suggestion that transition is an activity that "exists in relation not only to individuals but to broader institutional, societal and cultural forces" (p. 51) draws attention to the many aspects that make transition between class levels such a complex process. What this discussion to date argues is that transition is not an individual process, but it involves other stakeholders such as students, colleagues, school leaders and parents/caregivers. Also encompassed within transition are different contexts, such as class, team and school cultures, which all impact on a teacher's transition.

Although it seems there is a distinction made between the terms *change* and *transition*, they are often used interchangeably. This implies that change is not simply moving from one class level to another, but is actually much more difficult and challenging for a teacher. Both Bridges and Beach make distinctions which indicate that changing class levels can be complex for a teacher and that there is much that needs to be considered in order for it to be more deeply understood. Therefore, for the purposes of this literature review, transition will be understood as the experience felt by the teacher as they internalise the process of adapting to a new context, and changing class levels will be taken as the observable activity, which is the cause of the felt experience. This research is focussed specifically on building knowledge about the phenomenon of transition which a teacher experiences when they change class levels.

In order to more fully understand the nature of transition it is worth exploring another term, *boundary crossing*, which is sometimes used synonymously with transition. Tuomi-Grohn and Engeström (2003) describe boundary crossing as "encountering difference, entering into territory which we are unfamiliar and to some extent therefore unqualified" (p. 4). While this definition implies transition and boundary crossing are similar in that they involve an individual moving from one context to another, Akkerman and Bakker (2011) suggest that boundary crossing differs from transition because it refers to ongoing, two-sided actions and interactions between contexts which affect both the individual as well as the different social practices at large. An example of a boundary crossing event is *teaching out-of-field,* which is the term that is used to describe what happens when a teacher changes from teaching a subject area or year level, for which they are qualified, to one which they are unqualified to teach (du Plessis, Gillies, & Carroll, 2014). Although teaching out-of-field generally refers to secondary school teachers, some of the issues with this practice, such as how schools are organised and teachers utilised, are synonymous with transition between class levels (Ingersoll, 1998, 2002).

It is important when schools organise the assigning of teachers into class levels, particularly when it involves teachers changing class levels, that careful consideration needs to be given to ensure that teachers are able to transition successfully. Research indicates that successful transitions result in positive outcomes for teachers and, subsequently, their students (Bridges, 2004; Fullan, 1993; Hargreaves, Earl, Moore, & Manning, 2001). Indeed, Le Fevre (2010) suggests that transition is central to building better schools, and Bridges (2004) advocates that it is "the way to personal development" (p. 105). Fullan, Cuttress and Kilcher (2005) agree that there can be positive outcomes from transition, but also point out that it is essential to have an awareness of the key drivers and issues of transition in order for teachers to make successful and sustainable changes to their practice. Certainly the changing nature of schools mean that school leaders are challenged as never before to find new ways of working in schools (Fennell, 2005). Thus, building knowledge of transition will help school leaders to effectively manage transition between class levels so that the impact on teacher professional learning is a positive one. This brings to light the significance of this

research and the need to learn more about the process of transition and the many contributing factors that make it so complex.

2.2.1   Responding to transition

It is important to recognise that individuals respond to transition, and go through the process of transition, in different ways. Although some authors advocate the empowerment of others for transition to be successful (Fennell, 2005; Fullan et al., 2005), others, such as Lick, Clauset and Murphy (2013), posit that it is first necessary to understand underlying human nature. They emphasise the importance of understanding how acceptance of transition, such as between class levels, is based on both intellectual and emotional commitment, which is achieved by working through the process of transition fully.

Rogers (2003) extends this further by suggesting that it is essential to understand the five varying roles that individuals may play in the process of transition:

- Innovators – are eager to try new ideas, able to cope with a high degree of uncertainty and willing to accept an occasional setback;
- Early adopters – are respectful, act as role models to try out new ideas and serve as role models;
- Early majority – are deliberate, adopt new ideas but seldom hold leadership positions;
- Late majority – are sceptical, adopt change under peer pressure and require the uncertainty of a new idea to be removed before feeling safe;
- Laggards – are last to adopt change, suspicious of change and those who are change agents.

To understand these roles in the context of this research it is necessary to recognise that there are many contributing factors that make each transition unique. Some of these factors include whether or not a teacher initiates their transition, at what point in their career they are when they transition and if the school culture is supportive of the teacher during the transition. For example, it would be conceivable that a teacher who transitioned for five consecutive years to different class levels to assume the role of a laggard, if they were told they were going to transition again. Or a teacher who indicated that they were keen to transition to a different class level because they felt confident about their practice

and were ready for a new challenge to assume the role of an innovator and be willing to transition to any class level.

Similar to Rogers' suggestion that we can conceptualise individual's responses to the process of transition into roles that they play, Hobbs (2013) puts forward an adaptability scale (Figure 2.1) that shows a teacher's level of commitment and their identity in relation to the subject they are teaching out-of-field.
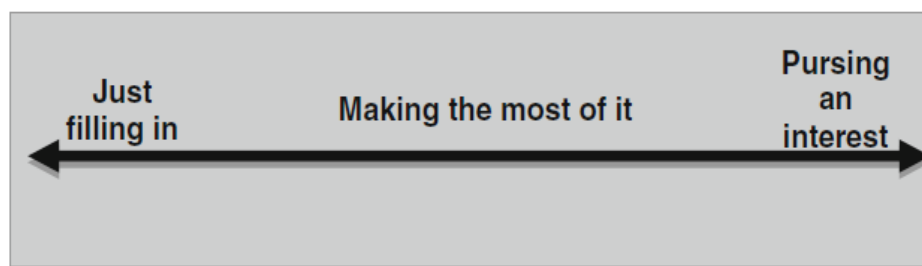
Figure 2.1. Adaptability scale for teaching out-of-field

From "Teaching 'out-of-field- as a boundary-crossing event: Factors shaping teaching identity". by L Hobbs, 2013, *International Journal of Science and Mathematics Education, 11*(2), 271–297. Copyright 2015 by Springer. Reprinted with permission.

The adaptability scale recognises the role that knowledge and situation play in the way that individual teachers are able to construct their perceptions of themselves. This is particularly relevant to this research because it illustrates how a teacher's level of commitment to transition is influenced by how they feel about their own ability to adapt in a particular class level. Moreover, it highlights that the view that a teacher has of themselves teaching a particular class level is likely to impact on their disposition towards engaging and seeking out professional learning. This illustrates that a teacher's sense of identity significantly influences his/her disposition towards transition and professional learning, as well as how they will experience transition. As such, *professional identity* is a key concept in this research and will be discussed in greater depth in the next section.

Both Rogers' and Hobbs's ideas are useful to consider in the context of teacher transition between class levels because they indicate that even the most effective teachers can find transition both difficult and demanding (Hargreaves et al., 2001). This implies that some teachers may struggle as they transition, particularly in light of the suggestion that it is common for teachers who transition between different sites of professional practice to be expected to simply fit in

17

(Seah, 2003). Beach (1999) acknowledges this and asserts that transition can be challenging and frustrating because developmental changes in relationships can occur within the individual, the social context, or both. He claims that consequential transitions involve the "construction of knowledge, identities and skills, or transformation, rather than the application of something that has been acquired elsewhere" (p. 119). Certainly, transition involves significant issues for an individual teacher and requires them to learn new knowledge, ways of teaching and form new relationships (Le Fevre, 2010; Newell et al., 2009; Vogler et al., 2008). While Fullan (1993) and Bullough and Baughman (1997) agree, they also argue that transition requires some adaptation of existing skills, behaviours, beliefs and understandings. This illustrates the complexity of transition, but also draws attention to the significant emotional energy that transition between class levels demands of a teacher.

Even though some teachers may find this process of adaptation and transition challenging, Kotter and Cohen (2002) posit that people are sensitive to the emotions that undermine and facilitate change. These emotions include "anger, false pride, pessimism, arrogance, cynicism, panic, exhaustion, insecurity and anxiety" (p. 180), and those that facilitate change include "faith, trust, optimism, urgency, reality-based pride, passion, excitement, hope and enthusiasm" (p. 180). Hargreaves et al. (2001) concur and put forward a view that in order to be successful in transition it is important to let go of old conceptions and familiar ways of doing things and develop a new and different outlook. Similarly, Bridges (2004) suggests that the challenge is to "find the connection between the change in your work or career and the underlying developmental rhythm of your life" (p. 86). This means that whether transition is in response to an external change or associated with an individual teacher's own development, if a teacher is to successfully transition they will need to be willing to modify their practice and pedagogy.

In this sense it has been suggested that teachers should be supported to let go of some of their established teaching practices and pedagogy and learn new ways of doing things when they transition. Bridges (2009) posits that people can be supported to manage transitions by helping them through three phases: ending, losing and letting go; the neutral zone; and the new beginning. Although he points

out that the phases don't happen separately; he states that "you need the transition that they add up to for the change to get under the surface of things and affect how people actually work" (p. 9). In the context of this research, this means that when a teacher transitions to a different class level they will require encouragement, support and reinforcement to help them move through these phases of their transition. During the first phase, they will need to give up some of their familiar teaching practices, pedagogy and identity. In the second phase, they will need to find ways to adapt, adjust and replace what has been familiar to them with new ideas that are suitable for their new class level. Finally, in the third phase as the teacher gains confidence in their new setting they will be able to re-shape and strengthen their identity.

In this section the terms *change* and *transition* have been explored and while they are frequently used interchangeably, they have been shown to differ considerably. *Transition* is shown to be the more appropriate term for use in this research because *change* only refers to the physical move, while *transition* refers to the internal process that a teacher experiences when they change from teaching at one class level to another. Under the sub-heading, *responding to transition,* literature highlights how individuals respond to transition and go through the process of transition in very different ways. This literature suggests that transition is a complex process that demands significant emotional energy from teachers and, in particular brings to light that professional identity is an important concept within the process.

2.3 Professional identity

This section explores professional identity in greater depth and provides justification for why it is included as a key concept in this research about teacher transition. The literature is presented under the following three sub-headings: the concept of identity, shaping and expanding professional identity, and the influence of transition on professional identity.

2.3.1 The concept of identity

Research undertaken by seminal authors in the area of teacher professional identity can be drawn on to gain a better understanding about the concept (see for example Beijaard, 1995; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Day, 1999, 2002; Nias, 1989; Olsen, 2010; Palmer, 1998). However, to first provide some explanation

about the concept of identity, early work of symbolic interactionist George Herbert Mead (1934) and psychologist Erik Erikson (1968) will be drawn on. Mead argued that individuals are social actors who construct their identity, or self-image, as they interact with the environment and communicate through a world of complex symbols (Ritzer & Goodman, 2003). This view of identity and identity formation focusses on interpersonal relationships and creating meaning within social interactions (Reicher, 2004). Erikson (1968) further progressed this view of identity being formed in social contexts by proposing eight stages that people pass through and the way they interact with the environment at each of these stages (Duchesne et al., 2013). He claimed that identity is not something a person has, but something they develop during their whole life. Although these concepts of identity may vary, they all share a common idea that identity is a relational phenomenon and that it is not a fixed attribute of a person, but rather something that is formed and reformed throughout an individual's life (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009).

Further to this, in their analysis of 22 studies about teacher professional identity, Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop (2004) found that there are four features that are essential for a teacher's professional identity. First, that professional identity is seen as a process of lifelong learning that is not stable or fixed, but rather, is dynamic. Second, that it is not entirely unique but that it implies both person and context. Next, that it consists of sub identities that relate to different contexts and relationships. Finally, that teachers exercise agency by being active in the process of professional development, and thus acknowledging that learning takes place through the activity of the learner (Beijaard et al., 2004). However, these authors also point out that current research on teacher professional identity continues to be problematic, and they noted that in all the studies they reviewed, the concept of identity was defined differently, or not at all. This illustrates that, while defining professional identity can be problematic, a teacher's professional identity is not something that necessarily stays the same but is continually developing as they interact with others and engage in different activities such as transition between class levels.

This literature implies that a teacher's professional identity may be continually shaped and expanded as they actively engage in activities such as transition. This

interaction may well occur even before a teacher transitions between class levels, and it can happen, for example, as they watch, listen and talk to others about transition. In addition, when a teacher does transition they interact with others as they learn to adapt to a new class level and reconsider what they value and believe is important in their practice and pedagogy. This illustrates that, on the one hand, the process of transition can help to shape and expand a teacher's professional identity, on the other a teacher's professional identity may constrain or prevent them from considering an opportunity to transition because of the way they shape their perception of the experience.

2.3.2   Shaping and expanding professional identity

Connelly and Clandinin (1999) referred to professional identity as 'stories to live by', which are given meaning by the narrative understandings of a teacher's knowledge and the contexts in which they work. Later, Beijaard et al. (2004) talked about professional identity being shaped by the stories teachers tell, and Clandinin, Downey and Huber (2009) suggested that using this concept "is a way to speak of the stories that teachers live out in practice and tell of who they are, and are becoming, as teachers" (p. 141). When teachers talk about transition and the impact that it has on them, this helps them to shape and expand their professional identities. An example of this could be of a teacher, experienced at teaching in junior class levels but apprehensive about teaching in senior class levels, finding that the transition to a senior class actually helped him/her to grow in confidence and improve their teaching practice.

In his early work, Beijaard (1995) made an attempt to understand how professional identity is shaped and expanded on the basis of three categories: the subject they teach, their relationship with students, and their role or role conception. While Beijaard points out that in the context of a primary school the first category can be excluded, the remaining two categories of relationships and role conception are two that connect well with this study. Beijaard drew attention to both positive relationships with pupils and functioning well in the school organisation as two important aspects that create a high degree of stability for a teacher. However, he contends that when a teacher has to teach a "new category of pupils" (p. 292), a period of instability surfaces that has a great impact on the way they perceive their role and contribution to the school. Important findings

21

from this research were that when a teacher experiences a poor relationship with their pupils they tend to perceive their contribution to the school organisation as inadequate. This research is particularly significant when considering teacher transition between class levels and aligns with the suggestion that when people face transitions that influence their self-image, and consequently their professional identity, they may feel threatened (Nias, 1989).

This was later confirmed in further studies by Beijaard, Verloop and Vermunt (2000) in which the authors found a significant difference between a teacher's professional identity as an experienced teacher and their identity as a beginning teacher. While they reported that many teachers shifted in response to different experiences during their careers, some of these authors' ideas have been challenged by others. An example is Canrinus, Helms-Lorenz, Beijaard, Buitink and Hofman (2011), who profiled 1214 teachers' sense of professional identity with regard to changes in their level of motivation, job satisfaction, occupational commitment and self-efficacy. In contrast to the idea that teachers move through stages of development as they gain experience, these authors assert that, when focussing on teachers' direct working environment, a teacher's sense of their professional identity is already clearly differentiated and is in no way wholly connected to experience.

Further work on ways in which teachers can shape and expand their professional identity suggests that the use of tools, such as metaphoric pictures, can be a meaningful vehicle for teachers to gain insights into their own teaching approaches and raise their awareness of their roles and functions in schools (Ben-Peretz, Mendelson, & Kron, 2003). Metaphoric pictures are pictorial images of metaphors that might be associated with teaching (Ben-Peretz et al., 2003); for example, a picture of a teacher with a class of very young students. The use of metaphoric pictures may help a teacher to internalise a transition, visualise themselves in a new class level and feel more confident to embrace the challenge of a new class level. This will then become something of a personal endeavour as they will continue to question themselves, their self-image, self-efficacy and professional identity, as well as manage the ongoing uncertainty that any change brings. This aligns with Hobbs's (2013) notion that a teacher's professional identity is dependent on whether they have "stories to tell, the depth of their

understanding and the connections they can make, knowledge of learners at different year levels and commitment to the subject department" (p. 293).

2.3.3 The influence of transition on professional identity

Authors such as Nias (1989) and Day (2002) maintain that there is a close correlation between professional identity and how a teacher responds to educational change. Hence, the issue of transition would seem to be integral to a teacher's professional identity and what teachers themselves find important in their professional work, based on both their experiences in practice and their personal backgrounds, as well as the expectations that others have of them (Beijaard et al., 2004). This aligns with Olsen's (2010) more recent suggestion that a teacher's identity should be seen as "both process and product, as both the influences on a teacher's knowledge and the effects of those influences" (p. 48). In his work Olsen contends that a teacher's identity consists of multiple layers of life experiences and influences that continually shape and reshape their everyday practice. These ideas are particularly fitting for this study because they draw attention to the way in which a teacher becomes more effective when they understand how to take ownership of the many experiences and transitions that influence the teacher they are becoming.

As well as influencing the way a teacher may think about transition, aspects such as a teacher's self-image, self-efficacy and their professional identity also influence their effectiveness as a teacher. Because these aspects all affect a teacher's practice and pedagogy, it is important to acknowledge the research that highlights how these aspects can strongly influence student learning (Beijaard et al., 2004; Ben-Peretz et al., 2003; Darby, 2008; Klassen et al., 2009). Self-image refers to the way a teacher may perceive themselves and their role as a professional (Ben-Peretz et al., 2003). An example of this may be of a teacher who always pictures themselves as teaching children from junior class levels and is unable to form a self-image teaching any other level. Self-efficacy is the belief a teacher holds about their own capabilities as a professional practitioner and how she/he will respond in different situations (Klassen et al., 2009), such as transitioning to a different class level. Professional identity can refer to what a teacher finds important in their professional work, based on both their experiences in practice and their personal backgrounds, as well as the expectations others have

of them (Beijaard et al., 2004). All these constructs entwine to influence how a teacher thinks of themselves as a teacher, visualises their role, what they value in their role, and how effective a teacher they believe they are and can be.

On the other hand, if a teacher does not create a vision of being able to confidently teach a different class level, the process of transition may not be easy or may be avoided all together. This aligns well with Wheatley's (2006) suggestion that "we need leaders to help us develop a clear identity that lights the dark moments of confusion" (p. 131) and illustrates how important it is for teachers to be provided with support and assistance that will enable them to work through the psychological constraints that may arise during the process of transition.

Literature relating to the concept of identity has been reviewed in this section, in order to describe not only the influences that shape and expand a teacher's professional identity, but also the influence of transition on professional identity. Professional identity is shown to be something that does not necessarily stay the same, but continually develops as individuals interact with others and engage in different activities. Literature has shown that a teacher's belief in themselves and their ability to manage transition may constrain or prevent them from considering an opportunity to change class levels. Notwithstanding this, there is also the potential for a teacher to have their professional identity shaped and strengthened when they transition.

From this it can be speculated that teachers may need support to be able to successfully transition and experience positive outcomes. Such support can be in the form of tools which help a teacher visualise themselves teaching at a different class level and leaders who understand the complex process of transition. However, when teachers are not supported they may well experience negative outcomes from transitioning. Thus, an exploration of the potential outcomes of transition provides further insight into the professional identity sensitivities that can influence a teacher's perception and commitment to transition.

2.4 Outcomes of transition

This section explores literature that extends this understanding of teacher transition, and how it links to professional identity and professional learning and

development, by drawing attention to the potential outcomes from this phenomenon. While some studies suggest that transition can be the catalyst for a teacher to engage in a kind of professional learning and development that "happens in personal behaviours" (Wheatley, 2006, p. 149) and is quite unique, contrasting work draws attention to the negative outcomes of transition (du Plessis et al., 2014). The latter authors highlight that an unsupportive culture exists among some school leaders towards teacher transition and argue that this, and a lack of understanding of the challenges, actually creates a void in a teacher's development. A discussion of some of these opposing possibilities will be presented under the following three sub-headings generated from a summary of literature concerning the potential outcomes of transition: engaging in critical reflection, becoming an adaptive expert, and developing collective responsibility.

2.4.1 Engaging in critical reflection

Literature indicates that transition provides teachers with opportunities to engage in critical reflection, which can help them to strengthen their practice, pedagogy and professional identities (Bullough, 2008; Carlyon, 2011; Elliott-Johns & Jarvis, 2013; Feldman, 2005; Newell et al., 2009; Seah, 2003). Further literature, such as Livingston (2012), posits that in a changing world teachers need to have "different opportunities and ways to access, experience and make sense of new knowledge and information" (p. 162) and "a fresh outlook on teaching" (Carlyon & Fisher, 2013, p. 73). As a teacher goes through the process of transition they are able to reflect on their practice and pedagogy to find ways to adapt to their new context, which includes repositioning and reconstructing their current values and beliefs (Timperley et al., 2008). This aligns with D. A. Schon's (1983) early work about teachers being reflective practitioners as they reflect *in* and *on* their practice. *Reflection-in-action* refers to the decision-making process that teachers go through while they are actively engaged in teaching, while *reflection-on-action* occurs both before and after the action of teaching (D. A. Schon, 1983). The notion of reflecting-on-action resonates with the findings of Feldman (2005), who undertook a self-study about her experiences as she relocated to Australia from South Africa. From this she argues that transition provides teachers with the opportunity to critically review their existing pedagogy. She suggests that the transition from one educational setting to another enables a teacher to see their

"new situation as 'other', with a stranger's eyes" (p. 49), and adds that as a teacher gains a deeper understanding of themselves; this gives him/her greater confidence to work openly and collaboratively with others in different contexts.

Brookfield (1995) describes this kind of critical reflection as seeing our practice from the other side of the mirror, and states that critically reflective teachers know that teaching well "requires a continual willingness to rethink and experiment with teaching" (p. 265). In contrast to D. A. Schon's concept of reflection-in-action, which does not take into account the social conditions of workplace learning, Brookfield suggests that there are four aspects to critical reflection: identifying and challenging assumptions, challenging the importance of context, imagining and exploring alternatives, and developing reflective scepticism. For many teachers discovering gaps in their own knowledge, this form of critical reflection provides them with opportunities to push personal boundaries and assists them to remain fully functioning, satisfied practitioners (Bullough, 2008; Kottler, Zehm, & Kottler, 2005; Olsen, 2010; Palmer, 1998). Furthermore, when teachers have opportunities to practice new ideas and become more adept at making judgements about what works and what does not work, this helps to build decisional capital (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012), that is, teachers have the ability to make better professional decisions. Hence, it is essential that teachers engage in critical reflection, otherwise they are in danger of being "trapped in unexamined judgements, interpretations, assumptions, and expectations" (Larrivee, 2000, p. 293). The suggestion that engaging in focussed critical reflection on their identity is the best way for a teacher to make use of professional development (Olsen, 2010) aligns well with this research, because changing class levels provides teachers with an opportunity to examine their practice, at their own pace and within their own classroom.

Although the literature suggests that engaging in this kind of critical reflection is necessary for professional learning (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Fullan, 2003; Wheatley, 2006), other literature points out that reflecting on and internalising a transition is challenging for many teachers (Bullough, 2008; Carlyon, 2011; Kitchen, 2009). Some teachers may even decide that transitioning between class levels is a journey they do not wish to embark on, particularly if they do not think that it will be a worthwhile experience for them (Wheatley, 2006). Therefore, it is

important to consider that although for some teachers "transition seems to rise up from inside – a wave of boredom directed at things they used to find interesting" (Bridges, 2004, p. 78), others may feel pressured to transition.

As a teacher tries to internalise their transition to a new class level, he/she may face issues around what might happen when they go down to a lower class level (or up to a higher class level). These issues could include whether he/she will like it, cope, be as good a teacher, be considered to be as good a teacher, still feel that they are a good teacher, and whether they will miss the level they are currently teaching, or perhaps regret moving to a different class level. Additionally, they may face issues concerning their new team and be concerned about what the new team will be like to work within and if they will be supported when they transition. This demonstrates that even before a teacher actually changes class levels this can be an uncertain time for them, because just the simple act of thinking about transition involves a significant amount of emotional labour. It illustrates that the process of transition consists of a "conscious reflective struggle to reconstruct knowledge, skills, and identity" (Beach, 1999, p. 130). Furthermore, if this level of reflection is something that a teacher is unfamiliar with they will require significant support from school leaders who understand that deeply structured self-reflection takes time, commitment and a great deal of courage (Branson, 2007).

The literature here indicates that transition between class levels can be the catalyst for a teacher to engage in a kind of critical reflection which may help them to strengthen their practice, pedagogy and professional identity. However, because transitions involve professional identity conflicts that have real consequences, teachers should not have to work through these alone (Olsen, 2010). Teachers need a particular kind of school culture and leadership to ensure they are supported when they are considering and experiencing transition so that they gain the most benefit from transitioning between class levels.

2.4.2 Becoming an adaptive expert

A further potential positive outcome of transitioning between class levels is in terms of teachers' professional learning as they learn new ways of planning, developing new programmes and understanding the needs of children from different age groups. The transition between class levels requires a teacher to

adapt and adjust their practice and pedagogy because they cannot rely entirely on past professional beliefs and practices as these may not be suitable. It is important that teachers remain "fluid and able to move in many directions, rather than stuck only being able to move in one direction as situations occur" (Larrivee, 2000, p. 294). When teachers transition to different class levels they learn to use their prior knowledge and understanding of children's learning and development as scaffolding in their new setting (Carlyon & Fisher, 2012). Additionally, they increase their knowledge of the curriculum and become skilled at adapting and adjusting resources to meet the needs of all learners (Carlyon, 2013, 2014). When teachers in a school know the curriculum and how to teach it, as well as know their students and understand how they learn, this can be seen as enhancing their human capital. In teaching, human capital is about teachers having the knowledge, skills and emotional capabilities to be an effective teacher and to be able to empathise with diverse groups of children and adults (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

As a teacher learns new ways of doing things, to ensure these are suitable and relevant in a different class level, they become "adaptive experts willing to modify their identities, skills and knowledge as they transition across the shifting dynamics of multiple settings" (Newell et al., 2009, p. 104). In their four year study, Newell et al. focussed on the transitions of an early career teacher from the completion of her graduate programme into teaching literature to different classes in an urban high school. Their findings show how the teacher learned simultaneously about the roles and responsibilities of a teacher, specific student learning needs and the school culture as she developed strategies to successfully negotiate from one activity setting to another within the same school. This example aligns with Borko's (2004) suggestion that "activities in which people learn become a fundamental part of what they learn" (p. 7) and illustrates that although for many teachers learning such as this occurs as they are living and doing their work every day, for others, a transition between class levels can be the platform for this learning to transpire.

Furthermore, Seah's (2003) research with immigrant teachers to examine how they transitioned between professional cultures, found that the inculcation of new values provides teachers with an empowering tool and helps to sustain their

professional health. Within this context, professional health is encompassed within teacher learning and refers to a teacher's ability to engage in and sustain effective teaching practice. Similarly, research undertaken by Carlyon and Fisher (2013) highlighted that teachers demonstrate a "greater openness to new learning" (p. 73) and become enriched by the experience of transition between class levels. This literature supports the view that transitions are significant when they are "consciously reflected on, often struggled with, and the eventual outcome changes one's sense of self and social positioning" (Beach, 1999, p. 114). It indicates that transition can benefit a teacher as they become an adaptive expert and see themselves as a more effective and employable practitioner (Carlyon, 2014).

While this kind of teacher learning is essential and it supports teaching practice (Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009; Timperley, 2005), Hobbs (2013) points out that a greater focus is required on the skills, knowledge and attitudes that are needed to increase a teacher's adaptability for transition. For some teachers transition places them in positions of vulnerability, and they struggle to adapt and adjust (Boreen, Niday, & Johnson, 2003; Bullough & Baughman, 1995; Cowley, 1996; Newell et al., 2009; Seah, 2003). Timperley et al. (2008) recognise the diversity of teachers and the contexts in which they teach and learn, and assert that even though a teacher may have expertise in one situation or level, this does not necessarily mean that they can translate this into a new situation. Just as each teacher is an individual with a specific set of cultural beliefs and values that makes them distinctive, so too does each class of students and each school. Berliner (2004) agrees and states that "exemplary performance by a teacher at the 10th grade does not automatically mean that exemplary performance will be seen at the 4th grade if that teacher were to change grades" (p. 204). This means that because teachers all have different prior learning, skills and dispositions they will not all react to or cope with transition in the same way. For some teachers, who have perhaps done things the same way for a number of years, having to "get to grips with new sets of understandings" (Timperley et al., 2008, p. 6) could well be a challenge.

Examples of teachers who have found transition to be challenging have been highlighted in the literature. For example, Bullough (2008) describes a teacher feeling "nearly overwhelmed" (p. 155) when she transitioned between classes and

schools. In this longitudinal case study, which centred on the experiences of a teacher over an eight year period as she transitioned, data were gathered from observations of teaching and meetings, and interviews with the teacher and school leaders. The author also describes how the teacher grappled with the following challenges: getting to know different students, adapting to new ways of planning, and understanding the cultural differences of a new setting. Further examples of teachers who have found transition challenging are provided by Feldman (2005), who describes feelings of frustration and embarrassment during the early months of her transition, and Kitchen (2009) who draws attention to an experienced teacher's diminishing satisfaction and performance during the initial period of his transition. du Plessis et al. (2014) add that when a teacher transitions, factors such as self-esteem concerns, interpersonal relationships, trust-relationships, communication, confidence, respect and insecurities have a significant impact on their professional development. They advocate the need for school leaders to have a greater understanding of the lived experience of teachers who transition so that they are able to provide effective professional development to improve these teachers' experiences. The literature here demonstrates how transition can be a complex endeavour for a teacher and supports Fullan's (2008) view that "re-culturing is proving far more difficult than previously realized" (p. 114).

Here, the literature has illustrated that transition between class levels can benefit a teacher in terms of their professional learning as they learn to become adaptive experts in their new setting. However, the literature also warns that not all teachers easily learn to adapt and adjust to a new culture. Hence, attention is again drawn to the importance of support and the role of leaders to ensure teachers can successfully transition (Carlyon, 2014; Kitchen, 2009; Newell et al., 2009; Seah, 2003). In particular, the need for an explicit model of professional learning that is specific for those teachers who transition has been brought to light (du Plessis et al., 2014).

2.4.3 Developing collective responsibility

A further outcome from teacher transition is that a teacher can develop their collective responsibility for student learning through having opportunities to work collaboratively with a wider range of stakeholders (Bullough, 2008; Carlyon, 2014; Newell et al., 2009). These stakeholders may include students from

different class levels, colleagues, school leaders and parents/caregivers. Collective responsibility has been defined as a teacher's willingness to accept responsibility for each and every student's learning and well-being (LoGerfo & Goddard, 2008). Collective responsibility in this sense means that individual teachers start to identify with all students in the school rather than just those in their class level (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). A teacher may develop this sense of collective responsibility when they transition, as this requires them to work collaboratively with different groups of students, colleagues, school leaders and parents/caregivers in the process of having to adjust to their new setting. Newell et al. (2009) concur and challenge conventional development theories by suggesting that when a teacher transitions, their learning becomes grounded in their new set of relationships.

Literature shows that working collaboratively with others is an essential part of professional learning for a teacher (Aitken & Mildon, 2002; Borko, 2004; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Timperley et al., 2008). In addition, it is commonly acknowledged that maintaining healthy relationships, particularly with their students, is an integral part of a teacher's work (Alton-Lee, 2003; Bishop, 2012; D. Fraser, 2012; Gibbs, 2006; Giles, 2008; Hattie, 2002; P. Schon, 2005). Bishop and Berryman (2009) state that students also recognise that it is the relationship that they have with their teacher which has the greatest influence on their educational achievement. The students in Bishop and Berryman's research highlighted that it was important that their teachers genuinely showed they cared for them and their learning. Furthermore, Carlyon (2013) posits that healthy student-teacher relationships are an integral part of any learning environment and that transition between class levels supports the development of these relationships because the teacher is likely to become "much more confident and connected with different age groups both inside and outside the classroom" (p. 103). This particular research highlights that a teacher gains confidence and awareness when they work with students of all ages, particularly in terms of managing students' behaviour, and this, in turn, strengthens a teacher's collective responsibility and professional identity (Carlyon, 2013). When a teacher interacts with students of all ages and the teachers of these students, they

learn from them and become better prepared when unexpected and challenging situations arise, even when the teacher is in a less familiar part of the school.

There are reported benefits for teachers who are able to move away from traditional norms of isolation and autonomy towards working far more collaboratively with a wider range of stakeholders and to share a collective responsibility for the development of quality teaching and learning (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2001; Whalan, 2012). In particular, the *School leadership and student outcomes: Identifying what works and why Best Evidence Iteration (BES)* (Robinson et al., 2009) draws attention to the importance of professional collaboration which is based on a more diverse understanding of how to enhance student success. This synthesis clearly outlines that "when teachers take collective responsibility for all students, teacher stress and burnout should be reduced because problems are shared and more help is available" (p. 127). Furthermore, when teachers work collaboratively, this helps to build social capital in a school (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Social capital refers to the interactions and social relationships that exist amongst teachers and affects their access to knowledge and information. While this highlights that there are ongoing benefits for a teacher when they develop collective responsibility for all students, it is important to acknowledge that in order to have the opportunity to extend their relationships, teachers need to be supported in the first instance to transition. Hargreaves et al. (2001) argue that if aspects such as the emotional dimensions of teaching and learning are not attended to, new learning will not be sustained over time. Additionally, Olsen (2010) contends that the personal-professional transitions and needs of teachers should not be considered separately but thought of as being a combination of who they are and what they can become. This suggests that if a teacher is to have positive outcomes when they transition to a different class level, it is imperative they are provided with both practical and emotional support.

This section has reviewed the literature that pertains to the outcomes of transition and highlights that when teachers engage in critical reflection, become adaptive experts and develop collective responsibility, there are benefits for teachers, students and schools. These outcomes enhance a teacher's professional learning (Robinson et al., 2009; Timperley, 2005) and shape and expand their professional

identity (Hobbs, 2013). Furthermore, these outcomes are shown to help to build decisional, human and social capital in schools which are drawn together to produce what has been described as *professional capital* (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Professional capital is a concept that "brings together the critical elements of what it takes to create high quality and high performance in all professional practice – including teaching" (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 102). Although the literature illustrates how this can help to improve teaching practice and pedagogy, it also alludes to the notion that some teachers avoid transition and "seek to make themselves invulnerable or immune to the possibility of failing" (Bullough, 2005, p. 23). From this we can speculate that while some teachers see transition as a way to stay challenged, others do not share this view.

This indicates that while there can be positive outcomes from transition, this depends a great deal on whether the school culture and leadership are supportive and consider transition to be an opportunity for professional learning and development. Thus, in order to understand why teachers' perceptions of transition differ so greatly, it is necessary to learn what the general literature says about professional learning and development.

2.5 Professional learning and development

The following section reviews literature relating to professional learning and development under the following three sub-headings: conceptualising teacher development, models of professional learning, and effective teaching. While professional learning and development have often been considered as very similar process-product outcomes, researchers have recognised the importance of understanding the process by which teachers learn and the conditions that support and promote their development (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Opfer & Pedder, 2011). Greater attention has been given to the individual nature of teacher learning and the notion of authentic engagement as opposed to a position of compliance (Cameron, Mulholland, & Branson, 2013).

While many of the meanings associated with the two terms, professional learning and professional development, tend to overlap and intersect, each has emerged from a specific set of circumstances and perspectives. Hence, for this research, the

distinction between professional *learning* and professional *development* is in keeping with that of Doecke, Parr and North (2008) who posit that,

> Professional learning connotes individual autonomy and motivation, an image of professionals consciously monitoring their professional practice, learning from their work, and arriving at new understandings or knowledge on that basis. Such learning is typically situated learning, reflecting the professional experiences and insights that become available to teachers within their local school communities. [Whereas] professional development is usually taken to mean activities done at the behest of employers or systems, involving knowledge that is delivered [externally or] by outside experts. (p. 9)

As a consequence of this distinction, the use of the term, professional learning, often seeks to highlight the important role played by individual cognition and the construction of personalised knowledge in bringing about enhanced professional practice. Whereas, professional development is more limited to describing the means by which a person is able to adopt and use a highly desired and externally observable professional practice. In truth, learning leads to development and development leads to learning but given the distinction proffered in the literature between these two terms, a brief description of each in relation to this particular research is provided.

Although consideration has not always been given to how activities, such as teacher transition, may impact on a teacher's professional learning and development, Hobbs (2013) points out that it is time that the practice of teaching out-of-field, that is, in unfamiliar environments, is considered as an opportunity for professional learning and development. In order to gain a greater understanding of the way in which transition can be seen as an opportunity for teachers to enhance their professional learning and development, it seems pertinent to first consider the process of teacher development per se.

2.5.1 Conceptualising teacher development

Teacher development has traditionally been conceptualised as being vertical whereby it is thought to occur in stages that are sequential and hierarchical, assuming each stage is more complex and desirable than the preceding stage (Richardson & Placier, 2001). This perspective is reflective of the early work by theorist Jean Piaget, who suggested that the process of development occurs in

stages (Duchesne et al., 2013). Although Piaget's work was with children, his conceptualisation of stages can be applied to initial views aligned with teacher development. An example of this is Katz's (1972, 1995) suggestion that teachers pass through the following four distinct stages during their professional development: survival, consolidation, renewal and maturity. Katz points out that as a teacher gains experience they will move through these four stages, although they will not all spend the same amount of time at each stage. Other similar models by Moir (1999) and Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) also appear to have a logical sequential progression and suggest that as teachers gain experience their professional decision making becomes less laboured and more intuitive and instinctive (Eraut, 1994). Berliner's (1994) model extends these views by suggesting that some teachers may remain fixed at a particular level, and thus do not, necessarily, move through the stages on the basis of experience alone.

Nonetheless, there has been some criticism of conceptualising teacher development as occurring in sequential stages. For example, Day (1999) points out that this perspective ignores the complex nature of classroom life and the importance of ongoing deliberate reflection on experience. He adds that stages of teacher development need to consider a teacher's phases of cognitive and emotional development as well as the historical and organisational cultures in which they work (Day, 1999). Others posit that some models of teacher development do not align with the complexity of the process, (see for example Clarke and Hollingsworth, 2002) and it is not enough to expect that experience alone will be sufficient for teachers to develop into expert practitioners (Berliner, 2004). Moreover, Olsen (2010) reasons that teacher development should not be conceptualised as occurring either vertically or horizontally through distinct stages, but rather that it should be viewed as more of a continuum, where a teacher, at any given time, is interpreting, enacting and reflecting on their work. He endorses this further in his proposal that teacher development is circular and occurs in a continuous manner because as teachers teach and think about their teaching, they automatically draw on past and present perspectives and contexts. His suggestion that greater acknowledgement be given to the shifting nature of teaching careers takes cognisance of the very different ways that teachers experience transition, as highlighted in the previous discussion about the

outcomes of transition. To this end, Olsen (2010) advocates that we conceptualise "professional development, and the personal-professional changes and needs of teachers, as integrated and interconnected parts of who we are and what we can become" (p. 26).

Another way of conceptualising teacher development has been offered by Hoyle (1980) who, in his early work, described teachers as being restricted or extended professionals. He suggests that a restricted professional is classroom-focussed, works mainly at an intuitive level with very little rationality and tends not to see their class within the wider school. Conversely, an extended professional is interested in theory, becomes involved in professional activities to further their own development and is concerned with locating their classroom teaching in a broader sense. Previous literature that illustrated the outcomes of transition, such as developing collective responsibility, aligns well with Hoyle's distinction between restricted and extended professionality.

2.5.2   Models of professional learning

A brief review of literature associated with the perceived effects of past professional development programmes establishes the ground upon which a move towards a preference for professional learning has arisen. While literature, such as the *BES*, which is firmly anchored in the New Zealand context, strongly supports the view that professional learning improves teaching practice (Timperley et al., 2008), not all previous approaches or models of professional development have proven to be effective (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Borko, 2004; Duncombe & Armour, 2004). In the past a deficit in teaching skills and knowledge was often implied (Guskey, 1986) and, as a consequence, teachers were sent on courses to further their professional development from outside experts (Wideen, 1992). Much of this form of professional development has now been challenged by researchers for lacking in consistency, offering few opportunities for understanding practice-based teaching and for simply providing forums for teachers to talk (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Day, 1999; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Hargreaves and Fullan (1992) further suggest that it is impossible to create a single, centrally administered and planned professional development programme that is suited to all teachers' needs because each teacher is unique. Likewise, Borko (2004) and Dadds (1997) point out that many approaches to

professional development fail to acknowledge the individual nature of teacher learning and that structures and cultures are essential to support teachers so they can successfully adapt in different contexts (Whalan, 2012). Hence, the need to understand professional learning, rather than just professional development, has come to the fore.

Livingston (2012) advocates that a clear infrastructure for effective professional learning be set up in schools which recognises teachers' individual learning needs and builds a collaborative community of learning. To this end, Nieto (2003) describes how teachers "need to continually rediscover who they are and what they stand for through their dialogue and collaboration with peers, ongoing and consistent study, and through deep reflection about their craft" (p. 125). There is evidence of this occurring in recent models of professional learning which recognise the individual nature of teacher learning and the importance of teachers becoming skilled inquirers (Kitchen, 2009; Robinson et al., 2009). These models align with Ferrier-Kerr, Keown and Hume's (2008) suggestion that three components critical to the success of professional learning are teachers' ability to be reflective, schools having a common vision and sound school leadership. Certainly, it is important not to underestimate the "value placed on the learning stimulated by working with others" (Kennedy, 2011, p. 26). There is considerable research that supports these suggestions and advocates for teachers working collaboratively and sharing a common vision for continuing professional learning (Bolam, McMahon, Stoll, Thomas, & Wallace, 2005; Fennell, 2005; Harris, 2003; Rhodes, Nevill, & Allan, 2005; Storey, 2004; Timperley, 2005).

Moreover, Kennedy (2005) presents a professional learning framework that describes alternative models that, together, underpin three purposes for supporting professional learning. The underpinning purposes of the particular models of professional learning are categorised as transmissive, transitional or transformative. The first four models are all categorised as transmissive because they support a skills-based view of teaching, emphasise the completion of award-bearing programmes of study, address a perceived deficit in teacher performance or involve individual teachers attending training events. The coaching/mentoring and community of practice models are all categorised as transitional because they focus on the notion that professional learning can be enhanced through teachers

sharing dialogue, sharing a common vision and working in collaborative ways in order to support professional learning. The action research and transformative models are both categorised as transformative because they allow teachers to ask critical questions of their practice and involve the combination of a number of aspects of other models. While these models align with the kind of learning that a teacher can experience when they transition, it is important to note that opportunities for teachers to learn do not necessarily need to be planned or formal, but can also occur incidentally and informally (Kennedy, 2011). Transformative models of professional learning recognise that collaborative inquiry and individual teachers reconstructing their own knowledge are most likely to lead to teacher learning, which would bring into line the notion of teacher transition as a transformative model of professional learning.

Others draw attention to the socio-cultural aspects of teacher learning and argue that there is a need for the social element in professional learning to be more widely understood (B. Bell, 2011; Bolam & Weindling, 2006; C. Fraser, Kennedy, Reid, & McKinney, 2007). This implies that learning does not occur in an isolated manner for teachers, but rather it is influenced by others around them and the different contexts in which they work. While Clark and Hollingsworth (2002) support this view, they also pay particular attention to the significant impact that the school context and the changing environment has on a teacher's learning. They propose a non-linear model for professional learning that encourages many different avenues for teacher learning and places the theories and practices developed by teachers themselves at the heart of their learning. This aligns with examples previously discussed which illustrate how teachers who transition draw on their established practices and then adapt and adjust these in their new settings.

Langdon's (2010) description of professional learning, as consisting of a "labyrinth of experiences that connect from one to another and become clear over time" (p. 25), can also be applied to teachers who transition between class levels. Although Langdon's research is with beginning teachers, it may be argued that this description of professional learning is relevant for teachers to strengthen their practice, pedagogy and professional identity at any stage in their career. This is because teacher learning should be ongoing and opportunities for new learning do

not just occur for beginning teachers. Here the professional learning gained through transition can be conceptualised as being continuous and consisting of the transformation or creation of new relationships between individuals and social activities (Engeström, 1996; Newell et al., 2009). This acknowledges that transition between class levels can provide opportunities for professional learning that may not necessarily be vertical or include promotion into a position of leadership or responsibility.

A framework that marks a distinct change in thinking from previous models for understanding professional learning is proposed by Cameron et al. (2013). This framework, while reinforcing essential components, such as the socio-cultural aspects, constructs professional learning as being inclusive of personal development and provides three strong recommendations to help re-frame our understanding. First, that teacher learning is described in more holistic terms to allow for meaningful attention to be given to personal learning needs as well as the deliberate improvement of professional skills, knowledge and attitudes. Second, that a broader approach be taken at both school and system levels to identify the ways in which teacher learning is supported. Finally, that teachers should be free to choose some learning opportunities that are focussed on their personal needs, in addition to those with direct relevance to their classrooms and pedagogy (Cameron et al., 2013). The notion of teachers having greater autonomy over their learning reinforces Stoll's (1992) suggestion that teachers should be able to engage in professional learning that is self-chosen and self-directed, and also Nieto's (2003) call for a change in the conditions in which teachers continue to learn throughout their careers. While the framework put forward by Cameron et al. (2013) offers ideas about professional learning that others may have overlooked, it is not dissimilar to previous non-linear models that also encourage teachers to take more responsibility for identifying individual opportunities for learning that meet their personal and professional needs.

These perceptions are very pertinent for this research and highlight the need to further consider the concept of professional learning. While previous literature about the outcomes of transition drew attention to benefits, such as a teacher expanding their professional identity and enhancing their professional learning, it also brought to light that not all teachers see transition as an opportunity for

professional learning. This may be because some models of professional learning still continue to treat all teachers the same, assume that each teacher will be receptive to transition and that each teacher will commit to professional learning (Day, 2002). In addition, teachers are often not recognised as having "existing experiences, practices, perspectives and insights and most usually, anxieties about the highly complex nature of their work" (Dadds, 1997, p. 32). These are all aspects which contribute to a teacher's sense of professional identity and commitment to professional learning and it is important that they are acknowledged and taken into account. This is confirmed in Livingston's (2012) comment that "teachers cannot be treated as a homogeneous group in relation to their professional learning needs" (p. 169).

Nonetheless, teachers engaging in collaborative professional learning, such as sharing and observing good practice between colleagues, is an integral aspect of professional learning and is highlighted in the literature (Duncombe & Armour, 2004). The importance of collaboration is confirmed in the *BES* which also emphasises elements of effective teacher learning, such as teachers being equipped with skills to inquire about how their teaching impacts on the learning of different groups of students, and having a strong theoretical base to help them make changes to their practice (Timperley et al., 2008). In addition, attention is drawn to the challenges of changing teaching practice and that teachers require time and opportunities to engage with key ideas for there to be improved outcomes for students (Timperley et al., 2008).

Also, the models of professional learning that have been reviewed show that although much has been learnt about the value of professional learning to support effective teaching practice, there still seems to be some disagreement about the order in which this learning takes place, or even if there is an order at all. When considering teacher transition, it remains unclear whether a change in belief leads to a change in practice or a change in practice leads to a change in belief (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). Previous discussion about the outcomes of transition would indicate that both may apply, and, for some teachers, transition between class levels leads to professional learning, while for others, it is their professional learning that leads them to want to transition.

Even so, the literature highlights important aspects of professional learning which align well to teacher transition between class levels. These aspects include the socio-cultural nature of learning, acknowledging and building on teachers' prior experiences, and encouraging and supporting teachers to take ownership of their learning. While it is the responsibility of school leaders to ensure these aspects are all acknowledged and attended to, earlier literature about the outcomes of transition show that when this is done, teachers can experience professional learning and become more effective practitioners.

2.5.3   Effective teaching

Given the current focus on teachers as being the most valuable resource in the classroom (Hattie, 2002), the plethora of literature about professional learning and development is unsurprising. Nonetheless, it is important to note that much of the literature, particularly about the socio-cultural aspect of professional learning, can be aligned with research which focusses specifically on what comprises effective teaching (Alton-Lee, 2003; Bishop, 2012; Carpenter, McMurchy-Pilkington, & Sutherland, 2002; D. Fraser, 2012). This section explores literature that concerns effective teaching and puts forward the attributes that an effective teacher demonstrates.

In particular, the work of Bishop and his colleagues in the Te Kotahitanga project, which was undertaken in New Zealand to improve the educational achievement of Māori students in mainstream schools, can be drawn on and aligned with teacher transition. Some of the outcomes of transition that have been previously highlighted, such as engaging in critical reflection to help inform and improve future teaching practice, learning to become an adaptive expert who can transfer teaching strategies from one context to another, and building positive relationships with a range of stakeholders to develop collective responsibility for all students' learning, were also illustrated as hallmarks of an effective teacher in the Te Kotahitanga project. The project found that the educational achievement of Māori students in mainstream secondary school classrooms could be improved by teachers practising culturally responsive pedagogy which has been summarised into an Effective Teacher Profile *(ETP)* (Bishop & Berryman, 2009). The *ETP* was constructed from reflecting on conversations that the researchers had with

students, whānau[1], principals and teachers, and consists of the following six elements:

- *Manaakitanga* – teachers care for their students as culturally located human beings above all else;
- *Mana motuhake* – teachers care for the performance of their students;
- *Ngā whakapiringatanga* – teachers are able to create a secure, well-managed learning environment;
- *Wānanga* – teachers are able to engage in effective teaching interactions with Māori students as Māori;
- *Ako* – teachers can use strategies that promote effective teaching interactions and relationships with their learners;
- *Kotahitanga* – teachers promote, monitor and reflect on outcomes that in turn lead to improvements in educational achievement for Māori students (Bishop, 2012).

All six of these elements align clearly with literature that shows the way in which a teacher can benefit in terms of improving their practice by means of transition. A culturally responsive pedagogy of relations, which is central to the development of the *ETP*, is illustrated when teachers have a strong sense of their own professional identity and see themselves as being capable of bringing about change in their students' improvement and accept responsibility for the learning of all their students (Bishop & Berryman, 2009). This brings into line previous literature which highlighted that a teacher can shape and expand their professional identity in these ways when he/she transitions between class levels.

Gibbs (2006) characterises effective teachers as inspirational teachers who are critical thinkers and see teaching as a "creative enterprise for social, cultural and individual good" (p. 119) rather than as a means to duplicate traditional ways of teaching. In his work, which draws on some historically significant teachers, he reveals some shared attributes, beliefs, dispositions and values of effective teachers. He contends that effective teachers are willing to take risks and experiment in their practice, are open and flexible to change, and understand and

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[1] **Whānau** (Māori pronunciation: [ˈfaːnaʉ]) is a Māori-language word for extended family, now increasingly entering New Zealand English.

value their students as individuals. While Gibbs and Bishop bring to light the attributes of effective teaching, they also highlight that teachers who display these attributes all have a sound understanding of themselves and their professional identity, which has been proposed as a key concept of this research.

While teacher professional identity is acknowledged as an important aspect of effective teaching, attention is also drawn to the way in which effective teachers constantly seek, judge and use evidence to confirm what is working and not working to improve their practice (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hattie, 2002, 2009). In a review of studies of teaching and learning from across the world, conclusions were reached about which classroom practices are most effective (Hattie, 2009). Teachers critically reflecting on their practice and pedagogy and the importance of positive teacher-student relationships were two aspects of effective teaching that were identified. In addition, attention was drawn to the importance of teachers believing that "their role is that of a change agent" (Hattie, 2009, p. 128). This kind of effective teaching has also been described as "teaching like a pro" (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 22) and encompasses teachers working collaboratively to actively contribute to their own and others' professional learning and development.

This signals that teachers can become more effective in their practice when they are provided with opportunities, such as transition between class levels, which encourage them to reflect on their practice and pedagogy. Teachers should be provided with these kinds of opportunities because "the more teachers explore, the more they discover. The more they question, the more they access new realms of possibility" (Larrivee, 2000, p. 306). This kind of professional learning and development brings together all the elements of effective teaching to enhance student learning (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). However, it is important to also acknowledge that although some teachers may seek out opportunities that will provide them with professional learning, such as transition between class levels, others may have to be encouraged to do so or may strive to avoid such opportunities.

This section has reviewed literature which relates to professional learning and development under the sub-headings of conceptualising teacher development,

models of professional learning and effective teaching. Literature indicates that there is still disagreement about the notion of teacher development occurring in sequential stages that all teachers progress through as they become more experienced. There is also some argument about which models of professional learning are the most beneficial for teachers in terms of how they can become more effective practitioners. This raises some important questions that relate to this study, such as: *Is teacher maturity alone sufficient for a teacher's learning, or are experiences such as transition between class levels also required?*

Although some models of professional learning align favourably with teacher transition, attention has not always been given to the inextricable link that exists between a teacher's professional learning and development and their professional identity. While it could be considered that there is a dichotomy between a teacher's professional learning and their professional identity, literature suggests that there is added benefit in viewing these in a more holistic manner. However, in order for this to occur it is necessary to attend to important aspects such as the socio-cultural nature of learning, acknowledging and building on teachers' prior experiences and encouraging and supporting teachers to take ownership of their learning. This implies that school culture and leadership play a major role in a teacher's transitions and, subsequently, on their professional learning, development and identity. Thus, it is necessary to explore, in particular, what kind of school culture and climate is necessary for a teacher to be able to successfully transition between class levels.

2.6 School culture and climate

Despite Fullan and Hargreaves' (1992) claim that "the culture of teaching and the culture of schools … are the keys to teacher learning" (p. 6) being somewhat dated, the previous discussion highlighting that a particular school culture is necessary for teachers to transition successfully, indicates that this still remains true. The literature reviewed to this point has illustrated how a teacher can experience positive outcomes from transition such as engaging in critical reflection, becoming an adaptive expert and developing collective responsibility. Conversely, this literature has also drawn attention to the importance of school culture and climate in teacher transition and describes how these kinds of outcomes can only transpire when a teacher is supported and encouraged by

others. This aligns with the suggestion that it is actually the culture in which professional knowledge is gained that helps people to understand the nature of the knowledge (Eraut, 1994).

However, it is noted that O'Mahoney, Barnett and Matthews (2006) make a distinction between *culture* and *climate* by describing firstly that culture is "the way we do things around here" (p. 2) and climate is "the way we feel now about the way we do things around here" (p. 2). School culture refers to the taken-for-granted beliefs, processes and values that are shared within schools that influence teachers' attitudes and behaviours (Schein, 1992), while school climate refers to the feelings a teacher has about having to abide by the expected cultural values, beliefs and behaviours (O'Mahoney et al., 2006). Others use the term *atmosphere* as an analogy for culture and refer to climate as "people's perceptions of the interactions of one person with many" (Busher, 2006, p. 84). When these interpretations are applied to this research, school culture denotes the explicit way a school approaches teacher transition between class levels, how the process of transition is managed, whether teachers are encouraged to transition and the ways that teachers may be supported. School climate refers to what teachers think about the way the school approaches, manages and supports teachers to transition between class levels and describes the teachers' perceptions of the process of transition in the particular school. Hence, if a school had a culture which valued transition between class levels and identified it as an opportunity for professional learning, this would be likely to have a positive impact on a teacher's disposition and willingness to transition. Here, the school's climate is likely to be positive around the concept of transition. Likewise, if a school had a culture whereby teachers remained in the same class levels for many years and transition was not encouraged, teachers would be likely to have a negative perception of transition and be disinclined to initiate a transition. Here, it is likely that a negative climate would be associated with transition.

While this illustrates that a positive school culture may encourage and inspire transition and improvement, literature has illustrated that not all school cultures are positive and conducive for a teacher to transition, and some have a negative or toxic culture (O'Mahoney et al., 2006). This is supported by Hargreaves (as cited

in O'Mahoney et al., 2006) who puts forward four cultures that may impact on a teacher's work and their ability to transition:

- Fragmented individualism – A culture where a teacher takes refuge in their classroom and is isolated. Working collaboratively with others is not encouraged;
- Balkanisation – A culture which is made up of teachers who compete for position. There is little collective acceptance of teaching practices;
- Contrived collegiality – A culture where collaboration is determined by administration rather than teachers. True collegiality is discouraged;
- Collaborative cultures – A culture where teacher learning is facilitated through mutual support and general agreement on educational values.

Although there is no one best culture, or indeed climate, for teachers to transition, a culture that is represented by fragmented individualism, balkanisation or contrived collegiality is less likely to be conducive for teachers to transition. Carlyon and Fisher (2013) assert that schools need to develop a culture of change for teachers to be receptive to transition between class levels. This aligns with previous literature which has brought to light that there are particular aspects of a school culture which best support teachers to successfully transition. The aspects that seem to be necessary for a teacher to successfully transition include shared values and norms such as building relational trust, working in collaborative ways and sharing a common vision.

2.6.1 Building relational trust

Le Fevre (2010) states that trust is "essential to the creation of an environment in which people are willing to take risks" (p. 84). Previous discussion about the outcomes of transition show this to be true and also that some teachers feel vulnerable about transition between class levels. Therefore, it is important that a culture of relational trust is established in schools, whereby teachers know they will be supported and able to work together (Tschannen-Moran, 2001). du Plessis (2013) points out that it is only through trust relationships that teachers can talk honestly about their experiences and challenges of transition and puts forward that respect and communication are two defining characteristics of trust relationships. While Robinson et al. (2009) agree that relational trust is built through teachers and school leaders showing mutual respect, competence and integrity in their

roles, others argue that trust goes further than this, and posit that it is based on perceptions of mutual accountability (Timperley, McNaughton, Lai, Hohepa, & Dingle, 2010). In the context of this study, this means that when a teacher transitions to a new class level they know that they can trust others to keep their word and provide them with the support that they said they would. It is also essential that teachers can trust the processes that schools have in place and that their leaders will take a strategic but also sensitive approach towards the process of transition between class levels (Carlyon & Fisher, 2013).

A culture of relational trust would enable a teacher to have confidence that others will listen to them in genuine and caring ways and value their ideas about transition between class levels. If they were considering a transition they could trust colleagues to fully inform them about what to expect and how to cope. This kind of culture would help to put a teacher's mind at ease, as they would know that they have the support and guidance they need in order to successfully transition. Building a culture of relational trust acknowledges that it is important that teachers are listened to and heard (du Plessis et al., 2014) and allowed to influence organisational decisions (Busher, 2006). This aligns with previous literature which illustrates that effective models of professional learning are those which encourage a culture in which teachers have greater autonomy over their learning.

2.6.2   Working in collaborative ways

In addition to relational trust being an essential component for teachers to successfully transition, a culture where teachers are encouraged and supported to work in collaborative ways is also necessary. This collaboration includes teachers being encouraged to engage in such activities as having open and honest dialogue, having opportunities to observe others teaching and having access to shared resources. It is important that when teachers transition between class levels they are able to work in collaborative ways because, as Newell et al. (2009) point out, it is impossible for teachers who transition to "go it alone" (p. 107). Working collaboratively with others will help teachers to internalise their transition and to work through the challenges and tensions they may face. For a teacher to experience growth and learning inherent in transition, it is essential that they are

able to talk openly and honestly about their concerns with others who share a common language for talking and thinking about their own teaching practices.

Given the issues associated with professional identity and professional learning and development, there are clear benefits when teachers are encouraged to work in collaboration and focus on the learning needs of all students (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Previous literature highlighted some advantages of teachers working collaboratively, such as sharing collective responsibility for all students' learning, and also brought into view the notion of coaching and mentoring where teachers are able to work together in ways that enable them to examine their practice (Megginson & Clutterbuck, 2005). While not all teachers and researchers share the same understanding of the term mentor, in this study the term will be taken as encompassing colleagues in support, critical friends, advisors and tutors. When a person is described as a *mentor,* this is referring to someone who has been identified as having the skills to provide the necessary support and guidance for a teacher who is transitioning. Furthermore, this accepts that the mentoring relationship was established specifically for this purpose, and is therefore considered to be an example of *formal mentoring*.

Teachers, who may already be experienced at teaching at a particular class level or have had positive experiences of transition themselves, can be mentors to help their colleagues to successfully transition. This kind of mentoring may include activities such as engaging in dialogue, facilitating observations and sharing ideas and resources. Although it is considered to be formal mentoring, it is important that a culture of informal mentoring and collaboration is also encouraged and nurtured in schools in order that teachers feel continually supported throughout the process of transition (Nias, 1989). For this study, *informal mentoring* describes a relationship where the roles and relationship were not formally defined as such, but rather they evolved and developed as a teacher transitioned.

2.6.3 Sharing a common vision

In the context of this study, a common vision is understood to be a shared understanding of a goal. A common vision of transition would be evident when all stakeholders in a school understand the benefits of changing class levels and consider transition in a positive light. When there is a culture of relational trust and teachers are encouraged to work in collaborative ways, a common vision can

be developed and shared in schools about transition between class levels. Developing and sharing a common vision is essential to leading towards meaningful change (Carlyon, 2014; Fennell, 2005). A school that shares a common vision about transition would be one in which a teacher is more receptive and open to transition and sees it as being beneficial to them, individually as well as to the school as a whole. Sharing a common vision about transition would mean a teacher would know that when they transition they would be supported by others.

Schools that share a common vision provide the best culture for teachers to participate in opportunities in which they can explore and challenge potential flaws in their personal and professional beliefs (de Vries, van de Grift, & Jansen, 2013). Previous literature has shown that when teachers are provided with the opportunity to transition within a supportive culture they can critically reflect on their practice and pedagogy as they learn to adapt to a new setting. When a school shares a common vision about transition between class levels, teachers should feel safe about engaging in such reflection and about trying new ideas and taking risks with their practice. They should also feel confident about engaging in open dialogue, observing and collaborating with others about different class levels and the needs of students at each level. It is important that a common vision about transition is developed in schools because schools and classrooms are no longer places where teachers can teach and do anything they like (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Schools are places where teachers are members of a professional community that works together to achieve excellent results.

This section has drawn attention to the kind of school culture and climate that is conducive to teacher transition between class levels. It describes a positive culture that includes aspects such as relational trust, working in collaborative ways and sharing a common vision. From this we can speculate that when a school has this kind of culture, teachers will be more inclined to take risks and be supportive of each other to transition between class levels. Furthermore, teachers will be able to successfully negotiate transition and are more likely to experience positive outcomes.

School leaders play a very influential role in teacher transition and school culture (Bullough, 2008; Carlyon, 2013; du Plessis, 2013; O'Mahoney et al., 2006). This indicates that a distinctive kind of leadership is required to ensure that school cultures are conducive for teachers to be able to successfully transition between class levels. So it seems pertinent to ask then, what are some of the components of leadership that lend itself to teacher transition? Certainly it is evident that when teachers transition they need a leader who understands the importance of working with their staff when implementing change (Carlyon & Fisher, 2012, 2013; Fennell, 2005; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Storey, 2004; Timperley, 2005). Others agree that unless the right kind of culture is established by the school leader, collaborative and informal learning will not thrive and a school will not function well (Kennedy, 2011; Stoll, 2009; Stoll & Bolam, 2005). This indicates that it is the responsibility of the school leader to foster a climate in which teachers will see transition between different class levels as an opportunity for professional learning and development which will, in turn, help them become more effective practitioners.

The next section explores this notion by reviewing the literature relating to the distinct kind of leadership that best suits teacher transition between class levels.

2.7 Leadership

Key considerations from the literature previously reviewed are that when a teacher transitions between class levels they can experience both external and internal changes. First, there is the physical change in their environment, and there are changes that can occur in a teacher's attitude, professionalism and sense of identity. Importantly, literature has highlighted that these changes are far more likely to lead to positive outcomes for a teacher when they are supported by school leaders. Arguably, this implies that the positive outcomes of transition for a teacher are more difficult to achieve if she/he is not supported by the school leader. When teachers are given support from their school leaders during periods of transition, they are provided with opportunities to transform their practice and pedagogy. This transformation occurs as teachers experience a unique kind of professional learning and development that has the potential to strengthen their professional identity so that they become more effective practitioners. Consequently, if transition in essence is transforming, then there would appear to

be a natural alignment with Burns' (1978) interpretation that leadership should be more than just getting people to do things, but that it should transform them:

> A leader not only speaks to immediate wants but elevates people by vesting in them a sense of possibility, a belief that changes can be made and that they can make them. Opportunity beckons where none had appeared before, and once seized upon opens another opportunity, and another. So a pursuit of happiness – happiness as more than a chimera, more than pleasing sensations or gratifications, but as something substantial, something essentially "good" – begins. This pursuit will take many forms, amid confusion and uncertainties and setbacks, but one factor is consistent: the needs are defined and their satisfaction sought on the needing person's terms. (p. 239)

This notion of transforming others and transformational leadership first originated in Burns' (1978) publication *Leadership* as a variation to the more traditionally accepted form of transactional leadership. Burns (2010) states that it is important that leadership is "relational, collective and purposeful" (p. 18) and that it is important for leaders to know their followers' needs, work alongside them and understand their values and principles. This aligns with Gardiner's (2006) suggestion that while transactional leaders "give something to get something in return" (p. 71), the transformational leader "asks followers to transcend their own self-interests for the good of the group" (p. 71). Others agree and describe transformational leadership as outstanding leadership that begins with the needs of followers and is demonstrated by having the ability to define the need for change and to create common visions (Den Hartog, House, Hanges, Ruiz-Quintanilla, & Dorfman, 1999). Transformational leadership can be thought of as a process that describes how leaders change individuals, teams and organisations through creating, communicating and modelling values and visions and priorities for the organisation, while also inspiring, motivating and empowering its followers to perform beyond their expectations (Bass, 1985). This style of leadership is characterised by successful leaders, who engage with teachers and other key stakeholders to produce high levels of commitment towards achieving the goals and visions of the organisation (Bush, 2003). In his work Burns (2010) advocates this kind of leadership and suggests a leader practices this by engaging with their staff "on the basis of shared motives and values and goals" (p. 46).

Theorists such as Avolio, Bass, & Jung, (1999); Bass, (1985); Robinson et al., (2009) suggest transformational leadership consists of four key components:

- individualised consideration: personal attention is given to individual staff so they feel uniquely valued;
- intellectual stimulation: encouraging creativity and new ways of thinking about problems or challenges;
- inspirational motivation: communicating optimism and high expectations;
- idealised influence: providing a sense of purpose and vision that elicit trust and respect from followers.

These ideas about transformational leadership are consistent with what has already been said about the kinds of things that leaders should be attending to when teachers transition such as building a culture of relational trust, collaboration and common vision for the needs of the whole school (Gardiner, 2006; Gold, Evans, Earley, Halpin, & Collarbone, 2003)**.**

However, Burns' suggestions about transformational leadership were left at a conceptual level and criticised for failing to recognise the motivation of followers (Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, 2011). Hence, an abundance of research and guiding principles followed as other theorists tried to describe the actions of a transformational leader. Some of these descriptions have resulted in the following interpretations of transformational leadership: servant, collective, intelligent, ethical, moral and authentic leadership. In particular, aspects of ethical, moral, and authentic leadership, such as being able to inspire and challenge teachers (Burns, 2003; Gold et al., 2003), can be aligned to the kind of leadership that would be required to support a teacher through transition.

An ethical leader values their staff and creates environments in which teachers feel that they can transition because ethical leaders look for the common good "rather than one's own benefit" (Starrat, 2005, p. 62). An ethical style of leadership is underpinned by virtues, such as responsibility, authenticity and presence (Starrat, 2005), which are all required to create the kind of culture that is essential for teachers to transition with a sense of safety and security. Furthermore, ethical leaders would be able to manage the clash of needs that can happen between a teacher and their school and would not avoid making difficult

decisions when teachers are required to change class levels. Ethical leaders are able to do this because they understand that it is their responsibility to ensure that there is a high level of teaching and learning going on in all classrooms (Starrat, 2005).

Moral leadership also lends itself to supporting teachers to transition because moral leaders are committed to connecting to their staff through genuine dialogue and maintaining caring relations with them (Noddings, 2005). Such a leader would be able to explain the possible benefits of transition and how teachers would be supported through the process. Certainly, the most important dimension of a leader's role in supporting teachers to transition is to ensure it is being done for all the right reasons and that it is for the good of the teachers and students. In addition, it is essential that leaders ensure these reasons are shared with teachers and the perceived values are acknowledged (Carlyon & Fisher, 2012).

A further interpretation of transformational leadership, which also has many of the characteristics required to work with teachers in this way, is authentic leadership. This style of leadership has evolved from ethical and moral leadership and is primarily based on professional knowledge that is informed by values, such as trust, and is skilfully executed (Begley, 2006). Moreover, authentic leadership extends beyond practical skills so as to include leaders having authentic relations with their staff that are characterised by traits such as trust and transparency (Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, & Walumbwa, 2005). Engaging in honest dialogue and getting to know their teachers as individuals are also key components of authentic leadership (Begley, 2006). An authentic leader would be able to learn where their teachers are in terms of growth, and then acknowledge and accommodate their individual needs. They would always have others' best interests at heart when making decisions about teachers changing class levels. Practising an authentic style of leadership in this way would, over time, help teachers to have a more positive view of transition. In this sense, an authentic leader is one who ensures the decisions they make about teachers changing class levels are well informed and enable teachers to confidently and successfully transition (Carlyon & Fisher, 2012).

While these interpretations of transformational leadership illustrate ways that leaders can support their teachers so that they can successfully transition and transform their practice and pedagogy, there are still deficiencies evident in these models. They all describe leaders who make the decisions about what will be done based on what they think is right and an assumption that others trust them. Branson (2010) argues that you cannot assume you have trust as a leader and asserts that you have to create a relational environment in which trust will be given to you. Furthermore, authors such as Haslam et al. (2011) claim that leadership is not so much about what a leader does but about how they are as a person. They argue that leaders need to get people to think more collectively about the interests of all and, in turn, suggest that leadership

> … is not just a relationship between leaders and followers. It is a relationship between leaders and followers within a social group. As a result, to be effective, leaders and followers need to be bound together by being part of a common "we". (Haslam et al., 2011, p. 45)

In the context of this research, when school leaders are considering teacher transition, it is important that they are influenced by relationships, intuition and meaningfulness rather than by power, authority and control (Branson, 2010). This means that it is imperative for leaders to encourage others to have input and to genuinely acknowledge and value this input. Fennell (2005) agrees that "power and leadership are interchangeable and expandable resources to be shared by all members of the community" (p. 163). These ideas illustrate that the role of a school leader is not to manage and control teachers, but it is to understand them as individuals and appreciate the problems, challenges and demands that they may have with transition between class levels. When school leaders fail to talk with their teachers in open and honest ways, or find out how they are feeling about transition, teachers are unlikely to be positive about changing class levels. Hence, it is essential that teachers know that their school leader will understand if they make mistakes and that any mistakes will be seen as learning opportunities, whereby everyone will be able to move on in a more knowledgeable and skilful way. When school leaders are comfortable, actively involved and empathetic with their teachers and understand their role in this way, they will become an accepted and trusted member of the staff and, thereby, a far more influential leader.

The leadership that has been described here has been defined by Branson, Franken and Penney (2016) as *trans-relational* leadership. Literature points to this kind of leadership as being most appropriate for teachers to be able to successfully transition between class levels and transform their practice and pedagogy. Although the literature has illustrated that ethical, moral and authentic leadership has the potential to provide practical guidance for how to lead teachers who transition between class levels, trans-relational leadership provides a greater emphasis on first building the supportive relationship so that such practical help is accepted as support and not manipulation and, thereby, is far more effective. Branson et al. (2016) suggest that the essence of trans-relational leadership is "to move others, the organization and the leader to another level of functioning by means of relationships" (p.155). Akin to earlier descriptions offered by Branson (2010) about leading change wisely, trans-relational leadership is characterised by leaders

> … having the knowledge and capacity to build personal and interpersonal relationships, to build interdependency, to create sincere and authentic professional collaborations, and to overcome various forms of resistance and interpersonal conflict. It is about the leader having the essential qualities of commitment, intentionality, and relationality. (p. 116)

Here we can see that trans-relational leadership is not just about transforming others, but it is about leaders who can work with tact and care (Fennell, 2005), nurture growth and development (Wheatley, 2006), and enhance and develop their relationships and influence with each person they are leading (Branson, 2010). In this sense trans-relational leaders have the ability to empower their teachers so they can become adaptive experts who are able to successfully transition and ultimately transform their practice and pedagogy.

To summarise, this section has illustrated that teachers may well be empowered to transform their practice and pedagogy when they are supported to transition by school leaders who practice a trans-relational style of leadership. Such leaders are able to create a culture in which teachers "all feel a sense of safety and security because they each feel that they can rely on each other in order to achieve their best" (Branson et al., 2016, p. 160). This implies that when a school leader practices a trans-relational style of leadership, a culture is able to be cultivated in

which teachers will be more likely to develop the disposition to seek out a transition between class levels. When this occurs teachers may consider that a change in class level will have a positive impact on their professional learning and development and help to shape and expand their professional identity.

2.8 Summary

Literature reviewed in this chapter pertains to how teachers might respond to transition by presenting and critiquing literature associated with professional identity, outcomes of transition, professional learning and development, school culture and climate, and leadership. Even though the terms *change* and *transition* are frequently used interchangeably, literature indicates that these two terms differ considerably and *transition* is shown to be the more appropriate term for use in this research. Literature shows that teachers respond to transition in different ways and suggests that transition is a complex process which demands significant emotional energy from teachers. While for many teachers transition between class levels may be considered a regular occurrence and nothing to be anxious about, this review has indicated that such a positive perspective is not universally the case. This highlights that the issue of transition is integral to what teachers themselves find important in their professional work, and hence *professional identity* is identified as a key concept in the issue and process of transition.

Literature also highlights that there are a number of positive outcomes from transition which may include engaging in critical reflection, learning to become an adaptive expert and developing collective responsibility for all students' learning. These outcomes suggest that transition between class levels has the potential to significantly influence a teacher's professional learning, development and identity as they learn to adjust and adapt in a new professional setting. Furthermore, the literature reviewed emphasises how transition can bring about more effective teaching and extended professionality, and thereby build professional capital in a school.

Many ideas about transition and teacher professional learning challenge the idea that teacher development occurs in a linear and sequential fashion as teachers become more experienced. While there is no doubt that professional learning supports effective teaching practice, whether there is an order to this learning, or

what the order may be, is unclear. It seems that for some teachers, transition between class levels leads to professional learning, while for others, it is their professional learning that leads them to want to transition. This suggests that while some teachers perceive a change in class level as an opportunity for professional learning, this is not the case for all teachers.

Although literature has illustrated that some models of professional learning may align favourably with teacher transition, it also highlights that some do not support the kind of learning that teachers can experience when they transition. It is evident that not every teacher has a positive experience or outcome of transition, and some have negative perceptions of transition. Furthermore, it seems that teachers will be more inclined to take risks and transition between class levels when they are encouraged and supported by others. Thus, school climate, culture and leadership are shown to all have a significant impact on teacher transition. Teachers are shown to be more receptive and confident about transition between class levels when there is a positive school climate and a healthy culture which encourages and values relational trust, working in collaboration and sharing a common vision. Hence, trans-relational leadership is identified as being the kind of leadership that is particularly suitable for teachers to be able to successfully transition and potentially have their practice and pedagogy transformed to become more effective practitioners.

This aligns with Giles (2008) and Gronn (2008), who highlight that the role of the school leader in New Zealand has changed and advocate that it includes fostering teacher learning. Part of this role is for leaders to ensure their teachers are not becoming 'habitual' in their teaching and are actively learning. In this sense, it is essential that school leaders make sure that teachers continue to grow as professionals, and if transition between class levels provides teachers with unique and important opportunities to do so, then it would seem incumbent upon the school leader to create a suitable means for this to occur.

The importance of these insights related to how teachers might respond to transition is manifested in the awareness that much of the current literature related to transition is very general. This is because there has been a dearth of national or international research that has been undertaken specifically on teacher transition

between class levels. While studies which involve transition and boundary crossing (Carlyon, 2013, 2014; du Plessis, 2013; Hobbs, 2013) provide some understanding, this review of the literature has shown that there is a need to add to the body of understanding about teacher transition between class levels. In addition, although a number of studies have focussed on one individual teacher's experience of transition (Bullough & Baughman, 1995, 1995; Feldman, 2005; Newell et al., 2009), I was unable to find any which included a large number of participants.

Even though some useful insights have been gained about how teachers manage and adjust to change, little attention has been paid to how teachers' construct their perceptions of transition and why some teachers have a positive perception while others do not. There has been insufficient attention paid to how transition is activated in schools, how teachers are assigned to class levels, how often decisions about teachers changing class levels are being based on administrative requirements and if these decisions are being made to benefit students, teachers or perhaps the community's needs. If the outcomes of transition are, in fact, shown to significantly influence a teacher's professional learning, development and identity, it is essential to explore this in greater depth so that it can be taken full advantage of. This draws attention to the relevance of this research and the importance of learning about the challenges teachers face when they transition and how teachers are able to negotiate these challenges so they can be alleviated or, at least, minimised for teachers.

While there are obvious implications for particular stakeholders, such as students, teachers, school leaders and parents/caregivers, without paying due regard to these, the potential exists for teachers to have negative experiences of changing class levels and opportunities for professional learning to be missed. This may not necessarily be because school leaders set out to achieve this, but it could be that they are not aware of these implications. Essentially this is to argue for the need to understand the particular aspects of a school culture that enable a teacher to successfully negotiate a transition and the role that school leadership plays in developing such a school culture. Since trans-relational leadership has been identified as being conducive for teachers to successfully transition, it is necessary to learn if this leadership is being enacted in schools. Thus, it is vital to build

better knowledge about how transition is being managed in schools, and what, in reality, is occurring in schools that enables or constrains teachers from being able to successfully negotiate the transition from one class level to another.

In seeking answers to these and other issues, I am aware of the importance of hearing the 'voices' of teachers and conscious of the need to find out how they think and behave with respect to transition between class levels. The importance of gathering data in order to identify any trends and patterns and to gain more in-depth information about teachers' perceptions and experiences of transition has been emphasised. Thus, the next chapter describes the research design considered as most suitable to provide these data in order to build better knowledge and understanding about the educational practice of teacher transition and how this impacts upon teacher professional learning.

CHAPTER THREE
THE RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter outlines the research design of this study. Firstly, the theoretical framework is presented and decisions relevant to this are explained. Important elements that have been included in this theoretical framework are epistemology, research paradigms, methodology and data methods. The chapter begins by providing my understanding of each of these elements in relation to this study. Next, the research process is discussed, including details about the selection of participants and how ethical issues were considered. This is followed by an explanation of the data gathering and analysis process. Finally, an outline is presented of how trustworthiness and credibility were maintained in this study.

Education research is encompassed within the broad category of social sciences research and can be distinguished by its focus on people, organisations and interactions (Mutch, 2005). It can be described as being research in which professionals in the education system construct personal meanings as they try to understand the social world of educational policy and practice (Radnor, 2001). In this research the purpose is to build knowledge about the educational practice of teacher transition and how this impacts teacher professional learning.

In order to build this knowledge, it has been necessary to explore the practice of teachers changing class levels. As the previous chapter has outlined, change and transition are not the same thing and change can be thought of as being situational whereas transition is psychological (Bridges, 2009). Therefore, finding out how teachers think and behave with respect to changing class levels is an integral part of this research. This has required me to gain an understanding of how a teacher's perception about transition between class levels is formed and what a teacher perceives to be the outcomes from transition. In order to build knowledge about the phenomenon of transition, it is imperative to identify any trends in teachers' dispositions towards changing class levels and to explore why some teachers do not transition.

Mutch (2005) has suggested that one of the reasons for conducting research is to seek out trends and establish popular interest. For this research it is also essential to find out what factors in a school are conducive or constraining to teacher transition and if these influence a teacher's decision to change class levels. By developing a greater understanding and a more holistic view of changing class levels, teachers are able to make more informed decisions about transition and school leaders are better informed about how to support them.

To this end, it was essential that the research design be best suited for gaining a greater understanding of teachers' perspectives and beliefs about transition. This necessitated decisions to be made about the most appropriate theoretical framework, which included the consideration of elements such as ontology, epistemology, research paradigms, methodology and data methods.

During the literature review stage, it is essential to spend time considering appropriate research questions as these influence the research design (Mutch, 2005). Thus, in order to build knowledge about teacher transition and the impact of changing class levels on the professional life of a teacher, the following four questions were developed to further guide this research:

> 1. How are teachers' perceptions of transition between class levels developed?
> 2. What outcomes are generated for teachers and other stakeholders from teacher transition between class levels?
> 3. How do teachers negotiate the transition between class levels?
> 4. What place does leadership have in teacher transition between class levels?

An elaboration of the mapping of survey items against these research questions is provided in Appendix 5. These questions have provided the stimulus for the participants to describe and discuss their thoughts and feelings about teacher transition and, in particular, the impact this has on their professional learning. The thoughts and feelings that the participants described were based on their own experiences and observations of teacher transition between class levels. These descriptions have provided me with each teacher's personally created knowledge

about transition based on his/her observations, experiences, feelings, values and beliefs.

As such, this is a qualitative study because the knowledge that has been gained is subjective and is about how people interpret the world in which they live, as opposed to being objective and based on discovering a 'universal law' about teacher transition. A qualitative approach was suitable in seeking answers to the research questions as it allowed me to gather rich descriptions and full pictures about the idiosyncratically and subjectively formed phenomenon of teacher transition. Furthermore, a qualitative approach was favoured because this kind of data is powerful and able to "evoke vivid images and recapture remarkable events" (Eisenhart, 2006, p. 567) about a personally formed understanding of a common phenomenon.

3.1   Theoretical framework

In the following section, the theoretical framework for this research is presented and discussed. Five key elements are considered within this framework: ontology, epistemology, research paradigms, methodology and data methods. Furthermore, a justification for the approaches taken in this research design will be fully explained.

3.1.1   Ontology

Ontology is about the view people have of the world and where they place themselves within it (Burton & Bartlett, 2009). It relates to the nature of reality and being and involves understanding of the person. Ontology can be thought of as a researcher's worldview or the general orientation about the world that they hold (Creswell, 2009). While Crotty (1998) suggests that epistemology and ontology tend to emerge together, it is important to note that ontology informs the theoretical framework of any research and, thereby, the epistemology. Some hold the ontological position that social phenomena exist as realities that we live among and are born into, whereas others contend that we constantly construct meanings of things that happen around us to make sense of them (Burton & Bartlett, 2009). While the former ontological view may be recognised as realism, it is the latter, which is known as nominalism, which can be closely aligned to this research.

Nominalism conceives that reality is something that is always in the making and, as such, is unfinished and dynamic (Sandstrom, Lively, Martin, & Fine, 2014). This view assumes that individuals have the capacity to communicate and respond through interacting with others and places meaning, interaction and human agency at the centre of understanding by emphasising that humans are rational problem solvers (Charon, 2010). That is to say, in particular circumstances the person's view of their reality is idiosyncratically created by how they weave together the perceived implications of the surrounding external objective realities, with that of their own personal subjective reaction to these. Hence, nominalism prompted the research perspective that in order to gain an understanding of how individuals create meaning so as to guide their actions, we must first understand what they believe about their world.

The ontology of nominalism aligns well with this research because there is no commonly held view, implementation or experience of transition. Nominalist ontology recognises that individual teachers and school leaders create their own positive and/or negative feelings about transition from personal experience and interpretations of other teachers' experiences. Thus, as a researcher, it was imperative that I tried to reconstruct the participants' realities and understand what influenced them and why they responded in regard to transition in the way they did. Nominalism aligns with my research goal because I wished to explore these feelings that were formed out of objective and subjective experience of change and transition in a teacher's professional life.

3.1.2 Epistemology – Constructionism

Epistemology has been described as "the theory of knowledge" and is a way of "understanding and explaining how we know what we know" (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). Burton and Bartlett posit that epistemology is "about how knowledge is created and what is seen to be legitimate knowledge" (2009, p. 17). Others, such as Guba (1990), describe epistemology as a "basic set of beliefs that guide action" (p. 17). It is these beliefs and philosophical ideas that describe the nature of research and the general orientation about the world that a researcher holds, as reflected by the guiding research questions. While all these philosophical ideas are often hidden in research, it is essential that they are identified as they influence the design of the research (Creswell, 2009).

Although there are a range of epistemologies, there are two general and contrasting positions: objectivism and constructionism. Objectivism holds the ontological view that "the world exists and is knowable as it really is. Organizations are real entities with a life of their own" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 10). Crotty (1998) explains that objective epistemology "holds that meaning, and therefore meaningful reality, exists as such apart from the operation of any consciousness" (p 8). Objectivist epistemology holds that the researcher is a neutral observer and is "distanced from the activities being examined" (Mutch, 2005, p. 221). In this respect, researchers taking an objectivist stance to the world treat knowledge as being concrete and tangible and, as such, their research usually involves examining and measuring the relationship among pre-selected variables (Creswell, 2009). Such researchers use methods and analysis aligned with quantitative research and usually start with an idea or hypothesis, which differs to qualitative research whereby the key idea usually arises out of the data.

In contrast to an objectivist epistemology is that of constructionism. Constructionism holds that there is not an objective truth to be discovered about the particular phenomenon being explored, but that meaning or truth comes into reality as people construct it through their engagement with others (Crotty, 1998). Furthermore, Crotty asserts that although constructionism is sometimes referred to as subjectivism, these are, in fact, different. Subjectivism considers that meaning is constructed in an individualistic way, while constructionism assumes that meaning is constructed out of thoughts, beliefs and impressions as the individual interacts, communicates and observes others, such that this meaning is socially constructed (Neuman, 2006). Also, Crotty suggests that nominalism in ontology and constructionism in epistemology is quite compatible and describes the constructionist position as

> the view that all knowledge and therefore meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context. (1998, p. 42)

Thus, although there are some differences of opinion, Crotty's (1998) theory of constructionism is the epistemology that best aligns with my theoretical

framework as it is based on the belief that not only is knowledge constructed socially, but it is also very idiosyncratic. This implies that, for this research, an emphasis on understanding the unique and individual way in which teachers socially construct their meaning of transition, was required. Hence, guided by a constructionist epistemology, the essential data to be gathered in this research is that which focusses on making meaning of how teachers have constructed their personal knowledge and understanding of transition as they have interacted with others. This idea of individuals creating their personal understanding and learning, as they respond to different experiences, aligns with John Dewey's (1963) early work which emphasised that the worlds of mind and matter are linked through human action.

Burton and Bartlett (2009) suggest that once a researcher understands what counts as legitimate knowledge, this will lead them on to the idea of research paradigms. This aligns with authors such as Creswell (2009) and Cohen et al. (2007), who suggest that it is a researcher's beliefs and views inherent within their research paradigm that guide them with their planning and which lead them to embrace a qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods approach to their research.

3.1.3 Research paradigms

Within a specific epistemology there are particular paradigms that researchers align with. Three key paradigms are objectivism, interpretivism and critical theory, in addition to others such as complexity and feminism (Cohen et al., 2007). Although over the past three decades a trend towards a more interpretive, qualitative research in education has emerged (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003), historically much of the research occurred in an objectivist paradigm. Researchers working within an objectivist paradigm more often use methods that involve working with two identical groups, one control and one experimental group to show cause and effect and outcomes that are measurable (Burton & Bartlett, 2009). This 'scientific' approach involves testing an idea or theory through experiments and making generalisations from the findings, and is often associated with quantitative research. Bishop (1997) suggests that research such as this often denies any personal involvement and describes it as structured, predictable and measurable. According to Cohen et al. (2007), the objectivist researcher regards "human behaviour as passive, essentially determined and controlled thereby

ignoring intention, individualism and freedom" (p. 18) and assumes that people hold very similar views which are based on consistent reasoning. Objectivism was incompatible with this research because it does not allow for acknowledgment that all teachers are individuals and have very idiosyncratic experiences of their reality.

Interpretivism differs somewhat to objectivism in that it is "characterized by a concern for the individual" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 21) and sees "that social life is based on social interactions and socially constructed meaning" (Neuman, 2006, p. 89). Research such as this is concerned with learning how people construct meaning, develop their understandings of social situations and decide how to act based upon a personal idiosyncratic interpretation of their social worlds (Newman, 2006). Authors such as Radnor (2001) advocate researchers work with an interpretive paradigm because it can deepen "one's sense of basic interpretability of life itself" (p. 16).

My philosophical viewpoint in this research aligns with the interpretive paradigm, which is to "clarify how interpretations and understandings are formulated, implemented and given meaning in lived situations" (Radnor, 2001, p. 4). As an interpretive researcher, I was able to interpret and explain my experiences of transition to others, and teachers were able to articulate what their experiences were like to me. By drawing on and acknowledging the importance of prior knowledge, I was able to interpret their experiences so they were able to identify with these (Radnor, 2001). Interpretive researchers are

> … not simply laying bare how members of a social group interpret the world around them. The social scientist will almost certainly be aiming to place the interpretations … into a social, scientific frame. There is a double interpretation going on: the researcher is providing an interpretation of others' interpretations. Indeed, there is a third level of interpretation going on, because the researcher's interpretations have to be further interpreted in terms of the concepts, theories, and literature of a discipline. (Bryman, 2001, p. 15)

Moreover, an integral part of designing a theoretical framework is for a researcher to first describe their research paradigm (Mutch, 2005). This requires the researcher to consider who they are and where their influences have come from. Mutch (2005) posits that researchers do this by asking themselves questions such

as whether their career choices and work experiences have impacted upon them and if higher-level study or in-depth reading has influenced their beliefs and values. By reflecting on my own experiences in this way, I recognise that prior experiences and research have influenced my views about transition and the impact this has on professional learning. However, more importantly for me was the critical insight that my view may not be shared by other teachers and that it was necessary to understand what other teachers believe about transition.

Within the interpretive paradigm, this research also uses tenets from socio-cultural theory whereby teachers are influenced by prior knowledge and the social situations in which they learn (B. Bell, 2011; Duchesne et al., 2013). Social situations, such as teaching, can be theorised as socio-cultural practice and can also be viewed as relational practice (B. Bell, 2011). In this research changing class levels is considered to be social and relational because teachers are actively involved in relationships with students, colleagues, school leaders and parents/caregivers.

Based on this analysis, the interpretive paradigm was preferred for this research because its purpose is to learn more about how individual teachers view transition and how their views have been formed.

3.1.3.1   *Symbolic interactionism and the interpretive research paradigm*
Symbolic interactionism provides a particular focus to interpretivist research as it hones in on the means by which the individual constructs views of a particular phenomenon. Many of the underlying principles of interpretivism, such as a person deriving meanings through social interaction with others, are characteristic of symbolic interactionist themes (Abrams & Hogg, 2004; Cohen et al., 2007; Reicher, 2004). However, symbolic interactionism takes interpretivism in a particular direction as it focusses on the "nature of interaction, the dynamic activities taking place between people" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 24). This unique version of interpretivism offers a highly developed explanation of the connection between individual perception and social organisation. It acknowledges that, through social interaction, individuals acquire the ability to interpret and use significant symbols, such as words and gestures, to make meaning and communicate with others (Sandstrom et al., 2014). Blumer (1969) suggests that

symbolic interactionism has become a brand for an approach that is used to refer to the study of "life and human conduct" (p. 1).

I consider symbolic interactionism is appropriate for this study because it is focussed on how a teacher interprets the interactions that take place between others when they transition between different class levels. There are two levels of symbolic interactionism within this research. Firstly, my understanding and beliefs about transition have been developed through my interpretation of symbols such as observing, interacting and conversing with others. The second is that the participants, too, have been influenced by similar symbols, and from this they have each made judgements and interpretations about why teachers may or may not successfully transition. The participants have also constructed their perceptions about their own ability to transition from interpreting these symbols.

Although there is a common misconception that John Dewey was the leader of the symbolic interactionist theory, it originated in the 1920s with two key theorists, George Herbert Mead and Charles Horton Cooley (Ritzer & Goodman, 2003). Blumer, who was a social constructionist and a student of Mead's, has become a well-known interpreter of symbolic interactionist theory. According to Blumer (1969), symbolic interactionism is based on the following three core principles: meaning, language and thought. He argues that

> human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them … secondly, that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's followers [sic] … and thirdly, that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he [sic] encounters. (Blumer, 1969, p. 21)

Positioning this research from a symbolic interactionist perspective enabled me to interpret how teachers respond to transition and how changing class levels impacts their professional learning. By applying Blumer's three principles of *meaning*, *language* and *thought*, it was important to first understand how teachers make *meaning* of the assumptions and beliefs they have about changing class levels. Based upon this meaning, each teacher establishes a personal disposition to transition, which impacts on the decisions they make about changing class levels. Secondly, it was necessary to learn about how teachers interpret *language*

symbols, such as communication, observation, body language, emotional response and other cues, in relation to transition. When teachers process these experiences and observations about transition through the use of their senses, they form opinions and make decisions about whether they should choose to change class levels or not. Lastly, it was important to find out more about the *thought* process that teachers engage in about transition. This thought process or mental conversation is where teachers can gain a greater understanding and more clarity about transition and the misjudgements and bias that some may have about the phenomenon. Thus, by adopting symbolic interactionism, I was able to build knowledge about how teachers act towards and make meaning of transition. I was able to highlight the symbols that represent successful or unsuccessful transitions for teachers and the interactions that occur between people that influence teachers' decisions.

It is crucial, however, to be mindful of concerns that authors such as Abrams and Hogg (2004), Reicher (2004) and Cohen et al. (2007) have raised about symbolic interactionism. It has been suggested that many of the original ideas of symbolic interactionism have tended to be placed into themes and effects, such as self-presentation and self-enhancement, which may not have been the intention of theorists such as Mead (Abrams & Hogg, 2004). Furthermore, it has been argued that symbolic interactionism is too micro in focus and may ignore the broader aspects of social reality (Cohen et al., 2007; Reicher, 2004). Some of these concerns have been mitigated in this study through the inclusion of an online survey in order to identify trends from a large group, and also in-depth interviews in order to learn more about the socio-cultural aspects of transitioning.

I have outlined why I considered symbolic interactionism to be most appropriate for this research. This research paradigm allows me to construct how it might be possible for teachers to make meaning of the phenomenon of teacher transition and the practice of changing class levels, by interpreting interactions of themselves and others. This aligns closely with my philosophical view point that teachers construct their knowledge of transition as they interact with others.

The next section outlines the reasons for selecting case study as an appropriate methodology for this research.

3.1.4 Methodology – Case study

Mutch describes methodologies as "the overarching links between theories and research practices" (2005, p. 71). Likewise, Crotty (1998) states that the methodology is the strategy or plan of action that lies behind the choice and use of particular methods that are being used. Case study has been defined as a strategy of inquiry in which a researcher explores in depth a programme, event, activity or phenomenon and is bounded by time and activity (Creswell, 2009). It enables readers to understand a phenomenon more clearly by providing unique examples and is focussed on portraying "participants' lived experiences of, thoughts about and feelings for a situation" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 254). Case study was a suitable methodology for this research because an in-depth investigation was needed in order to build knowledge about the phenomenon of teacher transition and how the change between class levels impacts teacher professional learning. Furthermore, Cresswell (2009) and Yin (2003) suggest that case study is an appropriate methodology for research guided by symbolic interactionism. In addition, researchers using a case study methodology can draw on their own experiences in order to help analyse and explain the findings, as I have been able to.

Because all teachers are unique, it is conceivable that the way they think about and experience transition would also be unique; thus, the case study methodology allowed me to "investigate and report the complex dynamic and unfolding interactions of events, human relationships and other factors in a unique instance" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 253). Using case study methodology also provided me with commonalities and differences between different data sources that enabled me to understand the phenomenon of teacher transition more thoroughly. This aligns with literature that suggests that case studies are a suitable methodology when the researcher wishes to explore a programme, event, activity or process on one or more individuals in-depth (Creswell, 2009; Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1991; Yin, 2003, 2014). Furthermore, an in-depth case study investigation gave me the understanding to be able to examine the phenomenon of transition in its real-life context. This is supported by authors such as Stake (1995), who propose that case study research is "concerned with the complexity and particular nature of the case in question" (p. 47), and Bryman who points out that with a case study "the case is an object of interest in its own right" (2001, p. 49).

70

Stake (2003) has distinguished three types of case studies based on the reason for undertaking research: intrinsic, instrumental and collective. He suggests that an intrinsic case study is used when the researcher wants to gain a better understanding of one particular case because it is of specific interest to them, while an instrumental case study is one in which the case is of secondary interest as it is examined primarily to provide insight into an issue (Stake, 2003). Finally, Stake suggests that a collective case study is where a number of cases are studied to investigate a particular phenomenon. Instrumental case study methodology links well with this research because the case has been defined as transition, and the purpose of examining it was to provide insight into the impact that transition has on teachers' learning. Each of the sources of data were drawn together in order to inform the case and to provide rich insights into the phenomenon of teacher transition. The case study is instrumental because these data were used to inform the case rather than to compare and contrast data across multiple cases of different transitions.

Three special characteristics of case studies that have been identified by Merriam (2001) align well with this study. These characteristics are that case studies are particularistic, descriptive and heuristic. Firstly, this research is particularistic because it focusses on the particular phenomenon of teacher transition. Secondly, it is descriptive in that the end product provides a rich description of the phenomenon of teacher transition. Lastly, this research is heuristic in the way it will help to advance an understanding of the phenomenon of transition, in addition to confirming what is already known (Merriam, 2001).

Nevertheless, it seems that although case studies have been described as a "reliable methodology", Tellis (1997) has suggested that they need to be "executed with due care" (p. 14). Cohen et al. (2007) caution that the examples researchers gain from a case study methodology must be supported by evidence which has been derived from generalisations. Eisenhart (2006) adds that in case studies there are always concerns about "how well the descriptions, concepts, excerpts, and quotes selected represent the people or events of interest" (p. 567). Furthermore, Yin (2014) points out that researchers using case studies should ensure that the case is not simply abstract, such a claim or argument, and they need to be defined and bound carefully.

In order to redress some of these limitations of using a case study methodology, it was necessary to bound the case, which Yin (2014) suggests requires distinguishing who and what is included, from who and what is outside of the case. For this research the bounded system comprised schools, school leaders, teachers, parents/caregivers and students. The case was defined as teacher transition and how a teacher perceives the impact of changing class levels on teacher professional learning. Bounding the case in this way helped to define teacher transition and the impact of changing class levels on teacher professional learning as a "specific, real-life case" (Yin, 2014, p. 34).

This section has discussed and justified the reasons for using case study methodology for this study. The next section will outline the methods that were used to gather data that would best answer the research questions.

3.1.5 Data methods: Mixed methods

Although this research is generally qualitative in nature, a mixed methods approach was adopted so as to gather both qualitative and quantitative data that would best answer the research questions. It was also felt that a mixed methods approach would provide qualitative data to support quantitative data and vice versa, in order to explore more deeply the phenomenon of transition. This is supported by a number of researchers who contend that when both qualitative and quantitative data are combined they may give a better understanding than if just one method was used (Bryman, 2001; Cohen et al., 2007; Neuman, 2006). The methods of data gathering for this research included an online survey and semi-structured interviews. Preliminary research including Carlyon, (2011, 2013) and Carlyon and Fisher (2012) informed the development of items for both the online survey and interviews. Further details of the mapping of survey items against the research questions are provided in Appendix 5. An online survey and semi-structured interviews were the preferred methods of data gathering as they were most likely to provide data that would enable me to build knowledge about the phenomenon of teacher transition and how this impacts teacher professional learning. The specifics of each of these data gathering methods and why they were the preferred methods are discussed in sections 3.1.5.1 and 3.1.5.2.

As Yin (2003) notes, the methods of data gathering essentially depend upon the choice of methodology which, for this research, is case study. Advocates of the

case study methodology often favour qualitative methods of data gathering because these are seen as particularly helpful in the detailed examination of a case (Bryman, 2001). Mutch (2005) explains that while qualitative research "looks in depth at fewer subjects through rich description of their thoughts, feelings, stories and/or activities", quantitative research, on the other hand, "reduces numerical data to quantifiable explanations" (p. 223). Similarly, Neuman (2006) suggests that qualitative researchers are concerned about "issues of the richness, texture, and feeling of raw data" (p. 149) as opposed to quantitative researchers who focus on issues of design, measurement and sampling. Although this literature clearly differentiates qualitative and quantitative data, I agree with Cresswell (2009) who contends that these two approaches to data collection can be used together successfully. He states that there are times when using one type of data exclusively is inadequate and "their combined use provides an expanded understanding of research problems" (p. 203). This study was enhanced by combining both quantitative and qualitative data to add robustness and trustworthiness.

For me, the significance of using a mixed methods approach was largely linked to being able to explain more fully the complexity of teacher transition by converging and comparing broad numeric trends that emerged from the quantitative data with the detail from the qualitative data (Creswell, 2002). In addition, the qualitative data from the survey provided guidance towards the development of more relevant interview questions. According to Merriam (2001), triangulation can include the use of multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, multiple informants, multiple perspectives or multiple methods to confirm the emerging findings. In this study the online survey and semi-structured interviews provided multiple sources of data, and the experiences of a large group of teachers provided multiple informants. This process improves the quality of the evidence and gives greater confidence and assurance that the meaning of what the participant has said has been taken accurately (Cohen et al., 2007; Stake, 2010).

The two methods of gathering data that were used in this research, the online survey and semi-structured interviews, will now each be described further.

3.1.5.1 Online survey

My reasons for choosing to survey a large group of teachers was that it would give this research greater robustness and trustworthiness. Additionally, it was used to identify any trends concerning transition and allowed me to make some tentative themes which could then be explored in the interviews. Any trends were able to be critiqued and explored through further data gathering and analysis to give greater depth and consistency of understanding about transition.

Online surveys, which can also be called web-based surveys, have become very popular and are a very fast and inexpensive method of gathering data (Cohen et al., 2007; Neuman, 2006). The survey was created using LimeSurvey, an open source survey application, which is supported by the University of Waikato. Some of the advantages of using an internet survey are that it reduces cost and time, accesses a wider and larger population, gives greater generalisability and there is a reduction of researcher effects (Cohen et al., 2007). Furthermore, online surveys are convenient for participants as they are able to complete them when it is most suitable for them and they are able to do so at their own speed (Bryman, 2001). As I was particularly conscious of the substantial workload that teaching entails, these advantages made the online survey a very appropriate method of gathering data.

Nevertheless, there are also disadvantages with online surveys, as technical and software issues can cause problems. Another common issue is that what shows on the screen to the person designing the survey can differ to that which appears on the participant's screen (Cohen et al., 2007). Other issues that these authors point out include poor or slow network connection, language that may offend potential participants and the survey being overloaded with instructions and information. In order to alleviate some of these issues, I used the survey application recommended and supported by the University of Waikato. Furthermore, as Robson (2002) suggests, I avoided questions that were in the negative, misleading or ambiguous, and ensured the survey was clear, concise, easy to complete and only included one open-ended question. Finally, to increase trustworthiness, which will be explained in more detail later in this chapter, the survey was trialled prior to it being provided to participants.

3.1.5.2   Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as a suitable method to gather further qualitative data to supplement that which was gathered from the short response question in the online survey. This aligns with Merriam's (2001) suggestion that when conducting case studies of a few selected individuals, semi-structured interviews are the best method to gain in-depth information. By interviewing a small number of participants in a semi-structured way, the participants were given the opportunity to discuss their interpretations of teacher transition and to express the ways they felt it had impacted on their professional learning

Burton and Bartlett (2009) posit that interviews can vary between highly structured and very formal to being quite unstructured, and almost like an everyday conversation. In a structured interview, a researcher has a set of questions to ask all the participants and does not deviate from these, whereas in a semi-structured interview, although the researcher has a prepared list of questions, they often probe further to clarify and gain a better understanding from the participant (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2006; Robson, 2002). In unstructured interviews the researcher may have a few topics they wish to cover and the interview takes on a more conversational approach (Lodico et al., 2006). To enable the participants to construct, clarify and develop their ideas and stories, semi-structured interviews were chosen as a suitable method of data gathering (Cohen et. al., 2007).

However, semi-structured interviews have a number of weaknesses. An example of this is that a significant amount of time can be required to ensure the questions are appropriately worded and also to organise and conduct them (J. Bell, 2005; Robson, 2002). A further weakness is that the conversational nature of a semi-structured interview can lead to a researcher's perspective towards the research topic influencing the participants' responses (Yin, 2014). In some cases this may result in participants providing information "based on what they think the interviewer wants to hear" (Best & Kahn, 1998, p. 254). To address this it was essential that I had a clear understanding of such issues and was reflexive about how I conducted the interviews. Reflexivity requires the researcher to be aware and sensitive about each participant's culture and values and in turn about the way they respond to this (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004).

Here the mixed methods approach and reasons for using an online survey and semi-structured interviews as methods for gathering the data have been explained.

3.1.6 Summary

The theoretical framework most appropriate for this research has been discussed, and justification about decisions concerning elements such as ontology, epistemology, research paradigms, methodology and methods has been provided. This theoretical framework is presented diagrammatically in Figure 3.1 below. The framework shows that constructionism is the epistemology aligned in this research. In addition, it illustrates how it is positioned within an interpretive paradigm, while also adopting symbolic interactionism theory. Finally, it illustrates that the research uses case study methodology with a mixed methods approach being taken to the data gathering.
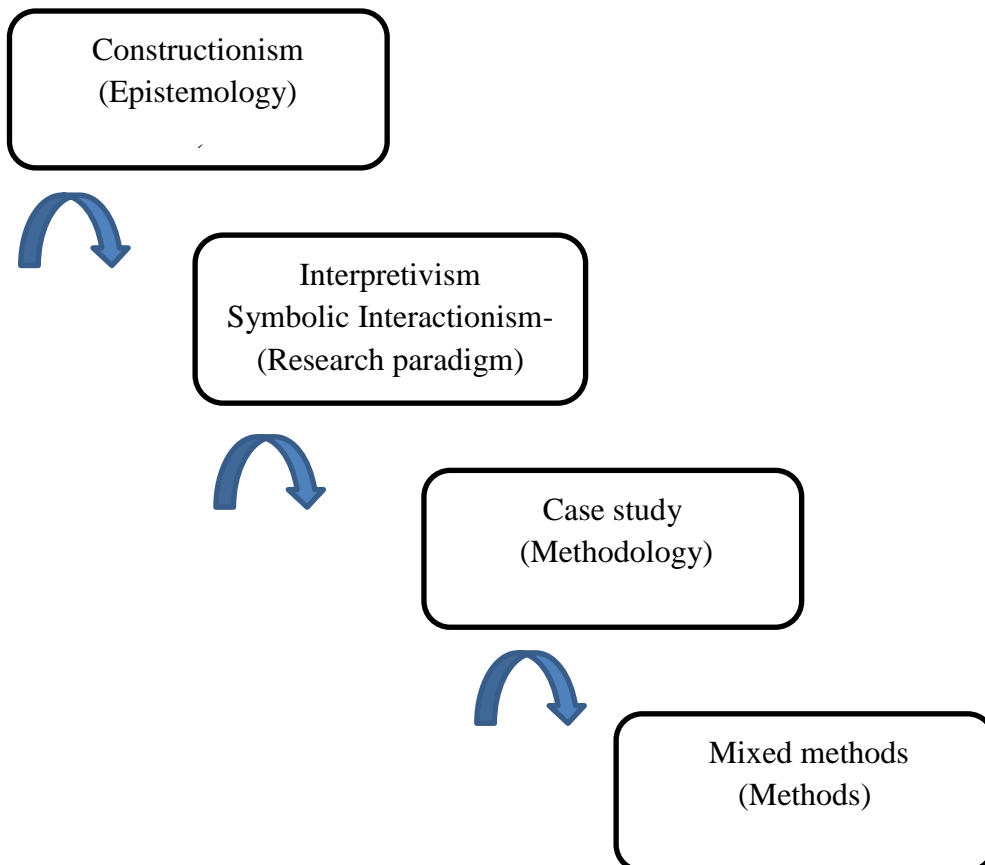
Figure 3.1. Theoretical framework

3.2 Research process

The following section outlines the research process. Firstly, a description of the participants in this study is presented, followed by a discussion about the ethical considerations. Next, the process of gathering and analysing the data is explained, followed by an outline of how trustworthiness and credibility were maintained in this research.

3.2.1 The participants

For this research two groups of participants were selected using both random and non-random sampling strategies. First, a large sample of teachers was required to participate in the online survey in order to get a broader and more credible understanding of teacher transition and to identify any trends pertaining to this phenomenon. For this, a random sample was taken of teachers from all schools in New Zealand that included year 1–8 classes. With random sampling such as this, each person has an equal probability of being selected from the population. In addition, a small purposive sample of teachers was selected to participate in a semi-structured interview, to help gain a more in-depth understanding. To create this non-random sample, this group of four teachers was selected using specific, pre-determined criteria as outlined in 3.2.1.2. Non-random sampling, which can also be known as non-probability sampling, is where participants are chosen for particular reasons (Cohen et al., 2007). The reasons for including both random and non-random sampling aligns with Neuman's views (2006) that the main purpose of sampling in qualitative research is to "collect specific cases, events, or actions that can clarify and deepen understanding" (p. 219). A more in-depth description of each of these two groups of participants is now provided.

3.2.1.1 Participants in the online survey

The participants in the online survey comprised 536 teachers who voluntarily completed the survey. Although there were a total of 967 teachers who accessed the survey, 431 of these responses were classed as 'incomplete'. This will be discussed in more detail in the analysis of data section. Of the 536 teachers who fully participated, 485 responded that they had taught more than one class level (Group A) and 51 indicated that they had taught only one class level (Group B), meaning that they had as yet not transitioned. A summary of these two groups showing their gender and age is presented in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1. *Age and Gender of Participants in Groups A & B*

Age Group	20-25 years		26-30 years		31-40 years		41-50 years		51+ years	
Gender	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Group A (Taught more than one level)	10	3	37	4	98	18	122	26	143	24
Group B (Taught one level only)	13	4	5	2	14	1	9	1	2	0

3.2.1.2 *Participants in the semi-structured interviews*

The participants in the interviews comprised a purposeful sample of four teachers (Group C). They were chosen from a larger group of teachers, who had been identified as possible participants through the professional networks I had established from the greater Auckland and Waikato regions of New Zealand. The criteria for selection was that the teachers were currently employed teaching full time as primary school class teachers, had been teaching at least three years, and had changed class levels. In addition, for ease of access, they all resided within 90 kilometres from the University of Waikato. In October 2013 four teachers (three female and one male) who met these criteria were then contacted by either phone or email and invited to participate in the interviews. They were also informed about the online survey and invited to participate, if they had not already done so. All four teachers responded that they wished to participate in the interviews and had completed the survey. The pseudonyms that have been used in order to provide confidentiality and anonymity for these teachers are *Ashleigh, Brigit, Carol* and *Dean.* The demographic information associated with these participants is provided in the table below.

Table 3.2. *Age and Gender of Participants in Group C*

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Years taught	Curriculum levels taught
Ashleigh	F	20-30	7	1 & 3
Brigit	F	20-30	5	2, 3, & 4
Carol	F	20-30	8	1, 2, 3, & 4
Dean	M	31-35	7	1, 2, & 3

Prior to each interview, I briefly explained my interest in transition to each participant, and how this had evolved from personal experience. I also

acknowledged that although my experience and research had indicated that transition between class levels can have a positive impact on teacher professional learning, I was not inferring that those teachers who did not change class levels were less effective in any way.

Profiles of the groups of participants and their involvement in this research are illustrated in Figure 3.2 below.
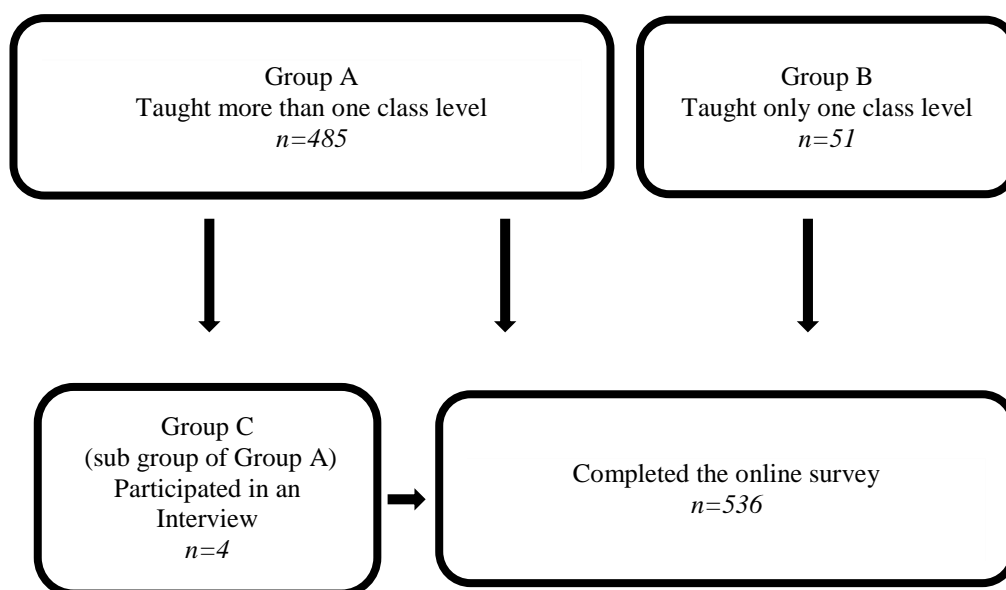
Figure 3.2. Groups of participants

3.2.2 Ethical considerations

With any research there are ethical issues that must be considered. To this end, Creswell (2009) emphasises that researchers need to anticipate and address these ethical issues early in their research planning. It is vital to understand that "in research, benefits to some do not justify burdens on others" (Wilkinson, 2001, p. 15). Addressing ethical issues is about the researcher ensuring that the planned research activities do not become a burden, an excessive demand or a source of discomfort for the participant. Furthermore, researchers must find a way to "strike a balance" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 51) between their search for truth while also upholding the rights of their participants, which may potentially be threatened.

More specifically, Bryman (2001) asserts that the ethical principles that researchers need to consider revolve around the following four main areas: harm to participants, informed consent, invasion of privacy and deception. The next section will outline how each of these four areas were considered and addressed in

this research. A key step in this significant part of the research included gaining ethical approval prior to commencing the data gathering process. This is a requirement of my university to ensure that ethical issues have been fully explored and appropriate actions are planned, so that these are properly addressed. Ethical approval was granted for this doctoral thesis by the University of Waikato, Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee on 28 May 2013.

3.2.2.1 *Harm to participants*

Researchers have an ethical responsibility to ensure that the participants are not harmed in any way as a result of the research being undertaken. Harm can include physical and mental harm, harm to participants' development and a loss of self-esteem (Bryman, 2001) as well as undue stress or inconvenience (Burton & Bartlett, 2009). I was conscious of these concerns and strove to ensure that this research was undertaken in such a way that the participants were not harmed in any way.

Although Cohen et al. (2007) suggest there is little risk of participants being inconvenienced in any way by participating in an online survey, because they are able to complete it in their own time and at their leisure, there were, however, other potential risks that presented themselves. Access to potential teacher participants for the online survey was only available through either the school or principal's email. In either case this meant that the principal was fully aware of the survey and it was up to the principal's discretion whether they chose to pass on the invitation to teachers to participate. Hence, I was mindful of the potential risk to a prospective teacher participant if the principal was unsupportive of this research. Indeed, one principal outlined their strong disapproval of this research in a return email to me and stated his intention not to inform the teachers in his school about the study. To me this indicated that some principals felt threatened about teachers in their school participating and making comments about the impact of their leadership on the teachers' perceptions and experiences of transition. Although in such a situation there was a risk in participating in the online survey, this was reduced by the participant's identity and that of their school being completely anonymous. Also, the teacher could complete the survey at a time and place that not only supported his/her anonymity but also ensured that

their principal would not have known whether or not they had completed the survey.

The risk of harm to the participants in the interviews was higher, due to being unable to assure them of complete anonymity. To address this I assured the participants of confidentiality and took care to ensure that they were given the opportunity to choose the time and place that was convenient for them for the interview to be conducted. This helped the participants feel safe, comfortable and relaxed during the interview and able to talk confidently and freely. Providing a conducive environment such as this helps to alleviate any anxiousness, uncertainty or nervousness participants may have about participating (Cohen et al., 2007; Mutch, 2005). Three of the four participants chose a venue other than their school for the interview to be conducted. For the participant who chose to have the interview at their school, prior to the interview I ensured that the principal was fully informed about the nature of this research and had agreed to it being conducted at the school.

Another potential risk to participants' development and loss of self-esteem identified was the potential harm to those participants who had taught only one class level. I did not want these teachers to feel that their participation in this research was less valued than those who had experienced transition and taught different class levels. This potential risk of harm was minimised by taking care that the wording of the possible responses in the survey did not suggest that teaching one level was in any way less significant than teaching more than one level.

3.2.2.2 *Informed consent*
In any research it is essential that the fundamental ethical principles of lack of coercion and voluntary participation are adhered to (Neuman, 2006). Hence, it is critical that potential participants are provided with as much information as possible so they can make an informed decision about whether or not they want to voluntarily participate. This means that participants must not be forced or pressured in any way to be involved, and it is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that the participant's consent has been based on him/her being informed fully and truthfully about the benefits and risks of taking part in the research. The

possible risks in this study were associated with concerns about anonymity and confidentiality of the participants and their past and current schools.

It has been suggested by B. Bell and Cowie (1999) that when the purpose of a study is clearly outlined and information is unambiguous, people will be positive about participating. Neuman (2006) agrees that getting permission from people to participate is not enough and adds that "they must know what they are being asked to participate in" (p. 135). Furthermore, Mutch (2005) posits that in order for participants to make an informed decision they should be provided with information about the "purposes, conduct and possible dissemination of the research" (p. 78). In this study, although the nature of required consent varied between participants in the online survey and the interviews, they were all given sufficient information to make a personal decision about whether they wished to participate or not. A brief description of how participants in each of these groups were invited to be involved in this research follows.

Participants in the online survey

In September 2013 an email was sent to all schools that included year 1–8 classes on their roll, inviting practising teachers who had taught at any of these levels to participate in this research (Appendix 1). The email addresses of either the school or principal were obtained from the Ministry of Education database that is publicly available. The email explained the study and how a teacher wishing to voluntarily participate could access the survey through a link that was provided. For teachers who accessed the survey, further information (Appendix 2) was then provided that outlined details such as participation needed to be voluntary, participants could be assured of complete anonymity, and by completing the survey they would be indicating their consent to participate. The information contained in this initial email provided relevant and sufficient information for the teacher to be able to make an informed decision about their role as a participant in this research prior to their actual involvement.

Participants in the semi-structured interview

The participants in Group C were initially contacted either by phone or email and informed about the study and invited to participate by involvement in an interview. They were also advised about the online survey and invited to

participate by completing the survey. Subsequent to this they were sent a letter (Appendix 3) which included information about the aims and purposes of the study. In this letter they were assured that if they chose to participate then the interview would be conducted on a day, time and at a venue that was suitable for them. They were also advised that their participation was completely voluntary, that the information they shared would be treated confidentially and pseudonyms would be used to protect their identity and that of their school. Included was a consent form (Appendix 4) which outlined aspects such as their right to withdraw, decline to answer and to express any concerns during the study. As with the participants in the online survey, the information that was provided gave the four teachers sufficient information to make an informed decision about whether or not to participate in this research.

3.2.2.3 *Invasion of privacy*

The issue of privacy is closely linked to the notion of informed consent, and Bryman (2001) suggests this is because, to an extent, when a participant gives informed consent they acknowledge "that the right to privacy has been surrendered for that limited domain" (p. 483). My interpretation of this is that when the participants gave their consent to participate in this research they understood that this would require them to share their thoughts and experiences about transition that may have previously been private.

In order to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants, a number of measures were employed. All data from the online survey, digital recordings and interview notes are stored in a password-protected file on my computer in my lockable office. In addition, all consent forms and anecdotal notes from the interviews and analysed data are stored in a locked cabinet in my lockable office to ensure the participants' personal information is kept confidential. I have also taken note of Bryman's (2001) suggestion and ensured that all care has been taken when publishing to safeguard the participants' confidentiality.

3.2.2.4 *Deception*

Deception occurs when a researcher fails to share all or part of the purposes or methods of the research with the participants (Mutch, 2005). Closely linked to the ethical principle of informed consent and voluntary participation, Neuman (2006) posits that the right of a person not to participate becomes a critical issue if the

researcher intentionally misleads them or uses covert research methods. Bryman (2001) agrees and states that "deception occurs when researchers represent their research as something other than what it is" (p. 483). However, he also suggests that deception is probably quite widespread as many researchers strive for participants to respond in a natural way by limiting their understanding of what the research is about.

At no time during this study was deception intended, or knowingly carried out, and the ethical principles of no harm to participants, informed consent and non-invasion of privacy were carefully considered throughout.

3.2.3   Data gathering

The next section outlines the data gathering process which was undertaken from September to December 2013. As outlined previously, a mixed methods approach was taken to the data gathering because I felt that the use of more than one method would add to the robustness and trustworthiness and improve the accuracy of this research (Neuman, 2006). It is important to note that although, here, the data gathering and analysis processes are presented separately, during the study they frequently occurred simultaneously.

In order to improve the robustness of the study, both the online survey and interview questions were trialled prior to the data gathering phase of this research. Trialling has been suggested by Lodico et al. (2006) as an effective way to improve the accuracy of data. The trials were carried out with practising teachers who were employed at the time in primary schools in New Zealand. From the trials I received valuable feedback in relation to the length of the survey and interviews, and about eliminating some difficult wording to improve the clarity of the questions. One example of this was in the survey, where the teachers were originally asked to comment on the impact of *school culture & school leadership,* a change was made to separate these two factors so the teachers were able to comment on each of them separately. Another example was in the interview, where teachers were asked about why they changed class levels, a change was made to include the following two prompts: *how this came about, and who initiated the change?* I also received suggestions about re-wording the email that invited teachers to participate in the online survey so as to ensure that the purpose of the research was more clearly articulated.

3.2.3.1 Online survey

The online survey was created using LimeSurvey, which is an open source survey application supported by the University of Waikato. The online survey was available for teachers to complete during six weeks from September to October 2013. This time frame included four weeks during the school term and two weeks of school holidays in order to provide suitable times for all participants to complete it. The survey comprised 21 questions (Appendix 6) that were planned carefully in order to elicit responses from a large sample of teachers about their thoughts, opinions and ideas about transition.

The first three questions asked for the teachers' demographic information after which they were asked how many levels they had taught, so as to automatically filter out those teachers who had taught one level from answering questions that concerned teaching more than one level. It was essential to separate these two groups of participants so that their responses to the questions could be compared. Using filter questions in this way can be an advantage when participants are required to skip some questions in order to "jump" to the next relevant question (Bryman, 2001). By drawing on my prior experiences and research about teacher transition, I was able to develop a range of questions and response modes that included dichotomous and multiple choice questions, some of which included a rating scale and a matrix layout. Dichotomous questions were used when a clear response was required from the participants to gather information such as their gender, age, and how many years they had been teaching. Multiple choice questions were used to gather information about the particular reasons for changing class levels and for identifying personnel who initiated a change. Including rating scales *(not at all, a little, a moderate amount* and *a great deal)* provided a range of responses to a given question or statement and built in a degree of sensitivity to which I was able to "fuse measurement with opinion, quantity and quality" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 327). A matrix layout was also employed for some questions to save space and make it easier for the participants to respond (e.g., *the level of impact that changing class levels has on relationships with particular stakeholders*). A matrix question is where sets of questions are listed in a compact form and they all share the same answer categories. All of the categories that were provided had evolved from my own experience and prior

research as being important aspects of transition (e.g., *collective responsibility was encouraged*). Finally, at the end of the survey, space was provided for those participants who wished to add any further comments or give examples of transition. The survey was constructed so that the question types were grouped together and the participants were required to check boxes in order to respond.

3.2.3.2 Semi-structured interviews

The interviews were all conducted during November and December 2013. The participants were each sent a copy of the interview questions (Appendix 7) prior to the interview and chose the day, time and venue for the interview to take place. It was important that the interviews were conducted in an environment that was quiet, comfortable and free from interruptions in order that it was a positive and beneficial experience for them. The interviews were no longer than 60 minutes and were all digitally recorded. This was for two reasons, firstly it allowed me to fully focus on the interview, and, secondly, I was able to fully transcribe the interview for analysis. In addition to recording the interviews, I took brief notes to allow myself to clarify any of the participants' responses that I was unsure about. These notes have been described by Bogdan and Biklen (1992) as field notes and can be categorised as descriptive, reflective and analytic. Firstly, descriptive field notes help the researcher to set the scene, while reflective field notes help the researcher to respond to the data in a more personal manner and incorporate body language that recordings cannot. Finally, analytic field notes help the researcher to begin to form patterns and themes during and immediately after the interview. Reflective and analytic field notes were particularly helpful to me during the interviews.

In order to gather rich data that would enable me to build up a clear picture of teacher transition, it was vital that each participant was able to talk through their thought processes as they answered the questions. During the interviews I needed to be focussed on what the participant was saying about their particular experiences of transition and "encourage examples, explanations and expansion" (Radnor, 2001, p. 60) of what was initially said. This required me to create an atmosphere in which each participant felt secure to talk freely and I was able to respond to their views about their own transitions as well as what they had observed from other teachers' transitions. In order to achieve this, I took care to

establish a good rapport with each participant from the outset, and after communicating the purpose, likely length and contents of the interview, gave the participant the opportunity to clarify any aspect she/he was unsure of (Cohen et al., 2007). It was also imperative during the interview to demonstrate active listening skills (Radnor, 2001) as well as to keep it moving and handle it in a sensitive and professional manner (Cohen et al., 2007).

Close consideration was given to the sequencing and framing of the interview questions, and initial demographic and background questions were kept to a minimum (Burton & Bartlett, 2009; Cohen et al., 2007). Care was taken that the questions were geared to answering the research questions and did not waste the participant's time. In addition, it was essential that the questions were not leading in any way and that the interview assumed a conversational manner. The majority of the questions used in the interview were open-ended as they encouraged free interaction and discussion. Furthermore, open-ended questions allowed me to probe further when clarification was needed (Lodico et al., 2006).

The advantages and disadvantages of asking open and closed-ended questions have been outlined by Neuman (2006). He explains that while an open-ended question provides the opportunity for a free response, they can require a greater amount of a participant's time and be more difficult to code. On the other hand, while closed questions give the opportunity for a fixed response from which to choose, they can suggest ideas that the participant would not otherwise have considered and any misinterpretation of a question can go unnoticed. Nevertheless, Neuman does posit that the decision to use an open or closed question depends on the purpose of the research. For this study, the decision to include mainly open-ended questions was to allow the participants to answer in rich detail, qualify and clarify their responses and reveal their thinking process about transition.

3.2.4   Analysing the data

It is essential that researchers have a clear plan for analysing the data prior to collecting it (Cohen et al., 2007; Creswell, 2009; Gorard, 2001; Radnor, 2001). In attempting to build knowledge about the phenomenon of teacher transition, a systematic approach was taken to both gathering and analysing the data, and I

took note of Merriam (2001) and Stake (2003) who suggest that it should be a simultaneous and ongoing activity.

The process of handling, organising and manipulating the quantitative data that was gathered from the survey was supported by the use of computer software. First, the raw data was downloaded from LimeSurvey to an Excel file and then exported straight into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis. SPSS has been in existence since the mid-1960s and is possibly the most widely used computer software for analysing quantitative data (Bryman, 2001). The data was checked for any coding errors, which is known as cleaning the data, prior to organising them into frequency tables for analysis.

The data were then examined and compared and any significant patterns and trends were identified. Tables are used to present these trends, as opposed to graphs, because this is a more succinct way of displaying data; it takes up less space and many readers find these easier to interpret (Cohen et al., 2007). Although graphs and charts may look appealing, for this study it was felt that these would not necessarily give any more information than a simple table. Some of the tables include cross code comparison to show one variable in relation to another.

As acknowledged previously, although 967 teachers participated in the online survey, 431 of these were classed as incomplete. While there are no apparent reasons for this high number of incomplete responses, it may be that some teachers started the survey before realising it only applied to teaching year levels 1–8. Alternatively, it may be that some teachers started the survey and then felt uncomfortable or threatened about answering some of the questions. Another interesting observation was the high number of participants in Group A (485) compared to Group B (51). This is a significant difference and indicates that those teachers who taught only one class level, for whatever reason, were much less inclined to participate in this research.

Qualitative data included the responses from the open-ended question in the survey and the transcripts and field notes from the interviews. Each of these were downloaded and printed onto hard copy and bound for ease of handling. The process of analysing, coding and categorising themes from these data began from

the outset of the data gathering process and included looking for patterns and themes, which is known as thematic analysis (Mutch, 2005). Although there are a number of computer assisted software programs available to help with data analysis, I took note of some of the concerns that have been outlined by Neuman (2006) and decided against using one for analysing the qualitative data. Two of these concerns are that the narrative flow of interview transcripts and field notes may become lost, and that there is a risk of the data becoming decontextualized.

3.2.4.1 *Coding the data*

All qualitative data was coded using a regime that involved developing open, axial and selective codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Open coding involves breaking down the data into parts and closely examining them for similarities and differences. These parts are labelled into categories for further analysis. In axial coding, data are put back together in new ways by utilising a coding regime that involves making links to those conditions, context, action/interactional strategies and consequences that apply to the categories. This coding regime helps to develop the categories beyond properties and dimensions but "in terms of the conditions that give rise to it" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 97). Selective coding is the final stage of the process, which involves integrating everything together in a way that it can be illustrated to others. Corbin and Strauss (2008) comment that because this requires sorting through everything to look for how all the different categories may fit together, it can be the most difficult part of the data analysis process. It is not intended that this coding should occur in stages, and, as I found, the codes may be used interchangeably and take place throughout the data gathering and analysis process.

During the initial readings of data, I used colour coding to identify key words or "repeated words, strong emotions, metaphors, images, emphasised items, key phrases, or significant concepts" (Mutch, 2005, p. 177). I used coloured pens to highlight the key words, which were coded as 'open codes' and then grouped and reorganised into initial themes. Many of these key words and ideas are indicative of symbolic interactionism whereby teachers process and interpret their experiences and observations about transition and form opinions and ideas about the practice of transitioning. The coding process was carried out on the hard copies of the comments from the survey and transcripts and field notes from the

interviews. As I immersed myself in the data further and asked myself questions, some of the initial categories were deleted, some combined and new ones were added. The following table is an example of how the open codes were recorded, then sorted into themes, sub-themes and re-sorted into categories.

Table 3.3. *Coding Process*

1. Key words/phrases:
     a) Seeking a transition
     b) Not wanting to transition
     c) Stuck/trapped
     d) Relocation
     e) Career advancement
 2. Themes:
     a) Reasons why a teacher may transition
     b) Reasons why a teacher may not transition
 3. Category: Explanations for teacher transition

1. Key words/phrases:
     a) Fresh/energised/motivated
     b) Confidence
     c) More able to support others (future leaders)
     d) Reflection
     e) Broader/deeper view/better understanding of student learning
     f) Where they have come from and are going to
     g) Progression/developmental/stages
     h) Modifying/adapting practice
     i) Greater understanding of curriculum
     j) Adjusting expectations/better able to manage learning environment
     k) Extends relationships (students from different class levels, colleagues, parents)
 2. Themes:
     a) Renewal, refreshment and reflection
     b) Professional learning – (3 sub-themes)
         Insight and understanding of student learning and development
         Modifying established teaching methods and implementing new practice
         Adjusting expectations and creating positive learning environments
     c) Extended relationships/collective responsibility
 3. Category: Outcomes of teacher transition

1. Key words/phrases
     a) Additional work/physical change/time consuming
     b) Resources
     c) Direction of change can be a factor
     d) Perceptions of different roles
     e) Lack of support/dialogue/transparency
 2. Themes:
     a) Perceptions others hold
     b) Increased workload and insufficient preparation
     c) Lack of support and school culture
 3. Category: Challenges of teacher transition

At the axial coding stage, the data that had been "broken down" during open coding were put back together in new ways by making connections between the themes. As with open coding, this also involved making comparisons and asking questions, but during the axial coding stage this became more focussed on developing each theme in terms of how it had occurred. To help with this process, I applied the coding regime as suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1990) and continued to 'saturate the categories' by repeatedly reading the data to identify possible recurring themes, and then scrutinising them to see if a theme did in fact become saturated (Crossley & Vulliamy, 1997).

Once the open and axial coding stages had been completed and tentative themes had emerged, the final stage required searching for examples in the cases to substantiate and illustrate the themes. This selective coding process included going back and looking at all data again, bringing everything together and integrating it in order to enhance the understanding and emerging theory. During this stage I was able to refine, order and validate the themes in a coherent way and give them "conceptual detail" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 141). This means that for those themes that lacked clarity or seemed poorly developed, I was able to go back to the raw data to find examples that would validate them and ensure that they linked properly with the other themes. The selective coding stage was an integral part of the data analysis process as it ensured that a clear understanding of the phenomenon could be presented.

The systematic approach that was taken to gathering and analysing the data has been explained here. The use of a computer software program and a coding regime were used to assist in the analysis and development of the following three overall categories: explanations for teacher transition, outcomes of teacher transition and challenges of teacher transition. Explanations and examples have been provided to demonstrate how these categories emerged through the data gathering and analysing process.

3.2.5 Maintaining trustworthiness and credibility

In any research it is important that the people reading it can trust the design and the decisions that the researcher has made concerning the study. In quantitative research this means that it is necessary for the researcher to convince the reader

that the study is valid and reliable; however, in qualitative research such as this the reader needs to be convinced that it is trustworthy and credible (Mutch, 2005).

It has been suggested that trustworthiness is, to some extent, common sense, and Robson (2002) explains that it is concerned with whether the researcher has tried to "explore, describe or explain in an open and unbiased way" (p. 100). Trustworthiness refers to readers being sure that they can trust the processes that have been used and believe the findings, and credibility is defined as ensuring that the findings resonate with those in, or who are familiar with, the case (Mutch, 2005). To improve the trustworthiness of this research, I clearly documented and explained the research design, methodology, methods of gathering data, data-analysis approaches and the decisions underpinning the design. As previously outlined, in order to strengthen the research credibility, more than one method was used to gather the data (Merriam, 2001; Mutch, 2005). Furthermore, I demonstrated an ethical approach throughout this study and adhered to the ethical guidelines provided by the University of Waikato. In particular, as I have outlined, close consideration was given to ensure that the risk of harm to participants was minimised, they were fully informed before giving consent to participate, their privacy was protected and they were not deceived in any way from participating in this research.

In addition, data triangulation occurred as I was able to elaborate and expand on the ideas and trends that emerged from one set of data with those of another set. According to Stake (2010), qualitative researchers triangulate their evidence to confirm and validate the findings and improve the trustworthiness of the research. Figure 3.3 below shows how triangulation occurred as I repeatedly checked on the trends and tendencies which emerged from one set of data against another set, to gain an in-depth understanding about what happens in reality when teachers transition.
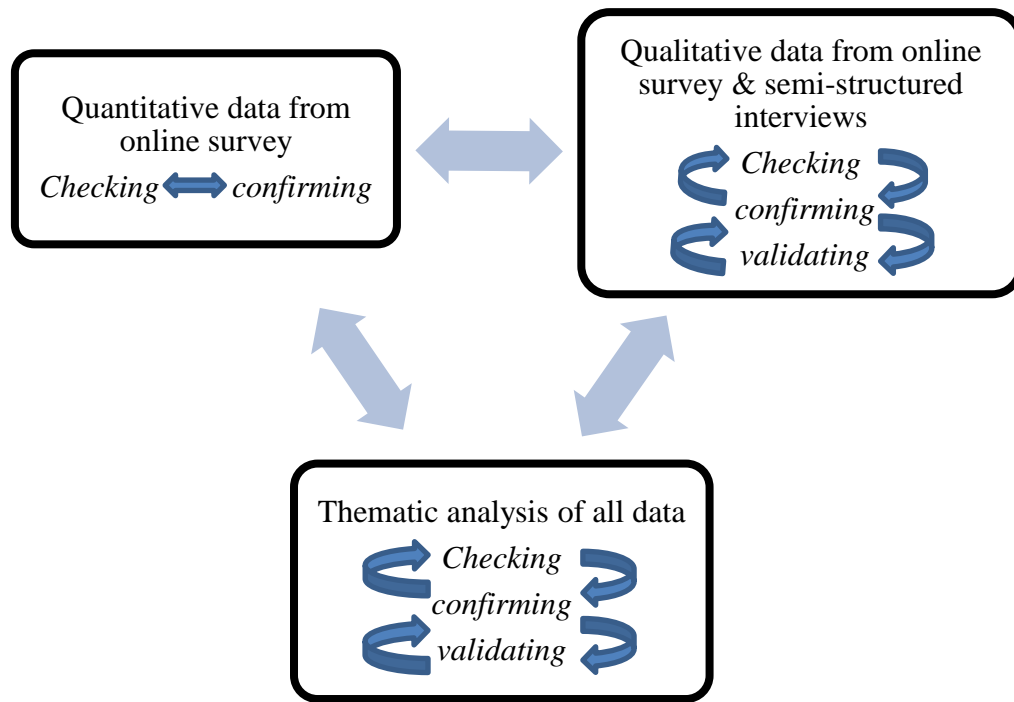
Figure 3.3. Triangulation

While this approach may not necessarily be considered as true triangulation in the traditional methodological sense, as the following example demonstrates, it enabled me to check, explore further and expanded on trends that emerged from one set of data with another. Initial data that were gathered from the survey showed that 86% of the participants in Group A responded that changing to a different class level had impacted on their learning by either a 'moderate amount' or a 'great deal'. However, of 792 instances of someone being identified as initiating a transition, 478 of those were actually someone other than a teacher themselves. This early indication showed that although many teachers believe that changing class levels has a significant impact on their learning, they do not necessarily always initiate transition themselves. It was during the interviews that this trend was able to be checked, explored further and expanded on by the participants. To further increase the credibility of this research, the participants in the interviews were sent a copy of the transcript of their interview for review. They were invited to read, review and edit prior to further analysis and reporting to ensure the transcript accurately reflected their responses.

3.3 Summary

This chapter has outlined the design of this study. This research is positioned within an interpretive paradigm while also adopting symbolic interactionism theory and employs a case study methodology. The theoretical framework that has been presented guides the research in order that knowledge can be built about teacher transition and the impact of changing class levels on teacher professional learning. A summary of the research process has been provided, including a description of the participants and an explanation of how they were selected. Close consideration has been given to ethical issues such as harm to participants, informed consent, invasion of privacy and deception. The process of gathering, analysing and coding all the data has been explained. Finally, an outline has been presented of how trustworthiness and credibility were maintained, including a discussion on how triangulation strengthened this study.

The next chapter presents the findings of this research.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The benefits for individual teachers, schools and students far outweigh those
moments of uncertainty, insecurity and additional time (TID18).

4.1 Introduction

The following chapter comprises an analysis of all data gathered from the online survey and the four interviews. This includes both the quantitative and qualitative data that was drawn from the responses to the survey and the qualitative data gathered from the four interviews. It was my intention that the interviews would provide the opportunity to explore the patterns and trends that emerged from the survey in more depth and help answer the research questions.

This chapter consists of five sections. The first section provides an overview of all these data, including a brief profile of each of the four teachers who participated in an interview. The second section presents data that gives explanations for why teachers may or may not transition and how this influences their perceptions. The data presented in section three illustrates the outcomes of teacher transition and how these impact on a teacher's professional learning. Section four reports on the challenges associated with teacher transition, followed by a brief summary of this chapter.

4.2 Overview of the data

4.2.1 Data from the online survey

Data from the online survey were gathered from the 536 teachers' responses to the questions. These teachers were each identified by a Teacher Identification Number *(TID)* automatically generated by the survey program. Of the 536 teachers who fully completed the survey, 485 (90%) indicated that they had taught more than one year level (i.e., had experienced transition) and 51 (10%) had taught only one class level (i.e., had not experienced transition). As outlined in the previous chapter, Group A comprised those teachers who had taught more than one level and Group B comprised those teachers who had taught only one level. The teachers in Group A indicated that they had taught at the following year

levels: Year 1 and 2 (361), Year 3 and 4 (395), Year 5 and 6 (369) and Year 7 and 8 (284). As illustrated in Figure 1.1 (page 7), *curriculum* and *year levels* both refer to the expected level of the curriculum that students should be working at in relation to their chronological age and the length of time they have been attending school. The teachers in each of these two groups, A and B, were asked a series of closed questions (Appendix 6) and also provided with the opportunity to add any short responses if they wished to elaborate or expand on any closed question. The responses to all of these questions provided both quantitative and qualitative data for analysis. Although it should be noted here that, due to the manner in which the online survey was constructed, only data from the short-responses from the survey were able to be aligned to individual teacher identification numbers.

4.2.2   Data from the four interviews

Data were also gathered from the four teachers who each participated in an individual interview. These four teachers were selected because they were currently employed as full time class teachers, had been teaching for at least three years, had taught more than one class level, and were readily accessible to the researcher. They formed a subgroup of Group A and each completed the survey prior to participating in their interview. In each of the interviews, the teachers were first asked some demographic questions, followed by a series of questions which were intended to help gain a deeper understanding of their impressions of teacher transition between class levels. Each of the recordings of the four interviews was transcribed. The interviews are not to be conceptualised as case studies but rather they are descriptive and serve to elaborate on the data previously gathered via the survey. Because all four of these teachers had experienced changing class levels, I was able to explore ideas and trends from the survey in greater detail and depth with each of them.

The following is a profile of each of these four teachers including background and contextual information that pertains not only to each teacher but also to their personal experiences and beliefs about class level transitions. These profiles indicate that, although the common element between the four teachers was transition, there were a variety of different explanations for why and how they

transitioned. In addition, the schools in which they taught were diverse and varied in size, geographic location and decile[2] rating.

4.2.2.1 Ashleigh

Ashleigh was a female who identified as being in the 20–30 year age group. She was in her seventh year of teaching and had taught in curriculum level 1 and 3 classes. Although she had taught in a level 2 class, this was in a relieving position and not as a full-time class teacher. Ashleigh had experienced transition once when she changed from a level 1 class to a level 3 class.

Ashleigh's transition occurred in the same school after four years of teaching. She initiated a change in class level because she said she was bored and was looking for a new challenge. She explained that she went and talked to her principal towards the end of her fourth year about changing class levels and requested to transition to a level 2 class. Ashleigh felt that the transition from level 1 to 2 would be a small transition and although initially she was told she was able to do this, at a later time she was told she would be transitioning to a level 3 class, instead.

At the time of the interview, Ashleigh was preparing for her second transition in the same school from level 3 to level 2. This transition was to occur at the beginning of the next year and, in this instance, Ashleigh had not requested it but had been asked to transition by her principal for administrative reasons.

4.2.2.2 Brigit

Brigit was a female who also identified as being in the 20–30 year age group. At the time of the interview she was at the end of her fifth year of teaching. During this time she had taught in curriculum level 2, 3 and 4 classes and experienced transition between class levels twice. In both instances these transitions involved relocating to new schools. Brigit's first transition was from teaching in a level 4 class in a composite college[3], to a level 1 and 2 class in a contributing primary

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[2] A school's decile rating indicates the extent to which it draws its students from low socio-economic communities. Decile 1 schools are the 10% of schools with the highest proportion of students from low socio-economic communities, whereas decile 10 schools are the 10% of schools with the lowest proportion of these students.

[3] A composite college is a combined intermediate and secondary school that serves levels 4–8 (years 7–13).

school[4]. Following this, her second transition was from teaching in a level 1 and 2 class back to a level 4 class in a full primary school[5].

The transition from a level 4 to a level 1 and 2 class arose because Brigit's teaching position was only for twelve months. She articulated that at the time she was happy to transition to any class level and was successful in gaining a position in a level 1 and 2 class in a contributing school. After teaching in this class for 12 months, Brigit decided to relocate because she was unhappy in the school. At the time, as with her previous transition, she was not concerned about what class level she taught and she was successful in gaining a position in a full primary school in a level 4 class.

4.2.2.3 Carol

Carol was a female who had been teaching for eight years and identified as being in the 20–30 year age group. She had taught at curriculum levels 1, 2, 3 and 4 and had experienced transition twice. After two years of teaching level 4 classes in an intermediate[6] school, Carol transitioned to a level 3 class in a contributing primary school. This transition, which was initiated by Carol because she wanted a change in class levels, required her to relocate to a new school and city.

Carol's second transition occurred after teaching in a level 3 class for four years and involved her moving to a level 1 and 2 class. She also initiated this transition; however, this time it was within the same school. Carol drew particular attention to the difference in decile rating of the two schools she had taught in. The intermediate school was a decile 10 school and the contributing primary school was a decile three school.

4.2.2.4 Dean

Dean was a male who identified as being in the 31–40 year age group. He had been teaching for seven years in New Zealand, but had previously taught curriculum levels 1, 2 and 3 in the United Kingdom. Dean's first transition occurred after teaching for four years in a level 2 class before relocating to a different school and changing to a level 1 class. He explained that he applied for

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[4] A contributing primary school serves levels 1–3 (years 1–6).
[5] A full primary school serves levels 1–4 (years 1–8).
[6] An intermediate school serves level 4 (years 7–8).

the new position because he wanted the experience of being in a foundation school and was not concerned about which class level he taught in.

The second transition for Dean happened after two years of teaching in the level 1 class when he moved to a different school and was assigned to a level 3 class. Again this transition was initiated by Dean and came about because he was relocating to a new city. Although this required another change in class level, he explained that changing from a foundation school to one that was 150 years old was a significant factor in this transition. At the time of the interview, Dean was preparing for his third transition, which was to occur the following year within the same school and would see him transition from a level 3 class to a level 2 class.

4.2.3 Presenting data

The findings are presented under the following overall categories: explanations for teacher transition, outcomes of teacher transition and challenges of teacher transition. These originated from the data analysis where key words and phrases were highlighted and coded, sorted into themes and then re-sorted into overall categories. Table 3.3, on page 90, provides a summary of this process, including examples of the key words and phrases. Under each category statistical data and short responses from the survey are presented in table format. The tables have been designed specifically to allow for a blending of quantitative and qualitative data in a single format which make it easier to see the relationships between these data. To ensure statistics are not misrepresented, frequencies rather than totals are shown with those questions that have multiple answers.

To allow for the inclusion of some short responses in the tables, the code categories *not at all*, *a little*, *a moderate amount* and *a great deal* have been abbreviated to *NAA, AL, AMA* and *AGD*. The criteria for the selection of short responses in the tables were that they reflected more than 50% of the responses for that data set and, as such, are referred to as the more dominant data set. Where short responses have been included that are reflective of less than 50% of a data set, these have been identified as such and referred to as the less dominant data set. This has been done to ensure that a fair balance of data has been provided and that the findings are an accurate representation of the teachers' responses. Subsequent to each table, an explanation is provided and further data have been

presented from both the survey and the four individual semi-structured interviews to elaborate and expand on the trends and patterns that have emerged.

For ease of reading, all numerals included in the statistical data have been rounded to the nearest whole number. In addition, the teachers' short responses from the survey and direct quotes from the interviews are both presented in italics. The short responses are identified by the teacher's individual identification number *(TID)*. These short responses have all been accurately copied from the online survey, and thus where teachers used exclamation marks and/or capital letters to highlight a point, these have been included. Quotes from the interviews are identified by each teacher's pseudonym *(Ashleigh, Brigit, Carol and Dean)* and the corresponding page number of their interview transcript *(T)*. When a particular word or phrase was emphasised by a teacher during their interview this was transcribed into either bold lettering or an exclamation mark was added.

4.3 Explanations for teacher transition

This section presents data that explains why teachers may or may not transition. There are a range of reasons for this and it is important to understand these as they provide insight to help answer the first research question: How are teachers' perceptions of transition between class levels developed? The following findings are presented under two headings that emerged from coding key words and phrases during the data analysis process: reasons why a teacher transitions and reasons why a teacher may not transition.

4.3.1 Reasons why a teacher may transition

Data shows that there are a number of different reasons why a teacher may transition, and although sometimes he or she initiates a change themselves, there are times when it is initiated by others. Furthermore, the teachers' responses highlight that sometimes teachers willingly change class levels, other times they feel they are forced, and sometimes they are unable to transition. To illustrate this, data from Questions 6 and 7 have been combined and presented in Table 4.1 below. Question 6 asked the teachers in Group A to choose from six options the reasons why they changed class levels, and Question 7 asked them to identify the person who initiated the change. The results from these questions, and short responses that give further explanation about the teachers' transitions, are shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1. *Reasons Why Teachers Change Class Levels*

Q6: Why did you change class levels?	*n*	Sample of short responses
Administrative/ organisational reasons	274	*Fluctuating student numbers often necessitate changing teaching levels (TID156).* *I was asked to take the position of team leader of the Senior Syndicate Y7/8 in 2012 as the current team leader left. I probably wouldn't have put my hand up to make such a dramatic leap in levels if I hadn't been asked: however, it turned out to be the best move ever (TID367)!* *My experience of moving is that I was asked to as other teachers in the school will not and I am seen as flexible (TID740).*
Professional learning	241	*I wanted to know the next stages in my students' learning. What happened after they left my class (TID123).* *Changing class levels was a personal choice as I believe you become complacent if you teach in one level for too long (TID232).*
Career development	191	*I was definitely aware of how I was benefitting my career by working across the curriculum (TID674).*
Boredom	74	*I changed class levels out of curiosity, for a challenge, and to avoid becoming stuck in a rut (TID 440).*
Suggested it would be good for my professional learning	58	*I was teaching NE-Y1 when my principal suggested I would be better teaching Y5/6. I was aghast as I never thought I would leave my 'babies'... I had an awesome class and have loved teaching the older kids ever since ... it revitalised my need to learn and extend myself (TID906).*
Other	204	*I never wanted to teach new entrants but it was the only job available. I now perceive the experience as invaluable and it gave a solid base to my teaching (TID419).*
Total responses	1042	
Q7 Personnel who initiate the transition	*n*	
Self	324	*It has been a choice of mine to master teaching every age group which I have done (TID559).* *I initiated it so I could learn about learning at a junior level (TID356).*
Principal/school leader	324	*I was made to change levels when I had made it clear I did not want to teach new entrants... I still feel bitter about being forced to change, three years on! I feel labelled and stuck at that level now (TID 299).* *When a teacher is told by a principal to change from Juniors to Seniors ... it can be devastating (TID486).* *I was informed by email ... No discussion or options given. I felt shocked. In my view this 'take it or leave it' attitude by school leaders is endemic, encouraged by officials and government, and is yet is another example of teachers being taken for granted (TID530).* *I have traditionally been a senior school teacher, but because of the personal circumstances of one of my colleagues, I was asked to go to the junior school. What an eye-opener! I fell in love with the littlies ... I am glad I was made to change levels (TID593).*
Team leader	74	*No short responses*
Colleague	14	*No short responses*
Mentor	14	*No short responses*
Other	42	*No short responses*
Total	792	

n= number

Table 4.1 shows that in 506 instances, teachers chose the following reasons for changing class levels: *was bored and wanted a change of class level*, *felt it would be good for my professional learning* and/or *felt it would be good for my career development*. As the short responses indicate, these teachers were clear about their reasons for wanting to change class levels, as in 324 instances they had personally initiated a change in class level themselves. Mention was made by teachers about the willingness of their school leaders to try and accommodate teachers when they wanted to change class levels with comments such as *my principals have been very happy to arrange the shift (TID412),* and *my principal always tries to accommodate the challenges and changes I ask for (TID435).*

However, Table 4.1 also indicates that, in 398 instances, the teachers said that their transitions were initiated by either the *principal or school/syndicate leader,* and 274 teachers said that they were asked to for *administrative/organisational* reasons. As the mixed responses in Table 4.1 show, when a transition has been initiated by someone else, or even forced on a teacher, this can have positive or negative outcomes for them. The following example illustrates the general comments made by 12 teachers who said they initially did not want to change class levels, although in hindsight, felt they had benefitted from this.

> *The Principal and Team Leader thought it best that before I took up that position, I should have a year with a Year 3 class to familiarise myself with juniors once again (I had taught juniors in the past). After years of seniors, I felt like a Beginning Teacher all over again. The purpose of the level change did meet its objective though. It was good for me to be seen in the junior syndicates, by teachers, parents and children and certainly prepared me for the Reading Recovery and Numeracy Support positions (which I still hold). (TID772)*

In contrast, there were 13 teachers who responded that they disapproved of teachers being forced to change class levels with comments such as *I still do not trust the principal who demanded this change (TID299)!* Another teacher pointed out how this can have negative results: *I think management enforced level changes are unacceptable unless unavoidable … I have seen enforced level changes in a very successful school that simply resulted in a lot of experienced staff leave* [sic] *(TID739).* The importance of schools having transparent processes when assigning teachers to classes, particularly when teachers are required to

change class levels, is exemplified by comments such as *all class allocations I have experienced have been at managements whims (TID945),* and

> *there was no discussion about my change in year levels. I was literally the last person to know and had no idea that the change was going to take place. Bad leadership on the part of my Principal ... I was really angry that no consultation had taken place. It would have been nice to be asked even if it was already a done deal. (TID251)*

The following two teachers voiced their concerns that a teacher could be made to change class levels because of conflict between him or her and the principal: *Changing levels is sometimes the way that the principal 'gets back' at a staff member or tries to get rid of a staff member by making them change to a level they don't want (TID578),* and

> *I truly believe that the so-called 'benefit' to 'moving old wood' as it is being sold to some very experienced teachers – change for the sake of professional development – is not really working out in actuality. There is a great deal to be said for an experienced year level teacher that has 'seen it all before'. (TID739)*

Such responses highlight that sometimes teachers are forced to change class levels because of another teacher's refusal to do so. In this way, as the following comment indicates, some teachers felt they were penalised for being agreeable and willing to change: *If teachers demonstrate too much flexibility, it can be to their disadvantage as they can just be put at a level while other more inflexible teachers dig their toes in and won't shift (TID328).*

Of those 204 teachers who indicated that they changed class levels for *other* reasons, although there were very few short responses referring to this, 17 teachers did make some reference to relocation. For these teachers, finding a new teaching position was as a consequence of them relocating to a new town or city, and in many instances this happened to be at a different class level to what they had previously taught. The following is an example that is indicative of others who pointed out that their relocations were not associated with a desire to change class levels: *I probably wouldn't have chosen to change levels but because we moved a lot I just went where there was a job (TID307).* In addition, six teachers attributed their transitions to fluctuations in school rolls with comments including,

as a young teacher due to a fall in roll numbers we all had to reapply for our jobs. I was lucky enough to secure mine. Then the Principal asked me to make a change of levels ... from Year 5/6 to NE!! What a shock! I did it a bit reluctantly but it was the best thing for my teaching. (TID619)

Although 70 of the teachers indicated that a change had been initiated by a colleague, mentor, and/or other, there were no short responses relating to this. However, examples such as *in all the thirteen years of teaching, I have not had a specific mentor. I have always looked at my principal and school leaders as my mentors (TID838)* illustrate how the term mentor may be interpreted differently.

These data show that factors, such as whether a teacher is willing or not to change class levels and who initiates the change, have a significant influence on their perception and experience of transition. This was confirmed in the interviews, first by Ashleigh, who explained that although she asked to move from a year 1 to year 2 class, just prior to her transition the principal said she had to move to a year 3 class:

> *I wanted to change to three/four ... I wanted something new. To be excited again ... I was kind of getting bored. It was like I could just go in and do it off the cuff ... and that wasn't cool anymore. I wasn't learning anything new, it was easy ... she allowed me to make that change but about two weeks before the end of school, they pulled me into the office and they said 'okay, we're moving you to five/six ... I was gutted ... I just slammed into a brick wall. It was a lot harder than I thought. (T page 2)*

Ashleigh said that she didn't have any input into the late change, which was due to a last minute resignation from another teacher who had been teaching in a year 5/6 class. She said that although she felt she didn't have a choice about the class level, other teachers in the school refused to change classes. She recalled one in particular: *She made it very clear. "I'm not moving and if I'm moving then I'm moving out of the school" (T page 10).* She felt that the way principals manage teacher transition has a big impact on teachers and explained that *in the past: teachers would just get moved and you didn't have a choice (T page 12).* However, Ashleigh felt her principal was managing teacher transition much more effectively and was no longer moving teachers between levels unless there was good reason to: *I feel like she is making good decisions, and [I'm] grateful for the*

opportunity. Cause she could have just left me there 'cause I was doing a good job (T page 25).

While Brigit, Carol and Dean had initiated their transitions for similar reasons to Ashleigh, like her, they were not always given the class levels they wanted. They had also experiences of being unable to change class levels, which will be explored further in the next section.

4.3.2 Reasons why a teacher may not transition

Data shows that there are also a number of different reasons why teachers may not transition. There are times when teachers may not want to transition for reasons such as wanting to consolidate their learning, become an expert at teaching in one particular class level or because they prefer one particular class level. The following is data from one teacher that is illustrative of this phenomenon: *I think it is important to stay in one level long enough to have a strong foundation rather than changing too often (TID800).*

Nonetheless, these and other reasons for not wanting to change class levels were challenged by comments such as *way too many [teachers] have a lot of experience at one year level and no understanding of what happens up/down the curriculum (TID885).* The teachers' responses highlight that, although there are some teachers who do not want to transition, there are also times when teachers wish to transition but are unable to do so. To illustrate this, data from Question 17, which asked the teachers in Group B to identify the reasons why they had not changed class levels, have been presented in Table 4.2 below. It should be noted that, of the 15 teachers in Group B who gave short responses, 10 were in their first five years of teaching. Although there was only one short response from this group that was to do with the reasons why they had not changed class levels, three short responses from the teachers in Group A gave some insight into this. A selection of short responses and the frequency of the key words *stuck/trapped* used in coding from the teachers in Group A are also included in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2. *Reasons Why Teachers Do Not Change Class Levels*

Group B	*n*	Sample of short responses
Q17 Why have you taught in one class level only?		
Have not wanted to	29	*I love intermediate and would be happy teaching the group forever (TID29)!*
Not been given the opportunity	19	
Have wanted to but have not been able to do so.	6	

Group A	TID	Sample of short responses
Key words/phrases Stuck/trapped (Coded 5 times)	174	*I'd like a change but it will not happen with the current management structure.*
	328	*... teachers get trapped because there is no one on the staff that has the necessary skills to replace them.*
	392	*I would have loved to change class levels more often but as a senior teacher I got stuck with a level making it very difficult to move out.*

n= number

Table 4.2 shows the responses from the teachers in Group B when they were asked to choose all the reasons why they had taught in one class level only. From this group 29 teachers responded that they *had not wanted to teach at other class levels*, and 25 teachers chose that they had *not been given the opportunity,* and/or that they had *wanted to but had not been able to do so*. The comment from *TID29* that teachers may not wish to change class levels because they enjoy teaching a particular class was supported by *TID325* from Group A: *I don't think it is important to change levels if you really enjoy a particular level.*

In contrast to teachers who seek out transition for career advancement, there are teachers who do not change class levels for the very same reason:

> *I feel that I would be able to take on much more leadership and extracurricular responsibility if I was settled in a year level and didn't have to 'invent' each year every year, and had a core base of skills and ideas that I built from around the individuals in my class each year. (TID739)*

However, data also highlights that when teachers do not change class levels this can create problems for teachers who may wish to do so. Table 4.2 draws attention to this and shows that five teachers from Group A said they felt *stuck* or *trapped* and unable to transition. There was some dissatisfaction with teachers being able to stay teaching at the same class level and, thereby, preventing others

from moving to teach at that level, with 15 teachers making mention of this issue. *TID328* pointed this out: *At our school we have one teacher who has effectively taught the same level for nearly twenty years! This is extremely unhealthy!* While another teacher suggested, *It should happen every two to three years in teaching. I know a teacher who spent 25 years in a new entrant class. Shocking (TID634)!*

The following three teachers made comments about teachers being unwilling to take a risk and change class levels: *Some teachers can be so certain that they are right for a particular age group, yet I feel that they never know what it would be like because they haven't given it a go (TID342); all too often educators suffer tunnel vision (TID887);* and

> *years ago when jobs were scarce and teachers were bonded changing levels and schools was something EVERYONE did and it was something that I feel is ESSENTIAL. Today if someone gets a job at a school so often they feel that is WHERE they fit and will not go outside their comfort zone. (TID681)*

Brigit agreed and gave an example that reinforced this opinion: *I know of a teacher who taught me when I was in Year 8 that's still teaching the exact same units on monarchs and butterflies that he taught when I was there (T page 29).* Dean made similar observations and said,

> *… people were just allowed to stay and rest … just doing the same thing year in, year out at the same level. I wonder actually with some of them, if they were told they'd have to change year level, if they'd even want to carry on teaching. It would actually almost push some of them completely out the door I think. And that's possibly not a bad thing. (T page 11)*

Both Carol and Dean had experiences when they had wanted to transition to a different class level but were unable to do so and felt that the process needed to be managed better by school leaders. Carol explained that in one school, although she repeatedly asked to change class levels, she was unable to because other teachers did not want to move and she was told *a space had to become available (T page 18).* She said that at the end of each year, despite indicating in a staff survey of her wish to change, *I stayed where I was.* Carol said she was not informed about the reasons why she was unable to move: *Then I thought: 'Okay the reason that I didn't get it is ' … there was nobody willing to give it up.* She described how at the time she felt *a bit ripped* about the situation *(T page 18).*

Dean believed that he was unable to transition in three schools because *teachers only move levels internally if there's movement externally away from the school,* and it was for this reason that in his first four years of teaching is was just *status quo (T page 10).* He explained, *In my first four years, I actually asked, at the end of every year, 'can I go up and teach year 5/6?' And I was never allowed to go up to that level (T page 3).* He said that in another school, towards the end of each year, the teachers were required to list the class levels they wished to teach in order of preference, *like a questionnaire type thing (T page 14).* Subsequent to this, however, teachers were not given any opportunities to engage in any discussions with school leaders about the questionnaire. Dean recalled feeling perplexed when he was not assigned to any of the class levels he had indicated that he wished to teach in: *I guess there's some real obvious reasons as to why. I would have liked a conversation around it because otherwise you make it up in your head anyway (T page 16).*

The findings presented here show that there are a number of explanations for teacher transition. These include teachers initiating a change in class level themselves, being initiated by someone else, feeling they were forced to and sometimes being unable to do so. Findings illustrate that there are times when these explanations contribute to tensions and we can begin to see how these tensions affect a teacher's perception of transition and sense of autonomy. While this makes each transition a unique yet complex phenomenon, findings imply that it may well be the catalyst for some teachers to strengthen their professional identity. The significant role that school leaders play has already begun to emerge, and further data concerning this will be presented and discussed in greater depth in the next two sections of this chapter.

4.4   Outcomes of teacher transition

This section presents data illustrating the outcomes of teacher transition. Together with the information presented in the previous section, this discussion provides answers to the first two research questions: How are teachers' perceptions of transition between class levels developed? What outcomes are generated for teachers and other stakeholders from teacher transition between class levels? To this end the outcomes are presented under the following three headings, which were derived from coding key words and phrases: renewal, refreshment and

reflection; professional learning; and extending relationships and collective responsibility.

4.4.1   Renewal, refreshment and reflection

The previous section illustrates that although some teachers initiate a change because they are bored and are looking for something new, this is not necessarily so for all teachers. Data shows that there are times when, even if a teacher does not initiate a change themselves, it can provide them with opportunities for renewal, refreshment and reflection. In order to illustrate this, the frequency of key words and phrases coded under *renewal, refreshment and reflection* have been aligned with replies from the teachers in Group A when they were asked, *how much impact did changing class levels have on you engaging in purposeful critical reflection more often?* In addition, selections of short responses which again reflect the more dominant data set are included. These data are presented in Table 4.3 below.

Table 4.3 shows that 35 teachers (7%) specifically drew attention to feeling fresh, energised, motivated or more confident after having transitioned. Furthermore, 456 teachers (94%) indicated that transition had some impact on them engaging in purposeful critical reflection more often. This indicates that transition is the platform for many teachers to reflect on their practice and pedagogy and experience a sense of renewal and refreshment. The following analogy, which is reflective of other similar comments, was used by one teacher: *I suppose it's almost like an adrenaline rush, feeling the fear of change and facing it anyway … I enjoy the challenge that this sort of change gives you (TID435).* As Table 4.3 illustrates, 13 teachers drew attention to having greater confidence, with general comments including *I think changing class levels is good practise* [sic]. *It extends you as a teacher, makes you more knowledgeable and confident (TID54)* and *TID333* believed that *change brings growth*.

Table 4.3. *Renewal, Refreshment and Reflection*

Code: Renewal, refreshment & reflection	TID	Sample of short responses
Key words/phrases Fresh/ energised/motivated (Coded 22 times)	110	*In my opinion any teacher who has taught at the same level for more than 10 years should have a change just to refresh themselves.*
	145	*I think if you stay at the same level, you risk stagnating ... we* need *to be forward thinking and stay fresh in our teaching.*
	405	*... is like a new lease on your job. It's stimulating, exciting and you are motivated to try new things and learn again. I recommend it.*
	435	*It's like going on a little adventure.*
	800	*I believe change is good, it keeps you energised, ensures self-learning, and keeps things fresh, rather than being stuck and uninspired.*
(Coded 13 times) More confident/able to manage change	18	*The ability to manage change, take risks and work outside my 'comfort zone' was a skill that I felt developed through changing class levels.*
	135	*I am more confident and comfortable as a teacher now.*
	278	*... made me excited to be a teacher, and has given me so much confidence. I am lucky to have been given the opportunity to move.*
	380	*Change of teaching level has resulted in greater self-confidence and has provided many opportunities to rediscover my enjoyment of working with children.*

Question 14:	NAA %	AL %	AMA %	AGD %	Short responses
How much impact did changing class levels have on you engaging in purposeful critical reflection more often?	6	19	40	35	*It develops good reflective practice, and understanding of how children learn in different ways, a different perspective on teaching (TID267). I think it has made me a more reflective teacher and I now have a more inquiring approach to my teaching (TID452). It keeps you fresh and makes you rethink your philosophies and teaching practice (TID618).*

Note. NAA=Not at all, AL=A little, AMA=A moderate amount, AGD=A great deal

The four teachers in the interviews also felt energised as a result of their transitions and Brigit explained that she felt it was essential that teachers transition *because otherwise they get stuck in their ways (T page 29).* Carol provided an example that illustrated a pattern of her becoming bored after four years of teaching in the same class level:

The first year was spent catching up. And then the second year was sort of, 'I feel confident,' and 'I can do this' – and then the third year was consolidating, and then the fourth year was like 'Oh , okay, I'm just going to rehash that narrative writing unit, I'm just going to rehash that. I've got the same kids but their names are different'... I don't know how people do it – like the same year for 20 years in the same school ... I knew professionally as a teacher, I needed to change. (T page 13 & 15)

As well as teachers benefitting from transition, findings show that teachers consider there are benefits for students too:

I think changing levels allows teachers the opportunity to continue to learn and discard the boredom factor. Initially you are completely out of your comfort zone but you adapt and it becomes a win win situation as the teacher has renewed enthusiasm and the students benefit from that enthusiasm as it is reflected in the effort put into meeting their learning needs. (TID 754)

A teacher from Group B, who had requested a change in class level for the subsequent year, commented that she felt transition *will develop my pedagogy further, challenge me and give me more 'strings in my bow' (TID664).*

There were also seven teachers who attributed their career advancement to having transitioned between class levels, and this can be seen in the following two examples: *[Changing class levels] has been very worthwhile and has contributed to movement up the 'ranks' far faster than if I had stayed in one level (TID770),* and *I believe I wouldn't be the teacher I am now without having covered all the levels in my teaching career (TID307).* Likewise, *TID18* said, *Having the ability to teach across all year levels was seen as a strength in my teaching practice when applying for future leadership positions,* and *TID602* believed *it also showed management that I was prepared to be flexible and this resulted in me being given opportunities for growth and promotion.*

Even so, it is important to acknowledge that transition between class levels is not the only opportunity for a teacher to experience renewal and refreshment, and not all teachers have positive perceptions and/or experiences of transition. A comment that illustrates this point was made by *TID740*:

> *I have found changing year levels a negative challenge. A proactive teacher is always looking to improve their practise [sic] so when remaining in the same year level or flipping between two, you can improve your practise [sic] with ideas, experiences and reflection.*

Again, attention is drawn to whether a teacher is willing to change class levels or if they feel they have been forced to do so and how this affects the outcome:

> *I think that changing year levels can be a positive thing – if the teacher wants to do it. I personally did not want to change levels at this time and was effectively forced into the situation. It did not do a lot for my self-esteem and I still feel a little out on a limb at times. (TID91)*

Later in this chapter further challenges such as these will be explored and discussed in greater depth under the heading *Challenges of teacher transition*.

The emergence of *renewal, refreshment and reflection* as an outcome of transition was able to be explored in greater depth in the interviews. Carol had initiated each of her transitions because she felt she got bored: *I was getting complacent … I had to, again, self-reflect (T page 13).* She said she felt so strongly about changing class levels at one point that if she hadn't been moved to a different class level, she would have left the school. Dean said that he too was *starting to get stale … looking back now … the more you teach at the same level, the more likely you are to pull the same thing out … some people would say that's a good thing. I don't think it is (T page 11).* Brigit said transition *forces you to really think about why you want to be a teacher … some real deep reflections* and she believed each time she changed class levels she would *come out the other end a whole lot stronger (T page 31).*

4.4.2 Professional learning

Data also suggests that teachers can benefit in terms of their professional learning when they transition between class levels. This is illustrated in Table 4.4, which shows the replies from the teachers in Groups A and B when they were asked about the level of impact that changing class levels has on teacher learning (Questions 8 and 19).

Table 4.4. *Level of Impact on Teacher Learning*

Q8	NAA %	AL %	AMA %	AGD %	Sample of short responses
Group A	4	10	31	55	*... enabled me to extend my professional knowledge and confidence in my own ability to teach any level (TID286).* *It has made me step up my learning to include older children and consolidate the knowledge I have for the young children to implement with older children (TID326).* *As teachers we have to be flexible and be on the continuum of lifelong learners any way-it is our profession (TID333).* *Best learning I think I ever did (TID542)!* *This has had enormous benefits for me as a teacher and for the children I teach (TID559).* *... develops depth and maturity as a teacher (TID680).* *... was the most meaningful, self-driven kind of p.d. I've done (TID959).*
Q19 Group B	6	10	27	57	*The more experience a teacher has at various levels the stronger their understanding of what a child can achieve and where they need to be extended or supported (TID434).* *I believe changing class levels is 'healthy' for a teacher's professional learning and ensures teachers are continually learning and developing their practice (TID831).*

Note. NAA=Not at all, AL=A little, AMA=A moderate amount, AGD=A great deal

Table 4.4 shows that 466 teachers (96%) in Group A of this study indicated that changing class levels had some impact on their learning, with 418 (86%) of them choosing either *a moderate amount* or *a great deal*. When this result is compared with the responses of the teachers in Group B, we can see that they are very similar as 48 (94%) of these teachers indicated that they thought it had the potential to impact on their learning, with 43 (84%) of them choosing either *a moderate amount* or *a great deal*. It is interesting that such a high number of the teachers in Group B held this perception even though they had not themselves changed class levels.

Also shown in Table 4.4 is that 21 teachers indicated an opinion that changing class levels has no impact on a teacher's professional learning. Although there may be a number of explanations for this, one that was highlighted was that transitioning too early and/or too often in a teacher's career is not conducive to their learning and can even be detrimental for them. A comment that was illustrative of this opinion included *I don't think the changing of levels at the beginning of my career was really a good thing. I spent a lot of time 'finding*

myself' before I could really start the teaching (TID135). Likewise, another teacher explained that in her first years of teaching she changed levels every year for six years:

> *The thing about changing class levels a lot when you first start out is you never feel like you've achieved the understanding of that level or what it means to be a teacher of a particular level. It often leaves you wondering if you will ever know what you don't know. (TID489)*

Seven teachers indicated that they would have preferred to stay teaching in one level in order to consolidate their learning. The comment made by *TID79* is indicative of this desire: *While I appreciate the opportunities and feel that I have a very broad understanding of developmental levels and the curriculum, I would really like to consolidate my skills at a particular level.* Attention was drawn to being able to become an expert in one particular class level and, to do this some teachers may wish to stay teaching in one level:

> *… so that I can be an 'expert' at what I do - just like high school teachers teach one core area. I believe this is far more achievable and rewarding than trying to learn it all over all areas of the curriculum. (TID740)*

In contrast to this, *TID407* expressed the view that transition can have a significant impact on teacher professional learning and pointed out that it *enriches your teaching knowledge*. This view was supported by the teachers in the interviews when they were each asked to describe the impact of transition on their professional learning: *absolutely massive (Carol, T page 40), fantastic (Ashleigh, T page 16),* and *amazing (Brigit, T page 27).* Dean explained how he felt that, out of all the opportunities he had for professional learning, transition had the greatest impact on him. In particular, he identified that teaching in a junior class had an extensive impact on his learning:

> *A year teaching juniors was probably the equivalent of the four years I had teaching Year 3s in terms of my professional development … And I feel like I learnt how to teach, teaching juniors. I think that you can almost get away with not being a good teacher with older kids, but with juniors you can't. (Dean, T pages 6 & 18)*

Here we can see that although it may not be beneficial to change class levels too often, or for early career teachers, transition can have a significantly positive

impact on a teacher's professional learning. Three sub-themes of potential areas of professional learning which emerged during the data analysis process (as shown in Table 3.3, page 90) will be discussed next. These sub-themes are *insight and understanding of student learning and development*, *modifying established teaching methods and implementing new practice* and *adjusting expectations and creating positive learning environments*.

4.4.2.1 Insight and understanding of student learning and development

Data suggest that when teachers transition, one of the potential benefits in terms of professional learning can be that they gain a greater insight and understanding of student learning and development. To illustrate this the frequencies of key words and phrases coded under *broader deeper view and understanding, where they have come from and are going to* and *progression/developmental stages*; the replies to Question 14 and a selection of short responses have all been combined into Table 4.5 below. Question 14 asked the teachers in Group A, *how much impact did changing class levels have on you meeting students' individual needs more effectively?*

Table 4.5 shows that 446 teachers (92%) in Group A indicated that changing class levels had some impact on them *meeting students' individual needs more effectively.* We can see from the short responses that having a greater insight and understanding of student learning and development helped these teachers to know where their students had come from, where they were progressing towards and how to best help them to get there. Attention was drawn by *TID440* that *this in turn helps with formative assessment when identifying where children are at in their learning and how to help them with their next learning step* and likewise, *TID314* described how she benefitted:

> *[Transition] is a very positive thing to do and impacts on teaching in that it gives a better idea of where students have come from e.g., from what they learn in Year 1 to Year 3. Or where they are going and expectations – what do they need to know before going on? What can I do towards that? It also gives a broader understanding of the curriculum. In my personal opinion teachers should be made to move every 3 years or 4 years to become better ROUNDED teachers!*

Brigit too explained,

115

I learnt how to teach the younger kids reading. Then I understood where they were coming from, if they struggled with reading when they were older. I could use those same approaches. It prompts you to change the way that you do things. (T pages 10 & 30)

There were limited short responses from the 39 teachers (8%) who responded that changing class levels had not impacted at all on them meeting students' individual needs more effectively. However, attention was drawn to the impact of changing schools, rather than changing class levels, by a comment that *change has hardly affected my teacher learning, whereas changing schools has (TID327).*

Table 4.5. *Impact on Being Able to Meet Students' Needs*

Group A	NAA %	AL %	AMA %	AGD %	Sample of short responses
Question 14: How much impact did changing class levels have on you meeting students' individual needs more effectively?	8	19	38	35	*Teaching lower year levels also helped me to cater for the 'strugglers' further up the school (TID137). Teachers from lower primary do well as they move up the school as they have experience of the stages the students have passed through – and they know what to do if the student is still working at that level (TID302). This allowed me to use other processes of teaching to benefit my students who were struggling or required extension (TID674).*

Key words/phrases	TID	Sample of short responses			
Broader/deeper view & understanding (Coded 11 times)	*18*	*... the broad teaching experience really enabled me to develop a deeper understanding of student learning and respond more effectively to the diverse range of students that are in any given classroom context.*			
	187	*... the junior school challenged many of the assumptions I had made about ECE, readiness for school and progress, I had to really deepen my understanding of how children learn/pace of lessons and clarity – keeping ideas clear and succinct.*			
Where they have come from and are going to (Coded 16 times)	*145*	*[Transition] enables us to have a greater understanding of where they [the students] have been and where they are heading in their learning.*			
	247	*... promotes a solid understanding of stages of learning.*			
	342	*I feel like I have a very clear picture of where students I teach have come from and where they are going. I am able to help them head towards the next learning step.*			
	744	*Knowing what has come before in the child's learning has had a HUGE impact on my teaching...*			
Progression/ developmental/ stages (Coded 20 times)	*116*	*... it is vitally important to have a broader understanding of the learning progressions of all levels.*			
	350	*... gave me a great insight into how children's development effects [sic] their learning and the way children build up their knowledge and what is effective learning practices to them.*			
	570	*Moving between levels was great for understanding the progression/stages students have to go through to acquire skills.*			

Note. NAA=Not at all, AL=A little, AMA=A moderate amount, AGD=A great deal

Of particular interest was that 14 teachers made specific reference to their experience of teaching in junior class levels being of real benefit to them. A principal talked about how his earlier experiences in junior classes had helped him to be a better school leader:

> *My principal early in my career told me that I was going to teach juniors. I told him I didn't want to but he told me, correctly, that it was an important learning time for me. Since going onto principals positions later in my career he was right as I have some understanding of what is happening at all levels of the curriculum and class levels. (TID529)*

This was reinforced by comments from others, such as *I learnt so many valuable skills as a junior room teacher that I was able to use with senior children – particularly low achieving ones (TID782),* and *all teachers need to teach at junior level as senior school teachers often undervalue the work of junior teachers (TID750).* Likewise, *TID29* held the opinion that *every teacher should have to teach at a junior level as it helps understand the foundations of learning.* This sentiment was echoed by Brigit, Carol and Dean, who all accredited their effectiveness as teachers to the learning they gained from teaching in junior classes. Dean elaborated further,

> *There's been so many positive aspects ... I actually look back at my year three/four experience before I had year one/two now and ... I could have done so much better with them. I would specify especially in reading more so than anything else ... it didn't take me long to realise that actually you have to be a far better teacher to teach juniors than at any other level. I'm a way better teacher for the fact that I've taught juniors. (T page 16)*

Further data from the interviews confirmed the belief that teacher transition can have a significant impact on teacher learning and, in particular, how teachers can gain a greater insight and understanding of student learning and development. Both Brigit *(T page 27)* and Ashleigh *(T page 24)* used the description *I know where they come from, and I know where they're going to.* Brigit elaborated by going on to explain that prior to changing class levels she felt frustrated with those students who struggled, but the learning that she had gained from her transitions had helped her to overcome this feeling considerably:

Below my year level was sort of a blur… I didn't really see the importance and now that I've taught year 2's I can see how much they have to cram into one year and how important it is to get them moving up reading levels quickly. I find it amazing that they come from year 2 being able to write three sentences – or four sentences – to getting to where I am and writing a whole writing sample. (Brigit, T pages 27–28)

Carol said that a teacher who has always taught in junior classes *doesn't quite realise where you've got to get them to so fast (T page 27).* She talked about how her knowledge of other levels had helped her with her class of year 3 students who were going up to the senior school the next year:

They need to know how to write for extended periods of time … I might model a sentence … model a language feature … being explicit about who, what, when, where and why and how … by the end of this year they'd all made progress … you can hear all their voices and it's not just my words regurgitated. I didn't want to dumb it down … I didn't want to treat them like babies. (T page 38 & 39)

Similarly Dean explained.

I feel like I'm a way better year 5/6 teacher for the fact that I've taught juniors. I'm teaching at the level – at level one of the curriculum with some of my kids. There's so many gaps there still, so I think because of that reason … I do feel like that movements[sic] *really, really important. (T page 11)*

Together these data illustrate that when a teacher transitions between class levels, they can gain a greater insight and understanding of student learning and development. For a teacher this means they have a broader and deeper view about their students' learning through having knowledge about the prior stages and progressions of learning, as well as those that their students are progressing towards. Such professional learning gives teachers a foundation which they can use to help them to more effectively meet all their students' needs.

4.4.2.2   *Modifying established teaching methods and implementing new practice*

The second area of teacher professional learning is that teachers can learn to modify their established teaching methods and implement new practices when they transition, in order to meet the needs of a different group of learners. To illustrate this responses to Questions 14 and 15 from the teachers in Group A are presented in Table 4.6 below. In Question 14 the teachers were asked how much

impact changing class levels had on them, *applying a range of different teaching techniques and strategies more effectively*, and *having a better understanding of the curriculum and how to implement it.* Subsequent to this, Question 15 asked, *In your experience how much impact does changing class levels have on teachers' willingness to try new ideas?*

Table 4.6. *Impact on Teaching Practice*

Group A	NAA %	AL %	AMA %	AGD %	Sample of short responses
Question 14: a) applying a range of different teaching techniques and strategies more effectively.	4	14	37	45	*Dropping a level has helped improve my ability to use concrete materials to show number concepts immensely (TID294).* *I know what to do if they are 'stuck' at a stage as I have taught all stages and therefore have a wide range of tools to draw on (TID342).*
b) having a better understanding of the curriculum and how to implement it.	4	13	37	46	*... great for teacher development and understanding of progressions within the curriculum (TID110).* *I did need to lift my expectations for these students and get to know the higher levels of the curriculum in much more depth (TID114).* *... helped to develop my understanding of the NZ curriculum at all levels (TID555).*
Question 15: Impact on teachers' willingness to try new ideas.	4	9	40	47	*It makes you more flexible in changing your practice, and makes you think of different ways to do things (TID155).* *... alter teaching methods constantly to address the differences in age levels and their learning (TID291).* *We need to model flexibility and always be prepared to learn, relearn and unlearn (TID333).* *The whole experience made me a more rounded teacher, less inflexible. I am glad I was made to change levels (TID593).*

Note. NAA=Not at all, AL=A little, AMA=A moderate amount, AGD=A great deal

Table 4.6 shows that 467 (96%) of the teachers in Group A indicated that transition encouraged them to *apply a range of different teaching techniques and strategies more effectively.* Moreover, for 401 (82%) of these particular teachers, the level of impact associated with transition to bring about this change was rated as either *a moderate amount* or *a great deal.* Similarly, 467 teachers (96%) indicated a belief in the assumption that, when a teacher changes class levels, this has some impact on their *willingness to try new ideas*, with 422 (87%) of this group of teachers choosing either *a moderate amount* or *a great deal* as the level of impact in this regard.

In addition, when the teachers in Group B were asked in Question 18 to identify from a range of options which ones they believed were impacted on when teachers change class levels, 34 (66%) of these teachers indicated a view that teachers who transition are likely to be *more willing to try new ideas*. The following comment made by a teacher from Group B is indicative of an opinion as to how transition can benefit teachers: *The impact is extremely wide ranging but in specific relation to teacher learning, I believe it is incredibly beneficial in providing insights into the differentiation of student learning (TID520).*

Table 4.6 also shows that 468 (96%) of the teachers in Group A indicated that changing class levels had impacted on them having a *better understanding of the curriculum and how to implement it,* with 407 (83%) of these teachers also choosing either *a moderate amount* or *a great deal* as the degree of impact. For these teachers it was beneficial to have a better understanding of documents, such as the *New Zealand Curriculum (NZC),* as they could use them to help with their planning and teaching to ensure they were meeting all their students' needs. The following teacher explained that she used the curriculum document to help her when she changed class levels:

> *I must admit I was apprehensive about moving 'up' the school if only one level but as I came to grips with the level I really enjoyed the older children … I did have to get the curriculum doc out to see where I was going, but that was good for me. (TID885)*

Some teachers talked about how transitioning had caused them to modify their established teaching methods and to implement new ideas, particularly in literacy and numeracy. This was confirmed in the examples given by the teachers in the interviews when asked about how they approached the need to create different resources, activities and strategies to implement with a different group of learners. In response, Ashleigh explained, *The exemplars were really good for me – to even know what it looks like at that level (T page 23).*

Brigit and Carol talked about learning new strategies that connected, in particular, to early literacy and numeracy. One example of a numeracy strategy that Carol had to learn was in relation to using apparatus to assist students to understand addition, subtraction, grouping and fractions: *I now know that's what some kids need … they couldn't get it at imaging (T page 37).* She described initially feeling

very frustrated when she changed from a level 3 class to a level 1 class, and having to adjust from teaching numeracy concepts such as *solving simultaneous equations,* to teaching *how to count to five.* Carol continued to explain how this was quite challenging for her:

> *These kids can't count to 10. How do you make that exciting? Okay, we're going to start counting. How do you get them to count on from stage three to stage four? I could go from stage four to stage five, I could get the kids to make that transition really easy, not easy easy. But better than from stage three to stage four. 'Cause that's a developmental thing and I have no control over that except just repetition, repetition, repetition. So how can you repeat the same thing without being bored. (T page 42)*

Likewise, in relation to literacy, Carol said, *I had no idea, I've never had to teach kids how to read, I've been doing reading to learn … I had no idea how much effort it is to get a kid to write a sentence (T pages 39 & 41).* Brigit felt the same way, and she shared how she devised a way to help her young students learn their basic words:

> *I came up with a new idea and a new way – other teachers might have used it, but to me it was a new idea. Typing up five words onto little cards on a flip ring, for them to learn each week. And those kids were so proud of those little flip charts, they took them home and practiced* [sic] *them. And they were so proud to come back to me the next day and cite – and say those words to me. (T page 18)*

Brigit then added, *So little things like that really boosted my self-confidence and my ability as a teacher.* Brigit later talked about a student who was very slow to complete his work *not because he can't do it, it's just the way that he is (T page 28).* She said that, while prior to transition she would have found this student frustrating, she was able to modify the tasks and try different methods that ensured the student felt a sense of success. Similarly, Dean described how he was able to transfer some of the skills he learnt from teaching in a level one class to a level three class: *Even with my kids that are well above in their reading … I'm talking strategies that I use with my five year olds (T page 17).*

4.4.2.3 Adjusting expectations and creating positive learning environments

The third area of teacher professional learning that has the potential to be impacted on by transition is a teacher's ability to adjust their expectations and create positive learning environments. To illustrate this Table 4.7 displays the

responses provided by the teachers in Group A when they were asked how much impact changing class levels had on them managing the learning environment more effectively (Question 14).

Table 4.7. *Impact on Classroom Management*

Group A	NAA %	AL %	AMA %	AGD %	Sample of short responses
Question 14: Managing the learning environment more effectively.	6	18	38	38	*Classroom management/behaviour of students is totally different at this age, and I think that's been the biggest leap for me is how to manage the class effectively for learning to occur (TID31).* *Moving from senior children down though meant I had high expectations – some were too high in terms of independence, to complete a task, but others had children doing things that had previously never been attempted (TID187).* *Classroom management techniques for year 1 and 2 are not the same I'd use when teaching form five maths, or for a special ed class or even year 7 and 8. All need tweaking for the level and the group of children you are teaching (TID296).* *Moving from senior school to junior area a huge eye opener as expectations are different completely different to how I had preconceived teaching the level would be. Had to completely reshape personal teaching pedagogy, particularly regarding classroom management and behaviour (TID331).* *… increased my management strategies with students' behaviour (TID407).* *… different behavioural expectations and different ways of communicating with and engaging children depending on their age and stage (TID440).*

Note. NAA=Not at all, AL=A little, AMA=A moderate amount, AGD=A great deal

Table 4.7 shows that 456 teachers (94%) in Group A indicated that changing class levels had some impact on them *managing the learning environment more effectively*, with 369 (76%) of them also choosing to rate the level of impact as being either *a moderate amount* or *a great deal*. These teachers posited that changing class levels improved their classroom management techniques. This is illustrated in the following two examples: *I learnt a lot and had to have good class management skills to engage the learners while I made adjustments to their*

122

learning programme to suit abilities in the class (TID425), and *when moving down a level I needed to take care with instructions by keeping things simple and by breaking down the steps for learning (TID734).*

Data highlights that sometimes teachers have unrealistic expectations of students from class levels that they have not taught. The comment by *TID906*, who had over 21 years of teaching experience, shows this well: *I did not know the 'language' needed to work with older kids.* Although this teacher was experienced at teaching junior class levels, she described feeling *aghast* at the suggestion of transitioning to a senior class level. However, she learnt to adjust her expectations in terms of behaviour management to ensure the learning environment was a positive one. Ashleigh, too, explained how she felt she had grown as a teacher as she learnt to adjust her expectations and she felt she had become much more accepting of all students. She believed she was less inclined to overreact in challenging situations *and not 'jump' like I normally would (T page 19).*

It is important to note that 29 (6%) of the teachers indicated that changing class levels had not impacted on them managing the learning environment more effectively. Although there were very few short responses pertaining to this view, *TID314* commented, *Changing class levels usually has no effect on how you manage students – i.e., you manage them appropriately at whatever level you teach and meet whatever needs are necessary.*

Nonetheless, both Brigit and Carol explained during their respective interviews that transition had impacted on the way that they managed their classrooms. Carol believed her expectations were too high when she changed from a senior class to a junior class, and so she had to learn very quickly that *their attention span is very, very short (T page 42).* She remembers asking the students to *'write down the date,' and they're 'what's the date?... it's on the board.' And I expected the kids would know (T page 25).*

Carol said she had to adjust her expectations, and *be on the ball (T page 25).* Since she had taught in higher levels, she knew the importance of students being able to work independently and take responsibility for their own learning. Also, Carol felt it was critical that the students learnt *self-directed learning where they choose their own activities … I didn't want to be the teacher responsible for*

sending sooky year 4s up to the senior syndicate because I've had sooky year 4s ... and they're annoying (T pages 25 & 41).

Brigit, too, said that transition had prompted her to alter her classroom management strategies when interacting with students of different ages. She created a 'mat area' for her senior students after she had successfully tried this in a junior class so the students could all come together during discussion time. She found that, regardless of the students' age, it was an effective management strategy. In addition, Brigit explained how she learnt to use positive reinforcement more frequently and ways of explaining to a child that their behaviour could be unacceptable. These strategies helped her to become more confident when communicating with any student: *Teaching in different areas did have a big difference because I now know how to talk ... to the younger ones (T page 12).*

Brigit also found that teaching younger students required a significant amount of preparation and organisation of resources that needed to be done ahead of time, in order to ensure the learning environment ran smoothly. For example, she described the environment in a junior class as being *action stations, it's go, go, go, go, go. And then it's lunchtime. I found I could just think on my feet a lot quicker, and easier, with seniors because they would actually just wait for five minutes (T page 20).*

This section has presented data highlighting, in particular, three areas of professional learning that the teachers in this research had experienced when they transitioned to a different class level: *insight and understanding of student learning and development*, *modifying expectations and implementing new practice* and *adjusting expectations and creating positive learning environments*. The next section presents data that relates to the way in which teachers extend their relationships and develop collective responsibility for all students when they transition.

4.4.3 Extending relationships and developing collective responsibility

The third outcome of teacher transition is that it has the potential to extend a teacher's relationships as they are required to interact with a wider variety of stakeholders when they transition to different class levels. This also helps teachers to develop a greater sense of responsibility for students, regardless of their age,

rather than just for those students in their particular class level. In order to illustrate this, Table 4.8 shows the responses that the teachers in Group A gave to Questions 13 and 15. Question 13 asked about the level of positive impact that changing class had on their relationships with *students from different class levels, colleagues, mentors, principal/school leaders and parents/caregivers.* Question 15 asked how much impact transition had on the *teacher's willingness to engage in dialogue about all students learning, taking a collective responsibility for all students, and parents/caregivers perceiving teachers as able to teach all class levels.* Again, selections of short responses have been included which reflect the more dominant data set.

Table 4.8 shows that the relationships that these particular teachers had with a wider variety of stakeholders were often impacted in a positive way when they changed class levels. In particular, 444 teachers (92%) in Group A said that there was some positive impact on the relationships they had with students from different class levels, while 419 teachers (86%) indicated that there was some positive impact on the relationships they had with their colleagues. The comment made by *TID602* is an example of this belief: *You respond better to colleagues, children and the school community as a whole.* The benefits for both teachers and students were also highlighted: *[Transition] helps the children not to pigeonhole teachers as only a junior/senior teacher (TID734)*; *it helps teachers to realise that there is something special about each age group (TID342),* and *much more able to comment on class sizes and capabilities (TID638).* Additionally, *TID887* pointed out that although in his experience *usually social interaction is limited between year level teachers,* this changes when teachers transition.

Also highlighted in Table 4.8 is that 319 teachers (66%) indicated that there was some positive impact on the relationships they had with a mentor. In turn, *TID342* explained how her experience of transition and working with a mentor had enabled her to become a mentor for other teachers: *I have now developed a mentoring role within the school that encompasses teachers from all levels as I have the knowledge and understanding to be able to help them.*

Table 4.8. *Impact on Relationships*

Q13	NAA %	AL %	AMA %	AGD %	Sample of short responses
Students from different class levels.	8	17	37	38	*It's a great way of getting to know the students from all areas of the school (TID349).* *I love the relationships I've built with the kids at my school … I know loads of children in the school (TID403).* *It's great for making connections with other children in a school ESPECIALLY a BIG one like ours AND also with parents (TID681).* *I have a much better relationship with the rest of the students in the school … as I am able to relate to them more easily (TID744).*
Colleagues	14	24	45	17	*Was a great opportunity to develop relationships with other colleagues in a new level (TID331).* *Teachers could help each other more when they had had experience at different levels (TID734).* *I became more understanding towards other syndicates during professional discussions and therefore could and would offer advice (TID777).*
Parents/ Caregivers	20	26	35	19	*I have very strong existing relationships with all of our parents as I have taught many of the kids coming through now (TID367).* *… form very close relationships with the families (TID615).* *… get a better feeling with the school community as a whole (TID676).*
Mentors	34	29	26	11	*It enabled me to provide professional support to teachers new to the profession, regardless of whether they were teaching in my syndicate or not (TID18.)*
Principal/ school leaders.	21	30	34	15	*I was lucky to have a Principal at the time who was happy to support me in that change (TID356).*
Q15 Willingness to engage in dialogue	5	18	42	35	*Much reflection going on and discussion with fellow teachers – more than when settled at a level (TID576).* *I learned to have open and regular dialogue with the new syndicate team and to get to know a different way of doing things (TID838).* *I find myself more free to ask for help from colleagues and this has improved my teaching capabilities enormously (TID842).*
More collective responsibility.	8	23	35	34	*… wasn't defined or confined to a particular year level or class, rather I saw my role as a teacher of all students, regardless of their age or developmental stage (TID18).* *I am a lot more open-minded to how certain practices could affect the entire school rather than just my students (TID744).*
Perceiving teachers as able to teach all class levels	11	25	36	28	*It was good for me to be seen in the junior syndicates, by teachers, parents and children (TID772).* *Parents want teachers with a variety of experiences (TID953).*

Note. NAA=Not at all, AL=A little, AMA=A moderate amount, AGD=A great deal

There was also evidence in the interviews that transitioning can have a positive impact on the relationships that teachers have with mentors. Brigit recalled how when she noticed that her deputy principal was struggling to transition from a level 2 class to a level 4 class, she offered to be a mentor. Brigit felt that her experience gave her the confidence to show her colleague resources that were suitable for level 4 and give useful feedback on her level 4 programmes. Likewise Ashleigh explained, *I'm a little worried for my friend who's coming in ... I'm a bit nervous for her ... so I'll be supporting her with her transition (T page 14).* Carol also talked about being a mentor for a teacher who had changed class levels and *not only a new school but a new culture as well because she came from decile ten ... so that's pretty big (T page 46).*

This suggests that as teachers strengthen existing relationships and form new ones, they gain a wider perspective of the whole school and the needs of all the students. This is highlighted in the short responses illustrated in Table 4.8 where the data shows that 445 (92%) of the teachers in Group A indicated that changing class levels had some impact on *teachers taking a more collective responsibility for all students*, and 462 (95%) of the teachers indicating that it has some impact on *teachers' willingness to engage in dialogue about all students' learning*. The following comment is indicative of this:

> *I feel I am accepted and welcomed in any area of the school. I am also less likely to feel my teaching area is different to others 'well in the senior team we do it this way ... Them* [sic] *in the junior school only have to ...' I don't have a 'them and us' mentality around workload, or ease of the job because I know first-hand the rewards and challenges each level brings. (TID435)*

Furthermore, when the teachers in Group B were asked in Question 18 which aspects they believed were impacted on when teachers change class levels, 23 (45%) of them chose *collective responsibility* and 21 (41%) chose *more willing to engage in dialogue*.

Table 4.8 also shows that 434 (89%) of the teachers in Group A indicated that changing class levels had some impact on the attitudes of *parents and caregivers perceiving teachers as able to teach all class levels*. An explanation for this is provided in the following example: *The staff and parents I worked with were different people to the previous level I had been teaching (TID962).* Fourteen

teachers made reference to the benefits of getting to know more parents/caregivers with comments such as *it sends a very strong message to the parent community when teachers shift around levels – I got quite a reaction when I went from teaching in the Intermediate Department to New Entrants (TID328).*

Other ideas were also able to be explored further during the interviews and Ashleigh explained that having strong relationships with all parents/caregivers was vital for her to be able to meet her students' needs: *It's all about getting to know the students and getting family involved (T page 18).* Brigit and Dean both gave examples of how they had gained a wider perspective of the whole school and the needs of all students as a result of changing class levels. Brigit felt that, when she had a better understanding of the specific demands of each level, the relationships she had with her colleagues were strengthened. Brigit spoke about feeling *more empathetic towards other people and their struggling* and gave an example of the new entrant teacher in her school being late for bus duty when she was often busy with parents: *Instead of me whinging that she's late for bus duty and the kids are getting naught, I just instantly do it because I know that she has [a] legitimate excuse for why she's not there (T pages 27 & 31).*

Dean also felt that changing class levels had given him a greater awareness of the needs of all students and he felt much more informed and able to contribute during informal discussions and formal meetings:

> *Oh it's a real awareness of the needs of other levels definitely. And I think even actually now I'm teaching Year 5/6 this year, I think after teaching juniors for a couple of years, I was very much like, 'Oh us junior teachers haven't we got it so hard in everything'. And, and it's just different. It's just different levels of hardness ... But yeah, definitely an awareness of that – and very vocal and even in syndicate meetings where it's just our senior team – and putting my opinion in for, 'hey that's going to affect these guys'. I do also speak my mind ... I don't mind saying, 'well actually ...' Cause I've done that level before and I can say it ... I feel like I'm allowed to. (T page 20)*

Dean continued to explain that he had much more contact with parents of junior students than with seniors:

> *The biggest learning curve for me teaching juniors was the amount of interactions you have with parents ... the first day I sort of met everybody ... but then they came back the next day and I was like*

'oh I've already met you. Why have you come back?' No one warned me about things like that. (T page 12)

This section has illustrated that although the teachers in this research held very different perceptions of changing class levels, for each of them, this transition had the potential to have a significant positive impact on their professional learning. *TID116* aptly summarised the outcomes of his transitions over 21 years of teaching as providing him with *a wide and rich tapestry to fall back on*. In particular, data has highlighted the following three positive outcomes of teacher transition: renewal, refreshment and reflection; professional learning; and extending relationships and developing collective responsibility. These outcomes have the potential to provide teachers with further opportunities to bring about effective teaching, become more extended professionals and to strengthen their professional identities.

4.5 Challenges of teacher transition

Data has already gone some way towards providing answers to the first two research questions. The findings have shown that the teachers' perceptions of transition and the way that these were developed varied greatly. Additionally, a number of outcomes were highlighted as being generated for teachers and other stakeholders from transition. This final section presents data which adds to these views and also puts forward answers to the third and fourth research questions: How do teachers negotiate the transition between class levels? What place does leadership have in teacher transition between class levels? Findings which relate to the challenges the teachers faced during their transitions are presented under the following three headings generated from coding key words and phrases: perceptions others hold, increased workload and insufficient preparation, and a lack of support and school culture.

4.5.1 Perceptions others hold

Data highlights that the perceptions others hold about changing class levels are challenging for a teacher when they are thinking about and/or experiencing transition. This is illustrated in Table 4.9, which shows the responses from the teachers in Group A when they were asked how much impact the following factors had on their ability to change class levels: *self-confidence, professional image that others had of you,* and *others views about which teachers are best*

suited for particular class levels. A selection of short responses that reflect both data sets have been included in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9. *Factors That Impact on a Teacher's Ability to Change Class Level*

Q9	NAA %	AL %	AMA %	AGD %	Sample of short responses
Self-confidence	15	23	33	29	*You do have to be confident that you have sound behaviour management practice when you move up levels (TID50).* *I had wanted to teach this level for a long time but did not have the confidence or opportunity earlier in my career (TID156).* *I know that for many changing level is a self-confidence issue and many are put off by the thought of having to 're-learn' content and delivery etc (TID367).* *I would have probably tried higher levels but was always concerned that my level of maths knowledge was never up to that level (TID394).* *Many teachers are unwilling to try another level due to confidence (TID679).*
Professional image that others had of you.	35	23	27	15	*A couple of parents questioned me about moving to year 7 and 8 once they heard I would be moving year groups. One parent seemed very surprised – as if I surely wasn't capable after teaching year 2 pupils (TID474).* *... had little respect from teachers of older children who believe teaching 5 year olds is the easiest level (TID638).*
Others' views about which teachers are best suited for particular class levels.	40	28	23	9	*If you are working at a higher level and change to a lower one there is often a parent perception that you have been demoted (TID81).* *Parents are often concerned as they view teachers as either junior or senior and don't like change (TID156).* *Many teachers within a primary school would very much struggle with the level of thought, intellect and ability of many year 7 and 8 students (TID328).* *Parents however perceive teachers to either be a junior, middle or senior class teacher depending on what they see and hear which is not always accurate (TID361).* *I think that it is unfortunate that when you are seen as a fabulous teacher in a certain area of the school (for me junior) that you get 'pegged' as being a junior teacher (TID367).* *Parents often perceive a teacher moving down a year level as being a 'backwards' move for the teacher and often think that the teacher wasn't good enough to teach at the level they moved from (TID750).* *... they are especially impressed by teaching experiences at the year 7/8 level (TID953).*

Note. NAA=Not at all, AL=A little, AMA=A moderate amount, AGD=A great deal

Table 4.9 shows that 413 teachers (85%) in this research chose *self-confidence*, 314 (65%) *professional image that others had of you* and 289 (60%) chose *others' views about which teachers are best suited for particular levels* as having some impact on their ability to change class levels. As these high numbers indicate, for many teachers a lack of self-confidence has a significant impact on the way they think about transition. It was pointed out by *TID18* that *it is full of uncertainties and initially quite daunting (especially jumping from year 1 to year 6).* The teachers' short responses show that this can be attributed to concerns such as behaviour management, pedagogical content knowledge and being able to manage the workload. *TID674* suggested, *There is a real sense of fear. Management need to be aware that competence in one year level does not necessarily equate to a feeling of comfort across the curriculum.* This indicates that even experienced teachers can lack self-confidence about changing class levels and some school leaders may not be aware of this. One experienced teacher pointed out that when she changed class levels *I had to up-skill myself hugely to deliver maths to these students (TID255).* Also, *TID386* stated that changing class levels was *a major learning curve as far as the curriculum is concerned.*

Ashleigh explained that she was concerned that she did not have the pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) required to teach in a higher class level: *My big worry was the curriculum knowledge because all I taught kids to do was 'I, am, Mum, Dad, is'... like now I'm going to that academic – that side of the curriculum, I was really nervous (T page 20).* Ashleigh's comment that when teachers transition to senior classes *all of a sudden it feels like everyone wants to use every word in the dictionary,* again highlights the perceptions that are held about teaching in certain class levels *(T page 23).*

From the short responses listed in Table 4.9 it can be seen that another challenge of teacher transition is the perception held by some stakeholders that teaching in higher class levels requires more skill than teaching in lower class levels. This belief was supported by *TID403*: *There is still a stigma as if you change to a lower year level you are being 'down-graded'.* Although these responses were illustrative of the less dominant data set, overall 15 teachers drew attention to this perception, while at the same time refuting its truth with comments such as *my quote is often 'you haven't taught until you have taught NE [New Entrants]' then*

you will know what teaching is all about (TID619)! Similarly, *TID296* and *TID302* agreed that this perception was commonly held, but explained their contrary opinions:

> *They often perceive teachers teaching the higher level classes as more able teachers. For example I had a parent worrying I was not teaching their child well in maths, I mentioned I had taught form five ... next thing I heard she was saying how wonderful a teacher of maths I was – NO change on my part. (TID296)*

> *Teachers who have spent more than a few years teaching at upper primary levels have a diminished understanding of students' needs when learning at lower levels. I notice a lack of understanding regarding the particular challenges of early junior school teaching amongst these teachers too! (TID302)*

Likewise, during Ashleigh's interview she remembered the reaction from some parents when they learnt she was going to change from a junior class to a senior class:

> *I even saw it in their faces when they would say, "Oh you're doing 5/6, have you ever done it before?' and I'd say, 'No.' I could see in their faces ... like 'Oh ... you're teaching my child.' They just saw me as a junior teacher and as did the kids too. (T page 5)*

Carol not only agreed that there was a widely held perception that teaching in junior classes was easier than in senior classes, but added that this had an impact on some teachers' willingness to change class levels. She recalled when she changed to a junior class thinking that *people will laugh, 'oh you're going down to the juniors – it's just colouring in and cutting out' (T page 41).* Nonetheless, Carol explained, like others, how her perception altered once she had transitioned: *I didn't have the appreciation of what the juniors did ... how much work some of the teachers had done to get them [the students] to move [reading levels] (T page 28).* In fact, there were 22 teachers who made comments that suggested all teachers should experience teaching in junior classes, such as *it should be compulsory/pre-requisite (TID885).*

Of those teachers who speculated about the level of difficulty between changing up to changing down (class levels), there was no dominant view amongst them. Five teachers shared similar views to *TID333* in that *it is harder to come from a higher level to teach a lower one because there are so many little steps to teach,*

while five other teachers held the opposite view. One such example was provided by *TID31: It is very difficult moving from year 2 to year 6 even when you've taught that year level before.*

Findings also highlight another perception that concerns male teachers being less suitable than their female counterparts to teach in junior classes. An example of this was provided by Dean who explained that when he was teaching in a year one class, he described how shocked he was when a colleague made the following comment:

> *What do the parents think of that … That's a bit weird isn't it? … later on I was talking to her again and she said, 'Oh, you're a Dad, oh that makes it a bit better then'. I said, 'What a bit better?' cause I was really flabbergasted by this stage. It did make me think after that though – if a **teacher** is to say that to my face, what do other people think? (T page 7)*

Aligned with this, one other teacher commented, *especially males, have little understanding of what goes on in junior classes (TID420).* While these were the only two comments that directly related to perceptions about teaching in certain classes which differentiate on the basis of gender, this does not reduce the significance of this perception.

However, the views' of other teachers do not always impact on a teacher's attitude towards transition. This is illustrated in Table 4.9 with 171 teachers (35%) indicating that *professional image that others had of you*, and 196 (40%) claiming that *others' views about which teachers are best suited for particular class levels* had no impact on their ability to change class levels. Although there were no short responses from the survey that were reflective of this data set, it was possible to explore this issue further in the individual interviews. For example, Brigit recalled the example that even though she had taught in senior classes, it became apparent to her in an interview that others had a perception that she would be best suited to teach in a junior class:

> *In the interview they said that to me 'we see you as a Year Two teacher'. And that they couldn't have imagined me teaching the older kids … I basically explained that you know, I can stand up for myself and I do have quite an authoritative voice and that type of thing. I think they sort of saw me as young, female and just put me in a little box of 'Okay, she teaches the juniors'. (T page 3)*

133

She went on to explain how she did not think that this had an impact on her ability to change class levels and, if anything, it made her more determined to be successful in her transition: *I think where I've got to now with my confidence and things, they wouldn't have that perception. And I've got the experience to back it up (T page 13).*

4.5.2 Increased workload and insufficient preparation

Another challenge of teacher transition highlighted in the data is that there can be a significant increase in a teacher's workload when they change class levels, and they are not always given sufficient time or opportunities to adequately prepare for this extra demand. This again draws attention to the place of leadership and, in particular, how school leaders facilitate transition between class levels. To illustrate this, the frequency of key words and phrases relating to workload and preparation, and the responses from the teachers in Group A to Question 11, are shown in Table 4.10. The key words and phrases include *additional work/physical change/time consuming/resource.* Question 11 asked the teachers about the opportunities they had to prepare for changing class levels. The following four options were provided for them to choose from: *talk with other teachers about what it is like teaching other class levels, observe others teaching different class levels, have extra time to prepare for the change* and *find and familiarise yourself with different resources.* The short responses illustrated in Table 4.10 are reflective of a range of workload and preparation concerns and have been chosen because they provide explanation about the wide variation in the teachers' experiences.

Table 4.10 shows that 48 teachers (10%) drew attention to the challenges associated with workload and/or resources, and 193 teachers (40%) said that they had been given no additional time to find and familiarise themselves with the different resources required for teaching their new class level. As the samples of short responses indicate, sourcing and preparing resources that are appropriate for students in a new class level is a time-consuming task for teachers.

Table 4.10. *Workload and Preparation*

Key words/phrases	TID	Sample of short responses
Additional work/ physical change/ time consuming (Coded 27 times)	156	*Personally it can be like starting teaching from the beginning. The workload in the first 6 months was huge.*
	244	*... the physical side of having to shift (within a school) paper, chairs, tables, personal belongings was stressful because much of that was left to myself and when I went to a new school finding stuff that others already knew about was demanding.*
	294	*It is a MASSIVE undertaking and commitment.*
	530	*I had very little lead in and have found this year to be massively stressful.*
	740	*... everything needs to be done from scratch. There just isn't the time to keep starting over and certainly not the support because everyone is overloaded. I was not given time for anything to prepare and spent my whole Christmas holidays working through (no exaggeration). I was given no extra budget or resources so had to make everything or fund it myself – which I can't afford.*
Resources (Coded 21 times)	219	*It created a lot of extra work to adapt to the change in students' needs, find new resources for what was being taught at that level, learn the culture and procedures of the new team of teacher's [sic] I was working with and understand curriculum requirements for that level.*
	361	*What is hard is becoming familiarised with resources and teaching approaches appropriate to the age of students.*
	440	*Changing levels is initially an enormous amount of work as you build resources and become accustomed to different sets of learning expectations in the various curriculum areas.*
	682	*The most difficult aspect of this is that it felt that I had to start from scratch as I couldn't use a lot of my units from previous years etc., and I had to familiarise myself to[sic] new resources at this level.*
	959	*It was up to me to beg and borrow learning materials.*

Q11 How much opportunity was there to:	NAA %	AL %	AMA %	AGD %	Sample of short responses
Have extra time to prepare	66	23	10	1	*I have been subject to little but usually no time to prepare for the new groupings/ages – always last minute and no lead in time (TID 945).*
Talk with others about what it is like.	17	39	31	13	*... you make time to find out yourself in your own time, about resources etc. I have never been given time (in 30 years teaching) to talk to other teachers within school time about the new level and what I need to know. You do that in your own time (TID314).*
Observe others teach.	39	42	15	4	*I now have a new principal who has been very supportive in allowing me to go to other schools and observe this year level and attend lots of PD ... I am grateful I have had this opportunity (TID682).*
Find and familiarise with different resources.	40	42	14	4	*... getting the resources made me feel secure in my new level (TID959).*

Note. NAA=Not at all, AL=A little, AMA=A moderate amount, AGD=A great deal

This extra workload is exemplified in the next two responses: *It's hard when you've put a lot of work in and have to start all over again (TID219),* and

> *I am completely exhausted, there is no extra time given or even recognition of how much extra work this practice creates. I feel quite burnt out as a teacher and have been considering other careers as a result and I would say much of this is due to level changing so often. (TID953)*

In addition, three teachers pointed out that they had to fund new resources themselves with general comments such as *it is extremely expensive to re-resource for each year level as we spend so much personal money on classroom environments and 'extras' (TID739).*

Other important considerations illustrated in Table 4.10 is that 321 (66%) of the teachers in Group A indicated that they had been given no extra time to prepare for their transition, and opportunities to observe and talk to others about teaching in particular class levels prior to transition were also limited, or not provided at all, for more than half of the teachers. *TID412,* who had over 21 years of teaching experience, drew attention to the extra workload: *Changing class levels can be like becoming a beginning teacher again. It requires putting in a huge amount of extra work.* In addition, the following comment was typical of other teachers who felt transition could have positive outcomes, but more preparation was required: *The challenge is good for me as a teacher but would have very much liked the chance to observe in other 7/8 rooms to re-orientate myself (TID419).* Six teachers drew attention to the physical demand of having to move to a different classroom, which is often required when changing to a different class level. For example, one teacher wrote, *The amount of time that goes into setting up a classroom, planning, resources, displays etc is unattractive (TID740),* and *TID356* pointed out that there *is still a widespread belief that moving is such a big disruption that it can be just easier to stay in one place.*

With respect to these issues, Ashleigh explained in her interview that she did not have any opportunities to observe in the class level she was changing to and talked at length about the challenges associated with her initial change:

> *I didn't have a clue what I was going in to ... it was **all** horrible. It was **all** horrible ... I was working through morning tea, I was*

working through lunch, after school. I was always in my class room. Planning, marking, trying to decorate walls and hang up stuff ... I just didn't have a clue ... it was the content and just not really meeting their needs ... me not understanding what those needs are at that level. (T page 14)

Likewise, Carol remembered feeling like she *didn't fit* in her new team: *I felt like I stuck out ... I didn't think I belonged. Cause they were talking about stuff I didn't know anything about ... I felt really, really dumb ... I was just meant to roll (T page 34).* When asked about the opportunities she had to prepare for changing class levels, she said, *I spent a day at my mum's school and I observed in the classroom there (T page 23).* Although Carol found this to be very useful, she described feeling *ripped off* because she was not given opportunities such as these in the schools in which she worked *(T page 21).* Of note, she was critical of school leadership for this and she held the view, *if you are the syndicate leader you should pick up the slack, and you should be able to stop what you're doing, and take stock of where your team is at (T page 11).*

Brigit also recalled having to spend a significant amount of time finding different resources when she changed class levels: *Trying to suss out, for myself, 'okay, what do I need to do ...' (T page 19).* She expanded on this view about the increased workload associated with changing class levels by adding that the first year she did not change class levels or class rooms:

> *I came in in January, feeling like I'd actually had a holiday, feeling like I could actually put some real thought into my programme rather than putting stuff up on the walls and putting things onto shelves and all that kind of meaningless stuff ... I had time to research new approaches. I had – yeah, some proper, decent time. (T page 8)*

Nevertheless, it is important to also note that 402 (83%) of the teachers in Group A said they were given some opportunity to talk with others about what changing class levels was like. In addition, 298 teachers (61%) in this research said they had been given some opportunity to observe others, 292 teachers (60%) were able to find and familiarise themselves with different resources and 164 teachers (34%) were given some extra time to prepare for their change in class level. An example was shared of how, in one school, the teachers were given opportunities to prepare and were supported when changing class levels:

Positive attitude is encouraged and support to make change is also delivered where possible, e.g., time to observe others in that year level before moving. Sharing of resources and planning etc is huge, especially when someone is new to the team. (TID791)

Likewise, *TID187,* who was also a deputy principal, explained how teachers in their school were supported to change class levels through formal mentoring: *We give teachers the opportunity to observe in other classes as well as a mentor to support them when they do move.*

From the interviews Brigit said that in one of her schools the teachers were encouraged to observe each other during their classroom release time (CRT), and this was *hugely helpful … I find that's how I learn best too, watching other people (T page 6).* However, she added that, due to the busy workload and constant change happening in the school, she found that finding opportunities to have conversations about these observations was often difficult.

4.5.3   Lack of support and school culture

Data also shows that a lack of support, and some school cultures, can pose challenges for a teacher when they transition. Illustrating this, Table 4.11 shows the replies from the teachers in Group A about the support they received, the impact of school culture and leadership and their level of agreement as to how certain aspects of school culture were evident when they changed class levels. These responses were gathered from Questions 9, 10 and 12. Question 9 asked the teachers, how much impact does the school culture and school leadership have on your ability to change class levels? Question 10 asked, how much support did you receive from colleagues, mentors, team leader/syndicate leader, principal/school leader and parents/caregivers? In addition, Question 12 asked, how much do you agree that changing class levels was widely accepted as a positive practice, honest dialogue with colleagues was encouraged, teachers were encouraged to take risks, collective responsibility for all children was encouraged, and there was a high level of trust with leadership evident? While the short responses included in Table 4.11 below are mostly reflective of the more dominant set, in some instances those which reflect the less dominant set have also been included to provide a balanced view of the teachers' experiences.

Table 4.11. *Support and School Culture*

Q9 Impact on your ability to change class levels:	NAA %	AL %	AMA %	AGD %	Sample of short responses
School culture	29	24	30	17	*The successful transition comes down to the leadership, school-wide culture, collegiality, communication (clear and transparent) (TID159).*
School leadership	20	22	33	25	*It really depends on the school … I was in a school where the leadership was weak, the staff morale low and there was a lack of support in just about everything (TID813).*
Q10 Support received from:					
Colleagues	6	32	34	28	*What support and help I received was from my colleagues (TID296).*
Mentors	32	25	26	17	*My colleagues, mentor teachers, and leadership team have been fantastic in supporting me (TID432).* *Excellent support from colleagues and management (TID576).*
Team leader/ syndicate leader	13	29	35	23	*Had the privilege of working with 'old school' junior syndicate leader who taught me heaps (TID419).* *Having the experienced working alongside me always supported my learning (TID838).* *Luckily my DP was supportive and encouraged PD and honest reflection (TID949).*
Principal/ school leader	26	35	23	16	*I am now a DP and encourage teachers to move through the levels as a way of developing their curriculum knowledge and to develop their practice (TID187).*
Parents/ caregivers	46	30	15	9	*I don't really feel they [parents] notice the levels teachers are at, unless it's a huge change. They are more focussed on their child's progress (TID885).*
Q12 How much do you agree that:					
Changing widely accepted.	4	26	43	27	*The difference is a positive encouraging and supportive staff climate that makes everything easy (TID791).*
Honest dialogue.	10	29	39	22	*Professional dialogue is encouraged and time allocated for this, so colleague support is awesome (TID791).*
Risk taking.	8	29	42	21	*… was allowed to make some errors along the way. It was all good for my professional development as a primary school teacher (TID838).*
Collective responsibility.	8	29	37	26	*… am involved with all ages in the school as well as my own class (TID569).*
Trust with leadership.	7	24	37	32	*Huge support from acting principal and my new team (TID736).*

Note. NAA=Not at all, AL=A little, AMA=A moderate amount, AGD=A great deal

Table 4.11 data suggests that school culture and leadership can have an important influence on a teacher's ability to transition. From the teachers' responses in Group A, 387 (80%) identified *school leadership* and 344 (71%) *school culture* as having some impact. In addition, there is a variation in the kinds of support that teachers received and who they received this from, with the following teachers indicating little or no support being received from *parents/caregivers* 366 teachers (76%), *principal/school leader* 298 (61%), *mentors* 274 (57%), *team leader/syndicate leader* 201 (42%) and *colleagues* 181 (38%). The following three comments offered by teachers provide an insight into how they felt when they changed class levels: *Left to find my own way (TID949)*; *sink or swim (TID740);* and *just suck it in and get going (TID791).* Another teacher pointed out, *if I had had the chance to observe … and speak to teachers about their programmes before I took this role on I think it wouldn't have been so stressful (TID953).*

Also, *TID50* suggested, *There is limited support from others (teachers, principal, team leader) I think because everyone is so busy.* Further to this, another teacher drew attention again to how resourceful teachers are: *There was very little mentoring or support available or offered. I became very good at sourcing outside help from the advisory (TID458).* The suggestion was made by *TID779* that *the support for teachers needs to be managed better.*

The influence that school culture and leadership can have on a teacher's ability to transition is brought to light further in Table 4.11, which shows that 183 teachers chose *not at all* when asked in Question 12 how much they agreed that certain aspects of school culture and leadership were evident when they changed class levels. This was supported by comments such as *I have felt left out of decisions and very much side-lined (TID530); we cannot assume that our leaders are trustworthy, as I know of several situations where syndicate leaders have gone behind inexperienced staff backs to meet their own agenda (TID328);* and *it has not been all that great. Some decisions made by senior leaders have not always been fair and transparent … it must always have the students' best interest at the heart and not the other way round (TID828).*

These challenges were similar to what the teachers in the interviews had experienced, and they were able to expand on these views during their respective interviews. For example, Ashleigh said it was important to acknowledge that it was not just the physical move of changing levels and classrooms that teachers found hard, but also *the mental move too* that was challenging for teachers *(T page 12)*. Like *TID740,* Brigit felt like she was *left to either sink or swim* when she changed from level 4 to level 2 *(T page 4)*. She also likened it to feeling as though she was *skating around on some marbles* and said it was *quite traumatic ... everything is a challenge and everything is a struggle (T pages 4, 15 & 31)*. Brigit attributed much of this to the culture of the school and said that there was too much change occurring in the school. In addition to trying to implement many new programmes and initiatives, each teacher was required to physically move classrooms every year, as well as most having to move to a new class level. In her opinion, *they don't like people getting too comfortable in their environment (T page 7)*. Brigit added that this resulted in a culture of *very high stress … everyone was trying to keep their head above water* and *people just coped or left. I don't think it works (T pages 7 & 16)*. She described the school as being challenging to work in because teachers were directed to transition and the positive aspects of changing class levels were not shared amongst staff. Furthermore, she said there was *little conversation ... I actually got told not to associate myself with that teacher ... not to talk to her because she was not a good influence on me. I got told who I could be friends with (T page 17)*.

Brigit further explained that although there was support put in place for her, she felt that this was not always the right kind of support. She said that her school leaders were solely focussed on the large number of students in her class who required assistance with their learning, and no one asked her about how they could best support her. As outlined below, there was no consultation with Brigit and the support that was put in place actually made the situation worse for her:

> *Their way of solving that problem too was, 'We'll just give her a teacher aide'. But I had never had a teacher aide before so I actually needed help in planning for a teacher aide and using a teacher aide to the best of their abilities too. Like making good use of them. So I had the teacher aide saying to me 'Oh what do you want me to do?' And me going 'well I've never had a teacher aide before.' It made it really hard. And they also gave me another*

141

parent helper too. So I had a parent helper and a teacher aide all asking, and expecting things from me, and all the kids expecting things from me. It would have actually been a lot easier just to be left for a little while by myself without them throwing all these people at me. (T page 5)

Brigit compared this culture to her previous school where she felt that transition was managed much more effectively through good communication and the use of strategies such as daily early morning meetings to keep all staff informed.

Like others, Brigit believed that *principals and Deputy principals can't come down on you like a ton of bricks if you make a silly mistake ... otherwise you're going to be too scared to try new things (T page 25).* She recalled trying out different reading strategies with a group of students who were struggling with their reading. Even though the students responded well, her school leader was unhappy about her implementing strategies other than those that were used school wide, and Brigit recalled being shocked when she was asked to justify and explain her actions: *I thought, 'okay, I'm being told that I'm useless and all this type of thing by the Principal and DP ... but these kids are learning' (T page 18).*

Carol, too, shared her frustrations and attributed many of her challenges to *the culture, the expectations of the staff to be a certain way, act a certain way, and to sort of follow or conform … people had left because they couldn't handle the pressure from management ... a very high socio-economic area (T page 5).* She went on to explain that when she changed schools and class levels *that meant me going from this well-to-do socio economic to a little decile three and I was like 'why is this kid coming with no lunch?'... it was a serious culture shock (T page 12).* She pointed out that teachers are not inspired to transition when they see their colleagues struggle: *Other people would have been watching a highly effective teacher of year five and six and go to year two/three and actually not get a lot of support. I wonder what that does? For encouraging other people to move class (T page 25).*

While some teachers experienced school cultures that were not conducive for teachers to transition, others experienced school cultures in which changing class levels was considered to be a positive practice and teachers knew that they would be supported to transition. This is illustrated in Table 4.11 where 465 teachers

(96%) said that they agreed to some extent *changing class levels was widely accepted as a positive practice*, 451 (93%) *there was a high level of trust with leadership evident*, 445 (92%) *teachers were encouraged to take risks,* 445 (92%) *collective responsibility for all children was encouraged,* and 435 (90%) *honest dialogue with colleagues was encouraged.* In addition, the following number of teachers indicated that they received either a moderate amount or a great deal of support from *colleagues* 304 (62%), *team leader/syndicate leader* 284 (58%), *mentors* 211 (43%), *principal/school leader* 187 (39%), and *parents/caregivers* 111 (24%). Of note, *TID872* commented, *My motto was if unsure, ask colleagues/senior staff,* while *TID173* said, *The key is having supportive team players in the school who offer support without judgement.* Additionally, the comment made by *TID949* that *having at least one person to rebound off is imperative,* was indicative of others.

Although they did not necessarily refer to them as mentors, the teachers in the interviews talked at length about being supported by others when they changed class levels. Some of these relationships were informal and some more formalised. Brigit had two examples of being provided with support, both informally and formally, when she changed class levels. The first time, a colleague who was already teaching in the school indicated that she was willing to be an informal mentor for her and supported Brigit by demonstrating what a reading programme for a level 2 class should look like and showing her resources that would be suitable for level 2. The second time the principal set up a formal mentoring relationship between Brigit and the school literacy leader, and Brigit was told *she'll step you through everything (T page 9).* In addition, because the school was using a specific writing programme, Brigit was provided with training in this programme earlier in the year prior to her transition, *so I could catch up with the rest of the school (T page 9).*

Carol also talked about having informal mentoring when she first changed class levels:

> *She wasn't officially designated … she said, 'this works good … you can borrow this … this is how I've got my classroom set up … this is how I roll with my behaviour management plan, this is what I do here' … she just took me under her wing. She came and checked on me before school to see if I had everything. (T page 10)*

In addition, she said, *I asked my mum to get resources and ideas from her school ... I got more information from her (T page 23).* When Carol changed class levels for a second time, she sought support from within the staff and described this as *networking* with the teachers who were leaders in particular curriculum areas *(T page 26).* Carol explained how she was able to get support with reading from a colleague: *She'd just done a year of reading recovery ... and so she knew her stuff (T page 26).* She also described finding *one really good with behaviour management and also a go-to person for maths ... and she was great (T page 26).* Furthermore, Carol explained that more recently in the school, more formalised mentoring relationships had been established for teachers changing class levels, and teachers were given time to go and observe others.

Dean's experiences were similar to *TID 419*, as shown in Table 4.11, as he also had informal support from his colleagues: *I did rely a lot on them in that first term to get me up to speed. And I sort of would bounce ideas ... we co-constructed planning and assessment and everything (T page 5).* He also shared an example of when he changed schools. He went from a level 1 class to a level 4 class and found he was supported well by his team members: *I've been in a really amazing team ... I could rely on others a lot in that first term to sort of collaborate with and get my head around things (T page 9).*

The teachers in the interviews agreed that having a high level of trust in the school leadership was vital. Brigit said that in one of her schools, in which she changed class levels, the principal was approachable and readily available for all staff if they wished to meet with him, and this in turn had a positive impact on the culture of the school. She described the principal as having an open door policy: *You could go in, vent your feelings, get it off your chest and not feel that you're going to get in trouble for it later (T page 10).* He was sensitive to individual teachers' needs and he was skilled at helping teachers to see their own strengths. This principal had demonstrated to the staff that he was willing to take a risk himself: *He is respected for saying, 'Okay I, I [sic] don't really know how to teach year 2s but I'm going to give it a go' (T page 23).* Brigit felt that this kind of leadership had helped to create a culture where teachers were confident about identifying those areas of their practice where they needed support and upskilling. This principal's approach to transition was supportive, and although *he's aware of*

144

teachers in the school that need to [change class levels], Brigit said that he did not directly require any teacher to do so against their personal wish *(T page 25).* She explained that he had created a school culture whereby he gave teachers the autonomy to identify their own professional needs and supported them in ways that they could meet these needs. This included teachers changing class levels and Brigit felt that his style of leadership meant that *people come to it themselves (T page 26).*

In this study data has shown that transition can pose significant challenges for teachers; however, when they are supported by others, such as mentors and colleagues, and given sufficient opportunities to prepare, they are able to successfully negotiate these challenges. The significant influence of school leadership has been further highlighted, and data supports the view that the way school leaders approach and manage teacher transition can significantly impact upon the culture of the school, and thereby the teacher's attitude towards, and experience of, transition between class levels.

4.6 Summary

This chapter has provided an analysis of all data gathered from the online survey and the four interviews. These data have provided explanations for why teachers may or may not transition and how this influences their perceptions of changing class levels. Findings illustrate that while there are times when these explanations contribute to tensions occurring, transition can have a significant positive impact on a teacher's professional learning. The positive outcomes of transition have shown to have the potential to provide teachers with opportunities to bring about effective teaching, become more extended professionals and to strengthen their professional identities. In addition, findings show that the following challenges are associated with transition: perceptions others hold, increased workload and insufficient preparation, and a lack of support and school culture. Finally, the role of school leadership and the significant influence that school culture has on teacher transition has been highlighted. These findings will be explored in greater depth and discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Expertise at one level is great but multi-dimensions of the same vocation are much richer, deeper and complex (TID116).

The aim of this study was to build knowledge about the phenomenon of teacher transition and how this impacts teacher professional learning. Of particular interest was the transition between year levels 1 to 8 in primary schools in New Zealand. Since this required an in-depth investigation, a case study approach using mixed methods of data gathering was used in order to identify, elaborate and expand on significant patterns and trends about teacher transition. As Chapter 4 has outlined, an online survey was used to gather both quantitative and qualitative data, and subsequent to this, four semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather further qualitative data. The intention was to gain a better understanding of how teachers' perceptions of transition are developed, the outcomes of transition that are generated for teachers and other stakeholders, the ways that teachers negotiate transition and the place that leadership plays in transition.

The findings are discussed next under four headings which directly respond to the research questions. The first section discusses teachers' perspectives of transition and how these are developed. The second and third sections explore the outcomes of transition, including the impact of teacher transition on teacher learning and how teachers strengthen their professional identities through transition. The final section discusses the roles that school leadership and culture play in teacher transition.

5.1   Teachers' perceptions of transition

This section responds to the first research question, what are teachers' perceptions of transition between class levels? Findings illustrate that while teachers' perceptions of transition are generally favourable, there are teachers who hold negative beliefs and feelings about transition. This variation in teachers' perceptions can be directly attributed to the tensions that they consider to be

associated with changing class levels. Findings consistently signal that the reasons why teachers may or may not transition, the perceptions that are held about teachers' roles and the challenges that are associated with transition, each have the potential to create tensions. Data also brings to light how these tensions have a considerable bearing on a teacher's perception, sense of autonomy and experience of transition.

These findings support the suggestion that transition is a complex process which involves a range of stakeholders (Beach, 2003). They also correspond with other literature (Hobbs, 2013; Rogers, 2003) positing the view that the perception a teacher holds about transition has an influence on how he/she feels about their own ability to adapt in a particular class level, their level of commitment and their response to transition.

5.1.1 Reasons why a teacher may or may not transition

The reasons why a teacher may or may not transition in the first instance are shown in the findings to have a significant impact on his/her perception of transition. Teachers' responses show that sometimes teachers initiate a transition, are directed to transition or are denied the opportunity, whereas in other instances teachers do not wish to transition at all for a range of different reasons. Moreover, teachers may transition for personal reasons that are totally unrelated to teaching, or the reasons could be directly linked to seeking benefits. These findings suggest that teachers can be broadly located into three groups: those who actively seek out transition, those who do not necessarily seek out transition but are willing to make the most of it and those teachers who do not want to transition. Notwithstanding this, it is important to recognise that because a teacher could have multiple transitions, each for different reasons, he/she may well be located in each of these groups at different times.

5.1.1.1 *Teachers actively seeking out transition*

The findings reinforce Bullough's (2008) notion that some teachers have 'the knack' for locating opportunities for professional learning and to stay interested in teaching. This highlights the importance of managing and leading the process of transition effectively in order that *all* teachers are able to see the benefits. This is illustrated in data which shows that teachers will seek out or initiate a transition when they perceive it to be an opportunity for professional learning, career

development or to overcome a sense of boredom (see Table 4.1, page 101). The short responses exemplify that teachers will consider transition in a positive light when they can see that a change in class level has benefits for them (see Table 4.1, short responses by *TID74, 191, 241)*. When teachers can draw on personal experience and/or observe and talk to others who have successfully transitioned, this helps them to see the benefits of changing class levels. These benefits were described aptly by *TID323*: *Changing levels gives you the opportunity to change your resources, teaching practice to suit the needs of the students, undertake professional learning which will upskill you in the necessary curriculum areas. It is refreshing and stimulating.*

It is not surprising, therefore, that there are instances when teachers are strategic about making sure they gain experience at teaching different class levels. For example, Carol explained that she was prepared to relocate to another school and recalled thinking towards the end of one year, *if they don't move me then I'll leave (T page 19).* Albeit encouraging when teachers take responsibility for their own professional learning, not all teachers are prepared or necessarily able to relocate to another school in order to do so. This highlights the predicament a teacher can find themselves in when he/she seeks a change in class level in a school but is prevented from doing so (see Table 4.2, page 106 short responses by *TID174, 328, 392*). Although this is a difficult predicament, as these data show it is not uncommon for teachers to feel stuck or trapped at a class level. Both Carol and Dean's experiences shed more light on the tension that can be created in schools when teachers are prevented from changing class levels because of another teacher's refusal to do so (see pages 107 & 108).

These findings show that it is vital for school leaders to listen to their teachers carefully, consider their individual needs, and try to accommodate their requests for a change in class level where possible. It is also vital that when school leaders are unable to meet teachers' requests that teachers understand the reasons for this and plans are put in place to ensure it will occur in the future. This makes it essential that a common vision about transition is developed and a culture is created in which teachers are able to see the benefits of changing class levels for themselves and their colleagues. A common vision is developed when teachers are able to engage in open and honest dialogue with their school leaders about their

professional learning needs and how they feel about changing class levels. It is also developed when school leaders ensure that there are opportunities for teachers to observe and talk about their experiences of changing class levels. Data supports the suggestion that the most suitable context for enhancing teacher learning is a school in which a common vision is shared (de Vries et al., 2013).

5.1.1.2   Teachers not seeking out transition but willing to make the most of it

There are also teachers who may not necessarily seek out transition, but if it occurs, for whatever reason, they are willing to make the most of it. Data from the survey shows that in 274 instances teachers were asked to transition for administrative reasons, usually by a school leader (see Table 4.1, page 101). Additionally, these data illustrate that the teachers' transitions were frequently initiated by someone other than themselves, such as a team/syndicate leader, colleague or mentor. Notwithstanding this, of particular interest were the different ways that teachers reacted when someone else initiated a transition or they were required to transition. While some teachers were willing to make the most of their transition, albeit for administrative reasons, others were obviously not, suggesting that transition is not managed well in some schools. Hence, the significance of context is highlighted and the importance of teachers being able to see the benefits of transition and consider it in a positive light. The role that school leadership and culture plays to ensure this occurs is again emphasised.

Findings are consistent with the suggestion that some teachers feel comfortable being settled and secure and are less inclined to seek out a transition than others (Bullough, 2008). Despite this, as the example by *TID772* demonstrates, when teachers have some autonomy and do not feel like they are being forced to change class levels they may be more willing to make the most of their transitions (see page 102). When school leaders manage the process well and attend to important aspects such as ensuring teachers are informed, involved and supported to transition, this helps teachers to have a better understanding that there are times when they may be required to transition. Furthermore, this helps teachers to see the benefits, feel they have some autonomy, manage any challenges and have a positive experience of transition (Carlyon, 2013, 2014). *TID267* described this appropriately: *Change is a good thing when it is done for the right reasons, support is in place and the children will benefit.* Findings show that it is crucial

that the process of assigning teachers to class levels is managed in a careful and considered manner so that if, and when, they are required to transition, teachers are willing to make the most of the opportunity. Although there may be times where teachers "have to be steered into new practices" (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 56), this study suggests that this does not necessarily mean that they lose their autonomy and develop negative perceptions about changing class levels.

5.1.1.3 *Teachers not wanting to transition*

Teachers may not want to transition for a range of reasons that include wanting to consolidate their learning, become an expert at teaching in one particular class level, or because they have a preference for one particular class level. In contrast to those teachers who seek out transition because they believe it will help with their career development, findings indicate that there are also teachers who do not want to transition for the very same reason. The comment by *TID739* (see page 106) typifies this, and shows that some teachers feel they are better placed to take on extra responsibilities and leadership roles in a school when they are settled in a particular class level.

Table 4.2 (page 106) shows that 56% of those teachers who had not experienced transition identified that the reason for this was that they had not wanted to and additional data provides some useful insights as to why, at particular times, teachers may not want to transition. There were occasions when it was not suitable or conducive for a teacher to transition, and as the following example illustrates, it is important that teachers have sufficient time to be able to consolidate their learning in each class level before changing to another: *I feel it is really beneficial to teach at least two years at the same level (TID981).* Further data indicates that some teachers do not want to transition, for the reasons that they prefer to become an expert in one particular class level (see short response by *TID740*, page 114).

Undoubtedly the process of assigning teachers to class levels is more difficult for school leaders when teachers do not want to transition, yet as previous discussion points out, they are more willing to make the most of it when the benefits are clear – and the process is managed carefully in schools. In spite of this, it is obvious that some teachers feel they are not listened to by their school leaders and have no autonomy over their transitions. Data from both the survey and interviews

illustrate that when a teacher feels forced to change class levels it is common for them to become aggrieved and feel resentment, anger and vulnerability about transitioning (see Table 4.1, page 101, short responses by *TID299, 486, 530*). These data highlight that transition involves a high level of emotion, particularly when a teacher feels they are being forced to change class levels, and this can have a negative impact on his/her professional identity. When teachers feel they are not involved and consulted about their transitions, this can result in them feeling helpless, losing confidence and lessening their sense of autonomy.

Hence, it can be detrimental to a teacher's professional well-being and identity when transition is not managed carefully in schools. It also makes it difficult for teachers to see the benefits and develop positive perceptions of transition – a finding that is consistent with other studies (Bullough, 2008; du Plessis, 2013; Kitchen, 2009). These findings reiterate that assigning teachers to class levels each year is a critical aspect of school administration which requires careful consideration and strategic planning, so that if a teacher is required to transition, they do so more confidently and, thus, more successfully.

5.1.2 Perceptions of teachers' roles

The perceptions that teachers and others hold about certain teaching roles can have a significant impact on the way that a teacher will see and think about transition. Findings suggest that the perceptions that are held about teachers' roles, by teachers themselves and other stakeholders, can also impact on a teacher's professional identity. When a teacher considers that they have a significant contribution to make to the school, this creates a feeling of stability for them, but as *TID885* explained, this stability can be challenged when a teacher transitions to a different class level (see page 120).

Findings show that teachers hold different perceptions about teaching in particular class levels and while in some instances the role of a teacher in junior classes is perceived to be more difficult, in other instances it is quite the opposite and the role of a teacher in senior classes is perceived to be more difficult. This is exemplified in teachers' comments which illustrate that transition from a senior to a junior class level is sometimes considered to be a demotion, where teaching in a junior class is a role that is perceived to require less skill (see Table 4.9, page 130 short responses by *TID81, 638, 750).*

151

While these perceptions may exist, it is obvious that it is important for teachers to feel they will be respected as practitioners, regardless of the class level they teach. However, as the next comment indicates, this does not always occur:

> *I have to say that junior teaching is the most challenging professionally but it is also the most undervalued and unappreciated by senior management and parents alike. The higher the level the easier the workload and the more you are credited with both intelligence and professional ability. (TID982)*

Certainly, teachers are likely to develop negative perceptions about a change in class levels if others deem the change to be a demotion. While teachers, too, may consider a change in class level to be a demotion, as Carol and Ashleigh explained, these perceptions seem to alter once teachers experience teaching at different class levels (see page 132).

Findings suggest that two further perceptions exist which have to do with male teachers being 'less suitable' to teach in junior classes than their female counterparts, and teachers lacking the pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) required for teaching in particular class levels. As Dean indicated, it concerns teachers when their colleagues and others share perceptions which differentiate teachers on the basis of gender (see page 133). Additionally, it concerns them when others, and teachers themselves, consider they lack the PCK required to teach in particular class levels (see Table 4.9, page 130, short responses by *TID156 & 394*). However, the following comment, which is indicative of other similar examples, implies that when teachers share this perception most are willing to take responsibility: *I had to make sure I had the knowledge required for the curriculum level e.g., mathematics concepts, deeper thinking in reading/writing (TID734).*

These kinds of perceptions and misconceptions have the potential to cause tensions in schools and influence a teacher's willingness to change class level. This is highlighted in data which shows that 65% of the teachers acknowledged that the professional image that others had of them had some impact on their ability to transition (see Table 4.9, page 130). These findings support previous research (Beijaard, 1995) which argues that teachers' actions are driven by the perceptions they have about different teaching roles. It highlights that the

perceptions that are held about teachers' roles, by teachers themselves and others, impact upon how a teacher may view transition, as well as his/her professional identity. Hence, it is essential that teachers' roles are better understood and misconceptions about teaching at certain class levels being more challenging than others, or which differentiate on the basis of gender, are dispelled. It is vital that teachers understand the benefits of changing class levels and are confident in the knowledge that they will be supported to manage these kinds of tensions.

5.1.3 Challenges

This study draws attention to challenges associated with increased workload, insufficient opportunities to prepare, a lack of support and school cultures that are not conducive to transition. Data consistently point to these challenges and the way in which they impact upon teachers' perceptions and decisions about transition. Because these challenges can lead to teachers having negative perceptions about changing class levels and an inability to see the benefits of transition, it is imperative that they are understood and alleviated as much as possible. Even though earlier discussion highlights the positive impact of transition, it is important to note that a teacher who demonstrates effective teaching in one class level may not necessarily do the same at a different level. Findings suggest that not all teachers find it easy to adapt and adjust to a new culture, and when teachers are denied support and opportunities to fully prepare, this can have negative outcomes.

The extra workload that is associated with transition means it is essential that teachers are provided with sufficient opportunities to prepare (du Plessis, 2013; Newell et al., 2009). This extra workload is associated with activities such as locating new resources, understanding and adjusting to different procedures and practices, and (usually) having to physically move to a new classroom. As Ashleigh pointed out, in many instances the resistance to transition can be attributed to *the hassle of moving classrooms (T page 11).* Despite this increase in workload demanding significant time and energy from a teacher, data revealed that 89% of the teachers in the survey said they had been given little or no extra time to prepare (see Table 4.10, page 135). Opportunities to observe their colleagues and talk to them about teaching in particular class levels, as well as locating new resources prior to changing class levels, were limited. As data

illustrates, this can result in teachers feeling very frustrated (see short responses by *TID219, 412, 953,* page 136).

Transition demands considerable emotional and physical energy from a teacher, and they can feel overwhelmed and struggle to negotiate the challenges. Ashleigh's description of how she *just smashed into a wall* is reflective of what can occur when teachers are not given the opportunity to fully prepare for their transition *(T page 6)*. This kind of reaction has been described as *culture freeze* (Seah, 2003) and can occur when a teacher is not fully prepared or provided with sufficient support to enable them to adjust and adapt in a new class level. Data indicates that teachers are not always provided with the level of support that they require and, as Ashleigh pointed out, transition can be *quite isolating too (T page 7)*. For example, Table 4.11 (see page 139) illustrates that more than 40% of the teachers identified that they had received little or no support from mentors, team leaders, principal/school leaders and/or parent caregivers. While 'colleagues' feature as providing the most support (28%), it was unsure what was being referred to because, as has previously been acknowledged, greater clarity was required in the survey around who the teachers identified as 'colleagues' and/or 'mentors', and what differences existed in these relationships.

It is evident that the culture of a school has a significant impact on a teacher's ability to successfully transition, and although some school cultures encourage and inspire teachers to transition, others do not, and some even prevent teachers from doing so. This is highlighted in data which shows that over 70% of the teachers acknowledged that school culture had some impact on their ability to transition (see Table 4.11, page 139). Particular aspects of school culture which are shown to impact upon teachers include changing class levels being widely accepted; and honest dialogue, risk taking and collective responsibility being encouraged. Nonetheless, it was disappointing that for at least 30% of the teachers there was little or no evidence of these aspects in the schools when they transitioned. Findings draw attention to unsupportive cultures that exist in some schools, such as those which expect teachers who transition to manage on their own and leave teachers to "sink or swim" (du Plessis et al., 2014, p. 101). A lack of consultation, honest dialogue and teachers being left to struggle are characteristics of an unsupportive school culture. Brigit and Carol's experiences

are illustrative of how teachers can develop negative perceptions of transition when this kind of culture exists (see page 137).

When teachers are not supported, this can threaten their ability to successfully transition and have a detrimental effect on their professional identity. Having insufficient opportunities to prepare and being unable to manage the increase in workload is likely to result in teachers being unable to see the benefits of transition, and develop negative perceptions of transition. Hence, it is essential that school leaders ensure teachers are given sufficient opportunities that will allow them to prepare for their transitions. It is also essential that school leaders try to alleviate the challenges so that tensions are reduced, and teachers are able to consider transition in a positive light. It is vital that school leaders have an understanding of these challenges and know how to foster school cultures which are conducive for teachers to change class levels.

5.1.4   Summary

This study shows that teachers have varied perceptions of transition and while in the main teachers hold positive beliefs, there are teachers who hold negative beliefs also. This variation can be directly attributed to the way in which the tensions associated with transition are managed in schools. Teachers are more likely to see the benefits of transition when they have autonomy, their school leaders have conversations with them, and the process of assigning teachers to class levels is managed with care. Teachers are likely to consider transition in a positive light when they are confident they will be supported and a common vision about transition is shared. On the other hand, when teachers feel they have no autonomy and are left to manage the challenges without support, they are likely to develop negative perceptions of transition.

The perceptions that are shown to be held about certain teaching roles can also create tension with regard to teachers changing class levels. When a change in class level is considered to be either a demotion or promotion, this can have an impact on a teacher's willingness to make the most of a transition. Likewise, when teachers feel that they do not have the PCK required to teach in particular class levels, this can result in them being unwilling to transition and having negative perceptions of transition.

Findings show that a transition can be an emotionally and physically demanding experience and a change in class level for some teachers can be overwhelming. For this reason it is important that school leaders work to reduce the challenges and tensions so teachers can successfully transition. When this does not occur, challenges such as the additional workload, insufficient opportunities to prepare, a lack of support and unsupportive school cultures can have a negative influence on teachers' perceptions and decisions about transition.

It is useful to apply Hobbs's (2013) adaptability scale, which has been introduced on page 17, as it illustrates how a teacher's perception of transition will impact on their professional identity and willingness to embrace the challenge of transition. When a teacher has constructed a positive perception of transition they are likely to actively seek it out, or are willing to make the most of it, if they are required to transition. On the other hand, when a teacher has constructed a negative perception of transition, they are unlikely to seek it out and will likely feel aggrieved if they are required to transition.

Consequently, for a teacher to consider transition in a positive light, it is essential that the tensions associated with transition are acknowledged and more clearly understood. It is crucial that teachers feel they have some autonomy over their transitions and have sufficient support and opportunities to prepare, in order to be able to successfully manage the extra workload that is associated with changing class levels. This makes it necessary to reflect on the inappropriateness of the 'sink or swim' attitude which some schools hold towards teachers when they are transitioning. It is well documented in the literature that when the process of transition is understood, well-managed, and supported in schools, teachers are able to see the benefits and develop positive perceptions of transition (Bullough, 2008; Carlyon, 2013, 2014; Hobbs, 2013). These findings draw attention to context and the pivotal role of school leadership, which can both enable and limit opportunities for transition to be seen as professional learning and development.

5.2 The impact of teacher transition on teacher learning

Although literature suggests that transition has an impact on teacher learning, explicit attention has not been given to the extent of this impact and how it influences teacher practice and pedagogy. This study pays close attention to this,

and illustrates that transition has a very significant impact on teacher learning. In responding to the second research question (what outcomes are generated for teachers and other stakeholders from teacher transition between class levels?), findings draw attention to a number of outcomes which influence teacher practice and pedagogy. Findings highlight the way in which teachers (a) gain insight and understanding of student learning, (b) modify established teaching methods and implement new practice and (c) adjust expectations and create positive learning environments. These outcomes are all hallmarks of effective teaching and are validated in a teacher's practice (Alton-Lee, 2003; Carpenter et al., 2002; D. Fraser, 2012).

While the impact of transition on teacher learning is shown to be significant, findings challenge the idea that teacher development occurs in sequential stages that teachers progress through in a linear fashion as they become more experienced. Instead, data indicates that teacher development does not necessarily occur with experience or in the same way for every teacher, but that it can take place at any given time when teachers are provided opportunities, such as transition, that compel them to make changes to their practice and pedagogy.

5.2.1   Insight and understanding of student learning

Data from the survey (see Table 4.4, page 113) shows that over 90% of the teachers, whether they had experienced transition or not, agreed that transition impacts on teacher learning. This was reiterated in the interviews where the four teachers all made comments similar to Dean's when he described the impact of transition on his learning and teaching as *huge … more than anything else (T page 18).* As illustrated in Table 4.5 (see page 116), 20 teachers made explicit reference to learning about students' *progressions* and *stages* and how much they valued having this knowledge. The short responses represent how these teachers believed that having a broader and deeper view of their students' learning enabled them to meet their learning needs much more effectively *(TID18, 302, 342, 674, 744).* Working with students from different class levels helped these teachers gain a greater insight and understanding of student learning and to build human capital in their schools. Human capital in teaching is about teachers having the necessary knowledge about students and how they learn, what they are teaching and how to teach it (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). When teachers transition between different

class levels they gain knowledge about the different stages of student learning as well as examine their teaching practice, so they are able to meet the needs of a different group of students.

Teachers do not always understand the demands of teaching in class levels other than their own, and when they stay in one class level for an extended period of time they can become narrow in their focus. As Carol's comment illustrates, some teachers consider that teaching in junior class levels is easier than teaching in senior class levels (see page 132). This is an example of restricted professionality, where a teacher is only focussed on their own class level as opposed to extended professionality where he/she becomes concerned about locating their teaching in a broader sense (Hoyle & John, 1995). Fifteen teachers acknowledged that prior to teaching in a junior class they did not have a good understanding about the specific demands of teaching in these levels; however, after transitioning they gained a greater appreciation of the different demands of each class level. These teachers learnt that it is common for students in junior classes to be less independent than older students and for junior students to require more focussed and individualised teaching in order to establish an understanding of literacy and numeracy.

Findings concur with literature which suggests that working at a restricted level of professionality can influence a teacher's commitment to ongoing learning and development (Berliner, 2004; Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Day, 1999). The present study highlights how transition can help teachers to be extended professionals as they gain greater insights and understanding into student learning, as illustrated by this quote from *TID342*: *[Transition] keeps teachers real and accountable and always learning.*

5.2.2 Modifying established teaching methods and implementing new practice

Findings demonstrate that transition helps a teacher to become more confident about modifying their established teaching methods and adapting them for use in a different context. When teachers change class levels they learn to identify which techniques are no longer effective and need to be discarded, as well as those which require modifying for a different group of learners. Brigit's example (see page 116) is illustrative of how teachers learn through interpreting and enacting

on past teaching approaches and adapt them for use in a different context. This aligns with research which suggests that it is through different experiences that teachers acquire and develop decisional capital to be able to make sensible judgements about their teaching (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Data shows that nearly all of the teachers who had transitioned were willing to try new ideas and use different teaching techniques and strategies more effectively (see Table 4.6, page 119). These findings verify that when teachers transition they actively challenge their own assumptions and explore alternatives to try and find solutions in their new setting (Brookfield, 1995; D. A. Schon, 1983).

It is not surprising, therefore, that over 90% of the teachers in Group A indicated that transition had some positive impact on their ability to meet students' individual needs (see Table 4.5, page 116). These findings support the suggestion that effective teachers are always looking for ways to improve their practice by confirming what works and what does not work. They highlight the importance of teachers having opportunities in which they can continue to improve their teaching practice.

Given that it is imperative for teachers to have a strong theoretical base to help them to modify their established teaching methods and implement new practice (Timperley et al., 2008), it is encouraging to note that over 96% of those teachers who had transitioned indicated that they had learnt more about the curriculum and how to implement it (see Table 4.6, page 119). While resources and documents, such as the *New Zealand Curriculum (NZC),* provide guidance for teachers and set the direction for student learning to enable them to become "confident, connected, actively involved, lifelong learners" (Ministry of Education, 2007a, p. 7), these documents are not always well understood in terms of appropriate pedagogical elements aligned to different levels. Ashleigh made specific mention of the usefulness of the *New Zealand Curriculum Exemplars* (Ministry of Education, 2007b) and explained that she used them to gain a better understanding about the progressions of student learning *(T page 23).* The purpose of the exemplars is to highlight features that teachers need to look for, gather information about and act on to promote learning. In order to respond to the learning conversations that are developed within any class level, it is essential that teachers become knowledgeable about the *NZC* and the *NZC Exemplars* and how

to use such documents more flexibly (Bishop & Berryman, 2009). Findings, such as the following quote, illustrate that a teacher's practice can be enhanced when they are able to understand and implement the *NZC* and *NZC Exemplar*s more insightfully and holistically: *My teaching was richly improved and curriculum knowledge, and how to adapt to other levels (TID333).*

Even though only five teachers made mention of transition being the impetus to engage in further studies, it is worthy of inclusion in this discussion. The example provided by *TID906* confirms this: *It revitalised my need to learn and extend myself ... I also then started a three year diploma in school management.* Engaging in further studies reflected the teachers' commitment to ongoing professional learning and supports the suggestion that, for some teachers, transition can be the catalyst to engage in further studies for new learning. These findings illustrate that teacher development does not necessarily occur as teachers become more experienced, or in a linear fashion, but that opportunities such as changing class levels can both challenge and inspire teachers to engage in new learning throughout their careers. Although the low number of responses could be attributed to the fact that there was no question that specifically identified 'further studies', there may well be a need for more research to be undertaken to find out more about whether it is common for teachers to engage in further studies as a result of transition and, for those who do, what the benefits are.

5.2.3 Adjusting expectations and creating positive learning environments

Findings indicate that when teachers transition they learn to adjust their expectations to different groups of learners in order to create positive learning environments. Data shows that nearly all of those teachers who had transitioned acknowledged that it had some impact on their ability to manage the learning environment more effectively (see Table 4.7, page 122). This supports earlier research which suggests that when teachers transition they become more confident and effective at managing different learning environments (Carlyon, 2013, 2014). When a teacher transitions they have the opportunity to learn new skills and strategies to effectively communicate and manage students from a different class level. Teachers learn the language that is appropriate for each group of learners and how to effectively manage such things as off task behaviour to ensure all students are actively engaged in their learning. Aspects of the Te Kotahitanga

Effective Teacher Profile, which include implementing new practice and creating positive learning environments, can be brought into line to support these findings (Bishop & Berryman, 2009).

Ashleigh, Brigit and Carol all shared examples of how they were able to create positive learning environments by implementing management techniques that they had used successfully in one class level to a different class level (see pages 123–124). These examples illustrate professional learning that is gained when teachers transition and make sense of, and connect different experiences together. It is important for teachers to know how to identify which of their teaching practices and expectations are no longer suitable and which require modifying in a new class level. This 'learning on the job' is shown to be particularly effective because it takes place at the teacher's own pace and within their own classroom. Discovering ways to adjust their expectations in a new environment helps teachers to gain confidence and is an essential element of their professional learning (Kennedy, 2011; Kitchen, 2009; Robinson et al., 2009; Timperley et al., 2008).

While it is important that teachers are able to interact with and manage students from different class levels, findings concur with the notion that not all teachers find it easy to let go of some of their familiar practices to enable them to adapt and adjust in a new class level (Bridges, 2004; Hargreaves et al., 2001). This means that some teachers will require support to help them identify which of their practices are no longer suitable and those which require modifying, and to learn new practices suitable for different groups of students. Once again this draws attention to the role that school leadership plays to ensure teachers are supported to work through these processes.

5.2.4   Summary

The impact of transition between class levels on teacher learning is shown to be very significant and, as such, should be considered more frequently in schools as an effective form of professional learning and development. While the professional learning that was described by teachers in this study was individual to each of them and their particular context, there were aspects that were common to many teachers. Data consistently illustrates that the outcomes generated from transition enabled the teachers to cater for students from a wider range of class levels than those they might otherwise have been able to. They show how

transition is an opportunity for effective professional learning which acknowledges the individual nature of teacher learning and the different contexts in which teachers work. This professional learning can occur both incidentally and informally as teachers continually learn to reconstruct their own knowledge and work collaboratively with others. It is evident that the learning teachers experience when they transition can bring about changes to their practice and pedagogy that result in extended professionality and, thereby, increased teacher effectiveness.

Findings about the nature of teacher learning challenge the notion that as teachers gain experience they progress through sequential stages of development in a linear fashion (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986; Katz, 1972; Moir, 1999) and confirm that, in reality, teaching experience alone is insufficient for teacher learning and development (Berliner, 2004; Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Day, 1999; Olsen, 2010). While there is no debate that every teacher requires new learning and renewal at different times during their careers, when, and how this occurs, is shown to vary for each teacher. This study argues that teacher development can be non-linear and that learning is a complex process which requires teachers to interpret, enact and reflect on their work, often in a less regular or organised sequence. This process also requires teachers to challenge existing norms and adapt and adjust their practice and pedagogy.

The next section discusses the link between professional learning and professional identity and illustrates how a teacher's professional identity can be strengthened when he/she transitions between class levels.

5.3 Strengthening professional identity through transition

This section also responds to the second research question and highlights further outcomes of transition which result in teachers strengthening their professional identities. Findings are in accord with researchers who maintain that professional identity is shaped and strengthened through socio-cultural activities (Erikson, 1968; Mead, 1934). Transition is shown to be one such socio-cultural activity in which teachers actively work and collaborate with others to find ways to adapt and adjust in a new setting. Attention is drawn to the idea that transition can be the catalyst for teachers to engage in purposeful critical reflection on their practice

and pedagogy that leads them to have a better understanding of themselves as professionals. By focussing on the rich descriptions that teachers in this study provided, I was able to understand how they became more confident in their own abilities and professional identity when they tried out new ideas and questioned their practice and pedagogy. This strongly indicates that transition provides teachers with a new 'lens' to view their teaching through and helps them to understand that they have an important role in *all* students' learning.

Whilst data highlights that transition stimulates the interplay between a teacher's professional learning and their professional identity, it also prompts questions that concern the manner in which changes occur between these two features. The term interplay best describes the unique way in which changes to a teacher's learning and identity act on, and react to, each other. Even though it remains unclear whether it is the changes in teacher learning which prompt changes in teacher identity or if is the changes in teacher identity which prompt changes in teacher learning, it is evident that there can be positive outcomes for teachers from this interplay. Findings illustrate how a teacher's professional identity can be strengthened when he/she transitions and finds renewal and refreshment, engages in purposeful reflection, extends relationships and develops collective responsibility. These findings consistently point to the fact that when a teacher has a strong belief in themselves and the contribution they have to make in their school, their professional identity strengthens.

5.3.1   Renewal and refreshment

Despite there being a number of tensions associated with transition, findings in this section illustrate that teachers generally experience a sense of renewal and refreshment when they transition. This is highlighted in data which shows that 22 survey teachers made specific comments that relate to feeling *fresh, energised* and/or *motivated* (see Table 4.3, page 110). The renewal and refreshment that these teachers experienced as a result of their transition is most clearly exemplified by the short responses in the survey (see Table 4.1, page 101, short responses by *TID232, 440, 419, 906* and Table 4.3, page 110 short responses by *TID110, 145, 405, 800).* Clearly all these teachers were positive about their new learning and motivated to try new approaches in their teaching. It is evident from the data that even though there are times when teachers may not necessarily

initiate or seek out transition, they can still experience a sense of renewal and refreshment from the experience. The comment made by *TID333* illustrates this well: *Initially it was a bit scary – out of the comfort zone – but I felt energized and more flexible in my thinking and strategy building.* This teacher, who had over 21 years of experience, acknowledged that she had become *stale* and believed that it was important for teachers to be flexible and prepared to change class levels.

While for some teachers transition can be the catalyst to discover a renewed interest in their teaching, others already consider it to be such an opportunity and, for this reason, specifically seek out transition. This is reflected in the data which shows that in 74 instances teachers stated that the reason for their transition was because they felt *bored* (see Table 4.1, page 101). For these teachers, transition provided the new challenge that they were seeking in order to find a sense of renewal in their teaching.

Carol's example (see page 111) aligns with the suggestion that teacher development includes a stage which is characterised by feelings of boredom or a loss of interest in teaching (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986; Katz, 1972; Moir, 1999). Katz (1972) suggests that during this stage teachers find it useful to work with colleagues from different settings to learn and relearn new practices. This is consistent with previous research which highlight how activities such as engaging in dialogue and observing colleagues can be of benefit for teachers when they transition (Carlyon, 2013, 2014). This was certainly true for the following two teachers, the first of whom indicated that transition *stops you from stagnating in your practice (TID842)*; and the second who said that transition provides new opportunities to *keep you fresh in your ideas (TID981).* Exposure to a wide range of different opportunities in which teachers can interact with others is beneficial for teacher development as it helps to strengthen their professional identities (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009).

Although these findings share some commonalities with the literature that conceptualises the process of teacher development as occurring in distinct stages, once again the notion that as teachers become more experienced they progress through these stages in a linear fashion is challenged. This perspective is supported by data that shows that not all teachers identify with a stage in their

development where they require renewal, while others clearly do. Furthermore, while teacher development occurs in stages, data argues that the sequence to these stages can change. Teacher development occurs for different teachers at different times and while some teachers may experience a stage of renewal once, for others this occurs multiple times throughout their careers. Thus, the process of strengthening a teacher's professional identity is a complex process and teacher development sometimes occurs in a non-linear fashion as he/she interacts with others and experiences new learning. This can be described as, "a process of practical knowledge-building characterized by an ongoing integration of what is individually and collectively seen as relevant to teaching" (Beijaard et al., 2004, p. 123).

5.3.2   Engaging in purposeful reflection

While transition is the opportunity that many teachers are already seeking to reflect on their practice and pedagogy, it can also be the vehicle for others, who may not ordinarily do so, to engage in reflection. Findings are consistent with research which suggests transition is an opportunity that is rich in possibilities for all teachers to strengthen their professional identities as they reflect on what they believe to be important in their teaching (Bullough, 2008; Carlyon & Fisher, 2013; Newell et al., 2009). Engaging in a process of reflection, both during and after their transitions, assisted the teachers to question some of their familiar teaching practices and pedagogy. This process helped them to gain new learning, a finding that is consistent with other researchers who claim that reflection is essential for professional learning and development (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Fullan, 2003; Larrivee, 2000; D. A. Schon, 1983; Wheatley, 2006). Gaining a greater understanding about student learning, how to modify established teaching techniques and adjust their expectations to a new class level also gave the teachers greater confidence in themselves. These findings support Hattie's (2009) claim that engaging in critical reflection is an important aspect of effective teaching. Engaging in purposeful reflection not only assists teachers to adapt and adjust their current values and beliefs, but also strengthens their professional identity as they "become more in tune with their sense of self" (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009, p. 182).

However, the process of reflecting on their practice and pedagogy requires significant emotional energy from teachers. It is not uncommon for teachers to consider that they will not be able to successfully adjust and adapt their practice and pedagogy to meet the needs of a different group of students, when they transition to a new class level. As previously discussed, some teachers do not feel confident about teaching in particular class levels and can doubt their pedagogical content knowledge. This emphasises that it is important for school leaders to reassure teachers that they will be supported and have opportunities to engage in professional learning as required.

Findings align with the suggestion that transition involves a high level of emotion and that transition can be a confronting and challenging time for teachers (Beach, 1999; Kotter & Cohen, 2002). They suggest that some teachers do not feel confident about changing class levels and feel that transition may place them in a vulnerable positon. This is highlighted in data which shows that over 80% of the teachers acknowledged that their self-confidence impacted on their ability to transition (see Table 4.9, page 130). While a teacher's lack of confidence towards transition could well be attributed to any one of the tensions that are associated with transition, data shows that some of the teachers who said they lacked self-confidence prior to transition actually felt that their confidence increased as a result of the experience. Moreover, Table 4.3 (see page 110) provides more examples of short responses showing that when a teacher experiences new learning this gives him/her more confidence in themselves and their professional identity. It is particularly interesting that these responses include both teachers who had transitioned and also teachers who had not. As the following example indicates, even when a teacher has not experienced transition, from observing and talking to others who have done so, they also consider that transition *makes you grow as a teacher – explore different ways of teaching (TID155).* For those teachers who had transitioned, many clearly felt empowered by their new learning and, on reflection, felt they were more confident about being able to meet their students' needs. Additional data shows that 13 teachers drew attention to how much more confident they were as a result of their transitions (see Table 4.3, page 110, short responses by *TID18, 135, 278, 380).* These findings align with the suggestion by Newell et al. (2009) that when a teacher is confident in their own

166

ability and is able to manage change this affirms and strengthens their professional identity.

This study shares some commonalities with researchers who characterise effective teachers as those who have a sound understanding of themselves and their professional identities (Bishop, 2012; Gibbs, 2006). Data indicates that when a teacher transitions their professional identity is strengthened as they become more reflective and confident about the role they have to play in students' learning. This is clearly articulated by the comment made by *TID333: I felt that my contributions to the wider life of the school were more valuable.* These findings support Beijaard's (1995) contention that professional identity is strengthened when teachers feel confident about themselves and the contributions they make to their schools.

5.3.3 Extending relationships and developing collective responsibility

Findings indicate that when teachers transition they extend their relationships with students from different class levels, colleagues, mentors, principal/school leaders and parents/caregivers. Relationships are extended when teachers transition and are compelled to work and collaborate with others whom they may not have previously. By extending relationships teachers have opportunities to develop their practice and pedagogy as they learn from others who may share different ideas and perspectives. This learning aligns well with those models of professional learning and development that acknowledge the relational and socio-cultural aspects of teacher learning (Cameron et al., 2013; Livingston, 2012). When teachers extend their relationships with others they also develop a sense of collective responsibility for all students. Collective responsibility is about teachers having concern for the well-being and success of all students rather than just identifying with the students in their class level (Tschannen-Moran, 2001; Whalan, 2012). This was certainly true for the majority of the teachers in Group A as Table 4.8 (see page 126) shows, 92% of these teachers indicated that transition had some impact on them developing collective responsibility for all students.

5.3.3.1 *Students from different class levels*

Extending relationships with students from different class levels has benefits for both teachers and students. Survey data shows that most of the teachers felt that transition had some impact on the relationships that they had with students from

different class levels (see Table 4.8, page 126). Likewise, all four teachers in the interviews reiterated that they, too, had developed stronger relationships and a greater understanding about all students as well as more empathy for others. A more positive classroom climate is created when teachers experience positive interactions with all students and demonstrate that all students can learn and progress. This corresponds with other literature that draws attention to student-teacher relationships being essential for effective teaching (Alton-Lee, 2003; Bishop, 2012; D. Fraser, 2012; Gibbs, 2006; Giles, 2008; Hattie, 2002).

Having the ability to be able to relate to, and empathise with, students from different class levels supports teacher well-being. When teachers transition they extend relationships with students from different class levels and develop a greater understanding of their own professional identity and ability as a teacher. Teachers become more confident about interacting and teaching different students, both inside and outside the classroom, and consider themselves to be a teacher of *all* students.

5.3.3.2 Colleagues

Findings which highlight that transition helps teachers to extend relationships with their colleagues, as they gain a greater understanding of how teaching roles differ in each class level, are also worthy of closer consideration. Understanding different teaching roles, extending relationships and working collaboratively with colleagues are all essential components of a teacher's professional learning (Aitken & Mildon, 1992; Borko, Liston, & Whitcomb, 2007; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Timperley et al., 2008). Notwithstanding this, data suggests that in some schools relationships are limited to within teams or syndicates of teachers who teach in the same class levels. This study suggests that transition helps teachers to feel more informed and confident about working collaboratively with other teachers with regard to the learning and behaviour of all students (see Table 4.8, page 126). Dean explained how this awareness helped him to consider how school-wide decisions would impact on his colleagues from different class levels, as well as himself (see page 128). As teachers extend their relationships they become more aware of the contribution they have to make in the whole school – a situation that supports other researchers' positions that teachers make sense of themselves and their practice as

they live out their stories (Bullough & Baughman, 1997; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999).

Findings are consistent with other studies that suggest that when there is shared mutual respect and collective responsibility for all students, teachers will demonstrate a willingness to help each other (Robinson et al., 2009; Timperley & Parr, 2010). Dean's comment that he knew he could rely on his colleagues to help him adjust and adapt in a new class level when he transitioned exemplifies this (see page 144). Further evidence of teachers extending relationships with their colleagues when they transition is provided in data which shows that over 90% of the teachers identified that they had received some support from their colleagues when they transitioned (see Table 4.11, page 139). The descriptions provided by Ashleigh, Brigit and Carol all supported the view that transition can be the impetus for teachers to work collaboratively to support each other by sharing, observing and engaging in dialogue with others (see page 127).

5.3.3.3 *Parents/caregivers*
Over half of the teachers in the survey felt that transition had a moderate to great deal of impact on the relationships they had with parents/caregivers (see Table 4.8, page 126). Teachers explained how changing class levels had provided them with suitable opportunities to forge positive relationships with parents/caregivers with whom they may not have otherwise (see Table 4.8, short responses by *TID367, 615, 676*). In all, fourteen teachers made specific reference to the way in which transition helped them to get to know more parents/caregivers, illustrating that teachers value having opportunities to extend their relationships.

Even though teachers recognise the value in having positive relationships with parents/caregivers, further findings indicate that these relationships are influenced by the perceptions that parents/caregivers have about teachers and their roles and capabilities. The short responses in Table 4.9 demonstrate how parents/caregivers can hold a particular 'image' of a teacher as being suited for a particular class level (page 130, see short responses by *TID81, 361, 474*). Despite this, the majority of the teachers felt that parents/caregivers changed their perception of teachers in general after they had transitioned. *TID296* explained that it is beneficial when teachers are considered to be capable and effective teachers at different class levels (see page 132). Thus, experiences such as transition not only

influence how teachers view themselves and their roles, but also how others perceive teachers and their roles.

5.3.3.4 *Mentors and principal/school leaders*

The impact that transition has on the relationships that a teacher has with his/her mentor and/or principal/school leader is not shown to be as significant as with other stakeholders. As explained previously, in the context of this research, a mentor refers to someone who has the necessary skills to guide and support another teacher through their transition. A principal/school leader is someone who holds a leadership position in a school, such as team or syndicate leader, and provides leadership for groups and individual teachers. However, a lack of understanding about teacher transition by those who are in mentoring and school leadership roles could account for over 50% of the teachers indicating that there was very little or no impact on the relationship that they had with both these groups of stakeholders. Or, as was pointed out in the Findings chapter, it could be because some of the teachers may not have identified with the term 'mentor', particularly if this role was not formalised as such. Certainly this was the case for Dean, who said he never thought of, or referred to, his colleagues as mentors because these relationships were always informal. Dean also pointed out that both he and his colleagues gained new learning from these relationships, and while his colleagues provided him with support and upskilling when he transitioned, he also helped them to upskill in different areas.

For those teachers who did identify with the term mentor, whether this was formal or informal mentoring, these relationships were considered to be an essential part of the teachers' successful transitions. The short responses in Table 4.11 represent how these teachers appreciated being supported and encouraged by either a mentor or principal/school leader when they transitioned (page 139, short responses by *TID419, 432, 576, 838, 949*). Likewise, school leaders appreciated it when teachers were willing to transition as the comment by *TID156* shows: *Leaders appreciate and value teachers who are willing to move … because the teacher's professional development grows as a result.* This discussion about the relationships that teachers have with their school leaders is extended in section 5.4 of this chapter.

While there is some variation in the amount of impact that transition has on the relationships that a teacher has with others, data shows that for at least 65% of the teachers, the relationships they had with students from different class levels, colleagues, mentors, principal/school leaders and parents/caregivers were affected in some way (see Table 4.8, page 126). When a teacher works collaboratively with others and extends these relationships, he/she gains a better understanding of others and the experiences that they have to offer. Changing class levels gives teachers the opportunity to extend their relationships and work with others whom they may not have prior to transitioning. Having extended relationships can be considered as social capital for teachers as it expands their network of influence and opportunities. Findings reinforce Hargreaves and Fullan's (2012) suggestion that social capital is developed when teachers work together to produce better results for students. Furthermore, this study suggests that when a teacher has a deeper understanding of themselves as someone who cares for and shares collective responsibility for all students, this engenders a greater sense of professional identity for him/her.

5.3.4   Summary

Data illustrates outcomes of transition which are likely to result in teachers having a better understanding of themselves as professionals and strengthening their professional identities. Findings indicate that, regardless of whether teachers are seeking something new, transition is an opportunity to not only reflect on what they believe to be important in their teaching, but also to work with others in ways they may not have before. This is in line with a socio-cultural view of identity formation that learning occurs for teachers when they are actively involved, both individually and in collaboration, with others (Beijaard et al., 2004).

The suggestion that transition is a socio-cultural activity which provides clear benefits for teachers as they work collaboratively with others is supported. Findings illustrate that when teachers transition between class levels they are compelled to work and collaborate with others whom they may not have otherwise. Teachers share ideas and learn new ways of working to help them find ways to adapt in new class levels and ultimately improve their practice and pedagogy, and strengthen their professional identities.

While this study brings to light a number of outcomes from transition that impact upon a teacher's professional learning and strengthen his/her professional identity, it is the *interplay* between these two factors and the order in which changes to them occur that are shown in this study to be of particular interest. For some teachers transition leads to professional learning, while for others it is their professional learning that leads them to want to transition. This study suggests that transition stimulates the interplay between a teacher's learning and professional identity, which may cause simultaneous changes that result in positive changes to his/her practice and pedagogy.

Even though the findings have highlighted how transition impacts upon teacher professional learning and strengthens professional identity, Beijaard et al. (2004) argues that much of the research on teacher professional identity fails to acknowledge the part that context and school leadership play. Thus, the next section explores the place of leadership in teacher transition and how school leaders can support teachers to successfully change class levels.

5.4 The place of leadership in teacher transition

The previous three sections have discussed teachers' perceptions of transition, the impact of transition on teacher learning and how a teacher's professional identity can be strengthened through transition. Within each of these sections, attention has been drawn to school contextual factors and, in particular, school leadership and culture. This section explores these ideas further in response to the third and fourth research questions: How do teachers negotiate the transition between class levels, and what place does leadership have in teacher transition between class levels?

The actions of school leaders and the influence of school culture are shown to play a significant role in successful teacher transitions. Findings illustrate that in order for teachers to successfully negotiate transition, it is essential that school leaders create a culture that is conducive for teachers to do so. The kind of school culture that is shown in this study to be most conducive for teachers to transition is one which is based on trust, collaboration and a shared common vision about transition. This includes ensuring that the process of assigning teachers to class levels is managed carefully so that relationships remain positive and teacher

development is fostered. Although this is a challenging task for school leaders, when this occurs teachers are more likely to successfully transition and benefit from the experience. Notwithstanding this, data illustrates that in order for this to take place, some school leaders need to grow their understanding of the *lived experience* and *constructed meaning* of transition between class levels for teachers.

5.4.1 Relational trust

Findings align with researchers who argue that trust must be an essential component of school culture in order for teachers to be willing to take risks (du Plessis, 2013; Le Fevre, 2010; Tschannen-Moran, 2001). When there is trust in a school, teachers know they will be supported to transition and will be confident about trying out ideas in a new class level. It is important that teachers know they can trust others because, as previous discussion illustrates, transition can be a challenging and emotional experience.

Findings highlight that school leaders play an integral role in creating and sustaining a trusting culture that is conducive for teachers to successfully transition. This is illustrated in data which shows that 80% of the teachers acknowledged that school leadership had some impact on their ability to change class levels (see Table 4.11, page 139). For these teachers it was important to know that they could trust their school leaders to make the right decisions, involve them in discussions and that their voice would be heard. The following example typifies this: *The principal at the time made the decision saying that it would give me a better grounding in the school – overall, getting to understand the culture and children better. He was right (TID777).*

In addition, findings show that it was essential for these teachers to know that they could trust their school leaders to ensure that they would be given time and opportunities to prepare for their transition. The comment in Table 4.10 (see page 135) by *TID682* illustrates this. For this to occur, however, it is essential that school leaders treat their teachers as professionals and consider their individual needs when they transition. Findings are in accord with Hobbs (2013), who argues that problems will arise if teachers do not have sufficient time to prepare for transition. When school leaders develop positive relationships with each of their teachers and value and trust them, this trust becomes reciprocal and teachers will

become more receptive towards transition. Previous discussion about the impact of transition on teacher learning shows that when teachers are supported by school leaders during transition they are better able to modify their established teaching techniques, so as to implement new practices and adjust their expectations in order to create positive learning environments. These findings suggest that relational trust is built in schools when school leaders and teachers show mutual respect and teachers know they will be supported if, and when, they transition.

Teachers in the study appreciated it when their school leaders were open and transparent about transition, and when teachers could see the benefits for themselves and the school, this helped them to form positive perceptions of transition. This is exemplified in the example provided by *TID539* that teachers are more willing to *take risks that take you out side of your comfort zone,* such as engaging in purposeful reflection more often and questioning established teaching practices and pedagogy, when they are positive about transition. While taking such risks can be challenging and confronting for teachers, when they know that school leaders will not criticise them if they make mistakes, this encourages teachers to have greater autonomy over their own learning. Brigit's example (see page 142), which left her feeling frustrated and unwilling to take further risks with her teaching, shows that relational trust cannot be built unless school leaders give teachers the autonomy to make sound decisions that affect the students in their classes.

Findings also indicate that a teacher's experience of transition influences their behaviour and actions when he/she becomes a school leader. Fifteen teachers made comments connected to their own experiences of transition influencing them when they later became school leaders, such as *changing class levels has undoubtedly made me a better teacher and a better leader. To be an authentic leader you have to have walked the talk (TID128)!* The four teachers in the interviews were also frank about how their own experiences of transition had influenced them and helped them to know how, and when, to support their colleagues through a transition. Ashleigh, Brigit, Carol and Dean all believed that when they became school leaders they would have a sound understanding of how to manage transition effectively in their schools. Carol's comments in particular exemplified that it was critical for school leaders to understand what it is like to

transition to a new class level, and for teachers to trust that their leaders would support them to provide adequate time and opportunities to fully prepare (see page 137).

However, trust is not evident in all schools, and data illustrates that many teachers do not have a high level of trust in their school leaders, particularly with regard to transition (see Table 4.1, page 101). In addition, the descriptions provided by *TID251, 299, 739* (see pages 102–103) represent how teachers feel when they cannot trust that their leaders will consult them about their transitions. When teachers are not included in decisions about transition that affect them, then trust is threatened and they can feel a sense of frustration, anger and a loss of autonomy. This reiterates the importance of school leaders developing relational trust with their teachers by consulting with them about their transitions and managing the process with care. It is critical that school leaders include teachers in discussions that concern their transitions and engage in open and honest dialogue with teachers about their professional learning needs. The examples given by Carol and Dean (see page 107) illustrate that when this does not occur, teachers may lack clarity about how, and why, decisions relating to assigning teachers into class levels are made. Consequently, teachers may not understand if the situation arises where they are unable to change class levels.

Brigit, too, experienced a school where teachers did not trust the principal and the environment was so difficult that she recalled *you'd get called to the principal's office and you would start shaking and almost be in tears by the time you made it (T page 16).* She added that it was noticeable when the principal was absent from school because *the mood lifted and the weight came off everyone's shoulders (T page 15).* Negative and unsupportive school cultures such as these lack trust and do nothing to foster collaboration or collegiality. When a lack of trust exists between teachers and school leaders, then teachers are unlikely to feel confident, or willing, to take risks such as changing class levels.

5.4.2 Working in collaborative ways

The present study indicates that in order for teachers to successfully transition it is essential that they are able to work in collaborative ways with others; thus, it is incumbent that school leaders create school cultures in which opportunities for collaboration can occur both informally and formally. Having opportunities to

work with others to prepare for transition are useful for teachers, and when this occurs it helps make their transitions less challenging. As the examples in Table 4.11 illustrate (see page 139, short responses by *TID419, 432, 576, 838*), teachers appreciated it when they were able to work collaboratively with others when they transitioned. True collaboration is encouraged when a leader's actions are moral and they are genuinely committed to maintaining caring relations with, and among, their staff. This is achieved when school leaders ensure their teachers are provided with opportunities to support each other such as observing, planning, and teaching together. In addition, when teachers are included in the process of teachers being assigned to class levels, this helps to build positive relationships and encourages them to work in collaborative ways. *TID117* explained that when this occurred in her school, instead of being told about changes that would occur, she began to feel that *we are now collectively making changes.*

Findings indicate that it is essential that teachers have someone who is able to provide them with support and guidance when they transition. Transition can be an emotional time for a teacher, and a mentor, or someone acting in this capacity, can help to guide him/her through this process. A mentor can help a teacher to examine their practice and pedagogy and support him/her to reflect on what does and does not work well in a new class level. While data illustrates that 32% of the teachers said they received no support from a mentor, over 70% of them received some support from colleagues and/or school leaders (see Table 4.11, page 139). As outlined in the literature review, while this study accepts that mentoring relationships may be established specifically for the purpose of supporting a teacher when they transition and, as such, are of a formal nature, it is important to note that the teachers in this study were exposed to a spectrum of different support arrangements, both formal and informal. Even though these teachers may not have considered the support they received from their colleagues and/or school leaders to be mentoring, there was agreement that when a teacher changes class levels they need someone who has the knowledge and experience to guide and support him/her to successfully transition.

Both Brigit and Carol had experienced transitions when they had been formally mentored. Their mentors provided practical and emotional support which included showing them new resources and classroom programmes. As Carol said, *If she*

hadn't of [sic] *been there, I probably wouldn't have made the transition and I don't think I would have handled the transition as well (T page 8).* The support that these teachers received from their mentors was vital to them being able to successfully manage their transitions. Their mentors provided guidance for the teachers to reflect on their practice, try new ideas and affirmed that what they were doing in their new class level was effective. Knowing they could rely on their mentors to guide them to adjust and adapt their practice and pedagogy in a new class level gave the teachers confidence as they went through their transitions. Mentors help teachers to build confidence in themselves as professionals and brings into line the idea that "identity is shaped and reshaped in interaction with others in a professional context" (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009, p. 178). Thus, it is vital that school leaders create opportunities and environments in which both formal and informal mentoring relationships can be developed and nurtured. They can do this by creating the infrastructure to support existing mentoring relationships while also facilitating new relationships to ensure that all teachers who transition have an identified mentor.

Yet collaboration and mentoring relationships are not necessarily encouraged in all schools, and other findings indicate that in many instances there are limited opportunities for teachers to work together when they transition. Disappointingly, only 13% of the teachers said they had a *great deal* of opportunity to talk with others about transition and 4% to observe others teach (see Table 10, page 135). Like many others, *TID417* indicated that *I would have very much liked the chance to observe in other 7/8 rooms to re-orientate myself.* These findings indicate that while some school leaders value and encourage collaboration, many school leaders appear unaware that collaboration is essential for teacher transition.

5.4.3   Sharing a common vision

When a common vision about transition is shared in schools, data suggests teachers are more likely to understand the benefits, have positive perceptions, support each other and have collective responsibility for all students. This study illustrates that the tensions associated with transition can be negated, and teachers can transition more easily, when a common vision about transition is shared. Tensions that relate to why a teacher may or may not transition, perceptions of teachers' roles and the challenges associated with transition are not as evident

when there is a common vision shared in a school. Hence, it is important for school leaders to develop a common vision, and they can do so by encouraging open and honest dialogue with, and between, teachers about how their perceptions of transition are constructed. Findings indicate that it is the responsibility of school leaders to ensure that this occurs, so teachers are able to manage the challenges and successfully transition. Data shows that some school leaders understand that it is their role to ensure that a common vision about transition is developed in their schools, with 63% of the teachers indicating in the survey that collective responsibility was encouraged a moderate to great deal (see Table 4.11, page 139). As well as encouraging collective responsibility, in these schools teachers were supported and encouraged to have open and honest dialogue, observe others teach, and share resources. When school leaders are genuine about the way in which they encourage and support teachers to engage in these kinds of activities, trust and collaboration is developed, and it is probable that teachers will feel confident and willing to identify what their strengths are and offer those to other teachers. The following comment illustrates this: *Changing class levels is a positive experience in a supportive open school. In a learning school this change is the norm not the exception (TID592).*

An integral part of developing a common vision is for school leaders to ensure that the process of assigning teachers to class levels each year is managed transparently. Even though at times this process may require teachers to transition to different class levels, it is essential that school leaders consider all stakeholders' needs. While this study supports Le Fevre's (2010) suggestion that transition "involves significant and complex issues at the individual, organisational and systemic levels" (p. 73), it emphasises the need for a common vision about transition to be developed in schools. Findings support the view that for school leaders to successfully manage the process of assigning teachers to class levels, it is essential that they take a strategic approach while also maintaining positive relationships, fostering teacher growth, and encouraging and supporting teachers if they are required, or wish, to transition (Carlyon & Fisher, 2013). This requires school leaders to be genuinely committed to finding out about each teacher's individual needs in order to make sound decisions about which class level he/she may be assigned to. It is important that teachers know

that if these decisions result in tensions occurring, then the school leader will act ethically and always have the best interests of the teacher in mind.

However, some school leaders do not understand the importance of developing and sharing a common vision about transition and consider that assigning teachers to class levels is simply an organisational task. These school leaders interpret their role as being a technical one and fail to take into account all the necessary factors that they should when assigning teachers to class levels, which can leave teachers feeling bitter, shocked, angry or at times even devastated. Dean said he felt it was crucial that school leaders managed transition carefully and he had *never seen it managed well (T page 11)*. Both Dean and Carol had experience in schools where teachers were asked to choose which class levels they wished to teach and then rank them in order of preference. Although this occurred, teachers were then not given the opportunity to have conversations with their school leaders about the information they had provided and were frequently not assigned to the class levels that they had chosen. Hence, poor communication, a lack of a common vision about transition and the way that this process was managed left them feeling frustrated and *a bit upset (Carol, T page 18)*. When there is no common vision about transition in schools this can result in a toxic culture (O'Mahoney et al., 2006) in which teachers become divided and compete against each other, instead of working collaboratively and supporting each other.

5.4.4 Summary

This study indicates that trans-relational leadership (Branson et al., 2016) best supports teacher transition. When leaders enact trans-relational leadership and their actions are ethical, moral and authentic, a school culture is more likely to be established where teachers can successfully transition between class levels, experience rich professional learning and strengthen their identities. The kind of culture that is required for teachers to transition is one which is characterised by trust and collaboration and where a common vision is shared about transition. It is evident from the findings that this kind of school culture is established through the actions of school leaders as they build reciprocal, supportive relationships with, and between, teachers.

While recognising the tensions associated with transition, the findings do suggest that the way school leaders manage transition in schools has a significant

influence on how teachers transition. When there is no trust, collaboration or common vision in schools, an unsupportive culture can develop which makes teacher transition difficult. An unsupportive school culture, where teachers do not feel that they are able to trust school leaders to support them, encourages individualism rather than working in collaboration and, as such, is not conducive for teachers to transition.

This study shows that successful teacher transition is heavily dependent on school leadership. It is vital that school leaders understand that teachers and school communities make judgements about them and their capacity to lead and support others. Consequently, if a teacher transition is not seen to be beneficial, their leadership credibility may be questioned. Furthermore, teacher transition is more likely to be successful if school leaders actively support their teachers throughout the process. Effective transition relies on school leaders taking account of these important factors, and not just the pragmatic or management ones. It is also about school leaders making sure that when a teacher changes class levels they have someone suitable, such as a mentor, who is able to provide them with support and guidance. Hence, it is essential that school leaders build a culture where reciprocal, supportive relationships with, and between, teachers can be developed and nurtured in order that teachers are able to transition successfully.

CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSION

Changing class levels was invigorating and motivating, knowing what had come before was helpful in understanding student needs in subsequent years and vice versa (TID247).

The aim of this research was to build knowledge about the phenomenon of teacher transition. Of particular interest was the transition between class levels in New Zealand primary schools and the impact of this change on teacher professional learning. As the literature in Chapter 2 suggests, even though it is sometimes considered to be a regular occurrence in schools, transition is a complex endeavour. However, the literature reveals that few studies have focussed specifically on the transition between class levels in primary schools, and of those studies that have been carried out few seem to have paid sufficient attention to the benefits and issues related to transition. It was the need to add to this body of understanding, along with my personal experiences and observations and prior studies on the topic of teacher transition, which motivated me to carry out this research.

Both qualitative and quantitative data were gathered to give a better understanding of the complexity of teacher transition. Data were gathered from September to December 2013 and were generated from an online survey and semi-structured interviews. The online survey was completed by 536 teachers and the semi-structured interviews were conducted with four of these teachers. Data gathered from the online survey were analysed to identify trends and patterns, which were then able to be explored and expanded on in greater depth in the interviews. This process provided me with critical insights about teachers' constructed perceptions of changing class levels, and a sound understanding into the lived experience of transition amongst many New Zealand primary school teachers.

The research questions guiding data collection were:

1. How are teachers' perceptions of transition between class levels developed?

2. What outcomes are generated for teachers and other stakeholders from teacher transition between class levels?

3. How do teachers negotiate the transition between class levels?

4. What place does leadership have in teacher transition between class levels?

Next is a summary of the key points, followed by a discussion about the four major implications for policy and practice that have come out of this research. An outline of the limitations of the study and suggestions for further research are then presented. These are followed by a brief summary of this chapter.

6.1 Key points from the study

The following is a summary of the key points from the study:

- Teachers' perceptions of transition are generally favourable; however, there are teachers who hold negative beliefs and feelings about transition;

- The tensions associated with transition have a considerable bearing on a teacher's perception, sense of autonomy and experience of transition;

- Transition can be an emotionally and physically demanding experience for teachers;

- Transition stimulates the interplay between a teacher's learning and professional identity which can result in positive changes to teachers' practice and pedagogy;

- Teacher development can be non-linear and learning is a complex process which requires teachers to interpret, enact, and reflect on their work, and includes shaping and reshaping professional identity;

- The outcomes that are generated from transition have the potential to provide teachers with further opportunities to bring about effective teaching, become more extended professionals, and to strengthen their professional identities;

- Transition is a socio-cultural activity in which teachers actively work and collaborate with others to find ways to adapt and succeed in new class levels, in order to meet the needs of different groups of learners;

- Teachers are more easily able to successfully negotiate transition when they are given opportunities to prepare and have access to someone suitable, such as a mentor, who is able to provide them with support and guidance;

- The actions of school leaders and the influence of school culture can both enable or limit opportunities such as transition for professional learning and development;

- A school culture that is conducive for teachers to successfully transition is characterised by trust and collaboration, and where a common vision is shared about changing class levels.

The overall findings in this study are bound together to explain more fully the complexity of teacher transition. The lived experience of teacher transition has been able to be understood by converging and comparing broad numeric trends that emerged from the quantitative data, with the more personalised detail from the qualitative data. While both positive and negative experiences of teacher transition are evident in the findings, this study clearly illustrates that when teachers are able to successfully negotiate transition, generally this culminates in positive outcomes for teachers. Thus, it is highly recommended that all teachers have opportunities to successfully transition between class levels, maximising opportunities for rich professional learning and to strengthen their professional identities.

6.2 Implications for practice and policy

This study holds four major implications for teachers, students, school leaders and teacher educators. These implications for policy and practice have emerged from the discussion of the findings in the previous chapter. They are encapsulated under the following headings: conceptualising transition as a form of professional learning and development, alleviating the tensions associated with transition, ensuring teachers are given sufficient opportunities to prepare for transition, and understanding the role that school leadership plays in teacher transition. These four major implications are discussed next.

6.2.1 Conceptualising transition as a form of professional learning and development

The first set of implications concern the significant impact that transition is shown to have on teacher professional learning. It is essential that cognisance is taken of the opportunity that transition provides for teachers, and that transition is conceptualised as a form of professional learning and development. Findings illustrate that the impact of transition on teacher learning is very significant, yet it is not always conceptualised as an opportunity for professional learning and development. Teachers frequently change class levels for administrative or organisational reasons, and the benefits of transition are not always understood and/or acknowledged. While in these instances teachers can still experience rich learning, it is vital that changes occur in the way that transition is conceptualised so that full advantage is taken of the opportunity for professional learning and development.

There is joint work to be done in initial teacher education, schools and professional development programmes to ensure teacher transition between class levels is viewed, and more widely accepted, as a form of professional learning and development. It is recommended that initial teacher education courses be extended to include discussion and information about transition between class levels. Providing useful information and opportunities for student teachers to engage in collaborative learning and discussions about the potential positive and negative aspects of transition will go some way to develop their understanding of how to enhance the positive and overcome the negative aspects. Information about significant factors, such as the interplay between a teacher's professional learning and professional identity that is stimulated when a teacher transitions, will help student teachers consider transition in a positive light and understand how, and under what conditions, it may benefit them. It is essential that student teachers are made aware of their obligation as professionals to continue to engage in learning and development, and that transition between class levels is considered as an opportunity for this to occur.

It is also incumbent upon schools and professional development providers to ensure that transition between class levels is considered as an opportunity for teachers to examine their practice and pedagogy, and experience rich professional

learning and development. Professional development and learning for teachers can be a considerable financial burden for schools, so given the negligible cost and the potential benefits associated with transition, it seems logical that schools would want to encourage their teachers to transition, and that they would want to do this well. Schools and professional development providers need to ensure teachers are given authentic opportunities in which they can engage in open and honest dialogue about their perceptions and experiences of transition between class levels. It is essential that teachers are given a voice so that tensions are alleviated and the potential benefits of transition are known and understood. Schools also have an important part to play to ensure that organisational structures are established to ensure that teacher transition can be conceptualised as a form of professional learning and development.

6.2.2   Alleviating the tensions associated with transition

The second set of implications arising from this study concern the tensions associated with transition and the way in which these influence teachers' sense of autonomy and perceptions of transition. The tensions that findings highlight are associated with the reasons why a teacher may or may not transition, perceptions that are held about teachers' roles and the challenges of transition. The findings suggest that when these tensions are acknowledged and clearly understood, teachers are more likely to feel a sense of autonomy and consider transition as a positive opportunity for professional learning and development.

There needs to be greater understanding about why teachers may or may not change class levels and how this influences teachers' perceptions and experiences of transition. Even though teachers do often change class levels for administrative reasons, they can also transition as a consequence of relocation and/or because they consider it to be an opportunity for professional learning or career development. In addition, there are times when some teachers are consistently denied the opportunity to change class levels, or when they refuse to transition all together. Thus, we cannot assume transitions are necessarily initiated by teachers themselves or that they perceive transition to be a positive experience. For these reasons it is essential that teachers are fully informed and involved in decisions about transitions that may affect them, and schools recognise how vulnerable teachers can feel if this does not occur.

There is considerable work to be done by school leaders, educators and policy makers to ensure that the tensions associated with transition are alleviated. Notwithstanding the pragmatics of assigning teachers to class levels, it is imperative that when decisions are made, which require teachers to change class levels, that the individual needs and welfare of teachers are taken into account. There is a pressing need in some schools for more open communication and discussion to be held about transition in order for teachers to feel they have some autonomy over decisions that may impact on them in relation to changing class levels. Upskilling in this area could occur if the practice of transition was included in programmes such as aspiring principal courses, regional and national school leadership meetings and conferences as well as Boards of Trustee training days. Drawing on examples of those schools which take a less rigid and more holistic approach towards transition would go some way to ensure that the explanations for teachers' transitions are more clearly acknowledged and understood. Perhaps there needs to be more discussion about whether it is desirable for teachers to stay teaching in one class level for a length of time or, when this does occur, how it impacts on other teachers who may wish to transition. This does not suggest that policy makers and school leaders should take a more rigid approach towards transition, or consider making it compulsory that teachers change class levels after a certain period of time. This study does, however, recommend that greater attention be given to the reasons why teachers may or may not transition, and for a broader view to be taken towards the process of assigning teachers to class levels.

There is also work to be done by initial teacher educators and schools to address the tensions associated with perceptions that are held about teachers' roles and the challenges of transition. Findings highlight that teachers can be constrained by perceptions that are held about teaching in certain class levels, and the challenges that are considered to be associated with transitioning to these particular levels. If initial teacher education programmes included a specific focus on transition this would go some way to help student teachers understand that each class level is different to teach in, and has its own idiosyncratic professional demands and responsibilities. While student teachers are expected to have experience in a range of different class levels during their initial teacher education, more discussion about the differences amongst these teaching experiences is needed so that work

186

can be done to dispel any perceptions that student teachers develop about certain teaching roles being more challenging, or more important, than others.

Tools, such as metaphoric pictures, and an adaptability scale, such as the one proposed by Hobbs (2013) and as discussed in Chapter 2 (see page 22), could be useful to use in both initial teacher education and schools to help teachers visualise themselves teaching at different class levels and to develop their understanding of transition. Using metaphoric or pictorial images that are associated with teaching at different class levels would help raise teachers' awareness of their own capabilities and professional identity development. An adaptability scale would support teachers to understand how their sense of identity has an influence on their perception towards changing class levels, and to consider transition as a form of professional learning. There is joint work to be done by initial teacher educators, schools and school leaders, to ensure that the demands of teaching are given equal recognition in order that teaching in one class level is not considered as being more challenging or prestigious than in another. It is crucial that teachers are not constrained by perceiving themselves to be a teacher in one particular class level, so that opportunities to change class levels are not dismissed because of a lack of understanding about transition.

6.2.3 Ensuring teachers are given sufficient opportunities to prepare for transition

The third set of implications concern teachers being given sufficient opportunities to prepare, both mentally and physically, for transition. Findings consistently highlight the emotional energy and additional workload that transition demands of teachers, and illustrate that it is necessary for teachers to be adequately prepared when they change class levels. Schools and policy makers need to review or develop policies that provide guidance about transition for teachers who are changing class levels. These policies must safeguard the individual needs of teachers and ensure that their opportunities to prepare are relevant and supported. This includes schools having formal mentoring programmes or similar informal arrangements, so that when teachers change class levels they can work alongside and learn from others to help them have a strong sense of their own professional identity and cope with challenges. This needs to include education for mentors to ensure that they understand transition and the specific needs of teachers who are

changing class levels, as well as their mentoring role. The challenge for schools and policy makers is to ensure that the emotional and physical energy required by teachers who are transitioning is not dismissed, and all teachers are given sufficient and appropriate opportunities to prepare both mentally and physically for transition.

6.2.4 Understanding the role that school leadership plays in teacher transition

The last set of implications, but by no means the least important, relate to the role that school leadership plays in teacher transition. This study shows that the success of teacher transition is fundamentally dependent on the actions of school leadership to ensure that school cultures are conducive for teachers to change class levels successfully. This requires that school leaders have a comprehensive understanding of transition in order to create a particular kind of school culture for teachers to be able to experience rich professional learning and strengthen their identities, when they transition. The kind of culture that is required for teachers to successfully transition is inclusive of trust and collaboration, and where a common vision is shared about transition. Findings illustrate that when school leaders develop and nurture reciprocal, supportive relationships with, and between, teachers this helps to create school cultures that are conducive for teachers to transition. Given the critical role that school leaders play in establishing school culture, it would seem pertinent for the Ministry of Education to provide professional development and support so that school leaders know how to create the kind of school culture needed for teachers to successfully transition.

It is crucial that school leaders raise their awareness and understanding of how to alleviate the tensions and successfully manage teacher transition between class levels. Findings suggest that some school leaders require support with important aspects of transition, in particular the process of assigning teachers to class levels and supporting teachers to prepare for transition. School leaders need to know how to act in an ethical, moral and authentic manner to ensure all teachers, as well as parents/caregivers, feel that they are valued and listened to with regard to assigning teachers to class levels. It is vital that school leaders include teachers in discussions about changing class levels that will affect them, and ensure that teachers are prepared for their transitions. It is also important that school leaders

188

understand the impact that this has on individual teachers when this does not occur.

Engaging in open discussion and sharing of ideas with other school leaders and educators will go some way to help school leaders gain a greater understanding of their role in teacher transition. Appraisals for school leaders and school reviews could also be a means for providing useful feedback relating to teacher transition in their schools to help school leaders' strengthen their understanding and knowledge about how to alleviate tensions and ensure teachers are supported and prepared for transition. It is imperative that school leaders know how to create the systems and culture in their schools to support teachers to successfully transition if transition is to be fully utilised as a form of rich professional learning and development for teachers.

6.3 Limitations and direction for further research

Using a case study approach, this qualitative research investigated the phenomenon of teacher transition. Of particular interest was finding out more about the impact of transition between class levels in New Zealand primary schools on teacher professional learning. Although sufficient data were collected to be able to identify and explore trends that provided critical insights about teachers' perceptions and experiences of transition, there were a number of limitations that emerged during this study.

Even though the volume of data gathered from the large group of teachers who had experienced transition enabled me to gain useful information about the lived experience of transition, there are limitations when participants are self-selected. It could be considered as a limitation that out of the 536 teachers who completed the online survey, only 51 had not experienced transition. This meant that it was much easier to identify and explore trends pertaining to teachers who had experienced transition than it was for teachers who had not. It also raises questions about the reason why there was such a significant difference in the number of participants in each group. While it was not my intention, I am aware that teachers who had not changed class levels may have chosen not to participate in the online survey because they felt that their experiences were not relevant or

valued for the study, or that they may have been asked to justify the reasons for teaching in one class level only.

A further limitation of the online survey relates to those questions in the survey which included the rating scale (*not at all, a little, a moderate amount, a great deal*). While it was unintentional, limiting the choices to four and combining these in some instances to present data as one choice for the negative and three choices for the positive has the potential to yield data that may present the issue in a favourable light. It is preferable to include a rating scale with five choices to lessen the likelihood of this occurring.

The scope of this study did not allow for a greater exploration of those schools whose classes comprise a wide range of levels. It should be acknowledged that four teachers in the online survey drew particular attention to the special nature and culture of small rural and Steiner[7] schools, in which teaching in classes that include students from a wide range of class levels is considered to be regular practice. This is because in some rural schools there are only one or two classes, and in Steiner schools, students generally stay with the same teacher for several years. Thus, for teachers in these schools, transition between different class levels, as such, is not an issue because it is regular practice to teach classes which comprise students from a wide range of class levels. It may be that much could be learnt from these schools and the practice of teaching in these classes, particularly in relation to teachers' roles and identity.

Another opportunity for further research that has come to light is whether there are tensions about teaching in certain class levels which differentiate on the basis of gender. Even though only two participants drew attention to perceptions that are held about male teachers not being suitable to teach in junior class levels, this had a significant impact on both of these teachers. This could also be considered to be a possible limitation because there was no question to prompt the teachers to even consider it as a tension associated with teacher transition.

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[7] The priority of the Steiner School ethos is to provide an unhurried and creative learning environment where children can find the joy in learning and experience the richness of childhood. In most cases the children are with the same class teacher from age 6 to 14, supported by a range of subject teachers.

Although the study did not allow for any exploration of a school's decile rating in relation to teacher transition, it should be noted that Carol twice made reference to the decile rating of schools in relation to teacher transition (see pages 127 & 142). Even though there was no clear data which showed that a school's decile rating influences teachers' perceptions of transition, this could be because neither the survey nor the interviews included a question which specifically asked about school decile ratings. Nonetheless, it would be beneficial to find out more about whether a school's decile rating has an influence on teachers' perceptions of changing class levels, and their ability to successfully transition. While it would be a complex endeavour to identify if correlations exist between successful teacher transition and school decile ratings, it would be useful to explore, especially given the data that suggests school culture is a factor and the significant role that schools have in teacher transition.

Instead of perceiving these matters as limitations they should be considered as providing direction for further research. More knowledge could be built if further investigations about teacher transition were undertaken using different methodologies and data gathering methods. For example, an ethnographic methodology would enable researchers to spend some time in schools and give attention to data gathered from observations and documentation. It would be useful to observe how school leaders manage the process of assigning teachers to class levels in a range of different schools, and also to observe how teachers negotiate a change in class level. It would also be useful for researchers to analyse documentation, such as school policies and minutes of staff meetings, that relate to teacher transition. Research, including data gathering methods such as observation and document analysis, would provide additional data and give a better understanding of the different approaches schools take towards teacher transition. It would also provide deeper insights into the impact of transition on individual teachers before, during and after transition.

Further investigation would also be useful to find out if it is common practice in schools that teachers are being denied the opportunity to transition. This would necessitate that research includes a non-random, or purposive, sample of teachers who have not experienced changing class levels, to participate in interviews. It would also be useful to gather more data, which adds to findings about

perceptions that are held about teaching roles that are having an impact on teachers' perceptions of transition. For example, whether there are commonly held perceptions about male teachers being less suited to teaching in junior class levels than their female counterparts. If this was shown to be a commonly held perception, it would be important to learn more about how this influences school leaders and teachers' decisions about changing class levels.

6.4   Summary

Given Hattie's (2009) contention that teachers are the most valuable resource in the classroom and that it is the "differences in the teachers that make the difference in student learning" (p. 236), it seems vital that different avenues for teachers to continue to learn and develop are explored. This study argues that transition between class levels is an opportunity for teachers to experience a rich and unique kind of professional learning and development that is individual to each of them and their particular context.

Furthermore, it highlights that professional learning and development does not occur in a vacuum but acknowledges and supports the socio-cultural and relational nature of transition, whereby teachers can learn alongside, and from, others. Findings bring to light the very significant impact that transition between class levels has on teacher learning, and the interplay that transition stimulates between a teacher's professional learning and professional identity. This study argues that the influence from these changes can result in changes to teachers' practice and pedagogy, which has the potential to strengthen their professional identities and bring about more effective teaching and extended professionality.

It also sheds light on the emotional and physical demands that are associated with transition, and reveals a number of tensions which serve to influence teachers' perceptions towards changing class levels. While there is evidence of both positive and negative perceptions of transition from the teachers in this study, how these teachers viewed changing class levels was very much dependent on school leadership and culture. This supports the development of positive relationships with, and between, teachers in agreement with Branson's (2010) notion that these relationships are built upon the "capacity to inspire, influence, develop others,

catalyse change, manage conflict, and to develop teamwork and collaboration" (p. 49). When school leaders create a trusting and collaborative school culture and there is a shared common vision about changing class levels, teachers are more likely to support their colleagues when they transition. Teachers will also know that their school leaders will ensure that they are given sufficient support and opportunities to prepare for the physical and emotional demands of transition. In sum, this study argues that the actions of school leaders are vital for teachers to feel a sense of autonomy and successfully negotiate transition, in order that they can gain rich professional learning and strengthen their professional identities from the experience.

The importance of continuing professional development and learning for teachers has been a subject of much national and international debate. Hence, the findings are of interest to all those involved in education and, in particular, schools who have the professional responsibility and financial burden of providing their teachers with opportunities to engage in quality, ongoing professional learning. This study adds to the knowledge about teacher transition, specifically in regard to managing aspects such as assigning teachers to class levels, and the kind of school leadership and culture that is required for teachers to be able to successfully transition. The in-depth understanding that this study offers brings schools a step towards better management of the 'sink or swim' attitude towards teachers who are changing class levels that currently exists in some schools.

In responding to the purpose of this study, the new information it offers supports outcomes for a range of educators. It gives support to initial teacher educators, student teachers, teachers, school leaders, schools, Boards of Trustees and policy makers to enhance their understanding of transition. The implications for policy and practice provide clear direction to ensure transition is conceptualised as a form of professional learning and development, that tensions are alleviated and that teachers are supported to transition. This study argues that much of the responsibility for the success of teacher transition falls on the shoulders of school leaders, and thus making it vital that they understand the implications for them. School leaders play an integral role in ensuring school cultures are conducive for teachers to transition, and the infrastructure is provided in order that teachers can benefit from the experience.

In an effort to build knowledge of teacher transition, this study advocates that all teachers are given the chance to take full advantage of the unique opportunity for rich professional learning and development that transition between class levels offers.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Email to all schools/principals

Dear Principal/Teachers

I am a doctoral student and lecturer in the Faculty of Education at the University of Waikato. The topic of my study is *'Exploring teacher transition: The influence of changing class levels on teacher professional learning.'* This research will enable me to gain insights into the reasons why some teachers change class levels, what impact this has on their professional learning, how they negotiate this change, and to identify the outcomes that are generated for teachers and other stakeholders from this practice. My aim is to gather data from as many teachers from across New Zealand in order to identify any trends that may be occurring in relation to teachers changing class levels.

The purpose of this letter is to inform you that I intend to invite all practising teachers in your school, who have taught students from years 1-8, to participate in an online survey that will provide key data to inform my exploration of teacher transition in New Zealand primary schools. Also, this data will be used to inform and guide subsequent conference presentations, seminars and publications.

Your support for this research would be deeply appreciated and I would be most grateful if you would forward this e mail to all teachers in your school, which is inviting them to participate. I would also appreciate it if you saw fit to encourage your teachers to complete the online survey, which would take no more than 15 minutes to complete.

The following link will take you to the survey http://bit.ly/132VFOQ

Thank you in advance.

Tracey Carlyon

Faculty of Education
University of Waikato
HAMILTON
Phone 078562889 Extn 7959
E mail carlyont@waikato.ac.nz

Appendix 2 - Information for online survey participants

Exploring teacher transition: The influence of changing class levels on teacher professional learning.

Dear Teacher

I am a doctoral student and lecturer in the Faculty of Education at the University of Waikato. The topic of my study is *'Exploring teacher transition: The influence of changing class levels on teacher learning.'* This research will enable me to gain insights into the reasons why some teachers change class levels, what impact this has on their professional learning, how they negotiate this change and to identify the outcomes that are generated for teachers and other stakeholders from this practice. My aim is to gather data from as many teachers from across New Zealand in order to identify any trends that may be occurring in relation to teachers changing class levels.

The purpose of this letter is to invite you to participate in an online survey that will provide key data to inform the basis of my exploration of teacher transition in New Zealand primary schools. Also, this data will be used to inform and guide subsequent conference presentations, seminars and publications.

I would be most grateful if you decide to complete the survey and anticipate that it will take no longer than 15 minutes for you to complete. Your participation in this online survey is voluntary and you can be assured of complete anonymity. If you wish to participate, please continue which indicates your consent to participate.

Thank you in advance,
Tracey Carlyon
Faculty of Education
University of Waikato
HAMILTON

Phone 078562889 Extn 7959

Email carlyont@waikato.ac.nz

Appendix 3 - Letter to participants in interviews

Date 2013

Dear Participant

The purpose of this letter is to invite you to participate in a study that aims to explore the influence of changing class levels on teacher professional learning. This study will provide key data that will form the basis of my thesis for a PhD at the University of Waikato and inform and guide subsequent conference presentations, seminars and publications. The study will enable me to gain insights into the reasons why some teachers change class levels, what impact this has on their professional learning, how they negotiate this change and to identify the outcomes that are generated for teachers and other stakeholders from this practice.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and the information you share will be treated confidentially. Should you agree to participate, it will involve an interview lasting no more than one hour. If a second interview is required to clarify any of your responses, this will also last no more than one hour. Pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity and that of your school. You are welcome to ask any questions about the study at any stage. Once you have given your consent I will make the interview questions available to you and set up an interview day, time and venue that is suitable for you. A transcript of your interview responses will be made available to you to read, review, adjust if necessary, and make comment upon prior to further analysis and reporting. It is anticipated the data gathering will commence on Monday 4 November and conclude by Friday 29 November, 2013. An electronic copy of the thesis will become widely available and lodged permanently in the university's digital repository research commons.

You have the right to express any concerns about the process or other matters to myself or my supervisor, Professor Chris Branson, whose contact details I have included below. You may withdraw from the study at any time prior to the commencement of the data analysis phase of the study. Should you choose to

withdraw, you will need to advise me of this in writing and any information pertaining to your involvement to that point will be destroyed.

Any questions or concerns regarding the study can be directed to myself or my supervisor. I have included our contact details below.

Tracey Carlyon	Professor Chris Branson
carlyon@waikato.ac.nz	cbranson@waikato.ac.nz
Phone 078562889 Extn 7959	Phone 078252889 Extn 7904

If you are willing to participate please complete the attached consent form and return to the Faculty of Education in the stamped addressed envelope. Thank you for considering this request.

Kind regards

Tracey Carlyon
Faculty of Education
University of Waikato
HAMILTON

Appendix 4 - Consent form for interview

I………………………………………………………………………………………

…………………….. (print your name), have been fully informed about the study and consent to participate.

- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time up to the commencement of the data analysis phase of the study. If necessary, I will advise the researcher of my intent to withdraw in writing should I decide to do so. Following notification of my decision to withdraw, any information pertaining to my involvement to that point will be destroyed.

- I understand that while no absolute guarantee of anonymity can be given, the researcher will make every effort to protect my identity and privacy through the use of pseudonyms. All information shared by me will be treated as confidential. I understand that five years after the conclusion of the study any personal details which might enable the identification of participants will be destroyed.

- I understand that during a semi-structured interview of no more than 60 minutes, and a possible second interview, I will be asked open-ended questions. The interview will be digitally recorded and interview notes will be taken during the interview to ensure my responses are accurately recorded. I may decline to answer any questions during the interview and know that I will have the opportunity to review and comment on the transcript of my interview responses prior to these being analysed and reported upon. While ownership of the analysed data and any subsequent publications will be the property of the researcher, my own interview data is owned by me, as a participant.

- I understand it is my choice whether I wish to share any journal or diary information that I may have written about my transition experiences, for the purposes of this study.

- I am aware that I have the right to express any concerns about the process or other matters to the researcher or her supervisors. If these concerns are not resolved to my satisfaction I may withdraw from the study up until I have approved my transcript.

Participant's
signature……………………………………………………………

Date…………………………………………………
Phone…………………………………………………
Email……………………………………….……………

Appendix 5 - Mapping of research questions to survey items

	Online survey	Interview
Research questions: 1. How are teachers' perceptions of transition between class levels developed?	Questions 6, 7, 8, 18	Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
2. What outcomes are generated for teachers and other stakeholders from teacher transition between class levels?	Questions 8, 14, 15, 16, 19, 20, 21	Questions 9, 10, 11
3. How do teachers negotiate the transition between class levels?	Questions 9, 10, 11, 12, 13	Questions 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
4. What place does leadership have in teacher transition between class levels?	Questions 9, 10, 11, 12, 13	Questions 4, 6, 7, 8

Appendix 6 – Online survey

1. What gender are you?

☐ Male ☐ Female

2. What age are you?

☐ 20-30 ☐ 31-40 ☐ 41-50 ☐ 51+

3. How many years have you been teaching? (Include part-time)

☐ 1-5 ☐ 6-10 ☐ 11-20 ☐ 21+

4. How many class levels have you taught?

☐ One ☐ More than one

If you have ticked one level only go to question 18.

5. If you have taught more than one class level, which class levels have you taught?

Tick all that apply

☐ Level 1 ☐ Level 2 ☐ Level 3 ☐ Level 4

6. What were the reasons you changed to a different class level?

Tick all that apply

☐ I was bored and wanted a change of class level

☐ I felt it would be good for my professional learning

☐ I felt it would be good for my career development

☐ I was asked to for administrative/organisation reasons

☐ It was suggested it would be good for my professional learning

☐ Other personal circumstances (eg. relocation)

7. Who initiated the change to a different class level?

Tick <u>all</u> that apply

☐ I did

☐ Team/syndicate leader

☐ Mentor

☐ Colleague

☐ Principal/school leader

☐ Other

8. What impact did changing class levels have on your teacher learning?

Place a tick in <u>one</u> space only

☐   Not at all

☐   A little

☐   A moderate amount

☐   A great deal

For the following questions, for each statement, place a tick in <u>one</u> space only as follows:

1=not at all;   2= a little;   3=a moderate amount;   4=a great deal;

9. How much impact did the following factors have on your ability to change class levels?

	1	2	3	4
Confidence	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Professional image that others have of you	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
The school culture	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
School leadership	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Others views about which teachers are best suited for particular class levels.	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

10. When you changed class levels how much support did you receive from-

	1	2	3	4
Colleagues	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Mentors	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Team leader/syndicate leaders	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Principal/school leaders	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Parents/caregivers	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

11. When you changed class levels how much opportunity was there for you to-

	1	2	3	4
Talk with others about different class levels	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Observe others teach different class levels	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Have extra time to prepare for the change	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Find and familiarise yourself with different resources	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

12. How much do you agree that when you changed class levels in your schools-

	1	2	3	4
Honest dialogue with colleagues was encouraged	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Teachers were encouraged to take risks	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
There was a high level of trust evident	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Collective responsibility for all children was encouraged	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Changing class levels was widely accepted as a positive practice	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

217

13. How much did the following factors impact on you changing class levels-

	1	2	3	4
Honest dialogue with colleagues	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Risk taking	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
High levels of trust	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Collective responsibility for all students	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Acceptance of changing class levels	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

14. How much impact did changing class levels have on your relationships with-

	1	2	3	4
Students from different class levels	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Colleagues	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Mentors	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Principal/school leaders	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Parents/caregivers	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

15. How much impact did changing class levels have on your-

	1	2	3	4
Engaging in critical reflection	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Understanding and implementing the curriculum	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Managing the learning environment	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Meeting students' individual learning needs	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Applying a range of different teaching techniques and strategies	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

16. How much impact did changing class levels have on-

	1	2	3	4
Teachers taking a more collective responsibility for all students	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Teachers more willing to engage in dialogue about all students' learning	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Parents/caregivers perceiving teachers as able to teach all class levels	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Teachers' willingness to try new ideas	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

17. Please add any further comments and/or examples here of the impact that changing class levels has had on your teacher learning (eg. Describe one of your experiences of changing class levels. Why and how did you come to decide to change class levels? What was it like changing class levels? In what ways did it affect your teaching effectiveness?)

(From question 4 - Questions pertaining to those teachers who have taught one class level)

18. Why have you taught in one class level only?

 Tick all that apply

☐ I have not been given the opportunity to teach at other class levels
☐ I have wanted to change class levels but have not been able to do so
☐ I have not wanted to teach at other class levels
☐ I have not felt supported to change class levels

19. What aspects do you believe are impacted on when teachers change class levels?

Tick all that apply

☐ Teachers take a more collective responsibility for all students
☐ Teachers more willing to engage in dialogue about all students learning
☐ Parents/caregivers see teachers as able to teach all class levels
☐ Teachers more willing to try new ideas

20. In your opinion, how much impact does teachers changing class levels have on their learning?

Place a tick in <u>one</u> space only

☐   Not at all
☐   A little
☐   A moderate amount
☐   A great deal

21. In your opinion, how much impact does teachers changing class levels have on the relationships they have with other stakeholders? (eg. students from different class levels, colleagues, principal, parents, caregivers)

Place a tick in <u>one</u> space only

☐   Not at all
☐   A little
☐   A moderate amount
☐   A great deal

22. Please add any further comments about the impact that other teachers changing class levels has on teacher learning.(eg. Describe an observation you have made of a colleague changing class levels. Why did they change class levels? In what ways did this affect their teacher effectiveness?

Thank you very much for participating in this study

Appendix 7 - Interview questions

Name:

Gender:

Age:

☐ 20-30 ☐ 31-40 ☐ 41-50 ☐ 51+

How many years have you been teaching? (Include part-time)

☐ 1-5 ☐ 6-10 ☐ 11-20 ☐ 21+

Which class levels have you taught?

☐ Level 1 ☐ Level 2 ☐ Level 3 ☐ Level 4

1. Can you tell me why you changed class levels? (How this came about, who initiated the change.)

2. In what ways did aspects such as your self-confidence, professional reputation or personal image impact on your decision and ability to change class levels?

3. In what ways did the perceptions that others hold about which teachers should teach which class levels affect your decision to change class levels?

4. How did the culture of the school and school leadership impact on your ability to change class levels?

5. Can you describe some of the social/emotional processes that you experienced when you changed class levels?

6. Were there challenges associated to changing class levels for you? If so can you describe these?

7. How were these challenges managed?

8. How well were you supported when you changed class levels?

9. In what ways do you think changing class levels impacted on your professional learning?

10. What aspects of your practice improved or diminished as a result of changing class levels? (To what extent?)

11. In what ways do you think changing class levels impacted on others? (eg. relationships with others, school culture, collective responsibility for all students learning etc.)

Do you have anything else to add?