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**Bridging The Transition From Year 6 To Year 7:
A New Zealand Context**

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree
of

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By

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the processes in place for vulnerable students when transitioning from Year 6 at primary school, to Year 7 at intermediate or middle school. Specifically, it investigates what data on vulnerable students is recorded, how this data is utilised when transitioning students, how it is disseminated by receiving schools and in what ways it is useful in supporting students. A convergent parallel mixed methods study design was used (Creswell & Clark, 2016); a national survey, a local Community of Learning / Kahui Ako survey and interviews were undertaken with five leaders from primary or intermediate/middle schools. This research identified a disconnect between primary feeder schools and receiving intermediate and middle schools in terms of what data is most valued, how it is utilised and how it is disseminated.

Respondents recognised the difficulties inherent in developing effective transition processes and the academic, social, behavioural and emotional risks to all students during transition, with particular concern for the vulnerable learners. Respondents also acknowledged the benefit of working across schools and across communities and expressed a desire to address the needs of Māori and Pasifika learners.

Recommendations are made for schools and teaching professionals to:

- i. engage in collective and collaborative professional discussion on the type, accuracy and value of data being collected and utilised
- ii. investigate changes in policy and practice with theory and current research as a basis for action
- iii. co-construct what skills and knowledge it is felt would be beneficial for a Year 6 learner to have in order to successfully transition to Year 7 at an intermediate/middle school
- iv. build understanding and relationships within the wider community through the Community of Learning / Kahui Ako
- v. collectively address the challenges of addressing and catering for Māori and Pasifika learners along with other diverse learners, so that there are clear and successful learning pathways

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*You can live on that shimmering line between your old thinking
and your new understanding, always in a state of learning...
this is a border that is always moving...
As you advance forwards in your studies and realizations...
the unknown always stays a few feet ahead of you.
(Gilbert, 2009, p. 214)*

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

By explicitly addressing children's emotional experiences, providing an emotionally enabling environment and ethos and having skilled adults who are attuned to children's needs and can model and teach coping strategies, transition can be a process that enhances children's emotional well-being and develops their emotional resilience for life.

(Howe & Richards, 2011, p. 23)

Introduction

In New Zealand the compulsory education system is made up of three tiers, which include primary, intermediate/middle and secondary schools. When children begin school at five years old, it is often viewed as a milestone to be celebrated and a defining age and stage of development. So too is the process of completing education at one level of schooling and moving on into the next, i.e. moving on to intermediate/middle or secondary schooling. This process of moving from one place or institution to the next is considered to be a transition.

These milestones are considered to be part of the normal progression through childhood and into adulthood. There has been a significant amount of global research on transitions to secondary schooling (Year 8 to Year 9), but a much more limited amount available on the earlier transition from primary to intermediate/middle school (Year 6 to Year 7). The majority of the research reviewed from varying study designs concludes that many students – although not all - may suffer negative effects on their academic, personal, social and/or emotional wellbeing after making a transition, and it is important to note that transitions between schools are not just representative of a physical change in environment.

Making transitions within a three-tier education system is not unique to New Zealand and indeed the effects of transition are well-recognised globally as well as in New Zealand. However, a key feature for many students in the New Zealand

system is our intermediate/middle school system, where enrolment is usually for a period of two years. Intermediate schools (Years 7-8) were established in 1932 and were based on the primary school culture but allowed exploration of specialist subjects like those found in secondary schools (Dowden, Bishop, & Nolan, 2009). Although middle schools (Years 7-9 or Years 7-10) had been trialled in the early 1900's, these were abandoned in favour of the intermediate school structure until the 1990's, where they made a resurgence. Dinham and Rowe (2007) noted that both intermediate and middle schools were driven by "concerns with the academic, personal, behavioural and social problems experienced by some students and groups during the middle years" (p. 9), yet also observed that acceptance of the middle school model has been relatively slow to develop in New Zealand, with the majority of students attending for only two years, rather than the possible three or four years. Therefore "the majority of New Zealand students experience two transitions within a two-year period, i.e. at Years 7 and 9" (Hawk & Hill, 2001, p. 3).

The New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) mandates schools to provide effective strategies to support student transition so that transitions are positive and have a clear sense of continuity and direction. Research shows that transition can cause a number of negative effects – although that there are some positive effects as well – and these are reviewed and explored in the following chapters. The subject of transitions is wide reaching and this will be discussed and defined in terms of the parameters of this research project before identifying the aim and context of this research project and a guiding outline of this thesis in the following sections.

Interest in the topic

For the past ten years, I have worked as a teacher with students ranging in age from Year 0 (five-six years old) children who are transitioning from Early Childhood Education (ECE) and beginning their school life, to Year 6 (ten-eleven years old) students on the cusp of leaving primary school to transition to intermediate or middle school. I am also the school SENCO (Special Education Needs Coordinator) and have worked with students, their families and outside agencies in

order to best meet the individual needs of the student. These experiences have provided me with a curiosity as to how a student's ability, self-belief, sense of agency and desire to be successful in the school is affected and shaped by external influences, such as the student's family and peer group, mental and physical health, and cultural beliefs.

When any student transitions from primary school to intermediate/middle school, the student faces numerous social, academic, emotional and physical demands. In addition to finding academia, social-emotional issues and other aspects of schooling testing, it appears that particular students find the process of transitioning to a new school perhaps more confronting than other students who are not facing the same kind of ongoing challenges. My teaching experiences have caused me to question the support that is offered to these students who, for a myriad of reasons, struggle within the education system.

Defining Transition

*“Transitions from group to group
and from one social situation to the next
are looked upon as implicit in the very fact of existence”
(Van Gennep, 1909/1960, p. 3)*

Arnold van Gennep's (1873-1957) seminal work on the 'rites of passage' and the significance of transitional stages in a person's life has become a part of the language of anthropology and sociology. Van Gennep (1960) observed that transitions are an implicit component of existence, with "the life of an individual in any society a series of passages from one age to another and from one occupation to another" (p. 3). Tilleczek and Ferguson (2007) add to this with their assertion that "transitions are best seen as temporal processes which cross social, academic, and procedural issues" (p. 1).

Garpelin (2014) describes transition in visual terms of an individual being on the threshold – or limen - between one known ‘room’ and another unknown ‘room’. When a person is on the threshold, or in the liminal phase, then they are neither in one room nor the other, “rather, the individual is being, without belonging, to any room (being without any status/position/stage)” (p. 119). Other researchers describe transition stages as boundaries, borders, borderlands, bridges and socio-spatial mobilities (Hörschelmann, 2011; Peters, 2003b; Peters & Sandberg, 2017; Van Gennepe, 1960; Wenger, 1998). All of these allow a visual representation of the movement through school levels as stages of transition and what connections between levels might be necessary to facilitate a smoother transition process.

In terms of transition within a New Zealand educational context, Figure 1 illustrates the traditional model of progression at its simplest, whereby moving through the school system is considered to be a lateral transition between two stages and is a progression in one direction with the new stage replacing the previous one.

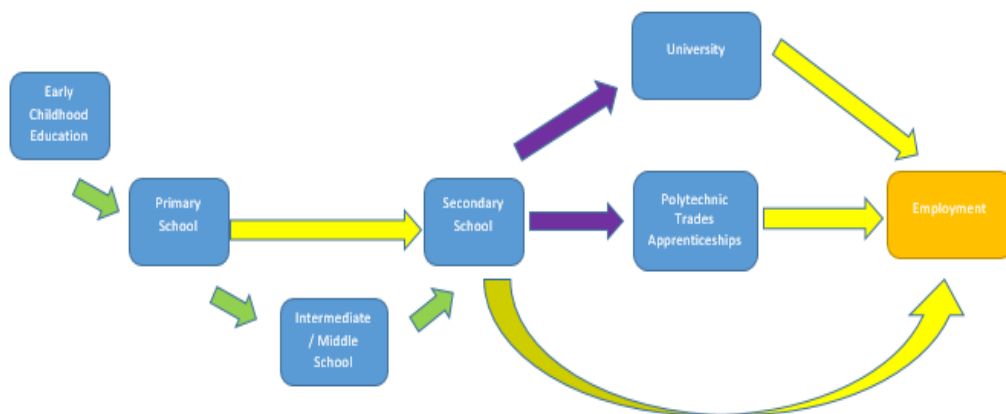


Figure 1. Traditional transitions.
Adapted from *Transitions: A discussion paper*, by S. Middleton, 2011. Retrieved from <http://akoaooteaoroa.ac.nz/download/ng/file/group-5797/transitions-discussion-paper.pdf>. Reprinted with permission.

Conversely, educational transitions may also be considered a ‘transfer paradox’ (Hallinan & Hallinan, 1992, cited in Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008) due to the nature of the individual being the oldest and most experienced in their current school, but by stepping up into a higher level of schooling the individual also steps down in relative social maturity and experience within the new school environment.

Middleton (2011) states that educational options are now more complex than shown in Figure 1 and therefore the transition processes between each are more complex; an adapted illustration of this is shown in Figure 2. The transitions between each institute involve more than a change in terms of just the physical learning space, they can create emotional, academic and social challenges as individuals adjust to their new learning setting. The relationships being formed can at times be two-directional rather than one-directional, such as when a student who has been attending alternative education is reintegrated into a traditional school environment. As Clandinin, Steeves, and Caine (2013) observe, these transitions are a life-making process, “composed over time, in places, and in different relationships” (p. 220).

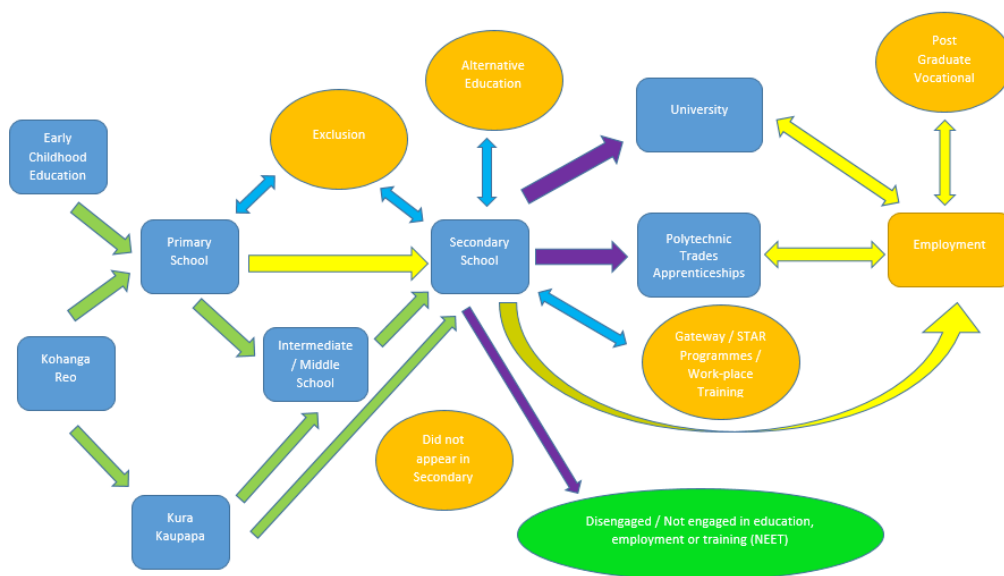


Figure 2. Increasing complexity in supplementary programmes offered. Adapted from *Transitions: A discussion paper*, by S. Middleton, 2011. Retrieved from <http://akoaootearoa.ac.nz/download/ng/file/group-5797/transitions-discussion-paper.pdf>. Reprinted with permission.

It is the process of adjustment to new life circumstances and the response to this that dictates how a transition is experienced (Zittoun, 2008). As noted by Dockett et al. (2017), “while transitions are experienced by individuals, they occur within social, educational, community, political, economic and institutional frames, involving children and families in expanding sets of relationships” (p. 275).

Hviid and Zittoun (2008) state that a transition is a ‘transaction’ between a person and their changing environment. The responsiveness of that environment either supports or depreciates the changes being made and experienced by the individual.

Furthermore, Crafter and Maunder (2012) contend that transitions are “complex and multi-faceted and invariably involve changes to self-identity born out of uncertainty in the social and cultural worlds of the individual” (p. 3).

Therefore, the stage of change from one physical location to another for students moving from Year 6 in primary school, to Year 7 in intermediate/middle schools is much more complex than it appears on the surface and there will invariably be some students who are better placed to cope than others.

In research on transition from elementary to secondary school in Canada (Grade 6 to Grade 7), Tilleczek (2008) found that students face difficulties in maintaining who they are currently and all their existing responsibilities, while developing slowly into adults, and simultaneously seeking a sense of belonging at school, amongst peers, at home, and in other aspects of an adolescent’s life. Tilleczek (2008) further identifies that “at precisely the time that young people are navigating multiple developmental challenges (social, intellectual, academic, physical), we expect them to move between these institutions of public education...[this is]... recognised as a stumbling point for students” (p. 68).

Similarly, in leaving primary school in New Zealand, students expressed concerns such as not knowing their peers and teachers in their new school, not being supported in class by a new teacher, getting lost in a strange environment, having to cope with more difficult schoolwork and homework, forming and/or maintaining friendships, being able to succeed academically, and knowing ‘what to do’ (Education Review Office, 2012). Because a transition process can have a cumulative and compounding effect on the success or otherwise of future transition processes and the building of ‘transition capital’ (Dunlop, 2014); there is particular concern for those at risk of leaving school “without skills and self-confidence necessary to have options in work, culture, civic affairs and relationships” (Tilleczek et al., 2010, p. 16).

Personal teaching experience has shown these concerns to be even more challenging for students who might be deemed ‘at risk’ (as defined and discussed in Chapter Two), perhaps because the daily struggles are further compounded by the transition process. Not all of the students have the same resources available in their daily lives which would support the development of coping skills and the

effective means to navigate these new challenges. There is a need to look at how these students are transitioned and to identify strategies and processes that would support a successful transition.

Defining Vulnerable Learners

In order to constrain and contextualise this research and to comprehend how challenges caused by transition to a new school specifically impact at-risk (or vulnerable) students, the term ‘at-risk’ must first be defined.

The very nature of defining certain students as ‘at-risk’ or vulnerable due to the presence of circumstantial and contextual conditions that are outside the individual student’s control, is based in critical theory. In the case of critical theory, the “reality” of these at-risk students has been created and formed by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). The simple (and usually well-meaning) act of identifying these risk factors points at inequalities, whereby students are deemed as being at risk of failure simply due to their status in society through preordained characteristics such as gender and socio-economic status (Wotherspoon & Schissel, 2001).

Gluckman and Hayne (2011) provide a full explanation and contend that:

What places young people at risk is not a single factor (such as family poverty) but rather an interactive accumulation of adverse social, family, personal and biological factors. These factors include family socio-economic and related conditions; cultural factors including discrimination and institutional racism; individual factors including personality, temperament and intelligence; exposure to perinatal adversities; child abuse, neglect and family violence; parenting practices and upbringing; educational achievement and school experiences; peer affiliations and influences; community and neighbourhood features; and media influences. These personal, social and contextual factors are likely to interact with biological influences including biological maturity, brain development and genetic strengths or vulnerabilities to influence the probability that the

young person will encounter significant difficulties during the period of adolescence. (pp. 2-3)

This very comprehensive explanation of possible factors provides an understanding as to the complexity of defining what ‘at-risk’ could mean or be caused by. In the field of education, students who are in danger of school failure are deemed as “at-risk”. Visible factors which generally lead to this label are suggested by Wotherspoon and Schissel (2001) as including low academic marks, learning needs, disabilities and poor attendance or truancy. They further contend that less obvious issues can also lead to an ‘at-risk’ label, such as students with a history of abuse, foetal alcohol syndrome, in-utero exposure to drugs, parental abuse of alcohol or drugs, emotional and/or behavioural difficulties, and/or mental health challenges.

‘At-risk’, or ‘vulnerable’ students are further variously characterised as those who could be young in age for their year level; be less able (academically, physically, socially etc.); more disruptive in class; experiencing low self-esteem and self-belief; have parents who are less encouraging of autonomy; come from lower socio-economic backgrounds; or be in foster homes or care (Bailey & Baines, 2012; Bloyce & Frederickson, 2012; de Montjoie Rudolf, 2015; Hodson, Baddeley, Laycock, & Williams, 2005; Maltais, Duchesne, Ratelle, & Feng, 2017; Rice, Frederickson, & Seymour, 2011; Serbin, Stack, & Kingdon, 2013; West, Sweeting, & Young, 2010).

Bellert and Graham (2006) make particular mention of students who are vulnerable because they “do not have a diagnosed disability but do under-achieve both in comparison with their age-peers and with their individual learning potential” (p. 4). Higgins (2015) adds to this with the term ‘students with learning support needs’ as describing “students identified by their schools as requiring added support in transition for learning, behavioural, social, cultural or emotional reasons and to distinguish them from those students with high or very high support needs funded directly by the Ministry of Education, Special Education” (p. 6).

Sagor and Cox (2004) clarified the definition of an at-risk learner as “one who is unlikely to graduate on schedule with the skills and self-esteem necessary to exercise meaningful options in the areas of work, leisure, culture, civic affairs, and intra/inter personal relationships” (p. 1).

It should also be noted that these varying definitions are different again from the Vulnerable Children's Act 2014 (New Zealand Government, 2014). The Act itself does not provide a definition of what constitutes a 'vulnerable child'. The aim of the Act is to improve the well-being of vulnerable children by:

promoting the best interests of vulnerable children (having regard to the whole of their lives), including (without limitation) taking measures aimed at:

- a) protecting them from abuse and neglect:
- b) improving their physical and mental health and their cultural and emotional well-being:
- c) improving their education and training and their participation in recreation and cultural activities:
- d) strengthening their connection to their families, whānau, hapū, and iwi, or other culturally recognised family group:
- e) increasing their participation in decision making about them, and their contribution to society:
- f) improving their social and economic well-being (p. 5).

The large diversity of risk factors, contexts, and circumstances which result in an 'at-risk' or 'vulnerable' label, as well as the use of the term in society, means the definition of 'at-risk' has become increasingly more difficult due to wider and more colloquial usage (Everett, Chadwell, & McChesney, 2002). This lack of clarity raises the question of how educators can help smooth transition pathways for our 'at-risk' students if there is not a clear definition of what the term 'at-risk' actually means. However, for the purposes of this research, the term 'vulnerable' rather than 'at-risk' will be used, with the premise that vulnerable students are interpreted as those who would benefit from specific emotional, social, behavioural or learning support but who do not receive funded support for transition through an external agency.

Aim & Context

The aim of this research is to investigate what kinds of informal student data and information is passed on between schools, how it is collected by schools and how it is utilised by receiving schools. The hypothesis is made that students would benefit from the sharing of informal data between schools during transition, in particular, for those students who are vulnerable, in that they have learning, behavioural, emotional or social needs, but who are not supported by any other internal or external agency such as SENCO, RTLB etc. The students of particular interest are those who may have:

- emotional needs which may arise from anxiety, stress, grief, loss, anger, etc.
- behavioural needs that are not officially ‘diagnosed’, but who still require adapted teaching and management strategies
- social needs in order to make and maintain relationships with peers and teachers
- learning needs that are often ‘unseen’ – e.g. dyslexic tendencies, processing disorders, CAPD

All students need to be transitioned carefully, but as outlined earlier, there are some students who are more at-risk at being lost in a system than others. A number of questions are raised around the transition process. Would sharing of anecdotal or informal data on how best to support a learner aid the transition process, so that the teacher and student in the receiving school are able to build their relationship based on knowledge of things that work, rather than guessing and experimenting? Are receiving schools being given the right kind of information and data to help them support the vulnerable student? How do relationships between schools affect the quality and means of the data transfer? Do teachers at receiving schools value and utilise the information being provided by the contributing schools?

Research Gap

The significant body of research on transition throughout the life course as well as transition within and between educational settings, is reviewed in the following chapter. It is interesting that Galton and McLellan (2017) noted one weakness of

early studies on school transitions was the experiences of teachers and pupils over the transition period was not explored to discover reasons for possible dips in attitude and attainment. It is heartening to see that globally there is now an increasing body of knowledge around this area which begin to identify a myriad of reasons and causes of varying transition experiences.

Hopwood (2014) contends that “teachers who are knowledgeable and sensitive to the impact transition can have on adolescent students are in a pivotal position to support students during this important step” (p. 305) whilst Higgins (2015, p. iii) further contends that four key features interact to help transition:

- deliberate responsibility for the transition process;
- purposeful and timely engagement;
- strategic transition knowledge and practice; and
- targeted support for transition.

Part of taking deliberate responsibility for the transition process includes the process of transferring and utilising documented information. Flitcroft and Kelly (2016) maintain that the use of transferred information between schools has not been well researched, and the evidence that exists is inconsistent. They further argue that UK-based studies show that documentation passed on to receiving schools is not utilised or is ignored, or that the full range of information is not communicated by the transferring school.

Fifteen years ago in New Zealand, a review of literature by McGee, Ward, Gibbons, and Harlow (2003) found that use of information by secondary schools ranges along a continuum, with some school deans seeking wide-ranging information and using it to indicate class placement in Year 9 or in conjunction with school assessments. Other schools used the data to track ‘at risk’ students, but otherwise ignored it in favour of a ‘clean slate’ approach. Further to this, there was some confusion between prior achievement and entry assessments and a variety in the type of data sought, how the data was used and to whom it was disseminated.

Since McGee et al.’s review there has been some New Zealand teacher-led inquiry in this area. In 2009 a cluster of Manurewa schools began trialling new transition approaches between primary, intermediate/middle and secondary schools, which

included a standardised transition form with a particular focus on special education needs. This study found that the focus on transition approaches resulted in significant shifts in understanding and teacher practice, resulted in better preparation for new students, created positive relationships within and between schools and resulted in a district-wide commitment to ensure improvement and sustainability of effective transition practice (Higgins, 2009; Kent, 2009).

The afore-mentioned study focused on students with special education needs and was supported by Group Special Education (GSE) working under the umbrella of the Enhancing Effective Practice in Special Education (EePiSE) Manukau Initiative. My study concentrates on vulnerable students rather than special education students and is structured around looking specifically at the transition from primary to intermediate/middle schools. It focuses on teachers and the systems, strategies and procedures that are in place in terms of what constitutes student data, what is passed on to receiving schools, how it is utilised and whether the current systems in place are 'fit for purpose', in that they support the learner throughout the transition process.

Thesis Outline

Chapter Two reviews the history of research studies on transitions and discusses the key ideas and themes that have emerged from the relevant literature read, offers a summary, analysis and critique and recognises areas of ambiguity or challenge.

Chapter Three outlines the research design, the methods used, sampling and data analysis used in this study. The selected mixed methods approach combining both qualitative and quantitative data from different perspectives is justified. The chapter also discusses reliability and validity, triangulation and ethical considerations.

Chapter Four focuses on the research findings and an analysis of the data gathered using interviews with teachers responsible for transition with surveys of a Kahui Ako along with the self-selected national survey responses. These data were analysed with a view to identifying correlations, corroboration and contradictions

within the findings. The findings are organised according to the themes ascertained during the analysis.

Chapter Five discusses the findings and presents the conclusions. Recommendations for future practice and for future research are listed. Limitations and implications of this research process are also recognised and discussed.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Giving sense to a new event mostly goes with thinking and speaking about it over and over again...[which] bridges the actual present and anticipated new future.
(Hviid & Zittoun, 2008, p. 126)

Introduction

Whilst transition processes occur throughout the life course, this research project focuses solely on the forced transitions inherent in New Zealand's education system. For most children, school life starts when they leave ECE and transition into primary school between the ages of 5 and 6 years. At around age 10-11 years (with the exception of full primary schools), students are transitioned into intermediate/middle schools. Although middle schools do offer three or four years of schooling, the majority of students tend to stay for only two years (Dinham & Rowe, 2007) and transition with intermediate school students around age 12-13 years to secondary school. *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) mandates that schools provide continuous learning pathways for students from early childhood through to secondary school and that each stage of the journey prepares and connects students with the next stage so that students have a clear sense of continuity and direction.

These school-to-school transitions are seen as a stage and marker of progress in the lives of students and according to Green (2010), Coffey (2013) and Yates (1999) are expected lifetime changes that involve moving from the known to the unknown. People experience and are affected by transitions in complex ways and this period of change requires people to call on accumulated knowledge and experience of previous transitions, or 'transition capital' (Dunlop, 2014) and to "utilise previously developed strategies and resources to counteract any issues" (Mackenzie, McMaugh, & O'Sullivan, 2012, p. 298).

Both of the transitions from primary to intermediate/middle school and then on to secondary school occur at a time when adolescents are experiencing physical, emotional, psychological and cognitive changes. These changes have the potential to affect the way in which transitions are experienced and managed and according to Ballam, Perry, and Garpelin (2017) and Hellblom-Thibblin and Marwick (2017), an increasing emphasis on diversity, inclusion and on students who may be perceived to be at a disadvantage has become central to policy making around the globe.

The Australian research of Ganeson and Ehrich (2009) state that for some people, the transition experience from Year 6 to Year 7 is a positive one, and cite Giorgi (1985a) in a longitudinal study which indicated that “transition yields more positive experiences for some students than negative” (p. 62). Akos and Galassi (2004), Tilleczek and Ferguson (2007) and Yates (1999), also noted that students express eagerness, enthusiasm, excitement and hopefulness at the prospect of a fresh start and new freedoms in moving on to a new school environment and all that it entails. Furthermore, Dockett et al. (2011) contended that transition can be a time of opportunity as children start school, experience academic and social success and as families forge positive relationships with schools.

However, Dockett et al. (2011) also recognised that transition at any point can be a time of vulnerability, where children and families move from known contexts and supports to unknown contexts. Certainly, there are a number of students who experience social, emotional and academic difficulties during a school transition process. Tilleczek and Ferguson (2007) confirmed that “an emotional paradox exists at this transition, as it does in many life junctions. Students are both excited and anxious, both doubtful and hopeful” (p. 3)

According to Andrews and Bishop (2012), difficulties during transition arise from “the need for students to acclimate to new policies, practices, and buildings; teachers require accurate data about their new students’ capacities; and families must navigate relationships with new personnel” with conclusion that “some students find the move between schools so difficult that they “unlearn” skills and content, beginning a potential spiral toward being retained or even dropping out” (p. 8).

This decline in achievement – as well as in behaviour and individual well-being - are common themes in between-school transition research. According to West et al. (2010), the impact that developmental changes has on adolescents cannot be ignored as it is not yet clear whether it is the transition itself that is difficult, or whether the difficulties are due to developmental changes. Whatever the cause, Bru, Stornes, Munthe, and Thuen (2010) state, “these drops in achievement, in positive behaviour and in well-being, are of great concern for caregivers, teachers and society at large” (p. 519). Ganeson and Ehrich (2009) remind us that “much rests in the hands of a school’s community – peers, teachers and administrators – to make transition...smooth and stress-free...for new school students” (p. 76).

This chapter will further discuss the theoretical influence and background research of this study, as well as the themes identified in the literature review of Purposeful Data Collection & Sharing, Communication, Teacher Pedagogy, Relationships and Diversity & Inclusion.

Theoretical Influence

This research project is influenced and underpinned by the theory of pragmatism, which is a philosophical tradition that began in the United States around 1870 and is often attributed to the philosophers William James, John Dewey, and Charles Sanders Peirce. Pragmatism in its simplest sense is a practical approach to a problem. Onwuegbuzie (2002) states that pragmatism developed because:

Pragmatists entertained the existence of causal relationships, but stated that it may not be possible to pin down many of these relationships. Pragmatists accepted external reality and believed that values played a role in the interpretation of results. However, they believed in the existence of both subjective and objective points of view. Asserting that research is influenced by theory/hypothesis and by observations, facts, and evidence, pragmatists utilized both inductive and deductive logic, choosing explanations that best produced desired outcomes, and combining formal and informal writing styles that used both the personal and impersonal voice (p. 520).

Supporters of pragmatism theory tend to start off with the research question to determine their research framework, rather than the more traditional approach of questioning ontology and epistemology beliefs as the first step. They tend to view research philosophy as a continuum, rather than as a set of either/or, mutually exclusive approaches and perspectives. Furthermore, they tend to view most philosophical topics, such as language, meaning, belief, science etc., in terms of their practical uses and successes. Therefore, a mixture of ontology, epistemology and axiology approaches is an acceptable way for pragmatists to research and understand social phenomena. The emphasis is on ‘what works best’ to address the research problem, so utilising both quantitative and qualitative data is often favoured as it allows the researcher to better understand social reality (Creswell & Clark, 2016; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Kalolo, 2015; Wahyuni, 2012).

Kalolo (2015) notes that the growing drive within educational research towards pragmatism works well because pragmatism does not centre itself on a set of arguments or points of view but instead assesses each argument made and its contribution to on-going practices, with the goal being to form better habits and improve society, rather than reproduce existing habits. Kalolo (2015) further contends that:

No specific aims, frameworks and methods of educational research can hold true and be applicable at all times, or in all places or situations. It is therefore necessary to have aims that enable the researcher to continuously grow and create new values, which provide him/her with dynamic direction and guidance towards intrinsic interest, strong attitude and capacities in their areas of specialisation (p. 159).

Pragmatism has been criticised by other philosophical schools of thought for operating in an ad hoc manner; ignoring philosophical ideas to expedite the research process; and for being epistemologically relativistic (i.e. the concept of ‘my’ truth versus ‘your’ truth or ‘our’ truth). In rebuttal, Kalolo (2015) and Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004), argue that rather than pragmatism being an ad hoc approach, it is a problem solving approach that is contextual and relevant to the research being addressed.

Further, Kalolo (2015) contends that the use of pragmatism develops a pathway for possible connections between actions and consequences, so that in terms of educational practice, the approach “provides a working point of view and an alternative perspective in the search for better means and methods of educational practice...in particular, it opens the way to both theorising practice and reflexivity in the practice of knowledge generation” (p. 165). Furthermore, in discussing research methods, Morgan (2013) argues that pragmatism “gives mixed methods researchers a shared view of how to conduct research [and] follow a pragmatic path...pragmatism treats inquiry as a process in which reflection unites research questions and research methods” (pp. 42-43).

This theory of pragmatism sits well in terms of this research project. It allows the critical review of a variety of studies that may be situated in differing theoretical paradigms or utilising varying methodologies along with an acceptance of both objective and subjective philosophies and deductive and inductive approaches. It accepts that reality is constantly renegotiated and interpreted and is a useful way to understand debates and discourses within social phenomena.

Background Research

The study of transition in schooling is by no means new, with research on schooling and the effects of teacher-student relationships and school environments being carried out over decades rather than years. G. Stanley Hall, who was President of Clark University and Professor of Psychology and Pedagogy, stated more than 100 years ago that “...the one unpardonable thing for the adolescent [to cope with] is dullness, stupidity, lack of life, interest, and enthusiasm in school or teachers ...most teachers know all their [students’] bad points, but fail to discover their good ones” (Hall, 1906, p. 208).

Nearly 30 years ago, Hargreaves and Earl (1990) stated that “the tragedy of the transition years is not that students experience anxiety on transfer to secondary school. The tragedy is that this anxiety passes so quickly, and that the students adjust so smoothly to the many uncomfortable realities of secondary school life.

These realities... can restrict achievement, and depress motivation (especially among the less academic) sowing the seeds for dropout in later years” (p. 214).

Given that these challenges are known to be ongoing over a number of years, affect all students to some degree (whether in a positive or negative fashion) and that these challenges have the potential to impact probabilities of school success for students; there then needs to be continuing examination of the causes and impacts of these issues with resulting suggestions for changes in practice and pedagogy considered.

As there is a significant amount of literature available, this review has been constrained where possible to literature that was either published within the last 10-15 years or seminal in nature. In critically reviewing the available literature, an overview table was developed noting a summary of the study, methodology used, findings and analysis, identification of a research gap and main theme(s) and comments. The literature was then grouped according to theme and relevance to research questions within this research project.

Most of the research available is centred on the transition process from early childhood centres onto primary schools, and from intermediate/middle or full primary schools on to secondary schools with a focus on the effects on academic attainment and the social-emotional adjustment of children and young people and what strategies and factors make a ‘successful’ transition (Bhumika, 2016; Bru et al., 2010; Coffey, 2013; Epstein, 2010; Evangelou et al., 2008; Goos & Decelle, 2016; Hanewald, 2013; Peters, 2003a, 2010; Peters & Sandberg, 2017; Symonds & Hargreaves, 2016).

However there appears to be less research available around the specific experience of transition from contributing primary schools into intermediate/middle schools, as noted by Topping (2011). This distinction is important, as the administrative and curricular systems and academic and social environments differ between primary, intermediate/middle schools and secondary schools, so therefore the resulting transition experiences differ. Furthermore, West et al. (2010) contend that studies have largely focussed on “the effects of transition on educational attainment and well-being; pupils’ experiences of transition; and predictors of

poorer transitions ... [but that there is a] ... lack of attention to differences in respect of the very situation the transition takes place in, schools themselves” (p. 22).

A Canadian-based study carried out over three years by Tilleczek (2008), highlights three areas in which students struggle with the transition of ‘being, becoming, and belonging’.

Young people are in constant motion and experience ongoing tension between being and becoming. They are in process of *being* themselves in their everyday lives, forging their identities through daily negotiations at school, home, community, work, and with friends. In doing so, they need to be valued for who they are today and to find places to *belong*. However, they are also in a state of *becoming* young adults. (p. 68)

Tilleczek (2008) suggests three levels of factors can ease transition to high school: macro (cultural), meso (classes, friends, family), and micro (youth and teachers as individuals). At the macro level, there must be a fit between students and school environments, so that a sense of belonging develops. At the meso level, we need to consider the everyday practices in schools, homes, and communities and the interactions between students, teachers and families. The micro factors include those which are internal to the student such as individual identities, beliefs, goals etc. Although Tilleczek (2008) referred to these three factors as ones which contribute to a successful transition, logically the absence of these factors would have an adverse effect on any student.

In a 2010 USA study on student perceptions of social support and adjustment in the transition from primary school to junior high school, Martínez, Aricak, Graves, Peters-Myszak, and Nellis (2011) examined the significance of social support during transition. Overall, the authors found that support from peers and teachers was perceived to decrease during the one-year transition period from the end of the elementary school year to the end of the first year of junior high and that social support and socio-emotional functioning that was perceived at the end of primary school was a predictor of the level of that same indicator for the beginning of junior high school (Martínez et al., 2011).

Martínez et al (2011) illustrate the significance of healthy social support in transitioning to high school, but more research needs to be conducted to determine whether social support and socio-emotional functioning impacts upon other transition challenges, such as long term academic achievement, behaviour, and/or social and emotional health.

In a more comprehensive, yet older longitudinal USA study, Barber and Olsen (2004) sought to correlate changes in the school environment with changes in academic, emotional, and social functions of youth in transition. The study sampled youth who were transitioning through Grades 5-10 and self-reported data on a longitudinal basis. Although, at times in the study participants were transitioning from grade to grade but not changing schools, findings are relevant to the process of transitioning in general and have correlations with the New Zealand system of transitioning from primary to intermediate/middle schools and on to secondary schools. The study was particularly interesting in concluding that youth in transition perceived a decline in the school environment (such as teacher support), and their academic, social and emotional functioning at each transition point regardless of gender, religion, or family turmoil.

However, the Barber and Olsen (2004) study also found that in the first transition from the 5th-6th grade at age ten-eleven years, (which involved a change in schools similar to the New Zealand primary to intermediate/middle school system), students reported improved overall functioning including social, academic, and emotional measures. Aspects of ‘functioning’ included “school performance (homework, grades, activities), psychological functioning (self-esteem, depression, loneliness), social competence (social initiative with teachers and peers, parental relationship quality, association with deviant peers), and problem behaviours (antisocial behaviour, aggression)” (p. 9). Compared to their reports from fifth grade, sixth graders reported more support from teachers, more hours spent on homework, higher self-esteem, lower depression, and lower loneliness. The three negative changes were “higher perceived need for school organization (e.g. rules to prevent deviant behaviour), a decline in grades, and a decline in the quality of students’ reported relationship with their fathers” (p. 15).

In sum, despite the three negative changes, the transition to a new school resulted in generally more positive school and personal experiences and functioning for students. This is in contrast to traditional beliefs that a change in school causes greater decline in perceived functioning. The posited reason for this was attributed to the ‘family pod’ structure of the new school environment. Exactly how the ‘family pod’ is structured is not clear beyond that they were small, personalised and contained, and “appeared to maintain familiarity and security for the new middle school students” (Barber & Olsen, 2004, p. 25). The authors further contended that this finding is meaningful as a caution around assuming or expecting a decline in student functioning and well-being as being ‘normal’ at school transition and also as an encouraging example that developing and adapting the structure of a school environment can benefit students throughout the transitions process.

Barber and Olsen (2004), Martínez et al. (2011), and Tilleczek (2008) all observed that a change in school environment, such as a transition from primary school to intermediate/middle school, is challenging academically, socially, and emotionally for all students in general. Barber and Olsen (2004) further contended that transitions in school are much more challenging for students when they occur at the same time as large physical and developmental changes, such as those during early adolescence. Therefore, the way the education system is structured in New Zealand, whereby two major transitions in school environment happen at the very same time as students are undergoing their own “micro” level changes (Tilleczek, 2008), would seem to further exacerbate transition challenges for all students (Kernohan, 2012).

The UK-based research of Rice et al. (2011) supports the view that school transition has a negative effect on students and that during this adjustment period, students can experience emotional and psychological stress, which can result in behaviour concerns, poor mental health and/or a drop in academic achievement. Of particular interest for a New Zealand context, is that our students typically make two transitions within a two year period – i.e. from primary to intermediate/middle schools and again when moving on to secondary schools – and these students could potentially experience a drop in achievement twice (Alspaugh, 1998; McGee et al., 2003).

Galton, Gray, and Ruddick (1999); Goos and Decelle (2016); McGee et al. (2003) state that reasons for potential achievement drops include having to:

- adjust to a new environment
- make new friends and possibly lose contact with old friends
- cope with new teachers and different expectations around work and behaviour
- make up for loss of previous knowledge and skills due to a long summer break
- repeat work when the expectation was that learning would be new and challenging

Easing The Transition From Primary To Secondary Schooling: Helpful Information for Schools to Consider (Ministry of Education, 2010) is a New Zealand study which followed a group of approximately 100 students over an eighteen month period during their transition from Year 8 at primary or intermediate/middle school, through Year 9 and into Year 10 at secondary school. The researchers determined that “during the middle years of schooling (Years 7 to 10), more vulnerable students [undefined] in terms of their progress and well-being at school tend to become increasingly disengaged from learning and from school generally” (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 8).

Furthermore, Tilleczeck et al. (2010) contends that “if a child faces multiple negative factors at home, at school, and in the neighbourhood, the effect of these factors is multiplied rather than simply added together, because these conditions interact with and reinforce each other” (p. 22). It could be speculated then, that the current education structure of making a significant transition from one school to another, could have a compounding effect on ‘at-risk’ students, simply because the risk factors that they face on a daily basis act in conjunction with, and on top of, the risk factors which are inherent for any student during the period of transition from primary to secondary school.

As a caveat, it should be noted that much of the existing research is of a qualitative nature and it cannot be generalised to all environments (Glesne, 2011). Furthermore, the educational context of Euro-Western countries where much of the research has been carried out is different from that found in New Zealand -

structures, times of transition, funding, and other factors such as cultural diversity differ, so the transitions made by Euro-Western youth, as well as how the notion of “at-risk” is defined will not always be comparable. Similarly, because the challenges presented by a transition differ between populations and are unique to each individual (Tilleczek et al., 2010), research and implementation of specific support programmes may not be applicable to another population or at the individual student level (Kernohan, 2012).

Nevertheless, school transition is a global concern and we can still utilise the research findings as a platform from which to inform and further develop our own understandings.

Successful Transitions

So what defines a ‘successful’ transition and how can educators influence the success (or otherwise) of the transition process? From New Zealand literature on transitions, the Education Review Office (ERO) identified 12 aspects that indicate students have made successful transitions, based on the literature review findings of Peters (2010) and Kennedy and Cox (2008).

Indicators of successful transitions are when students feel that:

- they belong in their new school, and are well included in school activities and programmes
- they are positively connected to their peers, other students in the school, and to their teachers
- their teachers know them, including their strengths, interests and learning needs, and show they are interested in them
- their teachers understand the importance of their language, culture and identity
- they have a sense of purpose in being at school
- they have an understanding and commitment to their learning pathway through their schooling and beyond
- they are making progress

- their current learning follows on from their previous learning (the curriculum is connected and continuous) and is appropriately challenging
- learning is interesting, relevant and is fun
- their families have been included in decisions
- they are physically and emotionally safe
- they have opportunities to try new, exciting things and/or extend their particular skills/interests (e.g. through extra-curricular activities).

(Education Review Office, 2012, p. 7)

In addition to this, Bafumo (2006); Crosnoe (2009); Hanewald (2013) and Sebba et al. (2015) found that both parents and students miss the ‘comfort level’ of primary school where students were well known by their teachers and peers. In order to mitigate the negative effects of the transition phase, students needed to feel that someone genuinely cared about them, that they would not be let down and that their life mattered. This feeling was particularly evident for those students who are considered to be vulnerable.

Howe and Richards (2011) UK-based research suggests that the holistic approach taken by early childhood educators whereby children’s learning and development is viewed in terms of “physical, cognitive, social, emotional, cultural, moral and spiritual needs” (p. 15), models a way in which to also address emotional experiences of older students, in order to alleviate the stressors of the transition period. The authors further argue that an explicit focus on these needs would allow transition to be a process that “enhances children’s emotional well-being and develops their emotional resilience for life” (p. 23).

There is limited research around what contributes to ‘success’ in terms of the specific transition period between Year 6 students from contributing primary schools to Year 7-8 intermediate/middle schools and the impact that this transition period has on achievement, engagement, social skills and personal development; however the existing research certainly provides a basis from which to begin to explore hypotheses. It is precisely this ‘knowing’ of students discussed above and the concept of educators having access to up to date, relevant, contextual information that is being researched in this project.

Purposeful Data Collection, Communication and Teacher Knowledge, Judgement & Pedagogy

A significant longitudinal study carried out in the UK, along with ongoing findings from this collated by Galton et al. (1999); Galton, Hargreaves, and Pell (2003); Galton and McLellan (2017); Galton and Mornson (2000); Galton, Morrison, and Pell (2000); Howe and Richards (2011); and Symonds and Galton (2014), found that an estimated two out of every five pupils failed to make expected progress during the year following the change in schools from primary to secondary, that levels of attainment for some students were held back or reversed and that many students experienced emotional distress prior to and during the period of transition. These authors recommended that schools do more to share information about student achievement, share induction programmes, undertake studies on children at risk, improve teacher pedagogy and practice to account for different learning styles and share information between schools about successful transition schemes.

These findings are echoed in a New Zealand-based literature review carried out by McGee et al. (2003), who determined that the majority of New Zealand secondary schools handle transitions well and have processes in place to support transition, including open evenings, school visits, orientation and peer support, but also noted that there was not consistent liaison between teachers of contributing and receiving schools and that this was a challenge which needed addressing.

The Ministry of Education (2010) study outlined earlier showed there were positive aspects around transition as reported by the students, including personal and social growth. As well, however, these study findings revealed “a steady decline (from Year 8 to Year 10) in positive attitudes to subjects and a simultaneous drop in the extent to which students overall engaged in their learning” (p. 89).

The Ministry of Education (2010) went on to discuss the importance of knowing individual student characteristics for better understanding the individual needs of transitioning students and that:

in order to provide students with the best possible support at times of potential added pressure, teachers should know students well, and have

access to up to date information concerning their learning and achievement and what is going on in their lives more generally (p. 15).

It was suggested that teachers develop strategies to facilitate this, such as asking students to write about themselves and their goals and desires, incorporate student interests into teaching and learning programmes, identify ways to keep up with changes in the lives of individual students in order to support better learning outcomes, and for teachers (both current and former) to actively share their knowledge and understandings of students with each other.

This sharing of data is of international interest, with a 2009 Canadian report illustrating the benefits of sharing longitudinal student-level data between schools from Kindergarten through to Grade 12, as a means to provide information on learning pathways and to understand and improve educational systems (Educational Policy Institute Council of Ministers of Education Statistics Canada, 2009). A recent 2017 report from the European Commission concluded that a holistic understanding of learners is necessary and that “relevant learner data should be shared between institutions in both directions, as part of an ongoing dialogue to ensure continuity and progression in learning” (ET2020 Working Group Schools 2016-18, 2017, p. 27). This report also recommended that targeted support is offered to vulnerable learners; pupils and families should be participants in decision-making processes; and collaboration and engagement between schools should be supported at a systemic level to bridge transition processes.

Of further consideration is teacher pedagogy and professional understanding in terms of providing for different learning styles, student needs (learning/social/emotional/behavioural); catering for diversity and inclusion; differing cultures, languages and identities; and actively engaging in teacher-student and teacher-family/whanau relationships. Finally, it is essential to consider the development of pedagogical understandings of the impact and influence of school transition and how this is addressed in individual schools and Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, and Fung (2008) contend it is vital that the processes and procedures in place and any changes made to teaching practices, are underpinned by theoretical knowledge and research.

Relationships

One of the repeating themes in the literature reviewed was the importance of relationships – those between schools, between students, between students and teachers and those between schools and family / whānau – and their effect on the transition process. The research carried out in New Zealand around the transition process has particularly focused on the ECE to primary transition and the Year 8 to Year 9 transition period.

As stated by ERO (2012), the transition process is more complex than just developing orientation processes and “relationships with and between teachers and students are critical in the transition process. Relationships and communication with parents, whānau and ‘aiga, and groups within the community are also important during transition” (p. 15).

Symonds and Hargreaves (2016) conducted a one-year, qualitative study on students who were transferring to a secondary school in the UK. Their findings suggested that “relationships with teachers and peers were the key determinant of emotional engagement and disengagement independent of transition” (p. 80). The longitudinal study carried out by Barber and Olsen (2004) discussed earlier in this chapter also contended that the teacher-student connection was vital and that “it was clear that the degree to which students felt supported by their teachers was most consistently predictive of their reported functioning, inside and outside of school” (p. 27). Despite the differences in geographical location, study design and age of the students, the common theme of relationships and connections still emerged.

In terms of school-to-school and school-to-family relationships within New Zealand, it is concerning to note that transitions from wharekura to receiving schools may not be as well-handled as those from mainstream schools, with the NZCER survey titled *Primary and Intermediate/Middle Schools in 2013* (Wylie & Bonne, 2014) stating –

Eighty-seven percent of principals said they worked closely with local intermediate/middle or secondary schools to ensure good transitions for their students with special education needs, and 80 percent did so for their general student population. But, again, the picture was different in relation

to transition from bilingual provision to secondary schools or *wharekura*: schools with such provision were in the minority. Only 11 percent of principals said they worked closely to ensure a good transition for *tamariki* from the school's bilingual units or classes, and 13 percent said they did not. Two percent of principals said they worked closely with local *wharekura* to ensure a good transition from their school's bilingual provision, and 11 percent said they did not. (p. 12).

Mackenzie et al. (2012) acknowledge that whilst some positive transition experiences can be attributed to external factors such as having a supportive home environment and a strong peer network, problematic aspects such as the differences between school environments in terms of increased size, different teaching styles or focus and individual school organisation suggest that these differences should be addressed. In their research on the transition from ECE to primary school, Hohepa and Paki (2017), Hohepa et al. (2017); Peters, Paki, and Davis (2015) ascertained that close connections are essential – those with home, with schools and between schools – in order to support students transitioning from a Māori medium setting to an English medium school or a Māori-medium school. To support this process, the authors maintain that teachers require a deeper understanding of traditional Māori cultural values and knowledge, an engagement with the values and practices of the student's cultural context and also need to provide continuity of language and culture.

As Hill (2016) states, students in a Māori-medium setting are immersed within Māori culture and structure, where concepts such as *whānau* (family), *wairua* (spirituality) and *manaakitanga* (caring) are paramount. However English-medium settings tend to emphasis success and achievement of the individual rather than the *whānau*. This poses a challenge for those New Zealand educators who are not familiar with Māori cultural understandings or where schools operate within a different environment, identity, context and cultural make-up and may account for the poorer handling of the (sometimes two-directional) transition from *wharekura* to mainstream English-medium schools noted earlier.

Whatever the reasons, the findings from Hohepa and Paki (2017), Hill (2016) and Wylie and Bonne (2014) suggest a continuing need for research around why

transitions from wharekura to English-medium settings are apparently not as well managed or actively sought, particularly when considering issues of diversity and inclusion and educator responsibilities under the Treaty of Waitangi as discussed later in this chapter.

Diversity & Inclusion

Globally, diversity and inclusion are of crucial importance when developing educational pedagogical approaches, from ‘ground-floor’ classroom level and extending out to encompass teacher networks, children, parents, communities and on to ministerial and policy level.

In New Zealand, Māori people hold specific consideration as partners in our national founding document, *The Treaty of Waitangi*. School leaders are required to consider and uphold the rights and needs of these people as a paramount consideration and there is a large body of ongoing research as to how Māori are best supported to enjoy success as Māori (Bishop, 2003; Cavanagh, Macfarlane, Glynn, & Macfarlane, 2012; Hohepa & Robson, 2008; Macfarlane, Glynn, Cavanagh, & Bateman, 2007).

Māori students are over-represented in data on students who make poor or unsuccessful transitions, in terms of their academic achievement and progress, emotional well-being and engagement (Education Review Office, 2012; Gluckman & Hayne, 2011). As discussed earlier, Hohepa and Paki (2017) agree that close connections are essential in supporting students transitioning from a Māori medium setting to an English medium school. Furthermore, the authors claim that “a successful transition for a child moving from Māori medium early childhood educational settings to school settings is measured by the child’s ability to maintain connections to their cultural history into the future” (p. 98).

This is an interesting view, as much is made of the academic disparities between Māori and non-Māori and educators are continuously exhorted by the Ministry of Education to raise the academic achievement of Māori, to the exclusion of recognising and valuing other areas of strength, skill and knowledge. Dockett et al. (2017) assert that the emphasis needs to shift from measuring the ‘gap’ using

Westernised assessments and move to “recognising, celebrating and enhancing the strengths these children have” (p. 280), whilst Hood (2015) also supports this notion with his statement that “schooling should be future orientated ...young people should not be judged on just their ‘academic’ ability but also on those other attributes we all recognise as being critical to their future successes” (p. 178).

This reasoning on valuing other areas could also be extended to all students across all schools, because beyond the issues and concerns specific to Māori, the diversity of students and teachers within a school context is also comprised of a variety of other ethnic backgrounds, cultural and religious beliefs and socio-economic differences and this all needs to be considered as well, in terms of how schools interact with their students and their communities.

Wyn and Dwyer (2000) state that,

As young people struggle to balance the multiple and often conflicting demands on them, it is time for education to focus more directly on their needs. Mental health, well-being, [and] identity construction are now part of the ‘core business’ of schools. Young people need to find that schools are as concerned about their living skills, capacities to understand complexity and manage personal relationships as they are about numeracy and literacy. (p. 158)

Developing an inclusive school culture that supports this sense of well-being for all students from these diverse contexts is fundamental to positively supporting transition. This could well be the key to supporting our vulnerable learners in particular.

Summary

The literature reviewed in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 illustrates a gap in research on transition between primary and intermediate/middle schools and within this gap, recurring themes surface which require further research and investigation.

Communication – investigate the importance of connections between schools to decide what student data and information is important; delineate responsibilities for

transition support; work collaboratively to develop transition processes; and establish connected learning pathways between institutions.

Teacher pedagogy –investigate ways to improve teacher pedagogy in terms of catering for different learning styles and needs; diversity and inclusion; and understandings around the impacts and effects of the school transition process.

Relationships – investigate the importance of ongoing development and understanding of relationships between schools; between teachers and students; between students and students; and between teachers and family/whanau in order to provide support and stability to transitioning students.

Vulnerable Learners – clarify what constitutes a ‘vulnerable’ or ‘at risk’ student; address the lack of targeted support and approaches; and investigate the need for continuity and communications between institutions to support these students.

Diversity and Inclusion – develop inclusive school cultures that support a sense of well-being for all students from diverse contexts, which is identified as being fundamental to positively supporting the transition process.

This review of literature provided parameters for the aim of the research question in this study, as outlined below.

Research Question

This project centres on researching the effectiveness of the transition process for vulnerable Year 6 students with learning, behavioural, emotional or social needs, who would not otherwise receive external support. It aims to discover what data on these vulnerable students is recorded, how it is utilised when transitioning students between schools, how it is disseminated by receiving schools and in what ways it is useful in supporting students.

Therefore, my guiding research question is in three parts:

- What informal information is passed on for vulnerable Year 6 learners when transitioning from primary schools to receiving schools?

- In what ways do receiving schools utilise informal information to support transitioning vulnerable learners?
- What transitional information would receiving schools like to be given?

Conclusion

Every academic year for every educational institute begins with a body of students transitioning into the school and ends with a body of students transitioning out of the school. It has been identified that for intermediate schools in particular, this is a pertinent issue due to the nature of these schools catering for two years of student enrolment. This means that every year sees one half of the entire student body beginning at the school and the other half leaving the school.

Evidence-based research recognises the transition process as a possible risk factor for all students, but such risk appears to be more so for vulnerable learners. Teachers and leaders in schools must understand the process and challenges of transition and work together to develop systems, strategies and procedures that support the students and provide a stable transition pathway. Relationships between teachers, students and their families have been identified as being pivotal along with relationships between schools. Furthermore, teacher pedagogy needs to continue to be developed in order to address understandings of what ‘transition’ is; what constitutes a ‘vulnerable’ learner; the need to understand, cater for and meet the needs of all students in terms of diversity and inclusion; and a combined understanding of what comprises ‘student data’ that is appropriate and useful to gather and how to improve the consistency with which this data is gathered and passed on.

Chapter Three aims to explain the theoretical framework, paradigm and research methodology used to guide this study. It outlines the methods used and discusses the rationale for choosing a mixed methods pragmatist approach in relation to relevant literature, along with issues of reliability, validity and ethical considerations.

Chapter 3 – Method

Data is not about adding more to your plate. Data is about making sure you have the right things on your plate.

Unknown

Introduction

Chapter Two reviewed literature and research regarding transition in New Zealand and around the world. It ascertained a research gap in the area of transition for Year 6 primary students moving to Year 7 intermediate/middle schools and outlined the challenges around teacher pedagogy, relationships, vulnerable learners, diversity and inclusion and between-school communication such as the transfer of student data. This research gap specifically recognised the discrepancies around what comprises ‘student data’ alongside the lack of consistency in terms of gathering and utilising appropriate data for vulnerable students.

Chapter Three describes research methodology used to guide this research. It begins with an outline of the theoretical framework and paradigm of pragmatism that underpins this study before discussing the rationale for choosing a mixed methods approach. The two data collection methods utilised – semi-structured interviews and surveys - are discussed in relation to relevant literature. The key issues associated with setting, sample selection and participants are explained and the strategies used to analyse the data are identified and discussed. Reliability, validity and trustworthiness is discussed within the context of the methods selected and triangulation of data is described. Lastly, ethical issues are considered in regard to the contexts of the specific schools and participants involved in this research.

Theoretical Framework

As discussed in Chapter 2, this study is situated in the theory of pragmatism and any research project must reflect the paradigms and theories that underpin the context for the research.

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) note research is guided by the researcher's set of beliefs and understandings about how the world should be understood and studied. The authors provide an apt visual description of paradigms as being a 'net' that contains a researcher's epistemological, ontological, axiological, rhetorical and methodological premises upon which they will base their research design and conclusions.

Research approaches have traditionally fallen into one of two broad areas – quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative research generally utilises traditional, positivist, experimental or empiricist approaches, whilst qualitative research generally utilises constructivist, naturalistic, postpositivist or postmodern perspectives. In the 1960's, these research approaches began to expand to also include mixed methods, which utilises gathering of both quantitative and qualitative data within the same study (Creswell, 2009).

These research approaches are further based upon ontological, epistemological, axiological, rhetorical and methodological understandings and approaches, as briefly overviewed in the following sections.

Ontology

Ontology is made up of the theories about 'what there is in the world', the view people have of the world and where they place themselves in it (Clark, 1997; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2013; Creswell, 1994, 2009; Gray, 2013). At one end of the continuum is the objectivist position of 'realism', that phenomena are "external, objective and independent of social actors" (Wahyuni, 2012, p. 70) – that there is a single truth and that facts can be revealed. At the other end of the continuum is the subjective position of 'nominalism', that there is no single truth and that facts are all created by humans so that "abstract concepts such as justice, virtue, nothingness

etc. are simply convenient labels or names which do not refer to real entities” (Vogt & Johnson, 2015, Nominalism, para.1)

This research study recognises the nominalist view that reality is constantly renegotiated, debated and interpreted depending on the situation in which it occurs (Creswell & Clark, 2016). Because the transition process for students is experienced in a number of different ways, then the experiences, views and responses to transition will differ from person to person. The nominalist view recognises that individual teachers create their own positive or negative feelings about student transitions based on their personal experiences and interpretations of current practice. Therefore, nominalism aligns with the research goal to explore and understand the process of transition for vulnerable students from the individual, subjective viewpoint of teachers.

Epistemology

Epistemology is described by Crotty (1998) as a way of “understanding and explaining how we know what we know” (p. 3). Essentially, it is comprised of the theories about our ‘knowledge of what there is in the world’ and what the source of our knowledge is, i.e. thoughts, experiences, intuition etc. Are our descriptions and knowledge claims objectively true or are they relative dependent on the social or cultural groups that the claims stem from? (Clark, 1997; Egbert & Sanden, 2013). There are a range of epistemologies, but two general and contrasting positions are of objectivism and constructionism.

According to Crotty (1998), objectivism is based on the ontological view that the world exists just as it is and is independent of consciousness and experience, whilst constructionism is based on the view that meaning emerges from our experiences with the world and is ‘socially constructed’ as people engage with others. The objectivist view means that researchers would treat knowledge as being concrete and tangible and research would usually be quantitative in nature and involve examining and measuring the relationship among pre-selected variables. Researchers operating from a constructionist view would generally use qualitative methodology and treat knowledge as something to be interpreted and used to discover the underlying meaning of events and activities.

Pragmatism lies somewhere in the middle and is the underlying paradigm of this study. It is based on the ontological view of nominalism and the epistemological view that the best research methodology is the one that solves problems. Researchers operating from this premise would utilise the methodology that allows them to ‘find out the answer’ so often use a mixed-methods approach with the concept of ‘change’ being the underlying aim of the research (Creswell & Clark, 2016; Onwuegbuzie, 2002).

Methodology

Methodology considers the way in which the research is carried out and is guided by the paradigm the research is situated within. Methodology can be deductive, based on cause-and-effect, survey or experimental research and be context free, which is usually associated with paradigms that align with quantitative studies. Alternatively, methodology can be inductive, utilise interventions, phenomenological research or grounded theory and be context specific. Studies utilising a combination of methods as appropriate to the research question being studied may use action research, design based research or the mixed methods approach (Cohen et al., 2013; Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Clark, 2016; Punch & Oancea, 2014).

This study operates within the ontological position of nominalism with a pragmatic epistemological view. It utilises inductive methodology and acknowledges that this research is not value-free as there are certainly elements of both objective and subjective findings and viewpoints which contribute to the informal rhetorical assumptions that develop from these. Because the transition process for students is experienced in a number of different ways, then the experiences, views and responses to transition will differ from person to person. This research recognises that individual teachers create their own positive or negative feelings about student transitions based on their personal experiences and interpretations of current practice. Nevertheless, this approach does align with the research goal to explore and understand the process of transition for vulnerable students from the individual, subjective viewpoint of teachers.

Research paradigm

In order to ascertain which paradigm is appropriate to use for a research study, the researcher needs to consider their own ontological and epistemological views. They need to account for their own beliefs and values, experiences and influences and the possible effects of these on research. The paradigms and the appropriateness or otherwise of an associated method use within research have long been debated (Cameron, 2011; Creswell & Clark, 2016; Green et al., 2015; Wahyuni, 2012), however it is pragmatism as a paradigm that underpins the theoretical basis of this research.

Pragmatism as a Paradigm

Pragmatism as a theory was discussed in Chapter 2, but simply put, pragmatists recognise that social, cultural, psychological and social factors all converge to shape an individual's understanding of the world and that researchers should make the most efficient use of both quantitative and qualitative approaches in order to answer research questions and to advance knowledge (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013; Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Wahyuni, 2012).

Using the pragmatic approach in this research provided insights into understanding the transition experiences for vulnerable learners through the view of educators, who are both participants and observers of the experience. The aim is to recognise and understand what data is gathered and transmitted to aid the transition process, whether educators responsible for the transition process felt that the data was supporting vulnerable students and to what extent the data is useful and is utilised. Both the quantitative method of surveying as well as the qualitative method of semi-structured interviews were utilised in keeping with the mixed-methods methodology of the pragmatic paradigm underpinning this study. These methods are discussed more fully in the following sections.

Data Collection Methods

Most research questions in education fall into three categories – description, cause, or process/mechanism, with each category being scientific but requiring different

methodologies and methods (Odom et al., 2005). The methods used reflect either a quantitative, qualitative or mixed-methods approach.

Quantitative research is considered by Keele (2012) to be a formal, objective, deductive approach to problem solving. Creswell and Clark (2016); and Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) explain this approach by providing a comprehensive overview of research methods. In an early publication, Creswell (1994) gives a full description and suggests that quantitative research is “an inquiry into a social or human problem, based on testing a theory composed of variables, measured with numbers, and analysed with statistical procedures, in order to determine whether the predictive generalisations of the theory hold true” (p. 2).

Qualitative research is considered by Keele (2012) to be a more informal, subjective, inductive approach to problem solving. Again Creswell (1994) provides a fuller description and suggests that qualitative research is “an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, human picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting” (pp. 1-2).

Mixed methods research is a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods. The gathering of quantitative data allows the researcher to analyse facts and figures, whilst gathering qualitative data allows “a holistic perspective within [an] explained context” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2013, p. 4). Trahan and Stewart (2013) found that “narratives, images, texts, and other forms of qualitative data can lend meaning to often unintelligible numerical data used in quantitative research. Conversely, quantitative findings can give precision to qualitative data” (p. 61). This is further supported by Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) who note that whilst qualitative understandings are most often used to expand upon quantitative data, quantitative data can also utilise the numerical data obtained in a way which supports or expands upon qualitative data and effectively deepens the description of findings.

Like any approach, mixed methods research has its own advantages and disadvantages and Table 1 outlines the strengths and weaknesses of the pragmatic mixed methods paradigm as established by Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004).

Table 1

Strengths and weaknesses of pragmatic mixed methods paradigm approach
 (adapted from Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 21)

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Words, pictures, and narrative can be used to add meaning to numbers . • Numbers can be used to add precision to words, pictures, and narrative. • Can provide quantitative and qualitative research strengths of each approach – which may also overcome the weaknesses inherent in the opposing method • Researcher can generate and test a grounded theory. • Can answer a broader and more complete range of research questions because the researcher is not confined to a single method or approach. • Can provide stronger evidence for a conclusion through convergence and corroboration of findings. • Can add insights and understanding that might be missed when only a single method is used. • Can be used to increase the generalisability of the results. • Qualitative and quantitative research used together produce more complete knowledge necessary to inform theory and practice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be difficult for a single researcher to carry out both qualitative and quantitative research, especially if two or more approaches are expected to be used concurrently; it may require a research team. • Researcher has to learn about multiple methods and approaches and understand how to mix them appropriately. • Methodological purists contend that one should always work within either a qualitative or a quantitative paradigm. • More expensive. • More time consuming. • Some of the details of mixed research remain to be worked out fully by research methodologists (e.g., problems of paradigm mixing, how to qualitatively analyse quantitative data, how to interpret conflicting results).

The goal of this research study was to understand how data is utilised and transmitted during the student transition experience from the viewpoint of teachers, in finding “meaning and understand the subjective experience of the study participants” (Keele, 2012, p. 51). A mixed methods approach appropriately utilises the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research. This approach, affirms Labaree (2003) is “well suited to the socially complex, variable-rich and context specific character of education” (p. 14).

Evidence in research

The purpose of research methodology is to generate evidence. Evidence is considered to be the information gathered which is used to answer a question, it might prove, disprove or provide context and understanding around a research

question but in essence, is a way of coming to know something about ourselves or our world (Bouma, 1997; Keele, 2012). Evidence needs to be independently observed and verified. This does not necessarily mean that one research design or source of evidence is of a higher value than another is, but instead highlights the importance of scrutinising evidence and of critical peer review (Davies & Hunt, 2000).

Donaldson, Christie, and Mark (2009) assert that qualities of good evidence include “relevance, coherence, verisimilitude, justifiability, and contextuality” (p. 16) whilst other researchers rightly point out the concerns around the possibility of selective reporting, distortion of findings and ability to cross-check information (Eisenhart, 2006) and that studies of single events can be difficult to generalise to other settings (Bell, 2014). Rycroft-Malone et al. (2004) add to this with their statement that “research evidence tends to be perceived as providing watertight answers to the questions posed...however such evidence rarely attains absolute certainty and may be changed as new research emerges” (p. 83).

The evidence gathered in this research certainly provides relevance and contextuality to the process of transition, although it could reasonably be argued that the interviews are relevant only to the local context in which they are carried out, or that the sample of national responses is not fully representative of the national population of primary and intermediate/middle teachers.

Johnson and Christensen (2008) assert that evidence in itself is not ‘proof’; it is considered instead as examples and instances that either do or do not fit the claims being made. The authors further contend that a cardinal rule in educational research is to provide “multiple sources of evidence [to enable the production of] research reports that are convincing, defensible and will be taken seriously” (p. 202). It is important to note that the findings in this research do not claim to be ‘proof’ or representative of all New Zealand primary to intermediate/middle school transition experiences – they are intended as a place from which to develop knowledge and practical approaches to changing current transition practice.

On this basis then, the material gathered for this research project - which included survey responses, semi-structured interview responses and documentation provided by individual schools that pertained to the process and policy of student transition

– can be considered multiple sources of evidence. Correlations or corroborations between the two evidence sources is discussed further in Chapter 4 – Findings.

Interviews

Shenton (2004) makes the general statement that research should reflect a random sample of data so that multiple voices “exhibiting characteristics of similarity, dissimilarity, redundancy and variety” (p. 65) are represented. However deciding on the ‘right’ number of participants for interviews is not straightforward and recommendations as to ideal numbers vary greatly, although there seems to be general agreement that the number of participants for interviews really depends upon the type and size of the study and the nature of the phenomenon to be researched (Brenner, Green, & Camilli, 2006; Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009; Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

The basic premise is that the number of qualitative interviews must be enough to uncover most or all of the perceptions, but to be aware that conducting too many interviews can result in data becoming repetitive or superfluous. Guest et al. (2006) found that “data saturation occurred within the first twelve interviews, although basic elements for meta-themes were present as early as six interviews”. Fusch and Ness (2015) add to this with their suggestion that data saturation is not decided solely on the quantity of the data, but on the quality of the data, with the ‘richness’ of the data being more valuable in achieving credible research findings.

Interviews are typically either structured, unstructured or semi-structured in nature. Structured interviews ask participants the same questions, in the same order and the interviewer gives the same set of responses. Unstructured interviews have no predetermined script or questions and the intent is to understand the views of the interviewee. Semi-structured interviews have a guiding set of questions but the interviewer is allowed to be more flexible in their responses and to follow a line of questioning or ask additional supporting questions to gather deeper understanding (Green et al., 2015; Menter, Elliot, Hulme, Lewin, & Lowden, 2011).

Essentially, semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to gain further information on variables inherent in personal experiences. They allow the exploration of new issues that may not have been considered previously and for the researcher to be more instinctive in the process, so that the interview is

conversational (Cousin, 2009; Doody & Noonan, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2014). The researcher is still guided by the set of questions and the purpose of the research, which ensures that similar data is collected from each participant and allows some level of standardisation of data (Doody & Noonan, 2013; Menter et al., 2011).

This semi-structured interview approach was appropriate to this research because it acknowledged people's experiences based over a specific period of time (Bouma, 1997) with a focus on 'how' and 'why' rather than 'when' or 'how many' (Atkins, 2012). In this study, teachers are the observers of what the experience of transition is like for these vulnerable learners. As Ritchie and Lewis (2013) note, qualitative research places "emphasis and value on the human, interpretative aspects of knowing about the social world and the significance of the investigator's own interpretations and understanding of the phenomenon being studied" (p. 7).

Interviews are a way to gain useful information where participants may lack motivation or ability for completing questionnaires; allows participants to express their personal views in their own language or to seek clarification of questions; and are a way to gather detailed, contextual answers which provide greater understanding around a topic (Edwards & Holland, 2013; Punch & Oancea, 2014). However these authors also reflect that interviews can be time consuming and that in order to ensure valid data, researchers have to compare a range of interviewee accounts and triangulate with other data such as observation or documentary analysis. Menter et al. (2011) and Bell (2014) then provide the caveat that participants who indicate they are willing to be involved in a semi-structured interview are effectively self-selecting, which means they are not a random sample and are not necessarily reflective of the group as a whole.

The content, course or outcome of an interview cannot be pre-determined (Doody & Noonan, 2013) and Denzin and Lincoln (2011) state that the difficulty with interviewing lies in finding a balance between the more positivist-based testing of a proposed hypothesis, and the phenomenological expectation that a researcher seeks to understand without imposing views or trying to 'prove' the hypothesis to be correct.

Other difficulties considered in this study was the interviewer's need to be actively listening, responsive to new ideas, aware of when to probe for more elaboration, of language differences or non-verbal cues and of assuming shared understandings and of unintentional influence on interviewees through non-verbal expression or tone of voice which could influence responses (Brenner et al., 2006; Menter et al., 2011). Green et al. (2015) further remind us that the questions asked have a direct effect on the usability of the data received and the ability to effectively code the data in order to corroborate or correlate it with the findings from the survey analysis.

One of the key criticisms of the interview method is that they lack rigour and allow researchers to make claims based on impressions rather than evidence (Atkins, 2012). Therefore, it was necessary to think carefully about the structure of the questions; these needed to be short and clear questions but open, allowing the participants to respond in detail about their specific views of the transition process.

This issue of establishing credibility around findings is alleviated somewhat in this research study by addressing the issues outlined above, as well as using questionnaires alongside semi-structured interviews; providing sources of evidence that can be triangulated (Yin, 2013); using literature review to inform research; identifying research findings that have both similar and rival interpretations; and also acknowledging the possible effects that one's own values and preconceptions may have on interpreting the findings (Atkins, 2012).

Surveys

Surveys are another means of gathering data and are widely used as a cost-effective way to access large numbers of respondents at one time that are representative of populations of interest. They can be exploratory in design, i.e. used to explore relationships and patterns; or confirmatory in design and used to test a hypothesis or relationship. Surveys can be descriptive and describe data that arise from the variables or can be analytic and seek explanatory variables that influence dependent variables (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011).

Surveys have advantages in that they are a way to gain large amounts of data; the standardised questions provide focus; open-ended questions allow respondents to answer using their own words whilst closed questions are quick to analyse and provide boundaries; are relatively easy to administer (although not necessarily easy

to design) and it is possible to use statistical techniques to look at validity, reliability etc. (Cohen et al., 2011; Green et al., 2015; Menter et al., 2011).

Disadvantages include the need for questions to be carefully designed to elicit the information required; they are dependent on the motivation, honesty and memory of the respondents to get accurate data and answers cannot be followed up as they are in an interview process (Fowler, 1998; Green et al., 2015; Menter et al., 2011). The survey respondents in this particular research study needed internet access and to be able to read and respond in English. Furthermore, the sample population is likely to be comprised of those who have a particular interest in transitions, so again, some bias needs to be accounted for.

A simple survey offers the same questions in a sequential manner, in the same order to every respondent. A more complex questionnaire can be constructed so that the questions shown are specific and logically connected to the respondent's previous answer. For example, in this research study, respondents were directed to a set of questions that were contingent on their response to the level of institution in which they teach (i.e. primary or intermediate/middle school). This allowed the questions to be worded so that they were specific to the teacher's environmental work context.

Research Design

This mixed methods study utilised both quantitative and qualitative data and was designed to address the research questions around the effectiveness of the transition process. It aimed to discover what data on vulnerable students is recorded, how this data is utilised when transitioning students, how it is disseminated by receiving schools and in what ways it is useful in supporting students.

A convergent parallel mixed methods design was used, whereby both qualitative and quantitative data are collected at the same time (i.e. in parallel) as outlined in Figure 3. The data from each method was analysed separately before cross-referencing each analysis to look for convergence, correlation and/or corroboration. The analyses are merged in order to make interpretations and present research findings. In this study, survey data gathered information on the type of student data that is disseminated or received, its intended and actual use, and to gather opinion

as to the effectiveness or otherwise of the student transition process. The semi-structured interviews explored the observations and beliefs of teachers who are active participants and observers of the student transition process.

Mixed Methods - Convergent Parallel Design

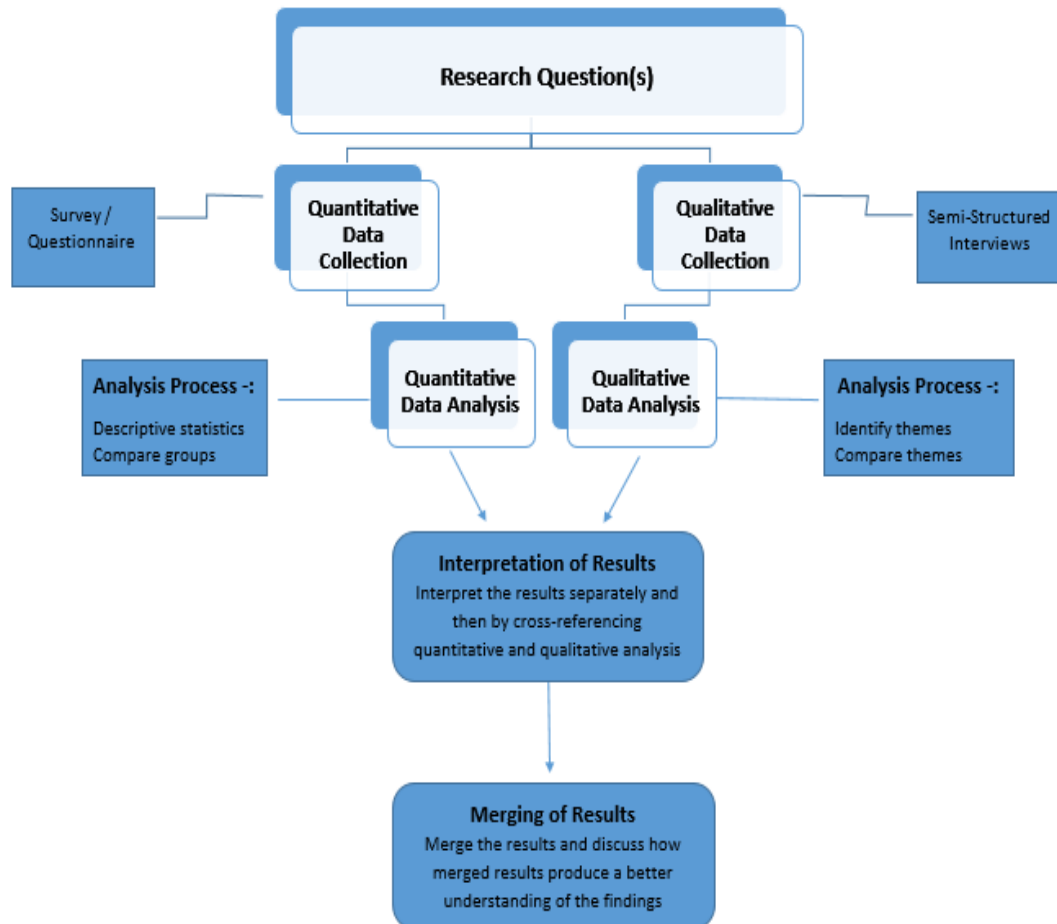


Figure 3. Mixed methods - Convergent Parallel Design. Adapted from Creswell and Clark (2016).

The reason for collecting both quantitative and qualitative data was to apply the strengths of each approach in order to provide a broader and deeper understanding of the research topic. The strength of this framework was that the qualitative material was used to analyse the quantitative material in more depth and vice versa. The discussion section balances qualitative quotes that support or negate the quantitative findings (Creswell, 2009) whilst the quantitative data add numerical support to qualitative findings.

Using more than one method of data collection meant that findings could be cross-checked to compare, link and triangulate the evidence (Green et al., 2015; Yin, 2013). As contended by Atkins (2012); Creswell (2009); and Green et al. (2015), corroboration between evidence types engenders more confidence in the trustworthiness of the methods used and the reliability and validity of the findings, which ensures rigorous and meaningful analysis.

Setting

This research involved two surveys which had the same questions (see Appendix A) and interviews with five school leaders (see Appendix B). The first survey was made available nationally and promoted via three different Facebook pages – NZ Teachers (Primary), NZ Teachers (Yr 7/8) and NZ Teachers (SENCO). The second survey was specifically targeted at teachers in eight schools that had combined as part of a Community of Learning/Kāhui Ako, as well as two other intermediate/middle schools who were alternative receiving schools in the local area.

Originally, ten schools from the same Kahui Ako were invited to participate in interviews for this study as these schools already have established relations in terms of being either the feeder or receiver schools for each other. Of these schools, three are intermediate/middle schools, one is a special character full primary school and the remaining six are contributing primary schools. Two of the middle schools were unable to participate in the interview research due to an already overloaded work schedule. The full primary decided that as the majority of their students transition at the end of Year 8 rather than Year 6, their context was not entirely appropriate to the research question being studied. Three of the primary schools did not respond at all to the research invitation and it is assumed that they were also unable to participate. In order to gain a more balanced perspective from intermediate/middle schools, an additional intermediate school was identified and invited to participate.

The final five participants in the interview research were one middle school, one intermediate school and three primary schools. However the online survey was still made available to all eleven schools, regardless of whether they had agreed to an interview or not.

Procedure

Following ethics approval, the survey questions were reviewed, finalised and then made available via the online website, Survey Monkey. Participants in the online survey were presented with an information sheet at the beginning of the survey which outlined the purpose and ethical approval of the research and at completion of the survey were asked to give final consent (see Appendices C-E).

Invited school principals were provided with information packs for their staff and Board of Trustees, as well as letters of invitation for the school leaders responsible for transitions to participate in an interview (see Appendices F-J). Responses were received throughout the months of September and October 2017 and the school leaders who consented to participate (see Appendix K) were contacted.

Questions were provided to the participants prior to the interview (see Appendix B) and 25-30 minute interviews were conducted at a place and time that suited the participants and supported an effective collection of data. The interviews were recorded and notes were taken during the interview that the researcher recognised as reflecting the key thoughts and opinions of the interviewees. Data collected from these interviews was transcribed and transcripts of each of the school leader's interviews was made available to the participants for verification.

The transcripts and survey results were coded and an analysis of both the interview and survey data was undertaken using a grounded theory approach, as discussed later in this chapter.

Supporting Documentation

The schools provided documentation that related to their transition processes, such as policy and procedures, transition forms and samples of Student Management System records. This was useful in further analysing the findings from the study.

Survey Participants

The national survey encompassed the views of 108 respondents in total. Of these, 45 identified as teaching in Auckland, 10 identified as teaching in Waikato and a further 10 identified as teaching in Taranaki. The remaining respondents were fairly evenly spread across other areas in New Zealand. The overall majority of respondents were classroom teachers (89/108 or 82%), whilst out of 108 total

respondents, 66 of these were based in primary schools and 42 of these were based in intermediate or middle schools.

The localised Kahui Ako survey encompassed the views of 22 respondents in total. The overall majority of respondents were classroom teachers (13/22 or 59%), whilst out of 22 total respondents, 6 were based in primary schools and 16 of these were based in intermediate or middle schools.

Interview Participants

The interview participants in the research were the five school leaders – one from each school - who self-identified as being responsible for transition of Year 6 students into Year 7 within those schools. Each of the participants are briefly introduced below and have been given a participant code, which they are referred to as throughout this and the following chapters:

- Participant One (P1TDPP): is an experienced teacher, is currently teaching Year 6 students and has additional Deputy Principal responsibilities.
- Participant Two (P2TDPP): is an experienced teacher and is currently teaching Year 6 students and has additional Deputy Principal responsibilities.
- Participant Three (P3TDPP): is an experienced teacher and is currently teaching Year 6 students and has additional Deputy Principal responsibilities.
- Participant Four (P4DPM): is an experienced teacher and is currently one of the Deputy Principals at a middle school.
- Participant Five (P5PI): is an experienced teacher and is currently the Principal of an intermediate school.

Data Analysis

Two initial aspects involved analysing the quantitative survey data and the qualitative interview data separately, before cross-referencing the two types of data to establish themes as appropriate to the Convergent Parallel Design (Creswell & Clark, 2016).

A pre-analysis was needed in sorting and organising material, ensuring notes were complete, survey data numerically analysed and statistical results gathered, interviews transcribed and that all material had been read. This allowed the researcher to firstly, become very familiar with the data available and able to negotiate the material available; secondly, to ensure that the data was organised in such a way that analysis would become easier, and thirdly; to begin to think about emerging patterns and themes.

The researcher then drew on the Grounded Theory inductive approach (Glasser & Strauss, 1967, as cited in Menter et al., 2011). Grounded theory can be considered a nominalist approach in that “people use categories to construct what problems mean to them in their everyday life” (Gibson & Hartman, 2013, p. 58). There is also an emerging body of research supporting the use of grounded theory method and pragmatism and the commonalities they have in “a concern with people’s engagement with the world, reliant on detailed observation and insight, followed by never-ending and iterative efforts to comprehend, persuade, and enhance (Bryant, 2017, p. 346).

In this part of the analysis, both sets of information – quantitative and qualitative – were analysed to look for themes, commonalities and differences, both within each set of data and when compared and contrasted with each other (Ritchie & Lewis, 2013). From here, preliminary codes that distinguished key issues or patterns were developed and then these individual codes were reviewed again, grouped and placed in general thematic categories. Each theme was broken into subsets and examined for reliability and consistency in terms of accuracy of classifying or coding and to ensure that there were clear and identifiable differences between thematic groups.

The next stage involved examining the data within each theme and creating a definition that accurately encompassed the meaning of each theme. The themes were explored to look for understandings, causes and explanations so that data could be presented descriptively in order to look for aspects of endorsement of current transition practice as well as possible recommendations for changes to current practice (Bui, 2014). The results of each method were then integrated and are compared side by side in the findings.

Validity, Reliability and Triangulation

Achieving validity, reliability and reflexivity is paramount in any research endeavour and involves being able to identify and respond to potential influences of planning, conduct, participants, context and writing up of the research; triangulation of findings; challenging researcher claims and interpretations and asking whether the interpretations are a true reflection of the data gathered (Dockett, Einarsdottir, & Perry, 2009; Einarsdóttir, 2007; Fontana & Frey, 2005; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004).

Validity

Validity in quantitative research is well documented and analysed. Essentially there are two key areas of validity in any research, being internal validity and external validity.

Internal validity assesses the clarity of the research question; whether the sampling size is appropriate, how data is collected and analysed, whether the tools or methods used to gather data are appropriate, whether claims are supported by evidence, if data is triangulated, how clear the links are between data, claims and conclusions and whether the completed research is peer-reviewed and contributes anything of value to an existing body of knowledge (Bell, 2014; Briggs, Morrison, & Coleman, 2012; Edwards & Holland, 2013; Leung, 2015). External validity assesses whether the conclusions or findings of the research are reliable and can be generalised to other populations. (Briggs et al., 2012; Leung, 2015; Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006).

Some of the potential issues of validity to consider in this research were sample-size - i.e. 108 teacher responses is not representative of all primary teachers in New Zealand; the online survey tool was potentially a barrier to collecting responses; and questions as to whether my analysis as a novice researcher would be supported by evidence or add anything new to current educational knowledge and understandings.

In quantitative research, validity and reliability would mean being able to replicate the exact processes and results on repeated trials in order to generalise findings, however in qualitative research, this is more difficult to achieve. In fact Cohen,

Manion, and Morrison (2007) suggest the notion of ‘validity’ should be replaced with that of ‘authenticity’ as “it is the meaning that subjects give to the data and inferences drawn from the data that are important” (p. 134) and Guba and Lincoln (1985, cited in Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006) argue that qualitative validity should instead be measured by credibility, transferability and confirmability.

The qualitative interviews in this study are essentially impossible to replicate as they are reliant on, and subject to so many factors. For example, the results of this research project are subject to the context of the topic, location of interview, power relations between researcher as interviewer and the interviewee, possible researcher bias, language and shared or assumed understandings and the personalities, emotions, values, understandings and meanings of those involved in the interview (Bell, 2014; DeMarrais, 2004; Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

In contrast however, Doody and Noonan (2013) argue that interviews with an open nature encourage depth and vitality, which in turn “increase the validity of the study, by ... collecting rich data for analysis” (p. 30) and Menter et al. (2011) argue that “information gathered is not meant to provide generalisable findings but rather to enhance understanding of social actions and processes” (p. 126).

Issues of validity for the qualitative aspect of this research were addressed. Firstly, the selection of schools was a primary consideration, ensuring that data gathered from schools was directly relevant to the context in which they operated and links in practice could be identified.

Secondly, the difficulties inherent in replicating qualitative interviews meant that selection of interviewees and professional relationships between the researcher and interviewee needed to be carefully considered. It was fundamentally important to ensure that it was the leader responsible for transition who was interviewed, as they are likely to be most knowledgeable about how the systems for transition worked in their school, have a shared understanding of the general process of transition and be able to provide depth to the interview, which in turn provides rich data. Interviewees were also given the opportunity to check and amend transcripts to ensure accuracy.

Reliability

Essentially the test of reliability is whether different researchers using the same methodology would get the same results when measuring the same event and asks questions around the accuracy of the measuring device being used (Bouma, 1997).

Quantitative data can be considered more reliable in terms of other researchers being able to more accurately replicate the study, however the nature of qualitative and mixed methods research means that reliability is based on consistency. Therefore, ensuring reliability in this research project required consistency in the survey questions between the national and local context surveys, as well as consistency across the five school leader interviews in terms of organisation of the interviews, questions asked and similar school contexts in order to assure meaningful and comparable data.

Interviews are certainly a subjective technique and there is always the danger of researcher bias with Campbell and Groundwater-Smith (2007) noting that “in research involving direct interaction with humans, the quality of the research will stand or fall upon the quality of the relationships” (p. 14). Nonetheless, Leung (2015) contends that a margin of variability for results is acceptable, providing that the methodology provides consistently similar results but which may differ in ‘richness and ambience’. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) further suggest that “data quality in mixed research...is determined by the separate strands of quality in the qualitative and quantitative strands: if the qualitative and quantitative data are valid and credible, then the mixed study will have high overall quality” (p. 208). So whilst ensuring validity and reliability in mixed methods research poses difficulties, it is the quality of the data that is paramount.

Triangulation

Triangulation is a powerful way of demonstrating validity and is often used in qualitative research. Simply put, it is the use of multiple types of data collection within the same study, thus providing three (or more) points of data that provide correlation of the same findings (Cohen et al., 2007).

Generalisability is the extent to which it is possible to generalise the findings of the study to broader populations and settings, whereas transferability is the extent to which it is possible to transfer the findings from the specific context of the research

to a new context, in order to provide a framework from which the new setting can be reflected upon and analysed (Blanche, Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006). As this is a mixed methods research project with a large qualitative component, it does not assume that findings are generalisable across the whole population (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) or even across all New Zealand primary and intermediate/middle schools, however the results may be transferable to other school and community contexts that are operating within similar contexts (Green et al., 2015; Shenton, 2004). The focus then, in ensuring validity and reliability, was to also triangulate the data gathered.

In this project, the quantitative data from the two surveys, the qualitative interview data and any individual documentation viewed (including policies and procedures, copies of transition forms and examples of data kept on Student Management Systems) were triangulated against each other. For example, the comparison of emerging themes and recommendations from each set of survey and interview information, as well the documentation viewed, allowed the identification of inconsistencies, conflicts or areas of confirmation, corroboration and correlation. This meant that all types of data were utilised to provide a broader and deeper understanding of the research topic,

Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues within research are certainly complex, Menter et al. (2011) suggests that the “overarching principle ... is to call for as much transparency, clarity and explicitness as is possible” (p. 62). Ethical approval was gained from the Faculty of Education Ethics Committee at Waikato University and ethical issues were considered at all stages of the research process, i.e. before, during and after and included a number of considerations as follows.

Access to participants

The researcher contacted Principals privately and it was their choice to disseminate the requests to their teaching staff and their responsibility to inform their Board of Trustees about the proposed research and request for interviews.

Informed consent

The participants in this project received an information letter and signed a consent form which was written in plain language, detailing the purpose and process of the research and outlined the rights that the participant has (Appendices C-K). Interview participants signed the consent form, whilst survey respondents submitted an electronic consent. Participants were advised of their right to withdraw from the research project at any stage up until the analysis began, to review the information gathered throughout the research process, to check transcripts and make additions or corrections if required. Participants were urged to contact the researcher or her supervisor to address any queries or concerns.

Anonymity/Confidentiality

Throughout the process, no names of schools or participants, were specifically mentioned in the research results or collated data. Whilst locations are limited to a specific area, all efforts were made to ensure that confidentiality was maintained through the use of pseudonyms for individuals and schools and respondents to the survey were not required to give their names. Data was collated and numerically coded and individual identifiable responses were not published or disseminated.

Potential harm to participants

No participant was recruited under duress, coercion or pressure of any sort. Participation was entirely voluntary and the researcher took care that collection and reporting on data would not result in negative perceptions of other participating schools or emotional harm due to the protection of identification not being adequately addressed. No inducements were made to participants other than the fact that their data may help to guide decision-making regarding enrolment and transition decisions in schools.

Use of the information

The information gathered was used in this thesis and participants were advised that the findings of the published study may be disseminated in oral presentations, seminars, conferences or journal articles, but that individual respondents and schools would not be identified in any publication.

Cultural and social considerations

Prior to beginning this research, the social and cultural background of the participants was not known, beyond that they are teachers employed in one of the participating schools. Care was taken to ensure that information and data was presented in a respectful way (from individuals, schools and different groups) and acknowledged intellectual or cultural property, as requested. Care was also taken to ensure that no group was identified in a way that could be perceived as negative.

Access, publication and storage of data or materials produced

Access to the research site was an important aspect of ethical considerations, particularly as the researcher worked within schools. Permission was gained from appropriate 'gatekeepers' such as teachers and principals and the researcher was aware that an ongoing 'duty of care' for the students would always override any research project (Einarsdóttir, 2007; Menter et al., 2011) Data is stored in a secure location. Hard materials are kept on a locked cabinet and digital material is accessible only by password. The final thesis is accessible at the University of Waikato's Digital Repository: Research Commons.

Summary

This research was designed to explore the challenges around gathering and utilisation of data for Year 6 primary students transitioning into Year 7 intermediate or middle schools: specifically to investigate what constitutes 'student data', identify what data should be transmitted, how this is most effectively done and to gather opinion as to whether our vulnerable students are well transitioned during this period. This chapter described the methodological considerations that framed the study and outlined the context and constraints of the research undertaken and explained the mixed method approach which included surveys and interviews. This chapter further considered aspects of research validity, reliability and triangulation as well as possible generalisability of findings.

Ethical issues considered included the wellbeing of the participants in terms of maintaining the good name of the schools and school leaders involved in this research. These issues along with those of informed consent, participant's rights and cultural and social understandings were considered. Rigour in confidentiality

was maintained to ensure protection for all participants and participating schools and to avoid possible inter-school negativity and/or conflict.

The anticipated benefit of this study is that the research findings will inform principals and teachers who are working towards improving and strengthening transition processes and the collection and utilisation of data that supports this process, so that ultimately it is the students who benefit. The findings from the research are considered in the following chapter.

Chapter 4 – Findings

A transition process always requires leaving some old conduct, ways of thinking or of defining oneself. That process of leaving behind things, relations or aspects of oneself, the dying out or loss of interest goes hand in hand with a process of moving towards a new form of acting, defining or sense-meaning.

(Hviid & Zittoun, 2008, p. 126)

Introduction

This research was designed to investigate the challenges around the gathering and utilisation of data for Year 6 primary students transitioning into Year 7 intermediate/middle schools, and specifically investigate what constitutes ‘student data’, identify the challenges around what data should be transmitted, how this is most effectively done and to gather information as to whether our vulnerable students are well transitioned during this period.

A broad range of opinions was gathered through a national survey accessible via three different teacher-focused Facebook pages, a local survey which was relevant to the cluster of schools where interviews were held, and semi-structured interviews with leaders within five schools, three of which are primary schools and two of which are intermediate or middle schools.

Chapter Four focuses on interpreting the gathered data by initially analysing the quantitative results of the tabled survey data before identifying overarching themes that have emerged. The qualitative interview data is analysed to look for common beliefs statements and ideas, which combine to create a second set of overarching themes. Finally, the two sets of data are compared with a view to identifying correlations, corroborations and contradictions within the findings and to identify and collate the common emerging themes.

National and Kahui Ako Survey Findings

The quantitative data in this section came from the completed surveys in the research. The data was analysed using descriptive statistical analysis to collate the results and comments of the participants. Collated responses to the national survey and the localised Kahui Ako survey follow.

Surveys

As described in Chapter 3, the national survey encompassed the views of 108 respondents and 22 respondents in the localised Kahui Ako survey. The following tables establish baseline information around identifying whether data is transmitted to a receiving school, the way in which the data is transmitted or received and what data is collected.

National survey data in Table 2 indicates almost 70% of primary respondents share student data, compared to 55% of intermediate/middle school respondents. There was an interesting comparison to make with the Kahui Ako respondents; with indications that 100% of primary respondents share student data, whilst only 75% of intermediate/middle school respondents receive student data.

Table 2
Individual Student Data Passed On or Received

Answers	National Responses				Kahui Ako Responses			
	Primary		Intermediate/ Middle School		Primary		Intermediate/ Middle School	
Yes	69.70%	46	54.76%	23	100.00%	6	75.00%	12
No	1.52%	1	4.76%	2	0.00%	0	0.00%	0
Sometimes	6.06%	4	16.67%	7	0.00%	0	18.75%	3
Depends on school	16.67%	11	11.90%	5	0.00%	0	0.00%	0
Don't know	4.55%	3	2.38%	1	0.00%	0	6.25%	1

The survey questions included a space for participants to make comments. Comments on this question indicated that receiving of data can be affected by late enrolment of students, primary schools not knowing where to send data to if unaware which school a student has enrolled and intermediate/middle schools not making specific requests for student data.

Respondents in both surveys indicated that data sent is received most often by the Deputy Principal or a Nominated Transition Teacher. Data is primarily passed on in one of two ways; the data is either sent in bulk to the receiving schools or the contributing and receiving schools engage in a face-to-face planning meeting (see Appendix L). Comments indicated that an increasing use of electronic methods, such as Google Docs or Student Management Systems, but that these methods are still in the minority.

The types of data collated and passed on are shown in Table 3. In the national survey, the majority of the data collected by primary schools is academic data (97%) or behavioural data (80%), as well as records of strengths, needs and interests (64%), emotional information (62%) and social information (62%). These findings are supported by similar percentages from intermediate/middle responses when noting the data they are likely to receive. One respondent observed that “in special situations behavioural/social information will be sent through, but generally this is only cursory”.

For the Kahui Ako survey, the majority of the data collected by primary schools is academic data (100%) closely followed by behavioural information (80%), emotional information (83%) or social information (83%). These findings are slightly different for intermediate/middle school responses who indicated the majority of the data collected by primary schools is academic data (100%) and behavioural information (100%), closely followed by social information (88%), records of strengths, needs and interests (81%) and emotional information (69%).

Table 3

Data Transmitted To Receiving Schools

Answers	National Responses				Kahui Ako Responses			
	Primary		Intermediate/ Middle School		Primary		Intermediate/ Middle School	
Academic results	96.97%	64	95.24%	40	100.00%	6	100.00%	16
Behavioural information	80.30%	53	90.48%	38	83.33%	5	100.00%	16
Emotional information	62.12%	41	61.90%	26	83.33%	5	68.75%	11
Social information	62.12%	41	71.43%	30	83.33%	5	87.50%	14
Membership of groups	50.00%	33	30.95%	13	66.67%	4	37.50%	6
Record of strengths/needs	63.64%	42	57.14%	24	66.67%	4	81.25%	13
Previous school reports	25.76%	17	21.43%	9	50.00%	3	12.50%	2
Other	6.06%	4	7.14%	3	0.00%	0	6.25%	1

Table 4 illustrated how data is intended to be utilised by receiving schools. Primary respondents ranked the top four uses as establishing learning needs (73%); class placement (67%); behavioural needs (65%); and emotional needs (52%). Yet the intermediate/middle school respondents ranked the top four as establishing behavioural needs (93%); learning needs (90%); class placement (88%); and social needs (74%).

Primary respondents in the Kahui Ako survey ranked them as establishing class placement (83%); behavioural needs (83%); learning needs (83%); and emotional needs (83%). There was a smaller difference here with intermediate/middle schools having the same ranking for the top three of class placement (100%); behavioural needs (100%) and learning needs (94%); with teacher needs (94%) in fourth place, rather than emotional needs.

Table 4

How Data Is Intended To Be Utilised By Receiving Schools

Answers	National Responses				Kahui Ako Responses			
	Primary		Intermediate/ Middle School		Primary		Intermediate/ Middle School	
Class placement	66.67%	44	88.10%	37	83.33%	5	100.00%	16
Academic achievement	39.39%	26	47.62%	20	50.00%	3	56.25%	9
Learning needs	72.73%	48	90.48%	38	83.33%	5	93.75%	15
Behavioural needs	65.15%	43	92.86%	39	83.33%	5	100.00%	16
Emotional needs	51.52%	34	71.43%	30	83.33%	5	62.50%	10
Social needs	45.45%	30	73.81%	31	66.67%	4	56.25%	9
Teacher needs	30.30%	20	64.29%	27	66.67%	4	93.75%	15
Teacher interests	25.76%	17	47.62%	20	66.67%	4	75.00%	12
Student interests	22.73%	15	26.19%	11	50.00%	3	25.00%	4
Don't know	16.67%	11	4.76%	2	16.67%	1	0.00%	0

The focus on gathering academic data evident in Table 3 was interesting to note, as Table 4 illustrated lower confidence that the data would actually be utilised for noting academic achievement. 40% of primary and 48% of intermediate/middle school national survey respondents, and only 50% of primary respondents and 56% of intermediate/middle school respondents in the Kahui Ako survey indicated the data would be used this way.

Comments made by respondents in both surveys indicated there was a lack of confidence by intermediate/middle school teachers in the academic judgements made by primary school teachers. E.g. "...it helps when the contributing school's data is correct", "...data we receive is extremely limited. We find the academic

judgements are off.”, “...I don't believe we get the same level and accuracy of data from all contributing schools” and “...much of the academic data has gaps”.

Table 5 indicates whether the data collected serves the purpose for which it is collated and the national responses show a clear lack of confidence, with only 36% of primary respondents and 31% of intermediate/middle school respondents indicating that it does, with one respondent notably commenting “the school test the first two weeks of the new year to get their own base data, which I do not agree on as these are important times to be building trust and positive relationships. Testing children when you do not know them means you are not doing to get the best from that student”.

Table 5

Data Provided Serves the Purpose for Which It Is Collected

Answers	National Responses				Kahui Ako Responses			
	Primary	Intermediate/ Middle School	Primary	Intermediate/ Middle School	Primary	Intermediate/ Middle School	Primary	Intermediate/ Middle School
Yes	36.36%	24	30.95%	13	50.00%	3	56.25%	9
No	13.64%	9	11.90%	5	16.67%	1	6.25%	1
Sometimes	31.82%	21	57.14%	24	16.67%	1	37.50%	6
Don't know	18.18%	12	0.00%	0	16.67%	1	0.00%	0

Kahui Ako results also demonstrated a lack of confidence, with only 50% of primary respondents and 56% of intermediate/middle school respondents indicating ‘yes’, with comments such as “I believe the school can further use the data received by ensuring they are placed in a class where the teacher ‘matches’ their interests to develop stronger and more valuable learning experiences for the individual and teacher alike” and “some schools take more time with it than others”.

Table 6 shows that less than 23% of the national survey primary respondents felt that the data is actually utilised by intermediate/middle schools, which is in contrast to the 45% of intermediate/middle school respondents who indicated the data is

utilised. Comments included “vital information is passed on in this document and in handover meetings which often never makes it to the relevant person (e.g. teachers not knowing that a student’s mother had passed away very recently)” and “teachers do not look at these files and miss out gaining valuable information to build relationships with students”.

Of the Kahui Ako respondents, only 50% of primary respondents felt that the data is utilised, with one respondent commenting “I don’t know if there has been communication between the two – so how would you know if what you provide is adequate?” In contrast, 94% of intermediate/middle school respondents strongly indicated that the data is utilised, with comments ranging from “...mostly. I don’t believe we get the same level and accuracy of data from all contributing schools” to “Absolutely! We want to ensure our students have the best chance of success as they begin their intermediate education. If we can assist this with careful placement from the information we are provided, we minimise the risks for these students”. There is again a difference illustrated here between primary and intermediate perceptions of how – and how much of – the data is utilised. Addressing the barriers to this is a research area that warrants further investigation.

Table 6

Data Provided Is Utilised By Receiving Schools

Answers	National Responses				Kahui Ako Responses			
	Primary		Intermediate/ Middle School		Primary		Intermediate/ Middle School	
Yes	22.73%	15	45.24%	19	50.00%	3	93.75%	15
No	12.12%	8	7.14%	3	0.00%	0	6.25%	1
Sometimes	30.30%	20	42.86%	18	16.67%	1	0.00%	0
Depends on school	18.18%	12	4.76%	2	16.67%	1	0.00%	0
Don’t know	16.67%	11	0.00%	0	16.67%	1	0.00%	0

Responses also illustrated the lack of clarity for primary teachers around the provision and value of data given to schools. Table 7 established whether data is given to individual classroom teachers at the receiving school. Of the national survey primary respondents, 18% indicated that it is, 15% indicated that it isn't, whilst 47% did not know whether it was given or not. In contrast, 72% of intermediate/middle school respondents indicated that data is given and 19% indicated it was sometimes given. Comments included "...just the academic stuff" as well as "received data is kept in a locked room".

Of the Kahui Ako survey primary respondents, 17% indicated that it is given, whilst the remaining 83% indicated that it was sometimes given or depends on the receiving school. In contrast, 88% of intermediate/middle school respondents indicated that data is given, with one respondent commenting, "...definitely – we take it very seriously. We also invite Year 6 teachers and principals up to look at the classes, prior to sharing this with the students in Week 7".

Table 7

Data Given to Individual Teachers at Receiving Schools

Answers	National Responses				Kahui Ako Responses			
	Primary		Intermediate/ Middle School		Primary		Intermediate/ Middle School	
Yes	18.18%	12	71.43%	30	16.67%	1	87.50%	14
No	15.15%	10	7.14%	3	0.00%	0	0.00%	0
Sometimes	6.06%	4	19.05%	8	0.00%	0	6.25%	1
Depends on school	13.64%	9	0.00%	0	16.67%	1	0.00%	0
Don't know	46.97%	31	2.38%	1	66.67%	4	6.25%	1

The findings presented in

Table 8 illustrate whether the student data provided is helpful to the receiving teachers. In the national survey, 44% of primary respondents and 48% of

intermediate/middle school respondents indicated it that is helpful. The Kahui Ako survey showed similar results, with 50% of primary respondents and 60% of intermediate/middle school respondents indicating that it is helpful.

Comments included “If they get access to it and if they then read it. Some are worried about pre-judging and prefer to offer a clean-slate start”, “whenever I have received it, it has been helpful and I am interested in it. Sometimes it gets left in the office/other teachers’ rooms though and we don’t know about it” and “the data we receive is extremely limited...the academic judgements are off...not enough social, emotional, behavioural information”. However, there were no indications by any intermediate/middle school respondents that the data was not helpful at all.

Table 8

Data Provided Is Helpful To Teachers at Receiving Schools

Answers	National Responses				Kahui Ako Responses			
	Primary		Intermediate/ Middle School		Primary		Intermediate/ Middle School	
Yes	43.94%	29	47.62%	20	50.00%	3	68.75%	11
No	3.03%	2	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0
Sometimes	25.76%	17	38.10%	16	16.67%	1	25.00%	4
Depends on school	15.15%	10	7.14%	3	0.00%	0	6.25%	1
Don’t know	12.12%	8	2.38%	1	33.33%	2	0.00%	0

Tables 3-8 indicated a lack of clear understanding by primary respondents on whether data is actually utilised, how it is utilised, which areas are prioritised, who the data is given to and whether the data is actually useful to the receiving teachers. Comments made by survey respondents questioned how well vulnerable learners are supported, whether the receiving school is inclusive and whether students with diverse needs are catered for. These findings appear to indicate a need for there to

be clearer understanding around the intended purposes and utilisation of student data in order to ensure that the correct and most valuable information is gathered.

Tables 9-11 focus on data gathered specifically for vulnerable students, as defined previously in Chapter 2.

Table 9 shows whether the data gathered for vulnerable students is different from that gathered for other students. 35% of national survey primary respondents and 31% of intermediate/middle school respondents indicated it is different. Comments on this question include that “the student may be offered more transition visits and more data is gathered” - although it was not made clear what the extra data consists of - and “the main difference is that student is noted as being vulnerable”.

Table 9

Different Data Gathered for ‘Vulnerable’ Learners

Answers	National Responses				Kahui Ako Responses			
	Primary		Intermediate/ Middle School		Primary		Intermediate/ Middle School	
Yes	34.85%	23	30.95%	13	16.67%	1	12.50%	2
No	24.24%	16	33.33%	14	33.33%	2	18.75%	3
Sometimes	16.67%	11	28.57%	12	33.33%	2	50.00%	8
Depends on school	12.12%	8	2.38%	1	0.00%	0	6.25%	1
Don’t know	12.12%	8	4.76%	2	16.67%	1	12.50%	2

Table 10 indicated whether the participants believed that vulnerable students are generally well transitioned from Year 6 to Year 7. Only 15% of national survey primary respondents felt that this was the case, compared to 31% of intermediate/middle school respondents. The Kahui Ako survey had similar findings, with only 17% of primary respondents believing that this was the case, compared to 32% of intermediate/middle school respondents.

These results indicate an overall lack of faith in the way vulnerable students are currently transitioned, with primary school teachers having even less confidence in the system than intermediate/middle school teachers. Comments made in relation to this question by both primary and intermediate/middle respondents included concern expressed that “relationships between schools affect the transition process”, the belief that “good data is provided to receiving schools but is not effectively utilised” and concern expressed for students who are “square pegs in round holes” and need support “beyond the standard transition systems and procedures”.

Table 10
Students are Well-Transitioned to Receiving Schools

Answers	National Responses				Kahui Ako Responses			
	Primary	Intermediate/ Middle School	Primary	Intermediate/ Middle School	Primary	Intermediate/ Middle School	Primary	Intermediate/ Middle School
Yes	15.15%	10	30.95%	13	16.67%	1	31.25%	5
No	13.64%	9	16.67%	7	16.67%	1	6.25%	1
Sometimes	28.79%	19	38.10%	16	0.00%	0	31.25%	5
Depends on school	28.79%	19	9.52%	4	50.00%	3	31.25%	5
Don't know	13.64%	9	4.76%	2	16.67%	1	0.00%	0

Table 11 portrays the level of support given to vulnerable students. Only 9% of the national survey primary respondents and 24% of intermediate/middle school respondents and 17% of the Kahui Ako survey primary respondents and 6% of intermediate/middle school respondents believe there is enough support given.

Table 11

Support Given to 'Vulnerable' Learners During Transition

Answers	National Responses				Kahui Ako Responses			
	Primary		Intermediate/ Middle School		Primary		Intermediate/ Middle School	
Yes	9.09%	6	23.81%	10	16.67%	1	6.25%	1
No	22.73%	15	28.57%	12	33.33%	2	12.50%	2
Sometimes	22.73%	15	16.67%	7	0.00%	0	43.75%	7
Depends on rec. school	21.21%	14	11.90%	5	33.33%	2	12.50%	2
Depends on cont. school	0.00%	0	33.33%	14	0.00%	0	25.00%	4
Depends on student	10.61%	7	23.81%	10	0.00%	0	31.25%	5
Don't know	13.64%	9	2.38%	1	16.67%	1	6.25%	1

Comments included "...resources available and numbers of vulnerable children will often determine this", "...some students slip through the cracks and are not picked up as being vulnerable until they have been at the receiving school for a few weeks if proper information has not been handed on", "...I think [students with] funding are well supported but often those with learning difficulties rely on their parents to pass on information and advocate for them" and "...more tailored transitions would be more beneficial for these students, rather than the one size fits all. A meeting similar to an IEP with teachers, parents and student would allow for a more comprehensive picture of the learner and their needs".

Table 12 represents whether participants felt more data and information could be given to support vulnerable learners during the transition period. 32% of national survey primary respondents compared to 62% of intermediate/middle school respondents indicated that is the case with one respondent commenting "in terms of behaviour information, I think it is a fine line – some students see transitioning to a new school as a chance for a fresh start, and you don't want to jeopardise that by sharing negative information before the teacher meets the student. However, if it is a matter of student or staff safety, then of course this information should be shared".

Similar results are visible in the Kahui Ako survey, with 33% of primary respondents compared to 56% of intermediate/middle school respondents also indicating that more information should be given with one respondent commenting “you can never have ‘too much’ information. We are wanting to set the students – vulnerable or otherwise – up for success. Even the smallest details of students could/should be passed on to better prepare ourselves in reducing the stress for students through the transition period”.

These results again indicate a mismatch between contributing and receiving schools. Intermediate/middle schools clearly indicate that there is more information that could be provided but primary schools feel that this is the case only some of the time. It is unclear however, where the problem lies. Is the information requested and not provided by the contributing schools, or is the information provided but not utilised or received by the schools and their individual teachers?

Table 12

Could More Data About ‘Vulnerable’ Learners Be Provided

Answer	National Responses				Kahui Ako Responses			
	Primary		Intermediate/ Middle School		Primary		Intermediate/ Middle School	
Yes	31.82%	21	61.90%	26	33.33%	2	56.25%	9
No	10.61%	7	7.14%	3	16.67%	1	0.00%	0
Sometimes	24.24%	16	11.90%	5	16.67%	1	18.75%	3
Depends on school	3.03%	2	4.76%	2	0.00%	0	0.00%	0
Depends on student	16.67%	11	7.14%	3	16.67%	1	12.50%	2
Don’t know	13.64%	9	7.14%	3	16.67%	1	12.50%	2

The findings illustrated in Table 11-14 and the comments made by respondents indicated that both primary and intermediate/middle teachers believe there are concerns with the transition process, the amount of support given to vulnerable

learners and the amount of information shared. By inference, this indicates that there could be improvements made in this area.

Summary of Responses from National and Kahui Ako Surveys

From this quantitative data, there were also a number of recurring ideas, questions and comments. Some of these were unique to each level of school, i.e. primary or intermediate/middle, whilst there were some that were expressed across levels.

These are detailed in *Appendix M: Collated Themes from National Survey* and *Appendix N: Collated Themes from Kahui Ako Survey*, but essentially thematic analysis of these ideas resulted in the following overarching themes:

Emerging Themes from National Survey

- Relationships
- Communication
- Purposeful Data Collection & Sharing
- Trust
- Reciprocal Feedback & Feedforward
- Teacher Knowledge, Judgement & Pedagogy
- Diversity and Inclusion

Emerging Themes from Kahui Ako Survey

- Relationships
- Communication
- Purposeful Data Collection & Sharing
- Trust
- Reciprocal Feedback & Feedforward

These themes are contrasted and compared to the themes emerging from the semi-structured interviews later in this chapter.

Semi-structured Interviews

The qualitative data in this section came from five semi-structured interviews. The data gathered was analysed to look for themes and statements which may support or negate the findings of the surveys, or which may provide new ideas to consider.

Interviews were carried out with five teachers across three primary schools, one intermediate school and one middle school. These schools already have an established relationship and connection as feeder or receiving schools for each other. All the leaders interviewed said they are directly responsible for transition in their school and therefore able to answer with knowledge and confidence. The questions as outlined in *Appendix B: Interview Questions*, were not rigidly adhered to, but instead guided the interview and there was an opportunity to clarify understanding or seek further information if required.

Interview Findings

Eight broad themes emerged from the interviews: Purposeful Data Collection & Sharing, Relationships; Teacher Knowledge, Judgement & Pedagogy; Parental Voice; Reciprocal Feedback & Feedforward; Academic Moderation; Trust; and Communication. These themes are explored in the sections below.

Purposeful Data Collection & Sharing

In establishing what kinds of data was collected for Year 6 learners, the responses from primary teachers were very similar and their answers reflected the findings of the quantitative surveys:

All the PATs, formal assessments, standardised assessments, sometimes general interests... just all the standardised data. And of course the pastoral data. P1TDPP

All...standardised testing, pre and post testing, a Māori Learners Pathway where we collect information for our students throughout the year around whānau, social notes, their learning etc...obviously all those contributing factors shape the learning. And we also collect data on our target students, so those students we consider to be below or at risk. P2TDPP

Academic data....the data around reading, writing, maths, and National Standards data...OTJ's...data in terms of any outside agency help or teacher aide hours. We keep behaviour data in terms of things that are regular incidences.... P3TDPP

When establishing what data is sought by receiving schools, P4DPM and P5PI's responses included requests for academic data, personal details and information around outside agency support:

The class teacher fills in a student profile sheet...that would be helpful for us to make placements. So academic records...other information that [like]...a protection order or something...ESOL information too because otherwise we're starting blind every year. P4DPM

The gender, ethnicity, if they are suitable for a year one teacher, who they are good combinations with...or not. We want the National Standards and...the 'well above' because it helps us to get balance...then obviously assessments that they have been doing. The key competencies, again, really important. Attendance, special needs, any agency involvement, RTLB. All of those things and then a comment from the teacher...have they been involved in extension or enrichment programmes. P5PI

When discussing what kinds of data or information the primary school leaders felt was the most important to pass on to a receiving school and whether there was additional data that should be collected, it was clear that pastoral data was considered vital in order to best support the learner.

The most valuable data is their learning behaviours and their pastoral care. Academic data I think is helpful for a classroom teacher as far as getting groupings and placements for the beginning of the year but it's more around who they are as a learner, how they learn, and family life, socially what kind of interactions or difficulties might they have had? And [identifying] any of those students that we would consider being at risk moving into teenage years. P2TDPP

The pastoral care data. Because they re-test the academic anyway. So really it's the pastoral care data at the start of the year. I'm hoping that they take notice of the kids that we've identified as say...a highly anxious child and a lot of their behaviour is actually rooted in high anxiety. And I'm really hoping that the teacher will take that in account and not just think oh, this kid is a ratbag...and end up with a hard year and not realise that this kid is actually really highly stressed and anxious right now and it's not until they feel safe in my classroom that I'm actually going to make inroads with them. To me that's the most important thing. P3TDPP

However it was interesting to consider the variations in the format and consistency with which pastoral data was collected. When primary teachers were prompted about specific pastoral data that is actually requested, the responses were:

No it's not requested and it's not on the form of any of the schools I filled the form out for...in a formal place...there might be a little space for 'anything else' or 'any concerns'...that's probably the only place that information would go. P1TDPP

So the transition report for [School Name] is quite comprehensive but not all schools are the same...the other schools...I don't feel that they cover the pastoral side of things as much and the learning behaviours, it's more just the academic results that they want to know. P2TDPP

We've always passed on the academic data. [School Name] always comes or one of the DPs come and I make sure that all that data including the pastoral data is passed on. But we had a situation with another school [where information] hadn't been recorded and hadn't been passed on. So now what we're doing is making sure that when a child has any RTLB help, Teacher Aide, extension help...then that is recorded and printed off and passed on as well. P3TDPP

The intermediate leaders also both maintained the need to collect information that was not just academic in order to make the best placements possible and when

questioned as to whether they specifically gathered pastoral data, responded with:

Yes we do. The teachers at the contributing schools are very open and honest about it and we do say, look this is completely confidential. We hand these profile sheets on to our teachers...with all that information...so if the child is sensitive and cries easily or if they have been bullied in the past...family dynamics, recent parental separation...so that they [our teachers] can start the year knowing...they can spend the summer having a look and seeing what sorts of needs there might be in their class and can plan for it. P4DPM

Absolutely. The contributing school teacher completes this and...when we're putting classes together we'll obviously try to get the balance as best as we can based on all of this information. We invite the contributing school teachers to come...we look at the lists and our teachers come in and talk to them about the students. So then we make adjustments based on what the teachers have told us and we do listen. You know that's the whole purpose. Because if we get the classes right then next year the students are going to have a far better transition. P5PI

Relationships

The importance of having a relationship between the receiving and contributing schools and the particular benefits of being able to have a face-to-face conversation in order to pass on pastoral data for students was explained by Participant P3TDPP:

When they come to me...you are getting that one on one and often you've got the form, you fill it out to the best of your ability...but it's not till I start talking about the student when I think, oh actually, that's probably quite important for you to know or note down. Either their family situation or...I'll say you've already had two of their siblings...it just jogs that connection. P3TDPP

However, in discussing with primary leaders how they expected the receiving school to utilise the data and whether they thought it happened, it became clear that the relationships and communication between the schools was such that none of the primary school leaders interviewed were entirely certain how the data is utilised:

I would hope they would use it to place the children in classes to spread the needs; or look at GATE programs or potential. For the really low children I'd be hoping they'd be assigning teacher aides or decide whether they've got a teacher who's more empathetic to [particular] learners. I actually have no idea how it's used because the kids just get put into classes and because I don't know the receiving middle schools or teachers I don't know how they use it. The only way I know anything is when the parents come and say to me oh we're really pleased with the placement of my child, or not pleased, or whatever. P1TDPP

I would expect that it was used to ensure that they are placed with the best teacher to suit their needs but also with any other students from our school...I would assume...it is used for groupings for students within the first few weeks of school before any other assessments are done...to make sure the kids are starting at a suitable learning level when they get to their classroom. P2TDPP

My assumption is in class placement...[they] try really hard to match children with other children and to match the teacher. And obviously it wouldn't be perfect because there are just so many kids. But in terms of class placement, identifying...where extra help may be required...them looking at their funding. P3TDPP

Intermediate leaders confirmed that when compiling the class lists the received data is utilised in the ways the primary leaders described. However they also highlighted other areas that are considered, which are more to do with teacher knowledge, judgement and pedagogy.

Teacher Knowledge, Judgement & Pedagogy

Intermediate/middle school leaders indicated that the class placement and transition process strategies are developed from their own knowledge of their teaching staff, their school pedagogy, judgement of best practice for placing learners and their professional understandings of how to best support their learners:

[Are they] “suitable for beginning teachers” ...we have people at all stages of their career and some kids...they're not suitable for beginning teachers, whether it's because they're really high academically, or they need certain things...sometimes it's some parents, just in their way of dealing with issues... are not suitable for a beginning teacher...also...what sort of teacher would really bring out the best in this child? P4DPM

We try and get that balance...with the Year 8 half...or the ethnic mix. If you put the investment into doing this well...it sets the kids and the teacher up for success really. If they're from a small school we try to have another child from that school [with them]. Leadership is...really important because they're going to be the positive role models for the rest of the class and help build that culture. With special needs...we will try and put them...in one classroom, so we can attach a teacher aide to that classroom. And we try and match up student interests with the teachers as well. P5PI

All responses indicated evidence of teacher judgement, knowledge and pedagogy in actively engaging in and supporting the transition of vulnerable learners. Interestingly, none of the respondents referred to theories underpinning transition processes, readings of recent research, Ministry of Education documents or other evidence of their own professional development in this area:

I always work on a level of independence and I'm always saying...you'll need to be able to do this when you're at middle school... to be independent and responsible for their learning...start using their initiative...but I don't actually know what the kids need to know for middle school...what do you need the children to be able to do? What am I working towards in Year 6? What I want for them is to have a successful time...to get...those quiet ones, the more reluctant ones, to start taking risks and to get involved. P1TDPP

We do a lot around leadership...students enabling, supporting, motivating, and guiding others...to become quite confident within themselves...[and] approaching their situations with that vocabulary and that kind of mind set. I do a lot around building success and self-esteem...talking in class around transition...and what that's going to be like...the kids really worry about finding people...[but] just allowing them to ask questions...that's really important. P2TDPP

Trying to develop more independence...about when they move on and making decisions and choices. And a focus on the Key Competencies and developing those...becoming aware of what they need to know and do. This is your responsibility. Do you need to know this or do you not need to know this? Do you know this already? It's your responsibility to ask for help. And for some kids that's really hard....and remembering that they're only 10 or 11 years old. P3TDPP

Parental voice

Intermediate leaders confirmed that the transition process of preparing the students for a change in schools is actively planned for, reviewed and reflected upon and also referred to the importance of parental voice and addressing the concerns of both students and parents during the transition period.

I feel like the transition is quite well done. We've opened up to the parents and teachers and said if they need more transition time, let us know...whatever you need to do to make it so that you feel excited to be here is fine. It's like some of this is for the parents...for them it's a big thing too and so we do try and offer tailored transition time. Using our lists...we'll know who might need a bit of extra support...particularly vulnerable students. We have our orientation...we talk in the hall and they get shown around by students and then spend some time in a classroom...and have time for parents to ask questions. Then we do the profile forms, we meet with the schools, parents come in with the children and...hold an open

evening...they find out which class they're in and they meet that class teacher. We ask the parents...what's worked well in the past, is there anything that you'd like to us to consider when placing your child...and where possible we'd try and make those requests. P4DPM

After we've refined and reviewed [the class lists] the students come in and they learn who their teacher is, they meet next year's Year 8's, they spend 15-20 minutes with the classroom teacher. And then...they're not stressing about who their teacher is, they know where their classroom is and who is going to be in it with them. We also give them a welcome booklet with information about the school day, the first day and pictures of all of the teachers. We have some advice from our Year 8's and a map of the school and so on. We've also had [three] open evenings. I've visited all of the schools...and bought some of my student executives and Year 7 students with me...then they come to the open morning or the orientation day. Our SENCO has been down to the local primary schools and had a conference around transition for some students. Then I've got parents who have made appointments in between to see me. [We] record all that information so that we're aware of the background and can try and place that child carefully. P5PI

Notably, specific focus on transition occurred over approximately four months, across the period of the Year 6 cohort preparing to leave and then begin a new school in Year 7. However there was little mention made of strategies utilised or continuing on throughout the Year 7 academic year that assist and support the Year 7 learners with their ongoing transition. This question was not directly asked of the interviewees and it may well be that there are specific ongoing strategies utilised. This is an area for further investigation and research.

Reciprocal Feedback & Feedforward

These interviews made it clear that the primary learners trusted the intermediate and middle schools would make good placements. However, they were also unsure how the information they had provided was utilised and the outcomes of their student transitions were most often unknown, with little feedback from the receiving

schools. When asked whether they would like feedback from the receiving schools, responses were unanimous:

Oh for the vulnerable learners I'd like to know because...we put in such an effort with those kids at the school...it would be nice to know even that we've prepared them well or anything we could do to help them transition or anything we're not doing. Are...we getting them to a certain level of learning or socialisation? Are we...getting them so they can cope in that situation? Because I think I do...[but]...I have no idea unless the parents come back and say. It would be nice especially for your vulnerable children...this year I've got three or four I'm worried about and I think they'll transition okay, but I'd like to know how well they settle, and get on with their learning and cope socially. P1TDPP

In an ideal world that would be amazing but it would be really hard for Intermediates to feed back to all teachers and students. There are some who you know are going to flourish anywhere but there are others...I often ring and talk to either the SENCO or the DP. Just to get a gauge to say yeah what you've told us is correlating or actually no, there is a discrepancy. Just for reassurance I suppose that you're on the right track. P2TDPP

Yeah that would be good information. And especially around them settling in and around the key competencies because we're doing such a big push are they seeing that actually coming through? Parents often feedback to us around how their child is getting on...[but]...otherwise we don't know if they're settled...if it's a regular thing where teachers are seeing a pattern and they really have concerns about it, well they should be talking to us about it. We want to know that we're doing a good job and sending them prepared. And if we're not...then what do you want us to be doing in order to prepare them? P3TDPP

Academic Moderation

National survey responses indicated an ongoing cause of consternation for teachers, students and parents, is the drop in achievement experienced by some students following school transition and that the cause of this is due to the academic judgements made by primary teachers not matching the academic judgements made by intermediate/middle school teachers (see commentary on Table 4). When asked about this during the interviews, the intermediate leaders shared the following opinions:

Yes I think that's probably why we gather the [academic] data, so we're going in with some idea. But we also trust that our teachers know the curriculum levels, we work very hard on moderation and things like that and we know that sometimes we're not going to make the same judgment that a primary school has made...we do know that kids take six months to sort of recover from a transition...there is sort of a lull point for them where they don't look like they've improved from what they had coming in as Year 6. And whether it's primary schools thinking that we've had these lovely kids for six years and they have done so well we want them to be 'at', or we like to send them off with...a good feeling...then they come here and suddenly they're 'below' or even 'well below'...parents get really worried.
P4DPM

That's right. However, we have to take that as a gauge and whilst it might not reflect it exactly it's still an indicator. You know, very rarely would you have a child who would be put in the 'well above' if they're in the 'below'. It's going to be there or thereabouts. And the teacher is going to learn more about the child in the first weeks of school with their own assessments and pieces of writing and so on, but it still gives us a starting point. P5PI

When seeking feedback on this, primary teachers also indicated that this was not a surprise but expressed their own views on whether this drop in achievement was accurate or if it is accurate, what the possible reasons for it might be:

I don't think [that] would be accurate because we retest too at the beginning of each year, so if you're looking at PATs for example, we always see progress over a year. Generally 90% of kids will show progress or stability or something...we don't generally see a drop. The odd child might have a dip for that day, but not as a general rule...that should be the same thing, if my Year 6's are scoring a Stanine 6 at the beginning of Year 6 then I would imagine they'd be a Stanine 6 at the beginning of Year 7. There should be no reason why they'd drop. P1TDPP

I can understand that but we get quite good feedback from [School Name] around our students and how they do academically and that they are always achieving really well. So that's quite good to know that any of the assessment we are doing is hopefully valued and is on par with what their expectations are. P2TDPP

I get so annoyed by that...we do our judgements at the end of the year and...we've been working with these kids all year and they are comfortable and they are safe. They start a new school and when do they test? Within the first couple of weeks after having six weeks off. Of course their data is going to go down. Because it's just what happens. They're under stress, they haven't done any of that for six weeks...why are you surprised when the data no longer matches the data we give you? Of course there's a mismatch. But that's not necessarily just because we've thought, "oh let's make it all look really rosy"...and I find that really almost an arrogance of the intermediates to assume it's because we're soft. Because I don't feel we do that. We try and be as accurate as we can. P3TDPP

Trust

When questioned about possible solutions to this problem, the responses demonstrated a need for more communication, moderation and trust between primary and intermediate schools and there was hope expressed that the Community of Learning (CoL or Kahui Ako) would be a way to address this:

I think that with the CoL...the intermediates and the high school are being asked by the primary schools to actually trust the judgment of the primary school teachers. I'd like to have the conversation and I don't want it to be where I'm accused of, "hey your data is so easily marked and come on, what are you doing?" but...it could be a professional discussion...if there was pattern of...[with incorrect data], I would like to know. I meet the APs and DPs of the middle schools...they've got exactly the same thoughts about children as I do... we just have to have a bit more trust. They need to trust us and we need to trust that what we give them is going to help them set those kids up into good classrooms...but they need to have that trust back. There does need to be communication and with the CoL...I'm hoping that's where it'll come up. P1TDPP

Yes I think that [moderation] would be valuable. We moderate in the school and we moderate in the primary school cluster but I think that for my view of Level 3 developing into Level 4, it would be really interesting to see if it correlates with what Year 7 teachers think...for all transitions and curriculum areas at all levels of school...I think it would be really beneficial. P2TDPP

It is something I'd like to try...getting the Year 6 teachers with the Year 7 teachers and saying look this is the data I'm sending...what would you put it at...see how much of a mismatch we're getting. I mean we have the same thing here...we have the same questions...if you've got data from the end of last year then why are we testing straightaway at the start of the following year? What is the purpose around that? Are we not trusting the previous teacher's data? P3TDPP

We moderate writing and maths and reading and everything but moderation in our CoL...I think would be very, very helpful. And I think that's where that sort of discrepancy in data does happen...we're moderating together, we feel like we know where we think things are, but there are thirteen – or more – schools...passing it to us and there are big discrepancies. And there

are schools who traditionally are very high with their judgments of all the students and those parents have been reported to on that. P4DPM

Absolutely. And moderation between Year 8 and Year 9. One thing that has happened with the college is they do get our Term 3 writing samples. The [high school] teachers have marked them...if there's a disconnect...we organise some moderation sessions. That's the sort of thing we can do with CoL and I think with the CoL that's only going to enable that to happen more so. Because we do our own moderation in school obviously and I've got a facilitator here working with us as well. But still there is disconnect from teacher...to teacher. P5PI

Communication

The other concern that repeatedly came up in surveys, was the quality of data received by individual classroom teachers. Potential causes included the possibility of incomplete data being passed on by feeder schools, or incomplete or 'cleansed' data being disseminated by the receiving transition coordinator, compounded by a lack of clear communication between schools. The reasoning most often given for this was the opportunity to provide a 'clean slate' for the Year 7 students versus the idea of giving all the information in order to best support a 'fresh start'. When questioned about their personal preferences, the primary teachers all held the same view:

Fresh start, but be prepared...[meet with the receiving schools] and talk pastoral. So that they have the heads up, they know what we have done and they are forewarned. You know we've got our ones who are really low-learners or our transients. And then you have your ones who have other things going on...seen some form of sexualised behaviour, or the parents are involved in the gangs...or seen and heard things in life they shouldn't have...they are our vulnerable people. P1TDPP

I can totally see both sides of the coin...my mentality is that they do get a fresh start but for me to ensure that I am providing them with the best teaching care...I like to know the whole picture...we've got kids who might

really need learning assistance so I hope that things are in place...that that's picked up and listened to and taken on. There are so many things to consider...passing on the information is the responsible approach...kids are anxious enough in their transition to a new school and I think there is some information that they want the schools to know about them to help support them with their learning and to support them in a situation like that. You do assume [data] would go straight to the classroom teacher but whether or not only some information is passed on....I don't understand why you wouldn't [pass it all on]...is that the best thing? Is that really supporting the kids? P2TDPP

I think they need the information...because when I send them off I'm not saying, look this kid has just got...a bad attitude, he's hard work, he's always in trouble...that's not the data I'm wanting to send. Yes he is hard work, but they need to know not to put him with a first year teacher. He needs an experienced teacher that is willing to take time. His need for attention is so high... he just wants to push your buttons and he doesn't want to do work...yes there is some of that; but some of his behaviour is that he's really anxious and he's really upset and he's not had much sleep and he wouldn't have had breakfast...and it will change his behaviour...so you know you just take a little bit more time to connect with him in the morning...and some of that information takes time to learn and know how to manage...and by then how many times has he been sent out of the class, how many times has he been in the principal's office and they're on the road to suspension...? P3TDPP

The intermediate teachers held similar views:

I don't think it's a deliberate hiding of it I think it's more...a want for the kid to have a fresh start perhaps, or you know they managed it fine using the [previous] school's techniques...so for them it seemed like it wasn't going to be a problem but...we have dynamics that we'd like to be able to separate and if we don't know, we can't do that. Sometimes inadvertently, two kids who have quite severe behavioural needs might be placed in the same

room...we're all aware that the kids need a fresh start but we'd like all the information so that we can give them the best fresh start that they can have. There'd be no judgments on that child and knowing that they'd had difficulties...[just] making sure that they've got certain things in place when they get here that are going to help them. P4DPM

I think setting them up for success...because my philosophy – not just mine...we all 'own' these children and they are ours to look after. So...we do take note but we also have an open mind and know that there's going to be maybe a little bit of disconnect, between what we're seeing, particularly if there's nothing in this [the profile sheet]...and in some schools I don't get 100% consistency in terms of them giving me all of the information. And that does cause frustration. P5PI

The interview respondents all felt that shared data, particularly the pastoral data, was necessary to enable the best start for all learners. All teachers were aware of labelling or 'storying' students and expressed their desire to support the learner in being settled and happy at school and able to achieve to the best of their ability. This sharing of information relies heavily on there being positive relationships, trust and communication between schools and families and these are all things which are interdependent and can only be developed concurrently.

Comparison and Collation of Emerging Themes and Keywords

From the qualitative data, there were again recurring ideas, questions and comments and these are detailed in *Appendix O: Collated Themes from Semi-Structured Interviews*. Thematic analysis of these ideas resulted in nine emerging themes of: Relationships, Communication, Purposeful Data Collection & Sharing, Trust, Reciprocal Feedback & Feedforward, Teacher Knowledge, Judgement & Pedagogy, Diversity & Inclusion, Academic Moderation and Parental Voice.

An overall comparison of themes illustrated that many of the same ideas and keywords are identified in both the national and localised surveys, as well as during interviews with school leaders.

Table 13

Comparison of Emerging Themes

National Survey	Kahui Ako Survey	Semi-Structured Interviews
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships • Communication • Purposeful Data Collection & Sharing • Trust • Reciprocal Feedback & Feedforward • Teacher Knowledge, Judgement & Pedagogy • Diversity & Inclusion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships • Communication • Purposeful Data Collection & Sharing • Trust • Reciprocal Feedback & Feedforward 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships • Communication • Purposeful Data Collection & Sharing • Trust • Reciprocal Feedback & Feedforward • Teacher Knowledge, Judgement & Pedagogy • Diversity & Inclusion • Academic Moderation • Parental voice

Combined Suggestions and Recommendations

Suggestions and comments were gathered from the two surveys and semi-structured interviews and are collated in *Appendix P: Combined Suggestions and Recommendations*. These represent comments which are repeated or common ideas and form the basis of the recommendations made in Chapter 5.

The surveys identified beliefs, understandings and concerns of a range of teaching practitioners. Some are school leaders who are directly responsible for transition of students, some are primary school teaching practitioners who felt strongly about the transition process and how the children they have taught will be affected, whilst some are intermediate/middle school teaching practitioners concerned as to how they as individuals, as well as the students, are affected by the transition process.

The localised Kahui Ako survey identified fewer themes and this is likely an indication of the assumption that a relationship between schools has already been

established. It is paradoxical to note that the themes of teacher pedagogy, diversity and inclusion, academic moderation and parental voice did not come up significantly in the Kahui Ako survey yet was pinpointed by the school leaders in the interview process (who are from the same Kahui Ako) as being an area needing more attention.

The interviews aimed to investigate the beliefs and views of the school leaders who are directly responsible for transition practice in their school. It sought to identify the premise behind current practice, to uncover misconceptions or areas of difficulty and to gather suggestions and recommendations where the process can be improved. Throughout the interviews, it became clear that the primary school teachers have their own methods and teaching practice that they incorporate into their Year 6 learning programme in order to support students into developing independent skills to cope with the transition process. However it was also clear the actual process of transition itself is largely guided by the processes and initiatives intermediate/middle schools have put in place; any communications about students is initiated by the intermediate or middle schools, rather than by the primary schools.

Specific publications, documents, theories or philosophies within which their transition process is based were not mentioned. The leaders tended instead to work within the already-established methods of transition for each individual school or within their own understandings and experience about what is 'the best way'.

The primary school leaders all expressed trust in their intermediate and middle school counterparts, however also expressed uncertainty as to the usefulness and way in which the data is utilised. The intermediate and middle school leaders expressed frustration with the sometimes lack of consistent and pertinent data, however also expressed their support for primary school teachers. All school leaders expressed a willingness to engage in professional discussions to improve the transition process.

From the collated themes and information gathered from the two sets of survey data and the interview data were collated to look for overlap between findings (see Table 15). Themes that appeared in two or more of the data sets were considered to be overarching themes. These were identified as: Communication, Teacher Pedagogy

& Reciprocal Feedback & Feedforward; Relationships & Trust; Purposeful Data Collection & Sharing; and Diversity & Inclusion.

Communication, Teacher Pedagogy and Reciprocal Feedback & Feedforward

Communication of data and information is essential in order to cater for students and to ensure that all parties concerned are well informed with confidence in the transition process. Although communication between receiving and contributing schools should be assumed to be a two-way process, much of the communication requests appear to be driven from intermediate and middle schools with less offers of communication coming from the contributing schools. There appears to be a disconnect between contributing and receiving schools, although this varies depending on existing relationships that support this communication and a communal understanding as to what and why communication is required.

There was a distinct indication that primary schools do not know outcomes of student transitions, do not know what value their data has been to the receiving school and are unclear as to the effectiveness of their individual transition programmes once the students have transferred.

Furthermore, responses indicated academic judgements made by contributing school teachers are not valued by receiving schools and are often seen as incorrect or inflated. Writing appears to be a particular issue and it was suggested moderation sessions between Year 6 and Year 7 teachers would help to gain understanding and consistency.

Relationships & Trust

A key element to successful transition processes included relationships between:

- a) contributing and receiving schools
- b) transitioning students and their current teachers
- c) transitioning students and their new teachers
- d) transitioning students and the receiving school leaders
- e) transitioning students and their peers

- f) families/whānau of the transitioning students and contributing school leaders and teachers
- g) families/whānau of the transitioning students and receiving school leaders and teachers

There were a number of comments made around issues of trust. Some expressed need for primary and intermediate/middle schools to trust each other and judgements made. Others questioned whether there could be trust between the two sectors; yet others expressed that they do have trust in the other sector. Trust is not an easy concern to address and ‘fix’. It is something that needs to develop over time through active development of the other areas identified, such as relationships and communication.

Hope was frequently expressed that the Community of Learning / Kahui Ako would go a long way towards addressing and building these relationships and trust.

Purposeful Data Collection & Sharing

All findings identified a concern with the level of appropriate support offered to vulnerable learners and this level is reliant on school processes, availability of resources, limited external funding and variations in teacher knowledge and pedagogy. There was a clear indication of the need for purposeful data collection and sharing. Whilst there was correlation in the types of data being gathered, respondents from both contributing and receiving schools were less confident in ascertaining why data was being collected, what value it had and whether the collection of data was serving the intended purpose.

There were clear discrepancies between what was being collected by contributing schools and what was most highly valued by receiving schools. There was also a clear indication that contributing schools are uncertain of the value placed on any of their data or how – or if – the data was utilised. Whilst both contributing and receiving schools acknowledged the concept of ‘clean slate’ or ‘fresh start’, it was also clear that teachers felt pastoral information was needed to support a new start; and that such information does not result in a student being labelled or ‘storied’. It was also recognised it would be helpful to collect parental voice and individual

student voice so both parents and students have an active part in broadening the views and understandings of a student's needs.

Diversity & Inclusion

Many of the survey comments and discussions within the interviews identified concerns about catering for diverse learners in an inclusive manner. Addressing these themes i.e. communication, relationships building, data sharing etc. would support the professional knowledge, awareness and ability to cater for diverse learners in a new learning environment.

Summary

All of the data collected through the surveys and semi-structured interviews came from teachers or school leaders within primary and intermediate or middle schools. Whilst there were some differences, there were clear correlations between the national survey data, the localised Kahui Ako survey data and the interviews with five school leaders from a mixture of primary and intermediate/middle schools. Analysis of this data allowed seven overarching themes to emerge: Communication, Teacher Pedagogy; Reciprocal Feedback and Feedforward; Relationships; Trust; Purposeful Data Collection & Sharing; and Diversity & Inclusion.

Within each theme a number of challenges were identified and discussed. It should be made clear there are certainly links to be made between and across each of the themes and none can stand entirely alone – to some degree each is dependent on the success or effectiveness of the other.

For discussion purposes these themes have been grouped. The following chapter will further discuss these findings and themes with reference to the literature reviewed in Chapter Two and make recommendations for future practice and research on the transition process for Year 6 to Year 7 learners.

Chapter 5 – Discussion

*Why not establish an intimate connection between
knowledge considered basic to any school curriculum and
knowledge that is the fruit of the lived experience
of these students as individuals?
(Freire, 1998, p. 36)*

Introduction

This concluding chapter uses a pragmatic approach to discuss the key findings from the national and localised surveys and the interviews with five school leaders from primary or intermediate/middle schools in the light of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, alongside the guiding research questions, of:

- What informal information is passed on for vulnerable Year 6 learners when transitioning from primary schools to receiving schools?
- In what ways do receiving schools utilise informal information to support transitioning vulnerable learners?
- What transitional information would receiving schools like to be given?

Themes were developed by identifying key words and concepts from the findings and provide valuable understandings in beginning to answer aspects of the guiding questions, as shown in Table 16 (overleaf).

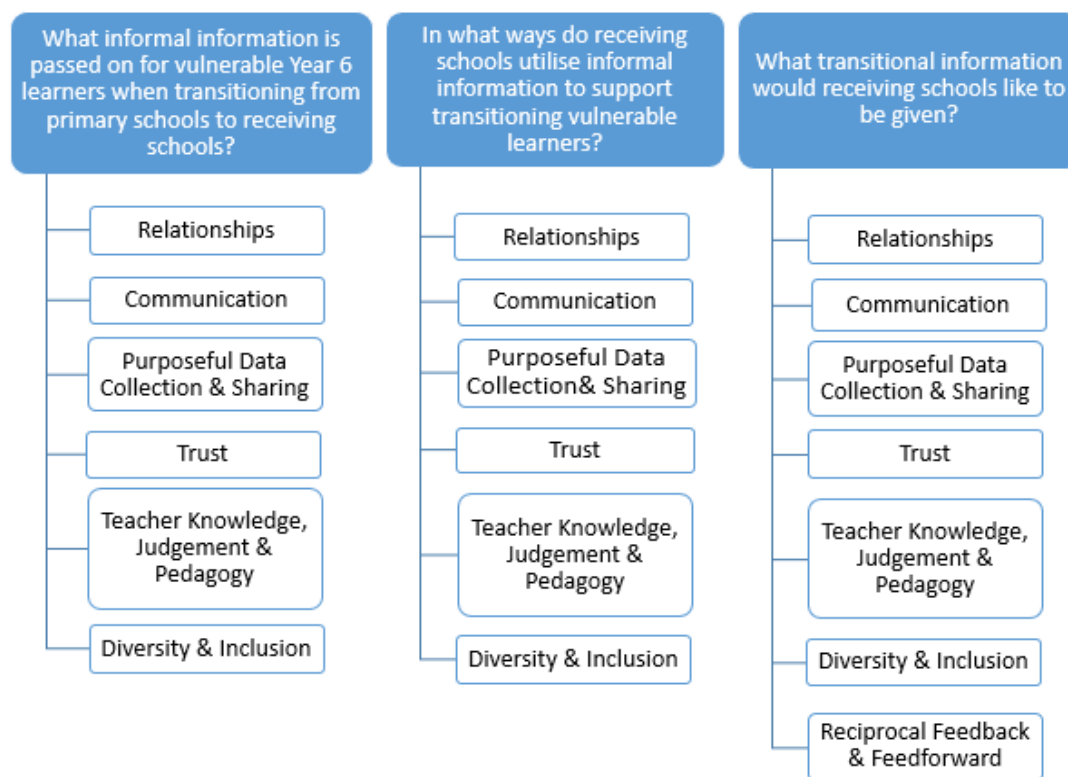
These themes have been grouped together for discussion purposes where the relationships and commonalities between concepts and themes were strongest, giving overall discussion points of Communication, Teacher Pedagogy & Reciprocal Feedback and Feedforward; Relationships & Trust; Purposeful Data Collection & Sharing; and Diversity & Inclusion.

However, it is also important to acknowledge that there are many areas where these overarching themes and findings interact or overlap and each are affected by the

other, that is, none operate in isolation; there are strong interdependent relationships between these.

Table 14

Links Between Research Questions and Overarching Themes



Pragmatists believe that results from research should be written up in a way that identifies how processes can become more effective, and “consider the research question to be more important than either the method they use or the paradigm that underlies the method” (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 679). The pragmatic approach taken in this study acknowledges the researcher’s interest “not only for what ‘is’, but also for what ‘might be’ ... [and a desire for] ... purposeful difference in practice”(Goldkuhl, 2012, p. 8).

Utilising a pragmatist mixed-methods framework allows deeper dimensions in findings to emerge, because as contended by Evans, Coon, and Ume (2011), “it offers an approach in which reasoning moves back and forth between induction/deduction and subjectivity/objectivity” (p. 2). Further, it acknowledges that knowledge acquired through research is relative and not absolute, that

researchers need to be flexible and adaptable and open to the possibilities of receiving unexpected data and to be able to continuously develop ideas in order to develop more comprehensive findings and theories (Bryant, 2017; Feilzer, 2010; Rylander, 2012).

Therefore, this chapter seeks to broadly pragmatically discuss these findings and themes in relation to the literature and to identify any anomalies in comparison to the literature. Finally, this chapter seeks to make recommendations which will support students, teachers and families throughout the Year 6 to Year 7 transition.

Communication, Teacher Pedagogy and Reciprocal Feedback & Feedforward

Many survey respondents and all the leaders interviewed recognised in accordance with Dockett et al. (2011) and Tilleczek and Ferguson (2007) that transition can be a time of vulnerability as well as opportunity. Respondents also recognised that the transition process affects different students in different ways dependent on the quality and strength of the ‘transition capital’ being utilised as outlined by Dunlop (2014) and Mackenzie et al. (2012), with awareness that the students and transition process are affected by the “social, educational, community, political, economic and institutional frames” in which they occur (Dockett et al., 2017, p. 275).

Difficulties inherent for intermediate/middle schools was acknowledged by all leaders interviewed in making class placements. Frustration was expressed with the lack of funding available to support vulnerable learners, the inconsistencies in the data that is requested or provided and the need to have strong transition processes in place. Tilleczek and Ferguson (2007) indicated that schools must develop strategies to support all students transitioning into their schools and Hopwood (2014) further reinforced the importance of knowledge and sensitivity of teachers who “are in a pivotal position to support students during this important step” (p. 305).

Both survey and interview respondents recognised transition as being the cause of a drop in achievement level and also gave possible reasons for the drop, for instance: anxiety experienced during the initial transition period; acclimating to new policies, practices and buildings; the need for accurate student data; and the

need to develop new relationships with teachers and peers. The reasons given are in keeping with the findings of Andrews and Bishop (2012) and Goos and Decelle (2016).

All school leaders indicated they actively engage in accommodating student transitions, nevertheless there was no specific reference to theories underpinning transition processes, readings of recent research or Ministry of Education documents such as *Evaluation at a Glance: Transitions from Primary to Secondary School* (Education Review Office, 2012) or indeed evidence of professional development in this area. Many of the processes in place appeared to stem from teacher knowledge, experience and individual school philosophy, although it must be acknowledged that this was inferred by the researcher, rather than specifically probed for.

Nevertheless, it is a point to consider. Research by Timperley et al. (2008) states the importance of “integrating theory and practice as they relate to curriculum, teaching practice, and assessment knowledge [so that] theoretical understandings give coherence to these teaching decisions” (p. 28). Recommendations by Higgins (2015) outline key features to help transition, being “...deliberate responsibility for the transition process; purposeful and timely engagement; strategic transition knowledge and practice; and targeted support for transition” (p. iii).

As noted earlier, part of taking deliberate responsibility for the transition process includes the process of transferring and utilising documented information and how this is done is one of the guiding research questions that this study aims to answer. Many survey respondents and all interview respondents identified concerns in regards to the perceived strength and accuracy of the achievement data passed on for students. No indication was given of a formal or set process for engaging in moderation, feedback or feedforward between schools. This was an area for improvement that was identified by a number of respondents. Receiving schools indicated that the data was often flawed, inflated or inaccurate and at times questioned the assessment ability and philosophical approaches of the feeder school teachers. On the other hand, feeder schools were adamant that the data was in fact correct at the time of assessment but that transition stressors affected achievement, in that there is often a lack of trust between feeder and receiving schools and testing

was often carried out too early in the academic year by receiving schools to gain accurate results. The combination of these things signalled an apparent drop or ‘lull’ in achievement.

Drop in achievement following transition has been observed by a number of researchers, resulting in recommendations by researchers such as Galton and McLellan (2017); Howe and Richards (2011); and Symonds and Galton (2014), for schools to do more to share information on students, share information on successful transition schemes, undertake studies on children at risk and to improve teacher pedagogy and practice. Furthermore, the reality of the ‘achievement drop’ and need for better communication and collaboration between schools, is in direct contrast to the *New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) with expectations of a seamless curriculum provision and intention that “each stage of the journey prepares them for and connects well with the next...so that students find the transitions positive and have a clear sense of continuity and direction” (p. 41).

On an encouraging note, all interview respondents indicated that moderation sessions between Year 6 and Year 7 teachers would be valuable and welcomed, as would the opportunity to engage in professional discussions around the effectiveness of the transition process, the value of the data received and a common understanding of what best transition practice would look like. The challenge now then lies in the logistics of setting up opportunities for professional discourse with the ability to find available meeting times in what are already burdensome work schedules. Even so, the benefits of building and developing professional dialogue between sectors in order to better support student learning and achievement is undeniable.

Relationships & Trust

These themes were particularly pertinent in discovering what transitional information schools would like to receive. Building relationships was strongly indicated in the interview and anecdotal survey responses as a key focus to support successful transitions. This is consistent with the findings of *Evaluation at a*

Glance: Transitions from Primary to Secondary School (Education Review Office, 2012). Yet, it is paradoxical that the transition and relationship strategies outlined by the respondents in both sets of research data operated in ‘silos’, falling into two distinct areas of either internal or external focus and/or strategies.

Respondents from the primary sector tended to be more internal in their focus and recognised what their Year 6 learners needed in terms of independence, social skills and academic knowledge. These they developed from the basis of the classroom teacher’s own knowledge, expertise and school context. They indicated that they are very open to communications and events such as open days etc. organised by the receiving schools, but the feeder schools do not actively seek or pursue relationships with the receiving schools and are unsure exactly what receiving schools want from their feeder schools. The impression gained was that it would be professionally inappropriate for feeder schools to initiate a co-constructed understanding of the transition process; that they were much at the mercy of the individual process of each receiving school.

Receiving schools tended to focus on external strategies to support and welcome those students coming in. This was achieved in the form of open evenings, orientation days, information documents, pōwhiri (welcome ceremony), in-class relationship building and learning, ‘school-spirit’ events and early connections made with parents and whanau. Communication with the feeder schools was initiated by the receiving school and tended to be of an inforamatory nature rather than a consultative nature in terms of outlining the transition process and how this will be managed. Many of the receiving schools initiated face-to-face interviews with feeder schools in order to gain a better understanding of the transitioning students. This, however, was certainly not consistent across or between schools.

Yet, both feeder and receiving schools acknowledged that transition is more complicated than just having in-school orientation processes. Respondents all indicated the need to develop and maintain strong connections and relationships between teachers and students, between teachers and families and between and within schools which are based on trust and respect; to do more to share student information; and to collaborate and share information about successful transition schemes.

These comments affirmed ERO's (2012) research which stated that relationships with and between teachers and students are critical, and that of Symonds and Hargreaves (2016) who suggested that "relationships with teachers and peers were the key determinant of emotional engagement and disengagement independent of transition" (p. 80). Barber and Olsen (2004) also contended that the teacher-student connection was vital and "the degree to which students felt supported by their teachers was most consistently predictive of their reported functioning, inside and outside of school" (p. 27). There were strong expressions of the vital importance of the student-teacher-family relationship in terms of how the relationships in the feeder schools support the Year 6 learners and their families as they transition, and then how important it is to build an equally positive relationship between the new teacher, the now Year 7 students and their families.

Respondents elaborated to include the relationships necessary between feeder and receiving schools and, as discussed earlier, highlighted some of the challenges with this. The research of Wylie and Bonne (2014) in particular identified a concern in New Zealand around poor transition processes for students between Māori-medium and English-medium schools (or vice-versa) and endorsed this as an area for further research. Although respondents did not recognise the Māori-medium to English-medium transition as an area of specific concern in the survey or interviews, there were a small number of respondents who did recognise the necessity and challenges inherent in building culturally-based relationships with individual students where the culture differs from their own personal understandings and/or teaching context.

This is in keeping with the findings of Hill (2016) who notes the differences in concept of a whanau-based context in a Māori-medium setting versus the individual-based context of an English-medium setting. Hohepa and Paki (2017), made the recommendation that teachers require a deeper understanding and engagement with traditional cultural values, knowledge and practices. Teachers need to provide continuity of language and culture to support these transitions between Māori-medium and English-medium settings.

Purposeful Data Collection

The findings from this theme are key to answering the research questions posed, particularly in terms of discovering what informal information is passed on for vulnerable Year 6 learners when transitioning between schools.

Vulnerable learners were perceived by respondents as being particularly susceptible to the challenges of transitions. The mix of enthusiasm and hopefulness expressed by students at the prospect of a fresh start was also mentioned and endorses the findings of Akos and Galassi (2004); Dockett et al. (2011); Tilleczek and Ferguson (2007) and Yates (1999). The respondents expressed their hope for students to experience this eagerness, but in keeping with Tilleczek and Ferguson (2007) also recognised the paradox in emotions that students are experiencing and the dilemma between providing a 'fresh start', whilst still having enough data and information in order to know the students well enough to effect appropriate support.

Differences between schools in the way the transition of data was managed, the supports and strategies in place to aid student transition and the perceived effectiveness or otherwise of the entire process was identified in the surveys and interview findings. It is somewhat disconcerting that this was also observed around 15 years ago in the findings of McGee et al. (2003) who postulated that the lack of consistent liaison between teachers of contributing and received schools was a challenge that needed addressing. It would be hoped that there has been some improvement in processes since then, although findings from this research indicate that this is certainly still a work in progress.

The majority of survey and interview respondents agreed, as reflected in the findings of Galton and McLellan (2017) and Symonds and Galton (2014), that academic data was needed to help decide where students should be placed and to enable a balanced mix of academic abilities within classes. The respondents further agreed that other types of data are also necessary, such as the behavioural, social, emotional and learning needs of students, particularly when these needs require additional support or pedagogical approaches.

It is interesting to note that of the leaders interviewed, both intermediate/middle school leaders identified strong internal reviews of transition process and

procedures. Yet only one identified an intended external review practice, in the form of asking for feedback on the transition process from contributing schools, from Year 6 teachers and from the students themselves. The primary school leaders interviewed indicated that they had not ever been requested to give feedback by any of the receiving schools but would happily engage in this process if asked.

This research appears to indicate that there is some motivation to change teaching practice and to actively work towards improving transition processes, however much of this motivation and review is aimed internally rather than in consultation with other schools.

It also appears that there is a disconnect between feeder and receiving schools in deciding what data is important to pass on to a receiving school and an uncertainty by feeder schools as to what data is most valued, or indeed if it is valued at all. The Ministry of Education (2010) declared in their report as outlined in Chapter 2, that teachers should “have access to up to date information concerning their [students’] learning and achievement and what is going on in their lives more generally” (p. 15). It is reinforced by Bafumo (2006); Crosnoe (2009); Education Review Office (2012); Hanewald (2013); and Sebba et al. (2015), that knowing students well and the ‘comfort level’ that this brings is vital to mitigate the negative effects of transition. These sentiments were strongly represented in the surveys and interview findings as well - particularly for vulnerable students - with the respondents expressing the desire to provide and receive information that is pertinent to the student, is holistic in nature (rather than purely academic) and would enable the new school and teachers to get to know the student quickly.

Diversity & Inclusion

Findings from this theme built understanding in helping to answer the question posed around the ways receiving schools utilise informal information to support the transition of vulnerable learners. The ideal of diversity and inclusion was expressed by many respondents and they indicated that this should be – and is - catered for regardless of ethnic, cultural or social background.

Māori & Pasifika Learners

Developing and supporting of applicable and relevant transition strategies for Māori and Pasifika students did not emerge as a strong theme in the findings. It is important to establish that Māori and Pasifika learners are not vulnerable learners by default, and respondents in this research were not specifically asked about transition strategies for Māori and Pasifika learners. However it is interesting to note that very few identified the need to work specifically for and with, their Māori and Pasifika communities, beyond echoing the view of ERO (2012) and Gluckman and Hayne (2011) in noting that special consideration needs to be given to learner pathways for Māori. There was a limited acknowledgement of the need to engage in culturally-appropriate practices, some of which reflected the research of Cavanagh et al. (2012); Hill (2016); Hohepa and Paki (2017) and Macfarlane et al. (2007) on how Māori are best supported to enjoy success as Māori and the need to improve pedagogical knowledge and cultural understandings.

All Learners

All of the leaders interviewed, and many of the survey respondents, acknowledged the diverse needs of students, such as academic, learning, behavioural, emotional or social needs; consideration for those who do not speak English as a first language; support for 'at-risk' students; awareness and support of family dynamics; and possible barriers to education in terms of equity. Many respondents expressed frustration that the current education focus is on pure academia rather than recognition of other areas of strength, skills and knowledge such as the arts, physical or sporting skills and ability, social skills, citizenship, cultural understandings, world awareness etc. These responses support the suggestions made by Dockett et al. (2017) and Hood (2015) that it is time to shift from 'measuring the gap' using Westernised assessments and to recognise other attributes that are critical to future success and also echo the idea suggested by Wyn and Dwyer (2000), that "mental health, well-being and identify construction are now part of the core-business of schools" (p. 158).

Communities of Learning - or Kahui Ako - and the possibilities inherent in these was a commonly recurring idea around catering for diverse learners in an inclusive

manner. It was ironic that despite the assertion in *Community of Learning – Guide for Schools and Kura* (Ministry of Education, 2016) that the purpose and intent of forming a Kahui Ako is to have “groups of kura/schools that come together, along with their communities, to raise achievement for all tamariki and young people by sharing expertise in teaching and learning (ako), and supporting each other” (p. 3), none of the respondents mentioned this specific goal of raising achievement as a reason to be involved in a Kahui Ako.

A number of respondents expressed hope that the Kahui Ako would be used to develop relationships across schools and communities; create an understanding of culture, identity and social backgrounds; and strengthen and smooth transition pathways by collaborating and communicating. Furthermore, there was a marked desire to develop school cultures and curriculum expectations that reflect a balanced recognition of the skills, knowledge and understandings required to enable learners to become confident, connected and contributing citizens of society.

These views are supported by the findings of Howe and Richards (2011), that the holistic approach of viewing learning and development of “physical, cognitive, social, emotional, cultural, moral and spiritual needs” (p. 15), is a way to address emotional experiences of older students, in order to alleviate the stressors of the transition period. This is also very much in keeping with the beliefs of Sir Ken Robinson, who stated at the 2010 TED conference:

Life is not linear; it's organic. We create our lives symbiotically as we explore our talents in relation to the circumstances they help to create for us. Human communities depend upon a diversity of talent, not a singular conception of ability. (Robinson, 2010)

The expressed Community of Learning goal of education of our young people and raising achievement, is not a new one for educators and has forever been the aim of schools and teaching professionals. Aristotle himself is credited with saying "All who have meditated on the art of governing mankind have been convinced that the fate of empires depends on the education of youth" (Aristotle, 384 – 322 B.C., cited in Boyle & Burns, 2011). There appears then, to be a necessity to use an alternative tactic; to view this disconnect between ideal and reality, theory and practice, through a fresh lens. Achievement goals could in fact be realised through engaging

in an inclusive and holistic approach to education and students and by actively catering to the unique challenges, needs and dreams of our diverse communities, teachers, families and learners.

Limitations of this Research

The sample surveyed in the national survey is not representative of all primary, intermediate/middle schools in New Zealand. Any respondents effectively self-selected and were only able to complete the survey if they had access to the online survey link. This link was only made available via three education-based Facebook pages.

The respondents in the Kahui Ako survey were again only able to access the survey link via emails distributed to them by leaders in their schools. The respondents in this survey are not indicative of all the schools in that particular Kahui Ako, with only 22 participants across four schools - out of a possible eleven schools - participating in the online survey research.

The respondents in the interview research were identified as being the leaders responsible for transition in their school. These schools are in close proximity to each other and had varying levels of relationships as being feeder or receiving schools for each other. This could potentially affect the results of the findings, in that positive relationships may result in better transition processes. Furthermore, analysis of interview responses identified three areas that required further probing – that of theoretical understandings behind transition processes, utilisation of transition strategies throughout the Year 7 academic year and utilisation of specific strategies for Māori and Pasifika learners.

Future research would be strengthened by interviewing a wider variety of schools in New Zealand, who perhaps do not have strong relationships with each of their feeder schools, and specifically probing to develop better understandings of the three areas identified as a concern.

These findings can be considered as indicators only and are not representative of all primary, intermediate and middle schools within New Zealand, therefore these

findings are not generalisable but may be transferable and are perhaps a basis from which to develop and inform further research platforms.

Recommendations

These recommendations come from the findings and discussion points considered throughout the preceding chapters and are intended to help support the transition process for students, their families, whanau and teachers in both feeder and receiving schools.

Recommendation One

Engagement by teachers and school leaders in professional learning and readings around transition and transition theory as per the recommendations on theory-based practice made by Timperley et al. (2008) with review of transition processes, procedures and strategies and co-construct these between feeder and receiving schools:

- Explicitly identify a ‘continuous learning pathway’ in keeping with the *New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) so that educational contexts are connected and clear – i.e. that curriculum content and aims link from one school setting to another and that the pathway of progression is clear to follow for both teachers and students
- Explicitly identify how the transition process addresses the specific needs of Māori and Pasifika and develop policies and procedures that support this based on research and the needs of the local context and community
- Explicitly identify how the transition process addresses and caters for diversity and inclusivity and develop policies and procedures that support this based on research and the needs of the local context and community

Recommendation Two

Review the format of transition profile forms to ask specifically for:

- Pastoral records which enable feeder schools to clearly indicate if there are behavioural, emotional, social or learning needs, particularly for those

vulnerable students who do not receive external agency support and/or funding

- Student interests, strengths and extracurricular activities
- Parental voice – an indication of what parents value for their children and would like the receiving school to know or be aware of
- Student voice – what do the students know about themselves as a learner and their ambitions, concerns, dreams etc. for intermediate/middle school?

Recommendation Three

Engage in collective and collaborative pedagogical discussion to address the concerns raised around the validity, accuracy and type of student data being passed on:

- Intermediate/middle schools to feedback to primary schools re value of data and how it is utilised
- Intermediate/middle schools to engage in an annual form (written or verbal) of feedback at the end of Term 1, to Year 6 teachers in contributing schools in regards to identified vulnerable students. Feedback to include information on success of transition, academic, social, emotional and behavioural progress and explanatory comments as required
- Intermediate/middle schools to provide feedback to feeder schools on what is ideally required in order to prepare students for positive transition experiences
- Engage in moderation sessions between Year 6 Primary and Year 7 intermediate/middle school teachers around academic data and levelling – particularly in writing
- Ensure that data is disseminated to receiving schools' classroom teachers. Ideally at the end of the preceding school year, to allow time to review and prepare for student needs over the January non-contact period

Recommendation Four

Engage and invest in community-wide communication and relationships in order to build reciprocal trust across schools and between schools and families/whanau:

- Actively engage in initiatives to develop strong links and relationships between schools from Year 6 to Year 7

- Consider issuing invitations for Year 6 students, their families/whanau and their teachers to receiving school events other than open days to breed familiarity and comfort with new school setting, e.g. school productions, sporting events, music evenings etc.
- Consider initiatives such as a buddy programme between Year 6 and Year 7 students prior to starting intermediate/middle school
- Consider other ways to gather student and parental voice during the transition process and how this voice is utilised to best effect
- Building understanding of the importance and effects of transition could be a target for Communities of Learning

Recommendations for Future Research

The following are suggestions for research which could build on the findings presented:

- Research the view and beliefs of parents and students and their experience of transition from Year 6 to Year 7
- Investigate the ‘achievement drop’ through a series of comparative longitudinal studies that follow learners as they progress from Year 5 to Year 10 in a New Zealand context
- Investigate the relationship and impact that social support and socio-emotional functioning has upon other transition challenges, such as long-term academic achievement, behaviours and/or social and emotional health
- Investigate how developing and adapting the structure of a receiving school environment to maintain familiarity and security for new students can benefit the transition process
- Investigate transition processes from Māori medium settings to English medium settings and the relationship between ‘successful’ transitions and teacher knowledge of traditional Māori cultural values and understandings and the continuity of language and culture

Conclusion

This research involved respondents from a mix of primary, intermediate and middle schools and was conducted via two surveys – a national survey and a localised survey - as well as interviews with five school leaders who were identified as being responsible for transition processes and strategies within their respective schools.

This research explored what kinds of informal student data and information is passed on between schools, how it is collected by schools and how it is utilised by receiving schools. Of particular focus was the content of the transition data gathered, how this was disseminated and what supports are in place for students who may have emotional, behavioural, social and/or learning needs.

It was this researcher's hypothesis that sharing of anecdotal or informal data on how best to support a learner would aid the transition process, so that the teacher and student in the receiving school are able to build their relationship based on knowledge of things that work, rather than guessing and experimenting.

It is significant that this research did, in fact, identify a disconnect between primary feeder schools and receiving intermediate and middle schools in terms of what data is most valued, how it is utilised and how it is disseminated. A recommendation was made for feeder and receiving schools to engage in robust professional discussion on the type, accuracy and value of data being collected and utilised.

Respondents recognised the difficulties inherent in developing effective transition processes and it was identified that each school operates within its own knowledge, experience, philosophy and context. A recommendation was made for schools to engage in professional development on transitions and to investigate changes with theory and current research as a basis for action.

Respondents highlighted the risks to all students throughout the transition process but were particularly concerned about the vulnerable learners. A recommendation was made for receiving schools to engage in feedback and feedforward with feeder schools to co-construct what skills and knowledge a Year 6 learner needs in order to transition successfully.

Respondents acknowledged the benefit of working across schools and across communities. Respondents expressed hope for the Community of Learning and it was recommended that this could be a vehicle to help build understanding and relationships within the wider community and a way to collectively address the challenges of addressing and catering for Māori and Pasifika learners along with other diverse learners, so that there is a clear and successful learning pathway.

It is recognised that this research has limitations and cannot be considered representative of all primary and intermediate or middle schools in New Zealand. Nevertheless, the findings of this study may have important implications for developing and shaping transition practice and process and it has established areas for future research platforms. Further development and investigation of transition process – particularly for our vulnerable learners - is certainly warranted and should be an area of focus for both feeder and receiving schools within New Zealand.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Survey Questions

All questions required a response before the participant was able to move on to the next question. The option to comment was available for most questions. Questions 1-5 gathered personal information and consent and are not detailed here in the interests of maintaining confidentiality.

6. Are you responsible for transitioning students in your school?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Sometimes / Other ____ [please specify]
 - Comment

7. Does your school pass on or receive individual student data for transitioning Year 6 to Year 7 learners?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Sometimes
 - Depends on the receiving school
 - Don't know
 - Other _____ [please detail]
 - Comment

8. Who is this data usually received by?
 - Principal
 - Deputy Principal
 - Nominated transition teacher
 - Don't know
 - Other _____ [please detail]
 - Comment

9. In what way is the data usually passed on to or received by intermediate/middle or Middle schools?
 - Face to face planning meeting
 - Student files are sent in bulk to receiving schools
 - Data is given to students at the end of the school year
 - Don't know

- Other _____ [please detail]
- Comment

10. What data is collected?

(Tick all that apply)

- Academic results – e.g. PAT, Probe, Running Records, etc
- Behavioural information
- Emotional information
- Social information
- Membership of groups (e.g. sports, cultural, music, clubs etc)
- Record of strengths / needs / interests
- Previous school reports
- Other _____ [please detail]
- Comment

11. In what way is the data provided intended to be utilised by the intermediate/middle or Middle schools? (Tick as many as apply)

- Class placement
- Academic achievement
- Learning needs
- Behavioural needs
- Emotional needs
- Social needs
- Learning needs
- Teacher needs (e.g. students suitable for beginning teachers)
- Teacher strengths / interests (e.g. matching students with teachers)
- Indication of student interests for encouragement to join groups (music, sport etc)
- Don't know
- Other _____ [please detail]
- Comment

12. Do you believe that the data Primary schools provide serves the purpose for which it is collected and collated?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes
- Don't know
- Other _____ [please detail]
- Comment

13. Do you believe that the data Primary schools provide is utilised by the receiving intermediate/middle or Middle school?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes
- Depends on the receiving school
- Don't know
- Other _____ [please detail]
- Comment

14. To your knowledge, is the data given to the individual classroom teachers at the receiving intermediate/middle or Middle schools?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes
- Depends on the receiving school
- Don't know
- Comment

15. * Do you think the data provided by Primary Schools is helpful to the teachers at the receiving intermediate/middle or Middle schools?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes
- Depends on the receiving school
- Don't know
- * Comment

16. Is the data gathered and passed on by Primary schools for 'vulnerable' students different in any way to the data for other students?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes
- Depends on the receiving school
- Don't know
- Comment [please detail any differences noted]

17. * Do you think 'vulnerable' students are generally transitioned well from Year 6 to Year 7? I.e. from Primary school to intermediate/middle or Middle schools?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes
- Depends on the receiving school

- Don't know
- * Comment [please detail]

18. * Do you think enough support is given to 'vulnerable' students during the Year 6 to Year 7 transition period?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes
- Depends on the receiving school
- Depends on the student
- Don't know
- * Comment [please detail]

19. * Do you think there is more data and information that could / should be given about students to the receiving intermediate/middle or Middle schools?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes
- Depends on the receiving school
- Depends on the student
- Don't know
- * Comment [please detail]

20. Further general comments about the process of transition from Year 6 to Year 7.

- Comment [general opinions, comments]

21. Thank you for participating in this survey – it is enormously appreciated. Please read the following consent agreement carefully before submitting your answers.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Guiding Research Questions

- What informal information is passed on for vulnerable Year 6 learners when transitioning from primary schools to receiving schools?
- In what ways do receiving schools utilise informal information to support transitioning vulnerable learners?
- What transitional information would receiving schools like to be given?

Interview questions – Teachers at Contributing Primary schools

1. What kinds of data do you record about students?
2. Of this data, what is passed on to the next school?
3. When you pass data on, how do you expect the receiving school to utilise the data?
4. Do you think this happens?
5. What kind of data or information do you think is the most important to pass on to a receiving school?
6. Do you think there is data that is currently not recorded, but that should / could be passed on to a receiving school?
7. How well do you think vulnerable learners are supported by the teaching staff in this school in their transition to a receiving school?
8. What does this school do to help or prepare students for the transition process?

Interview questions – Teachers at intermediate/middle / Middle School

1. What kinds of data do you get from contributing schools about your students?
2. Of this data, how much of it is useful?
3. How do you utilise and disseminate the data you receive?
4. Do your teachers find the data useful and do they use it to prepare for and support new students?
5. What kind of data or information do you think is the most important for a contributing school to provide?
6. Do you think there is data that is currently not recorded, but that should / could be passed on to a receiving school?
7. How well do you think vulnerable learners are supported by the teaching staff in this school in their transition to this school?
8. What does this school do to prepare and support students during the transition process?

Appendix C: Invitation to Participate in Survey

Dear Teacher,

My name is Kirsty Gilroy and I would like to invite you to complete an online survey.

As part of my Masters in Education thesis at the University of Waikato I am conducting research around the knowledge and understandings of teachers and the needs of students as they transition from Year 6 in contributing primary schools to Year 7 in intermediate/middle schools. You will find more information in the attached information sheet.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. The survey will take about 10 minutes to complete. Your responses will be kept confidential and individuals may choose to complete this survey anonymously.

If you encounter any problems or if you require any clarification regarding the concept of 'transition', you are welcome to phone or email me. At the end of the survey you will have the option to be emailed a link to the research findings once they have been published.

My contact details and those of my supervisor are on the information sheet and we are happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you very much for your co-operation – it is enormously appreciated.

Kind regards,

Kirsty Gilroy

Appendix D: Information Sheet: for Participants in Online Survey

Master of Education Thesis:

Bridging the transition from Year 6 to Year 7: A New Zealand Context

Researcher: Kirsty Gilroy

My name is Kirsty Gilroy and as part of my Masters in Education thesis at the University of Waikato, I am conducting research around the knowledge and understandings of teachers and the needs of students as they transition from Year 6 in contributing primary schools to Year 7 in intermediate/middle schools.

My research may contribute to the development of teacher knowledge and practice around the process of transition and identify what contributes to a smoother transition for learners between Year 6 and Year 7.

Your participation in this study will give you the opportunity to reflect on the needs of learners in this age group and share best practice and ideas for improvement.

This study has been approved by the Faculty of Education Ethics Committee at the University of Waikato. The findings of the study may be disseminated in oral presentations, seminars, conferences or journal articles, but you will not be identified in any publication. Data will be kept confidential and cannot be traced back to you.

I request your participation in the following way: I will be conducting an online survey and would appreciate your contribution to this process. I will also be asking you to give electronic consent at the end of the survey. By submitting the survey you will be consenting to the data being analysed and your individual responses will not be able to be withdrawn from the data analysis from this point. The survey does not require individual identification and neither you nor your organisation will be identified in the published thesis. At no time will the raw information or data you provide be made publicly available and it will be viewed only by myself and my supervisor.

I do hope that you will agree to take part and that you will find this participation of interest. You are welcome to contact myself in the first instance, should you wish

to discuss any aspect of this research. Should I be unable to resolve your query satisfactorily, then you are welcome to contact my supervisor, Dr Sally Peters.

Researcher

Kirsty Gilroy
Email: cyamakltd@gmail.com
Phone: 027 757 0838

Supervisor

Dr Sally Peters
Email: sally.peters@waikato.ac.nz
Ph. 07 856 2889

Yours sincerely

Kirsty Gilroy (BAppSocSci, GradDipTch)

Appendix E: Consent Form for Online Survey

[Individual Teacher Name]
[School address]

Kirsty Gilroy
309 Bell Road, RD1
Kiwitahi
Morrinsville, 3371
Waikato
Kirsty.gilroy@tauwhare.school.nz

**Re: Master of Education Thesis:
Bridging the transition from Year 6 to Year 7: A New Zealand Context**

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

- I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research and I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered.
- I understand that participation in this survey is voluntary
- I understand that the survey does not require individual identification and neither myself nor my organisation will be identified in the published thesis.
- I understand that upon submitting my survey, I am unable to withdraw myself or any information that has been provided
- I understand that I may request a copy of the published findings of this research project by contacting the researcher – Kirsty Gilroy.
- I agree to take part in this project.

Appendix F: Invitation to Participate

Dear Principal,

My name is Kirsty Gilroy and I would like to invite you to participate in a research project.

As part of my Masters in Education thesis at the University of Waikato I am conducting research around the knowledge and understandings of teachers and the needs of students as they transition from Year 6 in contributing primary schools to Year 7 in intermediate/middle schools. You will find more information in the attached information sheet.

Your participation in this project is voluntary. All responses will be kept confidential and raw data and information gathered will be viewed only by myself and my supervisor.

My contact details and those of my supervisor are on the information sheet and I am happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you very much for your co-operation – it is enormously appreciated.

Kind regards,

Kirsty Gilroy

Appendix G: Information Sheet for School Principals and Board of Trustees

Master of Education Thesis:

Bridging the transition from Year 6 to Year 7: A New Zealand Context

Researcher – Kirsty Gilroy

The purpose of the study is to investigate what kinds of informal student data and information is passed on between schools, how it is collected by schools and how it is utilised by receiving schools.

My research may contribute to the development of teacher knowledge and practice around the process of transition and identify what contributes to a smoother transition for learners between Year 6 and Year 7.

Your participation in this study will give you the opportunity to reflect on the needs of learners in this age group and share best practice and ideas for improvement.

This study has been approved by the Faculty of Education Ethics Committee at the University of Waikato. The findings of the study may be disseminated in oral presentations, seminars, conferences or journal articles, but you will not be identified in any publication. Data will be kept confidential and cannot be traced back to you.

I request your participation in the following ways:

1. I would like to conduct one-to-one interviews with one or two of the teaching staff in your school who have been identified as being ‘responsible for transition of students from Year 6 to Year 7’. This interview would take place in August at a time and place convenient to the leader(s) being interviewed.
2. I would like to survey teachers anonymously via Survey Monkey and this survey should take no more than 10-15 minutes to complete.

I will be asking for signed consent from your school and the 1-2 teachers participating in interviews. I will be recording interview contributions and will provide a transcript to individuals to check before data analysis is undertaken. Data

and participation in this research project may be withdrawn at any point up until research analysis has begun.

Teachers participating in the survey will be asked to give their electronic consent as part of the survey process. This will again be made clear at the end of the survey, but clicking on the “submit” button means that consent is given to participate in the survey. After the survey has been submitted, individuals will not be able to withdraw their responses.

I would appreciate if you could please indicate by return email whether your school agree to participate in the research project, and if appropriate, details of names of the participating teachers for interview. I will then directly contact the participants and arrange a time to conduct the relevant interviews at a time and place that suits your school and the participants.

Neither you nor your school will be identified in the thesis. At no time will the raw information or data you provide be made available to, or viewed by, any other people beyond myself and my supervisor.

I do hope that you will agree to take part and that you will find this participation of interest. You are welcome to contact myself in the first instance, should you wish to discuss any aspect of this research. Should I be unable to resolve your query satisfactorily, then you are welcome to contact my supervisor, Dr Sally Peters.

Researcher

Kirsty Gilroy
Email: cyamakltd@gmail.com
Phone: 027 757 0838

Supervisor

Dr Sally Peters
Email: sally.peters@waikato.ac.nz
Ph. 07 856 2889

Yours sincerely

Kirsty Gilroy (BAppSocSci, GradDipTch)

Appendix H: Consent to Conduct Research Within Your School and Access to Documentation for Transition

Template for a school to provide a letter giving permission to conduct research

[School address]

Kirsty Gilroy
309 Bell Road, RD1
Kiwitahi
Morrinsville, 3371
Waikato
Kirsty.gilroy@tauwhare.school.nz

[Date]

**Re: Master of Education Thesis:
Bridging the transition from Year 6 to Year 7: A New Zealand Context**

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

- I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research project.
- I give permission for research to be conducted within this organisation.
- I understand that the name of this organisation will not be used in any public reports and that all data collected will remain secure and confidential.
- I give permission for relevant documentation in regards to the topic this research to be provided to the researcher.

Signature _____

Name of signatory _____

Position of signatory _____ Date ____/____/____

Appendix I: Invitation to Participate in Interview

Dear Teacher,

My name is Kirsty Gilroy and I would like to invite you to engage in an interview for a research project I am currently involved in.

As part of my Masters in Education thesis at the University of Waikato I am conducting research around the knowledge and understandings of teachers and the needs of students as they transition from Year 6 in contributing primary schools to Year 7 in intermediate/middle schools. You will find more information in the attached information sheet.

Your participation in this interview is voluntary. The interview will take about 30 minutes to complete. Your responses will be kept confidential and individuals will not be identified in published material.

Should you wish to participate in the interview you will need to give signed consent for your responses to be used for the purpose of this research project. Further details are on the information sheet and consent form provided, as well as my contact details and those of my supervisor. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you very much for your co-operation – it is enormously appreciated.

Kind regards,

Kirsty Gilroy

Appendix J: Information Sheet: for School Leader Responsible for Transition

**Master of Education Thesis:
Bridging the transition from Year 6 to Year 7: A New Zealand Context
Researcher: Kirsty Gilroy**

My name is Kirsty Gilroy and as part of my Masters in Education thesis at the University of Waikato, I am conducting research around the knowledge and understandings of teachers and the needs of students as they transition from Year 6 in contributing primary schools to Year 7 in intermediate/middle schools.

My research may contribute to the development of teacher knowledge and practice around the process of transition and identify what contributes to a smoother transition for learners between Year 6 and Year 7.

Your participation in this study will give you the opportunity to reflect on the needs of learners in this age group and share best practice and ideas for improvement.

This study has been approved by the Faculty of Education Ethics Committee at the University of Waikato. The findings of the study may be disseminated in oral presentations, seminars, conferences or journal articles, but you will not be identified in any publication. Data will be kept confidential and cannot be traced back to you.

I request your participation in the following way: I will be conducting one-to-one interviews and would appreciate your contribution to this process. I will also be asking you to sign a consent form regarding this event. Neither you nor your organisation will be identified in the published thesis. At no time will the raw information or data you provide be made publicly available and it will be viewed only by myself and my supervisor.

I will be asking for signed consent from interview participants. I will be recording interview contributions and will provide a transcript to individuals to check before data analysis is undertaken. Data and participation in this research project may be withdrawn at any point up until research analysis has begun.

I do hope that you will agree to take part and that you will find this participation of interest. You are welcome to contact myself in the first instance, should you wish to discuss any aspect of this research. Should I be unable to resolve your query satisfactorily, then you are welcome to contact my supervisor, Dr Sally Peters.

Researcher

Kirsty Gilroy
Email: cyamakltd@gmail.com
Phone: 027 757 0838

Supervisor

Dr Sally Peters
Email: sally.peters@waikato.ac.nz
Ph. 07 856 2889

Yours sincerely

Kirsty Gilroy (BAppSocSci, GradDipTch)

Appendix K: Consent Form for Interviews

[Individual Teacher Name]
[School address]

Kirsty Gilroy
309 Bell Road, RD1
Kiwitahi
Morrinsville, 3371
Waikato
Kirsty.gilroy@tauwhare.school.nz

**Re: Master of Education Thesis:
Bridging the transition from Year 6 to Year 7: A New Zealand Context**

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

- I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research and I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered.
- I understand that neither my name nor the name of my organisation will be used in any public reports.
- I understand that the principal at my school will not be provided with any raw data or information provided at the interview that I attend.
- I understand that I will be provided with a transcript of the information from the interview for checking and amendment before data analysis is started.
- I am aware that I may withdraw myself or any information that has been provided for this project up to the stage when analysis of data has begun.
- I understand that I may request a copy of the published findings of this research project by contacting the researcher – Kirsty Gilroy.
- I agree to take part in this project.

Signature _____ Name of signatory _____

Position of signatory _____ Date ____/____/____

Appendix L: Data from National Survey & Kahui Ako Survey

Table 15

Role of the Person Who Receives Student Data

Answers	National Responses				Kahui Ako Responses			
	Primary	Intermediate Middle School	Primary	Intermediate Middle School	Primary	Intermediate Middle School	Primary	Intermediate Middle School
Principal	10.61%	7	11.90%	5	16.67%	1	18.75%	3
Deputy Principal	22.73%	15	54.76%	23	33.33%	2	56.25%	9
Transition teacher	31.82%	21	19.05%	8	16.67%	1	6.25%	1
Don't know	27.27%	18	4.76%	2	33.33%	2	12.50%	2
Other	7.58%	5	9.52%	4	0.00%	0	6.25%	1

Table 16

How Data is Transmitted to Receiving Schools

Answers	National Responses				Kahui Ako Responses			
	Primary	Intermediate Middle School	Primary	Intermediate Middle School	Primary	Intermediate Middle School	Primary	Intermediate Middle School
Face to face meeting	43.94%	29	40.48%	17	33.33%	2	37.50%	6
Student files sent in bulk	48.48%	32	47.62%	20	50.00%	3	62.50%	10
Data given to students	6.06%	4	7.14%	3	0.00%	0	6.25%	1
Don't know	12.12%	8	14.29%	6	16.67%	1	12.50%	2
Other	16.67%	11	19.05%	8	33.33%	2	6.25%	1

Appendix M: Collated Themes from National Survey

Primary School Responses – National Survey	Intermediate/Middle School Responses – National Survey
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of feedback from intermediate/middle schools to primary teachers on the purpose and effectiveness of student data and the transition process• Lack of understanding around what data is useful and how it is utilised by intermediate/middle school teachers• Testing – questioned value of prior testing and testing too early in the school year• Fear of possible repercussions if too honest – e.g. written information could be used for later ‘evidence’• Primary teachers provide pastoral data but it is not utilised by intermediate/middle school teachers• How well are vulnerable students supported? Is the receiving school inclusive? Do they cater for diverse learners?• Difficulties in consistency between what Intermediate / Middle schools want provided – varies from school to school	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of complete data received from primary schools• There is a gap when students enrol late and data becomes very hard to obtain• Data not always sent when it is requested - assumed this is because primary teachers are too busy• Belief that academic judgements of primary teachers are often incorrect• Not enough social, behavioural, emotional data provided to give a holistic view of the student• Difficulties in consistency between primary schools – some provide excellent data, others do not• Aim to cater for diverse learners and to be inclusive but need all the information available in order to do this

Figure 4: Collated themes from national survey.

Combined Primary & Intermediate/ Middle School Responses

- Relationships and trust between and within schools need to be developed
- Data not always getting to individual teachers at intermediate/middle schools – perception by Primary teachers and some evidence of truth in this
- Fine line between clean slate approach or supported fresh start
- Less confidence by Primary teachers that the data they provide is of value, conversely, data is seen as very valuable by intermediate/middle school teachers
- Teacher knowledge and pedagogy can be lacking in terms of catering for learners with high pastoral needs, therefore ‘best practice’ teachers become overloaded
- Expressed a hope for Communities of Learning to help address transition issues
- Relationships between schools, teachers, students and families are vital
- Communication between schools, teachers, students and families is vital
- Placement of students is about wellbeing of both student and teacher
- Lack of funding makes it difficult to provide additional resources to fully support vulnerable students

Figure 5: Collated themes from national survey (cont.).

Appendix N: Collated Themes from Kahui Ako Survey

<p>Primary School Responses – Kahui Ako Survey</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of feedback from intermediate/middle schools to primary teachers on the purpose and effectiveness of student data and the transition process• Lack of understanding around what data is useful and how it is utilised by receiving schools• Primary teachers provide pastoral data but it is not utilised by intermediate/middle school teachers – possibly due to intention to provide ‘clean-slate’ approach• Availability of resources and number of vulnerable students affects effectiveness of the transition process• Need to have trust in receiving schools	<p>Intermediate/Middle School Responses – Kahui Ako Survey</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of complete data received from primary schools• Not enough social, behavioural, emotional data provided to give a holistic view of the student• Difficulties in consistency between contributing schools – some provide excellent data, others do not• Not always full disclosure given – particularly when detailing extremities of behaviour or needs of vulnerable children• The more information that is given, the more support can be provided and the less stress the student will experience• Need to trust contributing schools
<p>Combined Primary & Intermediate/Middle School Responses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Value of face to face meetings was expressed, although time can be a barrier to this occurring• Fine line between clean slate approach or supported fresh start• Less confidence by primary teachers that the data they provide is of value, conversely, data is seen as very valuable by intermediate/middle school teachers• Placement of students is about wellbeing of both student and teacher	

Figure 6. Collated themes from Kahui Ako survey

Appendix O: Collated Themes from Semi-Structured Interviews

Primary Responses – Semi-structured Interviews	Intermediate/Middle School Responses – Semi-structured Interviews
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What value does the data have?• Testing is done too early in new year• Little value placed on prior teacher judgements• Uncertainty around the way data is disseminated – if at all• Parental expectations change• Pastoral data not always specifically asked for or valued. Particularly if filling in a form only with no follow up interview• Primary schools are more responsive to individual student needs• Year 6 teachers have proactive strategies to develop and prepare learners for transition but teachers are unclear what the intermediate/middle schools specifically want from Year 6 teachers in terms of data and preparation of student• There is trust from the primary schools that the intermediate/middle schools will act in best interests of the child	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of complete data received• Clean slate vs. supported fresh start – give us full information so that we can place the child in a class that best meets their needs and balances out the make-up of classes for the teachers• Transition is about settling child and their parents – teachers are responsive to this• It is a team effort at intermediate/middle schools at making up classes which involves leaders of the school as well as teachers• Intermediate/middle schools do want to know about the whole child – the holistic view.• Visibility of Principal and/or DP is important at contributing schools too. E.g. visits to school to meet students• Sometimes the academic judgements being made by primary teachers are incorrect.

Figure 7. Collated data from semi-structured interviews.

Combined Primary & Intermediate/Middle Responses

- There is hope for Communities of Learning to address these concerns
- Lack of parental voice in the transition process
- Parental voice is important – how do you get this?
- Lack of funding makes providing additional support for vulnerable students difficult
- No way to pass data on electronically between schools via SMS unless same SMS system and even then this doesn't transfer pastoral data
- National Standards information is not standard due to variances in teacher interpretation and judgements, therefore query the value of it
- At what point should students be told their classes? Earlier equals better outcomes
- Lack of standard process for passing on data between schools of same level results in a “void” where students can be lost
- Needs to be more trust between teachers – received and given.
- Need to have moderation between primary and intermediate/middle school teachers around academic data and levelling – particularly in writing
- Relationships between schools, teachers, students and families are vital
- Communication between schools, teachers, students and families is vital
- Placement of students is about wellbeing of both student and teacher

Figure 8. Collated data from semi-structured interviews (cont.).

Appendix P: Combined Suggestions and Recommendations

Combined Suggestions and Recommendations

- Ask specifically for pastoral records rather than “other concerns” on form
- Ask specifically for strengths / interests etc. of student
- Invitations for Year 6 students to receiving school events to breed familiarity and comfort with new school setting
- Consider initiatives such as a buddy programme between Year 6 and Year 7 students prior to starting
- Ensure that data is disseminated to the classroom teacher. Ideally at the end of the preceding school year, to allow time to review and prepare for student needs over the January non-contact period.
- Engage initiatives to develop strong links and relationships between schools
- Develop and share robust transition processes, strategies and structures which are co-constructed between primary and intermediate/middle school students
- Intermediate/middle schools to provide feedback to primary schools re value of data and how it is utilised
- Intermediate/middle schools to feedback on an annual basis to contributing schools to reassure Year 6 teachers re identified vulnerable students
- Intermediate/middle schools to provide feedback on what is ideally required in order to prepare students for positive transition experiences
- Transitions and relationships across schools and communities should be a target for Communities of Learning
- Engage in moderation sessions between Year 6 Primary and Year 7 intermediate/middle school teachers around academic data and levelling – particularly in writing
- Look at ways to gain parental voice during the transition process.

Figure 9. Combined suggestions and recommendations.