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Our journey to school:

A collaboratively constructed, digitally facilitated transition to school

A thesis

submitted in fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree

of

Doctor of Philosophy in Te Kura Toi Tangata Faculty of Education

at

The University of Waikato

by

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THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

2024

Abstract

A parent's role in supporting their child's transition to school has been well researched and the importance of educational settings developing a partnership with parents has been identified as a key factor in a child's effective transition to school. However, this idea is based on the belief that it is the child who is experiencing the transition, while the parents have only a supporting role to play. A smaller body of research and literature focuses on a family's transition to school and acknowledges that the parents as well as the child are undergoing their own processes of change, and may need support in this process.

Taking a new approach to the transition to school process, this thesis explores the use of Facebook by a New Entrant teacher to develop a Community of Practice (CoP) to collaborate with families in making decisions about their own transition to school process. Applying a qualitative, case study approach involving 20 families who had children transitioning from three early childhood centres to the same primary school, online questionnaires were used to generate data from families and teachers at the start of the process to support the purpose and design and of each of the two separate Facebook group (families and teachers) sites. van Gennepe's three phases of transition provided a framework to perceive transition as a process where families' needs changed over the period of their transition. Reflecting the ongoing process of transition, the two groups' online data generated through the Facebook page over the period of seven months were used formatively to provide for the families' immediate needs, and summatively to view activity and the evolving CoP.

The research found that Facebook was an accessible and flexible tool, and allowed families to participate and collaborate as much as they wanted or needed. This study shows that the functions available through Facebook provided opportunities to share children's learning with all stakeholders, and so develop transition practices in both ECE and NE environments through sharing and discussing examples of practices. The CoP framework provided a network that enabled those families who needed advice or support about their child's transition to seek this from experienced members of the group. Facebook facilitated the development of a range of resources for families and teachers to return to at their leisure. It also provided a space to ask questions, have anxieties alleviated and success celebrated. Using the digital space in Facebook,

traditionally not the place for more formal orientation meetings, allowed the subsequent face-to-face meetings to become social events. These face-to-face opportunities to meet supported the connections that the families and teachers had initially made online. This thesis advocates for the use of social media platforms, such as Facebook, to enhance a blended approach of both digital and face-to-face opportunities to give families greater agency during their child's transition to school.

Acknowledgements

I have some very special people to thank for the part that they have played this thesis. I would like to express my gratitude to those whose encouragement kept me going through all the challenges and helped me to recognise and celebrate my accomplishments along the way.

To my supervisors: Professor Sally Peters for your enduring motivation and attention to detail. Your mentoring throughout my postgraduate studies has been invaluable in supporting my development as a researcher and my academic growth, thank you. I will always admire and look up to you as a wonderful mentor. To Dr Jeanette Clarkin-Phillips for your continued faith, time, and commitment to help me to push through challenges and bounce back from struggles, thank you. Finally, Associate Professor Amanda Bateman, for helping me to reach my first milestone of confirmed enrolment.

Alison Annals and Andrea Haines: For your wisdom, patience, support and positivity.

My friends for your advice and encouragement. Many of you have experienced the PhD journey; you have been there for me!

The teachers who shared their practices, their openness to change, and generosity of time.

The parents of my New Entrant class whose stories have been shared, it was an absolute privilege to have been your child's first school teacher.

My Mam and Dad for your unwaivering support throughout my post graduate studies.

My brother Dr David Robson for your patience and feedback.

My love and thanks to my support team at home; Mark, Dylan, Patch and Daisy.

And a message of encouragement to all part-time PhD students still on their journey. A PhD is not just an academic achievement, it is a reflection of your resilience, determination and commitment to overcome obstacles. I wish you well, you can do it!

Thank you.

Publications from this research

Woodhouse, H. (2022) “*Plotting a course: Families navigating to school, developing a collaborative transition to school using social media*”. University of Waikato: Images of Research

Woodhouse, H. (2021). *Using social media to support the transition to school from ECE to school* [Webinar]. The Education Hub. <https://theeducationhub.org.nz/using-social-media-to-support-the-transition-from-ece-to-school-3>

Woodhouse, H. (2020). Facebook a place to build relationships and to collaboratively support Each family’s journey to school. *Early Childhood Folio*, 24(1), 9-14. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/10.18296/ecf.0076>

Woodhouse, H. (July 2019). Our journey to school-a school teacher’s response to a family-built transition to school programme. Paper presented at Early Years Research Annual Conference, *Perspectives on wellbeing and Belonging*, Hamilton, New Zealand.

Woodhouse, H. M. (2019). ‘Spiderman does not get lost’: Examining transitional objects in supporting a child’s transition to school. *Waikato Journal of Education*, 24(2), 3-10. <https://doi.org/10.16663/wje.v24i2.661>

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Chapter 1: Introduction and background

The research focus

A child's first day at school is a significant milestone, for both the child and their family. It is a day that brings mixed emotions: excitement along with being nervous or a little scared about new routines and social situations. The vignette below shares the story of one child's first visit to school.

“Connor came to school for his first visit on Thursday, he was extremely excited to come into class. He pointed to the children and clung to Mum saying, ‘That’s Mason, oh and Morgan, and that is Kamsin!’ I asked him if he knew the children from kindy or near home, and his Mum replied, ‘Oh he has watched all the videos¹ and looked at all the photos so he knows who everyone is.’ Connor appeared ‘star struck’ when he watched Mason at lunchtime. He asked where Mason was, and Mason waved at him from the climbing frame where he was playing. Connor gave a shy little wave, remarking to Mum, ‘Mason just waved at me!’”

Connor's first visit to school shows both him and his Mum feeling a mixture of emotions, but what shines through is Connor's feeling of familiarity. Connor and his Mum may never have visited Connor's new classroom before, but he knew the names of the children in his class, and later this appeared to give him the confidence to find and make new friends, and the motivation to explore the school environment.

Current transition to school practices may not always provide such a positive start to school as depicted in the vignette about Connor. Research would suggest (Dockett et al., 2012; O'Donnoghue, 2014) that schools and teachers have traditionally approached transition as a process that is “done to” families. However, in order for a family to feel as Connor's did, transition needs to be viewed as an opportunity for families to take an active role in the process. This study explores the possibilities of families and teachers using digital and social media to collaboratively construct a customised transition to school. I have chosen to use the term “transition intervention” to describe the collaboratively constructed transition to school process that took place. My intervention was designed to support families in the transition

¹ This refers to videos on the research Facebook page.

process to school. It provided parents with the tools and information to help them meet their child's needs, increasing the possibility of a positive transition to school experience.

The Aotearoa New Zealand educational context

In Aotearoa New Zealand, starting school is not compulsory until the age of six; however, most children start school on their fifth birthday. The transition from early childhood education (hereafter ECE) to school requires the child to become familiar with new practices, people and expectations. In each case these will be unique to the education system of a specific jurisdiction. A range of historical and philosophical influences have shaped the context in which a child starts school. In Aotearoa New Zealand some key influences are: The Treaty of Waitangi, early childhood education and the compulsory school context, all of which will be explored in more detail below.

The Treaty of Waitangi: Aotearoa New Zealand's founding document

One of the most significant influences on New Zealand systems of government is the Treaty of Waitangi *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* (hereafter referred to as *Te Tiriti*), the founding document of Aotearoa New Zealand. *Te Tiriti* was signed in 1840 between the British Crown and the indigenous people, Māori, as an attempt to provide a structure to live as two peoples. It embodies three principles, which are pertinent to education today: partnership, protection, and participation. These principles and their explicit connections to education were first outlined in the *Royal Commission on Social Policy* (1988).

The principles of *Te Tiriti* have influenced the writing of both the *New Zealand Curriculum*, the curriculum for compulsory schooling (Ministry of Education, 2007b) and *Te Whāriki*, the Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2017). The *New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007b) has *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* as one of the eight principles that provide a foundation for schools' decision-making, stating, "the curriculum acknowledges the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi and the bicultural foundations of Aotearoa New Zealand". *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017) similarly states, "The Treaty has implications for our education system, particularly in terms of achieving equitable outcomes for Māori and ensuring te reo Māori not only survives but thrives" (p. 4). The *New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007b) advocates for

all students to have the opportunity to acquire knowledge of te reo Māori me ōna tikanga² from the start of their educational journey in their ECE. New Zealand’s early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, originally published in 1996 (Ministry of Education, 1996), was the first bicultural curriculum statement developed in New Zealand, and a subsequent update in 2017 built on the bicultural underpinning of the 1996 document. *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017) is the curriculum document which is used by ECE settings, spanning birth to starting school.

Although the intent to build positive partnerships with Māori families is evident in New Zealand education documentation, this has not always been experienced by Māori families. Statistics provided by Green and Schulze (2019) in a report by Business and Economic Research Limited, (BERL), revealed that 19 Māori students in every 100 were more likely to leave school with no qualifications compared to their non-Māori peers (9 in every 100). Ensuring that transition practices reflect the principles of *Te Tiriti* and incorporate Māori cultural values is likely to contribute to more positive outcomes for Māori children and families. The *Ka-Hikitia: Accelerating Success: The Māori Education Strategy 2013-2017 report* (Ministry of Education, 2007a) advocates for a ‘*Te Tiriti*-led’ approach in supporting Māori families transition to school: “[S]uccessful transitions are critical in enabling strong education pathways for Māori students” (p. 24). Incorporating Māori cultural values into a school’s transition practices helps to build positive home-school relationships that respect Māori cultural heritage and enable families to develop a sense of belonging in their school community. The report reinforces the importance for home and school to work together to develop a shared understanding through collaboration between schools, iwi and Māori families to provide ‘tailored solutions’ (p. 23) that support an effective transition for Māori families.

Early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand

For many young learners, early childhood education plays an essential role in the education of many young learners in New Zealand. There are a variety of early childhood services available to children and families in Aotearoa New Zealand (ERO, n.d), including: education and care settings; kindergartens; play centres; home-based settings; play groups; te Kōhanga Reo (all engagement is in Te Reo Māori); Ngā Puna Kōhungahunga (playgroup settings that

² The language and cultural practices of Te Reo Māori

teach Te Reo Māori and tikanga; engagement may be in both English and Te Reo Māori or Te Reo Māori only) and Pacific Islands Early Childhood groups.

In Aotearoa New Zealand most children attend some form of early childhood education until they are old enough to start school. On average, 71% of children attend ECE for at least 10 hours a week (Ministry of Education, 2022). According to the Ministry of Education (2022) the number of children who participated in early learning in the six months before starting school in 2022 was 97%.

Whilst acknowledging the range of provision available to families in New Zealand, the focus for this research is located in two specific types of teacher-led ECE settings: education and care centre, and kindergarten. The teacher-led services are staffed mainly by registered and qualified ECE teachers and must meet licensing criteria (Ministry of Education 2020). The ECE sector comprises a mixture of community-based and privately-owned services, with ECE centres being predominantly owned by a corporation, publicly listed company, or administered by a community co-operative or charitable trust (Education.govt.nz, 2022). Education and care settings offer all-day care or part-day care programmes, with between 50% and 80% qualified and registered staff; and parents are usually charged fees (Education.govt.nz, 2022). Kindergartens on the other hand, are staffed by fully qualified and registered teachers and are overseen by a regional association, which is responsible for the administration of the kindergartens (Education.govt.nz, 2022). Traditionally, kindergartens have offered public provision of early childhood education, usually with “school day” sessions for two to four year olds, and with many now offering all-day programmes.

The vision of the early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017) is for all children to “be competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society” (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 2). It promotes holistic learning and development of children through play experiences. An important role of the teacher is to facilitate play that is reflective of the points of view and values of children and their family. *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017) states that the cultures and knowledge that children and their families bring are acknowledged through the development of each centre’s curriculum framework.

The *New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007b) provides an overarching vision, principles, and values for students in English Medium teaching and learning in years 0-13. The document's vision is for children to be "life long learners who are confident, creative, connected and actively involved" (p. 7). Strengthening this vision, the *New Zealand Curriculum* (2007b, p.9) indicates eight underlying principles: high expectations, learning to learn, Treaty of Waitangi, equity, community engagement, cultural diversity, inclusion, and future focus and coherence. The curriculum vision is further supported by a set of values that reflect the beliefs of the curriculum document, and inform a school's educational decision making and engagement with its learners and community. These values advocate for students to "aim high...by persevering in the face of difficulties" (Ministry of Education, 2007b, p. 10). The document recommends that through their learning experiences children are able to develop their skills of innovation, inquiry and curiosity by thinking critically, creatively and reflectively, and learn to respect themselves, others and the environment.

Making connections between ECE and school curricula

The key competencies of the *New Zealand Curriculum Framework* (Ministry of Education, 2007b) align with the strands of the early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996, 2017), potentially allowing a seamless connection between the two sectors, with their focus on the lifelong development of a child's learning skills. The *New Zealand Curriculum Framework* (Ministry of Education, 2007b, p. 42) offers a diagram to show how key competencies in the *New Zealand Curriculum Framework* align with the strands of *Te Whāriki*. As children move from the ECE curriculum to the primary school curriculum, the two curricula together provide a bridge for learning. Further suggestions for how the two curricula may be woven together are outlined in *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017). Tables are provided to show some of the ways in which the key competencies, values and learning areas of The *New Zealand Curriculum* can be woven into the learning outcomes of *Te Whāriki*. The tables also show the connections with *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa* (Ministry of Education, 2007b) [the curriculum appropriate to Māori-medium schools]. These tables serve as a starting place for educational settings to explore curriculum connections in more depth, so that there is not an abrupt shift in children's learning as they change sectors.

The alignment of the curricula provides ECE and schools in Aotearoa New Zealand provides an opportunity for schools and centres to explore the possibilities of a "pedagogical meeting place" (Moss, 2007, p. 34) and to put into practice a more "common culture" (Moss, 2007, p.

34). However, despite the intended alignment and common culture advocated, there is evidence of a variability of practice across the sectors. Alcock and Haggerty (2013) contend that the early childhood curriculum is at cross purposes with the school curriculum because of the latter's focus on learning outcomes. Related challenges to practice will be discussed in the next section.

ECE and school

Differences between ECE and primary school can arise from how each context views transition, whether as an event or as a process, which affects the objective of any interventions offered. The duration of the transition process, according to Peters (2004) and Petriwskyj et al. (2005), is an important consideration. Transition to school can be viewed either as a long-term trajectory with no fixed end date, or as a short-term intervention, where the ECE completes their input on the child's first day of school. This can influence the practices of the ECE setting as a "preparation place for school" (Clausen, 2015, p. 358).

The idea of preparing children for school has created pedagogical "tensions" (Peters, 2010, p. 8) between early childhood and school settings across countries such as the UK, Australia, and New Zealand. An Australian study by Boyd and Newman (2019) describes the differences between the ECE and school settings as "chalk and cheese" (p 19) pedagogically operating disparate approaches to teaching and learning. Burns (2022) notes that in Scotland, the same curriculum guides the planning of children's learning in nursery (ECE/Early years) and reception (the initial year of school). However, pedagogically, ECE and school are seen to be interpreting the documentation very differently. "Tension" occurs between the adoption of a play-based curriculum for children starting school and a more didactic approach focused on assessing children's progress against nationally set targets that have been pushed down into ECE (Burns, 2022). Early years settings in the UK, for example, often prioritise programmes that focus on a child's academic performance in school, especially in literacy and numeracy (Bradbury, 2019). Tensions or pressure on early years settings in the UK have led to concerns about potential 'schoolification' (Alcock & Haggerty, 2013).

Schoolification can be defined as "the trickle-down effect of school-based initiatives" into the ECE curriculum (Alcock & Haggerty, 2013, p. 22). Compulsory assessments that form part of a child's school entry may shape the provision of ECE contexts with settings preparing children for their assessments as part of their transition to school practices (Clauson (2015). In the New Zealand context National Standards came into effect 2010-2017. They were used

to assess and report on children's learning in reading, writing and maths across Years 1-8; however, schools decided to include NE children in this assessment. The National Standards were officially discontinued in New Zealand in 2017, but schools were invited to continue using the indicators of the Standards in their reporting to families, but to focus more on children's progress, rather than attainment of a Standard. A New Zealand study by Boereboom and Tymms (2018) recommended the development of a national standardised assessment to provide a baseline of what children know as they enter school. Their research had identified a lack of consistency in the availability of reliable data about children's school entry baseline knowledge. They proposed that a standardised assessment would allow teachers to identify more quickly any specific learning needs of new entrants. Baseline knowledge which they prioritised for assessment at school entry included literacy, numeracy and the child's ability to focus on their learning tasks.

The School Entry Assessment (SEA) is a non-compulsory but popular assessment tool used in New Zealand primary schools to measure a child's early literacy, oral language and early number knowledge. The assessment provides diagnostic data for each child within six weeks of starting school (Hattie et al., 2015). However, in their investigation of this diagnostic tool, Hattie et al. (2015) questioned whether the time taken to administer the assessment provided data that enabled teachers to modify their teaching strategies to support all children in their school learning tasks, or merely offered an immediate way of reporting on children who have just started school.

In other transition literature, Williams and Lerner (2019) place less emphasis on the importance of a child being "academically ready for school". More recent focus has been on developing a school's responsibility to "be child ready" to meet the needs of all children. In the notion of being "child ready" *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017) emphasises the importance for teachers to understand transition to school from a child's perspective. The document prompts teachers to appreciate not just specific elements of the child's learning and development, but to consider the "whole experience" which the child will need to manage when starting school.

Another aspect of tension between the ECE and school settings is identified in research by Dockett and Perry (2021), who found that through teachers' own expectations, rather than because of the curriculum, two separate approaches to transition may be operating in ECEs and in primary schools. Dockett and Perry (2021) noted that in some cases schools may

exclude ECE from their early communications with families. This creates further challenges to children making a positive start to school, and families experiencing a smooth transition. Conversely, when teachers of both settings collaborate and work together to support families' transition to school, Ballam et al. (2019) found that cross-sector "alliances" may form, which make possible the development of a network of teachers where practices and expertise may be shared and developed.

The compulsory school context

In Aotearoa New Zealand children can start school at anytime between the ages of five and six years, and are referred to as "new entrants". Most children start school on or just after their fifth birthday, and all children must be enrolled with a school or in-home education by their sixth birthday (Education.govt.nz, 2022). It is not uncommon that a child may be the only one starting school on a particular date (the child's fifth birthday) or a day soon after. The time that a child spends in a New Entrant (hereafter, NE) classroom will vary according to their start date. If a child starts in Term 1 at the beginning of the academic year (February) they will remain a NE for the school year. More recently, some schools have adopted a cohort entry system for NE (Education Review Office, 2022) where children start school as part of a group in one of four terms as they turn five years old. NE children are referred to as Year 1 if they start school in the first half of the school year, and would move to Year 2 the following academic year. When a child starts school in the second half of the year, they are referred to as Year 0, and these children will move into Year 1 the following year (Ministry of Education, 2023b). The group of children in this study are Year 0 children as they started school in the latter half of the school year.

Primary schools in Aotearoa New Zealand are categorised as either "full" or "contributing". A full primary school caters for Year 0-8 while a contributing primary school provides for Year 0-6. Primary schools generally accommodate two types of learning environments, which differ through their design and organisation. The first is a traditional single-cell classroom, which usually operates with one teacher and up to thirty students, and the second is an Innovative Learning Environment (ILE). ILEs are large and open learning environments that accommodate more than one class and have several teachers. The design's flexibility these spaces is intended to promote innovative possibilities for teaching and learning experiences.

While *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017) sets a pedagogical foundation for learning in ECE, learning through play has also become more prevalent in NE learning spaces in New Zealand primary schools to promote the values and Key Competencies of the *New Zealand Curriculum* (Te Kete Ipurangi, 2019). The promotion of play in NE learning environments means that children transitioning from their ECE are provided with a more continuous and familiar learning experience in their new school environment.

The primary school in this study is a contributing primary school catering for Year 0-6. The NE environment is a play-based ILE. This was the case when the children in this study started school. It is within this context, that this study is located; the children were transitioning from ECE settings which implemented a bi-cultural curriculum, and were seen as citizens moving to compulsory schooling underpinned by a curriculum that encourages life-long learning and a commitment to the principles of partnership, protection, and participation embedded in the Treaty of Waitangi, Aotearoa, New Zealand's founding document.

Interest of the researcher

My many years as a NE teacher assisting children and their families' transition to school provided the impetus for my Ph.D. research.

I have witnessed the impacts, both positive and negative, on children and families of the transition to school processes, and I have come to believe that generally transition has been "done to" children and families. In my experience, families, in most instances, have had very little contact with their child's new school and the transition experience has been largely a process determined by the school. This has made me interested in how power could be shared between the "players" and how the transition process could become more collaborative, in order to strengthen families' roles and draw on the expertise and knowledge of both ECE and NE teachers and other families. I have wondered whether perhaps a process offering opportunities for parents to build their confidence and knowledge of managing the transition process, facilitating their own child's adjustment to starting school, might be possible. Through the parents' involvement with their child's transition the families would have the opportunity to customise the support they needed to best assist their child in their move to school. Not only are parents supporting their child's transition, but they too experience changes in their role. In my role as a NE teacher, I have seen the challenges that some parents

have faced and have often wondered how parents undertaking their eldest or only child's transition could seek advice, support and reassurance from more experienced parents.

From my reading and previous work with transitioning families I became very interested in the possibilities offered by the use of digital methods as a collaborative meeting space, where families and teachers could come together and construct the families' transition. My previous research had used a children's e-portfolio system from their ECE centre to support the families' journey to school (Woodhouse, 2015). This earlier research focused on the support provided for a small group of children transitioning from one ECE centre to my NE class. The ECE teacher and I worked collaboratively, sharing learning stories³ and offering support to families via their child's e-portfolio. Building on this idea of digitally facilitated collaboration, I considered the potential of working with each family to support transition to school using digital platforms.

Alongside this notion of digital facilitation, I also wondered how teachers from both ECE and NE settings could pool their resources and expertise to support the families' transition. I soon discovered that not a great deal had been written about how to support a family's transition to school using a digital environment, in general and in a New Zealand context.

I also began to think about how families and teachers' interactions on a digital platform could generate a support network. The concept of a Community of Practice (CoP) developed by Wenger et al. (2002) seemed to support some of my theorising, particularly in relation to the potential of a social media platform to create a CoP involving families and teachers. I began to wonder how using a social media platform to support a family's transition to school could be constructed with the class teacher coordinating the group around the concept of a CoP. Subsequently, I also wondered how effectively a community of teachers could share and grow their own expertise in supporting families transitioning to school. These wonderings became the questions guiding the research.

Research Questions

Drawing from van Genep (1960/1977) transition theory and the Communities of Practice (CoP) framework (Wenger et al., 2002), this study utilises an interpretive, qualitative approach to examine the following questions:

³ A preferred form of narrative assessment used in ECE centres in NZ.

- 1) How might a New Entrant (NE) teacher meet individual families' needs and aspirations by using a customised transition to school process?
- 2) How might a collaboratively constructed transition to school using social media assist with the development of a Community of Practice (CoP) that includes families, ECE and NE teachers?
- 3) In what ways can a collaboration between schools and families develop a transition to school process that contributes to helping children find their place in the school environment?

Organisation of thesis

This thesis is organised into eleven chapters. The first chapter has introduced the thesis, setting the intent for the study and the following chapters. Chapter 2 considers the influence of the theoretical frameworks on which the study is based. The theoretical framework of a CoP (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger et al., 2000; Wenger et al., 2002; Wenger et al., 2011) with its origins in constructivism is explored. The CoP framework is then defined, and key components of the CoP are presented. Chapter 3 presents the literature review that informed the study. The first part of the review focuses on conceptualising transition as a process. Transition theories differ in their perceptions of how transition may be viewed. van Gennepe's (1960/1977) rites of passage and his theorisation of transition are considered, along with the notion of vertical and horizontal transitions, before moving into themes from the literature that offer further, more specific, insights into a family's transition to school. Chapter 4 outlines the methodology and data collection methods, including ethical considerations. Within the methodology, the use of an interpretive, qualitative approach of a case study, utilising a range of methods to collect data, is explained. This chapter also includes a description of the context of the research.

Chapter 5 shares the findings gained mostly from the two Facebook groups, families and teachers, beginning with a timeline of data collected and actions taken as part of the transition intervention. Chapter 5 shares the data analysis of the family and teacher questionnaires and then focuses on the data gained from both the family and teacher Facebook pages that evidence how effective the intervention was in customising a family's transition to school. Chapter 6 introduces and discusses a framework of facilitation that developed from supporting the families' transition process. Together, Chapters 5 and 6 provide a response to research question 1.

Chapter 7 shares the findings from the two Facebook groups and considers whether the two groups suggest the emergence of a potential CoP. Chapter 8 discusses the findings, using the CoP framework, through the three core characteristics, principles and stages of development. Chapters 7 and 8 offer a response to research question 2.

Chapter 9 investigates the data gained about the transitioning children. It begins by looking at the original group of focus children and the data gathered from their Storypark e-portfolios. These insights into the children's interests are then investigated by analysis of some of the key findings that resulted from observing the children in their moments of transition, as shared with both families and teachers through the Facebook groups. It concludes with observations on how Facebook provided the social space to facilitate a collaborative transition to school customised to support each family's specific needs. Chapter 10 discusses the findings on the children's transition, focusing on the facilitation of children's social learning. A framework of this facilitation is discussed. Chapters 9 and 10 provide a response to research question 3.

Chapter 11, the final chapter of this thesis, discusses the implications of findings and assesses the potential value which the study has provided, as well as the limitations of the study and identifies areas for further research.

Chapter 2: Theoretical perspectives

The concept of a Communities of practice (CoP) offers a theoretical framework that includes collaboration. The CoP framework emerges from and is influenced by theoretical considerations emerging from constructivism.

This chapter begins by investigating the theoretical underpinnings of constructivism, and the various schools of thought that have influenced its development as a significant theory. Next, the CoP model is introduced, with an outline of its connections to constructivism and the evolution of the model over time, including the various elements and principles which define a CoP. The chapter concludes with the examination of two e-learning models, those of Salmon (2002) and Moule (2007), with specific regard to the online or blended learning aspects relevant to this study.

Constructivism

Constructivism is a broad theory with a range of perspectives that share a foundational tenet in the assertion that knowledge is constructed rather than acquired.

Origins of constructivism

Four theorists can be viewed as foundational to the beginnings of constructivism: John Dewey (1859-1952); Jean Piaget (1896-1980); Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934), and Barbara Rogoff (1990). John Dewey (1859-1952) proposed that constructivism can build both individual and social knowledge. His work focused on the central notion that knowledge relies on a learner controlling their own acquisition of knowledge, aided by an instructor. Piaget worked to establish what is recognised as cognitive construction. He believed that an individual creates knowledge through the interaction between their ideas and their experiences. He focused on the development of knowledge, and so was mostly concerned with the details of logic, rather than the influence of social factors (Phillips, 1995). Lev Vygotsky theorised that cognitive functions are the product of social interactions, and his social learning theory is a form of social constructivism. Rogoff's theory concentrates on the relationships between the individual and society. She considers that an individual's cognitive skills are derived from their interaction with sociocultural activities.

Similarities and common ground exist between these theorists. Piaget and Vygotsky both believed that learning is what promotes the development of higher order thinking. However, Vygotsky utilised an active approach that centred on social interaction, whereas Piaget had a more constructivist stance, concentrating on the individual. Vygotsky's idea of the zone of proximal development has been revised by Rogoff's concept of guided participation to take into account the communication methods and developmental objectives of cultures other than those that place a strong emphasis on literacy and academic modes of communication.

Research by Doolittle and Hicks (2003) sought to clarify the elements of constructivism by categorising them according to their epistemological foundations. Constructivism according to Doolittle (1999) is not a "unitary theoretical position" (n.p). At the core of constructivism, as outlined by Doolittle and Hicks (2003) is the belief that learning is actively constructed, with thoughts, ideas and understandings actively created and modified "as the result of experiences that occur within socio-cultural contexts" (p. 77). Doolittle and Hicks (2003) suggest that the broad theory of constructivism is founded upon four epistemological tenets:

1. Learning is adaptive
2. Learning is subjective, not objective
3. Learning involves social, cultural and individual processes
4. Knowing has roots in biological/neurological construction, and social, cultural and language-based interactions

These four tenets, provide the foundation for the principles of a teaching, learning, and knowing process.

A continuum of constructivism

In his 1995 research Phillips offered to "produce some order and clarity" (p. 5) by developing a framework for comparing different forms of constructivism. He does this by forming a continuum between "individual psychology versus public discipline" (Phillips, 1995, p. 7-8), locating three forms of constructivism as points on his continuum. A way of categorising these forms according to Phillips (1995) and Sharma et al. (2005) is by whether the constructivist thought focuses on an individual's development of knowledge, or is more focused on the social aspects of interaction. Cognitive constructivism, (individual psychology) which is based on the work of theorists such as Piaget (1977), could then be placed at one end of the continuum and at the opposite end would be radical constructivism

(von Glasersfeld, 1995). von Glasersfeld (1995) theorised that an individual constructs knowledge, but this knowledge will also contribute to further collective knowledge, which then influences the course of subsequent learning. Finally there is social constructivism (public discipline), based on the work of theorists such as Vygotsky (1978), which Phillips (1995) places somewhere in the middle of the other two schools of thought on the continuum.

To summarise, the complexity of constructivism means that its three main forms do not hold clearly defined “single positions” (Phillips, 1995, p. 7), so there may be some overlapping of beliefs within the three forms concerning aspects of knowledge construction. The following sections will look first at cognitive constructivism, and then radical constructivism, before finally exploring social constructivism. Each of these three broad areas will be viewed through the four tenets of constructivism.

Cognitive constructivism

Cognitive constructivism emphasises only two of the epistemological tenets suggested by Doolittle and Hicks (2003): tenets 1 and 4. In cognitive constructivism, the focus is typically placed on the competent processes of cognition, the learning of new material and further constructing of knowledge through the individual’s active cognition. The assumption is that the existing framework is altered to accommodate new knowledge, forming the individual’s subjective experience of the world. This means that the individual’s comprehension of the world is based on both learning and experience and is therefore not objective.

Piaget’s (1977) research is emblematic of cognitive constructivism as he argued that learning took place at the individual level. At the centre of his model is the understanding that the individual is actively trying to make sense of the world, with new information being related to pre-existing structures of knowledge and understanding (Piaget, 1977; Wadsworth, 1996). Piaget’s (1977) view of individual learning sees one come to understand the world by actively exploring and experimenting within it. According to cognitive constructivist theory, learning is not considered to be a passive process. Individuals are viewed as being internally motivated to discover and explore for themselves.

Taking a similar view, Pea (1993) discusses the notion that “the mind rarely works alone” (Pea, 1993, p. 47). His theory identifies “distributed intelligence”. Pea’s (1993) view is that intelligence is not only accommodated within the thoughts of an individual, but is distributed across aspects of our environment, by the social (thinking with others), physical (engagement

with materials) and symbolic (ways of representing self-thought as a means of coping with a complex task), components which form our surroundings (Pea, 1993, p. 47). According to Pea (1993), “the environments in which humans live are thick with invented artefacts that are in constant use for structuring activity” (p. 48). Pea’s theory reinforces the importance of artefacts and resources, that are purposed to facilitate an individual’s learning. Pea (1993) included in his definition of resources “people who are in activity” (p. 50), therefore, “resources” may range from a group of children collaboratively solving a problem, to the physical engagement of using pen and paper (Pea, 1993).

Perkins (2009) developed his theory of the “person-plus” by building on Pea’s (1993) work. Perkins (2009) identified through his “equivalent access hypothesis” (p. 90) that cognition and learning for the person-plus depended on four “access characteristics” (Perkins, 2009, p. 90). These are; kind, representation, constructability and retrieval. This is premised on the individual having the relevant knowledge to know what kind of knowledge is being represented to them, how it is being represented and how they can retrieve the knowledge and constructability. The “person-solo” presents a less agentic view of learning. Perkins (2009) cautions that school learning tasks can place too much emphasis on “solo” learning, by requiring children to read and listen, rather than interact. A person-plus approach, seeks to provide opportunities for learners to engage in collaborative and creative problem-solving, to develop reasoning with others, and so view learning as a collective enterprise.

Pea’s (1993) and Perkins’ (2009) perspectives on thinking and learning can be likened to social learning. Although both Pea and Perkins were considered cognitive theorists, their theories encompassed social learning, whereby intelligence is not viewed as simply being internalised within the individual, but as being also within their interactions with resources that can be used to facilitate learning. The interaction of an individual with these resources highlights the potential for social learning to be explored.

When considering the collaboratively constructed knowledge generated through a social environment such as a social media platform, the cognitive form of constructivism is not an ideal fit with the aims of this study. However, the theories developed by Pea (1993) and Perkins (2009) translate to the facilitation of children’s learning in the classroom, in exploring the potential of distributed intelligence through the environment.

Radical constructivism

Radical constructivism emerges from the idea that knowledge is contained in the mind of an individual, and has been constructed based on what he or she has gained through his or her own experiences (von Glasersfeld, 1993). Thus experience is essentially subjective, and there is no way of knowing how an individual's experience may differ from one person to the next. A criticism of von Glasersfeld's theoretical thinking was made by Ernest (1993) when he termed radical interpretations of how an individual learns as being, "sealed in a privately constructed experiential world" (Ernest, 1993, as cited in Hardy & Taylor, 1997, p. 7). However, von Glasersfeld does not dismiss the social aspect of learning in his 1993 work. He does however argue for collaboration to be portrayed in a more balanced position. He cautions that collaboration may indeed inhibit and overly influence an individual's developing experiential reality. Conversely, he allows that collaboration can also be key to an individual's learning process, in consolidating their own perceptions of reality through interactions with others.

In the context of exploring the possibilities of a group of individuals working collaboratively, a radical constructivist approach may not be the best fit for this study, because although the social aspects of learning are not dismissed, radical constructivism does not offer further consideration of sociocultural and personal values and aspects of learning and collaboration (Hardy & Taylor, 1997).

Social constructivism

Constructivism began to embrace ideas about social interaction through the work of Lev Vygotsky (1978), with his emphasis on the critical role played by the social environment in developing children's learning. Vygotsky also noted that culture strongly influences learning, with guided learning and collaboration playing a central role in social constructivist theory. Vygotsky drew ideas from his own theory of social development, believing that learners could achieve a greater level of cognition through the guidance of a "more knowledgeable other". This belief developed into Vygotsky's research into the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978). The zone is representative of the distance between what the learner is independently capable of (actual development) and what they could achieve if given the benefit of support from a more skilled other (potential development). Guided learning should ideally fit into a learner's zone of proximal development if their cognition is to be challenged and extended. A crucial difference between Vygotsky and Piaget's theory of

learning was that Vygotsky placed great importance on the role of the more knowledgeable other and their guidance in the child's learning (Phillips, 1995; Youniss & Damon, 1992).

Social constructivism sees ideas as being understood and constructed through social interaction and language use, resulting therefore in a shared, rather than an individual experience (Vygotsky, 1987). Positioned somewhere near the opposite end of the continuum from cognitive constructivism, social constructivism emphasises all four of the epistemological tenets. Seeing the construction of knowledge as being influenced by both culture and social processes, social constructivism analyses how these factors shape an individual experience of the world (Estep, 2002). Vygotsky (1978) believed that learning takes place in the context of a community, a contrastingly collective approach that differs from the cognitive theory. Social constructivism highlights the creation of opportunities for the forming of relationships, because they directly affect individual learning. A facilitator of learning, such as a teacher, has a significant influence as they initiate the process of learning, guide participants, and contribute to the formation of an individual's conception of the world. This highlights the place of co-construction of knowledge, meaning that the individual is not necessarily required to actively cognise new experiences independently. Vygotsky (1967) suggested that sources of learning may be found in the outside environment, people, or social context.

John Dewey's research blended both Piaget's cognitive aspects of constructivism and Vygotsky's social learning. Dewey pointed out that learners engaged in a task could learn effectively through collaboration, cultivation of thought, and opportunities to reflect and develop shared meaning than by working alone. Dewey advocated the need for authentic and relevant learning tasks to enable learners to connect with real life experiences in order to make their learning meaningful.

Rogoff (1990) further developed the concept of learning through interaction. Her theoretical work is focused on the metaphor of an apprenticeship and builds upon socially based theories such as Vygotsky's. She suggests that learning occurs through "social cultural activity" (Rogoff, 1990, p. 7) which is generated through a learner's guided participation in "culturally defined problems" alongside "more skilled members of their society" (Rogoff, 1990, p. 7). Guided participation is embedded in practical day-to-day activities and does not explicitly involve instruction. Instead, Rogoff (1990) proposes that learning is viewed as a jointly managed and responsive process where, through observation and participation, the learner

can gradually be exposed to more complicated community-based tasks, becoming responsible for constructing new solutions to problems that can benefit their society.

Social learning theory and social constructivism

Social learning and social constructivism share some similar basic assumptions in that they both emphasise the role of social interaction in learning. Social learning draws from both Vygotsky and Dewey, who had similar beliefs concerning activity and development through their common appreciation of “real life learning” contexts that focus on the social aspects of learning. Both theories assert that the individual has an active role in the knowledge-making process.

The key difference between social constructivism and social learning theory is that social learning theory does not require social interaction as it is based on behavioural emulation in learners. This is because in observational learning, there are necessary mediational and cognitive processes which evaluate self-efficiency and application of observed behaviours (Hoppitt & Laland, 2013). In contrast, social constructivism states that knowledge is actively constructed through the collaboration and participation of learners.

Social constructivists focus more on the shared construction of knowledge in social interaction, emphasising the collaborative aspect of learning. From a social constructivist perspective, it is through social activity that all participants gain some form of knowledge. Vygotsky (1978) reinforces the centrality of language and culture as theoretical frameworks through which, “humans experience, communicate and understand reality” (p. 39). Social constructivist theory centralises the social interactions between a learner and a more knowledgeable other as crucial in the interplay of the more knowledgeable other guiding the learner in their cognitive development.

Reflecting on the social construction of knowledge as I considered facilitating a family’s transition to school primarily through a digital platform, I began to explore various theoretical models within the realms of social constructivism of learning that might be applicable to this research. I was particularly interested in models to do with learning in an online environment. One such concept that proved useful is Wenger’s (2002) Communities of Practice (CoP) model. A CoP is underpinned by social learning theory, more specifically “situated learning”, within the constructivism paradigm. Lave and Wenger (1999) explain situated learning as when apprentices gain knowledge through their interactions with those who are experts in the

field of knowledge which the apprentice wishes to learn about. Parallels with social constructivism may also be seen in the CoP framework. The goal for individuals participating within a CoP is to develop knowledge and learning through a process of collective learning. The process in which the individual's knowledge is transformed into collective learning is socially constructed. The next section discusses the development and principles of this model.

Communities of Practice

The CoP framework was first proposed by Lave and Wenger (1991) when they focused their research on learning interactions between experts and novices. In 1998, Wenger studied the personal development of an individual's participation (and meaning making) within a CoP. In 2002, Wenger, McDermott and Snyder developed the concept of a CoP further and focused particularly on developing a CoP as an organisation. A key point raised in this version of the CoP framework was to move away from previous thinking that had suggested that a CoP emerged spontaneously. Wenger et al. (2002) advise that a CoP can be designed and developed, and list seven principles to increase its effectiveness. Referenced in my study, the 2002 research of Wenger et al. (2002) provides specific ideas in the design and cultivation of a CoP.

Wenger et al. (2002) observe that everyone belongs to several CoPs, through their workplace, education and interests. Some of these CoPs may be a named group, others not. We may be core members in some groups and in others our participation is minimal. The people who are members of a CoP do not need to necessarily know each other socially or professionally, but meet through, finding "value in their interactions" (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 4).

As a group spends more time together, its members begin to share information, offer advice and insights, and discuss their own hopes, needs, and situations. The group may work together to explore ideas, and to offer support to one another. Through this process, the group develops a body of knowledge, creates tools, helps to develop resources and friendships, and establish their own ways of interacting (Wenger et al., 2002). Through their interaction and support of each other, Wenger et al. (2002, p. 5) point out groups may develop a "common sense of identity"-becoming a CoP.

The concept of a CoP has been used by people working in many different areas and across a whole range of situations, such as schools, businesses and groups of individuals who share a specific skill or interest. As Wenger et al. (2002) say, "[C]ommunities of practice are groups

of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (p. 4). On the basis of the CoP model, Wenger (1998) argues that forming relationships is significant in achieving a common goal, and this demonstrates the fundamentally social nature of human learning. These concepts are significant for this thesis, which studies a collective approach to an effective transition to school. To better understand the CoP, it is necessary to explore its adaptations and development over time in the context of its constructivist inspiration.

The evolution of the Community of Practice framework

Since the original conceptualising of CoP by Lave and Wenger (1991) this model has undergone a variety of iterations and definitions. The early focus of this model in 1991-1998 was on an individual’s learning and acquiring knowledge through actively participating in a context-bound experience. In 1998, the three characteristics of a CoP were built around a central focus of personal growth and the trajectory of an individual’s own participation.

However, between 1998 and 2011, focus shifted to include a definition that relied heavily on the collectivism of the community, adopting the interrelated terms of “mutual engagement”, “joint enterprise”, and “shared repertoire” (Wenger et al., 2002). This highlights the shifting focus of a CoP from personal growth and the trajectory of an individual’s participation within a group towards improving and optimising the characteristics of the group, such as support for the group members, interaction and the development of shared knowledge.

Critiques of the CoP framework

The CoP framework has been criticised by some commentators for its lack of definition, looseness in conceptualisation and perceived issues of unequal power between group members, and research has identified issues and shortcomings in the theorisation of the CoP framework (Beckett & Hager, 2002; Cox, 2005). This section addresses some of these criticisms and their implications for this study.

According to Lave and Wenger (1991), participation in a CoP provides a way for the group members to develop their skills and knowledge through their participation in their development to becoming “knowledgeable practitioners” (Lave & Wenger, 1991). If the objective or goal is for each group member to develop their skills and attain the knowledge necessary to be considered a “knowledgeable practitioner”, this raises the question of what the group values as knowledge and skills. Criticism has been made of the collective valued

learning developed within the CoP group. Researchers such as Engeström (1994) have raised concerns about the knowledge which is prioritised within a CoP. Engeström (1994) pointed out that within a CoP group, learning is developed, circulated and contained within the group space, meaning that similar versions of the same knowledge are being shared continuously. He suggests that this type of learning is primarily about how group members learn to imitate and conform to the group's values and internal viewpoints. Citing Engeström (1994), Fuller (2007) critiques the influence of group conformity by stating that if the objective of a CoP is for its members to be considered a "knowledgeable practitioner", is the knowledge which is valued measured by how well a member has been conditioned and socialised to fit into a specific group? When knowledge is built and circulated in the confines of a CoP group space, Beckett and Hager (2002) wondered about the applicability and transferability of the group's internally produced knowledge into wider contexts outside of the group.

Fuller (2007) (2007) questions the "idealism" that means a "community" is presented as a "harmonious" group where group members interact and engage with others, developing a sense of togetherness around their common interests, when according to Fuller (2007) cannot always be taken for granted, for many different reasons. There is potential for a CoP to become a conflictual environment, through such factors as the power some members may have over other members. This questions whether all group members do indeed share common interests and whose common interest will be prioritised. For example, the conditions which place group members in the same CoP as their boss may mean that those with power may inhibit or control the development and direction of the group over others.

With the shift of focus and additions made to the concept of the CoP since its inception, it appears that the CoP framework offers a balance of cognitive and social constructivist influences. Wenger himself alludes to this "balance" in a 2014 interview (Omidvar & Kislov, 2014). He described himself as a social learning theorist, "best understood as being halfway between social theory and learning theory. It's at the intersection of those two fields, I would say" (p. 268).

Despite criticisms of some of the shortcomings of the CoP framework, particularly around some of the blurry definitions and explanations being "inadequately dealt with by Lave and Wenger" (Fuller, 2007, p. 24), the CoP framework is nonetheless relevant to this study. The CoP offers a guided approach for a group of people who genuinely care about a real-life problem to come together, interact together and learn together. When a group of people are

focused on the same problem, the CoP framework advocates that there is the potential that group members can develop connections with one another and guide and renegotiate meanings of their experiences. The perceived blurriness of a CoP can also be viewed as flexibility and openness to interpretation - an opportunity. There are no rigid structures or processes which must be followed and adhered to. This means that each CoP will be unique to its members' development and engagement. The next section discusses the specific attributes of the CoP, by exploring the three elements of the CoP model and its application in variety of contexts, drawing from Wenger et al's (2002) conceptualisation.

Three elements of a Community of Practice

According to Wenger et al. (2002) not all CoPs are required to share the same structure, but there is flexibility in how a CoP is formed. Three fundamental elements of a CoP need to be present in order for a group to form a CoP, either spontaneously or deliberately. These are: domain, community and practice.

The domain

The domain is the community's shared interest or problem, the common ground which inspires and guides the group members to collaborate. Membership of the group is formed around a commitment to the domain. Wenger et al. (2002) note that the shared competence developed by the group around their "problem" distinguishes group members from other people. The group values their collective competence, learning from each other's expertise and shared knowledge. It is the facilitator who identifies the shared problem which forms the group's domain (Ellis et al., 2004). The facilitator helps to build the practice of the group through selected resources and the use of appropriate tools, and plans community events to activate connections and begin to encourage trust between group members (Ellis et al., 2004; Wenger et al., 2002). When first joining a CoP, group members need to develop a sense of compatibility with the rest of the group so that they feel safe in sharing their knowledge with the group (Usoro et al., 2007). Wenger et al. (2002) advise that to be able to perform the role it is crucial that the facilitator is both knowledgeable and passionate about the common problem. However, in these early stages the facilitator's main role is to connect members and encourage group interaction, and rather than give answers and offer opinions.

Community

The community, according to Wenger et al. (2002), creates the social backdrop for learning. In pursuing the group's interest in their common domain, the group engages in discussion and

activities which over time develop the collective learning of the group members. This collective learning gradually develops a bond between the group members. The place where the group meets is not in itself a CoP, it is the interactions which Wenger et al. (2002) advise are essential to making the group a CoP, as interaction is how group members learn together. The more time a group member invests in their engagement, the more likely that they will gain the individualised support from the rest of the group that they require (Smith & Kollock, 1999). However, Fuller (2007) questions the idealising of a community as a place where a group develops stability and harmony as they interact and deepen their connections with one another. She highlights the possibility that this may not always be the experience of members of a CoP.

Further critiques of the “community” element of a CoP are made by Jewson (2007) and Ross (2003), who also questioned the way Lave and Wenger portrayed the notion of a community and the vagueness of the term “community”. Ross (2003) felt that due to the ambiguous use of the term across the iterations it almost lost any meaning in the development of the CoP framework. In further developing the CoP theory, Jewson (2007) identified an omission of any evidence of a precise definition of “community”, and the term remained underdeveloped across the revisions of a CoP.

However, not having a clear definition of what constitutes a “community” from the outset of this study was not viewed as a disadvantage. The key ideas in how Wenger et al. (2002) describe a this concept provide indications of a “developing community” rather than a prescribed checklist of what a community should look like. The more general approach developed by Wenger et al. (2002) is inclusive of the uniqueness of each group.

Practice

The practice is the course of action around which a community develops and maintains its knowledge. The group’s interactions produce resources which in turn affect the group’s practice. How “learning” is interpreted within a CoP was described by Lave and Wenger (1991) as “an aspect of social practice, learning involves the whole person; it not only implies a relation to specific activities, but also a relation to social communities” (p. 53); and “learning” was defined as “an evolving form of membership” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 53). Lave and Wenger (1991) sought to shift learning from being viewed as taught or acquired by an individual towards learning through participation. However, as critiqued by Fuller (2005) the notion of a CoP being “underdeveloped and latent” (p. 5) made it possible for the concept

of learning by “participation” to be interpreted flexibly across studies. Edwards (2005) concurs, stating that Lave and Wenger’s (1998) interpretations of learning offer little understanding of how new knowledge emerges or develops within a CoP context. Lave and Wenger (1991) reinforced the notion that relationships developed between the group members fostered not only practice and learning, but also that through social relationships a group’s deepening understanding can be gained. The families in my study were focused on a common experience which they were all experiencing, their child’s transition to school.

The process of creating a CoP requires a group of people coming together to carry out everyday activities, but as described below these practices are then characterised by three determinants. These are mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire. Each determinant is a part of the group practices.

Mutual engagement

The first determinant is mutual engagement (Wenger, 1998). This characteristic describes the nature of group interactions. Interaction may be seen through the sharing of stories or tools and strategies that a group member may have found to be effective. The interaction shared within a CoP can therefore consist of both “explicit” and “tacit” knowledge (Pyrko et al., 2017, p. 393). In exchanging and sharing knowledge, members can develop a group understanding of the same problem (Pyrko, 2017). This interaction between individuals creates shared meaning around the group problem and develops ways and resources to develop the group’s practice. The more visible the interaction between group members within their group space, the more likely that the group will be viewed by its members as being a positive space conducive to the solving of their common problem (Matyas, 2017). Some members may choose to connect as a group socially in a setting outside of the group, or engage in activities to get to know other group members, sometimes in face-to-face settings. The importance of interacting face-to-face is deemed to be an essential inclusion in developing the mutual engagement of the group members (Meyerhoff & Strycharz, 2013).

Joint enterprise

The second characteristic, referred to as “joint enterprise” alludes to the common goal or “mission” identified by the group (Wenger, 1998). The group’s interactions create a shared understanding of what brings members together. According to Wenger et al. (2002) and Brown and Duguid (2002) the welcoming of newcomers to the group by the more established

group members is considered important. The established group members can support the new group members with orienting and familiarising themselves with the group practice.

Shared repertoire

The third and final characteristic is the development of resources, shared skills, language and behaviours that express to the group's identity and are used to negotiate meaning and facilitate group learning; this is termed the group's shared repertoire (Wenger et al., 2002).

The CoP model itself is flexible enough to be adapted to individual situations. Some communities maintain a close fit to Wenger's 1998 model, and others have developed and extended the concept. Members of a CoP are viewed as practitioners, and are responsible for innovatively developing the knowledge and expertise and the flexibility of the design of a CoP to cater for the specific needs of their developing CoP. Fuller (2007) highlights that the element of practice within a CoP offers the opportunity for participants to become "knowledgeable practitioner[s]" (p. 20) through their own participation and interactions within the group; however this is not a guaranteed outcome. Members sharing their knowledge with the rest of the group can provide an individual with a sense of purpose and fulfilment in being a valued member of the group (Usoro, et al., 2007). Regarding my study, the appeal of the CoP is the possibility of its broad application, in that it could be transferred to the context of social media and provide a way to implement change in terms of the transition process.

All communities pass through distinct stages of development (Wenger et al., 2002). This next section looks briefly at each of the five stages of development experienced by a CoP identified by Wenger et al. (2002).

Stages of community development

Communities are living things; they do not remain static but may undergo changes and adaptations which can reshape the initial reason for the formation of the community to a different purpose later in the life of the group. Wenger et al. (2002) accept that all communities evolve; however, they observe that there are five stages in a CoPs development. These five stages are: potential, coalescing, maturing, stewardship and transformation. As a community evolves through these five stages, the activities, which are provided for the group's development also need to change.

Stage 1: Potential

A CoP typically starts with a group of people who are interested in becoming more connected. A shared problem, or agenda, is what usually attracts interested people to the group. In this beginning stage of development, a priority is to find enough common interest among members for them to see the value of belonging to the group. Group members may begin to demonstrate “stewardship” (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 68) in developing a sense of responsibility for the wellbeing of the group that they are now part of. The more the problem matters to the group members, the more enthusiastic they will feel about being involved. Their engagement with this common problem provides valuable insights, which are then shared with the group; this allows members to learn from each other. According to Wenger et al. (2002) feeling passionate about the common problem is a significant motivator of group members. The idea of working towards developing a response to this problem will attract further interested members who feel passionate about being involved.

Stage 2: Coalescing

Once the group members have connected over their initial commonalities, the group begins to explore their connectedness. How and when the group is sharing knowledge becomes the focus for the community. By this second stage of its development, group members have had time to form connections, they know their purpose, and have a good idea of where the group can go next. It is crucial at stage 2 to provide opportunities to build relationships and trust between group members. Introducing community events at this coalescing stage generates an energy in the group. Participation in organising and attending events helps members to develop further awareness of common interests and needs (Wenger et al., 2002).

Stage 3: Maturing

At stage 3 the group’s membership and knowledge grow through the group members’ sharing. By engaging in joint activity and creating artefacts, the group is focused on sharing knowledge with each other. During stage 3 a community has begun to shift from its earlier establishing of value and initial sharing of ideas to consider how the group organises its knowledge and moves forward. At this stage, Wenger et al. (2002) point out, a group which is proving to be effective is likely to attract the interest of other potential members. This new growth in membership can also develop the relationships and connections which are occurring within the group. New members may have different questions and needs, but they also bring new knowledge, and this may shift the focus of the group’s interactions. Wenger et

al. (2002) advise that the group needs to balance the maintenance of relationships and trust with the energy that new members bring to the community.

Stage 4: Stewardship

At the fourth stage, Wenger et al. (2002) note that sustaining the group's impetus is critical. Stewardship is crucial in providing a "voice" and a strategic direction to steer the group's efforts, particularly when a group's energy may begin to wane. Stewarding the direction of the group involves a member to be invested in maintaining the relevance of the "key domain issue" (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 104) and seeking out new ideas and practices to promote engagement and maintain group interest.

Stage 5: Transformation

The ending of the lifespan of a community is an inevitable stage for the community. The issue or group problem which motivated group members to join and participate, may have been resolved and transformed. Practices have become common amongst the group members, so learning and sharing becomes less prevalent in the group's engagement. Wenger et al. (2002) affirm that closing a community can be emotional for members. Stage 5 is a time for members to look back at their contributions and sense of camaraderie and reflect on the transformations that the group has achieved through their commitment to their goal.

Wenger (1998) sums up by saying that in a CoP people come together to learn, share knowledge and collaborate. Collaboration allows greater opportunity for a group to support and solve complex problems with each other. This results in shared resources, techniques and expertise. The following section discusses the importance of collaborative learning and the conditions needed to foster co-construction of knowledge in the development of a CoP.

Collaborative learning and co-construction

Collaborative learning is a hallmark of social constructivism and is also a significant feature of a CoP. Roschelle (1992) characterises collaborative learning as a process of interacting within a group context. He explains that the key belief underpinning collaborative learning is that an individual may learn more effectively when they collaborate, rather than learning in isolation. Through collaborative learning, the knowledge of each individual is shared and developed within the group context. Storr (2007) says, "constructing knowledge mediated through a social experience is called co-construction" (p. 14). Roschelle (1992) and Storr (2007) draw clear parallels between the notion of collaborative learning and co-construction:

both are fundamentally focused on the benefits of interaction in a social setting. Co-construction is specifically concerned with the underlying process of knowledge construction in relation to a given problem. Important considerations in both collaborative learning and the co-construction of knowledge are the relationships and understandings which develop among the participants (Reusser, 2001).

The importance of relationships in co-construction is obvious, because more than one person is required for co-construction to take place, given that some form of dialogue is essential for the co-construction of knowledge (Storr, 2007). Jacoby and Ochs (1995) caution that co-construction does not necessarily create meaningful relationships nor agreement. An example they share is the co-construction of an argument, whereby parties disagree, although the argument itself has been co-constructed. The distinguishing factor between co-construction and collaborative learning is that in co-construction an agreement does not necessarily need to be met, while collaboration endeavours to create a meaningful relationship and agreement. However, two important aspects contribute to the process of co-construction: a concern for the problem and a concern for the problem-solving space. These aspects are further explained below.

A concern for the problem

Within the process of co-construction, “the problem” may be the focus of the negotiations towards a shared understanding. The problem is the premise around which communities form and collaborate, working together in constructing a solution which may not have been reached by the group’s members independently. This collaborative process “requires constant negotiations and recreations of meaning” (Reusser, 2001, p. 2059).

As noted earlier, the “problem” in a CoP, is central to its domain and integral to maintaining the success and longevity of a community. Wenger et al. (2002) defined the domain as “a concern, set of problems, or passion about a topic” and, as such, the “problem is what essentially draws the members to becoming part of the group” (p. 4). The problem provides the “initial centripetal pull” (Bentley et al., 2010, p. 2), or the motivation for an individual to become part of the community.

The shared problem proposed in this study was how to support a group of families’ transition from ECE to their primary school community. The shared problem offered an opportunity to explore multifaceted perspectives on the transition process and to consider how these

perspectives may inform and improve transition. The passionate connection to a real-life problem is more likely to motivate each group member to commit to solving it. This “mutual engagement” or social practice might then be developed and sustained over time. Through a shared mission, group members it is hoped, are able to work in harmony, furthering one another’s understanding in the process.

A concern for the problem-solving space

Problem-solving spaces are spaces which an individual has, or is required to develop, when individuals come together and engage in “goal oriented activity” (c, 1980 p. 4). This space is where specific problems can be posed and possible solutions formulated (c, 1980). In a CoP, the problem-solving space can be a physical place or a virtual environment (such as those hosted in social media). Through the group interactions and the space in which these are developed, fostered, and encouraged, the problem and the problem-solving space provides a basis for a thriving community to develop.

In the combination of collective concern for the problem and collaborative efforts in the problem-solving space, emphasis is placed on group interactions rather than on individual responses. Focusing on the group’s rather than the individual’s efforts helps develop the concept of a joint problem-solving space.

Joint problem-solving space

Sarmiento (2009) says the joint problem-solving space may be understood as a, “socio-temporal–semantic field, co-constructed through interactions such as collective remembering and providing the basis for shared understanding of meaning” (p. 3). The movement from the individual’s perspective towards that of the group prioritises joint activity; value is placed on the problem-solving space being “shared” throughout its development and adaptation. This joint problem-solving space is then maintained through the group’s interactions and problem-solving actions, which are not restricted or driven by individual stances (Teasley & Roschelle, 1993).

To summarise then, within the CoP framework, a shared repertoire and joint enterprise is developed through joint activity focused on the problem within the joint problem space. As part of this practice, the community produces a set of shared resources, which can have both literal and symbolic meanings and are employed in the pursuit of their joint enterprise. The joint enterprise is generated through the group’s interactions. They create a shared

understanding of what binds them together, which in turn can relate back to the idea of the domain of the community.

An effective learning environment or joint problem-solving space refers to the conditions in which productive collaborative interaction is most likely to occur, enabling the building of communities and exchange of information (Kimmerle et al., 2015). However, unless clearly guided these interactions may become “ad hoc” (Chang et al., 2018). The utility of these interactions may not contribute to a developed response to the shared problem or “persistent sense of an idea or concept construction” (Chang et al., 2018, p. 239). This emphasises the need for a deliberate design to support the purpose of the shared problem environment in order to enable participants to focus their development of knowledge through productive dialogue. It is only through “purposeful discussion, reflection, creative thinking, persistence and cooperation,” that the “process of knowledge construction” can contribute to an effective response to the shared problem (Idris & Ghani, 2012, p. 65). Or, as Roschelle and Teasley (1995) suggest, “collaboration is a coordinated, synchronous activity that is the result of a continued attempt to construct and maintain a shared conception of a problem” (p. 70). However, collaboration must be sustained by continued motivation in order to produce a useful response to a shared problem. The result is a collective ownership of the problem and the community of practice’s collaborative response. Achieving this requires consideration for the maintenance and development of the “joint problem-solving space” and the possible cultivation of a CoP. To develop the space, Wenger et al. (2002) propose seven foundational principles. These are outlined in the following section.

Principles of a Community of Practice

Wenger et al. (2002) offer seven principles to take into account in the design of a CoP. They are: design for evolution; open dialogue between inside and outside perspectives; different levels of participation; development of both public and private community spaces; a focus on value; the combination of familiarity and novelty; and the creation of a rhythm for the community. Wenger et al. (2002) propose these principles not as a recipe, rather they consider how these different elements can work together to provide a flexible design.

Principle 1: Design for evolution

Wenger et al. (2002) advise that a CoP is organic in how it evolves, therefore the design should be intended to guide the development rather than outline the CoP in great detail from its emergence. Elements of design recommended by Wenger et al. (2002) need to precipitate

change for a community's natural development rather than "over-structure" the community's design and impose too many commitments and expectations on the group members. As the community develops, it attracts new members, who may have new interests which can energise the group. These new interests may pull the group in different directions, but according to Wenger et al. (2002) "alive" (p. 53) communities thrive on reviewing and redesigning elements of their community through their own engagement and interaction. In designing an online CoP for evolution, added challenges should be faced by the group facilitator to promote engagement between group members who, according to Fontainha and Gannon-Leary (2008), need to work hard to achieve and maintain the group's energy and participation in the absence of face-to-face opportunities.

Principle 2: Open a dialogue between insider and outside perspectives

Wenger et al. (2002) recognise that an effective community design benefits from the "insider's" perspective of a leader who is familiar with the "problem" and guides the group to discover the possibilities of what their community is about. A leader who is an insider of the community is familiar with the common problem, which is at the heart of the domain, and understands the people and dynamics of the group. An insider is immersed in their community and is therefore likely to understand the group's needs. The leader appreciates what is at the centre of the group's domain; and their inside, well-connected knowledge can inform the group of what they need to know to face the challenges ahead. Wenger et al. (2002) affirm that the leader must have a deep understanding of community needs and issues. They need to know when to bring "outside" information and perspectives to the group dialogue to promote development of the group's knowledge. Wenger et al. (2002) emphasise that taking time to understand "outside" perspectives can help to provide a stronger sense of potential for the community, and enable improvements and new possibilities. Interestingly, the reality of individuals being members of many CoPs in their daily world raises the question, are all group members potentially both insiders and outsiders? The influence of other groups to which an individual belongs may be a source of new knowledge and experience which could benefit the CoP development.

Principle 3: Invite different levels of participation

The motivation and purpose for each group member to join a CoP can vary from member to member and so the infrastructure of a community needs to facilitate different ways for members to participate (Wenger et al., 2002). Some members participate to develop a

personal network within the group, others to develop skills and knowledge. Consideration for how each group member may contribute to the group in their own way needs to be part of the design of a CoP. The frequency and intensity of involvement of the members will contribute varying levels of participation to the overall group. Each group member needs to feel that he or she can drop in on the group conversation or be able to invest time in group discussions which interest them. The role of the facilitator is to connect the community, bring together the group members at their varying level of participation, and organise events which promote enthusiasm and purpose for the group members. Wenger et al. (2002) observe that several levels of participation can co-exist within a CoP, from the more frequently involved participants to the least involved. “Core” group members are categorised as the small invested group who take on the role of community leadership; this small group usually represents only 10-15% of the overall group members. The next level of member participation is the “active” group members, who are frequent attenders and participate occasionally in the group discussion and interactions. Again, Wenger et al. (2002) estimate this active group to be small, representing a further 15-20% of the overall group.

The largest proportion of group members in a CoP are the “peripheral” members, who are described as those who prefer to observe the group engagement, and not to be too directly involved in the group’s interaction (Wenger et al., 2002). Peripheral members can fall into the group conversations should the topic interest them, and then drift back out to observe the interaction from the “sidelines” (Wenger et al. 2002, p. 56). However, Wenger et al. (2002) caution that this does not necessarily indicate that a peripheral group member is as inactive in their engagement as their group engagement may portray. Outside the community group, peripheral members may be actively having conversations within other groups, transferring the group knowledge they have gained from the community group to other situations and contexts. Lastly, there are the “transactional” group members, who participate and connect with the group the least. They are deemed to be those members who visit the group only to access resources.

Principle 4: Develop both public and private community spaces

All interactions within a CoP can benefit the development of the group and its relationships. Discussions at both a formal level and conversations at an individual level all have the potential to enhance the interrelationships of the group. Wenger et al. (2002) draw attention to conversations generated within the “public” meeting space around a specific agenda or

topic which are important in building connections within the group; however, they remind us not to underestimate the conversations which are less formal “private chats” between group members. Based on the premise that people have committed themselves to a community, group members take on the responsibility of supporting one another as well as the group. Wenger et al. (2002) stress that every correspondence or conversation enhances individual relationships within the community. They point out that public events and social gatherings will become enriched when the relationships between group members are strong. By attending a public event, a member has the opportunity to get to know their other group members informally and to develop individual connections and relationships.

Alongside the opportunity offered for engagement at public events, a CoP needs to enable members to connect in “private spaces”. A group leader may need to support individual members and to connect them with useful resources. Getting to know the needs of individual members in these private spaces provides the group leader with a deeper understanding of how to further develop the public space to support the wider group. Wenger et al. (2002) advocate that a key element of a community’s design space is the organisation of activities in both formal and whole group (public) occasions much smaller, informal gatherings, enabling individuals to strengthen their connections with other community members.

Principle 5: Focus on value

Participants are drawn to the group because they value its purpose. They may become invested in contributing, feel their participation is important, and able to make a difference. The design of a CoP needs to reflect this purpose and thus encourage group members to engage with it.

Because most CoP are voluntary groups, individuals need to find their participation worthwhile in order to motivate them to maintain their connections as group members. Value can be found in small everyday connections between individual group members sharing their insights, and in informal group discussions. Some members may fluctuate in their engagement, between being an observer of group activity and engaging only when the subject is of interest to them (Cundill et al., 2015). Wenger et al. (2002) note that value is not always immediately gained by every group member when they first join the group, and recommend the planning of social events as a way to release potential value amongst the group. Developing new connections between individuals through such activities can generate enthusiasm and support the promotion of new ideas, which will in turn contribute to the wider

dialogue of the group. It should be noted that the degree of value which individual members find in being part of the group will vary according to the community's changing needs.

Principle 6: Combine familiarity and excitement

Familiarity with the routine of the group can help to facilitate the sharing of knowledge. A familiar meeting space and routine can be a comfortable place for members to interact and share their knowledge. Wenger et al. (2002) liken this level of comfort to feeling like that of a home town with a vibrant community. They draw attention to the need for interesting and varied events which encourage the community to keep visiting the group. For a community to continue to thrive its members must feel some level of engagement. Social events may present an opportunity for them to come together to share a pleasant experience. Vibrant communities combine both familiarity and excitement. The familiarity fosters the development of relationships and connections and the excitement of community draws members together in shared enjoyment.

Principle 7: The creation of a rhythm for the community

Communities are “living things” (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 64). The rhythm of the community is what keeps a group alive and able to thrive. Group members need to feel that they can keep up with the group activity, and not feel bored by a lack of activity where they are likely to lose interest. Planning and working towards an event can provide a community with milestones to break up the regular yearly rhythm. The frequency of interactions and the pace of the overall evolution are other influencing rhythms in a community. How to set the tempo of the group at the right pace and maintain this beat is a key consideration for the design and vitality of a community. Injecting intervals of excitement through planned events may provide the group with a surge of energy and momentum, but this momentum cannot be sustained for long periods as it is unrealistic to maintain continued interest at a constant level.

The seven principles outlined guide and support the growth of the community, and the development of intellectual and social capital generated by the group over time. In their work, Wenger et al. (2002) emphasise the importance of a group working together to develop shared resources and to achieve a common goal, whether this is through the development of a face-to-face group or an online CoP. The following section explores considerations for maintaining a functioning online CoP. An online CoP, sometimes termed a virtual CoP, is a CoP that is developed and maintained virtually, that is, using electronic media. An online CoP facilitates learning through the exchange of knowledge and experiences between

participants around a focused problem or interest. The following section discusses some specific considerations regarding the development of a virtual CoP.

Virtual Communities of Practice

Concern for the problem and the joint problem-solving space have been shown to be directly relevant to establishing and maintaining a CoP. The key characteristics of a CoP, (joint enterprise, mutual engagement and shared repertoire) need to define the practice, whether the CoP is located online or in a face-to-face environment. Wenger-Trayner (2011) acknowledges that as long as a “mutually relevant challenge” (n.p) also previously described as the “problem”, is at the heart of the CoP, this will develop a community’s “domain”, regardless of whether a group is online or contributing face-to-face.

Principle 6 of the seven principles for cultivating a CoP reminds us of the importance of familiarity; group members need to feel comfortable within the “problem-solving space”, or in the case of a virtual CoP, their digital problem-solving space. This comfort can be established by ensuring that the knowledge and experience that they bring to the group is recognised and valued. By the setting up social structures within the problem-solving space, members’ interactions can build and store knowledge which can be shared and negotiated within the group. These systems in a virtual community may be set up through a social media site to facilitate the group’s interactions. The members will then develop this problem-solving space into a joint problem-solving space. Wenger-Trayner (2011) explains that if a group decides to communicate through online interactions alone, it has the potential to become an online or virtual CoP members (Wenger-Trayner, 2011). The medium that connects the group is not viewed as a priority in developing a CoP, it merely provides a way for the members to interact. However, Dubé et al. (2005), Fontainha and Gannon-Leary (2008) and Hanisch and Churchman (2008) disagree. Their research on the development of online-based virtual CoPs revealed that using the medium of ICT can present some complexities and ambiguities for group members’ participation and engagement.

Dubé et al. (2005) investigated 14 organisations which had intentionally created 19 virtual CoPs. Their research highlighted the missing element of face-to-face communication within a virtual CoP. Dubé et al. (2005) found that by engaging online only, members had less opportunity to build trust and to feel socially comfortable with the other group members. Dubé et al. (2005) refer to the lack of face-to-face encounters early in the group’s formation appeared to be a missing opportunity for group members to bond, share stories and build

trust. Without face-to-face opportunities, members may not easily build connections with each other as easily. The building of trust and connections were also raised by Fontainha and Gannon-leary (2008) as a challenge for group members in a virtual CoP. They contended that a virtual space cannot replicate a face-to-face meeting space. Hanisch and Churchman (2008) further add that not meeting face-to-face reduces opportunities for members to exchange stories as part of getting to know each other. This could impact on group members' motivation and ability to build collegiality and peer-support (Fontainha & Gannon-Leary, 2008).

Wang and Yu (2012) focus on the various forms of participation of the group members in a virtual community. Two main categorisations were established, "active participants" (p. 10) and "lurkers" (p. 1). "Active participants" were described as those who contribute to content within the virtual community and perhaps ask questions and initiate interaction. "Lurkers" are individuals who might read posts, but may not be ready to engage confidently with other members, and so prefer to observe. Wang and Lu (2012) identify only two broad categories of participation within a virtual CoP i.e. lurkers or active participants. As with all groups, there are levels within levels of participation and these differing levels (core, active, peripheral and transactional members) have been noted within the active participants and lurkers categories (Wang & Lu, 2012).

The facilitator and reification

Engagement and the negotiation of meaning in social contexts involves a dual process (Wenger, 1998). Firstly, meaning is developed by the engagement of a group's members with each other through conversations and participation in activities. Secondly, the group produces physical resources developed through their words, tools, and stories. This is termed "reification" (Wenger, 1998). Wenger (1998) advises that for learning to be meaningful in a social context, both participation and reification need to interact dynamically. Together, the dual process of making meaning creates a social history of a CoP representative of both individual and collective aspects of development. The group facilitator usually guides this collective history. Wenger (1998) affirms that it is an important part of the facilitator's role to interpret the comments and resources provided by members, assigning the facilitator the role of editor of the community's collective memory. Wenger (1998) advises that the facilitator decides which stories remain within the parameters of the CoPs specified domain, and functions as the "keeper" of the CoPs shared resources. Part of the facilitator's job is to

encourage and prompt group discussion and the creation of reified products by initiating dialogue in a form they deem appropriate. The facilitator's role is that of an editor, an interpreter and, based on these two prior functions, an enabler-scaffolder of future content. As part of their recording and interpretive role, the facilitator will develop the collective memory of the CoP in its shared language.

Similarly, a facilitator plays a central role in developing activities which encourage active and collaborative learning and participation. However, in a purpose-designed online learning environment, e-learning models offer a structured developmental process to support participants' development (Salmon, 2002). The next section shares two e-learning models which were considered for this study. They are: the five-stage model proposed by Salmon (2002) and the e-learning ladder offered by Moule (2007).

e-learning models

Models of e-learning were interrogated to ascertain their usefulness for understanding engagement, participation and learning via digital media. Two specific e-learning models were considered: Salmon's five-stage model (2002) and Moule's e-learning ladder (2007).

In both models (Salmon, 2002; Moule, 2007) the role of the e-learning moderator or facilitator is essential in scaffolding an online group to achieve its learning goal. According to Salmon (2002), to promote active participation and interaction amongst the group members the individuals need to be supported through a five stage developmental process.

For the purposes of this study, setting learning goals was not considered to be a focus. In addition, Salmon's five-stage model focused exclusively on an online environment, which limited the potential of its application to a blended environment. The model is also individualistic in nature; it focuses on an individual's growth and achievement in their own learning over five consecutive stages, reducing its usefulness in exploring the development of a Community of Practice.

Moule's (2007) e-learning ladder provides a scaffolded approach to develop an aspect of e-learning. It offers a progression characterised by a series of technology-based skills used in a group environment, with the participants developing their technical knowledge through group tasks. Moule recommends that at the bottom rung of the ladder each group member needs to be explicitly taught some basic skills and knowledge to enable their development. The focus

on collaboratively constructing a transition to school with families and teachers in a social media environment did not have a preconceived programme of skills and knowledge that required explicit teaching, and the facilitator was not required to instruct but needed to respond and develop the transition intervention and its content with the group. However, overall, the CoP framework was found to be more applicable, because more flexible, framework for this study.

Chapter summary

This chapter has discussed the differing theoretical perspectives of constructivism as the broad theory from which CoP emerges. The assertion that knowledge is constructed rather than acquired is a commonality amongst differing perspectives within constructivism. The difference between the perspectives lies in who is positioned as doing the constructing. Social constructivism and social learning theory were both considered relevant to this study.

The CoP framework is built upon three characteristics: a shared passion or concern (the domain), a group who are invested to share their own knowledge and learn from others (the practice); and members who are committed to interact in some way within their group (the community). To be considered a CoP, the community needs to develop its practice around a shared goal, over time, through members' engagement and interaction. These interactions socially construct knowledge, which develops the group's practice. From a social constructivist perspective, learning occurs through the group members spending time within the group and through their active participation.

Wenger et al. (2002) have advised how a CoP can be designed for a group of people who share a common problem. The importance of monitoring the growth and development of a CoP is critical to maintaining the longevity of the group, by ensuring that the group remains relevant to its members' needs. The CoP framework is therefore clearly relevant to the purpose of this thesis and to the design of the three research questions.

The following chapter reviews transition theory and research that specifically focuses on families' transition from their children's early childhood to attending school.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

Chapter 2 outlined the theoretical approaches that can be used in considering a collaborative transition to school, with emphasis placed on constructivist theory, in particular the CoP framework relevant to this thesis. Chapter 3 reviews and critiques literature around the thesis topic of supporting a family's transition from ECE to school, and concludes with a rationale for the study. My analyses of transition research focus on those researchers who have sought or discussed parents' perspectives.

First, a conceptualisation of transition is offered. The review acknowledges transition as a process rather than an event, and this leads into theorising transition as a process of change over time, using van Gennepe's (1960/1977) Rites of Passage. Next, families' experiences of transition to school are explored. This thesis views this transition as being experienced by the family as an entity. Then, utilising the three phases of van Gennepe's (1960/1977) framework, the review explores practices related to each phase. Finally, the review examines studies into the use of digital communication to build and to maintain home-school contact.

Conceptualising transition

Characterised by change, and sometimes difficult, transition is undertaken by everyone at some time, in moving from place to place, from time to time or role to role. Because of transition's inherence to progress and development, transition theory has been developed across a range of multidisciplinary approaches. The following section defines transition in the context of this research and provides an overview of the selected theoretical approach.

Defining transition

This thesis recognises the way a family changes as it adapts to the requirements of their members' roles as the child becomes a school pupil and the parents become parents of a school pupil. Change and transition occur throughout the lifespan. According to Giele and Elder (1998) "any point in the transition lifespan must be viewed dynamically as the consequence of past experience and future expectation" (p. 19). All changes are influenced by prior experience and future expectations and so each family draws on their own diverse range of prior experiences, expectations, and aspirations for the child, the parents, and the school. A central theme of research is that the process of transition results in life

transformations or a redefinition of self over time, whereby an individual learns to adapt to certain conditions to enable their movement from one position or group to another. According to Amiot et al. (2008) the individual is able to adjust and learn so that they can adapt to these new situations. Salet (2018) says that individuals may spend some time equipping themselves with the skills, knowledge, and behaviour needed to to cross new thresholds and enter a new group. A key assertion in this thesis is that a school should begin their facilitation of a family's transition process before their child starts school. As used in this thesis, "transition" refers to the "movement" between the early childhood centre and a primary school, whereby families cross the threshold and move from an ECE community to a school community group.

Vertical and horizontal transitions

Dockett et al. (2017) consider vertical transitions as, "sequential, one-way vertical movements" (p. 4) marked by special ceremonies that recognise milestone events. Vertical transitions involve major occurrences at "key points" of time (Dockett et al., 2017, p. 4), involving an individual's changing identity, role and status (Elder, 1998; Kagan & Neuman, 1998; Vogler et al., 2008). These researchers all discuss vertical transitions as being connected to specific events, and not necessarily happening on a regular basis. Beach (1999) offers a similar notion, terming a vertical transition a "lateral transition" that involves the individual experiencing a "developmental advance from the previous activity" (p. 114). Vertical transitions are significant and involve "major changes" for families (Education Scotland, 2020, p. 90) such as the transition between different educational settings (Ackesjö, 2013). This movement signifies not only a change of environment but also a change of role, where the child is seen to be "moving up to school".

While these larger transitions, such as from ECE to primary school, are referred to as vertical transitions, the much broader and concurrent concept of horizontal or "multiple transitions" (Education Scotland, 2020, p. 90) offers a different perspective. A horizontal transition involves changes within a "short, fixed period of time" (Fontil et al., 2020, p. 1876) during an individual's everyday life: for example, the child's daily movement between school and their after-school setting (Ackesjö, 2013). Beach (1999) had earlier offered a similar concept to a horizontal transition called a "collateral transition". Building on work by Reineke (1995), Beach described a collateral transition as involving frequent movements between settings

which may involve a change in routine. Therefore, in addition to the larger vertical transition, as Fontil et al. (2020) suggest, an individual also needs to adapt to day-to-day changes.

Interestingly, the child starting school has been described by Brooker (2008) as being exposed to a combination of both vertical and horizontal movements. Vertically, the child is viewed to be “stepping up” (p. 25) the ladder to their next stage of schooling. This significant transition means that the child’s day-to-day routines are also affected, which Brooker (2008) likens to the child also “stepping sideways” on the ladder (p. 25). The stepping sideways connects to the horizontal movements that occur for the child in their new environment.

Schools can learn from the vertical and horizontal transitions experienced by families in their move to school how best to support transitioning families. Therefore, for the purposes of this research, the definition of transition includes the concepts of both vertical and horizontal transitions.

This section has reviewed studies that have explored the concepts of vertical and horizontal transitions as a way of defining transition. The following section reviews van Gennepe’s (1960/1977) conceptualisation of the rites of passage, which provides a framework to comprehend the transformative nature of these experiences and the need for supportive practices to help families navigate them successfully. The structure of the framework involves an individual passing through three phases. Whilst the three phases must all be experienced, the time spent by an individual at each phase may vary.

van Gennepe’s theory of transition

In *Les rites de passage*, written in 1909, Arnold van Gennepe (1873–1957) examines the rituals and ceremonies that communities use to signify important transitional stages for individuals, life events such as childbirth, marriage, or death. The goal of such rites is to ensure a change of condition, or a passage from one “world” to another.

Rites of Passage and the three phases of transition

van Gennepe (1960/1977) states that “a man’s [sic] life comes to be made up of a succession of stages with similar ends and beginnings: birth, social puberty, marriage, fatherhood, advancement to a higher class, occupational specialisation, and death” (p. 3). To go from one phase to the next, the individual must move through a number of stages. van Gennepe (1960/1977) defines these stages as follows: “(1) pre-liminal: separation; (2) liminal: a

transitional period with gradual removal of barriers; and (3) post-liminal: reintegration into ordinary life” (p. 44). A key feature of van Gennepe’s (1960/1977) categorisation was his conception of liminality. “Liminal” is based on the Latin word for threshold, and in the context of van Gennepe’s view of transition theory refers to the crossing of metaphorical thresholds that separate one space from another.

Each phase, according to van Gennepe (1960/1977), varies in “length and intricacy” (p. 28). However, he does not suggest what causes this variation in duration or complexity in each phase. A possible reason might be the difference in individuals’ prior experience or knowledge, which could see transition beginning with variable levels of preparedness. In the context of an early childhood to primary school transition, a possible source of differing levels of experience might be where a family have already undergone this transition with an older child versus others making the journey with their first child (Fabian, 1998). For van Gennepe, the transition is symbolised by rites that represent the stages of pre-liminal: separation, liminal: transition, and post-liminal: incorporation. The separation rite depicts the individual as leaving one world, withdrawing from their previous role and associated status within a group. The transitional rite marks the moving between worlds and describes a time where the individual no longer holds their pre-liminal status but is yet to transition to their new status. Thus the liminal phase is a period of transformation for the transitioning individual, before their acceptance of their new role or its acknowledgement via a ritual or ceremony. Grimes (2020) contends that there can be ambiguity regarding whether an individual’s level of preparation is deemed sufficient for them to be considered to have transitioned. A ritual may symbolise the completion of transition, but a discrepancy can exist between this recognition and the experience and skills necessary in their new role. The post-liminal phase is characterised by the individual’s incorporation into their new social group: they enter the new world and integrate fully into the new life. However, it does seem arguable that not all who undergo a rite of passage from the liminal phase have truly entered the post-liminal phase.

van Gennepe (1960/1977) proposes that the basic procedure of transition is always the same, whether experienced by an individual or a group. He describes a series of three distinct phases within which an individual or group must, “stop..., go through a transitional period, [and] enter, [to] be incorporated [into the new group]” (p. 28). van Gennepe’s hypothesis

necessitates the completion of all three phases before one can conclude that a rite of passage has been undertaken. These three-phases of the transition process will be explored below.

Pre-liminal phase

For van Gennep (1960/1977) the pre-liminal phase is characterised by separation, where the individual disconnects from their current environment or role. He notes that the pre-liminal phase may be viewed as incorporating preparation for the next phase of the transition. In van Gennep's discussion of rites of passage (1960/1977), he signals that intermediaries, guides with some expertise in transition process, may be employed to ease transition activities for the individual. The concept of an intermediary can be connected to the social constructivist idea of "a more knowledgeable other"; the intermediary understands the transitioning individual's new role, and eases their adoption of the new responsibilities and competencies. That intermediaries may be present to assist individuals with their transition raises the question of the extent to which transitions may be viewed as a series of challenges that must be overcome.

James and Prout (2015) agree that transitions present challenges; and in the context of transition to school, they identify that the process requires a child to develop particular skills and accomplishments to become a "big boy/girl" (p. 216). Given the relative ease some transitioning students have when moving from early childhood to school, through teacher facilitation, challenges can be minimised by either the individual or families. The question then becomes, can a difficult and stressful transition resulting from differences in experience be compensated for with sufficient intermediary support? This implies that stressful transitions may be the result of inadequate or non-existent facilitation by intermediaries.

A further tension emerges when the prospect of separation in the pre-liminal phase is considered. At the pre-liminal phase, an individual begins to separate emotionally and physically from their current situation. For some individuals this may be either a daunting or an exciting experience.

Liminal phase

The liminal phase is described by van Gennep (1960/1977) as the passage of time whilst "passing from one [phase] to the other" (p. 18). Within this phase, the individual experiences a "special situation [for] a certain length of time as he [sic] wavers between two worlds" (van Gennep, 1960/1977, p. 18). Positioned between two worlds, the individual experiences this

liminal phase as the most disruptive or disorienting phase of the transition process, as they feel a sense of loss for their old situation and uncertainty about what is to come. For some individuals the two may not be so different, and they find compatibilities in the new group's expectations and values. However, for others, their previous experiences and personal values may be incompatible with the expectations of their new social group. The liminal phase represents a time to make decisions and changes, a time of learning and growth to prepare the individual for their incorporation in their new role or context. Should an individual find it challenging to learn and prepare for their new role, van Genneep (1960/1977) theorises that their liminal phase experience may be of longer duration. As at the pre-liminal phase, van Genneep highlights the preparatory role of the intermediary, who at the liminal phase may need to offer varying levels of support for everyone's smooth passage. To explain liminal rites van Genneep (1960/1977) tells a story of a group of newcomers relocating to a new village, describing the rites at the liminal phase as "the period of marge [margin]" (p .xix), where the newcomers are invited to exchange gifts, or food with the villagers of the community that they wish to join.

The concept of the liminal phase was further developed by Turner (1974), who defined individuals within this state as feeling "ambiguous, neither here nor there, betwixt or between all fixed points of clarification" (p. 232). The liminal phase was described as a tunnel or passage of transition rather than a threshold, representing a "symbolic domain that has few or none of the attributes [of the individual's] past or coming state" (Turner, 1974, p. 232). Turner (1974) proposed that the liminal phase provided an individual with a unique opportunity of time and space to contemplate and make sense of what was ahead. Like van Genneep (1960/1977), Turner, in later collaboration with Abrahams identified that as a group or individual passes through this intermediate stage, they are temporarily status-less, between what they were and what they will become (Turner & Abrahams, 1996). Their research describes the individual passing through the intermediate phase as being a "liminal entity" or "neophyte" (Turner & Abraham, 1996, p. 95). Drawing on the example of an initiation or puberty rites ceremony in an African village, Turner and Abraham (1996) explain how the neophyte who is undergoing the rites is usually stripped of clothing so that they are unidentifiable by their previous status, position, or rank within the kinship system of their village.

By passing through the liminal phase the individual's former identity and status are shed as their new identity, personal and social, is developed and transformed, making them ready to enter and be accepted by their new social group. For both van Gennep and Turner, the notion of liminality is part of a wider theory of socialisation. Liminality is likened to a "territorial passage" connecting two social positions (van Gennep, 1960/1977, p. 192). However, this implies that the individual could move back and forth between the two social groups, while van Gennep and Turner – who focus their work on vertical transitions – typically view the process as a one-way progression. The post-liminal phase marks the introduction to the individual or group of individuals' new social status and subsequent way of life.

Post-liminal phase

van Gennep (1960/1977) identified the post-liminal phase as a time when the individual is integrated into their new context. However, the ease with which the individual settles into their new context depends on their prior knowledge and preparedness (van Gennep, 1960/1977). As previously noted regarding the liminal phase, a newcomer's values, beliefs and prior experiences may be other factors which affect how easily an individual will settle into their new social group. According to van Gennep (1960/1977), the more familiar new members are with their new context and community, the more swiftly their membership to their new social group is reinforced. van Gennep (1960/1977) notes that an adjustment to a wider group can be facilitated by a gradual integration to sub-groups at first, then the wider socialisation can be developed over time, thereby reducing the ambiguity brought about by change.

van Gennep (1960/1977) used a story to provide an example of post-liminal rites. He described the arrival of a group of newcomers at their new village. The introductory ceremony marking their formal entrance involved sharing a meal and shaking hands with the established villagers. Although van Gennep did not look specifically at transition to school, a number of studies (Ackesjö, 2013; Ballie et al., 2013; Fabian, 2007; Garpelin, 2014; Peters & Sandberg, 2017; Wilder & Lillvist, 2018) have utilised his ideas. Connections can also be made with the *pōwhiri*, a formal New Zealand Māori welcoming ritual which involves protocol that must be adhered to. As described by Glynn and Nuri (2017) the *pōwhiri* ritual's essential components start with *karanga*, whereby newcomers are called onto the land of their new community; once accepted, the newcomers *hongi* (press noses, indicating the sharing of breath) and *harirū* (shake hands) with members of their new community before sharing *kai*

(food), which is considered to elevate the sacredness of the *pōwhiri*. In their examination of children's transitions from Māori medium ECE to *kura* (school) research by Hohepa and Paki (2017) describes the *pōwhiri* ritual entailing the passing over of the children from their old educational setting to their new educational setting. As part of the ritual, the children are viewed as *taonga*, precious treasure, by their ECE teachers who they then commit to the care of the children's new school.

The following sections will explore literature that considers the importance of the transition to school as a process that significantly influences families. By examining transition research to identify examples of effective transition practices through families' experiences, the review aims to build an argument that highlights the importance of this perspective.

Why include families?

The literature review presented in this chapter recognises a parent's supporting role of their child, but additionally explores the transition that parents and caregivers experience as they adapt to their new role as a parent of a school pupil with its associated expectations and responsibilities (Dockett, 2017). Transition to school research and documentation often positions a family and home environment as the key context responsible for supporting a child starting school (Education Review Office, 2015). Research by Langford (2010) affirms that the family environment is consistently the main contributing element in a child's transition to school. Support and preparation at home can positively influence a child's experience of starting school (Dockett et al., 2012b). There is agreement across transition research (Englund et al., 2004; Krinninger & Schulz, 2017; McIntyre et al., 2007) that parents gain responsibilities in adopting their role as parents of a school pupil, and this needs to be supported. For example, Nuske et al. (2018) and Einarsdottir et al. (2008) highlight that families rely on building positive relationships and maintaining ongoing communication with their child's educational setting to for optimum engagement, and Santisi et al. (2018) suggest that the level of confidence that a parent has in their ability to support their child's transition can be linked to the outcome of the child's transition. This literature review is therefore interested in research that explores ways of enabling families to be involved while they are supported in their own transition as school parents (Brooker, 2008).

Transition to school involves several key stakeholders: children, family and ECE/NE teachers, all of whom can bring a unique perspective to the process. A large volume of

international transition literature has focused on the child as an individual and learner who experiences the move from ECE to school (Ackesjö, 2013; Ackesjö, 2014; Kienig, 2017; Sandberg et al., 2017). Research findings have drawn specifically on the child's experiences and perspectives, and offered insights into factors, which may support or complicate a child's movement from ECE to school as they reorient themselves to their new environment. Literature has also identified that parents are the foremost supporters of their child in their transition to school (Krinninger & Schulz, 2017; McIntyre et al., 2007; Miller et al., 2011; Ramey & Ramey, 1998; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 1999). However, less research has looked at the child with their parents and their wider families who may sometimes also be involved in a supporting role. A growing body of work positions the home environment, as considered by Krinninger and Schulz (2017), as being itself an educational environment. In this thesis, the experiences of families in a broader sense (not simply parents and children studied in isolation) and the use of the home as an educational environment, supportive of the school environment, are explored further. One concept of note, in developing the theoretical underpinnings of this theme, is the compatibility of the families and school. The following section explores the idea of the existence of a cultural match or mismatch between the two.

Schools and families: match or mismatch?

Brooker (2002) and Thomson (2002) both assert that if differences between parent and school values, beliefs and practices are wide, then the transition to school may be harder for those families to negotiate. Picchio and Sayer (2019) built on this, and identified in their study that migrant children starting school resulted in families experiencing a "double transition" (p. 293), due to their alien social environment and the unfamiliarity of their new school. In order to develop connections between family and school and create a partnership that supports the transitioning child's move to school, it is clear that schools need to develop inclusive transition practices so that families feel welcomed and included in their child's new school. An Australian research study by De Gioia (2017) explored the transition to school experiences of families from immigrant and refugee backgrounds across four primary schools. An effective transition practice highlighted by families in the study was the provision of adapting school information for families where English is a second language. Dockett, Perry, et al. (2011) highlighted in their report those transitioning families who have "complex support needs" (p. 1). Some of the challenges expressed by the families in their study included not only barriers as cultural and language differences but also poverty, violence, illness and disabilities.

However, Dockett et al. (2011) challenged the assumption that families who have “complex needs” are less likely to build positive relationships between themselves and the school. They reinforce the importance of positive home-school communication and connections with families beginning early in the transition process, to enable families to ask questions and seek advice. Building a connection with families early in the process enables schools to gain a deeper understanding of families’ experiences and to develop transition practices that foster ongoing engagement and support. The New Zealand Ministry of Education (2003) *Best evidence synthesis report* further reinforces the importance of schools maintaining a specific support system for parents. They argue that parents who have such a support system are more likely to feel confident in fostering positive home learning practices for their child.

Investigation into the level of synchronicity between the two potentially different educational settings was raised in an Irish report by O’Kane (2016). She emphasised that transition to school is recognised as a “very important time in children’s lives” (p. 12), with responsibility being placed on teachers from both ECE and school to operate a “coordinated information sharing process” (O’Kane, 2016, p. 12). My research is more specifically interested in exploring families’ experiences of transition. Dockett, Perry, et al. (2011) and Fontil and Petrakos (2015) further elaborate on how families tend to experience a smoother pathway to school when they have the same linguistic and cultural capital as their school. This connects with the idea of synchronicity in that, as Dockett et al. (2011) and Fontil and Petrakos (2015) identify, families whose social, cultural or economic capital does not match that of the school may not share the same aspirations and values. This can impair the collaborative attempts of educators and families to work on the transition process together.

Schools need to overcome this as it is they who are charged with a commitment to develop positive relationships with all families of all students (Education Review Office, 2018). A “one-size fits all” approach to transition that advantages some families over others is not satisfactory (Rogers et al., 2017; Stephen & Cope, 2003; Stockman Woodhams, 2012). Only by inviting the participation of families in their child’s transition and “open[ing] up [to] families and communities” (Griebel et al., 2017, p. 22) whilst providing a continuous flow of communication and support can the balance be redressed and positive home-school connections be achieved. This is especially important in the early stages of the transition

process. A means of understanding how families' contributions can be valued further is developed through the concept of capital.

Capital

The French sociologist Bourdieu (1986) scrutinised the way individuals operate in their social world. He developed the notion of "capital" as a means of exploring power relations in society. He conceptualised capital as an individual's social and cultural resources that contribute to their own "wealth" and "place" in society. An individual's wealth is only valuable when their society attributes it value. How society judges an individual's "wealth" directly influences where society may "place" an individual socially. In the context of transition to school, Trainor (2008) argues that it is the school which decides a family's social and cultural capital. In other words, the school judges the value of the skills and knowledge that a family brings to school. Transitions can be difficult for families when the school culture is at odds with a family's own experiences, and how the cultural capital of a transitioning family is perceived by the school can affect the level of control the family has over their transition (Ballam, 2008).

A related concept, funds of knowledge, develops the idea of capital with more specific reference to themes of preparation. Funds of knowledge was a concept offered in Australian research by Thomson (2002) using the idea of a child starting school with a "virtual school bag" (p. 1). Thomson (2002) writes, "imagine two children about to start school... Imagine each brings with them a virtual school bag full of things that they have learned at home, with their friends, and in and from the world in which they live" (p. 1). In this image the content of both children's school bags is relatively equivalent, but what each child brings is different in their "knowledge, narratives and interests" (p. 2). This might benefit a transitioning child if their existing knowledge and prior experiences are relevant to the expectations required at school, easing their integration. However, Thomson (2002) pointed out that the school determines what experiences and knowledge to draw on from each child's virtual school bag. The power therefore lies with the school. Families who already "know and can do school" (Thomson & Hall, 2008, p. 23) are advantaged from the outset, their virtual school bag being compatible with the school's expectations of what are necessary skills. Thomson and Hall (2008) highlight that for those children who bring experience or skills that are not valued their interest in school and corresponding sense of belonging is diminished. But as Thomson (2002) points out, "it is not the children who are disadvantaged but rather it is the school that

does the disadvantaging” (p. 4). The solution according to Thomson (2002) is that schools make use of as much of the available contents of the students’ virtual school bags as possible. By including the interests and experiences of students wherever opportunities present themselves, schools can foster stronger home-school connections and provide a greater sense of belonging for all learners.

Some examples of the capital that families bring in their virtual school bags are examined in the following sections along with different aspects of capital, including family culture, cultural capital and Māori cultural values. Finally this section reviews the literature to shed light on how schools can focus on developing a positive connection with families through understanding and appreciating transition from the families’ perspective.

Family culture

It is assumed that families are keen for their child to experience a successful transition to school, yet there may be differences in how they seek to attain this goal. Even the term “transition” could vary between families in its connotations, depending on their perspectives. An example of this is provided by Dockett and Perry (2006), who found that the term “transition” when discussed in the context of Australian Aboriginal culture, is seen as being representative of a “one-way” journey. Aboriginal families also use the term “firestick” (Dockett & Perry, 2006, p. 143), which symbolises the importance of preserving a family’s culture, keeping it alive in times of change or vulnerability. When discussing their child starting school, the idea of keeping that flame burning, enabling the family’s culture and traditions to be preserved, at the same time as they are expected by schools to take on a new role, can be key to ensuring that the transition is a smooth one. The familiarity of family traditions is a grounding force in times of change; also, the transitioning families will have a greater sense of belonging if they feel that their cultural background is appreciated.

Within the context of their research, Gonzales et al. (2005) explored using a home visit programme to build connections with families. They advocated for a “funds of knowledge approach”, where teachers view their visits as an opportunity to develop a strength-based appreciation of the family’s practices and resources, rather than adopting a stance of teaching parents “how to do school” to fit in with the school’s expectations. This appreciation of children’s family culture as they start school has been summarised by Glynn and Nuri (2017). In a presentation to school teachers they reinforced the importance of getting to know the family culture, where the child is central. They said, “For the culture of the teacher to be in

the consciousness of the child, the culture of the child must be in the consciousness of the teacher” (Glynn & Nuri, 2017). Examining the wider context of family culture and its importance to families can offer further insights into how an individualised transition process may be facilitated.

Cultural capital

All families bring their own prior knowledge and experiences, “wrapped in cultural capital that has been an innate part of their lives” (De Gioia, 2017, p. 247). Like Thomson (2002), she uses the metaphor of a child’s backpack to describe the uniqueness and diversity of the families arriving to school, each child carrying a virtual backpack representative of their own context and culture. Each family's backpack is a “different size, shape and colour” (De Gioia, 2017, p. 42), and brings that family’s strengths and cultural capital to school. Thomson (2002) and De Gioia’s (2017) research urges schools to spend time with families unpacking their new entrants’ cultural backpacks to support the development of a “two way transference of cultural capital” (De Gioia, 2017, p. 48), evoking the important sense of reciprocity emphasised by Glynn and Nuri (2017). By developing an understanding of transitioning families the school provides a foundation to foster and nurture early school and family relationships (De Gioia, 2017). Griebel et al. (2017) identify that building connections with transitioning families is a crucial element of an effective transition to school. Welsey and Buysse (2003) remind schools that for all families to be involved, schools need to acknowledge and respect all families’ attributes. Naturally, there are challenges for schools associated with this.

An obvious example of how cultural differences vary between schools and families is examined in studies by De Gioia (2017), Griebel et al. (2017) and Welsey and Buysse (2003). All found that migrant families typically have less community and school support as they navigate their child’s start to school. Additionally, families may be familiar with the school’s systems and expectations in their home country, but these may differ from those of the country that they have immigrated to. Another consideration is raised by Welsey and Buysse (2003), who identified that migrant families often have less support with parenting, having moved away from their extended families.

In the findings from their New Zealand research Chan and Ritchie (2019) describe the demographic make-up of New Zealand ECE centres as “superdiverse” (p. 53). Their findings were based on 2018 ECE enrolment data that showed 48% of ECE children were of European

ancestry, with 52% of children categorised as belonging to different ethnic groups. The authors suggest that an ECE setting adopt a *Te Tiriti* -led approach as a means of integrating all families into their community. Drawing on this *te reo me te ao Māori* method provides an ECE setting with a guiding process that acknowledges each child's heritage. The "genealogical and geographical connections" (Chan & Ritchie, 2019, n.p) of a child's family are recognised by their educational setting, fostering a "sense of interrelatedness to the land, mountains, rivers, oceans and other components of the more-than-human world" (Chan & Ritchie, 2019, n.p). A *Te Tiriti*-led approach facilitates the development of migrant families' appreciation of Māori worldviews, whilst reciprocally valuing and respecting the cultural heritage of all children and their families.

Although Chan and Ritchie (2019) specify the necessity of ECE teachers developing culturally responsive practices, it is clear that a *Te Tiriti*-led approach is equally relevant to a school context. The approach provides teachers in primary schools with a process to develop a deeper knowledge of families' cultures and home experiences. While the ideas suggested in Chan and Ritchie's (2019) work are specific to New Zealand, the broader principle of identifying what is important to families of varying cultures and seeking to incorporate it into their journey between educational settings is global. In families' transition to school, it is perhaps even more important for NE teachers to build connections with new families to help support their introduction to the school community (Education Review Office, 2018).

Māori cultural values

Both Hill et al. (2017) and Peters et al. (2015) caution that transition can present difficulties: "even the most confident [child] sometimes struggled on entry to school" (Peters et al., 2015, p. 12). In New Zealand research, it has been identified that successful transitions for Māori students require, "planned processes, genuine collaboration and consideration of Māori tikanga (cultural values) and aspects of the students' lives" (Hill et al., 2017, p. 4). These cultural values underpin the lives of the transitioning whānau (families), providing a "cultural identifier" (Hill et al., 2017, p. 10), unique to the child and their whānau, developed through the knowledge of their *tikanga*, *whakapapa* (family history and ancestors), *iwi* (tribe) and *hapu* (sub-tribe). Hill et al. (2017) also warn that there is a danger that whānau may be, "left behind in the transition process" (p. 32), struggling to meet the school's new expectations of them.

Peters et al. (2015) highlight the importance for educators from both ECE and school settings to recognise the significance of Māori values, urging settings to develop a, “cultural pedagogy of relations founded on respect and responsibility” (p. 8). Hill et al. (2017) ascertain that these pedagogies prioritise the importance of educators nurturing relationships with whānau. Peters et al. (2015) advise that it is key in developing relationships with Māori families that their child’s transition is recognised as being both a “collective and individual responsibility” (p. 14), with relationships and connections between school and home (which involves other family members as well as the child’s parents). This way transition is not a “foreign process” (Hill et al., 2017, p. 4) which is imposed on Māori whānau but a collaborative one in which they feel welcomed and sufficiently confident to provide input in their child’s education.

Effective practices from families’ perspectives

Research has demonstrated that “partnerships between family members and educators are complex and multi-layered, and contextually bound by the particular setting and time” (Rogers et al., 2017, p. 252). Research by Goff (2017) and Rogers et al. (2017) offers further insight into a contextual view of transition which recognises the complexity and uniqueness of each context to better facilitate a connection with families, and to meet their needs. In addition, Goff (2017) draws attention to the diverse personalities and characteristics of the teachers, emphasising the “complex undertaking” (p. 211) of coming together in order to promote home-school collaboration. Aouad and Bento (2020) concur, stating that there is no one approach to facilitating transition which can cater for the diverse factors, situations, and diverse complexity of parents, teachers and their environments. Rous et al. (2007) and Rous and Hallam (2012) noted transition to school research typically focused on school’s transition practices, including school visits, or parent information meetings, rather than closer examination of the strategies targeting the individual needs of each family.

These transition practices and strategies are viewed in some literature as being either “high intensity practices” or “low intensity practices” (Rous et al., 2010, p. 23). High intensity practices are associated with individualised support, while low intensity refers to a more generalised, group approach to support many families. General Findings across the literature indicate a greater prevalence of low intensity practices being adopted across schools to support families’ transition. Rous et al. (2007) propose that a contextualised approach with a focus on facilitating the complex interactions of tailored transition practices would more

effectively support all families. Rous and Hallam (2012), whose study explored special education and early childhood transition practices, encourage schools to think innovatively about how to develop transition practices that meet each family's specific needs.

The analogy of building bridges was offered by Huser et al. (2016), who suggest that a contextual transition can be likened to a co-constructed bridge built from each side (home and school). Such a bridge is constructed through two-way interactions and communication building; and this has relevance to the unique context of each family-school relationship (Huser et al., 2016). A contextual approach prioritises relationships and connections from the outset. Once foundations have been secured, the collaboration can focus on individualising transition practices through the strategies which meet the family's needs. An example is the idea of ECE settings developing a transition plan which includes individualised transition activities and goals for each family (Rous & Hallam, 2012).

Rous and Hallam's (2012) concept of a transition plan demonstrates the importance of reviewing and repurposing established transition practices. For example, school visits, a traditional transition practice, can be individualised to meet each family's needs, in terms of frequency, quantity, length, and who attends. The manageability of ECE services writing individual transition plans was a concern raised in a New Zealand study by Peters et al. (2015) which worked with ECE teachers. The teachers were keen to try this initiative, but having to write a transition plan for each child was deemed too time consuming. Time for ECE staff to ensure that every child has their own transition plan is a key point to consider, particularly if the children transitioning to school from their ECE centre are doing so via cohort entry.

Some schools may find reviewing traditional practices, such as school visits, requires some guidance. Just as parents need support in their transition to school, Miller (2014) suggests that so too do teachers. Miller (2014) highlights the urgency for government and education authorities to support schools in developing processes that are contextualised, collaborative, and inclusive. Goff (2017) recognises the importance of home-school collaboration, but wonders how this might be effectively actioned to facilitate the complex interrelationships and needs of those involved in the process. One of the ways to foster the sense of mutual respect and appreciation necessary for this to work is advocated in the "strength-based approach" to interacting with families.

Adopting a strength-based approach in building home-school relationships

U.S research undertaken by De Feyter and Winsler (2009) advocates for what they call a strengths-based approach in working with immigrant children and their families. Dockett et al. (2011) too argued that schools needed to view families and their challenges through a strengths-based approach, shifting away from a negative interpretation that views families according to their “problems” towards a positive appreciation of how they are managing challenges. Like other researchers, De Feyter and Winsler (2009) highlight the importance of developing a home-school relationship, and stress the importance of building these connections early in the transition process, before the child enters school. Furthermore, two US studies, by De Feyter and Winsler (2009) and Welsey and Buysse (2003) an Australian study by Dockett et al. (2011) and another by Dockett, Dunlop, et al. (2011), all demonstrate that families must be valued as partners in their child’s education and given the chance to establish relationships of trust and respect. Collectively, the research shows a positive correlation between parents and school working together and children’s successful transition to school.

However, these broad definitions of home-school relationships fail to provide specificity in how the critically important social, cultural and economic diversity of families can be accommodated (Lareau, 2011). The challenge lies in how one actually goes about recognising and celebrating different social and cultural capital. There is a large gap in the literature regarding the practical realisation of how the cultural capital of families can be valued and applied in a transition process. This study aims to explore this dimension.

Determining how best to support families at different points of their transition process is an important consideration of this review. The following section analyses transition research that focuses on parents’ perspectives and practices that seek to involve families. In what follows, relevant studies are arranged in accordance with the successive three phases of van Genneep’s (1960/1977) model, beginning with the pre-liminal phase.

The pre-liminal phase: Preparing for the transition to school

As previously established, in van Genneep’s (1960/1977) theory the pre-liminal phase marks the beginning of the transition process. The following theorists’ and researchers’ work has been analysed and identified as preparing families for their transition to school at the pre-liminal phase. Within the scope of this thesis, pre-liminal is defined as spanning the time

before the child's first day of school, when they are still attending the ECE setting. In this sense the pre-liminal represents the separation from the ECE setting and preparation for school.

As children are being prepared for what is to come, an important consideration raised by Ackesjö (2013) is the simultaneous need for the support of the families who are also exiting the ECE centre. Ackesjö (2013) describes this exiting process of families as a period of deconstruction and disengagement from their ECE context and relationships. At the same time, families are preparing to reconstruct by building connections with their child's new school. The central implication is that parents are losing one support network, and, at a critical moment, are reaching for another. It is at this moment that schools can do the most for families and ease the discomfort that surely comes with the deconstruction phase.

Ackesjö (2013), Ecclestone et al. (2010) and James and Prout (2015) describe this process of deconstruction and reconstruction as a time when an individual moves from "being" to "becoming", then to a new form of "being". This highlights the significance of the process by linking it to the families' sense of identity. For example, a parent is described as "being" a parent of an ECE child, who then prepares for their new role of "becoming" a parent of a school child. This may prove to be an easier process for some families than for others. Ackesjö (2013), Ecclestone et al. (2010) and James and Prout (2015) all identified the significance of separating from an existing environment whilst at the same time preparing for the new environment from the perspective of a child transitioning to school. However, this same concept can also be applied to their families, as they too undergo their own transition, and it is important to ensure that they have the support they need during this transformative process.

Transition research from Krinninger and Schulz (2017), McIntyre et al. (2007) and Miller et al. (2011) emphasises that schools should begin their involvement with parents while the children are still attending their ECE centre. McIntyre et al.'s (2007) research explored parents' reflections on their transition experiences. They said they had needed more orientation information than was provided and would have liked to have had more opportunities to be involved in their child's preparation for starting school. Krinninger and Schulz (2017) and McIntyre et al. (2007) all found that the level of parental involvement can vary considerably across a group of transitioning families and that a family's access to financial resources can be an important determinant in their involvement when preparing

their child for school. Those families with fewer financial resources were found by both studies to be less involved in their children's preparation for starting school.

However, ERO (2015) considered that the most powerful resource which can be drawn upon to support all children starting school is the connections that are forged between home and educational settings, stressing that relationships can be "educationally powerful" (p. 17) when families and educational settings work together. The implication of this for a teacher's practice is that an effort should be made to establish effective communication between families and school. A goal of this thesis is to explore the possibilities of enhancing home-school communication for all families by using a digital platform. Yet, teachers and educational settings cannot be expected to be equipped to help families with all of the constraints on their successful transition, such as financial or medical concerns. While there is great enthusiasm for collaborative relationships to be formed between families and teachers, there will always be some aspects of families' transition-related concerns where the burden cannot reasonably be alleviated by educators.

Understanding the influences on parents' perspectives in preparing their child for school

Families often want to be involved in assisting their child's transition. However, Peters (2004) raised an important point in her thesis when she noted that families moving from ECE do not always know how to support their child's transition to school. Similarly, Ackesjö (2017) observed that for parents who are transitioning their eldest or only child school may be an unfamiliar concept, for which they require guidance and support from their school's teachers. It is particularly important that a customised transition to school arrangement take account of the range of prior experiences families draw upon. For example, for parents transitioning their first child, the experience of transitioning may be fraught with expectations and unfamiliarity.

Research by Miller et al. (2011) explores why the transition to school process might be easier for some families than others, by emphasising that parents' own transition experiences play a role in how they prepare their children for school. The concept of identity is also important here; as Miller et al. (2011) note, parents' perceptions of their child starting school are ultimately shaped by their own history, including intergenerational influences. The authors conclude that understanding the circumstances of each parent is necessary in order to provide appropriate support.

However, the influence of parents' own experience is difficult for the educator to interpret. For example, if parents struggled with transitions or with certain areas of school they may struggle to support their child when they encounter the same problems, or, conversely, may be especially eager to see the child succeed in these areas. A limiting factor when analysing Miller's (2011) study is that while it emphasised the importance of diversity, all the parents examined were mothers. The concern here is that the study did not consider the role of fathers or families where extended members such as grandparents play an important role. Likewise, families with single or divorced parents or parents in same-sex relationships might encounter circumstances that might not benefit from observations drawn from a narrow focus on mothers only. Developing a more inclusive and adaptable method to accommodate the diversity of families could unlock even greater support for more transitioning families.

Dockett and Perry (2004) noted that parents and teachers may have different expectations and aspirations for their school beginners. For example, in data gathered from interviews and questionnaire responses from 300 parents, teachers and children, parents were more likely than teachers to place importance on their child's academic skills in their preparation for school. Interestingly, parents and teachers both considered the child's adjustment to school important. However, Dockett and Perry (2004) found disparities between the two groups' interpretation of what "adjustment" would look like for a child.

Parents in Dockett and Perry's (2004) study hoped that their child would be able to "fit in" and adjust socially to a new group of children. They additionally saw adjustment as requiring the teacher to recognise their child's individual characteristics, and believed that the teacher played an important role in supporting their child as an individual. Parents' aspirations focused on their child being socially accepted into the larger group, but at the same time they did not want them to become just another pupil in the class. Naturally, parents wanted their child's new teacher to recognise the "special" qualities of their child. Teachers also categorised a child's adjustment as their becoming part of a group, but they also wanted the child to be able to follow instructions, and adapt to new routines independently. The teachers' perspectives focused less on the individuality of each child and more on the child's ability to conform to classroom expectations as a school pupil.

Contrastingly, in two later studies by Boivin and Bierman (2014) and Kennedy et al. (2012) it was found teachers valued the child's ability to function in the school environment, such as prioritising the development of the child's socio-emotional skills, therefore identifying that

context was a factor that affected the skills that teachers prioritised. Both studies recognised that a child's transition may provoke emotional discomfort as they try to adjust to an unfamiliar setting. In order to develop a more cohesive approach to transition, Dockett and Perry (2004) identified that it was the responsibility of teachers to co-ordinate and promote a collaborative approach to transition that can bring together the support of both families and teachers. Unfortunately, as Harper (2016) pointed out, in preparing children for an effective transition to school, parent involvement in the planning process has not been found to be common practice. In her review of transition to school research that specifically drew on parents' perspectives, Harper (2016) found, as Peters (2004) had, that parents were left feeling "in the dark" about school and teacher expectations of their role in supporting their child's transition. Harper (2016) found that across the studies in her review, parents needed schools to provide detailed and clear information along with opportunities for them to be more actively involved in preparing for their child's transition to school.

Yet it is worth noting that the influence of parents' attitudes towards the transition vary. Taylor et al. (2004) identified the powerful influence that parental attitude and behaviours towards their child starting school has on the development of their home practices. Research by Englund et al. (2004) also focused on the correlation between parental home practices and children's academic achievement. They found that positive progress in their child's academic achievement motivated the continuous investment of parental involvement. Conversely, Brooker (2002) found that the school did not recognise the preparation that some families were making for their child's start to school. In contrast, however, as will be explored further in the following section, some parents may have a minimal level of interest and thus put little effort into preparing for the transition process. Dockett and Perry (n.d.) point out that it is likely that families will support their child's transition in lots of different ways, such as through conversations and sharing stories, but it is unlikely that families will prepare their child for school in the same way as the school would. Dockett and Perry (n.d.) advocate that schools need to appreciate that each family is unique, and that importance is placed on the school building connections to get to know their transitioning families. In regularly engaging with families, teachers can provide the necessary information to more effectively support a "family-centred approach" to transition (Wilder & Lillvest, 2017, p. 54).

In offering an example of a family-centred approach Correia and Marques-Pinto (2016) explored the influence that parental and school expectations may have on a child's

adjustment to school. They found that it is important for schools to develop a climate that is respectful and open to the characteristics and uniqueness of each family. Their study advocated the need for schools to develop new and responsive strategies that are focused on “boosting the competencies of both families and teachers”, which starts from “the point at which each family finds itself (and not so much where the teachers think it is or should be)” (Correia & Marques-Pinto, 2016, p. 259). Their research recommended that schools provide parent education or family-school collaboration programmes to support the development of responsive transition practices.

Parent aspirations and families’ goals

“Aspirations” have been described by Nurmi (2004) as being representative of “personal goals”, reflecting what a person would like to achieve. As a child starts school a parent may put their personal aspirations into practice by setting “family goals” (Brooker, 2002, p. 21) that they view as being an attainable and positive outcome for their child’s start to school and which they are invested to support their child in achieving.

Brooker’s (2002) study recognised that all families wanted the best for their child for their child starting school. What this looked like, and what each family prioritised as their goal, differed from family to family. Understanding parents’ values and aspirations is critical in determining how best to support parents’ needs as they assist in their child’s transition to school (Dockett & Perry, 2004; Englund et al., 2004; Miller et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2004).

Englund et al. (2004) found that parents’ own academic achievements shape and influence their beliefs, aspirations and expectations for their child. Those parents who attained higher educational achievement themselves generally had higher expectations for their child and were more likely to become involved in the child’s education. Similarly, the parents’ own experiences of school shaped their moral expectations for their child’s start to school. Miller et al. (2011) found that parents’ moral values, such as those related to their experience of attending a faith-based school, would, they hoped, inform their child’s schooling also.

Several studies have found a correlation between parents who have positive aspirations for their child to make progress in their academic performance and schools that have acknowledged and appreciated the commitment of parents in supporting their child’s learning during the transition to school (Buchmann et al., 2022; Graßhoff et al., 2013; Krininger & Schulz, 2017; Puccioni, 2015; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005; Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010).

Many parents associate their child starting school as a step up to the challenges of academic learning, with the child's educational achievement becoming more important than when attending ECE (Puccioni, 2015; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). Other researchers, such as Moulton et al. (2015) and Peters (2003a), have highlighted parents' aspirations for their child's wellbeing, such as their child's ability to manage socially and emotionally in their adjustments to school, with children's social competencies viewed as being important for making friends (Griebel & Niesel, 2003). In Peters' (2003) research, the family goals highlighted in her study showed some parents actively supporting their child in making friends with other children by initiating playdates with other families before their child started school.

Much of the research exploring families' goals and aspirations for their child starting school prioritised the child's academic learning as crucial to an effective start to school. Besi and Sakellariou (2019) study found that parents gave less attention to the social and emotional domains of children's development. Some studies (see Barnett & Taylor, 2009; Li et al., 2013) noted a shift in the nature of parental concerns from their child's development of physical development skills and well-being in their early childhood years towards prioritising their child's future success by supporting their academic needs. For example, parents may focus on their child beginning to "know letters and numbers, since these are the fundamental elements of learning" (Besi & Sakellariou, 2019, p. 33). Some parents studies, viewed the beginning of school as the beginning of the "seriousness of life" (Graßhoff et al., 2013, p. 129), which can be seen as their acceptance that parents are supposed to feel a "co-responsibility for giving children the best possible support in their educational attainment" (Krinninger & Schulz, 2017, p. 102).

Parental transition practices

Both Timperley et al. (2003) and Carr et al. (2009) prioritise the parents' role in supporting their child's adjustment to the changes that accompany moving to their new school setting. Highlighting a social outcome, Besi and Sakellariou (2019), Dockett and Perry (2001), O'Kane (2016), Niesel and Griebel (2005) and Puccioni (2015) advocate the importance of parental support for their New Entrant children. Examples of effective parental support offered by Dockett and Perry (2001) include preparing their child to manage the unfamiliar context of school and separating from the parent each day to stay with the teacher in class. Puccioni (2015) advises the adoption of "parental transition practices", where parents share

specific activities such as reading stories and learning the alphabet to prepare their child for school-based learning. Alternatively, parental transition practices may prioritise preparing a child to manage new social situations by supporting a child's "social and emotional skills, communication and language skills, positive learning dispositions like independence and curiosity, and self-help skills" (O'Kane, 2016, p. 14). "Parental transition practices" are therefore dependent on each family's interpretation of what they see as the main focus for readying their child to start school. The intended outcome of this parental support is that the child will be equipped to cope with a time of change and confidently adapt to their new environment (Besi & Sakellariou, 2019; Niesel & Griebel, 2005).

Parent-teacher relationships prior to starting school

The pre-liminal phase is a time to farewell the ECE teachers with whom many families have held long association and to develop new connections with the child's school teacher (Griebel et al., 2017). Developing a positive teacher-parent relationship is signalled by Epstein and Sander (2000) and Sebastian et al. (2017) as contributing towards a successful transition to school. Rouse and O'Brien (2017) emphasise that while it is expected that teachers initiate the relationship with parents, teachers would benefit from careful consideration in how to position families in this process. Edwards and Kutaka (2015) caution teachers against pushing a "school-centric" (p. 5) agenda that may lead to pre-defining roles in this new relationship. In this school-centric notion, according to Rouse and O'Brien (2017), the school identifies themselves as the "help giver" and the families as the "help-seeker" (p. 46), and fails to recognise the knowledge and expertise that the families bring to the relationship.

Instead, Rouse and O'Brien (2017) and Edwards and Kutaka (2015) recommend that schools and parents collaboratively develop a shared agenda and negotiate what preparation is needed for the child's transition to school. Positive and reciprocal relationships between families and school are considered essential for an effective transition, with some studies indicating that family involvement should be an integral element of a school's transition practices (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2002; Dockett & Perry, 2002; Kemp, 2003). According to the OECD (2017) *Starting Strong V report*, "good quality transitions include numerous activities that involve personal contact between teachers, parents and children" (p. 21). The report recommends that schools begin contacting families prior to starting school and continue to keep in touch after the child has started school. A more proactive stance on the part of the school is advocated in research as well (LoCassale-Crouch et al., 2008).

Continuity of learning transition from early childhood services to schools, an evaluation by the New Zealand Education Review Office (2015), recommended that schools develop a two-way partnership with families early in the transition process. This allowed schools time not only to provide families with information to help prepare families, but also to gather information from parents about their family's specific needs in their transition to the school community. The report found that where schools provided both formal and informal opportunities to develop relationships between home and educational settings, parent respondents were more likely to feel "respected and valued and welcome" in their child's new school (Education Review Office, 2015, n.p).

Where studies have provided examples of schools effectively engaging in early communication between home and school settings, such as those of Brooker (2002), Doucet and Tudge (2007) and Gallagher (2006), proactively making time for building positive communication was identified as necessary. Doucet and Tudge (2007) found that where teachers had begun to develop an understanding of families' transition needs, schools could better support families as they prepared to leave the ECE environment. Further studies (Correia & Marques-Pinto, 2016; Margetts, 2007; Wilder & Lillvest, 2017) have also indicated that a communication system which bridged the home/school gap also helped parents feel able to support a more effective transition for their child, thus emphasising the importance of collaboration.

Initiating collaboration

Collaboration is defined as a process of "cooperation and a form of social interaction based on trust that demands a certain degree of autonomy" (Hanke et al., 2017, pp. 227-228). In the context of their research, Hanke et al. (2017) identified families as active participants in their own transition to school when changes affect not only the child but also the parents are recognised and managed between the family and school. Like Bryk and Schneider (2003), Hanke et al. (2017) highlighted the significance of the frequency of social interaction based on trust, as previously mentioned. The OECD (2017, p. 5) *Starting Strong V report* found that collaboration between schools and families tended to focus around "common activities". These included attending events, parent information meetings, home visits made by the class teacher, or transition planning, such as creating a "biography" of the child as an individual, to develop a shared understanding of the child's needs before they start school.

It is also important to consider the role of ECE educators in collaborating with schools. Research studies have exposed “tensions” between the two sectors of ECE and primary school, with each developing their own transition practices. However, work by Bond et al. (2019) focused on establishing relationships that provide a “community-wide” practice between ECE and school to develop a collaborative sharing of good practice to support families. This is key because the ECE educators are a part of the families’ existing support network. A further means of establishing collaboration is, as suggested by the *Starting Strong V report* (OECD, 2017), promoting an alignment of pedagogical practices between children’s learning experiences in ECE and in school. The continuity thus established ensures a less disorienting shift for families

In developing collaboration between stakeholders, Peters and Sandberg (2017) suggest the development of a borderland space, or “shared space” in which school and families could work to familiarise themselves with one another’s values and practice. An example of how such a borderland space may be developed is discussed by Mitchell et al. (2008). They created a space where families were introduced to their new school whilst still attending their ECE centre. Through experiences such as a series of school visits, children and families became better acquainted with their new environment. Similarly, Ackesjö (2013) suggested that school visits, could be viewed as “rehearsal visits” (p. 399), giving children repeated opportunities to learn about school routines and norms.

These rehearsal visits during the pre-liminal phase offer the benefit of visiting the school setting before children separate from the familiarity of the ECE. However, rehearsal visits may not always provide opportunities for every child to begin forming relationships. The purpose of the visits outlined by Ackesjö (2013) has been to orientate children with their new classroom. For example, a child may make several visits to their new school just before their starting date to familiarise themselves with their new classroom and other children. However, this might not always be an effective strategy particularly in the New Zealand context, when a child may be the only one visiting at any one time, and may be entering a group where children have already formed friendships and the class is established.

Ackesjö (2013) observes that children’s and parents’ early connections with school can influence their developing ideas of what school will be like. Through glimpses of school, children may begin to actively deconstruct their identity as an ECE child and begin to develop their ideas of what is required to be a school child. As part of this process, children

and their families will need to come to terms with leaving the familiarity of their ECE centre (Ackesjö, 2013a).

In summary, at the pre-liminal phase of families' transition to school, research has focused on the importance of supporting families in their separation from their ECE centre, whilst simultaneously preparing for their child to start school. An effective strategy discussed in this section has been the development of a borderland space. Ideally, in developing this shared space families may benefit from the support of both ECE and school teachers in preparing them for the changes and challenges ahead. School visits have been described as being an effective rehearsal to help familiarise families with their new school environment. The literature has shown that a "one size fits all" approach operated by schools does not necessarily mean that all families experience a confident and effective transition. The key idea emerging from this review has been that the support each family needs is unique, as is their cultural capital and the contents of their virtual school bag.

The following section explores research spanning the liminal phase.

The liminal phase: Children starting school

The liminal phase in van Gennep's 1960/1977 model signifies the "in-between" period during which an individual has not yet reached their new status, nor been fully incorporated into their new role or new social group. Within the parameters of this study, the liminal phase begins with the child's first day of school and represents a period of adjustment. This phase includes the challenges, changes and demands of the school setting. In the context of transition to school, this perspective accepts that not only the child faces the challenges of attending school, their parent too experiences changes to aspects of their life and their role (Griebel et al., 2017; Hanke et al., 2017). As the individual crosses the threshold between worlds, they may experience a sense of loss for their old situation and an uncertainty about what is to come.

The liminal phase has been likened to a connecting passage that links "a nowhere between two somewheres" (Ackesjö, 2013, p. 5). Similarly, Garpelin (2014) describes an individual who is in this position as "being without belonging to any room" (p. 119). The liminal phase is often viewed as a time of change, challenge and disruption. Niesel and Griebel (2007) note that for children this can be an emotional experience filled with both anticipation and insecurity. In their view this can provide useful insights into the emotional and sometimes

ambiguous journey that parents as well as children may experience during the liminal phase of their transition as their child starts school. On a basic level, the transition requires families to alter most of their normal practices as they adopt new daily and weekly routines. Adjusting to the expectations of families' new roles within school can be daunting. Educators devise various ways to bridge the gap for NE children to avoid the stresses of the liminal, "limbo-like" phase by adapting school practices to resemble more familiar play-based routines. In her New Zealand-based study of the transition practices of three NE classrooms, Davis (2015) found that when NE teachers implement a play-based approach that values the children's prior ECE learning experiences children are more at ease in their new environment.

Parents of a school child: New responsibilities

The responsibilities of parents of a school child may differ from their responsibilities when their child attended ECE. For example, as Brooker (2002) notes, it is the parent's responsibility to ensure that their child regularly attends school. Epstein and Sheldon (2006) found that parents are also required to be increasingly involved in their children's learning once the child starts school. One example, cited by Griebel and Niesel (2002), was the involvement of a parent in the supervision of their child's homework. Other studies (Englund et al., 2004); Krinninger & Schulz, 2017) have highlighted the various ways parents are involved in supporting their child's learning for school, such as attending parent-teacher conferences and supporting school initiatives. On the basis of their German study that conducted interviews with twelve families, Krinninger and Schulz (2017) propose that parents may experience an increase in expectations and commitments from their child's new school and may need to allocate more time at home on educationally valued tasks. Krinninger and Schulz (2017) point out that in becoming parents of a school pupil they are now obliged, with the school's support, to be co-responsible for giving their child the best possible support in their educational achievement. Given this shared responsibility for a child's education, schools need to actively devise ways to help parents adjust to their new responsibilities.

Epstein and Sheldon (2006) discuss how public institutions appear to set the agenda for their expectations of a parent's responsibilities to their child by utilising a parent partnership model. The partnership model in this scenario is set by the school, therefore is developed by the expectations and needs of the public institution rather than to meet specific families' needs. O'Donnoghue (2014) advocates that a parent partnership model needs to be reflective of the demographic diversity across schools, with educational settings providing families with

the resources they need to have agency in the transition process. In addition there is also great diversity in parent expectations, for example some families are driven to see their child succeed academically, and will ask for support to engage in further practices. Therefore, an effective parent partnership model needs to be flexible and adaptable. As with earlier discussions regarding cultural capital, studies advocate that schools' recognise families' diversity, but researchers do not readily offer strategies to support schools in achieving this. What is more often the case is an unfortunate one-way system of communication, that aims to offer support, but does not accommodate families' individual needs.

Miller (2011) termed the ongoing communication process between school and home the "backpack connection", although "backpack" in Miller's (2011) study does not hold the same connotations as in studies by Thomson (2002) and De Gioia (2017). The backpack in Miller's (2011) study represents the way letters and communication were given to the child to deliver to their parents. This communication system is limited by being completely one-way. While the mothers in Miller's study appreciated the ongoing communication and felt they had been kept informed by the school, they remained passive recipients. This invites the question: Is there not a way to make parents active participants in a communicative process with school? After all, the various studies, educational policies and research considered in this section emphasise the benefits of collaborating with families to support children's learning. By actively involving them in this process and establishing a dialogue, it is likely that even greater gains may be made for the support of families. Fulfilling this need is particularly important at this stage as families are exposed to the stresses and challenges associated with the liminal phase.

Challenges and changes for parents at the liminal phase

With the parent's expectations and responsibilities for their school child, small and large adjustments to the parent's existing world may be needed (Graßhoff et al., 2013; Reichmann, 2010), as families are, "exposed to new dynamics" in the transition process as their child starts school (Krininger & Schulz, 2017, p. 114). Griebel et al. (2017) and Hanke et al. (2017) discuss the need to focus on the different levels of change that transition brings to a family both as a group, and as individuals. Both studies propose that starting school comes with changes for families at the individual, interactional and contextual levels which are now explored in the sections that follows.

Challenges and changes at the individual level

Research by Ackesjö (2014; 2017) and Giallo et al. (2008) has highlighted that the shift for parents as their child starts school continues to be more significant for the families supporting their eldest or only child at school, where families may struggle to adjust to the new and additional demands of the education system, with no prior experiences to draw on.

Reichmann (2010) says that for some parents the occasion of their child starting school may prompt memories of their child's early years, and they may miss their child's greater dependency upon them. For other parents, their child starting school may cause them to feel a sense of pride in their five year old child's increasing independence (Reichmann, 2010).

Dockett, Perry, et al. (2011) identified the implications of the longer, less flexible hours of the school day and the addition of school holidays as changes that created challenges for parents at the individual level. Conversely, for some New Zealand families the school day may be shorter than the hours their child has been attending an ECE setting, and this can also present a challenge for families' adjustments.

Challenges and changes at the interactional level

Studies (see Correia & Marques-Pinto, 2016; Dockett et al., 2017; Doucet & Tudge, 2007; Wilder & Lillvest, 2017) identify a reduction in opportunities for parents to interact with their child's new teacher at school when compared to their ECE centre, suggesting that building and maintaining connections between home and school may prove more challenging. Griebel et al. (2017) identified that when a school supports parents in coping with the demands of adjusting to their role, thereby reducing the parent's stress at the individual level, a parent-teacher relationship at the interactional level can be developed from mutual trust and shared decision-making. Dockett et al. (2011), Fontil and Petrakos (2015), Hutchinson et al. (2014) and Starr et al. (2014) caution that some parents in their research studies found maintaining connections with their child's teacher a challenge; they struggled to establish meaningful relationships with their child's teacher or felt unable to advocate for their child's needs. The implication of this is that a successful start to school may prove challenging to accomplish if parents do not have the means to ask for help to support their adjustment to their new responsibilities.

Challenges and changes at the contextual level

The contextual level refers to the changes and adjustments that families need to make to their daily routines in order to manage their home, school and work commitments. For families,

commencing school may cause numerous other changes in different aspects of their lives, in a short space of time (Dockett, Perry, et al., 2011). For some parents, their child's start to school may require changes in how they manage their work and home commitments and responsibilities (Hanke et al., 2017). For some families, after-school care provisions and arrangements for collecting their children from school become part of the new family routine.

As part of the transition to school process, parents and children are required to make sense of the new school contexts, their role and place within it (Dockett et al., 2017). Webb et al. (2017) have called for schools to develop a greater appreciation and understanding of the effects of this on families, as parents adapt to their new role and manage the changes associated with the responsibilities of supporting their child as they start school.

Parents' confidence in their new role

Research by Giallo et al. (2008) explored parents' self-assessment of their efficacy and feelings of anxiety about their child starting school. They found that those parents who felt more confident in their ability to support their child in adjusting to their new daily routines had fewer worries about how their child adapted to school. Parents who were transitioning their first child to school needed to learn the school rules that applied to themselves and their child. These rules included expectations such as packing an appropriate lunch box, being punctual and ensuring regular attendance at school (Brooker, 2002).

Interestingly, as part of the longitudinal '*Growing up in New Zealand study*' by Morton et al. (2018) reported that most mothers and their children had adapted well to the new school routine in less than a month of their move to school. Some mothers, however, reported having difficulties with the transition. Concerns included worrying about their child making friends, or not enjoying school. Of the mothers who experienced personal difficulty, some expressed feeling anxious about being separated from their child, or that they found the process new and challenging with their first child. Therefore, their experience of the liminal phase may be longer.

Studies by De Gioia (2017), Nuske et al. (2018) and Rogers et al. (2017) also reported that by continuing opportunities for reciprocal communication, schools can enable families to feel empowered in how they support their child at school. Reassurance and information provided by the school to parents to help them adjust to their new responsibilities was key in building parental confidence. Bryk and Schneider (2003) stated that for families to trust teachers, they

must believe that the school consistently acts in the best interests of its pupils. In a four-year longitudinal study conducted in twelve different schools, Bryk and Schneider (2003) established that trust is built over time. A study by Rutherford (2017) and documentation from the Victorian State Government (2020) both found that creating situations during transition which foster ongoing opportunities for sustained dialogue enables a sense of trust to develop.

Differences in the language used to describe a parent-teacher partnership is prevalent across transition literature. It is interesting to note how the connotations of the terms used to label efforts in building connections with families differ, with some seeming more inclusive than others. In the final analysis, however, the resulting practises that are important. Some examples of these labels include Dockett, Perry, et al.'s (2011) "educational partnerships", Rous and Hallam (2012) "family engagement", Webb et al. (2017) "respectful, collaborative and agentic relationships" and the idea of an "educational coalition" in Griebel et al. (2017, p. 31). On the theme of defining cooperative relations with families, the idea of collaboration warrants further exploration.

Unquestionably, a significant part of developing a positive relationship between families and school is established through positive and ongoing home-school communication.

Maintaining positive home-school communication

The importance of schools initiating communication with families and providing information to support a child's start to school, already noted as a critical component of the pre-liminal phase, is also essential after a family's move to school. Bronfenbrenner (1979) emphasises the importance of maintaining communication between home and school settings, stating that the child's development is "enhanced [by] ... valid information, advice and experience relevant to one setting" made available "on a continuing basis to the other" (p. 217).

Other studies have highlighted the importance parents place on maintaining a regular communication channel with their child's new teacher. As already noted, part of starting school may involve children attending after-school provision, therefore limiting the opportunities that parents have to meet in school with their child's teacher. Rogers et al. (2017) found that from the parents' perspective, the ongoing communication they had with the teacher was essential so they could be kept up to date with their child's progress and know how to support their child at home. In that study over 20 mothers interviewed before

their child began school were asked about the kind of relationship they wished to develop and maintain with their child's teacher. These parents sought ongoing communication and contact with the teacher, particularly informal opportunities to discuss their child's progress (Rogers et al., 2017).

Schools may prioritise more formal opportunities to inform parents of their child's progress, whereas parents may value more frequent, less formal updates as their child settles in. This could reflect their need for reassurance as they encounter the successive short-term challenges associated with the liminal phase. Parents and schools can have different ideas about what underpins their partnership. Ongoing communication in developing positive connections between settings is essential in maintaining and developing relationships between families and their educational settings (Kuusimäki et al., 2019; Margetts, 2002; Verderber et al., 2010).

Maintaining positive home-school relationships

Dockett and Perry (2007) promote the importance of maintaining positive home-school relationships once the child has started school. Ongoing support for families once they join the school community also needs to be accessible and available as they may encounter varying challenges at different points during the liminal phase (Dockett & Perry, 2007). However, an additional question arising from this idea is whether or not the support required by families changes as they continue their journey to school. How this manifests in the maintaining of ongoing home-school relationships is explored further in this thesis.

Maintaining a relationship between teachers and families is recognised as being a complex process which can be interpreted from multiple perspectives. In a Lebanese study that explored building parent-teacher connections in a special education context, Aouad and Bento (2020) found that, from a school's position, building relationships with families involved regular communication purposed to foster interaction with all families. The study found this was sometimes challenging and advocated that schools explore a range of different ways of trying to reach and engage with all families. Studies by Griebel et al. (2017) and Sapungan and Sapungan (2014) both examined situations where home-school connections had faltered, and interpreted the problem from different stakeholder's perspective. Working from a parent's perspective, Griebel et al. (2017) found that a family's lack of experience with school structures, processes, expectations and programmes may leave some families feeling lost and unsure how to cope with supporting their child as they adjust to school.

Accordingly Griebel et al. (2017) advise that it is the responsibility of the school to ensure parents are receiving positive and frequent communication and opportunities to contribute to their child's learning.

Analysing a breakdown of home-school connections from a school's perspective, Sapungan and Sapungan (2014) affirmed that effective home-school relationships rely on a parent's regular presence in school. In their study of parent engagement in schools in the Philippines, teacher participants cited a recent decline in parental support due to parents choosing not to meet their obligations as a school parent, and displaying a "we don't care attitude" (p. 44). Perhaps this happens when parents feel they are not able to meet the school's expectations of them. A parent's ability to commit to time spent in school was further addressed by Dockett, Perry, et al. (2011) who found that parents may view an "educational partnership" as being time intensive, difficult to manage, and not something that they wanted to commit to. Indeed, negative parent perceptions may stem from a school's poor communication, an unmanageable demand on parents' time and a lack of meaningful opportunities where families feel able to contribute towards building and maintaining a home-school relationship.

Family members and educators bring their own interpretations of a partnership, based on their own values, attitudes and expectations; however, these may not be compatible or realistic with schools. Parents are "actors in different life situations" (Griebel et al., 2017, p. 31); their spheres of knowledge and experience of the educational system may not be current or detailed, meaning they may not be fully prepared for the continued challenges following their child's move to school. Likewise, teachers are influenced by their own pedagogical beliefs, shaped by the school culture and curriculum. Dockett et al. (2017) and Krinninger and Schulz (2017) suggest that both parents and teachers bring their own roles and associated values and beliefs to their partnership during the transition process. Navigating the differences in perspective and expectation to negotiate an equitable transition from liminal to post-liminal is ultimately necessary if families are to feel they finally belong.

The post-liminal phase: Families finding their place

The final phase van Genneep (1960/1977) outlines is the post-liminal, whereby the individual or group of individuals are incorporated into a new group. van Genneep (1960/1977) proposes that those who are less familiar with their new role and environment may need more support to be able to integrate into the new group. Within the scope of this thesis, the post-liminal

phase is interpreted as a time when families have adjusted to the changes of starting school, formed relationships and developed familiarity with their new setting. This final phase represents the point at which families develop a sense of belonging to their new school community. Peters and Sandberg (2017) further add that if an individual finds the challenges of managing and adjusting to the changes brought about by starting school too bewildering, they will remain at the liminal phase, unable to feel fully incorporated into their new setting. This means that those who have not reached the post-liminal phase can be said not to have fully completed their transition. Consequently, these individuals have not achieved a sense of belonging in their new community. In the context of developing a customised approach to a transition to school, this idea prompts the need for an individualised approach to ensure that none are left in limbo and all make it to the final phase.

The preparation and support which an individual has received at the pre-liminal and liminal phase may help to make families' incorporation into their new community a relatively smooth experience (van Gennep (1960/1977)). Much of the literature on transition to school focuses on supporting families' transition, and ends once the children start school, or during their early weeks of being at school. However, in thinking more widely about indications of the post-liminal phase, it is pertinent to consider literature which will emphasise identified key indications that families have reached post-liminality. In my analysis of transition research the following sections explore key indicators that, when aligned with van Gennep's (1960/1977) theory, offer examples of how families have entered the post-liminal phase during their transition to school.

A sense of belonging

Families developing a sense of belonging to their new school community and environment is identified in the literature as a key indication of an effective transition (Brooker, 2008; Bull et al., 2008; Peters, 2010; Sancho & Cline, 2012). A sense of belonging as an important determinant of wellbeing is described by Sancho and Cline (2012) as fulfilling a fundamental human need for "connection with others" (p. 64). A definition of belonging is offered by Allen et al. (2021), who describe it as a feeling which one develops over time and which results in an individual feeling connected to a new social group or physical location. This sentiment is shared by Peters (2010), who describes belonging as when an individual feels "valued and accepted" (p. 15). Thus, a sense of belonging can be identified as an indication of post-liminality and, therefore, of an effective transition. However, a concern associated

with belonging is that, as Peters (2010) cautions, during the process of an individual “fitting in” to a new community, the influence of the group should not force them to abandon their own values in favour of those prioritised by the group. When customising each family’s transition to school, this becomes a key consideration for educators, as families will need to feel that their values, cultural knowledge and ideas are an implicit part of a collaborative process (Bull et al., 2008). The concern remains that families who have simply conformed in order to fit in may not be truly in the post-liminal phase. What is not ambiguous, however, is the significance of relationships in getting families through and beyond the final stage of the transition.

Central to families developing a sense of belonging in their new school community is the feeling of having established positive relationships (Brown, 2019; Dockett & Perry, 2008; Peters & Roberts, 2015). The following section considers one of the most important components of the child’s transition: the development of friendships with other children, key to being accepted into their new group. The roles of teachers and parents in supporting this process are explored.

The importance of children’s friendships

Research by Ackesjö (2014), Neuman (2007), Hollingsworth and Buysse (2009) and Peters (2003a) focused on children’s perspectives on transitioning to school. Therein, friendships and forming new relationships are critical factors in an effective transition. Like Peters (2003a), Hollingsworth and Buysse (2009) found that parents valued their child having friends when starting school. Parents in their UK study helped their children to develop peer social networks initiating play dates with other members of their new class. A participatory action research project led by Bath (2009) and teachers from three Reception classes in a Northern city in the UK examined their existing practices to explore what children’s participation looks like in a Reception classroom. One of the findings was the important role teachers play in nurturing children’s friendships at school. Bath (2009) found that teachers who planned ways to encourage children to engage and co-operate with each other helped them to develop a sense of belonging to their new class.

Peters (2003a) and Neuman (2007) found that a child’s ability to develop and maintain friendships is a significant source of support when moving from the familiarity of ECE to the new and unfamiliar school context. In an interview conducted by Roberts with Peters, resulting in an article by Peters and Roberts (2015) they drew attention to the positive

influence that children who are already part of the class may have on supporting those who are just starting school. This aligned with examples from Peters' (2004) earlier research, when she observed more experienced NE children providing "scaffolded support" and even "rolemodel[ing]" (p. 6) for newly arrived children. If there are children who are comfortable enough to provide support to more recently arrived students, then those who are showing the way may be viewed as having successfully transitioned into the post liminal-phase. However, there was less literature regarding the friendships that parents form and how building connections with other parents might support them in adjusting as parents of a school child.

To summarise, the post-liminal phase of transition has been found in this review to be an under-explored area of transition research. Yet, key indications that a family has reached the post-liminal phase of their transition have been indentified, including the development of a sense of belonging within their new school community. Likewise, the further implications of "fitting in" have been considered and the importance of relationships established. A key tool in fostering the growth of the relationships which so often prove essential in helping families transition to school is found in digital communication. Various internet and social media communication methods can facilitate many of the important aspects previously identified in this chapter, such as the maintaining of regular home-school communication and of ongoing parent-teacher partnerships. The following section explores the potential role of digital communication between school and families throughout the whole transition process.

Digital communication and transition to school

Despite its great potential in addressing many of the concerns raised in transition literature, the use of digital communication during the transition process remains a relatively under-explored field. Interest in understanding the potential uses of social media has spiked as a by-product of global lockdowns during the 2020 pandemic. However, the central focus of much of this new research is on how digital technology can facilitate home learning, and social media's use in aiding transition between home and school remains an area deserving of further research. The challenges and benefits of digital communication in maintaining home-school connections will be explored in this section.

The importance of developing and maintaining a two-way communication process between families and school to enable the sharing of information and the building of connections is well documented in the literature (Chou, 2015; Wilder & Lillvest, 2017; Dockett & Perry,

2007). Digital methods offer a promising means of resolving the concern identified in previously cited studies, that is, that communication with families must be flexible and recognise that one size does not fit all. Digital communication offers families a way of communicating with teachers confidently on their own terms and in a timely manner. As well, it is a flexible medium that does not require parents to take time out of their schedules to meet physically with their child's new teacher (Woodhouse, 2015).

A Finnish study by Kuusimäki et al. (2019) that involved 400 parents and 80 teachers focused on how digital communication could benefit parent-teacher relationships. Their premise was that "most parent-teacher communication nowadays takes place on digital platforms" (Kuusimäki et al., 2019, p. 1). The research concluded that there were four aspects needed for an effective parent-teacher collaboration through digital communication: positive communication, personalised communication, proactive communication, and collaboration. In research into an online environment Reddy et al. (2003) found that not only was the frequency of communication between school and home important: it was also essential that the communication was respectful and positive. Kuusimäki et al. (2019) advise that relying solely on digital communication cannot develop the trust between home and school as effectively as face-to-face meetings.

Kuusimäki et al. (2019) found that proactive communication was an important aspect to consider for effective digital communication between home and school. They explain that proactive communication can be viewed as the development of open dialogue between school and home. Open dialogue needs to be facilitated and enabled through "choosing the right channel" (Kuusimäki et al., 2019, p. 6) that is, teacher and parent should select the most appropriate way to communicate with each other. This reveals the value of accessibility because parents are not likely to communicate via a method that is not intuitive or accessible. Furthermore, Chou (2015) noted a lack of personalised information from schools to families and saw this as a lost opportunity to make positive connections. Digital communication can also assuage this concern by streamlining the process by which families can access personalised information from educators, and this in turn strengthens the home-school partnership.

Kuusimäki et al. (2019) identified partnership and collaboration between parent and teacher as the remaining components of effective digital communication, underlining the shared responsibility of parents and school. Byron (2009) emphasised that discussion between

parents and children, scaffolded by teacher's prompts, and talking about school bridges the gap between the two settings of the child's world. The use of digital communication as a social practice may assist in the development of the relationship between the families and school in a manner that fosters reciprocal expectation (Geser, 2004; Grant, 2011).

Technology provides a way to reach and involve more parents in their child's world of school (Bull et al., 2008) and alleviate some of the communication challenges of time and distance faced by parents and teachers (Juniu, 2009). However, it is important to consider the time and expectations placed on teachers to respond to parents' messages outside of school hours when evaluating the freedom from time constraints that digital communication offers.

Social media and transition

Social media specifically provides a more interactive form of what Grant (2010) calls "thin" communication, typified by short postings, photos, and videos. Grant (2010) considers it a flexible and efficient method for sender and recipient. Heppell and Chapman (2011) too found that social networking and portable devices provide easy and accessible communication channels between parents, students and teachers. The following section shares some of the findings from literature that has investigated the role that social media, specifically Facebook, has played in supporting a range of different transitions.

With a decreasing need for physical "places", technology is increasingly curating the virtual space for people to conveniently meet and interact with others with similar interests (Ontong & Waghid, 2020). Research by Semaan et al. (2016) studied a group of 13 veteran soldiers who were transitioning from military life to civil life. The study focused on the development of "transition resilience" (p. 2883) in returning soldiers by using social media for online support. "Transition resilience" (Semaan et al., 2016, p. 2883) refers to how an individual reactively copes or bounces back from disruption in their world, as they navigate from the familiar to an unfamiliar environment. Facebook was chosen to provide a safe space to navigate the "new social structures" and to support the soldiers' development in gaining a "big picture understanding of the unfamiliar rules and norms and receive support while reintegrating into society" (Semaan et al., 2016, pp. 2882-2883). This research highlighted the Facebook environment as a safe, accessible digital space for a bounded group where "collective meaning-making can occur" (Semaan et al., 2016, p. 2883).

Similarly, research by Yildirim (2019) and Bartholomew et al. (2013), focuses on using Facebook to develop collective knowledge within an online Community of Practice (CoP).

Yildirim (2019) was interested in the emotional factors which kept the group motivated to engage. Engagement within the Facebook group page was influenced by how long the Facebook group remained relevant to its members; once motivation and interest was lost, the group ceased to continue (Yildirim, 2019). Understanding how to maintain parent and teacher motivation and interest via social media makes this relevant to my research.

As well as building a social network, seeking information was cited as important in developing a sense of belonging to a new group (Sawyer, 2011). The support of a facilitator who was knowledgeable about the new environment was a key consideration for a study by Martin et al. (2020). Their study of hybrid learning groups of university students and their teacher-facilitators found via an online survey that the student group members rated being able to contact their facilitator for help as their highest priority. Similarly, both Perle et al. (2002) and Martin et al. (2020) considered the facilitator vital to the success of a community. Troy et al. (2009), noted “an important factor in providing reliable information to the group is the assignment of a ‘mentor’” (p .6). Woodley and Meredith (2012) too found facilitation to be important, and further advocated that the facilitator “should not only be responsible for providing information but also should generate enthusiasm, connectedness, and a sense of belonging” (p. 93).

This reinforces the significance of the facilitator ensuring emotional and social support when mentoring group members who may feel awkward about “being green” (Minocha, 2009, p. 91) as they navigate the unfamiliarity of a new environment. Australian research by Willis and Exley (2018) explored the use of social media in the ECE context. The study used app-based technology including Seesaw and Skype to enable centres to communicate and engage with their family community. Three New Zealand-based examples, one in Waiuku kindergarten (Hatherly et al., 2009) and another in Botany Downs (Education Central, 2019) described how Skype was utilised by their kindergartens to make video calls to children’s new friends in the NE classroom. Hooker (2015) examined the use of e-portfolios in ECE and the ways teacher, parents and children engaged with these documents. In a New Zealand-based Master’s study of one ECE Centre, Higgins and Cherrington (2017) found that teachers using e-portfolios to share frequent examples of children’s learning with families via photos and videos provided a foundation for conversation that helped develop home-school relationships. These local examples of research use innovative ideas and strategies to build connections with families and acquaint them with their new school environment.

Chapter summary

My analysis of transition to school research findings has demonstrated that an effective transition process needs to be viewed from multiple perspectives. While much attention in transition research has been on the child, the child is also part of a family unit. Peters (2010) raised the consideration of “whose voices are heard” (p.13) in the transition to school process. This chapter has presented different conceptualisations, perceptions, and considerations of transition relevant to understanding how to best support a family’s transition to school. The transition to school is viewed in some studies as a vertical transition, a significant event where children, and their parents, are seen as moving up to school. Along the way, families adopt new expectations and responsibilities associated with joining the school community. There is less research into how families may be supported through the changes caused by horizontal changes, characterised by those adjustments which occur daily when children start school.

Transition has been conceptualised by van Genep (1960/1977) as a process characterised by three distinct phases: the pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal phases, although it is important to note that much of the literature reviewed about families’ transitions is relevant across all three phases. Chief among the transferable concepts was the importance of developing positive relationships and sharing personalised information between school and families. This is a common theme across many of the studies explored. As acknowledged in the previous section, digital communication methods can be used to address many of these areas of significance identified in research. As yet, however, there have been few examples of studies examining the use of this technology to support families embarking on the transition to school. This provides much of the impetus for this thesis, and is explained further in the following rationale.

Rationale

This study addresses the paucity of analysis in the scholarship regarding the use of digital and social media technologies in fostering collaborative transitions to school. Since the commencement of this study, the COVID 19 pandemic has accelerated interest regarding online learning so that this study is even more timely and makes important contributions to a growing body of work. While starting school has always been conceptualised in literature as a milestone event (Dockett et al., 2017), the advent of social media offers new opportunities to aid families and children in their transition to school. Research studies have communicated

the benefits of educational settings initiating dialogue between families and school early in the transition process whilst the child is still attending ECE (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Mitchell et al., 2006; Morton et al., 2018). By commencing communication and building connections during the pre-liminal phase, the school has time to share information with families and to reciprocally gather information from parents. By learning about their families' specific needs in their transition, schools may devise a more responsive transition intervention for families (Educational Review Office, 2015; Krinninger & Schulz, 2017; McIntyre et al., 2007; Miller et al., 2011).

As indicated in the review, many transition to school research studies concluded during the initial weeks of the children starting school. However, a key indication of an effective transition which was identified through my analysis of the literature was that families developed a sense of belonging to their new school community. Central to this is the forming of positive relationships (Brown, 2019; Peters & Roberts, 2015). Viewing transition as a process over three phases, the benefits of continuing a family's support for a sustained period of time to promote and maintain positive connections between home and school, has become apparent.

Literature has identified that parents are mainly regarded as their child's supporter in their transition to school (Krinninger & Schultz, 2017; McIntyre et al., 2007; Miller et al., 2011). Studies by Ackesjö (2014; 2017) and Giallo et al. (2008) have highlighted the transition process for parents whose first child is starting school. Previous research has focused primarily on the transitioning child, with much less attention having been given to parents. Becoming the parent of a school child may include difficulty in understanding the new and additional demands of the education system. Research by Dockett et al. (2017) and Fontil and Petrakos (2015) acknowledges the importance of parents not only as their child's supporter, but also recognises transition to school as a family experience, with parents too requiring support in their adaptation to the changes involved in their child starting school.

Studies have advocated for the development of a partnership between families and school; however, some have cautioned that a power imbalance may develop, with the school setting the agenda for the expectations placed on parents (Dockett & Perry, 2006). For example, the idea that parents need to be physically visible by attending school meetings and contribute to their child's learning is a commitment that has become increasingly difficult for busy families to fit into their schedules. Social media could overcome such challenges. However, although

some studies have investigated the place of digital and social media in facilitating transitions, this literature review has identified that little research has been conducted which explores social media as a vehicle to assist the transition to school.

A lack of communication and connections between the two settings can create further challenges in supporting children to make a positive start to school and for families to experience a smooth transition (Dockett & Perry, 2021). Conversely, researchers such as Ballam et al. (2019) advocate that when teachers of both settings collaborate to support a families' transition to school, "alliances" may generate a cross-sector network where teachers can share their practices and expertise.

This review has identified gaps in studies pertaining to the deliberate collaboration between schools and families to develop a responsive transition to school, in particular the undertaking of this process utilising a digital focus. These under-explored aspects of transition provide a rationale for this study and have assisted in the framing of the research questions:

- 1) How might a NE teacher meet individual families' needs and aspirations by using a customised transition to school process?
- 2) How might a collaboratively constructed transition to school using social media assist with the development of a CoP that includes families, ECE and NE teachers?
- 3) In what ways can a collaboration between schools and families develop a transition to school process that contributes to helping children find their place in the school environment?

The following chapter outlines the methodology, design, and data collection methods of the research.

Chapter 4: Methodology

The previous chapter discussed a range of literature about the transition to school for families, concluding that using digital media makes it possible for teachers and families to experience a responsive transition process through frequent two-way communication. The review of literature provided a rationale for the research questions explored in this study. These research questions, outlined at the end of Chapter 3, guided and led the study from the beginning to the end (Drew et al., 2008; Menter et al., 2011; Robinson & Lai, 2006). This chapter considers the research methods employed to address the research questions and further explore how online interaction might drive a customised transition to school. It also locates this study in an interpretive methodology and considers the selected methods of data collection, analysis, and credibility.

This chapter is in two parts. Part one begins with the research design, which includes an explanation of the ontological and epistemological assumptions that underlie the study and led to the selection of a case study approach, my position as a both a teacher and a researcher, and a brief summary of the context and participants. Part two discusses the methods used and ethical matters that were relevant to this research.

Part one: Research design

This initial section outlines the rationale for my research design as a combination of ontological, epistemological and methodological considerations. As stated by Agee (2009) “the reflective and interrogative processes required for developing research questions can give shape and direction to a study in ways that are often underestimated” (p. 431). The research methodology and methods, therefore, emerge from the research questions. A research design can be defined as being the “conceptual blueprint within [which] research is conducted” (Akhtar & Islamia, 2016, p. 17).

Crotty (1998) posits that there are three hierarchical levels of decision making within the research design process. Firstly, the researcher adopts a particular position towards how they view the nature of knowledge. This epistemological and ontological position will underpin the research process, guiding the researcher in selecting a particular theoretical perspective. Secondly, the theoretical perspective is essentially connected with the research questions,

which in turn guides the methodological plan. Thirdly, this plan then informs the choice of methods employed in the research. How I applied each hierarchical level of decision-making within the research design process of this research will now be examined.

Ontological and epistemological assumptions

The first hierarchical level of decision-making is found through the philosophical examination of ontology, which draws attention to “the nature of the phenomena being studied” (Hammersley, 2014, p. 169). Ontological assumptions are those that respond to questions which ask “What is the nature of reality?” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 12). This reflects a perspective underpinned by an objective understanding of the world, where, through empirical analysis, it may be possible to know about the world (Snape & Spencer, 2003). Bryman (2008) introduced a contrasting concept of “social ontology”, which suggests reality is constructed through the interaction of social entities, and offers two opposing ontological positions for consideration. The first position is objective and views reality as existing independently of social phenomenon (Bryman, 2008). The second position views reality as being constantly under construction and reshaped through social interaction (Bryman, 2008). Despite the two positions viewing the nature of reality itself in seemingly “ontologically incompatible” ways (Farquhar, 2012, p. 9), Morgan (2007) suggests the benefits of viewing both positions from a “pragmatic” ontological stance. This “mid-way position” lies between the two opposing stances previously offered. Reality may be viewed objectively, recognising reality as a single world. Whilst simultaneously recognising that all individuals have their own interpretations of the world, this pragmatic position shifts focus from presenting a definitive ontological stance. Given that my study has strong connections to social interaction and learning, yet is also cognisant of certain objective factors which children and their families encounter, Morgan’s (2007) approach offered a more flexible basis for designing my research methods, without losing sight of the philosophical questions (Norwich, 2020).

In the context of my study, the transition to school emphasises the role of key stakeholders surrounding children and the influence they have on the individual family’s needs. While all families enter the transition process with varying levels of preparedness and experience, there is still a requirement that children’s basic needs are met, such as knowing the location of bathroom facilities and the routine for the school day. A wholly social constructivist position could be persuasive in the context of this study, given the emphasis placed on the

collaborative construction of the transition process and the significance of the CoP. However, the primary needs of all children point to the existence of an objective reality beyond the unique and socially constructed experiences of individuals. Accordingly, this study is grounded in a pragmatic ontological stance based on the assumption that objective reality exists, but that individuals interpret and perpetuate an understanding of it through their interactions with others. Morgan's (2007) pragmatic approach also aids in understanding the influence of administrative factors. For example, while children objectively turn five, there are a range of socially constructed implications associated with this, including starting school, and their introduction to the New Zealand Curriculum. This practicality further applies to the framework of the study, where objective elements include the number of participants and when they entered the study. My study also benefited from the application of social constructivism in that the transition process features a group of participants, whose "individual experiences, thoughts and perceptions may be shaped through interaction" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 108).

Epistemology is defined by Crotty (1998) as a way of "understanding and explaining how we know what we know" (p. 3). Cohen et al. (2007) elaborate, explaining that epistemology constitutes "the very basis of knowledge-its nature and form and how it can be acquired and how it can be communicated to other human beings" (p. 7). Rashid et al. (2019) point out that epistemology assumes knowledge can be either objective, if regulated by scientific principles, or subjective, where knowledge is interpreted by individuals. Therefore, epistemological assumptions penetrate the perceptions of participants and how the researcher interprets them (Rashid et al., 2019). The knowledge generated by the participants in this research positions the study within a subjective stance.

The epistemological theoretical perspective that underpins this study emerges from social constructivism. The epistemological assumption that guides the research collected in this study is that: the participants, based on their socially constructed versions of reality, produce knowledge which is interpreted by the researcher, in order to gain understandings about children's transition to school and their families' transition to the school community. The selection of philosophical paradigms in guiding my research combines understandings of ontology and epistemology (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). More recent research proposes that ontological and epistemological levels of a paradigm may not necessarily piece together tidily

to create a definitive choice of paradigm (Norwich, 2020), and so a “best fit” positioning paradigm is justified for this study.

Paradigm positioning

A paradigm constitutes a set of ontological and epistemological underpinnings or set of beliefs that define the worldview of the researcher (Denscombe, 2008; Lincoln et al., 2011). The epistemological assumptions in this study are to examine the individual experiences, thoughts, and perceptions, of a group of participants. The investigation into their worlds leads this largely qualitative research to be positioned in an interpretive paradigm.

An interpretive approach places value on human experiences and examines the role of individuals and their interactions with others. In adopting an interpretive approach, the research is viewed through the eyes of the participants. In order to understand the individual world of each actor, the researcher needs to spend time in their environment and, where appropriate, take a flexible approach to the modification of data collection methods (Tolich & Davidson, 2003). Cohen et al. (2002) state that within an interpretive approach, “individuals hold a unique perspective and therefore there can be multiple interpretations of a single event of situation” (p. 22). Thus an interpretive approach recognises that a researcher cannot confidently report findings as “fact” due to the researcher describing the experiences of others and situations or events that need to be investigated “through the eyes of the participants” (Cohen et al., 2002, p. 22).

Within the interpretive field of research, data is generated through the interactions between the researcher and their data sources (Given, 2008). The role of the researcher is to “interpret” reality through a “sense-making” process. Knowledge is actively constructed using research methods that engage the researcher with their data sources. The goal of interpretive research is to gain in-depth understanding of a particular cultural context (Bennett & Elman, 2007). A number of specific methods of data collection are used from an interpretive perspective, but all are designed to collect data that investigates the ways participants make sense of the world.

Bryman (2008) advocated for a “double interpretation” (p. 17), whereby the research is explained by the perceptions of the participants. However, this approach carries the risk of the researcher contaminating the findings through the inadvertent inclusion or imprinting of their own life experiences and social background onto their data and analysis (Denzin &

Lincoln, 2008). Indeed, there may even be further influential variables apart from those mentioned by Denzin and Lincoln (2008). The researcher, therefore, must be conscious of their position in relation to the phenomenon and to be aware of how their own experiences may have created the potential for bias. It is possible that this may itself be an impossible task, considering that some theories of epistemology suggest that all knowledge is based on subjective experience. Whilst aim for this study was to understand the subjective experiences of the participants, I gave more careful consideration to the interpretive openness and acknowledgement of my own preformed views and life experiences.

Teacher-Researcher

This section explores the concept of teacher-researcher and considerations of the dual positioning of these roles. After gaining consent from the focus families and teachers for their participation in the study, my role shifted from researcher to a teacher-researcher when due to staffing changes I became the teacher of the NE class involved in the study. Hoong et al. (2007) interpreted the two roles of teacher and researcher as having differing priorities. They explain that a teacher typically prioritises their own “teaching agenda” (p. 6), where compassion and responsiveness are fundamental values in their work as they respond to their learner’s specific needs. Hoong et al. (2007) posit that a researcher prioritises their “research agenda” (p. 8), which is focused by the intended goals of the research. A dilemma posed is that the teacher-researcher is placed in a unique “insider” position, which may prove to either “conflict or complement” (Hoong et al., 2007, p. 5) the research and teaching agendas which a teacher-researcher is carrying. However, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) view these two roles as being complimentary. The unique perspective of the teacher-researcher is positioned to give access to both the practical context known to the teacher and the theoretical dimension which concerns the researcher. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) described this as operating as an “insider” researcher, and suggested that the two roles benefit one another by allowing the teacher-researcher to interchange agendas as needed and enrich the knowledge generated.

My teacher knowledge of the school’s capabilities and relationships with both learners and parents enabled me to begin to consider how to customise a transition process for an individual family. As a teacher, one of my responsibilities was to translate aspects of our school culture into postings to extend families' tacit and explicit knowledge and, by answering their questions, help clarify school procedures and practices. Roux et al. (2017)

describe this as the role of a “bridging agent” (p. 712), an individual who is “skilled at social facilitation and can create specialised interfaces between external knowledge sources, research teams and various participating actors” (p. 712).

The role of teacher and researcher, together, can be viewed as being both complementary and integrated (Stenhouse, 1975). Stenhouse (1975) conceptualised the dual role of the teacher-researcher as involving self-evaluation, with the teacher continuously seeking to improve their teaching. The expertise and professionalism of a teacher is underpinned by their actively seeking to learn more about the world and their own teaching practices (Stenhouse, 1975). The combination of the two roles encourage the pedagogical development of a teacher, improving their own practice through targeted research.

In more recent research, Fagundes (2016) describes the blended role of the teacher-researcher as serving two broad functions: firstly, a teacher researching how they can improve learning experiences for children in their class; and secondly, a teacher reflecting more deeply on their own practices (Fagundes, 2016). Schön (1983) highlighted the value of the deliberate act of reflection as enabling a teacher to gain professional knowledge by examining their daily practices. Pimenta (2005) describes the habit of reflecting as being both intuitive and spontaneous to a teacher in their everyday practices. Fagundes (2016) offers that the concept of a teacher-researcher can be grouped within the same paradigm as the reflective-teacher, “who think[s], reflect[s] on their own practice and develop[s] strategies based on this practice considering their school reality as an object of research, reflection and analysis” (p. 292). As summarised by Zalipour (2015), reflective practice in teaching shifts from thinking about a sequence of chronological events to purposeful thinking in order to identify how to improve specific learning situations. It can enable teachers to think systematically about the learning experience of the students whose lives they influence in many “visible and invisible ways” (Zalipour, 2015, p. 6). In considering my research project, I could argue that the teaching practice extended its influence beyond the children in the classroom and into their families and their transition to school process.

The following section explores the research methodology of case study. A methodology that lends itself to an interpretive research is case study. The methodology according to Crotty (2003) is “the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcome” (p.3). A case study methodology is utilised in this research.

Case study research: Methodology or method?

Harrison et al. (2017) question the notion as to whether a case study approach can be deemed a methodology or a method. Mills (2014) distinguishes a methodology as the lens by which the researcher views the research, whereas the method is a research procedure technique.

Feagin et al. (2011) view case study as a methodological approach adopted in the investigation of a phenomenon. Stake (1995) further verifies this stance by focusing on the importance of the individual cases rather than the methods of investigation utilised.

Conversely, Ebneyamini et al. (2018) perceive the case study as a research method which “enables a researcher to closely examine the data within a specific context. Commonly, a case study method selects a small geographical area or a very limited number of individuals as the subjects of study” (p. 3).

However, Yin (2014) describes a case study as being, “an all-encompassing method with its own research design”, defining a case study as being, “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon [the case] in depth and within its real-world context” (p. 16). This definition has the best fit for my research, as the terms “methodology” or “method” are replaced by the term, “empirical inquiry”. Critical inquiry encompasses the potential to employ a broad scope of methods and interpretive practices to be able to understand the real-world context (Merriam, 2009) from the perceptions of the participants’ “real existence and real action” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 108). The overarching perspective of case study as a methodology therefore shapes the research design.

As an interpretive position, my involvement in the data collection process was essential. In a case study, “the phenomenon is not isolated from its context... rather is of interest precisely because of its relations with the context” (Rashid et al., 2019, n.p) to try and comprehend and give meaning to events in the setting. Therefore, knowledge generated from the research is influenced by the time and context of the study (Rashid et al., 2019; Stake, 1995). The development of a collaboratively constructed intervention was the phenomenon in my study.

Boundaries of a case study

Defining, or bounding the case can be difficult due to the intersection of many variables and points of interest of the research (Harrison et al., 2017). Stake (1995) points out that by defining a case it is possible to conduct intensive analysis and provide a rich description of its uniqueness and complexity. A single case may be a family, or a classroom, or a digital space, or several cases, such as several families, or several ECE centres (Creswell, 2013).

Merriam (2009) says that the bounded attributes of a case study may have been selected because they are of interest in and of themselves, or the case may lend itself to transferability and contribute knowledge around a particular issue. The bounding of a case offers some defining parameters and Yin (2014) terms these as “the units of analysis” which help to draw a line between the context of the study and the phenomenon being investigated. In my study, the transition process is the unit of analysis while school and ECE settings and Facebook provide the context. The research questions of a study seek to shape and frame the boundaries to best manage the data collection and analysis process and are informed by existing literature and a prior appreciation of the theoretical issues of the case phenomenon. Identification of the participants, context and timeframe of the case can help to set the boundaries of the case (Yin, 2014). In my study the families and teachers, the ECE centres, school and Facebook and the data collection period of February-December have contributed to setting the boundaries of the case.

Case selection

As specified by Yin (1994), a case study is deemed to be a suitable research strategy when the “contextual conditions are pertinent with the phenomenon of the inquiry” (p. 1994). 1994). The selection of the case, therefore, is an essential part of case study research design (Mills et al., 2009). In selecting a case, “an agenda is set” for the study (Seawright & Gerring, 2008, p. 294). Kuzel (1999) further advises that two issues determine the selection of a case: “appropriateness” and “adequacy”. Appropriateness is concerned with the best fit to both the objectives of the research and the phenomenon of inquiry; adequacy refers to how many cases are required to fulfil the research objectives.

Regarding the “appropriateness” of selecting the case, the primary school was my place of work, which enabled me to engage in the roles of both teacher and researcher. The three ECE centres were selected for their locations. Centre A was within immediate vicinity of the focus primary school. Centres B and C were over 5 km away from the school, and so provided the challenge of transition with less opportunities for face-to-face connection.

“Adequacy” focused on the number of key participating families who fitted the criteria controlled by two determining factors. Firstly, their child was enrolled at the focus primary school and would commence school in term 4 (September-November), limiting the sample group sourced from each centre. Secondly, three ECE centres provided enough participants to

enable an individualised investigation of each transitioning family, as well as the breadth of an appropriate representation of a range of New Zealand families. In my study, the context is transition from ECE to school, the unit of analysis is the transitioning families, and the phenomenon was the transition intervention based on collaboration between the teachers and families. The broad range of data collected, which, while largely qualitative also spans some quantitative realms, was advantageous. A mixed methods approach according to Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) is when the “quantitative and qualitative data collection, results and integration are used to provide in-depth evidence for a case” (p.116).

Mixed methods

Morgan (2014) asserts that quantitative and qualitative methods used together can meet the research goals and respond to the research question. This strength-based approach to planning a methodology is evident in contemporary research, which is exploring the potential of mixing qualitative and quantitative methodologies, and how well methods from each methodology might perform side by side (Denscombe, 2008; Harrits, 2011; Norwich, 2020). While the original intent of the research was to adopt a mixed methods approach, in practice the predominance of data included in the study was qualitative. In analysing Facebook postings, some of the data explored was quantitative and I analysed this and presented the data in graphs and tables. However, only some of this data was selected to be included in the study. It was the qualitative data gained from the different data sources which were deemed most useful to the purpose of the study. Qualitative research is deeply embedded in real-world contexts, focusing on the meanings and interpretations that people attach to their experiences. By situating themselves within these contexts, researchers can uncover rich, detailed insights that help to make the invisible aspects of true-to-life scenarios visible (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

To summarise, this research design was underpinned by the first hierarchical level of ontological and epistemological assumptions, which influenced how I perceived my participants, their realities and the need to develop an appreciation of their social worlds.

The second hierarchical layer described the paradigm which conceptualises this research. The interpretive position fitted with the idea of the researcher embarking on a “sense making” journey in order to gain an understanding of how the participants make sense of their world.

The ontological and epistemological positioning of this study informed the selection of research methods. The goal of this research was to study a group of families and teachers in order to learn more about the transition process of children from ECE to school through the experience and contributions of the participants. An overview of each research context is shared in the sections below.

The settings

The study was situated in a large primary school (761 students) and three contributing ECE centres in a city in the North Island of New Zealand. These settings are described further below.

Focus primary school

Located in an area of growing housing development, the school was well resourced and enrolment was restricted to families who lived within the catchment zone of the school. As a decile 10 rated school, it had the lowest proportion of students from lower economic backgrounds in the New Zealand context (Ministry of Education, 2023a). The most recent Educational Review Office (ERO⁴) report stated that 761 students were in attendance, 21% identified as Asian, mainly of Indian and Chinese descent, 9% as Māori and seven international students attended the school and a significant number of students were speakers of other languages. The remaining students identified as NZ European. A comment within the ERO report pertinent to this study concerned the focus school's transition to school programme as being, "A well-planned and highly sought-after programme [which] prepares new students and families well for transition into school" (n.p). The school developed a "Flying Start" transition programme in 2013, consisting of three visits in the term before a child started school to their NE classroom.

The NE class

The NE class at the focus primary school was a large, ILE (Innovative Learning Environment) with access to a fenced outdoor space which bordered onto ECE Centre A. "Junior" playground equipment was located next to the NE learning space. The NE learning space accommodated all together, five NE teachers, 80 NE children and one learning support

⁴ The Education Review Office (ERO) is the New Zealand government's external valuation agency who report on the education and care of learners in schools and early childhood services.

assistant. The 20 new children and one teacher in this study joined the already enrolled 60 children and four teachers, in the remaining home-base learning space accommodated within the wider learning environment. The indoor environment consisted of five designated smaller spaces, which were the home spaces for individual groups and their teachers. Each child had a home base and a home teacher. The home base was where the children stored their bags and belongings, and the place where parents dropped off and collected their children each day. All five learning spaces shared a kitchen and two separate “quiet” rooms. These rooms were used for group work, as well as providing a less busy space for some children to retreat to.

The NE learning space operated a play-based approach to learning. Large construction, sand, water and other play-based resources were accessible to the children throughout their school day. In the first hour after the children arrived at school they explored their own learning within the wider learning space. The NE children returned to their home space to focus on their reading and writing. Literacy was taught in small groups which targeted the children’s specific learning needs. Maths was taught in small groups within the children’s home base. During literacy and maths sessions the children accessed play-based equipment that focused their learning on a particular skill or specific knowledge, such as letter recognition or counting.

Because of a change in the school organisation, the NE class involved in this research started earlier than planned in term 3. At the start of the research, only one child began school at the beginning of term 3, as their birthday was in August. By week two of term 3, a further three children turned five and joined the class. By the end of term 3, the NE class had gradually built up to 10 children. A further 10 children joined the NE class in term 4, as their fifth birthday fell between September and November. As the last child started school in November, the class intake was at full capacity of 20 children. The school “capped” NE classes at 20 students to give the teacher more time to focus on each of these new learners as they started school.

The three ECE centres

The following information was obtained from ERO reports describing the contexts of the three ECE centres. One centre was located next door to the school. The other two centres were purposefully chosen due to their distance of over 5km from the focus primary school. A facet of the study was to research physically distanced ECE centres where NE school visits

were not a readily available option. Detailed information of the characteristics of each ECE centre is provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Information about the three participating ECE centres

Centre	Proximity to primary school	Date of ERO report	Number of children enrolled	Demographics	% of teachers holding fully qualified teaching status
A	Adjacent	2015	75	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 46 Pākehā • 9 Chinese • 8 Māori • 3 Brazilian • 2 Samoan • 1 Cook Island Māori • 1 Indian • 3 other European • 2 other 	80%
B	5km+	2017	63	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 57 Pākehā • 3 Māori • 3 other 	80%
C	5km+	2015	97	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 55 Pākehā • 2 Māori • 26 Chinese • 2 Indian • 2 South East Asian • 1 Tongan • 5 other European • 2 other Asian • 2 other 	80%

Participants

Three ECE centres were approached at the beginning of the year. The criteria for selecting family participants were based on four-year old children who were currently attending one of the three ECE centres, and were enrolled and due to start attending the focus school in term 4.

Because of the change in starting dates for the final class of NE, parents who had children starting in term 3 were also offered the opportunity to be part of the research. Consent was gained for this research at various levels: the kindergarten association management to which the three centres belonged, (see Appendix 1); the three ECE centres management: (see Appendix 2); the school principal and Board of Trustees, (see Appendix 3); teachers in both the ECE and NE settings (see Appendices 4a and 4b); and families (see Appendix 5). In total nine families who fitted the criteria agreed to participate, and nine ECE teachers from the three centres and five NE teachers signed consent forms.

Family participants

Table 2 (below) shares the profile of the children and family participants.

Table 2: Summary of demographic information of the focus children and their families

Child (pseudonym)	Place in family	Kindergarten/centre	Ethnicity	Starting date for school
Morgan	2:2	Centre A	NZ European	August
Fergus	2:2	Centre A	NZ European	October
Hoana	2:2	Centre A	Māori	November
Sunita	2:2	Centre A	Indian	December
Jack	2:2	Centre B	NZ European	September
Ian	1:2	Centre B	Chinese	September
Josie	2:3	Centre C	NZ European	August
Charlie	1:2	Centre C	NZ European	September
Dylan	1:2	Centre C	NZ European	September

Table 2 shows that each participating child was given a pseudonym. Their caregivers were identified by the pseudonym of their child along with their role, e.g., Morgan’s Mum or Morgan’s Dad. The child’s place in the family was considered, as this could help to build a picture of the family’s previous experiences of supporting a child who was starting school.

ECE teachers

In ECE Centre A, six teachers agreed to participate; five were female and one male. Three teachers were aged 36-45 and three teachers were aged 56-70. Four teachers described their ethnicity as NZ European, one as Asian and one as Sri Lankan.

In ECE Centre B, two female teachers agreed to participate. They were both aged 36-45 and described their ethnicity as NZ European.

In ECE Centre C only one teacher consented to participate; he described his ethnicity as Asian and was aged 36-45 years old.

NE teachers

Five NE teachers agreed to participate in the study, four females and one male. All described their ethnicity as NZ European. Five were aged 36-45 and one was aged 56-70 years old.

In the planning stages for this study I was the NE team leader and my role in the study was that of a researcher. As explained above, the school then assigned me as the NE teacher to the children of the focus families involved in the research. The NE children in this study were my home group. In my role as teacher-researcher, I have not added myself to the NE teachers total. The remaining four female NE teachers interacted during the day with my home group of NE children. A male teacher has been additionally listed to the regular NE teaching team. As part of his responsibilities as the school principal, he provided weekly teacher release for one full day a week in the NE learning space.

This section has introduced the focus families and teachers that form the basis of this study. The next section will discuss the methods employed to generate the data required for this research.

Part two: Methods

This section begins with an overview of data collection methods. The methods selected were questionnaires, document analysis (relevant publicly available material and reports, e-portfolios, introductory digital stories, Facebook postings and email) teacher research journal and digital stories.

Questionnaires

Fink (1995, cited in Inoue, 2003) defined a questionnaire as “a system for collecting information to describe, compare or explain knowledge, attitudes and behaviour” (p. 3). Robinson and Lai (2006) established that the data gained via questionnaires can often be representative of a larger group and is general to the population it represents. In the main, this is due to the same questions being asked of all respondents, therefore generating standardised data. Data from questionnaires can also show how often something occurs, or how widely an identified view is held. Mertens (2005) explains that questionnaire methods can be conducted via internet, mail, interview, or phone. Email questionnaires were used in my study because of their online accessibility to families. Tolich and Davidson (2011) note that electronic questionnaires offer a fast turnaround, high response levels, low respondent error and adaptability in question structure. Cohen et al. (2004) suggest that open-ended questions could allow for a richer discussion for the researcher. I incorporated open-ended questions in the initial questionnaires to gain responses designed to provide a more descriptive understanding of the families and teachers.

Two questionnaires were administered to families via email (see Appendix 6: Initial parents’ questionnaire and Appendix 9: Review parents’ questionnaire). The initial questionnaires from families across the three ECE centres were used to gauge an indication of the parents’ thoughts, values, and needs for their child’s forthcoming transition to school, as well as teachers’ perceptions and practices for the transition process. The data gained provided information that formed the basis of the Facebook page.

The second questionnaire was administered to families near the end of the research via a link on Facebook (Appendix 9). This questionnaire was designed to glean information about how the families assessed the support that they had received mostly through Facebook in their transition to school. The review feedback from the teachers was elicited through open-ended questions posted on their Facebook page, encouraging them to offer feedback on their experiences of using Facebook as a communication tool.

Document analyses

Document analysis is a form of qualitative research in which documents are interpreted by the researchers to provide evidence and answer research questions (Bowen, 2009). According to O’Leary (2021), documents can be categorised into three main types: public records,

personal documents and physical evidence. This study drew upon both public records and personal documents.

Public records

Many of the documents analysed in this study were public records, meaning that they were available through open websites or information sources. School documents were obtained from the school's enrolment packs provided to families after their children's enrolment. The latest Education Review Office (ERO) reports, policies and information are publically available to families regarding their transition to school. It was useful to know how information was being presented to families as well how it supported families. The ERO reports provided the Education Review Office's most recent assessment of the school and ECE centres' transition practices. All of the information produced by ERO was in written format, and available digitally. This information provided a baseline understanding of the current provisions that facilitated a family's journey to school.

Personal documents

The rest of the documents drawn upon were privately sourced or personal documents. O'Leary (2021) categorises "personal" as those documents that share accounts of an individual's activity, experiences and values. Personal documents that were drawn on were those that enabled the owner to control and share access. They were generally stored in a secure, password protected environments. These included the ECE children's e-portfolios, introductory digital stories, Facebook postings and emails. As part of the ethical requirement for the study, information was provided to ensure participants were informed when asked to consent to their personal documents being accessed, as part of the data collected for this study.

e-portfolio

e-portfolios, as described by Abrami and Barrett (2005) are "digital containers capable of storing visual and auditory content; software for which may also be designed to support a variety of pedagogical processes and assessment purposes" (n.p). The capability of the e-portfolio to capture information of the child's learning, within the time and context in which it takes place, offers a unique and authentic way of sharing a child's learning (Higgins, 2015). This method was chosen to provide evidence of the children's learning experiences prior to starting school, both at home and in their ECE centre. The early childhood e-portfolios were a rich source of data which brought context to the individual case studies of the participating

families, providing insights into parent-teacher communication and engagement between home and centre. The learning stories that the staff at each ECE centre wrote provided insights into the children's own interests, learning motivations and personalities. The dialogue generated about the learning stories between home and ECE was also useful in making visible how family interests influence a child's interests and motivations. The e-portfolios provided insights into established friendships between the child and others in the group which was useful to know as some of the friendship groups were transitioning to the same NE class.

Introductory digital stories

The focus families were invited to produce a short digital story about themselves and their four-year old child starting school. The teachers from the ECE centres were also invited to share their stories. The NE teacher and school principal added their stories to the families' early childhood e-portfolio postings. These videos or photos were then shared on the child's e-portfolio as a way for the NE teacher to get to know the transitioning family.

Facebook postings

Content analysis of user-generated textual data, videos, images and reactions from Facebook, alongside my observations, were used to collect data from the two separate Facebook groups (family and teacher). According to Franz et al. (2019), there are three main primary types of user-generated data on Facebook: posts, comments and messages. A post is written by a Facebook user, a comment is a response to a Facebook post, and a message is privately sent from one user to another. All three types of user-generated data on Facebook can be accompanied by images, videos, and/or emoji. An emoji, or graphic facial expression is used to convey emotional information that otherwise would be found in face-to-face interactions which can be embedded in text communication on Facebook (Kaye et al., 2016).

Email

Email was used to sustain a connection with the focus families and afforded a means of accessing further data. According to Selwyn and Robson (1998) the use of email as a research tool offers the advantages of "instantaneous dialogue" and promotes a "democratisation of exchange" (n.p) that is unique to a digital mode of messaging. Emails offered the flexibility and efficiency to send one consistent message to the whole group, but allowed individual

responses from families. This provided privacy to families and had the potential for one-to-one digital conversations between an individual family and myself.

Teacher research journal

An additional tool used across all phases of data collections was a teacher research journal. The journal provided a site for initial and ongoing analyses of the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 1995). I used it to write a personal account of my ongoing observations. The journal served as a place to capture interactions and discussions which I had “in the moment” that might otherwise have been lost and forgotten in the midst of collecting and interpreting planned and more tangible data. According to Borg (2001), maintaining a research journal as a source of data collection can provide the researcher with a deeper reflection of “all facets of the research processes” (p. 156). The research journal can then be analysed by highlighting key themes identified from the entries to substantiate other sources of evidence. In the classroom, whilst I was working with the children, observing and documenting my field notes, my teaching agenda of supporting each child in their learning became the focus for my work. The notes and documentation produced from the observations were later used for a dual purpose. Firstly I used them to facilitate the learning of the child I was observing, as I determined their specific next learning step. Secondly, the data was viewed with a researcher’s agenda, to interpret any patterns and findings across wider observations which would enable me to identify themes or trends across the data and across the wider group of children. Because the observations were dated chronologically, I could track an individual child’s development over time, which, again, benefited both my teacher and researcher agendas.

Digital storytelling

Digital storytelling is defined by Banaszewski (2008) as “the practice of combining personal narrative with multimedia (images, audio and text) to produce a short autobiographical movie” (p. 115). Banaszewski (2008) further states “Digital storytelling makes use of a wide variety of techniques including standard storytelling, audio and video recording, multimedia publication, and shared ‘mediated’ events” (p. 115).

Throughout my study digital storytelling was used as a research method in numerous ways. Firstly, video clips were used to get to know the family and teacher participants, and secondly they were a way of developing social stories for parents to share and support their child in their preparation for starting school. A key character, a five year old boy named Patrick, was used in these scenarios to support discussions at home about specific social situations, likely

faced by a child at school. For example (see Figure 1) research has identified a potential stressor for children starting school as visiting the toilet (Talow-Golden et al., 2017). This digital story can be viewed at: <https://youtu.be/sbYETxQx7r0>

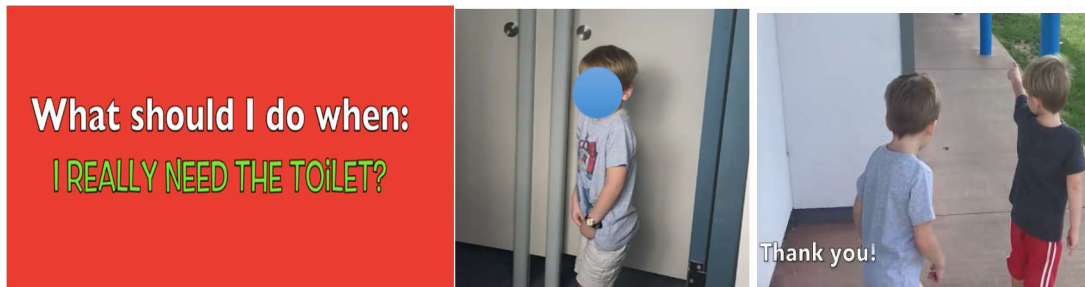


Figure 1: Screenshots from one of the Patrick Videos.

A digital story can be viewed as a blend between traditional storytelling and multimedia technology (Normann, 2011). The story-making process does not require any specialised software. Programs such as iPhoto, iMovie, or PowerPoint are available through computers, smartphones, and tablets.

Data timeline

Data was collected between January and December and was planned in four phases. The research plan was designed to gain a range of responses to the three research questions which guided my study. My research agenda then guided my teaching agenda. My research agenda was intended to lead to a collaborative transition intervention that would be responsive to the needs of the participants. The following sections share each of the four phases of data collection.

Phase 1: Data collection (February-July)

In phase 1 data collection began prior to children starting school. The data collection included document analysis of the ECEs and school's existing transition policies and guidance and information gathered from the ECE e-portfolios. My NE teacher's observation field notes began in phase 1 of the data collection. After the principal's and my own digital stories were shared with the focus families, some families put their own digital story onto their child's e-portfolio, and these were included in the initial phase of data collection. At the end of phase one, the (Patrick) digital social stories were shared with the two Facebook groups. The families and teachers gave feedback about the stories on Facebook, providing a source of data.

In this initial stage of data collection, the focus for the two Facebook groups was “building connections”. The connections made in phase one were generated by the families and the teachers’ groups. Two important digital sources that provided data were the children’s e-portfolios and the two Facebook groups’ pages. Each layer of data collected in phase one provided insights into the developing connections between myself as the NE teacher and the transitioning families. The e-portfolios were used as a source of information to inform the setting up of resources in the NE learning space.

Phase 2: Data collection: (July-December)

In phase 2, information was collected from two main sources of data: emails sharing family images, and the Facebook postings used to organise face-to-face events. The teacher’s research journal continued to provide an ongoing account, adding to the data collected during phase 2.

Creators of a Facebook posting are able to set up polls whereby respondents can select different options. Polling can be used to gain a snapshot and learn more generally about group opinion and preferences. This method was used to organise preferred timings for two events as part of the transition intervention. Polling offered the group four options of dates and times. Once a preference was clicked, an indication of ongoing group opinion was made visible to the group so that they could see which option was the most popular.

Phase 3: Data collection (September-December)

In phase 3, data was generated through teacher observations, journaling, Facebook postings of classroom stories and livestreaming.

Postings on Facebook

The sharing of the school day was the focus of the Facebook pages postings, enabling group participants to use Facebook as a place to find out about the children’s day at school. Facebook postings were used as a way to provide glimpses for the parents and teachers.

Livestream on Facebook

Livestream was another source of data generated through the tools available on Facebook. A recording of the children in the classroom operated in real time, and showed the children engaging with each other and their classroom environment as it was occurring. The data gathered from sharing the children’s learning through real time generated parent comments and emoji which were intended to be shared with their children. In addition, my NE teacher

field notes recorded the children's responses to what their parents were sharing on the livestream recording, further evidencing the interactivity which this form of data gathering produced.

Phase 4: Data collection: (December)

The final phase generated data through a family online questionnaire and teachers' responses to reflective Facebook postings on their Facebook page.

Family online Questionnaire

The families were asked to complete an online questionnaire to review their experiences of the transition intervention (see Appendix 9). The questionnaire was sent one term after the first children had started in the NE class to give families the opportunity to reflect on their transition and assess if the transition intervention had met their family's needs.

Teacher Facebook postings

Teachers were provided with a guiding, reflective question posted onto their Facebook page. The questions were designed to gain a teacher's review of their experiences of being part of the Facebook page. Examples of questions posted were: "Can you share which parts of this Facebook page you have found the most enjoyable?" and, "Do you feel that this Facebook page has made a difference to how you may transition children in the future?"

Table 3 provides a summary timeline of the data collection process over the four phases.

Table 3: Showing the four phases of data collection

Date	Data collection phase Method	Data collection method
February -July	Phase 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • questionnaires: families/teachers • document analysis • teacher research journal • email • e-portfolios • digital stories • Patrick stories
July- December	Phase 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook pages • children’s photos • teacher research journal
September-December	Phase 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teacher observations • sharing the children’s school day • teacher research journal
December	Phase 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • family review questionnaire • teacher review-Facebook postings • teacher research journal

Attention must be paid to ethical considerations to protect the participants and the data when answers to research questions are being formulated. The next section outlines the considerations given to ethical procedures.

Review of research ethics

As stated by Sanjari et al. (2014) “the researcher faces ethical challenges in all stages of the study from the designing to reporting” (p. 2). Busher and James (2012) stress the importance of developing an “ethical framework practice” to develop a “collaborative culture” (p. 1) where the researcher ensures a duty of care for the participants. The development of trust and respect primary in a qualitative methodology (Stake, 1995). Two ethical dimensions must be considered: “procedural ethics” and “ethics in practice” (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 263). Procedural ethics usually involves the process of seeking approval from an ethics committee to undertake the research. Ethics in practice focuses more on the everyday matters that arise in undertaking research and the reflexive role of the researcher in “taking stock of their actions” (Mason, 1996, p. 6), scrutinising their role as the researcher just as critically as they would the data that they collect.

Ethical approval for my study was obtained from the Division of Education Ethics Committee at the University of Waikato, May 2017, before the data collection commenced. Two further amendments to the original application were lodged as the research progressed. The first was due to a change in staff at the focus primary school where I was employed as a NE teacher. As a result of that I was required to adopt the class which was the focus of the study. This meant a shift in my role from being simply the researcher to being both researcher and class teacher to the focus families. The Ethics Committee recommended that a new amended consent form be issued to focus families with the addition of a highlighted new section explaining the change in staffing. This offered the opportunity for the families to reconsider their involvement with the research. All nine participating families consented.

The second amendment to the original ethics application occurred in August, when the whole NE class came together for the *mihi whakatau* (a welcoming ceremony). This led to the decision to invite all of the NE class families in my class to be part of the research and have access to the same information, therefore not advantaging the group of focus parents over the wider group of the NE class families. Connected to my role of teacher-researcher were some associated ethical considerations; voluntary participation and informed consent.

Voluntary participation

Parents and teachers were invited to participate in the research, but they were free to decline if they chose to do so. It was emphasised to parents that my professional relationship with all families was equitable, ensuring that there would be no disadvantages to a family if they decided not to take part in the research. Similarly, for teachers, their involvement in the Facebook group was separate from their role at their centre or school. They were informed that their participation on Facebook would be in their own time, and there was no pressure on them to accept the invitation.

Informed consent

Informed consent necessitates that researchers ensure participants consent to participating in the research after understanding the researcher's scope, objectives their participatory role, potential benefits and risks, and the intended use of their data (Stake, 2005). Gaining this consent began with meeting and presenting to the management team of the Kindergarten Association that managed the ECE centres and to the focus school's Board of Trustees members. I was then given permission from both settings to approach the teachers and parents from the three ECE centres and teachers from the NE teaching team. Following

information meetings held at ECE and NE settings, participants were provided with information sheets detailing the proposed nature of the study, their involvement, the use of the information and confidentiality were given to each participant (See Appendices 1-4).

Respecting anonymity, confidentiality, and privacy

Within case study research the concepts of anonymity and confidentiality are entwined (Wallace, 2010). Anonymity is defined as the “protections of a research participant’s or site identity” (Wallace, 2010, p. 23). Participants risk a possible loss of anonymity through the use of qualitative methods of data collection, due to their provision of more detailed insights into their everyday worlds in situated-contexts (Wallace, 2010). In this study, participants’ questionnaire responses were provided anonymously via a google form that did not require identifying details such as the name of the respondent.

Confidentiality is defined as the “safeguarding of information obtained in confidence during the course of the research” (Wallace, 2010, p. 23). Information gathered during this research was stored securely and protected by the researcher’s assurance of confidentiality to participants. The identification of educational settings needed to be protected, to avoid possible connections to a participant’s identity (Wiles, 2012). To mitigate this risk, all families in this study were addressed by a pseudonym and each ECE centre was assigned a letter, e.g., Centre A, B, or C, and the school labelled as the focus primary school. In my use of images that contained participants, most often children, or school signage, I have endeavoured to maintain confidentiality of participants and the school setting through the pixelation of faces and signage. Facebook is a complexity on its own with regards to ethics, therefore specific Facebook ethical considerations have been included in their own section.

Facebook and ethics

The increasing role of social media and its influence on how we engage in our everyday professional and personal lives has quickly caught the interest of researchers, influencing how “we do” research (Fileborn, 2016, p. 97). According to Franz et al. (2019) social media platforms, such as Facebook, provide a method to gather qualitative data from participants in a social online environment through “posts”, and make it possible to collate “visual, virtual, and textual interactions...with some accuracy” (Franz et al., 2019, p. 2).

A post is generated when a Facebook user shares a brief message, photo or video or creates a poll. When a Facebook user replies to the posting, a comment is created, any subsequent

replies from other friends appear as comments to the posting. An emoji, as defined earlier by Kaye et al. (2016), is a graphic used in postings and comments to convey a user's emotional expression and can be evidenced within written postings and comments, or as a stand-alone response to postings and comments.

Social media raises new ethical concerns when used for data collection (Fileborn, 2016; McCay-Peet & Quan-Haase, 2017; Vitak, 2017). The following sections discuss key ethical considerations for using Facebook as a research tool in this research study: privacy settings, netiquette, and digital traces. According to Snelson (2016) it is likely that a large proportion of an individual's social lives may be conducted on Facebook. Ethically, this raises considerations around the privacy and protection of a participant's identity.

Privacy settings

Chalklen and Anderson (2017, p. 2) have described privacy and social networking as a "privacy paradox" with users sharing and disclosing personal information whilst simultaneously professing to be concerned about privacy issues. Knowing what information you are sharing and with whom is a continuous ethical and moral challenge when interacting within a social media digital space (Light & McGrath, 2010).

The protection of a participant's online persona within a group of people with whom they were not necessarily previously acquainted is an important ethical consideration when conducting research within a social media environment. Facebook users may not be aware of nor fully understand the privacy settings of their Facebook account (Eysenbach & Till, 2001; Fileborn, 2016). The default privacy setting of a new Facebook account is set as "open", requiring the new user to manually override it and select "private". The default open setting means that the user's Facebook account can be publically found by a search engine both within and outside the Facebook network. This could result in personal information sourced from their Facebook page being openly accessible without the individuals' knowledge (boyd & Hargittai, 2010; Chalklen & Anderson, 2017; Fileborn, 2016). Even though the groups in my research were set up as closed groups, the privacy settings of their personal Facebook pages could be adjusted only by the participants; and this was advised to all participants via the consent information form.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality was established within Facebook by creating two separate group pages, one for the teachers (NE and ECE), and the other for the transitioning families. A closed group status was set, which meant that only those who were invited by a digital link could apply to join the group. Once the participant clicked on the link, a message was sent to myself as the page administrator to verify and approve their group membership. Within the group, the identities of the participants were visible. Before the participants consented to take part in the research they were advised to review their privacy settings so that their profiles were at a comfortable level for each individual. Material that was uploaded to the Facebook group contained images and recordings of the NE children. Because of the sharing restrictions set within a Facebook closed group material could not be re-shared by any group member with anyone outside of the group. This ensured the privacy of both the children, families, and teachers within the closed group space.

Netiquette

Netiquette is a term derived from the merging of ‘etiquette’ and ‘network’ (Yarmohammadian et al., 2012). Netiquette is generally applied to the conventions of good manners and politeness according to social norms, but within the uniqueness of the online environment. Freestone and Mitchell (2004) elaborate further, describing netiquette as an ethical culture, a set of ethical standards that are shared by an online group of people. As a tool, Facebook is largely viewed as an informal digital platform mainly purposed as a way for people to stay in touch through friends’ profile pages and news feeds (Wise et al., 2010). Engaging in a group space necessitates careful consideration of the content, tone and clarity of a message, and in responding to others’ postings.

Participants were to join a closed Facebook group for this research. This meant that the group was not based on existing friendships and associations, but rather around a common point of interest: their child’s transition to a specific NE class at a particular time. Fixing the purpose around a specific issue or problem that focused on the responsibilities of parenting and teachers as a professional group, guided the tone and expectations of netiquette for the two groups.

Digital traces

Our online lives leave hundreds of digital traces every day. “Digital traces” (Vitak, 2017, p. 627), or a digital footprint, are discoverable through emails, texts, or a Facebook posting. The

ethical implications underlying digital traces are important to consider. Two types of digital traces provoke consideration. Firstly, what could be called a “deliberate trace” may be described in the context of Facebook as a photo posted by a parent onto their Facebook page of their child’s first day of school. Secondly, a “non-deliberate trace” of the posted photo would be information which could be gleaned from the profile of the Facebook user who posted it: the time it was posted and its location (Barassi, 2021). Chalklen and Anderson (2017) offered the dilemma of, “to post or not to post photos of children” (p. 1). Their research shared the concerns that parents in their study felt about leaving digital traces over time, as well as raising the importance of how the user can manage control over what may be left as a trace. The two Facebook groups in this study were bounded by a closed group page. Material could not be shared or tagged beyond the group itself, minimising the opportunities for digital traces to spread beyond the boundary of the group space.

Status and power

A final consideration of Facebook ethics worthy of note, is presented by Fileborn (2016) who raises the dual ethical challenge of managing an individual's personal and professional identities. Regarding my dual roles of being research participant and class teacher to the transitioning families on the Facebook group page, Fileborn (2016) has stated that our, “personal and professional selves converge online owing to the geographical nature of online space, which is simultaneously everywhere and nowhere” (p. 110). In my professional capacity as a teacher in this research, I had offline and online relationships with families. Offline, in the context of the classroom, I was able to control the flow of personal information I actively chose to share with my children’s families. Online, I ensured that my profile’s privacy settings were set to manage the personal information that I was comfortable in sharing with the group.

Hogg (1992) highlighted that in offline encounters people can be highly sensitive to subtle cues that may be indicative of status, for example, body language, dress, or tone of voice. An advantage of online interactions is that status differences are less obvious than when offline; however, status and power may still be apparent. Research by Sassenberg (2002) showed that those perceived as experts in terms of task-related knowledge are generally given more room by other participants in interactive discussions to express their points of view. This meant that I had to be mindful that my role as a New Entrant (NE) teacher at the primary school in this

study might have given weight to any comments for the parents, who were less confident in their knowledge around their child's induction to starting school.

Data analysis

Data analysis is a process of making meaning and sharing the story. The researcher needs a clear understanding of the purpose of the data gathering before beginning the process of analysing, to explore and interpret its meaning. The purpose of data collection in my study was to inform the transition intervention. Data analysis is considered to be a creative process, not a mechanical one (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Each source of data is associated with an array of data or evidence. A characteristic of case study research is the large amount of narrative data generated through multiple sources of evidence. Braun and Clarke (2019) highlight the significance of using a reflexive thematic analysis approach for analysing qualitative data sets. This approach acknowledges the researcher's role in the research process and views their influence as a valuable analytical tool. Rather than developing trends emerging naturally, researchers actively produce them through systematic engagement with the data, requiring self-awareness and reflection on personal biases and perspectives. Making sense and interpreting the various sources of data generated through the case study approach is not necessarily a linear process, and may require repeated reviews of the generated data (Creswell, 2009). Most data collected through this approach produces thick and descriptive data, and mostly non-numerical.

After consent was gained from the focus families and their ECE centres I was given access to the transitioning four-year old children's e-portfolios. Their learning stories provided themes of interest and contexts which the children had been enthusiastic about, sometimes over a sustained period. Knowing this allowed me as the NE class teacher to set up the classroom as a welcoming space where the children would feel at ease when they started school, and to ensure that their interests were evident in the classroom. These interests were also common to other children, and this allowed me to plan and organise group activities based around a shared interest to encourage the children to begin to get to know each other.

The e-portfolio data also highlighted the family's engagement level. Dialogue, posts, and the frequency of interaction were also analysed. This gave me insight into how "present" families chose to be on their child's e-portfolios, and provided examples of how home and centre reciprocally communicated and shared information about the child's development.

Questionnaires

Three questionnaires were used as part of the data collection. An initial questionnaire was sent to the families of the three ECE centres (see Appendix 6) and to all teachers in NE and the three ECE centres (see Appendix 7) at the start of the data collection, and a final review questionnaire was sent to families in December (see Appendix 9). The family questionnaires provided insights to the families' aspirations, concerns, needs and reflections on their transition to the school community. The teachers' questionnaires shared information about their transition practices, values and beliefs which might influence a child's transition to school.

A Google form was used for each questionnaire. Google forms provide digital display of the data responses under their matching question, making the responses easier to process. and to identify any developing trends.. Braun and Clarke (2006) caution that it is important that the question alone not be used as a theme in itself. This may, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), limit the analysis across the data set. Being mindful of this advice, after each question's responses were processed, I focused my analysis of the questionnaire data across the data sets gained from each question. I colour coded and grouped the data to surface any recurring themes from the participants' responses. This was mostly analysed and captured using semantic codes to capture the ideas that were conveyed found relevant to my research questions. Initially, this was achieved in tighter sub-themes, similar to the processes of analysing the field work notes; but again, by returning to the literature review, and cross-checking and reviewing the data alongside early field notes, I began to group these mini themes into richer broader themes.

Field notes

I used my field notes over the four phases of data collection. I maintained field notes in my teacher research journal, but this resulted in notes added ad hoc, and I regularly typed up the notes for easier analysis later. At the end of phase 4, the typed field notes were then reviewed and analysed in chronological order. Observations of children in their play were checked to ensure that the child's family had provided permission to be included in the research. I deleted any observations made of children for whom no permission for inclusion in the study had been given. If those children who were observed without permissions formed an integral role in a group play situation that included children who had permission, contributions were noted, but not reported as part of the data and findings.

As I typed up the field work notes I began to take note and highlight children's interests, friendship groups and allocated a colour coded highlight to each of the focus children, so that their contributions were clearly present amongst the data. As the group of children grew, with the additional families providing consent to be part of the research, I could highlight the stories of these additional children and begin to analyse their patterns and interests.

The continuous process of searching, highlighting and returning frequently to the fieldwork notes over time, meant that I could slowly identify themes. As themes were noted, I re-read the field work notes and began to piece together evidence under occurring themes. As themes were identified, they were copied and pasted and grouped under a theme heading which they evidenced. Over time, some of the smaller themes were identified and labelled as sub-themes and were revisited and regrouped under broader themes. This thematic form of analysis according to Braun and Clarke (2019) is used to describe the data, interpret its processes and begin to construct themes. Whilst re-reading and re-analysing the field notes, I began to cross-reference related literature next to a highlighted theme, as advised by Tuckett (2005): this meant that I could begin to situate findings within their relevant fields of literature, which provided more richness to the interpretation. As I considered the data from the children, I noticed that some themes were not evident in the literature review. For example, the identification of themes around the child's social adjustment required a return to the literature review for further research. Discussing some of the developing themes with my supervisors and responding to their feedback and suggestions further developed my thinking, particularly regarding the data generated from the children.

Facebook

The analysis of Facebook postings is divided into fortnightly figures. Facebook data was analysed as determined by:

- The number of postings, calculated separately for both teachers and families
- A total of how many times each posting was viewed (seen by) by teachers/families
- How many emoji were given to all posts
- How many comments each post generated
- The focus of the comments, for example, information, an event etc.

The number of posts generated for a particular fortnight was calculated, to monitor any patterns of interaction, surges of activity or periods of inactivity. It was important that the

material on Facebook was viewed and engaged with by families; and keeping a fortnightly watch on the data meant that the material I posted subsequently could meet families and teachers’ immediate needs, based on their levels of engagement. The number of “seen posts” (an indication visible only to the page administrator) was calculated, along with the number and category of emoji used by the group members. The number of responding comments per post over a fortnight was totalled. The purpose of the post was categorised into themes. In some cases, school holiday breaks shortened the time span available within a particular fortnight e.g., October included a school break of two weeks where no activity was added to the Facebook page (see Figure 2 for examples of Facebook postings).

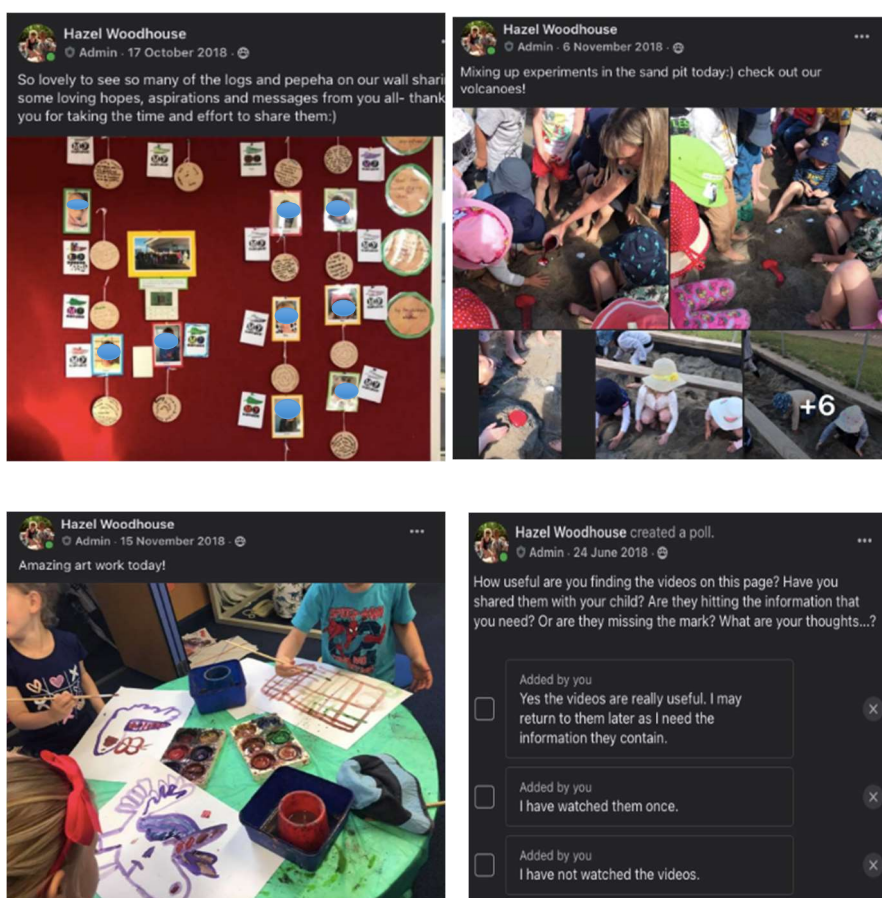


Figure 2: Screenshots of the group Facebook pages and examples of postings

The postings made by each participant over the lifespan of the Facebook groups were collated. These were colour coded and grouped under each participant’s pseudonym. The types of interactions were then attributed to each participant, e.g., posting or use of emoji. High interest postings which generated more responses were noted along with the purpose for these postings. Each participant’s activity was subdivided into categories such as, “activated

the seen facility”, “emoji used to validate postings”, “posted in response”, or “initiated a posting”. Each participant’s interactions and types of interactions were then reviewed and participants were grouped and categorised according to their level of activity in their Facebook group, to offer an understanding of their individual contribution over time. Their contribution was then assessed using the levels of participation developed by Wenger et al. (2002), as introduced in Chapter 2. This analysis was used to inform Chapter 7 and 8. At the end of the three initial phases, I developed actions in response to my analysis of the variety of data.

Rigour and trustworthiness

The quality of research is significantly influenced by the research design. Toma (2006) explained that qualitative researchers must “at least satisfy themselves that they have not misrepresented data and have not been careless in recording and analysing data” (p. 409). The concepts of trustworthiness and authenticity or credibility, are essential components of research in a constructionist paradigm (Toma, 2006). In my capacity of teacher-researcher both roles were part of my overall identity and my interests and experiences more widely. Within this context my study could not claim to be objective as even my research was informed by my professional and personal interests. A strategy I regularly drew upon to maintain rigour was engaging with my supervisors who helped me to challenge my findings and to have confidence in my results.

Trustworthiness is the clear documentation of research and analysis decisions (Mutch, 2005). It has four aspects that researchers need to establish: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Credibility

Credibility is explained by Toma (2006) as meaning that the research “relates to some reality” (p. 410). This can be achieved by using more than one data source to confirm that notes and findings resonate with participants' own experiences of the phenomenon. An example within this research could be observations made from the Facebook page and notes made in my researcher’s journal, alongside the statistical data gathered about each post, such as the number of comments and emoji which were shared. This method of “triangulation” of data can prove to be a useful tool for achieving data credibility (Cohen et al., 2000).

Triangulation uses different data collection methods and sources to enable consistency and enhance the credibility of findings (Salkind, 2010). An example could be the use of

observation in the classroom of the NE children, and observation of the day-to-day interactions on the Facebook pages. In this study triangulation was adopted to assist in “the reliability of authentic information” from participating families (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 141). Data was validated by cross-referencing two or more different sources. For example, the families’ digital entries on Facebook were cross-referenced with the data generated through their questionnaire responses, alongside my researcher’s observations.

Reflexivity in qualitative research involves recognising the researcher’s own involvement in the research process, where the researcher’s past experiences, assumptions, and beliefs play a significant role in shaping the research outcomes. The researcher’s subjective perspective, or ‘bias,’ is deeply intertwined with qualitative research processes (Rees et al., 2020).

Reflexivity entails the researcher scrutinising their own practices and beliefs during the data collection process (Braun & Clarke, 2019). While the researcher’s perspective can have positive effects, Olmos-Vega et al. (2023) caution that neglecting reflexivity can have adverse effects on the knowledge generated through qualitative research and those connected to it.

Transferability

Transferability in research requires evidence that the findings could be adapted to other contexts and research situations. To construct how a case might be transferable to another case, Kirk and Miller (1986) pose two guiding questions: could the same study be conducted by two researchers yield the same results?; and could the study’s findings be replicated using the same researcher and respondents? Transferability was addressed in my study through clear descriptions of the case, sample groups and methods of data collection.

Stake (1998) advised that an assessment of a case’s internal and external validity could support a more reliable transferability between cases. He explained that internal validity requires multiple data from multiple sources to establish an authentic chain of evidence. For example, cross-referencing and validation of anecdotal information with official documentation from ERO supported transferability in my research. External validity reflects whether findings are dependable beyond the immediate case study (Stake, 1998); the transferability of my research and its relevance to future research was addressed by providing such detail as educational contexts, location, and number of participants. My research study is not expected to prove with certainty that the findings are applicable to all differing contexts, but evidence was sought to suggest that they could be generalised to other research situations.

Dependability

Dependability or reliability refers to the stability, accuracy, and precision of data. The researcher aims to prove that the findings and their interpretations are verifiable with the data collected (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Revisiting the study's purpose and realigning the focus of the research questions to reflect focus areas ensured and assured the dependability of data collected throughout my research. Rapley (2007) recommended that findings from case studies must be supported by credibility and plausibility, giving the reader access to the method utilised, along with adequate examples from the data to illustrate that these formed the substructure of the research argument. I have attempted to achieve this through the application of triangulation of data across the different methods.

Confirmability

Confirmability or objectivity of findings is required to be "grounded in the data" (Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p. 122) and not shaped by the researcher. Within my research, confirmability was demonstrated through the transparency of the findings process to provide assurance of the data's "accuracy, relevance or meaning" (Elo et al., 2014, p. 5). By maintaining an audit trail and being clear in my data analysis, I aimed to prove that I accurately represented the information that the participants provided. The researcher's diary provided a place to note any unplanned conversations or observations. Maintaining an audit trail demonstrates that the interpretations are true to the data collected, and provide valuable insight as to how themes were identified from the data (Elo et al., 2014).

Chapter summary

The aim of this study was to develop and customise a transition to school intervention that would support a family's individual needs. To achieve this aim, the methodology was a case study approach that utilised a range of methods, largely within the online environment; these methods were then triangulated. The data collected was used to inform the intervention which was developed with the families and teachers to respond to the families' and children's changing needs during the transition process. This chapter has explained the design of the planned research project and the data collection, which fitted within an interpretive perspective utilising qualitative methods of data collection.

The data was collected initially from nine focus families; twenty initial parent questionnaire respondents; and a combined total of 14 teachers from the three ECE centres and the NE teaching team at the focus primary school. Data was sourced from document analysis, a

teacher's research journal, email, the focus children's e-portfolios and digital stories, and Facebook postings. As the data collection period progressed, the family group of participants grew in numbers to include all the families of the newly established NE class. Thirty-five parents (representative of twenty families) then formed the family Facebook closed group page.

In the following chapters (Chapters 5, 7 and 9), the data gained from each of the participant groups: families, teachers, and children will be analysed. Each findings chapter is followed by a discussion of these findings (Chapters 6, 8 and 10). Chapter 5 provides an analysis of the data and a response to the analysis that was undertaken in order to customise the transition process according to families' needs and aspirations.

Chapter 5: Findings: Transition phases and experiences

The aim of my thesis was to examine the possibilities of using digital methods to facilitate a collaborative approach to transition to school. This first findings chapter addresses the first research question: “How might a NE teacher meet individual families’ needs and aspirations by using a customised transition to school process?” It is important to note that in supporting a family’s perceived needs, I based my facilitated actions on my interpretations of the most useful response at each point in time. In doing this, I drew on my experience as a NE teacher and my understanding of the general transition process. Sometimes families shared their needs directly with me, asking about explicit aspects of their transition process. This enabled me to provide support informed by my analysis of the data during their transition process. In formulating a response to the research question I draw on data collected from document analysis, Storypark, questionnaire responses, email, Facebook postings and my teacher research journal.

This chapter presents findings in a chronological order, following the three phases of transition offered by van Genneep (1966/1970): pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal phases. The pre-liminal phase includes findings from the data collected while children and families were still attending their ECE centres. The liminal phase outlines the process once the children started school, whilst the post-liminal phase includes reflections and reviews from families and teachers after some of the children had been attending school for four months. In addition, quotes from parents, teachers and photographs are used to show examples of my planned specific interventions or Ensuing Actions (EAs). Ensuing actions were developed to customise the families’ transition. These planned interventions or EAs were my responses to families’ changing needs developed through collaboration with the families and teachers.

Timeline of data collection

Data that was collected over the three phases of the families’ transition process is outlined in Figure 3 (below). At the pre-liminal phase, research data was collected from families and teachers, beginning in Term 1 through to the beginning of Term 3. Data sources included document analysis, my teacher’s research journal, Storypark e-portfolios, questionnaire responses, and Facebook postings. The liminal phase included the remainder of Term 3 and

most of Term 4, when all of the children in the study had started school. Data was collected from Facebook postings and from families' responses to welcome packs and emails. The post-liminal phase was identified as the latter part of Term 4. Data was sourced through a family review questionnaire and teachers' Facebook postings. The timeline of data collection and actions taken over the seven-month research period is placed along the vertical axis of Figure 3, enabling the school terms and research timeframe to be cross-referenced. As noted in Chapter 1, children in New Zealand usually begin school on or near their fifth birthday, so the participant children started school on different dates through Terms 3 and 4.

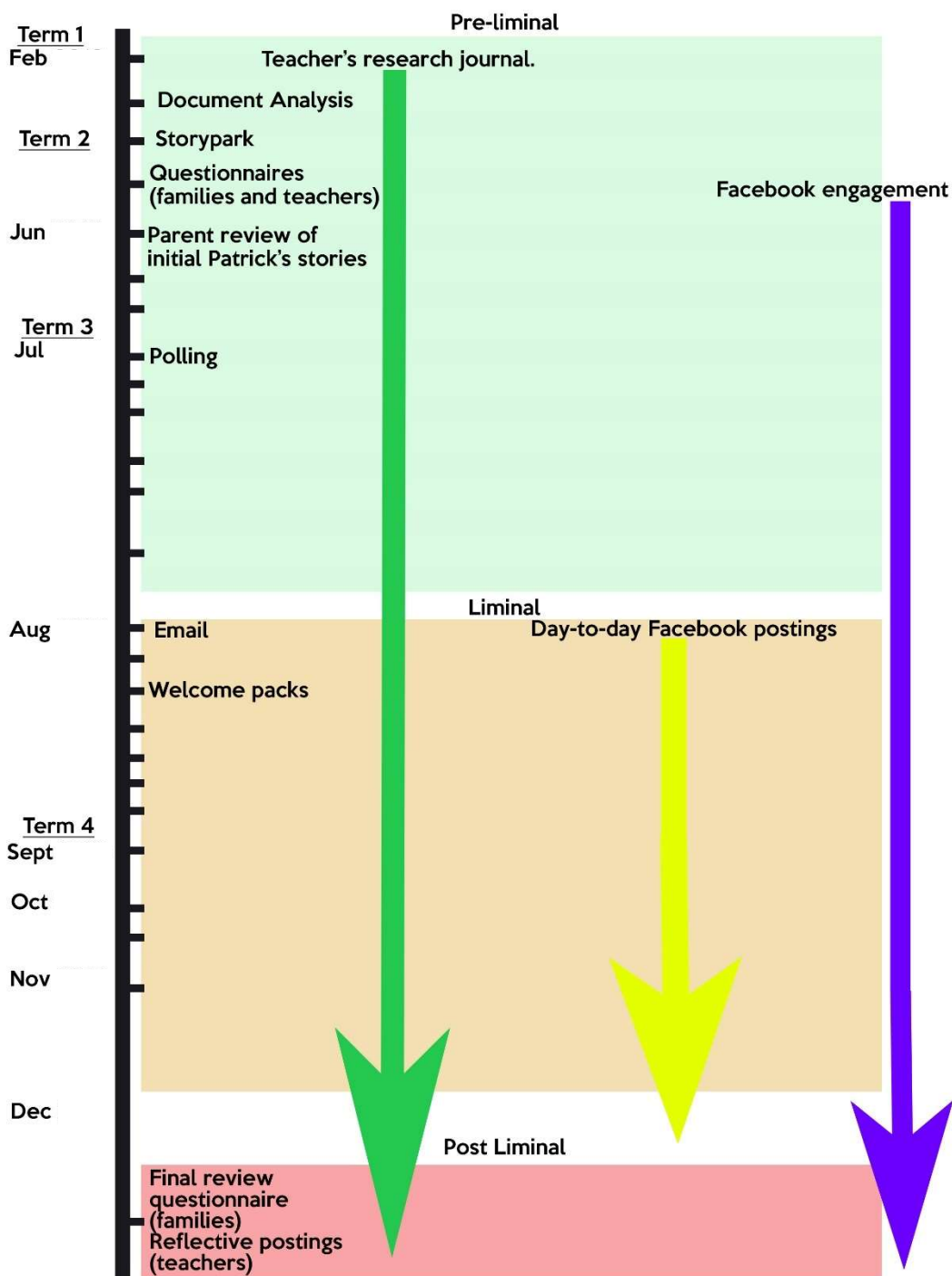


Figure 3: Timeline of data collection across the three phases.

The coloured blocks in Figure 3 represent the three phases of transition identified by van Genep (1960/1977). The green block represents the pre-liminal phase of the families' transition process; the beige block represents the liminal phase, and the pink shows the post-liminal phase. In Figure 3 the green arrow indicates the ongoing data collection period of my

teacher's research journal. The journal was a data source throughout the study and was used to record observations, thoughts and day-to-day conversations with families and teachers. The yellow arrow represents the time I started my day-to-day postings about the children's day at school on Facebook (on both families and teachers' group pages). These postings began in August and generated data until the end of the data collection period in December. The purple arrow highlights the data collected from when the Facebook groups began in June up until their closure in December, as generated by the families and teachers' Facebook group pages.

Data analysis and responses during the pre-liminal phase

According to van Gennep (1960/1977) the pre-liminal phase signifies a period of separation from an individual's previous way of life and marks the start of the transition process. In my study, the pre-liminal phase represented a time of getting to know the wants and needs of the families, teachers, and children by gathering data through multiple methods (see Figure 4 below), to begin constructing a collaborative transition process. Two assumptions were identified from the sources of data collected during the pre-liminal phase. The first involved the customisation of information about starting school to help families prepare their child for the changes involved in moving from the less structured ECE environment to the more structured school environment. The second considered the child's movement from an environment where the ECE teacher knew them well, to that of a NE teacher who had little or no knowledge of the child. The data collection methods utilised in the pre-liminal phase are shown in blue text in Figure 4, highlighting times when research data was collected and analysed, whilst the resulting ensuing actions are noted in green text.

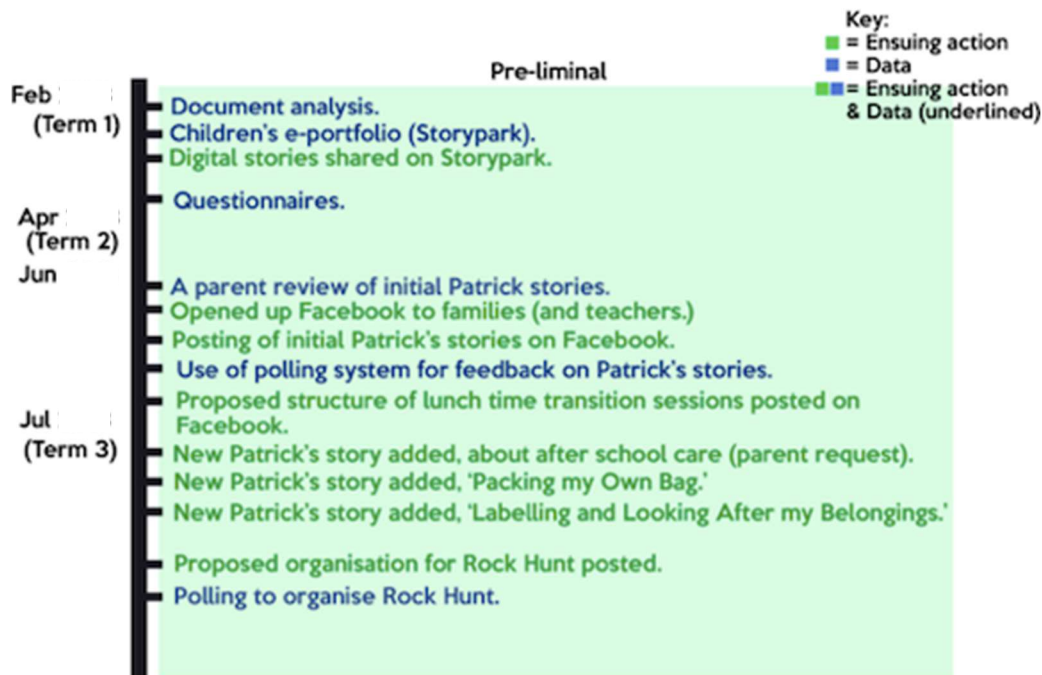


Figure 4: Pre-liminal phase timeline of the data collected and ensuing actions.

During the pre-liminal phase, data was sourced from: document analysis, my teacher research journal, Storypark, questionnaire responses and Facebook. The methods used provided the data outlined below.

Document analysis

Initial data about each of the three ECE Centres and the primary school was sourced from publicly available documentation. Respective websites provided access to the school enrolment pack, ERO reports and advice about transition to school. In the enrolment pack, the school highlighted Flying Start where children could visit their new class before their child started school. The three ECE centres' websites each introduced parents to *Cool 4 School* information via a downloadable pamphlet and visual Powerpoint. The data sourced from the ECE websites enabled me to understand how the ECE Centres informed parents about their transition programmes to prepare children for starting school. The primary school website data and downloadable enrolment pack focused on the transition administration via an online enrolment form.

Teacher research journal

My teacher research journal was an ongoing source of data through all three phases of the transition process (see Figure 3). The journal provided a place for me to make notes of

relevant face-to-face conversations between myself and other teachers or families, and these contributed to my development of transition resources. For example, a conversation which was conducted “over the fence” between a teacher from Centre A and myself, provided further feedback from the Centre A teachers about a digital story which they had viewed on Facebook. It was helpful to know how useful particular Facebook resources had been in supporting Centre A’s transition practices. The journal proved to be an even more valuable source of data to draw upon in the liminal phase, when the children started school. These findings are further shared in Chapter 9 and discussed in Chapter 10.

Ensuing Action: Storypark

Storypark was the ECE Centres’ chosen digital platform for hosting children’s e-portfolios. The data gained from Storypark provided an ongoing record of the children’s learning interests and insights into how the platform was used to support connections between the ECE and their families. I utilised Storypark to share two digital stories that introduced the principal and myself to the transitioning families. Reciprocally, the families also introduced themselves using photos and videos via their child’s e-portfolio.

Children’s e-portfolios and parents’ feedback

The children’s ECE e-portfolio stories detailed their interests and provided glimpses of their prior learning. Knowing the interests that had motivated the children whilst in their ECE centres enabled me to refer to those interests when planning some of the transition interventions. How this information was used is further explained and developed later in this chapter, in “Fostering ongoing interests”, and in Chapter 9. Table 4 provides a summary of the information gained from each focus child’s e-portfolio, including the child’s interests, and the broad range of interactions and family members involved in the child’s e-portfolio.

Table 4: Information gained from individual e-portfolios.

Name of Child/(Centre)	Interests	Family interaction on Storypark
Morgan (A)	Dance, role-play	Frequent sharing of reciprocal stories of similar interests at home.
Fergus (A)	Racing cars, spaceships, building their own vehicles,	No evidence-Centre A prompted for family responses, but none were added to Storypark
Hoana (A)	Role-play, fairy stories, fashion	No evidence-Centre A prompted for family responses, but none were added to Storypark
Sunita (A)	Music, dance,	Regular interaction, responses to centre's prompts and questions, shared Sunita's interests at home.
Jack (B)	Building and trucks	Regular interaction, Mum shared that Jack loved dinosaurs at home.
Ian (B)	No information as Ian only started at the centre in September, only a month before his move to school	None
Charlie (C)	Building and construction, milestone moments and regular stories about Charlie's participation in the "Cool 4 school" programme.	Some interaction to celebrate milestone moments such as birthdays. Family photos were shared when Charlie's baby sister was born.
Josie (C)	Leader of play, role-play, large playground equipment.	Ten family members were present on Josie's page. However, interaction was sparse and tied to when the learning summary was shared every 6 months.
Dylan (C)	Drawing and writing, stories and role-play. Likes to look after new children as they start in the preschool room.	Regular interaction. Mum shared further information about Dylan's interests at home.

As shown in Table 4, having access to the children's e-portfolios provided an opportunity to explore the online engagement between the ECE teachers and families, revealing the extent of their engagement with their e-portfolios (Table 4). Evidence from the e-portfolios showed examples of strategies adopted by the ECE teachers to promote engagement with families which I might find useful to replicate with the Facebook groups. The Storypark data showed that the ways in which families interacted with their child's e-portfolio varied considerably. Some families engaged and shared aspects of their child's life at home with their ECE Centre, other families checked into the site when reminded, and some chose not reply to comments or prompts made by the ECE teachers. The overview of the differing levels of engagement on

Storypark, suggested that a similar spread of interactions might occur across the family Facebook group.

Introductory digital stories

I shared two introductory digital stories on Storypark. The first story presented the school principal, and the other myself as the children’s NE teacher. These stories were narrated by a five year old child and contained fun topics about our pets and our families, enabling children to learn a bit about us and perhaps build some connections. The feedback from the parents showed children had engaged with the digital stories. Dylan’s Mum posted “*Dylan loved the kunekune! [my pet pig]*”, and noticed that “*You have a little boy too!*” Josie’s Mum posted “*Josie said thank you for your videos... I have a cat named Mercedes and a dog named Jimmy*”.

Families and ECE teachers were invited to create a Storypark posting about themselves. I provided three options to help inspire them: a video, PowerPoint, or adding photos to a template. Of the nine focus families, three families, all associated with Centre A, shared photos, and added notes to a picture collage template, identifying their family members and pets (see Figure 5).



Figure 5: An example of a family collage introducing themselves.

The data collected from the children’s e-portfolio illustrated some of the children and their families’ interests and helped to initiate connections between the transitioning families and their child’s NE teacher.

Questionnaire responses

In March, two questionnaires were distributed to families and teachers. The first questionnaire was shared with the three ECE centres and distributed to all families whose four-year old child attended their centre. It was hoped that this would provide access to a larger group of families, beyond just the small group of focus families. I wanted to gain a wider comprehensive overview of families' needs and thoughts about transition to school. The second questionnaire was shared with ECE and NE primary school teachers. The data gathered from the families' questionnaire responses is shared below, followed by the teacher questionnaire responses.

Families' responses

The initial family questionnaire was designed to ascertain what the families wanted to know before their child started school and to inform them of the development of customised transition practices and actions to support the families' specific needs. The questionnaire responses guided the development of content for the family Facebook page and the timings of the transition interventions. Three broad themes were identified from the initial family questionnaire. They were: "willingness to be involved", "communication" and "my child adjusting to school".

Willingness to be involved

Almost half of the parents (9/20) stated that they would like to be "very" involved in their child's transition, with a further 4/20 electing that they would, "like to be" involved. However, many parents (11/20) felt that their work commitments would dictate the extent of their participation. Most of the parents who responded to the questionnaire (17/20) worked either part- or full-time. Another parent identified "*not knowing exactly what is and isn't expected of me*" as a factor which might influence their involvement in their child's transition. This comment, along with concerns for how much time a NE teacher might have to spend connecting with families, prompted one parent to suggest the benefits of connecting digitally with their teacher: "*I know the teacher's time is precious so it would mean you could have [online] contact and they could reach you when they are available*". Another parent offered that attending occasional social events hosted by their ECE Centre had been a positive way that she had been able to be involved and build connections with her child's ECE teachers, and wondered if schools held similar functions.

The questionnaire responses indicated that working and family commitments held a considerable influence over the time families had available to be actively involved in their child's transition. Still, parents largely indicated a willingness to be involved, provided that opportunities offered by the school were manageable and flexible to fit with their families' busy daily routines.

Communication

The second theme identified from the parent questionnaire responses was the importance of maintaining regular communication between ECE centres and families, between ECE centres and school and between school and families. Each of these will be evidenced with examples from the parent's questionnaire.

Communication between the ECE teachers and families was mostly face-to-face (11 mentions), with fewer parents (5) indicating that they relied on Storypark to keep in touch with their child's ECE teachers. Parents found their connections with their ECE teacher at the start or end of the day to be their usual way to gain updates about the centre or their child's learning. Some respondents felt more comfortable in communicating and seeking support from other parents or friends, but one parent cautioned that *"seeking opinions from other parents can be problematic"*.

The questionnaire asked the parents about their online experiences of using Storypark as a communication tool between themselves and their ECE centre (see Appendix 6, initial parent questionnaire). One parent commented that *"I'm enjoy[ing] the use of Storypark as it gives a snapshot into my child's kindy life"*, and *"share[s] the individualised planning for my child"*, and said that it *"would be great if something similar could carry on when they are at school"*. Two parent responses were not so receptive to using digital tools, with one parent stating *"I hate the amount of technology used in school!"* Other parents deemed digital communication between the ECE and parents effective. One parent asked how their child could be more actively involved in their e-portfolio space: *"I wonder how much [child's name] could contribute?"*, alluding to a lack of children's active involvement in their e-portfolio space.

Some parents thought about the benefits of their ECE centre communicating directly with their child's new primary school in order to support their child's transition, saying it would *"make the transition comfortable and secure [for their child]"*. While recognising the importance of ECE centres liaising with the child's new school, some parents were *"not sure*

[the] two [i.e.school and ECE] need to work together on the transition”, since “school does visits [and] ECE can prep kids for what’s needed in a classroom environment”. In addition, some parents who already had older children attending school thought scheduled school visits for their transitioning child “seem[ed] excessive... We visit the school regularly for pick up/drop off etc., so it’s a very familiar environment”.

Others saw benefits from ECE and schools working together. Two parents commented *“It is good to work together so the transition to school is not a shock”, and “ECEs and New Entrant classrooms need to have similarities”.* Working together to share information about the transitioning children, such as *“soft/anecdotal and hard data”* between the ECE and school was viewed as beneficial by one parent, who expressed interest in school *“knowing about our daughter so that [we] can use this information to help her transition”.*

The parents were asked when they would like to begin receiving information about their child starting school. Responses indicated that they preferred to receive information around 3 months before their child was due to start. During this time, parents wanted to make contact with their child’s NE teacher (18/20 responses) as parents prioritised the time needed to build a *“trusting relationship with her [the child’s] teacher”.* During the three months period families wanted to receive information that helped to prepare their child for academic learning (5 mentions) and to be able to seek advice about what parents could do at home to help familiarise their child with the structure and routine of the school day (12 mentions).

The parents’ responses showed that both face-to-face and digital communication between ECE teachers and families were valued (6 mentions). Whilst Storypark did not facilitate parent-to-parent connections, the data showed that parents sought opportunities to build a relationship and get to know their child’s new teacher, signalling that a collaborative approach to transition, particularly between family and NE teacher, to build positive connections through communication was an important place to start.

My child adjusting to school

A child’s comfort and security, followed by their self-confidence and ability to adapt to school-learning, were regarded by some parents (5/20) as important attributes that would help their child to adjust to school. One parent shared *“I hope [that] my son will be able to adjust to the fact that school is not mostly ‘play time’ and more about learning and working”.*

Similarly, “[their child’s] ability to cope with a [different] learning style” highlighted parents’ awareness of the different teaching and learning approach used in school compared with ECE centres. The change to a more formal learning environment was welcomed by some, who looked forward to their child “*learning to read and write more*” and “*finally making a start to their learning journey*”, saying that school’s clear expectations coupled with a structured and disciplined approach would help to support their child’s adjustment to the classroom.

Twelve parents felt that their child would feel more confident and excited about starting school if they had already made connections with other children. “*Having a friend*” or “*meeting new friends and reconnecting with old friends*”, or being able to play with their siblings (e.g. a “*big brother*”) was viewed by families as an advantage for their child.

Summary of parents’ questionnaire

The data collected from the parent questionnaire was integral to planning how to best meet families’ needs and aspirations for their child starting school. The parents’ responses helped to shape the initial content for the family Facebook page. Table 5 below offers a summary of the three key themes identified from the families’ responses.

Table 5: Summary of information from the families’ initial questionnaire responses.

Theme	Response and number of responses
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face-to-face daily contact with ECE teachers was seen as valuable (11/20) • Storypark the preferred source of communication between ECE and home (5/20) • Supportive of ECE and school collaborating to support transition (16/20) • Opportunity for families to get to know their child’s new teacher (7/20)
Families’ willingness to be involved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very involved (9/20) • Like to be involved (4/20) • Restricted by working commitments (11/20)
My child adjusting to school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children need to be comfortable and feel secure (7/20) • Confident and ready to learn (5/20) • Adjusting to more structured learning (5/20)

Teachers’ responses

The initial teacher questionnaire provided insights into 10 ECE teachers and four primary teachers’ existing transition practices. Teachers’ responses were used to support the development of content for both the family and teacher Facebook pages and to inform the timing of transition practices.

Three broad themes identified from the teachers’ questionnaire: “preparation for starting school”, “inter-sector connections” and “e-portfolios”. Examples of data illustrating these themes will now be presented.

Preparation for starting school

Three ECE teachers believed that transition to school programmes needed to begin when the child turned four years old. Five teachers felt that transition to school only really started for families when school visits commenced, a few weeks before the child’s starting date. However, most of the teachers (9/14) identified that programmes ideally started for children aged 4.5 years old. These nine responses coincided with when each of the three ECE Centres already scheduled their *Cool 4 school* transition programme. As part of Centre A’s programme, the ECE teachers drew on videos and material used by the school that facilitated a structured approach to teaching literacy, to introduce transitioning children to a different approach of teaching and learning.

Inter-sector connections

The data gained from ECE teachers' responses showed how centres shared information about transitioning children with schools. ECE teachers felt it was an important part of their role to provide NE teachers with information about their transitioning children, and NE teachers valued the ECE teachers' insights to help them to get to know the children. All three centres shared each child's mini portfolio, a summary of their more extensive ECE e-portfolio, with schools. Only Centre A chose to share a hard copy of this document. Some ECE teachers (4) said that their only contact with primary schools was when they emailed the children's learning summaries to NE teachers.

Connections with the different schools that the ECE children transitioned to was described by one ECE teacher as "*varying dramatically*", with physical distance between the settings cited as a reason for this variation. For example, four of the teachers from Centre A participated in weekly visits to their neighbouring school's library. Another centre made termly visits to their nearest primary school. Eight ECE teachers intimated that their relationships across the range of schools were "inconsistent". Three ECE teachers had initiated connections with their local school. One ECE teacher expressed doubts that schools even wanted to make contact with the centre, stating that "*some [schools] don't contact the kindergarten at all*". Further comments suggested that schools and ECE centres may not appear to be "on the same page" in their values for transitioning to school: "*Schools don't always appear to support our concerns for a strong transition for ALL tamariki*"; others said that their local school had an "*open and friendly 'open-door' approach*".

Knowing the expectations of NE teachers for children starting school was raised as important by three ECE teachers. One teacher would like more specific information: "*...such as what children learn in their first year at school, so [we] can support their learning and help them adjust to school*", and to understand "*what schools are wanting from 5 year olds starting*". Both these comments emphasise that a collaboratively constructed transition process would need to incorporate a reciprocal exchange of information. ECE teachers felt that they were best placed to support both the NE teachers and the child's transition. They already held a wealth of information about the child and their family and could help the NE teacher in getting to know the new five year olds and their families. One teacher commented "*the [ECE] teacher knows about the child more than they [the school] do now*". In comparison with school, ECE teachers have "*known [their] children for at least three years in a very*

nurturing environment [and] I feel we have lots more time for one-on-one comforting". ECE teachers were concerned that the school environment might not foster such close relationships with their new class teacher.

Eight teachers indicated that the biggest challenge for children starting school was adjusting to a structured day with *"less opportunities to be creative"*, coupled with large numbers of children in both the classroom and outside school environment. Increased numbers of pupils in the classroom required the children to manage *"coming from [an ECE centre of] 35[children] up to [a classroom] of 75 ish [children]"*. Children's self-management during the less supervised recess in an outside environment raised concerns for four ECE teachers, including: *"How well are new children supported when they are on their own?"* and *"[How do they] manage their own eating and drinking needs?"*, and the exposure to *"increased noise"* and *"volume of children"* in a busy playground. However, three ECE teachers identified that exploring the new school environment with its *"multiple buildings"* posed a positive challenge for some children, who were excited to experience this change. The teachers' responses identified key points of the school day to be lunchtime and morning tea recess, being unstructured parts of the school day when children needed to manage by themselves.

Inter-setting communication between ECE, school and home was raised as crucial to developing a collaborative approach that provides a smooth transition process for children, where *"all stakeholders work together to gain knowledge about their transitioning child"* so that *"schools [can] have a good understanding of each child coming to them"*. Knowledge sharing across educational settings relied on developing active *"communication between families [and] early childhood settings"*, with teachers' comments demonstrating an openness to collaboration. ECE teachers wanted the opportunity to share *"vital knowledge"* with NE teachers to support each child's start to school. However, in practice, building effective reciprocal communicative links between ECE and school was described by ECE teachers as *"vary[ing] from context to context"*. Again, distance between ECE centres and schools was cited as the biggest influence in maintaining inter-setting connections, with four ECE teachers saying that the school closest to their centre was where they maintained the strongest communication channels. This suggests that face-to-face connections are still an important component of effective inter-setting communication.

e-portfolios

Ten ECE teachers found e-portfolios to be highly effective in sharing a child's "*in the moment learning*" with their family, enabling parents to respond to the postings "*at a time that was convenient for them*" (8 mentions). However, two ECE teachers raised concerns about their centre's reliance on technology to develop connections with families. One teacher pointed out that some families had experienced technical difficulties with the Storypark app, "*not logging in*", or having "*internet connection problems*". Another ECE teacher felt that "*an online connection was not as powerful as talking face-to-face with families*". However, Storypark was used by all centres to update families with what was happening at the centre as well as regularly sharing moments of the children's learning.

Summary of teachers' questionnaire

The data collected from the teacher questionnaire proved valuable in: revealing more about teachers' existing transition practices in their preparation for children starting school and how they communicated with transitioning families, as well as examples of collaboration between ECE and school settings. Table 6 shares a summary of the three main themes with examples of data from the teachers' responses.

Table 6: Summary of information from teachers' initial questionnaire responses.

Theme	Theme	Response and number of responses/mentions
Preparation for starting school	<p>Adjusting to the demands of school: Answering parents' questions, what do the ECE teachers want to know?</p> <p>Length of transition process</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECE teachers generally felt equipped to answer parent questions (13/14) • More formal learning in ECE day- (9/14) • Adjusting ECE routines to prepare for school day(4/14) • All stakeholders working together (4/14) • Children's ability to cope with starting school (socially and emotionally) (4/14) • ECE teachers wanted to know more about the school day (3/14) • Expectations of the NE teacher (3/14) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Starting when children are 4.5 years old (9/14) • When school visits started (5/14)
Inter-sector connections	Existing connections between ECE centres and school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships not established (8/14) • Learning summaries (4/14) • Visiting school (4/14)
e-portfolios	e-portfolios as a form of digital communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECE e-portfolios were successful in communicating with families (10/14) • E-portfolios were deemed to be effective in sharing children's learning (8/14)

Setting up the Facebook pages

This section begins with a summary of the data gained from the parents and teachers' questionnaire responses and showing how this data informed the customisation of the two Facebook group pages. The first column of Table 7 provides an overview of the key ideas raised in the families and teachers' questionnaire responses. The second column shows the ensuing actions (EA) developed in response to the questionnaire in order to customise the construction of the Facebook pages. The first EA was the setting up of the two Facebook group pages.

Table 7: The Facebook plan prompted by feedback from questionnaires.

Topics	Ensuing Actions: Customising the intervention to meet families' needs
<p>Timing</p> <p>Parents wanted transition to begin around 3 months (1 term) before their child's start to school. Teachers preferred 3-6 months. Transition to school for both groups prioritised children getting to know their new class and meeting the teacher.</p>	<p>The Facebook page opened in June, approximately 3 months before the first group of children started school. Initial contact was made with families through the Storypark app and a visit to each centre was made around 6 months before the first group started school.</p>
<p>Parents and teachers raised the importance for the child to know more about:</p> <p>'Play time' 'learning styles' 'getting to know friends' 'academic challenges' 'managing my own belongings' 'knowing my way around my school' 'managing myself' 'getting to know my teacher'</p>	<p>A series of digital stories about a central 5 year old character, Patrick, and including the class teacher was created. Videos portrayed everyday dilemmas featuring ideas which the families raised.</p>
<p>Working parents</p> <p>Most parents worked full time and could not easily attend meetings at school.</p> <p>ECE teachers felt that their online communication through Storypark was largely successful.</p>	<p>Initial information shared online could provide families with what they needed to know about starting school, e.g. a plan of a typical day at school, guidance on purchasing a backpack or sunhat for their child.</p>
<p>Supportive of social events</p> <p>Both parents and teachers were supportive of social events at their child's ECE centre which brought them together as a community.</p>	<p>Planning school events to fit in with the families was facilitated through the polling system of Facebook.</p> <p>Planned events had a social focus so the whole family could attend.</p>
<p>How could the children be more actively involved in their transition ?</p> <p>"I wonder how much [child's name] could contribute?"</p>	<p>Patrick stories and teacher stories were designed to be shared by the parent with their child.</p>
<p>Getting to know the teacher</p> <p>Both families and teachers raised the importance of opportunities for children and families to get to know their new class teacher.</p>	<p>A digital story about the school principal, the class teacher and a photo board of the office staff and caretaker was made for families to share with their child.</p>
<p>Information and orientation:</p> <p>Parents and teachers wanted to know more about academic learning, particularly, reading, writing and maths. ECE teachers wanted to know about NE assessments and requirements</p>	<p>Weekly themes were generated around a key aspect of starting school, for example, eating lunch together at school. Videos and resources were shared on Facebook along with postings asking for participants' opinions.</p>

The families' Facebook group page

The Facebook group page was envisaged as a space for families to collaborate in customising a process that worked for each family, with an opportunity to build connections with other transitioning parents and their child's class teacher.

The parent questionnaire responses indicated that most wanted to be involved with their child's transition, but for many their availability was limited. It was important to consider transition practices that did not make extra demands on a family's time yet still gave parents opportunities to engage with their child's transition. The Facebook platform was identified as an accessible medium, with 19/20 parents already having their own active Facebook account, and one parent sharing a joint account with their partner. As part of my teaching role I regularly led the face-to-face family orientation meetings at school and knew the specific information that would be useful to them. I began to think about how the orientation information could be made accessible online using Facebook.

When to open the Facebook page to the nine focus families was guided by their questionnaire responses. The most common response from parents (7/20) indicated that they had wanted to receive information about starting school 2-3 months prior to enrolment. A three-month timeframe fitted well with the school calendar, equivalent to one term to help prepare families for their child's start to school. The resources initially shared with the families on Facebook provided information they could access at home to familiarise their child with their new school. The developed resources and information responded to the three themes identified from my analysis of the parents' questionnaire responses: "what families needed to know before their child started school", "their willingness to be involved", and the "child's adjustment to school".

The teachers' Facebook page

I envisaged the teachers' digital space as an environment for experienced practitioners to share and develop their knowledge of transition practices. Fourteen teachers participated in the questionnaire, but only ten teachers accepted the invitation to join the Facebook group. I was mindful that the teacher questionnaire responses had highlighted inconsistencies across teachers' views about the duration of the transition process, the effectiveness of relationships between ECE and schools, and a disjointed process in how each sector prepared children for starting school.

Responses from ECE teachers showed no consensus in schools' programmes of school visits for transitioning families. Facebook offered an ideal forum for teachers to share their transition practices and to create transparency that might shed light on these disparities. In the teachers' group I presented the timetable and themes which guided the focus primary school's existing transition programme, to give ECE teachers some knowledge of the school's programme to share with transitioning children and families.

Initial Patrick stories

The questionnaire responses from both families and teachers were used to develop responsive resources that took the form of a series of videos using my five year old nephew Patrick (pseudonym) as a protagonist. The stories formed an EA, based on issues raised by the teachers' and parents' responses regarding the importance of the transitioning child being able to "*self-help*" and "*care for themselves and others*". The four original Patrick stories were: "Where to find the toilet"; "Nobody to play with"; "Keep trying when something is hard" and "What to do when I don't understand". Before I brought the stories to the Facebook groups they were reviewed by a parent whose child had already started school (see Appendix 8 for the parent review questions). The parent reviewer identified a gap within the selection of stories that stemmed from his own child's experiences. When his child had started school he had hurt himself at play-time and did not know how to seek help. Based on this feedback a fifth Patrick story was added which addressed the scenario of "What to do if I hurt myself".

The Patrick stories were designed for parents to use in preparing their child for social situations they might face as part of starting school. As part of the video, question prompts were provided to scaffold a conversation between the parent and child, such as "*What would you do?*" when Patrick is faced with a choice or dilemma. Along with the Patrick stories for the children, additional digital videos created for parents shared a brief history of the school, a typical day in the NE classroom, and some ideas for supporting reading time at home. These additional resources were developed as part of a response to the data gained from the questionnaires, identified in Table 7. Parents reviewed the Patrick stories as a helpful transition tool that supported their home practices. Using a Facebook poll, I was able to learn that most parents (6) had found the videos "*really useful*", with one saying "*may return to them later*". Furthermore, Facebook provided me with a way to gain ongoing parent feedback

about the effectiveness of the transition resources as they were developed and shared on Facebook.

Ensuing Action: New Patrick stories added

A further EA was developed as a result of the parents' positive feedback about the initial Patrick stories. An additional story was created to meet a parent's need identified from the family Facebook discussions and from my own experiences as a NE teacher. Dylan's Mum posted: *"I am wondering how many parents here will need before or after-school care for their child? Would it be possible to have a kind of online intro to them...It would be good for the faces to be made familiar to Dylan before I leave him there. It's the thing I am feeling most uneasy about"*. A Patrick story video was chosen to introduce an after-school care resource as the format lent itself to sharing the story from the child's perspective. The video introduced the staff, other children, and after-school care routines and activities. Two further Patrick stories were added in July to help children learn how to pack their own school bag and to encourage them to look after their belongings. Both topics were identified as key areas of preparation for school from my experiences as a NE teacher. Both aspects of transition were usually addressed at the school's orientation meeting for families.

The Patrick digital stories were also posted in the teacher Facebook group. In an "over the fence" conversation between Centre A Teacher 1 and myself, she commented that the videos were a *"good resource to share with the children"* for teachers to use to support children in *"managing new social situations which they might find themselves in school"*. She reported that Centre A teachers had *"used the videos as part of their Cool 4 School Programme"*. From the teachers' and families' feedback, it appeared that the Patrick stories had proven to be a resource adaptable to both home and ECE transition practices, being focused on aspects of transition that were important to all stakeholders.

Collaboratively organising events: Using Facebook polling

The importance of providing face-to-face interaction through social events was an important consideration in planning a mostly digitally-driven transition to school intervention.

Questionnaire responses highlighted *"special events"* ranging from *"fish and chip evenings"* to *"athletics day"*, and, more formally, *"school assemblies"* as effective opportunities to develop community relationships. The timing of a planned face-to-face event held on school grounds was identified as a valuable experience for children just on the verge of starting school. Accordingly, the planned face-to-face events are outlined in the liminal phase section.

ECE Teachers' contributions to the collaborative process

In order to generate discussion in the teachers' group, I shared concerns which some of the ECE teachers (and families) had raised in their questionnaire responses. I hoped that selecting an issue that the teachers felt strongly about would provoke discussion and interaction. I began by raising the topic of how transitioning children manage lunchtime. I used a quote from a research article to give a professional focus to this discussion: "*According to Smith (2003) not all children have learnt to negotiate relationships and establish friendships; therefore, the playground could be a socially isolating environment*" (p. 130). I then posed the question: "*Lunchtimes and morning tea time - do you feel that brand new five year olds all cope well with this time of day?*" Two ECE teachers from Centre A posted that recess was not necessarily a challenge that all children experienced: "*I believe that some of our 5 year olds feel secure during morning tea and lunchtime*", however, they stipulated that this feeling of security relied on the child having a "*familiar face to support them*". Two other ECE teachers from Centre A shared that they had "*observed some new 5 year olds from our centre [children's names] looked unsure of themselves in their new school environment*".

Facebook offered a space to problem-solve and collaboratively develop new transition practices. The teachers of ECE Centre A posted that "lunchtime-recess visits" might help familiarise children with this new experience. Ideas included: "*Could the lunchtime/morning tea staff be introduced to the new tamariki*" and: "*we could bring our nearly five year olds, with a teacher from the centre prior to the child starting school?*" As a result of the discussion amongst the teachers from Centre A in their Facebook group, an EA was formulated which I then proposed to the family Facebook group: lunchtime transition visits held over three sessions, to introduce children to school lunchtimes, supported by the child's ECE teacher or family.

Customising transition to school information for families

To help each family prepare their child starting school I found that providing information pertinent to supporting the needs of the majority of families was useful. I was then able to respond to individual family's requests by refining or developing new resources, an example being the after-school care Patrick story. When I developed new resources to facilitate individual family requests, I always checked with the family that the new resource met their needs before sharing it with the whole group using Facebook. I planned to develop a range of

transition resources accessible to all families which they could draw upon at any time, to cover the range of individual children's starting school dates.

Communication of information was the key purpose for Facebook in the initial three months of the study (the pre-liminal phase). The development of the Facebook pages was further guided by participant feedback which influenced each week's content, to ensure information was pertinent to families. Content of the two Facebook pages was customised to suit the families' transition to a specific NE classroom and school environment.

The next section shares the findings from the data sourced during the liminal phase.

Data analysis and responses during the liminal phase

van Gennep (1960/1977) described the liminal phase as an "in between time". This is characterised by the transition from an old to a new identity and community. My study acknowledged the importance of the liminal phase, signified by the movement of the families as they left their ECE community and associated roles for a new identity at school. For parents and children, this presented a period of adaptation to their new roles and community, and familiarisation with their new school environment. Families no longer needed preparatory orientation, rather a customised intervention that addressed their changing needs as they adjusted to their new roles and routines. A key finding noted from the data at the liminal phase was the importance of maintaining connections between group members. For families, face-to-face events were found to encourage the development of personal networks with other NE families. For teachers, reciprocal communication at the liminal phase was demonstrated in the data by the sharing of transition objects between ECE centres and school. This constituted further communication across settings. In response to the Facebook groups' postings, several EAs were developed: emailing photos, organising and attending the family rock hunt (weekend event) and *mihi whakatau*, (during the school day event) welcome packs, daily postings about the children's day, and livestreaming. These EAs have been added to Figure 6, which summarises the data and actions from the pre-liminal to the liminal phase of the families' transition process. The following sections present the findings gathered during the liminal phase, using examples identified from the data.

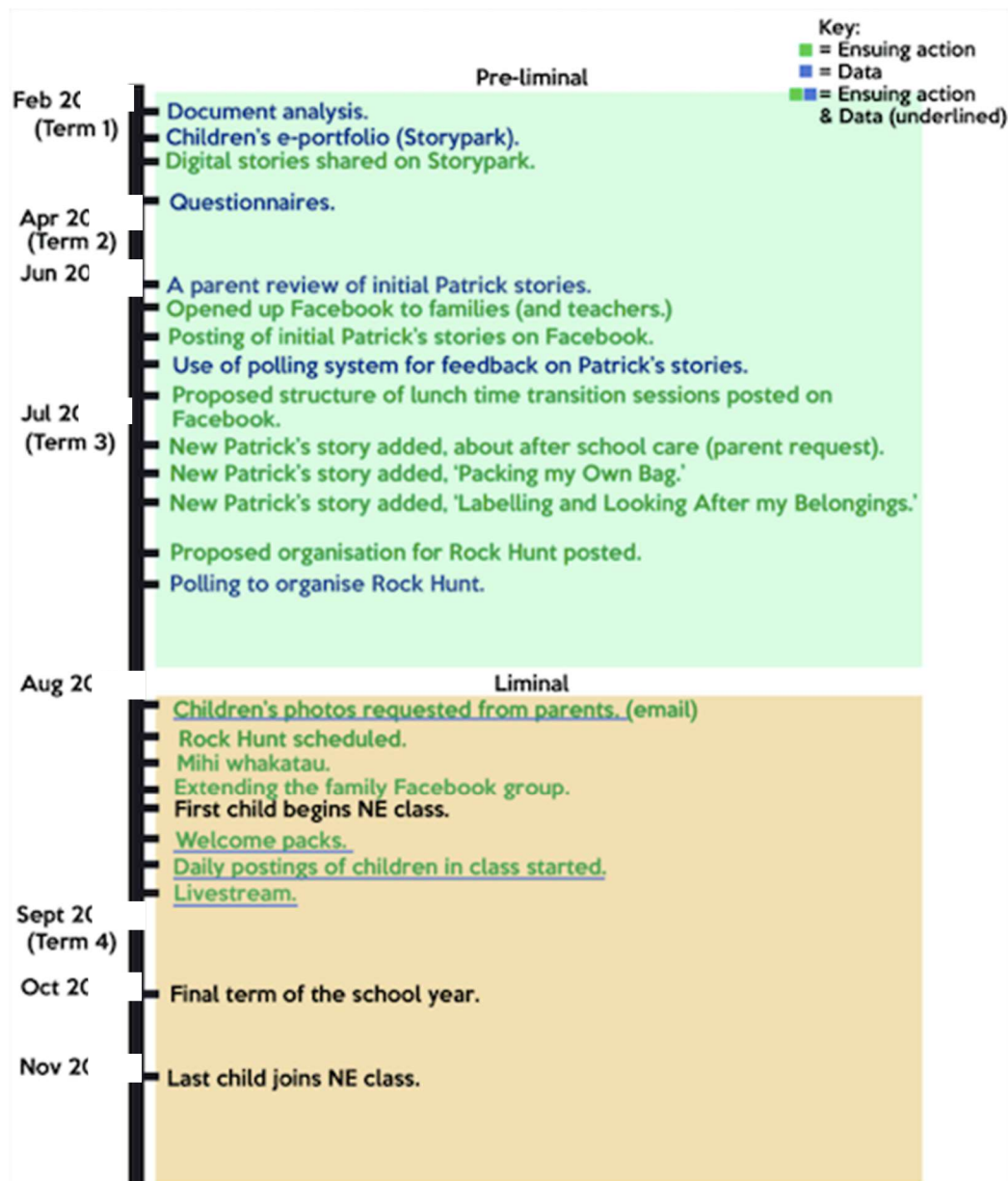


Figure 6: Pre-liminal and liminal phase timeline of the data collected with actions and subsequent interventions that supported the families' transition process.

Requesting photos of children's from parents

Prior to the children starting school, I emailed all families inviting them to email a photo of their child and share something special about their child with their new class teacher. These images could then be displayed as a way of welcoming the families to their new classroom on their child's first day. The action of families emailing the photos offered me an opportunity to learn more about each of the families. Many of the families sent a selection of photos. For example, Josie's Mum replied, *"I couldn't choose - you choose, when I looked at all the photos they told a story about her, but these ones all say something different about her. She*

loves the snow, she loves being in the garden and she loves her brother”. The photo and story Josie’s Mum shared helped me to learn more about her daughter.

The photographs provided eye-catching and succinct information with only the minimum expectation of words. I designed this to be a quick task, but one which could include the child. I chose to display photos of all 20 children who would be starting school in my NE class. Out of 20 families, I received photos for 13 children. The remaining seven children each had their photo taken by their parents as they arrived at school on their first day. The photos were displayed prominently in the classroom, so that they were the first thing that families saw on their arrival. The children’s photos were also used to personalise coat-peg cards, so that children could identify their place for their bags and belongings.

All five of the initial group of families went straight to their photos (see Figure 7) and spent time discussing the image. Mason’s Mum remarked *“Remember that photo? That was at your first soccer match.”* Rebekah’s Mum used the photo to prompt her child in remembering a new friend that she had met at the *mihi whakatau*: *“Remember you met Amie on our last visit, and she became your friend, she will be in your class really soon. Look, can you see her photo?”*



Figure 7: Children’s photos displayed in the classroom.

The emails I received from the families showed that the photos supported collaboration between the families and me, and between parents and their children. The photos were used as familiar images for parents to locate and share with their child to ease first-day nerves when they arrived at their new classroom. As part of my observations, I noted that the photos of the children were also used by parents as a discussion point about other children who would be their friends.

Social events

Face-to-face events were a way for families to meet other families and build networks. During the pre-liminal phase, a date for the rock hunt was scheduled using Facebook polling with the event to be held during the liminal phase. From my observations, the face-to-face events provided the opportunity for families to seek advice from other parents, make connections with other families and introduce their child to the other children who would be in their class. In the initial questionnaires, both families and teachers recommended that face-to-face social events at school would be a useful way to meet and build connections.

Ensuing action: Rock hunt

The rock hunt was a weekend opportunity for families to connect and for children to get to know their classmates. The “Rock hunt” was a familiar activity for most families, as looking for painted rocks is a local tradition in the city where they all lived. The event involved a “treasure hunt” to find decorated rocks hidden in the school grounds. This EA provided the purpose for the families to engage and make connections with each other.

My role in the event was less directive and provided an opportunity for me to observe and socially engage with families. In my teacher journal I noted observations and interactions between families, such as parents asking other parents questions about school stationery, school bags and lunchboxes, parents finding things in common with their children, and parents introducing their child to other children in their class. For example, Amie’s and Rebekah’s Mum were observed arranging their first “play-date” for their children.

Collaboration at this event was focused on families forging social connections with other families, mostly to support their child in making friends, and with opportunities for parents to swap tips and advice about their adjustments to their child starting school.

Ensuing action: Mihi whakatau

The second, more formal face-to-face (week day) event scheduled using the Facebook polling system with the groups was the *mihi whakatau*. The purpose of the *mihi whakatau* was to celebrate and mark the families’ entering together as new members of the school’s community. The *mihi whakatau* was an effective way to welcome both families and ECE teachers to the school and begin to forge connections across stakeholders. I had discussed holding a *mihi whakatau*, a shorter, less formal, flexible ceremony than a pōwhiri (a traditional welcoming ceremony), with a colleague as a cultural advisor. When I posted an invitation on Facebook, some families were unable to attend with their child, but were still

keen that their child should attend. In these instances, families asked their child's ECE teachers to accompany the children. The *mihi whakatau* was personalised by the school principal who was the lead speaker and guide for the ceremony. Older school students and current NE children also sang a waiata (song) to welcome the families.

This social gathering was an effective way to welcome our NE families and marked the start of their school journey by crossing the threshold into the school community, as acknowledged by the traditional welcoming ceremony. In line with van Genneep's (1960/1977) transition theory, thresholds lie between the two statuses of an individual. van Genneep described the process as being when an individual's prior status is shed, and their new status is adopted, as their new community incorporates them. The individual's entry to their new community is often marked by the symbolic act of crossing over the threshold, with a celebration such as our *mihi whakatau*.

Extending the family Facebook group

As we gathered as a group after the *mihi whakatau* in the school staff room, I noticed a difference in how comfortable some of the families were to engage with each other. The focus families (the Facebook group) socialised together and when communicating with the school principal and me they mentioned some of the ideas on Facebook which they were enjoying. After observing how relaxed the focus parents were with each other and the school staff, I wanted to offer the same opportunity to the rest of the NE families, and open the Facebook group to the remaining families. This constituted another EA, when I responded to the situation by providing the new families with the same access to opportunities on Facebook as the focus families. When I gained ethical approval for the inclusion of the additional families in the study they were invited to join the Facebook group.

Ensuing Action: Welcome packs

When the families began their classroom visits, I gave them each a small welcome pack. Inside was a pepeha ⁵ booklet for them to complete, and a small, round section of log, which they were asked to personalise with their hopes and aspirations for their child as they started school (See Figure 8). These resources were designed to enable me to gain insights into the families' hopes for their child as they started school.

⁵ Pepeha is a way of introducing oneself through a set structure. It defines who we are, where we are from and where we belong.



Figure 8: Image of logs and pepeha.

Given the succinct format of the information received on the log pieces, key themes were easily identifiable. For example, a key value communicated by parents was for their child to be independent and able to self-manage changes when starting school. These concepts correlated with beliefs and values that the ECE and NE teachers had also prioritised for their NE children in their questionnaire data.

All families (20) completed and returned their child's log section and the key words in their comments were coded into themes. These themes were: developing personal attributes to be able to manage by myself (26 mentions); learning-focused aspirations such as in reading, writing and maths (19 mentions); enjoying school and making friends (each received 12 mentions); confidence (11 mentions); and being best that I can be (9 mentions). The graph in Figure 9 summarises these themes.

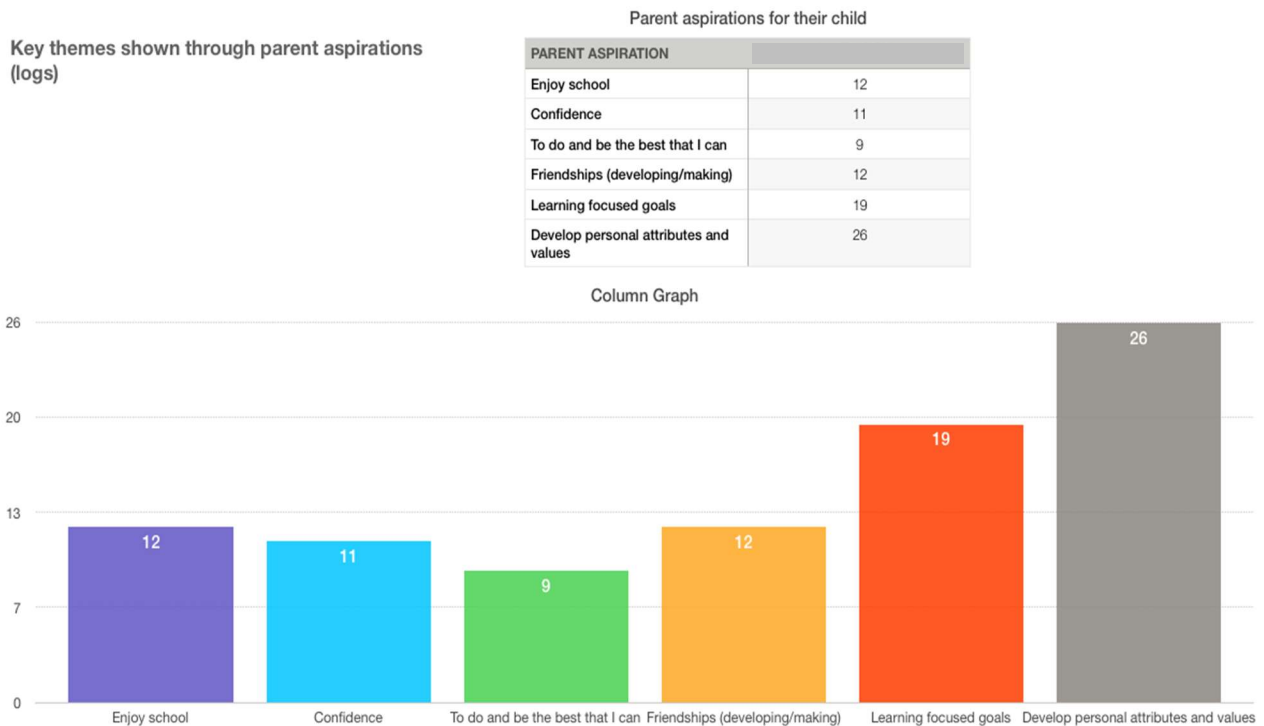


Figure 9: Graph to show key themes of parent aspiration shared on their logs.

The data illustrates that most families hoped that their child had the necessary skills and knowledge to self-manage the changes involved with starting school.

Fostering children’s ongoing interests

In customising the classroom environment, I used data sourced from e-portfolios and Facebook to suggest how the children’s learning interests at home and ECE could be fostered and continued in school. I had learnt from the e-portfolios that the focus children’s interests involved construction and opportunities to be creative through art, dance, and role-play. As part of setting up the classroom, a small stage, dress-up masks, hats, and a microphone were made available. Props such as these were signalled to be of “high interest” in Morgan, Josie, and Hoana’s learning stories. Similarly, the construction area was stocked with books and images of vehicles to inspire Fergus, Dylan, Jack, and Charlie.

In the teachers’ Facebook group, ECE teachers in Centre A made connections to children’s previous interests identified through my postings of the children’s play in the classroom. In one posting (See Figure 10) I shared a construction project involving Fergus and Morgan. This post prompted one teacher to respond *“I am so glad they at last got to build the Sky tower. There was a request from Morgan for us to build it in the gully earlier this year. We*

struggled a bit with the construction". Using the children's e-portfolios I could establish a classroom space that would invite children to engage with familiar activities. The postings that shared the children's play on Facebook provided ongoing connections with ECE teachers and families, whose feedback supported my ongoing facilitation of the children's interests. Through Facebook responses I was able to learn about previous projects popular with the children, such as "*We had a real interest in potion making [in ECE] last term*"; in the NE class I chose to extend the children's experiences by setting up experiments for them to explore their potion making. Further feedback from Centre A teachers noted "*Great to see you meeting that interest and taking it further*".



Figure 10: Image of Morgan's construction project.

Using Facebook postings to share the children's day

Making daily postings on Facebook provided some conversation starters for parents talking about their child's school day at home. The daily postings provided ECE teachers with glimpses of their children's progress since starting school. The following sections will outline the data gathered from families and teachers' postings and the use of the Livestream function on Facebook.

Ensuing action: Day-to-day Facebook postings to families about the children's at school

Daily Facebook postings were a way for me to maintain frequent connections with all the families. As children started school I began to develop regular face-to-face connections with some families; but for those families I did not get to meet after-school, I looked for a way to provide them with reassurance and insights of their children's day. I started to use Facebook to share daily postings, making videos and taking photos of the children and sharing special occasions which happened at school. Using Facebook to communicate about school to families provided a new experience for them, as the postings were shared within a group

space and not in an individual space such as Storypark. Posting in a group space provided potential for group engagement, such as shared jokes, such as when Charlie's Mum commented on a posting that showed Josie playing on the monkey bars at the school playground, responding, "*Go Josie! That's impressive ☺ you must have been putting in the hours at [Centre C]*", with Josie's Mum replying, "*She surely has!*" I found that when I assessed the family Facebook activity before the daily postings of the children had begun, and then again after regular daily postings had commenced, the families' engagement data showed an increase that was sustained until the Facebook group was closed in December.

Daily postings: Updating teachers

At the start of the liminal phase, I noted a low level of interaction across the group. As the children started school, I began to share snapshots of learning in the NE class with the teacher group. The postings prompted two ECE teachers at Centre A to make connections between their pedagogies and with those of the NE classroom; one teacher commented that the postings showed how I was "*...working with the skills, interests and imaginations of these tamariki*", and another was pleased to see how children were building on to their previous learning: "*[This posting highlights] such an important area of development that is extending upon children's ongoing foundation skills already gained through ECE*".

The posts on the teachers' Facebook page were visible only to the teacher Facebook group and not to the children's families; however, the ECE Teachers at Centre A usually addressed their responding postings to the children, such as, "*Wow Morgan! What great writing you are doing!*" followed by other teachers adding "*And the beautiful drawing.☺.*" and "*So lovely to see ...so proud ...ka pai to mahi [well done on your good work] Morgan ☺.*" Addressing the comments directly to Morgan meant the praise was intended for her. Centre A teachers' postings to the children tended to generate further affirmation and praise from other teachers at the Centre.

The ECE Centre A teachers showed a continued interest in the children who had previously attended their setting through their Facebook postings. For example, Morgan, unfortunately, had to go into hospital. Her ECE teachers were kept updated with postings about her progress. Figure 11 shares some of the "get well" cards that the children made for her.



Figure 11: Get well cards posted on Facebook for Morgan from the children.

Responses from three of her ECE teachers included *“Get well soon Morgan. Take care”* followed by, *“Oh, what beautiful cards for Morgan”* and, *“Morgan will love the cards and drawings”*.

Through sharing the postings of the children, stronger connections between teachers of ECE Centre A and myself began to develop. Outside Facebook, the proximity of Centre A to the school held an enormous advantage over the other two ECE centres. As already noted, this made it possible for NE children to visit Centre A. A boundary fence provided a “meeting place” where NE, ECE children and ECE teachers chatted literally over the fence during breaktimes. One ECE teacher commented *“I enjoy see[ing] our past children at the fence, I have a chat with them about their school activities!”* The close proximity between ECE Centre A and NE was found to be an advantage offering opportunities for the two settings to connect both face-to-face as well as online.

Ensuing Action: Livestream

Livestream made it possible for me to invite parents who were unable to attend school face-to-face with a “virtual real-time” visit to their child’s new classroom. Initial questionnaire responses made by teachers and families highlighted a concern that children might find it difficult to adjust to the more structured style of teaching and learning used in school. Using Livestream, I could share a real representation of the NE classroom, and the Livestream recording shared with families in real-time resulted in the highest level of engagement for any posting in the families’ Facebook activities, recording 15 postings from the parent viewers.

Livestream provided inclusive access so that all families had the opportunity to participate in their child's learning.

Overall, the families and teachers' Facebook engagement provided further insights into the children's interests and learning motivations that supported the customisation of the children's transition process in the NE classroom. Additionally, my Facebook postings proved an effective way to share with both teachers and families how the children were settling into school. Daily postings of the children provided members in both groups the opportunity to demonstrate their pride in how the child had managed their start to school and in the progress that they were making.

Finding: Reciprocal communication between sectors: Developing transition objects

In the context of this study transition objects were tools that formed part of a setting's valued practices shared between the sectors as a way to foster collaboration. Facebook provided a way for teachers to acknowledge different settings' transition practices, and to provide feedback about how these actions supported a child's transition. As noted in Chapter 4, all three centres shared a transition portfolio (see Figure 12). Centre A differed from Centre B and C by choosing to personally deliver a hard copy to the child's NE teacher. The physical copies of the children's portfolios were a valued transition practice that represented for Centre A the gifting of knowledge about a transitioning child between the ECE and NE. Centre A viewed the portfolio as "*a taonga [treasure] from [our] EEC to [you]*", sharing the children's "*attributes*" as "*[the ECE teachers] introduce[d] [the children] to [the NE teacher]*".

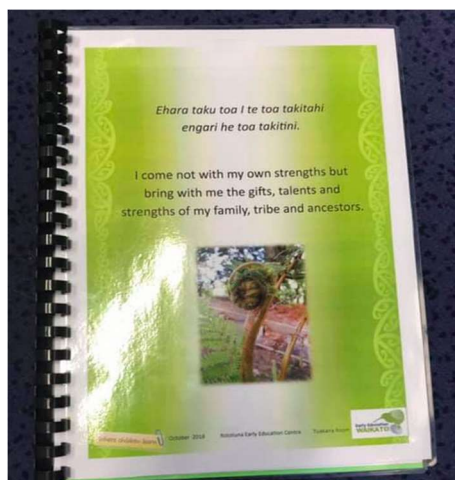


Figure 12: Image of the transition portfolios used by all three centres.

“Block people” were developed as a transition resource used to support the children in building connections with their NE class and other children. Each child’s block person consisted of a photo of themselves fixed to a wooden block, with the name “block person” used by the children to describe their, “*mini-me*” (Morgan). In the NE class, the block people were developed as a transition object for the children to use as a prop in their imaginative play. After a class conversation, the children decided that it would be a good idea to make some “grown-up versions” of block people. In collaboration with the children, a set of block people was made of key staff members from the primary school, with labels to say who they were and what they did at school (see Figure 13). The children who had previously attended Centre A then had the idea to deliver a set of block people to the *Cool 4 School* group so that the ECE children could learn about the people at school.



Figure 13: Image of school personnel ‘block people’ provided to Centre A.

Sharing and delivering the transition object consolidated connections between Centre A and the NE settings. The proximity of Centre A to the primary school offered a unique opportunity for children to revisit their previous ECE setting as part of their transition process. It enabled the NE children to share stories with the ECE children and seek affirmation from ECE teachers in the form of praise regarding their progress. The relationship that the children had built with their ECE teachers was long-standing and their visit to the familiar Centre was almost like visiting a family member. The Facebook posting that shared the visit received several responses from Centre A teachers, such as “*It was so exciting to see Fergus, and Morgan!!!*” and “*How fantastic was that! It was great to see our school children*”.

The transition object shared with Centre A by the NE class sparked further connections and ideas from the ECE teachers over the potential of adding the object to their own transition practices. In regard to building connections, a Centre A teacher said that the block people had

prompted her to connect with one of the school staff that she had recognised from the transition objects: *“This afternoon [a child at the centre] and I were talking to the school caretaker, and we told him he had a block person. Then we popped inside to get it and show him. He was surprised; he didn’t know he was so famous!”* Three ECE teachers shared their ideas of how the object could be added to their practices, *“The block people were ...a really cool way to introduce these people who will become part of our children’s school learning journey”*. Further responses added *“We will talk about them at the next Cool 4 School meet”*, and *“We are very keen to create our own block people as well”*. Sharing transition objects across the settings proved to be an effective way of developing collaborative transition practices.

Summary of the findings: Communication and collaboration

In reviewing the findings of the liminal phase, a key finding was the importance of developing possibilities for reciprocal communication. The data shared in the liminal phase has demonstrated the development of EAs to meet individual families’ needs and aspirations through a collaboratively customised transition process. Welcome packs were designed for families to share their values and aspirations for their child starting school. Face-to-face events such as the rock hunt and *mihi whakatau* proved to be successful in connecting families with other transitioning families, providing an opportunity for them to generate their own networks. Daily postings of the children encouraged both families and teachers’ engagement with the Facebook group.

The need for an exchange of information about transitioning children between the ECE and NE teachers was identified in the pre-liminal phase. In the liminal phase, reciprocity of sharing information was established in the sharing of transition objects between ECE centres and school, forming collaborative links across settings. The next section, examining the post-liminal phase, discusses whether the transition intervention had met the needs of the families and teachers.

Data analysis and responses during the post-liminal phase

van Genneep (1960/1977) describes the post-liminal phase as the time when an individual is incorporated into their new community within their new role. In my study, the post-liminal phase was influenced by the school year drawing to a close and the intended lifespan of the Facebook groups. At the end of the school year, some children had attended school for only a

few weeks, and others a few months, so although I have called this the post-liminal phase of the project, no children and families were at the same point in their transition. For the purpose of this research, the post-liminal phase is identified as a time for reflection. Figure 14 shows how the post-liminal phase adds to the previous two phases of data collection.

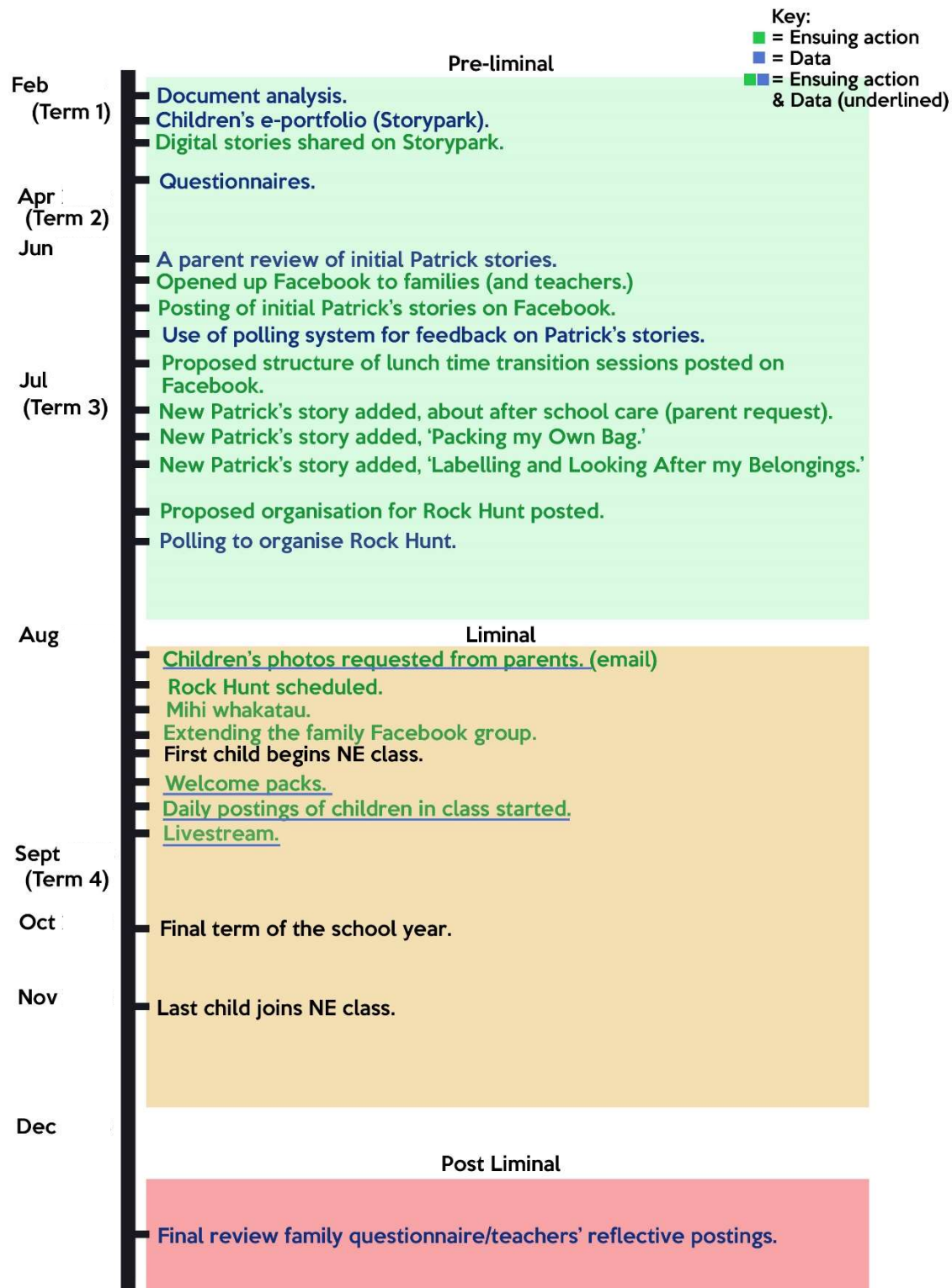


Figure 14: Three-phase timeline of data collected and actions taken as part of the transition intervention.

At the post-liminal phase, the children had all started school and some families were in a position to reflect on their transition experiences. Ten of the twenty families responded to a google form link that was posted on Facebook (see Appendix 9 for the review questionnaire). ECE and NE teachers were asked to respond to Facebook postings that sought their feedback about their experiences in the teachers' Facebook group. Together, the two sources of data presented the participants' reflections and feedback on the customised transition intervention using Facebook.

Parent review questionnaire: Findings

The questionnaire responses provided families' perspectives on how they felt that their needs had been facilitated in their transition to school. In reviewing the role that Facebook played in hosting aspects of their transition to school process, three themes were identified from my analysis of the parent review questionnaire data: "building connections", "preparing my child for school" and "providing reassurance to families" (by me keeping in touch). Each of these themes will now be discussed.

Preparing my child for school

Most parents (7/10) who responded to the review had visited the Facebook page before their child started school and had accessed resources on the Facebook page to support their child's preparation for school. Parents' responses included "*Before [my child] began, the videos brought a sense of familiarity to the changes ahead of beginning at school and were great conversations we could have at home to help support the change*". Content purposely made for children had also proved popular with the families: "*Our son loved the content aimed at him. The videos about his teacher, the photos of staff members and the videos about things such as, 'what do I do if I hurt myself'- [they] were all valuable. He went to school feeling confident*". By seeing through a five year old child's eyes, the videos helped to make social situations relatable for families to unpack with their child. "*[It] made a huge difference. Being able to watch the videos (what to do at lunch time etc.) with my son helped him (and me!) feel confident about starting school*". Several parents (6) expressed finding the Patrick videos "*the most valuable*". Most parents (8) found the "getting to know" digital stories shared about the school principal and myself an effective way to introduce new people to

their child. One parent found that these videos showed “*genuine, family-oriented, relatable people that gave us confidence about starting school*”.

For other parents, the Facebook group reaffirmed a confidence in their own ability to support their child in their start to school. Access to information, such as their child’s daily routine, meant that they knew how to encourage their child and prepare them for their day. The daily Facebook postings of the children at school provided reassurance for parents that their child was safe, secure, and happy in their new environment. One parent commented “*For sure. I was reassured to see pictures of my daughter happy at school and playing with friends. All this in real time (or close to) was extremely valuable for me*”.

Building connections

Most of the families’ responses (8/10) showed that the Facebook page had provided children with a place to see new and old friends in the new school environment and helped to familiarise them with the kinds of things that happened at school. In regard to Facebook connecting children yet to start school one parent shared “[*child’s name*] has just started [*school*] but [*before she did she*] enjoyed seeing her friends and learning what they do in the classroom”. For families whose children had no prior connections with other children starting school, Facebook was “*great for connecting, especially coming from a day-care where we had made many strong bonds and these families are now at other schools*”. The Facebook group was found to offer families benefits beyond recognising members of their child's new class. One parent found the page “*delightful*”, saying how much they “*looked forward to the photos of [the children’s] adventures at school in the classroom*”, along with looking forward to “*celebrations of learning and student’s interests and personalities*”.

In the initial questionnaire, one parent questioned what role her child could have, or indeed, how her child might participate with their e-portfolio. Most parents (8/10) reflected that they had regularly shared the Facebook page with their children to increase their own and their child’s familiarity with the school environment and its people. Building connections with the child’s new teachers was also viewed as a positive experience enabled through Facebook. One parent’s response drew on a posting about her son sharing a painting of his special teddy at school. When her son got home, at his request, his Mum had posted photos of his teddy onto the Facebook page. The parent reflected that “*Valuing Blue Bear was very important to him and his Mum*”.

The parents had found the Facebook transition resources useful to develop their children's knowledge and expectations about starting school while still at home. Their reflections evidenced their active involvement in supporting their own child's transition to school by using the Facebook resources. After the children had started school, the parents had continued to connect with the family Facebook page to encourage their child to reflect on their school day. One parent commented that *"having this page gave me a good window of his learning and created opportunities for me to ask questions about [her child's] day"*. Maintaining the daily Facebook postings after the children had started school provided families with a valuable connection to the people and activities of the classroom, strengthening and maintaining home-school connections.

Providing reassurance to families by my keeping in touch

Some parents' responses (6) indicated that the daily Facebook postings helped to connect families to their child's classroom learning, sparking conversations and further learning at home with the children; they commented that activities such as *"[the] language play around lemons was really good and inspired us to do something similar at home with other things"*. Facebook was used as a way to share information about the children's learning so that they could support their child at home. One parent commented *"When we picked up our son, we looked through his writing book, discussed his writing and tried to help him build his confidence in writing, which made him confident in his transition to school"*. The parent linked their child making progress in their learning to their child making a confident transition.

All parents who responded to the questionnaire said that they would recommend the Facebook page to other families who were transitioning to school. The accessibility of Facebook and the provision of relatable topics provided an entry point for families to support their child as they started school. Ten out of ten families felt that the information shared on Facebook had helped them feel more confident in supporting their child's transition to school. The tools, resources, and opportunities that Facebook provided had empowered parents to support their child in a way that worked for them. Interactions and support generated by the Facebook page had helped one parent to feel that their child had *"fe[lt] valued in his class"*. All ten families stated that the digital environment had helped to support their child's start to school. One parent ended by saying *"[A] brilliant transition for our girl in her start to school. We have a passionate, engaged and happy young lady"*.

All ten parents indicated that they had felt listened to, and that their ideas and suggestions were valued, with one parent specifically mentioning that they felt that their suggestions had been acted upon. There was no specific mention in the data gathered about the effectiveness of the customisation of the transition process from individual parents' questionnaire responses. However, the responses indicated that families had valued Facebook as a place to ask and respond to parents' questions. One parent commented "*It's been a 'check-in' place, if I thought of a question I could have a look as someone may have asked that question or the information had already been provided*". In developing the Facebook space as a place for parents to connect, where transition was shaped by the support of other families, one parent said "*It was a valuable space to hear other parent voice and to be able to connect, share in the feeling, or share own experience, to find or be another voice to offer information or support*".

The next section offers the data collected from the teachers' review Facebook postings.

The teachers' review

The themes of the Facebook posts canvassed on the teachers' page sought their opinions of the transition process and reflections on their time in the Facebook group. I posted the question: "*Do you feel that the Facebook page has made a difference to how you may transition children to school in the future? I'd really love your feedback...*" All ten teachers responded to the posting using emoji (3 NE and 7 from Centre A) with four of them (three from ECE Centre A and one NE teacher) each posting a response. "*A deeper understanding*" was gained for four ECE teachers from Centre A, who felt that Facebook had provided them with knowledge about "*what happens when our children go to school*", whilst the NE teacher had found "*finding out what the children have learnt in ECE*" to have been "*useful in planning [the children's] learning experiences at school*". Collaborative discussions in the Facebook group facilitated ECE teachers to be able to "*share [their] thoughts about what [they] think is important for children to experience prior to their school start*". ECE teachers found the Facebook page "*empowering*" and felt that the group space "*nurtured collaboration*". The responses from the Centre A teachers affirmed that through the collaborative discussion generated in the Facebook group they had developed a realistic understanding of starting school. ECE teachers from Centre A had felt that their opinions about preparing children for starting school had been valued by the group.

The ECE teachers from Centre A had enjoyed the opportunities of continuing to be part of their children's learning journey after they had left their ECE Centre. They found this *“very rewarding and something we have not been able to see before”*. Centre A teachers concentrated their engagement between themselves and with me within the Facebook group. Their frequent involvement during the seven months had caused some of the teachers to reflect that the Facebook page had *“give[n] us a real view into what is happening at school right now”* with opportunities to *“see children thriving at school”*. This was particularly important for the ECE teachers, some of whom had held long-term connections with the child and their family, having *“nurtured some of these children for 4.5 years!”* Using Facebook had prompted some of the Centre A ECE teachers to review their existing transition practices, with one teacher sharing that *“our work in Facebook [will] have an impact on the way we transition [future]children to school”*. The Centre A ECE teachers reflected that Facebook had been an effective place to discuss transition, and for *“exchanging ideas and matching interests”*. Being able to collaborate with the NE setting had supported Centre A ECE teachers in reviewing their practices and to gain feedback on those that were working well in supporting families' transition to school. One teacher commented that *“the Facebook page has created an awareness that we are supporting transitioning children really well, and that they are thriving at school. It is exciting that it fosters reflection around transition and possible future growth”*. Prompting that *“in the future we can help children transition in a more meaningful way, as we have more knowledge and understanding of what happens at school and why”*.

The Centre A ECE teachers' postings showed that Facebook helped them to recognise that their efforts in preparing the children for school had been valued by the NE teacher: *“[The Facebook page has] bridged the gap not only for children, but also for teachers between Early Childhood Centre and School”*. The photos and postings enabled the ECE teachers to reflect on their collective efforts, feeling proud of how the children were *“developing in their learning, making new friends and developing new relationships”*.

The data gathered from the teachers' review postings showed that the Facebook group had been effective in supporting a collaborative space to discuss and develop transition practices. Those who had engaged in the Facebook group felt that they had gained an authentic picture of ECE and school and the practices and values that underpinned the transition processes for

each setting. Through collaboration, commonalities were discovered and new transition initiatives were developed.

Chapter summary

The findings of this chapter have been organised into the three phases of transition offered by van Genneep (1960/1977): pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal. Throughout the data collection of the three phases of the families' transition, a series of interventions have been highlighted (see Figure 16). These interventions were EAs developed to respond to the data. In analysing the data, I argue that families need to be involved throughout the transition process to successfully customise their experiences. For the greatest benefit, this process should begin when the child is still attending their ECE centre, allowing time to build connections with age-peers and with the school. Data collected from the teachers, mostly through Facebook, also indicated that when ECE and NE teachers actively cooperate, they can devise collaborative transition practices that can better support families. Likewise, the findings highlight that families' priorities and needs will change over the transition process. For transition practices to be responsive to parents' changing needs, the type of support and information provided by educators needs to be guided by parent feedback and questions.

In developing a transition to school intervention, the data has evidenced the need for planned opportunities to develop an awareness of families' aspirations and values for their child starting school. Families in this research felt included in their transition process when the school was responsive to their values and goals. The EAs shared in this chapter illustrated how this was actioned. This chapter has revealed the influence the Facebook group had in customising and supporting families. This online space facilitated a means for parents to support each other. The next chapter will provide discussion about the findings shared in this chapter to determine whether the intervention effectively supported a collaboratively constructed transition to school process.

Chapter 6: Discussion: Conceptualising a teacher's facilitation of a group of families' transition to school

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the findings presented in Chapter 5 regarding the experiences of the families during their transition to school. The discussion is framed by van Gennepe's three phases of transition (1960/1977), wherein the specific actions taken at key points in time to support the families are the focus. A theory regarding the significance of taking these specific supporting actions across the three phases of the families' transition, when they were found to be most relevant, is developed through the concept of the "Deliberate Acts of Transition" (DATs). Resulting from discussion of these DATs, in connection with findings from Chapter 5, is a guiding framework that is intended to aid teachers in identifying the best course of action to support families, at each phase of their transitional journeys. As the needs of families change, it can be challenging for educators to adapt their support accordingly. In my study, I ascertained that because of families' shifting requirements DATs were found to be influenced by time. From the analysis of the data in Chapter 5, three key DATs were prioritised over each of the three phases of the families' transition: "Making connections" (pre-liminal), "Engaging with families", (liminal) and "Maintaining relationships with families"(post-liminal). When analysing the data that showed the most effective "Ensuing Actions" (EAs) employed to support families across their transition, these actions could to be categorised under each of the three DATs at the corresponding phase. This is because they were responsive to families' requirements at the optimum time. The value of DATs is therefore to inform teachers' EAs by giving them a defined purpose at each of the three phases. Further explanation of the theory of DATs is outlined in the following section.

Deliberate Acts of Transition: key concepts

A Deliberate Act of Transition provides an overarching objective to guide teachers' facilitation of families' transition to school at each of van Gennepe's three phases. The teacher's EAs are given focus by the overall DAT. Based on the uniqueness of the context, teachers may develop differing EAs; however, the overall purpose and DAT remains constant at each phase. The acronym DAT was originally used to refer to "Deliberate Acts of

Teaching” (Te Kete Ipurangi, n.d.), Te Kete Ipurangi (n.d), which uses the term to identify essential teaching strategies deemed to promote effective practices. In much the same spirit, the Deliberate Acts of Transition in this study focus on directing teacher facilitation towards the most effective practices over time. It is important to note that DATs discussed in this chapter were identified only for the families, more specifically the parents, and not the children. DATs pertaining to the children are identified in Chapter 10. DATs are different for families and children because analysis of the data identified that the needs of the children were distinct, with learners taking a different course from their families. Each of the DATs concerning the families will now be discussed, beginning with “Making connections” at the pre-liminal phase.

Pre-liminal DAT: Making Connections

I found that connections made by teachers with transitioning families were an important first step of the customising process. Although other studies, such as Miller et al. (2011) and Krinninger and Schultz (2017), were not looking at the customisation of the transition process, they also prioritised building connections at this time. Research by Kuusimäki et al. (2019) links to findings in my research, with their findings reinforcing the importance of developing and maintaining home-school communication links. My findings further emphasise that any communication links that are established between home and school need to be made easily accessible if they are to reach all families. Ideally links will be maintained frequently so families are encouraged to respond as well as receive communication. Providing a way for families to directly message me via email or Facebook was found to be important in how I developed and sustained connections with individual families.

Furthermore, my findings support my previous research that emphasised the importance of ECE and NE teacher collaboration in supporting a family’s transition to school (Woodhouse, 2015). I identified that the initiation of positive and inclusive connections between ECE, home and school should begin while the children are still attending ECE. Establishing communication links at the pre-liminal phase with families was key, so that I could begin to connect with the families with the assistance of the ECE teachers. Dockett and Perry (2021) found that once the school began to build connections with families ECE teachers were often excluded from the school’s communication. My approach relied on making and building connections with the ECE. I used the ECE e-portfolio facility to make my initial connections; rather than the school’s communication channels, I chose to use the ECE centres’ digital

technology, which enabled families and their teachers to have access to my communications. This meant that families could remain within the “comfort” of their familiar communication practices which had been developed in the ECE setting, with support from their ECE teachers.

My study has placed significant importance on the benefits teacher-collaboration brings to supporting individual families, adding further to the findings of Margetts (2002), who revealed the value of ECE and NE teachers working collaboratively. Margetts (2002) highlighted the potential for teachers across settings to develop a carefully planned transition programme together. In developing a collaborative transition process that is responsive to families’ needs my study also links with the work of Bond et al. (2019), who, like me, found that teacher-collaboration enabled a deeper, collective knowledge of how to support a child’s transition.

As noted earlier, traditional teacher orientation presentations and school-based transition practices used by the focus primary school were found to limit the attendance of families who could not easily participate face-to-face. To address this barrier I considered how school-related activities might be designed to make them accessible to all families. Peters (2010) had earlier asked “whose voices are heard” (p. 13) in the transition to school process. In designing responsive transition practices that better fitted with families’ circumstances, I aimed to increase the opportunities for *all* voices to be heard. Using Facebook as a place for families to connect and access information and to ask questions reduced the need for scheduled face-to-face information meetings with families.

In preparing the families for their separation from their ECE centres, I knew that for some parents moving on from this support network might leave them feeling vulnerable. Similarly, Ackesjö (2013) identified the importance of schools not only supporting families’ exit from their ECE community, but also helping their entrance and incorporation into their new school community. Studies such as those of Correia and Marques-Pinto (2016) and Wilder and Lillvest (2017) signalled that when families entered the school setting they generally experienced a reduction in opportunities to engage with their child’s school teacher in school, compared with the frequent engagement they had experienced with their ECE teachers. In addressing the issues raised by Ackesjö (2013), Correia and Marques-Pinto (2016) and Wilder and Lillvest (2017), I set out to make initial connections with families during the pre-liminal phase of their transition. This enabled me to have a constant and supportive presence

that maintained my connections with families during their process of separation from their ECE setting and their incorporation into school. Transition to school research has shown that by making time and space to build positive connections with families schools can more effectively support a parent's transition (Brooker, 2002; Doucet & Tudge, 2007; Gallagher, 2006). My initiating communication with families at the pre-liminal phase meant they had already started to build connections with their new school and specifically their child's new teacher.

At the pre-liminal phase the identified DAT of "Making connections" was facilitated through two key ensuing actions: "sharing stories" and "customising information".

EA 1: Sharing stories

The introductory stories posted on Storypark were a way of initiating communication and building connections between home and school. According to Geser (2004) and Grant (2011), communication is fundamental to developing social practices that can support positive connections between home and school. Focusing the facilitation of the families' transition on making connections through sharing stories gave me the opportunity to develop a "two-way transference of cultural capital" (De Gioia, 2017, p. 48) where teachers and families learned about each other's backgrounds and interests.

Sharing stories was an ongoing feature facilitated through the Facebook page. The Facebook data revealed that the parents' connections with each other were an important source of support for families in their transition process. Surprisingly, in transition to school research this specific connection between stakeholders appeared to be an under-explored aspect of facilitating a family's transition. In my study the connections the parents made enabled them to gain advice and support that related to their questions and needs, with data from the family Facebook page supporting this. Research by Ackesjö (2017) and Giallo et al. (2008) also identified that parents undertaking their first experience of transitioning their child were likely to have additional questions. Thus, by using Facebook I was able to provide all families with an accessible space to ask questions and seek advice.

Facebook was a space constantly available for parents. Through Facebook postings, families shared "tacit knowledge" (Orr, 1990, p. 170), generated through the personal anecdotes, dilemmas, questions, and challenges which the individual families were experiencing. According to González et al. (2005), regularly sharing day-to-day stories promotes a versatile

transference of information through engagement with others' stories. The group members used emoji to respond and support other parents' stories. The parents' sharing of tacit knowledge led to the space being viewed as a place where parents could share problems and receive advice. The frequent interactions between the group members in the Facebook space provided the opportunity to build parent connections, and form relationships with those who were also navigating their child's transition to school.

EA 2: Customising information

Facebook was found to be crucial in making connections and and sharing information with families. As noted earlier, some families were experiencing transition to school with their eldest or only child, whilst others had previous experiences from which to draw upon. Information provided by schools has been criticised in transition research by Dockett and Perry (1999) as being "generic", with the same information shared to all families in the same way. At the pre-liminal phase, I found that it was important to gain a baseline knowledge of families' requirements so that I could develop a transition plan to share orientation information that was pertinent to a specific group of families. The transition plan in my study was guided by the families' initial questionnaire responses and responded to the ideas that came up from the group. I identified this as key in shaping the transition information for families from the "point at which each family is at" (Correia & Marques-Pinto, 2016, p. 259). I considered that my making early connections with families would mean that they were more likely to feel comfortable in requesting specific information to support their transition. In responding to their requests, I was able to refine or add information, developing a range of resources that families could draw upon when necessary.

In employing "generic" or "traditional orientation practices", it is unlikely that the needs of specific families could be identified effectively. Facebook afforded multi-modal responses that could be individualised for each family, and a range of digital tools that could be used to customise how resources were shared with families, for example, photos, video, polling and postings. The customisation of resources is supported by findings from Rous and Hallan (2012) and Miller (2014) who advocated that individualised transition resources be developed for transitioning families. The "Patrick stories" were an example of a resource developed for families to use at home with their children. They were an individualised transition resource in terms of video content, being specific to the school context, and parents were able to access and use the videos in a way that worked for them with their child. The videos were designed

to be interactive, and offered key questions for families to discuss with their child. Translated versions of the stories in Mandarin were provided to support some families' specific needs. The videos, along with the translated versions, were shared on Facebook and accessible to all families.

Rather than delivering information to all families on a single occasion, such as a parent information evening, my use of Facebook provided parents with ongoing opportunities to access transition information so that they could re-visit information when appropriate. At the pre-liminal phase, the DAT "Making connections" generated two EAs, "Sharing stories" and "Customising information". Both contributed to connections between the families and me, to enable information to be customised to meet all families' requirements.

Figure 15 offers my framework of facilitation of the families' transition process at the pre-liminal phase. It shows the identified DAT "Making connections" and its two contributing EAs (EA 1 and 2), "Sharing stories" and "Customising information".



Figure 15: Identified DAT for the pre-liminal phase of customising the families' transition process.

Forming relationships

The large grey arrow located at the end of the pre-liminal phase in Figure 1 represents my ongoing facilitation of a group of families' transition process founded on forming relationships. At the pre-liminal phase, making connections with and between the transitioning families was essential, as this provided a means to begin to develop positive

relationships with families and for families to get to know other transitioning families. DAT 2 and DAT 3 further contributed towards this overall aim and will be discussed in the facilitation of the liminal and post-liminal phase of the families' transition in this chapter. At the pre-liminal phase, it has been argued that the identified DAT "Making connections" prioritised the development of EAs. These actions could have been planned for the needs of the wider family group or developed in response to an individual family's requirements.

Engagement with families at the pre-liminal phase focused on building connections using Facebook. Facebook facilitated a way for parents to contact me when it was convenient for them to ask questions, and for me to share information with the families as a wider group. At the pre-liminal phase, initial engagement was evidenced by how the families interacted with my Facebook postings. They began by using emoji, and eventually some parents began to post and engage with me and each other. In posting in a group space, the parents could begin to form relationships with the other group members whose children would be in the same NE class, providing an opportunity for parents to form their own support network. The following section discusses the second DAT; "Developing engagement".

Liminal DAT: Developing engagement

The DAT "Developing engagement" comprised of three EAs identified at the liminal phase: "customising practices", "sharing moments of the school day" and "social events". The EAs involved both pre-planned activities and responsive actions to facilitate individual families' needs that were identified from the Facebook data.

I found that using Facebook as an ongoing channel for families to engage with me as their child's new teacher, and with each other, provided parents with an effective way to ask questions and advice. Rous and Hallam (2012) found that to facilitate ongoing home-school engagement, two key areas for development were prioritised: communication and relationships. In my study Facebook provided an accessible and manageable way to maintain frequent home-school communication; and over time, communication was revealed as a fundamental element of engagement that strengthened home-school relationships. By the liminal phase of their transition, some parents were responding to my postings, using emoji and their own postings. Sometimes parents engaged with each other around specific aspects of their transition process. Through families' postings I was able to see that their interests had begun to shift once their children started school. My findings aligned with research by

Griebel et al. (2017) and Hanke et al. (2017), who identified that as families' experiences change over the course of their transition, those changes can impact different aspects of their everyday routines at different times for each family. In order for my facilitation to be effective, I needed to develop responsive and flexible transition practices designed to support a range of families' circumstances impacted by various aspects of change as their child started school.

The following sections discuss the contributions that each of the three EAs, "Customising practices", "Sharing day-to-day moments" and "Social events" made to the overall DAT, "Developing engagement".

EA 3: Customising practices

EA 3 focused on developing specific resources that met the requests of individual families, which were simultaneously shared and added to group's collective resources. In their research, Rous and Hallam (2012) advocated for schools to customise their transition practices to meet the diverse needs of all families. In my interactions with families on Facebook, digital communication provided me with a way to meet families' requirements by identifying how aspects of change were affecting families, and at what point in their transition process. Rouse and O'Brien (2017) and Edwards and Kutaka (2015) reinforce the importance of providing space for families and school to develop a shared transition agenda. In conceptualising this further, a teacher's facilitation of a responsive transition process is developed by engaging with families to negotiate the support provided for each family. I created activities that encouraged families to disclose more about themselves – for example, sharing and explaining a photo of their child – so that my actions would be sensitive to the requirements of each family. Responding to the families' emergent needs was a key part of my facilitation as their child started school.

As each child started school at the liminal phase, the families needed time to adjust to their newly assigned roles and responsibilities of becoming a parents of a school child. It was important that in my engagement using the Facebook page I monitored and noticed the changing needs of group members as they adjusted to their child starting school. For example, parents had previously asked questions about school processes and procedures. Once their child started school, postings generally showed a stronger interest in children's learning and an ongoing curiosity about their child's day at school. Research by Goff (2017) affirms the importance of flexibility and adaptability in the development of home-school

collaboration, emphasising that a teacher's facilitation needs to be responsive and open to dialogue. Using Facebook meant that I could develop transition practices based on questions and needs that the families shared in their postings.

EA 4: Sharing moments of the day

The liminal phase was represented by the children in my study starting school; and in line with van Gennep's (1960/1977) theory, this constituted a disorientating and potentially stressful point of adjustment for each family. The families' interests shifted from my providing orientation-type information to sharing moments of the children's day. Sharing aspects of daily classroom activities enabled parents to see how their child was settling into their new routines and making a positive start to school. Research by Hanke et al. (2017) found that parents sought a real opportunity to observe their child in class. I also found parents were naturally curious of their child's experiences in class. Emerging from my daily engagement with families in both Facebook and in the classroom, I found that most parents wanted reassurance and feedback about their child's start to school. Similarly, Miller et al. (2011) observed that families may not always find the adjustments to starting school easy, I responded to my families' requirements by sharing daily postings of the children in class, and these were found to offer regular reassurance to parents.

EA 5: Social Events

The findings at the liminal phase corroborate those of Dubé et al. (2005) who emphasised the significance of providing face-to-face opportunities to online groups in the form of events. This point will be addressed more in Chapter 8, in the context of developing groups members' connections within an online Community of Practice. However, it is acknowledged that two discussion chapters, Chapter 6 and Chapter 8, collectively substantiate the important contribution that social events made to cementing the relationships between the transitioning families. Two face-to-face social events were planned in my study, the *mihi whakataua* and family Rock hunt. The goal was to help families to form connections through socialising with one another, in the school environment, and with their new teacher.

In my study, I found face-to-face events consolidated the families' connections outside their digital group. My findings connect with those of Kuusimäki et al. (2019), who found that while digital communication between families and their child's teacher assists in building connections, community face-to-face meetings are needed in order to develop a more personal and individual connection. Brooker (2002) also suggested that schools provide

opportunities for families to build new relationships with people at school through face-to-face events, which she found an effective means of supporting families in their transition process. My study further identified that purposing social events for families, not just parents, provided a valuable opportunity for families to further generate their own social networks to include their children. Additionally, face-to-face social events in turn strengthened connections within the Facebook group, evidenced through group member's continued engagement. Developing a blended approach over selecting either a fully face-to-face or digital experience allowed me to draw on a range of flexible and accessible ways to engage with families and respond to their circumstances. In line with the findings of Bull et al. (2008), using technology enabled me to communicate regularly and share information that reached all families, particularly those parents unable to come to class with their child. Using video, photos and postings on Facebook offered multiple ways for me to share children's learning and to engage directly with parents. Similarly, Higgins and Cherrington (2017) noted this potential in app-based technology, such as Seesaw and Storypark apps, to facilitate regular communication about a child's learning between parent, teacher, and child.

Building on to my framework of facilitation at the pre-liminal phase, Figure 16 shows the conceptualised DAT of "Developing engagement" at the liminal phase EA 3, 4 and 5, "Customising practices", "Sharing day-to-day moments" and "Hosting social events", supported the development of engagement between the families and with me. Planned activities to illustrate examples of the EAs are bulleted under each action.

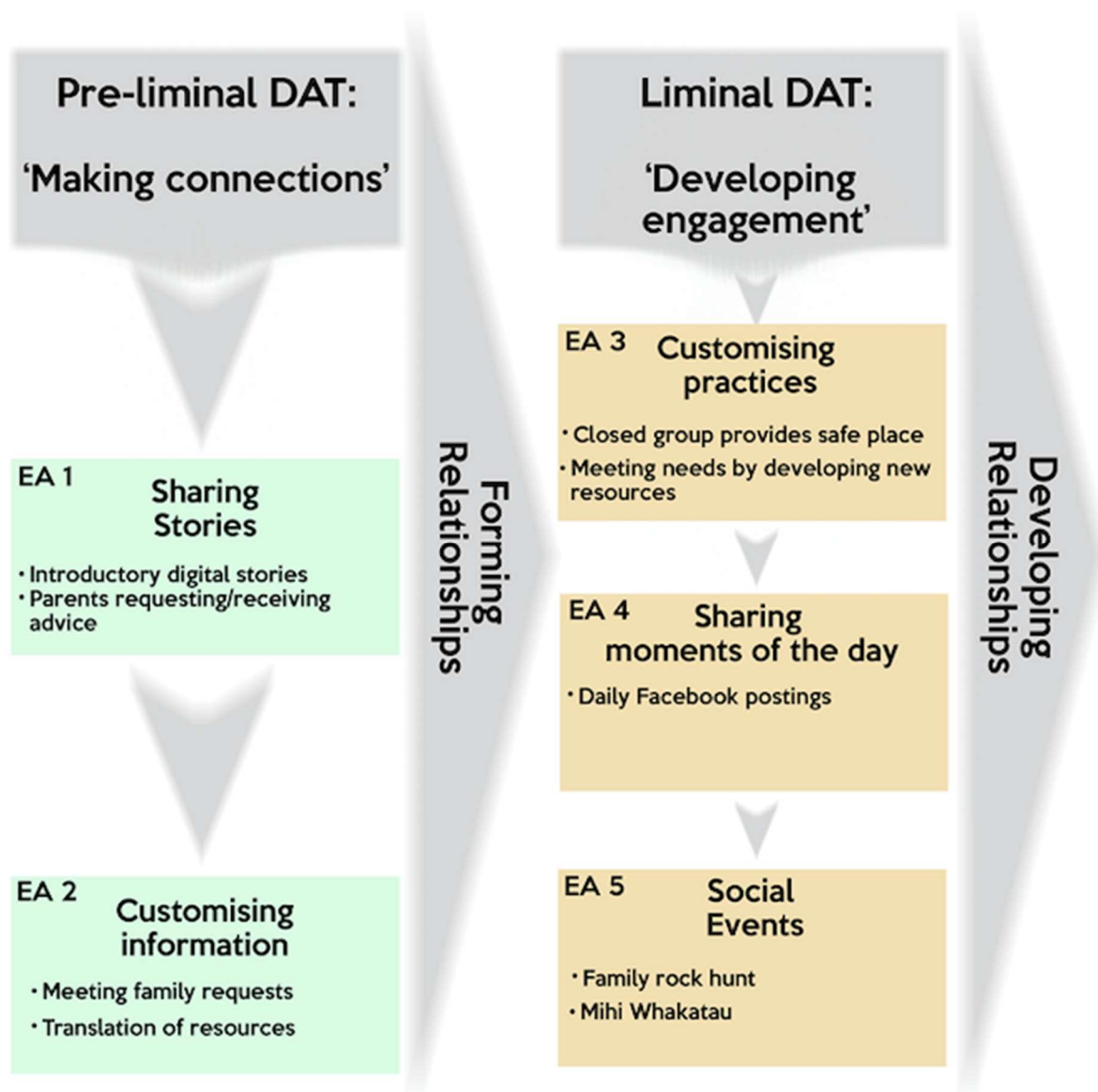


Figure 16: Identified DAT for the liminal phase of customising the families' transition process.

In Figure 16 the large grey arrow, again, highlights the ongoing significance of developing relationships as a central purpose in a teacher's facilitation. EA 5 "Social events" was important at this phase in promoting opportunities for face-to-face engagement that built on the initial social connections made via Facebook during the pre-liminal phase.

Simultaneously, at the liminal phase, families were still engaging and collaborating within the Facebook group space. This hybrid form of engagement – online and face-to-face – will be discussed further in Chapter 8 in the context of a Community of Practice.

Post-liminal DAT: Facilitating needs

The post-liminal phase for the transitioning families was represented by their children's regular attendance at school becoming an established part of the families' daily routines. Much transition to school research does not extend its exploration of families' experiences beyond the child's first day of school, so there is little research that focuses on learning about families' needs at the post-liminal phase. However, my study identified that families still required advice to support their individual needs as they established themselves as part of the school community.

Maintaining relationships was the DAT identified at the post-liminal phase. This was important if I was to support each family's adjustments in becoming established as members of the school community. For those families for whom this was their first experience of transition to school, the post-liminal process might have highlighted unfamiliar experiences for them that still required individual support. I further found that each family's previous experiences and circumstances influenced how quickly they felt part of their new school community. The findings from this study have concurred with those of Ackesjö (2017) and Giallo et al. (2008), who identified those who are confronting their first child's transition generally experience the effects of the changes involved more profoundly. However, it is important to note that even parents who already have children attending school can still find they have new things to learn. For example, I can endorse the findings of Peters (2004), who noted that some of the families in her study had recently moved to New Zealand having attended ECE in a different country. Some families in my study had also recently immigrated to New Zealand, and both their younger and older children were starting school in a new country. For another family in my study, their youngest child was starting in a different school from the one where their elder siblings had attended. Teachers cannot assume that because parents already have a child at school they know how to support their younger child's transition.

Analysis of the data gained through the families' review questionnaire revealed that my responsive development of facilitation over time enabled most families to move more smoothly to post-liminality. This placed an emphasis in the post-liminal phase on my maintaining relationships with families in order to continue to be able to respond to their specific needs. Two EAs were identified as being central in my facilitation of families' needs;

“Maintaining communication: Keeping Facebook open” and “Responding to individual and group needs”. Each will now be discussed.

EA 6: Maintaining communication: Keeping Facebook open

Using Facebook, I was able to address the challenge posed across research studies of how to maintain positive, regular and personal connection between home and school (Chou, 2015; Kuusimäki et al., 2019; Reddy et al., 2003). As advocated by Chou (2015), the home-school relationship can be improved by sharing “touching moments” that show an appreciation for a child’s development and help parents understand that growth. In keeping up frequent and informal digital connections with families, I supported a way for them to be involved and to feel part of daily school life. Bearing in mind Chou’s (2015) recommendation, I made sure that my postings shared entertaining moments and celebrated children’s daily achievements.

As well as sharing moments of the children’s day, I also used Facebook as a place to remind the group of forthcoming school events. The New Zealand Education Review Office (2015) *Continuity of learning transition from early childhood services to schools report*, recommends that schools provide both formal and informal opportunities to develop relationships between home and educational settings. Posting daily updates in Facebook at the post-liminal phase was an important action in supporting families to find their place in the school community. By choosing to maintain relationships mostly through social media, families in my research were able to maintain their connections with other families in their child’s class. This was significant because as the children moved to a new class at the start of the academic year, families had the opportunity to develop an ongoing network, and in some cases develop friendships which could sustain and support them in their child’s next transition to Year One. Facebook served as a continuous community space where families could contact their teacher and share challenges and celebrations with other group members.

EA 7: Responding to individual and group needs

By maintaining a positive home-school relationship I was able to respond to what I interpreted as group and individual needs identified from the data. Linking with recommendations by the *Starting School Report* (OECD, 2017), I continued to use Facebook as a tool, having first contacted there and, crucially, maintained my communication after the children had started school. Facebook being kept open meant families had a place where they could continue to post questions that required individual support.

Some parents at the post-liminal phase were able to maintain their daily connections with school in both digital and face-to-face contexts. Operating in two contexts provided the families with a blended approach and the option of “choosing the right channel” (Kuusimäki et al., 2019, p. 6) to help sustain relationships with the teacher and other families. Having access to both channels provided a more inclusive approach to families who did not have the opportunity of regularly connecting within the classroom.

Figure 17 shows the conceptualisation of the DAT at the post-liminal phase. The grey arrow points onwards, continuing the importance of maintaining relationships for the future. The two EAs, EA 6 and 7, demonstrate how actions were formed by the identified DAT of “Facilitating needs”.

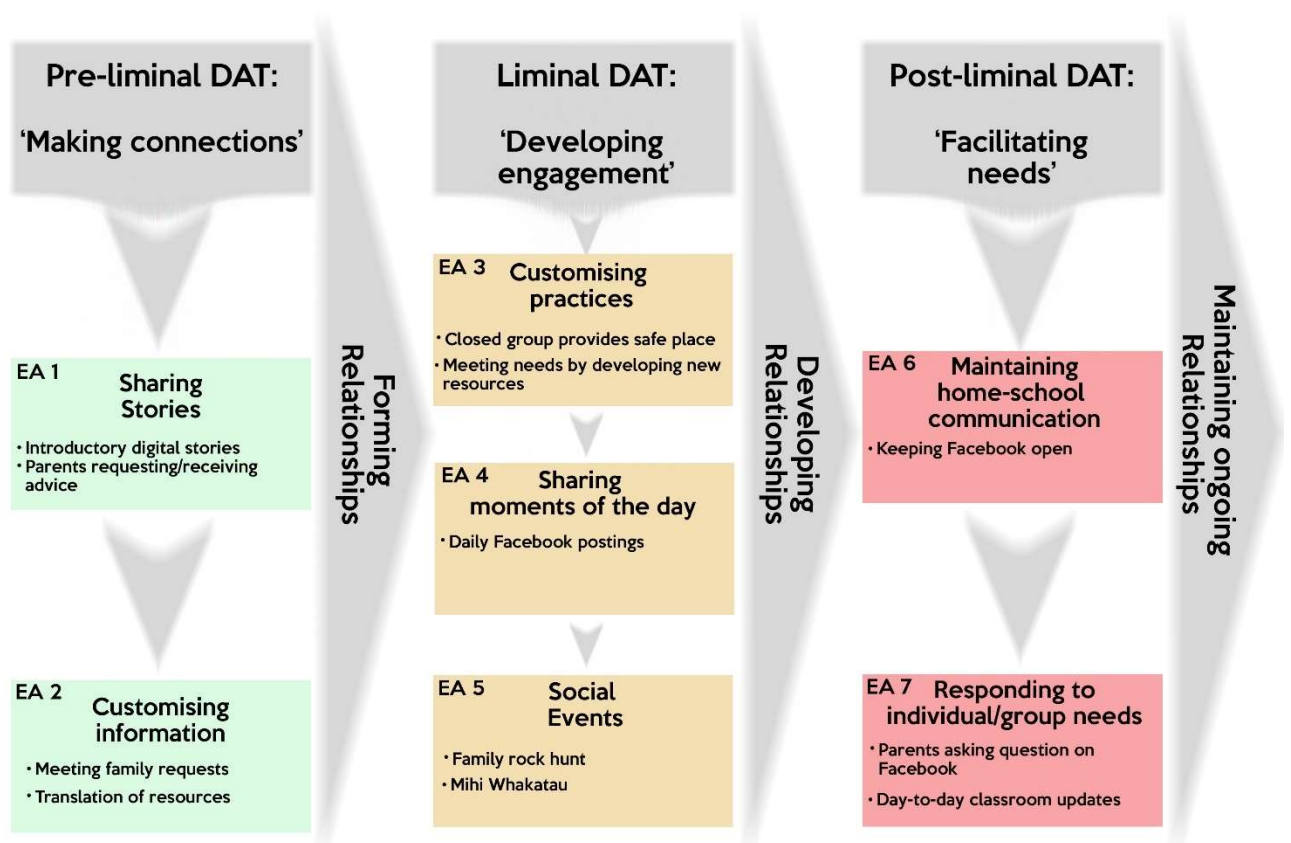


Figure 17: Identified DAT for the post-liminal phase of customising the families’ transition process.

The following section presents a framework that shares an overview of the key concepts (DATs) for facilitating responsive interventions across the three phases of a family's transition process.

Guiding framework of facilitation

Throughout the development of the transition process, three identified DATs prioritised a teacher's facilitation of a families' transition to school: "Making connections", "Developing engagement" and "Facilitating needs". Whilst the actions that supported the DAT changed based on my interpretation of each family's needs, at the heart of facilitation was the development of relationships developed by applying a blended approach. As shown in Figure 18, each phase is cumulative, contributing towards the overall goal of developing home-school relationships. It has already been argued that each family's transition is influenced by their own previous experiences and circumstances, making each family's transition process unique. As the families' engagement with me varied, so too it will vary if the framework is applied by a different teacher, in another context. Some families used Facebook to ask questions about aspects of their transition, others chose not to engage in dialogue within the group space. Provided with a responsive, social framework of facilitation, families were as active and involved as they chose to be in their engagement, either through Facebook, attending face-to-face events, or daily visits to the classroom.

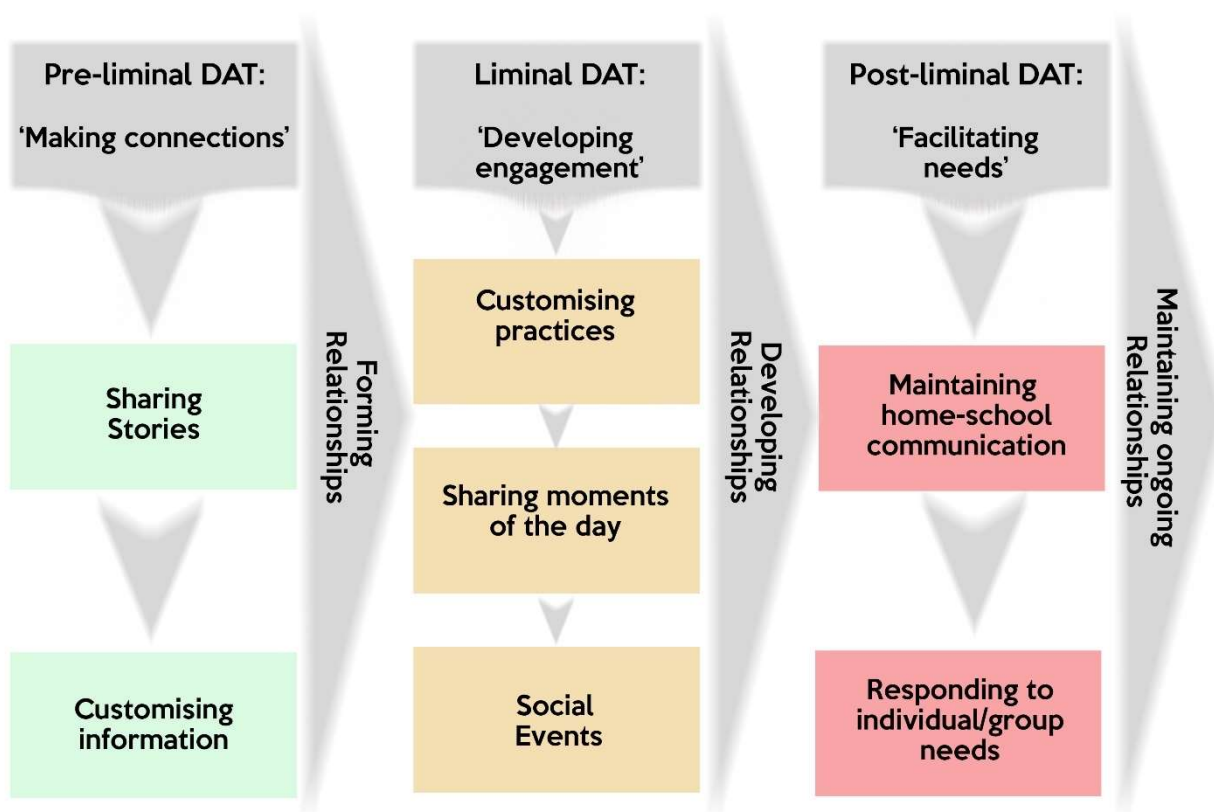


Figure 18: Guiding framework of facilitation.

By developing opportunities to socially engage with families, a teacher can facilitate a transition process that supports individual families' circumstances and that is responsive to families' changing needs over time.

Chapter summary

This study has viewed transition to school as a context for collaboration, where transition practices and strategies are constructed through social engagement. Figure 18 presents a flexible framework, where there is no prescribed or fixed route, but space and time for schools and families to collaboratively engage. Each DAT conceptualised an overall approach underpinned by developing relationships. Responsive facilitation is enabled through home-school engagement, so that families' changing needs can be shared and EAs shaped in response. My findings contribute to transition to school research through the practical application of van Gennepe's (1960/1977) theory of transition. By theorising transition across the three phases, and prioritising a social constructivist focus, this study has argued that a school's transition intervention benefits from a long-term trajectory. This is because

relationships require the time and space to develop. The following chapter responds to the implications of the potential development of a Community of Practice among the transitioning families.

Chapter 7: Findings: Facebook engagement, activities and interactions

The focus of the study has been on developing a collaboratively customised transition to school, paying particular attention to Facebook interactions. This chapter presents the findings from which conclusions will be drawn and discussed in Chapter 8 to help answer research question 2: “How might a collaboratively constructed transition to school using social media assist with the development of a CoP that includes families, ECE and NE teachers?” Data in this chapter is grouped by types of interaction made by each of the two Facebook groups: from members’ participation with the content of the Facebook page, to their engagement with each other. By grouping and plotting the data in this way I hoped to find out whether there had been increased levels of engagement across the groups. Increased engagement would suggest that connections had developed between group members, and that the content of the Facebook page had sustained the groups’ members’ motivation to participate. To analyse the data, interaction types such as “view only”; “emoji”; “responding to facilitator” and “supporting each other” were used to categorise the Facebook data, firstly, to help show how the engagement changed over time, and secondly, to highlight where my facilitation had helped engagement. The analysis also identified other triggers such as events that increased engagement.

The findings are presented according to interaction type, firstly from the families’ Facebook data, then the teachers’ Facebook data. It has not been my intention to draw comparisons between the two groups’ engagement. In choosing to report findings of families and teachers separately, my purpose is to provide a developing picture over time of each group’s engagement and ongoing commitment to their Facebook group. Finally, the findings that focus on my facilitation actions and responses to the Facebook groups’ engagement are presented.

Participation and engagement: Families

In my initial analysis of the Facebook family group data, I categorised the activity generated by each posting into seven different types of interaction: facilitator initiated; family initiated;

facilitator response; family response; seen by; emoji (facilitator) and emoji (family). Having categorised the group activity into these different forms, the pattern of the families' ongoing participation with the Facebook page and their engagement with members of the group began to emerge. In analysing the seven different types of interaction, I was able to ascertain members' level of participation from "seen by" (viewed postings) to engaging with each other (initiating/responding postings). I considered "seen by" to indicate an individual's interaction directly with the Facebook page. In viewing a post, the individual was not necessarily engaging with the group, only the Facebook content. Sharing an emoji or responding to the posting with a reply I considered as indicating of group engagement, because the members' responses were visible to the rest of the group. Replying to postings clearly showed a group member's response to the original post. I judged sharing emoji as an indication of engagement, as group members were using the icons to offer a response or express an idea or emotion.

Five of the seven different types of interaction over the seven-month data collection period are represented on the graph presented in Figure 19. The graph shows facilitator-initiated posts; family-initiated posts; facilitator response posts; family response posts; and emoji used by the facilitator. Two further graphs indicate the number of posts that were viewed or "seen by" over each two-week period (see Figure 20) and the number of emoji used by families (see Figure 21). When an individual viewed a post, they activated the "seen by" function which provided numerical data for graphing. The graph in Figure 21 shows the number of emoji used by families over the seven-month period. A full breakdown of the families' data can be found in Appendix 10, where each posting made during each two-week period has been analysed for evidence of the seven types of interaction noted above.

The graph below (Figure 19) plots the participation and engagement of the families' Facebook group. The different colour lines of the graph represent five of the seven different types of interaction, for example, the top blue line tracks the number of postings that were initiated by me (as the facilitator). The horizontal axis of the graph plots the data over two-week intervals. Each interval is matched with dates indicated on the table (top right). For example, number 1 on the horizontal axis is identified as the initial two-week period (period 1) of data collection which began on the 6th of June (as shown on the table). The vertical axis indicates the counts, or total number, of each action that occurred during each identified two-week period.

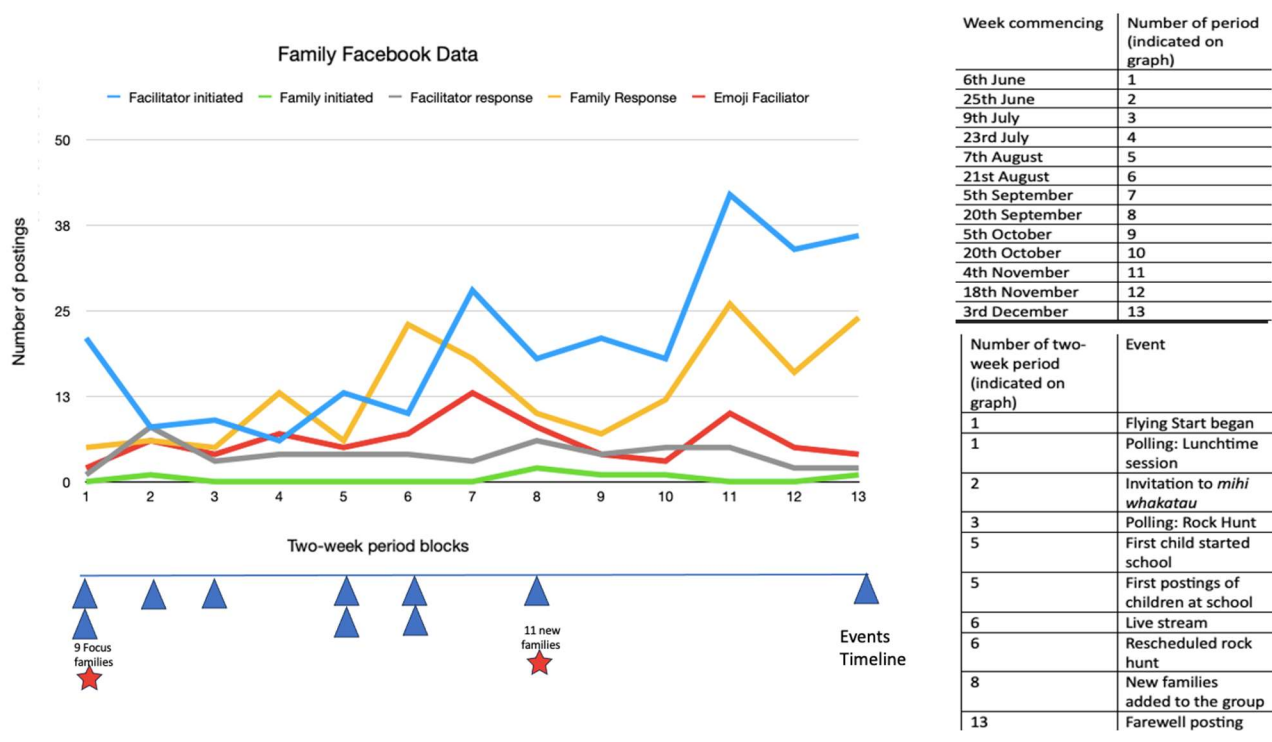


Figure 19: Graph showing different types of Facebook interaction over the data collection period.

The events timeline beneath the graph in Figure 19 identifies significant occurrences over the seven-month period. Each blue triangle indicates an event which is then plotted underneath the horizontal axis of the graph, aligning to the corresponding two-week period. The date when each event took place is indicated in the table (bottom right). For example, during period 1 (within the two-week period beginning the 6th of June) there are two triangles on the events timeline. One triangle indicates the start of the Flying Start the school’s established pre-school visit programme, and the other represents the polling for a lunchtime transition session on Facebook. The graph shows that during period 1 (the initial two weeks of the data collection) I initiated 21 postings, the families initiated 0 postings and five of my initiated postings were responded to by the families.

Figure 20 shows the data related to the families’ activation of the “seen by” function. The “seen by” data was visible to the group facilitator only. However, activating this function did not provide me with clear data that differentiated whether the same person had revisited a particular post once, or several times. The data is only reflective of how many views each post recorded over the two-week period. The graph shows that the postings made over periods 11-13 were those most viewed during the data collection timeframe. Period 11

recorded almost 1,200 views of posts, with an average of 28.3 posts “seen by” families during this two-week period. The graph also shows that when families were added to the group in period 8, the new group members did not appear to review postings from period 1-6 (indicated by the lower number of views). For example, in period 3, an average of 8.6 posts were viewed by families. However, an increase in views which occurred during period 7 showed an average of 14.6 posts were “seen by” families, suggesting that some new families had reviewed posts from this more recent period. This probably relates to the fact that the new families mostly viewed postings that were about their children, most of whom started school in periods 7-9.

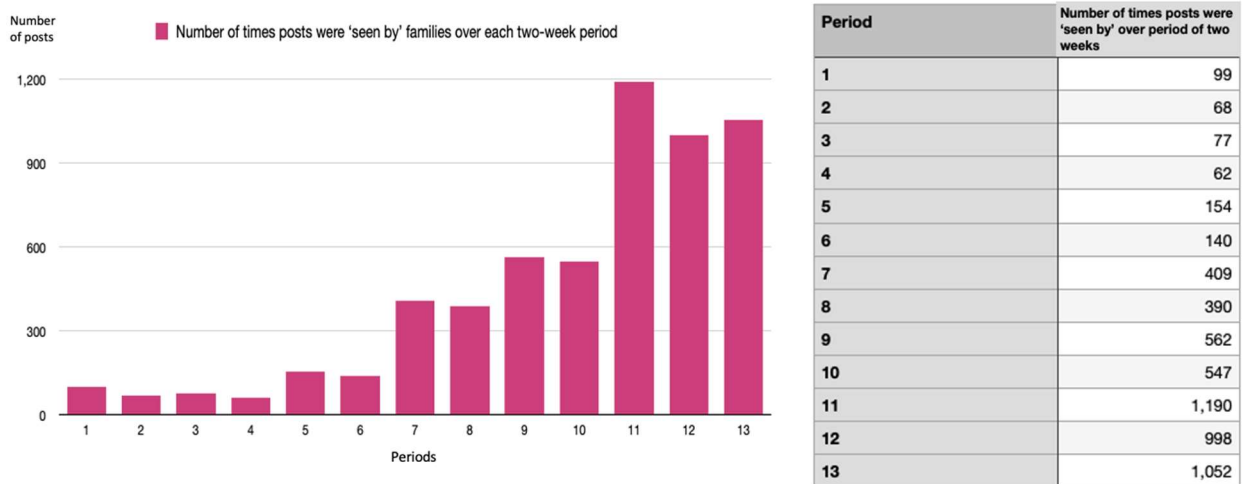


Figure 20: Number of times posts were “seen by” families over each of the two-week periods.

Figure 21 (below) presents the families’ use of emoji. The graph shows that from period 5 onwards that members increasingly used emoji to acknowledge, react to a posting, or included emoji within their own postings.

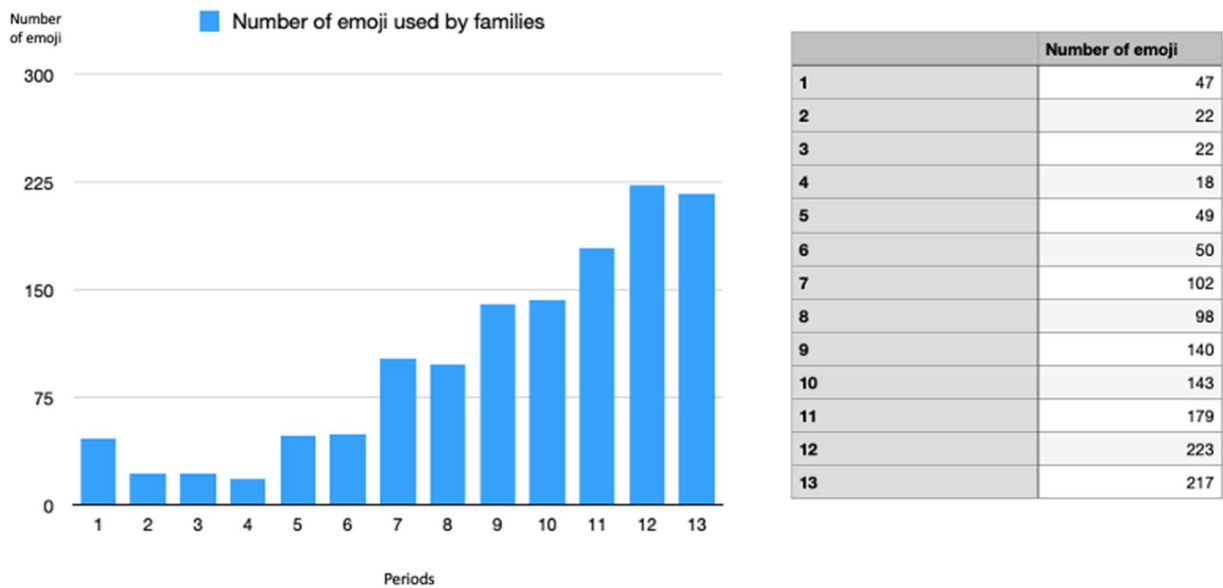


Figure 21: Families’ use of emoji over each of the 13 periods.

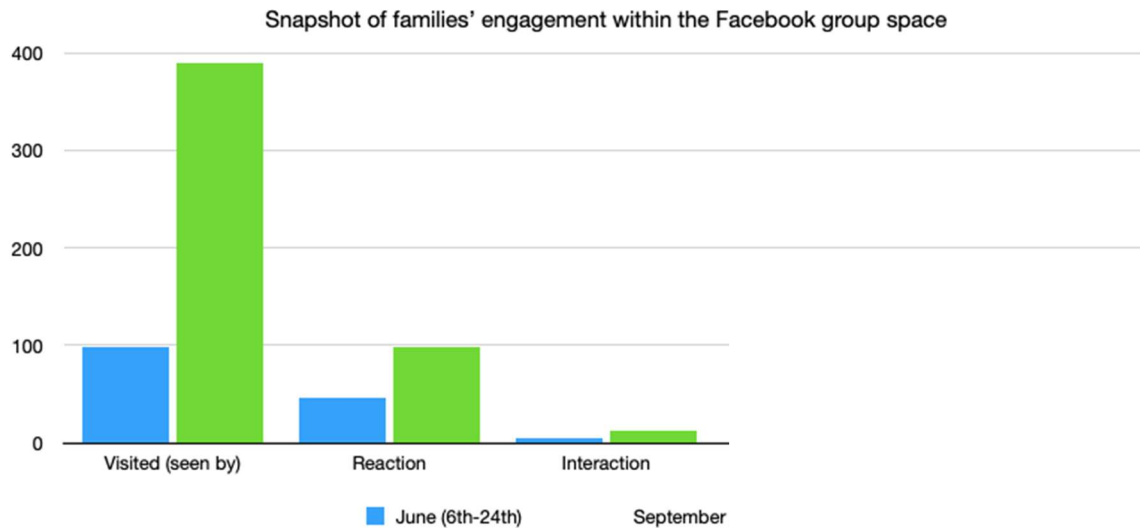
During the seven-month data collection period two groups of families joined the Facebook group at two different entry points. The focus families joined in June, identified on Figure 19 as period 1, whilst additional families entered the group in September, indicated on the graph during period 8. The following section analyses the Facebook interactions of the two intakes and compares the data that developed during their initial two-week period of the respective groups.

Families’ initial engagement in the Facebook group

As already noted, the families entered the group during two specific points of the transition process. Nine focus families joined the group in June (period 1, see Figure 19) while eleven new families were added in September (period 8, see Figure 19). Comparing and contrasting the families’ interactions generated in the initial two weeks of their respective entry to Facebook was important. I wanted to know if there were similar patterns of increasing engagement demonstrated by both groups, and whether the eleven new families’ participation and engagement might have been influenced by their entry to a pre-established group of families. Overall, the data generated from these two groups of families provided insights about participant activity in the family Facebook group.

Figure 22 (below) summarises the Facebook activities of each of the two family groups during the initial two-week period of their respective entry to the group. The table shows a breakdown of how many parents visited the Facebook page, the number of emoji shared as a

reaction to the postings, and the number of initiated and response postings. The graph shows that the interaction of the new families, in each category of responses/interactions (visited, reaction, interaction) during September 21-29 (indicated by the green columns of the graph) was found to be around double that of the nine focus families' interaction in June (indicated by the blue columns). This increased activity coincides with the more than doubled number of participants, to a total of twenty families.



	June (6th-24th) x9 focus families	September (21st-29th) x 20 families		
Visited (seen by)	99	390		
Reaction	47	98		
Interaction	5	12		

Figure 22: Snapshot of families' Facebook activity 6th-24th June and 21st-29th September.

In the initial two weeks, the data shows that the focus families (June) regularly visited the Facebook page, as indicated by the “seen by” function of Facebook. Both groups also began to use emoji during their initial two-week period, and this usage increased over time, as previously noted in Figure 21. Figure 22 shows an increase in “reactions”. By reacting to the postings using emoji, families were making their interactions with the Facebook page visible to the other group members. As noted earlier, the families had mostly activated the “seen by” function which was visible only to the facilitator.

Responding postings began for the focus families after I posted information about the forthcoming visits scheduled for the children. At this point, the Facebook group had been

operating exactly one week prior to this actual first posting. Figure 23 shares this first posting made by the focus families. The pink circle represents my postings, the blue circle those of Dylan’s Mum, and the cream circle, Morgan’s Mum. Previous to this posting I had mostly provided families with information preparing them for school, such as the Patrick stories. Although still information-driven, this particular posting was about an experience that families were were anticipating: their first visit to the classroom. For some families who were transitioning their eldest child, The school’s existing visit programme: Flying Start provided them with their first opportunity to interact with the school environment.

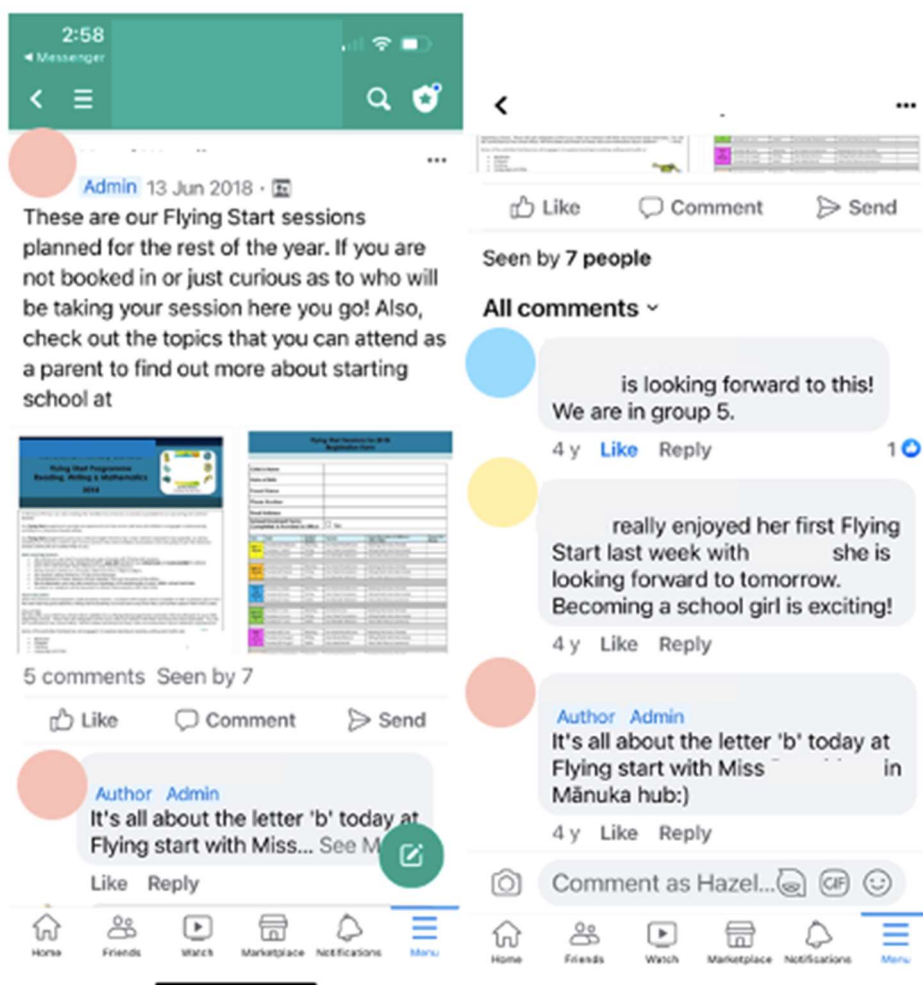
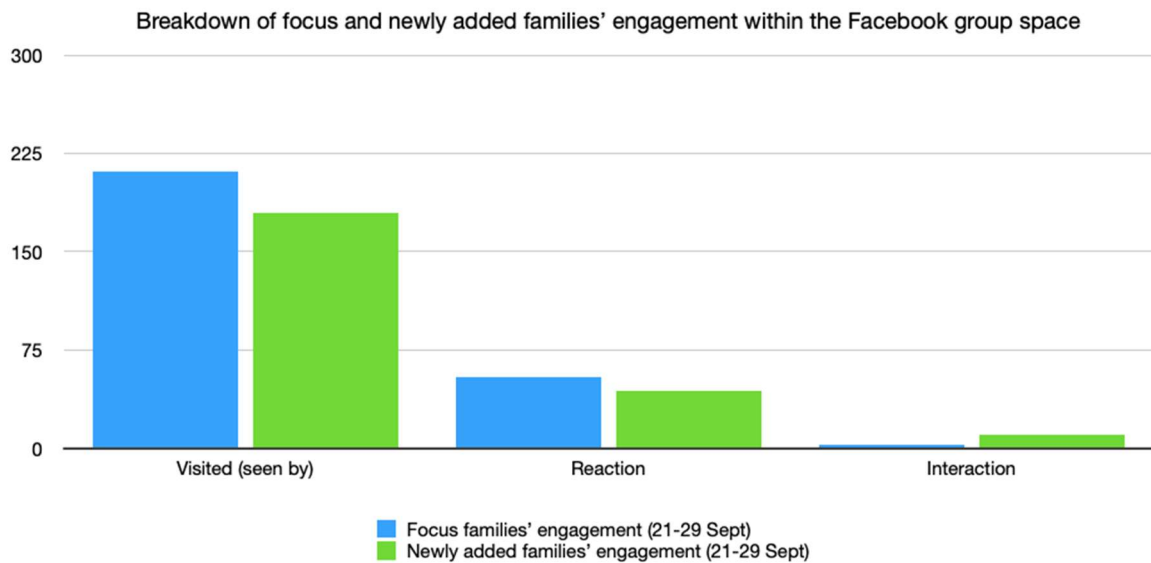


Figure 23: First family Facebook posting.

Comparison of families’ engagement

To see if the newly added families demonstrated a similar pattern of interaction to the focus families, Figure 24 offers a further break down of both groups of families within the 21-29

September period. It shows the focus families' and the new families' separate engagement at this point in time, enabling a comparison of the two groups' activity.



	September (21-29) Focus families' engagement	September (21-29) Newly added families' engagement
Visited (seen by)	211	179
Reaction	54	44
Interaction	2	10

Figure 24: Breakdown of focus families and newly added families' engagement (September 21-29).

Figure 24 shows that the new families (green columns) generally viewed fewer postings and reacted to fewer postings using emoji than the focus families (blue columns). However the new families took time to begin to interact with the group by initiating and responding to postings. For example, as shown on Figure 24 from 21-29 September, within the first two weeks of the new families entering the group, a total of twelve parents initiated or offered a response posting, and ten of these were made by the new families.

The difference in time it took between the two groups to initiate their own posts was 20 days from when each group had entered the Facebook space. The focus families took 21 days for the first family to initiate a post. This compares with the first posting initiated by a new

parent made on the same day as they had entered the group. Four days later, another new parent also made their first posting.

Some assumptions may be made from this comparison. The new families may have been influenced by being able to see the history of previous activity generated by the focus families. As already noted, an increase of viewed postings during period 7 was indicated on Figure 19. The new families entering the group had the opportunity to be able to review and observe how the focus families had engaged with these postings, perhaps influencing them to post. For example, Figure 25 shows a posting made on the 25th September, when Abdul's Mum initiated a posting that shared photos of the rock hunt. Abdul's Mum was one of the new families; she had visited the Facebook page daily since entering the group. Previously she had mostly acknowledged postings using emoji. The posting that she shared with the group about the rock hunt was added four days after she had joined the Facebook group. Abdul's Mum is represented by the pink circle.



Figure 25: Example of a posting initiated by one of the new families to the Facebook group in her initial two weeks of entering the group.

Conclusions can be drawn from comparing the activity made in their initial two weeks of entry by the two family groups. The focus families appeared to take longer to begin posting, whilst some of the new families appeared to respond and initiate postings almost instantly after entering the group. In examining factors which may have influenced the more active start made by some of the new families, two conclusions can be proposed: firstly, the new families benefitted from having access to an established group's history, and secondly, at that point in time my postings mainly shared moments of the children's day at school, which offered more reason for participants to engage. Both factors were deemed to have influenced group members' engagement. The following sections presents the findings of each type of engagement evidenced from the whole families' Facebook activity.

Types of engagement

In presenting the key findings from the family Facebook data, seven types of interaction were identified in the families' Facebook data (presented in Figure 19, 20 and 21). These seven types of interaction are now further grouped to reflect four main types of engagement that more clearly show the purpose of the interaction. These are: "view only"; "emoji"; "responding to facilitator" and "supporting each other". Each will now be presented, along with conclusions drawn about how families' interacted and engaged in the Facebook group space.

View only

In the initial two weeks of establishing the Facebook groups (indicated by period 1 on the graph shown in Figure 19) the most popular responses made by parents activated the "seen by" function. During this two-week period 1,099 posts were viewed by the families. Figure 26 shows the first posting I initiated, welcoming the families to the group (I am represented by the pink circle in the posting) which was "seen by" by four group members. All nine focus families entered the group at the same time, but the "seen by function" showed that only four group members had begun to explore the page on their entry. This was demonstrated by the initial post being viewed only four times by the families.

Activating the "seen-by"function gave evidence of family interaction with the Facebook page on the first day of the group opening. Viewing postings continued to be the most popular form of interaction used across the family group. The graph in Figure 21 shows that postings were viewed more times over each two week period than they were engaged with using emoji or response postings. This suggests that most of the group members were visiting Facebook

regularly, perhaps using the page as a way to keep up to date with information. It is possible that family members were interested in the Facebook content, and this motivated their regular visits to the page.

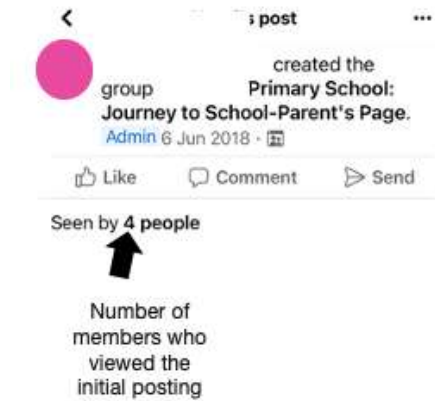


Figure 26: Initial posting on the families' Facebook page indicating number of parents who had viewed the post.

Emoji

By the end of period 1 (6th-24th June) families were still activating the “seen by” function as they viewed postings, but some members had begun to use emoji to acknowledge postings that they found interesting. Using emoji meant that the group members’ interactions were visible to the other group members. This perhaps showed that group members were now prepared to reveal themselves to each other, or at least felt comfortable to indicate their interest in the posting. Figure 27 shows an example of the families’ use of the “thumbs up” emoji in a posting I initiated towards the end of period 1.

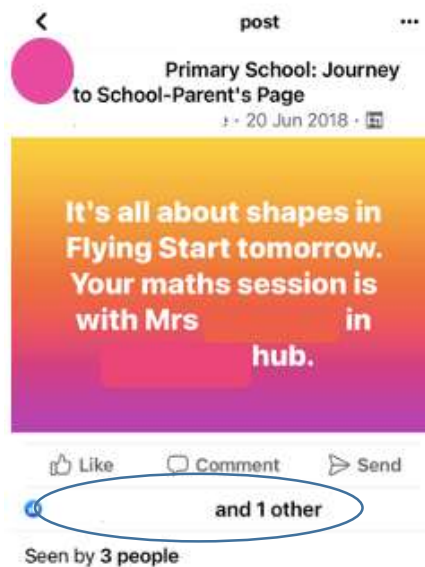


Figure 27: Facebook posting indicating the families' use of "like" emoji in period 1 of their engagement.

During period 1, the family groups sustained a consistent level of interaction using emoji, as shown on Figure 21. Each posting I made during period 1 received an average three "thumbs-up" emoji from the families. The functions on Facebook allowed group members to find out who had "liked" a posting. Therefore, the group members who "liked" a posting were prepared to be identified. It may then follow that seeing that a particular group member had "liked" a post encouraged other group members to also add an emoji response.

Another example of the families' increasing engagement using emoji began to emerge with families selecting various types of emoji (as well as the thumbs-up emoji) to more accurately convey an emotion to the posting. One example (see Figure 28) was a posting made by Charlie's Mum, sharing a joke about Charlie. In the example, Charlie's Mum is represented by the green circle and me by the pink circle.



Figure 28: Posting showing an example of parents' mutual engagement.

As shown in Figure 28, five parents responded to Charlie's Mum selecting the "thumbs-up" and "ha-ha face" emoji, indicating that families were sharing the joke with her.

Families' postings: Responding directly to the facilitator using the tag function

Figure 19 clearly shows that the majority of postings made over the data collection period were initiated by me (represented by the blue line on the graph). During period 3 (9th July- 22nd July) I initiated a total of nine postings. At this point in time, I found that families had started to reply directly to me by "tagging" me into their responses. For example, in a posting I made on the 10th July (at the start of period 3) I shared a new Patrick story about after-school care in response to a question from Dylan's Mum, who then then tagged me into her reply. Another example of where families used the "tag" facility was to direct a question to me. Josie's Mum wanted to know about the school's guidance about sunscreen. *"Hi [Teacher tagged], might be a silly question - but how do we navigate sunblock on our kids over lunchtime? Do we (as parents) teach them to remember to put it on before they go and play, and really hope that they do, or do you have rules about it?"*

Family members tagged me into postings to ensure that I would not miss their post. One example was Connor's Mum who, on a day when I was absent from school due to illness,

tagged me into a posting which shared a photo of Connor, who had finally mastered the skill of writing his name on the whiteboard when he arrived at school. Connor had been persevering for a few days in trying to write his full name. Seeing the posting I was then able to respond to Connor’s Mum and thank her for sharing the moment with me, tagging her into my reply, “(Tag Connor’s Mum) I am missing the children, but so glad that I got to see the beginning of Connor’s day today - feeling like a very special teacher, you have made the start of my day 😊”.

Family members supporting each other in the transition to school

As time went on, family group members began responding to each other’s postings. It was some months after the focus families had entered the group that members began to have “conversations” offering advice and support to other families. For example, during period 10 (20th October-3rd November) indicated on Figure 19), families responded to a posting made by Dylan’s Mum with a question about her son starting school (see Figure 29). The blue circle represents Dylan’s Mum who initiated the posting, replies made by Connor’s Mum (cream circle) and Charlie’s Mum’s (green circle), and my response using emoji (grey circle).

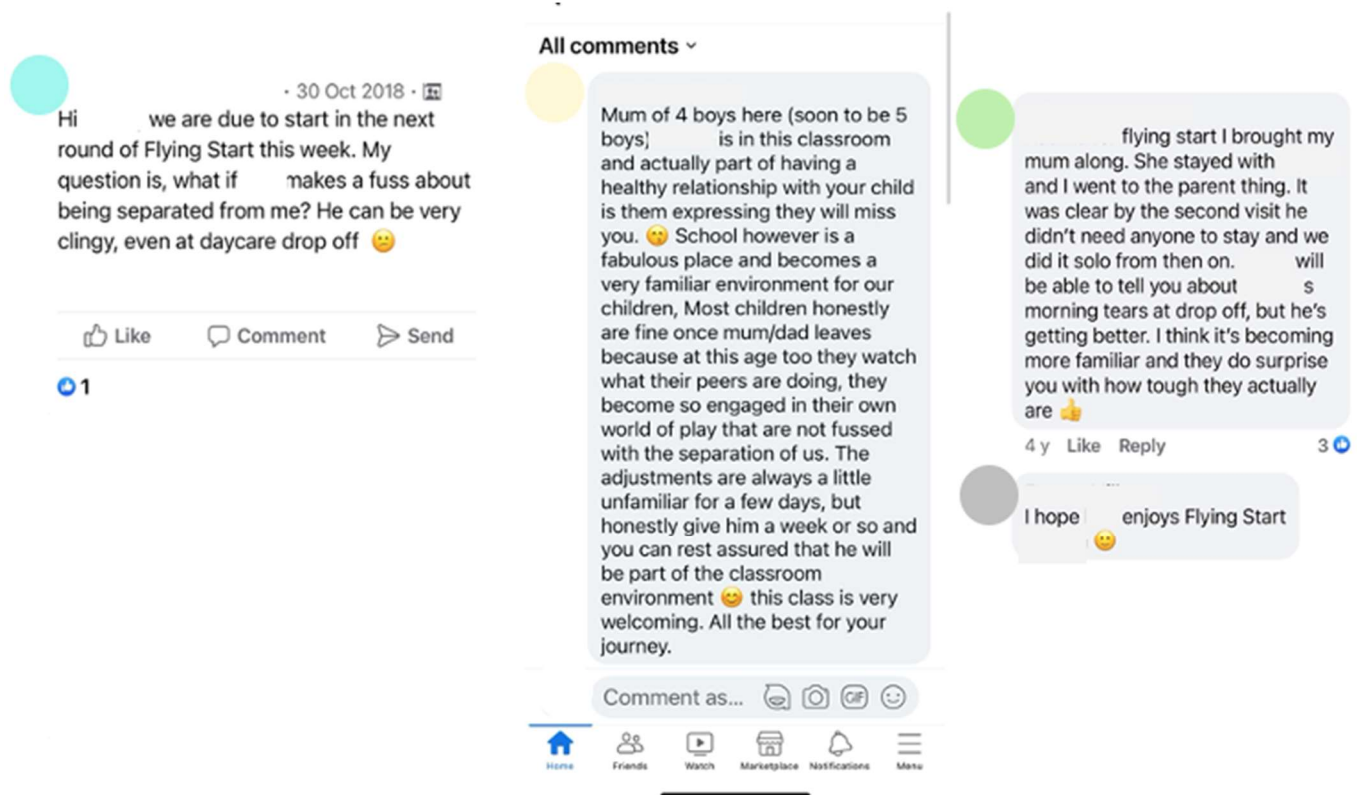


Figure 29: Posting showing parents offering advice and support to each other.

The parent's response postings in Figure 29 show group members offering other parents advice and support. Dylan's Mum was worried about separating herself from Dylan on their arrival at school during their first school visit. Connor's Mum and Josie's Mum both posted successful strategies that they had used with their child to offer reassurance to Dylan's Mum. Dylan's Mum posted the next day to update the group, sharing that Dylan's visit to school had gone well and thanked them for their support.

Another example of parents' offering support to each other can be seen in a post made by Connor's Mum. In it she expressed how valued she had felt in being part of the Facebook group when she posted to let the group know that Connor was leaving our class to start at a new school. Connor's Mum thanked the group for making Connor's start to school a positive experience, sharing *"Thank you for the awesome new entrant experience Connor has had whilst being a part of this class 😊"*, she further invited families to *"'catch up' at their local park"*.

Using Facebook to reassure parents of the children's positive start to school

Photos of the children highlighted connections between parents. In a posting about their daughter, Morgan's Dad tagged her Mum saying, *"Check out the picture of Morgan!!"* referring to Morgan wearing her rainbow tail. Morgan's Mum replied; *"Oh, that's what it is, I thought it was a dance pose!"* Parents often felt reassured by the photos of their child, such as when Amie's Mum responded to a video where her daughter had shared her "butterfly dance". Amie's Mum tagged Amie's Dad into her reply saying *"That is so awesome. So great to see her so happy and being creative. Omg my heart melts. Thanks [Amie's Dad tagged]"*. Through images, videos and discussion shared in the group space over time, we accumulated a shared history. Just like looking back at a photo album, Facebook displayed the children in video and images, providing artefacts and special moments for families to return to whenever they chose.

Parents sharing their everyday challenges with their child at home

Using Facebook I was able to learn and support parents' practices that they were developing at home. Facebook provided a way for me to maintain regular updates with the families. For example, I discovered that Connor's Mum was concerned that her son was forgetting to wear his hat whilst outside. In a posting of photos which I shared after the children and I had visited the school gully, I learnt of Connor's Mum's concerns. She responded: *"Connor and*

his non hat wearing LOL. I showed him that it's in his very front pocket of his bag 📁 oh well try again tomorrow 😊." I replied, *"OK, I'll give him a nudge tomorrow 😊"*. Another example of a practice parents were focusing on at home was posted by two parents both encouraging their children to eat their lunch. Family postings showed evidence that parents shared the every day challenges that they were managing at home with the Facebook group, sometimes to seek advice in managing their child's adjustments to school.

There was evidence of parents' postings which demonstrated that families were feeling comfortable and secure in sharing information about their child with other members of the group. One example was when some of the children had contracted a stomach bug. I posted to update to families and their responses formed almost a conversation, with each parent adding information about their child. They shared: *"Fergus has just come down with it 😞"* (Fergus's Mum), followed by a posting from Charlie's Mum saying, *"Charlie had a temperature on Thursday night, but never actually vomited. So possibly something else going around too - last week... 😞 lovely end of year bugs"*. Dylan's Mum added, *"Eek I hope it's all settled before we have our school visits"*.

New families welcomed to the group seemed comfortable in initiating postings. As noted earlier, the new families almost immediately began to initiate and respond to postings. It has already been suggested that perhaps the new families' access to previous group activity in an online environment that was already familiar to them might have influenced their almost instant engagement on entering the group. Evidence of the new families responding to postings which some of the focus families were also discussing was seen on September 26 (see Figure 30). Amie's Mum (represented by the yellow circle) and Blake's Mum (blue circle) had both commented on a posting which I had shared about the children's art work. Connor's Mum, who was new to the group, responded with her posting. Connor's Mum is represented by a pink circle.

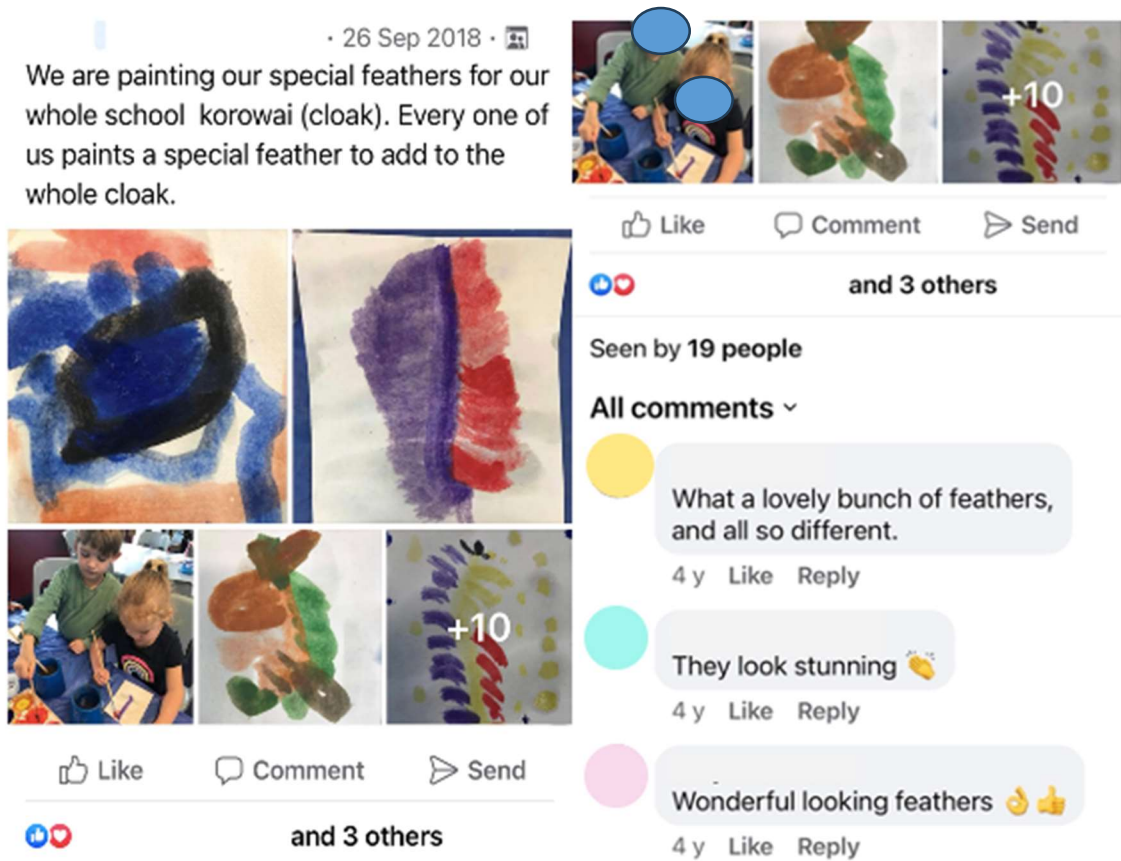


Figure 30: Example of a posting where new families are interacting with focus families.

Families addressing postings to their children

In responding to my postings which shared moments of the children’s day at school, parents began to address their responses to the children themselves. Figure 31 shares a posting where Charlotte’s Mum commented on her daughter’s artwork. In her response she communicated directly to Charlotte and to the family group.

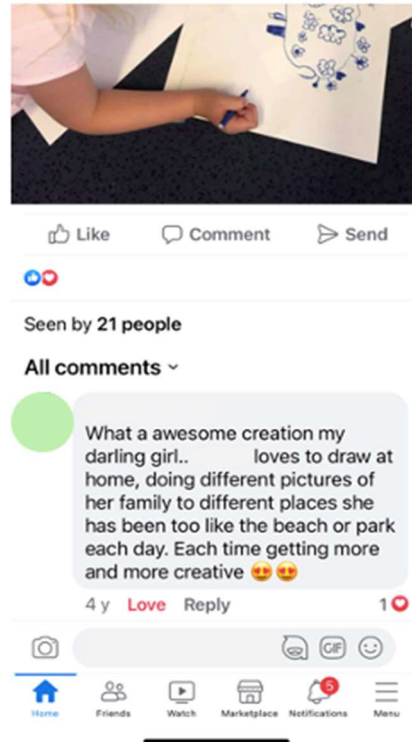


Figure 31: Showing a parent sharing a sense of pride about their child with the group.

Another example was when Hoana had been to school for her school visit, her Mum posted thank you to the other children who had looked after her. *“Thank you, Morgan, and Fergus, and all [Hoana’s] new friends for making Hoana feel welcome. She loved today X”*. Postings which included the children, or directly addressed the children were deemed to show that parents were perhaps sharing the family Facebook postings with their child. This was interpreted as an indication that the parents felt that the Facebook space was not just for parents, but also included the involvement of their child. Parents’ actively sharing Facebook with their child was viewed as demonstrating a family’s sense of trust and belonging to the group.

This next section presents the findings that show examples of my facilitation of the group as I selected and shared transition practices with the group by using the various Facebook functions. Families were provided with opportunities to respond and shape proposed transition practices so that they were responsive to families’ needs. The purpose of this process was that families were given the opportunity to influence their own transition by being involved in the planning and decision-making.

Facilitation of the group

Data about my facilitation was collected and analysed in two different ways. Firstly, at the end of each two-week period I collected the data from Facebook, categorising the types of interaction from each posting into one of the seven categories (shown in Appendix 10 and Figure 19, Figure 20 and Figure 21). From this categorisation, I could then identify families' and my own levels of participation and engagement. This was important, as I was able to see how many posts I had initiated and how many of these posts had been viewed by families, to ascertain my appropriate level of response. I had hoped that family participation and engagement would increase over time and help direct me in developing responsive transition practices.

Secondly, I made notes in my research journal. My notes included ideas that were appearing in the families' response postings and postings that were populated by emoji. My notes then informed my plan for the next week of facilitation, enabling me to adjust the overall transition plan to fit with current group activity. I collected and analysed data about my facilitation to make sure that I was meeting the families' needs at a particular point in their transition process.

Group commitment

Ongoing commitment from the Facebook group members was essential to the development of a collaboratively constructed transition to school process. To promote group commitment I planned key initiatives which required the group's support. Sometimes group members were offered the opportunity to be involved in the planning and attending of an event or experience. Arranging and discussing the rock hunt, *mihi whakatau* and lunchtime transition sessions with the families in turn promoted their attendance at the event. For example, Figure 32 shows postings from parents affirming their commitment to support and attend the proposed lunchtime transition sessions. The pink circles represent my postings, Jack's Mum (cream circle), Dylan's Mum (grey circle), Morgan's Mum (blue circle), and Charlie's Mum (green circle).

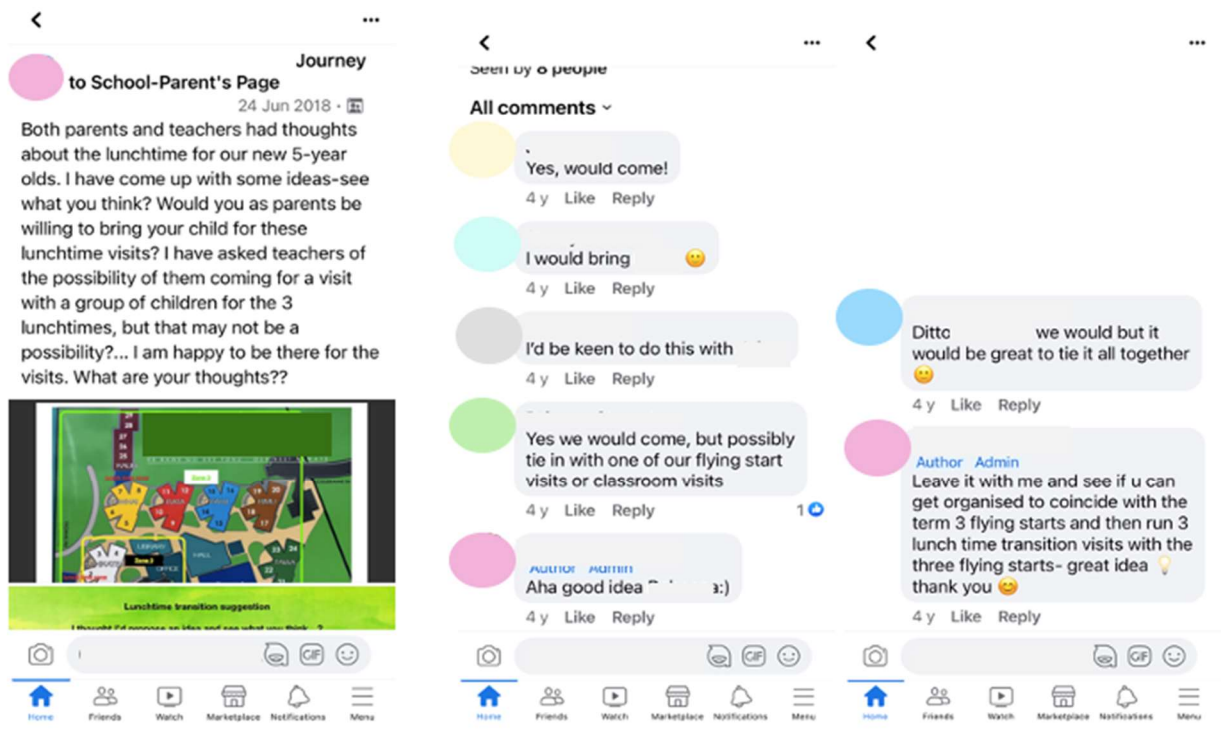


Figure 32: Showing families supporting the organisation and attending of an event.

The following sections present the findings that show parents' responses to my facilitation of the group using the different functions/tools available to me in Facebook.

Using different Facebook functions

Facebook provided a selection of functions. These tools were: polling, emoji, videos, photos and postings.

Polling

Polling was used to gauge group interest and opinions that provided feedback about particular aspects of transition to help target my facilitation. I found polling effective, providing a quick indication of responses. I used the polling tool several times over the period of the data collection, particularly for organising dates and events.

Using polling during period 1 (6th-24th June as shown in Figure 19) was particularly important, because families mainly viewed or responded to postings by using emoji, offering little response or feedback to help guide my facilitation. During this initial period, I used the polling facility to ask the Facebook group whether they had found the Patrick stories a useful resource to use at home with their children. Ten families viewed the poll; five selected their

preferred option from the three choices available: “*Yes, the videos are useful. I may return to them later*”, “*I have watched them once*”, or “*I have not watched the videos*”. All five parents chose the first option, indicating that the videos had been useful to some families and signalling that perhaps video resources might be an accessible tool to support home transition practices, and worthy of further exploration. Polling proved useful for giving a snapshot of opinions from families. I could select the specific area of my facilitation that I wanted feedback about, and phrase the questions and responses so that families only had to click on a selected response. This worked particularly well for families who did not have a lot of spare time, but who wanted to be involved in their transition process.

Using Emoji

In my facilitation of the families’ group I used emoji along with postings to encourage and support members’ engagement within the group. When a parent supported another parent, I used emoji to make my encouragement visible to the group. In a posting I made on the 10th July I shared a new Patrick story about after-school care in response to Dylan’s Mum’s question. She further inquired about the logistics of Dylan attending a sports club, but being returned afterwards to after-school care. Another child who attended after-school care was Morgan; she also attended the sports club and after-school care, thus her Mum was able to post information of how she had managed the same situation and provided Dylan’s Mum with tips from a parent’s perspective. Dylan’s Mum’s original posting is represented by the blue circle, and Morgan’s Mum’s response by the green circle. My emoji response showed support for both parents’ postings and is indicated by the arrows in Figure 33.

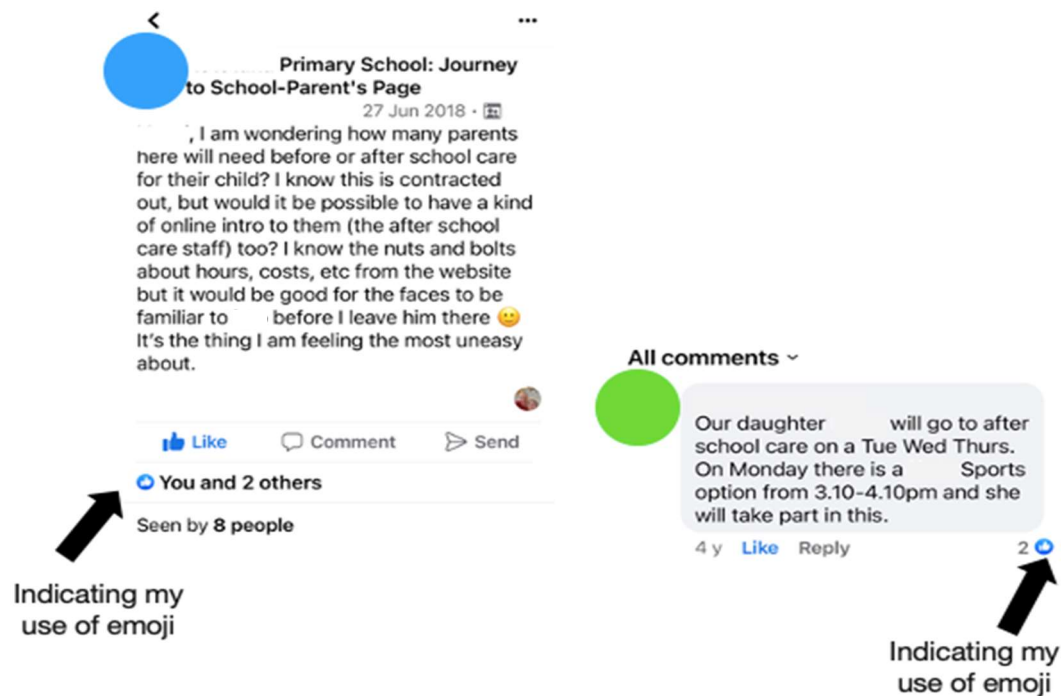


Figure 33: Parent initiated postings and my use of emoji in support.

Postings

At the start of the Facebook group I encouraged participation by acknowledging and thanking group members for their ideas and generating further postings for them to consider. In my mind, I was promoting engagement, but in retrospect this was perhaps a form of interference that “over-mediated” group interactions. In the first two weeks of the Facebook data (period 1-6th June-24th June, see Figure 19) I made 21 postings to the family group. These postings were viewed 99 times by the families. I interpreted this data as indicating that families were feeling overwhelmed by the volume of postings. I consciously slowed down my rate of posting and addition of content, and focused instead on providing conversation starters for members to respond to. I found at times that it was challenging to strike the balance between nurturing the group’s direction and not interfering too much with the group’s engagement.

The postings of the children’s daily classroom activities were a key factor that shifted and sustained the families’ group engagement when their interaction had begun to wane. The day-to-day postings prompted families to engage with each other about the videos and photos of classroom life. Postings about the children’s day were first shared on Facebook during period 7. This was two weeks before the new families entered the group. In period 6, 50 posts were viewed, compared with 102 posts seen by families in period 7. “Seen by” posts had almost

doubled in recorded visits viewed during period 6 and period 7 (see Figure 19). This may be due to the shift in purpose for my postings, moving from mostly information posts to sharing moments about the children's day.

In posting photos and videos of the children at school I was able to satisfy the parents' curiosity about their child's day. These glimpses into the classroom proved to be of interest to families and because most of the postings shared by me were about the children, it can be surmised that postings about the classroom day maintained family interaction and engagement with the Facebook group. As each child started school I shared a welcome post, which often sparked parents to reply. Of the first four children to start school, their welcome posts all received 4-8 emoji responses, with two, prompting postings from the child's parents, as well as other group members. For example, Amie's Mum replied to her child's welcome post: *"Only just saw this. She had a great day. So tired, although she cried saying she didn't want to leave! All credit to you [tagged teacher's name] for making her feel welcome"*. In Morgan's welcome post, Amie's Mum responded saying, *"Hope Morgan had a great first day, Amie is excited to join her on Thursday!"*

Videos and photos

As previously noted, the photos and the videos of the children shared with the families each day captured and sustained the group's interest throughout the data collection period, and became the main focus for group interactions. For example, during period 11 (as shown in Figure 21) I made 42 posts to the group; 34 of these posts were about the children. Of the 42 posts shared during period 11, 26 response postings were made by the families, showing that more than half of the posts I made in period 11 gained response postings by the families.

Video was the ideal medium to provide transition resources that were accessible to all families' language needs for families to use at home. For some of the families for whom English was a second language, the videos were also recorded in Mandarin, showing video to be an adaptable medium able to offer inclusive opportunities to provide families with access to transition resources. Subtitles enabled families to use online translation to access the videos.

Frequent updates

I naturally wanted to promote engagement with the postings that were shared. However, over time I began to notice patterns of engagement displayed by the wider family group members.

Whilst there were examples of group members supporting and engaging with each other, the majority of the twenty group members did not actively seek to engage. These families appeared to use the Facebook page as a place to source information, evidenced by their frequent visits that activated the “seen function” on postings they viewed. Therefore, in facilitating the needs of the majority of families, postings needed to be frequent and purposeful in order to maintain their interest. Postings, such as updates about school assemblies, shared lunch days, or athletics day proved to be popular with the families. Figure 34 shows a posting made on 29th November that shared images from the children’s athletics day with the families. As shown in Figure 34, the posting gained one posted response, ten “thumbs-up” emoji, but activated the “seen function” thirty times, further reinforcing the importance of maintaining frequent updates that kept families visiting the Facebook group.



Figure 34: Showing the number of families who have activated the “seen by” function on postings.

The data that was generated from the family Facebook group showed that families found the Facebook page a useful source of information to assist their transition process. Overall, the

families seemed to find the Facebook group a trusted space to engage with in a variety of ways.

At the start of my facilitation of the family Facebook group I found it difficult to gauge whether my support for families' was meeting their transition needs. Families mostly viewed or offered an emoji response to postings, making it difficult for me to interpret whether resources and aspects of transition that I was sharing with the families were useful to them. In promoting group engagement, I tried to find a balance in how often I posted to the group, so that the number of postings were manageable for the group, but at the same time provide enough updates to encourage group members to make frequent visits to the group space. The data evidenced a large number of "seen by" activations made by group members who chose not to engage with the group but to simply view postings. I responded to postings, but in an effort to shift from being viewed as the "group expert", I tried to foster group members' engagement with each other by using emoji to acknowledge parents' responses to each other's questions.

Different levels of group engagement

As previously shared in Chapter 3; Wenger et al. (2002) purported that a CoP usually involves five differing levels of participation. These are: core, active, occasional, peripheral and transactional. The data from the family Facebook group showed that group members' levels of interaction and engagement could be categorised to indicate an overall level of participation for each member. This proved useful because, according to Wenger et al. (2002), the group's domain had different levels of purpose for individual members. By examining the levels of participation across the Facebook group, I learnt more about what motivated the families to visit the Facebook page, enabling me to draw conclusions about the different forms of relevance members had found in the Facebook space. For example, was a group member only using Facebook simply as a place to seek information, or were they connecting and engaging with other transitioning families? In gauging an individual's level of participation it could provide further insights into their purpose for visiting the group.

The five different levels of participation, each Facebook posting over the seven-month period provided a breakdown of the group participants' interactions. By totalling each group members' interaction (posts "seen by") and engagement (emoji and responding or initiated postings), I could then look across the data and position each group member into a category of participation.

It is important to note that in totalling the number of “seen by” posts made by members, I was only able to attribute posts viewed to individual members after a major update of the Facebook tools. This update occurred after the initial analysis of the data. Prior to this, the “seen by” function had only shown a total of views that each post received; after the update, the data revealed individual group members’ names. A point to consider with this new data was that it only registered the group member’s initial viewing of a posting; should the group member revisit the posting their name would not appear in the “seen by” data a subsequent time. I have included the data gained via the new function as it was deemed valuable to analyse the differing levels of participation across the Facebook group by viewing each member’s activity.

Of the five levels of participation proposed by Wenger et al. (2002), they deemed that “core” group members were the most actively engaged. In my analysis of members’ participation the core group displayed the highest level of engagement, through their frequent use of emoji along with their high number of initiated and response postings. Next, “active” group members also demonstrated a high, almost daily interaction with the Facebook page. Their levels of engagement were mostly evidenced through the use of emoji, with only a low number of initiated/response postings. The next identified level was the “occasional” members, who demonstrated a low level of engagement with the Facebook group but a high level of interaction with the page content, visiting the page once or twice a week. Their engagement was limited to using occasional emoji to respond to postings. The “peripheral” group members formed the next level. These members evidenced their interaction with the Facebook page content through their activation of the “seen by” function once or twice a week. The findings suggest that these group members only interacted with the page to keep up to date. Finally, the “transactional” category identified those members who were found to have interacted with the page the least. Their interactions were minimal and sporadic (activating usually the “seen by” function rarely); the data suggested that these group members only visited the page when they were prompted (such as when they were tagged into a post), or when they had time to connect to the page.

Table 8 (below) provides a snapshot of each level of participation, sharing a profile of one family member’s interaction and engagement to exemplify each level of participation. Later, Figure 46 will share all members of the family group’s levels of participation. In the left column, Table 8 shows the differing levels of group participation in a CoP: core, active,

occasional, and peripheral (Wenger et al., 2002), and in the right column each level is illustrated by a particular group member’s engagement and interaction.

Table 8: Examples of family members’ interaction and engagement and categorised level of participation.

Categorised level of participation	Example of activity
Core	Dylan’s Mum: Seen by posts: 251 Used emoji: 62 times Posted: (initiated/responded): 30 times
Active	Josie’s Mum: Seen by posts: 215 Used emoji: 104 times Posted (responded): 2
Occasional	Jack’s Mum: Seen by posts: 82 Used emoji: 46 times Posted (responded): 2
Peripheral	Fergus’s Mum: Seen by posts: 212 Used emoji: 3 Posted: 0
Transactional	Josie’s Dad: Seen by 38 posts Used emoji: 4 times Posted: 0 times (was tagged into post by partner).

Building on the characteristics of each level of participation through examples of individual group members’ activity in Facebook, Figure 35 (below) shows the levels of group participation across all members of the family Facebook group. The “blue bubbles” in Figure 35 represent each of the group members’ levels of participation.

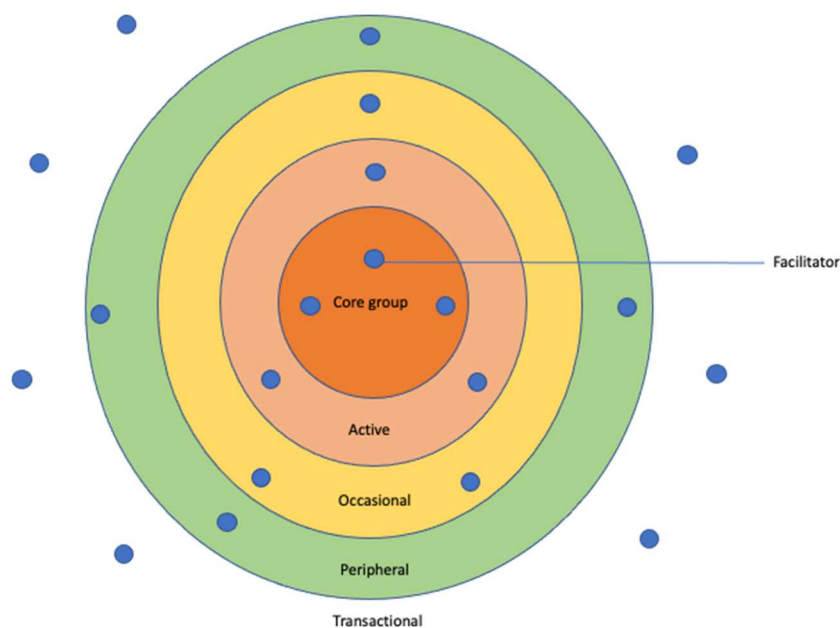


Figure 35: Families' levels of community participation.

The core and active members identified in the family group were predominantly found to be the focus families who had been part of the group the longest (since June). Connor's Mum proved the exception; she joined the group on the 10th September, significantly later than the other core and active members of the family Facebook group. Wenger et al. (2002) mention that it is usual for the core group to be very small, representing only around (10-15%) of the community as a whole. In the family Facebook group, core members represented 10% of the overall group. Active members of a CoP are estimated to be around 15-20% of the group. In the family Facebook group 15% of members were categorised as being active in their participation. Therefore, the most actively participating members represented a comparable percentage of the overall Facebook group with those proposed by Wenger et al. (2002), albeit at the lower range of their recommendations. Advised by Wenger et al.'s (2002) theory, I expected that a large proportion of CoP members would be placed in the least active levels of participation (no percentages were offered for an indication in their research), but for the family Facebook group, 15% of the families were deemed to be occasional in their participation, 20% displayed peripheral participation and 40% were identified as transactional. These percentages show that almost half of the family Facebook group were rarely active in their participation, correlating with Wenger et al.'s guidance.

My analysis of the data shows that some members of the Facebook group formed connections. These connections were mostly developed and maintained through responses to daily postings about the children. The members of the family Facebook group who were categorised as either core or active in their participation were identified as those most likely to have developed group connections, evidenced through their high level of engagement with the other group members.

The following section presents the findings by interaction type identified from my analysis of the teachers' Facebook data. The section begins by sharing an overall representation of the teachers' engagement and participation across the seven types of interaction over the seven-month data collection period.

Participation and engagement: Teachers

The same tools used to analyse the families' levels of interaction were utilised to analyse the teachers' participation. The graph below (Figure 36) plots the participation and engagement of the teachers' Facebook group. The different coloured lines of the graph represent five different types of interaction: "facilitator-initiated posts", "teacher-initiated posts", "facilitator responding posts", "teacher responding posts" and "facilitator emoji". The red line on the graph tracks the number of emoji that I used over each two-week period. The horizontal axis of the graph plots the data over two-week intervals. Each interval is matched with dates, indicated on the table (top right), ranging from period 1, which identifies the initial two-week period of the 6th -24th June to period 13, the final two-week period of data collection which commenced on December 14th. The vertical axis indicates the number of interactions of each Facebook posting during each identified two-week period. As in Figure 19, Figure 36 also identifies significant events that occurred during the data collection period which may have influenced the teachers' participation and engagement within their Facebook group.

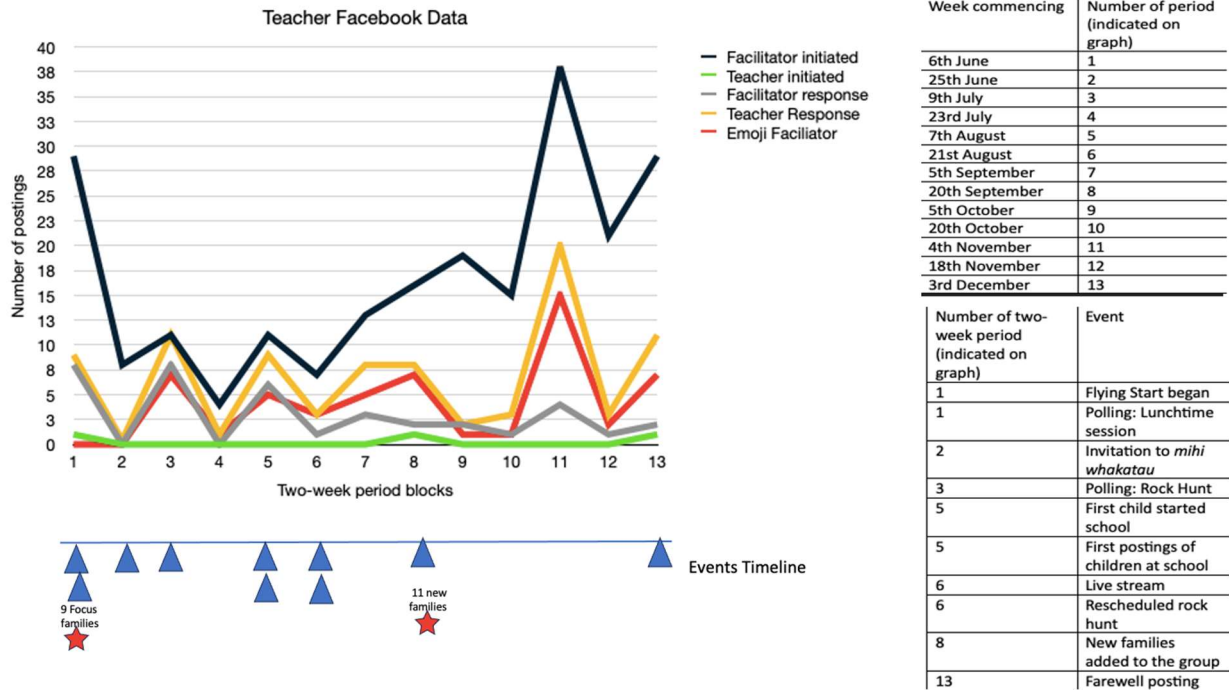
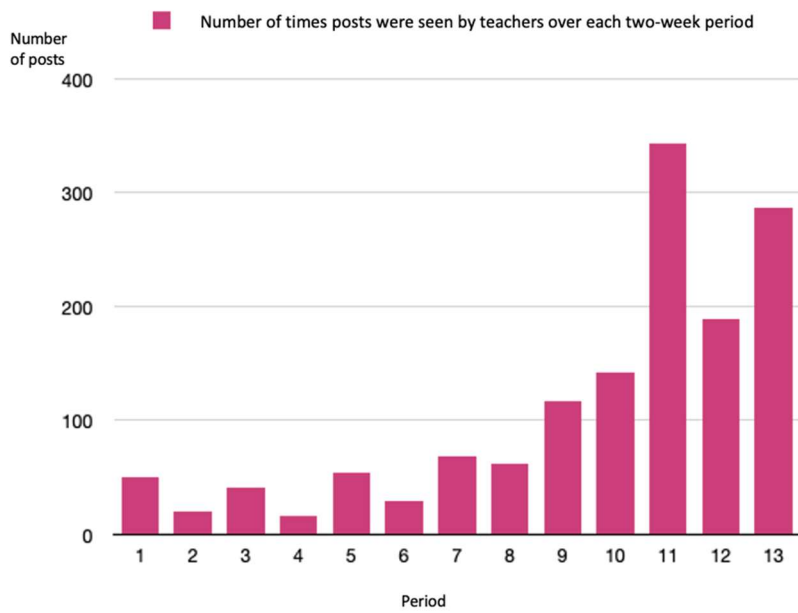


Figure 36: Graph showing the teachers’ different types of Facebook interaction over the data collection period.

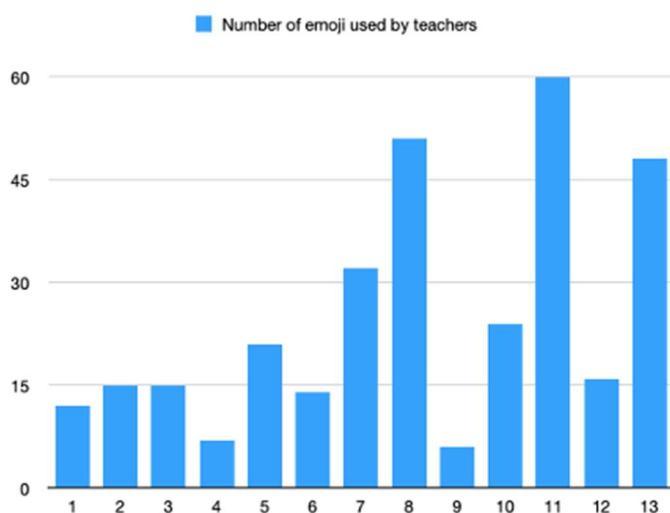
In analysing the data, the top dark blue line on the graph of Figure 36 shows the number of postings which I initiated. It is useful to compare the number of postings I made with how many views the postings recorded to analyse teacher interaction with the Facebook content. The graph shows a spike in postings made during period 1, recording 38 posts initiated by me during that two-week period. Figure 37, below, displays the number of posts “seen by” the teachers. During period 11 there were 343 posts viewed during this two-week period, indicating that each post during period 11 was viewed on average 11 times. Assumptions may be made that during period 11 teachers were finding the postings interesting and engaging.



Period	Number of times posts were 'seen by' over period of two weeks
1	51
2	21
3	42
4	17
5	55
6	30
7	69
8	62
9	117
10	143
11	343
12	189
13	286

Figure 37: Number of times posts were ‘seen by’ the teacher group.

Figure 38 (below) presents the teachers’ use of emoji over the seven-month period. The graph shows that the group’s use of emoji was not consistent. In some periods emoji use had been low, such as periods 4 and 9. Both periods coincided with school holidays, and when connected with Figure 39 indicated that generally teachers’ engagement with Facebook was low during school holiday periods.



Period	Number of emoji used
1	12
2	15
3	15
4	7
5	21
6	14
7	32
8	51
9	6
10	24
11	60
12	16
13	48

Figure 38: Graph to show teachers’ use of emoji.

Types of engagement

To explore the teachers' participation and engagement further, the following sections present the findings of each of the types of engagement evidenced from the teachers' Facebook activity: "viewed only", "emoji", "responding to facilitation" and "supporting each other". Examples of how I facilitated the teachers' group using various Facebook functions will then be presented. These findings will be used to support some conclusions, which will then be discussed in relation to research question 2: "How might a collaboratively constructed transition to school using social media assist with the development of a CoP that includes families, ECE and NE teachers?"

Viewed only postings

Figure 37 tracks the number of postings "seen by" teachers over each two-week period. The number of times the posts were viewed by activating the "seen by" function peaked during period 11, when teachers viewed 38 postings 343 times. According to the events timeline there was no specific prompt or action to account for this growth in teacher viewed postings; the activity generated during period 11 was solely between the ECE Centre A teachers and me.

Emoji

Engagement across the wider group mostly occurred through when teachers used emoji to acknowledge a posting. Figure 38 tracks the number of emoji used over each two-week period. Period 5 shows an increased use of emoji (21 emoji) compared with earlier periods. In ascertaining what may have prompted this increase in use of emoji, period 5 coincided with Morgan starting school, the first child to do so. Morgan had been attending Centre A, and the teachers at that centre were excited to be involved in her transition. Other peaks in emoji use occurred during period 8 when an event occurred (on the 1st of November), a Community of Learning meeting which the Centre A teachers and I attended. The posting I made about the meeting received 16 emoji responses from both Centre A and NE teachers.

Responding to facilitation

Facilitating the teachers' Facebook group was not without its challenges. I needed to connect smaller established groups of members who worked in a range of settings. Teachers from Centres A, B and C and the NE team each had colleagues who were part of the teacher Facebook group. The existing bonds between small groups of teachers, for example, between Centre A teachers, influenced their interactions on the Facebook page. Engagement occurred

between the ECE Centre A teachers, who usually offered a response directly to my postings or to each other's. Some assumptions may be made about why engagement occurred this way. As already noted, the close proximity of ECE Centre A with the school meant that we did connect face-to-face "over the fence". Additionally, Centre A teachers had made the decision that their participation within the teachers' Facebook group would contribute towards their own Professional Learning Development, and so were invested in developing and sharing their own transition practices with the group.

ECE teachers still able to be part of the school children's learning journey

The ECE teacher engagement was usually focused around a photo or video of a child who had previously attended their centre. The Centre A teachers would post how proud they were of children's progress in their learning, or remember interests that a child was passionate about, or share a project from the child's previous learning experiences in the centre.

Evidence of the Centre A teachers' engagement can be seen in a posting made about former attendee of Centre A, Morgan. The posting shared a short video of her writing a story, and generated three Centre A teachers' postings in response to the video (see Figure 39). The green circle represents Teacher 2, the cream circle Teacher 3 and the blue circle Teacher 1.

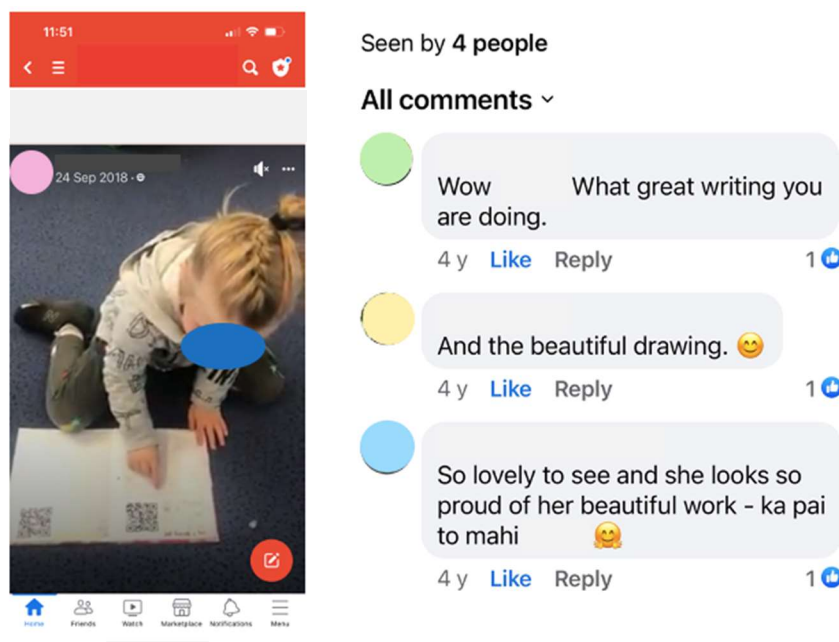


Figure 39: Posting showing Centre A teachers' interaction about a former attendee's continued learning in school.

ECE Centre A teachers' engagement demonstrated their shared interest and pride in their children's ongoing development at school. A further example (see Figure 40) included a posting that shared Hoana's first day at school, the last child to join the NE class from Centre A. The responses from Teacher 2 (cream circle), myself (pink circle) and Teacher 1 (green circle) provide an example of the engagement developed from this specific group of teachers around the postings of children who had previously attended Centre A.



Figure 40: Showing an example of teachers' engagement.

Teacher group engagement: Sharing and developing transition practices

Centre A teachers' engagement within the Facebook space with each other and with me was significant because it provided an opportunity to develop cross-sector transition practices. For example, Centre A teachers were influential in developing the lunchtime transition sessions. These were the teachers who had identified the challenges that they perceived were ahead for transitioning children in their self-management during the long lunchtime recess.

Building on already established, smaller group connections with the teachers' group (between Centre A teachers and myself), I tried to encourage a wider group response. I posted examples of my own practice through photos and videos onto the group page. I thought that sharing teaching practices might develop a common bond amongst teachers, encourage group interaction between teachers from other ECE centres and the NE team. However, activity remained concentrated amongst Centre A teachers and myself. For example, the prompt "*Has*

the Facebook group influenced any new ideas in your transition practices?” proved successful in promoting engagement with teachers in ECE Centre A. They shared examples of how they were trying some of the ideas which they had seen on their Facebook page about teaching phonics in their *Cool 4 School* programme.

My analysis of the data shows that facilitating the teachers’ group required constant monitoring of engagement to ensure that I was providing material and postings which were of interest and relevance to the group members. There is evidence to suggest that the development of collaborative practices occurred between a school and an ECE setting, rather than across ECE settings. My shared examples of the classroom or specific transition practices, such as the block people and the digital stories, inspired teachers in Centre A to try new practices, but this was not seen more generally across the group.

Sharing children’s learning across the sectors

As already noted, postings which shared examples of teaching and learning in the NE class that included children who had attended ECE Centre A developed collaborative practices between Centre A teachers and myself. Examples include posts about, potion making, building a Sky Tower and looking at Spring blossom, which all generated responses from Centre A teachers. An example of Centre A teachers developing their transition practices when sparked by examples of shared practices was when I posted a Patrick video about children looking after their belongings at school. Figure 41 shows how Centre A teachers’ interest in this aspect of transition to school influenced their teaching and learning with the *Cool 4 School* group. The pink circles represent my postings, the yellow circle those of Teacher 1 and the blue circle that of Teacher 4. The “thumbs-up” emoji on each posting was activated by Teacher 2 Centre A. The activities that developed from this original posting were then shared as a video with the teachers’ Facebook group.

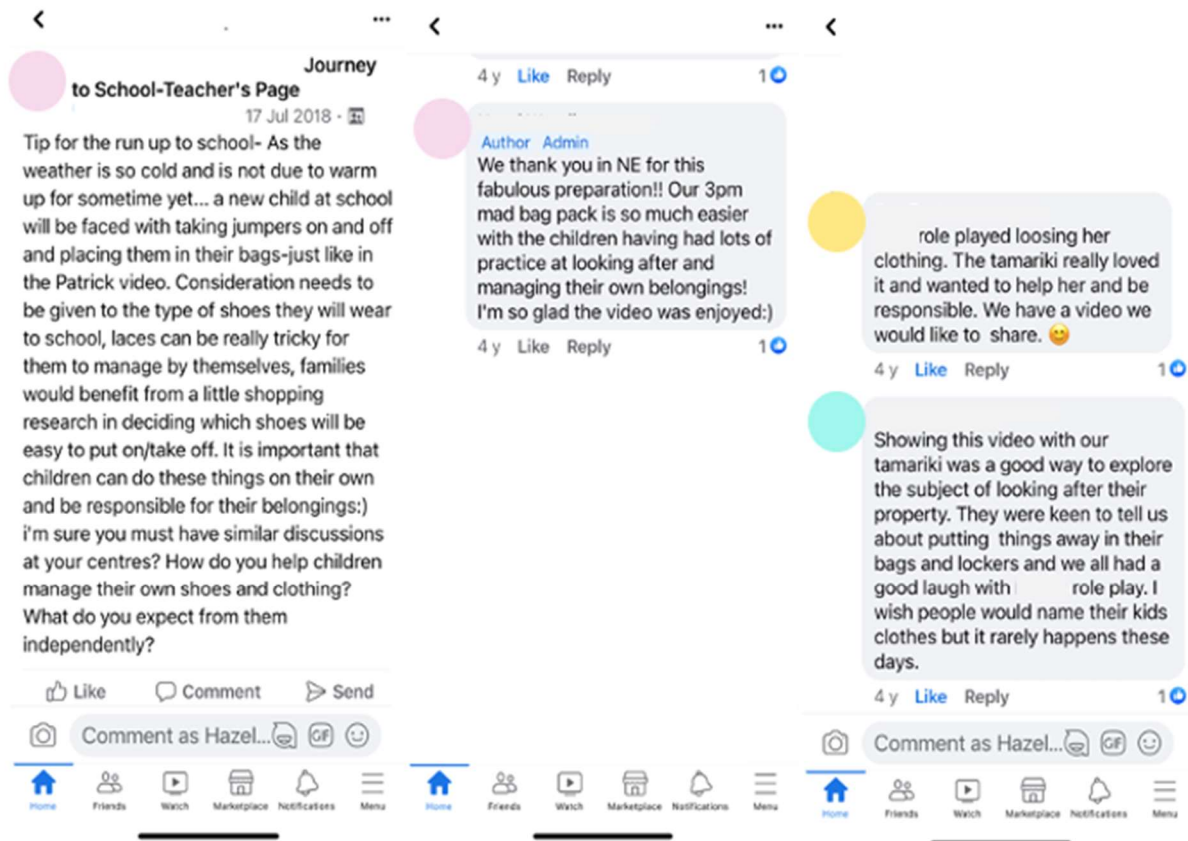


Figure 41: Posting showing an example of collaborative transition practices across the settings.

ECE teachers' still invested in the children's school learning

Posting moments of the children's school day to the teacher group enabled ECE teachers to continue their connections with their previous learners' experiences in school. Their responding posts provided me with advice and support as the children's new teacher. The daily postings enabled teachers from ECE Centre A to feel a sense of value in seeing the fruition of their work with examples of the transitioning children making a positive start to school. The responding postings made by the Centre A teachers' postings showed that they were evaluating the effectiveness of *Cool 4 School* experiences, affirming the importance of foundational skills development, or drawing on examples from the long-term relationships that they had built with the children. In continuing to be part of the children's day, the Centre A teachers were still invested in their children's achievements. Some conclusions may be drawn as to why, some teachers, as noted, had established long-term relationships with the children. For example, Teacher 4 commented on a posting which showed a photo of Teacher

2 who had visited the NE class. The posting captured her reading a story to one of the children who had recently transitioned from Centre A. Teacher 4 shared: *“This is my favourite picture, [teacher 2] reading a story with Fergus when she visited your class today. He was with us for 4 ½ years. He would have loved that moment with her, it was so special”*. Figure 42 shares a posting from ECE Centre A: Teacher 1 which shares the sense of value that she had found in continuing to be part of the children’s school experiences.



Figure 42: Posting from ECE teacher expressing her sense of value.

My analysis of the data showed that Facebook provided ECE teachers from Centre A with an opportunity to celebrate the positive foundation which they had laid during the children’s ECE years.

Using Facebook to maintain regular ‘catch-ups’ between Centre A and myself

Evidence of feeling comfortable in the group space was again demonstrated by Centre A teachers when I shared daily aspects of my teaching practices; it almost felt like we were “catching up” with each other. The gully area space that bordered both the school and ECE Centre A became a place which both settings drew upon and shared with each other in our postings. In one image that I posted of the NE children exploring the spring blossom, Centre A Teacher 2 responded: *“I noticed those beautiful trees too. Must go and have a look with Cool 4 School tomorrow. That’s the most flowers I’ve seen on those trees”*. The special bond

that the teachers from Centre A already had with each other was then extended to me, as shown in a post that shared photos and a message from Centre A Teacher 5: *“Some special moments from the last few weeks...growing relationships and a sense of belonging between both our learning communities”*.

Centre A teachers sharing their practices with the Facebook group

The teachers from Centre A shared resources that they had made with the Facebook group. As noted earlier they brought their team of teachers’ introductory digital story to the Facebook group, further evidence that the Centre A teachers felt secure that in posting the video they would receive a positive response. Two Centre A teachers supported their colleagues’ posting of the video by sharing an emoji, as did I, and a teacher from Centre C, who also shared a “thumbs-up” emoji along with a post, *“Good idea 😊”*. The Centre C teacher who posted this response made only one other posting during the seven-month data collection period. However, from the end of September, my analysis showed that this teacher visited the group two to five times a week. The timing of this teacher’s more regular visits coincided with two children from Centre C starting school, prompting their only other post: *“It looks like Charlie and Josie are right at home. We hope that their first day went well 😊”*. Further interaction from this teacher was evidenced in their regular activation of the “seen-by function” and use of emoji on postings which shared photos and videos of children in Centre C.

Further encouraged, Centre A Teacher 1 responded to a posting which shared some images of the block people. Teacher 1 responded: *“Love the block people. We might make some in our Cool 4 School group and send you some of the adventures that they are having 😊”*. The teachers from Centre A responded positively to my postings, sometimes sharing postings of practices inspired by ideas on Facebook. Teachers from the NE and the other Centres generally did not engage with the other group members on Facebook; however, five teachers had viewed Centre A’s post, which showed that teachers may have been interested, and might have even tried the idea in their own setting. It is important to note that practices shared on Facebook may have been explored and developed in any of the physical settings without it being recorded, so the influence of teachers sharing their practices can be difficult to gauge.

Reviewing a setting's own transition practices

Reviewing each other's transition practices was found a useful way to refine and develop teachers' professional practices. The data showed where ECE Centre A or myself had sought feedback from each other. ECE Centre A Teacher 1 was particularly interested in gaining a NE perspective about their transition portfolios. Teacher 1 posted: *"Would you like to see more information in our introductory portfolios [NE teacher]? If so, what would you like to see? We are going to ask our parents if we can share their mihimihi (introduction to themselves) with you as well 😊"*. I was able to provide Teacher 1 with feedback from our NE teaching team meeting after we spent time discussing how useful the portfolios were to the NE team and how we integrated the documents into classrooms. Another transition practice that I shared on Facebook was a Patrick story, "Managing my own belongings". Centre A had used the video as part of a *Cool 4 School* session to support children in being able to pack their own bag. The Centre A teachers posted that they had shared the video, and had then engaged in role play with the children to further support them in managing their belongings. Facebook provided a perfect place for a setting to reciprocally review and receive feedback about the effectiveness of their transition resources.

Collaborative initiatives

Teacher engagement on Facebook helped to develop collaborative transition practices that supported children's management of lunchtimes. ECE Centre A Teacher 1 shared her observations of school children at lunchtime: *"I have observed some new 5 year olds from our centre, as my office window affords me a view of the the eating and gathering area just outside the [school] hub, [the 5 year olds were] looking unsure of themselves in their new school environment... How are children supported at morning tea and lunchtime?"* Teacher 3 from Centre A, added: *"Could the lunchtime staff be introduced to the new children so that they feel confident to approach them if they need help?"* Accordingly, I proposed a series of three guided lunchtime sessions as an opportunity for families to support their child's familiarisation with the wider school environment. Centre A Teacher 1 further offered: *"This is a fantastic idea. I like the 3 sessions, but would like to see them focused more on the immediate [closer to the classroom] area[s] [of the outside environment]"*. The teachers' feedback helped to develop the content of the three sessions offered to families. The families in their Facebook group then negotiated the organisation of the sessions so that they could attend and support the initiative. In my analysis of the data the two groups (teachers and

families), although working separately, both offered evidence of engagement around a specific aspect of “the problem”: transition to school. The teachers shaped the transition practices through their professional knowledge, and the families managed the organisation of the proposed intervention.

In my analysis of the data, the connections between ECE teachers’ and their prior learners were continued through the day-to-day postings of the children, which provided a reason for ECE teachers to maintain their engagement with their Facebook group. For the teachers’ group, their collective focus of “transition to school” was shared and discussed through aspects of the children’s day. The postings provided reassurance and promoted a sense of pride for ECE teachers in how the children had begun to settle into school, and helped NE teachers to learn more about the children. The following section presents the findings that show how group members’ engagement was analysed and categorised to identify level of overall group participation.

Different levels of group engagement

Five levels of participation were identified by Wenger et al. (2002) in their CoP theory: core, active, occasional, peripheral and transactional. As with the families, the data from the teacher Facebook group showed that group members’ levels of interaction and engagement could be categorised to indicate an overall level of participation for each member. However, the teachers’ group contained a smaller number of members. As noted in Chapter 4 fourteen teachers across three ECE centres and the NE teaching team were invited to join the Facebook group, but only ten teachers accepted this invitation. Figure 43 (below) shows the differing levels of group participation across the ten teacher Facebook group members. The placing of the blue bubbles in Figure 43 represents each of the group members’ level of participation.

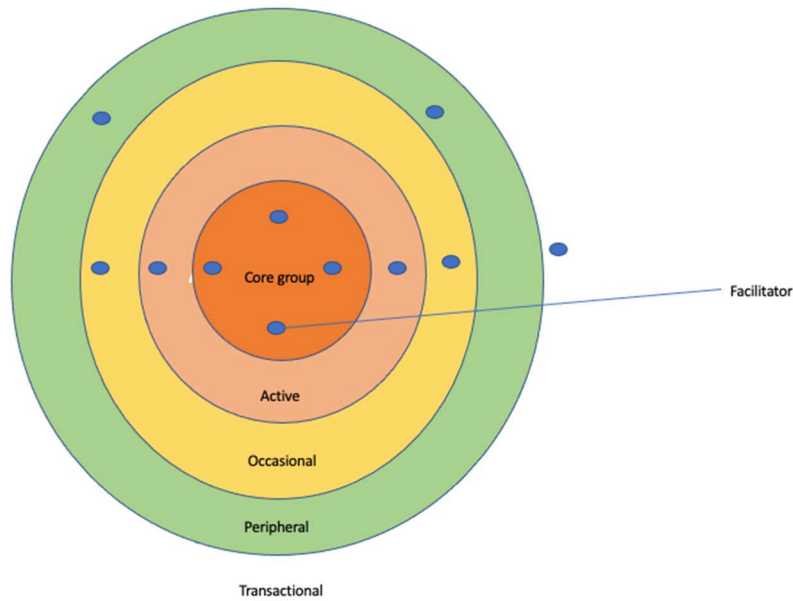


Figure 43: Teachers' levels of community participation.

The core and active members were all teachers from ECE Centre A. Aligning with Wenger et al.'s (2002) theory of 10-15% of the community forming the "core group", three of the ten teachers were identified as core members. Due to the small number of group members, the number of teachers who were categorised as being core members appears high. Two teachers were deemed to be "active" in their participation, and the rest of the group (five members) were considered less frequent or passive in their participation. This large group of less active participants aligns with Wenger et al.'s (2002) estimation that the largest portion of a CoP tends to be the least active members.

Chapter summary

Through their participation and engagement within their Facebook groups, the families and teachers became immersed in the day-to-day postings, and the resources for their transition to school. The "problem that needed to be solved" already existed as part of each family's and teacher's world. Even without the Facebook groups, families would still need to manage their own transition to school, and teachers still needed to transition families; I simply provided the vehicle for the groups to come together to help "solve the problem" collaboratively. The Facebook group provided the families with a central place to meet, to gain information they needed, and to problem-solve collectively with other families who were also experiencing their own child's transition to school. For teachers, their Facebook group provided a place to collaborate with other educators, and to develop and share their transition practices from their

own settings. Resources were added to the two Facebook pages to focus the interactions and develop the practice of the groups around specific aspects of transitioning to school.

The two Facebook groups showed that connections were possibly developed over time, but only for some of the group members. In this sense, the findings from the two Facebook groups suggest that the core and active group members, who represented a small number of participants, were more likely to have found a sense of belonging within the group. These more active participants chose to engage with each other and develop connections. Individual members who hovered on the periphery of the activity mainly gained information for their own purpose, but arguably did not need to belong because they got what they needed from the page, as demonstrated through their return visits.

A family's need for information and orientation became less important to them as their children started school, and this resulted in a drop in the group's engagement. By shifting the purpose of postings to sharing the children's day at school, I re-connected with what mattered to the groups. This new purpose for posting ignited an increase in engagement, with some lively interactions evidenced in both the families' and teachers' groups. The postings about the children's day at school occasionally motivated some of the peripheral members to engage, and become flexible in their habits of participation. They joined in conversations around postings that interested them, but then chose to re-occupy the outskirts of the group activity, where they maintained their observation of the group space.

The next chapter discusses the findings from this chapter and assesses the potentiality of two CoPs emerging from the family and teacher Facebook groups.

Chapter 8: Facebook: A potential Community of Practice

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the findings that emerged from my analysis of the two Facebook groups in Chapter 7. Chapter 8 offers a response to research question 2 by considering the potential for two Facebook groups to collaboratively develop a response to a common problem. This research has combined two key theoretical frameworks: van Genneep's (1960/1977) three phases of transition model and Wenger et al.'s (2002) CoP framework. This dual framework is used to interpret the findings from the families and teachers' Facebook groups. The combination of the two frameworks is important. Where Wenger's (2002) framework explains the potential development of a CoP, van Genneep's (1960/1977) helped me evaluate the priorities of my facilitation of the two groups in order to meet the members' needs at each phase of transition. Combining both models made it possible to chart the development of the Facebook groups during the transition process, enabling transition practices to target individual and group needs as they emerged. Reference will be made to van Genneep's stages at each point where they become relevant.

It is first necessary to justify why the findings can be understood through this theory by locating the three essential elements of a CoP in the studied context.

Communities of Practice: three fundamental elements

To determine whether either Facebook group met the criteria of a CoP, data from both groups using the fundamental elements of community development over the three phases of the transition process will be discussed. The three fundamental elements that are core to the constitution of a CoP are identified as the domain, practice, and community and must be evident in a community group if it is to be considered a CoP (Wenger et al., 2002). In the analysis of the data shared in Chapter 7, both Facebook groups were seen as engaging with a common problem: "transition to school". Data from both groups indicated that connections had developed between group members. Group members offered each other support, shared humour, or discussed aspects of transition to school. By using the three fundamental elements of domain, community and practice to organise and interpret the Facebook groups' findings, the possibilities of either group indicating the development of a domain, group practices and

a sense of community will lead into establishing whether either group could be described as a CoP.

The following sections focus on interpreting the findings through the three fundamental elements: domain, community and practice.

Domain

The prospect of transitioning to school constituted the domain that was the common motivator that drew the groups together and aligned with members' motivations and interests. This was found to inspire the group members to contribute and participate.

The concept of a domain connotes more than merely a group of people united by a common problem (Wenger et al., 2002) A key part of maintaining the domain's lifespan is fostering group interactions and social engagement (Wenger et al., 2002). This depends on several factors: what drew an individual to join the group, how committed the group members are to supporting the group, and the connections between group members that develop over time.

My remit was to ensure that the group members gained value from being part of the group so that they would choose to continue their engagement. If the families failed to see value in their Facebook group interaction, there was a strong possibility that they would lose interest and their participation would be lost.

Building trust was identified in the early stages of development of the two Facebook groups as being crucial to encouraging members to share knowledge. Figure 44 shows my first posting to the family Facebook group. Both Facebook groups were set up as “closed groups”, providing families and teachers with a space which was open to their group discussion but closed to anyone else. This level of privacy was important, so group members could be sure their engagement was between only those invited to be part of the group. By establishing both groups as “closed groups” I hoped that group members could feel that the group was a safe place where they could share their transition to school experiences and ask questions.

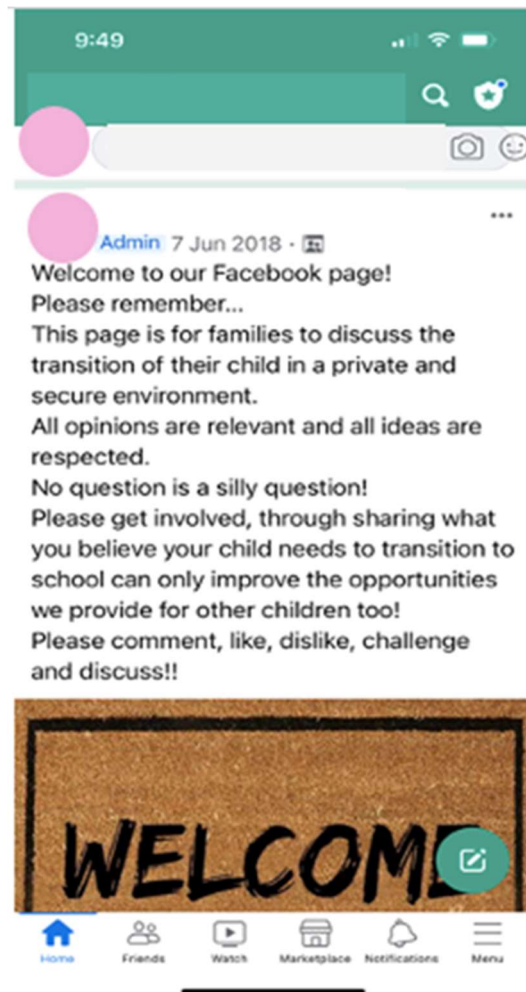


Figure 44: The initial “Welcome” post to reinforce the purpose of the families’ Facebook group.

My first posting to the family group was intended to establish the purpose of the Facebook group as a secure and reliable space for families to share their challenges and to seek advice about their child starting school. Ellis et al. (2004) and Wenger et al. (2002) advise that using activities that promote the building of trust and social connections as well as developing an awareness of the group’s common interests are important when guiding a CoP. Usoro et al. (2007) recommended that for members to maintain their motivation to be part of a CoP individuals must feel valued, safe and comfortable in sharing their knowledge and experiences. In addition, they found identified that group members needed to feel a sense of compatibility and consistency with other group members' behaviour in order to be comfortable to engage with them (Usoro et al., 2007). Developing trust within the families and teachers’ groups took time. During the pre-liminal phase of the transition process, fostering positive interaction and building connections within the group space was a priority.

Although trust could be described as more of a feeling that was developed between group members, in analysis of the postings trust appeared to be a contributing factor in the atmosphere of the group as a whole. Parents' postings showed examples of group members feeling able to share an aspect of their child's transition that they were finding difficult. For example, Connor's Mum was worried about her son not liking packed lunches and concerned that he would not eat at lunch-time. Another example came from Charlie's Mum, who worked overseas, often missing opportunities to be part of face-to-face events and asking if there would be recordings, or some other way she could still be part of the occasions.

The findings of this research support the importance of fostering a positive group climate early in the pre-liminal phase which is likely to lead to the development of group trust. The family Facebook group became a place where the members felt able to ask questions about their child's transition. The group evolved from being a place to find information to becoming a hub where group members could develop connections within the group and potentially build up their own supportive networks. The help families provided for each other ranged from sharing parenting advice and offering reassurance to general camaraderie.

In the light of my findings my primary conclusion about the domain concur with this found by Wenger et al. (2002) that the domain should be a problem or cause that group members find relevant. It needs to be a focus that not only draws but also motivates members to regularly participate and engage. It needs to be flexible, able to reflect and shift to meet the group's changing needs in order to sustain the long-term commitment of its members. It provides the focus for group members to share their different knowledge, skills and experiences that when brought together help to solve the common problem. Group members who have prior experience of the identified "problem" can support those with less experience. I observed that through engagement with the domain in the group space a shared interest developed between some members and some connections were formed, and drawn upon when a group member needed to seek guidance.

Community

The task of facilitating opportunities for group members to build connections within an online community when most of the group have never met before is a somewhat different process from that portrayed by Wenger et al. (2002). They describe the ideal organic formation of a motivated community, informally developed through everyday interactions,

and focused on a common interest or cause. In many ways, the setting up and facilitation of the Facebook groups did not match this ideal scenario.

This study acknowledges that a digital space lacks those tangible aspects of social interaction, such as tone of voice and body language, that in a face-to-face context might consolidate a group member's commitment to their community. Dubé et al. (2005), Gannon-Leary and Fontainha (2007) and Hanisch and Churchman (2008) have identified additional barriers in developing an online community in comparison with a face-to-face group. All cautioned that the building of group trust and a sense of belonging may be impeded by the impersonal nature of a digital environment. Combining the challenges identified in developing trust within an online environment with facilitating a sense of belonging amongst a group of parents and teachers who had previously known few or none of the other group members meant that the two Facebook groups developing into a "community" was not without its difficulties. However, I argue that the group members' previous familiarity of how to interact within the Facebook environment coupled with sharing of stories, and time, went some way to the two groups overcoming these early qualms.

The findings of this study support the argument that sharing experiences and stories around a common purpose can foster a positive group climate that is conducive to trust and a sense of belonging. The ECE teachers in Centre A, for example, shared a group story about themselves which they recorded and posted to the teachers' group. The Centre A teachers had previously not shared information about themselves with their community in an online format, but had felt "inspired" by the positive parent feedback that I had received when I shared my digital story with the families on Storypark. On another occasion, a teacher from Centre A responded to a photo of Teacher 2 Centre A reading a story to Fergus, posting that Fergus had been with them at their Centre since he was a baby and how special that photo was to the Centre A teachers. In posting daily stories from the classroom, the ECE teachers were able to maintain their connections with the children with whom they had built long-term relationships. These daily connections with the children helped the teachers to feel connected to the Facebook group.

Garrad and Page (2022) posit that finding a sense of belonging within a group can be viewed as the individual feeling "valued and respected" (p. 2). As noted in the Facebook groups, the more useful a member's contributions were considered by the group, the more likely it was that the member would continue to offer advice, and find a sense of value within the

community (Usoro, et al. 2007). The findings of my research support the observation of Garrad and Page (2022) that a sense of belonging can develop when an individual is valued and respected for their own knowledge and experiences. In a social media environment, it is possible for an individual to gain value and respect from other group members through postings. The other group members' responding postings can offer affirmation of the individual's advice and contributions, sometimes with emoji. A unique feature of the social media experience is the almost instantaneous speed at which individuals can be reassured by the group that their contribution is valued.

Practice

Practice relates to the tools, ideas, stories and resources which the members shared in the group space. Within the context of the Facebook groups, the communities' practice was developed through engaging about the common problem inside their shared group space. However, in the teachers' Facebook group, only some of the participants chose to engage. This limited interaction to a small sub-group of teachers which contained ECE Teachers from Centre A and me. Our sharing of ideas and teaching practices contributed towards this small sub-group's professional development. Group engagement is not merely generated through members' direct participation in a specific activity, it is developed through the investment of time and continued interaction amongst the group. The more continually active a participant in their engagement, the more likely that they will find purposeful support from the group that meets their needs (Smith & Kollock, 1999). The activity generated by this sub-group's interaction was also visible to the wider group who also had access to these discussions. This meant that the sub-group's interactions were still able to benefit the professional development of the less active members of the wider group.

According to Wenger et al. (2002) a CoP is not just a community of "interest". I argue that interest is nonetheless an influential factor in why some group members continue to engage with their CoP. Through their interest in the domain, some group members gain the added value of what they can learn about a particular interest. This study has identified that the main motivation for group members to participate in their group space is value. As noted above, value, in regard to "practice" in the two Facebook groups, was identified as "interest". In this sense, interest was the focus that I used to bring the group together. For some group members the interest in their child's transition was what sustained their visits to the Facebook group over time.

The ongoing posts on the Facebook group pages were useful in keeping the families informed about school events or sharing about the children's day. However, most group members were transactional in their engagement. An imbalance in group practice became evident in this study through many members' sporadic visits to the Facebook page as opposed to the meaningful engagement observed between small sub-groups. This suggested that some group members valued the Facebook page as primarily as a source of information, and others utilised it as a group space to meet socially. The level at which each group member chose to participate was entirely his or her choice and was not always consistent. Facilitating a CoP where the majority of group participants were peripheral in their engagement meant that I gave much thought to how to entice these specific group members into interaction. Matyas (2017) encourages that "lurking is the first step towards contribution" (p. 146), valuing the peripheral members as integral to the group. That peripheral members could still find value in their group space indicated by their frequent return visits. By visiting the group on a frequent basis, a participant can keep themselves up to date with important aspects of the group (Matyas, 2017).

A further aspect of practice is "mutual engagement". This aspect underpins interaction through the consideration of participation amongst individuals alongside the development of a group's environment.

Mutual engagement

Mutual engagement underpins interaction; the shared group space is developed through its group members' participation. Mutual engagement cannot be achieved by individuals working independently of others, and develops through the exchanging and sharing of knowledge.

Parents whose children had already started school confidently shared information about their own experiences through stories, tools, and advice. An example of parents supporting other parents with their transitioning dilemmas was seen in Figure 32, where Connor's Mum responded to Dylan's Mum who was worried about her child feeling emotional at school drop-off, replying: "*Mum of 4 boys (soon to be 5 boys) ... part of having a healthy relationship with your child is them expressing that they will miss you 😊*". This shared knowledge became a communal resource within the Facebook group. A communal resource is defined as both "tacit and explicit aspects of community's knowledge" (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 38). Pyrko et al. (2017) further develop this notion of tacit knowledge, defining it as

being personal knowledge and learning, gained from “the experience of everyday life” (p. 390). By “thinking together” (McDermott, 1999, p. 110), the members of a CoP are able to “guide one another through their understanding of the same problem” (Pyrkro et al., 2017, p. 391). When I initiated a post and shared it with the group, its focus was developed into a communal resource through the group’s engagement and knowledge sharing. As noted in Chapter 7, the wider group’s mutual engagement was most evident around postings about the children’s day at school. Through a focus on the children’s experiences, the wider group shared ways of engaging, such as through jokes. An example of parents sharing a joke was in a posting made by Morgan’s Mum and Dad about an image of Morgan with her rainbow tail, where both her Mum and Dad found humour in Morgan’s pose in the image.

Facebook was part of what made mutual engagement possible. However, organised social events where group members could meet face-to-face consolidated the digital connections previously made within the Facebook group. In supporting face-to-face events, the families’ increased interaction benefitted the group culture and its practices. An important additional influence on parents’ interactions at the face-to-face events was the presence of the children. The children were only introduced to the wider family group at the events, where they began to form their own connections with each other. The outcome of their interactions was that bonds between parents across the group were further cemented through their children developing connections. An example I observed at the family rock hunt was Amie and Rebekah’s Mum, previously unacquainted, except for their Facebook connections, organising a play-date for the two girls.

The peripheral members of the family Facebook group typically viewed postings and resources to find out what they needed. These group members chose not to interact socially within the online group. Wenger et al. (2002) advocate that all members of a CoP are practitioners, and that peripheral participation should not be undervalued. Matyas (2017) advises that a group member’s interaction may fluctuate. The development of this “insider” knowledge may shift the engagement of a “lurker” into more sustained engagement. For these less visible group members, other than activating the “seen” function did not show their presence to the rest of the group. These invisible contributions are not necessarily viewed by other group members as contributing towards the development of a “positive reputation” within the community (Matyas, 2017, p. 146). However, I noted in my observations gained outside the group space that information was being shared between peripheral parent group

members. One such time was when Charlie's Dad, who only viewed the Facebook page, responded to a question from another parent about athletics day. His response referred to the posting he had seen on Facebook. The information that peripheral members, such as Charlie's Dad, were providing to other parents had originated from the Facebook page. This observation is supportive of the notion that all members of a CoP can be practitioners (Wenger et al., 2002). Information is a transferable commodity and digital information can also be shared face-to-face. My findings identified that information can be shared through three forms of mutual engagement: "online-to-online", "face-to-face" and a hybrid method of "online to face-to-face". The sharing of information leads to the notion of a common purpose that binds the group members together. The brings in the second aspect of practice: joint enterprise.

Joint enterprise

Participation of the group members was facilitated by Facebook's ease of access, a familiarity of navigation, and the ability for a busy family to engage whenever it was convenient. A joint enterprise can be defined as a common purpose that binds a community together (Wenger et al., 2002). This study found that Facebook was extremely useful in its provision of very easy access to groups. It also maintained an ongoing record of the groups' activity. This facility enabled new families to view older postings to help gain a sense of the group purpose, and decide if this community were for them. Wenger et al. (2002) recommend that archiving resources is an effective way of developing practice into a community-led and owned product.

Brown and Duguid (2002) emphasise the importance of established group members mentoring new members as they join the group, suggesting that new members may need help to navigate the group space and learn how "to be in practice" (p. 138). Facebook, however, was familiar to all new families to the group. The orientation of this environment to find resources or to ask questions was an easy task for new members, and required little support or explanation from the original group members. My research identified that the use of a familiar tool, such as Facebook, negated the need for such mentoring. This meant that the group's energy could focus on the shared purpose of connecting the group around the common problem.

Facebook resources and group spaces were made instantly accessible to those invited to the group. In this familiar space, new members quickly connected and automatically became

members of the community. This means that more time within the group did not necessarily advantage more established group members over newcomers in discussing the group's common problem. Rather, newcomers could arrive with their own experiences about the common problem and contribute to the community. For some of these new group members, this was not their first experience of transitioning their children to school, whereas two of the original focus families were transitioning their eldest or only child to school. Being a new member in the Facebook group was not a barrier. The findings of this study identified that it was the shared problem of transition to school that provided the opportunity for mentoring and support. The advice and support generated by the group created bonds between members. As family members interacted within their group space, they developed a shared repertoire of resources and negotiated a shared way of addressing a problem.

Shared Repertoire

As part of their practice, the two groups shaped their own communal resources and procedures: their shared repertoire. The Facebook tools and environment influenced shared procedures integral to the group interaction. The use of emoji was the method most used by the group members to respond to postings. Participants used emoji, either on their own, to show a reaction, or as part of a posting. Emoji provided a way to convey a tone or feeling to a posting, such as a “ha-ha” face indicating humour. Using emoji within the digital environment provided a substitute for body language that would ordinarily convey an individual's feelings in a face-to-face context. The following section summarises the discussion of the Facebook groups' engagement viewed through Wenger's three fundamental elements.

Summary of the three elements

The previous sections have discussed the three fundamental elements of a CoP. Several key considerations have emerged and will now be summarised.

The domain provides both the appeal for group members to join a group and a common focus to sustain their engagement and participation. The key finding in this research was the importance of developing trust within the group space. A CoP can be provided with activities and tasks around a common interest, but if individuals do not feel safe, comfortable and relaxed about sharing their experiences trust cannot be fostered.

Most of the Facebook group members chose to be peripheral in their practice and engagement. These members tended to observe the main group activity, visiting the page to seek the information that was useful to them to support their transition. Their engagement was not always visible in the Facebook group. It has been noted that some members' practices were transferred and shared from the online to the face-to-face environment. Information and learning which had been gained by members from within the Facebook group was used to support other parents outside of the group.

The two communities within this research were purposefully constructed through the use of a Facebook group. This by-passed the organic or engineered face-to-face approach to developing a CoP idealised by Wenger et al. (2002). Facebook was already a part of everyday life for the families and teachers. As an online forum it gave members very easy and almost immediate access to a community that interested them. The findings of this research have identified that while an "instant community" can be quickly established, sustaining a community requires development of trust and the fostering of a sense of belonging for group members over time. A further implication is that time is needed for members to feel comfortable in sharing personal stories and to seek and provide advice from within the group.

As discussed in Chapter 3, Wenger et al. (2002) advocate that there are seven design principles which can guide how key elements of a design work together. The next section will discuss how the seven principles contributed to this research and supported the cultivation of the two Facebook groups, and indicates when each principle was drawn upon using the three phases of van Gennep's (1960/1977) transition theory.

The seven principles for cultivating a CoP

It is important to note that the seven principles for cultivating a CoP are overarching. The principles are not necessarily sequential and might be drawn on by a group facilitator more than once in the development of a CoP. However, for organising this discussion, each principle will be discussed chronologically.

CoP principle 1: Design for evolution

The first principle focuses on the active and changing nature of the group, but this does not necessarily mean that this principle is only applicable to an emerging CoP. This study concurs that it is important to consider the needs of the group in the early stages of a CoP, but also agrees with Wenger et al. (2002), who caution that over time the group's needs may

change and for the CoP to be effectively sustained its design must continue to progress. Principle 1 was drawn upon in the pre-liminal and liminal phase.

Planning a community involves identifying “triggers to catalyse evolution rather than creating a full design” (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 73). The facilitator helps to build the practice and knowledge, finds tools for learning, and identifies important issues of the community’s domain. Wenger et al. (2002) identify an effective facilitator to be enthusiastic, knowledgeable, and with an emotional connection to the domain. Whilst the findings of this study support this notion, I would argue that my enthusiasm for the role was primarily related to my “sense of duty” as the families’ NE teacher, which might have focused my attention on “fixing” the common problem of the transition to school over the evolution of the CoP.

I was passionate about developing a collaborative transition to school process. I was emotionally and professionally invested in the Facebook groups, and hopeful for what we could achieve together. However, my duty as a NE teacher always prioritised supporting the families in their transition to school. The family Facebook group provided me with a meaningful opportunity to learn directly about those families’ wants and needs. Developing their role in the online community and delegating them responsibilities to better serve the CoP was not the primary driver in my leadership of the groups, nor the design of the community. In my role as a NE teacher, I needed to provide families with a clear representation of school processes, routines and culture. As I was leading these processes, the resources generated by the group and by me demonstrated my control as the facilitator over the process of reification. For example, information that I considered important was shared with the community in a way which I felt was appropriate, such as through a video or image. Wenger et al. (2002) advocate that in designing a CoP the group’s development should be prioritised. I argue that in the course of my research my role became that of a group leader rather than a guide. The research has identified this for two reasons: firstly, my sense of duty as NE teacher to support the families’ transition to school; and secondly, because of this, the families regarded me as an expert.

As already noted, Wenger et al. (2002) advise against creating a CoP “from scratch”. Their position advocates a more organic evolution, generated through a group’s prior connections and networks. This study found that while some existing connections were a constructive influence in the evolution of the two groups, they might also have excluded others within the wider group through the creation of “cliques”. For instance, parents from ECE Centre C were

active participants within their Facebook group, and sometimes the “in-house” jokes which they shared in their postings excluded the rest of the group. I was mindful that the existing connections of the teachers, strong ties made over many years in their centres or school, might present a barrier to other members of the group.

Wenger et al. (2002) contend that a group of friends or a pre-existing network does not constitute a CoP. It is the shared domain of interest along with a shared, valued competence which focuses on developing the learning and knowledge within the group which defines a CoP. However, it was noted that the pre-existing connections between the teachers in Centre A provided a catalyst to their development of knowledge. They further strengthened common connections in their small sub-group of colleagues through their focus on transition to school. Similarly, in the teachers’ Facebook group, most of its members could be described as “lurkers” in the digital space. The activity generated between the participating teachers from Centre A was also visible to the wider group space. This activity held potential to develop the group’s collective knowledge. In my facilitation of the teachers’ Facebook group, the focus of the design was to develop their competence to support a family’s transition to school. Pre-existing boundaries of individual educational settings remained in the teachers’ group; however, it was the development of the teachers’ group knowledge and expertise which was central to the group’s design.

When the children started school, the families’ needs shifted to requiring reassurance that their child was settling into school. The Facebook group as a support mechanism was controlled by the timeframe of the families’ transition to school and duration of this research. This study, therefore, identified that external pressures, such as time and purpose, directly influenced the evolution of the families’ Facebook group, as opposed to a more organic evolution over time as advocated by Wenger et al. (2002). In contrast to the narrative of a CoP evolving through cultivation, as espoused by Wenger et al. (2002), the findings of this study indicate that a CoP might be developed through a managed process that is appropriately responsive to external triggers.

When the children started school, the families’ entered the liminal phase of their transition, and they no longer required as much information and scaffolding. The children, though outside of the Facebook community, quickly became the driving force for interaction within it. As the purpose for the Facebook group was to develop a transition programme for families, this development signalled a change in the power dynamics regarding reification.

The children had become a source for the exercise of creative power. In some cases, their influence was direct, with some of the children taking the initiative to ask for activities to be shared with the community, such as Fergus asking his Mum to post an image of him holding a bird's egg he had found on his way to school. The result of the trend toward increasingly collaborative reification led to the transition programme itself developing into the group's reified product. In fact, given that the relationships developed between the participants were formed dynamically within the community, and were of benefit to the shared enterprise of the transition, it could be suggested that these relationships were themselves a reified product. In the forming of these relationships, the facilitator held no power besides creating the space and opportunities for the community to interact. The two groups being located on Facebook centralised reification and became a vehicle for developing a CoP, through being a text-based social media environment.

CoP principle 2: Foster open dialogue between inside and outside perspectives

Principle 2 was most pertinent for the development of the two Facebook groups at the pre-liminal phase. It supported the focus of developing opportunities for group discussion and engagement early, to set a precedent for the group moving forward. It was important for the group to learn about the school's respective histories, systems, values, and knowledge that could help grow group knowledge. As stated by Wenger et al. (2002), a good community design requires an "insider's perspective to lead the discovery of what the community is about, but it often takes an outsider's perspective to help members see possibilities" (p 54). As the children's NE teacher, I was an "insider". I held both the knowledge and experience needed to organise families' transition to school. In the early stages of the intervention, the main purpose for sharing my "insider" knowledge was providing information. Wenger et al. (2002) advocate that only an insider can understand the issues central to the domain and prioritise the knowledge which needs to be and shared with the group. A similar concept is espoused by Roux et al. (2017), who discuss the important role of advisors or "translators" within a CoP. My sharing of inside information that was specific to school onto Facebook, could be seen as "translating" aspects of our school culture into postings that helped to develop the families' tacit and explicit knowledge.

The families were largely considered "outsiders" to the school, but not to the Facebook group. There was some variance in using this term to describe all families across the family group. Some families had previous knowledge and experiences of transitioning their elder

children to school, which provided them with “inside knowledge” of transition to school from a parent’s perspective. Instead of bringing outsiders’ expertise to the groups, the groups provided a range of knowledge within their Facebook groups specific to transitioning to the focus primary school. Lave and Wenger (1991) in their work around apprenticeship focused on the interactions between novices and experts to identify the diversity of expertise and knowledge across a CoP. They described novices as those members who may be unfamiliar with norms and resources available to them in the CoP. By spending time within the group, the novices begin to learn from the more experienced group members. At the same time, Lave and Wenger (1991) do not disclaim that all members of the CoP learn from each other. Newcomers can test out ideas and clarify understandings which, in turn, develop the group’s collective knowledge.

The teachers could be viewed as being both outsiders and insiders, and were instrumental in developing a wider insider perspective of transition to school practices. Through the interactions and participation of both ECE and NE teachers, a broader base of professional knowledge was shared, and a clearer understanding developed about what information was needed from both educational sectors. The ECE teachers were considered outsiders to the specific context of the NE classroom which the children were transitioning to. “Insider” knowledge, which the ECE teachers were particularly interested in learning about, was what the school day looked like, and how that would impact on their preparation of transitioning children. NE teachers were outsiders regarding information about the transitioning children’s prior learning and experiences. By the development of a combined insider’s perspective a common understanding of how a transition is managed in other educational contexts beyond each teacher’s own could be achieved through the contributions of shared knowledge to the teachers’ Facebook page.

A view expressed by Wenger et al. (2002) is that there are insiders and outsiders, and that dialogue needs to be developed between the two. This distinction between the one and the other was less obvious within this study. All participants, including me, could be considered as being both inside or outside the group, and of aspects of the transition process. However, on reflection, a lack of clear definition between insider or outsider had not significantly influenced the community design.

CoP principle 3: Enable multiple levels of participation

Facebook offered the opportunity for all group members to participate within their group at a level in which they felt comfortable. Principle 3 supported the facilitation of the two Facebook groups, particularly at the liminal phase of the groups' development. By the liminal phase, the group members had developed a pattern of interaction. People participated within the Facebook groups according to how much they valued what they found. Some people found value in making group connections, whilst others wanted to improve their knowledge and skills; each group member had their own conceptualisation of value. It is unrealistic to have uniform expectations for all group members' levels of participation. Some members kept up an active level of participation, for others their participation was more sporadic. Those members who were invested in their participation with the group helped to maintain its ongoing development. Without the engagement of the active and core group members, I would have been unable to facilitate the groups' needs. Knowledge would not have been shaped and clarified through a social process to meet the group's needs.

My concern as a group facilitator was that I was not reaching all the group members. I felt that the lack of regular participation by many of the members meant that the group was failing to meet their needs and that the majority of the members saw little value in participating. I could only focus on the core and active group members' expressed needs, but at the same time I felt that my facilitation of their needs might also have benefitted the peripheral group members. Wenger et al. (2002) reinforce the value of sustaining the connection of peripheral members without enforcing expectations of their participation. Research from Nonnecke et al. (2006) addressed reasons for "lurking" in online communities and found that most lurkers (54% in their study) gained enough value from the group by reading and browsing material, without actively interacting with the other group members. Other reasons they found for lurking included members wanting to learn more about the group before participating (30%), being shy about posting (28%), and reportedly having nothing to offer (22%). The context of my study further identified lack of time as a factor. Usually, Facebook offers a function that addresses the problem of a participant lacking time to view posts and potentially missing important information. A Facebook notification sent to each member alerts users of any activity which they might have missed. This ensured that all group members could be kept up to date with group activity.

Facilitating and participating

Mutuality is an expectation within the facilitation role. Roux et al. (2017) maintain that facilitation should include active participation, and willingness to learn from other participants. For a facilitator and teacher, it can be difficult to shake off the identity of being a professional, and believing, perhaps subconsciously, that the knowledge that a qualified individual holds is superior. This notion may present an obstacle towards mutual learning (Roux et al., 2017). It may also colour the way families view the role of a teacher. It may provide the teacher/facilitator with a status in the group that would position the facilitator as an “expert”, when in fact the group interactions, the participants’ individual and combined knowledge, and experiences, offer the facilitator, too, much potential learning.

CoP principle 4: Provide public and private community space

Wenger et al. (2002) advise that energised and lively communities are those that are rich with connections, and offer both public and private places for dialogue between members. The Facebook environment offered both facilities. The guidance provided by Wenger et al. (2002), assigned to Principle 4, was found to be most relevant in establishing the two Facebook groups in the pre-liminal phase. All invited group members could view postings; however, as the page was a closed group environment, viewing was restricted to them only. The term “open” may therefore be more applicable than “public” to describe a closed group Facebook community. Private messaging was another facility offered to the group. This was a way to message one person, as a closed form of communication away from other group members.

When the Facebook group first opened, the focus families became part of this “private group”. As noted earlier there was a clear indication that the focus families had begun to formulate early bonds and connections through their group membership on the Facebook page. Wenger et al. (2002) reinforce the importance of developing connections by stating that at the centre of a community is a “web of relationships” (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 58) connecting each community member. A web of relationships had begun to develop between the focus families when they started connecting in their Facebook group. This was evidenced in how the Facebook group interacted face-to-face with one another and discussed aspects of the Facebook group with each other at the *mihi whakatau*.

The *mihi whakatau* was a “public” event, in the sense that it was open to the NE families, but “closed” in that the whole school community was not invited. The focus families naturally

gravitated towards other families from their Facebook group, creating their own clique, to which the NE families who were outside of the Facebook group were not able to relate. A family member who was not part of the Facebook group was overheard asking a focus family Facebook group member about a particular aspect of information that she had mentioned and how she knew that, to which the group member replied that she knew it from the Facebook group. The interactions of the focus families compared with the NE families, who were outside the group, highlighted the privileged knowledge that those who were members of the Facebook group were able to access as opposed to those outside it.

Wenger et al. (2002) recommended that in the early stages of an online community's development group members benefit from having opportunities to meet not just online but face-to-face, to share experiences and to strengthen relationships. In the facilitation of the two Facebook groups in an online environment, planned face-to-face events were organised and discussed well in advance, so that the families could fit them around their commitments. These planned events were public and included those families who were not part of the Facebook group but whose child was transitioning to the NE class.

CoP principle 5: Focus on value

Finding value was the essential principle drawn upon throughout the development of the two Facebook groups and across the three phases of the transition process. Joining the Facebook group was a result of being invited. The survival of the groups depended on each participant finding some sort of value to motivate them to continue with the group. Value in terms of this study was realised through the concept of a shared problem and this value could be viewed as personal or group wide. For the Facebook group members, value was expressed in their postings and use of emoji to signal a topic which they had found useful. In the first two months of the page, information posts seemed to hold most value for the participants across the group. However, personal value was found when individual requests were made for further information around a specific aspect of starting school that mattered to a family. Both group-wide and personal value indicated how the intervention could be customised to support each family's transition to school process.

Wenger et al. (2002) stress the importance of encouraging members to openly express and communicate what they value. In gaining the groups' feedback on resources which they found useful and enjoyable, I was able to maintain their motivation to participate with the digital community by creating resources that mattered to them. Wenger et al. (2002) observe

that value changes over time and that the effects of community activities are not often immediately visible. In response to this, Wenger et al. (2000) recommend that evidence can be gained regarding what members have found valuable in their CoP by listening to and reflecting upon the group members' stories.

Principle 5 was central to all three phases of the two Facebook group's development and was revisited across the duration of the two Facebook groups to support my facilitation. The main indication of value during the data collection of the Facebook groups was found in the fortnightly data generated from the group's engagement. However, as noted earlier, personal value may be gained by a group member but only realised when it is shared outside of the group. The value gained for the wider Facebook family group was the opportunity to come together to support each other through a common experience.

This study identified that an increased personal value was found by parents who were transitioning their eldest or only child to school. Advice and tips from more experienced members, along with access to information, meant that these parents could seek advice from experts to support their transition process. More widely across the family group, images, and opportunities to share parts of their child's day constituted the value found by many families and that sustained their engagement with the group. According to Cundill et al. (2015), sometimes group members will progress from their peripheral stance to becoming more active in their participation when value is found in something that interests them, then returning to passively observing. In analysing the Facebook data, it was noted that Amie's Dad, who was mostly peripheral in his group participation, found value in postings that contained a photo or video of his daughter, demonstrated by his engagement with only these specific postings. Wenger et al. (2002) reinforce the importance of nurturing these peripheral group members, and "build[ing] benches for those on the side-lines" (p. 57). The daily postings that shared the children's day at school facilitated a "bench" for parents, who found value in viewing aspects of their child's day, or connecting with news from school when it suited them.

From the outset, my intention was to ensure that the families and teachers used the Facebook page as a place where they could find what they were looking for to support their transition process, a place where group knowledge and resources were stored and made readily available to the group members when they were needed. Wenger et al. (2002) advise that as the community develops and grows value is increasingly invested in developing group

knowledge, shifting from the early value focused on group needs. The findings of this study supported this claim. During the pre-liminal phase when families or teachers could not find the information that they were looking for, I made sure that I responded quickly to ensure that they found a continuing value in visiting the site on a regular basis.

In summary, this study identified that value can indeed be personal, but once expressed can help others in the group become more aware of their own values, confirm community norms, and and elaborating shared meaning. A group's value is more likely to be found when it aligns with a member's own identity (Wenger et al., 2002). When the Facebook pages were established for the two groups, their initial questionnaire responses provided me with a good indication of the teachers and families' needs so that I could customise their page. Wenger et al. (2002) signal that early value tends to be gained by focusing on current issues that affect the group's needs. In the pre-liminal phase, I included resources designed to tap into areas of interest which families and teachers had indicated in their questionnaire were useful to them in their transition to school. In the liminal and post-liminal wider group, value was found in sharing moments of the children's day.

CoP principle 6: Combine familiarity and excitement

Principle 6 supported my facilitation of the two groups during the pre-liminal and the liminal phase when the families were looking ahead, or their child had just started school. Through the organisation of a common experience that members could look forward to, the planning of events provided a level of excitement in the Facebook groups. Principle 6 advises facilitating a balance between "excitement and familiarity" within the comfort of a group routine. Wenger et al. (2002) note that the enjoyment that events generate helps to bring members together, supporting a more vibrant and attractive community for its group members. Starting school added excitement to each families' participation in the group, providing a "sense of common adventure" (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 62) as each family got nearer to the date that their child would start school.

As reported by the Educational Review Office (2015), the transition period is viewed as a process all stakeholders experience, rather than an event that happens only to the child. Providing a familiar and comfortable space for families to gain support for their role in the transition process was a key purpose in developing the family Facebook group. According to Wenger et al. (2002) a CoP is distinct and separated from other areas of an individual's everyday life, and provides a "neutral space" for an individual to visit, where they can find

advice and ask questions without being too entangled in the lives of the other group members. The Facebook family community helped to support the parents' transition from being parents of an ECE child to becoming parents of a school child.

The excitement of sharing achievements and celebrating milestones of children's progress at school was a positive way that families used the Facebook page to share their delight and pride in their child's development. For example, Connor's Mum captured her son's achievements of writing his own name for the first time on the whiteboard, choosing to share her special moment on Facebook. Posting the children's personal milestone events generated further enjoyment within the teachers' Facebook group. The teachers were able to feel pride and gain valuable insights into how the children they had prepared for school had eventually established themselves in school.

CoP principle 7: Create a rhythm for the community

To support the healthy rhythm of the Facebook groups an important consideration in my facilitation was not to post too much material to the group, but just enough to keep members interested and motivated to maintain their visits to the group page. In my facilitating role I needed to be aware of any changes in the rhythm of the community, and respond to this change by altering the purpose or number of postings that tapped into the group's interests to reinvigorate community participation when the interaction slowed. According to Wenger et al. (2002) relationships which have been built within the community help to sustain a steady rhythm through the group's interactions. However, relying just on relationships to maintain the group's "beat" may not be productive in maintaining the lifespan of the community for all of its members.

In my facilitation of the families and teachers' groups, a drop in engagement levels emerged as the children started school during the liminal phase of the transition intervention. As already identified, the main reason for posting for the Facebook families at the pre-liminal phase had been to provide information to support their move to school. At the liminal phase, it became evident that the rhythm of the group had slowed as the earlier value was lost. However, in organising events and sharing moments of the school day, the group's rhythm picked up pace. Wenger et al. (2002) note that an increase of activity between participants in an online space can be found just before and after a community event; and they see such events as being "milestones" for the community. The *mihi whakatau* was one such group

milestone for both Facebook groups, where families came together with ECE teachers and school and were welcomed to their new community.

Finding the right “beat” is critical at each stage of development of a community for it to thrive. Wenger et al. (2002) describe communities as, “alive”, and as such they require a design that will embrace the energy and time of community members. If the rhythm of the community is too fast, members cannot keep up with the pace of participating that they feel is required of them. If the rhythm is too slow, the group loses momentum. Rhythm is intricately linked to value. Therefore, the success of this principle across the two Facebook groups was directly related to my facilitation. Value and interest drives rhythm, therefore, both must be maintained. This was found largely to be achievable through responsive facilitation, as opposed to natural peaks and troughs of community development.

The seven principles and the cultivation of the Facebook groups.

This study found that the seven principles of cultivating a CoP (Wenger et al., 2002) were foregrounded at times across the seven-month period of the Facebook groups. The data and actions shared in the findings of Chapter 6 were organised into a three-phase process guided by van Gennepe’s (1960/1977) model for transition. By overlaying van Gennepe’s (1960/1977) three phases on the seven principles for cultivating a CoP, it is possible to determine which of the seven principles foregrounded the three phases of transition. Figure 45 shows the development of a CoP overtime, against the context of transition and the interconnectedness of the principles. This results in a combined theoretical lens.

van Gennep (1960/1970) 3 phases of transition.

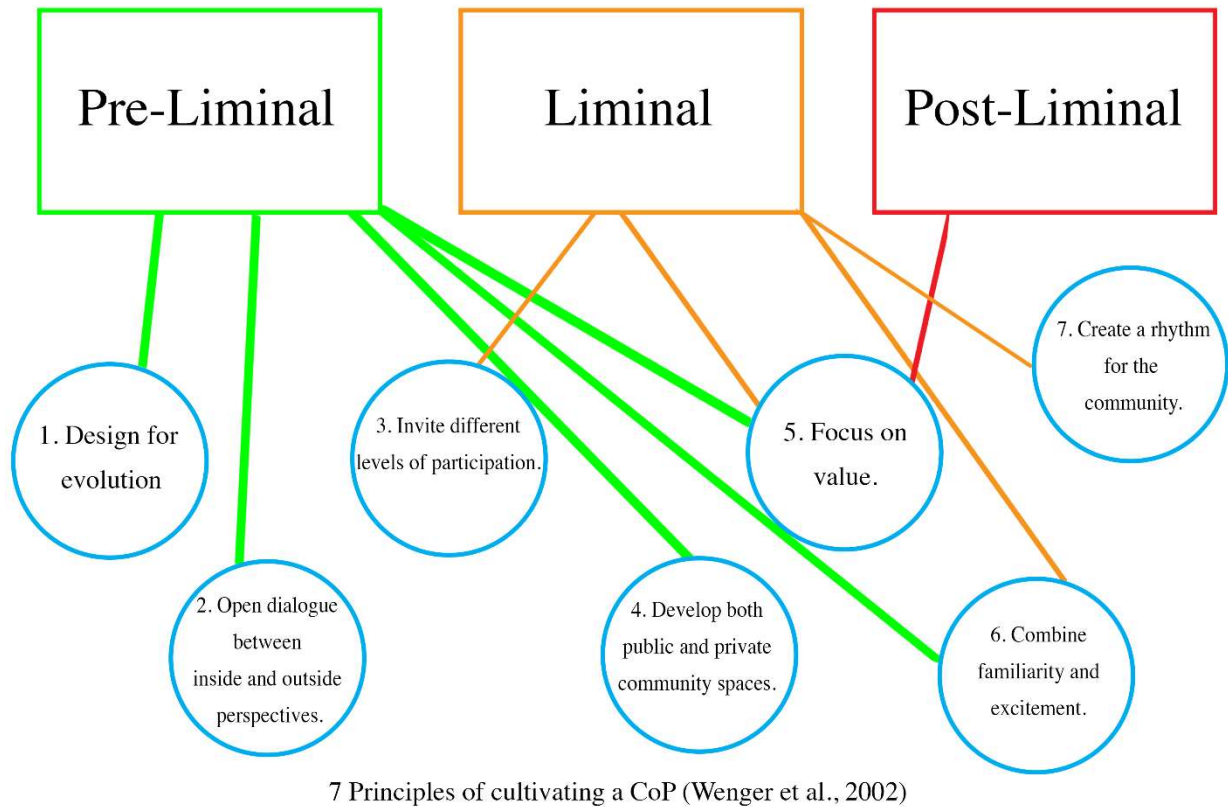


Figure 45: The seven principles used to support facilitation of the Facebook groups over their three phases of transition.

The seven principles for cultivating a CoP offered by Wenger et al. (2002) are flexible in their purpose. They are not incremental, and as such might need to be reviewed and revisited at various stages of a group's development, as shown in Figure 45. The seven principles foreground key ideas for a facilitator to consider in their coordination in order to generate the enjoyment, relevance and value needed to sustain a community. Figure 45 shows that group members consistently finding value across all three phases is critical throughout the entire transition process.

The key findings identified in this Chapter regarding the three essential elements and the seven principles will now be summarised and discussed.

Chapter summary

Research question 2 poses the possibility that, through the cultivation of the two Facebook groups, families and ECE and NE teachers can all be included in a CoP. The seven principles discussed in this chapter have highlighted that inclusiveness is driven by participation;

ultimately, it is the group members who actively decide how they will participate. In developing the domain, this study has identified that the group value at the pre-liminal phase cannot simply be measured by the volume of postings and use of emoji. The development of a positive climate is the first step towards establishing trust within the community. If trust is not developed, this will almost inevitably effect future group interaction and engagement.

A key finding within the groups' practice revealed more about peripheral participation, identified as "lurking". Firstly, interaction by lurkers may not always have been confined to the Facebook group space. Conversations about the Facebook group postings also occurred in face-to-face interactions, suggesting that Facebook interaction data may not necessarily give an accurate representation of peripheral group members' activity. This leads, secondly, to the identification of a third method of interaction. Wenger et al. (2002) espoused that a CoP communicated either face-to-face or online. This research has identified a blend of the two, whereby peripheral participants who viewed a posting online then engaged in conversation and shared this information face-to-face, rather than within the Facebook group space.

Wenger et al. (2002) have advocated for communities to develop organically, emerging from a group of interested individuals. Facebook, however, creates an instant community. The communities in this research were generated by invitation and were indeed started "from scratch". However, the use of Facebook still facilitates community dynamics, supporting Wenger et al.'s (2002) requirement of multiple entry points through the provision of public and private spaces. Using social media, entry to a community is expedited by accepting a direct invitation. Exiting the community is likewise an almost instant process. This study started with two instant communities. It recognised that these communities facilitated by social media are more likely to be transient and temporary compared to a face-to-face approach because of the ease of leaving a group if a group member loses interest. It is therefore critical that the facilitator meet the group's needs throughout the three phases of the transition process, so that members find enough value to keep them returning to the group. This also reinforced the importance of offering a blended approach that included invitations to face-to-face social events.

As explained in Chapter 3, Lave and Wenger (1991) theorise that situated learning is socially and culturally located, and so must be placed in a real-life context. Situated learning provides a framework for participation. For the families and teachers, transition to school was the real-life context that was shared and developed by group members' participation in the two

Facebook groups. The Facebook group spaces were where ideas and challenges were shared. Group members then engaged with these challenges to develop solutions to each part of the transition to school “problem”. My facilitation of the group was guided by both a flexible weekly plan and the group’s engagement around aspects of transition to school. Sharing of school-based knowledge, parental practices and stories designed to support a family’s transition to school were examples of situated learning being developed within the family Facebook group. For teachers, my daily postings of the children’s classroom helped to focus the development of situated learning amongst the group. This was accomplished through sharing transition practices and knowledge about the children’s needs.

This research found Wenger’s seven principles to be an effective tool kit in my facilitation of the Facebook groups. The principles provided a critical framework by which to reveal the importance of group members’ value to drive engagement in their Facebook group. The principles were found not to be “static measures” (Wenger et al. 2002, p. 168) and could be revisited and combined throughout the life of the CoP to form the basis of an adaptable guide to support a facilitator’s role.

As already noted, Wenger et al. (2002) advocated that a CoP emerges and progresses organically. This study argues that external factors directly influence the development of a CoP, thus requiring it to be a managed process. The CoPs that were formed for the purpose of this research acknowledged distinct milestones that informed the families’ transition to school. The transition to school process was driven by time. Two external factors influenced the development of the CoPs: firstly, the timeframe of the study’s data collection, and secondly, the families’ transition to school process. These made it necessary that the facilitator actively accommodated the milestones within the transition process.

Reflecting on the discussion covered in this chapter, research question 2, poses the challenge: “How might a collaboratively constructed transition to school using social media assist with the development of a CoP that includes families, ECE and NE teachers?” It was found that in the two Facebook groups all teachers and families were indeed included; however, because individuals each decided their level of participation there were varying levels of engagement across the CoP community. Wenger et al. (2002) validate this finding, reminding that the expectation of equal participation by members is unrealistic. It is acknowledged that a family and teacher CoP can be created and successfully function, and that participation cannot be controlled, but only influenced by the facilitator.

This chapter has discussed the strong effect of the families' transition to school on the facilitation and development of the two Facebook groups. The next chapter discusses the children's transition, and the facilitation of collaboratively supporting a child in finding their place in their new school environment.

Chapter 9: The children establish their place at school

A NE teacher has many things to notice and respond to when supporting a child's start to school. This chapter draws particularly on what I observed when children were playing, engaging with the classroom resources and each other as they established themselves in the new learning space. It seemed to me that if the children's transition needs were met, other school-related learning would follow.

This findings chapter shares some of the moments of learning that occurred during the children's first term of school and were shared with the teachers and families on their Facebook pages. My field notes and Facebook postings present examples of how children actively collaborated in adjusting to their new school environment. The chapter also notes that in some cases interests from the ECE centre were re-ignited in the NE classroom.

The children's stories

This chapter presents five stories that show children using play to help them manage things they found problematic when they started school. Most of the stories relate to the six focus children, but incorporate other children who were members of the NE class, some of whom began to build connections with the focus children. This chapter presents the findings from which conclusions will be drawn and discussed in Chapter 10 in relation to research question 3: "In what ways can a collaboration between schools and families develop a transition to school process that contributes to helping children find their place in the school environment?"

"That's what big school girls do"

The first story is an example of children's perceptions and motivations about starting school. My observations and the connections I had built with Josie and her family gave me insight into what she imagined starting school would be like, and to understand what being a "big school girl" meant to her.

Josie arrived at one of our lunchtime transition sessions with her own goal: being able to swing from one side of the school monkey bars to the other. Meeting this challenge was important for Josie; her cousin who already attended school had told her all about being able

to conquer the monkey bars. Josie very proudly displayed the calluses and blisters on her hands from the hours of practising on the smaller set of monkey bars at her ECE playground. Josie's Mum said, *"She wants to come to school because she wants to learn the monkey bars, because that's what her cousin can do and she is eight, and that's what big school girls can do"*. For Josie, the smaller monkey bars in ECE had provided a focus for her preparation for starting school. Her hours of practising were based on her idea that conquering the monkey bars meant that she was a big school girl, because it was a challenge that only school children and not ECE children could meet.

Josie's story highlights how her older cousin's narrative had shaped her expectations about being a school pupil. Josie wanted to prove to herself that she could shift her own identity to that of a "big school girl" by succeeding in the challenge she had set herself. During her first week of school, Josie managed to navigate her way across the full length of the monkey bars; her practising had paid off (see Figure 46).



Figure 46: Josie challenging herself on the monkey bars.

The block people

Displaying photos of the children in their new class environment has already been highlighted in Chapter 5 as a transition practice developed to support the children in making initial connections by seeing images of themselves in their new classroom space. The block

people (see Figure 47) were an extension to this transition practice. In the first few moments of receiving their block people, the children showed their block person around the classroom environment, introducing them to other block people as if they were new additions to the group. In this moment, the children were no longer the new additions to the classroom, the block people were. The children shared their favourite places to play and inducted the block people into their space.

Block people integrated into imaginative play

Data generated from my observations of children engaging in imaginative play were analysed to identify any emerging transition needs that children might be grappling with. I saw imaginative play as a meaningful way for children to process the significant changes involved in starting school. I did not intervene with the children's imaginative play but remained a passive observer of their stories they were creating. Revisiting my observations enabled me to identify how to facilitate their needs by creating props and developing strategies to support their play and problem-solving.

An example of a child exploring a specific aspect of their transition emerged from my observation of Mason. Previously, I had observed Mason being upset by getting lost in the wider school environment. When he tried to return to his class at the end of the lunchtime recess from the sports court he became disoriented and arrived at class feeling distressed. In the classroom, I observed him engaging in imaginative play using his block person to represent Spiderman. Over a two-day period he replayed the same scenario in the wooden block area alongside Kamsin. The two boys regularly used their block people and the school buildings in their games, forming an ongoing storyline where superheroes swung from the respective buildings, enacting their block people's journeys. When it was Mason's turn he described the route that Spiderman was taking, and appeared to be practising and rehearsing the journey from the classroom to the sports court, identifying some of his buildings as different parts of the school environment.

Key to my facilitation of children's imaginative play was knowing when and how to respond and support. To support Mason in establishing his route from the sports courts to his classroom, the next day I took him on a walk around the school, bringing an iPad with us. We started at the sports court, and I encouraged Mason to take photos of the buildings which he was interested in as we made our way back to class. When I asked him what he wanted to do

with the photos, he asked if we could print the images of the buildings which he and I then fixed them on to the wooden blocks (see Figure 47).

From observing Mason's imaginative play I identified his immediate transition need: to familiarise himself with the wider school environment. During his play, I did not intervene or disturb his imaginative storytelling. In forming his next step I actively collaborated with him, modelling the route and providing him with a tool to record the journey, but then left it to him to decide how he used this information. The photos that he had taken and attached to the wooden blocks provided him with a way to sequence his route and solved his orientation problem in a way that was meaningful to him.



Figure 47: Images of block people from Facebook.

Rehearsing new routines

Morgan, Rebekah and Amie's story shows that by rehearsing and enacting aspects of the new daily routine through role-play children can explore different perspectives and ideas to help make the new routines feel safe and familiar. The role-play context the group selected mirrored their new before-school morning routines. Their role-play was focused around packing lunchboxes. All three girls were excited about their new lunchboxes that had been specially purchased for them prior to starting school. For several successive days, the three girls retrieved their lunchboxes and school bags from their coat pegs and added them to their play, practising and consolidating their morning routine. The girls pretended to be a Mum or a child, taking turns at who was responsible for getting the "child" "ready" for school. The girls then wheeled play prams and dolls and "walked to school" (see Figure 48). Morgan, adopted the identity of Rebekah's Mum, pretending that the doll in the pram was Rebekah's brother. "*Come on Rebekah, you know your brother will want to play in the classroom and he*

has to go to kindy. Now, make sure you put your book bag in the box and write your name, and try hard with your learning - oh and eat your lunch!"



Figure 48: Image of the children's role-play shared on Facebook.

Lunchtime and the preparation of lunches was becoming a frequent yet still new addition to the girls' routine. Role-play provided a way for them to create dialogue and actions to help them process their adjustments to their new daily routine. The role-play highlighted in this example held similarities to the superhero imaginative play initiated in the previous example of block people. Rehearsing an aspect of the school's daily routine, such as packing lunchboxes, was another visible indication of the children processing and adjusting to the new environment and routines of starting school.

Children finding their place at school

The following story shows Morgan feeling comfortable that she had found her own place at school and thus being able to support Josie in her adjustment to school. It shows how teacher observations of children's interactions with each other can provide valuable insights into how children are managing their own transition after they have started school. The story also highlights the important role that children can play in supporting each other's transition.

When Morgan started school in term three, I noticed she developed an attachment to an item from the dress-up box: a furry, rainbow tail attached to an elastic waistband (see Figure 49). The rainbow tail appeared to provide Morgan with a feeling of safety and security. She would leave the tail at the door of the learning space, putting it on in the morning, then at break time, and taking it off again at home time. When she left it on the floor at the doorway, she

gave strict instructions that she wanted it left there ready for the morning, that it was not to be moved or put away.

Josie started on the first day of term four, along with nine other new children. On entering the classroom, Josie had felt overwhelmed. When Morgan arrived back at school in term 4, she put her tail on and wore it around the room as she always did. Morgan was quite excited that new children had started in class that day and challenged herself to make new friends. She had noticed that Josie was quiet and sucking her thumb, and announced, *“That girl is feeling sad, I am going to be her friend”*. Morgan approached Josie and as she chatted to her I saw her take off the rainbow tail. She passed it to Josie and said, *“You can have this now I don’t need it”*. The next day I saw that Josie was wearing the tail again, quietly taking it out of the dress-up basket when she arrived, and only returning it to the basket at the end of the day.

I was interested to observe that Morgan had become emotionally attached to a particular object in the classroom which appeared to have brought her comfort over a number of weeks, and it had become her routine to arrive in the morning and to put on her rainbow tail. Passing the tail on to Josie demonstrated that Morgan had decided while she now felt secure in her classroom, Josie did not. She had needed the tail previously, but realised that Josie now needed its comfort more than she did, and drew on this strategy to help Josie in feeling more confident. Morgan had actively sought to develop positive connections with Josie. This showed that Morgan felt safe and had developed a sense of familiarity with their school environment. In addition, her support of Josie revealed her increased sense of responsibility in her new role as a school pupil.



Figure 49: Morgan (left) and Josie (right) in their rainbow tail.

Making friends

This final story shows the importance of children finding and sustaining friendships around common interests in order to feel more established in their place at school.

Mason, who had started school very early in term three, had found making friends challenging. He had no prior friends attending the primary school and he was the only child starting school in this class from his ECE centre. With no pre-existing connections, he had difficulty in forging friendships within his class. He found lunchtime and play times the most upsetting. Initially, his brother, persuaded by their parents, would look after Mason during break times, but he found Mason's emotional outbursts at the end of morning tea or at lunch challenging, and so stopped coming to collect him. To help Mason cope with morning tea and lunchtimes, I engaged strategies such as encouraging him to join in with other children's play. Mason's designated "buddy" from an older class came and invited Mason to play, but these strategies all resulted in short-term associations, and rarely would Mason return to find the children he had played with, as he did not know their names, or did not feel a connection with them. This was a distressing time for both Mason and his family, and despite my efforts to connect Mason with other children he continued to feel isolated and sad. However, friendships began to happen for him when Kamsin and Abdul joined the class. Connections between Mason, Kamsin and Abdul were forged by a shared love of construction and superhero role-play (as described in a previous story). Mason's connections with two other children who shared his love of construction and imaginative play provided a meaningful focus for their group engagement and social connections (see Figure 50).

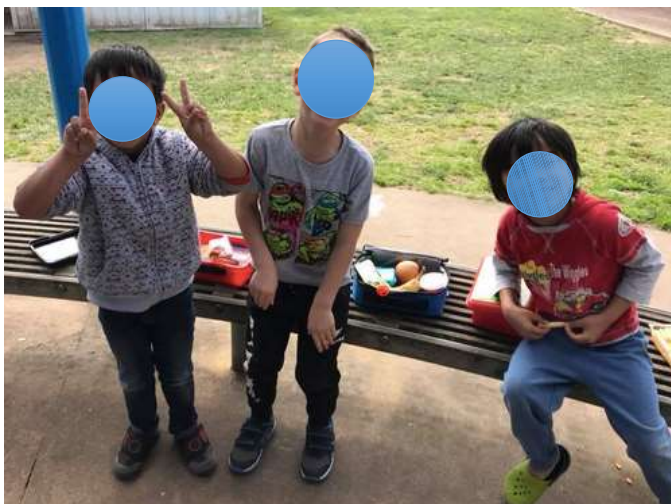


Figure 50: Mason, Kamsin and Abdul becoming friends: Shared Facebook posting.

Chapter summary

In this chapter, the children's stories of transition show that children are active collaborators in their own and other children's transition to school. They arrive at school having already developed their own world-views and understandings of what starting school will be about. Highlights for me were seeing actions and dialogue that clearly showed when children felt comfortable with their new roles and responsibilities, and were actively supporting those not yet secure to find their sense of familiarity and belonging. The evidence suggests that the children were collaborating with each other in constructing and sharing transition strategies.

By not directly intervening but just observing, I was able to see how the children created play situations to re-run stories and to problem-solve, figuring out in their own way how to adjust to the newness of becoming a school child. When given time, space and opportunities to engage in play, the children repeated, rehearsed, and resolved the day-to-day moments of their transition. The transition resources I developed in response to my observations were designed to support children in managing aspects of their own transition within their play.

The next chapter identifies the specific DATs in supporting children's changing needs over their transition to school process. It discusses and proposes a framework of facilitation that combines the three phases of transition (pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal) offered by van Gennep (1960/1977) with the theory of "distributed intelligence" developed by Pea (1993). This framework utilises a collaborative process which involves children, their families, and teachers in a customised transition to school process that is flexible enough to support each individual child.

Chapter 10: Customising the transition process to facilitate each child's needs

This chapter discusses the findings related to the third research question “In what ways can a collaboration between schools and families develop a transition to school process that contributes to helping children find their place in the school environment?” The chapter focuses on my customisation of children’s activities in the transition process, and their purpose in supporting an effective transition to school. Chapter 10 presents a framework of facilitation that brings together the resources and strategies that surfaced from the findings that supported the children’s transition process. The framework incorporates van Gennepe’s (1960-1966) three phases of transition and draws on the concepts of horizontal and vertical transitions introduced in Chapter 2.

When I was analysing the children’s experiences at each phase of the research, I realised that some of my interventions, made in consultation with families and with the children themselves, could be described as a DATs, that is, Deliberate Acts of Transition. Like the conceptualisation of a DAT defined and explained in Chapter 6, the DATs identified specifically for the children, focused on facilitating opportunities for children to actively explore, develop and problem-solve, as well as support each other in understanding their transition to school.

In contrast to Chapter 6, where I discussed the support identified across the three phases of the the families’ transition process, in this chapter, my facilitation of the children’s transition is mostly focused on the first two phases of their transition process, with the post-liminal phase acknowledged through discussion and looking at examples of children who had demonstrated that they had found their place at school. The following section discusses the support and collaboration that developed to facilitate the children’s transition at the pre-liminal phase.

The pre-liminal phase: Prepare

The DAT identified at the pre-liminal phase for the children was “Prepare”. Here, my role as the teacher was important in developing the resources to support the children’s preparation for school. At the pre-liminal phase, my collaboration with the families focused on

developing transition tools to be used as part of their home practices. The parents' role was then to customise how they used the transition tools to meet their own child's individual needs.

As shared in Chapter 9, two key findings were identified at the pre-liminal phase: the important role families held in preparing their child for school and how home-school collaboration supported teachers to develop "transition tools" to be used by families. Transition tools were developed to build a parent's ability to facilitate an effective transition process. As a range of studies, such as those of Krinninger and Schulz (2017) and McIntyre et al. (2007), has highlighted, parents are the child's main support during transition, thus, constructing resources that met families' needs and enabled dialogue between children and parents was a significant consideration for me in setting up the Facebook page for families.

I knew it was essential to build positive and trusting relationships with the families. It was my intention from the beginning of the research to be proactive in maintaining open communication with families. Research by Byron (2009) and Miller et al. (2011) reinforces the importance of developing regular and ongoing home-school engagement early in the transition process. I facilitated this by my frequent engagement through Facebook and my open invitation for families to be actively involved in their child's transition process. Facebook provided an easily managed way to communicate and to continually build my initial and frequent connections with families. Kuusimäki et al. (2019) caution that a school's reliance on digital communication alone with families cannot foster trust as effectively as meeting face-to-face. However, at the time of my study I learned that face-to-face practices where families were invited to school meetings had already proven ineffective. A reason for this, as outlined in Chapter 5, was that parents in the Facebook group were found to be time-poor, so maintaining connections on Facebook provided families with digital support that helped to prepare their child for school, something that they appreciated an example of which is shared in the vignette of this study's abstract. Ease of accessibility and convenience suited the families, and enabled a facilitation which face-to-face meetings could not provide.

Parents whose eldest child was starting school were themselves experiencing that transition for the first time. Peters (2004) and Ackesjö (2017) both emphasise that these parents have little previous experience to draw upon to help them support their child about to start school. Connecting digitally with their child's new teacher, as opposed to face-to-face, may have felt a more comfortable option for families at the beginning of their transition process. Trust and

relationships had not yet been established and perhaps communicating with me digitally when a parents' physical presence was not required might have felt a more convenient and accessible context for their questions. Facebook offered a safe and accessible environment (Semaan et al., 2016) for first-time parents to ask questions and seek advice (Woodhouse, 2015). Additionally, in the digital group space, parents who posted questions to the group may have influenced other members to use Facebook to communicate with me as well. Also, people are increasingly accustomed to the digital environment as a place for meeting and talking.

A surprising finding (see Chapter 9) was that many of the families shared my Facebook postings about children who had started in the NE class with their own children, as part of their preparation for starting school. Peters and Sandberg (2017) describe school as being an unfamiliar environment for transitioning children. The families in my study focused their home transition practices around the daily postings as a way to share aspects of school life on a frequent basis. For example, Hoana's Mum said that she had used Facebook to introduce her daughter to the other children before she started school, as an important step in helping her child to feel less intimidated by entering a new environment. Parents told me that the Facebook postings helped deepen the connection between home and the school, and enabled children to familiarise themselves with their new class. Semaan et al. (2016) highlighted the usefulness of a Facebook group space to provide members with a "big picture understanding of the unfamiliar rules and norms" (Semaan et al., 2016, pp. 2882-2883). In line with Semaan et al's suggestion, I would also add that Facebook was an effective tool to share and support orientation information with families. Additionally, the parents in my study showed how Facebook can be used as an effective tool to support social familiarisation, enabling group members to connect and learn more about each other.

As noted above, a specific part of the social familiarisation process that parents developed at home was sharing the daily Facebook postings to help their child to learn names and to connect with other children who would be in their class. The parents in my study clearly understood the need for their child to begin to build friendships that would help them develop a sense of belonging in a new situation. A parent's direct involvement in actively supporting their child to form new friendships was a parenting strategy also observed by Ackesjö (2014). She found that, along with parental support, having a friend had helped children to find their place and to adjust to the changes of starting school. For the parents in my study familiarising

their child with the other children by sharing the daily Facebook postings was an important step in preparing their child socially for starting school and meeting their classmates.

The next section presents my framework of facilitation of the children’s transition process at the pre-liminal phase.

Framework of facilitation for the Pre-liminal phase

The identified DAT: Prepare informed the five ensuing actions developed at the pre-liminal phase (see Figure 51 below). Ensuing Actions (EA) are explained in Chapter 6 as being actions guided by the overall DAT. These actions may have been planned for the needs of the wider group of children or developed in response to an individual child’s requirements.

Van Gennep’s 3 phases of transition (1977)	Pre liminal
Deliberate Act of Transition (DAT)	Prepare
	EA 1-Children’s e-portfolio stories EA 2- Online digital Patrick stories
	EA 3-Video promotes social interaction between parent and child with question prompts. -Parents encouraged to share the stories with the child
	EA 4- Families connecting and interacting through Facebook.
	EA 5 -Child processing information, forming own questions and theories

Figure 51: Framework of facilitation.

As well as their home practices at the pre-liminal phase, the children had begun to experience movement between ECE and school, as indicated by the series of blue arrows in Figure 51.

The arrows are double headed to indicate that the children were still attending their ECE centre, and any physical engagement or interaction with the primary school was likely to be

fleeting. For example, the ECE children in Centre A began their weekly visits to the school library and playground as part of their *Cool 4 school* programme.

The following section discuss the ensuing actions (EA 1-5 shown on Figure 51) that were developed from the identified DAT: Prepare, which was the focus of the children's pre-liminal phase of their transition.

Ensuuing Action 1: Children's e-portfolio stories

As the children's NE teacher, I needed to get to know the children's interests and prior learning experiences. This was most easily achieved through access to their e-portfolios. Hooker (2016) noted that ECE e-portfolios provide NE teachers with a broad foundation of knowledge about each transitioning child. My study used this potential; by making available prior knowledge about the children, the e-portfolios were a useful tool to inform my planning of the classroom environment and helped me to select meaningful physical resources with which the children were already familiar.

Ensuuing Action 2: Patrick digital stories

Digital resources, such as the Patrick story videos, helped the parents to prepare and rehearse situations with their child. The content of the videos and the social scenarios that they presented assisted in demystifying aspects of school life, using authentic representations of various scenarios. Reviewing everyday scenarios which a child might find challenging, such as finding the bathroom (Tatlow-Golden et al., 2017), enabled parents to help their child face potentially stressful situations. It appeared, from the parents' feedback and my observations, that these digital resources helped to alleviate stress of the unknown and enhance a feeling of security, which, as Harper (2016) suggests, is important in fostering a sense of belonging for the child.

Parents used the Patrick videos to prepare their child for what was ahead. Rous et al. (2010) identified the type of transition practices that families were developing at home with their child as providing an individualised approach, deemed to be more meaningful in supporting a child's ideas about school. In this sense, the videos and Facebook postings which focused on the conversations the child had with their parents were a high intensity transition practice. In preparing children for starting school at the pre-liminal phase my study identified that a family's development of home transition practices was an essential source of support for the child.

Ensuing Action 3: Parent and child interactions with the Facebook resources

At the pre-liminal phase of the families' transition the support of the families emerged as an integral element of preparing children for their start to school. O'Donnoghue (2014) reaffirms that it is important that schools provide families with appropriate transition resources so that they have agency in the transition process. Through adult facilitation, the child's interaction with a video or artefact was more likely to occur within their ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978). While the digital stories were designed to be appropriate for children to watch independently, the conversations and questions with which a parent could provide their child supported their targeted engagement with the resource. According to Kuusimäki et al. (2019) the parent's knowledge of their child makes them the ideal supporter in their child's transition to school. To facilitate the children's preparation for school, families were provided with a range of resources from which they could select those most appropriate to their child. In alignment with Pea's (1993) conceptualisation, the resources were only tools to be drawn upon. It was the parent's knowledge of their own child that influenced how they chose to use the tools.

Facebook provided families with access to physical resources that could be used to help them feel confident in preparing their child for school. According to Giallo et al. (2010), if tools and information are available, families can support their child's transition more confidently. Besi and Sakellariou (2019) found that confident parents are more able to adapt and manage change, promoting a smoother transition to school for their families. Facebook provided an inclusive way for parents to find the information that they required through its provision of an ongoing archive of physical resources available whenever needed.

Ensuing Action 4: Families connecting and interacting using Facebook

Research has highlighted the importance for schools to develop a positive climate and create opportunities to learn about each family's values and needs in starting school (Correia & Marques-Pinto, 2016), and to involve families in the planning of their transition (Harper, 2016), so that teachers can provide a supportive transition process (Doucet & Tudge, 2007). Facebook provides ways to develop resources to help families to develop home practices to prepare for their child starting school. In consultation with families, I was able to customise physical resources to fit families' specific needs and identify any gaps where additional resources were required. Using Facebook, I could add or adapt additional physical resources to respond and meet the families' developing needs to customise their home transition practices to support their child's preparation for starting school. For example, after-school

care emerged as such a gap, one which I had not previously considered. The development of a digital story about after-school care demonstrated how the families interacted with the resources on the Facebook page, creating an interplay between practice and resources. This, in turn, supported their own development and learning about starting school (Pea, 1993; Perkins, 1997) in order to support the preparation of their child.

Ensuing Action 5: Children processing information and forming own theories and questions

At the pre-liminal phase there was a reliance on families to support their children in preparing for school; however, my study also found that the children too were preparing for their own transition; and enabling them to do this is very important. The data revealed that the children had developed their own theories of “what should a school child be able to show or do that an ECE child could not?”, and were making their own preparations. To process these adjustments whilst still at ECE, some children had set personal achievement goals which they wanted to attain before they started school. For example, Josie, influenced by her older cousin, set herself a goal of conquering an aspect of her surrounding environment. As Peters (2010) highlighted, stakeholders have varying perspectives and beliefs regarding what constitutes an effective transition process. A child therefore, will likely hold differing beliefs and values from the adults involved about what they prioritise as important for a positive start to school. For children, such as Josie, preparing for her start to school prompted her to set herself a meaningful goal that she was determined to attain.

The framework of facilitation (see Figure 51) that developed from the findings at the pre-liminal phase was focused around the purpose of the identified DAT: Prepare. The ensuing actions (EA 1-5 as shown in Figure 51) show that my facilitation was focused on constructing tools and information which families could use as part of their home transition practices to help prepare their child for school. The families were then able to customise the tools and information gained from Facebook to prioritise particular aspects of transition, or adapt the resources to meet their child’s needs in a way that was meaningful for them.

The next section discusses the liminal phase of the children’s transition process as they started school.

The liminal phase: Learning to adjust

For each child their first day in NE signified an individual event. The child entered their new classroom as an individual who was yet to be incorporated into a new group of peers. Each child needed time to develop their connections to learn to adjust to their new environment at their own pace. van Gennep (1960/1977) reminds us that some individuals might be caught between the pre-liminal and the liminal phase for longer than others and may need more time and support to adjust to their new social group. In the context of this study, the findings suggested that the best way for the child to find familiarity within their new environment was to make connections with their previous learning motivations and resources. My role was to facilitate these learning opportunities to support the transitioning children's adjustments.

As shared in Chapter 9, two key findings were identified at the liminal phase which supported the development of the identified DAT: Learning to adjust. Firstly, in my observations of the children in their play I noticed how they incorporated aspects of the transition which they were confronted with into their role-play scenarios. Secondly, in supporting the child's adjustment to school, teacher observations were used to surface and prioritise a child's next step in supporting a specific transition need. The powerful role of teacher observation in supporting a child's transition is echoed in findings by Peters et al. (2015), who reinforce the importance for teachers to "pay attention to how children gain familiarity and develop relationships in a new context" (p. 7). In taking a step back, a teacher has the opportunity to see how the child interacts with their new environment, making them better placed to develop a "framework for thinking about supporting" (Peters et al., 2015, p. 7) each child's adjustment to school.

The following section further develops the facilitation framework to include the liminal phase.

Framework of facilitation for the Liminal phase

Figure 52 further builds on the framework of facilitating a child's transition to school that prioritised the DAT and ensuing actions identified at the liminal phase of the children's transition: Learning to adjust. During the liminal phase, the DAT shifted the focus of facilitation from previously supporting families' in preparing children through their home practices towards developing facilitation of my interpretation of the children's transition needs as they started school, where the children led and directed their own play, which

provided me with the opportunity to observe and interpret, and then guide them in their next steps.

At the liminal phase the child experiences for the first time in this transition process a vertical shift, (Kagan & Neuman, 1998) represented in Figure 52 as a vertical arrow. For the children it is an intense period of learning to adjust, as they finally start school. At this school a rite of passage ritual that signified the vertical transition was symbolised by the *mihi whakatau* ceremony, which marked the transitioning families' crossing over the threshold into their new school community, as parents of a school child and a school pupil. During the liminal phase, the child permanently moved from their ECE centre to start school as a new school pupil. As a result of this major change, their role and daily routines may have needed to be realigned to accommodate starting school. The horizontal arrows at the liminal phase represent the many smaller movements between routines and places which the child was still learning to adjust to as part of their school day (Kagan & Neuman, 1998) .

Van Gennep's 3 phases of transition (1977)	Pre liminal	Liminal
Deliberate Act of Transition (DAT)	Prepare	Learning to adjust
	EA 1-Children's e-portfolio stories EA 2- Online digital Patrick stories	EA 6-Addition of props and 'invitations to play'
	EA 3-Video promotes social interaction between parent and child with question prompts. -Parents encouraged to share the stories with the child EA 4- Families connecting and interacting through Facebook.	EA 7- Welcoming children to school
	EA 5 -Child processing information, forming own questions and theories	EA 8- Children rehearse and problem-solve, represent and de-construct scenarios in their play

Figure 52: Framework of facilitation liminal DAT.

Focused by the identified DAT: Learning to adjust, three Ensuing Actions were formed (EA 6,7 and 8, see Figure 52). These actions were developed in response to an individual child's requirements gained through my teacher observations and will now be discussed.

Ensuing Action 6: Addition of props and invitations to play

Finding familiarity amongst new and unfamiliar places and faces was an anchor for the children in their orientation to their new environment. In providing familiar contexts and motivations to support the children's adjustment to their new learning environment, I needed to get to know the children's interests and prior learning experiences. This was achieved through access to the children's e-portfolios.

With knowledge of the children's ECE experiences, I could customise opportunities for them to play and engage with familiar props, such as wooden construction, dress-up clothes and

sand and water equipment. The block people proved to be an adaptable, physical resource introduced to the children's play. As discussed in Chapter 9, a key part of the superhero play developed by Mason and his friends was how his block person operated as a mediating artefact, as defined by Perkins (1997). Such tools can enhance the activity in which the children are engaged. According to Simonsson (2015), "the value of an artefact... is not the thing itself, but its capacity to provide agency" (p. 16). For Mason the block person was the tool that helped him to process the layout of his new school environment. He also used his block person to represent a character in his imaginary play, featuring in the stories he developed with his friends. Children who held similar play interests were then drawn together by connecting with familiar and favourite play activities.

Ensuing Action 7: Welcoming children to school

At the liminal phase learning about school involved my facilitating first-hand experiences for children, with their families, to physically experience the school environment. Rous and Hallam (2012) have noted that schools' transition practices that included physical visits to the school tended to focus on strategies such as a parent information meeting or tour of the school grounds. These strategies do not always offer the opportunity for families to be actively involved and perhaps are more suited to be an opportunity for families to receive orientation information. In my study I wanted to use the physical visit to build on the digital connections that the families had already developed through Facebook. At the liminal phase I prioritised opportunities for the children to begin to develop their social connections with each other, so the physical visits to school also included active opportunities for families to connect socially with other parents, children and school staff. The *mihi whakatau* discussed in Chapter 5 and 6 represented a culturally symbolic rite of passage. The first planned physical visit was the rock hunt. The rocks were physical objects that focused the children's hunting, but they also functioned as artefacts. They could be viewed as a resource or prompt that provided an authentic purpose for the children and parents to search and explore the school environment together to find them, but also provided the opportunity to socially connect and collaborate with the other transitioning families.

As the children started school, the *mihi whakatau* formed an ensuing action in the liminal phase to acknowledge the vertical transition of the children towards becoming school pupils. It was a way to celebrate, welcome and include the children and their families, as members of their new school community. In focusing on the liminal DAT: Learning to adjust, the *mihi*

whakatau created an opportunity for families to learn about their new school community and to be guided by established community members. It was a way for families to feel less like visitors to the school and instead to begin to feel part of their school community. The ceremony not only marked what Hokstad et al. (2016) described as this outsider/insider transformation, it also supported the children and their families as they learned more about being part of this new community. The event provided a valuable context for building new and reaffirming existing relationships between groups of people (Hohepa et al., 2017). For the ECE teachers, this event facilitated the opportunity to hand over their *taonga* [treasure], referring to the child and their family, from the care of their previous ECE community into that of their new school community (Hohepa et al., 2017).

For some of the children and their families, the *mihi whakatau* was a new cultural experience and as such the process was led and guided by the school principal, who explained and customised the ceremony to meet the families' needs. The children were given the opportunity to participate in the ceremony, stay with their parents, or join in with the other children who would be in their class. The ceremony represented a metaphorical action; it was a cultural support which assured the families and their ECE centres that the school would be a safe and nurturing place for their children. As suggested by Hohepa et al. (2017) a *mihi whakatau* it is not just a relational and social process. Through this welcoming ceremony, deeper connections to Māori cultural values can provide a feeling or connection which has a spiritual dimension. This might not have happened for all families; however, it was imperative to honour *tangata whenua* (the original inhabitants of New Zealand) as treaty partners in the country's bicultural context. The *mihi whakatau* signified a time and space to connect socially and build connections between families and across educational settings but also represented separation from the families' ECE centre community and their entry to their new school community. The *mihi whakatau* supported the children's "official" entry to school as something that was shared with their family or ECE teacher. The child was helped to feel more comfortable in this new environment and amongst new people by having someone familiar with them.

Ensuing Action 8: Opportunities for children to rehearse and problem-solve aspects of their own transition in their play

As I observed the children's play in the classroom, I realised that I was learning how to support their adjustment to the changes they were navigating in their move to school. I began to notice moments when a child would draw into their play aspects of starting school. To

facilitate the children's needs as they emerged from my interpretation of my observations I added resources to familiar play activities that were flexible to the children's interpretations. The children often surprised me in the ways they used the resources, and I had to try different teaching strategies to respond to their evolving needs. The children used some of the props as a way to represent a "character" that sparked ideas for imaginary play scenarios in which they proceeded to rehearse aspects of their transition. Imaginative play appeared to be a primary way for children to learn how to process the changes and manage the new experiences of starting school.

The children's engagement in imaginative role-play provided a way for them to explore their thoughts and ascribe feelings to their created characters to process aspects of the changes that they were processing. According to Reusser (2001) an effective learning environment is one which is supportive of collaborative construction of learning. My observations of their play made it clear that they were using play to negotiate their understanding of school and its routines. The play-based learning environment could be viewed as a joint problem space, which facilitated conditions that promoted collaborative interaction and exchanges of information (Kimmerle et al., 2015).

As described in Chapter 9, Mason found that adopting the role of a superhero was an effective way for him to cope with his transition. Harris (2000) advised that role-play, where children imitate and act out the part of another person or creature, is crucial for the development of their own social understanding. Being in the role of a superhero and encouraging his friends to join him enabled Mason to problem-solve and feel more confident in approaching his concerns. In the opinion of White and Carlson (2016) the psychological distance provided by being in role as a superhero can promote a "bird's-eye view" (p. 420) on situations which children find stressful or difficult to handle. Once a child can view the situation within their role-play, they are able to see their choices more clearly, reflect on them, and ultimately feel more in control of their actions. White and Carlson (2016) espouse the benefit that an individual may gain from having an overview of the situation. For Mason his imaginative play attracted other children to join him, and he was able to collaborate in his role-play with a small group of children. The children's group play enabled them to process, rehearse and consolidate the impact of the changes caused by their transition. Through collaborative play, they could take small parts of this change and begin to adjust and understand it.

The following section discusses the process of facilitating the children’s next step to support their most immediate transition need, which became obvious as I watched them in their play.

Process of learning: Observe, respond, facilitate

Figure 53 shows the process that emerged as I interpreted, identified and prioritised a child’s transitional learning need through my observations, and how I developed my response to support the child’s next steps.



Figure 53: Teacher observation cycle to surface children’s transitional needs.

Whilst my intended focus was more broadly on the family, the sociocultural theoretical base of the study and the understanding of the challenges of moving from liminality to post-liminality led me to consider my role as a teacher-researcher in supporting children. It is important to note there are advantages and disadvantages to teachers' intervention in children’s play. On the one hand, intervention may enrich children’s play and allow the teacher to extend and develop their social skills (Tarmen & Tarman, 2011), while on the other, there is the view that the teacher may inadvertently take over and disrupt the play. As cautioned by Hedges (2000) scaffolding, or guiding a child’s learning, has often been “misinterpreted” as a form of “direct teaching” (p. 17). Resources and invitations to play are

obvious areas in which a teacher can more directly influence learning. However, adopting a “person-plus” approach (Perkins, 1997), means that these props and resources added to the children’s play encourage a learner to explore and process their learning needs.

Facilitating the children’s transition needs

When I observed the children as they entered school, I noticed that some of them were unconfident about getting involved with the play activities, tending to stand back and watch the other children from the periphery. For example, Josie was watching a group of children making masks, but when Morgan invited her to join in, Josie took a step back, but continued to observe. Josie had been described in her ECE e-portfolio as leading the play and an active explorer in her previous learning environment. *The Continuity of Learning Report*, ERO (2015) suggests that children who feel secure and happy in their ECE environment, prior to moving to school may be de-stabilised by a change of environments and expectations in the school environment (*Continuity of Learning Report*, ERO, 2015). I could see that Josie was feeling unsure, and taking time to observe and learn how her previous experiences of ECE could help her understand her new classroom experiences.

My facilitation of the children’s emerging transition needs involved observing their play and responding by adding props, or making suggestions. For children coping with a new situation, such as starting school, Frydenberg et al. (2012) place importance on allowing an individual the time to “take stock” of their situation. Through my observations of the children’s play, I could see how they were taking stock of school; they were adjusting to specific aspects of their transition, such as adapting to new before-school morning routines, or navigating the school environment, as outlined in Chapter 9. Further evidence of how children were taking stock was observed through their tendency to re-run a particular play scenario over a number of days. Therefore, in bringing further insights into supporting children as they coped with change, my study has identified the importance of providing children with extended periods of time to play, to process, problem-solve and to manage the changes they may be experiencing.

To facilitate the children’s adjustment to school, I engaged critically with the observations I had made. I had noted that the children often talked to themselves, acted in roles, or engaged with other children. I worked alongside the children to figure out how best to support them in a particular aspect of change that they were trying to cope with. Frydenberg et al. (2012), advise that the facilitation of a child’s next learning step needs to ensure that the individual

has the capacity to manage it. At this point, the teacher's judgement may support an intervention which will assist the child's growing competency to manage the situation. The intervention may be to support the child through questioning, giving feedback, or encouraging them to jointly solve through the use of resources or tools. Working within the child's Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978) means that supporting the child's potential development needs to be carefully planned around the skills which the child is close to mastering. If the situation proves too difficult for a child to manage, it may cause that child to feel stressed and unable to cope (Youngs, 1985). According to Frydenberg et al. (2012), stress can be defined as a, "mismatch between the demands of a situation and a person's perceived capacity to cope" (p. 22). Having identified the child's transition need, I returned to observing that child, and paying attention to the context which was the motivation for their play. This context guided me in selecting props to facilitate an invitation to play.

When planning an invitation to play for a child or group of children, I needed to carefully select resources that would provide a focal point or context that facilitated opportunities for them to explore a targeted transition learning need that I had perceived in my observations. Frydenberg et al. (2012) emphasise that the individual needs to know how to access resources or tools to support themselves in coping with a situation. Leaving props and "invitations to play" accessible in the classroom for a number of days meant that the children could return and re-explore these tools and resources, promoting what Ackesjö (2014) terms as a "spiral process" (p. 9), where the learner has the opportunity to employ repetition, as a positive way of preparing children for their move to school. She explains that children need opportunities to "construct and reconstruct expectations" (p. 9) of school. Through my observations of the children I had noticed how important it was to provide them with time to support and a range of play activities for them to test and retest their ideas. I noticed that sometimes a child was "stuck" in re-running the same scenario and I deduced that further intervention was needed to help them manage their immediate transition needs. Vygotsky (1982) reiterates that interaction with cultural tools or artefacts forms an important part of a learner's psychological development, for example, objects such as the block people or the rainbow tail mentioned in Chapter 9. The object contextualised the focus for repetition; but building further on ideas raised by Ackesjö (2014), it is the conversations and actions sparked by the object which can promote collaboration amongst the children. In problem-solving together the children are able to share strategies from their own coping repertoire that may support other children and break the re-running cycle in which an individual child may be stuck.

At the liminal phase, the identified DAT was Learning to adjust, which was supported by three focused ensuing actions (EA 6,7, and 8; see Figure 52). As highlighted in Figure 52, EA 6 Props and invitations to play helped the children make connections with their prior learning. The props provided opportunities for children to build on their existing as they adapted to their new learning space. I was then able to observe how the children interacted with the resources, respond to their requests for new resources, and support them in their next steps as they used their play to rehearse and manage aspects of their adjustment to school. EA 7 was an opportunity for the children to learn about school with the support of their families and their new school community. The *mihi whakatau* ceremony marked starting school as a celebration for the children and one which they were invited to be part of. EA 8 focused on enabling children to explore aspects of their own transition in their play. The children demonstrated that imaginative play provided them with a personal distance from the problem or aspect of transition that they were trying to solve. By “being in role” the children were able to transfer and channel their ideas through a persona which supported them in managing aspects of starting school that they were dealing with in a way that was meaningful for them. A process of facilitation has been shared at the liminal phase. Observing the children in their play helped me to identify what they were trying to manage and resolve as they adjusted to school. I was then able to customise a response which would support their next steps

The following section discusses my facilitation in helping the children to navigate the uncertainties of the liminal phase towards feeling more secure as part of their NE class, signifying a shift to the post-liminal phase of their transition process.

Moving children from the liminal to the post-liminal

As the children became more familiar with their school environment, my focus as a teacher shifted from working with children to identify and facilitate their transition needs towards encouraging them to build connections with each other and to support them in finding their places as school children.

Fostering the development of social connections was key in nurturing new friendships. By establishing social connections the children helped each other to develop a sense of belonging to the NE group. When a child showed that they had developed a sense of belonging in their school environment I saw it as an indication that the child was experiencing the post-liminal phase of their transition. Like Ladd (1990) and Margetts (1997), I considered that building relationships with other children was a key factor for a child to begin to find their place in

school. Children could be regarded as “finding their place” when they began to share their coping strategies to support other children’s adjustment to starting school. One example of a child who showed indications of moving from the liminal to the post-liminal was Morgan, when she modelled a “coping strategy”, drawing a love heart on her hand as she separated from Mum to help her manage the start of the school day. This had proved to be an effective intervention developed by Morgan’s Mum which Morgan had stored in her own coping repertoire and which she later used to support another child. Vygotsky (1978) assigns an important role in his theory to the imitative behaviour of the child. He describes “mimicking” as an activity which the child engages in collaboratively with another child or adult, rather than independently. This collaborative process creates an opportunity for learning that focuses on the child’s ZPD, enabling a mediated solution to be developed that supports the solving of a problem.

Morgan mimicked her Mum’s coping strategy, re-sharing it with Josie, so that she too could add this strategy to her own coping repertoire. When situations are manageable for an individual, they will feel more able to problem-solve their way towards other conclusions. When children begin to regulate their emotions and gain more control over their responses, they are more able to concentrate on developing their social or academic goals (Schutz et al., 2006; Vohs & Baumeister, 2011). I interpreted Morgan’s actions as an indication of her entering the post-liminal phase of the transition process. She had felt comfortable enough in her own place to help Josie in trying to find her place.

The following sections discuss the resources that were used to facilitate the children’s transition at the post-liminal phase.

The post-liminal phase: ‘Finding my feet’: Connecting with others

The DAT identified at the post-liminal phase was Finding my feet: Connecting with others. At the post-liminal phase some children began to show that they were comfortable in their school environment. They were familiar with the classroom routines and had begun to make connections with the other children. Friendships were becoming established, and play scenarios tended to involve new friends focused around common interests and points of connection, such as creating a “Pop Idol show” or a “Lego shop”. The children who had been attending school the longest began to support more recent arrivals who were still adjusting to school. I observed children showing beginners around the classroom or inviting them to play.

Figure 54 shares the final phase of the model of facilitation, and includes the remaining ensuing actions focused by the post-liminal DAT.

Van Gennep's 3 phases of transition (1977)	Pre liminal	Liminal	Post liminal
Deliberate Act of Transition (DAT)	Prepare	Learning to adjust	'Finding my feet': Connecting with others
	EA 1-Children's e-portfolio stories EA 2- Online digital Patrick stories	EA 6-Addition of props and 'invitations to play'	EA 6-continued: Addition of props and 'invitations to play'
	EA 3-Video promotes social interaction between parent and child with question prompts. -Parents encouraged to share the stories with the child EA 4- Families connecting and interacting through Facebook.	EA 7- Welcoming children to school	EA 9-supporting children in building connections through play
	EA 5 -Child processing information, forming own questions and theories	EA 8- Children rehearse and problem-solve, represent and de-construct scenarios in their play	EA 10- Developing a sense of belonging: Supporting others

Figure 54: Framework of facilitation post-liminal DAT.

Framework of facilitation for the Post-liminal phase

At the post-liminal phase, children continued to experience horizontal transitions in their day in the form of small movements within their school environment, such as attending after-school care. However, at the post-liminal phase, a child was able to manage these transitions and movements independently as part of their daily routine. Figure 54 completes the final phase of the framework of facilitating a child's transition to school. During the post-liminal phase, the DAT shifted the focus of my facilitation from my earlier interpretation and identification of the children's transition needs as they adjusted to starting school towards helping them to make connections in their new classroom community. The following sections present ensuing actions EA 6, 9 and 10. EA 6 Addition of props and invitations to play continues from the liminal into the post-liminal phase. This is then followed by a summary of the framework of facilitation.

Ensuing action 6 continued: ‘Addition of props and invitations to play’

As shown in Figure 54 the addition of props and invitations to play continued to be an ensuing action at the post-liminal phase. The focus for play was shifting as the children began to build friendships, and the context for the play scenarios was guided by groups as well as individuals.

Ensuing Action 9: Supporting children in building connections through play

My facilitation of the children’s post-liminal phase focused on supporting their integration and their feeling of belonging in their new educational setting. EA 6 and EA 9 both resulted from my commitment to using play to promote opportunities for the children. The children’s families clearly regarded the potential for their children to make new friends as an advantage and something that they hoped their child could achieve (Peters, 2003a). At the post-liminal phase, those children who had arrived with pre-established friendships which were then transferred to the school environment generally found the move to school less challenging and appeared to find their place more easily than those children who arrived without any pre-existing connections.

The importance of making friends

According to Fabian Fabian and Dunlop (2005) children need emotional orientation and confidence to make friends. Therefore, when children arrived at school with pre-established friendships, they were more likely to feel confident in managing new situations and meeting the challenges of transition with the support of their existing friends. Having a sense of familiarity through established friendships eased the newness of school, and for some children brought security and existing knowledge of each other and their common experiences (Peters, 2003a). Some of the families who had had pre-existing connections from their ECE held on tightly to these bonds, ensuring that their child would continue to have a familiar face in their new classroom. Hollingsworth and Buysse (2009) found that parents place great value on their child having friends and often directly intervene in fostering social connections for their child with other families. The families of Josie, Dylan, and Charlie were an example of this, regularly hosting play dates for the children.

However, not all children arrived with pre-existing friendships. In fact, in the focus group, I observed Mason was the only child who transitioned into the NE class from his ECE Centre, and it became my role as NE teacher to put in place strategies and opportunities that supported all the children in building social connections. In order to find their place at the

post-liminal phase, children needed to begin to develop peer social networks. In focusing my support on a child's social and emotional competence I aimed to help them become more confident in making friends and, as espoused by Rohan (2019), to develop a positive perception of themselves as learners. Children's friendships are also a social resource, able to scaffold individuals' adjustment to the new school environment (Peters, 2003b).

Hollingsworth and Buysse (2009) noted that time for children to build friendships through play is often neglected when children start school, with priorities shifting towards academic progress rather than on the social and emotional needs of the child. The results of my study emphasise the significance of extended periods of play in the NE timetable, to allow for children's social and emotional need for peer friendships in their new environment. As Ladd (1990) and Margetts (1997) found, helping children to build their peer social network contributes towards a smoother transition to school. For children such as Mason, who had no pre-established connections with any of the children in his NE class, time both inside and outside the classroom to play with his new playmates were key to his coping with the school day.

The teacher's role in the child's world at school can be a fine balance of observing but not intruding on their play, allowing them time and space, and guiding them as they build friendships. Bath (2009) advises that teachers have a particular role to play in guiding children in their emotional understanding by supporting them to make new friendships. Elsewhere Bath (2008) says that teaching strategies provide opportunities to develop a child's ability to act independently, make their own choices and retain their agency in building new friendships. In stepping back and observing the children's play I was able to see how they were beginning to build connections with each other. My direct intervention was minimal. My role was to plan play scenarios that could motivate children with similar interests to be drawn to an activity and to allow the children time and space to connect with each other.

Ensuing Action 10: Developing a sense of belonging: Supporting others

Some children who had attended school for a longer period of time were able to support children just starting school by sharing some of their own coping strategies. As described in Chapter 9, Morgan's giving the rainbow tail to Josie highlighted the power the artefact represented to her as providing agency and independence. Morgan's modelling of supportive strategies provided Josie with a sense of comfort and security (Peters, 2015). These

observations point toward the effectiveness of learning in a social environment, an idea underpinned by strong theoretical foundations (Vygotsky, 1978).

Summary of framework of facilitating social learning in a child's transition to school

The framework of facilitation shared in Figure 54 prioritised key DATs, focused on actions at each of the three phases of the children's transition. These actions were developed from the findings as contributing most effectively to the transition process. Facilitating a child's transition to school is a shared responsibility. In the pre-liminal phase of the transition I created digital tools to support the families as they developed their home transition practices. During this initial phase, the families were the child's key facilitators, as they prepared their child to start school. In the liminal phase the focus for facilitation became more my responsibility. I observed, interpreted what I saw, and responded to the children's emerging transition needs, taking my cues from the children's play. At the post-liminal phase I was still facilitating children's play, but also providing opportunities for collaborative play which created the context in which the children could interact and support each other. My observations suggested that once a child felt comfortable and secure in their school environment they felt able to support children who were still "finding their feet".

Chapter summary

A facilitation framework that prioritised and supported children's transition needs was formed during the course of the three phases of transition (van Gennep, 1960/1977). The framework came together after an analysis of the findings. This was evidenced by some of the children showing that they had reached the post-liminal phase by being willing to welcome more recent arrivals in their NE class.

The importance of fostering social relationships points to the social nature of learning. One of the relationships theorised by Vygotsky (1987) suggests that a child's ability to problem-solve and create knowledge emerges from a dialectical process. This social learning theory sees the child's experiences as shared and negotiated with a more knowledgeable other, be that their parent, their teacher, or another child. Children can solve some problems independently; however, starting school brings new contexts and challenges. Taking the time before a child begins school to pre-empt and clarify these more challenging problems requires additional support from social agents (Vygotsky, 1987). In this study, the resources

and connections formed through the Facebook page, visits, and e-portfolios, provided this support through a social means, in line with Vygotsky's (1987) theory.

This discussion chapter has offered evidence that children spend time reviewing and rehearsing new routines, learning the layout of their environment, and adopting roles to allow them to understand differing perspectives of the changes that they are undergoing – in this case, the changes inherent in the move from ECE to primary school. Children experience horizontal transitions in the pre-liminal phase as they move back and forth between their ECE and new school environment. At the liminal phase, permanent changes in the children's daily physical environment and in their role within their new educational context cause a vertical transition. Horizontal transitions continue to influence the child's adjustment to their new environment. At the post-liminal phase children are more familiar with their new environment. The horizontal transitions they experience have come to be accepted as part of their daily routine. Throughout their transition to school process, children are constantly interacting with the physical, social, and symbolic resources available to them in their environment. This was demonstrated in their self-directed play. During this time of change, the child needs to negotiate their new role as a school pupil, build new relationships, and understand new rules and responsibilities.

The children in the study responded positively to their situation, finding learning activities that they were enthusiastic about and that were familiar to them. The less regulated the activity, the more the children could explore the potential of the props and resources to direct and negotiate their own play and ideas, or to work with other children. Play happened mostly in groups, with individuals joining in with others interested in common themes or activities. This shows the importance of familiarity and of freedom for the children to follow their own initiative in play. Therefore, the time and space offered to children through play enabled them to become familiar with the practices and the social environment of their new setting as they formed friendships.

The significance of social learning for the children in their transition process across the three phases has been highlighted for this study by a framework of facilitation. Access to familiar resources for a smooth and continuous learning journey, opportunities to make friends, and time for the children to problem-solve in their new environment through role-play, were all provided by the NE teacher. This nexus has been represented in the study as the framework of facilitation, which prioritises the importance of collaboration both between home and

school and between the parents and their child in the development of home transition practices. The next chapter summarises and synthesises the research findings into conclusions. Chapter 11 revisits the key components of this study and discusses the study's main argument.

Chapter 11: Implications and recommendations

The purpose of this thesis has been to explore how a collaborative transition to school process might be developed using social media to customise and support a family's individual needs. This final chapter summarises the key findings and considers their implications for practice and finally limitations are acknowledged and suggestions made for further study stemming from this research. This final chapter draws upon data collected from participants, literature and my own personal insights gained from my experiences. Three research questions have underpinned this study.

- 1) How might a NE teacher meet individual families' needs and aspirations by using a customised transition to school process?
- 2) How might a collaboratively constructed transition to school using social media assist with the development of a CoP that includes families, ECE and NE teachers?
- 3) In what ways can a collaboration between schools and families develop a transition to school process that contributes to helping children find their place in the school environment?

In search of answers to these questions, my fieldwork explored families, teachers, and children's perspectives with respect to transition to school. Adult participant responses were gained at key points of the transition process via questionnaires, with ongoing insights generated using Facebook as well as in-class observations to gain an understanding of the children's perspectives.

The context of this study was transition to school. I sought to examine how different theoretical perspectives might be combined to develop a responsive facilitation framework for teachers to support families in their transition process. van Genneep's (1960/1977) three-phase theory of transition has been used to interpret a three-phase process that began whilst the children were still attending ECE (pre-liminal), continuing as they moved to school (liminal) and for an extended period after they had started school (post-liminal). Using Facebook to facilitate the transition intervention, this study has also explored the possibilities of identifying two emerging CoPs from the participation and engagement of the teachers and families' Facebook groups. Socially constructed learning underpins the nature of mutual

engagement for a CoP. A CoP develops around a central value or problem which draws and binds a group of motivated people in helping to solve or contribute towards a social entity. In this case, the context is a child's transition to school.

In transition theory, importance is placed on a child's first day of school, which has led some transition literature to identify this day as an event that ECE centres spend time preparing children (Dockett et al., 2012a; Harper, 2016; Sayers et al., 2012). Although preparation was identified as a key element in supporting a family's transition at the pre-liminal phase, my study has built on other transition research that has viewed transition to school as a longer process (Griebel & Niesel, 2002; Hanke et al., 2017; Wilder & Lillvist, 2018). My study submits that a supportive transition process needs to continue for some time after the child's first day at school for the family. Accessible teacher support for families after a child has started school was found to be important in helping families to find their place in their new school community. This study can therefore claim that in a teacher's facilitation of families' transition to school a sustained intervention that supports families and children in managing their movement from liminality to post-liminality, is needed.

Answers readily emerged from the data in relation to research question one, how a NE teacher can customise families' transition to school process in order to meet their specific needs. Sometimes families expressed their needs directly by requesting specific information. For a teacher to facilitate a customised transition to school process, the social context of Facebook provided an environment for families to interact and engage with each other, a place where families learned about transition to school and I learned about their specific needs. The knowledge developed in the families' Facebook space was further interpreted and shaped by parents to share with their children. Social media formed an ongoing resource for families to draw upon and for teachers to customise and redefine support for the development of families home practices that prepared each child for the start to school. Another key finding was the idea that some significant actions taken over the course of facilitating the families' and children's transition process, were Deliberate Acts of Transition (DATs).

The DATs are "key concepts" that prioritise the support for families in their transition. They focused this facilitation to meet families' needs identified at the pre-liminal, liminal and post-liminal phases. Figure 55 (below) shows the three phases of the families' transition, the overall DAT of each phase and the identified key indicators for facilitating a family's transition to school. DATs guide a teacher's facilitation at key points of a family's transition

to school. Each of these points can be understood as falling within one of the three phases outlined by van Gennepe (1960/1977). I suggest that DATs are broad enough in concept to enable flexibility for a teacher’s interpretation. The DATs are “key concepts” that prioritise support for families in their transition, and provide an evaluative framework for teachers which outlines what actions may be the most conducive to an effective transition to school for families. By identifying these actions, teachers can develop their own responsive transition practices.

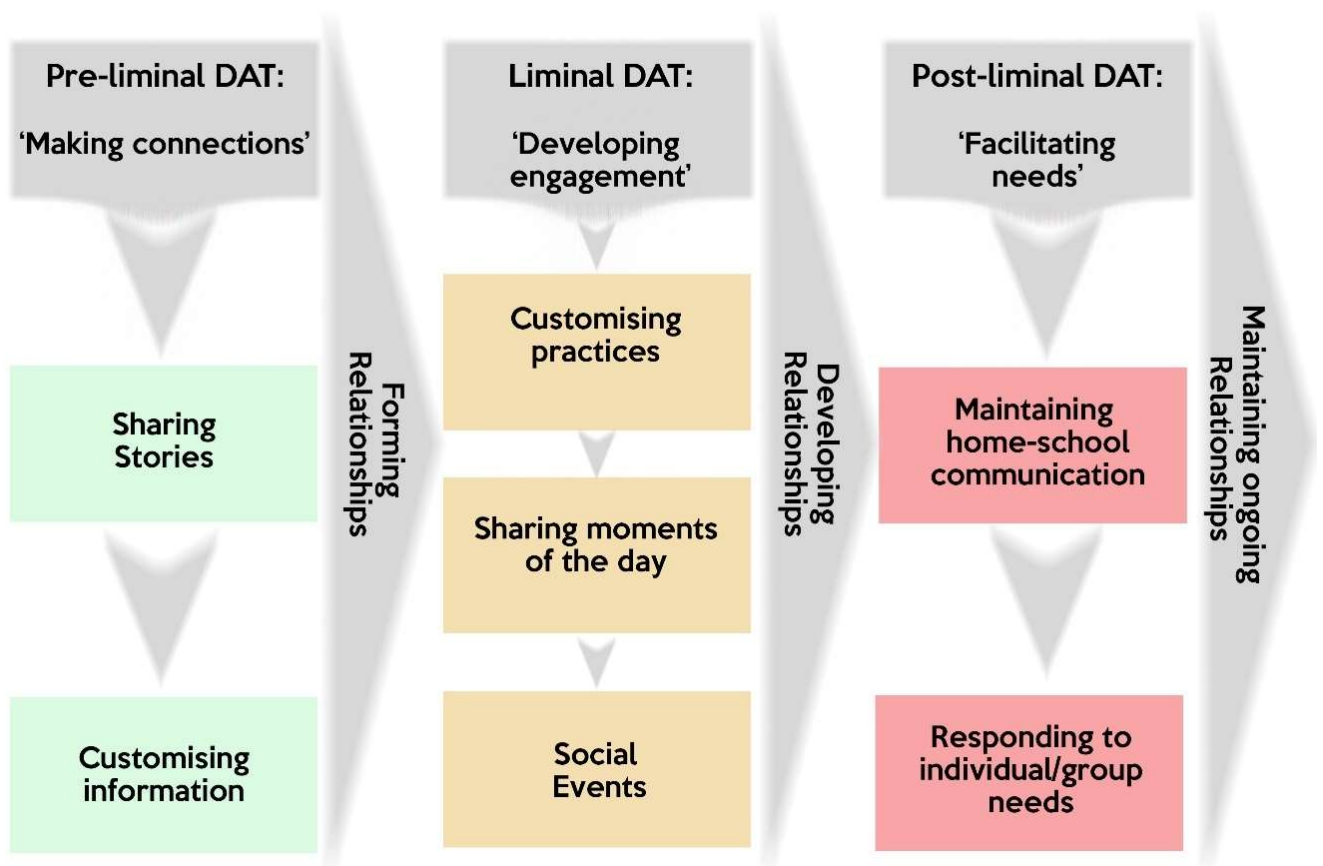


Figure 55: Guiding framework of facilitation: Prioritised DATs in the three phases of the families’ transition.

Social media overcame barriers of distance and parent working hours, developing and maintaining connections between the families themselves as well as with myself as the

teacher. Developing connections between families helped to provide parents with their own support network, a place to go for parental advice. This was particularly useful for families who were transitioning their eldest or only child. More experienced parents readily offered advice and tips to help less experienced parents in supporting their child's transition.

Facebook postings gave parents an insight into their child's world at school. Not only did this inform families about their child's day at school, it provided reassurance that the child was finding their place in school.

The provision of a social media space for families and teachers to engage and connect allowed knowing and learning to be transferred through social and cultural language-based interactions, offering evidence of social learning. Vygotsky (1978) defined learning as inherently collaborative and inextricably linked to the social context. When facilitating a transition process, teachers must therefore remember that a social dimension is essential to the informative functions of orientation. This understanding provides a comprehensive response to research question 2 in collaboratively constructing a transition to school that includes families and teachers using social media. There was a clear connection between how knowledge and learning were attained in the Facebook groups through social interaction as part of the knowledge-making process fostered in a developing CoP. The daily postings of the children in their classroom activities shared on social media in the collaborative meeting space provided the social context for teachers to discuss aspects of children's learning. This accorded with two social constructivist tenets recommended by Doolittle and Hicks (2003), tenets 3 and 4, particularly that learning is understood as a social process which employs language-based interactions in individual and collective mental constructions. For teachers the practical application of this understanding is that when they engage with families – who are themselves in transition – they must pay attention to the ongoing building of connections. In my study Facebook facilitated the continuation of social learning through language-based interactions online.

The theoretical approach of a CoP (Wenger et al., 2002) described in Chapter 3 provided a useful framework for analysing the families' and teachers' data. The potential for families to become part of a community of transitioning families provided scope to explore how a CoP which included all families' participation at a level which they felt comfortable might emerge during the transition process. As noted by Wenger et al. (2002) a CoP offers a theoretical approach which flexibly adapts to the needs of the practical context of each individual

community. Each CoP is therefore unique and this study has focused on its own interpretation of this framework through the context of the two Facebook groups. It has been noted that Wenger et al. (2002) have been criticised for their CoP framework providing “guidance” rather than offering tighter explicit theoretical ideas; what I have drawn and discussed in the preceding chapters are my interpretations of the guidance.

The domain for both the families and teachers did not remain a static problem. Over time, the original focus of the group was influenced by changes brought about by the transition process itself, and thus both groups evolved along with the community. Contrary to CoP theory, where ideally the domain attracts its members, implications for the two Facebook groups were that all participants were invited to join the Facebook groups; the groups did not form organically on the basis of participants’ interests. This adds to the literature and our understanding because even with the development of a deliberately established CoP, the participants in this study still found value in and remained motivated to engage with the group content. Instead of a distributed model of leadership, where group members began to take on responsibilities for the domain’s development, I maintained leadership of the groups. The group members did not seek out leadership opportunities; however, they influenced the changing focus of the domain through their engagement in the Facebook space. The developed DATs in the model of facilitation show the changes that the domain underwent to reflect families’ shifting needs, though still within the overall focus of transition to school. Despite these differences between the communities formed in this study and the original framework, CoP theory nonetheless strongly underpins the contributions of this thesis.

A sense of community is deemed by Wenger et al. (2002) to be crucial in developing and maintaining a CoP. Both Facebook groups showed indications of a developing community. In particular, smaller, more active groups within the Facebook pages began to develop their own community bonds. Ultimately, stronger community bonds between group members were evidenced for some, but not all, members of the Facebook group. This challenges the interpretation of the notion of “community” in Wenger et al.’s (2002) guidance as it did not appear crucial that all members developed community bonds. Some participants derived what they needed from the information provided on Facebook without engaging in community ties.

The practice of both the families’ and teachers’ spaces evolved through the sharing of both tacit and explicit aspects of knowledge focused on transition to school. Examples ranged from tangible digital resources such as stories and videos, to group members’ advice to a

parent's question about a specific problem. The CoP framework acknowledges individual choice in how involved each member chooses to be. On the surface, the lack of interaction by some group members made me feel that I was not facilitating the needs of those outlying group members. Nevertheless the group members' different levels of participation across the two groups showed that they were able to use the space in flexible ways, customising their own participation to address their questions and help to meet their specific needs and aspirations. Overall, the findings of this study have demonstrated that both Facebook groups developed the three elements that make up a CoP: domain, community and practice.

With respect to the third question concerning the development of a collaborative approach to supporting the children in finding their place at school, as shared in Chapter 10, the child's transition has been interpreted as a three-phase process where the key findings that were identified at each of the three phases for facilitating the children's transition process were informed by the development of their own DATs. The children's DATs prioritised the facilitation of their interpreted transition needs at the pre-liminal, liminal and post-liminal phases. I have highlighted how different key individuals were given precedence while working together over the three phases. At the pre-liminal phase, I facilitated and collaborated with the families in developing resources which supported the cultivation of their home practices. I was able to provide parents with the information and support to develop their home practices with their child. In ensuring that the families were well informed, I provided them with a strong basis for their child's smooth transition to school. At the liminal phase of their transition, my observation of the children in play gave the opportunity to develop "joint activity" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 90), promoting a joint problem-solving approach to scaffold the child's transition by providing the time, space and resources for this to happen. My support for the children's transition included using physical resources as props to support their play. These objects, when integrated by the children into their imaginative play, were developed as a "vehicle of thought" (Perkins, 1997, p. 90) which the children used as part of their problem-solving. Allowing time for the children to rehearse and problem solve as they adjusted to their new school environment and began to find their place in their new learning space was a key strategy in facilitating their movement from the liminal to the post-liminal. At the post-liminal phase it was the connections that had begun to develop between the children themselves that were prioritised. Children who appeared to have found their place were observed to share their developed knowledge and strategies, unprompted, to support children who were still adjusting to their new situation.

Contributions of this research

This study contributes to the growing body of research on the transition to school, particularly through the insights the findings provide in the area of families' transitioning as a unit. The development of positive and respectful relationships between the adults involved in the process is identified as key to managing a smooth transition (Peters, 2010). Likewise, positive and respectful home-school relationships should be prioritised to enable a collaborative approach. My study drew attention to the collaborative efforts of the key stakeholders involved and has recognised transition to be a process which highlights specific endeavours at different phases. These collaborative endeavours have spotlighted opportunities for the child to construct their own adjustment to their new school in collaboration with the NE teacher. This research has promoted family involvement in their child's transition to school by the development of a supportive network. Finally, this thesis adds to the expanding body of knowledge concerning the development of an online CoP within a social media platform, particularly within the limited research available regarding the New Zealand context.

Implications for educators

This research has alerted me to new possibilities in examining transition to school as a process that is negotiated between key stakeholders. Suggested pedagogical strategies and specific actions (DATs) have been shared that can be implemented by teachers in order to provide a responsive transition process.

The major implications include the value of schools undertaking the following:

- Develop a social digital space for families to build initial connections amongst themselves and with their child's new teacher;
- Invest time in building relationships which develop trust and openness between stakeholders, enabling teachers to learn about families' individual aspirations, needs and cultural capital;
- Plan opportunities for families to meet at social events to foster connections between transitioning families;

- Review school transition practices with families to determine if the support provided is meeting families' needs;
- Provide families with information, tools and support before the child starts school to enable them time to develop their own home practices to prepare their child;
- View transition as an opportunity to develop collaborative practices between ECE and primary settings. Digital forums provide a forum for teachers to share and discuss transition practices;
- Appreciate that each family's transition needs are different and that they will change over time. The way an educational setting supports and provides information to families will require teachers to be flexible and adaptable to these changes;
- Provide more opportunities for NE children to process, rehearse and self-manage different aspects of their transition to the new school environment through play. Teachers would benefit from taking time to observe children in their play to identify changes to which the children are adjusting. These observations can inspire the provision of further resources to help children navigate their next challenges.

Limitations of the research

It is important to acknowledge potential limitations of this study when reflecting on research design. A first limitation is associated with the situated nature of the study, located within a specific context. Data was gathered from one primary school, three ECE centres, and their transitioning families, in the suburbs of a New Zealand city. The socio-economic contexts of the three centres and the primary school were associated with the higher end of the socio-economic spectrum; evidence of this conclusion was the school's decile 10 rating (currently listed on the school's website). Therefore, future research that engages with and tests the ideas presented in this study could determine the extent to which the findings might apply to other contexts.

A second limitation was the limited range of early childhood education provision drawn upon. Chapter 1 highlighted the wide range of such facilities available to families in New Zealand. This study has focused on only two of these provisions, early years education centres and kindergarten, with Centre A and C representing the early years centres, and Centre B representing a kindergarten.

A third limitation was the unique characteristics, processes, systems, and culture of the focus primary school. Some of the information and data that has been shared is specific to the context of the focus primary school. In order to transfer this to another context, the uniqueness of each context will need to be considered to ensure its approach to transition is fit for purpose.

The fourth limitation was in light of my data collection constraints. I would have preferred to have had more time to collect data during the post-liminal phase. I was only able to collect data from the children and families who had attended school the longest because of the time constraints brought on by the end of the school year. My chance to investigate experiences of families' whose child had started school later during the data collection period was limited.

Finally, I was, as declared at the start of the research, the NE team leader of the focus primary school, and was conscious of my influence over the NE team of teachers. This was made clear to the team, and they were asked to view my role in the research as the researcher, but this may be perceived as a power imbalance.

Areas for further research

Finally, this study has identified other areas for future research:

- Families and teachers operated in two separate closed groups on Facebook. Both groups of participants commented that “one group-one page” would be a way of moving forward, with only one collaborative meeting place for all;
- Further observation of how children rehearse and process the implications of a change in their own lives through play. Research possibilities in exploring the facilitation of play and the adult's role within this process could also be an area for future research;
- While Facebook was determined to be an effective platform in this study, there is still room to investigate the advantages of other digital technologies to explore the facilitation of a “blended” approach for aiding families' transition to school;
- Reviewing the traditional transition practices used by schools with the families involved could help to explore how resources and information might be adapted to meet the needs of specific settings and groups;

- The participative methods used with the families and teachers' through Facebook may prove useful in researching group engagement in digital spaces. For example, the use of polling, live feed, exploring various purposes of postings, the dialogue generated, and the role of emoji in interactions may provide researchers with opportunities to further study group interaction and the building of a digital CoP;
- Exploring the use of social events as a transition practice within a families' transition to school, in order to forge social connections and emerging support networks amongst families;
- Further investigation in how combining transition-related theoretical perspectives might support the gaining of further knowledge of groups' needs when establishing and sustaining CoPs.

Concluding statement

This study contributes a new approach to facilitating a collaboratively constructed transition to school that involves the efforts of all key stakeholders. It has explored how digital communication specifically, social media, can develop a virtual meeting place to provide families with information and aid them in their own home practices. The thesis may be considered useful for teachers who are involved with supporting families' transition to school in both the ECE and NE primary school environments, along with school leaders and ECE centre management.

The research has shared the journey of a group of transitioning families from their ECE centre, and concluded its story after one term of schooling. As both a teacher and a researcher, I encourage other teachers to challenge their established transition practices and view them from the perspective of the families. This study has devised a "road map" to guide teachers in their facilitation. The contribution of DATs is to identify areas of focus at each of the three phases of the families' transition. Teachers can base their own practices and ensuing actions, reflective of their unique contexts, on these DATs to ensure they remain aware of families' changing needs. In addition to teachers' assisting families, the parents have also been highlighted by this study as providing a useful support network to one another. Educational settings may work to prepare families for transition in isolation from each other, however, as the Whakatauki (Māori proverb) suggests: "*Nā tō rourou, nā taku rourou ka ora ai te iwi.*" meaning, "With your food basket and my food basket, the people will thrive".

Working together with families and teachers from both settings, supplies the strength of collaboration and the potential to thrive as a supportive community can be realised.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Information and Consent forms for Kindergarten Association Management:

**Department of Human
Development and
Counselling**
Faculty of Education
Te Kura Toi Tangata
The University of Waikato
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Hamilton, New Zealand

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THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Kindergarten Association

Dear ****,

My name is Hazel Woodhouse, and I am a part time PhD student at the University of Waikato. I am a full time New Entrant team leader at *****primary school.

My research focuses on involving families and children in a collaborative process of starting school and developing a meaningful transition that explores their aspirations and beliefs of what transition to school means to them.

The overarching question guiding my research is, 'How can a school provide opportunities for families and teachers to collaboratively plan and implement a child's transition to school?'

Through my role as a NE team leader, I am exploring a strength-based approach to transition. In order to explore this approach, the primary school needs to work more closely with yourselves, and transitioning families to enable a collaborative pathway to school for a child to be developed. This collaborative pathway will be explored using digital media to connect busy families and teachers across the sectors enabling the sharing of information and ideas.

Both ECE centres at ***** and ***** have previously worked with us at *****primary school in order to facilitate individual and group transitions for four year old children coming to our school. The focus of this study is to directly work with a group of transitioning families whose children start school at *****primary in term four 2018, working collaboratively alongside the two ECE centres and primary school, in the development of a co-constructed transition to school programme. I have purposely selected these ECE centres, as one is local to the primary school, and the other is located much further away, therefore providing an opportunity to explore and support families transitioning to school from a more distant location.

Your two ECE centres have already established a strong relationship with these families, connecting with them through day-to-day contact and sharing learning stories via their e-portfolios. My research would include exploring how we might use

the children's e-portfolio as a communication tool in documenting their transition into their first term of school.

Should you wish to discuss my research further, or have any questions you wish to clarify, I have included a separate information sheet with more details about the study and the potential commitment required by the two ECE centres.

Please feel free to contact me by phone or email. My details are below.

Regards

Hazel Woodhouse

Phone (*****)

Email:hwoodhouse@***** school.nz

What the involvement of the two ECE centres and participant families would require:

Teachers:

- Emailing an invitation to families who have a child starting -----primary school in term four (October), 2018 to come along to an information meeting.
- Hosting an information meeting at the ECE centre, facilitated by me (lasting approximately 30-40min and at a time convenient to all) for interested families. The information evening is to ensure that families are fully informed about the research and can make an informed decision about participating or not. It should be noted, due to school organisation and for ethical reasons for the study, that I will not be the families' classroom teacher when their children start school in term four 2018.
- Providing me with documents and information about how the ECE centres help with the process of transition for families, such as handouts for parents, transition policies, displays and/or organised events.
- The ECE teachers (employed in the four year old's room) will be invited to join a closed group Facebook page, working collaboratively with the teachers from the New Entrants (NE) at the primary school and other ECE centre, in offering ideas and feedback in developing a co-constructed transition pathway to school.
- Giving consideration to providing participant families having access to a digital device at the centre during working hours, should individual family experience technical problems with accessing their child's e-portfolio through their own digital device. This is to enable families to continue to be part of the research. If this is not possible, a device will be made available through myself as the researcher.
- For the ECE teachers employed in the four year old's room to create a short digital story to tell families a little about themselves as a person, and to talk a little about starting school, this is to be shared on the child's e-portfolio of the participating families.

- The teachers who are involved in the research will be asked to participate in a digital 'hui,' whereby teachers may use the closed group Facebook page to offer opinions and suggestions regarding the draft co-constructed transition programme (end of term three, 2018).
- Adding the transitioning children's NE teacher, at the end of term three, 2018 onto Storypark as an educator, so that they are able to log on and access the focus families' children's e-portfolios. Advising the families that their NE teacher will be added to their profile as an educator.

Families:

- Attending a voluntary information meeting facilitated by me and lasting approximately 30-40 minutes to explain the research.
- Giving me permission to access the children's e-portfolio to edit and view learning stories.
Being made aware that their child's future New Entrant teacher at ----- primary school will be added as an educator on to their child's portfolio in term three, 2018,
- Giving consideration to extending their child's e-portfolio into their child's first term at school, to digitally document their journey.
- Creating a short digital story for their child's e-portfolio. The purpose of the digital stories (both families and teachers') is to help teachers and families to get to know more about each other and provide an opportunity to gain further insight into the participant's world and starting school.
- Engaging in a digital forum on a closed group Facebook page with families of parents whose children will be starting at ----- primary school at the start of term 4, 2018.

Ethical considerations:

- Facebook has a function whereby the teachers/families involved can amend or withdraw their comments as they generate them.
- The teachers and families' online identity will be that from their Facebook account. It will identify them by their cover photo and their privacy settings. The postings can ONLY be seen by those invited to the closed group Facebook page and it will be closed to public access.
- Should any participants wish to withdraw generated data from the project, they may do so up until the end of data collection (up to 6 weeks after it has been generated).
- All material collected will be confidential, and individuals and centres will not be identifiable in the report.
- On completion, my research will be written up into a thesis that will be submitted to the University of Waikato. An electronic copy of this research will become available, as the University of Waikato requires that a digital copy of this thesis be lodged permanently in the university's digital library.
- It is intended that findings from this thesis may be submitted for publication in educational journals or books and conferences or professional development presentations.

- If at any time you have questions or concerns about the conduct of the research, please feel free to contact either of my supervisors:
- Dr Sally Peters, Email: speters@waikato.ac.nz, phone: 838 4466 ext.8386
- Dr Jeanette Clarkin-Phillips, Email: jgcp@waikato.ac.nz phone: 838 4875.

Some Important points:

- The raw data will be discussed with my supervisors (Dr Sally Peters and Dr Jeanette Clarkin-Phillips).
- The information all participants give will be stored in a password protected file on my computer/external hard-drive and printed copies kept in a locked filing cabinet for at least five years after completing this study.
- An electronic copy of this research will become available. The University of Waikato requires that a digital copy of this thesis is lodged permanently in the university's digital library.
- In addition to this PhD, the data from all of the participants may be utilised for publications and or presentations, teaching, staff meetings and written work such as articles.
- On completion of my research, the school, and the ECEs will be provided with an electronic copy of the research report. Parents will be notified of its existence should they wish to access the research findings.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that the information I provide will be kept confidential.

I understand that the published results will not use the association's name or that of the either of the two ECE centres or their teachers.

I would like to receive a summary of the results of this research when it is completed

I agree to Waikato Kindergarten Association taking part in this research.

Waikato Kindergarten Association: Signed: _____ Position: _____ Date:

Appendix 2: Information and Consent forms for Centre Managers

**Department of Human
Development and
Counselling**
Faculty of Education
Te Kura Toi Tangata
The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton, New Zealand

Phone +64 7 838 4500
www.waikato.ac.nz/education



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Information sheet and consent form for the ECE centre managers

Dear *****,

I am getting in touch with you to discuss the possibility of working with your centre in exploring a strength-based approach to transition.

Alongside my role as a New Entrant team leader at *****primary school, I am also studying part time towards my PhD. My research focuses on involving families and children in a collaborative process of starting school and developing a meaningful transition that explores their aspirations and beliefs of what transition to school means to them.

The overarching question guiding my research is, 'How can a school provide opportunities for families and teachers to collaboratively plan and implement a child's transition to school?'

The study would involve our primary school working more closely with yourselves, and transitioning families to enable a collaborative pathway to school for children to be developed. This collaborative pathway will be explored using digital media to connect busy families and teachers across the sectors, enabling the sharing of information and ideas.

Your ECE centre has previously worked with us at ***** primary school in order to facilitate individual and group transitions for four year old children coming to our school. The focus of this study is to directly work with a group of transitioning families whose children start school at the primary school, in term four 2018, working collaboratively alongside your ECE centre teachers located in the four year old room, and ***** primary school, in the development of a co-constructed transition to school programme. I have purposely selected your ECE centres as they are either local to the primary school, or some distance from the primary school, therefore providing an opportunity to explore and support families transitioning to school from a more distant location as well as being close to the school.

Your ECE centre has already established a strong relationship with these families, connecting with them through day-to-day contact, and sharing learning stories via their e-portfolios. My research would include exploring how we might use the

children's e-portfolio as a communication tool in documenting their transition into their first term of school.

Should you wish to discuss my research further, or have any questions you wish to clarify, I have included a separate information sheet with more details about the study and the potential commitment required by the two ECE centres.

Please feel free to contact me by phone or email. My details are below.

Regards

Hazel Woodhouse

Phone (*****)

Email:hwoodhouse@*****.school.nz

The involvement of the two ECE centres and participant families would require:

Teachers:

- Emailing an invitation to families who have a child starting ***** primary school in term four (October), 2018 to come along to an information meeting.
- Hosting an information meeting at the ECE centre, facilitated by me (lasting approximately 30-40min and at a time convenient to all) for interested families. The information evening is to ensure that families are fully informed about the research and can make an informed decision about participating or not. It should be noted, due to school organisation and for ethical reasons for the study, that I will not be the families' classroom teacher when their children start school in term four 2018.
- Providing me with documents and information about how the ECE centres help with the process of transition for families, such as handouts for parents, transition policies, displays, and/or organised events.
- The ECE teachers (employed in the four year old's room) will be invited to join a closed group Facebook page, working collaboratively with the teachers from the New Entrants (NE) at the primary school and other ECE centre, in offering ideas and feedback in developing a co-constructed transition pathway to school.
- Considering participant families having access to a digital device at the centre during working hours should individual family experience technical problems with accessing their child's e-portfolio through their own digital device. This is to enable families to continue to be part of the research. If this is not possible, a device will be made available through myself as the researcher.
- For the ECE teachers employed in the four year old's room to create a short digital story to tell families a little about themselves as a person and to talk a little about starting school, this is to be shared on the child's e-portfolio of the participating families.
- The teachers (in the four year old's room) who are involved in the research, will be asked to participate in a digital 'hui' whereby they will use the closed group Facebook page to offer opinions and suggestions regarding the draft co-constructed transition programme (end of term three, 2018).

- Adding the transitioning children's NE teacher, at the end of term three, 2018 onto Storypark as an educator so that they are able to log on and access the focus families' children's e-portfolios. Advising the families that their NE teacher will be added to their profile as an educator.

Families:

- Attend a voluntary information meeting facilitated by me and lasting approximately 30-40 minutes to explain the research. This meeting would need to be held at your ECE centre, at a time convenient to your families and yourselves.
- Giving me permission to access the children's e-portfolio to edit and view learning stories.
Being made aware that their child's future New Entrant teacher at the primary school will be added as an educator to their child's portfolio in term three, 2018.
- Giving consideration to extending their child's e-portfolio into their child's first term at school, to digitally document their journey.
- Create a short digital story for their child's e-portfolio. The purpose of the digital stories (both families and teachers') is to help teachers and families to get to know more about each other and provide an opportunity to gain further insight into the participant's world and starting school.
- Engage in a digital forum on a closed group Facebook page with families of parents whose children will be starting at the primary school at the start of term 4, 2018.

Ethical considerations:

- Facebook has a function whereby the teachers/families involved can amend or withdraw their comments as they generate them.
 - The teachers and families' online identity will be that from their Facebook account. It will identify them by their cover photo and their privacy settings. Those invited to the closed group Facebook page can ONLY see the postings and it will be closed to public access.
 - Should any participants wish to withdraw generated data from the project, they may do so up until the end of data collection (up to 6 weeks after it has been generated).
 - All material collected will be confidential, and individuals and centres will not be identifiable in the report.
 - On completion, my research will be written up into a thesis that will be submitted to the University of Waikato. An electronic copy of this research will become available, as the University of Waikato requires that a digital copy of this thesis is lodged permanently in the university's digital library.
 - It is intended that findings from this thesis may be submitted for publication in educational journals or books and conferences or professional development presentations.
 - If at any time you have questions or concerns about the conduct of the research, please feel free to contact either of my supervisors:
- Dr Sally Peters, [Email: speters@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:speters@waikato.ac.nz), phone: 838 4466 ext.8386

- Dr Jeanette Clarkin-Phillips, Email: jgcp@waikato.ac.nz phone: 838 4875.

Some Important points:

- The raw data will be discussed with my supervisors (Dr Sally Peters and Dr Jeanette Clarkin-Phillips).
- The information all participants give will be stored in a password-protected file on my computer/external hard-drive and printed copies kept in a locked filing cabinet for at least five years after completing this study.
- An electronic copy of this research will become available, as the University of Waikato requires that a digital copy of this thesis is lodged permanently in the university's digital library.
- In addition to this PhD, the data from all of the participants may be utilised for publications and or presentations, teaching, staff meetings and written work such as articles.
- On completion of my research, the school and the ECEs will be provided with an electronic copy of the research report. Parents will be notified of its existence should they wish to access the research findings.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

I have been given, and have understood an explanation of this research.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that the information I provide will be kept confidential.

I understand that the published results will not use the association's name or that of our ECE centre.

I would like to receive a summary of the results of this research when it is completed.

I agree toECE centre taking part in this research.

**** ECE centre: Signed: ___ Position: ____ Date:

Appendix 3: Information and Consent forms for School Principal and Board of Trustees

Department of Human
Development and
Counselling
Faculty of Education
Te Kura Toi Tangata
The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton, New Zealand

Phone +64 7 838 4500
www.waikato.ac.nz/education



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Information sheet and consent form for the primary school

Dear *****,

Further to our previous conversations concerning my research, I have taken this opportunity to put in writing a clarification of my research and how this involves the school and your staff.

My research focuses on involving families and children in a collaborative process of starting school and developing a meaningful transition that explores their aspirations and beliefs of what transition to school means to them.

The overarching question guiding my research is, 'How can a school provide opportunities for families and teachers to collaboratively plan and implement a child's transition to school?'

Through my role as the school's NE team leader, I am exploring a strength-based approach to transition. In order to explore this approach, it would require both myself as the facilitator, and the New Entrant teacher employed as the term 4 classroom teacher to work more closely with two ECE centres and their transitioning families. Our purpose would be to develop a collaborative pathway to school for the transitioning child. This collaborative pathway will be explored using digital media to connect busy families and teachers across the sectors, enabling the sharing of information and ideas. The data collection for the research is over a 10 month period, commencing in term 1 2018 and I aim to complete my data collection by end of term 4, 2018.

In order to provide you with further information, I have included a separate sheet with more details about the intentions of the study and the potential commitment required by the school. If you need any further clarification, I am happy to discuss your questions further.

Regards, Hazel

What will be the involvement required of the primary school teachers?

New Entrant (NE) Teachers:

- Your permission for me to use any documents and information that explain how NE children are transitioned to school, such as handouts for parents, transition policies, displays and/or organised events.
- The three NE teachers (currently employed in term one 2018) will be invited to join a closed group Facebook page, working collaboratively with the teachers from the two ECE centres around developing a co-constructed transition pathway to school.
- The children's NE teacher (who will be employed for the term four intake) will be invited to become an 'educator' on Storypark; the ECE centres' e-portfolio system towards the end of term three 2018.
- The term 4 2018, NE teacher will be able to view and comment on the transitioning children's e-portfolio in order to get to know the children and their interests and make connections with the families. Their access to Storypark would commence at the end of term three 2018. They will also be invited to create a short digital story, which will be shared on the password-protected e-portfolios to share a little about themselves so that the families can get to know them too. The NE teacher in term four will also be asked to contribute to the children's e-portfolios for the children's first term at school, updating posts, which will be shared with the families and their ECE centres.
- The three initial NE teachers who are involved in the research from term one 2018, along with the term four teacher if available, will then be asked to participate in a digital 'hui' (end of term three 2018) whereby, they will use the closed group Facebook page to offer opinion and suggestions regarding the draft co-constructed transition programme and digital resources for families.

Ethical considerations:

- Facebook has a function whereby the teachers' involved can amend or withdraw their comments as they generate them.
- The teacher's online identity will be that from their Facebook account. It will identify them by their cover photo and your privacy settings. Those invited to the closed group Facebook page can ONLY see the postings and it will be closed to public access.
- Should any participants wish to withdraw generated data from the project, they may do so up until the end of data collection (up to 6 weeks after it is generated).
- All material collected will be confidential, and individuals and the school will not be identifiable in the report.
- On completion, my research will be written up into a thesis that will be submitted to the University of Waikato. An electronic copy of this research will become available, as the University of Waikato requires that a digital copy of this thesis is lodged permanently in the university's digital library.
- It is intended that findings from this thesis may be submitted for publication in educational journals or books and conferences or professional development presentations.

- If at any time you have questions or concerns about the conduct of the research, please feel free to contact either of my supervisors:
- Dr Sally Peters, Email : speters@waikato.ac.nz, phone: 838 4466 ext.8386
- Dr Jeanette Clarkin-Phillips - (Email: jgcp@waikato.ac.nz phone: 838 4875.

Some Important points:

- The raw data will be discussed with my supervisors (Dr Sally Peters and Dr Jeanette Clarkin-Phillips).
- The information all participants give will be stored in a password-protected file on my computer/external hard-drive and printed copies kept in a locked filing cabinet for at least five years after completing this study.
- An electronic copy of this research will become available, as the University of Waikato requires that a digital copy of this thesis be lodged permanently in the university's digital library.
- In addition to this PhD, the data from all of the participants may be utilised for publications and or presentations, teaching, staff meetings and written work such as articles.
- On completion of my research, the school and the ECEs will be provided with an electronic copy of the research report. Parents will be notified of its existence should they wish to access the research findings.
-

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that I may withdraw my school and myself from this research at any time up to the end of data collection, (up to 6 weeks from when data was generated) without having to give reasons.

I understand that the published results will not use my name or that of the school or the teachers involved.

I understand that the information I provide will be kept confidential.

I understand that the published results will not use my name or that of the school.

I would like to receive a summary of the results of this research when it is completed.

I agree to XXXX primary school to take part in this research.

Name of primary school: __

Signed: _____

Position: _____

Date:

Appendix 4a: Information and Consent forms for ECE Teachers

(4a) ECE teachers:

Department of Human
Development and
Counselling
Faculty of Education
Te Kura Toi Tangata
The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton, New Zealand

Phone +64 7 838 4500
www.waikato.ac.nz/education



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Further to my meeting with *****and your managers*****, *****and*****, I am getting in touch with you to discuss the possibility of working with you in exploring a strength based approach to transition for a group of four-year old children from your centre.

Alongside my role as a New Entrant team leader at ***** primary school I am also studying part time towards my PhD. My research focuses on involving families and children in a collaborative process of starting school and developing a meaningful transition that explores their aspirations and beliefs of what transition to school means to them.

The overarching question guiding my research is, 'How can a school provide opportunities for families and teachers to collaboratively plan and implement a child's transition to school?'

The study would involve our primary school working more closely with yourselves, and the transitioning families to enable a collaborative pathway to school for the child to be developed. This collaborative pathway will be explored using digital media to connect busy families and teachers across the sectors enabling the sharing of information and ideas.

You have previously worked with us at *****primary school in order to facilitate individual and group transitions for four year old children coming to our school. The focus of this study is to directly work with a group of transitioning families whose children start school at*****, in term four 2018, working collaboratively alongside your ECE centre and our primary school, in the development of a co-constructed transition to school programme. I have purposely selected your ECE centre, as it is local to the primary school/or/as it is located much further away from the primary school, therefore providing an opportunity to explore and support families transitioning to school from a more distant location.

You have already established a strong relationship with these families, connecting with them through day-to-day contact and sharing learning stories via their e-portfolios. My research would include exploring how we might use the children's e-portfolio as a communication tool in documenting their transition into their first term of school.

Should you wish to discuss my research further or have any questions you wish to clarify, I have included a separate information sheet with more details about the study and the potential commitment required by yourselves in the study.

Please feel free to contact me by phone or email. My details are below

Regards

Hazel Woodhouse

Phone (*****)

Email:hwoodhouse@*****.school.nz

What is your involvement?

ECE centre teachers:

- Emailing an invitation to families who have a child starting ***** primary school in term four (October), 2018 to come along to an information meeting.
- Hosting an information meeting at your ECE centre, facilitated by me (lasting approximately 30-40min and at a time convenient to all) for interested families. The information evening is to ensure that families are fully informed about the research and can make an informed decision about participating or not. It should be noted, due to school organisation and for ethical reasons for the study, that I will not be the families' classroom teacher when their children start school in term four 2018.
- Providing me with documents and information about how the ECE centres help with the process of transition for families, such as handouts for parents, transition policies, displays and/or organised events.
- You will be invited to join a closed group Facebook page, working collaboratively with the teachers from the New Entrants (NE) at the primary school and other ECE centres involved in the study, in offering ideas and feedback in developing a co-constructed transition pathway to school.
- Considering participant families having access to a digital device at your centre during working hours should an individual family experience technical problems with accessing their child's e-portfolio through their own digital device. This is to enable families to continue to be part of the research. If this is not possible, a device will be made available through myself as the researcher.
- For you to create a short digital story to tell families a little about yourselves as a person and to talk a little about starting school, this is to be shared on the child's e-portfolio of the participating families.
- You will be asked to participate in a digital 'hui' whereby you will use the closed group Facebook page to offer opinions and suggestions regarding the draft co-constructed transition programme (end of term 3, 2018).
- Adding the transitioning children's NE teacher, at the end of term three, 2018 onto Storypark as an educator so that they are able to log on and access the focus families' children's e-portfolios. Advising the families that their NE teacher will be added to their profile as an educator.

How will the ECE centre families be involved in the study?

- Attend a voluntary information meeting facilitated by me and lasting approximately 30-40 minutes to explain the research. This meeting would need to be held at your ECE centre, at a time convenient to your families and yourselves.
- Giving me permission to access the children's e-portfolio to edit and view learning stories.
Being made aware that their child's future New Entrant teacher at the primary school will be added as an educator on to their child's portfolio in term three, 2018.
- Giving consideration to extending their child's e-portfolio into their child's first term at school, to digitally document their journey.
- Create a short digital story for their child's e-portfolio. The purpose of the digital stories (both families and teachers') is to help teachers and families to get to know more about each other and provide an opportunity to gain further insight into the participant's world and starting school.
- Engage in a digital forum on a closed group Facebook page with families of parents whose children will be starting at the primary school at the start of term four, 2018.

Ethical considerations:

- Facebook has a function whereby you can amend or withdraw your comments as you generate them.
 - Your online identity will be that from your Facebook account. It will identify you by your cover photo and your privacy settings. Those invited to the closed group Facebook page can ONLY see the postings and it will be closed to public access.
 - Should you wish to withdraw generated data from the project, you may do so up until the end of data collection (up to 6 weeks after it has been generated).
 - All material collected will be confidential, and individuals and centres will not be identifiable in the report.
 - On completion, my research will be written up into a thesis that will be submitted to the University of Waikato. An electronic copy of this research will become available, as the University of Waikato requires that a digital copy of this thesis is lodged permanently in the university's digital library.
 - It is intended that findings from this thesis may be submitted for publication in educational journals or books and conferences or professional development presentations.
 - If at any time you have questions or concerns about the conduct of the research, please feel free to contact either of my supervisors:
- Dr Sally Peters, [Email: speters@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:speters@waikato.ac.nz), phone: 838 4466 ext.8386
 - Dr Jeanette Clarkin-Phillips, [Email: jgcp@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:jgcp@waikato.ac.nz) phone: 838 4875.

Some Important points:

- The raw data will be discussed with my supervisors (Dr Sally Peters and Dr Jeanette Clarkin-Phillips).
- The information all participants give will be stored in a password protected file on my computer/external hard-drive and printed copies kept in a locked filing cabinet for at least five years after completing this study.
- An electronic copy of this research will become available, as the University of Waikato requires that a digital copy of this thesis is lodged permanently in the university's digital library.
- In addition to this PhD, the data from all of the participants may be utilized for publications, and or presentations, teaching, staff meetings, and written work such as articles.
- On completion of my research, the school and the ECEs will be provided with an electronic copy of the research report. Parents will be notified of its existence should they wish to access the research findings.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that the information I provide will be kept confidential.

I understand that the published results will not use the association's name or that of our ECE centre or my own name.

I would like to receive a summary of the results of this research when it is completed

I agree to take part in this research.

- Name of ECE centre: Signed: ___ Position: ___

Appendix 4b: Information and Consent forms for NE Teachers

Department of Human
Development and
Counselling
Faculty of Education
Te Kura Toi Tangata
The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton, New Zealand

Phone +64 7 838 4500
www.waikato.ac.nz/education



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

General Information Sheet and Consent for x NE teachers in the ILE classroom.

Dear *****,

Alongside my role as a New Entrant team leader at *****primary school I am also studying part time towards my PhD. My research focuses on involving families and children in a collaborative process of starting school and developing a meaningful transition that explores their aspirations and beliefs of what transition to school means to them.

The overarching question guiding my research is, 'How can a school provide opportunities for families and teachers to collaboratively plan and implement a child's transition to school?'

The study would involve our primary school working more closely with transitioning families and their ECE centre, to enable a collaborative pathway to school for a child to be developed. This collaborative pathway will be explored using digital media to connect busy families and teachers across the sectors enabling the sharing of information and ideas.

You will be invited to join a closed group Facebook page, along with the ECE centre teachers to add your ideas and opinions in helping to co-construct the transitional journey for the families involved in this research.

As part of the co-constructed transition plan, there may be school visits made by the transitioning families. This does not alter any requirements to your day-to-day role as a NE teacher, and your role in the research, will therefore be mainly passive during these visits. However, you may be mentioned as part of observations made during the families' school visits. Anonymity will be ensured by your identity being given a pseudonym in the final written report, rather than being identified by your true name. Please be confident that all information is strictly confidential and that I am bound by the ethical codes of the University of Waikato concerning research.

Should you wish to discuss my research further or have any questions you wish to clarify, I have included a separate information sheet with more details about the study and the potential commitment required by yourselves in the study.

Regards, Hazel

What is your involvement in the study?

NE Teachers:

- You will be invited to join a closed group Facebook page, working collaboratively with the teachers from the two ECE centres involved in the study, in offering ideas and feedback in developing a co-constructed transition pathway to school.
- You will be asked to participate in a digital 'hui' whereby you will use the closed group Facebook page to offer opinions and suggestions regarding the draft co-constructed transition programme (end of term three, 2018).

Ethical considerations:

- Facebook has a function whereby you can amend or withdraw your comments as you generate them.
 - Your online identity will be that from your Facebook account. It will identify you by your cover photo and your privacy settings. Those invited to the closed group Facebook page can ONLY see the postings and it will be closed to public access.
 - Should you wish to withdraw generated data from the project, you may do so up until the end of data collection (up to 6 weeks after it has been generated).
 - All material collected will be confidential, and individuals and centres will not be identifiable in the report.
 - On completion, my research will be written up into a thesis that will be submitted to the University of Waikato. An electronic copy of this research will become available, as the University of Waikato requires that a digital copy of this thesis is lodged permanently in the university's digital library.
 - It is intended that findings from this thesis may be submitted for publication in educational journals or books and conferences or professional development presentations.
 - If at any time you have questions or concerns about the conduct of the research, please feel free to contact either of my supervisors:
- Dr Sally Peters, [Email: speters@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:speters@waikato.ac.nz), phone: 838 4466 ext.8386
 - Dr Jeanette Clarkin-Phillips, [Email: jgcp@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:jgcp@waikato.ac.nz) phone: 838 4875.

Some Important points:

- The raw data will be discussed with my supervisors (Dr Sally Peters and Dr Jeanette Clarkin-Phillips).
- The information all participants give will be stored in a password protected file on my computer/external hard-drive and printed copies kept in a locked filing cabinet for at least five years after completing this study.

- An electronic copy of this research will become available, as the University of Waikato requires that a digital copy of this thesis is lodged permanently in the university's digital library.
- In addition to this PhD, the data from all of the participants may be utilized for publications, and or presentations, teaching, staff meetings, and written work such as articles.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that I may withdraw from this research at any time up to 6 weeks after the data was generated, without having to give reasons.

I understand that any information generated from the school visits will be kept confidential.

I understand that the published results will not use my name or that of the school.

I would like to receive a summary of the results of this research when it is completed.

I agree to take part in this research

Name: Signed: _____ Position: ___ Date:

Appendix 5: Information and Consent forms for families

Department of Human
Development and
Counselling
Faculty of Education
Te Kura Toi Tangata
The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton, New Zealand

Phone +64 7 838 4500
www.waikato.ac.nz/education



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Families

My name is Hazel Woodhouse, and I am a part time PhD student at the University of Waikato. I am a full time New Entrant team leader at *****primary school.

My research focuses on involving families and children in a collaborative process of starting school and developing a meaningful transition that explores their aspirations and beliefs of what transition to school means to them.

The overarching question guiding my research is, 'How can a school provide opportunities for families and teachers to collaboratively plan and implement a child's transition to school?'

Through my role as a NE team leader, I am exploring a strength-based approach to transition. In order to explore this approach, the primary school needs to work more closely with yourselves as transitioning families, and your ECE centre, to enable a collaborative pathway to school for your child to be developed. This collaborative pathway will be explored using digital media to connect yourselves as busy families and teachers across the sectors enabling the sharing of information and ideas.

Your ECE centre have previously worked with us at ***** primary school in order to facilitate individual and group transitions for four year old children coming to our school. The focus of this study is to directly work with your family as your child prepares for their journey to school in term four 2018, working collaboratively alongside your ECE centre and ourselves at the primary school, in the development of a co-constructed transition to school programme.

You have already established a strong relationship with your ECE centre teachers, connecting with them through day-to-day contact and sharing learning stories via their e-portfolios. My research would include exploring how we might use your child's e-portfolio as a communication tool in documenting their transition into their first term of school.

Due to a change of organisation for 2018, I will now be the term 4 classroom teacher for the New Entrant children. This means that I will hold two different roles with two different responsibilities.

I am primarily your child's classroom teacher. My responsibilities lie with the day-to-day care and education of your child alongside my commitment to build a relationship with your family.

My second role is that of a researcher. My roles and responsibilities are to protect you as a participant and to gather data responsibly and ethically.

If at any time you wish to withdraw from the study, I am happy to support you in this decision in my role as a researcher. This does not affect in any way my professionalism and dedication to your child and your family as your classroom teacher.

However, if you feel uncomfortable in approaching me directly should you choose to withdraw, please contact my supervisors Dr Sally Peters, or Dr Jeanette Clarkin-Phillips whose details you will find on this sheet.

Should you wish to discuss my research further or have any questions you wish to clarify, I have included a separate information sheet with more details about the study and the potential commitment required by your family.

Please feel free to contact me by phone or email. My details are below.

Regards

Hazel Woodhouse

Phone (*****)

Email:hwoodhouse@*****.school.nz

Additional information for families:

- You will be invited to attend a voluntary information meeting facilitated by me and lasting approximately 30-40 minutes to explain the research.
- I kindly ask your permission to access your child's e-portfolio to edit and view their learning stories.
You will be made aware when your child's future New Entrant teacher at ***** primary school will be added as an 'educator' on to your child's portfolio in term three, 2018.
- You will be asked to give consideration to extending your child's e-portfolio into their first term at school, to digitally document their journey.
- You will be invited to create a short digital story for your child's e-portfolio. The purpose of the digital stories is to help teachers to get to know more about

your child and provide an opportunity to gain further insight into your family's world and how you feel about them starting school.

- You will be invited to engage in a digital forum on a closed group Facebook page with families of parents whose children will be starting at **** primary school at the start of term four, 2018. You will be asked to offer your opinion on digital resources and ideas towards your child's transition to school.
- You will be invited to participate in a digital 'hui' whereby you will use the closed group Facebook page to offer opinions and suggestions in the draft co-constructed transition programme (end of term three, 2018) before it goes ahead.

Ethical considerations:

- Facebook has a function whereby you can amend or withdraw your comments as you generate them.
 - Your online identity will be that from your Facebook account. It will identify you by your cover photo and your privacy settings. Those invited to the closed group Facebook page can ONLY see the postings and it will be closed to public access.
 - Should you wish to withdraw generated data from the project, you may do so up until the end of data collection (up to 6 weeks after it is generated).
 - All material collected will be confidential, individuals, the school or ECE centre or your family will not be identifiable in the report.
 - On completion, my research will be written up into a thesis that will be submitted to the University of Waikato. An electronic copy of this research will become available, as the University of Waikato requires that a digital copy of this thesis is lodged permanently in the university's digital library.
 - It is intended that findings from this thesis may be submitted for publication in educational journals or books and conferences or professional development presentations.
 - If at any time you have questions or concerns about the conduct of the research, please feel free to contact either of my supervisors:
- Dr Sally Peters, [Email : speters@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:speters@waikato.ac.nz), phone: 838 4466 ext.8386
 - Dr Jeanette Clarkin-Phillips - (Email: jgcp@waikato.ac.nz phone: 838 4875.

Some Important points:

- The raw data will be discussed with my supervisors (Dr Sally Peters and Dr Jeanette Clarkin-Phillips).
- The information all participants give will be stored in a password-protected file on my computer/external hard-drive and printed copies kept in a locked filing cabinet for at least five years after completing this study.

- An electronic copy of this research will become available, as the University of Waikato requires that a digital copy of this thesis is lodged permanently in the university's digital library.
- In addition to this PhD, the data from all of the participants may be utilised for publications and or presentations, teaching, staff meetings and written work such as articles.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my

satisfaction.

I understand that I may withdraw my family from this research at any time, up to the end of data collection (up to 6 weeks after its generation without having to give

reasons.

I understand that the information I provide will be kept confidential.

I understand that the published results will not use my family's names or that of my

child's centre.

I consent to making a short digital story (with any necessary support) and for that story to be placed on my child's e-portfolio.

I give consent for the NE (New Entrant) teacher and Hazel Woodhouse as the transition programme facilitator, to access this story. I will provide Hazel and the NE teacher with access to my child's e-portfolio.

I understand that I can delete or retract any comments I have made on the digital forum. I would like to receive a summary of the results of this research when it is completed.

I agree to take part in the family's group digital forum with other families involved in this research and the transition programme in term three.

I agree to myself, and my child taking part in this research.

Child's name: _____

Family represented: _____

Signed _____

Date:

Appendix 6: Initial Parent Questionnaire

Appendix Parent Questionnaire

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this questionnaire. Your views and opinions towards a co-constructed approach to transitioning children from early childhood to school will form a vital part of the research.

1a) Your age:

- under 25
- 25-35
- 36-45
- 56-70
- Other...

1b) Your family's ethnicity:

Short answer text

1c) Your gender:

- Female
- Male

1d) Your Occupation:

Short answer text

1e) Do you have a Facebook account?

Yes

No

2a) How many children do you have?

Short answer text

2b) Please state how many of your children are currently at school?

Short answer text

Choose the 3 most important reasons for choosing your child's primary school.

Column 1

Siblings already attending school.

Proximity to home.

General reputation of school.

Friends going to same school.

Reputation for good academic standards.

Close links to the early childhood centre.

The primary school has made active links with you p...

4a) Do you mainly access your child's e-portfolio system to keep up to date with your child's learning?

Long answer text

4b) Do you rely on other sources and ways of finding out information about the centre and your child's learning? Please give details...

Long answer text

5) What matters most to you about your child's transition from ECE to school?

Long answer text

6) What are you and your child looking forward to about starting school?

Long answer text

7) How important is it to you as a parent that you make contact with your child's future school before your child begins?

- Very important
- Important
- Not important at all

...

8a) What information would you as a family like communicated to you from your child's future school to help prepare your family for starting school?

Long answer text

8b) How far in advance of starting school would you like to be able to access this information?

Long answer text

9) Regarding your child's first year at school, what would you describe as being the most important for them to be able to do and manage in adjusting to being at school?

Long answer text

10) Regarding your child starting school. How would you describe your personal feelings?

- Anxious/nervous
- Confident
- Very confident
- Other...

11) Describe what value you would gain by visiting school with your child prior to their starting date?

Long answer text

12) What do you think is of value in families and a school working together on a transition to school plan that is supported by your early childhood centre?

Long answer text

13a) As a parent, in an ideal world, how much would you like to be involved in the transition of your child from early childhood centre to school?

Long answer text

13b) What would impact on your involvement?

Long answer text

14a) How would you feel about working together with the school through an online platform to assist your child's transition to school? For example, through your child's e-portfolio or an online website?

Long answer text

14b) What might be the benefits with this approach?

Long answer text

14c) What might be the issues with this approach?

Long answer text

15a) Is it important to your family to maintain a connection with your child's ECE centre in your child's first term of adjusting to school?

Yes

No

15b) If so why? If not why?

Long answer text

Thank you for this information and taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Description (optional)

Appendix 7: Initial Teacher Questionnaire

Teacher questionnaire

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this questionnaire. Your views and opinions towards a co-constructed approach to transitioning children from early childhood to school will form a vital part of the research.

1a) Your age:

- under 25
- 25-35
- 36-45
- 46-55
- 56-70

1b) Your ethnicity:

Short answer text

1c) Are you:

- Male
- Female

1d) Your occupation:

Short answer text

2) Do you have a Facebook account?

Yes

No

⋮

3a) When does transition to school begin for your families?

Short answer text

3b) What does this involve?

Short answer text

3c) Does it vary for different schools?

Yes

No

Maybe

⋮

3d) If so in what ways?

Long answer text

4) How do you help parents think about their child's transition to school?

Long answer text

***Question 5-8 are for ECE teachers only. Primary teachers please go straight to question 9.**

Description (optional)

5a) What relationships does your ECE centre have with the primary schools that the children attend?

Long answer text

5b) Does this relationship vary from school to school? If so how?

Long answer text

6) How do you connect with the different schools that the children are going to?

Long answer text

⋮

7) How effective are e-portfolios in sharing and discussing learning with families?

- Very effective
- Moderately effective
- Not effective

8a) Do you feel this way of sharing to be the most successful way of connecting with families?

- Yes
- No
- Mostly

⋮

8b) Please explain:

Long answer text

***ALL Teachers to answer question 9 onwards.**

Description (optional)

9a) In what ways do families get involved in your ECE centre/school?

Long answer text

9b) What affects their involvement?

Short answer text

10a) Do you get a lot of questions about starting school from your families?

- Yes
- No
- Quite a few.

⋮

10b) Do you feel you have the information to answer them?

- Yes
- No
- Generally/usually

10c) What information would you like?

Long answer text

⋮

11) What ways do you work with children in your centre/classroom to help develop their coping strategies to manage the demands of a school day?

Long answer text

12) What situations do you feel children will encounter at school that differs from their experiences at the ECE centre?

Long answer text

13) What do you think are important aspects of a child's transition to school?

Long answer text

Thank you for this information and taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Description (optional)

Appendix 8: A parent's review of the initial Patrick stories

Question 1:

Did the videos surface some ideas about school that you may not have talked about with your child before they started school?

Question 2:

Did you think that the videos were useful to support conversations with your child about situations that they may experience at school?

Question 3:

Do you find the videos were appropriate for your child?

Question 4:

What were your child's thoughts regarding the videos? Did the videos initiate any conversations for them?

Question 5:

Do you feel that the videos could be a useful resource for families? If so, why?

Question 6:

What would you change/add or feel might have been missed in the videos? Any other comments?

Appendix 9: Parent Review Questionnaire

1) With regards to your contributions and experiences, what do you think has been the most influential in making your family transition to school more positive? (Please tick your 3 top choices.)

- The information on Facebook was relative to my needs:
- It was presented to me in a way in which met my family's needs:
- The way I was listened to and felt my suggestions were valued:
- I felt confident in being a partner with the school in my transition experiences:
- Other reasons:

2) How did you feel the discussions generated from the Family Facebook page reaffirmed your own feelings?

3a) Did you feel you got to know/recognise the children and their families in your child's class before your child started school by recognising them through Facebook?

3b) If yes, did this familiarity of people make a difference to you or your child's start to school?

4) Did you feel your contributions were..

Valued/Made a difference/Not taken into consideration?

5a) Can you describe if the Facebook page made a difference to you or your child's start to school? If so, how?

5b) If not...what would you change?

5c) Please give an example, or more than one example, of how the Facebook page made a difference to your family's transition to school

6) Did you visit the Facebook page before your child started school?

7) Did you feel that any of the videos and postings made a difference to you as a family in supporting your transition to school? If yes, please give an example of a video or posting if you can...

8) Would you recommend the Facebook page to other families who are transitioning to school to help support them?

9) Did you feel that the information on the Facebook page made you feel more confident in supporting your child through any part of their transition?

Appendix 10: Analysis of Facebook data Families

Date	Facilitator Initiated	Family Initiated	Facilitator Response	Family Response	Seen by	Emoji Facilitator	Emoji Family
------	--------------------------	---------------------	-------------------------	--------------------	---------	----------------------	-----------------

6/06/2018	1	0	0	0	4	0	1
6/06/2018	1	0	0	0	3	0	1
6/06/2018	1	0	0	0	3	0	1
6/06/2018	1	0	0	0	4	0	2
6/06/2018	1	0	0	0	3	0	1
6/06/2018	1	0	0	0	3	0	1
6/06/2018	1	0	0	0	5	0	2
6/06/2018	1	0	0	0	5	0	2
6/06/2018	1	0	0	0	5	0	2
6/06/2018	1	0	0	0	6	0	5
6/06/2018	1	0	0	0	6	0	2
6/06/2018	1	0	0	0	6	0	1
7/06/2018	1	0	0	0	7	0	4
13/06/2018	3	0	0	3	7	2	2
17/06/2018	1	0	0	0	7	0	1
17/06/2018	1	0	0	0	6	0	0
19/06/2018	1	0	1	2	6	0	11
20/06/2018	1	0	0	0	3	0	2
24/06/2018	1	0	0	0	10	0	6
Postings over the two weeks with seen by and emoji	21.0	0.0	1	5	99	2	47

Date	Facilitator Initiated	Family Initiated	Facilitator Response	Family Response	Seen by	Emoji Facilitator	Emoji Family
27/06/2018	1	0	1	2	6	2	1
27/06/2018	0	1	1	1	7	1	3
28/06/2018	1	0	1	0	8	2	3
1/07/2018	1	0	0	0	7	0	2
1/07/2018	1	0	1	1	8	1	4
1/07/2018	1	0	4	2	7	0	3
8/07/2018	1	0	0	0	8	0	3
8/07/2018	1	0	0	0	8	0	2
8/07/2018	1	0	0	0	9	0	1
Postings over the two weeks with seen by and emoji	8.0	1.0	8	6	68	6	22
Date	Facilitator Initiated	Family Initiated	Facilitator Response	Family Response	Seen by	Emoji Facilitator	Emoji Family
10/07/2018	1	0	1	2	6	2	2
10/07/2018	1	0	1	1	10	0	5
15/07/2018	1	0	0	0	9	0	1
15/07/2018	1	0	0	0	8	0	0
16/07/2018	1	0	0	0	8	0	1
17/07/2018	1	0	0	0	8	0	3
17/07/2018	1	0	0	1	8	1	1

22/07/2018	1	0	0	0	10	0	3
22/07/2018	1	0	1	1	10	1	8
Postings over the two weeks with seen by and emoji	9.0	0.0	3	5	77	4	22
Date	Facilitator Initiated	Family Initiated	Facilitator Response	Family Response	Seen by	Emoji Facilitator	Emoji Family
24/07/2018	1	0	0	0	9	0	0
25/07/2018	1	0	3	2	11	2	2
27/07/2018	1	0	1	3	10	3	3
29/07/2018	1	0	0	0	11	0	6
3/08/2018	1	0	0	4	10	0	5
6/08/2018	1	0	0	4	11	2	2
Postings over the two weeks with seen by and emoji	6.0	0.0	4	13	62	7	18
Date	Facilitator Initiated	Family Initiated	Facilitator Response	Family Response	Seen by	Emoji Facilitator	Emoji Family
8/08/2018	1	0	0	0	10	0	3
8/08/2018	1	0	0	1	8	1	2
12/08/2018	1	0	0	0	8	0	1
14/08/2018	1	0	2	1	13	2	6
15/08/2018	1	0	0	0	14	0	3
15/08/2018	1	0	0	0	10	1	1
16/08/2018	1	0	1	2	13	1	4

19/08/2018	1	0	0	0	12	0	4
20/08/2018	1	0	0	0	14	0	5
20/08/2018	1	0	0	0	15	0	8
20/08/2018	1	0	0	0	14	0	6
20/08/2018	1	0	0	0	9	0	4
20/08/2018	1	0	1	2	14	0	2
Postings over the two weeks with seen by and emoji	13.0	0.0	4	6	154	5	49
Date	Facilitator Initiated	Family Initiated	Facilitator Response	Family Response	Seen by	Emoji Facilitator	Emoji Family
21/08/2018	1	0	0	0	14	2	2
22/08/2018	1	0	3	14	15	4	11
23/08/2018	1	0	0	0	14	0	6
24/08/2018	1	0	0	0	13	0	4
24/08/2018	1	0	0	4	15	0	8
29/08/2018	1	0	0	3	15	1	1
30/08/2018	1	0	1	2	14	0	4
3/09/2018	1	0	0	0	13	0	6
4/09/2018	1	0	0	0	13	0	4
4/09/2018	1	0	0	0	14	0	4
Postings over the two weeks with seen by and emoji	10.0	0.0	4	23	140	7	50

Date	Facilitator Initiated	Family Initiated	Facilitator Response	Family Response	Seen by	Emoji Facilitator	Emoji Family
5/09/2018	1	0	0	0	14	0	2
5/09/2018	1	0	1	1	16	0	5
6/09/2018	1	0	0	0	15	0	7
6/09/2018	1	0	0	2	6	2	1
7/09/2018	1	0	0	0	14	0	4
7/09/2018	1	0	1	2	8	1	1
9/09/2018	1	0	1	1	15	1	2
10/09/2018	1	0	0	0	13	0	3
10/09/2018	1	0	0	0	14	0	4
10/09/2018	1	0	0	0	13	0	3
10/09/2018	1	0	0	0	13	0	3
10/09/2018	1	0	0	0	13	0	2
10/09/2018	1	0	0	0	13	0	4
10/09/2018	1	0	0	2	14	1	5
10/09/2018	1	0	0	1	7	1	0
10/09/2018	1	0	0	2	15	2	8
11/09/2018	1	0	0	1	16	1	6
11/09/2018	1	0	0	2	16	2	5
13/09/2018	1	0	0	0	17	0	0

18/09/2018	1	0	0	0	19	0	6
18/09/2018	1	0	0	0	18	0	5
18/09/2018	1	0	0	0	19	0	6
18/09/2018	1	0	0	1	16	1	4
19/09/2018	1	0	0	0	18	0	5
19/09/2018	1	0	0	0	18	0	4
19/09/2018	1	0	0	0	19	0	5
19/09/2018	1	0	0	1	18	1	1
19/09/2018	1	0	0	2	12	0	1
Postings over the two weeks with seen by and emoji	28.0	0.0	3	18	409	13	102
Date	Facilitator Initiated	Family Initiated	Facilitator Response	Family Response	Seen by	Emoji Facilitator	Emoji Family
21/09/2018	0	1	3	2	21	1	7
24/09/2018	1	0	0	0	21	0	5
24/09/2018	1	0	0	0	19	0	3
24/09/2018	1	0	0	0	19	0	4
24/09/2018	1	0	0	0	19	0	6
24/09/2018	1	0	0	0	22	0	6
24/09/2018	1	0	0	0	21	0	5
25/09/2018	0	1	1	0	20	1	7
25/09/2018	1	0	0	0	18	0	5

25/09/2018	1	0	0	0	15	0	3
25/09/2018	1	0	0	0	18	0	3
25/09/2018	1	0	0	1	19	0	3
26/09/2018	1	0	0	0	18	0	4
26/09/2018	13	0	0	3	19	3	4
26/09/2018	1	0	0	0	19	0	5
26/09/2018	1	0	0	0	19	0	5
27/09/2018	1	0	0	0	21	0	3
27/09/2018	1	0	0	0	21	0	6
28/09/2018	1	0	0	1	21	1	6
29/09/2018	1	0	2	3	20	2	8
Postings over the two weeks with seen by and emoji	18.0	2.0	6	10	390	8	98
Date	Facilitator Initiated	Family Initiated	Facilitator Response	Family Response	Seen by	Emoji Facilitator	Emoji Family
11/10/2018	1	0	0	0	22	0	4
11/10/2018	1	0	0	0	22	0	4
15/10/2018	1	0	0	0	24	0	10
15/10/2018	1	0	0	0	25	0	10
15/10/2018	1	0	0	0	24	0	13
15/10/2018	1	0	0	0	24	0	2
15/10/2018	1	0	0	1	24	1	7

16/10/2018	1	0	0	0	25	0	4
16/10/2018	1	0	0	0	25	0	4
16/10/2018	1	0	0	0	24	0	5
16/10/2018	0	1	1	0	22	0	23
16/10/2018	1	0	2	2	28	1	6
16/10/2018	1	0	0	1	28	0	5
17/10/2018	1	0	0	0	26	0	6
17/10/2018	1	0	0	0	25	0	3
17/10/2018	1	0	0	1	29	1	9
17/10/2018	1	0	0	0	26	0	4
17/10/2018	1	0	0	1	29	1	9
18/10/2018	1	0	1	1	29	0	5
18/10/2018	1	0	0	0	29	0	2
19/10/2018	1	0	0	0	30	0	2
19/10/2018	1	0	0	0	22	0	4
Postings over the two weeks with seen by and emoji	21.0	1.0	4	7	562	4	140
Date	Facilitator Initiated	Family Initiated	Facilitator Response	Family Response	Seen by	Emoji Facilitator	Emoji Family
24/10/2018	1	0	0	0	30	0	7
24/10/2018	1	0	0	0	28	0	9
25/10/2018	1	0	0	0	27	0	6

25/10/2018	1	0	0	0	28	0	7
25/10/2018	1	0	1	2	30	1	12
26/10/2018	1	0	0	0	28	0	10
26/10/2018	1	0	0	0	27	0	7
28/10/2018	1	0	0	0	29	0	10
29/10/2018	1	0	0	0	28	0	9
29/10/2018	1	0	0	0	28	0	7
29/10/2018	1	0	0	0	28	0	8
30/10/2018	0	1	2	5	32	0	13
31/10/2018	1	0	0	0	29	0	4
31/10/2018	1	0	0	0	29	0	4
31/10/2018	1	0	0	1	30	1	7
1/11/2018	1	0	2	2	29	1	2
2/11/2018	1	0	0	2	30	0	8
2/11/2018	1	0	0	0	30	0	5
2/11/2018	1	0	0	0	27	0	8
Postings over the two weeks with seen by and emoji	18.0	1.0	5	12	547	3	143
Date	Facilitator Initiated	Family Initiated	Facilitator Response	Family Response	Seen by	Emoji Facilitator	Emoji Family
5/11/2018	1	0	0	0	29	0	4

5/11/2018	1	0	0	0	27	0	4
5/11/2018	1	0	0	0	29	0	5
5/11/2018	1	0	0	0	27	0	2
5/11/2018	1	0	0	1	30	1	1
5/11/2018	1	0	0	1	28	1	2
5/11/2018	1	0	0	1	27	1	1
6/11/2018	1	0	0	2	26	0	7
6/11/2018	1	0	0	0	25	0	3
6/11/2018	1	0	1	4	29	3	0
6/11/2018	1	0	1	0	29	0	3
8/11/2018	1	0	0	1	27	0	2
8/11/2018	1	0	0	0	31	0	4
8/11/2018	1	0	0	0	30	0	4
8/11/2018	1	0	0	1	30	0	8
8/11/2018	1	0	0	0	28	0	8
8/11/2018	1	0	0	2	29	0	6
9/11/2018	1	0	0	0	29	0	4
9/11/2018	1	0	1	3	32	2	10
12/12/2018	1	0	0	0	29	0	6
12/12/2018	1	0	0	0	28	0	2
12/12/2018	1	0	0	0	28	0	2

12/12/2018	1	0	1	2	28	0	3
12/12/2018	1	0	0	3	30	0	7
14/11/2018	1	0	0	0	28	0	4
14/11/2018	1	0	0	0	28	0	5
14/11/2018	1	0	0	1	29	0	10
14/11/2018	1	0	0	0	29	0	0
14/11/2018	1	0	0	1	30	0	4
15/11/2018	1	0	0	0	28	0	6
15/11/2018	1	0	0	0	29	0	7
15/11/2018	1	0	0	0	30	0	4
15/11/2018	1	0	0	0	27	0	4
15/11/2018	1	0	0	0	28	0	1
15/11/2018	1	0	1	0	28	0	3
15/11/2018	1	0	0	0	30	0	4
15/11/2018	1	0	0	1	30	1	2
15/11/2018	1	0	0	1	30	0	11
16/11/2018	1	0	0	0	29	0	6
16/11/2018	1	0	0	0	21	0	2
16/11/2018	1	0	0	1	22	1	4
16/11/2018	1	0	0	0	29	0	4

Postings over the two weeks with seen by and emoji	42.0	0.0	5	26	1190	10	179
Date	Facilitator Initiated	Family Initiated	Facilitator Response	Family Response	Seen by	Emoji Facilitator	Emoji Family
18/11/2018	1	0	0	1	30	1	8
19/11/2018	1	0	0	1	28	1	4
19/11/2018	1	0	0	0	29	0	7
19/11/2018	1	0	0	0	30	0	6
19/11/2018	1	0	0	0	29	0	4
19/11/2018	1	0	0	0	29	0	4
19/11/2018	1	0	0	1	30	0	4
19/11/2018	1	0	0	0	28	0	6
19/11/2018	1	0	0	0	29	0	4
19/11/2018	1	0	0	0	29	0	5
20/11/2018	1	0	0	0	28	0	3
20/11/2018	1	0	0	0	31	0	4
21/11/2018	1	0	0	0	30	0	6
21/11/2018	1	0	0	0	29	0	4
26/11/2018	1	0	0	0	27	0	2
26/11/2018	1	0	0	0	27	0	3
26/11/2018	1	0	0	0	30	0	2
26/11/2018	1	0	0	1	31	0	4

26/11/2018	1	0	1	2	29	0	6
26/11/2018	1	0	0	0	30	0	7
27/11/2018	1	0	0	0	31	0	4
27/11/2018	1	0	0	0	30	0	3
27/11/2018	1	0	0	0	32	0	3
27/11/2018	1	0	1	3	31	0	2
27/11/2018	1	0	0	0	32	0	10
29/11/2018	1	0	0	1	27	0	9
29/11/2018	1	0	0	0	29	0	7
29/11/2018	1	0	0	1	30	0	10
30/11/2018	1	0	0	0	28	0	5
30/11/2018	1	0	0	2	30	1	10
30/11/2018	1	0	0	0	31	0	8
30/11/2018	1	0	0	1	26	0	3
2/12/2018	1	0	0	1	30	1	5
2/12/2018	1	0	0	1	28	1	4
Postings over the two weeks with seen by and emoji	34.0	0.0	2	16	998	5	233
Date	Facilitator Initiated	Family Initiated	Facilitator Response	Family Response	Seen by	Emoji Facilitator	Emoji Family
3/12/2018	1	0	0	0	30	0	4
3/12/2018	1	0	0	0	29	0	5

3/12/2018	1	0	0	0	31	0	7
3/12/2018	1	0	0	0	29	0	3
3/12/2018	1	0	0	0	31	0	4
3/12/2018	1	0	0	1	32	0	9
3/12/2018	1	0	0	1	30	0	5
3/12/2018	1	0	0	1	22	0	6
3/12/2018	1	0	0	1	29	0	4
3/12/2018	1	0	0	6	31	0	5
4/12/2018	1	0	0	1	31	0	4
6/12/2018	1	0	0	0	29	0	5
6/12/2018	1	0	0	0	29	0	4
7/12/2018	1	0	0	0	30	0	6
7/12/2018	1	0	0	2	31	0	9
9/12/2018	1	0	0	0	30	0	8
11/12/2018	1	0	0	0	29	0	8
11/12/2018	1	0	0	0	29	0	7
11/12/2018	1	0	0	1	24	0	4
11/12/2018	1	0	0	1	30	0	11
12/12/2018	1	0	0	0	28	0	6
12/12/2018	1	0	0	0	26	0	4
12/12/2018	1	0	0	0	28	0	7

12/12/2018	1	0	0	0	28	0	5
12/12/2018	1	0	0	1	28	1	2
12/12/2018	1	0	0	0	27	0	6
12/12/2018	1	0	0	0	27	0	4
13/12/2018	1	0	0	0	26	0	8
13/12/2018	1	0	0	0	28	0	6
13/12/2018	1	0	0	0	27	0	5
13/12/2018	1	0	0	0	29	0	10
13/12/2018	1	0	0	0	27	0	5
14/12/2018	0	1	1	1	27	1	6
14/12/2018	1	0	1	1	26	1	1
14/12/2018	1	0	0	0	28	0	7
14/12/2018	1	0	0	4	28	0	9
14/12/2018	1	0	0	2	28	1	8
Postings over the two weeks with seen by and emoji	36.0	1.0	2	24	1052	4	217

