



Ready or Not, Here I Come

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ABSTRACT

A well-developed transition process between the early childhood setting and primary school is important when considering transition to school. This paper reports on an inquiry that focused on the enablers and barriers to a successful transition to school. The inquiry which used case studies at two schools involved interviews with new entrant, kindergarten and early childhood kaiako, parents and Special Education Needs Coordinators (SENCOs). Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to share personal knowledge and experience. The importance of inclusion was the common denominator in all interviews and was encompassed within the seven enablers identified: partnerships; communication; fostering relationships; belonging; parental involvement; the sharing of information, and developing a relationship with the tamariki.¹ In this context, inclusion involved all stakeholders having a part to play in the transition process. Inflexibility in systems, poor funding and a lack of continuity around support were identified as barriers to successful transitions. Almost all interviewees shared the view that the process should be led by the tamariki.

Research paper

Keywords:

inclusive education, inquiry, transition

Ko te Tamaiti te Pūtake o te Kaupapa

The Child – the Heart of the Matter

INTRODUCTION

While “transitions can be times of risk, uncertainty and anxiety; they can also be times of excitement and pleasure” (Dockett, Griebel & Perry, 2017, p.3). How stakeholders work together is central to

effective interprofessional practice, with Mentis, Kearney and Bevan-Brown (2012) suggesting professionals can learn with, from and about each other in order to create a shared understanding of each of their areas of expertise. Furthermore, recent research acknowledges the significance of connecting the numerous environments during transition (Wilder & Lillvist, 2017). Whilst there has been substantial New Zealand-based research associated with transition to school, there is more to ascertain when it comes to ways in which tamariki can enhance their learning prowess through both opportunity and challenge (Peters & Paki, 2013).

Small-scale studies that focus on enablers and barriers to successful transition provide insight to the development of a responsive transition process that builds on the strengths, interests and capabilities of tamariki. The present research considered the perceived enablers and barriers of a successful transition from early childhood to school through the eyes of whānau² and kaiako³, and how these perceptions could be used to develop responsive transition processes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This review considers the factors that are deemed to be important when considering effective transition from early childhood services to school, including the theoretical contexts for thinking about transition - in particular, Durie’s Te Whare Tapa Whā model and Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model. These models shape how transition to school is understood within the New Zealand context and what is deemed central to best practice. This includes working interprofessionally and with families to share knowledge in regards to collaboration around transition to school. This literature review takes a strengths-based approach built on the idea that as professionals work together to support transitions, positive outcomes are likely when people’s strongest qualities are recognised and cherished, and they are supported to build on their strengths (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi 2000).

¹ Child/ren

² Extended family

³ Teacher

A Theoretical Context for Considering Positive Transitions

Māori health expert, Mason Durie, developed a model of health and well-being known as Te Whare Tapa Whā encapsulating a te ao Māori (Maori worldview) of health and wellness. Similarly, ecological theory emphasises the significant inter-relationships between tamariki, their whānau, hapū and iwi, such that, when the connections between home and school are solid, the transition process can be enhanced further (Bronfenbrenner 1976, 1979). In support of Bronfenbrenner's studies, Durie's (1982) model also looks at the wholeness of the tamariki; the four walls of the house; physical, mental, spiritual and whānau-interconnect. When schools and whānau work together, this interconnectedness provides opportunities for the growth and development of competent and happy tamariki in mind, body and soul (Nuttall, 2013). Both of these theorists are ultimately suggesting that learning all aspects of the child is important for teachers in both sectors, and that the development in one domain should not be at the expense of other aspects (Peters & Paki, 2013).

Curricula Support for Transitions in New Zealand

Just as the partnership between home, the early childhood setting and primary school plays an important role in the transition process, so too does the connection between Te Whāriki (Early Childhood Curriculum) and the New Zealand Curriculum (NZC). The NZC (Ministry of Education, 2007) maintains transition from early childhood education to school is supported when the school "fosters a child's relationship with teachers and other children and affirms their identity; builds on the learning experiences that the child brings with them; considers the child's whole experience of school and is genuine in the welcoming of family and whānau involvement" (p.41).

Te Whāriki includes principles and strands which together describe a holistic curriculum. "When deciding which areas to focus on, teachers and educators take into account the interests, strengths and needs of the children and the aspirations of parents, whānau and community. Te Whāriki supports every child to be strong in his or her identity, language and culture" (Ministry of Education, 2017, p.15). This next stage in a child's learning, starting school, can build on and connect with early childhood learning and experiences including children's preferences when learning and what they find interesting (Peters, 2010; Peters & Paki, 2013).

Factors that Contribute to Positive Transitions

New Zealand research over the past twenty years suggests that effective transition to school is largely due to the support and scaffolding that is available to individual children, having familiar faces around them, family and whānau, and cross-sector partnerships that enable curriculum continuity have been highlighted as fundamental to creating an effective transition process (Howie & Timperley, 2001; Margetts, 1999; Peters, 2002).

The NZC (Ministry of Education, 2007) specifies the significance of "building on learning experiences that a child brings with them" (p.41) and a better understanding of children's working theories enhances the possibility of richer and more meaningful learning (Davis & Peters 2011; Education Review Office, 2015). Peters and Paki (2013) looked at links between the two curricula and one of their findings, which was corroborated by the ECE kaiako interviewed, was a successful transition is not simply a seamless flow from Te Whāriki to the NZC but rather involves kaiako sharing knowledge of both curricula to think about how best to support the tamariki. The complex nature of both the personal and environmental factors that shape experiences means that the learning journey should be individualised for each of the tamariki. The principles of Te Whāriki - whakamana (empowerment), kotahitanga (holistic development), whānau tangata (family and community), and ngā hononga (relationships) - offer a wealth of knowledge and meaning that can be used to inform transition practices (Peters & Paki, 2013). In 2013, the Education Review Office evaluated how well both early childhood services and schools support tamariki through the transition to school. The subsequent reports suggested that transition to school is enhanced when leaders and teachers in ECE and schools understand the links between Te Whāriki and the NZC (Education Review Office, 2015). In the 2017 revision of Te Whāriki, there was an increased focus on the continuity of learning for tamariki.

To support seamless transition to school, kaiako of new entrant tamariki can endeavour to provide teaching and learning programmes that have been developed through a range of experiences across all learning areas, with a focus on literacy and numeracy along with the development of values and key competencies (Mortlock, Plowman & Glasgow, 2011). When teachers are able to listen to children's ideas and interests, and use these to design connected learning opportunities, they are effectively putting the child behind the wheel of their own learning (Howie & Timperley, 2001). Article 12 of the United Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) is clear that it is a

basic right of children and young people to express their views and for this to be taken into account when making decisions that involve them directly.

Other factors that contribute to positive transitions include orientation programmes and liaisons between early childhood centres and their primary counterparts. When groups of professionals work collaboratively within an inclusive model and tailored transition approach, it helps to make the transition process less stressful for the majority of ākonga (Hornby 2011; Peters, 2010; Pianta, 2004).

Working Interprofessionally and with Families

Those involved in the transition process may include family and whānau, early childhood kaiako, new entrant kaiako, Ministry of Education early intervention teams including physiotherapists, occupational therapists and speech language therapists, Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLb), and the school's SENCO. Mentis, Kearney and Bevan-Brown (2012) advocate for an interprofessional approach which promotes inclusion for ākonga with diverse learning needs through the sharing of skills, expertise and knowledge amongst professionals. Professionals learn with, from and about each other (Mentis et al., 2012) within a context where "values and ethics; roles and responsibilities; interprofessional communication; and teams and teamwork" are prioritised (Interprofessional Education Collaborative Expert Panel, 2011, p. 299). Working interprofessionally is particularly important when transitioning tamariki with learning and/or behavioural challenges as this transition can be complex and challenging (Siddiqua & Janus, 2016; Walker, et al., 2012). Siddiqua and Janus (2016) identify inadequate communication and organisation of information as major barriers to successful transition for tamariki who need additional support, and argue that interprofessional approaches where knowledge can be effectively shared are needed in these situations. Their research explored parents' views and experiences of transition to school, and revealed that collaboration among and between both providers and families are fundamental components of an effective transition.

There has been extensive research internationally demonstrating the link between parental involvement and improved academic and social outcomes (Hornby, 2011). It is widely considered that our most effective schools are the ones that

actively support and foster parental and whānau involvement in their tamariki's learning journey (Grant & Ray, 2010; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). It is likely that the relationships connecting those assisting tamariki during the transition process will support both the adjustment to, and the readiness for, school (Wickett, 2017; Wright, 2009).

Ritchie (2013) looks at the commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and in particular draws on kaiako "enactment of whakawhanaungatanga"⁴, and "demonstrating the pedagogical integration of other Māori values such as manaakitanga⁵ and kaitiakitanga"⁶ (p.141). In order for families and whānau to feel valued, Mortlock, Plowman and Glasgow (2011) suggest it is important for kaiako, and indeed the kura's leadership team, to communicate attitudes of genuineness, respect and empathy. They go on to say, on a very simplistic level, relationship connections are both dynamic and multi-faceted (2011).

INQUIRY QUESTIONS

The research presented in this article considered the perceived enablers and barriers of a successful transition from early childhood education to school through the eyes of both whānau and kaiako.

The research was carried out in two schools, presenting a case study of two tamariki as they transitioned from an early childhood setting to primary school. Parents' and professionals' perspectives were gathered to understand the factors that participants believe support positive transitions, with a particular focus on the sharing of knowledge amongst families and professionals. It was hoped that this knowledge would provide insight to inform transition processes that benefit not only the individual child but also the rest of the tamariki in the classroom.

The inquiry question was:

- What do ECE kaiako, new entrant kaiako and whānau perceive the enablers and barriers of a successful transition to school to be?

METHODOLOGY

Taking into consideration the social context of both the ECE and primary school setting, interview data was gathered from kaiako in schools and ECEs as well as from families and whānau. An appreciative inquiry model guided the approach to data collection and analysis (Fifolt & Lander, 2013; Harrison & Hasan, 2013). Fifolt and Lander (2013) describe appreciative inquiry as a strength-based approach, promoting engagement, empowerment

⁴The building of relationships

⁵Caring of others

⁶Guardianship

and the chance to imagine opportunities instead of dwelling on difficulties. This approach is used to promote positive emotions, psychological safety and development of relationships. When carrying out the interviews for this inquiry, the focus was on what key stakeholders believe effectively enables the transition process. The appreciative approach involves a process of identifying what is working well, analysing why it's working, then engaging key stakeholders in self-determined change. This is reflected in Figure 1 which illustrates the cycle.

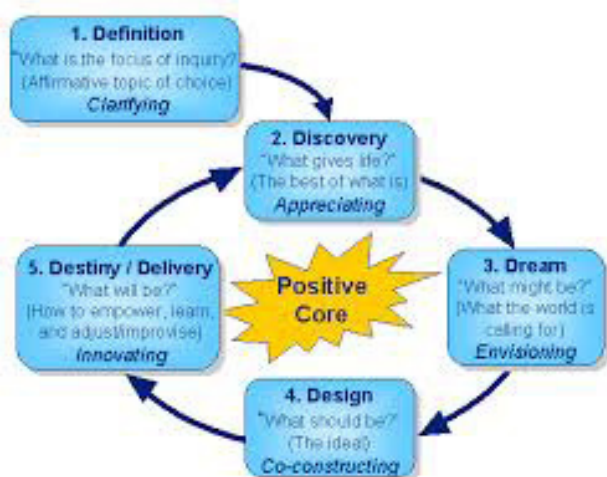


Figure 1: *The Cycle of Appreciate Inquiry*. <https://appreciativeinquiry.champlain.edu/learn/appreciative-inquiry-introduction/5-d-cycle-appreciative-inquiry/>

This encouraging approach was adopted for this inquiry in order to take individuals' strengths into account and supports the research to recognise, appreciate and value the positive traits tamariki bring to classrooms. Fiftol and Lander (2013) point out appreciative inquiry impacts the questions asked in interviews, the way in which interviews are conducted, as well as the analysis and write up of data.

Methods

The research aimed to ascertain what participants considered to be best practice in relation to transition to school. To gain participants' perspectives, semi-structured interviews were used to gather information including the successful aspects of the transition process and any perceived barriers.

Ethical Considerations

A critical reflection on the ethical considerations surrounding the inquiry was undertaken in the planning stages in accordance with the Massey University Code of Ethical Conduct (2015) and the project was deemed, through a process of ethical review by the Massey University Human Ethics

Committee, to be low risk. The research adhered to the principles of voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality and the right of withdrawal.

Inquiry Participants

The case studies took place in two schools. The commitment to gain a deep and ecological understanding of the transition process drove the choice around school selection. Value was placed on the perspectives of multiple schools, and in carrying out this inquiry the approach was to learn from their practice specifically what they believed worked well and areas in which they felt they could improve. Within each school, interviews were undertaken with the new entrant kaiako, the SENCO and one family member who had recently been through the transition process. Four early childhood kaiako directly involved in the child's transition were also interviewed. The schools involved made the initial approach to families to see if there was a willingness to be involved. Informed consent was gained from all participants and the right to withdraw from the research at any stage was available. One of the tamariki had additional needs and there were plans in place for transition meetings prior to starting school.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were used to gather participants' perspectives on the transition process. The interviewer had a "sketch map of the territory to be explored, but the freedom to explore it as he or she will" (Menter, Elliot, Hulme, Lewin & Lowden, 2011, p.131). The purpose of semi-structured interviews is to elucidate the interviewee's understanding of the topic thereby producing qualitative information. The advantages of using semi-structured interviews is that participants have the opportunity to expand on answers, share personal stories and add personal interpretation (Pihama, n.d.) all within a safe and culturally-sensitive manner (Cram, 2013). The interview questions included kaiako sharing current practice and what they perceived to be the enablers and barriers to a successful transition. Parents were asked about their experience of transition, what their tamariki may say about starting school, and what they may change if they had to transition their child again.

Interview questions were provided to the participants one week prior to the interview via email. Interviews were audio-recorded and ranged from 25 minutes to 48 minutes in length. These were transcribed by the interviewer and shared with the participants for review of accuracy (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011) which assisted with maintaining an unbiased method of data gathering through self-

reflexivity (Burne, 2017).

Data Analysis

Data were transcribed, coded and thematically analysed based on the research question. Notes made on each transcribed interview identified key themes. Themes were organised into two broad categories: enablers and barriers. A critical perspective was applied as the interviews were coded and the researcher referred back to notes taken at the time of the interview (Menter et al., 2011).

RESULTS

In this section the findings of the inquiry, including the key themes that were identified, are examined in accordance with the inquiry question:

- What are the perceived enablers and barriers of a successful transition to school?

Enablers Supporting Successful Transition to School

When participants explored enablers that contributed to positive transition an overarching theme of inclusion emerged. Under this umbrella, participants talked about including tamariki, their whānau, ECE kaiako and any agencies working with the family when transitioning to school. Participants identified seven key enablers that fostered successful transition to school: partnerships, communication, fostering relationships, belonging, parental involvement, the sharing of information, and developing a relationship with the child.

Partnerships

All interviewees described the partnerships between the school, early childhood facility and family as being paramount to a successful transition to school. Partnerships were described as those between the school and the parents, the school and the ECE centre, and the child and the new entrant kaiako. Ultimately the school wanted parents to feel, “confident in the knowledge that their child will be happy and safe at school.” (SENCO 1).

“For our school, the final part of this process, in terms of cementing the partnership, is the powhiri. It is saying, very deliberately, we are welcoming you to our school, you have crossed the paepae, you belong to our whānau now in a very special and significant way for the child and their family that says you are now part of us; you are a school boy or school girl now.” (SENCO 2)

Early childhood kaiako talked about their programmes lending themselves to being a stepping

stone to life at school. Alongside this, they talked about how, “beneficial it would be for new entrant kaiako to be more familiar with our curriculum, Te Whāriki, the diversity and richness of it so that they can better-understand and value where the child is coming from” (ECE kaiako 2). There was a consensus among kaiako that building on connections between the two curricula was important, however they did not describe how to share and use this knowledge. The notion of a partnership amongst professionals in both settings was considered central to supporting positive transitions:

“In my experience, of over 15 years as a new entrant teacher, the stronger the partnership between the different adults working alongside the tamariki, the more successful the transition to school will be.” (New Entrant kaiako 1)

Communication

Interviewees emphasised communication between families and kaiako was vital in order to support successful transitions, with one kindergarten kaiako suggesting, “... the building of relationships with the new entrant kaiako is crucial” (ECE kaiako 1). For parents who are transitioning their oldest child to school it can seem like information overload. When the parents bring their child to school for the first visit this is a:

“... perfect opportunity to ask them if they have any questions and I also make a point of talking about the way we teach in a school and how this might look different to what takes place in the environment they have come from.” (New entrant kaiako 2)

Interviewees also discussed the use of classroom noticeboards and starting school newsletters as being particularly useful for first-time parents; these acted as a timely reminder of routines and expectations for those who already have tamariki at school.

Fostering Relationships

Making connections and building on these were considered as essential elements in the transition process. All interviewees talked about the importance of building positive relationships as part of the transition to school. Both the ECE kaiako and new entrant kaiako described the relationship between parents and professionals as, “... friendship in a professional sense” (ECE kaiako 1). A kaiako is often the first person parents entrust their tamariki with; as such, building the relationship with them is paramount at the beginning of the transition process. Inclusion of parents is key because their needs are often greater than the child’s. New entrant kaiako 1, for example, believed, “The transition to

school is most successful when you meet the needs of the child and the family; it isn't a child who starts school, it is the family who starts school". A common thread from kaiako interviewed was the, "fine balance of what is provided to the tamariki and their whānau in order for the kindergarten and school to live up to the reputation they have built and are proud of" (New Entrant kaiako 2). The kindergarten teachers believed making links with the wider community through visits to the local school and reciprocal visits from them help the tamariki to see, "we are all working together on the learning journey." (Kindergarten kaiako 1)

A Sense of Belonging

Knowing where the child has come from and incorporating this into the new environment is a key factor in the transition process. SENCO 1, for example, said, "The child's need to be included and feel part of the new group should be established promptly." "All participants talked about valuing what the child brings to the environment in terms of prior experiences and cultural heritage. They commented that children are more likely to thrive in an environment they feel safe in and feel they belong to. It helps to be familiar with the school before starting too: "Being a second child has helped my child to transition to school because he was already familiar with the school, the site and teachers." (Parent 2)

Parents interviewed described the importance of being welcomed into the school. Parent 2 said she felt, "... part of the school family after the powhiri." Parent 1 commented that, "As a first time parent I feel like my child's needs have been met and indeed have exceeded all my expectations in terms of starting school. We very much feel as though we are part of a community already."

Parental Involvement

All kaiako interviewed emphasised parent inclusion in the transition process. Kaiako 2 went as far to say, "Transition is often more about parents, what they need and how they are feeling. We find what the parents need is to see and hear from the teacher what their expectations are." Regardless of the child's background, making them feel part of the school upon their arrival is paramount to a successful transition. Both schools stressed the importance of having too much information about a child, rather than too little:

Forming a good picture without barriers is achieved by listening to parents and understanding that each child is an individual

and some require more support than others when it comes to starting school and conforming to school life. (SENCO 1)

Sharing Information

Information-sharing meetings prior to a child starting school, particularly a child who has learning or behavioural challenges, were identified as another means of supporting a successful transition. Participants suggested those present could include, but wasn't limited to, parents, ECE kaiako, new entrant kaiako, SENCO, Ministry of Education early intervention team members, and any other individuals working with the child. SENCO 2 said transition meetings allowed people to, "... go around the table and share information." "New entrant kaiako 2 added such meetings could ... reassure the parents that their tamariki will be well looked after." Both schools reported their main role in these meetings was to listen to and learn from the information being shared. From Parent 1's perspective, "the flexibility and focus on individuals" was paramount in the decision to choose one school over another:

Each transition to a new environment is a big deal for our family, particularly with our daughter's medical condition. We have felt very well looked after by the school and she hasn't even started yet. What impressed us most was the principal had made time in his busy schedule to be at the transition meeting too (Parent 1).

Developing a Relationship – the tamariki and their Kaiako

The first school visit provides an opportunity for the new entrant kaiako to make a connection with the tamariki. Three of the participants (kaiako from a school, a kindergarten and an ECE kaiako) suggested that the first visit should take place in the tamariki's known environment. New entrant kaiako 1, for example, placed enormous value on visiting the ECE setting:

I arrive and introduce myself, asking the child what they would like to show me and what they enjoy doing. I ask them about their friends and get them to show me their profile book and talk me through this. I follow the child around for about 30 minutes. (New Entrant kaiako 1)

Another avenue reported to encourage child voice is to have one child visit the class at a time because, "... there are more authentic opportunities to engage

and to talk to individuals when there is just one school visitor in the classroom" (New Entrant kaiako 1). Informally asking the tamariki questions such as, "I wonder what it will be like at school, how do you feel about school and what do you know about school?" (ECE kaiako 2) was considered to be another effective way to hear directly from the child. The constant review of transition processes was also felt to be important with a view to always reflecting on how these can be improved. "Knowledge that what works for one child may not work for another is power; all children need transition processes that are individual to their needs" (ECE kaiako 1). Parents and kaiako shared the view that the process should be led by the tamariki and, where possible, should be individualised to their needs. However they also acknowledged that this was not always feasible because schools, "want to have consistency for all tamariki." (Parent 2)

Barriers Deterring Successful Transition to School

Just as there were enablers to successful transition, some barriers were also identified. The barriers were presented as a lack of funding, the inflexibility of the school visit structure, and issues surrounding continuity of support from the Ministry of Education's early intervention team to the school focus team.

Time and Funding

Time and funding are often perceived barriers to transition. ECE and new entrant kaiako talked at length about the lack of funding which meant that visits to one another's settings were not always part of the transition process with kindergarten kaiako 2 noting, "It always comes down to workload and funding which is so wrong." Both parties believed that there should be funding available for the NE kaiako to visit the tamariki in their ECE setting as the initial point of contact and for the ECE kaiako to take the tamariki to one of the school visits. "We would love to be able to take the children on a school visit just as much as we would love for new entrant teachers to visit children here in the kindergarten" (ECE kaiako 1). Kaiako from both sectors expressed the wish to have more time to learn, "... alongside each other to share knowledge about the children." (New Entrant kaiako 2)

Inflexibility of School Visit Structure

The inflexibility of the school visit structure was a barrier perceived by the ECE kaiako and parents. The feeling that there was, "no parental choice" (Parent 2) around the timing and organisation of school visits was mentioned by one interviewee, however she did follow up with, "I realise the school is large and they can't accommodate individual needs" (Parent 2). New entrant kaiako acknowledged they

try to accommodate individual family's preferences and needs around school visits however this is not always possible, particularly in larger schools. From the kindergarten kaiako's perspective, visits are better to take place at different times where there are opportunities to showcase and explain the actual school programme, as opposed to a 'visitor's morning' programme which can be less structured. "There is a looseness about kindy that does not necessarily prepare children for school and to have this echoed at a school visit is not helpful" (Parent 2). One of the kindergarten kaiako interviewed talked about the school visit as being a snapshot of the school day and also voiced the concern, "... is the child experiencing a day in action or are they experiencing something that is a transition to school programme that is not representative of what the school day is actually going to look like" (Kindergarten kaiako 3).

Continuity of Support from Ministry of Education's Early Intervention Team to School Focus Team

Whilst early intervention teams working with tamariki make the commitment to be involved for the first term at school to help bridge the gap, the funding for support workers ceases. This can cause, "significant strain on the school's financial resources" (SENCO 2) whilst they wait for the school focus team to come on board. SENCO 1 reiterated this saying, "Our tamariki do not turn five and have a magic wand waved over them to eliminate any number of reasons they need EI support." ECE kaiako described finding more children are staying on at kindergarten beyond age 5 because they are, "simply not ready for school and support structures are different at school, often much less than what we can provide here" (ECE kaiako 3). Transition funding can sometimes be provided by the RTLB service which can be used to provide additional adult support in the classroom when a child starts school. One kaiako noted the value of this support by saying, "I have found the most successful use of this support is between 9am and 9.30am; the support staff can settle the child in for the day and then they are good to go for the rest of the day." (SENCO 1)

DISCUSSION

The inquiry set out to identify the enablers and barriers to a successful transition to school. The data shows there are kaiako working in this area who have developed effective processes and they are able to draw on a range of personal and professional knowledge to inform their practice (Hedges, 2013). These same kaiako also identified some barriers to effective transition; in particular, the ability for kaiako to share knowledge interprofessionally whilst visiting one another's settings.

Enablers to a Successful Transition

Kaiako involved in supporting transitions described successful transitions as contextualised within broader inclusive practice and involved a number of enablers including belonging, the sharing of information, relationships, communication and parental involvement. Transitions were described as planned and implemented by a collaborative team whereby all students are welcomed and are able to take part in all aspects of school life. The Education Review Office (2015) reiterates this theme, noting that each individual's diversity should be respected and supported in an inclusive school. In addition, building on children's known preferences when learning, and on what they find interesting, will go some of the way to supporting continuity for children and engagement when they start school (Peters, 2010). Through the transition lens, an inclusive environment works towards developing responsive transition processes that build on the strengths, interests and capabilities of tamariki.

Belonging

Mana whenua (belonging), one of the core strands of the early childhood curriculum Te Whāriki, was highlighted as a significant enabler to successful transition to school. When tamariki feel they belong, their well-being is enhanced and this gives them the confidence to attempt new experiences (Ministry of Education, 2017). When looking at transition as a process, the Te Whare Tapa Whā framework provides schools with a way to conceptualise the closely woven attributes of health and wellness, and how they contribute to an integrated whole. Similarly, Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework for human development applies socio-ecological models to human development. In this inquiry, children's well-being was felt by kaiako to be enhanced when parents are actively involved in the transition process and ongoing learning, "whereby families and kaiako become co-educators, activates an important partnership for effective practice" (Peters & Paki, 2013, p.204). The value of the connection schools make with families and communities cannot be underestimated. Happiness and well-being are equally important for the tamariki and whānau; this is achieved through development of the partnership between home and school in the early stages of the transition process. This perspective, encapsulated in Te Whāriki, maintains that, "responsive, reciprocal and caring teacher-child interactions and relationships are necessary to support all young children's learning and development" (Macartney, Purdue & MacArthur, 2013, p.129).

Sharing of Information

The sharing of information and working interprofessionally, particularly for tamariki who may have additional learning needs, was highlighted as one of the enablers within this inquiry. Social-ecological theory as espoused by Bronfenbrenner (1979) views the adults in a child's life as playing an essential role when it comes to collaboratively supporting and scaffolding experiences for tamariki through any transition processes they may encounter. In support of this, Timperley, McNaughton, Howie and Robinson (2003) have suggested optimising children's development and learning across both settings is probably best achieved if kaiako are able to include, in their professional roles, responsibility for presenting complementary activities so that tamariki are able to recognise strategies acquired at their ECE centre can be applied at school too.

In 2013, the Education Review Office evaluated how well early childhood services and schools support tamariki through transition to school. The subsequent report suggested that transition to school is enhanced when leaders and teachers in ECE and schools understand the links between Te Whāriki and the NZC, and subsequently provide a curriculum that is relevant and meaningful for children starting school (Education Review Office, 2015). Kaiako in the present inquiry agreed that building connections between the two curricula was important, however they did not describe how they shared and used this knowledge, with only the new entrant kaiako agreeing it was something they could do better. The implication is that kaiako knowledge of both curricula could be a factor that contributes to successful transition. SENCO's acknowledged the interprofessional knowledge could be enriched through knowing and understanding the links between the two curricula (Mentis et al., 2012; Nuttall, 2013). In support of this, there is an opportunity within the new kāhui ako (Community of Learning) structure that allows for schools and ECEs to work together and this may lead to strengthened transition practices.

Relationships and Communication

Transition to school is when new relationships are fostered and the nature of these has been cited as being central to a successful transition (Dockett & Perry, 2008). There are many relationships to consider: kaiako and whānau, kaiako and ākonga, early childhood education kaiako and new entrant kaiako however this inquiry indicated the key relationship as being between kaiako and parents and that this went hand-in-hand with effective communication. The kaiako recognised parents

and whānau were also transitioning to a new environment and that in order to build collaborative relationships a “mutual respect and balance of power” (Education Review Office, 2015, p.44) was necessary through the acknowledgement and respect of the child’s first teacher - their parents. Parents involved in the inquiry felt that when their input was valued and appreciated, and the school genuinely wanted to know about their family as a whole, this assisted with the collaborative partnership and relationships between all parties (Education Review Office, 2015). Transition processes were further strengthened when effective relationships were developed between ECE and NE kaiako (Education Review Office, 2015; Nutall 2013). This was reiterated by the kaiako when they discussed the benefits of reciprocal visits at the time of transition.

Parental Involvement

Parents shared that when they were made to feel as though they were a part of the team they wanted to be a part of it. When effective relationships are developed, successful collaborative working partnerships can be established (Hornby, 2011). Parents know what is going to work for their tamariki and it is role of the school to foster the relationship and keep the lines of communication open in order develop responsive transition processes that build on the strengths, interests and capabilities of individual tamariki. In her work on transition from early childhood education to school, Peters (2010) describes a number of ways parents can be involved in and support their tamariki through the transition process. In the present inquiry, parents did not mention several of these opportunities; notably health checks, networking with other parents and rich learning experiences, which makes the case for individualised transition processes even stronger. In support of Peters’ findings, parents did indicate learning about the school and fostering friendships were two key components to a successful start to school (2010).

The Barriers and Challenges to Successful Transition

Kaiako from both sectors expressed concern about varying transition to school approaches being used when it came to the structure of school visits, in particular, the number of visits, the timing of these, and the programme delivered during the visits. A recent project on transition to school concurred, “If we, as teachers were concerned about the lack of a consistent, coherent approach to transition to school, what must it be like for the children and their families?” (Kirkwood & Te One, 2017, p.14). The present inquiry participants recommended a more cohesive partnership particularly around knowledge of one another’s curricula and first-

hand involvement in the process for kaiako from both sectors. Alongside those recommendations, Kirkwood and Te One’s view about ensuring, “that children’s views of themselves as ready, willing and able to learn are important attitudes to foster when looking at school readiness”(p.14) was echoed by those interviewed for the present inquiry.

Funding Constraints

There was overwhelming support from kaiako and parents that ECE kaiako should be part of the school visit process, allowing teachers in both contexts to share knowledge and information about the tamariki. However, a lack of funding to allow teacher-release for this meant it wasn’t always feasible. ERO’s report on the continuity of learning suggest arranging two-way visits between teachers so they, “understand what the teaching and learning looks like for each other” (Education Review Office, 2015, p.47) as a means of continuity for the tamariki. The value placed on the ECE kaiako participation in the transition process raises questions about why there is little support for this to happen on a consistent basis.

Continuity of Support

The continuity of support from the early intervention team to the school focus team comes down to funding at a much higher level. Research advocates for professionals to have this vital time together to create a shared understanding of the learner to enhance their success when starting school for the first time (Boyle & Petriwskyj, 2014). Parents reported that EI personnel wanted to be able to provide support as the ākongā moved into the school setting, yet their hands were tied. Positive change would include the EI kaiako being able to connect with school staff and to be involved in the transition process. Policy and funding need to support this so that kaiako in both settings, alongside the EI kaiako, can learn with, from and about one another to support the whānau and ākongā effectively. This is particularly important when the tamariki transitioning has learning challenges and needs additional support. Currently, the Ministry of Education provide a number of key documents and initiatives to support transition including Mutukaroa, Ka Hikitia, Pasifika Education Plan, Continuity of Learning Group, Special Education Policy Guidelines and the ECE Strategic Plan (Ministry of Education, 2015), however these do not always address the lack of financial support schools are experiencing.

Strengths and Limitations of the Inquiry

This inquiry was a small study based on the experiences of five kaiako and two parents involved

in children's transition to school. The researcher emphasised depth over breadth to provide a rich and detailed account of the experiences of the people involved. It tells a story of the enablers and barriers as experienced by kaiako and parents in two case studies and, as such, it is valuable data drawing directly on real experiences in authentic contexts.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This inquiry emphasised there are a number of factors that contribute to a successful transition to school. It has shown that when relationships are fostered and communication between all parties is open and valued, it is the tamariki who reap the benefits. Interprofessional partnerships and information sharing, particularly for tamariki who have learning and/or behavioural challenges, are fundamental to a successful transition. Responsive transition processes that build on the strengths, interests and capabilities of tamariki are, "critical to the development of children's self-worth, confidence and resilience, and ongoing success at school" (Education Review Office 2015, p.1). Kaiako discussed the value of developing connections with tamariki on school visits as being crucial. Likewise, the parents believed feeling part of the school community was important to them.

The barriers identified aren't going to go away unless there is change within individual schools and how they are funded. Schools choose how they run their transition process, including the number of school visits, days and times of these visits, and the classroom programme the school visitor is included in. The variation across schools is significant. This inquiry found that independently-run ECE facilities were more-likely to participate in a school visit with tamariki, however their kindergarten kaiako counterparts in this study found school visit participation impossible.

Unsurprisingly, inclusion emerged as the overarching theme to a successful transition. More specifically, this involved the fostering of relationships between all parties, effective communication to ensure key information was not lost in the transition process, creating a sense of belonging in the new environment for the tamariki and their whanau, and kaiako developing positive relationships with the precious tamariki who are being entrusted into their care as five year olds starting school for the first time. Kaiako on the frontline have the ability to make or break the transition to school experience. Together with whānau, kaiako can make the transition as successful as possible using the enablers identified in this inquiry and whilst working collectively to minimise the barriers.

Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi, Engari he toa takitini

Success is not in the work of one, but in the work of many

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Kate Reynard is the deputy principal at a small suburban school in Wellington. As well as teaching a delightful class of five and six year olds, Kate is also SENCo, literacy leader and holds the ESOL portfolio at the school. This year Kate has begun a two year appointment as an Across School Lead for the Wellington Catholic Schools Kāhui Ako. She loves the challenges that her job brings each day – no two days are the same. It was during her time as an RTLB that Kate became particularly interested in transition and when the opportunity arose to complete an inquiry on transition to school she jumped at the chance.

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