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Becoming a school child: The role of peers in supporting new entrant transitions

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Abstract

When children start school they are faced with the task of learning how to fit into the new environment and how to learn in new ways. The ease with which children transition to school is a factor in later academic and social success. It is therefore important that educators understand the ways successful transition experiences can be facilitated and supported. Literature describes the role of teachers in supporting transition experiences for children and the ways in which family can support children during this time. However, although research identifies a link between social skills, friendships and transition experiences, few studies have explored the role that peers play in helping new entrants learn what to do and how to learn at school. This qualitative research project aimed to address this gap and explored the role more experienced school children play in supporting the transition process for new entrants in the New Zealand context. The objectives were to identify: the ways in which more experienced peers support new entrants during their transition to school; the strategies new entrants use to learn from their peers; and the ways teachers can facilitate this learning process.

A case study approach was used to examine the experiences of three children in three different schools during their early days at school. The use of classroom observations and interviews with teachers and case study children provided a range of data from different perspectives which were then thematically analysed to inform the findings. Findings presented describe the process of “intent participation” (Rogoff et al., 2003, p. 175) occurring as the new entrants moved from watching and listening to their peers to participating fully in classroom experiences. Their more experienced peers supported this process in a range of ways. Aspects of the classroom organisation and each teacher’s pedagogical practices which affected peer learning for the new entrants will be discussed and implications for educators will be explored. The findings highlight how specific contexts can influence the opportunities that arise for peer learning.

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Chapter One

Introduction

When children start school they are faced with the task of learning what to do and how to participate in the new environment. School rules and routines may be very different from those of the early childhood or home settings and the processes by which children are expected to learn may also differ significantly (Hartley, Rogers, Smith, Peters, & Carr, 2012). The ‘culture’ of school may feel very unfamiliar to the new entrant (Peters, 2004a). How quickly a child feels a sense of belonging in the new environment, and how smoothly the transition to school goes has been associated with educational outcomes for children (Brooker, 2008; Peters, 2010). It is therefore important to understand how children can be supported during this time.

There is general agreement that transition is about change (Dockett & Perry, 2007b; Dunlop, 2007; Fabian, 2007). Educational transitions usually involve the “process of moving from one setting to another often accompanied by a move from one phase of education to another” (Fabian, 2007, p. 6). This change in setting affects children’s sense of identity, their status and the roles they take on as they engage in new experiences (Fabian, 2007). Brooker (2008) contends that humans encounter many small and large transitions resulting in discontinuities which need to be accommodated. When children enter the school setting they are unfamiliar with life as a school child and must learn how to participate in this new environment.

Rationale for the present study

Early research about children starting school looked at how ready the child was for the transition. This ‘readiness’ approach was centred around the idea that children needed to

meet certain standards before they could cope with school learning and in the United States led to children being held back from starting school if they were deemed not ready (Graue, 1999; Peters, 2003b). While New Zealand has never had a policy of preventing children from entering school based on their readiness, in the 1980s Renwick's (1984) book, *To School At Five*, devoted a section to discussing the characteristics teachers felt children who were ready to start school possessed. The teachers in Renwick's study had a clear image of what 'school readiness' entailed. These characteristics related to social maturity, behaviour and discipline, health, desire to learn and specific skills that teachers felt children should possess. Many early childhood centres today offer 'transition programmes' and primary schools often run 'preschool afternoons' to prepare four year olds for starting school suggesting the concept of the 'ready child' is still prevalent today. Researchers also continue to explore how children can be prepared for school entry (Dockett & Perry, 2013; Margetts & Kienig, 2013).

Recently literature about children starting school has recognised that transitions are jointly constructed between all the people involved rather than being an individual experience, dependent only on the transitioning child for its success. This perspective has been influenced by theorists such as Bronfenbrenner (1979), Vygotsky (1978) and Rogoff (2003). Thus, researchers have explored what new entrant teachers, early childhood teachers *and* parents can do to support children to have smooth transitions to school and have recognised the role of friendships and social skills in helping children adjust to the new setting (Peters, 2010). If, as Vygotsky (1978) posited, "human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them" (p. 88), research is needed to explore the social nature of learning during the transition to school. It would be useful to know how friends and peers contribute to children's learning of what to do and how to learn at school and how teachers can support this peer learning process.

It has become tradition that children in New Zealand start school on their fifth birthday (H. May, 2011). This differs from the processes for starting school in other parts of the world where children would usually start in a group at the beginning of the school year or at the start of a term. There is no rationale for why New Zealand differs but one advantage of this system is that new entrants may learn from children who started school before them what to do and how to act at school. This study seeks to establish whether this is so.

Being involved in new entrant transitions from a variety of perspectives has stimulated my personal interest in how children and families can be supported to have positive experiences of the transition to school. As a new entrant teacher, I have planned and supported children during their early school days and observed the ease with which some children settle in and the difficulty other children experience. My own children's experiences of starting school has highlighted to me the impact different teachers and teaching styles can have on both the child and the parents during the transition to school. Additionally, my experience of teaching in early childhood has given me the opportunity to experience transition from an early childhood perspective. Currently, I am employed as a teacher educator and have had to consider what initial teacher education students need to understand about the transition to school so that they can support families and children who are nearing school age. These roles have given me an awareness of the complex interplay of different factors which can affect children during their transition to school. This research study explores one particular factor that may influence the transition experience of new entrants when they start school: how peers can influence their learning of what to do at school.

Aims and objectives of the present study

Using a case study approach, this research study examines the peer learning that occurs during the early days of children's transition to school and whether children learn from their more

experienced peers about how to fit into the culture of school. The study aims to answer the question:

- What role do more experienced school children play in supporting the transition process for new entrants in the New Zealand context?

By exploring this question the objectives were to identify:

- Strategies that new entrants use to learn from those who are more experienced;
- Strategies experienced peers use to help new entrants learn what to do at school; and
- Strategies teachers use to support peer learning about what to do at school.

The findings of this study add to a growing body of research about the transition to school and how new entrants may be supported to adapt to the school environment.

Structure of this thesis

Following this introduction, Chapter Two reviews literature associated with both the transition to school and peer learning. The review begins with a discussion of theoretical perspectives on transition and then explores the change in culture that occurs when children start school and how children can be supported. Literature relating to peer learning is then reviewed.

In Chapter Three, the methodology used in this study is outlined and justified. The use of three case studies involving observations and interviews of both teachers and children is described. The method of analysis and the ethical procedures are presented and the research participants and settings are described.

Chapters Four, Five and Six present and discuss the findings from the three case studies. These chapters are organised around the research objectives and the emerging themes. The findings from each case are presented and illustrated with excerpts from the interviews and observations.

Chapter Seven addresses the research question and draws together the emerging themes identified across the three case studies. Similarities and differences between the settings are highlighted and discussed in order to identify significant aspects of peer learning during the transition to school.

Chapter Eight reflects on the methodology adopted for the present study and discusses its limitations and strengths. In addition this chapter summarises what has been discovered in relation to peer learning and it concludes with implications for schools, teachers and further research. The literature review, which follows in Chapter Two, provides an overview of recent literature relating to transition and peer learning.

Chapter Two

Literature review

Introduction

When children start school they may look forward to the status involved with being a “school child” but they can also experience many uncertainties associated with changes in “culture, identity, role and status as well as daily experience” (Fabian, 2007, p. 7). Children must adjust to new ways of learning and teaching and to the culture of school. Examining transition through the lens of ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) suggests that children come to school with different experiences which may be an advantage or disadvantage to them when participating in school based learning experiences. A sociocultural perspective (Peters, 2003b) highlights the dynamic role social interaction can play in supporting children to transition successfully to school. There can be long term positive and negative effects of transitional experiences on children’s future lives (Brooker, 2008; Dockett & Perry, 2007a, 2013; Dunlop, 2007; Fabian, 2007; Ledger, Smith, & Rich, 1998; McGann & Clark, 2007; Mirkil, 2010), and therefore it is important for educators to understand ways in which successful transitions can be facilitated.

The focus of this review is on recent literature surrounding children’s transition to school and how this relates to their learning as they seek to fit into their new role as a ‘school child’. The review also explores literature relating to peer learning. Searches of relevant data bases (Academic Search Complete, Ebsco, Education Research Complete, ERIC) and library catalogues for the time period from 2000 to 2013 were undertaken using keywords such as “literacy”, “peer learning”, “mathematics” in combination with the terms “transition” or “starting school”. Earlier research that was much cited and could be considered seminal was also included. Additional key terms such as “tuakana teina” were later searched as themes began to emerge during data analysis. Reference lists of relevant articles were examined for useful

literature and colleagues were consulted. Ministry of Education and Education Review Office (ERO) publications and websites were searched and the NZCER thesis database was also used to locate sources. Literature which addressed the topic of starting school and aspects of peer learning was included. Research which is not strongly linked to these topics has been discarded. For example, although literature relating to communities of learners emerged during the literature search, this literature was not included as the focus of this study is not whether the classroom was a community of learners or whether the children became part of that community of learners. Literature was analysed thematically to identify recent emerging themes related to this topic.

The review of literature begins with an overview of theoretical perspectives of transition which is followed by a discussion of the relationship between transition and development. The next section considers how children's home culture can impact on the transition experience. The literature relating to the continuities and discontinuities associated with starting school is then examined as well as literature about the role of parents and teachers in supporting transitions. Finally, the literature relating to the role of peers and friendships during transition and literature relating to peer learning is reviewed.

Theoretical perspectives

Ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) informs the work of many who investigate the transitional experiences of children (for example Brooker, 2008; Dockett & Perry, 2007a, 2007b, 2009; Fabian, 2007, 2013; Ledger, et al., 1998; Margetts, 2007, 2013; Margetts & Phatudi, 2013; Niesel & Griebel, 2007). This theory sees the human as central to a range of interlocking systems and contexts which each have an impact on development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and helps to explain the way in which transition affects all who are

involved, not just the child (Dockett & Perry, 2009). Bronfenbrenner (1979) stated that ecological transitions occur “whenever a person’s position in the ecological environment is altered as a result of change of role or setting or both” (p. 26). Therefore, children must work out their roles in, the rules of, and the relationships in the setting; they have to learn the culture of the new setting (Peters, 2003b).

Related to this perspective is the view of learning as a social activity which is mediated by interactions between people (Carr et al., 2009). This perspective acknowledges that others play a part in shaping the transitional experiences of children and is based on the writings of social constructivist and sociocultural theorists such as Vygotsky (1978) and Rogoff (2003). Vygotsky (1978) contended that learning is a social construction which is dependent on intersubjectivity or some form of social interaction. He theorised that development is first demonstrated in a social context, between people, and then is internalised. In this theory, it was proposed that children learn when supported by others to accomplish that which they cannot do alone (Cullen, 2001; Gauvain, 2001; Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). This support during transition can be provided by a teacher or by a more experienced peer. So although Phillips et al. (2004) state that it is the way teachers manage the discontinuities associated with starting school that is important, parents and peers also play a role in shaping transitional experiences (Hagan, 2005, 2007; Niesel & Griebel, 2007; Peters, 2003a, 2004a). Rogoff’s (2003) work also reflects the social nature of learning. She emphasizes that “human development is a process of *peoples changing participation in sociocultural activities of their communities*” (emphasis of original, p. 52). These sociocultural perspectives are supported by Corsaro, Molinari and Rosier’s (2002, cited in Dockett & Perry, 2007a) suggestion that transitions are not individual experiences but jointly shaped and shared by all those who are involved.

These ecological and sociocultural perspectives contrast with earlier writings which often discussed transition in relation to attachment theory and explored how transitions both

impacted on, and were affected by, the child's attachment to their parent (Brooker, 2008). A problem with this earlier perspective is the cultural specificity of it, which assumes that people of all cultures form and display attachments in the same way and does not acknowledge that attachment is a socially constructed concept (Rogoff, 2003). Another contrasting view of transition which is still discussed by many today (Dockett & Perry, 2009; Peters, 2010) involves examining maturational factors and the readiness of children for transition and identifying how to fill the gaps in order to enable children to deal with transition (Peters, 2003b). Assessing readiness "involves a judgement about whether and to what extent an individual child will make the transition to school successfully" (Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood, 2008, p. 18) and is problematic as there are different opinions as to what the indicators of readiness might be (Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood, 2008; Dockett & Perry, 2009, 2013; Doucet & Tudge, 2007; Graue, 2006). Graue (2006) suggests that teachers and parents have different ideas about what is most important in terms of readiness and that readiness beliefs vary according to culture. Graue also argues that measuring children's readiness for school is not an easy task and that communities and schools should ask themselves who and what should be ready and how children are supported to be ready.

However, maturational factors are no longer the sole focus of developmental theory (Timperley, McNaughton, Howie, & Robinson, 2003), and many studies approach the subject of transition through the lens of ecological systems theory with some writers combining this with a sociocultural perspective (for example Dockett & Perry, 2007a; Niesel & Griebel, 2007; Peters, 2003b). Combining these views is logical as there is an overlap in the way these theories situate the child, family and all involved in the transition as having agency in what happens. Children do have an influence on the environments in which they participate (Fleer, Hedegaard, & Tudge, 2009) and the differences in how ready children are thought to be for school are not enough to explain the diversity of outcomes of the transition experience (Dockett & Perry, 2007a, 2013). This study investigates how children learn about school from

their peers; therefore sociocultural theories have guided the research design and analysis as well as the topic selection. No assessment was made of the child's readiness for school or how this affects their transition, so theories relating to readiness are of limited relevance in this thesis.

Transition and development

When a child starts school, how well they adjust to the new situation is a "critical factor in determining children's future progress and development" (Ghaye & Pascal, 1989, cited by Fabian, 2007, p. 3) and can set a pattern for future transitions (Dunlop & Fabian, 2007). In particular, the transition to school has been linked to academic and social outcomes at a later date (Brooker, 2008; Dockett & Perry, 2007a, 2007b; Ledger, et al., 1998; Margetts, 1997; McGann & Clark, 2007). Both Einarsdottir (2007) and Dockett and Perry (2007) concur that difficulty in adjusting to school has been linked to continued problems throughout schooling and Fabian (2013) suggests that when transitions are successful children feel more confidence when encountering other unfamiliar situations. However, there is a lack of recent research and longitudinal data showing the causal link between transition experiences and educational outcomes, particularly in the New Zealand context.

Despite the potential for negative outcomes, transition experiences can be supportive of development. Brooker (2008) notes that children need change to develop and that transitions can act as a developmental trigger. She argues that new experiences extend children's thinking in new directions and pathways. Similarly, Phillips, McNaughton and MacDonald (2004) state that while "the transition from home to school learning produces some degree of discontinuity and confusion for all children... conflict and ambiguity can itself provide a basis for learning" (p. 310).

Transition and culture

The culture of a school can be very different from the culture of a child's prior-to-school settings, which can affect how easy it is for the child to learn at school. When there is a mismatch of values, beliefs and practices, children's prior knowledge and learning may not be useful in the new setting (Brooker, 2008; Dockett & Perry, 2007a; Margetts, 2007, 2013; McNaughton, 2002). McNaughton (2001) comments that parents have their own ideas about the ways in which children learn and how to teach them. He suggests that this can vary across cultures leading to discontinuity for some children when there is a mismatch between the ways of learning and teaching valued by parents and the actual methods used in schools. An example of this is the mismatch that occurs for some Māori children when they encounter the compartmentalised approach to education and the focus on individual development that characterises many schools (Macfarlane, Glynn, Grace, Penetito, & Bateman, 2008).

Peters (2010) was commissioned by the Ministry of Education to carry out a review of literature relating to children's transition to school from New Zealand and countries with similar profiles. She found that a major theme pertaining to successful transitions relates to whether the child's characteristics match those of the school. Peters notes that, in New Zealand, this is a particular issue for those children from Māori and Pacific Island families whose cultural capital may not match that of the school. There is limited discussion in her review of how this relates to other cultures in New Zealand's increasingly multicultural society. For successful transitions to occur, Peters contends that the child's culture needs to be recognised and the child needs to feel "suitable at school" (p. 15).

Turoa, Wolfgramm, Tanielu and McNaughton (2002) concur with Peters, saying that in order to learn, children need to feel comfortable, affirmed and recognised at school and maintain a positive cultural identity. In their report to the Ministry of Education, Turoa et al. investigated the home literacy practices of Pasifika and Māori families and found that the strong oral

literacy of traditional ways of learning for these groups was not closely matched to the methods of teaching in schools. Solutions for preventing this mismatch could involve intervening in family practices, making changes in school practices or doing both. The data for this report was based on a relatively small number of participants (four Māori children and nine Pasifika families) in only one urban area of New Zealand. Further research would be useful to establish the extent to which there is a mismatch in other ethnic groups and other areas of New Zealand.

However, the *Picking up the Pace* report to the Ministry of Education demonstrated that the effect of cultural difference is not insurmountable (Phillips, McNaughton, & MacDonald, 2002). Professional development was provided to teachers in fifteen early childhood centres and twelve primary schools in Otara and Mangere about literacy acquisition, transition and the role of teachers in centres and schools. Children's literacy development was compared with those who had been taught by the same teachers before the professional support was given. Phillips et al. found that when teachers are able to capitalise on the knowledge and skills children bring to school there are positive benefits for academic achievement. Key strategies included recognising how children's home literacy experiences related to school literacy, helping children see the relationship between home and school literacy, and providing differentiated instruction. The research demonstrated that the mismatch between prior to school experience and school practices can be managed. This confirms McNaughton's (2001, 2002) earlier contention that teachers need to understand home literacy practices. As he points out, "When teachers and communities have shared ideas about teaching, learning and literacy, the transition to school made by children from diverse language and cultural communities is likely to be enhanced" (McNaughton, 2001, p. 55). McNaughton (2002) suggests that this "meeting of minds" (p. 14) can be supported by connecting to what is already familiar to the child. A later study involving 49 Tongan and Samoan children also based in South Auckland found that understanding children's literacy experiences at home and using effective teaching practices in

early childhood and the first years at primary school supported children's language and literacy development in both English and the home language over the transition from Pasifika early childhood centres to school (Tagoilelagi-LeotaGlynn, McNaughton, MacDonald, & Farry, 2005).

The effects of cultural mismatch have also been demonstrated in research internationally. Reporting on qualitative data collected as part of the wide ranging *Starting School Research Project*, Dockett, Mason and Perry (2006) found that Aboriginal children experienced a considerable mismatch between prior-to-school experiences and practices and those of school. While the sample size of this project was not noted, there were some interesting findings in relation to the mismatch that can occur between school and prior to school cultures. Families considered that the school environment did not reflect and value the Aboriginal identity and language, that there were differences in the way children were expected to interact with teachers, and that the home literacy experiences of the indigenous children were not valued by the schools. The Aboriginal children tended to have well developed oral communication skills, but teachers did not value these and assessed children as having poor literacy skills. This mismatch was perceived to impact on children's learning. The actual impact of the difference in values and beliefs on children's learning was not specifically measured in this study, unlike the study by Phillips et al (2002).

Brooker (2002) compared the transitional experiences of a Bangladeshi boy and an English boy in the same classroom in England. The boys were born in the same town on the same day, held the same place in their family, and entered the same classroom on the same day. Brooker found that although the home literacy experiences of neither boy were ideally matched with those of the school, the experiences of the English child provided continuity with school experiences that the Bangladeshi child's did not. She suggests that this was due to cultural differences in beliefs and expectations about how children learn and develop.

Although it has been demonstrated that there is sometimes a cultural mismatch between home and school experiences, assumptions should not be made about how well matched a child's prior to school experience is with the culture of school. Each child is unique, no two will react in exactly the same way to the transition experience even when variables are similar (Dockett & Perry, 2007a, 2013; Peters, 2004a). There is no "perfect pathway" to a successful transition (McLachlan, Nicholson, Fielding-Barnsley, Mercer, & Ohi, 2013, p. 168).

Continuities and discontinuities.

Peters (2004b) suggests that the different objectives, approaches and methods encountered by New Zealand children on school entry mean that starting school "is not just a transition into a new physical context, but also an entry point to a new 'culture' where aspects of teaching, learning and assessment are different and hence what it means to be a learner is constructed differently" (p. 1). Fabian (2013) agrees that there are many discontinuities between prior to school and school settings which children must understand and negotiate and that educators must work together to mediate the discontinuities.

Government policy has acknowledged the importance of creating more continuity between the early childhood and primary school sectors of education in order to minimise the differences between the sectors (Hartley, et al., 2012). The early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) aims to lay "the foundations for successful future learning" (p. 9) and includes links to learning in the school environment as well as examples of the types of things children should attain before school entry. Following this, an aim of the strategic plan for early childhood education (Ministry of Education, 2002) was to promote collaborative relationships between early childhood centres, families and schools so that there would be a better understanding of the differences between the sectors. Documents such as

Ka Hikitia (Ministry of Education, 2008) and *The Pasifika Education Plan* (Ministry of Education, 2009) also stressed the importance of children's transition to school and aimed to improve transition experiences. When *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) was revised the Ministry of Education used the opportunity to increase continuity with *Te Whāriki*. Increased continuity between documents was achieved by the introduction of key competencies which link to the strands of the early childhood curriculum (Carr et al., 2008; H. May, 2011; Peters & Paki, 2013), although in practice there are still significant discontinuities for children. Peters and Paki (2013) contend that while there are potential connections between documents, teachers must reflect these connections in their practice. According to May (2011) there was also a shift in emphasis in the new curriculum "towards expecting the school to 'make connections' with the new entrant child's earlier experience rather than the child arriving 'ready for school'" (p. 274). However, she also claims this emphasis is not reflected in the practice of all teachers. The introduction of *National Standards* (Ministry of Education, 2010b) has seen an increased focus on literacy and mathematics in schools which potentially has implications for what is expected of children at school entry and for what is prioritised as valued learning and knowledge on school entry (Mortlock, Plowman, & Glasgow, 2011). The *Literacy Learning Progressions* (Ministry of Education, 2010a) which have expectations for children at school entry, further emphasise the government's expectations of the outcomes of early childhood education and children's preparedness for the transition to school.

Children's perspectives of the change in culture when starting school.

Research suggests children are aware of the discontinuities associated with starting school. In a review of international literature about children's perspectives of starting school, Einsardottir (2007) identified some common themes: Children were aware of the difference in

pedagogy that was likely to occur at school; anticipated that school would consist of more work and less play with a focus on academic learning; and that they would have less choice. Einarsdottir (2013) discusses the findings of four Icelandic studies which investigated preschool and primary school children's thinking about starting school. Sample sizes ranged from 26 to 48 children and the studies were carried out between 2003 and 2012. The children in these studies said starting school was a time of significant change involving more teacher direction in what and how learning occurred, less choice and more restriction. Dockett and Perry's (2007a) Australian project had similar findings. Children in this study stated they were at school to learn and expected to learn quickly. Children in White and Sharp's (2007) research in twelve English schools highlighted the lack of choice, increased amounts of formal work, increased time sitting still and decreased access to the outdoors further confirming Einarsdottir's findings. Children are thus aware of how different the culture of school is from the culture of early childhood settings in a range of western countries.

Margetts (2013; 2006) asked 54 Australian children in their first year at four schools what other children needed to know about starting school and how children could be helped. Children said that they needed to know more about aspects of literacy and numeracy before starting school. The children were also concerned about peer relationships and stated that teachers could help them make friends. Another aspect the children highlighted was the importance of knowing about the routines which enable them to engage in the pedagogy of the classroom in appropriate ways. Dockett and Perry (2007b) also found this was important to children. Like Einarsdottir (2007), Dockett and Perry (2007a) and White and Sharp (2007), Margetts' study also highlighted a concern with the difference in what children were expected to learn and how to demonstrate their learning.

Teachers' perceptions of the change in culture from ECE to school.

Research suggests teachers are also aware of the differences in pedagogy between early childhood and primary schools. A survey of early childhood and school teachers in Ireland found that schools were more structured and formal and included more verbal instruction with a focus on literacy and numeracy (O'Kane & Hayes, 2006). The teachers were aware that early childhood teachers focused on individual learning while primary school teachers had more of a concern with standards and whole class learning.

An Australian research project involving three pre-service primary teachers identified similar differences between early childhood and school to those found in O'Kane and Hayes' (2006) project (Lord & McFarland, 2010). Lord and McFarland suggest that some primary teachers may have little knowledge of early childhood development and the foundations of learning. Tamarua's (2006) Ph.D study of four Māori children starting school identified the limited knowledge some New Zealand teachers had of the diverse literacy experiences children brought to school. This lack of knowledge affected the ability of teachers to recognise children's expertise and to link school experiences with what happens at home. The findings of Lord and McFarland (2010) and Tamarua (2006) have implications for teachers, as it is difficult for teachers to build on and make links with prior learning if they do not have an understanding of what happens before children start school. Anthony and Walshaw (2009) agree, arguing that in order to provide a bridge for children's transitions there is a need for school teachers to become more aware of the pedagogy employed in early childhood education.

An investigation of kindergarten and new entrant teachers' beliefs and practices in mathematics teaching and learning also found differences in pedagogy (Sherley, 2011). This Ph.D project used observation, questionnaires and interviews of five new entrant teachers and fourteen kindergarten teachers to establish that, while the teachers in both sectors had similar

beliefs about learning and teaching mathematics, their practices differed. Teachers in both sectors believed that mathematics should be fun and taught in a real life context. The kindergarten teachers involved children in learning mathematics in the context of their interests, free play and when they were exploring the world. The pedagogy employed in the schools was teacher directed and structured and made little connection to the prior experiences of the children. Sherley concluded that the primary curriculum offered seemed to be based on what the teachers thought the children needed to know.

Timperley et al. (2003) suggest that when children start school the content of what is taught changes, as does how it is taught, and argue that if the difference is significant children may fail to see how their previous learning is relevant in the new context. This research involved interviews of teachers from 20 schools and 27 early childhood services in a low decile Auckland area to find out whether their views surrounding children's transition to school were similar. Primary teachers considered that the difference in the structure of the settings made it difficult for children to settle into learning at school. Timperley et al. recommend that teachers from both settings offer activities that are similar so that children can apply the strategies they have learned in early childhood and become familiar with the strategies which are used in school. In order to do this, teachers in both sectors would need to increase their awareness of what happens in the other sector (Anthony & Walshaw, 2009; Timperley, et al., 2003). Including 'school' activities such as a large group time in early childhood programmes can be a way of helping children become familiar with the kinds of teaching and learning experiences they will have at school and also of helping them learn the 'rules' of classroom interaction (McLachlan, et al., 2013). The ERO (2011) report into *Literacy in Early Childhood Services* reminds teachers that when striving to make connections with school learning, care needs to be taken to ensure that experiences provided for children are appropriate for the early childhood context.

McLachlan (2008) contends that early childhood settings tend to encourage literacy learning by providing a literacy rich environment and using shared reading experiences. She suggests including teaching of phonemic and alphabetic awareness, as this could increase literate cultural capital and provide continuity with the learning activities children encounter at school. A review of the current New Zealand literacy strategy highlights the importance of children coming to school with literate cultural capital and a need for early assessment of literacy skills (Tunmer, Chapman, Greaney, Prochnow, & Arrow, 2013). In order to increase the continuity of activities, Timperley et al. (2003) propose that early childhood teachers need to communicate and share information so that school teachers will be able to build on the skills children already have and recognise the things that children can do. McLachlan (2008) agrees, stating that "children may be successful with literacy in the out-of-school contexts, which use different approaches to conventional educational settings and teachers need to find out what experiences the child has had" (pp. 109-110). The same appears to be true in mathematics. Observations in early childhood centres, homes and schools showed that the mathematics skills observed in the early childhood setting are not always visible in the school setting (Perry & Dockett, 2005). A reason for this could be that the mathematics teaching (and assessment) in schools becomes more confined to specific categories and children are used to the integrative nature of learning in early childhood.

Early childhood teachers have expressed concern that when assessed at school children are unable to do things that they had been capable of achieving in the early childhood setting (Timperley & Robinson, 2002). Peters (2004b) suggests that schools have narrowly defined objectives for assessment which may not measure children's ability in other areas. This contrasts with assessments in early childhood which look at the child in a holistic way, but may not assess children's domain knowledge particularly well (Blaiklock, 2008; McLachlan & Arrow, in press, November 2013). Sherley (2011) contends that the assessment of mathematics in schools is based on teachers' predetermined outcomes which contrast with the methods of

observations of a child's strengths which are commonly used in early childhood. She noted that the primary teachers in her study tended to underestimate children's mathematics ability. The new entrant teachers in Sherley's study stated that the assessment information they received from the early childhood teachers was not useful to them. The quality of the assessment information could have impacted on teachers' perceptions of children's abilities. When ERO (2007) investigated assessment in early childhood settings they found that while some settings had robust assessment practices, many did not do a good job of assessment. Therefore, the information many early childhood settings share with schools may be of variable usefulness. McLachlan (2008) contends that the methods of assessment used in early childhood settings lead to a lack of assessment in literacy, and calls for a "broader conception of assessment which includes assessment of children before, during and after school entry" (p. 113). The data collected needs to be useful to primary teachers, as well as early childhood educators.

The contrasting practices of the sectors mean that children must quickly learn how to act and identify what to do at school so that they can engage in the learning experiences that are provided. It is argued that beginning school involves crossing a "physical and cultural border" (Hartley, et al., 2012, p. 1) to a place where there are "different realms of meaning, knowledge and social forms" (p. 2) which are socially constructed. If children are to be supported in learning about these different realms educators must understand what can be done to assist them in learning about the new culture.

Supporting transitions

The role of teachers and families.

Communication and collaboration between settings is integral to the ability to create connections between prior-to-school and school practices (McLachlan, 2008; McLachlan, et al., 2013; McNaughton, 2001; Niesel & Griebel, 2007) enabling teachers to create greater continuity for children (Dockett & Perry, 2007b). When teachers have an understanding of the settings from which children have come, and the ways in which they are accustomed to learning, they are more likely to be able to make links between prior to school and school learning (Peters, 2010). With collaboration and communication educators from both settings are able to co-construct the transition process (Fabian, 2007) leading to consistent practices and messages.

An action research project was undertaken in a kindergarten in Mangere Bridge, Auckland, which endeavoured to explore the crossing of borders between the kindergarten and local schools (Hartley, et al., 2012). As part of this project relationships between the teachers of the kindergarten and the school were strengthened and there was a focus on teachers in both settings understanding the pedagogy and curriculum in each setting. Kindergarten teachers incorporated aspects of the school settings such as the phonics programme and school teachers did the same, in one case buying a carpentry table. It was found that the children noticed these continuities and such continuities helped children to find something familiar in the new setting. This research demonstrates the benefits of teachers working together across the sectors as recommended in the strategic plan for early childhood (Ministry of Education, 2002).

One frequently mentioned way of supporting children is for teachers and families to provide opportunities for them to become familiar with the new environment before their first day

(Dockett & Perry, 2007a, 2011; Fabian, 2007, 2010; Margetts, 2007; Peters, 2004a, 2010).

Familiarity can be developed through a series of visits to the new setting and the sharing of information about the changes that will be encountered. Laverick (2008) suggests that children's literature and DVDs about local schools can help children be aware of what school is like and giving out a welcome pack with key information is useful. During the Mangere Bridge project (Hartley, et al., 2012), artefacts such as DVDs, photo boards and information leaflets were created to help children and their families become more familiar with local schools. Visits to the schools with the kindergarten teachers were also implemented alongside the usual parent/child visits. The authors concluded that transition experiences that allowed children to become familiar with the new setting prepared new entrants to participate competently in the classroom.

Visits to the school are not always useful, however. Peters' (2004a) doctoral study found that visiting allowed parents to find out what happened at school, and thereby provide scaffolding for their children, and that some children could find it reassuring to be familiar with the classroom and meet the teacher. However, for other children visits could *create* rather than alleviate anxiety. She recommends that schools pay attention to the timing and purpose of pre-visits and plan them carefully.

In examining the child's perspective, Dockett and Perry (2011) found it was important to provide opportunities for children to become familiar with the setting. The researchers asked an unspecified number of children from four schools and ten early childhood settings for their ideas about how to support children during the transition to school. Data were collected using multiple methods such as books, DVDs, power point presentations, drawings, letters written by children and interviews. The children highlighted the importance of multiple visits to the new settings and suggested it would be useful to visit without parents. Children suggested other positive strategies might include teachers from both sectors participating in a

celebration of the transition, more outdoor time at school and resources (such as the ones they made) which informed children about school. Another suggestion was that the teacher could help the children to make friends reflecting Fabian's (2010) suggestion that when teachers foster friendships and assist children in engaging in social interaction a sense of belonging is created for those who are new to the setting. McLachlan et al. (2013) highlight the role early childhood teachers play in preparing children socially and emotionally for school which would support them in forming friendships in the new context. Preparing children for the social aspects of school can help them benefit from the support offered by other children in the classroom.

The role of peers.

Teachers and families are not the only sources of support for children during the transition to school. Children can access help from their peers. Research highlights the role of friends and friendships in helping children to feel happier at school (Corsaro & Molinari, 2008; Danby, Thompson, Theobald, & Thorpe, 2012; Dockett & Perry, 2007b, 2009; Einarsdottir, 2010; Margetts, 2007; Peters, 2003a, 2010). Fabian (2013) suggests that when children transition they should be supported in making and keeping friends. Some literature refers to the role of peers in supporting new children in learning about what is required at school (Peters, 2003a) and the importance of children having social skills (Belcher, 2006; Fabian, 2007; Margetts, 2007). However, there is little discussion of how peers support new entrants to learn about school or why social skills matter to transition which is surprising given the influence of sociocultural theory which recognises that learning is a social activity influenced by society and culture (Carr, et al., 2009) and is an area that this thesis will address.

An exception to this is the work of Hagan (2005, 2007) who conducted case studies in an Auckland classroom for his doctoral study. Using video evidence, Hagan collected data showing that children watched and copied other children and instructed each other in what to do at school. His study highlighted the role of peers in supporting and guiding new class members to participate more fully in the social interaction of the classroom. He also identified that the constraints of the curriculum could limit the opportunities for this to occur. When viewing the video the teacher became more aware of the role peers could play in supporting new children in adjusting to learning at school. Hagan concluded that teachers should reflect on how they promote children's collaboration and provide opportunities for them to support each other. He notes a lack of research addressing the connection between social interaction and learning during the adjustment to school and calls for further study in this field; a gap this thesis will address.

Peters' (2004a) interpretive study of children "crossing the border" to one school also noted instances of children supporting each other in learning curriculum content and school appropriate behaviour. Consistent with Hagan's (2005, 2007) findings, children in this study learned by observing, copying and being instructed by peers; the importance of social skills and friends were noted by teachers, parents, and children interviewed. Observations provided detailed examples of how peers provided scaffolding to new entrants during learning activities and also how as children "chatted" they explored challenging ideas. For one child, having a friend in the classroom resulted in instances where peer scaffolding helped her to complete unfamiliar tasks. Another child's tendency to play alone in kindergarten was associated with her inability to access help from her peers during her transition to school. Peters (2004a) suggests that fostering friendships and focusing on relationships is of importance in the first year of schooling.

When investigating new entrants' and parents' perceptions of the transition to school numeracy in one classroom, Belcher (2006) found that social factors were of relevance as some mathematics activities required children to work together. The children in this study identified that being friendly was important because their friends would help them if they did not know what to do. Although only five children were interviewed and observed, the findings indicate that children were engaging in some peer learning during the transition to school learning.

According to Danby, Thompson, Theobald and Thorpe (2012) making friends and being able to participate in peer culture are important aspects of feeling a sense of belonging at school. This research involving 162 Australian first grade children established that meeting old friends at school and making new friends were some of the things children liked about starting school. The children in this study stated that being given a buddy was helpful.

Older students can also provide support to children over the transition to school. This support can happen through a tuakana/teina like relationship where the older child is able to "model the language and behaviours acceptable in school situations, talk about what happens in the classroom, demonstrate positive learning attitudes, and become a friendly face in the new setting" (Hartley, et al., 2012, p. 49). Providing kindergarten children with year five buddies who visited the kindergarten prior to the transition to school showed how older students could help new entrants to feel more comfortable at school and to learn about school (Hartley, et al., 2012). Peers of all ages play a significant role in supporting new entrant transitions. Understanding how peer learning can occur could help teachers to reflect on how they might plan for peer learning in the new entrant classroom.

Peer learning

Although there is limited research on how peer learning happens over the transition to school many researchers have explored how peer learning occurs in other contexts and how teachers can support peer learning. Piaget (1932) theorised that peer learning could occur during child interactions when children encounter ideas that differ from their own and through peer conflict (as cited by De Lisi & Golbeck, 1999). Although this is one way in which peer learning can occur, the work of Vygotsky (1978) highlighted learning as a social activity where learning can be the result of intersubjectivity between peers and much recent literature has drawn on this perspective.

Smith's (2012; 2010) research on peer learning in two child-care centres found that in the play context of the setting children used strategies such as negotiation, problem solving and collaborative talk. She contends that "placing children in the role of either expert or novice was ideal for encouraging peers to scaffold each other through the zone of proximal development" (2010, p. 27). Smith suggests that when children are in mixed age groupings peer interactions are enriched and recommends that teachers ensure they provide opportunities for children to share their knowledge with each other.

When investigating numeracy teaching and learning techniques in an Australian multi-age classroom, Wood and Fid (2005) also found that children were scaffolding each other's learning. This research involved 44 year one and two students who explained to each other what to do and regulated one another's behaviour. The authors concluded that "peer sharing and tutoring... can support children's numeracy learning" (p. 96) and that careful attention to grouping children is *not* enough to support peer learning. They suggest that teachers need to play a role in facilitating productive discussion and in supporting children to know how to learn with and from each other.

Action research in a New Zealand kindergarten established that while children played a role in supporting the bilingual development of their peers, cognitive development was also enhanced by peer learning (Haworth et al., 2006). Many examples of older children working with younger children and taking on a nurturing and caring role were observed. Children were scaffolding their peers and co-constructing learning together. The researchers associated this with the Māori concept of tuakana-teina where a more experienced child supports a younger or less experienced child. While traditionally tuakana-teina was a term used to refer to an older sibling or relation supporting a younger sibling (Macfarlane, et al., 2008; Tamati, 2005), it is now commonly used in education to refer to this kind of learning situation. The research findings suggest that more experienced children (tuakana) have ideas about what the less experienced children (teina) need to know and that they support them to learn these things. This contributed to the growth of individual independence in the teina. Haworth et al. (2006) advocate that teachers support learning by encouraging and supporting peer interactions.

Tamati (2005) contends that the notion of tuakana-teina is integrally linked with the concept of Ako. Ako means “to learn as well as to teach... Therefore it is acceptable for the child to reverse roles and in the same activity change from that of learner to the role of teacher” (Tangaere, 1997, p. 45). The concept of Ako has similarities with the notion of co-construction and sees everyone as having experiences, skills and/or knowledge which they bring to the learning experience. Each person’s contribution influences the learning and new understandings which develop (Tamati, 2005). Tamati explored how the concept of Ako was present in children’s learning in a Māori immersion early childhood setting. Observations involving 25 children established that for Ako to occur teachers need to accept and provide opportunities for shared learning. Opportunities for children to explore different roles and responsibilities contributed to the co-construction of learning. Like Haworth et al. (2006), Tamati noticed incidences of children acting as tuakana, taking on responsibility for the learning of other children. She also saw learning being co-constructed as each child

contributed their strengths. According to Tamati “Ako positions children as equal partners in the teaching and learning process” (p. 30), so in order for Ako to occur there needs to be an environment where power is shared with children.

Similarly, when children were able to collaborate in a block sorting task, the less able children were able to achieve better results (Fawcett & Garton, 2005). This Australian study, involving 100 children aged six to seven, found that verbal communication skills were a factor in the learning that occurred. Fawcett and Garton suggest that it would be useful to identify the qualities and characteristics associated with effective peer scaffolding. They recommend that teachers should train children in the skills of interaction, choose tasks which involve collaboration carefully and ensure a difference of ability when choosing groups.

Although Topping (2005) describes peer learning as “the acquisition of knowledge and skill through active helping and supporting among status equals or matched companions” (p. 631), children can learn from their peers through watching and listening to what is happening around them without any active help or support. Rogoff, Paradise, Arauz, Correa-Chavez and Angelillo (2003) contend that observing and ‘listening in’ is a strategy children use to learn from other children before they are ready to become involved in the activity. They call this “intent participation” (p. 175). Although this watching may involve little or no active support sometimes it is accompanied by suggestions or information from the more experienced child.

Williams (2001) agrees with Rogoff et al. (2003) that children can learn by both observing and listening to their peers. Her study of peer learning in a Swedish preschool found children would often watch and listen before joining in activities with the help of others. She suggests that imitation of others’ actions following keen observation helps children to move towards full participation in the routines, ‘hidden codes of behaviour’, discursive practices and activities of the preschool. It was also evident that children taught each other the rules of the preschool and would take on the teacher’s role of reinforcing rules when the teacher was unavailable.

Williams suggests that teachers plan and reflect on recurrent activities and routines to support children to learn from their peers. Williams (2007) also studied children who were asked to teach a game to children who could not play and found imitation was a factor in the way children aged seven to nine learned from peers. Children in this study also learned when their peers demonstrated what to do, explained the rules and answered their questions. A conflict of interests can occur for the more experienced peer between their role as a teacher and their desire to win the game, however.

Although there are benefits of peer learning, Barnard (2002) also identifies some limitations. When investigating how two year seven children with non English speaking backgrounds were scaffolded by their peers in a New Zealand classroom, Barnard found that techniques used by peers to support these children included explaining the task, giving examples, demonstrating and modelling. Barnard concluded that while there are benefits to the use of peer tutoring, there are potential problems. Sometimes children did not have the skill or knowledge required and could steer the learner in the wrong direction. Therefore, teachers need to take care in choosing which children will work together to ensure a difference of ability (Barnard, 2002; Fawcett & Garton, 2005). Other difficulties include the development of a dependency in the less experienced child and the time taken could interfere with the more able peer's learning. Barnard (2002) recommends teachers plan for peer tutoring to occur, supervise what happens and evaluate its success. As this research focused on only two children in one classroom the findings may not reflect what occurs in other contexts.

Similarly, Angelova, Gunawardena and Volk (2006) found that when selecting children to support others teachers must take care to consider the ability of the children. Research involving observation, interviews and the collection of literary artefacts investigated peer learning of English and Spanish in a dual language American classroom of 56 children. Seven girls in the class were followed. The girls appeared to be sensitive to the needs of their peers

for support and used encouragement and praise to reinforce learning. It was found that the role of learner and expert can be fluid and change depending on the context, linking to the notion of *ako* previously discussed. Although gender of the sample is a limitation, there are implications for teachers. Angelova et al. (2006) suggest that teachers plan experiences that include a need for peer interaction within the zone of proximal development, include problem solving tasks, and carefully consider how children are grouped.

It is evident that peer interaction is a valuable tool for learning in a range of learning environments including the new entrant classroom. However, the role of the teacher is a factor in the quality of learning that can occur and teachers must do more than pairing children up and “hoping for the best” (Topping, 2005, p. 632). As Hagan (2005, 2007) found in his study of transition, teachers can plan for peer interaction which is supportive of the successful integration of new entrants into the classroom.

Summary

Children need to adjust to new ways of learning and teaching when they start school. The ease with which new entrants learn to participate in classroom learning activities is, in part, dependent on how well the culture of the school matches the culture of their prior-to-school experience. It can also be affected by the amount and type of support they receive at this time. Research highlights the ways teachers can support children to adjust to classroom life and the positive effect of friendships and social skills on children’s transition. What remains to be explored are the actual ways in which peers support each other to learn what to do and how to learn at school, and how teachers can encourage and plan for supportive peer interactions over the first days at school. These questions are the focus of this research study.

The next chapter outlines the methodology and methods used to investigate peer learning during the transition to school. The participants and research settings are introduced, data collection and analysis are explained and ethical procedures are discussed.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Introduction

Research can never be value neutral (Glesne, 2006; T. May, 2011). The methodology and tools used in conducting this research are influenced by personal views of children as competent people with the right to have a say in matters that concern them and the understanding that knowledge is socially and culturally constructed (United Nations, 1989; Vygotsky, 1978). The epistemology underpinning of this research, therefore, involves the position that children actively construct their own understandings of the world and is based on a world view that is shaped by constructivism, and in particular social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978). Glesne (2006) suggests qualitative research seeks to “understand and interpret how various participants in a social setting construct the world around them” (p. 4). As this research seeks to examine behaviour during the transition to school and how this relates to the construction of children’s learning about how to participate in the new entrant classroom, a qualitative approach has been taken.

This project used a case study approach to investigate the ways in which new entrant children learn from more experienced school children how to act, how to learn and how to participate in the classroom context. The case studies involved the use of multiple methods of data collection in different new entrant classroom settings. The use of observations and interviews with teachers and case study children provided a range of rich data which was thematically analysed to inform the findings. This chapter will explain and justify the chosen methods of data collection and form of data analysis. Also outlined are the ethical procedures and considerations and a description of the research participants and settings.

Research Question and Objectives

The research investigates the following question:

- What role do more experienced school children play in supporting the transition process for new entrants in the New Zealand context?

The objectives of the research were to identify:

- The strategies experienced school children use to help new entrants know what to do and when to do it;
- The strategies that new entrants use to learn from those who are more experienced; and
- The ways teachers facilitate and support peer learning about what to do at school.

Method

Case studies.

This research study consists of three case studies of children's transitions into three schools, a number found suitable by Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2007) and Cresswell (2002). Case studies provide a "unique example of real people in real situations" which enable researchers to develop theories which can help similar cases to be understood (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 253). Because case studies recognise the importance of context to behaviour (Cohen, et al., 2007) they are useful to research which has a sociocultural perspective. Investigating multiple cases provides greater insight into what is happening, allows for comparisons to be made between cases and similarities and differences to be highlighted, and the research may be more readily generalised (Glesne, 2006; Johnson & Christenson, 2008). The boundaries of each case (Cohen, et al., 2007; Johnson & Christenson, 2008) studied in this research surround the experiences of the transitioning child within the classroom context. The interactions involving the children and teacher within the classroom were the focus of the research. Data was not gathered at break times.

Triangulation was sought with the use of multiple methods of data collection, data collection in different places and on different occasions (Cohen, et al., 2007) in order to look at the topic from different perspectives and in different ways (Dockett & Perry, 2007c). Thus triangulation reduced the likelihood of researcher bias which can occur with the exclusive reliance on one method of research (Cohen, et al., 2007). The use of multiple methods of data collection in case studies allows a rich picture of what is happening to be developed (O'Hara, Carter, Dewis, Kay, & Wainwright, 2011) and can promote greater depth (Mason, 2002, cited by Cohen, et al., 2007).

Data collection methods

Observations.

Observations were conducted in one classroom in each school during the first two weeks of a child's transition. Before the collection of observational data began the classrooms were visited to enable the children to become familiar with my presence and also to provide an opportunity for them to ask questions about me, what I was doing and the research project. The visits also provided the opportunity to become familiar with each context and to consider positioning in the classroom.

Six 1.5-2 hour observations were made in each school at a range of times and days. By conducting observations researchers can "learn about 'the other' by participating in their everyday life" (Warming, 2005, p. 51). This approach allowed immersion in the interactions in order to reach an "empathic understanding of a social scene" (T. May, 2011, p. 166) and to witness exactly what was happening in the classroom (Cotton, Stokes, & Cotton, 2010, p. 465). Observations were important because the kinds of interactions vary in different classrooms and this variance may not have been evident in teacher interviews alone. Repeated visits also allowed enough time and opportunity to gain some perspective of which were common

behaviours and which were less usual (Cohen, et al., 2007). Observation also confirmed actual behaviour rather than relying exclusively on what the participants said that they do (O'Hara, et al., 2011). Behaviour may change in the presence of a researcher (Cohen, et al., 2007) therefore several observations were planned as it was anticipated that the participants would behave more naturally as they became used to being observed. Pre visits were also undertaken to reduce researcher effect (Cohen, et al., 2007).

Christensen (2004) contends that when conducting research involving children researchers must consider their role in the chosen context. In this case, the role of the 'other adult' was adopted, rather than acting as a teacher or attempting to take on 'the least adult' role advocated by Mandell (1991, cited by Christensen, 2004). My role in this study was that of "observer as participant" (Glesne, 2006, p. 50) where the observer is primarily observing but does interact at times with participants. Interactions with children were not initiated but brief responses were made if children initiated interactions. Assistance was not given with learning tasks, nor was behaviour corrected unless it posed a risk to children's safety. This minimised the effect researcher presence may have had on the behaviour of the participants.

The focus of the observations in each classroom was on the verbal and non-verbal interactions between the case study child, the more experienced children in the class, and the teacher. Details of the environment were also recorded if they were relevant to the episodes noted. A running record of interactions involving the focus child was made during observations and reflections relating to the observations were noted. Photographs were also taken to be used as prompts when interviewing children. Data were written up as field notes as soon as possible after each observation which enabled further detail to be added while the incidents were still recent.

Interviews.

The teachers and focus children of each case study were interviewed using a semi-structured approach after the observations were completed. Semi-structured interviews gave participants the opportunity to “answer questions from their own point of view” (T. May, 2011, p. 132) without being confined by a rigid structure of questions and also provided the opportunity for answers to be clarified. There was also an opportunity to check the participant’s meaning was understood thus enhancing the validity and trustworthiness of the findings (O’Hara, et al., 2011). Interviewing both the teachers and children enabled different perspectives to be considered and represented in the findings.

Each focus child was interviewed individually to establish the ways in which they thought other children helped them and the ways in which they may have asked for help or imitated others. Interviewing children gave the child’s voice an opportunity to be heard; although this is, of course, filtered through the assumptions and perceptions of the researcher (Gollop, 2000), as at times it is difficult for adults to understand exactly what children are trying to say (Mackey & Vaealiki, 2011). A semi-structured format enabled children’s responses to be probed to unpack the meaning of what they said (Danby, Ewing, & Thorpe, 2011). Open questions (Cohen, et al., 2007; Gollop, 2000) were asked related to things that were observed happening in the classroom, to help engender more discussion (MacNaughton, Rolfe, & Siraj-Blatchford, 2001) (Appendix A). Photographs taken during observations were used to help stimulate discussion, as props and artefacts can be useful in supporting interactions during interviews with children (Danby, et al., 2011; Gollop, 2000; MacNaughton, et al., 2001). It is important that when children are interviewed they are familiar with the interviewer and the location (Clark, 2005; Danby, et al., 2011; Gollop, 2000; MacNaughton, et al., 2001), therefore the interviews took place at school, in the classroom, after the observations were complete and in the presence of a parent.

When the teachers were interviewed a semi-structured format was also adopted to find out the ways in which they noticed more experienced children helping new entrants and the ways they consciously facilitate this to happen (Appendix B). This format enabled questions to be asked about some of the observed episodes in order to understand and clarify the teacher's intentions.

Interviews are an interactional event and researchers must be aware of how they affect the data collected by the types of questions asked, their pauses, interruptions and silences (Danby, et al., 2011; De Fina & Perrino, 2011; Dockett & Perry, 2007b). It is also important to be mindful of issues of power (David, Edwards, & Alldred, 2001; Dockett & Perry, 2007c) particularly when interviewing children who may say what they think the adult wants them to say. As suggested by Gollop (2000), children were told that there were no right or wrong answers and that they could say that they "don't know" if they wished.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed (a transcriber was employed) to ensure accuracy of data collection and to allow concentration on the conversation rather than taking extensive notes (T. May, 2011). In order to guard against the failure of technology some written notes were also made. Transcripts were checked by adult participants and parents for accuracy.

Children's drawings

Hedges (2002) advocates an approach to research that seeks to empower children's active participation and so is consistent with sociocultural theory. Children's active participation was sought by giving them the opportunity to communicate their early experiences at school through drawings if they wished. Dockett and Perry (2007b) have used this approach successfully to find out about children's experiences of transition in Australia. During the

interview children were invited to draw a picture of a time someone helped them learn what to do at school. As Warming (2005) suggests, children have different preferences for communication and this allowed children's perspectives to be understood through a method that is not purely verbal if they so chose. It was intended that the data elicited from the pictures and the interviews with transitioning children would give value to children's perspectives, ensure children's rights were respected, allow children to actively participate in the research and give them a voice (Mackey & Vaealiki, 2011). Unfortunately, this method of data collection was not successfully implemented with the case study children. Two children drew pictures which were not relevant and the third child did not want to draw a picture. His wishes were respected.

Data Analysis

An inductive approach to data analysis was employed where themes and categories were used to organise data. Braun and Clarke (2006) contend that analysing the data by themes enables a "rich and detailed, yet complex, account" (p. 78) and is appropriate within a sociocultural framework because it can help theorise the conditions influencing interactions. This approach required immersion in the data; reading and re-reading the data a number of times during the data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Cohen, et al., 2007; T. May, 2011). N-vivo10 (QSR International, 2012) was used for coding interview transcripts and field notes (Appendix C).

The data from each case study was analysed separately. Each set of data (observations, interview transcripts) was coded first in relation to the three research objectives (Cohen, et al., 2007). The resulting sets of data were examined to identify patterns, similarities and differences. Subcategories were then established. The codes for these were inductively determined (Johnson & Christenson, 2008) by the nature of the data and the types of behaviours which occurred. Data sets were then able to be compared to establish

commonalities and differences between the data types. It could then be determined whether observed behaviour confirmed what the participants communicated in interviews. Once each case study had been analysed data from the three cases were compared. A table was created showing each theme and the cases in which the themes occurred, a process that helped to establish whether particular behaviours were related to a certain context, teacher or child or whether they were present in all contexts (Appendix D).

Ethical considerations

The principles of the Massey University Human Ethics Code were followed in this research project and ethical approval to carry out this research was sought and gained from Massey University (Appendix E). Ethics is about respect, fairness, trust and honesty (Graue & Walsh, 1998) and this study endeavoured to uphold these values. Researchers must strive to protect the rights of participants and preserve their dignity as humans by ascertaining and balancing the potential benefits and negative effects that the research may elicit (Cohen, et al., 2007). Negative effects on the participants were not anticipated.

Ethical concerns include how much information to give participants so that they are informed but not confused, the need to outline any positive and negative effects of the research, confidentiality and giving participants the opportunity to check the accuracy of data that has been gathered (Dockett & Perry, 2007c). Sufficient information must be given so that informed consent can be given thus protecting the rights of participants (Cohen, et al., 2007; Cotton, et al., 2010; T. May, 2011). The teachers and parents of the focus children were given an information sheet outlining the purpose of the research, their rights, how they and the children were to be involved, costs and benefits to themselves, the use of pseudonyms and information about methods of data collection and storage of data (Appendices F and G). The project was discussed with them and they were invited to ask questions before signing consent

forms. Parents were asked to be present at the interview of their child and check the transcription of their child's interview. Teachers also checked the accuracy of transcription.

Although informed consent from guardians or parents is often accepted as sufficient to cover the participation of children (Mackey & Vaealiki, 2011) article 12 of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989) protects the rights of children to have a voice in matters affecting them. There is some debate as to whether gaining children's informed consent is possible considering issues of power, therefore it is likely that children's 'consent' was actually 'assent' or as David et al. (2001) put it 'educated consent' (p. 347). The children who were the focus of the case study were read an information sheet (Appendix H) and asked by their parents if they wished to participate. Assent was revisited before they were interviewed. All of these children agreed to participate. Parents of the other children in the class were notified by newsletter that the research was going to occur and given the opportunity to discuss their child's involvement if they wished.

During a pre-visit the research study was explained to the whole class, as Dockett and Perry (2007b) suggest, and any questions the children had were answered. The children were also given an information sheet with pictures and a child friendly explanation of what would happen which was read to them (Appendix I). Children were asked if they were happy for 'stories' to be written down about them. Although it is important to provide opportunities for children's voices to be heard, children may not wish to share their views and thoughts (Gollop, 2000). Children were, therefore, told that they did not have to participate if they did not wish (Gollop, 2000). The children were given time to reflect on whether they wished to be involved before being asked to consent/assent. Children were asked to write their names or draw a symbol on a sheet of paper to indicate their willingness to be included in the research. If children did not wish to take part no data was recorded relating to them or their interactions with the case study children.

In gaining informed consent, the ongoing nature of consent where research is undertaken over a period of time was acknowledged (David, et al., 2001; Dockett & Perry, 2007c). Some children, who did not wish to participate at the outset of the project, later changed their minds and gave assent to the collection of data relating to their interactions with the focus children. It was also important to be mindful of the power relations involved between adults and children which may make it difficult for children to opt out (Denscombe & Aubrook, 1992, cited by David, et al., 2001). One way in which this was done was to observe the body language of the children during the interview. In one case very few questions were asked as the child's body language after the first couple of questions indicated that he no longer wished to answer the questions. Both child and adult participants were made aware that they may withdraw from the study at any time and that confidentiality would be respected. Pseudonyms have been used to protect participant's identity.

Ethical dilemmas can arise during research which may involve deciding what to do if the researcher sees something inappropriate happening in the classroom and considerations of conducting research with children (Mackey & Vaealiki, 2011) such as a child wanting to be involved when the parent has not given consent (T. May, 2011). No such ethical dilemmas arose during the course of this project, although procedures for dealing with any possible ethical dilemmas were approved in the ethics application.

Participants and settings

The research was conducted in three schools in a central North Island town. Three children's transitions were the focus of the case studies. ERO reports were used to select schools which were diverse in area and decile rating so that data was representative of a diverse population. Letters outlining the project were sent to the principals of the schools which looked appropriate for data collection. This letter requested permission to explain the project to new

entrant teachers in their school and request their participation. Once the schools and participating teachers were established meetings were held to identify children transitioning to school within the required timeframe. The sample of case study children was, therefore, a matter of convenience (Cohen, et al., 2007). Due to the small sample from one geographic area, results will not be representative of the New Zealand population.

School 1: Eve and Mrs Austin.

School 1 is a mid decile school of special character with just over 400 students enrolled and several new entrant classrooms. The school runs a preschool afternoon once a week which children may attend with their parents in the weeks before they turn five. This programme is taken by a semi-retired teacher who used to teach new entrants in the school. Children start school on or near their fifth birthday and usually have at least one visit to the classroom before their first day. Eve attended the preschool classes and before starting school was attending a local kindergarten. Eve's older sister was also a pupil at the school. Her mother was a little concerned that Eve would struggle to settle in to school as she considered her to be a little timid and felt she would need the right kind of teacher. Mrs Austin is an experienced new entrant teacher who has taught at the school for a number of years. There were 15 children in the class when Eve started school some of whom had started school in the previous year. Two other children joined the class during the time in which the observations took place.

School 2: John and Mrs Harding.

The second case study was conducted in a high decile school of over 500 pupils which also runs a preschool afternoon every week. Children are invited to attend this programme for 10 weeks before beginning school. Children start school on the Monday following their fifth birthday.

When the observations in this school began it was the second week of term two and the school had just set up a new classroom for new entrants. Consequently, when John started school, this classroom contained only four children who had been at school for only a week. Another child started on the same day as John and three other children started the following Monday. John had attended a kindergarten which shares a boundary with the school and also participated in the preschool afternoons. He had visited the classroom with the children who started a week earlier before the end of the previous term and also one morning the week before. John's older sister attended the same school. His mother felt that the kindergarten had done a good job of preparing John for school and that he was 'ready' for school. Mrs Harding was newly employed by the school and although she had taught for a number of years she had not taught new entrants before.

School 3: Rob and Mrs Worden.

School three is a special character school in a lower decile area of the town with around 150 children on the roll. There are two new entrant classrooms and in this school the transition process is flexible. Children and families may visit the classroom as many times as they wish before the child starts school. Visits occur on one regular morning a week in the classroom into which the child will be placed. The child participates in the regular classroom programme on these visits. However, Rob did not visit the classroom before beginning school so the teacher was unsure how he would settle into the routines of the classroom. Rob did not have any older siblings at the school, but had a friend in the class who had attended the same childcare centre. Mrs Worden is an experienced new entrant teacher who has taught at the school for a number of years. There were 16 children in the class when Rob started school some of whom had been at school for over a year.

Summary

The use of interviews and observations enabled in-depth study of the interactions which contribute to children's learning of what to do and how to learn at school in three different classrooms. While case studies are not always able to be generalised it is anticipated that the data generated from this study may "stimulate worthwhile thinking" (O'Hara, et al., 2011, p. 100) about how teachers can increase the opportunities for more experienced school children to help their new entrant peers. The findings from each case study will be reported in the next three chapters.

Chapter Four

Case Study One: Eve and Mrs Austin

Introduction

The findings from Case Study One are presented in this chapter. This first case study took place in March in a medium decile school. Mrs Austin was an experienced new entrant teacher. Eve transitioned from a local kindergarten and had also attended the preschool afternoons run by the school. Eve's mother described her as shy and timid. When Eve started school the class consisted of fifteen children, the oldest had begun school in July the previous year.

The following discussion describes how peer learning helped Eve learn about school and is organised around each research objective and the categories of behaviour which emerged.

Strategies new entrants use to learn from their peers.

Children are active participants in learning experiences, and they have a part to play in constructing their own learning. When entering school Eve played an active part in learning from her peers about what to do and how to go about her learning at school.

New Entrant Strategy: Learning by observing peers.

Research has highlighted the role of observation in children's learning. Rogoff et al. (2003) argue that children of all cultures learn as they watch and listen to other children and that when they are ready they will become involved in what is occurring. This process referred to by Rogoff et al. as "intent participation" (p. 175) was observed in this case study and is

consistent with Hagan's (2005) findings that new entrants used observation of their peers to learn how to participate in school life.

Interview data showed that both Eve and Mrs Austin were aware of the benefit of new entrants watching and copying the other children. Eve was asked how she learned to put up her hand:

Eve: No one told.

Researcher: No one told you? How did you learn about that then?

Eve: I just looked.

Researcher: You just looked?

Eve: I looked at them when they put up their hand. (INT C1 p.2)

Although Eve spent a lot of time watching what the other children were doing and sometimes copied immediately the things she had observed, this observation did not always translate into immediate action. There are many recorded examples of Eve on her first morning at school, carefully watching when children put up their hands. However, Eve was not observed to put up her own hand until she had been at school for one week. It is also likely that although Eve may have learned from her observations in the classroom that you raise your hand when wanting to speak, she needed time to think about and gain the confidence to put this learning into practice. These observations enabled Eve to learn the unwritten rules of how to act in the school setting.

Eve would often pause after the teacher had given an instruction until she had observed what the other children did. At one point Mrs Austin asked the children to take off their shoes and put them under their desks. The children complied with the instruction, but Eve sat and watched the other children before taking her shoes off and putting them away. Here, observation of her peers may have acted as a check on her understanding of what was required or a reassurance that she was doing the right thing.

Eve used the strategies of watching and listening in to support her in knowing how to participate in group experiences as was evident on her first morning at school. The children were having a drama lesson involving lots of different group experiences. During these experiences, Eve would watch and copy the other children and her observations arguably assisted her to gradually increase her participation.

Mrs Austin: "Now we will play 'yes lets' one person chooses what the children will do and the class says "yes lets" and does it."

The teacher starts by calling out "sleeping." The children call "yes lets" and pretend to be sleeping.. Eve looks around at the other children.

Mrs Austin: "Rabbits." Eve watches for a few seconds then begins to jump like a rabbit as the other children are.

Mrs Austin: "Racing cars." Eve watches rather than joining in

Mrs Austin: "Ducks."

Eve shouts: "Yes lets" like the other children and joins in, pretending to be a duck. (OB C1 Day 1)

In the example above, Eve did not join in the game until she had an opportunity to observe what the other children were doing. She moved from watching, to joining in first with the physical action, to full participation in all aspects of the game.

Hagan (2007) noted that adjustment to school is not just about being able to negotiate participation in group activity, but also involves being able to engage with the academic aspects of the curriculum. Eve's observations helped her to complete her written academic work. For instance, when the children were sitting at tables completing writing tasks, Eve would spend a lot of time watching what the other children were doing and looking at their work. By looking at the other children and their work, Eve was able to work out how learning happens at school and how to engage with the tasks involved. At printing time on Eve's third day at school the children were given white board cards with letters printed on them to trace and copy. The teacher did not describe to the children what to do. Eve looked at what the child sitting next to her was doing to help her understand what she needed to do before beginning to trace over the letters on her card. Sometimes Eve would spend so much time watching the

other children at her table and looking around the room that she would accomplish very little of her own written work. However, she may still have been learning from her observations. It is possible that the learning could be displayed at a later time.

Watching supported Eve to know how to join in and to feel comfortable to do so, however, at times, observation was not enough and more experienced peers played a more active role in supporting Eve's participation:

Mrs Austin: Could you, super quietly, like mice, tiptoe to the door and line up?
Eve watches, then another girl takes her hand and together they tiptoe to the door and line up. (OB C1 Day 1)

Although Eve was watching the other children, it is not until her hand was taken that she followed the teacher's direction. As Rogoff et al. (2003) explain, learning from observation and listening is sometimes supported by help from those who are more experienced. Peers can play a part in helping new entrants learn what to do and how to learn at school.

Strategies experienced peers use to help new entrants know what to do at school.

Barnard (2002) reminds us that adults are not the only ones who play a role in scaffolding learning. Children's learning can be supported by their peers. Children who have been at school for some time have already become familiar with the routines and ways of learning at school. This experience enables them to play a role in supporting new entrants in learning about how to act at school. The children actively sought opportunities to support Eve in knowing what to do and how to learn at school.

Peer Strategy: Telling.

Wood and Fid (2005) explain that peers can play a role in explaining what should be done and in regulating behaviour and this was observed in this case study. One of the ways the other children helped Eve to know what to do in the classroom was by telling her what to do, what not to do, or explaining how to do things. By telling Eve what she needed to do the more experienced children were ensuring that she was able to participate in classroom learning and reassuring her that she was not going to get into trouble for not finishing her work or for doing something wrong. A number of times children were observed telling Eve to hurry up and finish what she was doing and when Eve started to play with the doll's house during reading time a child is quick to inform her "It's not time to play with that." (OB C1 Day 4)

Eve took a long time to gain the confidence to speak at circle time. It is not until her sixth day at school that Eve said anything during circle time. One of her peers supported her to do so by telling her what to say.

The teacher has asked the children to share something they are thankful for and given an example. Several children share before it is Eve's turn. Eve sits for a moment. D leans over towards her and says "Thank you", prompting her. She does not say anything.

Mrs Austin: "I think we will wait a minute and give Eve time to think." (Pause)

Mrs Austin: "I think you went somewhere special at the weekend." (Pause)

Mrs Austin: "Can we help our friend? She went somewhere with animals."

Children: "Zoo."

D to Eve: "You have to say "thank you for the zoo.""

Eve (in a quiet voice): "Thank you for the zoo." (OB C1 Day 6)

Although Eve had listened to the other children sharing before it was her turn, she was still not confident to participate. When Eve did not immediately speak, the child next to her tried to prompt her. The teacher then provided some scaffolding for Eve by giving her an idea of something she could be thankful for. However, it is not until D actually told her what to say that Eve was empowered to share.

Williams (2007) found that children can successfully teach other children to play a game and in this classroom the more experienced children were expected to support the new entrants in learning how to play games. Teaching Eve how to play maths and alphabet games required children to tell Eve what to do. For this to happen successfully however, the children needed to have a good understanding of how to play the game. During Eve's first day at school, the teacher asked a group of children to teach Eve how to play an alphabet game. It is evident that the children did not really know how to play the game which meant that Eve was unable to engage in the learning experience.

S to Eve: "Do you know how to play?"

Eve: "No."

S: "She doesn't know how to play."

B: "You have to tell her."

Children give a jumbled explanation of the game

C: "Do you know now?" Eve nods.

Children roll the dice. It is Eve's turn. S says "Do you know how to play?" Eve looks confused and shakes her head. (OB C1 Day 1)

In contrast, another child is more successful in supporting Eve and another new entrant (Q) to play a maths game by telling them when to have a turn, how to keep to the rules and what to do when it is their turn:

X tells Q to find the dog which corresponds to her last spin. "You can keep it" she directs when Q does this.

Eve spins a 4. She picks up a dog which has 3 spots.

X states: "That's not 4." Eve looks again and picks up the right card.

X: "Lets count it." They count together.

As the game continues X hands the spinner round to make sure the children all have turns. At times she tells the others which dog to choose. "1 is over here" (Pointing). (OB C1 Day 6)

X was able to teach Eve and Q how to play the game. Later however, once the new entrants knew how to play and became aware of how to win, they did not always respond to what X was telling them. A consideration when peers are teaching other children to play a game is that games involve competition which can affect how much information the peer tutor gives their learner (Williams, 2007). This did not appear to affect the way X taught the others the

game. However, once the children had worked out how to win the game they did not always follow the rules. Although X was quick to tell the others when they were ‘cheating’ she was not equipped to stop this happening. The competitive aspect of the game made her job harder.

Peer strategy: Showing or modelling.

Sometimes the more experienced children needed to show Eve how to do unfamiliar tasks. Showing or modelling was often combined with telling Eve what to do. During reading time Eve needed to learn how to read the task board to enable her to rotate around the activities in the expected way. In the following example, Eve and S were reading in the library corner when Mrs Austin called out that it was time to go to the second reading activity:

Eve gets another book.

S: “No, you have to go to the next.”

Mrs Austin: “Thank you S. Take her to the board and show her how to check what to do.” S takes Eve to the board and points to her name and the activity. They move to the big books. Eve sits and looks around at the books scattered on the floor somewhat aimlessly.

S: “OK. I’ll read to you.”

S opens the book ‘Lunch for Greedy Cat.’ She reads to Eve, pointing to the words using a long pointer. S stops reading and looks around. Eve points to the words. S turns back and continues reading and pointing. (OB C1 Day 4)

S begins by telling Eve what to do. This was the first time Eve needed to read the task board and she was not sure how to interpret it. At the teacher’s prompting S showed Eve how to read the task board and work out what to do next. When they moved to the next area, S was also involved in showing Eve the way in which she should be reading the books. S modelled how to point to the words as she reads. In this way the relationship between the written and spoken words is modelled for Eve and social participation helped her access the formal curriculum (Hagan, 2005).

Peer strategy: Scaffolding academic learning.

Researchers are aware of the role some children can play in supporting the learning of others through scaffolding. Both Hartley et al. (2012) and Tamati (2005) have written about the way in which children can act as tuakana by supporting the learning of those who have less experience than them. Peters (2004a) also details how more experienced children can scaffold the learning of children who are new to the classroom. The following example shows how a child who had already been at school for some time supported the learning of a child who was new to the classroom. This example is particularly interesting as the child who is acting as the tuakana is using strategies which she had observed the teacher using to support learning.

The children are writing a story about something they like.

Mrs Austin: "What's your story about?"

Eve shrugs. Mrs Austin looks at Eve's stories for the last two days and reminds her of what she has written, praising her work. She asks Eve questions such as "What do you like to do at home with your Mum?" Eve says she likes to bake. Eve is sent to the table to start.

Eve draws her picture and fidgets. She does not attempt to start writing. P writes 'I like' in Eve's book for her. Eve sits without doing anything.

B comes up to her.

B: "What's your story?" Eve does not reply. B asks "What do you like doing?"
Eve does not respond.

B reads yesterday's story: "I like going to the playground. That's a good story. What's this picture?" pointing to the picture Eve has just drawn.

Eve tells her it is a picture of her baking.

B: "I like baking (clarifying what Eve should write). B...b....baking"

She gets a letter card and shows Eve the letter b on the card. She demonstrates making a finger space on the page and traces a b lightly on Eve's book. B then begins making the 'a' sound in 'baking' and gets Eve to find the letter a on the letter card. (OB C1 Day 3)

It is clear that B is copying the way in which Mrs Austin has helped Eve decide what to write.

When Eve did not respond to B's initial question about what she was going to write, B went back and looked at what Eve had written in the past and gave her positive affirmation for it, just as the teacher did at the beginning of this observation. B then proceeded to use other strategies which Mrs Austin frequently used when modelling writing as she began to write Eve's story in her book. Even though B wrote for Eve, she provided Eve with an opportunity to

observe and participate in the identification of appropriate sounds and modelled how to record sounds for meaning confirming Peters' (2004a) finding that peers can scaffold academic learning to new entrants.

Peer strategy: Supporting participation.

When children first start school they participate in experiences that are unfamiliar to them. Many times children were observed supporting Eve's participation in school experiences by taking her hand, particularly on her first day at school. It appeared that some of the children were adept at reading Eve's body language and sensing when she was unsure and needed some support to join in.

The class are playing a game where they have to move in the way the teacher says. Eve looks very uncertain about joining in.

Mrs Austin: "Skipping." M takes Eve's hand and they skip around together.

Mrs Austin: "Freeze." They freeze together holding hands. The teacher repeats the game for marching and the girls do it together. M needs to go to the toilet so she leaves the room. Eve looks unsure.

Mrs Austin: "Everyone walk backwards." Eve stands and watches then another child takes her hand and she moves backwards. The child drops her hand. Eve begins to join in by herself. (OB C1 Day 1)

Initially, Eve was reluctant to join in and tended to stand and watch but when M took her hand she began to participate in the learning experience with the other children. When left by M Eve did not join in until another child took her hand. Without the support of her peers Eve may have taken longer to participate. This is only one of many observed instances of Eve participating in classroom experiences when another child takes her hand and is one way guided participation occurred (Rogoff, 2003).

Peer strategy: Doing things for the new entrant.

Several observations recorded instances of the more experienced children doing things for Eve. Sometimes this happened when Eve was unable to do the required task but there were also times when children did things for Eve that she was quite capable of doing herself, like taking her book to the teacher, cutting out for her or cleaning her mini whiteboard. As Mrs Austin stated, the children really wanted to help the new entrants, but did not always know how to help so would do things for them. In the following example, the teacher had given the children a worksheet to complete and told them to write the letters then colour in the picture:

H: "Shall I do this?" taking Eve's worksheet

Eve: "You do it."

H: "You can colour in." H completes the writing on Eve's sheet. Eve watches. H stops for a minute.

Eve: "You do all those and I will colour in."

H finishes writing all the letters "There you are." She pushes the paper to Eve and Eve begins to colour it in. (OB C1 Day 4)

The teacher's intention was that each child would learn how to correctly form the letters from the experience of tracing over them. However, even though Eve did not write the letters herself she watched H closely and may have been learning what to do next time she was given a similar handwriting sheet. It is possible that she actually had not known what was required of her to complete this task.

Mrs Austin was aware that children would often do things for new entrants and commented that she would often remind the children not to do things for the new child as this could create a dependency and prevent the new child from becoming independent. However, she also said that usually this was not too much of a concern as "most kids will quite quickly tell them that they don't need them to do it for them anymore, because they want do it for themselves."

(INT T1 p.2) This was certainly what happened in Eve's case as the following extract from Eve's sixth day at school shows:

K has been helping Eve glue her mask pieces onto card. She goes to start cutting the pieces out.

Eve: "I can do it". They tussle for a moment then K goes off and Eve continues to make her mask by herself. (OB C1 Day 6)

Eve was becoming more confident that she could do things for herself and also had gained the confidence to tell other children when she did not want them to do things for her. This observation contrasts with earlier observations where Eve had passively allowed others to do things for her. Eve was gradually gaining independence and moving towards full participation in classroom life. While Barnard (2002) cautions teachers that peer learning can result in dependencies developing this observation demonstrates that this does not always happen.

Peer strategy: Giving encouragement and positive affirmation.

One way children can support each other's learning is by using encouragement and praise (Angelova, et al., 2006). Evidence of this occurring in this case study included when a child who was helping Eve said "Good girl. You are nearly finished" (OB C1 Day 1) and when a child looked at the mask Eve had made commenting "That's awesome" (OB C1 Day 6). These kinds of affirmations reinforce for the learner that they are doing the right thing and reassure them that they are functioning as expected.

Strategies teachers use to support peer learning about what to do at school

The children did not need to be told to help Eve, they appeared to want to help her but there were aspects of the teacher's practice which supported them to help Eve and also provided for other types of peer learning to occur. Hagan (2005) comments that social interaction in the new entrant classroom is negotiated between the teacher and the children. Therefore, the

teacher has a role to play in promoting or limiting how peer learning occurs in the classroom.

The teacher in this case study used many intentional strategies to support peer learning.

Teacher strategy: Providing opportunities for children to work together.

Tamati (2005) argues that in order for peer learning to occur opportunities for shared learning must be provided. There were many ways shared learning occurred in this classroom. Mrs Austin planned group and paired learning experiences which involved children playing games together or working together, seated them at tables where they were able to interact and allowed them to discuss their work with each other. In this way the children were given the chance to learn from, and with, each other and Eve, in particular, was able to learn from her more experienced peers.

Reading and maths were times when there were frequent opportunities for children to work together and thus for Eve to learn from her peers. During reading and maths children worked in groups both with the teacher and independently. At reading time the children rotated around a series of reading activities with the help of a task board. Maths time often involved children playing maths games together. Many of the observed instances of peer learning occurred when the children were working independently of the teacher. Similarly, Hagan (2005) found that peer learning was more likely to occur when children worked independently from the teacher.

Teacher strategy: Selecting groups and buddies.

Opportunities for peer learning to occur during group work are enhanced when the teacher pays attention to the composition of groups and ensures that groups consist of children with mixed abilities (Barnard, 2002; Fawcett & Garton, 2005). In this case study, the inclusion of children with different levels of ability in groups enabled scaffolding and co-construction to occur and gave children the opportunity to take responsibility for newcomers in a tuakana teina style relationship. Sometimes children chose their own groups but at other times Mrs Austin directed who would work with whom. Data showed that at times groups were carefully chosen to include children with a mix of experiences as expressed by Mrs Austin:

...when they come to me as a reading group obviously they're ability-based groups but their independent groups are not, their independent groups are across the board with abilities, which enables the more able kids to lead the other kids and to help them. (INT T1 p.2)

When selecting buddies to support new entrants at playtime and lunchtime, Mrs Austin also chose carefully, selected multiple buddies and made sure that the buddies were aware of their responsibilities. Careful choice of lunchtime buddies can be important as previous studies have shown that the use of buddies can be problematic. Peters (2004a) suggests that unless the children are already friends there may not be any point in allocating buddies. Buddies can run off and leave the new entrant alone and bewildered. Mrs Austin highlighted her strategies for making sure buddies were useful to the new entrant:

I try to look for children who have got a pretty good attention span, because often,... they just wander off and they've forgotten all about the person. Just somebody sensible, ...who's going to stay with the child. There's a few children that you know you can rely on. I generally would pick more than one as well, so that if somebody did flake, and go off, then somebody else would be there with them. Also I give them a set of guidelines like: you need to make sure that you show her where the toilets are, you need to make sure that she knows where she's allowed to play and where she's not allowed to play... (INT T1 p.4)

Although observations did not take place over the playtime it was noted that on Eve's first day the teacher followed this process before playtime. After playtime, a smiling Eve ran up to the line with the girls who had been asked to be her buddy.

Teacher strategy: Telling experienced children how to help.

As the above example demonstrates, Mrs Austin was aware that the children could need support in knowing how and when to help Eve. Several times Mrs Austin asked children to help Eve. Children were asked to help with practical tasks such as doing the buckles on her shoes up, or to model what to do or say. When they went to the hall on Eve's first morning at school the teacher said:

"M can you show Eve our circle and what to do? Take her hand." M takes Eve's hand and they sit on the black circle. (OB C1 Day 1)

At times Mrs Austin provided guidance to children of how they could effectively help Eve. Guidance was necessary in this case as Eve was very happy to let the other children do things for her and some of them were inclined to do this. If the teacher had not provided guidance, it is possible that a dependency could have developed (Barnard, 2002). On several occasions, children were reminded to *help* Eve rather than doing things for her and Mrs Austin commented on how she had needed to take some children aside and talk to them about how to support the new entrant children:

... we just had a little whisper about maybe you could help in this way, or you know it's not your job to do it for her, but support her and help her, just like I support and help you, but don't do it for you, and they clicked on to that pretty quickly. (INT T1 p.2-3)

As well as telling the children to help Eve, rather than to do things for her, Mrs Austin suggested ways to help her. When P writes Eve's story for her Mrs Austin says "She needs to

do it herself. When you do it for her you are not helping. You could help her find the word on the card." (OB C1 Day 3). As this incident highlights children are not always skilled in knowing how to help each other and may need support to understand the best way of giving help. Teachers can suggest alternative ways of supporting new entrants. Teaching children to help can increase the effectiveness of peer learning (Fawcett & Garton, 2005).

Teacher strategy: Using experienced children as a model.

Eve has the opportunity to observe and listen to other children before she is called on to complete many classroom tasks. Mrs Austin deliberately asked other children to say or do things before she asked Eve, as the following observation demonstrates:

Mrs Austin asks each child "Kei konei koe (name)?"

The children respond "Kei konei ahau" as she marks the roll. She asks all of the other children before she asks Eve.

When Eve does not respond she asks the children to help Eve and they all say "Kei konei ahau" together. Eve does not join in. (OB C1 Day 3)

Even though Eve did not respond in the expected manner she was given the opportunity to listen to and observe the other children before she was expected to participate. Mrs Austin frequently did this. Eve was never expected to do something before she had a chance to see the other children doing it. In this way Mrs Austin was allowing intent participation to occur (Rogoff, et al., 2003).

Other children were held up as a model when the teacher drew attention to their good behaviour. Behaviours such as working hard and putting hands up were praised and this gave Eve the chance to learn the kinds of behaviours which are expected at school. When Mrs Austin praised someone for appropriate behaviour Eve often looked at that child and sometimes copied them. The classroom had a special helper system and sometimes the special helper was asked to model actions for the others to copy. Mrs Austin explained that this

system was not a deliberate way of providing a model for the new entrants, but it can have that effect.

As well as helping new entrants know how to behave appropriately, new entrants can also be supported in their academic learning when the teacher uses other children as a model. One of the ways this was seen to happen was when Mrs Austin involved the children in writing a story together:

Mrs Austin: "How do we write 'I'?" Some children put their hands up.

Mrs Austin: "X can you show us in the air?"

X draws an 'I' in the air and the teacher writes 'I'. Next Mrs Austin gets a child to point to 'like' on the word card and writes it in the story book. She does the same with 'going' and 'to'. She exaggerates the sounds in 'shops' and the children call out the letters for the sounds they can hear. Eve is watching and listening throughout this process. (OB C1 Day 1)

Rather than modelling the way to approach story writing herself, the teacher uses the children in the class to model different aspects of writing the story. In this way Eve was able to watch and learn from her peers. Eve saw the children finding words on a word card and also heard them trying to identify the phonemes in words; skills needed to write her own stories.

Mrs Austin also used questioning as a tool to get the other children to tell Eve what to do rather than telling her herself. This strategy occurred when the class went to the library and Mrs Austin asked the children what the rules of the library were as a reminder about appropriate behaviour. This reminder also provided the opportunity for Eve to learn from her peers about expected behaviour. Peters (2004a) documented how new entrants learn by observing their peers and using other children as models. Mrs Austin was supporting this way of learning.

Teacher strategy: Affirming children who help the new entrant.

Mrs Austin created an environment where helping others was expected and affirmed. She explained that helping each other is an important part of the school philosophy. As well as creating opportunities for children to help Eve and asking them to help her, Mrs Austin used positive reinforcement to encourage children to be helpful to her. In the following example, a child is rewarded when he helps Eve to participate in doing the Hokey Tokey in te reo Māori:

Eve stands in the circle watching the other children but does no actions. At the end of the song the children take hands and move in and out together. Eve does not put out her hand. J, the child next to her, grabs her hand, looking at the teacher as he does so. Mrs Austin nods. Eve runs in and out with the other children.

Mrs Austin: J, come here. I am going to give you a sticker because you didn't forget our new friend and tried to help her." (OB C1 Day 3)

The helper in this incident looked to the teacher for affirmation that he should reach his hand out to Eve and help her join in. Although in this case the child who helped was given a sticker, the most frequent way of affirming children who supported Eve was through praise and encouragement. For example Mrs Austin acknowledged S's support for Eve by saying "Awesome S. I love the way you are supporting Eve, helping her but not doing it for her" (OB C1 Day 1). Such comments, show value for the more experienced child's help and also highlight when they are helping in an appropriate way. Children were also often thanked for being helpful to Eve.

Summary.

In this classroom, the teacher deliberately fostered an environment where children were expected to help and support the new members of their class. Mrs Austin provided many opportunities for children to work together and selected group members carefully. However, as Topping (2005) noted, giving children the opportunity to work together is not sufficient for

peer learning to occur and Mrs Austin supported the children by helping them understand how to help their peers. Mrs Austin gave Eve the chance to learn from her peers in many different ways and while most of these were deliberate, others were a result of the pedagogy employed. The children were thus enabled to be active in helping Eve to learn about school and build on what she learned by observing the more experienced children. Peer learning was a significant way in which Eve learned about the culture of school during her first two weeks in the classroom.

Chapter Five

Case Study Two: John and Mrs Harding

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the second case study. Data collection for this case took place in May in a high decile primary school. John joined a recently established new entrant class. Mrs Harding had frequently relieved at the school before she was appointed to this teaching position, her first appointment as a new entrant teacher.

Data was coded in the same way as the data from Case Study One. Although similar themes emerged from the second case, categories used in the first case study were not initially used for coding. This approach was taken so that differences between contexts could emerge; the data guiding the analysis, rather than predetermined ideas shaping the analysis. For this reason, data from this case study was not analysed until case study one had been analysed.

Strategies new entrants use to learn from their peers.

While school can be very different from children's prior-to-school contexts, when children start school they have already had experiences which help shape their schooling experience. Children will have developed strategies which can assist them to learn about the culture of school. Rogoff et al. (2003) state that when children encounter new contexts they need to learn about the processes in which they will engage. One of the ways children learn about new contexts is through observation.

New Entrant strategy: Learning by observing peers.

Mrs Harding indicated her awareness that children observe and copy others to learn the routines of the classroom. New children “look at the other children and they see, ‘Oh ok, this is what we do in the classroom’” (INT T2 p.1). This evidence of how children learn classroom routines was reinforced by John when he said that he knew to put his bag in his cubby hole “because the other people did that and I copied them.”(INT C2 p.2). The classroom observations confirmed that John observed and copied his more experienced peers so that he could learn about the routines of school. As well as helping him to learn about the routines of the classroom, John’s observations of his classmates helped him to engage in the classroom learning experiences and helped him fit into the peer culture.

As was found in Case Study One, watching and copying was a mechanism which assisted John in participating in classroom experiences. On John’s first morning at school this process of “intent participation” (Rogoff, et al., 2003) was observed during a literacy lesson:

The teacher holds up an alphabet chart, pointing to the letters of the alphabet. She names the letters and makes the sounds and the children copy her. John watches throughout the first few letters then begins to join in saying the letter and copying the sounds with the other children. He looks at the other children frequently. At times the children call out a noun that relates to the letter.

When they get to the letter ‘O’ John says: “octopus” The teacher affirms this. John knows lots of the correct letters and sounds and begins to make them as the teacher points to the letters without waiting to copy the teacher. (OB C2 Day 1)

John initially watched and listened to what was happening. He quickly worked out what Mrs Harding was expecting the children to do and began to join in. Once he was confident in saying the letters and sounds with the other children, he took his participation to another level and did not wait for the other children to model what to say and do.

As well as assisting John to participate in whole class experiences, looking at what the other children were doing helped John to work out what to do when completing his written work.

Mrs Harding puts the modelling book open on the table saying: "Start with 'on'. A you've already written it!" John looks at A's book and writes an 'O'. The teacher praises him. He writes an 'N'. John continues to copy the story. He often looks at the other children's books as he works.

Mrs Harding dots a 'W' for N to trace over commenting that it is a tricky letter. She does this for another child too.

N: "Mrs Harding. I've done it."

Mrs Harding: "Well done, now go onto the next word."

John looks at N's book. He is up to 'was'. Mrs Harding had dotted a 'w' for N and another child. John does not attempt a 'W' till the teacher sees he is up to 'W' and dots it for him. He then confidently and quickly copies the rest of the story. (OB C2 Day 1)

John looked at other children's work when he heard the teacher praise them, using his observations to make sure he was doing the right thing. Of further interest in this example is that John waited for the teacher to dot a letter for him to trace over. The teacher had not told him to wait for her to do this, which meant he had observed her doing this for the other two children and expected that she would do it for him. As he then seemed confident to copy the rest of the story independently, it was possible that he did not really need her to do this. Copying the other children had resulted in John waiting for help which may not have been necessary.

Fabian (2002) writes that one of the challenges for new entrants is to become part of the group. As well as learning about the routines and culture of the classroom, children must learn how to fit into peer culture. While watching and copying the other children had helped John to know the right things to do at school, he also used these strategies to help him to become part of the peer group. Sometimes becoming part of the peer group involved doing things that the teacher would not have found appropriate such as copying another child doing star jumps when walking in line or becoming part of a cat game using the cushions in the library.

John moved very quickly from watching to full participation in the classroom experiences. There are very few observed incidences of John watching and copying the other children after the first week of observations. The small size of the class and the limited experience of the other children in the class, who only started school a week before John, may have contributed

to this. John also appeared to have already developed many skills and knowledge which were valuable at school. However, there were some things that John needed to learn and his peers played a role in helping him to learn them.

Strategies experienced peers use to help new entrants learn what to do at school.

Although John stated that none of the children in the class helped him, there were times when the children assisted John in knowing what to do. John may not have recognised the ways in which the children were active in helping him to learn about the culture of the classroom. He may have interpreted “helping” in a different way. It is not surprising that at times the children supported John to know what to do. As Haworth et al. (2006) suggest more experienced children have ideas about what is important for others to know, and they help them to learn these things.

Peer strategy: Telling.

Mrs Harding explained that the children tell each other what to do and that this helped children to learn the expectations, rules and routines of the classroom

...the other children will say, oh we need to have our whole lunchboxes for lunch, or, we need to put our lunchboxes away when we are finished. We put our chairs in when we are finished at the table. (INT T2 p.1)

Children were observed telling John to wipe his feet before entering the classroom, when to start doing things and where to write in his book confirming what Mrs Harding said. John was responsive to what the other children told him and in this way was able to participate in the classroom culture.

New entrants can be reassured by the information shared by more experienced children. When the children went out to practise cross country A explained that there is no need to worry because “the teacher will tell you where to go, ‘cos I went the wrong way and they call to you” (OB C2 Day 6). This child’s past experience had taught him that the teachers were there to help if things went wrong during the cross country. A appeared to realise that this information would be reassuring to a new entrant such as John. Wood and Fid (2005) found that children often focussed on regulating the behaviour of others by telling them what to do; findings confirmed in this case. Apart from the cross country example though, children tended to confine their help to telling John what to do or how to do something, possibly paralleling Dockett and Perry (2007b) who found that from the children’s perspective one of the most important aspects of starting school was to know the rules.

Strategies teachers use to support peer learning about what to do at school.

Mrs Harding was aware more experienced children could play a part in helping new entrants to learn about the culture of school and encouraged this to happen. However, opportunities for peer learning were somewhat limited in this context. Williams (2001) argues interactions between children are affected by the actions of the teacher. In this case, it is clear that the amount and type of peer learning that occurred was mediated not just by the decisions and actions of the teacher, but also by the size and composition of the class.

Teacher strategy: Providing opportunities for children to work together.

Tamati (2005) observed that it is important for teachers to plan opportunities for shared learning to occur. However, Hagan (2005) found that constraints of the New Zealand

curriculum and the classroom could limit opportunities for shared learning. In this case, the small class size possibly affected the amount and type of peer learning that happened.

Hagan (2005) found most collaboration between children occurred during teacher assigned curriculum tasks or child initiated tasks and less during whole class learning. There were no observed instances of children collaborating to complete tasks or scaffolding each other's academic learning in this classroom. Due to small class size the teacher worked with children during teacher assigned tasks and there was little opportunity for child initiated learning. The opportunities for peer interaction which was not mediated by the teacher were therefore limited.

Older children in the school can also model the language, behaviours and learning attitudes which are expected at school (Hartley, et al., 2012). As the school ran a buddy programme where new entrants were matched with an older child there was opportunity for new entrants to be supported by older students. During the observations buddies came to the class once; to give 'their' new entrant a welcome to school card. Mrs Harding was unsure of the purpose of this buddy system as she was newly appointed, but thought it could be a good system if well organised. She stated that buddy reading with older buddies could be useful in modelling to new entrants the value of school learning:

...that kind of thing is just fostering a love of stories and reading and showing that wow, my buddy can read so I can learn to read too. (INT T2 p.4)

Hartley et al. (2012) also suggest that older buddies can be role models for new entrants. However, Mrs Harding also discussed some challenges to using older buddies, including planning times which suited teachers in both classrooms, crowded classrooms and suitability of buddies.

Teacher strategy: Selecting groups and buddies

When asked if there were any strategies not currently used which would facilitate more peer learning Mrs Harding suggested she could use more experienced children to help the new children to know where to write and draw their picture during writing and handwriting time. However, she said this would be difficult as the children were grouped by ability so more experienced children sit apart from new entrants. In this way, the perceived constraints of the classroom can affect the opportunities for peer learning.

Buddies were assigned to new entrants on their first day of school to support them at lunch time. Mrs Harding explained that she let children volunteer to be the buddy and that “they usually rise to that responsibility quite well” (INT T2 p.3). She also felt that a certain type of child was most likely to volunteer:

Usually it’s the same kind of children that will do it. Yes, it’s the ones with siblings, and younger siblings, that seem to be the ones that go “oh I’ll do it.” (INT T2 p.3)

Observations did not include break times, but on John’s first day at school all of the children, except one, had to be called to come in from play time despite the bell ringing. It is likely that as John’s buddy had only been at school a week, he was still unsure about certain aspects of the schooling routines. A buddy is only useful if they have enough experience of school to support the new entrant.

Teacher strategy: Telling experienced children how to help.

In contrast to Case Study One, there were fewer occasions when more experienced children were given clear guidance of when and how to help a new entrant. Possibly the smaller class size meant the teacher could provide more guidance to children rather than relying on the more experienced children to help. John also seemed to know a lot about what was expected

at school and did not require a lot of support. However, Mrs Harding did expect the children to help each other, reminding them that “you are the big, first children who are coming to school so you will need to teach the new children what to do.” (OB T2 Day 3). She also asked children to help those who were new to school. During cross country John and A were asked to look after L who had just started school that day and to run with him. Although they agreed to help L, it was observed that they soon ran ahead of him. As Williams (2007) found, when competition is involved it can be difficult for children to choose between winning and providing support for peers. Alternatively the excitement of the race may have meant that John and A forgot that they were supposed to be helping L.

Teacher strategy: Using experienced children as a model.

Like Mrs Austin in Case Study One, Mrs Harding frequently used other children as models for those who were new to school. One way she did this was to point out the behaviour of other children. On John’s first day at school, he was banging his bag on the floor when Mrs Harding said “No John. See how the other children have got theirs. Flat on the floor.” (OB C2 Day 1). John immediately looked at what the other children were doing and put his bag down.

As Mrs Harding explained, another strategy was to prompt other children to tell her what they should be doing so that the new child could learn classroom routines such as how to sit on the mat. There were many observed instances of this strategy being used to highlight routines. However, she also used this strategy during whole class work to get a more experienced child to explain a learning strategy. In the following example, A is prompted to tell the class how he worked out what the title of the book was:

Mrs Harding gets out a big book called ‘Dog.’

A: “D.”

Mrs Harding: “Yes a ‘D’.”

A: “Dog.”

Mrs Harding: "How did you know it said Dog?"

A: "I saw the picture."

Mrs Harding: "Yes the pictures help us know what the words say." (OB C2 Day 1)

This excerpt shows how Mrs Harding encouraged A to explain his strategy for working out the word Dog. A's explanation provided a model for the other children of a strategy they could use when reading, and suggests that teachers can successfully use children to model learning approaches.

The work children have done can also be used as a model. As noted earlier, John often looked at other children's work to help him to know what to do or whether his action was correct. However, the teacher can also use a child's work as a model for new entrants. Mrs Harding explained that sometimes she shared a child's work to draw attention to features she expected. For instance, she might show the children a child's writing and say "oh look this person has started with a capital letter. This person has spaces between their words. This person has a full stop at the end." (INT T2 p.2). An example of children's work being used as an example was observed when Mrs Harding had asked the children to draw a picture in their books and opened N's book to show them a picture N had drawn another day. Both Peters (2004) and Hagan (2005) found that new entrants learn from observing their peers. By using more experienced children and their work as models Mrs Harding was highlighting valued behaviours John could observe and copy.

Teacher strategy: Establishing classroom routines.

One way teachers can help children to learn from what they see their peers doing is to plan recurrent activities (Williams, 2001). Children can then see from the repeated routines what is expected and move towards full participation. Mrs Harding planned a very structured routine

at the beginning of the day where the children discussed the date and the weather, the roll was called and news was shared. John had the opportunity to observe the same things occurring several times so he could quickly learn what was expected from watching the other children. Having a routine was a deliberate strategy employed by Mrs Harding to support the new children to learn the routines as she stated that repetition helped the children to know the routine really well and that the new children could then observe and “learn from them.”(INT T2 p.2).

Teacher strategy: Affirming children who help the new entrant.

Mrs Harding expected the children to help new entrants in the class. This expectation was enshrined in the classroom treaty that the children wrote during the first week of the term and revisited the day John and H started school. The treaty stated that children agreed to “help the new people in our class when they do not know what to do” (OB C2 Day 1). By having this statement in the treaty and revisiting it, Mrs Harding made it clear more experienced children were expected to help children who were new. Mrs Harding commented that this expectation to help others was part of the caring atmosphere she wanted to foster in the classroom.

Having created a ‘helping’ environment, it was not surprising that Mrs Harding praised and rewarded children when they were helpful to new children. On one occasion B was praised for being “a good friend” (OB C2 Day 1) when she helped a new entrant child to put away her book and was rewarded with a sticker. This positive reinforcement was designed to encourage this type of behaviour.

Additional aspects of peer learning

Ako.

Peer learning is not a one way process. Both Angelova et al. (2006) and Hartley et al. (2012) found that the teacher/learner roles can be interchangeable. As, arguably, John came to school with many experiences which were valuable in the classroom context, there were times when he was able to act as a model for others. The following observation occurred on John's third day at school.

The first three children cannot do the monkey bars. They swing on the first bar and Mrs Harding helps them down. John can do the monkey bars and happily swings his way along to the end without any help. B is after him and she tries to do the bars. N is next. She can do the bars. The children have another turn, this time the children who were not able to swing along the monkey bars give it a go. (OB C2 Day 3)

Here John was positioned as an expert even though it was only his third day at school. Once the other children had observed John and N successfully negotiate the monkey bars, they gained confidence to try it out.

Later on this same day, John was also able to share his expertise academically. John took on the expert role during writing time when Mrs Harding asked the children to help her spell 'apples' when she was modelling story writing:

John calls out 'A' for apples. The teacher asks him to stand up and point to the letter on the alphabet chart. John stays by the chart and points to each letter as it is identified before the teacher writes it in the modelling book. (OB C2 Day 3)

Fleer, Hedegaard and Tudge (2009) state that while children will change in response to entering a new environment, they will also influence and affect the classroom environment. One way this can happen is by the sharing of knowledge and learning as in this example. While the teacher and children are able to show John new things, he also had something to contribute to the learning experience.

New entrant becoming a tuakana.

In a small class consisting of children who were very new to school, it is not surprising that John moved quickly to take on the tuakana role of helping other children who were new to school. Exactly a week after John started school, three new children joined the class. In the following observation, John and L (who started school that day) had been asked to tidy away a tarpaulin that the children sat on while they ate their morning tea:

L starts to fold the tarpaulin. John says “Don’t fold it yet. You have to shake it.” They take it outside. They each take one end and shake it up and down several times. Then John directs L as they fold it together lengthwise twice. John says: “Fold it, fold it” and they fold it over and over until it is small and tidy. (OB C2 Day 6)

As John has completed this task before he is able to tell L the right way to fold up the tarpaulin and L follows his instructions. John had become the child who had the knowledge of what to do at school and so could help L to do the right thing.

Summary.

Over the first two weeks of John’s transition to school he had the opportunity to learn both what to do and how to learn at school from his peers. By observing the other children John quickly learned how to fit into the culture of both the classroom and his peer group. The other children told him many things that helped him to keep to the rules and routines of the school but opportunities for peer learning were affected by small class size and the way children were grouped according to ability. The oldest children in the class had only been at school one week when John started school so there was a limited range of ability and knowledge about school that could be shared. John moved quickly from being a “new” child to being expected to be a role model and to help the other children. Mrs Harding expected the children to help

each other and gave children the opportunity to learn from each other by asking questions, which highlighted the rules and routines, pointing out children who were doing the right thing and by getting children to explain their learning strategies. The use of consistent routines enabled the new entrant children to learn by watching the others as they engaged in repeated experiences. There was also potential for peer learning to occur through the matching of children with older buddies. Even in this newly established class, it was evident that when children transition into the classroom, they learn what to do and how to learn from their peers.

Chapter Six

Case Study Three: Rob and Mrs Worden

Introduction

The findings from Case Study Three are presented in this chapter. This case study took place in May and June in a special character, lower decile school. Mrs Worden was an experienced new entrant teacher. Rob attended a nearby childcare centre prior to school entry. The teacher noted that children who transitioned from this particular centre usually settled well, but as Rob had not attended any classroom visits prior to his first day she was unsure how prepared he was for the school environment. There were 16 children in the class and there was a wide spread of ages as some children had been at school for over a year.

Data from this case study was analysed in a consistent way to that used with the previous case studies. Coding of these data did not begin until Case Study Two was complete in order avoid confusion with this case.

Strategies new entrants use to learn from their peers

As with the two other case studies, Rob was an active participant in learning about what to do at school. He did not wait to be told what to do by the teacher or by the other children. He appeared to want to learn about the classroom expectations and used the other children as a guide to what he was expected to do.

New entrant strategy: Learning by observing peers.

Hagan (2007) documented how in the new entrant classroom children watch and copy their peers. Interview data suggested Mrs Worden was aware of the benefits of new entrants learning by copying other children. Many observations documented the way in which she encouraged this to happen. When the class was playing a game using the smart board on Rob's first day at school a child commented that Rob would learn what to do by copying. The teacher affirmed this saying "Yes. Rob can just copy." (OB C3 Day 1). Mrs Worden explained that the classroom visits made prior to starting school gave children an opportunity to see what was involved in being a school student; they could start to observe and copy other children. In this way, by the time children started school they would already have learned some of the expected patterns of behaviour in the classroom. Rob had not attended any classroom visits so had not previously observed what was expected at school. However, he quickly began to pick up and copy aspects of classroom life that the teacher had not explained.

By watching and copying the other children, Rob was able to learn the rules of participating in the classroom particularly during his first few days at school. In the first week Rob watched the other children raise their hands and he copied this several times. On his second day in the classroom, when the teacher asked the children to "sit up nicely" (OB C3 Day 2) a child immediately crossed his arms. Rob saw the child do this and folded his own arms.

By observing what other children were doing, Rob learned about unfamiliar tasks and resources such as how to use the smart board and how to explore the reading programme on the computer. The first time Rob used the classroom computers Mrs Worden showed him how to click on an icon so that the computer would read a story to him. After a while, Rob noticed that a child on another computer was doing something different, so he copied that child and clicked on the individual words. Later, he tried to find a game which another child was playing. By observing what the other children were doing on the computers Rob may have been

empowered to explore the different functions of the computer.

If Rob was unsure of what to do, he sometimes looked at the work of the children who were near him and would copy what they were doing. Doing this helped him to work out what his task involved. Even when the teacher had explained the task, there were times when Rob looked at someone else's work and copied what they were doing, as this observation from his first day at school shows:

Rob is doing a worksheet on which there is a bee. On each wing is a letter b which the children are supposed to trace over. Rob colours in a little bit of the wings. He stands and looks at P's work. P has traced over the letters on his bee's wings. Rob sits and traces over a b on one of his bee's wings then returns to colouring in the wing. (OB C3 Day 1)

In the example above, it is not until Rob looked at P's work that he seemed to be aware that there was more to the task than just colouring in the picture. Observing the way other children were doing their work enabled Rob to do what was expected of him.

As seen in the first and second case studies, by observing the activities of other children, new entrants can work out how to participate in classroom experiences. Williams (2001) contends that children observe their peers to learn what is expected as they move towards full participation. This process of "intent participation" (Rogoff, et al., 2003, p. 175) is evident in the data collected during Rob's early days at school. The following observation, demonstrates how watching and copying enabled Rob to join in the action song with confidence:

The other children are familiar with this song and at times anticipate the actions. Rob watches the other children and copies what they do. When a child makes a mistake and puts the beanbag on his shoulder instead of his elbow Rob copies him. Even though the teacher is also doing the actions Rob is watching and copying the other children with an intent expression on his face.

During the second song Rob is more confident and smiling. Sometimes he listens and does what the song tells him rather than watching the other children. (OB C3 Day 3)

As music time progressed, Rob moved from intently watching the other children to listening to the song to help him know what to do; eventually he joined in the actions without the need to watch so carefully.

Several researchers have noted that there are benefits for children who start school in a classroom where they already have a friend (Fabian, 2002; Hartley, et al., 2012; Peters, 2004a; Tamarua, 2006). Rob's friendship with a child who had started school before him impacted on his learning of what to do at school. Rob and P had attended the same childcare and were already friends when Rob started school. During the classroom observations it was noticed that Rob often turned to his friend (P) to watch what he was doing or to look at his work. Rob did watch and copy other children but tended to have a preference for using P as a model for what he needed to do, particularly on his first day at school. Often Rob waited until P did something before he copied, even though other children had already done the required task and Rob could have copied them. Because Rob was already friends with P it is possible that a level of trust had already been built up between the boys (Fabian, 2013) and Rob felt he could rely on P to do the right thing; hence he was a trusted role model.

Watching and copying was a valuable learning tool to help children to learn about appropriate school behaviour from more experienced peers. However, at times children can copy behaviour that the teacher sees as undesirable and Rob was no different. During Rob's second week at school he copied another child who was making faces and crawling around at mat time. Another time Rob copied inappropriate behaviour on the way to the hall:

At first Rob walks exactly as the teacher has described with hands behind his back despite the other boys hopping, jumping etc. When they are nearly to the hall, some boys walk along a ledge beside the footpath. Rob copies them. The teacher notices and tells them not to because it is slippery. When she turns her back some boys do it again, including Rob. (OB C1 day 2)

While copying this type of behaviour did not help Rob to fit in with the teacher's expectations, it was a way in which he could show that he fitted in with the peer culture. Feeling like part of the group is an important aspect of transition (Fabian, 2002).

While copying other children can help a new entrant to work out what to do at school, this is only possible if the child or children being copied know what to do themselves (Barnard, 2002). There were times when Rob copied others who were not doing what the teacher required:

Mrs Worden asks the children to run around the field and then back to class. Rob is watching the children next to him and does not appear to be listening to Mrs Worden. The three children who are standing near him head off in the wrong direction taking the shortest route back to class. Rob follows them. (OB C3 Day 8)

The new entrant cannot always be sure that the children they are watching and imitating are doing the correct thing. If new entrants rely on watching the other children rather than listening to the teacher this can lead to them doing the wrong thing. However, most of the observed instances of Rob watching and copying his peers involved him learning to participate in school as the teacher expected and his peers were also eager to help him learn about school.

Strategies experienced peers use to help new entrants learn what to do at school.

It has been shown that when new entrants start school they are able to watch and learn from other children. However, the other children are not just passive models for the new child to copy. In Mrs Worden's classroom the more experienced children took an active role in helping Rob to learn about school. Having a friend in the classroom was a benefit to Rob, as P, Rob's friend, seemed very conscious of the need to help Rob learn about classroom life and featured in many of the observations. Rob was aware of this. When asked if anyone at school had been really helpful to him the only child he mentioned was P. While the high levels of

assistance given by P in the early days of Rob's transition could have resulted in Rob becoming dependent on P (Barnard, 2002), this did not occur. Rob gradually became more independent, reflecting the findings of Haworth et al. (2006) that tuakana teina like relationships are ultimately supportive of individual independence.

Peer strategy: Telling.

As was found in the first and second case studies, one strategy that the children often used was to tell Rob what to do. At times a child would notice that Rob was not participating in an activity in the required manner and so would tell him what to do. An example was observed during music time on Rob's third day at school:

Mrs Worden: "C can you show the children what we do with the happy sticks while D collects the bean bags?"

C takes the two sticks and puts one under each armpit. The teacher hands sticks to 5 children who all put them under their armpits like C. Rob gets his and bangs them together. P grabs one off him and tells him what to do. Rob takes the stick back and puts his sticks under his armpits. (OB C3 Day 3)

Although Rob was able to watch and copy what the other children were doing when unsure of what to do, he did not always do so. Mrs Worden was aware that, while the class were familiar with the sticks and would know what to do, Rob would not be familiar with what was required so she asked a child to demonstrate for him. Even though there was a model that Rob could copy he did not copy the model. P noticed that Rob was not doing as he was supposed to and told him what to do. P made sure that Rob was able to participate appropriately.

In every classroom there are 'rules' which everyone appears to know about. These 'rules' can be ones which are present in most classrooms, like putting your hand up or asking to go to the toilet. Parents or teachers may explain these rules to new entrants or they may see them in action and so be able to copy the other children doing them. However, each classroom has its

own peculiarities and these may not be evident to children until they get them wrong. At one point Rob was unaware that one of the pencils was to be used only by a particular child who was struggling with holding the pencil correctly. However, P soon put him right saying, "That's not for you. That is for B." P is very clear about the rules of the classroom and this is only one example of him telling Rob what to do or what not to do. In this way, he teaches Rob about many aspects of classroom life confirming Barnard's (2002) finding that children explain tasks to each other during peer learning episodes.

Peer strategy: Showing or modelling.

An interesting aspect of this case was that, instead of telling Rob what to do, there were times when P would take Rob's hand and show him what to do. It appeared that when Rob was unsure what to do, P would notice and provide him with guidance by taking his hand and leading him to where he should be. This peer guidance occurred on Rob's first morning at school:

After assembly the children walk back to class in line. Rob stands by the teacher's chair looking lost. The other children sit down on the mat and the teacher goes to her desk. P stands back up, goes to Rob, takes his hand and leads him to the mat where they sit down together. (OB C3 Day 1)

Although Rob could easily have looked at what other children were doing and copied them, it was not until P took his hand that Rob sat on the mat with the other children. Perhaps he was waiting for the teacher to tell him what to do. However, P was quick to notice that Rob needed support and provided it by taking his hand. P was observed to take Rob's hand and show him what to do several times during Rob's first day at school, but less frequently on subsequent days.

Peer strategy: Scaffolding academic learning.

As discussed, Rob's friend featured a lot in supporting him to learn about the rules of school and helping him to participate. Having a friend in the classroom increases the opportunities peer scaffolding to occur (Peters, 2004a) and there were times when P provided scaffolding of academic learning for Rob. One example happened on Rob's first day at school when P was reading a story to him. The story had a repeated phrase on each page where the only difference was the last word in the sentence. Rob noticed the repetition and exclaimed:

Rob: "It's the same one"

P: "No, it's different" He points to the last word. (OB C3 Day 1)

Here P was taking responsibility for making sure that Rob was aware of the difference on each page. As well as telling him it was not the same he pointed to the last word to clarify his point, scaffolding Rob's awareness of text and meanings of words.

Peer strategy: Supporting participation.

When children start school they may not be confident or knowledgeable about how to participate; other children in the class can support them to know how to participate (Rogoff, 2003). When playing a maths game Rob was supported to participate by another child:

Mrs Worden explains how to play the game which is similar to bingo. Rob watches as 5 children have turns then throws the dice. He counts pointing to the spots on the dice.

Mrs Worden: "Have you got a number 6?"

Rob says nothing. After a couple of seconds V says to Rob: "Yes."

Rob says: "Yes." Mrs Worden tells him to get a counter. V shows him where to put it. (OB C3 Day 8)

The game of bingo is new to Rob and although he observed other children have their turn, he still needed support to participate. It is not clear whether Rob was unable to recognise the number six or whether he was just unsure how to respond. V picked up on this and prompted

Rob by telling him what to say and showed him where to place the counter. In this way, V provided scaffolding for Rob.

Peer strategy: Doing things for the new entrant.

Fawcett and Garton (2005) argue that children do not always know how best to help their peers. Mrs Worden observed that at times more experienced children in her classroom were unsure how to help their peers in a constructive way. As she said, "you've got to just watch for that difference between helping and doing it for them." (INT T3 p.3) There were times when Rob's peers tidied up for him, answered for him and did his written work for him. On Rob's first day at school when P had completed his own worksheet he turned to Rob:

P: "Want me to do it for you?" He reaches for Rob's worksheet. Rob pushes it towards him and gives him the pencil. P colours in Rob's picture. Rob lies with his hands on his head looking in the opposite direction. (OB C3 Day 1)

Although Rob could have still been learning what to do at school by watching P as he completed the worksheet, it is evident that this was not happening. However, P was unaware that he may not have been supporting Rob's learning in the most appropriate way. From his point of view, he was helping Rob as was shown when he had finished the worksheet and told the teacher "I helped him."

Strategies teachers use to support peer learning about what to do at school

As previously explored in the earlier cases, teachers have an impact on the amount and type of peer learning and support that happens within the classroom. The types of experiences provided affect the types and amount of peer interaction that occurs (Hagan, 2005). In this classroom Mrs Worden was very aware of the possibilities for peers supporting new entrants

to learn about school, consciously planned for this to happen, and supported children in learning how to help.

Teacher strategy: Providing opportunities for children to work together.

Peer interaction has been found to support both cognitive and language development (Haworth, et al., 2006) so it is important that teachers plan for children to work together. According to Belcher (2006), social skills are important to children who are starting school as some school activities require children to work as groups or with partners. In this classroom, there were many planned opportunities for children to work together and interact. Children were grouped for different curriculum subjects, they played games together, and they worked at tables together where they were allowed to discuss their work as they did it. Before school, and when they had finished their work, children were able to play with toys together.

There were also times when Mrs Worden deliberately planned for peer learning to occur. An example of this occurred several times at mat time when Mrs Worden asked the children to turn to a buddy and talk with them about an aspect of the story she was reading or share an idea they had. In this way, the children were given the chance to share their thinking with each other, to practise their oral language, and to interact with each other.

Another strategy Mrs Worden used to facilitate peer interaction was to get the children to sit in two circles, one inside the other, like a donut, and to pair up to talk about something or complete a task together. For instance, children worked together to find out what was wrong in a picture they were given. One circle of children then moved around and they were given a new picture to discuss. In this way Rob interacted with several other children and could co-construct with them ideas about what was wrong with the picture. He also had the opportunity to practice his oral language skills and worked with children he might not

otherwise have worked with. Mrs Worden talked about the benefits of this type of activity for children's oral language as rather than having one turn each and having to sit and wait for long periods "...they get a turn very quickly and they get three turns..." (INT T3 p.5). Mrs Worden also described how she would organise the donut so that the newest children were in the middle of the donut and did not need to move around because that could be confusing. As the new entrants got used to the activity and had the opportunity to observe how it worked, Mrs Worden would move them to the outside of the ring.

Hagan (2007) suggests that teachers think about how they can promote children's collaboration and give children opportunities to scaffold each other in the new entrant classroom. Mrs Worden did not just rely on current strategies to include interaction in the classroom, she was thinking about alternatives, as Hagan suggests. One strategy she was thinking of trying had been observed in another teacher's classroom where children were allocated to one of two categories for sharing. Mrs Worden said this might be easier to organise than the donut ring and was intending to try it out.

The value of older buddies supporting new entrants has been documented by Hartley et al. (2012). Mrs Worden described how a buddy class can provide opportunities for peer learning to new entrants. In the past, her buddy class had made maths games to share with the younger children. Barnard (2002) observes that the time taken for peer learning can interfere with the more able peers learning, but in this case planning and constructing maths games was a planned part of the older children's learning experience. The classes had also read together. Although there might be a lack of space, this was overcome by half of the other teacher's class coming to Mrs Worden's classroom and half Mrs Worden's children going to the other classroom. However, Mrs Worden said that organising buddy classes was a challenge due to time constraints and the pressure of national standards:

Because now you have, ...you're far more pressurised for the standards.... definitely

that time restraint whereas before, I think we did a lot more sharing with other classes.(INT T3 p.7).

Teacher strategy: Selecting groups and buddies.

If children are to learn from their peers it is important for teachers to pay attention to how children are grouped and who they will work with (Fawcett & Garton, 2005). In this classroom, there were times when children were able to choose who they would work with and times when Mrs Worden matched children up or put them into groups. During the interview, Mrs Worden stated that new entrants learn from the other children about how to be a school child, but observed that the learning can depend on who the new child is buddied with. Mrs Worden explained that there are a number of things to consider when deciding who should be a buddy for a new entrant. She said that it needs to be:

...somebody who fulfils that child's need. So if it's a behavioural issue it would be buddying them up with somebody who can sit beautifully on the mat. Or if it's a learning thing, somebody who had been at school a little bit longer or a child who is further down the road with the learning. (INT T3 p.2).

When the observations took place the children were allowed to sit where ever they liked when completing written work. However when the interview took place, Mrs Worden had decided to use a seating plan to cater for the expanding class numbers and the need for children to learn to work independently. Mrs Worden had carefully considered how children were placed and what they might learn from each other:

My new ones I've buddied up with some of the older ones, but not in every case. There's one who's only been at school since the beginning of this term, and he's one of my buddies that I'm using for a new one sitting next to him, because he's got really good working skills, when he's working independently at his table. (INT T3 p.2)

This comment shows that Mrs Worden knew the children and their strengths and was aware

that even though some children had been at school for a shorter time this did not mean that they could not act as role models to others. However, Mrs Worden also discussed how difficult it can be if there are no older children in the class to act as role models and give support to the new entrants. When describing a year when there was a big influx of five year olds and the children got moved up to a new class within six months, Mrs Worden said “that year I really, really noticed the difference, because there was nobody... to be the role-models” (INT T3 p.4). It is not just the composition of groups within the class which impact on peer learning, but also the composition of the class itself.

Teacher strategy: Telling experienced children how to help.

As seen in these data, at times children are not sure how to help the new entrant and may end up doing things for them. Mrs Worden was conscious this could happen. She explained that when a more experienced child did things for the new child it was an opportunity to teach the child how they can help. When she had noticed this happening earlier in the year she had talked to the whole class: “I got them to think about why that wasn’t helpful, why it wasn’t being helpful, and they figured it out” (INT T3 p.4). The children realised that the new entrant was not learning from having things done for them. One child said that it would be a problem when the ‘helper’ moved to a new classroom and was no longer there to do things for the new entrant reflecting Barnard’s (2002) contention that peer learning can result in dependencies developing. Mrs Worden then asked the children how they could help and the children said “they could have been a teacher and explained to them what to do if they didn’t know.” (INT T3 p.4). In this way, the children became more aware of the role they played in supporting new entrants to learn at school, as well as the appropriate ways to offer their help.

Teacher strategy: Using experienced children as a model.

Like the other teachers, Mrs Worden frequently used other children as a model to the new entrant of how to behave and what to do. One of the ways she did this was by pointing out children who were behaving appropriately saying such things as “if you are ready for lunch you look like R” (OB C3 Day 1) or “I love P’s quiet hand” (OB C3 Day2). When Mrs Worden said things like this Rob would often look at the child and copy them.

Writing shared stories together was often a time when Mrs Worden got children to share their knowledge and tell or model to the other children what to do. In the following observation Mrs Worden was working on the mat with a group of children writing a story with them on the white board:

Mrs Worden: “K what comes at the end of our story?”

N: “full stop.”

K: “full stop.”

Rob: “full stop.” (quietly)

The teacher gets K to stand up and put a full stop at the end of the story. (OB C3 Day 6)

The children and Mrs Worden talked about and discussed what was going to be written and Mrs Worden wrote the sentence on the board. She could have put a full stop at the end of the sentence and told the children that this was what she was doing. Instead, Mrs Worden chose to ask a child who she thought would know what to do. We can see from Rob’s whispered response that he was attentive. Mrs Worden reinforced the learning by getting K to model what a full stop is.

When working with the class Mrs Worden also highlighted the strategies that children were using so that other children would understand different ways to find an answer:

The teacher has a hundreds’ board and asks C to show her a number. C flips the right number around. Mrs Worden then gets P to come up and find number 7. Instead of just pointing to the number 7 he begins at 1 and points to all the numbers till he gets to number 7.

Mrs Worden: "Did you see what P did? He didn't know which number was 7, so he thought in his head and he made a plan. He counted 1,2,3,4,5,6,7 and flipped the right number over." (OB C3 Day 8).

Rob had not seen the hundreds board before, so by observing he learned that when asked you can just flip the number over if you know it. When P had his turn, Rob could see that there was another way to find the number if it was not recognised. Mrs Worden clarified what P was doing so that Rob (and other children) could understand the strategy and perhaps use it too. Mrs Worden mentioned that while children do learn from watching, and that it was important to provide opportunities for this to happen, sometimes more is needed. Mrs Worden said that she did not take it for granted that children would learn from the modelling. So, if for instance the children were playing a maths game, "I find it's best if you mention, oh wow, look how L is taking turns, can you see how L is waiting for his turn." (INT T3 p.2). The teacher can point out the appropriate behaviour which is being modelled and so guide participation (Rogoff, 2003).

Teacher strategy: Affirming children who help the new entrant.

There were times when Mrs Worden reinforced the value given within the classroom to helping those who were new to the class. On Rob's first morning at school, Mrs Worden explained the reward system used throughout the school. The reward system involved children's names being progressed up a mountain. In giving examples of the kinds of things children might do to help them climb the mountain, Mrs Worden included "helping new people" (OB C3 Day 1) and proceeded to reward P and B for helping Rob by moving their names up the mountain. In this way, Mrs Worden was affirming and rewarding the children who helped Rob and showed the children that she wanted them to help the new entrant child.

Teacher strategy: Supporting children's interactions.

Peer learning involves interaction between peers. Therefore, to support peer learning there is a need for teachers to support and encourage interaction (Fawcett & Garton, 2005; Haworth, et al., 2006). As has been discussed, Mrs Worden encouraged interaction by planning opportunities for children to interact within the learning experiences; however she also introduces children to each other and helps them to interact appropriately.

Children in Dockett and Perry's (2011) study suggested teachers can help new entrants by introducing them to other children, which Mrs Worden did. On his first day at school, Mrs Worden introduced Rob to children in the classroom and helped him to form relationships with them by supporting the interaction which resulted. When W asked her who Rob was she responded:

"This is Rob. He is new so you could be his friend."

W: "Has he got a brother?"

Mrs Worden: "You will have to ask him."

W asks Rob, who starts telling him about his family. The teacher asks some more questions to support the conversation. (OB C3 Day 1)

Mrs Worden was aware that at times children need support to make friends and to be able to work together (Fabian, 2010), so as well as introducing the boys she encouraged W to ask Rob questions about his family and stayed with them till they were conversing freely. Wood and Fid (2005) argue that teachers have a role in facilitating productive discussion between peers. Another example of Mrs Worden supporting peer interaction happened during the donut activity previously described. Mrs Worden asked Rob and his partner questions to help them to stay on task, to help them think more deeply and to sustain the discussion for longer. Mrs Worden supported the children to fully engage in the learning experience.

Additional aspects of peer learning

Ako.

When children start school, although they have a lot to learn, they also have their own strengths, knowledge and experiences which they can share. The role of learner and teacher can be fluid (Tamati, 2005). It is not always the child who has been at school the longest who has the most valuable knowledge. However, as the new person in the classroom the new entrant can be positioned as the one who knows least, even when they are the one who knows most, as in this observation:

The children at Rob's table are singing 'Oma rapeti' as they do a worksheet.

N: "Oma rapeti means running."

Rob: "No. Oma is running."

N: "No. I've been here longer. Oma Rapeti means running." (OB C3 Day 1)

N's position as a child who had been at school longer gave her the confidence to know that she must be correct; she was quick to make it clear that as the more experienced school child she should be believed. Even though Rob was correct, he made no further attempt to correct N's misconception and returned to doing his worksheet.

Summary

It is clear that there were many ways Rob learned about school from his peers. Rob watched and listened to the other children and this helped him move towards full participation in classroom experiences and also helped him learn the rules and routines of the classroom. Rob was supported in learning about the culture of the classroom when other children told him what to do and helped scaffold his academic learning. Having a friend already in the class was

a benefit to him in the process of learning what to do at school, as he often copied this friend, and his friend also helped him learn what to do at school. While Rob was able to contribute his own knowledge and learning to the classroom, his position as the newest child at school meant that the other children did not always value his contribution.

There were many opportunities provided for children to work and learn together which could support new entrants in learning from their peers during their transition to school. Mrs Worden supported children in their interactions and helped them to think about the most appropriate ways of helping the less experienced children in the class. Mrs Worden used other children as a model to the new entrant and valued the help that more experienced children gave to new entrants. In this classroom, peers played a significant role in supporting Rob to learn what to do and how to learn at school.

Chapter Seven

Discussion: Peer learning in three new entrant classrooms

Introduction

When children start school, they enter a new culture in which there are different rules, new routines and unfamiliar learning experiences. In New Zealand, typically, there are already a number of children in the classroom who are familiar with the rules, routines and learning experiences of school when a newcomer arrives. These more experienced peers can support the new entrant in learning what to do at school. However, the way in which children are able to engage in peer learning about school can vary. As Einarsdottir (2007) reminds us, each child's experience of transition will differ because each child is unique. Each classroom is also unique and the particular classroom context has an impact on the experiences of children and the opportunities which are available for peer learning.

This study has examined the way in which peer learning happens during the transition to school. The focus of the study was the transitions of three children into three different schools in a central North Island provincial town. Using a case study approach, the research aimed to answer the following question:

- What role do more experienced school children play in supporting the transition process for new entrants in the New Zealand context?

By answering this question the project addressed the following research objectives, which were to identify:

- Strategies that new entrants use to learn from those who are more experienced;
- Strategies experienced peers use to help new entrants learn what to do at school; and
- Strategies teachers use to support peer learning about what to do at school.

Data collection in each case study began with a series of classroom observations during the child's first two weeks at school. Following these observations, the teacher and transitioning child were interviewed separately using a semi-structured interview format.

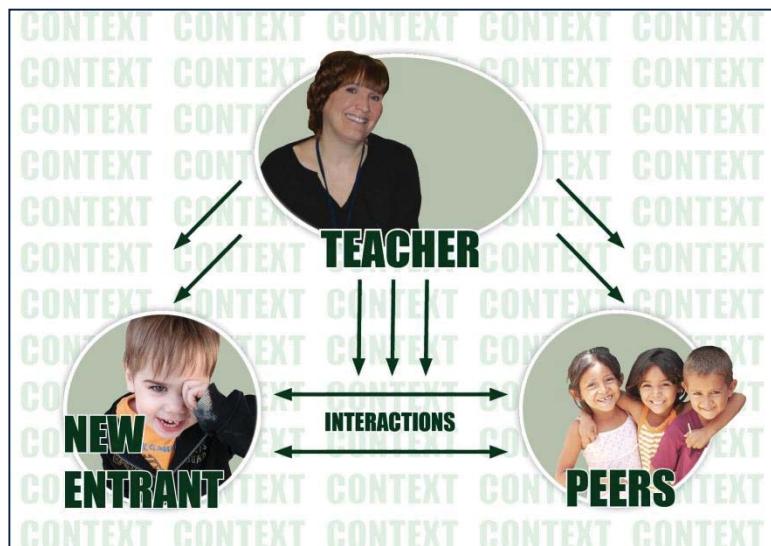
Once data collection in each case study was completed, the data gathered were analysed. By analysing each case separately an understanding was gained of how peer learning was happening in each context. Data from each case were examined for evidence relating to each of the research objectives, and then coded to each objective using NVivo 10 (QSR International, 2012). Data relating to each objective were then revisited and further categorised into the emerging themes relating to peer learning. In this analysis, understandings emerged of the ways in which the three new entrant children were learning about the culture of school from more experienced peers. The ways in which the teachers affected the peer learning which occurred also became evident, as reported in chapters 4, 5 and 6. Strategies identified in each case study were recorded in a table which highlighted the similarities and differences between the cases (Appendix I).

The discussion that follows begins by answering the research question and highlights similarities and differences across the three case studies. An overview is presented of what has been learned about the role more experienced peers play in supporting the transition of new entrants into school in New Zealand. Common themes which emerged in relation to each research objective are then discussed. Finally, the discussion considers other findings that emerged including the role of friends, the notion of *ako* and how quickly a new entrant child becomes the 'more experienced peer'.

Do more experienced children play a role in supporting transition for new entrants?

In this study, peers played a significant role in supporting the learning of new entrants during their early days at school confirming the work of Peters (2004a) and Hagan (2005, 2007). More experienced peers assisted new entrants to learn about the rules and norms of classroom life, participate in unfamiliar experiences, learn academic content, and to fit into the peer culture. Of interest, was the significance of the interactions *between* the new entrant, their peers and the context. The new entrants actively sought to learn from their peers and their peers tried to help them learn what to do at school.

While it is tempting to see peer learning as being only about the interaction between peers, peer learning does not happen in a void. The classroom context and the teacher are also factors which affect the peer learning that occurs. While both the new entrant and the more experienced peers actively participate in peer learning about what to do at school, their interactions are mediated by the teacher and the context. For example the teacher controls the opportunities and the groupings within which children interact. Hagan (2005, 2007) also noted this relationship between the types of experiences teachers plan and peer learning in new entrant classrooms. It is the relationships between the new entrant, the peers, the teacher and the classroom context which affect peer learning during the transition to school. As sociocultural theory explains, learning is embedded in the interactions between people and the context in which these interactions take place (Vygotsky, 1978). The following diagram demonstrates how the interactions between children are affected by aspects of the teacher's practice and the classroom context.



Model of peer learning in the new entrant classroom

All aspects of the model have an impact on the ensuing learning. While the teacher may provide opportunities for, and be supportive of peer learning, the children can choose whether to act within that context. Therefore, a discussion of how peer learning occurs during the transition to school needs to consider the role of the new entrant, the role of peers and the role of the teacher and the context.

Strategies new entrant children use to learn from their peers.

Rogoff et al. (2003) argue that “children everywhere learn by observing and listening-in on activities of adults and other children” (p. 176). Both Hagan’s (2005, 2007) and Peters’ (2004a) investigations of transition to school in New Zealand found that observation of more experienced peers was a way in which children learned about school. Similarly, in all three case studies of this study, it was evident that observing their more experienced peers was a valuable way for the new entrants to learn. While much of this observation was initiated by the new entrant, the teachers did have an influence on the learning new entrants gained by observation.

The new entrants spent a lot of time observing their more experienced peers. Watching their peers enabled the new entrants to learn about the rules of classroom interaction, and helped them to participate appropriately in group experiences as well as to engage in academic learning experiences. This finding is consistent with that of Williams (2001), who showed that through observation children move towards participation in the routines, activities and codes of behaviour of a learning environment. By watching others, children learn how to engage in the cultural activities of the classroom and can move towards participating in these activities. This process of “intent participation” (Rogoff, et al., 2003, p. 175) was observed in all three case studies. Watching and listening to peers meant that the new entrant child was able to see and hear the patterns of interaction in the classroom and could then replicate them. In addition to observing the way in which the more experienced children acted, new entrants also looked at the written work of their peers which could help them to understand what to do and provided a way of checking that they were doing the right thing. However, data showed that difficulties arise if the child whose work or actions are being copied does not know what to do or is doing the wrong thing. Barnard (2002) similarly found some children did not have the required expertise to support the learning of their peers.

While all three of the children used observation to help them to understand what to do at school, variation was seen in how quickly and to what extent new entrants put this learning into practice. Eve appeared to watch things happen many times before she showed confidence to participate fully. By the time the observations were completed, she was still watching a lot in comparison to John and Rob, who were no longer frequently using observation. Fabian (2002) contends that differences in social skills may lead to differences in participation which may explain variation in this study. Although social skills were not measured, Eve’s mother had mentioned that her daughter was shy. The context into which the child transitioned could also have been a factor. John entered a classroom where the

other children had limited experience of the school environment. His peers had only started school a week before and John spent a lot less time watching than either Eve or Rob.

Another influence on the amount of watching and copying a child does could be the match between prior-to-school and classroom experiences. Where children's prior-to-school experiences match well with those of the classroom there is a continuity which supports their participation in school learning experiences (Dockett & Perry, 2007b; Peters, 2010; Tamarua, 2006; Timperley, et al., 2003). Where there is a significant mismatch, Dunlop (2007) contends that new entrants are like a "fish out of water" (p. 159) and they may need to do more watching before participating in classroom experiences. In the second case study John appeared to have strong emergent literacy skills which are useful to school learning. He moved quickly from watching the other children to participating in literacy activities whereas Eve and Rob watched for longer before joining in. The match between home and early childhood experiences was not measured in this study, so analysis is only speculative, but it would be an interesting avenue for further research.

As well as helping children to learn about the teachers' expectations, watching and copying can help children to fit into the peer culture. Both John and Rob were seen replicating actions which reflected their peer culture such as walking in line in a particular way. The behaviour copied in an effort to become part of the peer group was not always valued by the teacher, as the example of Rob making faces on the mat exemplifies. Developing a sense of belonging and beginning to feel like part of the group was seen to be an important part of settling into the classroom (Fabian, 2002; Peters, 2010).

The teachers were all aware of the learning which could occur when new entrant children observed their more experienced classmates. Mrs Harding spoke of her planned regular routines which enabled the new entrant to see things repeated and so be more easily copied. Mrs Worden was observed verbally encouraging the new entrant to watch and copy his peers.

Mrs Austin encouraged new entrants to move from observation to full participation by asking other children to do things before the new entrant needed to engage with the task. The new child was thus provided with the opportunity to observe his or her peers and so learn what to do. In this way the teachers influenced the peer learning which occurred through observation. Although Rogoff et al. (2003) contend that in some cultures children are taught to learn through observation, the role of the teacher in supporting new entrants to learn about school life through observation has not been explored in previous studies of transition.

Williams (2007) and Fabian (2002) found that one way children learn from their peers is by asking questions and Fabian suggests that this is one way children can learn what to do at school. However, during observations there was no time when Eve, John or Rob asked their more experienced peers for help. There were occasions, however, when they asked me what to do, so it is possible that they did not see it as their peers' role to help them when there was an adult present. Even when I responded with a shrug or said "I'm not sure" the children did not ask their peers what to do, instead they asked the teacher. This is one time when children's interaction may have been affected by my presence. It is possible that if I had not been there, the new entrants would have asked a peer for help. Age of the children could also be a factor because children in William's (2007) study were older and may perceive peers as sources of information more than young children.

Strategies peers use to help new entrants learn what to do at school.

Peters (2004a) found that as well as observing and copying their peers, new entrants were instructed by them. These new entrant children were also instructed by their peers. The more experienced children in all of the case studies helped the newcomers by telling them what to do. The instructions tended to be about the 'rules' of the classroom. This finding is not surprising as research into children's perspectives of transition documents the importance

children attach to knowing the rules of school (Dockett & Perry, 2007a; Margetts, 2006; Peters, 2010). Peters (2010) comments that learning the rules means that children feel they are participating appropriately in the classroom and in so doing, feel a sense of belonging in the new setting. The more experienced peers did not need the teacher to tell them when to give rule-focused instructions to the new entrants. It is likely that the more experienced children remembered how important it was to them to know the rules of the classroom when they first started school, and so they prioritised this focus on rules.

All of the classroom observations showed new entrant children learning the rules and what to do from their more experienced peers, however, in only two classrooms were children observed scaffolding the *academic* learning of the new entrant without teacher direction. Perhaps this did not happen in the other classroom due to the small number of children in the class, but it could also be due to the nature of the learning programme which was very teacher directed. Consistent with Hagan's (2005, 2007) findings, peer scaffolding of academic learning occurred during learning experiences where the children worked in small groups without direct teacher supervision. It is possible that, in the presence of the teacher, a child might hesitate to take a direct part in supporting the learning of a less experienced peer; they may see this as the teacher's role. Interactions in the teachers' presence typically flowed between teacher and child/ren, rather than between children, which limited the opportunities for peers to scaffold each other's academic learning. In the two case studies where scaffolding of academic learning was observed, teachers provided many opportunities for Eve and Rob to work with other children without the teacher being involved. For example, children worked in maths and reading groups independently of the teacher. During the observations of John's class, however, children worked under teacher supervision at all times. Opportunities for scaffolding each other's academic learning in this situation were, therefore limited.

The small size of John's class (six students during the first week) meant that the teacher could be with all the children and chose not to have them work in independent groups. Class size is therefore one way in which the classroom context can affect peer learning. In classrooms with a small number of students, it is important to plan carefully to ensure that children have opportunities to work together independent of the teacher. Unless this happens, opportunities are limited for peers to play a role in scaffolding each other's academic learning. As research shows peer scaffolding aids cognition (for example Barnard, 2002; Fawcett & Garton, 2005; Haworth, et al., 2006), it is important that new entrant teachers reflect on how they can provide opportunities for peer learning to occur.

According to Fawcett and Garton (2005) children do not always know the best way to support the learning of their less experienced peers and this was evident in these data. Both Eve's and Rob's peers would at times do things for them instead of helping them to learn how to do things for themselves. It must be remembered however, that even when someone was doing a task for the new entrant, this child may still be learning. If the new entrant is watching their more experienced peer complete a task, the new entrant may be moving towards being able to do the task themselves. This is not always the case though, as observations showed that new entrants did not always watch while their peers completed their work. Both Mrs Worden and Mrs Austin were aware that the more experienced children did things for the new entrants and supported the more experienced children to learn how to help in more effective ways. In this way the teachers influenced peer learning.

One of the ways more experienced peers supported the new entrants was by helping them to join in classroom experiences. Although the new entrants moved into participation by the process of "intent participation" (Rogoff, et al., 2003, p. 176) described previously, there were times when their peers took an active role in encouraging and supporting participation. Ways in which this occurred included telling the new entrant what to say or do or actually taking the

new entrant's hand. The teacher did not need to tell the more experienced peers to help the new entrant to join in. The more experienced children seemed to sense when the new entrant felt uncertain about joining in. At these times, a more experienced child could provide scaffolding which enabled the new entrant child to participate in the classroom activity.

Strategies teachers use to support peer learning about what to do at school

Dockett and Perry (2007b) argue that teachers are responsible for facilitating smooth transitions to school. As this study demonstrates, more experienced peers play an important role in supporting the transitions of new entrants. Therefore, one of the ways teachers can facilitate smooth transitions is to put in place strategies which support peer learning about what to do at school. As teachers' actions mediate the interactions which happen between children (Hagan, 2005; Williams, 2001), they play a significant role in determining peer learning for new entrant children.

In all three classrooms, the more experienced children were *expected* to help the new entrants to learn what to do at school. In John's case, helping the new children was included as part of the class treaty. Teachers in all three cases valued the more experienced children's role in supporting new entrants by giving positive affirmation when their help was noticed. Value was shown by praising the helper or by giving a reward such as a sticker. In this way teachers encouraged more experienced children to help those who were new to the classroom.

Hagan (2005, 2007) found that peer learning increased when children were involved in small group activities where little teacher direction was given in contrast to whole class, teacher-led experiences. Evidence from these cases confirms that peer learning is enhanced during small group activities where the children direct their own learning. Mrs Austin and Mrs Worden facilitated a variety of small group experiences and more experienced peers were observed

helping the new entrants to learn what to do. For example, when children were playing games, peers instructed new entrants in the rules and supported them to participate. During reading activities more experienced peers supported the new entrants to engage in activities in appropriate ways.

However, peer learning also occurred during teacher-led experiences in this study. Teachers in all three cases deliberately used more experienced children as a model to help the new entrants to learn about what to do and how to learn at school. One way they did this was by praising children who were doing the right thing: when a child was praised, the new entrant would observe and copy what they were doing. This strategy was frequently used to draw attention to aspects of classroom behaviour such as sitting nicely on the mat or putting up a hand, but could also be used to support academic learning. In all three case studies, the teacher used other children as models during shared writing episodes. While writing a story with the whole class, the teachers would call on a child to demonstrate an aspect they wished to highlight or to model a strategy children could use in their own writing. In this way the new entrant children could move towards participation by watching and listening to their peers (Rogoff, et al., 2003). Both small group, child-directed activities and whole class experiences were useful sites for peer learning of what to do and how to learn at school, but the potential for peer learning was mediated by the pedagogical style of the teacher. As Hagan (2007) suggests, teachers need to consider how to structure learning experiences so peer learning is promoted.

How children were grouped was a significant way in which teachers' decisions impacted on peer learning. This finding is not surprising as research shows the importance of teachers carefully considering the grouping of children and the need for mixed abilities within groups (Angelova, et al., 2006; Fawcett & Garton, 2005; Topping, 2005). All three teachers talked about the effectiveness of peer learning when children are grouped by mixed abilities and

mixed ages. However, mixed ability grouping of children was only observed to happen in Eve's and Rob's cases. There appears to be a mismatch between what teachers say and their actual practice in these data (O'Hara, et al., 2011). Where children did not work in mixed ability groups, there were limited opportunities for peer learning and notably no examples observed of more experienced peers scaffolding academic learning. Teachers also noted that care was needed in establishing groups, as some combinations of children do not work and that consideration of learning needs and temperament was important.

New entrant teachers often assign a buddy to help new entrants to learn what to do at school. Fabian (2013) suggests that buddies can support new entrants to learn about school and to make friends. However, Peters (2004a) found that using buddies to support new entrants at lunch or play time is not always useful. All three teachers spoke of giving new entrants a buddy at lunchtime, but suggested care was required. The teachers spoke of the importance of guidelines and the need to ensure that buddies took their responsibilities seriously and to choose more than one buddy to support the new entrant. It was also apparent that when the buddy had little experience of school they were not in a position to provide appropriate support to the new entrant during break times.

Supporting new entrants to develop new friendships is also advocated as a strategy for teachers to use to help new entrants to adjust to the new environment and to feel a sense of belonging (Fabian, 2002, 2010; Margetts, 2013; Peters, 2010). Supporting new friendships may also help new entrants to build relationships within which peer learning can successfully occur. For example, Mrs Worden supported Rob to make friends by introducing him to other children in the class. As well as providing an introduction, Mrs Worden helped the children to get to know each other by participating in conversation with them until they could talk freely. Studies have suggested that to enhance peer learning, teachers must support children to learn to interact effectively (Fawcett & Garton, 2005; Wood & Fid, 2005). By scaffolding social

interactions Mrs Worden set up an environment that was conducive to peer learning, helped keep children on task and deepened their interactions; confirming these earlier studies.

Older buddies can also be role models for new entrants (Hartley, et al., 2012). Different systems of buddies were used in two of the schools. In John's school, the new entrants were matched with a specific child in the senior school. Rob's class had a buddy class in the senior school. Both of the teachers considered that buddy systems with older children had the potential to support new entrants in learning about school, as was documented by the *Mangere Bridge Project* (Hartley, et al., 2012), but noted that it was not always easy to run a successful buddy programme. Barriers such as time, class make-up, space, organisational difficulties and the impact of national standards could get in the way. Although there are some barriers to using older buddies, these can be overcome with careful planning. One teacher overcame the space issues by splitting the children between the two classrooms.

As discussed, more experienced children do not always support new entrants' learning in the most appropriate way. The teacher, therefore, has a role in helping children to learn how to provide support in an appropriate way and at appropriate times. All three teachers in this study asked more experienced children to help the new entrant. Children were asked to help new entrants in a range of ways including helping them to find things, work out how to read a task board, or play games. More specific guidance on how to help the new entrants was also given. Mrs Worden and Mrs Austin discussed the need to teach the more experienced children to help the new entrant, rather than acting for the new entrant. Mrs Worden described how she helped the children understand that if they did things for the newcomer the new entrant might become dependent on them (Barnard, 2002). However, Mrs Austin commented that usually a new entrant would get to a point where they made it clear to the more experienced child that they wanted to do things for themselves. In all three classrooms

the teachers were observed making suggestions about how the more experienced child could help the new entrant. In this way, the teachers influenced peer learning.

Additional aspects of peer learning.

How children are organised and grouped into classes is a contextual factor in the amount of peer learning which occurs. More examples of peer learning occurred in the two classrooms which included children who had been at school for a longer period of time than in the newly established classroom. The children in John's class had only been at school for a week when John started school, so did not have extensive experience of the culture of the classroom to share. These children were still learning about the culture of school and the culture of the classroom may still have been evolving. When more experienced children transitioned into the next classroom, the opportunities for new entrants to be supported by peers were limited, making it difficult for children to learn what to do. One teacher talked about helping new children to learn things which they usually learned from more experienced children when this happened. This study confirms previous findings that the constraints of the classroom can limit opportunities for peer learning to occur during the transition to school (Hagan, 2005).

It can be helpful when a child starts school for them to already have a friend in the classroom (Dockett & Perry, 2007b; Einarsdottir, 2010; Fabian, 2013; Margetts, 2007; Peters, 2003a, 2010). Only one child in this project had an existing friend in the classroom and as the literature suggests, this did benefit him. As Fabian (2013) suggests, having a friend appeared to provide a sense of security for Rob as he usually sat with and worked with his friend. However, it is possible that the characteristics of the friend may be significant. If the friend did not fit in well with the culture of the classroom the result may have been different. He may have modelled behaviour that was less acceptable in the context of the classroom and the new entrant may have copied him. It is also possible that if the new entrant had not had a friend to

rely on, other children would have played a larger role in supporting his learning about what to do at school. Further research is needed into whether friendships are always helpful for children transitioning to school.

In the New Zealand context, as the new entrant learns more about classroom life, it is likely that other children will enter the classroom and need assistance to learn what to do at school. The ‘new-comer’ can then become an ‘old-timer’ who has valuable knowledge about school which can be shared, thereby moving into a tuakana role (Tamati, 2005). It is clear from this study that children move on to becoming a tuakana at different rates. Peters (2010) comments that there are many personal and environmental factors which affect children during their transition. The speed with which a new entrant will move onto being a tuakana who supports the learning of their less experienced peers could be affected by a range of factors. These factors could include the class size, the character of the child involved, the past experiences of the child, the opportunities provided, and the involvement of other children.

School entry does not mark the beginning of children’s learning journey. New entrants bring with them prior knowledge and experiences which are valuable in the school context and may serve to scaffold the learning of their more experienced peers. The role of teacher and learner can be interchangeable (Angelova, et al., 2006; Hartley, et al., 2012; Tamati, 2005) and each child will have an influence on the environment (Fleer, et al., 2009). In John’s and Rob’s cases the fluid nature of the teacher/learner roles were highlighted when the new entrants shared knowledge or demonstrated skills which could be helpful to the other children in the class.

Summary

In describing guided participation, Rogoff (2003) states that it includes not just the interactions which are aimed at instructing children in what to do but the “side by side or distal arrangements in which children participate in the values skills and practices of their

communities without intentional instruction” (p. 284). The teachers in these case studies did tell the new entrants what to do and did support them to learn what to do at school. However, it is evident that the new entrant children learned what to do and how to participate at school in a range of ways which were *not* always planned by the teacher. The children learned by observing and through their peers’ support. Peer learning was a significant factor in assisting these new entrants to learn about the culture of school. The New Zealand practice of admitting children to school on their fifth birthday provides a context for peer learning to happen over the transition to school. Consistent with sociocultural theories, peer learning is also affected by the actions of the teacher and the context of the classroom. The value given within the classrooms to the role of peers in supporting new entrants and the ways the classroom tasks and groups were organised impacted on how new entrant children learned about the culture of the classroom. The “distal arrangements” (p. 284) of the classroom played a significant role in the new entrants learning of what to do and how to learn at school.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

Introduction

A case study approach was used to investigate peer learning over the transition to school. Three children's transitions were the focus of the case studies. Observations and interviews with teachers and new entrants provided a range of data that were thematically analysed. This final chapter will summarise the findings, discuss the strengths and limitations of the research design, highlight implications of this research for schools and teachers and identify some avenues for further research.

Summary of findings

The aim of this research was to investigate the role more experienced school children play in supporting the transition process for new entrants in the New Zealand context. The findings show that children who have had more experience of school provide a role model for new entrants to watch and copy. More experienced children help new entrants to learn the rules and routines of the classroom and can play a role in scaffolding academic learning. The more experienced school children can therefore play a significant role in supporting new entrants during their early days at school, but the findings suggest that the extent to which this support occurs is also influenced by the teacher and the environment.

The findings also showed that new entrants actively seek to learn about what to do at school from their peers. This learning occurs through watching and copying the more experienced children in the classroom. By observing other children, the new entrant is able to identify the appropriate actions to take in a range of learning experiences and so is supported to

participate. Thus new entrants learned about the expectations and rules of the classroom. While all three children moved from watching to participating, it was observed to happen at different rates.

The more experienced school children also actively helped the new entrants to learn about school. More experienced children often told the new entrant what to do or gave the new entrant support which enabled them to participate in classroom experiences. In some contexts, more experienced children were able to scaffold the new entrant's academic learning. At times more experienced children were so keen to help the new entrant they did things for them. The research showed that children bring prior learning to school which they can share with others. New entrants were also observed moving from being the new child to being able to share their knowledge of school with other new entrants.

In addition to the impact of the school children, the teachers and the classroom environment were also factors in the peer learning that happened. Teachers controlled many of the opportunities for peer learning and often chose who the new entrants would work with. Teachers encouraged children to help the new entrants and also provided guidance, modelling and scaffolding to more experienced children in how to help the new entrant. Teachers also supported children's interactions.

Reflections on the methodology

Strengths of this approach.

The study used three case studies to explore the research question; a number which had been previously found to be sufficient for the purpose (Cresswell, 2002; Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). Case Study methodology was a suitable way to answer the research question and achieve the research objectives because it allowed an in depth exploration of how the case

study children were learning about school from their more experienced peers. Choosing to follow the transitions of specific children meant that a detailed record of each child's interactions with others could be recorded. The result was a clear understanding of how each child's peers were supporting and influencing learning about what to do at school. The cases could then be compared and some conclusions reached about how peer learning can be supported during the transition to school. If, in contrast, the study had not observed the transitions of specific children but generally observed the interactions within the classroom it would have been more difficult to decide which interactions to observe.

Collecting data from three different schools meant that it was possible to compare what was happening in different classrooms and look for similarities and differences in the peer learning that was occurring. Similarities in the data from the three research sites revealed some consistencies in the ways that peer learning was occurring in the classrooms, which strengthens the validity of the findings (Cohen, et al., 2007). Using multiple sites of data collection meant that significant aspects of the findings, such as the impact of different teachers' pedagogical styles, the size and make-up of the class and the characteristics of case study children became evident. If multiple sites had not been included drawing conclusions from the data would have been more difficult as conclusions could only be drawn in relation to what happened in one classroom. Although the findings from case studies are not easily generalised (Cohen, et al., 2007), the use of three case studies in three schools in this project meant that insights could be gained into peer learning over the transition to school in one provincial town, which may have implications for further research into transition to school in other New Zealand locations.

Data in this project were collected through classroom observations, interviews with teachers and interviews with children. Interviewing both teachers and children meant that the perspectives of each could be captured in the data. These perspectives could be triangulated

with data collected through observation to determine whether what participants said they did was reflected in their actions. By using multiple methods of data collection in multiple sites the validity and trustworthiness of the project was increased (Cohen, et al., 2007).

Limitations of this approach.

While the use of observations and interviews of teachers and children to gather the data for this project were effective in providing a rich and in-depth data, the findings could have been enriched if more observations had taken place. Six observations were made in each classroom at a range of times during the first two weeks each focus child was at school. More observations would have strengthened the findings, making it less likely that significant episodes of peer learning were missed. It is possible that strategies which were not observed in a case may have been used at times when observations were not taking place. Videotaping interactions may also have been useful. Observing over a longer period of time may have established whether less peer learning occurred as the new entrants became familiar with the culture of school and more data may have been collected showing the new entrant moving on and supporting the learning of other new entrants. Observations in the playground could also have added an interesting dimension to this project, particularly in light of the literature which identifies playtime and lunchtime as difficult times for new entrants (Dockett & Perry, 2007b; Peters, 2004a). The findings could also have deepened by measuring the degree of match or continuity between home, early childhood and school experiences.

Although a non-participant observation role was planned, as explained in Chapter Three, this role was difficult to sustain in a classroom with curious children who wanted to know what was going on around them. Children are used to interacting with and being helped by the adults in their classroom. The effect of the presence of a researcher in the classroom can be a limitation

of using observation to collect data (Cohen, et al., 2007). Using video to record classroom interactions could be a way to minimise the impact of the researcher's presence.

Collecting data from children is not always straight forward. Children do not always want to participate in a research project and have a right to have their wishes respected and there were children in this study who did not initially wish to take part. It takes time for children to trust strangers and this is a limitation of conducting research in a setting where the children are not familiar with the researcher. The on-going nature of consent must also be considered when working with children (David, et al., 2001). Children may initially give their consent and later change their minds as became evident in this study, when during an interview, a child's body language indicated that he no longer wished to answer the questions. The interview was therefore concluded, which limited data collection, but respected the child's non-verbal request to stop. As explained in Chapter Three, it was intended to use pictures drawn by the case study children as a further method of data collection. This plan was not successfully implemented further illustrating that collecting any type of data with young children is not as simple as with older children, who may display greater comprehension of requests from adults and a stronger desire to please (Bagnato, 2007).

Something not considered when designing the research process was that during the collection of data there would be times when the teacher and I had informal discussions which related to the research. These informal conversations could have provided another source of data which may have enriched the findings. As the Ethics approval had not included informal conversations as a source of data this information was not used. Although informal conversations were not used as data, some informal conversations were revisited in the interviews, so some aspects of what teachers had discussed were captured. Any further study on this topic would deliberately include spontaneous data collection opportunities and a research journal as another data source.

It must be stressed that the findings of this study reflect what happened in particular classroom contexts over a particular period of time. The conclusions of this study must therefore be considered with that caveat. The findings may not reflect what happens in other parts of New Zealand, or indeed, in other schools in the locality. However, the findings do show that peer learning about what to do at school did occur in all three cases and it is highly likely that new entrants in other classrooms benefit from some peer support. If teachers are aware of how much new entrants can benefit from the assistance of their peers then they can support and facilitate peer learning. These cases have highlighted some ways in which school and teachers did support new entrants to learn from their more experienced peers how to ‘do’ school.

Implications for schools and teachers

Having found that more experienced peers do play a significant role in supporting new entrants to learn about the culture of school it is important to consider how teachers and schools can best ensure that this peer learning occurs. Findings of this study have been used to inform the following recommendations of how schools and teachers can facilitate peer learning over the transition to school.

Teach social skills and support peer learning in early childhood settings.

Learning from peers involves interacting with others. Therefore, it is helpful if children enter school with skills which will assist them in interacting with and learning from their peers. Early childhood settings contain many opportunities for peer learning to occur. When early childhood teachers support children in working together and learning from each other,

children will begin school with dispositions which will help them learn from their more experienced peers.

Support the process of ‘intent participation’.

Children move from observation to participation at different rates. Teachers can support this movement by planning regular routines which enable new entrants to see the same things happening multiple times and by allowing children time to make this transition. More experienced children who are displaying desired behaviours can be pointed out as models so that those who are new to the classroom can watch and learn. The work of children who have done the right thing can be used as an exemplar. New entrants can then see what is expected from them at school.

Plan opportunities for children to work together.

Children must be given the chance to work together and interact with each other if peer learning is to happen. Teachers can plan experiences where shared learning is more likely to happen. These experiences can include: small group activities, talking to a buddy, using a donut ring, oral language experiences, maths and alphabet games, using a task board and seating children in groups where they can interact. It is important to include experiences when children are working together without teacher direction.

Support peer interactions.

For peer learning to occur there needs to be a relationship between the peers. Teachers can support relationships between children to develop by introducing the new entrant to other

children and helping them get to know each other. When children are working together it is also useful for the teacher to provide scaffolding which supports children's interactions. The teacher can participate in interactions, supporting and guiding discussion, then gradually withdraw support.

Teach helping behaviours.

More experienced children do not always know the most useful way to help the new entrant. Teachers can support children in learning how best to help the new entrants by talking to children about the difference between doing things for them and helping them. Teachers can watch for children doing things for the new entrant and make suggestions of alternative ways of providing support.

Careful choice of groups and buddies.

Reflecting on the best way to group children to maximise opportunities for peer learning to occur involves thinking about the abilities and characteristics of each child. When choosing groups and buddies with peer learning in mind teachers should make sure that the child giving the support has the knowledge or skills required. There should also be times when children work in mixed ability groups and the needs of the children should be considered. When selecting lunch time buddies the teacher may decide to choose more than one child, remind the buddies of what the new entrant needs to know and ensure the chosen buddy has a sense of responsibility.

Consider composition of class.

Peer learning in new entrant classrooms is enhanced when there are children in the classroom with more experience of school. In classrooms where children enter school at much the same time there are fewer episodes of peer learning. To support peer learning over the transition to school, schools must consider how classes are made up and ensure that older children are mixed with younger children.

Professional learning about transition and peer learning.

In order for teachers to provide appropriate support for children who are starting school they must be aware of the importance of the transition and how best to facilitate positive transition experiences. Teacher training programmes must therefore ensure that the transition to school is part of the content student teachers encounter. In light of the findings of the current study this content should include raising awareness of the role more experienced children can play in scaffolding new entrant learning about the culture of school and how teachers can support this to happen.

Implications for further research

This study has demonstrated that the current New Zealand practice of admitting children to school on their fifth birthday does mean that there are opportunities for new entrants to learn about school from their more experienced peers. While being able to learn from their peers is a benefit of the current system, this does not mean that the current practice is necessarily the best. A comparative study of the transition experiences and educational outcomes for children

starting school at five and children who start school all in one intake would be needed to determine the advantages and disadvantages of both systems.

One of the case studies in this study highlighted the role of friends in supporting new entrant learning about what to do at school. In this case, having a friend who was already at school was a benefit to the new entrant. However, it is possible that the characteristics of the friend may affect the quality of support given and also whether the friend models and encourages behaviours valued in the school context. A friend who has not settled well into the culture of school may have a negative influence on a new entrant's learning about what to do at school. This is therefore an aspect of transition which could be addressed in future research.

There is limited research into the transition experiences of Māori, Pasifika, new immigrant and refugee children and their families in mainstream schools. A significant body of research highlights the possible mismatch of culture that can occur for some children when they begin school (for example Brooker, 2002; Dockett & Perry, 2006, 2007b; Einarsdottir, 2013; Fabian, 2013; Margetts, 2013; Peters, 2004a; Peters, 2010). Research is needed to investigate how the culture of school meets the learning and development needs of the identified groups of children and to discover how schools might better match the home culture of these children and ensure greater continuities in transition. The latest PIRLS data shows that there is a significant gap between the top and bottom achievers in literacy in New Zealand and that Māori and Pasifika children are over represented in the tail (Chamberlain, 2013; Tunmer, et al., 2013). Given that successful transitions are linked to educational outcomes (Brooker, 2008; Dockett & Perry, 2007b), research into the transition experiences of Māori and Pasifika children and families in particular may help to identify strategies which can help narrow the gap in literacy achievement.

The findings from this study could be used as the basis of an action research project which implemented and reviewed some of the strategies identified in this study with the aim of

increasing the quality and quantity of peer learning within a new entrant classroom. It would also be possible to evaluate whether increasing the amount of peer learning in the new entrant classroom made a difference for the new entrants.

Consistent with most research on the transition to school, this study has taken a qualitative approach. With the growing awareness of the importance of the transition to school it would be useful for future research to use quantitative or mixed methods approaches. A quantitative or mixed method study which includes a larger, more representative sample and a range of methods could help to establish more definitively the impact of different approaches to transition and different transition experiences (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007).

While this study has demonstrated the impact of teachers' actions on the process of peer learning in the new entrant classroom it would be beneficial to investigate the impact of teachers' actions on peer learning in other classroom contexts such as early childhood and in the early primary years. Much of the literature reviewed focussed on what children do and identifying the learning that occurs. It would be useful to learn more about the role of the teacher in facilitating peer learning within educational contexts.

Final words

This study has shown that peer learning about how to be a school student does occur in new entrant classrooms and is therefore a benefit of children starting school on their fifth birthday. When children enter a classroom in which there are already students who are familiar with the culture of school they can learn from these more experienced peers about what to do at school. The way in which this peer learning occurs is mediated by the children involved, the teacher and the context. Depending on their prior experiences and temperament children require different amounts of support from their peers. The types of learning experiences

which are planned by the teacher afford opportunities for different types of interactions. Peer learning is enhanced in classrooms where there are opportunities for children to interact in a variety of ways without teacher direction. The classroom context also affords differing opportunities for peer learning to occur. It is more difficult for peer learning to occur when children all start school at around the same time.

When thinking about children's transitions there are two aspects which must be addressed: how children can be prepared for school; and how schools can prepare themselves to support children's transition to their cultural practices (Margetts & Kienig, 2013). An awareness of the roles that peer learning can play during the transition to school may encourage early childhood teachers to reflect on how they can prepare children to engage in peer learning on school entry. Likewise, primary teachers and schools have a responsibility to reflect on how they can be ready for each individual child on school entry including reflecting on how classroom organisation and pedagogy supports new entrants to learn from the more experienced children in the class. It is important to ensure that all children have the opportunity to learn about the culture of school and make a smooth transition into primary school.

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Appendix A: Protocol for child interview

Interview outline for children

After the observations are completed the child will be asked whether they are still happy to talk to me and tell me a little bit more about what it was like to start school and how they learned what to do at school (by the teacher or parent). If they assent then the interview will go ahead in a quiet location at the school.

Introductory questions and comments to get child to relax a bit more.

Hello xxxx. How are you?

I would ask a couple of general questions here that related to the child in particular as by this time I will have observed the child and know a bit about them. The actual questions would vary depending on the child and what I have learned about them. Examples include: discussing an interest I have observed, something relating to their family life/pets, What is the best part of school? What are you good at? What do you like to do at home?

Do you remember when I first met you and your mother/father and told you I wanted to find out what it was like to start school so that teachers know how to help children who start school? You know I have been watching what happens in the classroom, now I would like to ask you a few questions to find out a bit more. Is that OK with you? If you are not sure what to say you can just tell me you are “not sure” or “don’t understand” (If the child agrees they will be thanked and the interview will proceed)

Interview- semi structured so flexibility to omit questions and prompt child to expand or to change order

1. School is quite different from your childcare/home/kindy (depending on background)
Can you tell me what was new to you when you started school? (Then prompt for another thing.)
2. How did you learn about these things and know what to do?
3. If the answer is that the teacher told them- Did anyone else tell you what to do? Who and what did they help you with? Did any of the children in your class help you? How did they help you?
4. While I was in your classroom trying to learn a bit about how you learn at school I noticed that sometimes when you didn't know what to do other children would help you. (Give an example and show a photo.) Do you remember this?
5. I wonder if you could draw me a picture showing a time someone helped you.
6. (If the child wants to draw a picture they will be asked some questions about their drawing as they draw)
7. Ask child to dictate a caption or story about their picture (or to write one if they prefer).
8. I notice that in your classroom you have to (name something I observed the child imitating other children doing –e.g. putting hand up) how did you learn about that? (A couple of questions in that format-)

9. I notice that in your classroom you have to (name something I observed another child showing or telling the child what to do) How did you learn to do that? (a couple of questions)
10. If given a buddy by the teacher – The teacher asked xxx to help you on your first day. In what ways did they help you? Do you think they were a good buddy? Why/why not? Do they still help you sometimes? Was there something you needed help with but didn't get help? Tell me about that.
11. Is there anyone in your class who was really helpful? Who was that and what kinds of things did they help you with?
12. Use photos as prompts e.g. another child showing them what to do or helping them with a task – Tell me what is happening here. What are you and xxxxx doing? How did xxx help you?
13. Do you think it is important for other children to show new children what to do at school? Why/ why not? What do new children need to know at this school? How might you help them find out these things?
14. Is there anything else you want to tell me about starting school?

Thank you very much for helping me find out about what it's like to start school at xxxx school. I will come back in a while and tell your class a little bit about what I learned from you. Shall I walk back to your class with you?

Appendix B: Protocol for teacher interview

Interview outline for teachers-semi structured interview

To discuss before the interview:

Welcome and thanks for time commitment and allowing me to observe in your classroom

Remind that do not have to answer all questions

You may ask to turn off the recorder at any time

You will get to check and amend the transcript

Interview questions:

1. Tell me what kinds of things children need to learn after they arrive at school to enable them to fully participate in the learning experiences and classroom life
2. How do you think children learn these things? Can you give some examples ?
3. In what ways do you think the new entrant learns what to do and how to learn at school from the more experienced children in the class ? Can you give some examples of times you have seen this happening? What do you see as the teacher's role in this?
4. In what ways have you noticed the more experienced children helping the new entrants? Can you give some examples of times you have seen this happening?
5. Do some children seem more likely to do this than others? If so why do you think?
6. What kinds of things do you consciously do to encourage the more experienced children to support the new entrant? Are there particular strategies you use? /do you give the child a buddy? Why/ Why not?
7. What dispositions or skills do you think children need to bring to school to enable them to learn what to do at school from their more experienced classmates?
8. Discuss some examples of when the teacher has appeared to give the opportunity for more experienced children to help the new entrant from the observations asking for clarification of the teacher's intentions.
9. Are there any other ways you think teachers can encourage this kind of tuakana teina (more experienced helping less experienced) during the transition of new entrants? What changes might need to happen in the classroom or the culture of schools to better support newcomers?
10. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

After the interview:

Thank you for your time. When the information has been analysed and written up I will provide you with a summary. I would also like to come back in a couple of weeks and share a little about what I found out with the children. Would that be alright with you?

Appendix C: Screen shot of Nvivo10 data analysis in progress

The screenshot shows the Nvivo10 software interface with two main windows open:

- Document Window:** The top window displays a text document with several highlighted sections and associated codes. The text discusses children's interactions over the transition to school, mentioning strategies like 'organising children into donut circles' and 'sharing their picture with a buddy'. Two references are cited: Reference 1 (5.53% Coverage) and Reference 2 (3.19% Coverage).
- Code Book Window:** The bottom window shows the 'Code At' tab selected, displaying a list of codes: 'Name', 'Child strategies', 'Fostering friendship', 'Peer strategies', 'Teacher strategies', 'Affirming helping', 'Grouping', 'Interesting', 'Providing opportunities for shared learning', 'Supporting interaction', 'Teaching children how to help', and 'Using children as a model'. A note indicates 'providing opportunities for sharing'.
- Navigation Bar:** The bottom of the interface features a standard Windows-style taskbar with icons for Start, Task View, File Explorer, Edge, Mail, Photos, OneDrive, and Settings, along with a system clock showing 3:31 PM on 24/10/2013.

Appendix D: Table comparing data from three cases

Strategy	Case study			Comments/reflections
	1	2	3	
New entrant strategies:				
Learning by observing peers	✓	✓	✓	Child directed but teachers could encourage this to happen or plan for children to have the opportunity to observe peers Children varied in how much watching they did before participating
Peer strategies:				
Telling	✓	✓	✓	Child directed- often about the 'rules'
Showing or modelling	✓		✓	Both child directed and done at teacher's direction
Scaffolding academic learning	✓		✓	Affect of number of children in the class, type of programme (opportunities to work in groups independent of teacher)
Supporting participation	✓		✓	Child directed but sometimes teacher approved
Doing things for the new entrant	✓		✓	Child initiated but teachers helped children understand how to help rather than do things for the new entrant
Giving encouragement and positive affirmation	✓			
Teacher strategies:				
Providing opportunities for children to work together	✓		✓	Small group activities led to many of the observed instances More examples of peer learning in classes where children worked in groups without teacher
Selecting groups and buddies	✓	✓	✓	Benefit of mixed ability grouping Observed peer learning in classrooms where children were grouped in mixed ability groups Grouping within classroom Care with selecting buddies The use of older buddies- not always easy
Telling children how to help	✓	✓	✓	Asking children to help Teaching children how to help
Using experienced children as a model	✓	✓	✓	Praising children doing the right thing Often happened during writing time- all 3 cases
Affirming children who help the new entrant	✓	✓	✓	Showing value for peers helping the new entrant
Establishing classroom routines		✓		Gives opportunity to learn from observing
Classroom treaty		✓		Showing value for peers helping the new entrant

			entrant
Supporting children's interactions		✓	Introducing new entrant and participating in interactions to extend them
Other aspects of peer learning			
Ako	✓	✓	Dependent on child's prior experiences, issues of whose knowledge is valued
New entrant becoming a tuakana	✓		Affected by make up of class, character and confidence of child, past experiences, opportunities
The role of friendships		✓	Only observed in one case study-

Appendix E: Ethics approval letter



MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA

7 February 2013

FILE

Joanne Hayes
13 Peachgrove Terrace
ROTORUA

Dear Joanne

Re: HEC: Southern B Application – 12/53
Becoming a school child: The role of peers in supporting new entrant transitions

Thank you for your letter dated 25 January 2013.

On behalf of the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B I am pleased to advise you that the ethics of your application are now approved. Approval is for three years. If this project has not been completed within three years from the date of this letter, reapproval must be requested.

If the nature, content, location, procedures or personnel of your approved application change, please advise the Secretary of the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Dr Nathan Matthews, Chair
Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B

cc A/Prof Claire McLachlan
School of Arts, Development &
Health Education
PN900

Dr Alison Sewell
School of Educational Studies
PN900

Dr Kama Weir, HoS
School of Arts, Development &
Health Education
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Prof Howard Lee, HoS
School of Educational Studies
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Mrs Roseanne MacGillivray
Graduate School of Education
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Appendix F: Teacher information sheet

[Print on Massey University departmental letterhead]

[Logo, name and address of
Department/School/Institute/Section]

Becoming a school child: The role of peers in supporting new entrant transitions

INFORMATION SHEET: Teacher

Researcher Introduction

My name is Joanne Hayes and I am currently completing my Masters degree in Education with Massey University. As part of this I am conducting a research project which will examine the ways in which children learn to "do school" and hope that you will agree to take part in this project. I am investigating the ways in which more experienced children help new entrants to learn what to do and how to learn at school. I am also interested in finding out how you support this learning process. The data from this project will form the basis of the thesis I submit for the final part of my MEd degree.

I am currently lecturing on the Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood) at Waikari Institute of Technology and anticipate that as well as contributing to my study this research will inform my teaching. The findings from this project may be reported in an Education Journal and/or at an Education Conference. Schools, teachers and child participants will not be identified in any such publication.

The project will be supervised by Associate Professor Claire McLachlan and Dr Alison Sewell who are both experienced researchers.

Project Description and Invitation

I invite you to participate in this project and ask your permission to collect data in your classroom.

New Zealand is unique in that children start school on their fifth birthday rather than as a group of children at the beginning of the school term or year. I have always thought that a benefit of this staggered entry is that more experienced children can model for new entrants what to do and how to learn at school. I would like to find out if this is indeed so.

In order to do this I intend to follow the transitions of three children into three classrooms in three different schools.

If you agree to take part I would conduct a series of observations in your classroom making notes of the ways in which more experienced children support and scaffold the new entrant in learning what to do and how to learn in the school environment. I will also note the ways you encourage and support more experienced children to help new entrants learn what to do at school. Photographs may be taken to act as prompts in the follow up interviews.

Following the observations the transitioning child will be interviewed and invited to draw a picture showing a way some other child had helped them. The drawing will become part of the data and also act as a discussion starter as will any photographs taken during the observations.

I would then like to interview you so you can tell me about the ways you have noticed new entrants learning what to do at school from their more experienced peers and the ways you support this to happen. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. You will receive a summary of the research findings which relate to your classroom and if you wish you may read the completed thesis.

Participant Identification and Recruitment

Three teachers and three children from different schools in the Rotorua region will take part in this study. Teachers of new entrant children have been selected as this Project is investigating an aspect of the transition to school of new entrant children. The children whose transitions will be the focus of this project were identified in consultation with the school. It is anticipated that the collection of data in three different environments will provide rich and varied examples of children's interactions and strategies teachers use to encourage children to support new entrants.

Project Procedures

A minimum of six observations (1.5-2 hours duration) will be made in your classroom during the early days of a child's transition into your classroom. These observations will record what usually happens in the classroom and primarily focus on children's interactions so there is no need to change the usual daily programme. As the teacher you will then be invited to take part in a short interview regarding your perspective of the ways children learn from each other what to do at school and how you encourage this to happen. This will be recorded and last about 20-30 minutes. Once the interview has been transcribed you will have the opportunity to view the transcript and make changes if necessary.

The child who has just started school will also be asked to participate in an interview so that his/her perspective may be included in the findings. This should take no longer than 20 minutes and his/her parents will be present at this interview.

Data Management

Data collected as part of this Project will be used to identify the strategies more experienced school children use to help new entrants know what to do and when to do it, the strategies that new entrants use to learn from those who are more experienced and also the ways you and the other teachers facilitate and support peer learning about what to do at school.

Confidentiality will be maintained and protected by the use of pseudonyms. Schools and participants will not be named in any reporting of the findings. Any photographs used as discussion starters will not be used in any publications of the research findings. Pictures drawn by children will be scanned and returned to them and the scanned images may be used in the dissemination of the research findings.

Data will be stored in locked cabinets while I am completing data analysis and then transferred to safe storage at Massey University and kept for five years before being destroyed.

A summary of the findings relating to their classroom will be made available to teachers and parents of each classroom.

Participant's Rights

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study at any time up until the completion of data collection;
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded;
- ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview.

Project Contacts

Please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisors at any time if you have questions about the project. Contact details are as follows

Joanne Hayes

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Mokoia Drive

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Rotorua 3046

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Email: joanne.hayes@waiaiiki.ac.nz

Associate Professor Claire McLachlan

Dr Alison Sewell

Massey University

Massey University

Private Bag 11 222

Private Bag 11 222

Palmerston North

Palmerston North

Phone: 06 356 9099, Ext 8609

Phone: 06 356 9099, Ext 8853

Email: c.j.mclachlan@massey.ac.nz

Email:

a.m.sewell@massey.ac.nz

Committee Approval Statement

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 12/53. If you have any concerns about the conduct of the research, please contact Dr Nathan Matthews, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 06 350 5799 x 80877, email humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz.

Appendix G: Parent information sheet

[Print on Massey University departmental letterhead]

[Logo, name and address of
Department/School/Institute/Section]

Becoming a school child: The role of peers in supporting new entrant transitions

INFORMATION SHEET: Parents

Researcher Introduction

My name is Joanne Hayes and I am currently completing my Masters degree in Education with Massey University. As part of this I am conducting a research project that will examine the ways in which children learn to "do school". I want to find out the ways in which children who are already at school help new entrants to learn what to do and how to learn at school. I am also interested in finding out how teachers support this learning process.

I am also a lecturer on the Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood) at Waiariki Institute of Technology and hope that this research will be useful to my teaching. The findings from this project may be reported in an Education Journal and/or at an Education Conference. Schools, teachers and child participants will not be identified in any such publications.

The project is supervised by Associate Professor Claire McLachlan and Dr Alison Sewell who are both experienced researchers.

Project Description and Invitation

In New Zealand children start school on the day they turn five. I think this gives them the opportunity to copy the children who started school before them and so learn what to do at school. I want to find out if this is so and hope that you will agree for your child to be part of this project.

The project involves my coming into the classroom and watching and making written notes of the interactions between your child and other school children during the usual daily programme. There will be a minimum of 6 observations of about 1.5 hours long. I may also take some photographs which will be used later when I interview your child as a discussion starter. I would then interview your child (in your presence) and ask them to draw a picture showing a way another child helped them. This would take a maximum of 20 minutes but is likely to be shorter. The classroom teacher will also be interviewed.

If you are interested in this project, can you please talk to your child read them the enclosed child information sheet and see if they would like to take part. If your child agrees, please sign the parent consent form and return it to me in the stamped addressed envelope I have supplied by (date). On the day of the interview your child will be asked if they are happy to answer some questions and their wishes will be respected.

Participant Identification and Recruitment

Three teachers and three children from different schools in the Rotorua region will be invited to take part in this study. Permission has been gained from Boards of Trustees and Principals. The children whose transitions are the focus of this project were identified in consultation with the school.

Data Management

Information collected as part of this Project will be used to identify how children learn what to do at school from more experienced school children and how teachers can support that to happen. Neither the school, your child, nor the teacher will be named in any reporting of the findings.

Photographs from this project will be used only as discussion starters during the interview.

Pictures drawn by children will be scanned and the originals returned to the child. The scanned images may be used in the final research report and in any conference presentations and journal articles about this research.

Data will be stored in locked cabinets while the project is being completed and then transferred to safe storage at Massey University and kept for five years before being destroyed.

A summary of the findings relating to their classroom will be made available to you and I will return to the classroom and share my findings with the children.

Participant's Rights

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation on behalf of your child. If you decide to allow your child to participate, they have the right to:

- * decline to answer any particular question;
- * withdraw from the study at any time up until the data collection is complete;
- * ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- * provide information on the understanding that their name will not be used unless permission is given;
- * access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded;
- * ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview.

Project Contacts

Please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisors at any time if you have questions about the project. Contact details are as follows

Joanne Hayes

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Email:

Committee Approval Statement

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 12/53. If you have any concerns about the conduct of the research, please contact Dr Nathan Matthews, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 06 350 5799 x 80877, email humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz.

Appendix H: Case study child information sheet

Information sheet for child

Hello, I am Joanne Hayes.



I hear you are turning 5 soon and will be starting school.



I want to learn about what happens when children start school.

I hope you will help me by letting me watch you at school a few times and write down some things that happen. I also want to ask you some questions about what it was like for you. If you want to you could draw me a picture about it too.



Please tell your parents if you are happy for me to do this.

Appendix I: Classroom children information sheet

Consent for children

Hello, I am Joanne Hayes.



I want to learn about what happens when children start school and how children learn what to do at school.



I will be coming to your classroom to watch what happens. I will be writing some stories down about what the children in your class do. If you do not want me to write about you please tell me and I will not write about anything you do.

If you are happy to be part of my project please sign my piece of paper with your name or a picture of yourself. If you change your mind later you can tell me and I will not use any stories I have written about you.

Signature: