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# **PRIMARY-SECONDARY TRANSITIONS:**

## **What Helps Adolescents with Learning Support Needs, Family Members, and Teachers?**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Education

at

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New Zealand

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## ABSTRACT

Transition from primary to secondary school marks a significant milestone in a young person's life. Research indicates some students, particularly those for whom primary school presented considerable learning challenges, can struggle to settle into their new school. Gaps in understanding exist about what helps those students, their families and their teachers have positive transition experiences.

This case study explored what personal and contextual factors assisted students with learning support needs transition from primary to secondary school and what helped their parents and caregivers, and teachers at transition time. Taking a strength focus and utilising a pragmatic approach, the research drew upon personal experiences of transition to investigate the question: What helped? The main objectives were to inform transition pedagogy and policy, and professional development within schools; to generate serious contemplation about primary-secondary transition which seems to have been almost forgotten within current educational policy; and to contribute to the domain of knowledge about qualities that enable students with learning support needs and their school communities to flourish.

The sequential design utilised two main data collection methods. Questionnaire data, including scaled and short answer responses, were collected from students with identified learning support needs, their family members, primary teachers, and secondary teachers from one urban New Zealand schooling district, before and after transition. Following transition, a subsample of students who had reported making a positive transition, along with subsamples from each participant grouping and a small group of expert educators then shared their views and knowledge about the transition, by way of individual interviews. Open-ended questionnaire data and interview data were coded and analysed using thematic analysis.

Systemically, four key features interacted to help transition. These features, applicable across all stakeholder groupings were: deliberate responsibility for the transition process; purposeful and timely engagement; strategic transition knowledge and practice; and targeted support for transition. Systemic processes were effective when schools took the lead in fostering family-

student-school relationships and new skills for transition, which enhanced participants' feelings of efficacy. Transition was found to be an event (e.g. first day) and process (e.g. school engagement). Being present on the first day of the school year appeared to have lasting effects for students, indicating robust enrolment and school placement processes were essential; this topic area emerged as a direction for future investigation.

Transition process and practice knowledge was found to reside predominately with secondary school managers, while all classroom teachers were not entirely comfortable about catering for new students' learning needs; suggesting students' learning needs may not be accommodated optimally in general classrooms. Information transfer systems operated throughout the district but may have been under-utilised and not always accessible for classroom teachers. Secondary classroom teachers required support to become more versed about transition matters and practice, including assisting students to adapt to routines and demands over time. It was suggested that transition pedagogy be incorporated into classroom teachers' repertoires and prioritised for all students.

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*I also loved the sweet feeling of privilege which never failed me as I presented my ID card to a bored guard in a black uniform sitting behind a clear desktop. You enter a room lined with long desks and lamplight that is not too bright or too dim, but just right. Everything was just right. I loved the fact you could call up anything ... and within the hour that material would be found in the bowels of this great library. (Jones, 2006, p.213)*

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## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

<b>Term</b>	<b>Description (as used in this thesis)</b>
āiga	close and extended family
aroha	love
AsTTle	Assessment Tool for Teaching and Learning
haka	traditional Māori dance or challenge
hāngi	traditional Māori cooking method in a pit oven
hui	meeting or gathering
intermediate school	separate school for Years 7 and 8
iwi	tribe
kai	food
kanohi ki te kanohi	face-to-face
karakia	prayers
kura kaupapa Māori	Māori language immersion school
Māori	Indigenous people of New Zealand
Māoritanga	Māori culture
marae	sacred meeting ground
mihimihi	introduction about self
pākehā	Non-indigenous New Zealanders of European descent
pānui	newsletter, news
Pasifika	Indigenous peoples of the Pacific Islands
pōwhiri	Māori welcome ceremony
rumaki	Māori medium learning unit
tamariki	children
taonga	prized treasure
Te Marautanga o Aotearoa	New Zealand Curriculum for Māori medium schools
te reo	the language
third form	Year 9

<b>Term (cont.)</b>	<b>Description (as used in this thesis)</b>
tikanga	best practice, custom
tuakana-teina	older-younger buddy relationship
waiata	song
Whaea	title of respect for woman
whānau	close and extended family
wharekura	Māori language immersion secondary school
Year 8	last year of primary school
Year 9	first year of secondary school

*...to turn a square into a cube,  
a triangle into a pyramid,  
a circle into a sphere...*

(Ihimaera, 2007)

# **PART ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION, BACKGROUND, AND PROCESS**

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# **PART ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION, BACKGROUND AND PROCESS**

Part One of this thesis comprises four chapters which, taken as a whole, provide the background of the research and rationale for the study approach, framework and design decisions.

Chapter One provides an introduction to the research. The second chapter presents a review of the literature and research questions. Chapter Three presents the design development process and the justification for methodological resolutions related to the current study. The final chapter in this part details the research methods.

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

---

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

*The first day of school could not have been merrier;  
The teacher turned out to be a fox terrier  
Who taught us to leap and taught us to bark  
And chase little birdies all over the park.  
For the rest of our lives we still had the spark  
From the wonderful first day of school.*

Leunig (2007). Reproduced with permission by Penguin Australia Pty Ltd.

This study involved a school district in urban New Zealand and focused upon what helped students with learning support needs negotiate a positive transition to secondary school. In addition, it explored what assisted the students' parents and caregivers, teachers, and schools to support the transition. The research took a strength orientation (Hewitt, 2005; Maton et al., 2004), shown efficacious for school improvement and development (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011), and drew upon stakeholders' perceptions and personal experiences of transition to investigate the question: What helped?

This chapter introduces the educational concern that initiated this research. Following a brief explanation of important terms used in the thesis, the nature of the local New Zealand educational landscape is described, in order to contextualise the study. It is important to note that every attempt was made to ensure the accuracy of the information however there is the possibility that some details may have changed over time. Significant influences on the study's conceptualisation are explained, methodology, research methods, and scope are outlined and the research purpose and significance are stated. The chapter concludes with an overview of the thesis structure.

## 1.1 The Educational Concern

School transition represents a major task for young people and is recognised as one of life's significant change events (Felner, et al., 1993). Transition to secondary school is a normative educational milestone, coinciding with the developmental shift from childhood to adolescence and signalling the start of more considered learning, directed on future educational and occupational pathways. However, while the event is a commonplace experience within adolescent life, and there is considerable understanding of the institutional practices that support positive transitions and seamless engagement of the student majority (Galton, Gray, & Rudduck, 1999; Mizelle & Irvin, 2000), student responses to and outcomes of the transition to secondary school are far from homogeneous.

There are two lanes in the transition expressway to secondary school. One side of the road is evenly surfaced and provides a relatively smooth pathway for the majority of children (Cox & Kennedy, 2008; McGee, Ward, Gibbons, & Harlow, 2003; Wylie, Hodgen, & Ferral, 2006). However, some students, who have encountered challenges at primary school, find their side of the road bumpy with some potholes along the way; not so easy to navigate. This side bares evidence that poor transition preparation and process may expose students to poor engagement in learning at secondary school (Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai, & Richardson, 2003; Cox & Kennedy, 2008; Galton et al., 2003; McGee et al., 2003; Wylie et al., 2006).

Given enduring emphasis by governments in New Zealand and worldwide upon transition policies and practices, clearly, transition matters. There is general recognition that transition effects contribute to educational outcomes and that students' early disengagement from post-primary schooling jeopardises future work and/or income possibilities (e.g. Ministry of Education, 2013d; Ministry of Education, 2013e; Wylie et al., 2006). However, although New Zealand's education policy and action plans (Education Review Office, 2012a, 2012b; Ministry of Education, 2006a, 2013g, 2014b) remind of the need for sustained attention on learning pathways and educational continuity, a shifting policy spotlight away from primary-secondary transition in favour of other schooling transition points is apparent (Ministry of Education, 2012b, 2013g, 2014c).

Getting the shift to secondary school right for all New Zealand students offers significant challenge for teachers and schools and consequently, for some students, positive transition and learning experiences at secondary school remains an elusive ideal (Cox & Kennedy, 2008; Sutton, 2000; Wylie et al., 2006). There are still gaps in our knowledge about what facilitates positive transition experiences for students who have experienced considerable challenge at primary school. In addition, the educational longevity of New Zealand adolescents who enter schooling change with vulnerability remains a point of disquiet (Ministry of Education, 2012b, 2013f). Accordingly, this field of study remains worthy of investigation and is the focus of the current research.

## **1.2 Definitions of Terms**

‘Transition’ in the present context refers to the movement of students between year levels. The specific focus in the current research is Year Eight to Year Nine transition which, in New Zealand, marks the move from primary education to secondary school. Typically, students’ ages at this time range from 12 years to 14 years with the vast majority of students being in their thirteenth year.

‘High school’ and ‘secondary school’ are used interchangeably to refer to post-primary schooling.

The term ‘students with learning support needs’ was adopted in the current research to describe students identified by their schools as requiring added support in transition for learning, behavioural, social, cultural or emotional reasons and to distinguish them from those students with high or very high support needs funded directly by the Ministry of Education, Special Education. The following description utilised by Bellert and Graham (2006), in relation to students with learning difficulties, also has pertinence here: “those who do not have a diagnosed disability but do under-achieve both in comparison with their age-peers and with their individual learning potential” (p. 4).

While some of the students in the participant group may have received specialist educational support at some time, typically, that temporary resource would have supported their teachers to target a short term need. An example would be a student referred for a specific learning or

behavioural concern. It would be unusual for such students to receive on-going resourced support during transition between schools and therefore their educational needs might place them in a position of future vulnerability, particularly if their individual needs were not recognised and attended to by their receiving school. Within the particular community of schools where this research was sited, general systems were in place to share learning information between schooling sectors to support students' transitions and additional information about selected students was passed on as deemed appropriate by collaborating schools.

'Family' in the present context is used as a general, inclusive term to incorporate 'whānau', 'āiga', and members of extended families who have close relational bonds with the children.

### **1.3 The Structure of Schooling in New Zealand**

In New Zealand, schooling is compulsory between the ages of six and sixteen although the majority of children start school at five years old, having attended pre-school or kindergarten for at least a year. Primary schooling incorporates Years 1 – 8 and students tend to be about 13 years old when they transition to secondary schooling which spans Years 9 – 13. Some variation in schooling organisation exists around the country, as shown in Table One, however the predominant structural model sees students spend the last two years of their primary schooling at intermediate school before moving on to high school.

Teaching and learning in primary schools is homeroom based. Intermediate schools typically retain a homeroom base for core subjects while additional specialist subjects, technology, physical education, drama, and art for example, may require students to move around the school during the day. In this way, intermediate schools are seen to offer students some preparation for the more specialist teaching model they will encounter in high school.

Comparative to structures elsewhere (Kallen, 1997), this schooling arrangement appears reasonably unique requiring students to navigate two significant transitions, each to a different school campus, in quick succession. For some students, navigation of this pathway will be a feat in itself, given association has been found between the number of school changes with vulnerability to early school leaving and disrupted achievement trajectory (Alspaugh, 1998,

2001). Participant schools in the current study were typical, including contributing and full primary schools, intermediate schools and Year 9 - 13 secondary schools.

**Table 1**

*Schooling Structures in New Zealand*

Years	Designation
1-6	Contributing primary school
1-8	Full primary school
7-8	Intermediate school
9-13	Secondary school (Years 9-13)
7-13	Secondary school (Years 7-13)
7-10	Middle school or Junior high school
11-13	Senior high school
1-10	Composite school (Years 1-10)
1-13	Composite (Years 1-13) or Area school

*Note.* From Ministry of Education (2015b, Schooling structures section)

### 1.3.1 Transition in New Zealand Government Policy

In 2007, The New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) set out a vision for education in this country; that, as a result of an appropriate and considered education, young people would become “confident, connected, actively involved, lifelong learners” (p. 8). The framework emphasised learning pathways and curriculum continuity and the establishment of positive relationships during the middle years of learning was recognised as important. Transition to school was identified as a time when relationships, past learning experiences, family and whānau, and new school experiences mattered. It is suggested here that those four factors were likewise relevant to the primary-secondary transition, however, no parallels were drawn and there was no mention of primary-secondary transition being an important juncture. It seemed an opportunity missed.

Some years later, primary-secondary transition received brief attention within the New Zealand Government's statement of educational intent as follows:

We will focus on transitions within and through education for children and young people, and their parents, families, whānau and iwi. Smooth and supported transitions from early childhood education to primary schooling, from primary to secondary schooling, and from secondary schooling into tertiary education and/or the workforce will support students to succeed. (Ministry of Education, 2013e, p.6)

Ka Hikitia – Accelerating Success, the Māori education strategy (Ministry of Education, 2013f), specifically stated priorities of “supporting effective transitions and pathways” (p. 12), including “shifting from primary school to intermediate school, and on to secondary school” (p. 24). Additionally, the problematic nature of transition was raised in a briefing to the then incoming Associate Minister of Education: “The early benefits of education are persistent but transitioning into school, between schools, and into further education can be difficult for learners” (Ministry of Education, 2013a, p.5). However, a briefing to the incoming Minister of Education (Ministry of Education, 2011) indicated a focus prioritisation on the move from early childhood services to school and the transition out of compulsory education to work or tertiary learning.

It is surprising, given recognition that between-schools transition is an important change point for students and bearing in mind one of the Ministry of Education's top priorities in service delivery was “improving education outcomes for Māori students, Pasifika students, students with special education needs and students from low socio-economic areas” (Ministry of Education, 2013e, p.13), that between-schools transition received little prominence in either of the Pasifika Education Plan (Ministry of Education, 2013g) or the special education strategy: Success for All – Every School, Every Child (Ministry of Education, 2014c).

### **1.3.2 Special Education in New Zealand Government Policy**

According to the Education Act 1989, and reinforced by the Human Rights Act 1993 ([www.legislation.govt.nz](http://www.legislation.govt.nz)) which made discrimination on the basis of disability illegal, every child in New Zealand has the right to enrol and access free education in a regular state school classroom alongside same age peers. However, while purported to be inclusive, there was

evidence of contradiction. For example, the Ministry of Education's vision for inclusive education emphasising a collaborative model including "confident educators, confident parents, families, whānau and communities, and confident learners" (2014c, p.3) was sited within special education policy and guidelines for school managers were couched in the language of special education (Ministry of Education, 2013c). There have been many criticisms of such conceptualisation (e.g. Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Slee, 1997); Purdue (2006) stated: "Inclusion is not another name for special needs education ..." (p. 14).

Funded "on the basis of need rather than diagnosis" (Ministry of Education, 2012c, p.2-3), children with high and very high on-going special needs receive targeted direct resourcing from the Ministry of Education and attend either separate special schools, units within mainstream schools or mainstream classrooms. A range of support options are available for students with more moderate needs but routinely they are supported by systems funded and managed by schools through the special education grant (SEG), paid as part of each school's operational funding. The SEG handbook cautioned that managing the allocation of the SEG was not an easy task for schools and criteria might prevent some students' access to resourcing or support:

Special education needs can be difficult to determine because they can vary from one setting to another. A student may appear to have special education needs in one class but not in another, simply because of specific learning or behaviour requirements. (Ministry of Education, 1998, p. 1)

Increasingly schools receive resourcing as systemic support, for example, the Positive Behaviour for Learners (PB4L) initiative; the rationale being that up-skilling schools and teachers enables them to better support all learners (Ministry of Education, 2013e).

With special educational needs being defined, more or less, by the capacity of support resources, it is apparent that some students will always miss out on assistance that, given different criteria or a system of greater resource, might have helped enhance their educational experience and outcomes (Carson, 2013). The Office for Standards in Education in Great Britain, reporting on attendance and behaviour in secondary schools, articulated similar concerns: "Many pupils who behave badly have learning needs and often just fail to qualify

for help from special educational needs staff. Their learning needs are often compounded by poor social skills. Some pupils mask their academic failings ...” (2001, p.7). It was the transition experiences of students like those who might have ‘just missed out’ that were of interest in the current research.

### **1.3.3 Policy to Practice in New Zealand Schools**

New Zealand schools are individually governed by elected boards of trustees which are accountable to the Crown and school communities for “the improvement of student progress and achievement” (Ministry of Education, 2010b, p.3). The Government provides operational funding to boards to facilitate their meeting of National educational policy objectives and their own identified priorities. While funding varies according to differing school characteristics, the greatest determinant is decile rating. The Ministry of Education explained the system thus: “Decile 1 schools are the 10% of schools with the highest proportion of students from low socio-economic communities, whereas decile 10 schools are the 10% of schools with the lowest proportion of these students” (2015a). Demographically, lower decile schools cater for higher proportions of Māori and Pasifika students and students with identified special needs; they also receive more targeted funding to meet their community’s needs.

Each board, in collaboration with the principal, is charged with developing a school charter that establishes strategic policy, planning, direction, and targets based upon the Government’s National Educational Guidelines. The charter must include actions to improve all students’ achievement and contain policies and practices that demonstrate inclusivity, encompassing specific consideration of New Zealand’s indigenous population and unique cultural mix, and students with special educational needs. There is no guarantee that transition will be afforded priority status, or indeed, any place at all within a school charter since it is up to each individual school to identify their own direction and priority goals. This compares unfavourably to the United Kingdom where local borough councils provide mandatory free transition advice to families, as the following example from the Bromley local borough website (2015) shows:

The Information, Advice and Support Service (IASS - formerly Parent Partnership) offers information, advice and support, for parents and carers of children with special educational needs (SEN) or disabilities from birth to 25; young people with SEN or disabilities aged 16-25; all children (regardless of SEN) on their child's transition from primary school to secondary school.

Some support for New Zealand parents has been provided by initiatives like “Team Up” ([www.teamup.co.nz](http://www.teamup.co.nz)) which provided web- and paper-based resources for all aspects of school planning including transition. In addition, the Ministry of Education’s “Education” portal ([www.education.govt.nz](http://www.education.govt.nz)) launched a dedicated parent site however at the time this study was conducted it did not provide specific primary-secondary transition information.

The Ministry of Education website has provided a number of guides and templates to assist schools to fulfil planning duties. However, the charter guide for supporting students with special educational needs (Ministry of Education, 2013b) contained no reference to transition. No charter guide could be found for primary and intermediate schools but the guide for planning and reporting for secondary schools (Ministry of Education, 2014a) emphasised transition planning within a focus on supporting achievement and retention. A charter template developed by the Centre for Educational Leadership (University of Auckland, 2013) paired transition with student engagement as a possible priority focus for strategic development. Given the factors above, it is unsurprising that the landscape of transition policy and practice within New Zealand has demonstrated neither predictability nor uniformity, a situation which inevitably must have impacted students, families, and teachers.

#### **1.3.4 Other Related Concerns in the New Zealand Educational Landscape**

Emphasis upon presence, participation and raising student achievement in New Zealand has resulted in steady improvement in retention rates in secondary schools and attainment rates of the basic formal school qualification - the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) Level One. However, 2012 figures showed that 14.8% of all school leavers exited school without basic level literacy and numeracy skills and disparities existed between ethnic groups with 29.5% of Māori and 21.2% of Pasifika students leaving school without NCEA Level One (Ministry of Education, 2013h).

Of those who became disconnected with learning and left school, students with a history of poor achievement or special educational needs, those who were Māori or Pasfika, boys, students with behavioural needs, and students who attended lower decile schools were over-represented (Ministry of Education, 2013h; Ministry of Education, 2012d; Wylie et al., 2006). Parallel patterns have been observed in the United States (Lehr, Johnson, Bremer, Cosio, & Thompson, 2004) and Australia (Down & Choules, 2011). A national Australian longitudinal, prospective study of students (n = 11624) found that indigenous students, those from non-English speaking backgrounds, boys, students from poorer homes, and students with a history of poor achievement were more likely to leave school early (Marks & Fleming, 1999). Furthermore, as in New Zealand, schooling disparities between indigenous and non-indigenous students in Australia have continued to be documented (Purdie & Buckley, 2010).

Locally, rates of stand-down, suspensions, exclusions, and expulsions, also indicative of disengagement, revealed that incidence rises sharply at around age 13, coinciding with primary-secondary transition. Furthermore, Māori students were stood down, suspended and excluded more than any other ethnic group, while boys received more behavioural sanctions than girls (Ministry of Education, 2013i). The incidence of truancy, another precipitator of early school leaving (Balfanz, Herzog, & MacIver, 2007), increased about the same time, in Year Eight, with rates in lower decile schools and for Māori and Pasfika students comparably higher than for other students (Mallari & Loader, 2013).

Patterns of school disengagement around early adolescence - the time of primary-secondary transition, is a problem not unique to New Zealand. Similar pictures have been documented in Australia (Brooks, Milne, Paterson, Johansson, & Hart, 1997; Down & Choules, 2011; McLaughlin & Pearce, 2008; Marks & Fleming, 1999; Smyth et al., 2000), the United States of America (Bottoms, 2008; Duckenfield & Reynolds, 2013; United States Department of Education, 2008), Great Britain (Mahoney, 2000) and indeed, worldwide (Hunt, 2008; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2013). Furthermore, that adolescents of indigenous or minority cultures, poor students, and those struggling academically are over represented in inferior schooling outcomes data is universally evident within the abovementioned references.

In 2013, Hekia Parata, New Zealand’s Minister of Education, admitted “system failure” in meeting commitments to learners, especially Māori, Pasifika, students from low socio-economic communities, and students with special learning needs (Ministry of Education, 2013e). Consequently, these priority groups, having the poorest learning outcomes in New Zealand, were targeted for “unrelenting focus” in regard to raising achievement. Subsequently, a working party including “sector leaders” from across the educational spectrum suggested that aiming learning interventions at *all* may not be serving all students. Additionally, it was suggested that existing systems could not cope with the diversity of student needs and there appeared little incentive or support for schooling districts and communities to work together to raise system capability (Ministry of Education, 2014b).

Given evidence of increased disengagement around entry to secondary education (Bottoms, 2008; Ministry of Education, 2013i; McLaughlin & Peace, 2008) and the local realities highlighted herein, the need to place greater focus upon primary-secondary transition as a critical schooling juncture for students with learning support needs was evident. The following sections set out the personal influences of the researcher that impacted on the study direction and initial approach to the current research.

## **1.4 Influences on the Study**

It is impossible to divorce oneself from one’s history and experience. In the present instance, influence upon the subject matter, approach, and process of this research originated from a number of reference points. Ian Dey’s (1993) remarks about the impact of prior knowledge to research process are pertinent here. He said: “In short, there is a difference between an open mind and an empty head. To analyze data, we need to use accumulated knowledge, not dispense with it. The issue is not whether to use existing knowledge, but how” (p. 63). The following four sub-sections present the important personal and professional influences that impacted upon the conceptualisation and process of the current study.

### **1.4.1 Professional Experience**

Lifelong service to education, as secondary teacher and manager and then psychologist supporting and working with children with moderate and high special educational needs,

reinforced the need to persistently question ways of thinking and doing. Career dominance within the early adolescence arena of schooling prompted the interest in supporting children's learning through transition and emphasised benefits of student-focused practice.

The impetus to investigate primary-secondary transition by taking a strength perspective was seeded by work within the Enhancing Effective Practice in Special Education initiative funded by the New Zealand Ministry of Education (Kearney et al, 2006) and subsequent action-learning project work in the area of transition (Higgins, 2008). Both pieces of work supported schools to promote effective educational outcomes for all through building teacher capability. Those works highlighted that educators value local, effective practice exemplars and actively seek ways to hone transition practices that support learning successes for all students; also underscored was the need for new research in the area of transition focusing upon students with vulnerabilities.<sup>1</sup>

Being trained as a New Zealand psychologist to utilise the 'tool' of situational analysis (Annan, 2005) to direct casework in educational work (see Ryba, Bowler, Pine, & Mentis, 1999), affirmed the appropriate influence of that ecological, multi-systemic framework on the conceptualisation and implementation of the present research. The following section describes the situational analysis framework for psychological practice.

#### **1.4.2 Situational Analysis**

A recent variant of problem-analysis (Robinson, 1987), situational analysis was described by Jean Annan, a tenacious advocate for its use by educational psychologists, as "a framework for professional practice and research in educational psychology. The process is guided by a set of practice principles requiring psychologists' work be evidence-based, ecological, collaborative and constructive" (2005, p.131). Other features include: actively seeking out participants' perspectives, viewing knowledge as being socially constructed and finding new solutions within existing conditions. This inherently strength-focused, systemic practice model regards educational concerns to be located in the interface between people or individuals and their environment, rather than within individuals.

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<sup>1</sup> The present research is new work and did not include data from the aforementioned Ministry of Education projects, however systems referred to by current participants might have arisen from the previous initiatives.

While the development of interventions was not the objective of the current research and therefore, situational analysis was not applied *in toto*, it nonetheless was a worthy influence for methodological decision-making including: a) over-viewing the case; b) engagement with participants and their circumstances; c) paying attention to, and managing, detail through reduction of complexity, and most importantly, d) at the point of analysis to understand linkages between features and with established bodies of knowledge. As an open-minded framework that requires existing strengths to underpin interventions and fit-for-purpose methodology to respond to persons and environments, situational analysis dovetailed elegantly with the pragmatic, ecological, and positive keystones of the current study design.

### 1.4.3 Ecological Orientation

Underpinning the situational analysis framework is Bronfenbrenner's (1974, 1994) ecological model of human development. The nested model is represented by a number of inter-related systems, as follows: The microsystem describes the most near activities and relations with those most closely connected, such as family, friends, and the school. The mesosystem comprises connections and reciprocal effects between the various microsystems. For example, events within the home which affect an adolescent's school life and vice versa, or in the case of transition, parents accompanying their children on the first day (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Epstein, 1987). The exosystem describes linkages between settings which, while not necessarily directly involved with the developing individual, do exert influence, such as a parent's workplace. The macrosystem represents global systems which provide context for, and bears influence upon, all other systems via cultural and political influences, for example (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In the case of transition, that influence has been characterised conspicuously within discussions of early school leaving focused upon aspects of cultural and societal disadvantage (Roderick & Camburn, 1999; Smyth et al., 2000). Lastly, applicable to transition, the chronosystem examines influences "on the person's development of changes (and continuities) over time in the environments in which the person is living" (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, p.724).

Influences brought by this model to the present study may be recognised in the design and research path. Contexts of home, school, and community were prioritised, while study participants, stakeholders in the transition process, contributed from a knowledgebase of

experience that drew from individual, interpersonal, cultural, contextual, and wider experiences. Importantly, students remained in central focus, while the interest, as per situational analysis philosophy (Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000), became the interactional space, which necessarily brought a strength-based view by moving focus away from seeking “dysfunction” within individuals (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

#### **1.4.4 Positive and Strength-Focused Psychology**

Foundational to this research were principles of both humanistic psychology, described as the “psychology of inclusion” (Taylor, 2001, p.22) and positive psychology, described by Sheldon and King (2001) as “ordinary” and “simply psychology” (p. 216). Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) described the field of positive psychology as valuing subjective experience (e.g. satisfaction), individual qualities (e.g. interpersonal skill), and group or institutional virtues (e.g. responsibility), all of which supported a focus on positive aspects of life to “... show what actions lead to well-being, to positive individuals, and to thriving communities” (p. 5).

Positive orientation in educational and psychological research has sound roots (e.g. William James, Victor Frankl, John Dewey, Carl Rogers, and Abraham Maslow). Examples of strength-based perspectives include Bandura’s (1978, 1997) concept of self-efficacy which emphasises how positive beliefs and experiences influence future actions via reciprocal determinism, Csikszentmihalyi’s (1991) consideration of meaningful engagement through the concept of ‘flow’; and Cooperrider and Whitney’s (2005) methods of appreciative inquiry that promote positive organisational change through the amplification of strengths. Other examples of shift from negative theorising to positive orientation include Zimbardo’s switch from compliance to heroism and Seligman’s repositioning from learned helplessness to optimism. Asking what helps and what is working is one way positive features may be identified (Maton et al., 2004).

A local, worked example was the Te Kotahitanga research (Bishop et al., 2003) which focused upon ways to lift Māori students’ achievement and found advantages came when less attention was paid to adverse aspects of students’ school life. A stark conclusion being “deficit theorising by teachers is the major impediment to Māori students’ achievement” (p.

2), while effective teaching was grounded in positive, responsive relationships, structures, and practices (Bishop et al., 2003).

In regard to research involving children with special educational needs, capturing strengths fits well with qualitative methods (Anzul, Evans, King, & Tellier-Robinson, 2001), while deficit thinking has increasingly being challenged (e.g. Annan, 2005; Tobin, Sugai & Colvin, 1996; Trent, Artiles, Englert, 1998). The features of a strength-focus, pertinent to the current study, were summarised by Maton and colleagues (2004), as follows:

1. Recognize and build on existing strengths in individuals, families, and communities.
2. Build new strengths in individuals, families, and communities.
3. Strengthen the larger social environments in which individuals, families, and communities are embedded.
4. Engage individuals, families, and communities in a strengths-based process of designing, implementing, and evaluating interventions. (p. 6)

These factors are entirely concordant with situational analysis, ecological orientations, and an inclusive approach, which will be introduced next.

#### **1.4.5 Inclusion**

Although historically aligned with special education, concepts of inclusion have broadened over time to include, for example: education for all (Ainscow, 2005); responsive schools (Ballard, 2004a); participation (Booth & Ainscow, 2002); accommodation of diversity (Dyson, Gallannaugh, & Millward, 2003); effective schools (Florian & Rouse, 2001); protection of ordinary citizenship rights (Slee, 2001); student-centred education (Vaughn & Schumm, 1995); and freedom from disablist discourse (Oliver, 1996). Considerable shift occurred in response to the Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs Education and the adoption of the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 1994) and, as highlighted earlier, inclusive education is supported in New Zealand by Government legislation.

For reasons highlighted in Section 1.3.2, it has proven difficult in New Zealand to separate inclusion from special education; the local funding model and associated discourse represents

an imperfect system that has created tension and practice challenges. However, in accordance with the view that inclusive education is about ordinariness (Ballard, 1995) and quality systems that respond to diversity (Florian & Rouse, 2001), the present research was grounded by the understanding that schools are effective for all when they respond to all children's learning needs and foster an inclusive culture that respects children, families, and staff members (Ministry of Education, 2012a, 2013c, 2014c; UNESCO, 1994, 2012). That respect is demonstrated by finding out from those key people about their experiences and thoughts (Ainscow, 2005) and understanding inter-relationships (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Thus, there is synchronicity between inclusion and the aforementioned influences, which conjointly informed the research inception and process, as follows.

### **1.5 Rationale for the Study and Research Significance**

The central purpose of this research was to identify personal and contextual features of transition that enabled students with learning support needs to navigate a positive move to secondary school. Additionally the research aimed to find what assisted their parents and caregivers, and teachers to handle that transition, given their roles as key contributors to the transition process, while at the same time being stakeholders, alongside students, in the outcomes (Bishop et al., 2003; Catterall, 1998; MacIver & Epstein, 1991; Nastasi, 2000).

The evidence regarding increased disengagement around entry to secondary education (Bottoms, 2008; Ministry of Education, 2013i; McLaughlin & Peace, 2008) and the often, irreparable nature of early disconnections (Roderick & Camburn, 1999) appears unequivocal. The local realities highlighted herein demonstrate a need for sustained attention on primary-secondary transition, while on-going concerns (Ministry of Education, 2013h; Ministry of Education, 2012d; Wylie et al., 2006) signal that different perspectives to support practice development are required.

To this end, two aspects of the present research offered fresh contributions to the transition research landscape. Firstly, the study purposefully placed focus upon students with learning support needs; students for whom, based upon prior schooling experiences, the transition might present added challenges. Secondly, the research was positioned within a strength focus, setting out to identify and capitalise upon positive aspects of persons or situations

within a supportive, respectful approach (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), 2011; Maton et al., 2004; Barwick, 2004).

The research held promise to inform transition pedagogy, enhance local practice initiatives, further action learning or professional development within schools, feed into school policy, and contribute to dialogue and the domain of knowledge about qualities that enable school communities to flourish (Annan, 2005; Ballard 2004a; Florian & Rouse, 2001; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Indeed, these ideals represented the drivers and objectives of the research.

## **1.6 Overview of Methodology and Research Methods**

This research utilised an exploratory, case study design seated within the pragmatic paradigm (Greene & Hall, 2010) and adopted a constructive, positive orientation (Sheldon & King, 2001) to investigate personal and systemic features that enhanced transition within a local schooling district. The decision to ground this study within a pragmatic approach was made with due consideration of the literature and the aims of the research, based upon the rationale of ‘fit for purpose’ (Biesta, 2010). Pragmatism recognises knowledge is socially constructed, supports an ecological focus, is well suited to a positive orientation and mixed methodologies, and being action-oriented is suited to educational improvement research. The research process was influenced by the researcher’s preferred *modus operandi* in professional psychological practice of utilising inclusive and strength-based ways of working within a situational analysis approach (Annan, 2005).

The sequential design utilised mixed methods to best address the requirements of sampling, enhancement, and completeness (Bryman, 2006a) in data collection. Data was collected in three phases via pre-transition and post-transition questionnaires and follow up personal interviews with smaller groupings drawn from the larger samples of participants. Participants from 14 primary, intermediate and secondary schools, the majority of schools in the district, voluntarily agreed to take part in the study. Represented were students with identified learning support needs, their parents or caregivers, primary teachers and secondary teachers, all of whom contributed their ideas about transition.

Students' attitudes to transition were assessed before and after the move to secondary school and a group of ten students, who had transitioned well in comparison to their peers, were identified. Those students, along with their parents and caregivers took part in a personal interview after the transition to high school. Ten teachers from each year level were selected for interview by random selection. A further ten 'expert' school staff members with positions of responsibility for transition in their school or the district were invited to contribute from a platform of transition practice expertise.

Inferential statistics were used to analyse scaled data, while short-answer questionnaire responses and interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. Each data phase was explored independently however analysis was informed by preceding stages.

### **1.7 Assumptions and Scope**

This study did not set out to discover causal links between factors; it was an exploratory study. The following assumptions were made:

1. A strength-orientated design was an appropriate platform for investigating the primary-secondary transition of students with learning support needs.
2. The opinions expressed in questionnaires were participants' own.
3. Participants provided honest responses during interviews and contributed to the best of their ability.

### **1.8 Structure of the Thesis**

The thesis is organised into three parts and eight chapters:

Part One, comprising four chapters, introduces the study and study decisions. Chapter One introduces the area of concern, the rationale, statement of purpose and contextualises the study by providing background information. In Chapter Two, the literature review includes a brief historical view of transition followed by an examination of literature around successful transition, strength-focused research, systemic studies, stakeholder perspectives and New Zealand research contributions. Literature was approached within a frame of relevance to

students with learning support needs and a positive focus. The research questions which emerge from identified gaps in the literature are presented at the end of the chapter. Chapter Three provides a review of methodological theory that guided design decisions. The rationale for adopting a pragmatic approach within a mixed method, case study design introduced in Chapter One is expanded. Chosen data collection and analysis methods, and ethical and quality standards are justified. Chapter Four applies the theoretical concepts and methodological decisions to the study and describes the research methods employed, including those used to identify a small subsample of students whose questionnaire results indicated they had completed a positive transition.

Part Two presents results in three chapters. The first, Chapter Five, reports questionnaire findings including Phase One data - before transition, and Phase Two data - after transition. Chapter Six presents Phase Three data collected through individual interviews with small groupings of students, family members, and school staff members.

Part Three concludes the thesis with a discussion of results and conclusions over two chapters. Chapter Seven discusses research findings in relation to the literature reviewed and research questions. Chapter Eight presents a summary of the study, a model representing findings, and conclusions. Significant practice implications and recommendations are offered, strengths and weaknesses of the study are considered, and avenues for further research suggested.

# **CHAPTER TWO**

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

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# CHAPTER TWO

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction

Transition matters came to the fore with the introduction of compulsory post-primary schooling and early twentieth century education policy requiring children aged around puberty to move on from primary to secondary school (Nisbet & Entwistle, 1969). Issues attracting on-going attention have included educational continuity, attainment, engagement, and students' well-being (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008; Cox & Kennedy, 2008; Galton et al., 1999). Points of consensus being that moving to secondary school represents a time of change and vulnerability for children and families (Smith, Feldwisch, & Abell, 2006); an interruption of continuity when all students require support (Anderson, Jacobs, Schramm, & Splittgerber, 2000; McGee et al., 2003), and some need assistance more than others (Dutch & McCall, 1974; Galton et al., 2003).

The current research was interested in local primary-secondary transitions of students with unsupported learning needs; students having inferior learning outcomes, like those recently prioritised by the New Zealand Government for attention, who are more likely to live in poorer areas, be of Māori and Pasifika origin and have extra learning requirements (Ministry of Education, 2012b). Seeking to move from a deficit orientation (Howard & Johnson, 2004), literature that approached transition within positively-framed methodology was of interest for this review. Principally, research that focused upon beneficial transition practice and/or positive transition experiences of students with learning support needs was sought to review, however representative works were found to be scarce.

Working within the aforementioned paucity, the literature review begins with an historical snapshot of general transition research to provide an initial context. This is followed by presentation and discussion of selected literature that illustrates the shifting landscape of thought and practice underpinning current transition processes. Factors considered include the conceptualisation of successful transition, positively framed aspects of transition including

risk and resilience, ecological approaches, and different perspectives of transition from New Zealand and overseas, bearing specific regard for students with learning support needs. Gaps in the literature that informed the direction of the research are identified and the chapter concludes with the research questions.

## **2.2 Historical Context**

Finding the ideal schooling structure to best serve (all) children, in terms of smooth passage and continuous learning development, has drawn on-going interest in transition matters (Eccles et al., 1993; Galton, Morrison, & Pell, 2000; Soares, Soares, & Pumerantz, 1973; Ward, 2000; Weiss & Baker-Smith, 2010). One early investigation looked into the optimum transition age and effects on attainment (success) by following over 3,000 Scottish students for five years to their second year of high school “when they have clearly left behind the stage of transition” (Nisbet & Entwistle, 1969, p.22). Principals contributed opinions and students, who must have had a reasonable level of literacy, completed psychological test batteries, and personal essays. Although a long-term view of the transition process was adopted, short-term supports of orientation and meeting future staff members were found to benefit more vulnerable students. At that time, family background and involvement, student attitudes, and readiness emerged as both positive influences and potential risk factors, and those findings were supported elsewhere (Dutch & McCall, 1974).

With self-concept being a flourishing area of interest at the time (Coopersmith, 1959), the impact of structure upon students’ social and psychological development was taken up by Blyth, Simmons and Bush (1978). Their comparison of K-8 and K-6 students from Minnesota contrasted to other findings (Soares et al., 1973), showing internal transitions supported student self-concept. A mixed bag of effects revealed K-6 to Year Seven transition was more risky for girls although it benefitted all students’ academic focus; thus, environmental context emerged as a critical mediator of risk and maturity in transition (Blyth et al., 1978). Self-esteem and relational factors attracted on-going attention (Wigfield, Eccles, MacIver, Reuman, & Midgley, 1991; Wigfield, Lutz, & Wagner, 2005).

Other factors of interest included risk appraisal and adaptation to high school, as in Pumfrey and Ward’s (1976) British study. Two groups of adolescents, none of whom received support

from professional educational services were designated “maladjusted” (n = 26) and “normally adjusted” (n = 19) according to the Bristol Social Adjustment Guides and matched by attainment, intelligence, and personality measures. Comparison of pre- and post-transition measurements indicated adjustment more likely for brighter students, while initial high maladjustment and extroversion were found to be deleterious to student-teacher relationships and social adjustment. Bearing in mind the limitations of the non-random and small sample size, maladaptive status in high school was found sensitive to teacher and time effects, with spontaneous improvement not uncommon. With teacher effects brought to light, questions about the power of pedagogy and practice were followed up by others (Ward et al., 1982), and Pumfrey and Ward’s (1976) results challenged educational services of the day.

Ward and colleagues (1982) critically-framed study reflected the emergent emphasis upon teacher practice; their goal at outset to identify effective pedagogical responses to benefit students’ transition success within a United States schooling district. The ecologically-orientated methodology reflected a more inclusive attitude with data collected before, during and after the transition period. The comprehensive dataset included student attitude surveys, classroom observations of 24 students and their teachers, interviews with students, teachers and parents, and teachers’ reflective comments. Students’ initial transition experience was measured by independent raters according to four success criteria: report grade (nine weeks into secondary); student engagement (class participation, completion of work, correctness of oral participation); classroom behaviour; and peer relationships. The influence of teacher pedagogy was evident with students’ primary school learning management skills impacting their later adaptation to different learning expectations (group work, individual research skills). Additionally, teacher accessibility and classroom management skills affected students’ adaptation.

Teachers assessed students’ peer relations and classroom behaviour using six categories: success/multitask; social; dependent; phantom (attends, non-contributory); isolate (non-engaged, compliant); and alienate (confrontational, off-task) (Ward et al., 1982). Although consistency was evident in students’ class behaviours over time, extra teacher accessibility and support of “dependent” students did “... have a greater impact on their success than teacher time spent with alienated students” (p. 27); evidence of growing disparity between student cohorts. The “alienated” appeared to emerge as collateral casualties of transition

(Bauman, 2007; Slee 2009) and one was left to wonder what practices might have ameliorated their “unsuccessful” trajectory of poor grades and unacceptable behaviour.

Students’ notions of successful adaptation were not gathered but parents’ views revealed concerns for their children’s grades, emotional well-being, and peer relations across transition while worries about authority relations featured post-transition (Ward et al., 1982). Also, time management, attitude, motivation, and extra-curricular involvement were raised as concerns. With parent-teacher connections impacting positively on student performance, the researchers urged further investigation and prioritisation of academic matters in transition, especially continuity and meeting needs of students deemed responsive to remediation. Conclusions not unlike those of Youngman (1978) who suggested “disenchanted” students or those exhibiting “inferior performance” might hold promise if identified early enough.

Power and Cotterell (1981) noted the propensity of research to approach primary-secondary transition as a problem concentrating more upon negative effects for students, with little cognisance of context. Thus, seeking to move from a sole focus on “transition trauma”, environment and person effects were considered. Students from 13 Brisbane primary schools (n=1662) were followed to four high schools completing pre- and post-transition inventories measuring satisfaction, involvement, expectations, ability, personality, and achievement data. Teachers contributed via interview but unlike Ward and others’ (1982), parent data was not collected.

Most concerns of the 1100 successfully tracked students dissipated once in secondary school and although “coping with the demands of high school proved to be a challenge, initially” and settling in was “a significant achievement” (Power & Cotterell, 1981, p.10), once over the initial hurdle, students drew upon their own resources to fit in and just ‘got on with it’. Peers and classmates provided support and most negative predictions about school, schoolwork, other students, and teachers were found spurious. For example, older students were neither bullies nor unfriendly and teachers were kind not nasty.

Primary teachers felt comfortable with their preparation of students but worried those less able might strike difficulties with secondary schoolwork and expectations (Power & Cotterell, 1981). In contrast, secondary teachers saw barriers in structural terms – timetables, resources,

systemic learning requirements, societal demands, and prescriptive ideas of success all of which, they thought, impacted their ability to meet students' needs. The researchers suggested that such a pattern of externalisation "militates against the development of teaching strategies which are tailored to the needs of students in transition" (p. 36). Years later, Zeedyk and colleagues' (2003) warned of repercussions about similar findings which they suggested carried "the risk of creating a degree of helplessness for individual pupils" (p. 67) if appropriate pedagogical responses were not forthcoming. Power and Cotterell (1981) also found cross- curriculum knowledge and continuity wanting, while concerns were expressed for students experiencing conformity, learning, confidence, and relationship challenges; points resonating with later findings (Galton et al., 1999).

Taking a strength view, the "rationality and adaptability of children in periods of change" (Power & Cotterell, 1981, p. 37), was underscored. With the added recommendation that parents take a greater part in transition planning matters, conclusions demonstrated synchronicity with many ideals of community and inclusion (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Thus, transition was presented as a time of opportunity contingent upon appropriate responses, including curriculum and pedagogical connections between sectors, supportive organisational systems, and structures extending through transition to meet students' needs:

Designing primary and secondary environments capable of optimising the intellectual growth, adjustment and satisfaction of other pupils is, however, a more complex task. What seems critical in the end is the extent to which the school provides appropriate support structures and the teachers involved are sensitive to the needs of individuals. (Power & Cotterell, 1981, p.30)

Power and Cotterell's (1981) more positive appraisal of transition process and participation represented a growing shift away from problem-packaging adolescents and negative terminology more apparent in early portrayals of transition experiences (See Nisbet & Entwistle, 1969; Pumfrey & Ward, 1976). For this movement, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) contribution to the changing discourse must be considered significant. For instance, he proposed the apparent increase in behavioural problems and academic failure of young people moving toward secondary school was linked to the trend of building school islands, separated

from family and community. Moreover, internal silos within schools (by age, subject, etc) compounded the loss of children's connections and amplified the experience of increasing alienation. These propositions were a positive step for the discussion of transition (Wehlage & Rutter, 1985) and opened the way for alternative questions. Subsequent studies (e.g. Bishop et al., 2003; Galton et al., 2003) demonstrated responsiveness to ecological theory and openness to investigating positive outcomes (Evangelou et al., 2008; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990).

Following Power and Cotterell's (1981) lead and wishing to explore more positive aspects of transition in the current study, the following section considers successful transition; specifically, how it has been operationalised within research and generally what it looked like in results.

### **2.3 What does Successful Transition look like?**

Successful transition has been characterised according to positive aspects of schooling, for example: adaptation (Gutman & Midgley, 2000); curriculum continuity (Galton et al., 2003); social stability (McGee et al., 2003); student participation (Ward et al., 1982); and resilience (Howard & Johnson, 2000). Equally, successful transition has been contextualised alongside barriers, for example: declining attainment (Anderson et al., 2000); risk (Bowen, Richman, Brewster, & Bowen, 1998); and behavioural problems (Wentzel, 1998). This pairing seems logical, since as Tilleczeck and Ferguson (2007) suggested "risk factors which hinder or help the transition are those which help or hinder school disengagement and student success" (p. 2), citing community, culture, and caring as foundational prerequisites.

Transition can be viewed as a long-term process (Cox & Kennedy, 2008), or in more immediate terms. A short-range view has advantages in practice by recognising small steps along the introductory path to secondary school (Howard & Johnson, 2004). Such a scaffolded approach, beneficial for new situations (Vygotsky, 1986), enables students to reflect on incremental steps - meeting friends, getting on with new teachers, for example. Anderson and colleagues' (2000) conceptualised short-term transitional success as an ecological event dependent upon students' preparedness (from primary school), the availability of support structures, and family participation. Success itself was likened to

factors “found on elementary school report cards” (p. 331) - achievement, conduct, and effort. Similarly taking a short-range view, Ganeson and Ehrich’s (2009) phenomenological study involving 16 Australian adolescents emphasised proximal facilitators including supportive peers, transition programmes, and school staff, though family influences weren’t mentioned.

Evangelou and colleagues (2008) also took a short-term view. They addressed successful transition within a larger project focused upon effective education involving students, parents, teachers, and local authority officers from five different regions across England. With only the latter group (n = 6) asked directly about features of successful transition, the resultant definition of smooth process around school choice and enrolment was unsurprising. In contrast, factor analysis on students’ and parents’ survey responses revealed students’ successful transition characterised by

- developing new friendships and improving self esteem and confidence;
- settling well in school life and causing no concerns to their parents;
- showing an increasing interest in school and school work;
- getting used to their new routines and school organisation with ease; and
- experiencing curriculum continuity. (p. 16)

Thus, the importance of gauging all stakeholders’ views was reinforced. Overall, cross-sector relationships, supportive school practices including tutor group activities, and clear information provision for parents and pupils emerged as success facilitators. Students with special educational needs were not found to have experienced a less successful transition however a greater proportion, compared to other students, experienced bullying, which was identified as an inhibiting factor.

Literature also reflected long-term views and/or institutional orientations. For example, McGee and colleagues (2003) stated: “The academic attainment of students is of primary importance when they make the transition from primary to secondary school” (p. 3). In a similar vein, the New Zealand Ministry of Education (2013e) stated: “Success for priority students is measured by the system’s ability to ensure that all children and young people are experiencing improved outcomes” (p. 8), and from the Education Review Office:

All students coming from Year 8 should expect to be successful at secondary school. A good start at secondary school is essential to this success and will help students achieve the foundation skills necessary for future wellbeing, training and employment (2012a, p.3).

Given prevalent governmental policy and influence in research direction, the pairing of attainment or school success with successful primary-secondary transition is logical and consistent. However, as already raised by Power and Cotterell (1981), it seems possible the pervasiveness of an institutional model and associated focus upon secondary schools' prescriptive outcomes has evolved to the expense of some students (Ballard, 2004b) and diverging conceptualisations of "success" within the stakeholder community may have been ignored. It remains to be seen whether the following softening of discourse within New Zealand's current educational policy leads to more responsive and inclusive outcomes:

Every student has the opportunity and capability to achieve education success. This means that the education system is responsive to the needs of every child and young person, helps them find what success looks like for them and supports them to achieve that success (Ministry of Education, 2013e, p.8).

In contrast to the aforementioned top-down approach, Peters' (2010) systemic view of success reflected aspects of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model, respecting micro- and mesosystems of the child. In common with Tilleczek and Ferguson (2007) and in agreement with Ballard (2004a), Peters (2010) suggested relational building blocks underpinned success: "Starting school involves not just the child but also a range of other participants, including families and teachers in ECE and school. Determining success must therefore take into account the different perspectives involved" (p. 1). It is suggested here that Peters' responsive, partnership approach which emphasised mutual understandings between stakeholders, albeit in relation to transition from early childhood education to school, has great pertinence to primary-secondary transition.

## **2.4 Shifting to a Positive View**

As student success, defined as attainment of a high school diploma, grew increasingly inaccessible for a wide section of society in the United States (Rumberger, 1995, 2011),

attention to transition risk, articulation, and retention increased. Early school leaving occurred not only in North America (Bottoms, 2008; Neild, Balfanz, & Herzog, 2007); there was ample evidence of students leaving early from secondary schooling in New Zealand (Bishop et al., 2003; Ministry of Education, 2013i; McGee et al., 2003) and worldwide (UNESCO, 2014).

Risk identification dominated initial research direction, focusing often upon student or family characteristics, for example, attitudes (Dutch & McCall, 1974) or family status (Green & Scott, 1995). While understandably an important issue for policy makers and educators, a focus upon risk supported a negative view of student prospects and over-emphasised discrete problems (Adelman & Taylor, 2000). For example, in the context of students marginalised by mainstream systems, Anderson and colleagues (2000) stated: “When all is said and done, gender, classroom behaviour, achievement, and SES/race combine to make successful systemic transition extremely unlikely” (p. 329).

In contrast, preventative approaches emphasised opportunity (Rutter, 1987), articulated ways to shift from problem-focused psychological research (Anzul et al., 2001; Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Seligman, 2002) and emphasised long reaching consequences of the more positive approach:

... understanding how individuals navigate developmental transitions is at the crux of understanding risk and resilience across the life span ... transitional periods or events have the potential to alter behavior, affect, cognition, or context, all of which could result in lifelong change. (Graber & Brooks-Gunn, 1996, p.768)

Thus, strength-focused research grew in counterbalance to deficit orientations which emphasised abnormality, disorders, and barriers; approaches which, in human services, fostered paternalistic attitudes and “expert” professionals who “fixed” problems or individuals (Epstein, Rudolph & Epstein, 2000). Protective (positive) aspects were explored including: attendance (Balfanz et al., 2007); adolescent skills (Berliner, 1993); prior proficiencies (Cappella & Weinstein, 2001); school responsiveness (Catterall, 1998); peer support (Ellis, Marsh, & Craven, 2005); families (Garmezy, 1993); student self-efficacy (Gibbs & Poskitt,

2010; Gutman & Midgley, 2000); supportive teachers (Howard & Johnson, 2000); and, social relationships (Langenkamp, 2010).

Roderick and Camburn's (1999) research provided an instance of the philosophical shift in action. The risk-focused study set out to investigate the effects of race, ethnicity, gender, age, and prior attainment upon transitional progress of nearly 26,000 predominately disadvantaged, minority students; the complete 1992-1993 cohort of transitioning adolescents in urban Chicago. Forty-two percent of students failed at least one subject in their introductory year. That students' continued progress depended upon good attendance, work completion, and examination passes afforded no surprise. However, once students started to fail at high school, recovery was found extremely difficult and early school leaving was often the inevitable outcome. Thus, consideration of institutional influences was necessitated and, as a consequence, the importance of ensuring students' learning needs were catered for on arrival at the new school was highlighted; accountability for students' coping and engagement was passed back to teachers and schools, and a swing from a problem-student focus was demonstrated:

Providing a good transition into a high risk environment does not ensure that students get better at being in a high risk environment ... Future research needs to move beyond demographic analysis ... how students, families and schools respond in ways that might promote or inhibit recovery and the extent to which alternative school environments might shape both the task students face and their academic performance in early years of high school (Roderick & Camburn, 1999, pp. 338-339).

Increased attention to resilience, defined as "the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances" (Masten et al., 1990, p.426), emphasised strengths and helpful processes as risk was reconceptualised in ecological terms, located within social structures rather than individuals (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Howard & Johnson, 2000).

That perspective was also taken by Catterall (1998) who reasoned lumping children in categories, rather than treating them as individuals who experienced risks, could lead to tarring by association, or conversely, disregard; a stance familiar in the New Zealand context

where stereotyped attitudes have been shown to disadvantage students (Bevan-Brown, 2006; Bishop et al., 2003).

Catterall's (1998) access to a United States' national dataset enabled data follow-up from primary to secondary school according to academic resilience, commitment resilience, and early school leaving rates. His expressed interest was in demonstrated resilience (recovery) of students who had doubts, while at primary school, about their future educational longevity and achievement. Survival to the tenth grade was the dependent measure for success. Although current participant voices might have afforded a more accurate and sensitive analysis, retrospectively accessed personal contributions were represented in the dataset and conclusions offered a breath of fresh air to the research landscape.

Student involvement in extra-curricula activities, school responsiveness, and family support were found to impact students' educational resilience, although unlike McGee and colleagues' (2003) findings, socioeconomic background lacked effect on academic resilience. Significantly, dropout occurred in earlier years and, backing Power and Cotterell's (1981) findings, risk was found to be individually experienced and changeable, showing that school responsiveness to individual need mattered:

Today's C or D student appears to have a greater chance of becoming tomorrow's achiever than teachers, school administrators, or policy makers may recognize, and, with advances in such recognition, the prospects of student resilience would probably be even higher. (Catterall, 1998, p.329)

The similarities between Catterall's (1998) conclusions and those of Te Kotahitanga (Bishop et al., 2003) are striking and remind of the need to nurture opportunity by valuing subjective experiences. Furthermore by recognising individual strengths, capitalising on available protective factors (Cappella & Weinstein, 2001), and building supportive relationships and institutions (Howard & Johnson, 2004; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) academic resilience had been proved possible.

## 2.5 Systemic Ecological Research

A focus on positive aspects was supported by an ecological orientation, best conceptualised according to Bronfenbrenner's model (1979, 1986, 1994). The model framed human development as influenced by person-environment reciprocal processes varying according to proximity to the developing individual and the impact of personal, relational, and ecological factors over time which, captured by the chronosystem in the model, held pertinence to discussion of transition. Person-characteristics were recognised within the nested model, with disposition, resources (skill and knowledge), and demand characteristics (reactional social processes) described as affecting interactions and shaping future development. The model enabled and demanded a wide view of transition encompassing individual, partnership, and systemic influences.

Within the prevailing climate of concern for students' learning progress and attainment (Alspaugh, 1998; Morgan & Hertzog, 2001; Roderick & Camburn, 1999), a striking example of a systemic, ecological approach was provided by the studies of Galton and various colleagues' (Hargreaves & Galton, 2002) that facilitated greater understanding of contextual, institutional, environmental, and relational aspects of transition within United Kingdom schools. Their research, spanning over two decades, demonstrated strength-focused approaches that attended to what was going right and what was working. Furthermore, being solution-focused and couched in constructive terms, critique of practice affirmed change and improvement as viable. For the aforementioned reasons, this body of work was influential in the conceptualisation of the current study and a brief synopsis follows.

The original ORACLE (Observational Research and Classroom Learning Evaluation) longitudinal studies (1975-1980) used classroom observations to focus upon curriculum delivery and student progress before and through transition (Galton & Willcocks, 1983). Pre- and post- transition standardised assessment tasks showed around 40% of students failed to make progress in English, mathematics, and reading in the first year after moving to their new school. Evidence of a general hiatus in progress and deterioration in students' attitudes on transition to high school, prompted the British Government to respond with the introduction of a national curriculum.

Greater public accountability, as a result of national British initiatives, was reported (Galton et al., 1999) and transition practices improved, especially social and induction strategies. Five categories of transition activity were detailed:

- Administrative (at organisational level including exchange of information)
- Pupil-centred (mainly social aspects)
- Curriculum continuity (involving primary-secondary connections)
- Pedagogic (engaging students in learning)
- Learning management (students learning about learning)

A replication of the ORACLE study (1995-1998) followed approximately 600 pupils through transition to high school (Galton, Comber, & Pell, 2002), and exposed less than perfect transition processes and interrupted learning progress. It is important to note that pupils with special learning or behavioural difficulties were expressively excluded from observations made for the study, however evidence from attitude inventories showed low-attaining pupils were more socially isolated and less motivated than their peers post-transition. In addition, able pupils' enjoyment of school steadily declined as students were expected to become more passive recipients in the classroom. Hargreaves and Galton (2002) suggested that secondary teaching style was answerable. Schagen and Kerr (1999) were blunt in their appraisal of institutional progress; they stated: "...the National Curriculum has not had the anticipated positive impact on curriculum continuity and individual progression" (p. 92).

Thus, curriculum continuity and pedagogy came into the spotlight and, like Power and Cotterell (1981) some years prior, highlighted divergence between primary and secondary teachers' approach to their craft (Galton, et al., 2002). By way of example, when teachers were invited to identify students who might be at-risk early after transition, primary teachers concentrated on emotional and relational factors whereas secondary teachers viewed academic progress as critical to adjustment (Galton, et al., 2002). Conclusions were frank. Regarding the five previously identified approaches to transition practice, transfer had become smoother, successful even, in terms of administrative and social details but continuity of learning was still being ignored. It was suggested that the lack of cross-sector pedagogical understanding, persistent stereotypical views of "how they do it", and apparent neglect by teachers to instruct students about different approaches to learning had serious implications

for students' learning progress, especially those identified as potentially at risk of losing traction in their learning path (Galton et al., 2000).

Following up on the established works (Galton et al., 1999, 2002) a further study was commissioned by the United Kingdom Government to consider issues raised (Galton et al., 2003). Fifty principals from more than 12 local education authorities shared their views about progress, while tracking data for over 3000 primary school students was accessed. Additionally, comment was sought from teachers and students about facilitative practice, while 25 schools, whose Year Seven students had made positive attitude gains post-transition, were selected for more intensive study.

Various projects resulted which utilised a mix of fieldwork, action research projects, professional development, and information-gathering to investigate factors of student engagement and academic progress. These included "looking at strategies which might help sustain pupils' commitment to learning across the middle years of secondary schooling, and strategies which support disengaged pupils in renewing their interest and effort in learning" (Rudduck, Berry, Demetriou, & Goalen, 2003, p. 1). The team paid particular attention to making a connection with student interviewees who shared their reasons for, or sources of, disengagement. In addition, they worked at extending practice horizons for schools and teachers, as follows:

In the students' words it was about moving from being a 'dosser' or a 'shirker' to a 'worker', but these terms can give the impression that the problem is simply laziness and that the remedy lies exclusively in the students' hands. We think that this is only part of the story; there are often things within the regimes of schooling that make the students avoid work and that can be remedied once teachers understand what they are (Rudduck, et al., 2003, p.87).

Consideration of triggers enabled schools to then plan actions that reflected inclusive responses that "fit the context and the needs of the students" (p. 88). Outcomes indicated strength-focused approaches by significant adults could assist reversal of disengagement and early intervention which was sustained at secondary school could interrupt students' negative learning stories. Similar restorative effects upon confidence and learning engagement had

been reported by Flutter and Rudduck (2004) in relation to mastery-orientated teaching. Furthermore, that students' must be given the opportunity to voice their needs and have their efforts toward change acknowledged, was universally accepted.

Reflecting the iterative nature of Galton and others' (2003) work and feedback from stakeholders, certain counsel was modified. It was suggested previous weight placed upon 'smooth' transition may have been overstated. Thus, educators needed to be mindful of retaining students' experience of difference on entering high school by ensuring excitement for the 'new' was sustained and opportunities for making the fresh start, valued by some students, were present. Put differently, too smooth (or boring) a transition might even militate against resilience and engagement in the long term. Furthermore, it was recommended that secondary schools pay greater attention to the teaching of learning and thinking strategies – both pre- and post-transition. Other prior recommendations endured, such as academic progress through primary grades being prioritised and pupils' retrospective opinions about facilitative transition practices continue to be sought.

Schooling outcomes may be related to proximal and distal influences (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and therefore investigation of the nature of relations within a community is imperative to understand development. Galton and colleagues' (2003) work, within which teachers were given voice, parents contributed and students were consulted, demonstrated this principle and revealed the significant contribution made by personal accounts of experience. Research that demonstrated accessing different stakeholder views is addressed in the next section.

## **2.6 Stakeholder Perspectives**

Transition occurs within a relational context which involves and connects students, families and schools (Peters, 2010; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Historically, very little research gathered children's subjective viewpoints directly; even less opinion was collected from parents and family members. However, a special issue of the Educational Review in 1978, focused upon pupils' perspectives, resulted in an increasing trend to gather qualitative information from students and stakeholders. Growth in the field occurred within a human rights and justice framework and it was quickly recognised that schools could learn about themselves by asking those people intimately involved; that pupil consultation and teacher participation in the

research process added insight and promoted development (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; Galton et al., 1999; MacBeath, Galton, Steward, MacBeath, & Page, 2006).

To this point in the current review, attention has been drawn to active input of stakeholders' opinions where it has (or hasn't) occurred. Clearly, despite broad advocacy for the inclusion of stakeholder perspectives in transition research, representation by all stakeholder groups within in any one piece of transition research has been uncommon and furthermore, some voices have been excluded more than others.

Referencing the exclusion of authentic student contribution to schooling enhancements, Rudduck, Chaplain and Wallace (1996) commented: "... this bracketing out of their voice, is founded upon an outdated view of childhood which fails to acknowledge children's capacity to reflect on issues affecting their lives ..." (p. 172), moreover "such neglect merely confirms the low status of student opinion" (p. 176). For decades, prominent educational psychologist and educator, Tony Booth has advocated inclusive school development through partnership with stakeholders. In regard to students' participation, his words were clear: "We as teachers are often surprised by what the children have to say" (2009).

As illustrated by studies presented herein some redress has occurred resulting in clarification of certain early transitional successes relating to personal and institutional matters (Cox & Kennedy, 2008; Evangelou et al., 2008). However, there remains a dearth of research exploring directly the school experiences of students with mild and moderate needs in New Zealand (McGee et al., 2003). Thomson (2004) suggested that historically, pupils "at-risk" in particular, were excluded from contributing because their voice was viewed as "unworthy" or "incompetent". Advocating for a more inclusive approach, she declared "the rationale for deliberately seeking out the voices of pupils 'at-risk' is precisely because these are the young people for whom the school is not working well" (p. 2).

With reference to families, and analogous to Thomson's (2004) thoughts, Hanafin and Lynch (2002) found working-class parents were interested but marginalised because they were not consulted by schools and therefore felt excluded from school decision-making. Similarly, Bishop and colleagues (2003) found parents wanted their children's schooling outcomes to be better than their own but generally they found home-school relationships were difficult

because their culture was not valued and there was little experience of partnership. Their summative comments were blunt: “Currently relationships between mainstream secondary schools and those parenting Māori students are at a standoff, exacerbated by discourses of blame and guilt” (p. 2). The need for a more collaborative working model between home and school for the benefit of adolescents settling into high school was evident.

Parental involvement in schools at transition time (Gutman & Midgley, 2000; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999; Ministry of Education, 2010a), and generally, is known to influence children’s engagement and schooling outcomes (Benner & Mistry, 2008), and bring reciprocal benefits for students, family members and teachers (Christenson, Reschly & Wylie, 2012; Epstein, 1987; Hornby, 2000; Paulson, Marchant, & Rothlisberg, 1998; Reschly & Christenson, 2006). At post-primary level, an open stance to involvement is encouraged (Epstein, 2007) as parents can be reticent to be involved (Bishop et al., 2003; Eccles & Harold, 1996) and, mainly because of competing priorities, schools do not or cannot prioritise home-school relationships (Markow, Macia, & Lee, 2013; Vinson & Harrison, 2006). While Hornby (2000) advocated for parents to be acknowledged as experts about their children, he and others have suggested that primary responsibility for parental engagement sat firmly with schools and staff (Reschly & Christenson, 2012). Given these factors, continued advocacy for the inclusion of, erstwhile under-represented parent voice in schooling life and development (Cox & Kennedy, 2008; McGee et al., 2003; Power & Cotterell, 1981) is unsurprising. Within both local and wider transition literature, opinion appears unequivocal; there is a fundamental need to hear what parents and families have to say (Hanafin & Lynch, 2002; Lumby, 2007).

Moreover, in regard to teachers, although school improvement initiatives have benefitted from teacher input (Galton et al., 1999) and the efficacy of various supportive transition strategies has been demonstrated (e.g. Education Review Office, 2012a, 2012b; Humphrey & Ainscow, 2006; MacIver & Epstein, 1991), ample scope remains for staff members’ reflective contributions about successful and helpful transition processes. Just as voices of students and parents “on the fringes” have been marginalised, similarly teachers have been disregarded. Adelman and Taylor (2000) suggested progress toward addressing students’ barriers to learning “is hampered by the marginalized status of programs and personnel whose primary focus is on enabling learning ...” (p. 29). As a conduit to remedy, Hargreaves (1996) stated: “Recognizing and respecting teachers’ voices and the worth of the knowledge and experience

they articulate gives teachers rightful redress against the background of this previous and prolonged silence” (pp. 12-13). This is particularly pertinent to the New Zealand context which will be addressed in the next section.

## **2.7 New Zealand Contributions**

An evaluation of transition aimed at informing New Zealand practice (Education Review Office, 2012a) cited 38 literature sources including Ministry of Education research reports, overseas literature and 13 national evaluation reports. Of those, one study (Cox & Kennedy, 2008) and one literature review (McGee et al., 2003) exclusively addressed primary-secondary transition in New Zealand. Prior to the two aforementioned works, dedicated research was rare and transition typically emerged, as an issue to be tackled, from within initiatives like Achievement in Multi Cultural High Schools (AIMHI) (Hawk et al., 1996).

An exception was the Early Linkages Project which investigated teachers’ perceptions of transition connections between schooling sectors (McGee, 1987) and was comparable to research interest elsewhere (Galton & Willcocks, 1983). In common with the study abroad, McGee (1987) found links were mainly administrative with some “haphazard” cross-sector curriculum planning in evidence. Family involvement in transition and enthusiastic cross-sector relationships led by principals were recommended as helpful to transition practice, while lack of time presented as the chief barrier. McGee’s (1987) call for further research to “look at how transition can be improved from the point of view of students and parents” (p. 225), was subsequently echoed many times over (e.g. Galton et al., 2003; McGee et al., 2003).

The AIMHI project aspired to improve learning outcomes of Pasifika students and the performance of eight low decile high schools they attended so that more local students would be attracted to boost falling roll numbers (Hawk et al., 1996). Data was sourced from school documents, and from interviews with staff members in positions of responsibility and with convenience samples of school personnel, students and family members. As a result, transition was presented as a poor and traumatic introduction to secondary schooling. Transition practices provided inferior service to students and parents, and between and within school processes were found wanting and blameworthy. Like others (McGee et al., 2003; Sutton, 2000), Hawk and colleagues (1996) reported cross-sector misunderstanding, even

distrust, and presented a picture of particularly acrimonious connections between the schooling levels. Furthermore, primary and intermediate preparation and pedagogy were attacked and, because primary sector contribution was not sought, claims were not able to be defended.

While some useful transition processes were reported, mainly in regard to easing transition for students along the line of social and induction supports, it was difficult to find many positive features to grasp on to in the report. Given the circumstances of ‘failing’ schools, unsupportive leadership structures, and divided school cultures, the dominating negative or perverse reports were perhaps understandable. Contextual effects are known to impact teacher views (Hargreaves, 1996). However, one wondered whether there were so few positive things happening in the target schools, or maybe the good stories were not reported (Hawk et al., 1996). It is possible that questions were only negatively-oriented, for, while no question protocols were supplied in the report, a sample student question illustrated a negative standpoint: “Tell me some of the things that you do at school that cause teachers to be angry with you” (p. 101). Thus, if only by omission, the need for a positive approach was highlighted. Later, with increasing appreciation of strength recognition in organisational development (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005), the need for strength-orientated investigations of transition was raised (McGee et al., 2003).

A positive tone was more forthcoming from the Assessment for Learning and Progressions Project (Sutton, 2000) which afforded students’ voice priority and was able to demonstrate students do survive transition and may even experience developmental benefits through coping with change; an important aspect raised elsewhere (Power & Cotterell, 1981; Reyes, Gillock, Kobus, & Sanchez, 2000).

While the AIMHI project focused upon improving Pasifika students’ schooling, Te Kotahitanga (Bishop et al., 2003) focused upon Māori students’ achievement by investigating Year Nine and Year Ten Māori students’ experiences in secondary school. The researchers paid specific attention to student voice and utilised in-depth interviews with students, teachers, principals, and whānau members to gain an understanding of personal experiences. The rationale for focusing upon the first two years of secondary school was because “this is

the crisis location for students where the statistics on low achievement, retention and suspension problems are at their worst” (p. 1).

Findings from the Te Kotahitanga project were confronting. Many issues were brought to the fore, especially in connection with teachers’ negatively-framed assumptions about their Māori students and the resultant effects for teacher-student relationships and home-school relations. The assertion that transition was one of the most important influences on Māori students’ experience at secondary school aligned with others (McGee et al., 2003). Bishop and colleagues (2003) identified school structures and relationships with teachers as potential barriers to successful transitions. By contrast, students benefitted from a partnership approach in which their needs were addressed and culture was acknowledged, respected, and valued within the learning environment.

Barber and Olsen (2004), in reference to the passage of youth through middle school transitions into high school, reiterated the powerful effect of relationships saying, “it was clear that the degree to which students felt supported by their teachers was the most consistently predictive of their reported functioning, inside and outside of school” and went on to emphasise “... the critical importance of adult teachers in the development of youth” (p. 27).

Glynn, Berryman, Loader and Cavanagh’s (2005) transition intervention focused upon that supportive and preventative ideal. Aimed at addressing literacy barriers experienced by Māori students transitioning from kura kaupapa Māori language immersion settings to mainstream secondary schools, they took a community approach to engage students, whānau, and schools to improve students’ English writing and reading proficiencies prior to transition. Reporting the effectiveness of the 10-week intensive intervention they stated students were able to “stand tall in their own language and culture” (p. 452) and move on to secondary schooling with confidence. Moreover, benefits for home-school relations and whānau learning were patent.

Further recognition that the transition from Māori-medium education to general secondary schools presented as a time of vulnerability came from Hawera, Taylor and Herewini (2009) who raised the potential for mismatch between teacher and student views of pedagogy and learning management in reference to mathematics learning. Consistent with themes raised in

the aforementioned research projects, student participants emphasised teacher behaviour, relations and literacy barriers. Asked to pass on advice to their younger peers about transition, the 10 participant Year Nine students suggested work hard, listen and beware of mathematics vocabulary which hindered initial progress. While the sample size of 61 student participants was cited a potential limitation by the researchers, the possible implications of unsupported or naïve transition processes was brought judiciously into the spotlight. While the researchers were left to wonder whether culture featured or indeed mattered to secondary mathematics teachers, the growing evidence base of Māori students' disparate experiences ensured responsive governmental strategy:

Transitions can be challenging for Māori students. Māori students place strong importance on relationships with education professionals and their peers. Tailored solutions are required for Māori students transitioning between Māori medium and English medium education. Parents, whānau, iwi, Māori organisations and education professionals need a shared understanding of the negative impact that poor transitions can have on students. These stakeholders must work together to create the conditions and support networks for successful transitions. (Ministry of Education, 2013f, p.24)

Much of New Zealand's transition research has responded to specific Governmental interest of the time. In the case of McGee and colleagues' (2003) commissioned literature review, no particular focus was stated however it appeared to be aimed at identifying gaps in the transition knowledge base. Opinion was canvassed from Ministry of Education personnel and school principals enabling local opinion to supplement wider analysis. Eight themes encompassing academic, social, demographic, and affective factors as well as institutional aspects related to students' achievement and adjustment were identified. Unsurprisingly, given the lack of prior research, gaps in local transition knowledge were raised; those related to gender, ethnicity, family background, and disparate achievers reflecting the universality of transition 'issues'. The authors called for "research projects to look at linkage schemes and perceptions of students and school communities about transition to secondary school" (p. 20), adding "the literature may have a tendency to relate problems with transition. Therefore, more needs to be known about the students for whom transition was a positive experience" (p. 27).

The impact of primary-secondary transition on school performance was the focus of the last chapter of the *Competent Children, Competent Learners* longitudinal study that tracked 500

Wellington children from the age of five until sixteen years (Wylie et al., 2006) and also involved parents and teachers in interviews and surveys (see Wylie & Hipkins, 2006). Analysis of the transition stage utilised data collected from students aged 12 and again post-transition, when the mainly Pākehā students from disproportionately high-income homes, were in Year 10.

Wylie and colleagues (2006) detected no general drop in student performance between ages of 12 and 14, finding “change was just as likely to be up as down” (p. 75). This was an important finding since the post-transition performance dip had attracted considerable attention (Alspaugh, 2001; Galton, et al., 1999; McGee et al., 2003). Most students settled quickly, and contrary to Alspaugh (2001), who found close consecutive transitions deleterious to achievement, intermediate students having completed a transition only two years prior, settled more quickly, on average, than those from full primary schools. Thus, the possibility that adaptation to previous change and varying expectations bode well for the life’s further transitions (Power & Cotterell, 1981; Sutton, 2000) was reiterated.

However, Wylie and colleagues (2006) found around 17% of students took longer than the average two terms to feel comfortable in their new environment. With results showing a negative association between confidence and satisfaction levels and time taken to settle into high school, it seems possible the developmental trajectory of a number of students was impacted by their introduction to secondary school. Although, in common with Balfanz and colleagues (2007), students most at-risk of poorer outcomes at age 14 had already demonstrated disengagement at primary school. Māori and Pasifika students, more vulnerable to disenchantment at high school (Ministry of Education, 2013h), did experience greater difficulty adapting to teachers and rules (Wylie et al., 2006). With lower performing students possibly experiencing less support for understanding their own learning management needs, it seemed unsurprising that disillusioned students reported more frequently that school was not engaging them.

The study’s longitudinal design (Wylie et al., 2006) enabled students’ transition to be viewed in the context of changeable patterns of performance and attitude over time. Transition was presented as “a socially defined challenge” (p. 86) for the majority, with the implication that enduring negative emphases on this milestone had been overstated. However, enough

evidence was presented that illustrated the heterogeneity of students' transition experiences and served as a reminder that appropriate school responses to student needs on entry to high school mattered (Catterall, 1998). Furthermore, the experience of the minority, the under-represented in this study, was not adequately addressed. Thus, reflecting on McGee and colleagues (2003) identified gaps in local knowledge, it must be said a breach remained.

The New Zealand Government invested in further research (Cox & Kennedy, 2008) which contrasted to an Australian commitment to practice and widespread, active support of schools; the New South Wales Government assigning \$11.5 million in November 2008 to expand the support already in place for transition initiatives such as orientation and induction, taster classes, data transfer, and pastoral care (New South Wales Government, 2008). Following Vinson and Harrison's (2006) recommendation that transition be co-ordinated at district level, such provision was prioritised, while centralised enrolment for state secondary schools ensured placements before the end of the primary school year. Also, in Victoria, transition was designated a priority area for system improvement (DEECD, 2009b) with special funding allocated to school-based research projects to investigate primary-secondary transition (DEECD, 2009a).

Cox and Kennedy's (2008) research followed approximately 100 students from eight primary and intermediate schools to two secondary schools over 18 months with an eye on achievement, social adjustment, and student attitudes. As an exploratory study, the research aimed to shed specific light on current practices and perspectives of transition. Having an ecological focus, individual interview and quantitative assessment data were collected from parents, school staff members, and students. Student participants were clustered into banded groups to afford comparisons according to achievement and attitude. Findings substantiated much of what was known: transition represented an unsettling time (Neild et al., 2007); attainment fluctuates through transition (Wylie et al., 2006); positive teacher-student connections were key to school engagement (Bishop et al., 2003); peers provided support (McGee et al., 2003); and, curriculum, pedagogical factors, and environmental factors are important (Galton et al., 2002).

However, some remaining gaps in Cox and Kennedy's (2008) research provoked a number of queries, in respect of the current study:

1. Secondary teachers found it difficult to plan, support, and build relationships with low achieving students. However there was no investigation of enablers for teachers to cater for students with more challenging needs in transition.
2. Literature indicates home-school relationships are critical in transition, especially for students potentially at-risk (Epstein, 1995; Hughes, 2008) but teachers had little contact with parents of low achieving students. The factors that facilitate positive teacher-family relationships represent a knowledge gap.
3. Participants were asked about positive aspects of learning and future plans but were not asked to report what helped their transition.
4. Transitional success was measured in achievement terms, supplemented with attitudinal data. No criticism of that methodology is offered here, but it was interesting that parents' assessment of 'low achiever' students did not match teachers' assessments. One wonders whether parents' views of successful transition might also differ.

While the Ministry of Education invested considerable resources in transition research, aside from a school resource (Ministry of Education, 2010a) developed out of Sharon Cox and Shelley Kennedy's (2008) work, there appeared to be limited attention given to practical follow up. An exception was a small participatory, action-learning project (Higgins, 2008), which aimed to assist schools to improve transition practice systemically, following Fullan (2006), within a strength-focused community development method (Dharan, 2006; Wenger, 1998), and focused upon students who presented with greater vulnerability at transition time.

The initiative, supported by a facilitator from the Ministry of Education, Group Special Education ran for two years following one cohort of 50 transitioning students, school personnel, and parents from an initial pyramid of six contributing schools and one secondary school (Higgins, 2008). As a model for evidence-based practice development initial information was collected within the district. The data net was cast wide, as follows: students responded to pre- and post-transition questionnaires and took part in focus groups post-transition; school personnel reflected on personal and school processes and discussed their practice during professional development workshops; and, interviews were conducted with subsamples of students and teachers. Students, who had behavioural, emotional, social,

cultural or learning needs, identified by primary school personnel, contributed voluntarily with consent from parents or caregivers.

Some findings confirmed what was known – students' transition experiences were mostly positive with family, teachers, and friends supportive (Cox & Kennedy, 2008; Galton et al., 1999). Like Akos and Galassi (2004) more alignment was found within families while teachers' perceptions between sectors differed, at times. Challenging results provided fuel for various developments and professional discussions (Higgins, 2008). For example, there was evidence that some students, whom teachers had worried about, appeared to recover traction on entry to secondary school and reported making a good transition. Additionally, students reported being most concerned about teaching and learning issues in secondary schools, whereas teachers thought students' personal safety concerns would prevail. These findings signalled the need for greater investigation of the transitional experiences of students with learning support needs.

In line with previous findings (Evangelou et al., 2008; Ward et al., 1982), parents expressed paramount concern for their children's happiness along with their learning engagement (Higgins, 2008). However, while there was reasonable knowledge about administrative and orientation details few family members indicated familiarity about secondary learning matters. Interestingly, 77% of 90 parents wrote their name on the otherwise anonymous questionnaire to indicate they were willing to be contacted. This was taken to suggest that, in line with others (Bishop et al., 2003; Hanafin & Lynch, 2002), they wanted the opportunity to learn about their children's education or transition and/or be heard.

Given the known benefits of shared reflective learning (Piggot-Irvine, 2006) it was not surprising the teacher participants reported value was gained from the opportunity to collaborate on practice models. Higgins (2008) reported little of the between-sector negativity reported by Hawk and colleagues (1996) but numerous intermediate teachers reported being unaware of secondary transition processes and many teachers from both sectors reported no contact with their cross-sector colleagues. Administration matters drew considerable energy but district consistency was found lacking. Citing time and resourcing barriers, learning and teaching continuity was largely overlooked.

These findings paralleled those of Vinson and Harrison (2006) whose Sydney-based principals prioritised administrative measures, including data transfer and information-giving with the availability of time/resources identified as the most significant barrier to transition practice development. Less than 15% of the 457 primary and secondary principals in the study were involved in active cross-sector engagement although the development of cross-sector sharing to focus on curriculum, learning and pedagogy was considered highly important. Apparently continuity in home-school relationships also suffered, cited as being possible for less than one third of the respondents (Vinson & Harrison, 2006). Such findings add weight to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) silo hypothesis wherein the primary-secondary gulf thwarts teacher contact, precludes cross-fertilisation of ideas and unfortunately jeopardises effective transition.

The New Zealand studies reviewed herein have reinforced the usefulness of ecological models showing that taking a community view worked methodologically on a localised level (Higgins, 2008), just as elsewhere (Galton et al., 2002). As advocated by others (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; Power & Cotterell, 1981; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000), it demonstrated that stakeholders, especially students and families who stand to benefit most, want to have a say and have unique perspectives to contribute. Furthermore, with reported practice shifts occurring within the schooling district that included enhanced cross-sector planning and home-school relationships, and improved systemic arrangements and student-focused transition processes (Higgins, 2009b) teachers confirmed and demonstrated openness to moving their practice forward.

## **2.8 Transition of Students with Learning Support Needs**

A history of poor achievement and/or social and behavioural difficulties increases students' vulnerability to poor schooling progression (Ministry of Education, 2013i) and in turn, non-completion or early school leaving can bring poorer employment opportunities and attendant social and economic risks. Therefore, transition and early high school experiences are important (Cox & Kennedy, 2008; Ministry of Education, 2013a, 2014a) and their influence on learning progression ought not to be discounted (Eccles et al., 1993; Hawera et al., 2009; Neild, Stoner-Eby, & Furstenberg, 2008; Wylie et al., 2006).

Students have a better chance of success when their needs are met within the classroom (Alton-Lee, 2003; Bishop et al., 2003; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996) but learning needs must be known and addressed on arrival at a new school (Balfanz et al., 2007; Ministry of Education, 2014a) to ensure students' initial and on-going engagement. Bellert and Graham (2006) stated: "Effective teaching does not leave learning for vulnerable students to chance" (p. 8) and put the onus firmly upon management to support teachers in their task of meeting middle school students' needs. However, research indicates students' learning needs and/or transitional needs have not always been supported by schools; inclusive practice and continuity being compromised by organisational systems (Howes, Booth, Dyson, & Frankham, 2005; Roderick & Camburn, 1999) and leadership attitudes and practices (Adelman & Taylor, 2000; Kearney & Poskitt, 2001).

The Center for Mental Health in Schools advocated for teachers' frontline needs, saying: "When teachers encounter barriers that interfere with effective teaching, the first concern must be to provide them with a range of supports so they can enable the learning of students who are not doing well" (2013, p.6). Additionally, it was suggested that along with the two prevailing United States' standards pertaining to instruction and governance, a third standard was required to specifically address students' internal and external barriers to learning that would necessarily be supportive of teachers (and of all stakeholders) (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2013, 2014). The third standard would utilise mechanisms to unify and integrate intervention systems and structures, enable appropriate resourcing, build capacity for stakeholders and systems, and ensure evaluation and accountability processes. The standard would encompass the following six aspects:

- Personalised instruction through collaboration in schools
- Support for transitions (for students, family, and teachers)
- Home-school connections
- Response to and prevention of risk
- Community involvement
- Access to services for students and families

An important component of the standard was the prioritisation all stakeholders' needs at classroom, school-wide, and district level, including such factors as preventing difficulties,

promoting inclusive school community, and encouraging student engagement at the moment of transfer. Furthermore, transition received specific focus as a time when targeted intervention was possible; a time for preventative action and enhancement of opportunity, when positive direction or changes could be encouraged. Some of these ideals were evident in the previously-mentioned New South Wales approach to transition.

With reference to teaching capability in New Zealand, the Ministry of Education stated: “Teachers are skilled at using *The New Zealand Curriculum* and *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa* to meet the learning needs of all learners, inside and outside of the classroom” (2012a, p.3). Yet in the past, students’ behavioural issues have caused teachers extreme stress (Fraser & Moltzen, 2000) and planning for diverse needs has been found problematical (Bishop et al., 2003; Cox & Kennedy, 2008). One New Zealand study found about half of 84 primary and secondary teachers interviewed expressed frustration and concern at not receiving the level of support required to cater for student diversity in their classrooms. The researchers remarked: “In a very real sense, teachers are struggling with students for whom they need support ...” (Prochnow, Kearney, & Carroll-Lind, 2000, p.175).

Such findings are not isolated incidents. Teachers have been shown to struggle to accommodate students’ diverse learning needs on entry to secondary school for a range of reasons including attitudes and beliefs (Pivik, McComas, & Laflamme, 2002); confidence issues (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996); inadequate training (Bartak & Fry, 2004; Bellert & Graham, 2006; O’Neill, Bourke, & Kearney, 2009); lack of information (Galton et al., 1999); and, poor skills or resources (Barber & Olsen, 2004; MacBeath et al., 2006; Vinson & Harrison, 2006). Furthermore, Midgley Feldlaufer, & Eccles (1989) found “students who moved from high- to low-efficacy math teachers during the transition ended the junior high year with the lowest expectancies and perceived performance” (p. 247), and this was particularly so for low achieving students. On the other hand, a high level of teacher efficacy facilitates a more accommodating view of students with learning difficulties (Bandura, 1997; Soodak & Podell, 1993).

In Great Britain, MacBeath and colleagues (2006) reported about schools where Special Needs Co-ordinators managed transition and genuine attempts were made to operate within inclusive frameworks however, analogous to other results (Vinson & Harrison, 2006), good

transitions relied upon expertise and resources that were often in short supply and the handling of students' additional learning needs left much to be desired. Similarly, teachers in Australia (Feeney & Best, 1997) expressed good intentions to address the needs of all transitioning students, however knowledge and subsequent practice was found wanting.

Clearly, while there may be conceptual understanding of inclusion among educators, in practice, aligning principles to create inclusive systems that match the rhetoric has not proved straightforward. Teacher training standards have been called into question (Kane, 2005; O'Neill et al., 2009); Kane (2005) stating: "Explicit attention given to inclusion theory and practice is variable at best or apparently absent from most qualifications" (p. xv). In what could be interpreted as an act of redress and acknowledgement of a service practice breach here in New Zealand, the Ministry of Education embarked on an in-service training initiative across the country in 2012 to encourage schools to consider their inclusive practices (Ministry of Education, 2012a).

Students' learning trajectories have been changed by appropriately-targeted pedagogical and systemic approaches (Catterall, 1998; Roderick & Camburn, 1999). A proactive, positive illustration of teacher practice came from Cooper and Vickers (1989), researcher-teachers from Great Britain, who reported the transition of a student with learning needs which were not recognised by official statement. Student J transitioned to secondary school having general attainment results equivalent to a nine year old, a reading age of six and a half years, and a history of experiencing behavioural and learning challenges. Students like "J" can find transition more challenging than their peers (Bellert & Graham, 2006; Watson 2007) and along with their families can experience difficulties making a connection with their new school (Catterall, 1998; Cox & Kennedy, 2008; Ministry of Education, 2013h; Glynn et al., 2005). Student J must have received some assistance in primary school for he was known to require support during transition. Demonstrating cognisance of the need for continuity, on entry to a secondary school mainstream setting his progress was closely monitored by the reporting staff members, presumably connected with the special education department.

Cooper and Vickers (1989) reported a mixed bag of outcomes from the initial transition including class withdrawal and some teachers becoming annoyed with J's inability to meet requirements. On a positive note, it was reported the student responded during paired

learning, to individualised assistance and he enjoyed technology classes, demonstrating an imaginative approach. However, with his reading difficulties impacting his access to core subjects, an adaptation was devised involving taped presentation of curricula. Apparently, the intervention involving differentiation and recognition of strengths was effective and Student J was able to grow in confidence and make progress. In summing up, the practitioners emphasised the need to tailor learning approaches, that “the judicious mix of support offered assisted J’s integration and transition” (p. 82).

A further practice example, provided by Pickering’s (2008) account of children with dyslexia transitioning to high school, reflected the positive impact of appropriate adaptation using assistive technology. Teachers reported helpful practices including: being aware of student needs, having an inclusive culture, sharing responsibility with families, and listening to family as a source of information. Teacher skill was cited as a significant contributory factor in students’ successful adaptation to secondary school.

In reference to the two abovementioned examples, some might say that recommendations offered, which involved continuity of support and steering away from a ‘one size fits all’ approach (Catterall, 1998), reflected no more than good pedagogy (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Florian, 2006). Although, as already discussed, good pedagogy can be an elusive phenomenon. However, that the aforementioned studies provided a platform for teacher voice must be recognised and embraced and what’s more such practice accounts must be seen to have value for the initiation of future action research in schools.

Perspectives of those who have experienced transition offer an important contribution to the wider picture of transition but the inclusion of student voices, especially those on the fringes, has not been given priority (Booth, 2009). Flutter and Rudduck (2004) suggested that “when we are looking for answers to the problems affecting our society we often fail to recognise that *how things are* is often less important than *how people think* – or perceive – things are” (p. 6).

Watson’s (2007) research, in which Australian students with learning difficulties were asked about their ‘everyday’ school life in the mainstream, took that lead. While the phenomenological study involved only six students, three were in Year Eight or Nine and two

of those, despite having low levels of literacy, did not have “ascertainment” - service provision based upon disability status (Scott, 2004). Tyrone and Emily who “had consistently failed in key curriculum areas” (p. 53), attended different secondary schools. Tyrone was described as having behavioural issues at primary school while Emily experienced difficulties with reading and tests, preferring questions to be delivered orally so she could concentrate better. The present study’s depiction of having ‘unfunded learning support needs’ appeared fitting for these students.

Tyrone had not long been in secondary school but commented he didn’t like having to copy notes from the board, had trouble with word processing and would “rather do art than French” (p. 54). Given these reports and his known poor literacy levels, it appeared the school had not taken account of Tyrone’s learning needs at transition, perhaps offering some explanation why he had difficulty reporting the positive side of his entry to secondary school and had already started to disengage. In contrast, Emily had been in secondary school just over a year. She had received some independent support from a tutor in relation to dyslexia and commented positively about other supportive teachers; she looked forward to continuing her education and the future. Thus - two different students, two different schools, and possibly two different outcomes, although the length of time at secondary school could have been an influencing factor in their reported adaptation.

Albeit a small and methodologically limited study with demographic imbalances and possible researcher-participant connections, the value of Watson’s (2007) research lay within the personal accounts of marginalised students, some of whom continued to struggle after transition while others overcame adversity, developed self-belief and were able to articulate their experiences of challenge. In summation, Watson stated “...this study was not in sufficient depth to determine contributory factors” (p. 56). However, light was cast upon barriers such as teachers that students felt lacked the knowledge to support their learning needs, but also upon enabling features such as staff members who took the time to build relationships and supportive managers who responded to students’ needs. Findings may have been enhanced by more time been devoted to seeking out further enablers of resilient responses.

Resilience has been cited as a key ingredient in students' capability to adjust to change (Education Review Office, 2012a; Graber & Brooks-Gunn, 1996; Masten et al., 1990), so as a concept, it has genuine relevance to the subject of transition of students with learning support needs. Howard and Johnson (2004) responded to recommendations from the literature (e.g. Rudduck et al., 1996); their study involved listening to unique perspectives of students who had beaten the odds in transition.

Howard and Johnson's (2004) focus, prompted by high rates of suspensions, exclusions, and absenteeism, was students described as "experiencing 'tough lives' but who were 'doing O.K.'" (p. 2). Twenty-five students from Years Six and Seven, 10 of whom were Indigenous Australians, participated in semi-structured interviews (Howard & Johnson, 2004). Importantly, in light of the current study, one of their interview questions was "What helps you to do OK?" (p. 2). In response, students felt making friends, fitting in, dealing with work requirements, and features of the school environment created challenges, but, like Emily in Watson's (2007) study and students in Power and Cotterell's (1981) research, when challenges were mastered, they enjoyed a sense of accomplishment.

The researchers (Howard & Johnson, 2004) expressed some surprise that resilient students looked to other students, who weren't able to prevail over those aspects, as responsible for their own fate. They suggested students had been indoctrinated by their schools to accept responsibility for their own progress, allowing schools to relinquish accountability. Considering Lahelma and Gordon's (1997) argument about schools exerting regulatory powers and stifling student initiative in the first days at secondary school, Howard and Johnson (2004) might have a point. However, viewed via an ecological lens (Annan, 2005; Bronfenbrenner, 1986), given students' known resilient attitudes, and parents' expressed support and high expectations for both their offspring and the schools they attended, the personal sense of agency and self-efficacy they demonstrated might be thought understandable (Bandura, 2006; Epstein, 1987; Rutter, 1987; Walls & Little, 2005).

## **2.10 Chapter Two Summary**

This chapter traced historical and current literature of primary-secondary transition with specific reference to students with learning support needs and a focus on strength-orientated

research and practice. Based on literature reviewed, transition was revealed as a period of discontinuity which created challenges for students, families, and teachers. There was general agreement that transition experiences impacted on future learning trajectories. However, as a rite of passage for adolescents, the consensus in the literature was that most students experienced equivocal feelings pre-transition but adjustment to secondary school life was negotiated quickly and successfully; it was not an on-going traumatic experience and students reflected on their negotiation of transition with some pride.

The review exposed comparable patterns of disparate outcomes within transitioning student populations across settings and borders have been occurring for decades. Comparative studies have shown that students facing personal, academic, and other challenges at primary school or from poor or minority backgrounds, have been more likely to experience persistent difficulties and have their learning trajectory interrupted in the year of entry to secondary school (Balfanz et al., 2007; Mallari & Loader, 2013; McGee et al., 2003; Roderick & Camburn, 1999; Wylie et al., 2006). In addition, heterogeneity in stakeholders' perceptions of transition success, experiences, practices, and processes within school communities was shown (Catterall, 1998; Cox & Kennedy, 2008; Evangelou et al., 2008; Wylie et al., 2006), although research specifically representing school experiences of students with mild and moderate needs and/or of those who support them proved difficult to find.

The review revealed that many aspects of students' risk status on entry to high school were changeable with resilient outcomes demonstrated when students' learning needs were recognised and responded to appropriately and directly at transition (Catterall, 1998; Roderick & Camburn, 1999; Watson, 2007). A shift to recognising positive aspects of transition demonstrated the utility of that approach to school development (Galton et al., 2003) and further moves toward strength-focused responses were widely advocated (Annan, 2005; Barwick, 2004; Bishop et al., 2003; Howard & Johnson, 2000; Masten et al., 1990; McGee et al., 2003; Ministry of Education 2013e; Ward et al., 1982).

The advantages of relational practices and systemic processes were highlighted (Galton et al., 1999; McGee et al., 2003) as they also emerged as possible mediating factors of risk (Bishop et al., 2003; Catterall, 1998; Howard & Johnson, 2000). Effective pedagogical and school systems were confirmed as critical facilitating factors in transition for children with learning

support needs (Galton et al., 2003). Yet while teachers were properly positioned to provide continuity of support through transition from primary to secondary school (Ministry of Education, 2013i), often school and pedagogical responses were found wanting, with teachers challenged by the needs of students who fell outside the majority (Bishop et al., 2003; MacBeath et al., 2006; Prochnow et al., 2000; Watson, 2007).

Howard and Johnson (2004) suggested “no school reform can be successful unless parents and students, as well as teachers and school leaders, are committed to change” (p. 8). While Galton and colleagues (1999) demonstrated hearing what was working for teachers represented one way of supporting them in their practice, Bellert and Graham (2006), in support of teachers and their development, advocated research-based interventions as a starting point for practice change. The review has confirmed that a systemic/ecological framework is an appropriate methodological approach to ensure all stakeholders in the transition process are represented. Furthermore, a clear directive emerged from the literature review to broaden understanding of stakeholders’ experiences of transition by accessing their views directly – by paying attention to their voiced accounts (Galton et al., 2003; McGee et al., 2003; Power & Cotterell, 1981; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000). That mandate is especially relevant in the New Zealand context where a pattern of disproportionate secondary school success persists.

The New Zealand education system was found to be an imperfect system because it has failed considerable portions of the student population early in their secondary schooling. Primary-secondary transition was recognised as a significant step to ensure learning engagement and continuity but New Zealand literature directly addressing primary-secondary transition is sparse and very few non-Governmentally sponsored studies exist. In particular, the review exposed a gap in local knowledge about the primary-secondary transition experiences of students with unsupported learning needs and of those who support them (Cox & Kennedy, 2008; McGee et al., 2003).

## **2.11 Research Questions**

The review revealed the existence of a considerable repository of literature around primary-secondary transition. However, identified gaps provided direction to make a unique

contribution in New Zealand by looking specifically at transition experiences of students with learning needs that were unsupported in the mainstream. The key question that emerged from the literature for the current research was:

What home, school, and personal practices do students with learning support needs, parents or caregivers, and teachers from a local community of schools perceive to be helpful for transition from Year Eight to Year Nine?

Formulation of the research question and secondary questions heeded counsel to pay attention to actual stakeholder voices, so that school communities might respond to students' needs from a platform of understanding. Similarly, considering evidence about the benefits of strength-focused research and practice, the question was framed to enable focus upon positive experiences and community responsiveness.

Supplementary questions which guided the direction of data collection were:

1. What are students' perceptions of moving to secondary school before and after their transition?
2. What do students, parents or caregivers, and teachers consider "successful" transition to be and what are the similarities and differences between their expressed views?
3. What do students, parents or caregivers, and teachers think about the move to high school and what are the similarities and differences between the reported perceptions?
4. How are parents or caregivers involved in their child's move to high school?

The research questions sat acceptably within a strength orientation and positioned the study to provide constructive information for local school communities and for future students, families, and teachers. Chapter Three describes the decision making process followed to operationalise the questions and format a study design.

# **CHAPTER THREE**

## **METHODOLOGY**

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# CHAPTER THREE

## METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the conceptual framework underpinning the current research. The chapter is structured to mirror the design development process while at the same time reflect the considerable learning process that ensued. Following a brief introduction to methodology and reference to influences from the literature and personal experience, various theoretical perspectives are intentionally approached and considered. The subsequent decision to employ a sequential, mixed method design seated within a pragmatic paradigm is justified along with data collection, analysis, and ethical decisions. Practical applications of these methodological resolutions are described in detail in Chapter Four.

### 3.2 Research and Methodology – What’s it all about?

Inquiry starts with “... a stage of perplexity, hesitation, doubt...” linked to “... an act of search or investigation directed toward bringing to light further facts” (Dewey, 1997, p.9). Dewey’s discussion of reflective thought (research) provided a point of positive reference in the present instance showing that, although a puzzle (problem) might challenge thinking, the search for meaning may be aimed at greater understanding, not necessarily solution. Simply, empirical research starts with a question that initiates inquiry.

The pathway to address the question is shaped by the researcher’s basic beliefs (assumptions) about the nature of social reality (ontology), what kinds of knowledge are possible (epistemology), and the researcher’s relationship with the object of the research (methodology) (Creswell, 2007; Crotty, 1998). Crotty (1998) stated that those assumptions “shape for us the meaning of research questions, the purposiveness of research methodologies, and the interpretability of research findings” (p. 17). While sounding straightforward, the shifting sands of research methodology literature afforded no clear roadmap in the present instance.

Nevertheless, it is the task of the researcher to understand and clearly articulate the philosophical and/or practical bases of the research design (Grix, 2002). Not an easy task with methodology literature increasingly challenging historical ways of thinking about and doing research (Denzin, 2010; Gorard, 2010; Morgan, 2007; Oakley, 1999; Rorty, 2002; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2010). The resulting quagmire of terms has the terms “methodology” and “methods” used interchangeably and basic foundations variously labelled as paradigms (Guba, 1990; Kuhn, 1962); traditions and theoretical underpinnings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007); theoretical orientations (Patton, 2002); worldviews (Creswell, 2008); epistemology and perspectives (Crotty, 1998); and philosophical orientations (Merriam, 1998). The paradigm issue will be addressed in the next section. In the meantime, Kaplan (1998) provided clarity to the methodology/method untidiness, defining ‘*methodology*’ as “the description, the explanation, and the justification – of methods, and not the methods themselves” (p. 18), while ‘*methods*’ refers to “techniques” (p. 23).

Yet sorting out the terminology tangle is more than just getting the words right. Accordingly, in line with Kaplan’s (1998) definition above, this chapter will provide explanations to link question and process, explain the logic and framework that informed the research design and choice of methods, and provide justification for the methods chosen. To that end, Hanson, Creswell, Plano Clark, Petska and Creswell’s (2005) three steps provided a process guide:

1. Decide on a philosophical lens.
2. Choose data collection techniques.
3. Make analysis decisions.

### **3.3 Finding an Appropriate Philosophical Lens - Paradigms**

Thorough engagement with the paradigm issues of philosophy, perspective, and practice is essential to robust research design. Greene (2007) stated:

... mental models inevitably influence practice choices with or without the inquirer’s intentional engagement and consideration. ... conscious attention to how the various strands of mental models influence inquiry decisions renders such decisions more thoughtful, reflective, intentional and thereby more generative and defensible. (p. 59)

Proliferation of the term ‘paradigm’ has been attributed to Thomas Kuhn’s (1962) book entitled “The Structure of Scientific Revolutions”. He defined ‘paradigm’ as “universally recognised scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners” (p. viii). Although a lack of clarity in his essay was highlighted by Masterman (1970) who identified at least 21 different usages of ‘paradigm’ which she suggested be condensed to three main usages: metaphysical, sociological, and artefact.

Masterman (1970) further argued that although the metaphysical usage had taken general precedence in social science research, a paradigm was neither “basic theory” nor “metaphysical viewpoint” as other commentators might have it. Later, Kuhn (1970) clarified his thinking, preferring the term “disciplinary matrix” (p. 182) but the themes of shared values, techniques, beliefs, and traditional models remained constant. Alignment was found in a later proposition that paradigms be viewed as “intellectual cultures” (Oakley, 1999, p.155). Later, Morgan (2007) analysed 25 years of social science research methodology and identified the four prevailing uses of the word paradigm referred to worldviews, epistemological stances, shared beliefs in a research field and model examples; none of which conflicted with Kuhn’s (1970) view.

Guba (1990) honoured the lack of precision in Kuhn’s (1962) account, saying that grappling with the open nature of the paradigm concept was “intellectually useful” (p. 17). However in contrast, Gorard (2010) exclaimed “the concept of paradigm has, thus, become a cultural cliché with so many meanings it is now almost meaningless” (p. 244). Nonetheless, Guba’s (1990) widely quoted definition was accepted in the present instance; that being “a basic set of beliefs that guides action, whether of the everyday garden variety or action taken in connection with a disciplined inquiry” (p. 17).

Historically, social science research has been dominated by two paradigms which lie at opposite ends of a continuum: positivism (scientific) underlying quantitative methods and interpretivism (naturalistic) underpinning qualitative methods. Wide criticism of the prescriptive paradigm-methodology pairing (e.g. Niglas, 2010) has resulted in vigorous debate over decades about respective superiority, compatibility, and mixability within research design (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003). Howe (1988) advocated that the debate “ought to be closed down” and “no incompatibility between quantitative and qualitative methods exists at

either the level of practice or that of epistemology” (p. 15). Although Patton (2002) noted: “Though many have pronounced the war and even the debate over ... not everyone has adopted a stance of methodological enlightenment and tolerance, namely, that methodological orthodoxy, superiority, and purity should yield to methodological appropriateness, pragmatism, and mutual respect” (p. 68).

As scholarship from diverse research communities blurred boundaries, other approaches evolved. Lather (1992) celebrated the displacement of historical views of “doing science”, assuming postpositivism by emphasising four ways of knowledge generation: prediction, understanding, emancipation, and deconstruction. Guba and Lincoln (2005) made adjustment, adding the participatory paradigm to the four paradigms originally endorsed - positivism, postpositivism, critical theory, and constructivism. Miller and Crabtree (1999) described three paradigms: materialistic, constructivist, and critical/ecological which aligned with Mertens’ (2003) views of that time. However, along with Creswell (2008), who identified four influential worldviews: postpositivism, constructivism, pragmatism, and advocacy/participatory, Mertens (2010) adjusted her thoughts suggesting the face of current research was dominated by positivist-postpositivist, interpretive-constructivist, transformative-emancipatory, and the pragmatic paradigm. This latter conceptualisation of four paradigms took the current decision making process forward.

### **3.3.1 Positivist-Postpositivist Paradigm**

Positivism, based on assumptions of knowable reality with predictability the goal, supports the “gold standard” of doing research associated with hypothesis testing, experimentation, controlled and manipulated variables, causality, and the search for certainty (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). In social or behavioural research, it is difficult to argue for ultimate truths so postpositivism offers a modified stance while still taking a scientific approach (Creswell, 2007).

Ontologically, postpositivists still focus upon one reality although recognise that known reality is necessarily an approximation, based on the laws of probability. Epistemologically aligned with positivism, objectivity is important to a postpositivist researcher who strives for detachment from the subject of the research. Methodological imperatives include

randomisation and representativeness of sample, while counting and quantities remain critical to the research process. Methods include surveys or tests (e.g. Vinson & Harrison, 2006) and are particularly suited to large scale quantitative data collection. If qualitative methods are utilised, deductive analysis is probable with findings reduced to quantities to enable statistical examination (Merriam, 1998), hence the criticism that the human side of research might be ignored.

### **3.3.2 Constructivist Paradigm**

The constructivist paradigm is based on the ontological assumption that knowledge is socially constructed. From an epistemological stance, it recognises multiple realities (between and within research participants and researcher), which may not necessarily be aligned, but are co-constructed within the interactive research process (Mertens, 2010). In contrast to a positivist approach where theories are tested, models are inductively generated - the key goal being to understand the subjective experience of humankind (Mertens, 2010).

Methodologically, contextual, social, cultural, and historical factors are considered in an attempt to maximise understandings of the other's perspective. Common modes of inquiry include phenomenology, ethnography, and participatory action research in which the qualitative methods include observations, interviews, and document analysis. There is an emphasis on depth in data collection and analysis and therefore participant numbers are typically smaller (e.g. Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009) than in those studies utilising quantitative methods. Interpretation focuses upon qualities not quantities and thus in the articulation of research findings the use of direct quotes is common (e.g. Bishop et al., 2003). It is well suited to educational research where it might be conceived as a "practical and moral activity" (Smith, 1992, p.100). Criticisms of this approach refer to the methodological technique of approximating observations and findings which can marginalise the voice of vulnerable peoples (Hargreaves, 1996).

### **3.3.3 Transformative Paradigm**

The transformative paradigm also called the advocacy/participatory paradigm demonstrates evolution driven by the research community and community at large (Creswell, 2007). It is aimed directly at addressing human issues, especially those of power and social justice and

while there is recognition of multiple and socially constructed realities, a key ontological assumption is that espoused reality cannot be approximated or assumed and therefore each person's reality is "critically examined via an ideological critique of its role in perpetuating oppressive social structures and policies" (Mertens, 2010, p. 32). Central importance is placed upon the subjective experience of marginalised peoples and on issues such as social inequality, gender, ethnicity, mental health, and disability.

Epistemologically, the transformative paradigm is inherently collaborative at all stages of the research process with researcher and participants standing side by side with a common action agenda of social reform (Creswell, 2007; Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003; Mertens, 2010). In this way all methodological decisions can be thoroughly examined by both parties and the entire process of planning, research process and reporting can be co-constructed to ensure the end product presents a balanced and representative view. The transformative paradigm supports the use of all data collection methods while analysis of research conducted within this paradigm may utilise different frameworks, including critical theory, feminist theory, or queer theory.

### **3.3.4 Pragmatic Paradigm**

Pragmatism, recognised as a commonsense paradigm (Mertens, 2010), stems from the work of Pierce, James, and Dewey, who sought and advocated a practical response to understand the real world, including that of education and psychology. Does doing what feels good or right offer the required credibility or legitimacy for paradigm status? Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) argued, "there is a common set of beliefs that many social and behavioural scientists have that undergird a paradigm distinct from positivism or postpositivism or constructivism" (p. 17). Thus, bearing in mind Kuhn's (1962) idea of a universally-recognised model utilised within a community of practice, it must be conceded that within the education community, the pragmatic paradigm has earned its stripes (Howe, 1988; Mertens, 2010; Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004).

Ontologically, pragmatists recognise both singular and multiple realities, while the epistemological maxim is to be practical and find "what works" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). However, within pragmatism, there exists a tendency to downplay ontological and

epistemological matters and there is increasing accord within the ‘community’ of proponents that these metaphysical concepts have received undue attention in research decisions at the expense of establishing logical and practical connections between purpose, question and method (e.g. Bryman, 2007; Greene & Hall, 2010; Howe, 1988; Mertens, 2010; Morgan, 2007; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003).

Pragmatism, which advocates no incompatibility of qualitative and quantitative methods either philosophically or practically, was instrumental in the demise of positivism (Howe, 1988). Biesta (2010) suggested pragmatism is “helpful in overcoming some of the dualisms that continue to stifle discussions about social and behavioural research” and “can help to break down alleged epistemological hierarchies between the different methods and methodologies” (p. 96). Working pragmatically with mixed methods to investigate of complex social questions was a “no-brainer” according to Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010, p. 271). Thus, with the yardstick of quality resting with methodological appropriateness for purpose (Maxcy, 2003; Patton, 1997), pragmatism has become a leading paradigm in mixed methods and educational research. Furthermore, it is often applied to case study, being equally suited to large scale studies (e.g. Berliner, Barrat, Fong, & Shirk, 2008) or research on a more limited level (e.g. Cox & Kennedy, 2008).

In sum, pragmatism rejects the qualitative-quantitative dichotomy, is outcome-oriented, value-oriented, and seeks explicitly to provide the best possible way to answer research questions (Creswell, 2007; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). It is an optimistic and progressive philosophy (Greene & Hall, 2010) which focuses upon the improvement of human experience (Crotty, 1998; Rorty, 2002) and fits well with strength-based inquiry (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004), especially within educational settings (Berliner et al., 2008; Cox & Kennedy, 2008).

### **3.4 Rationale for Current Use of the Philosophical Lens of Pragmatism**

Having followed Greene’s (2007) counsel, the exploration of dominant paradigms facilitated justification of the pragmatic paradigm as the appropriate foundation for the current research. The worked example of Greene and Hall’s (2010) design decision guide presented in Table Two provided added validation of the decision, demonstrating considerable parallels between

the pragmatic stance in educational research (column 2) and decisions related to the present study (column 3).

**Table 2**

*Comparison of Inquiry Decisions*

Inquiry decision	Pragmatic stance	The present study
What issue is important to study?	The inquiry focus comes from an issue of importance in the world	Transition to high school can be difficult for students with learning support needs.
What framework should guide the study?	Context and practicality. Information from everyday experience is as important as prior research and theory	Experience from work in the field of transition will inform research directions. The research will need to be practically orientated in the context of school communities. An ecological perspective is ideal for educational research, especially in the area of transition.
How should the study be designed?	Data gathered will be inclusive of multiple perspectives to inform about the issue.	It is important to take a positive standpoint by locating examples of successful transition and then exploring those stories further. All participants in the transition process must be able to contribute their view freely.
What is important to be mindful of in data collection and analysis?	It is important to reflect on outcomes, goals, and values and to consider the links between data and future actions.	Positive engagement with participants - teachers, students, and families – will facilitate an understanding of their experience and possible avenues for future action.
What are important inquirer activities and stances during the inquiry process?	The pragmatist engages in ongoing reflection on inquiry decisions and result.	An open, semi-formal, interactional form of inquiry. Reflection is fundamental to psychological and educational practice.
What constitute warranted inferences?	These constitute knowledge that can be acted upon to facilitate positive outcomes in terms of the issue.	Finding what helps offers hope for practice improvements in the future.
What is hoped for the contribution of the study?	Consequential in terms of contributions to workable solutions.	Better outcomes for students in transition. Provision of information that can be acted upon in practice and policy terms in schools and school communities.

*Note.* Adapted from Greene and Hall (2010, p.139)

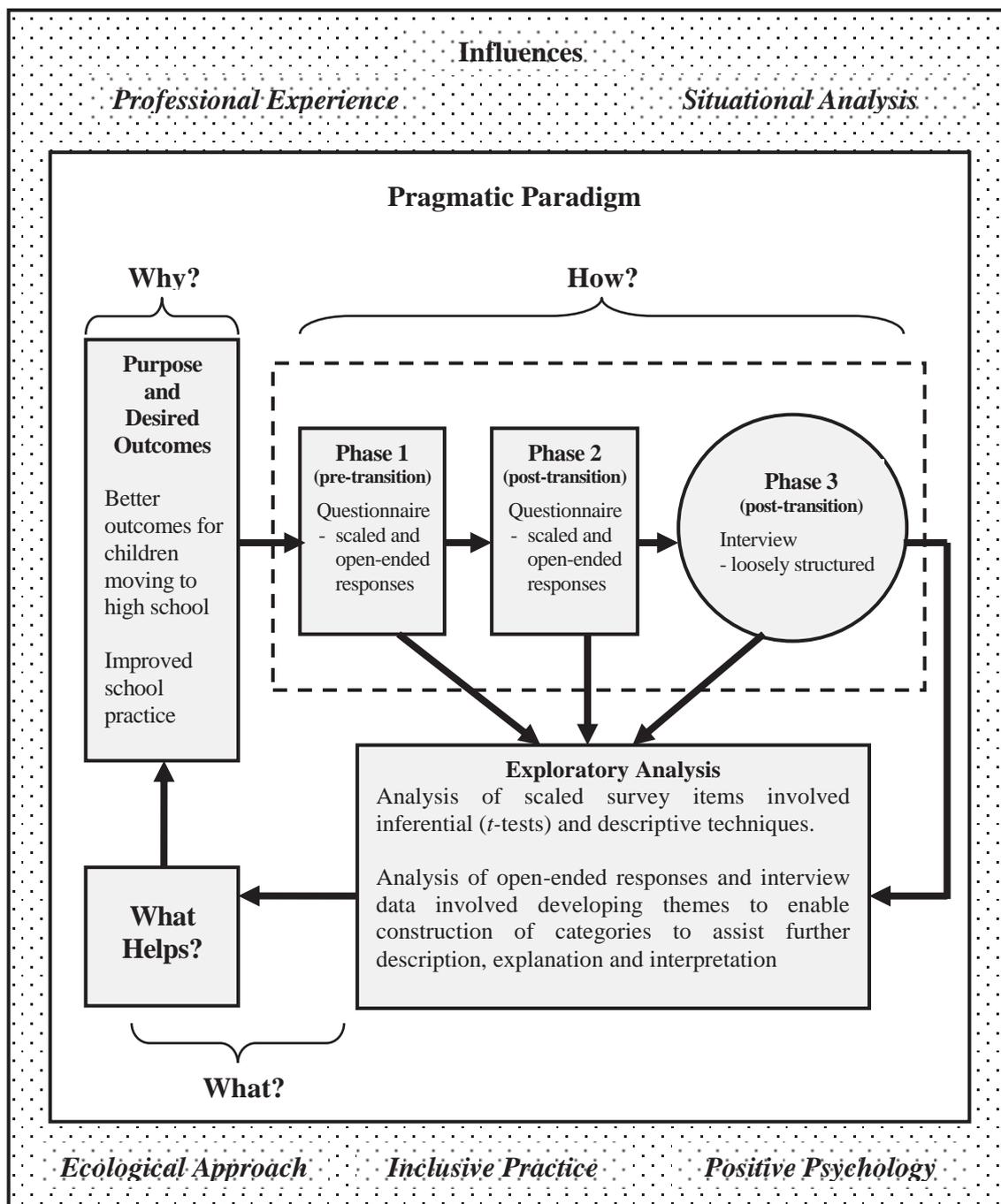
Thus, positioning the present study within a pragmatic paradigm was deemed proper and justified, based upon the assertion that pragmatism

- regards knowledge as being constructed, based on experience, and reality in a social context;
- endorses (and mandates) methodological flexibility and rejects traditional paradigm dichotomies;
- supports an ecological focus;
- requires a focus on improvement for the participants and communities;
- is strength focused and action-focused toward positive outcomes that are synonymous with initial goals;
- is widely accepted and utilised within educational research communities; and
- recognises the contribution of researcher experience in the inquiry field.

The conceptualisation of the overall design within the pragmatic paradigm is the emphasis of the following section.

### 3.5 Design Conceptualisation

Conceptualising the research design, presented in Figure One, as a sequential, mixed-method case study respected the ‘fit for purpose’ mandate of pragmatism (Biesta, 2010).



**Figure 1.** Research design – exploratory, sequential, mixed-method case study, as it fits within the pragmatic paradigm.

The designation of exploratory was fitting since the design was conceived in accordance with Onwuegbuzie and Leech's (2005) endorsement of that methodological classification within a pragmatic stance.

Being neither value-free nor apolitical, pragmatism acknowledges how personal beliefs influence the course of research from inception to dissemination (Greene, 2007; Morgan, 2007). Thus the research design was represented as a case study nested within a background of significant influences which impacted upon the approach to the study and the way the study was conducted. Those influences were the researcher's professional experience as a psychologist working with situational analysis as a preferred respectful approach to interventional practice and the desire for the study to be inclusive, strength-oriented, and ecological in focus.

Stake (1995) stated: "The purpose of the case study is not to represent the world but to represent the case" (p. 460). Accordingly, situational analysis, being well suited to psychological research involving ecological, constructive, and evidence-based methods (Annan, 2005) provided an appropriate guide. Situational analysis necessitates educational concerns be considered as located within systems of interaction rather than within individuals and therefore it sits comfortably alongside strength-oriented and inclusive practice. The perspectives of stakeholders in any given situation are regarded critical to finding solutions and therefore analysis necessarily requires reflection upon multiple perspectives. That position is reflected within Figure 1 by the "How?" Thus, the research design portrays both survey and interview data collection techniques, structured within a case study framework to ensure representation of all stakeholders within the transition process - students, parents or caregivers, and teachers, in all three study phases.

The strategy of case study and mixed method techniques will now be discussed generally and as they related to the current study.

### 3.6 Case Study

Case study may be regarded as a methodology (Creswell, 2007) or “a bounded system, for example a child, a clique, a class, a school, a community” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 253). Stake (2005) agreed with the latter saying “case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied” (p. 443). For example, an intrinsic case study aimed at providing full, descriptive information might focus upon a child whose behaviour is interfering with learning in the classroom (Merriam, 1998).

Alternatively, where the case structure is utilised to investigate a phenomenon of interest it has an instrumental purpose; the case is purposively selected to fit the question or issue. Also described as exploratory (Bouma & Ling, 2004; Yin, 2003), these studies are useful to investigate possible directions for further study. Exploratory research is an appropriate response to investigate ‘what?’ questions, typically addressed by qualitative or mixed methodology (Bouma & Ling, 2004; Merriam, 1998). In the present study, as in the aforementioned examples, the rationale for utilising case study was to understand intimately and represent, as best as possible, the “particular” which will be a “... specific, a complex, functioning thing” (Stake, 1995, p.2).

The case study may be characterised three ways: It is particularistic because the focus is a specific feature or phenomenon; it is descriptive, providing an holistic, complex picture of the study phenomenon; and, it is heuristic because it provides information that extends, explains and increases understanding, providing new insight about relationships between variables (Merriam, 1998). A key strength of case study lies in the capability to support multiple methods in data collection (Cohen et al., 2007; Merriam, 1998). Such questions as “What is going on here?” or “What is one’s understandings of a situation or event?” may be teased out, facilitating descriptions rich in detail, leading to greater depth of meaning (Bouma & Ling, 2004).

In regard to limitations, Merriam (1998) suggested strength and weakness exist as two sides of the one coin, for example the presentation of rich, thick description may be desirable but is time consuming and may be expensive. Other matters raised were:

- The product may be unwieldy.

- The researcher, as the primary research instrument, may lack experience, sensitivity, and/or integrity.
- Anonymity of participants may be difficult to protect.
- Questions of quality, generalisability, and representativeness are ever present.

However, Yin (2003) referred to criticisms of time restraints and lack of rigor and generalisability as ‘prejudices’. Flyvbjerg (2006) concurred, claiming threats are “common misunderstandings” and “over-simplifications” (p. 221), while Anderson’s (1998) defence referred to protective factors of tight process.

Stake’s (1995) compelling portrayal of the case researcher as the critical element to credible case study research found general accord (Anderson, 1998; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011; Kvale, 1996; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). The concept of naturalistic generalisation was advanced, whereby a reader’s subjective understanding of a similar situation may be enhanced by case findings and future practice subsequently influenced. Cautionary practices to ensure completed findings were more acceptable to the wider research community were advised. Those practices included sound design that was fit for purpose and systematic processes (Anderson, 1998; Yin, 2003); researcher knowledge and integrity to ensure bias-free and trustworthy results (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995); and, careful interpretation so that claims of representativeness or generalisability were prudent and relevant (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003).

No constraint or management strategy referred to here is unique to case study research. Clearly robust systems of design, data collection, analysis, and reporting in studies that are planned and executed with the research questions as the foundation for planning enhance strength and acceptability of research outcomes. There is resonance here with the basic tenets of pragmatism.

### **3.6.1 The Current Study**

Case study design is well suited to and widely utilised in educational settings (e.g. Catterall, 1998; Cox & Kennedy, 2008; Galton et al., 2003; Humphrey & Ainscow, 2006; Merriam, 1998) because it facilitates an understanding of real people in real-life situations (Cohen et al.,

2007) which can be an efficient force in setting public policy (Stake, 2005); this design and subject matter had relevance to predicted audiences.

A considered approach to design justified the appropriateness of an exploratory case study strategy, utilising mixed data collection techniques as a good fit for the current research which provided an ideal “bounded system” (Merriam, 1998) given:

1. Students with learning support needs were routinely identified pre-transition.
2. Local students tended to move on to neighbourhood high schools so transition patterns were contained within the boundaries of the school district. Therefore the ‘case’ was able to be reasonably well defined.
3. Given the nature of the school district, the study was seen to be manageable for a single researcher to carry out.

### **3.7 Mixed Methods**

Mixed method research uses a variety of methods within a single study. While the status of mixed methods research continues to draw comment and examination over its status as philosophy, paradigm, methodology or method (e.g. Bryman, 2008; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003), it has been increasingly endorsed as appropriate for educational research (e.g. Berliner et al., 2008; Catterall, 1998; Cox & Kennedy, 2008; Rutter, Maughn, Mortimer, & Ouston, 1979).

It is difficult to discuss mixed methods design, data collection, and analysis without using the “Q-words” (Gorard, 2010) but resistance of the qualitative-quantitative dichotomy has strengthened the place of mixed method research. Moreover, commonalities between the two q-methods exist, including the use of observation techniques, triangulation, data collection safeguards, manipulation of data to maximise findings, data reduction, and narrative interpretation and explanation of data and findings. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005) asserted that the schism between the two q-methods “... must be dismantled or at least minimized” (p. 382) proposing the alternate terms of ‘exploratory’ and ‘confirmatory’ reconceptualise mixed method collection and analysis procedures according to purpose. Thus, while ‘confirmatory’ fits to describe quantitative methods; equally it described replication studies using qualitative

methods. And further, ‘exploratory’ techniques (survey or interview) might be analysed using descriptive statistics or thematic analysis. This re-conceptualisation complemented the pragmatic approach enabling flexibility, a broader scope, and a more inclusive approach to investigation (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005) – a noticeable fit with the current research.

### **3.7.1 The Current Study**

Described variously as intuitive research (Creswell & Plano Clarke, 2011), as providing inspirational and respectful opportunities for engagement (Greene, 2007), as “human research” (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010), and as logical and natural (Gorard, 2010), mixed method design was an appropriate choice in the present study based upon the following understandings from the literature:

- Combining methods is a good thing (Howe, 1988).
- The choice of methods must be driven by the questions that this study seeks to answer (Biesta, 2010; Patton, 2002).
- Data collection decisions must be sensible and pragmatic (Gorard, 2010; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).
- Mixing methods enables meaningful engagement in data collection practice (Greene, 2007).
- A combination of methods provides a better and more comprehensive way of understanding the issue at hand (Creswell & Plano Clarke, 2007; Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

The decision to employ mixed methodology brought with it a responsibility to clearly articulate reasons for use and application of methods in relation to the level of interaction, method priority, timing, and stage of integration (Creswell & Plano Clarke, 2011). Bryman’s (2006a) comprehensive review of mixed method literature revealed 16 stated reasons for combining methods; three of those presented in Table Three, served as reference points for data collection methods in the current study.

**Table 3**

*Rationale for Mixing Methods in the Current Study*

Rationale	Explanation	Method
Sampling - one approach is used to facilitate the sampling of respondents or cases	To identify from a larger sample, a small subgroup of students for whom the transition to high school appeared more positive compared to their peers.	Comparison of pre-transition and post-transition data
Completeness - a more comprehensive picture is achieved through the combination of methods	To establish an overall picture of transition	Collect experiences from all participants in the transition process - students, family members, and teachers by questionnaire and interview
Enhancement - making more of or augmenting one form of data with another	To collect data that will give breadth and depth to the understanding of transition.	Interviews build on questionnaire responses. A time-ordered design enables information from one stage to contribute to the next and all phases to contribute to overall findings

Sampling refers to the selection of students according to pre-determined criteria. Completeness signifies the combination of methods to enable a fuller picture to be developed and enhancement indicates that one technique leads on to another and each stage builds on what has gone before. While triangulation is not explicitly stated, as a concept it was not ignored. Commonly regarded as a technique of convergence or confirmation (Cohen et al., 2007; Greene, Caracelli & Graham, 1989), triangulation is usually linked with validity (Flick, 2006). The incorporation of different methods and different voices in the study can be seen as meeting this criterion (Merriam, 1998).

An alternate interpretation for triangulation is one of a broadening approach to data collection and analysis, of offering greater potential for enhanced depth of understanding (Flick, 1992, 2006; Patton, 2002). Morrow (2005) suggested, “The more variety in the data sources one is able to obtain, the greater will be the richness, breadth, and depth of the data gathered” (p.

256). In keeping with the current philosophical response to the research questions, it is argued that the ‘package’ based upon the three stated rationales above fully encompassed triangulation in its divergent sense. A detailed discussion of quality assurance and accountability is presented in Section 3.10 including validity (§3.10.1) triangulation (§3.10.2).

Having decided on a sequential design, the order of data collection was determined by asking “what will work best for the research question?” Thus, pre-transition and post-transition information was collected via questionnaires, followed by interviews with a basic tenet being that each stage of analysis and interpretation would inform subsequent stages with interpretation based on all data collected. The design judgments in Table Four aligned with principles for mixed method design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

**Table 4**

*Mixed Method Design Principles of the Current Research*

Principle	Explanation
1. May be fixed and/or emergent	Data is collected in three pre-determined phases therefore the design is fixed.
2. May be typology-based and/or dynamic	The sequential data collection follows a strict format, but is not typology driven. While Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) advocate dynamism in response to this principle, the “exploratory” conceptualisation of Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005) offered a more appropriate fit as an overall model.
3. Design is matched to the question	According to pragmatic principles, the design responds to the key questions, guided by extant literature in the same field.
4. Reasons will be explicit	The three reasons for deciding a mixed methods design are sampling, enhancement, and completeness according to Bryman (2006a).

Strength of the design lay within its ease of management which was an important consideration for a sole researcher (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011); a possible challenge being to accommodate a lengthier timeframe, characteristic of a sequential study. The following

section includes a general introduction to data collection for education research and details questionnaire and interview techniques selected for this study.

### **3.8 Data Collection**

Surveys and interview methods feature widely in educational and social research. Bryman's (2006a) content analysis of 232 social research mixed methods studies found 82.4 percent of articles reported the use of survey and 71.1 percent used interviews. Focus groups and document analysis featured to a lesser extent. However, over half of the studies reported collecting data using a combination of survey and interview techniques. The key advantage offered by mixed methods research is the provision of a flexible, yet comprehensive means to investigate educational research questions.

In reference to transition research, Humphrey and Ainscow's (2006) exploratory case study utilising observation, questionnaire, and interview data collection methods proved an effective strategy to investigate how students' transition to secondary school in the United Kingdom was assisted by a supportive school-based transition club. They found group interviews particularly effective to focus pupils' reflection on their experiences. In a more comprehensive, multi-site case study, Cox and Kennedy (2008) utilised an exploratory design to investigate New Zealand students' achievement in transition. Survey and interview data were collected from 100 adolescents at four points over one and a half years during their transition to high school, along with the views of parents and teachers. The study provided a credible template for the current study.

#### **3.8.1 Questionnaires**

Questionnaires are appropriately used when information sought will be familiar to participants and when the researcher has extensive background knowledge in the area, as in the present case (Warwick & Lininger, 1975). Anderson's (1998) summation of advantages and limitations of the questionnaire method, paraphrased in Table Five, were taken on board during planning for the present research. The benefits of time efficiency and the flexibility of presentation were balanced against the threat of poor response rate. The possible limitation of student participants not understanding questions was considered and addressed in design and administration, as detailed in Section 4.5.1.

**Table 5**

*Considerations in the Use of Questionnaires for Data Collection*

<b>Questionnaires</b>	
<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Limitations</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highly efficient for routine data collection with a large number of participants</li> <li>• Ideal if target participants are geographically dispersed</li> <li>• Useful for quantitative data collection and analysis</li> <li>• Enables use of large number of questions</li> <li>• Can provide for individual comments and perspectives in open-ended questions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questionnaire fatigue</li> <li>• Poor response rate</li> <li>• Requires extensive planning and pre-testing</li> <li>• People may not understand question</li> <li>• Data entry errors in analysis</li> </ul>

A well constructed questionnaire “permits the collection of reliable and reasonably valid data in a simple, cheap and timely manner” (Anderson 1998, p.170). Considerable advantage can be gained in this process if the questionnaire chosen has already been successfully established in research elsewhere even though modification of existing surveys may be necessary to ensure the instrument fits the needs of the research for which it is used (Hutson & Kolbe, 2010). In the present case, the “Attitudes to Changing School” scale was developed and utilised for comprehensive transition research in the United Kingdom (Galton et al., 2003).

**3.8.2 Interviews**

Kvale (2006) said, “Interviews give voice to the many. For example, the marginalized, who do not ordinarily participate in public debates, can in interview studies have their social situations and their viewpoints communicated to a larger audience” (p. 481). Thus, using Anderson’s (1998) points of guidance, as presented in Table Six, and drawing on previous transition research within case study frameworks (e.g. Cox & Kennedy, 2008; Galton et al., 1999; Humphrey & Ainscow, 2006) it was clear interviewing would be well suited to the current research.

**Table 6**

*Considerations in the Use of Interviews for Data Collection*

<b>Face-to-face interview</b>	
<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Limitations</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highly efficient for routine data collection with a large number of participants</li> <li>• Value placed on individual subject</li> <li>• Allows for in-depth detail and analysis</li> <li>• May be individually tailored</li> <li>• Key informants can be accessed</li> <li>• Good responses rates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acquiescent response set possible</li> <li>• Requires careful planning of questions and skilled interviewer</li> <li>• Logistically difficult to arrange interviews</li> <li>• Time-consuming for all parties</li> <li>• Large data quantity difficult to analyse</li> </ul>

An interview is a guided conversation (Kvale, 2007; Yin, 2003) but also mutually constructed by parties involved (Nisbet & Watt, 1984) so building a relationship is critical (Cohen et al., 2007). Success is dependent upon planning and skilled execution, for which the responsibility rests with the interviewer (Anderson, 1998; Patton, 2002).

Anderson (1998) distinguished between normative and key informant interviews; the former, usually statistically analysed, being suited to large scale research and the latter used to collect “elite” information from people intimately connected with the topic of interest. Structured interviews follow a set question format, are organised in advance and allow for little flexibility in delivery. Unstructured interviews, in comparison, are conducted in an informal fashion, are open and responsive to the interviewer-participant relationship.

Situated in between is the semi-structured interview steered by an interview guide but providing for a natural conversation and environment in which a variable range of topics or questions may be covered. Referenced as “the most important form of interviewing in case study research” (Gillham, 2000, p. 65), it is, according to Bryman’s (2006a) content analysis, the most prevalent qualitative data collection method in mixed method, social science research. Similarly, the “loosely structured interview” is guided by topics but allows for interviewees to introduce related matters and possibly unanticipated themes; having the advantage of catering for the “twists and turns of conversation” (Gunn, Needham, & Bullman,

2000, p.253). These latter forms of interviewing were considered appropriate for the present research as it was conceived.

### 3.8.3 Research with Children

Flutter and Rudduck (2004) whose examination of school research projects spanned 10 years indicated the “transformational potential” of engaging children at both personal and organisational levels as valued participants in school research (p. 132). Flutter and Rudduck’s (2004) ‘Dos and Don’ts’ in relation to research with children served as a decision-making guide and are captured within the synopsis presented in Table Seven.

**Table 7**

*Considerations for Data Collection with Children*

Interview	Questionnaire
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build rapport through chat before starting the interview proper</li> <li>• Don’t influence answers with judgemental responses e.g. “good answer”</li> <li>• Don’t be too rigid in the interview</li> <li>• Allow time for thinking about and providing answers</li> <li>• Ask pupils not to name teachers or other people they refer to</li> <li>• Keep interview short and focused</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simple layout</li> <li>• Keep questions and survey short</li> <li>• Limit options and don’t provide a middle choice in a scale</li> <li>• Verbal labels work better than numeric ones</li> <li>• Keep language simple</li> <li>• Consider reading items as well as presenting in written form</li> <li>• Provide adequate space for answers</li> <li>• Leave open space so they can have their own say</li> <li>• Provide plenty of time</li> <li>• Children can influence each other so questionnaires are better completed individually</li> </ul>

Four main methodological concerns - ethics, the children themselves, the context or setting, and the data collection methods stand out in studies and reference sources dealing with research with children (e.g. Amato & Ochiltree, 1987; Bell, 2007; Borgers, de Leeuw, & Hox, 2000; Cohen et al., 2011; Flutter & Ruddock, 2004; Galton et al., 2003; Mahon, Glendinning, Clarke, & Craig, 1996; Pell & Jarvis, 2001; Punch, 2002; Rutter et al., 1979; Scott, 2000).

Ethical considerations include provision of quality information appropriate to developmental stage, opportunity for the young people to supply their own informed consent, the right to withdraw at any time without stigma (Cohen et al., 2011; Fine & Sandstrom, 1988), and the assurance of confidentiality (Scott, 2000; Gollop, 2000). The onus on the researcher is a heightened awareness of the research act and process when it is conducted with young people.

In relation to data collection techniques, the possibilities are varied and appear limited by imagination only, examples being: observation (Smith, 1998); web surveys (Borgers, Hox, & Sikkels, 2003); family group interviews (Dielman, Leech, Becker, Rosenstock, Horvath, & Radius, 1982); journaling (Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2005); photo recording (Allen, 2011); and telephone surveys (Finkelhor & Dziuba-Leatherman, 1994). In addition, Hill, Laybourn and Borland (1996) used focus groups incorporating brainstorming, visual prompting, puppetry, and role plays in their study of emotional experiences with under-twelve year olds.

Children must be able to understand not only the research and the procedure, but also the content (Borgers et al., 2000; Scott, 2000) so literacy and cognitive capabilities are necessary considerations in design and process. Relevant to the present work, Scott (2000) stated: “Most children of 11 and older are fully able to articulate their perceptions, opinions and beliefs and, with relatively little adaptation, surveys designed for adults can be used with adolescents” (p. 91). Furthermore, children of 8-9 years have been found to be capable of providing quality interview information (Amato & Ochiltree, 1987). Building rapport is the most important conduit to successful outcomes in the interview process with children (Gollop, 2000) while awareness of contextual factors, including presence of peers and time of day must be considered (Borgers et al., 2000; Scott, 2000).

### **3.8.4 The Current Study**

Consideration of fitness for purpose, participant and place remained paramount in the design of the current study. With surveys and interviews established as favoured methods within educational settings (e.g. Cox & Kennedy, 2008; Galton et al., 2003; Humphrey & Ainscow, 2006), all participants in the present research completed questionnaires and all participant groupings were represented in the interview sample. The use of questionnaires permitted relatively easy data collection by a sole researcher within critical time frames across sixteen

state school communities. Similar constraints on Cox and Kennedy (2008) appeared to offer no barrier. Questionnaires held strategic importance in the sequential design enabling comparison of pre- and post-transition data to identify a group of students to proceed to Phase Three, and questionnaire results informed interviews. Questionnaires are described fully in Chapter Four, Section 4.5.1. Briefly, they were adapted from those utilised by Homerton College, University of Cambridge in their transfer research projects during 2001-2002 (see Galton et al., 2003). Resources were made available at that time via dedicated websites: <http://creict.homerton.cam.ac.uk/transfer> and <http://www.slamnet.org.uk/transfer>. Questions were modified as necessary in accordance with research aims and to suit the New Zealand context (e.g. inclusion of 'whānau' for 'family').

Interviews were individual, face-to-face, and loosely structured, focused upon participants' personal experience of the recent transition. Being stakeholders in the primary-secondary transition, all participants were regarded as "key informants" (Anderson, 1998, p. 191). As a novice interviewer, Spradley's (2002) concept of the "grand tour question" proved invaluable, being especially applicable for knowledgeable participants and the loose structure.

The following section presents a general discussion of data analysis decision-making and procedures (Step three in Hanson and colleagues (2005) design process introduced in Section 3.2). Factors of influence to the current study are raised.

### **3.9 Analysis**

Data analysis decisions respond to the overall design, data collection methods, research questions, and the foundational paradigm. Generally, research analysis is described by reference to quantitative or qualitative techniques and therefore, a brief synopsis is offered in this introduction to analysis. Following on, the pertinence of mixed method analysis in the present instance will be addressed.

Quantitative analysis, guided by statistical theory, is a deductive process aimed at testing hypotheses or assumptions using theory as a starting point (Bryman, 2008) and, in theory, quantitative analysis presents as relatively straightforward with decisions and findings governed by reasonably standardised processes.

By comparison, the practice of analysing qualitative data focuses on meanings, insight, and interpretation (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2013); typically described as an inductive process where themes or concepts are drawn from the data and theory is an outcome (e.g. Bryman, 2008; Merriam, 2009). However in practice both inductive processes (data-driven) and deductive processes are usually incorporated; a priori codes or themes brought from the literature to inform analysis (concept driven) (Gibbs, 2007). Findings result from individualised processes based upon the particular researcher's interest or focus so "different evaluators may produce findings that are not identical and that have non-overlapping components" (Thomas, 2006, p.240).

Common qualitative analysis involves multiple listenings or readings in moving toward theory development (Bryman, 2008; Dey, 1993; Simons, 2009). Ryan and Bernard suggested the question: "what is this expression an example of?" (2003, p.87) be a starting point for identifying themes (codes). Richards and Morse (2007) provided a possible tripartite approach to sorting data: descriptive coding to record known or factual data; topic coding to identify data about a particular concept; and analytic coding where ideas emerge or develop from the data. Later, Richards (2009) suggested the use of three key questions: What is interesting? Why is it interesting? and Why am I interested in that? Further, Mason (2002) distinguished between reading data literally (if style or language is of interest), interpretively (when participant views or understandings are of interest) or reflexively (when the researcher wishes to explore their own role in the research process). Such three part coding models soundly follow in the footsteps of Charmaz (2006), Glaser (1992), and Strauss and Corbin (1998), all of whom recommended some variant of combining open (initial), axial (theoretical), and focused coding.

### **3.9.1 Mixed Method Analysis**

The great strength of working within a mixed method framework and pragmatic philosophy is that decisions are not prescribed by data collection techniques and therefore can be made on pragmatic grounds (Morgan, 2007), attending to contextual, practical, and instrumental goals (Creswell & Plano Clark 2007; Greene & Hall, 2010). Thus, while analysis may be designated a particular place in the research process, incidental analysis as result of reflection, for example, may occupy a legitimate place in the overall analysis schema. Associations

made in passing and patterns that spring to mind therefore, may influence the course of the study spontaneously, not only at pre-determined analysis ‘stops’ (Patton, 2002; Richards & Morse, 2013). Furthermore, the flexibility may extend to the analysis ‘stage’ itself where the imprecise nature of the boundaries are acknowledged enabling “bursts of insight” at any time during data processing, analysis, and interpretation (Wolcott, 1994, p. 24). Accordingly, while research design articulates formal beginnings and endings in research progression, in reality the process must be seen as much more “human” (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

As a generic guide, Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie (2003) suggested seven analysis steps: reduction, display, transformation, correlation, consolidation, comparison, and integration. Initially data quantity might expand, however interpretation is a process of narrowing focus. The steps used depend on the answers to four important questions (Onwuegbuzie, Slate, Leech, & Collins, 2007):

1. How many data types will be analysed - e.g. rating scales, interviews?
2. How many data analysis types will be used?
3. What will the order of analysis be - concurrent or sequential?
4. Which analysis type has priority or are they equal in status?

Li, Marquart and Zercher (2000) provided an excellent worked example of multitype, mixed analysis in their ecological study of pre-school inclusion. Mixed methods was said to provide: “a broader perspective and deeper understanding of different levels of the ecological systems and interactions among different levels than could be achieved by a single-method design” (p. 117). They utilised a battery of developmental assessment and telephone surveys to generate quantitative data and included observation, open-ended surveys and interviews in their collection of qualitative data.

Their analysis, following Greene and colleagues’ (1989) model, utilised two main analytic approaches: 1) parallel tracks in which separate analysis steps were taken during the reduction and transformation stages and then brought together in a mixed analysis for comparison and integration, and 2) cross over tracks involving concurrent data analysis from multiple sources where “analysis moves back and forth continually between data sets during transformation, comparison and integration” (Li et al., 2000, p.126). This analysis example

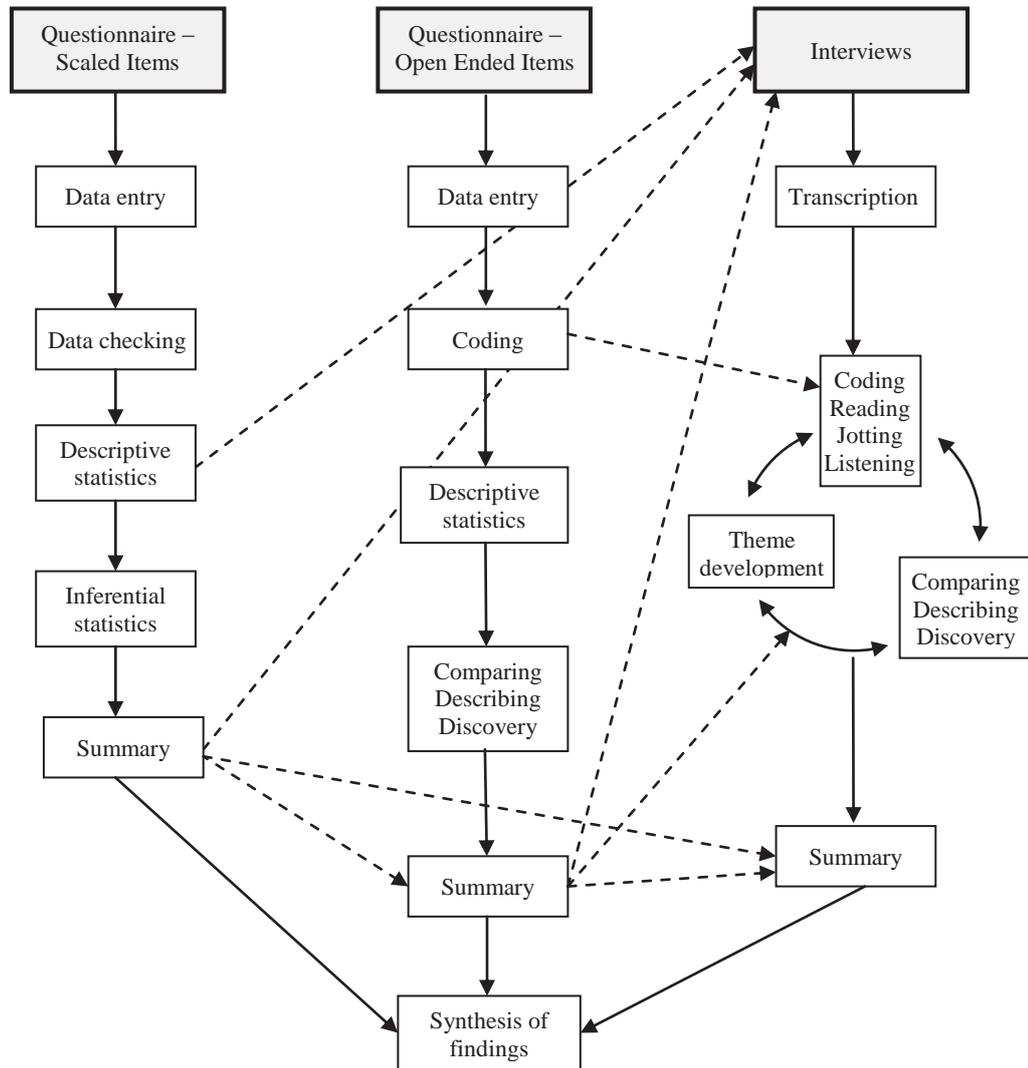
highlighted the non-linear characteristics of analysis in integrated research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Mertens, 2010; Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003) and had applicability to the current research.

### **3.9.2 The Current Study**

The pragmatic solution to analysis for the current study was based upon meeting three requirements: sampling needs, enhancement, and completeness (after Bryman, 2006a). Analysis decisions were based upon the aforementioned literature pointers and situational analysis process which “takes into account the interdependence of individuals and social systems of the environment” (Annan, 2005, p.142). Although described as a “problem solving” intervention framework, in the present study there was no intention to arrive at cause and effect associations, or solve a problem. Nonetheless, one of the aims of the study was to inform practice and therefore it was possible that conclusions would suggest promising mechanisms for future action.

Representing a multitype, mixed analysis design (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2007), a parallel tracks analysis framework modelled on the work of Li and colleagues (2000) was devised to enable an integrated and responsive process according to the ‘fit for purpose’ rationale of pragmatism (Biesta, 2010). While each phase was explored independently, each stage of analysis built on and was informed by what went before, as represented by the dotted arrows in Figure Two.

Inferential statistics were employed to compare students’ pre-post attitude differences to meet sampling selection requirements. Simple descriptive statistics were utilised for analysis of scaled data while open-ended responses were coded according to themes. Information derived from scaled and open-ended questionnaire items were synthesised in analysis and subsequently contributed to the development of an interview guide with topic prompts. The thematic analysis of interviews was planned as a dynamic process, as represented by the circular configuration in Figure 2, and involved multiple hearings and readings.



**Figure 2.** Parallel tracks analysis framework. Adapted with permission from “Conceptual issues and analytic strategies in mixed-method studies of preschool inclusion” by S. Li, J. Marquart and C. Zercher, 2000, *Journal of Early Intervention*, 23(2), p.122.

Process guidance was taken from Ryan and Bernard (2003) and Richards and Morse (2007) following steps suggested by Marshall and Rossman (2011, p.209-214):

1. Organising the data (e.g. cleaning, data entry).
2. Immersion in the data (“cuddle up”, read, re-read, and read again).

3. Generating categories and themes (theory-generated and/or in vivo).
4. Coding the data (and at the same time writing memos).
5. Writing analytic memos (notes, thoughts, insight that bring ideas together, including looking for patterns, alternate understandings).
6. Searching for alternative understandings.

A combination of inductively generated codes, including those sourced from the open-ended item analysis, were supplemented by a priori codes drawn from the literature review and the researcher's experience to provide the best platform for the analysis (Gibbs, 2007). Consideration was given to how the thematic analysis of a uni-directional research question might obscure exceptions and thus jeopardise the integrity of findings. McPherson and Thorne (2006) found enhanced inductive analysis outcomes and greater research insight were possible through paying attention to variation in their Canadian research of cancer patients' communication. To this end, while "What doesn't help?" was not the focus of the current research, it was decided exceptions and variations would be attended to and in reporting, those findings are presented in Chapter Six within subsections entitled "Additional Findings".

In summary, the current analyses were mixed, aimed at optimising understanding of the case while fulfilling a pragmatic, cohesive, integrated methodology at design, data collection, data analysis, and interpretation stages (Bryman, 2006a; Cohen et al., 2007; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Greene, 2007; Mertens, 2010; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2008). Data management and analysis process details are presented in Chapter Four, (§4.8). The final section in this Methodology chapter addresses quality standards in the research process and product.

### **3.10 Quality in Process and Product**

Defensibility of a research process and product is critical if new work is to be favourably accepted by fellow researchers and/or the receiving practice community (Bassey, 1984; Eisenhart & Howe, 1992; O'Cathain, 2010; Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006). While validity and reliability are critical measures of quality in all types of research (Cohen et al., 2011) alternate measures of accountability have been suggested. For example, Wolcott (1994) presented "understanding" as a more legitimate criterion of quality and Bassey (1999) saw no place for reliability or validity in educational case study, preferring trustworthiness and strong

ethical codes to convey assurance of “significant”, “plausible”, “worthwhile”, and “convincing” research (p. 58). Of interest, transparency was a recurring theme in an e-survey of 251 social policy researchers in the United Kingdom (Bryman, Becker, & Sempik, 2008).

### 3.10.1 Standards and Criteria

Within the positivist paradigm the established conventions for quality control emphasise rigor, for example Cronbach’s alpha, the ultimate goal being to enhance the credibility of inferences drawn from data (Denzin, 1989). In contrast, validation within the realm of qualitative research is characterised by varied opinion ranging from adaptation of conventional techniques to meet qualitative process (Denzin, 1989) to the rejection of convention (Wolcott, 1994).

Utilising the theory-in-use model of Argyris and Schön (1974), Maxwell (1992) provided a formulation based upon their analysis of validation concepts utilised by researchers. Thus, five types of validity with demonstrated pertinence to the qualitative research community were incorporated into the “realist approach”: descriptive, interpretive, theoretical, generalisability, and evaluative. Within the aspect of generalisability lay the concept of analytical generalisation where findings are utilised to make sense of similar situations (Bryman, 1988; Kvale, 1996; Yin, 2003). Bassey (1984) called that reliability where “details are sufficient and appropriate for a teacher working in a similar situation to relate his decision-making” (p. 119). Relating well to education and psychology, Eisner (2005) regarded this real-life generalisation, where the “particular”, learned by studying individual cases, is incorporated into new schema. In a similar vein, while not disagreeing with the need for quality control, Guba (1981) highlighted rigor as defined in quantitative terms potentially reduced research relevance to real-life situations. Thus, the alternate quality criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, under the trustworthiness umbrella, were offered for naturalistic inquiry [See Guba (1981) or Lincoln & Guba (1985) for a full discussion].

Like Guba (1981), Kvale (1996) argued that an obsession with validation ultimately leads to invalidation – the more you do, the more you have to do. He seemed to have a point with validation options listed by Cohen and colleague’s (2011) totalling 20 while Tashakkori and

Teddlie (2003) provided 35 different types of validity. Kvale (1996) riled against the traditional use of measures based on the philosophy of truth, which he said have been used in the past to discount and invalidate qualitative research stating:

In modern science the concepts of generalisability, reliability and validity have reached the status of a scientific holy trinity. They appear to belong to some abstract realm in a sanctuary of science far removed from the interactions of the everyday world... (p. 229)

Kvale (1996) advocated a simple approach which included three key aspects of validation - to check, to question, and to theorise, at all steps of the research process. Additionally, communication to readers about knowledge claims and the effects of any assertions made were considered critical aspects of the total validation picture. Other advocates of mixed methods research also promoted permeation of quality control through all stages of the research process (Leech, Dellinger, Brannagan, & Tanaka, 2010; Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006).

Like others who saw the researcher as the most significant ingredient for credible research outcomes (Anderson, 1998; Cohen et al., 2011; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003), Kvale (1996) presented a convincing argument in support of ‘modern’ validity being regarded in terms of the “credibility of the researcher” (p. 241) stating: “Ideally, the quality of the craftsmanship results in products with knowledge claims that are so powerful and convincing in their own right that they, so to say, carry the validation with them, like a strong piece of art” (1996, p.252). Furthermore, he was not a lone voice. Patton (2002) reinforced the line of wisdom saying that inquiry credibility depended on the following:

1) *rigorous methods* for doing fieldwork that yield high-quality data that are systematically analyzed with attention to issues of credibility; 2) the *credibility* of the researcher, which is dependent on training, experience, track record, status, and presentation of self; and 3) *philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry*, that is, a fundamental appreciation of naturalistic inquiry, qualitative methods, inductive analysis, purposeful sampling, and holistic thinking. (pp. 552-553, emphasis in original)

Developed specifically for educational research, the validation standards of Eisenhart and Howe (1992), summarised in Table Eight, cut through the quantitative-qualitative debate and fit well with the philosophies of pragmatism and mixed methods. Like Robinson and Lai’s (2006) pragmatic approach to validity, which emphasised high ethical, professional, and methodological standards in all research stages because: “the decisions of teachers and administrators affect the lives of children” (p. 4), the standards mandated quality control from research inception to dissemination and with refreshing simplicity, captured the essence of various aforementioned formulations. As this model was utilised in the current study it will be revisited in Section 3.10.3.

**Table 8**

*Standards for Quality According to Eisenhart and Howe (1992)*

Standard	Explanation
1. The fit between research questions, data collection procedures, and analysis techniques.	The research (design, data collection, and analysis) must be “cogently developed”, pragmatically decided and fit for purpose.
2. The effective application of specific data collection and analysis techniques.	Process must be guided by credible principles and systematic procedures. Valid rationale for choices must be evident.
3. Alertness to and coherence of prior knowledge.	Research must be grounded upon existing theoretical and practical knowledge. Prior researcher knowledge is valid but must be made explicit.
4. Value constraints.	External value constraints refer to the worth of the research to educational practice. Findings must be accessible to the community. Internal value constraints refer to ethics.
5. Comprehensiveness.	Judgement about overall balance in standards including theoretical quality, technical quality, value, and ethical standards.

**3.10.2 Mixed Methods Research Quality**

Regarded as “... a vehicle for improving the quality of inferences that are potentially obtainable from either the qualitative or quantitative strands of a study” (Tashakkori &

Teddlie, 2008, p.110), Bazeley (2004) cautioned mixed methodology must not be taken for granted:

Mixed methods are inherently neither more nor less valid than specific approaches to research. As with any research, validity stems more from the appropriateness, thoroughness and effectiveness with which those methods are applied and the care given to thoughtful weighing of the evidence, than from the application of a particular set of rules or adherence to an established tradition. (p. 156)

The use of different data collection techniques is often rationalised with reference to triangulation (Bryman, 2006a). Originating in navigation (Cohen et al., 2007), it refers to a confirmatory technique for the validation of interpretation (Hammersley, 2008) and for seeking convergence or agreement of findings (Greene et al., 1989). Four types of triangulation were described by Denzin (1989): data (different times, social settings, strategies or participant groupings); investigator (more than one researcher); theoretical (alternative viewpoints); and methodological (within- or between-method data collection).

A concept of many colours, there has been criticism, especially within the qualitative research community, of the use of triangulation as a validation technique; a discussion that highlights varying conceptions of truth and discrepancy (Brannen, 1992; Bryman, 1992; Gorard & Taylor, 2004; Hammersley, 2008; Patton, 2002; Tobin & Begley, 2004). On the other hand, seen as a possible method of contributing complementary information, of adding richness, colour, and quality to a picture, the discussion of triangulation appears to attract little resistance (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Flick, 2006; Gorard & Taylor, 2004; Jick 1979). Triangulation of method, as in mixed methods research, facilitates a middle ground position where “Areas of convergence increase confidence in findings. Areas of divergence open windows to better understand the multifaceted, complex nature of a phenomenon” (Patton, 2002, p. 559).

Establishing quality within mixed methods research is not straight forward because while there is some agreement that quality be viewed as a process not an outcome (O’Cathain, 2010), there is no consensus within the research community about actual quality criteria (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006). This state of affairs

reflects complexity and variation possible in mixed method research design including how techniques, data, analysis, and findings are integrated throughout the research process (Greene et al., 1989).

Options are available however. Bryman (2008) suggested three possibilities depending on the dominance of data collection and integration: convergent (the same standards are applied to qualitative and quantitative strands); separate (different criteria are used for qualitative and quantitative strands); and bespoke (new criteria are devised). The “Quality Legitimation Model” of Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005) integrated different types of validity to address threats to internal and external credibility. Tashakkori and Teddlie’s (2003) “integrative model of inference quality” based upon design quality (suitability, adequacy, within-design consistency, analytic adequacy) and interpretive rigor (interpretive consistency, theoretical consistency, interpretive agreement, interpretive distinctiveness, and integrative efficacy) provided a third alternative.

There is consensus within traditional and modern paradigms that quality control is absolutely essential for research credibility. Consistent aspects include: integrity and fostering productive, respectful relationships; permeability, and continuity referring to robust quality process; usefulness and accessibility of the research product; and either explicitly expressed or implicit are responsibility, appropriateness and respect relating to the entire research endeavour. Together, all of the above factors form a montage of quality practice inextricably linked with, and situated within, ethical practice; a sum of parts that equals a pedagogy of quality. Maybe Kvale’s (1996) notion of art was not so far off the mark.

### **3.10.3 The Current Study**

Quality assurance aspects of the current study have been introduced throughout this chapter. Four key features that influenced quality control decisions were:

1. The study was philosophically situated within the pragmatic paradigm.
2. Data were collected using mixed techniques.
3. The study was conducted primarily in an educational setting with one of the participant groups being children.

4. The researcher was an experienced secondary teacher and educational psychologist with relevant expertise working with children with learning support needs and in the area of transition.

In this section, quality control measures undertaken in this study are presented with reference to the aspects above and to Eisenhart and Howe's (1992) general standards (introduced in §3.10.1) which "require that research studies be cogently developed, competently produced, coherent with respect to previous work, important, ethical, and comprehensive" (p. 656). Thus, the margins between ethical behaviour, professional conduct, and quality assurance appear purposely blurred – each a vital ingredient, simultaneously influencing and shaping the other with the responsibility for quality placed squarely on the shoulders of the researcher; no reliance on mechanical or statistical indicators is mandated.

Previous chapters have articulated the thorough evolution of this research. The design was developed giving due priority to extant literature while considering and making explicit the professional experience and beliefs of the researcher, as recommended by Eisenhart and Howe (1992). Furthermore, at design and proposal stage the research was presented on numerous occasions to academic superiors, professional peers, and student fora for feedback. Also, feedback was sought in regard to the design, value, and applicability of the research to the educational community.

Positioning this research within the pragmatic paradigm and guided by a situational analysis framework was a judicious decision made with due regard to referential standards: fit for purpose (Biesta, 2010; Maxcy, 2003); inclusive of multiple perspectives (Annan, 2005; Greene & Hall, 2010); contextually responsive (Annan, 2005; Datta, 1997); link means to ends and outcome oriented (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004); and work toward bettering the human experience (Crotty, 1998; Rorty, 2002). The stated reasons for combining methods of sampling, enhancement, and completeness enabled quality judgements related to purpose (Bergman, 2008; Bryman, 2006b).

The present research design was sequential which afforded the opportunity to separate out quality control measures and enable quality checks to permeate the entire process of research. Scaled questionnaire items were checked for internal reliability, and other quality assurance

steps employed for both questionnaire and interview data collection included solid formatting and sequence, pilot testing, and careful attention to dissemination/collection and analysis details (Anderson, 1998). Following transcription of interviews, script accuracy was prioritised by the researcher and all were returned to participants to enable feedback or correction. This was regarded as a check for quality and also a respectful act.

The values and standards that guided this research were methodological and ethical; bound together and inseparable. A research journal was maintained and regular supervision meetings with academic supervisors and professional colleagues ensured awareness of the research act remained fresh as advocated in the literature (Fine & Sandstrom, 1988; Guba, 1981; Punch, 2002).

Eisenhart and Howe's (1992) fourth standard charged the researcher with the responsibility of making the research pay by making it accessible to the practice community. They called this "the "so what?" question" (p. 7). To this end, the ideas and process of the present research have already been presented to peers, school personnel, and professional colleagues in local and national forums via presentation and publication (Higgins, 2009a).

Attention has been drawn to the synergy between Eisenhart and Howe's (1992) standards for quality, pragmatic philosophy, general ethical and quality ideals for educational research (Fine & Sandstrom, 1988; Lincoln, 1995; Mertens, 2010; Robinson & Lai, 2006), and the professional code of ethics for psychologists. These were reference points and benchmarks for quality in the present research which was undertaken seriously with the view of contributing to, and improving, educational practice and positive outcomes for children. Bassey's (1984) words sum up fittingly:

If studies ... are carried out systematically and critically, if they are aimed at the improvement of education, if they are relatable, and if by publication of the findings they extend the boundaries of existing knowledge, then they are valid forms of education research. (p. 121)

### **3.11 Chapter Three Summary**

This chapter has provided rational links between theory and practice and articulated the logic for the research design and process of the present study. Influences within social research, education, and psychology were explored and the decision to position the current research within the pragmatic paradigm was justified.

The use of mixed methodology has widespread acceptance in the educational community of practice. The three-phase sequential design, incorporating questionnaires and interviews, within a case study framework was selected for this study providing a good fit to the research question, context, and purpose of the research. It was justified according to the pragmatic, responsible stance of “what works” (Howe, 1988, p.10) or as Gorard (2010) stated “the only sensible and ethical way to conduct research” (p. 247). Matters pertaining to data quality standards were discussed in general and then related to the current research. Chapter Four, Research Methods, provides discussion of the practical application of the theoretical concepts presented here as Methodology.

# **CHAPTER FOUR**

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

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# CHAPTER FOUR

## RESEARCH METHODS

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter details the actual techniques that were utilised in this research (Kaplan, 1998) as a result of methodological decisions focused upon establishing the best possible way to answer the research questions (Creswell, 2007; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010), as detailed in Chapter Three. The selection of participants, development of measures, and conduct of procedures are discussed with reference to the processes of approval, consent, data collection, and data analyses. The practical application of ethical principles is considered.

### 4.2 The Structure of the Study

The present study was designed to look at the transition of students with learning support needs and to explore factors perceived by students, their parents or caregivers, and teachers to facilitate positive transitions. Data gathering involved the use of questionnaires and follow-up interviews spanning the move from primary/intermediate to secondary school. Three main data collection phases were incorporated as follows:

- Phase One: Toward the end of the school year, perceptions about the impending move to high school were collected by questionnaire from Year Eight students, their family members, and Year Eight teachers.
- Phase Two: At the start of the following school year perceptions about the recent move to high school were collected from the same students, now in Year Nine, their family members, and Year Nine teachers.
- Phase Three: Sub-samples of the students, family members, Year Eight teachers, Year Nine teachers, and 'expert' school staff were individually interviewed to explore

further the main research question: What helps in the transition to high school of students with learning support needs?

### **4.3 Selection Strategy, Setting and Gaining Approval**

Purposive sampling (Patton, 1990) was utilised to select the school district as a possible research setting. This is a powerful strategy that enables focus on particular characteristics of interest via access to information-rich sources, as Merriam (1998) expresses: "... based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 61).

While not necessarily representative, this district was a good fit for the investigation of the transition experiences of primary school students with identified learning support needs, providing an ideal "bounded system" (Merriam, 1998) because:

- transition systems were already in place to identify children with additional learning needs before their move to their new school, and
- local students tended to transition to neighbourhood high schools and therefore boundaries of the school district were reasonably well defined.

The district contained three main secondary schools, each with contributing full primary and intermediate schools forming three structural "pyramids" – 16 schools in total. The pyramid representation, a research structure used extensively in the United Kingdom (Galton et al., 2003), was applicable in the current context because transition movements occurred predominantly within pyramids. It was hoped that the bounded nature of the district would facilitate optimum follow-up of students after their transition to secondary school.

There were a very small number of special character schools in the chosen area but these schools were not included in the study sample for two reasons. Firstly, students from the special character primary schools tended to transition to small special character high schools outside the school district. Secondly, transition support structures already in existence introduced the potential that students, families, and teachers from these schools might form

small non-representative sub-groupings within the chosen population and therefore introduce bias to results.

Once ethical approval for the study was gained from the Massey University Human Ethics Committee approaches were made to schools. For pragmatic reasons, the three secondary principals and their Boards of Trustees (BOT) were contacted first. All secondary principals agreed to participate and so contact with primary and intermediate school principals in the district was made. The importance of initial introductions was not underestimated for they provided the platform on which the research relationship was established. Follow-up meetings provided the opportunity to introduce the research and possible involvement required from staff, students, and family members and significantly, to bring the study alive for each principal. Copies of all Information Sheets (Appendix A), formal letters of invitation (Appendix C) and questionnaires (Appendix D) were provided and emailed to chairpersons of Boards of Trustees.

The next two sections present details of participants starting with particulars of participating schools and followed by information about students, parents and caregivers, and teachers. Included is the decision-making process to identify student participants progressing from Phase Two to Phase Three interviews (§4.4.2).

#### **4.4 Participants**

Participation in the research was voluntary. Four main participant groupings comprised the targeted sample for the investigation:

1. Students with identified learning support needs transitioning from primary or intermediate schools to secondary mainstream settings.
2. Parents or caregivers of the above students.
3. Teachers of Year Eight students (pre-transition).
4. Teachers of Year Nine students (post-transition).

Later in Phase Three, an added grouping of ten experts, each of whom held responsibilities in the area of transition, were approached for interview, as explained in the sub-section below entitled 'School Staff Members' (§4.4.4).

#### 4.4.1 Schools

Of the 16 schools approached, 15 agreed to participate in the research, viewing the focus as highly relevant to the district emphasis on transition improvement. Thus, the sample comprised a near full complement of possible mainstream schools in the district: three secondary schools, three intermediate schools, seven full primary schools, and two contributing primary schools, as presented in Table Nine. Most schools represented diverse communities, drawing their students from lower socio-economic neighbourhoods.

**Table 9**

*Participating Schools*

School	Roll	Decile	Major ethnic composition
High school 1	~ 2100	3	NZ Māori, NZ Euro/Pākehā <sup>a</sup> , Pasifika <sup>b</sup>
High school 2	~1400	1	NZ Māori, NZ Euro/Pākehā, Pasifika
High school 3	~ 1300	3	NZ Māori, NZ Euro/Pākehā, Pasifika, Asian
Intermediate 1	~700	1	NZ Māori, Pasifika
Intermediate 2	~ 450	1	NZ Māori, Pasifika
Intermediate 3	~ 450	3	NZ Māori, NZ Euro/Pākehā, Pasifika
Full primary 1	~ 800	1	NZ Māori, Pasifika
Full primary 2	~ 500	1	NZ Māori, Pasifika
Full primary 3	~ 450	3	NZ Māori, NZ Euro/Pākehā, Pasifika
Full primary 4	~ 400	1	NZ Māori, Pasifika
Full primary 5	~ 400	10	NZ Euro/Pākehā, Māori, Indian
Full primary 6	~ 300	9	NZ Euro/Pākehā
Full primary 7	~ 300	10	NZ Euro/Pākehā
Contributing primary 1	~ 800	1	NZ Māori, Pasifika
Contributing primary 2	~ 450	1	NZ Māori, Pasifika

*Notes:*

<sup>a</sup> Pākehā refers to New Zealand European people living in New Zealand.

<sup>b</sup> For the purposes of the table Pasifika refers to all Pacific people living in New Zealand. The major ethnicities represented in this group are from Cook Islands, Fiji, Niue, Samoa, Tokelau, and Tonga according to the New Zealand Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs.

As BOT acceptances were received, in discussion with school principals, a liaison staff member was identified for each school. It was with this person that all subsequent arrangements were made. At this point with further information supplied, one full primary school that had initially agreed to participate withdrew on the grounds that they did not have any children currently attending who met the participating criteria.

#### **4.4.2 Students**

##### *Phase One*

The selection of student participants followed a purposeful technique of criterion sampling (Patton, 2002). Potential participants were those for whom supplementary learning support information would be passed on to their new school to support their transition. Such students were routinely nominated by their teachers toward the latter part of the school year. Three schools did not have students with learning support needs transitioning to high school, so the student sample was drawn from the remaining nine schools, representing a decile rating spread from one to three.

Information Sheets (Appendix A) and Consent Forms (Appendix B) were provided to school liaison personnel who then invited parents and caregivers of identified students, along with their children, to participate in the research. (It was a condition of Massey University Human Ethics approval that schools make the first approach to families.) In a gesture of respect to families, consent forms were written in English, with alternate versions in dual language formats - English and Māori, Samoan, Tongan, Hindi, Cook Island Māori, Fijian, and Nuiean. (A sample of these is provided in Appendix B). It was agreed that the school liaison person was best placed to decide which version of the letter would be appropriately sent to each family.

Consent Forms were returned by 58 families from an approximate population of 250 students with learning support needs identified within nine schools. The exact population was difficult to ascertain because both the identification of students and management of this part of the process was outside of the researcher's control. A process tracking form (Appendix E1) was supplied to assist classroom teachers with distribution and collection processes.

Fifty-two parents and caregivers took up the invitation to participate and gave consent for their child to participate. Subsequently, students were given the opportunity to personally accept or decline involvement and one student of the 52 students with parental consent declined to take part. Thus, Phase One questionnaires were completed by 51 Year Eight students comprising 55% boys ( $n = 28$ ) and 45% girls ( $n = 23$ ); forty three percent ( $n = 22$ ) from intermediate schools, 29.5% ( $n = 15$ ) from full primary schools, and 27.5% ( $n = 14$ ) from contributing primary schools, as Table Ten details.

**Table 10***Phase One Student Participants*

Characteristic	Freq	%
<b>Students' gender</b>		
Male	28	55
Female	23	45
<b>Students' contributing school</b>		
Intermediate	22	43
Full primary	15	29.5
Contributing primary	14	27.5
<b>Students' ethnicity</b>		
Samoan	23	45
NZ Māori	11	21
NZ Euro/Pākehā	6	12
Asian	2	4
Indian	2	4
Pākehā/Māori	2	4
Tongan	2	4
Cook Island Māori	1	2
Nuiean	1	2
Tokelauan	1	2

Ethnicity details were provided by parents and caregivers on their questionnaire forms. Reference to school roll statistics ([www.ero.govt.nz](http://www.ero.govt.nz)) showed the resulting study sample was relatively representative of the district's student population.

### *Phase Two*

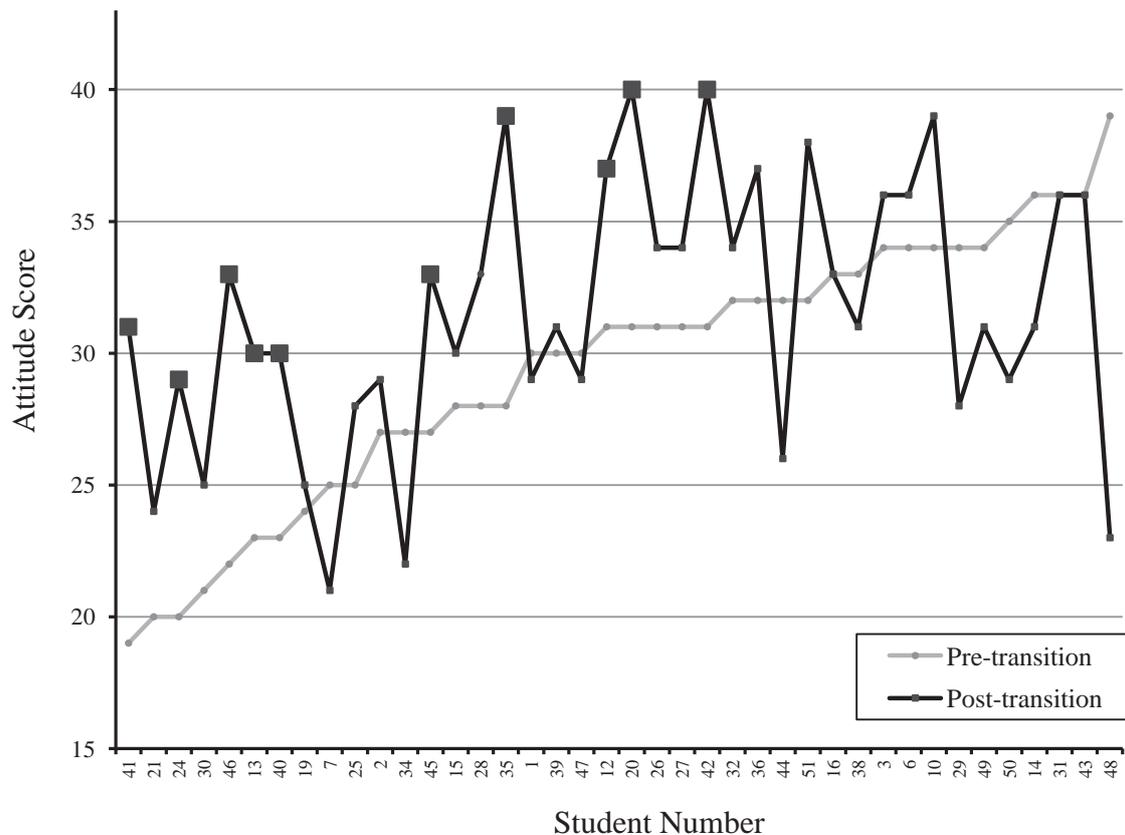
On follow-up post-transition, it was found that ten students had left the district placing them outside the scope of the study design. Therefore 41 students from three secondary schools were re-approached to continue with the study. All agreed to continue their participation in the study and completed Phase Two questionnaires.

### *Phase Three*

Phase Three required identification of a small, homogeneous grouping of students who appeared to have transitioned well compared to their peers. A comparative analysis of pre-post attitudes to transition from Phase One and Two questionnaires was employed to identify possible interviewees, ten of whom would be selected to take part in the interview phase. This practice of 'unique sampling' (Merriam, 1998) is appropriately used in this instance where a sample is chosen based on unique attributes or prior available information (Patton, 1990). The decision-making process is presented graphically in Figure Three. To highlight Phase Two (post-transition) change more clearly, Phase One (pre-transition) student ratings are presented in lighter tone and ordered by increasing value.

Given previous research findings into attitudinal change involving students within general school populations (Cox & Kennedy, 2008; Evangelou et al., 2008; Galton et al., 2003), it was expected attitudes to transition would improve post-transition. In the current sample, all students did not experience more positive attitudes post-transition, however for most students their attitudes to transition improved.

One student left the district after completing the second questionnaire, leaving 40 available student 'possibles' from which to select an interview sub-sample. On examination of variables of the 'Attitudes to Transition' scale prior to analysis, one result set was found to represent an extreme outlier in the data set (see Student 48 in Figure Three). While not considered a threat to the outcomes of the study, it was decided to exclude Student 48's results for examination of pre-post differences only.



Note: Students 12, 13, 20, 24, 35, 40, 41, 42, 45, and 46 are highlighted to indicate selected interview subsample. Student 28 was unavailable at the time of interviews.

**Figure 3.** Phase One and Phase Two ratings for the ‘Attitudes to Transition’ scale

The ‘Attitudes to Transition’ scale produced a possible score range of 10 – 40 representing increasing positivity, with 25 being a ‘neutral’ score. Phase One attitude ratings produced a range of 19 – 36 ( $M = 29.21$ ,  $SD = 4.91$ ) with 79% of students indicating a positive attitude to transition ( $M \geq 25$ ). In Phase Two, 92% of students indicated positive attitudes ( $M = 31.72$ ,  $SD = 4.87$ ), ratings ranging from 21 - 40. Mean attitude ratings compared favourably with results from over 4000 students made available by Homerton College at the time on their website: 30.43 pre-transition and 31.56 post-transition.

With the expectation that students would rate their attitudes to transition more positively post-transition, differences were examined using a paired-sample, one-tail  $t$ -test; the null

hypothesis being  $H_0: \bar{x}_2 \leq \bar{x}_1$ . Subsequently, the  $H_0$  was rejected:  $t(38) = 3.1657, p < .003$  indicating that the pre-post differences were indeed significant in the predicted direction. This finding provided assurance of a stable foundation on which to proceed. It was found that overall, 29 out of 40 students felt equally or more positive post-transition.

By way of a rule to locate ten students for whom the transition appeared to be most positive relative to their peers, it was decided that all students whose scores indicated a pre-post transition discrepancy of at least one standard deviation (post-transition  $SD = \sim 5.00$ ) would be considered for interview. Fourteen students fit the imposed criteria. However, on closer inspection of the data it was found that for three students (10, 36, and 51), while their pre-post scores differed by one standard deviation, their pre-transition scores were already above the post-transition mean. Thus, these three students, being already more positive than many of their peers before transition, were excluded from the selection sample, which left eleven students from which to draw the interview sub-sample. Access to these students was once again managed by the respective high school liaison staff. Unfortunately student 28, who met the selection criteria, was unavailable for interview but seven girls and three boys, agreed to take part in the interview phase. The selected interview sub-sample is identified within the graph with a heavier marker point.

#### **4.4.3 Parents and Caregivers**

Parent and caregiver participants were selected purposefully according to the criterion of having a Year Eight child who had been identified, by their school, as having a learning support need in transition. Fifty-two parents and caregivers provided family consent for participation but with one student leaving the district after completing his pre-transition questionnaire, 51 questionnaires were distributed to families. Questionnaires were completed and returned to school by 56.86% (29/51) of families.

Forty one families were available on follow-up. Then, with a further student leaving the district at the beginning of the year, 40 questionnaires were distributed to families post-transition and 62.5% (25/40) of those were returned. Later during data checking it was found that one family questionnaire was invalid so the final sample number of parents and caregivers completing Phase Two numbered twenty-four.

In Phase Three, the parents or caregivers of selected student interview participants were invited to meet with the researcher to participate in a follow-up interview. A total of ten parents and caregivers participated in the interview. Ethnic groups represented were: New Zealand European, Māori, and Samoan.

#### **4.4.4 School Staff Members**

Teachers were invited to participate on the basis of their teaching students with learning support needs resulting in an almost full complement of staff members meeting the criterion.<sup>2</sup> A total of 70 primary or intermediate teachers completed Phase One and 116 secondary teachers completed Phase Two questionnaires. The process was managed by schools so it was not viable to calculate response rates. It is possible that a small minority of staff members in each school did not participate in the research.

In Phase Three, twenty teachers who had completed the questionnaire were selected for interview through systematic sampling which prevents possible researcher bias and provides increased reliability (Bouma & Ling, 2004). To this end, every seventh primary or intermediate teacher participant (10/70) and every eleventh secondary teacher (10/116) was selected for the interview sample. It was found that consent had not been provided for the interview phase by two of the selected teachers so the next name on the list was taken in each case. All twenty teachers approached agreed to continue with the interview phase. Teachers might have been selected on the basis of teaching the student interviewees but this method was not favoured as it jeopardised anonymity of those students.

Year Eight teachers numbered one male and nine females; three from full primary schools and seven from intermediate schools. Four male and six female teachers comprised the secondary grouping. Overall, teaching histories were mixed with service ranging from one year to over thirty years. However, during interviews it became apparent that the contribution of some teacher interviewees was restricted by limited teaching experience, local knowledge or limited transition practice. For example, one teacher was new to the service and another had recently arrived from abroad.

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<sup>2</sup> As an experienced teacher, one knows that it is commonplace to find, in nearly every classroom, a small number of students requiring extra assistance because of learning, social, behavioural or cultural support needs.

In order to access pertinent information about local transition practice for the study, a further ten school staff, all of whom held responsibilities in the area of transition in the district were approached to join the study as interviewees. This non-random, expert sampling technique, described by Patton (2002) as “purposefully biased”, is recommended when high quality information is specifically sought (Yin, 2009). The ‘expert’ grouping comprised two primary principals, one secondary principal, three intermediate deputy principals (DP), two secondary DPs, one secondary Head of Learning Support, and one Resource Teacher of Learning and Behaviour (RTLB).

#### **4.4.5 Summary of Participants**

Table 11 presents an overview of all participants in each of research phases. Participation in the current study was voluntary and included students, their parent or caregiver, primary teachers, secondary teachers, and ‘expert’ school staff members with positions of responsibility in the area of transition. Participants were drawn from 14 school communities encompassing primary, intermediate and secondary schools.

**Table 11***Summary of Participants*

<b>Phase one - questionnaire</b>	<b>Phase two – questionnaire</b>	<b>Phase three – interviews</b>
<b>Term 4</b>	<b>Term 1</b>	<b>Term 2</b>
<b>Schools</b>		
6 full primary schools 2 primary schools (with language units) 3 intermediate schools	3 high schools	3 full primary schools 1 primary school 3 intermediate schools 3 secondary schools
<b>Teachers</b>		
70 Year 8 teachers	116 Year 9 teachers	3 full primary teachers 1 primary teacher 6 intermediate teachers 10 secondary teachers 10 experts - 2 full primary principals - 3 intermediate DPs - 1 secondary principal - 2 secondary DPs - 1 secondary head of learning - 1 RTLB
<b>Students</b>		
51 Year 8 students	41 Year 9 students	10 students
<b>Parents and caregivers</b>		
29 parents or caregivers	25 parents or caregivers	10 parents or caregivers

#### **4.5 Data Collection Measures**

Data collection in the current study was based on asking questions in questionnaire and interview mode, a complementary data gathering method fitting the current pragmatic, exploratory design (Hansen et al., 2005; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). The sequential model enabled data from initial stages to inform subsequent stages and interpretation to be based on all data collected (Creswell & Plano Clarke, 2011; Mertens, 2010). The study incorporated

three main data collection phases. Phase One and Phase Two involved students, family members, and primary and secondary sector teachers completing questionnaires. In Phase Three, sub-samples of all participant groupings were individually interviewed to explore further the main research question: “What helps in the transition of students with learning support needs to high school?” The measures are detailed in the following section.

#### 4.5.1 Questionnaires

Yin’s (2003) description of a written questionnaire being a formal interview is appropriate in the present case. Pre-transition (Phase One) questionnaires requested that participants reflect upon their experiences in regard to the approaching transition and post-transition (Phase Two) questionnaires focused on the recent transition to high school. Questions focused upon student attitudes toward transition, successful transition, helpful school, family, and personal processes, supportive processes for family and whānau, and concerns about transition. Being the first mode of data collection, these questions addressed the research questions directly by way of structured (scaled) and semi-structured (open-ended) items.

Questionnaires (see Appendix D), presented students, family members, and teachers with similar questions personalised to each grouping’s perspective. For example:

Student:                      What is your school or the high school doing to help you make a successful move to high school?

Parent or Caregiver:      How is the school or the teacher helping your child to make a successful move to high school?

Teacher:                      Please identify 3 things that you feel your school or the high school is doing to help Sam make a successful move to high school.

Teachers’ questionnaires, as in the example above, referred to Sam, an hypothetical Year Eight or Year Nine student, with a learning support need because of learning, behavioural, social, cultural, or other reasons who was transitioning (or just transitioned) to high school. A key difference between the adults’ and students’ questionnaires was that the latter were designed to be delivered orally. Watson (2007) cited a Year Nine student from her small qualitative study into student voice. That student’s comments held pertinence for the rationale

behind the current method: “Emily elaborated, “If they read the questions to me I don’t have to concentrate on reading the questions, I’m concentrating on the questions”” (p. 55). To encourage adult participants to think widely, response space was structured enabling three responses to each question. Additional suggestions and comments were welcomed from all participants.

### *Student Questionnaire (Appendices D1 and D2)*

The student questionnaire contained 15 scaled items and 10 open-ended items. To maximise students’ contribution the questionnaire was constructed with a simple layout and delivered orally (Rutter et al., 1979; Watson, 2007). Designed to be visually appealing, students were able to follow along and fill in their responses individually. Utilising the Flesch Reading Ease Test and the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level Test in *Word* the readability of the text was calculated at 88.2% while the grade level was 3.2 (equivalent to 8 – 9 years old).

Students’ attitudes to moving to high school were assessed pre- and post-transition via ten scaled items adapted from the ‘Attitudes to Transfer’ scale, part of the ‘Attitudes to Changing School’ questionnaire developed by Dr. Tony Pell and colleagues of Homerton College, University of Cambridge to research student changes across school transfer in the United Kingdom. Two further items provided measures of “losing friends” and “strict teachers”. Permission was granted by Dr. Pell for use of the questionnaire (personal communication, July 5, 2007). Although students’ year and age levels at transition in the United Kingdom differ slightly to the New Zealand situation, the scale was designed to map the change from primary to high school and therefore deemed appropriate for the current study.

Internal consistency reliabilities of the ‘Attitudes to Transfer’ scale were originally reported as 0.74 based upon a sample of over 4500 students in Year Six (pre-transition) and 0.76 for a Year Seven (post-transition) sample of 6000 students. Later internal reliabilities of the questionnaires, available on the Suffolk County Council educational portal “Suffolk Learning”, were stated as 0.71 for both of the pre- and post- forms (Suffolk County Council, 2012). Internal reliabilities in the current research compared favourably with all stated iterations, being 0.72 for both pre- and post- transition measures.

Prior to use in this research, the questionnaire was piloted on a group of five students from Year Eight and four students from Year Nine in order to check the appropriateness of question, delivery, and response methods. These data were not included in the final analysis and students who participated in the pilot were not included in the research sample. Discussions with students during piloting indicated the influential nature of both teachers and family/whānau in their transition to high school. Thus, as a result of piloting, three further items were added giving a total of 15 scaled items. The extra items addressed whether teachers and family members were providing support. For example: “My parents/whānau are helping me to feel OK about my new school”.

Scaled items required students to think about a child named Sam who was moving to high school just like themselves. Statements about transition were then presented as Sam’s commentary, while student participants were asked to consider whether Sam’s experience was similar to their own. Students rated statements on a four-point Likert scale ranging from “a lot like me” to “not at all like me”. Examples of the items are:

Pre-transition Sam says:

Question 1: “I think my new school will be really interesting.”

Question 8: “I think the work will be quite easy at my new school.”

Post-transition Sam says:

Question 1: “I think this school is really interesting.”

Question 8: “I think the work is quite easy at this school.”

Bell (2007) advised simplicity is the key to successful questionnaire design for children, especially with regard to language. To this end, in the open-ended section, a one-word prompt was provided for students in their questionnaire script instead of the full question. For example, for Question number 19: “What is your school or the high school doing to help you make a good move to high school?” the prompt “School” was presented in the questionnaire. Protocols (see attached to questionnaires in Appendices D1 and D2) ensured consistency of oral question presentation.

***Parent and Caregiver Questionnaire (Appendices D3 and D4)***

The parent and caregiver questionnaire contained 12 scaled items and nine open-ended items, all of which mirrored student items. Scaled items provided parents and caregivers the opportunity to rate the extent to which statements accurately described their child's experience ranging from "a lot" to "not at all". For example:

Student version:

Pre-transition: "I think my new school will be really interesting."

Post-transition: "I think this school is really interesting."

Parent and caregiver version:

Pre-transition: "My child thinks their new school will be really interesting."

Post-transition: "My child thinks the new school is really interesting."

Open-ended items asked participants to reflect on their experiences of transition to identify helpful practices. For example: "How is the school or the teacher helping to make your child's move to high school successful?" The parent and caregiver questionnaire was tested on two parents, both of whom had children with learning needs who had recently transitioned to secondary school. These adults were not included in the parent/caregiver research sample. As a result of piloting minor alterations were made in layout and wording. For example, feedback indicated parents were unable to easily make a distinction between school and teacher initiated supports. These factors were grouped together as one item which feedback indicated was a workable solution.

***Teacher Questionnaire (Appendices D5 and D6)***

The teachers' questionnaire consisted of ten open-ended response items with two spaces to make further suggestions or comment. To focus response, instructions directed teachers to think of either a Year Eight or Year Nine student called Sam, who might be male or female, with a learning support need because of learning, behavioural, social, cultural, or other reasons, and be transitioning (or just transitioned) to high school. The questionnaires were piloted on a group of three intermediate teachers and three secondary teachers. The formatting decision of providing three response spaces per question was made as a result of feedback. This format was followed for all adult participants. No data collected from the pilot teachers contributed to the results.

#### 4.5.2 Interviews

Individual loosely structured interviews focused on participants' personal experience of the recent transition and enabled extension of themes encountered in the open-ended survey questions (Gunn et al., 2000). Returning for a moment to the stated rationales for the methods employed, the inclusion of interviews offered completeness – the opportunity to gain a broader account of transition via a personal interface, and enhancement – achieving a 'gestalt' effect through the combination of methods.

Developing rapport was prioritised (Cohen et al., 2007). Students were informed that their selection for interview was based upon their questionnaire results which had reflected their positive move to high school. Parents and caregivers were informed that their selection for interview was based upon their child's questionnaire findings which had reflected a positive move to high school. A brief chat about the study and general school life served as a general opener. Pilot work had indicated that the positive focus of the investigation promoted easy sharing of views by interviewees, so engagement was found undemanding.

Participants were reminded about the focus of the study and teachers were reminded about Sam, the student referred to in the questionnaire. Individual questionnaire responses were utilised as icebreakers and later as prompts or reference points during the interview, if necessary. Guiding protocols (Appendix F) referenced themes from questionnaire data analysis and other significant ideas arising from the literature (e.g. Galton and colleagues' (1999) influential work about transition bridges). It was found that the key question: "What helps?" was a profitable conversation opener and "grand tour" question (Spradley, 2002). Participants freely offered their experiences so that, in many cases, topic areas within the protocols occurred within the natural conversation that ensued. The intention was to offer 'room' for contribution and ensure the experience and perspective of participants was captured in a respectful and comfortable manner (Kvale, 2007; Patton, 2002; Spradley, 2002). Feedback from participants at the time was encouraging with comments such as "*I've never thought about that like that before*", and "*Thanks, it was great to be asked for my views*" being offered.

## **4.6 Procedures**

### **4.6.1 Data Collection**

In all phases of data collection, formal documentation was supplied by the researcher but handled and managed by the liaison school staff member who also directed all meetings and contacts with students, families and teachers. The researcher, a New Zealand registered teacher at the time of data collection, was at times in sole charge of students during data collection. Prior to the commencement of data collection, many schools ran short articles in their newsletters about the research. An example is provided in Appendix E2. In addition, the offer was made on consent forms (see Appendix B) for families to meet with the researcher to find out more. As a result, a meeting was organised at one school when the researcher met with a group of families.

### **4.6.2 Student Process**

#### *Phase One*

Students were gathered together in small groups by school liaison staff members who introduced the researcher and process. The researcher introduced the research and informed students that the exercise was not a test and not to worry about spelling. They were told that their contributions might help other children in the future make a positive move to secondary school. Questionnaires were presented orally by the researcher and completed individually by students. Every effort was made to ensure students felt at ease and that their contribution was valued. A flexible approach to the timing of item delivery was followed and while no prompts in relation to possible responses were provided, students were able to ask questions and items were repeated as requested. Students were able to ask for assistance from their peers or the researcher to write down an idea if they experienced difficulties. Students were asked to inform their parent or caregiver that they had completed the transition survey at school as set out in the information sheet they had taken home.

#### *Phase Two*

In the second phase of the data collection, students who had taken part in Phase One were gathered together once again by the school liaison staff member at their high schools during the first term to complete the post-transition questionnaire. Students were reminded about the

study and their rights and consent was revisited. The same procedure of administration was followed as in Phase One.

### *Phase Three*

Selected students were invited by their high school to participate in the interview. With consent reconsidered, students were interviewed individually by the researcher in a space allocated by each school. Staff members were not present during interviews as students were reassured that their contributions would not be accessible by the school. Interviews were audio-taped by the researcher with consent. A small gift was offered to each participating student on completion of the interview. Students were asked to inform their parent or caregiver that they had completed the interview and that the school would be contacting them soon to organise their interview.

## **4.6.3 Parent and Caregiver Process**

### *Phase One and Two*

Questionnaire packages were taken home by students whose parent or caregiver had provided consent and when completed returned to classroom teachers in sealed envelopes. The researcher was informed by schools that they generally struggle to get children to bring back notice returns to school. In an attempt to assist schools a process schedule (Appendix E1) was supplied for all teachers to facilitate their tracking returns. The distribution and collection of parent and caregiver questionnaires did indeed pose many challenges for the school staff because students lost or forgot them. Further questionnaire copies were supplied to school staff to enable follow up.

### *Phase Three*

Parents and caregivers of student interviewees were invited by schools to participate in a follow-up interview. Arrangements were made for the researcher to make personal contact to enable planning of suitable appointment times and venues with each family. All families opted for the interview to be completed in their own homes. In regard to language barriers, school advice was that older siblings or the students themselves would act as interpreters if required. All families were able to converse in English with two Samoan families relying partially on their child to interpret some questions. Interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 80

minutes and were audio-taped with permission. A small gift was given to each family in appreciation of their participation.

#### **4.6.4 Teacher Process**

##### ***Phase One and Two***

Teachers of students who met the criterion were invited by either management or their liaison staff member to participate in the study. Information Sheets were distributed during staff meetings and at that time the researcher was available to describe the research and answer questions. Consent Forms (Appendix B6) and questionnaires were distributed to those who wished to participate and some schools allocated immediate completion time. Other schools returned questionnaires within an agreed timeframe.

##### ***Phase Three***

Potential teacher interviewees were contacted by email with help from the staff liaison contact. Individual interviews were conducted by the researcher in a private space allocated by the school and audio-taped with permission. Following the interview a small gift was made to each interviewee in thanks.

## 4.7 Summary of Methods

Table 12 provides an overview of the research methods including process over three phases, with three broad participant groupings (students, parents and caregivers, and teachers) and two data collection methods (questionnaire and interview).

**Table 12**

*Summary of Methods*

Term 4	Term 1	Term 2
<b>Phase one – questionnaire</b>	<b>Phase two – questionnaire</b>	<b>Phase three – loosely structured individual interviews</b>
<b>Students</b>		
51 students with learning support needs	41 students followed up from Phase One	10 students who experienced a positive transition relative to their peers selected by purposeful sampling
<b>Parents and caregivers</b>		
29 parents and caregivers student participants	25 parents and caregivers followed through from Phase One	10 parents or caregivers of selected student interview sub-sample
<b>Teachers and school staff</b>		
70 primary or intermediate teachers teaching students with learning support needs	116 secondary teachers teaching students with learning support needs	10 primary sector teachers and 10 secondary teachers selected by random systematic sampling from Phase One and Phase Two participants
		10 experts selected by non-random expert sampling

## 4.8 Data Management and Analysis

Richards and Morse (2013) suggested “...managing data is not merely a clerical but also a first analytical process” (p. 138). Thus, this section addresses management and analysis in tandem, with reference to the three forms of data collected in the present research: 1) scaled survey data, 2) short answer written responses, and 3) interview data from individual interviews. The decision-making process related to data management and analysis was introduced in Chapter Three, Section 3.9. Briefly, decisions were based upon finding a pragmatic solution for the mixed method design that appropriately responded to the data types collected (Bryman, 2006a; Cohen et al., 2007; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Greene, 2007; Mertens, 2010; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2008). Thus, a mixture of deductive and inductive strategies were utilised as detailed below.

### 4.8.1 Scaled Items

Data derived from scaled items were entered into a *Microsoft Excel* spreadsheet as recommended in the administration and management instructions provided with the ‘Attitudes to Changing School’ questionnaire which enabled pre-post transition tracking according to each participant’s unique identifier.

Preliminary data checking of scaled items revealed a limited amount of missing data (equivalent to 0.73% of data set). Further inspection found that missing items were dispersed randomly through the scaled items data set and did not relate to the same question or the same student. For these reasons simple within-variable mean imputation, where the group mean for that item was substituted for the missing data, was employed (Downey & King, 1998; Roth, 1994; Saunders et al., 2006).

Simple descriptive statistics were computed within *Excel*. Pre-post differences and between group differences were examined via paired *t*-tests or independent *t*-tests, as appropriate, using the computer statistical package *STATISTICA* 10 (Statsoft 2010). Alpha levels for significance were set at  $p < .05$ .

### 4.8.2 Open-ended Items

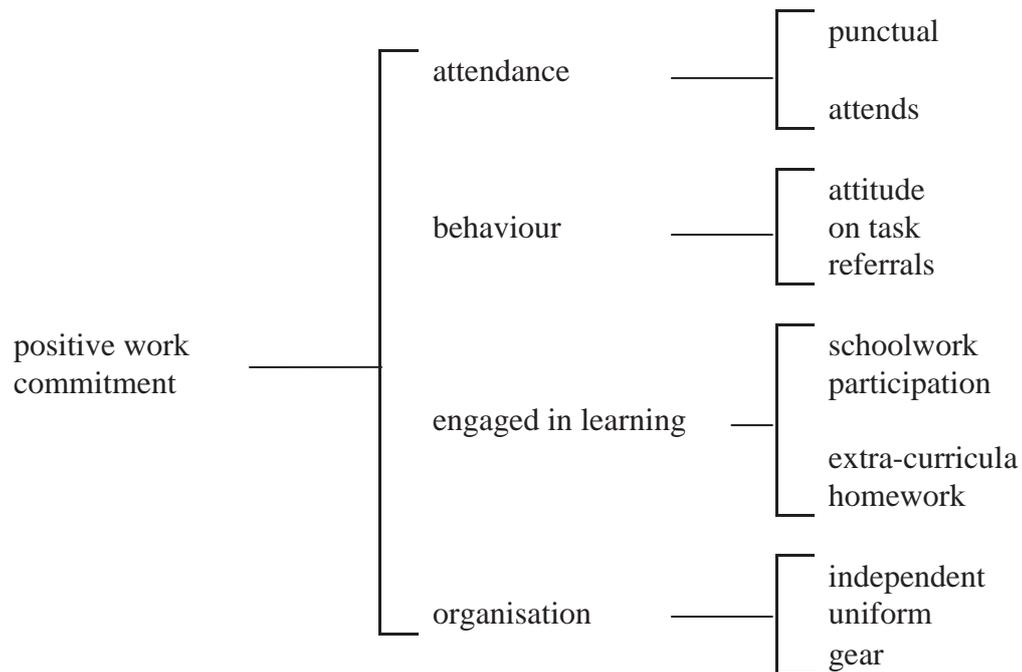
The generally brief responses to open-ended questionnaire items were all entered into *Microsoft Word* spreadsheets. Each participant group was handled separately and every question was assigned a separate spreadsheet. Working within spreadsheets facilitated the easy addition of coding columns as categories developed conceptually (Hahn, 2008; Yin, 2011). Where a comment held two or more separate key ideas, they were entered on separate lines before coding. For example, within secondary teachers' responses about indicators of success, Participant 301 responded: "*Has developed friendships and is engaged in learning*". This comment was divided into two: "has developed friendships" and "is engaged in learning". Missing open-ended responses were not considered problematic as analysis involved aggregation of data and overall, very few participants omitted responses. Table 13 provides a sample spreadsheet section by participant number.

**Table 13**

*Coding Spreadsheet Example*

#	Question 1 – teachers	Code	Subcode 1	Subcode 2
320	involved in other aspects of school	engaged	extra-curr	participate
344	correct uniform and equipment	engaged	organised	uniform/gear
357	respectful of others	engaged	behaviour	communication
383	attends and punctual	engaged	attends	independent
384	actively participates	engaged		participate

Simple, mechanical inductive analysis was carried out based upon Richards and Morse (2007) data analysis processes of topic coding and analytic coding. Initial topic coding was guided by Ryan and Bernard's (2003) key question: "what is this expression an example of?" As familiarity with the data increased, codes grew in number and were refined. The 'sort' function allowed codes to be viewed in many different ways which proved invaluable to cross-check and review codes (Hahn, 2008). Coding hierarchies were developed for each question as per the example provided in Figure Four.



**Figure 4.** Coding hierarchy for positive work commitment (an indicator of success)

As a lone researcher, two techniques were employed to bring rigour to the coding process: 1) independent coding and debrief – coding of a duplicate sample of findings by a knowledgeable colleague using a given scheme followed by reflective evaluation and refining of the coding categories, and 2) intracoder reliability - a sample of questions was re-coded after two months and compared to the original (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Richards & Morse, 2013). Interrogation of the data (Barbour, 2001) during reflective discussion resulted in clarification of analysis thoughts and some refinement. On re-check, mean percentile intracoder agreement was 0.96.

Descriptive statistics and frequency data were generated, by way of *Excel* and *Word* spreadsheets and tables, to suggest dominant themes, provide summaries of participant responses, identify common patterns and to facilitate comparisons within and between data sets (Le Compte, Milroy, & Preissle, 1993; Namey, Guest, Thairu, & Johnson, 2008; Yin, 2009).

### 4.8.3 Interviews

The retention of participant perspective and context has been considered problematic during data transcription (Nisbet, 2006), and coding or fracturing text (Smith & Hesse-Biber, 1996; Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003). Thus management and analysis retained data in four modes (audio files; transcriptions within *Word*; hard copy transcriptions; and transcriptions in NVivo 9) as a pragmatic response to these concerns. The aim was to utilise technology as a tool to complement mechanical analysis procedures while ensuring easy accessibility to the raw data.

Bearing in mind this was not a linear process the following steps provide an overview of the process:

1. Interviews saved as audio files.
2. Interviews transcribed into separate documents by a private transcriber, directed to use ‘clean verbatim’ style. This style presents an authentic transcription that is not paraphrased but “... ah ...” and “... um ...” sounds are removed. The decision to follow this style of transcription was pragmatic based upon the intent of interpretive analysis not literal analysis (Mason, 2002). Furthermore as transcripts were to be returned to participants for release, it was decided that full verbatim transcripts might have been received as somewhat daunting.
3. Interview transcriptions (electronic) were thoroughly checked by researcher against master audio files to ensure that transcription had produced a faithful representation (Poland, 1999). A few corrections were made, mostly the result of a participant’s accent or quiet voice, or where unfamiliar words were used.
4. Corrected interviews were either hand-delivered or emailed to participants so that they might check the veracity of the transcripts, amend their interview if they wished, and give authorisation for its use. This process was regarded as respectful of the participants and also a first step toward valid representation of participant views. No changes were requested. One participant requested that she be contacted prior to any of her words being used verbatim in the resulting thesis.
5. While waiting for the interviews to be returned, reading and listening continued. Notes were made to capture relevant contextual observations and an overall holistic impression of each interview. These notes supplemented initial post-interview notes recorded by the researcher. While a reflexive analysis (Mason, 2002) was not a

specific design feature of the research, it is recognised that researcher reflection is an important element in the process of producing ethical, respectful and faithful research.

6. Released documents were imported into NVivo 9 as they were received back and were printed off in hard copy.

Planning considered the portability of data because it was found that more effective initial coding was achieved when working with pen and paper. Marshall and Rossman's (2011) direction and comments having particular resonance: "Ideas about codes can happen just about anytime and anywhere—in front of the computer, on a dinner napkin at a restaurant, creating designs in the sand while at the beach, in the shower, and more!" (p. 213)

The main techniques employed to identify themes were: looking for repetitions, similarities, differences and key words in context, and cutting and sorting (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). In line with recommendations from the literature, codes were developed using a combination of a priori and inductive generation (Dey, 1993; Gibbs, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Richards, 2009; Ryan & Bernard, 2003) and included those established during analysis of the open-ended items. It was found that inductive generation served the analysis to best advantage producing a more faithful representation of the data.

#### *Computer-assisted Management and Analysis*

The software programme NVivo 9 (QSR International, 2010) was utilised in the current study as an organisational tool predominately. The benefits of using NVivo included streamlining the coding process, better storage of text segments within multiple categories and ease of contextual retrieval (Smith & Hesse-Biber, 1996). In later stages of the analysis, NVivo complemented traditional mechanical analysis and organisation of themes.

## **4.9 Research Ethics**

Research within the pragmatic paradigm presupposes a research process firmly embedded within an overtly value-laden approach (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Therefore, the pragmatic researcher is necessarily reflective and openly engages with the values and beliefs that drive the research endeavour.

Justification for ethical decision-making is provided by the universal principles of beneficence, respect for persons, and justice (Sieber, 1992). The first and most basic principle in social research of ‘do no harm’, relates not only to participants’ basic right to being and feeling safe, but also requires research to maximise positive outcomes and benefits for science and humanity, while minimising risk and harm (Diener & Crandall, 1978; Sieber, 1992). Risks might arise in the process of poorly planned or executed research (Cohen et al., 2007; Kvale, 1996) and also might exist within the publication process. For example, a breach of privacy may have unpredictable effects upon participants, groups or organisations as discussed by Hammersley (1995). Beneficence therefore requires researcher responsibility to the research, the participants and audience and will require balancing risk with potential benefits (Cohen et al., 2007). Howe and Moses (1999) highlighted the complications of the ‘intimate’ nature of social research where the distance between researcher and participant is reduced, and where the outcomes are unpredictable to a certain extent because of open-ended processes.

The second principle of respect for persons requires considerate interactions with others. This principle also encompasses protection of autonomy, which assumes people are capable of making their own decisions in respect of themselves (Sieber, 1992). Norms governed by this principle relate to access, consent, privacy, freedom, and trustworthiness (both of the researcher and the research) (Kitchener & Kitchener, 2009; Sieber, 1992).

The third principle of justice addresses fairness. Thus, research processes must be considered in respect of purpose and consequences to persons and groups, and conflicts of interest need to be assessed (Kitchener & Kitchener, 2009; Sieber, 1992). Costs and benefits should be weighed, for example, the right of the researcher to conduct research to further knowledge versus the rights of participants to self-determination, privacy, and dignity (Cohen et al., 2007).

#### **4.9.1 Ethical Considerations in the Current Study**

Consideration of ethical standards is about seeking to do right (New Zealand Psychologists Board, 2002), it is about the correctness of actions (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and above all it is about respect for others (Sieber, 1992). Prior to making a full application to the Massey

University Human Ethics Committee, an ethical analysis of the project was undertaken. To assist in this process reference was made to the Massey University Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations involving Human Participants (Massey University, 2006) which listed the main principles requiring consideration as:

- a) respect for persons;
- b) minimisation of harm to participants, researchers, institutions, and groups;
- c) informed and voluntary consent;
- d) respect for privacy and confidentiality;
- e) the avoidance of unnecessary deception;
- f) avoidance of conflict of interest;
- g) social and cultural sensitivity to the age, gender, culture, religion, and social class of the participants; and
- h) justice.

Both Massey University and the New Zealand Psychologists Board required due regard for New Zealand's cultural diversity and to the Treaty of Waitangi (Te Tiriti o Waitangi). Further, as a practicing, registered psychologist, the researcher was bound by the New Zealand Psychologists Board's Code of Ethics (2002) which must be applied in respect of research activity. The main ethical principles in that Code (2002) are:

1. Respect for the dignity of persons and peoples;
2. Responsible caring;
3. Integrity in relationships;
4. Social justice and responsibility to society.

Ethical issues concerning the conduct of the study were discussed in professional supervision and with work colleagues within the Ministry of Education (MOE) who were teachers and Psychologists. Also, advice was sought from a friend who had just finished a PhD and from a number of parents with children in the same age range as the target students in the proposed study. Cultural advice and guidance were sought from Kaitakawaenga (MOE advisor to ensure culturally-appropriate service to Māori), Pasifika Cultural Advisor (MOE), Samoan Matai (Chief), Indian Psychologist, Hindu Priest, and other MOE work colleagues as representatives of the other ethnicities that would likely be represented in the study's target

population (e.g. Cook Islands, Tongan). These people also assisted with appropriate greetings and introductions in the introductory letters. After discussion in supervision and with due cognisance of the aforementioned principles, a formal application was made and the current project was reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee in August 2008.

During the research process particular consideration was afforded the following ethical matters: minimisation of risk of harm, processes of informed and voluntary consent, especially in regard to research involving minors, respect for privacy and confidentiality, and respect for persons in regard to social and cultural sensitivity. Each of these principles will be discussed in turn.

### ***Minimisation of Risk of Harm***

In regard to the subject matter of the research, it was considered because the study had a strength focus and emphasised reflection on positive experiences little risk was posed. Further, participants were assured that any contributions would be valued.

During project planning inconvenience was recognised as a potential key issue both for schools and families. Consequently the project management was fully negotiated with schools prior to the commencement of the research. Information Sheets invited people to participate and detailed the possible time commitment. Thus, people were able to make informed decisions at that time whether they wished to participate and make a commitment to the research.

The intrusion into school life had the potential to be harmful to the progress of a student's learning on a particular day. Thus, all timings for data collection was negotiated with schools and managed by schools. They decided how students were accessed, the best time for students to be called from class and how they might catch up on any work missed. In actuality this proved to be a negligible issue as most data collection was organised either in tutor periods, assembly time or at lunch times.

The intrusion into staff life, as part of staff participation and staff management of student processes (consent, questionnaire collection, student management), was acknowledged to be a

considerable undertaking. However, once negotiated, it was found that school staff willingly accepted this responsibility as they could see the potential in the research and the benefits it might bring to them and the possibilities to enhance transition outcomes for students and families in the future.

The intrusion into family life was also considered. Voluntary consent processes enabled families to decline the invitation to participate if they were unable to dedicate the time to the research requirements as outlined in the Information Sheet.

In regard to the identification of students, this process was routinely carried out by schools therefore in planning the research study no risks were foreseen in regard to that identification process.

### ***Informed Consent***

In ethical terms, to provide consent, one must have all information needed to make an informed choice and understood that information (knowledge), have the ability to make a decision (competence), and give of their own freewill (voluntarily) (Grisso & Vierling, 1978; Ministry of Education, 2006b). Sandoval and Irvin (2003) put it this way: “To give consent an individual must know what will be done, why it will be done and how it will be done” (p. 67).

To enable members of school communities (parents and caregivers, children, and teachers) to make informed decisions about their participation in the research, project information was supplied in written form through introductory letters, school newsletters and Information Sheets. Information was also provided verbally (in person) at school staff meetings, school parents’ evenings and read out to students before any data collection commenced.

Information Sheets and Consent Forms were sent home with targeted students. Although parental or caregiver approval was the first step in the consent process, students were given the opportunity to personally consent to participation or decline the invitation. The Information Sheet, already provided for each student (Appendix A1), was read aloud in the group meeting when there was opportunity for discussion and questions, and the voluntary nature of participation was thoroughly explained.

In line with current practice, gaining consent was not a one-off process (Ministry of Education, 2006b). Instead consent was revisited through explanation of participant rights and re-established at each phase of the research before further data collection was undertaken. Furthermore, because of the time lapse between Phase One and Phase Two of the data collection, Information Sheets were provided once again to all students and family participants.

Following Phase Three all participants viewed the transcriptions of their interviews and were given the opportunity to comment on or amend their words and to authorise the release of the transcript to be used in the research or subsequent publications. The implications of that authorisation were explained to all participants at the time.

No inducements were offered to participants to acquire consent and at no time were staff members, family members or students subjected to undue influence by the researcher to take part in the study. Participation was in response to invitation and therefore was voluntary (Cottrell & McKenzie, 2011).

### ***Respect for Privacy and Confidentiality***

A confidentiality agreement informs participants what will be done with their contributions and how that data will be managed in terms of their privacy (Sieber, 1992). In the current study confidentiality was addressed at the access stage with principals and BOTs, at each stage of participant consent (invitation, questionnaire completion, interview, transcript release), and at the transcription stage. The transcriber signed a confidentiality agreement (Appendix G3) before audio tapes were forwarded for transcription.

Participants were assured that the researcher would respect the privacy of all information contributed, that no district, school or person would be identified in any writing or publications. Students were assured that their family members and teachers would not be able to read the information they provided. Further, school staff members were advised that their contributions would not be accessible by either their school management or the Ministry of Education. Where face-to-face data collection occurred, an additional verbal assurance of protection of identity in the management of data and in any writing was offered by the researcher.

### *Social and Cultural Sensitivity*

It is important that participants are acknowledged and feel valued for the commitment made to research (Sieber, 1992). In the present study information sessions and data collection in schools were organised at mutually agreed times to minimise intrusion and to fit in with school programmes. Parent and caregiver interviews were organised at mutually convenient times and locations to suit families. Interview appointments were not pressured and time was devoted to building rapport and ease with families.

Further, it is important that the act of valuing is extended via the communication and sharing of research outcomes (Sieber, 1992). The personal accounts and ideas were shared in good faith so the passing back of research results is not only a logical sequel but also an ethical obligation (Cottrell & McKenzie, 2011). Thus, in respect of research findings, participants were informed that a summary of findings would be supplied in written form to all participants, schools, and Boards of Trustees. Moreover, offers were made to address school community meetings at schools' request.

No particular cultural group was the primary focus in the research. However, because the research locality was one of ethnic diversity, cultural advice was sought from Pasifika (Samoan, Tongan, and Nuiean), Māori, and Indian advisors both in the design of the study and before the interview stage of data collection. The researcher wanted to ensure an awareness of cultural practices and protocols especially in respect of visiting families in their homes. On the basis of advice received, each interview participant was given a small koha (gift) in appreciation of the time given and possible inconvenience that the research may have created.

## **4.10 Chapter Four Summary**

This chapter presented the methods utilised in the course of the research study including selection of the research setting and participant groups, collection of data, and analysis of data. The sequential design was carried out in three phases incorporating questionnaire and interview data gathering techniques. Analysis of pre- and post-transition questionnaires contributed to Phase Three sample selection and interview content.

The consideration and application of ethical principles was described with reference to the Massey University Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations involving Human Participants (Massey University, 2006) and the New Zealand Psychologists Board Code of Ethics (New Zealand Psychologists Board, 2002).

This case study was designed to explore the perceptions about transition of teachers, students, and their parent or caregiver using a sequential, mixed method design situated within the pragmatic paradigm. The findings are presented in Chapter Five.

# **PART TWO**

## **RESULTS**

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## **PART TWO**

### **RESULTS**

Focusing upon participants' personal views, the reported experiences of students in transition to high school, their parents or caregivers, and teachers were gathered in three phases. Part Two presents results over the next two chapters.

Chapter Five reports findings of Phase One (pre-transition) and Phase Two (post-transition) questionnaires which contained scaled and short-answer questions. Chapter Six presents findings from Phase Three interviews which provided participants the opportunity to reflect on and discuss their recent experiences of transition in greater detail. Participants had the opportunity to consider themes that arose from within questionnaire findings and who or what helped their transition, and/or the transition of their children or their students.

While questionnaire and interview data are separated in reporting, inferences were drawn from the entire data set wherein each step of analysis and interpretation was both independent and interdependent. That is, each stage of analysis was necessarily influenced by what had gone before, holding true to the mixed method design (Greene et al., 1989; Mertens, 2010), and based upon data collection rationales of sampling, enhancement, and completeness (Bryman, 2006a).

# **CHAPTER FIVE**

## **QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS**

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# CHAPTER FIVE

## QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents results from the first two data collection phases that utilised questionnaires. Questions were related across all participant groups and addressed broad features of moving to high school including successful transition, worries about transition, helpful practices, and helpful people. Students' and family members' responses referred to their own personal experiences. Teachers were asked to think of a male or female student named Sam, with a learning support need related to learning, behavioural, social, cultural, or other reasons, and who was transitioning (or had just transitioned) to high school. Questionnaires are contained in Appendix D.

### 5.2 Questionnaire Results from Scaled Items

#### 5.2.1 Students' Scaled Items

The student questionnaire contained fifteen scaled items of which ten comprised the 'Attitudes to Transition' scale used to select the student sub-sample for interview. The selection process for the interview sample, reported in Section 4.6.1 in the previous chapter, employed *t*-tests to investigate pre-post attitude change. That analysis found that students' attitude to transition was more positive after the move to high school.

The remaining five scaled items provided information on what students felt about losing friends, strict teachers, and available sources of support. It must be noted that because student sample numbers differed across Phases One and Two, the following analyses of pre- and post- changes employed independent *t*-tests. Findings of the *t*-tests and descriptive statistics, including means and positivity prevalence calculations are reported in Table 14. For interpretive ease, the first entry in the table provides findings of the 'Attitudes to Transition' 10-item scale, expressed as an item mean.

**Table 14***Students' Attitudes to Changing Schools Pre- and Post- Transition*

Scaled items	Phase one <sup>a</sup>		Phase two		
	Mean	% <sup>b</sup>	Mean	%	Sig <i>t</i>
'Attitudes to Transition' <sup>c</sup>	2.95	75.00	3.16	90.00	3.16** <sup>d</sup>
9. Losing friends	2.25	35.29	2.73	58.54	1.94*
12. Strict teachers	1.86	25.49	2.07	36.59	0.99
13. Family helping	3.69	92.16	3.39	87.80	-1.88*
14. Teachers helping	3.09	76.47	3.39	85.37	1.58
15. Family helping with homework	3.37	82.35	3.27	78.05	-0.49

*Notes:*<sup>a</sup> Phase One *n* = 51; Phase Two *n* = 41<sup>b</sup> Prevalence rate represents the percentage of participants reporting positive attitude ratings ( $\bar{x} \geq 2.5$ )<sup>c</sup> 'Attitudes to Transition' scale contains 10 items. Mean indicates item mean<sup>d</sup> \**p* < .05, \*\**p* < .01

Before the move, students indicated strongly that maintaining friendships caused concern (35.29% positive), however soon after transition students were already significantly more positive about their friendships  $t(90) = 1.94$ ,  $p < .05$ . While the expectation that secondary teachers would be strict did not change significantly after transition, overall, teachers were rated predominately supportive, with most students experiencing secondary teachers as making them feel OK after the move to high school (85.37% positive). The majority of students experienced family support throughout the transition, albeit rated as reduced post-transition,  $t(90) = -1.88$ ,  $p < .05$ . Such a pattern might be reflective of growing independence (Wentzel, 1998; Youniss & Smollar, 1985).

### 5.2.2 Parents' and Caregivers' Scaled Items

Matched to student questionnaires, scaled items of the parent and caregiver questionnaires, asked family members to rate what their child thought about transition. It was found that before transition 82.76% of parents and caregivers assessed their children's attitude to transition positively (compared to 74.51% of students self-assessing positively) while after

transition that increased to 91.67% (compared to 85.37% of students). Table 15 presents the post-transition ratings of all family members and students.

**Table 15**

*Mean Parent and Caregiver Attitudes Compared with Students' Ratings*

Scaled items	Mean ratings		Sig <i>t</i>
	Parent or caregiver <sup>a</sup>	Student <sup>b</sup>	
'Attitudes to Transition' <sup>c</sup>	3.40	3.16	1.93
9. Losing friends	3.42	2.73	2.69**
12. Strict teachers	2.29	2.07	0.77

Notes:

<sup>a</sup> Phase Two  $n = 24$

<sup>b</sup> Phase Two  $n = 41$

<sup>c</sup> 'Attitudes to Transition' scale contains 10 items. Mean indicates item mean

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

Family-student comparisons of the 'Attitudes to Transition' assessment revealed a strong trend (not quite reaching significance) toward parents and caregivers being more optimistic about their children's approach to transition than the students themselves,  $t(63) = -1.93$ ,  $p < .06$ , suggesting that they were not fully aware of their child's feelings. Greater synchronicity of understanding was found within family pairs of students who experienced a particularly positive transition (i.e. those chosen for the interview sub-sample),  $t(6) = 0.866$ ,  $p < .5$ , compared to the balance of the family-student pairs,  $t(16) = 3.78$ ,  $p < .01$ . On the two remaining scaled items, children's thoughts about losing friends were assessed more optimistically by family members,  $t(63) = -2.69$ ,  $p < .01$  while greater alignment in ratings regarding strict teachers was found.

### 5.3 Questionnaire Results from Open-ended Items

Open-ended items provided participants with enhanced response freedom. Questions related to what a successful move looks like, what people worried about in the transition, who was helping whom in the move to high school, and the supports being provided. All participants

were asked about the most important support for them. Blank space was provided at the end of each questionnaire for participants to include comments should they wish to and most students took advantage of that opportunity.

The findings are reported in the next seven sub-sections (§5.3.1 to §5.3.7), corresponding to the question sets in the following outline:

1. One word
2. Success
3. Worries
4. What helped students in transition?
5. What helped families to be included in transition?
6. What helped teachers with their transition practice?
7. Most important practices and added comments

Both Phase One and Phase Two findings will be included in each set. For some question sets, parts of the analysis were reworked (after Richards, 2009), to find greater clarity or to compare certain aspects of emergent findings. In the case of success, the reviewed analysis enabled between-group comparison of indicators so is reported in a pre-post summary.

### **5.3.1 One Word**

Question 16 asked students to write one word that described how they felt about the transition (“Please write one word that describes how you feel about going to high school next year”) and make a comment about that word if they wished in Question 17 (“Add a comment if you like in this space”).

#### ***Students***

As might be expected, response themes mirrored ratings for scaled items, with the majority of primary and intermediate students (60.78%), positive about their forthcoming transition. Common descriptors offered included “*excited*” and “*cool*” although equal numbers of students expressed being “*happy*” as being “*scared*”. Comments indicated excitement about meeting up with friends, making new friends, looking forward to a new experience, and facing new challenges. Overall, these findings were at odds with Cox and Kennedy’s (2008)

research that reported using the same methodological technique. They found a minority of Year 8 students felt positive about the forthcoming move to high school. Furthermore, environment anxiety was barely mentioned in the current study - three comments before and one after transition, whereas this counted as one of the prevalent worries in the aforementioned research.

Post-transition, only five students offered negative descriptors: *“tough”*, *“crazy”*, *“scary”*, *“freaky”*, and *“dumb”*. Accompanying comments referred to mean kids, strict teachers, hard or boring work, and crowds. Closer scrutiny of the five students’ questionnaires revealed various pre-transition anxiety related to bullies, relational concerns (not knowing anyone and meeting people), schoolwork, and the environment. Post-transition attitude ratings for all five were found to be in the lower quartile of scores and one recorded a post-transition dip. It appeared three of the five students were experiencing schoolwork difficulties with three receiving extra assistance from teacher aides or within homeroom situations. Overall, it appeared that all five students found the transition tough however understood they experienced challenges and acknowledged the help provided in the high schools. All reported receiving family support.

With nearly 90% of students providing positive post-transition descriptors and comments, the following two examples provide typical illustrations of pre-post change. Pre-transition, Student 28 wrote: *“Nervous”*, and *“Because I may not be able to keep up with the work pace in class and might not get my best results ...”*, and then post-transition wrote: *“Excited”*, and *“I am excited about high school and nowhere near as nervous as I thought I would be”*. Another wrote pre-transition: *“Scared”*, and *“Because I’m not ready to have mo [more] teachers and make new friends yet”*, and post-transition: *“AWSOME”*, and *“High skewl is awesome becoz I’ve made new friends and gotn to no lots of new teachers.”* (S41).

### 5.3.2 Success

Positive or successful transition was at the heart of this research and a core supplementary focus. Thus, all participants were asked to think about and describe how a student’s successful transition to high school might be recognised. While a few students made brief mention of physical appearance and future goals, responses from all participant groupings fell

within four broad themes: positive work commitment, good relationships, learning progress, and positive outlook (happy) with the first two themes being predominant. Positive work commitment included those comments relating to class work, homework, extra-curricula participation, being organised (uniform, gear), attendance, and good behaviour (settling to work). Some mention was made of the provision of student support and home-school relations. Responses from each participant grouping are presented below.

### ***Students' Ideas of Success***

Students were asked: "If you could see yourself in May next/this year, how would you know that your move to high school had been successful?" Before and after transition comments such as "*putting in 100%*" (S1) and "*working hard*" (S22) amounted to about 40% of total remarks. Learning progress maintained importance for students drawing approximately 15% of comment through transition, for example: "*...learn and move a high level.*" (S44) and "*...achiving my goals*" (S45).

Being "*happy*" featured strongly pre-transition but at that time no particular pattern of association was evident. After transition, while fewer references were made to happiness, a link emerged to positive relationships and connections with others: "*Il look happy because I can get along well with other kids*" (S18) and "*people are happy around me*" (S42).

Some remarks before transition signalled growing maturity and awareness, for example: "*I know that I'm doing well in High Sch ... I am doing the right thing*" (S1), "*I would do my homework, have full uniform and be more mature*" (S19) and "*ready to learn*" (S49). Extrinsic acknowledgement of progress retained meaning for some, for example: "*There would be a good look on their face when they saw me working well in class*" (S6) and "*my teacher thinks im better at doing my work*" (S20). Only one post-transition remark was coded under 'attendance': "*...go to class on time ...*" (S19).

### ***Parents' and Caregivers' Ideas of Success***

Parents and caregivers identified positive work commitment, academic progress, and happiness as success indicators and prioritised these features over good relationships, an aspect mentioned less frequently. Although family members looked forward to their offspring learning new things, 45% of comments before transition and 70% after transition revealed that

engagement in the business of learning held importance, for example: *“She can easily work on her sch works by herself; her willingness to reach her goal of better education”* (P101). Such comments suggested their children’s growing independence was assumed, while school attendance was also expected. An element of engagement was how their child’s school outlook impacted home, as follows: *“My son is very unpredictable, but I guess if he is waking each morning and getting prepared to go to school without complaining then it is a good sign ...happy each afternoon”* (P121).

A minor theme mentioned by only two family members was provision of appropriate support, for example: *“She getting the help she needs for learning”* (P104).

### ***Primary and Intermediate Teachers’ Ideas of Success***

The key transition success factor for primary sector teachers, with over 90% of coded remarks, was positive work commitment to school life, including settled behaviour, and agreeable social engagement (positive communication, happy demeanour, and self confidence), as follows: *“Taking part in extra-curricula activity and the life of the school”* (T230), and *“Being able to settle down in High School with good attitude”* (T258).

Support provision for the student and family emerged as a minor but nonetheless important marker of successful transition for some teachers, as follows: *“His teachers know him – about his individual case - he’s not getting lost in the crowd* (T221) and *“What teaching strategy that works for him according to his background, behavioural and cultural reasons; need to identify his strengths and his needs to cater for”* (T251).

### ***Secondary Teachers’ Ideas of Success***

Once again, positive work commitment, including active engagement in the classroom and school life, drew the greatest overall comment (50%) with settled behaviour accounting for approximately 50% within those responses, for example: *“Settled and into routines; on task most of the time; no serious issues (daily report, detentions etc)”* (T353); and *“Sitting in class, not wandering around; focussed on learning; considerate to others and environment”* (T327). Teachers’ comments often reflected multiple layers of expectation for students’ increasing independence and personal management skills, including organisational and attendance factors, as follows: *“Has correct uniform and equipment for class; has good*

*attendance and punctuality” (T344); “Correct uniform and gear suggests s/he’s ready to learn and has a vested interest in education” (T377), and “Discipline; attendance/punctuality; manners” (T410).*

Approximately 20% of total comments raised the importance of positive relationships for successful transition, including making friends and connecting with classmates and teachers. Considerable weight was placed upon students’ social and intellectual openness, as follows: *“generally happy/positive outlook on school” (T367) and “an openness to share ideas in front of a class” (T399).*

While academic progress was identified as an indicator of successful transition, it accounted for only 10% of comments. Furthermore, reference to student learning supports being in place were few (14 out of a total 505), as were comments coded home-school connection (2/505).

### ***Comparative Views of Success***

As introduced in Chapter Four, (Section §4.8.2), one of the consistency techniques employed in this research was to revisit coding decisions (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Richards & Morse, 2013). Thus, during reflective evaluation of the coding formulation of the ‘positive work commitment’ theme, it was decided that comparative clarity between participant groupings had not been fully achieved. More especially, the emphasis placed by some participant groupings on features of attendance, behaviour, and organisation was lost in the rationalisation of these four coding categories to form the ‘positive work commitment’ theme. Consequently, a coding reappraisal was undertaken and, as a result of the review, merged subthemes within the ‘positive work commitment’ theme were reinstated. To facilitate between-group comparison pre- and post-transition success factors were broadly ranked by prevalence - most to least number of text references (1-9) within each participant group.

As presented in Table 16, student engagement (including active participation in class, homework, and extra-curricula activities) was shown to be the predominant indicator of successful student transition.

**Table 16***Ranked Comparative Views about the Indicators of Successful Transition*

Success factor	Student		Parent and caregiver		Teacher	
	S1	S2	P1	P2	T1	T2
Academic progress: improvement, good report	3	3	1	3	3	4
Attendance: attends, punctual	-	6	3	2	3	4
Behaviour: attitude, on task, referrals	5	4	3	3	6	3
Engagement in learning process: schoolwork, participation, extra-curricula	1	1	2	1	1	1
Home-School: school-home	-	-	-	-	9	9
Organisation: independent, uniform, gear	6	-	7	7	7	4
Outlook: happy (home and school), enjoying school, sense of pride	2	4	3	3	3	4
Relationships: friends, teacher, positive social communication	3	2	6	6	2	2
Student supported: needs met, cultural support	-	-	8	-	8	8

*Notes:* S1 = Phase One; S2 = Phase Two

A dash indicates no comment was coded within the category for that participant grouping.

Agreement was evident in regard to academic progress and having a happy outlook. Mismatches occurred in the prioritisation of settled on-task behaviour, students' organisational skills, and school relationships. Also, while student learning support and home-school relationships appear in the table, these aspects of student transition were referenced by few participants and therefore appear with negligible weight compared to other indicators of successful transition.

### 5.3.3 Worries

The third guiding question sought to investigate participants' thoughts about the transition to high school. Previous research found transition to be a stressful event, bringing with it some trepidation (Duchesne, Ratelle, & Roy, 2012; Kvalsund, 2000; Taub, 2006) and therefore worrisome thoughts were of relevant interest. Participant groups were asked to identify up to

three worries they had for students (themselves, in the case of students) in transition. Of particular interest in this exploration was whether worries were later resolved (findings to be taken forward to the interview stage). Considering teachers take a leading role in planning for and facilitating transition for both students and families, Phase One primary sector teachers ( $n = 70$ ) and Phase Two secondary sector teachers ( $n = 116$ ) were asked about their own worries for students' transition and what they thought others might be concerned about.

### *Students' Worries*

Overall, the numbers of students reporting no worries doubled post-transition; a pattern of increasing positivity consistent with 'one word' findings and the literature (Cox & Kennedy, 2008; Mizelle & Irvin, 2000). Table 17 presents worrisome aspects of transition reported by students before and after transition.

**Table 17**

*Worries Identified by Students Pre- and Post- Transition*

Identified worry	Percentage of students reporting worry	
	Phase one <sup>a</sup>	Phase two <sup>b</sup>
friendships	56.86	-
teachers/staff	45.10	17.07
schoolwork	37.25	26.83
bullies	35.29	31.71
environs	11.76	-
trouble	11.76	14.63
nothing	11.76	26.83

Notes: <sup>a</sup>Phase One  $n = 51$ ; Phase Two  $n = 41$

Before transition, over half of students mentioned friendship concerns, frequently in regard to introductory situations, for example, "*meeting other kids*" (S46), and "*might be shy*" (S34). Such unease extended to teachers or staff as well, with "*meeting the teacher*" being a frequent comment. There was no mention of friendship concerns post-transition.

Consistent with Cox and Kennedy's (2008) findings, the possibility of being bullied or getting into fights emerged as a lasting worry although comments suggested some discrepancy between worries and actual school experiences. For example, Student 38 who worried at primary school that: *"Someone that wants to fight me"*, commented on arrival to secondary school: *"...no one hasn't pretend [threatened] me or wanted to fight; I thing [think] this school is alright"*.

In Phase One nearly half of students mentioned teachers or staff, for example *"strict teachers"* (S21) and *"I think I get a teacher that growl at me"* (S27), concerns which reduced considerably post-transition, consistent with students' expression of teachers' supportive behaviours. However, read alongside other persistent learning concerns like: *"failing classes; grades arnt up to date; getting behind in school work"* (S6), and *"help me with lots of things"* (S27), worries about the learning situation persisted once in secondary school. Furthermore, some situations were perceived beyond control, for example: *"Fail subject im not good at"* (S24) and *"I am concern about getting involed in troble and geeting send home"* (S37). Getting into trouble was an enduring worry for some students, while in contrast, getting lost in the new environment created no post-transition worries.

### ***Parents' and Caregivers' Worries***

Like students, parents and caregivers worried about their child's interpersonal experiences - making good friends, having no friends, and peer pressure, especially in regard to smoking, drinking, fights, and drugs. For about one third of family members, there was lingering unease about bullies, with more heartfelt concerns expressed by some: *"Bullies that's my worst fear for my daughter for being different"* (P130). Personal safety and the possible repercussions of negative peer influences in relation to attendance and punctuality issues also created some disquiet.

Pre-transition 40% of parents and caregivers indicated trepidation about whether teachers would be accommodating of their child's needs, for example: *"Because his learning capabilities are quite low I hope he doesn't get lost in the system. I hope he is placed in the most suitable class for him; that all concerned are made aware of his learning difficulties"* (P121) and *"He wont cope with the level of work expected; non-supportive teachers that don't understand his difficulties or wont allow him to use his assistive tech aids"* (P123). Teaching

and learning concerns reduced dramatically after transition and while there was some enduring concern about teachers being too harsh, the focus of worries reflected a shifting focus of responsibility to the child for learning (and behaviour), for example: “*Not listening to the teacher*” (P110) and “*She not attending her classes*” (P148). Getting into trouble, getting lost in the school, the cost of uniforms and books, and home-school communication featured as concerns but accounted for relatively few comments overall.

### ***Primary and Intermediate Teachers’ Worries***

Demonstrating accord with students and family members, primary sector teachers identified learning issues (including schoolwork, support, and teachers), friendships, and bullying as the chief concerns. In addition, teachers thought adaptation to the new environment would be of considerable concern to both students and families but, as findings have shown, this was not the case.

Primary sector teachers’ comments revealed significant personal concern for student learning in secondary school. Comments encompassed students’ capabilities to cope with the level of work, for example: “*academic levels too low for high school*” (T220), and “*coping with subjects*” (T225) and teacher expectations, for example: “*not able to meet expectations*” (T254) and “*level of help from teachers*” (T262). Indeed, over 80% of the primary and intermediate teacher sample mentioned one or more teacher, learning or learning support concern for their students, and the potential snowball effects for student behaviour. For example:

*Becoming lost in the system and floating around without finding a niche; encountering abrasive teachers he can’t deal with. (T219)*

*Will his behaviour go down; will his needs be catered for; will his academic progress be monitored. (T221)*

*Not catered for adequately ... has been on individual programme to maintain engagement. Will truant if needs not met or feels threatened. (T228)*

*Unable to learn because rapport with teachers and peers is not good. (T260)*

In contrast to their assessment of the bullying concerns that students and family members may hold, only 9% of teachers mentioned bullying specifically as a personal concern for their

students. However, 39% of teachers opined that making friends and peer interactions might present challenges for their students with learning support needs.

### *Secondary Teachers' Worries*

Secondary teachers felt that students and family members would be most worried about learning and teaching aspects of schooling, friendships, and peer interactions, and adaptation to the environment. They did not foresee students' concerns about the school environment or friendships dissipating. Seventy-six percent of the secondary teacher sample made comments about schoolwork, and/or teachers, and/or learning support. Sixty nine out of 99 learning-focused comments signalled concerns about students' capabilities to keep up with the secondary curriculum, and/or their learning background. For example:

*How much do kids know i.e. reading & writing. (T308)*

*Is she/he able to access the curriculum. (T339)*

*Ability to understand explicit instructions; engaging in activities. (T348)*

*That he will cope (understand) what I'm teaching. (T371)*

Over a third of comments raised whether students would bring focus to their work and whether discipline and attitude in class would be an issue. Other comments reflected concern about class placements, availability of learning support mechanisms, and how one might find out about student support needs, suggesting some teachers questioned their own or their school's capability to cater for students' needs, as follows:

*How can I keep Sam motivated and focused on his learning and at the same time getting him to enjoy his learning? (T302)*

*Whether I'll be able to provide for all the learners in my class with different abilities & issues. (T304)*

Teachers iterated their concerns about students' interpersonal skills: "*unable to make friends*" (T313); "*difficulty making friends*" (T389); and "*choosing the right friends*" (T354). Of minor concern overall was students' adjustment to the environment, bullying, support from home and attendance; one teacher worried about "*not being aware of his culture*" (T392).

### 5.3.4 What Helped Students Transition?

Next, participants were asked to reflect on their own and others' behaviour to identify what or who was helping the transition process of students with learning support needs.

#### *Students Say What Helped*

Students' recognised teachers' and schools' efforts in providing for their transition needs, both routinely and for going the extra mile in transition preparation, orientation activities, learning support, and encouragement. For example:

*My teachers given me instructions of what to do in high school. (S19)*

*Hopeing (helping) with my reading; hopeing (helping) with withing (writing). (S22)*

*Saying good comments about me moving to high school. She is encouraging me to move on to other things. (S31)*

*I went to my school dat im going to and it made me fell good but a bit nervous because I met dis lade and she was talking about hal (how) shes gana help me wen I cam to dat school. (S32)*

*They never gave up on us. She pushes us so we are at our stages of learning. (S48)*

Once in secondary school students identified a wide range of school and teacher practices that they found helpful, including: learning support, school welcomes, Deans, tutor group activities and support networks, and provision of useful information, for example, discipline expectations. The impact of positive teacher style and/or teacher-pupil relationship building was apparent in the majority of comments, for example:

*She has encouraging me when she gives me work I tell her I don't know how to do it but she says to have a try and when I do I go really well and do good. (S19)*

*My teacher Aid and Form teacher have made me go further in high school and they just have been helpful to me. I thank them for that. (S21)*

*Mah teacher is alryte he has changed mah act. (S45)*

Family involvement in transition preparation and settling post-transition was patent. Some students mentioned the provision of books and uniforms but by far the most frequently identified supports were the sharing of advice and information, general encouragement, and assistance for learning:

*Telling me about it - how the school is; how people are going to be and how work is going to be. (S5)*

*Going to see the school on what classes I can be in and the teachers that I can work with. (S6)*

*Supporting me in every way that they can and keeping me in line. (S28)*

*Buy me equipment that will help me with my schoolwork; they help me study. (S48)*

The request for students to reflect upon their own behaviour resulted in three-quarters of the sample revealing some intentional focus upon commitment to learning or improved attitude, including attendance, behavioural, effort, and relational aspects, as follows:

*Stayed away from trouble, not making enemies, working hard and giving my best shot. (S10)*

*I go to my classes and I don't give up. (S13)*

*Changed my attitude, I'm being more mature and I'm trying hard to do all my work. (S20)*

*Trying to be good so that I won't have any naughty stuff that I've done put on [system] so that I would be known as a well behaved and educated person. (S41)*

Some comments revealed transition was tough. A number of students found it helpful to stay positive and quite remarkable purposeful attempts toward making this a successful move were expressed, for example:

*Keep on telling myself not to be afraid and that I'm going to be just fine. (S1)*

*Pulling myself to school and saying to myself every time to just try. (S19)*

*By working harder and thinking of positive things to keep out of trouble. I am trying my best to be good and getting on the right track. (S45)*

### ***Parents and Caregivers Say What Helped Students***

First, family members were asked how the school or teacher was helping to make their child's transition successful. Preparatory orientation visits, transition advice, and encouragement about future work standards were valued, as were reassurances about the availability of learning support, as follows:

*[He] likes the visits he makes with his fellow peers doing certain topics at the high school and the frequent visits is helping him to fit in... (P103)*

*Explain her how to learn in high school different from primary school. Give her advise. (P112)*

*RTLB and mentor have said they will visit at college. (P121)*

Like their children, family members recognised secondary teachers' efforts to build positive personal and learning relationships. For example: *"Teachers taking time to relate ...providing the right environment for my child to learn in"* (P103), and *"By being patient with him; listening to him; being there for him"* (P121). It was thought the provision of homework to be a marker of schools' response to learning needs. Family members also reflected on the part they played in their child's transition. They indicated awareness for their on-going presence in their child's life, to provide advice about the move in positive ways, encourage attendance, help with homework or learning, and ensure high school requirements (uniform and stationery) were purchased:

*Encouraging him to be strong and be responsible for his own actions; drop him off to school, same routine every day; if he needs anything I will try to get it... (P115)*

*Make sure my child knows we stand beside him with his marks. Peaceful space for him while doing study. Help with his homeworks. Push him hard to work hard. (P135)*

Some parents and caregivers initiated contact with the high school to pass on learning background details about their child or to meet with senior staff members, for example:

*[My wife and I] recently went to visit the school with our son - met the Deputy Principal, and a few other teachers and the school counsellor. The way they made you feel welcome and their dedication to the students, dealing not only to the education needs but their emotional needs as well is a big plus with us. (P103)*

Parents and caregivers affirmed children's early efforts to ask for information, keep positive, put in extra effort with learning before and after transition, become more responsible, and settle into positive work habits, as follows: *"Taking responsibility for himself; enjoying what he is doing"* (P103) and *"Attending ... having class equipment; on task in class"* (P148).

### ***Primary and Intermediate Teachers Say What Helped Students***

Over half of school transition practices and systems identified could have been interpreted as routine. For example, importance was placed upon fostering relationships and learning partnerships with secondary schools: *“The Dean comes to talk to Yr 8 students about high school, answers any question they may have/want to know and helps with enrolments”* (T232). Also, proactive efforts regarding academic preparation, establishing learning routines, supporting independence, and providing information about high school were made apparent.

It was clear that inclusive school practices had been instituted to benefit all students, but particularly students with learning support needs. Of those, information transfer between schools was identified most frequently, with just fewer than 50% of comments, as follows: *“Giving as much relevant information – literacy/numeracy; any extra-curricular activities involved; any learning needs/talents, etc”* (T241), and *“Liaising with his teachers to know what learning support needs to be in place for Year 9”* (T267). Wylie and colleagues (2006) found students settled better in schools where Year Eight information was used and these teachers viewed students’ continuity of learning as a critical element of positive transition. Not only was information passed on through learning profile forms, in some instances between-school sharing was more personal:

*Informing the RTLB about Sam’s issues and strategies adopted to help him overcome these issues. Persuading the high school at a meeting with the key players – Dean, Learning Support Teacher and RTLB, to place Sam in the Learning Support Unit and have appropriate data available to support this request. (T270)*

Constructive connections between school sectors were highly respected, as follows: *“High schools are taking transition of ‘high needs’ students seriously – a willingness to make meetings happen if they are requested”* (T240). Teachers also noted benefits of orientation, home-school collaboration, and support systems including RTLB, external agencies (e.g. MOE), and mentoring programmes (e.g. MATES - Mentoring and Tutoring Education Scheme).

Primary and intermediate teachers’ reflection upon their own practice revealed that transition preparation in Year Eight was taken seriously as were the needs of students with learning support issues. Teachers assigned precedence to engaging students in discussion about

transition, giving advice and information about programmes offered, and explaining differences in routines. Targeted preparation for high school learning was aimed at ensuring students developed skills of self management and independent learning, as follows: *“Prepare him as best as I can in reading, numeracy, writing and spelling skills; tell Sam that he needs to be able to work with different teachers in different learning areas”* (T233); *“He is learning to be responsible for his own actions and learning”* (T244); and *“Taught him respect and tolerance for others; be the best you can be”* (T256). It appeared, for primary and intermediate teachers, awareness and/or accommodation of students’ specific transition support needs was ‘doing what they do’.

Some teachers extended the personal approach to the home, ensuring parents and caregivers were well informed, supported, and enrolments were completed in timely fashion. Reflecting on both student’ and family’ reports about teacher support and encouragement for transition, it is clear these efforts did not go unnoticed.

### ***Secondary Teachers Say What Helped Students***

Secondary teachers’ comments highlighted their schools’ efforts to foster pupil-centred, inclusive pedagogy in regard to building positive relationships, routines, and learning habits during the early transition days at secondary school. Tutor and house group supports; orientation activities including senior peer support, orientation workbooks and fun induction activities (e.g. sports day); management of learning needs through academic assessment, class placement, streaming or learning supports; and school consistency in rules and discipline appeared to be generally practiced and would have assisted students with learning support needs.

Some responses, like T333 below, suggested a clustering of expertise; some teachers holding significant knowledge of systems targeted to students with learning support needs. Overall, of the helpful practices identified, secondary teachers placed considerable weight upon school structures including class placement, social and learning support systems (e.g. guidance, social workers, Deans), and professional learning opportunities. Comments included:

*Placed him in an appropriate class that meets his learning needs; made his case known to the various support networks in school.* (T301)

*Given significant thought to student placement, i.e. matched information received with school organisation and placed in a nominated tutor group/educational facility; held a pre & post transition meeting with parents, pastoral staff, teaching staff; adapted timetable to specific student needs and requests from parents. (T333)*

*RTLB contacts Sam's teachers suggesting strategies to deal with behavioural issues. (T348)*

*MATES; other mentoring programmes available for identified students. (T369)*

In contrast to their primary sector colleagues, who placed value on passing information forward, references to information transfer were minimal. Also, while orientation and welcoming events were aimed at family inclusion, on-going home-school communication and liaison was barely mentioned as a helpful school practice.

Reflecting on their own practice, teachers found spending time on building positive teacher-student relationships and providing encouragement for students most helpful for transition, efforts endorsed by both students and family members. Other offerings included: teachers as mentors; form teachers' role of liaising with other adults, including classroom teachers, e.g. "*form teacher checking up on his progress each day or week*" (T330); and home-school communication, e.g. "*sent a card home that is positive about his improvement in class*" (T328).

Overall, while much of the teaching practice shared could be described as good inclusive pedagogy, for example: "*Caring for learner as individual; safe and positive classroom environment; high expectations and guidance to have strong learning connections*" (T316), evidence of specifically helpful student-centred responses to learning needs was scant. These two examples were exceptions:

*Make sure my lessons contain enough differentiation to successfully scaffold Sam's learning; maintain a connected relationships with tutor teachers, and [house] leaders; make contact with home prior to any incidents, so Sam's aware of the home/school connection. (T307)*

*Identified health/medical info and relevance to classroom; learn Sam's name and something Sam does well, make Sam feel welcome and accepted; ring home and introduce myself. (T405)*

While primary and intermediate colleagues placed considerable importance on learning continuity, it appeared that very few secondary classroom teachers accessed learning history information, although it appeared that when teachers sought out background information on prior learning other supportive practices were shared. Some teachers' remarks seemed to indicate little cognisance of appropriate ways to respond to the specific needs of students with learning support issues in terms of what helps. For example, one teacher responded: *"timetable; computer password for computer; course outline"* (T341).

### 5.3.5 Including Families in Transition

Family members and teachers were asked to consider how parents and caregivers were being included, by schools and teachers, in the transition process.

#### *Parents and Caregivers Identify Inclusive Practices*

In contrast to other questions, this was the only question where response gaps across the entire parent and caregiver participant group were found. Only one third of families offered suggestions leading into transition, while 50% provided post-transition responses suggesting, perhaps, that many family members experienced difficulty identifying ways they felt included in the transition process. Within comments made, value was found in information that helped with school choices and completion of necessary enrolment and transition procedures. Also, reference was made to home-school occasions organised specifically to discuss children's needs or as part of the orientation, enrolment or the settling in process. For example:

*They have shown much concern for his well being, sometimes beyond their normal means. The relationship and communication between them and our and family is crystal clear and overwhelming. (P103)*

*[Son], myself and the Associate Principal visited the college that he will be attending and met with the D.P. When we met with the D.P. of the college he put my mind to rest; Having contact with staff who have a lot to do with my son during school hours. (P121)*

*When I ring it is not a problem to talk or when I go up to the school they always make you feel welcome. (P130)*

Parents and caregivers appreciated being afforded the respect of personal involvement, the opportunity to meet with school personnel and engage in shared decision making:

*The pōwhiri was overwhelming in setting the atmosphere for our tamariki [children]; Parents having the advantage to be involved. (P103)*

*Enrolment was excellent. I was concerned with [child's] knowledge of Te Reo Pākehā and was reassured by the Dean that there are ways they can help if needed; Appointment was on time; We were given the opportunity to meet the senior teacher and shown around the unit. (P115)*

### **Primary and Intermediate Teachers Identify Practice Inclusive of Families**

Although one teacher reflected: “*Perhaps we should be doing more*” (T221), others offered examples of targeted practice to include families of children with learning support needs, as follows:

*Offer support to visit HS; visit home to discuss transition issues; offer support through RTLB meetings. (T211)*

*Discussing with them what support child will need; set up a plan of how we are going to get him ready for transition; encourage parent to visit school with child. (T243)*

*Regular communication with parents about enrolment processes, open days, deadlines etc; personal invites to home-school meetings particularly the transition meeting. (T262)*

Generally, it appeared that primary and intermediate schools took a long-term view of schooling engagement with families encouraged to take part in regular school activities and occasions, which doubled as transition information sessions toward the end of the year. Transition planning, both personal and social, included: telephoning home, visiting home to discuss transition issues, meetings to plan individual approaches to transition including specialist support, high school expo at intermediate school, open-door policies, cultural and sporting activities, regular parent-teacher-student conferences in which transition planning and goal setting occurred, and inviting high school management and past pupils to talk with students and families.

Supported by cross-sector cordial relationships, high school presence at primary and intermediate events was specifically aimed at education continuity and transition: “*Opportunities for parents to be in the school (home-school partnership) and develop rapport with staff. Meetings of home-school partnership with [high school D.P.] as lead speaker.*” (T264). Furthermore, the inclusion of families in timely enrolment processes was prioritised

and emphasised with classroom teachers providing enrolment process assistance: *“Early contact with home regarding enrolment process. We do photocopying etc for them; phone calls regarding choices for high school”* (T215).

### ***Secondary Teachers Identify Practice Inclusive of Families***

Comments suggested that while importance was placed upon making connection with parents and caregivers during pre-transition, enrolment and orientation events, much of that contact was focused upon administration and establishing rapport. For example, Year Eight families being required to attend compulsory enrolment appointments at the high school and some schools’ requirement for tutor teachers to make early phone contact with every parent or caregiver of their student group. Many teachers highlighted the activities of Day One which often included pōwhiri for families, an event also singled out by some family members as a highlight. Other relaxed, socialising opportunities occurred early in the school year, for example: sports and cultural events, language unit parent welcome events, and new parents’ nights.

Relatively few teachers referred to steps to include parents and caregivers of children with learning support needs, although some teachers reported making a special effort to send information home providing positive early feedback about students: *“Praise postcards sent home to Sam’s house to say how he has improved”* (T343). Other practice examples were:

*Positive feedback and advising of any probs, including them in solution.* (T327)

*Māori unit allows/expects parents to play a role in their child’s education, e.g. Friday training sessions; Ensure parents are included in any discussion about their child. Remind parents that they are the first point of discussion for their child.* (T413)

Overall, it appeared that aside from special character units encouraging family participation in certain aspects of students’ learning and extra-curricula events, the practice of family inclusion during transition was largely under-utilised and few systems existed to foster ongoing relationships between classroom teachers and families, other than those connected to administrative tasks like reporting and newsletters. Two teachers agreed, saying: *“Incorporate into extra-curricula activities; nothing else, but I am thinking now what else I can do”* (T375); and *“This is an area of weakness”* (T388).

### 5.3.6 What Helped Teachers with their Transition Practice?

#### *Help for Primary and Intermediate Teachers' Transition Practice*

Primary and intermediate teachers strongly asserted the constructive impact on their practice of positive teacher-student relations, for example: “*Relationships – with my students as they can talk to me about any concern they have and we can discuss these together*” (T201). Furthermore, strong professional relationships were prerequisite to the development of essential transition systems both within and between schools, and shared professional development opportunities (sometimes including families), as follows:

*Being involved in [MOE-facilitated] community transition hui that took place last term at our local Marae for parents, tchrs and students. (T221)*

*Having access to the PD in transition and being part of the transition group that started working together on strategies and processes a couple of years ago. (T262)*

*Open dialogue between high school and primary school – leads to clarity of expectations and information that can be relayed to students and their families. (T265)*

*Relationships are crucial. Visiting the new school and meeting some of the staff, the room they will be moving to and the classroom teacher. Sharing concerns about the learning situation. (T269)*

Contact with families enabled teachers to feel they were doing justice to Sam’s transition process, for example: “*Getting to know Sam’s family members, relationship with primary caregiver – able to coach and offer suggestions (e.g. Dean’s interview)*” (T211).

#### *Help for Secondary Teachers' Transition Practice*

Secondary teachers’ were helped at transition time by: student supports and pastoral care; being mindful of teacher-student relationship pedagogy; and teacher professional development or practice support, including co-operation within departments and with management, especially Deans. Comments included:

*RTLB and student support services in terms of making sure that Sam’s emotional, physical and academic well being is taken care of. (T351)*

*Reminding myself that relationship building is key to successful teaching. (T362)*

*Information about particular learner disability and about how to combat disability.* (T313)

*Te Kotahitanga has helped to provide awareness of students as to their prior knowledge and building rapport b/t tchrs and students.* (T396)

Initially appearing contradictory to earlier remarks, secondary teachers indicated that they did access students' information. However rather than prior learning information being accessed it seemed teachers were drawing on current learning and support information from systems facilitated by Deans or central information management systems. Such systems enabled staff members to be 'on the same page' as colleagues, regarding a particular student's learning capabilities, needs, and/or other aspects like behavioural management strategies: "...*the deaning system because it enables me to get vital information about a student to help me in my dealings with them*" (T340). This finding was consistent with the impression ventured earlier that some secondary teachers', possibly feeling poorly equipped to respond to students' diverse needs, appeared to rely heavily upon supportive relationships within their school, as per the following: "*Basically knowing I can ask for support!!! from either the Guidance Dept/Deans/DP in charge of an area*" (T328).

Opportunities to develop professional practice and pedagogical knowledge were held in high regard.<sup>3</sup> Many teachers mentioned 'Te Kotahitanga', a programme that assists teachers to build and maintain positive student relationships, create culturally responsive classrooms, and raise educational achievement of Māori students. Described as fostering a "culturally responsive pedagogy of relations" Te Kotahitanga cites outcomes including: "... long-term positive impact on these students in addition to its immediate positive impact across the student body" (Ministry of Education, 2012d).

Certainly, relationship and rapport building through 'get-to-know-you' activities were prioritised by secondary teachers and the establishment of positive student connections was cited as helpful in enabling teachers to settle new students, as follows: "*Try to find out students' interests, cultural involvement, family connections through introduction sheets, and*

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<sup>3</sup> A very well attended staff professional development session on curriculum differentiation for students entering secondary school with literacy and numeracy levels below the norm was observed in one secondary school during the research process.

*discussing the info 1:1” (T336); and “Building a relationship with the learner is the most important thing. Knowing about the learner means you are able to have a conversation constructively and then you are able to get progress from their schooling” (T305). Few teachers mentioned making connections with family.*

### **5.3.7 Most Important Practices to Facilitate Transition**

After considering various aspects of transition, participants were asked to nominate the one most helpful factor for Sam’s (or their own) transition and offer a closing comment if they wished.

Leading into transition, students nominated themselves as the prime influence for a successful move, for example: *“Me – whatever I do will make the difference” (S7). The need for family backing showed no sign of waning post-transition, for example: “How my mum was up straight with me and told me you could do better, next time I want to see you do better, you are capable of anything if you put your mind to it. Then I pushed myself to do my best and just carry on” (S42). Overall, a triangle of resource founded upon positive relationships emerged as significant: personal application, family support, and teacher practices including targeted learning support.*

Alignment was found between students and their parents’ and caregivers, who saw the need for their children to take on responsibility in the transition process. They expressed the importance of school structures and teachers catering for their children’s learning and other needs. The desire to maintain an active presence was evident:

*Having opportunity to talk to son’s new teachers about his difficulties and have them listen!; Good communication between school and home – be able to email teachers / get emails from teachers when needed; School/teacher keeping us (parents) informed how our son is doing not just academically but interest/effort, also socially – getting on with peers. Basically effective communication both ways! (P123)*

Primary and intermediate teachers placed equal weight upon teacher pedagogy and school learning support systems including information transfer as follows:

*All relevant information about all aspects of Sam’s life – academic/behavioural/*

*social etc. need to be passed on and this must be taken into account/acted upon so that the transition is as smooth as possible. Help needs to be available at the beginning of the year not part way through. (T265)*

That teachers must take responsibility for Sam's transition resonated through comments, as did the need to engage and maintain productive relationships with all stakeholders.

Secondary teachers nominated school structures and processes, including consistent school-wide pastoral and learning supports, and within-school information transfer as the most important influences on transition. Examples were:

*Getting support and advice from the specialist teacher ... so that I can actively implement strategies in my class to support Sam. (T301)*

*Placement in supportive environment, tutor group and teaching environment with selected staff. (T333)*

*Information – the greater the amount of information, the better programmes/ approaches can be implemented. (T408)*

Relationship aspects, mentioned less often, included comments around getting to know students, forming positive relationships, the need to be respectful of students' culture and background, and tutor systems, in terms of being an approachable face. Only two secondary teachers referred to transition-specific pedagogy: "teaching strategies to help students process instructions" (T313); and "teachers encourage, motivate and help to understand transition" (T395). Overall, orientation, home-school connections, friendships, and the students' personal management skills were identified less frequently than school organisational and structural factors.

#### **5.4 Questionnaire Results Summary**

Student data revealed increasing positivity to transition over time. Overall, successful transition was thought best recognised by students' positive work commitment, including active engagement in class and school life and increasing maturity, demonstrated by independence in terms of attendance and organisation. In addition, learning progress, positive relationships and happy demeanour were raised as important features.

Common worries across participant groupings were connected with interpersonal relationships, learning, and behaviour. Students' tentativeness about secondary teachers' potential for strictness was matched by apprehension among teachers about future teacher-pupil interactions. Some balance emerged with teachers' post-transition supportive stance. Students' and family members' enduring concerns about bullying were not supported by any instances of maltreatment. Teachers were less worried about bullying but, like family members who hoped their children would not be led astray by peers, expressed some trepidation about students' future friendships.

Learning concerns expressed by students, parents, and caregivers centred on expected schoolwork outputs. Teachers in general were concerned about provision of student learning support and students' learning capabilities, while many secondary teachers expressed added concerns about their own practice capabilities in regard to supporting students' learning appropriately. In regard to behavioural worries, students didn't like the idea of getting into trouble, while teachers questioned whether students' attitudes would be conducive to productive learning engagement.

In terms of what was found helpful, the positive impact on learning engagement of affirming teacher-pupil relations was evident among students. Also, students thought their focus on learning preparation and finding out about their new school helped, as did staying positive. For parents and caregivers, value was placed upon schools providing reassurance and information about transition, and including them in the transition processes. Also, they and their children recognised the reciprocal benefits of support, encouragement, and positive relationships within families. Findings suggested that family members were involved in their child's transition experience albeit expressing slightly more optimistic reports of their children's attitudes to transition than the children themselves.

Stakeholders identified benefits of teachers' purposeful relationship-building with students and families. Furthermore, the transition of students with learning support needs, taken seriously by teachers, was supported by intra-school relationships, inter-school collaboration, and shared professional development that included an emphasis upon the transition process. Information transfer and management systems enabled more student-focused responses to

learning needs although there were indications that secondary classroom teachers relied heavily on support systems to augment their response to students' specific needs.

Of the most important influences on transition, students emphasised their own role in making transition work within the learning context and expressed awareness of the power of family support and teachers. Parents and caregivers placed their faith in teachers and schools while understanding their role and expecting greater independence from their children. Primary teachers took much responsibility for successful transition upon themselves having developed close working relationships with students and families. Secondary teachers found an early emphasis on relationship building with families and students, consistent school process, learning management, pastoral care, and teacher support assisted students' successful transition.

## **5.5 Chapter Five Summary**

This chapter presented results from the first and second phases of questionnaire data collection incorporating scaled items and open-ended items. Questions about helpful practice were the predominant focus, while supplementary matters of successful transition, concerns about transition and involvement in the transition process encouraged participants to think more widely about their recent transition experiences.

A variety of response modes enabled participants to supplement initial quick responses with added detail which served to enhance data quality. The collection of multiple perspectives over time meant patterns of similarity and difference between participants started to become apparent. Provisional themes, summarised in the previous section (§5.4) began to emerge and these tentative thoughts provided one starting point for the interview phase which is reported in the following chapter, Chapter Six.

# **CHAPTER SIX**

## **INTERVIEW RESULTS**

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# CHAPTER SIX

## INTERVIEW RESULTS

### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents results from the third data collection phase comprising 50 individual interviews. Ten participants were drawn from each of following groupings: students; parents and caregivers; primary and intermediate teachers; and secondary teachers. The balance of ten interviews was conducted with ‘expert’ educators, selected for their extensive experience of transition practice within the schooling district.

Purposeful sampling measures were employed for the selection of students and family members (Merriam, 1998, Patton, 2002). Teacher interviewees were selected using systematic sampling (Bouma & Ling, 2004), while a non-random, expert sampling method was utilised to access the views of the specialist group of educators (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2009). (Sampling procedures were explained fully in Chapter Four.)

Interviews were carried out following the completion of post-transition questionnaires. Interviews provided the opportunity to add depth and richness to the overall data set, prompting participants to be reflective of their recent experience of transition in response to the key question: “What helped?” Thus, interviews were framed within a strength focus, although constructive criticism raised during interview conversations was not disregarded and is reported, as appropriate. Additionally, relevant issues and themes raised in questionnaire responses were revisited, especially if matters of interest were not spontaneously addressed within the interview conversation. The subject area of “success” was specifically revisited in interviews.

Results are presented within the subsequent five sections (§6.2 - §6.6) corresponding to the five participant groupings - students, parents and caregivers, primary and intermediate teachers, secondary teachers, and expert educators. Quotations were selected to provide pertinent illustrations of themes and context, and consequently some passages are

comprehensive. To convey the fullness of participant contributions in reporting, meandering thoughts around a common theme were aggregated for quotation.

While the research necessarily adopts an affirmative focus on transition practice, some points raised by interviewees were coded as criticisms or opportunities for development; they were seen as variations offering further insight into the case. In the interest of paying attention to exceptions (McPherson & Thorne, 2006), these comments are recorded, as appropriate, under the heading “Additional Findings”. The chapter concludes with a synopsis of important themes that will be taken forward to the next chapter for discussion.

## **6.2 Students’ Interview Results**

Ten Year Nine students, seven girls and three boys, whose questionnaire results reflected a positive transition relative to their peers, completed an individual interview with the researcher focused upon successful transition to high school and helpful transition practices, led by the main question: “What helped?” Findings are reported accordingly in the following sections.

### **6.2.1 Success**

In questionnaires, students identified engagement, a positive outlook, positive relationships and learning progress as prime markers of successful transition and within those findings, goal setting and meeting challenges became increasingly important. Interview findings confirmed these views with students emphasising their role on the road to a successful transition; orientated on moving forward and taking more responsibility for themselves. Given known interactional effects of increasing personal agency and the development of self-efficacy (Bandura, 2006), such a finding bodes well for the young people in the study.

### **6.2.2 What Helped?**

Three main themes emerged from the analysis of factors students believed had assisted their transition. Considerable interconnection between themes was apparent; with positive relationships found to permeate other themes it was considered to be foundational. The main themes and associated sub-themes were:

1. Positive relationships (family, friends, school introduction, teacher-pupil)
2. Support and guidance (family, primary school/teacher, seniors)
3. Personal capability (goal setting, self management – learning and behaviour, school information)

### 6.2.2a *Positive Relationships*

Students were openly accepting and tolerant of their parents' and caregivers' supportive presence during transition, as the following exchange exemplified:

Researcher: What do you think helped you make the move to high school?

*Encouragement from my parents and family wanting me to be prepared and know what I'm doing, what step I'm taking, it's a big step I'm taking from intermediate to high school. But not pressure. It was my choice to take this step to high school and I knew that maybe there would be some obstacles that I would have to face going into high school because getting older and getting more mature, you have to act more serious now. So it was just encouragement from family, friends and teachers about making this big step to high school.*

Researcher: Can you remember anything in particular your family said that was helpful?

*Strive for the best and if it's what you want in life then go for it, if someone thinks differently about what you want to do, don't listen to them, just listen to yourself and go for it. Like boosting me up.*

Researcher: Did you come in with your parents on the first day?

*My Mum, it was her choice to come in. I was alright because I told her I had friends walking in with me and they were waiting at the gates for me. It was mum's choice. She was just making sure I knew where I had to go and where to go for the assembly. She was just being...a Mother. (S42)*

Also noteworthy were students' general expressions of positive connections they experienced with their teachers. Students credited teachers' preparatory efforts for feeling ready for the move. Once in secondary school, they were impressed by teachers' and form/house tutors' welcoming classroom style; the sense of connectedness achieved through such practice has been shown to be a factor in student resilience (Howard & Johnson, 2000); while schools' foundational steps towards positive relations, through pōwhiri especially, impacted thus:

*I came here for the pōwhiri on the marae. ...It was special because you are new to the school and they are happy to welcome you ... My parents were here with me on the first day...families were welcomed. A lot of parents came...The Principal welcomed us and said it was a pleasure to have us in the school...If you just come here and the Principal doesn't really want you to come here and it will make you feel I don't want to come to the school anymore. But it's really good he did that because you feel welcome and want to stay at this school and learn. (S20)*

Comfort was drawn from peer relationships at transition time, although students made more references to meeting new classmates, making new friends, and meeting older students than to friends from former schools. Friendships were often formed on the first day in tutor/house groups or in their new classes. As found elsewhere, frequently siblings and cousins filled the place of friends during the early days at the new school (Eccles & Harold, 1996; Ward, 2000); these significant family members provided a familiar face and filled the role of 'the guide on the side'. Some students expressed surprise that the seniors were not scary and intimidating as they had expected; their support and guidance found invaluable during the settling-in period.

Students quickly learned the importance of reciprocity in the establishment of satisfactory peer relationships. This finding was very much in line with developmental literature that highlights children's abilities of reflective assessment of otherwise risky environments to effect good outcomes. For example, Smith, Madsen and Moody (1999) suggested children "become more able to recognize real provocations, interpret the social context more accurately...reflect on the consequences of their reactions to being teased or bullied, and what might happen if they were to use alternative responses..." (p. 271). Two examples follow:

*...people were kind and teachers were alright. I thought they'd be mean but they're not. My form teacher and the Year 13s the peer support people...asked us questions, like if you are scared and stuff. They said they were scared in their first week too. There were 6 or 5 of them - seniors. We had them for a whole week. The seniors showed you around the school. I thought seniors were that bad, but they're not...The seniors are alright, they'll support you in the school....have to be friendly and not be smart, make sure you listen and follow their instruction...treat people the way you want to be treated. (S12)*

*I've become a bit more confident talking to the teachers and other people and I haven't been bullied yet ... and I've made lots of new friends even years above me. I don't like swear at anyone or make trouble with anyone so I don't have any people on my back. (S41)*

### 6.2.2b *Support and Guidance*

Without exception, interviewees accepted and acknowledged family members as valuable sources of information and guidance leading into the transition period and beyond. The comments provided by Student 42 in passage in §6.2.2a were illustrative. Family members accompanying children on the first day, along with cousins relating their transition experiences, and siblings assisting in orientation, were common experiences. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979) support by significant others during ecological transitions serves to bolster mesosystem connections. Teachers and peers were valued resources and student interviewees responded becoming active participants in the transition process, as these reports show:

*I get on really well with my dad. He taught me a lot before I came to high school. My Dad said its education, education, education...You have to achieve your goals. Yes, Mum and Dad want us to achieve at school ... but not forcing us. They are like...try your best...encouraging me. (S35)*

*Because I got into trouble [last year] and had to go to the office and my parents came in and the Principal told my parents that I should be making the right friends and the right choices ... I told my parents about [high school] and they came and asked and got information. They encourage me to go to school and to succeed in school. By telling me what to do and forcing me to go to school. They tell me to go to school every day. They encourage me to have a goal and to succeed in that goal ...My parents encourage me not to worry and not be afraid. I thought it was gonna be kind of hard. ...Turned out OK. (S40)*

*[I received] a lot of support from my family, friends and teachers from my old school. I have so many people wanting to help me. (S41)*

Adults' questionnaire results revealed concern regarding children making good friends. The advice credited, by students, to teachers and family about the need to choose new friends wisely was therefore not surprising and comments reflected openness to that prospect; almost an expectation that new friendships were an integral part of transition, as the examples show:

*Mum, my family. Supporting me and telling me not to be scared. You will get used to it. I was scared about not getting any new friends and mum said I will make new friends ... Because you get to know new people and it's important to meet new people and make new friends. (S12)*

*...talk to my cousins ... telling me don't choose the wrong friends, choose the right friends, don't follow them, just go your own way...now I chose the right friends and I'm doing well, staying out of trouble and all that. (S45)*

For a number of students getting to school was a challenge. For one student real and practical support came from his cousin, the house leader, and the librarian who encouraged him to become a volunteer in the library. For him, one of the most successful aspects of the transition was: “*Probably actually getting here*” (S24). Along the same lines, another said:

*[Form tutor] is supporting me by making sure I come to school every day...we have a big family and sometimes we don't have enough lunch or my Mum doesn't have time to do uniforms because she is looking after my little siblings. (S41)*

### **6.2.2c Personal Capability**

A majority of student interviewees offered information about negative incidents from their past school life and voiced aspirations to use transition time to move on in terms of making improvements to their behaviour, learning, and relationships with teachers. As found elsewhere (Ministry of Education, 2010a), every student interviewee recognised the need to build skills of independence; also they acknowledged family members' and primary teachers' counsel. Thus, looking forward, responding to direction, finding out information, and taking responsibility were found helpful for transition, as follows:

*I have talked to other teachers, I've said sometimes I'm not used to what they do like when they are angry and they told me how it feels like when a student doesn't listen. And then I learned from that and I like ... listen. I don't talk and only talk when the teacher tells me a question...(S13)*

*[Primary teacher] actually told me what would happen in high school, like the work. We ran over it and we were talking about the work we would do in high school and she showed us how to do it so when we came here we would know what to do. ... It actually helped me to remember what we are doing at high school, like ...if I don't know anything, I think back to what we did at primary and then I will remember and write it down if we have a test or something ... She told us it's a big responsibility to do your homework and so you don't get detention. (S20)*

*She got a reliever in and pulled groups of people over and talked about it because she had more detailed information... so we could just have an idea. What classes there was and told us about whanau groups. Yeah it was a help. Yeah. I know the teacher next door*

*did it as well...she was the senior teacher so she was trying to teach my teacher because she was fairly new. (S24)*

*There are a few strict teachers but they are alright after that. Keep on their good side and they won't pick on you. Get on their bad side and they will pick on you for the rest of the year. You just complete your work and then you are on his or her good side. Getting on their bad side is talking back, not doing your work and talking loud and then they have a close eye on you all the time. Sometimes, it's just hard not to talk...I guess because it's a new school I wanted to be on a clean slate. I just think – I'm going to be good...I'm not saying there's not bad kids here but...I don't join in their riff raffs. (S41)*

Lastly, half of the interviewees reported written material provided by secondary schools prior to transition assisted their preparation. Three students made reference to pre-transition orientation, although two of them reported losing their way during the first few days. In all, seven students reported getting lost, although any feelings of anxiety were fleeting with senior students on hand to provide directions, as the example illustrates:

*...we had to go to a bus which brang us over here... so that when you came here on the first day you wouldn't be lost. But I got lost anyway, but I found my way around after a while...I did get a bit anxious on my first day ... And then there was a senior who was walking around and I asked him where [class] is and he said, "Just over there". (S24)*

### **6.3 Parents' and Caregivers' Interview Results**

Ten parents or caregivers of student interviewees completed an interview. All but one of the parents and caregivers interviewed, without prompt or guided questioning, openly talked about challenges their child had experienced at primary school. These issues included extreme shyness, bullying, behavioural incidents, learning difficulties, literacy issues, anxiety, and truancy. Like their children, family members expressed a desire to embrace the transition to high school as an opportunity to move on. Family members' positive attitude toward the interview process was noted. They clearly valued and appreciated the opportunity to express their views.

#### **6.3.1 Success**

Parents' and caregivers' identified learning engagement, attendance, academic progress, good behaviour, and happiness as important markers of successful transition in the questionnaires.

Interviews reinforced these findings; a willing disposition at home seen as indicative of positive school adjustment. One father regarded his son's growing confidence signalled a successful transition. Sample comments were as follows:

*Yeah learning, to do her homework and I know she has changed from doing her homework between primary school and high school...She always wants to go to school. Never miss, she doesn't want to miss. (P112)*

*My opinion is that a successful transition is when your children start at a new school and they are happy. They don't have to do exceptionally well, but they are doing alright and they want to go, they get up and want to go to school ... that on its own is a reward, knowing your kids want to get up and go to school. They are settled...You want them to be able to do whatever it is they want to do... (P141)*

Parents' and caregivers' reflected a cautious approach to their children making new friends, which might help explain why friendship was not identified in questionnaires as a prime indicator of successful transition: For example:

*I also didn't want her to be friends with just anybody, I wanted to her to know who she wanted to be with, because at the end of the day they get influenced. Some friends are good and some not so good. (P.142)*

*I told her to choose the right friend, not the bad ones, ones who smoke. (P.146)*

### **6.3.2 What Helped?**

Analysis of family members' discussion around the key question "What helped?" revealed two major response foci: 1) help for parents and caregivers; and 2) help from parents and caregivers (for children). Thus, parents and caregivers took advantage of beneficial relationships to receive support and develop knowledge for transition to then act as conduits of that support to benefit their children, as presented in Table 18.

**Table 18***Helpful Practices Identified in Parents' and Caregivers' Interviews*

<b>Help <u>for</u> parents and caregivers</b>	<b>Help <u>from</u> parents and caregivers</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Practical assistance</li> <li>- Information and advice from extended and immediate family</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Schools               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Engage families (family friendly)</li> <li>- Information provided</li> <li>- Transition decisions</li> <li>- Administrative tasks</li> <li>- Enrolment</li> <li>- Family events and welcome</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Community (Church)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Parenting</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationships               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Foster positive connection with child</li> <li>- Partnership with schools</li> <li>- Demonstrate initiative</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Skills for independence               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Goal setting</li> <li>- Encourage independence</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Family support of education               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Take responsibility</li> <li>- Set high expectations</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

**6.3.2a Help for Parents and Caregivers**

School, whānau, and community supports were welcomed by family members. A number had made changes to their parenting sometimes as a result of attending church programmes teaching parenting skills, family decision-making, and ways to support education in the home. While not specifically targeted at transition, the programmes appeared to be a positive force, supporting parents and caregivers for their child's next stage of education, for example:

*With support parenting we know what to do... We have to let them know which way they go, which way they shouldn't go, they have to chose which they have to do is right and which one is wrong. They also have a strong programme for the youth ... same messages. Every lesson we learn from there seek more education for your long life learning. (P135)*

**Help from Family**

Interviewees received support predominately from immediate or extended family members. A number of interviewees were sole parents and at least two mentioned ex-partners had shared transition planning and attended orientation. One mother (of six children) talked about the strength she drew from her mother who had assisted successful modifications to her parenting style enabling a re-connection with her teenage daughter at transition time:

*At intermediate she was terrible. She ran away ... she was starting to get out of control, kind of ... she had the holidays to think about what she was doing. Yeah, probably if I'd let it go she would have got worse. Yes, I gave her a bit more responsibility. I used to want her home ASAP and she likes to walk with her friends and I said as long as she's home by 4.30, because she wasn't coming home til 6pm. ...[Mother] just said look the way you are doing this is not working. Instead of yelling at her, I talked to her. Gave her the reasons why I didn't want her to do that. Being in college meant she was a woman, you know going into womanhood. So she just grew up a bit. Communication is good between us now I would like to think. We talk a bit now. (P141)*

### ***Help from Schools***

All interviewees experienced help from their schools prior to transition. Assistance took the form of parent information events to assist with decision making (e.g. school choice), enrolment help, and guided advice to help their child with learning transitions. Some families found attending school meetings and appointments logistically difficult so collaboration between the primary and secondary sectors provided practical support. Such family-friendly services were greatly appreciated as follows:

*[Intermediate] sent home the enrolment packs ... they had somebody there doing the interviews at the intermediate ... They had the [secondary] DP, he was there doing the enrolments and so they had everything on hand which made it really easy ...fill out the forms, meet the Principal and that was it. ... it made it really easy for both of us because he was sorted. So all I had to worry about was uniform and stationery packs. It's more the interview timing. They were interviewing when it was appropriate for you. We met face-to-face with the DP, so we know if anything goes wrong we know who's the man to talk to. (P141)*

The majority of families either initiated a school connection of their own volition or responded to schools' provisions for family involvement. However, it would be wrong to assume that every family found it easy to establish a connection with the high school. For example, one mother spoke of her apprehension: "I never go to this meeting before, they have one down here, but I'm scared. I know I should go but I'm really, really scared to face the teacher." (P146). Another said: "I don't go. I haven't been to [meeting] at the college because they are so late in the night. I mean with all the kids, during the day is easy, but with six children..." (P141).

Some transition decisions were difficult for families but the supply of factual information enabled parents and caregivers to tackle important decisions in an informed manner, as the following comment illustrated:

*When the pānui came from the school about the transition hui at the marae, I was in for that. It was good because it gave me an idea of what availability there was for Te Reo for kura kaupapa children. Like, [local high school], they don't have a Māori unit. They teach Te Reo Māori as a subject. [Other high school] is in the process of getting things together to make a bilingual unit. Wharekura has the Reo there already, and its OK, its just that its small, yeah. Yeah, all the parents from our school Māori Unit were there...could have been maybe eight parents there out of nine children ... we were all worried about our children and what is going to happen with them because we hadn't made our choices. (P115)*

Secondary schools were acknowledged for events where families were not only included, but felt included. It seemed the assurance that their active engagement in the transition process brought enabled them to better support their child and be positive about the transition experience. For example:

*We went to the pōwhiri. That was beautiful. Yeah, they welcomed them to the new school; you don't get that very often. We never got that when I was in third form. That was really beautiful, being Māori and having it at the marae it made us feel warm and comfortable and at home. All the parents who wanted to bring their children for the pōwhiri, they were allowed to. Not only parents, you could take your whole family if you wanted to. Then there was a kai afterwards and then meet the teachers. Because they had all the Year 9 teachers there as well, so as well as [Māori Unit] teachers. That was awesome and then we got toured around to where they were going to be. Well I thought that was really cool because I've never known a school to take you like that and show you this is what this class does. It was good because you worry about your children because they are only young even though they are going to high school, they are still babies. You get scared because they might go to the wrong class and get in trouble for being in the wrong class. So it was just peace of mind really, knowing that he knew this was his first class ... Oh maybe I baby my child too much. I mean it will never end, looking after your child and thinking the best for them. You can only do the best you can I suppose. It's our background aye, my upbringing as well too. I think I will find it a lot harder because I'm a single parent and you know I don't want to be a statistic, I don't want my children to be statistics. Yeah. ...You need to have that relationship with the school. Otherwise I wouldn't feel good about it. I just wouldn't want my child to go to school when I don't know anything about it. (P115)*

Mentoring support through the transition period offered via an external programme, but facilitated by the school, brought peace of mind to another mother:

*I think the MATES programme was good. I think having the mate at [high school] was a great help for him...gave him strategies to fit in and things like that. They met at [intermediate] to start with and then they met at [high school] and went from there, so it carried on through. He was picked as being a child that could perhaps slip under the mat so to speak. He was very shy, he wasn't very confident and they had fears that he would suffer I suppose going into the transition. (P124)*

### **6.3.2b Help from Parents and Caregivers**

Every parent or caregiver interviewee expressed interest and involvement in their child's transition. As active participants in the transition experience, parents and caregivers helped their children by way of encouraging guidance and active support of education in the home; these caring values bolstered positive relationships within family homes and seemed to have enabled families to look forward and overcome some past obstacles. Furthermore, a majority of interview families completed a timely enrolment into secondary school.

#### ***Positive Relationships***

Parents and caregivers interacted with schools in a variety of ways; the general tenor of comments was that a relationship or partnership with the school was understood to be beneficial for their child and themselves. Many interviewees indicated wanting reassurance their child's needs were being met; that they were safe and settled, especially on the first day. Some expressed wanting to see and meet the teacher face-to-face, as follows:

*...I just thought about it before high school started and thought, I was sitting at work thinking about it and thought buggar it, I will get cheeky and say right I'm here to start [son] off type of thing and I'm also here to sit in on the class to see how you go about your job. I went along with them and stood around and listened, and met [house leader]. I had a lot of trust in him after listening to hear what he had to say to the group and how he treated and looked after the other kids that had been there for a couple of years or whatever. (P106)*

*Māori pōwhiri welcome all the parents...I saw the teacher's face. They smile, give them smile, yeah. It's alright for us. There are meetings for the Samoan high school parents. Me and my wife went...like parents' meeting and parents' interview. We give the support; everything...its teamwork, very nice. (P120)*

*To start [house leader] rang me over an incident with [son]. We talked over the phone and I emailed him and he approached me personally, and talked to me about it. ... he is very approachable. I email him regularly. If [son] is sick he will email me and say is he alright. He notices when he isn't at school. I think its building the confidence between myself and [house leader] to know that I can contact him and know that he will contact me back and it will be actioned. (P124)*

### ***Skills for Independence***

While clearly not relinquishing accountability for their child's education, all interviewees reported actively teaching or fostering skills of independence in their children. Transition emerged as a time for engaging in future-focused discussions and starting to pass on the baton of responsibility:

*I talk to my children...To think for the future of our family. ...give them advice, obey the teacher, listen, honest, respect, everything like that. That is how I help. Go to school and think. What is the future, if you love your family, love your parents, go to school, be honest...Yes very important. Yes the future. I show her about my father and tell her about you know that man he talk to me like that, that's why I pass to you because it's not for me, but for your future. (P120)*

*I told him Mum can't go up there and sort it out all the time...Just the confidence having [house leader] and knowing he can go to him if something is bothering him, even if it's little. I said to [son] if you are being bullied you need to stomp on it from the word go, don't let it carry on, deal with it...And that is why I said to [son] you need to go and talk to him yourself about it. Go and see him and have a chat to him. He is there to help. You need to make yourself available. So I think he has that confidence now that [house leader] will help him deal with that. (P124)*

### ***Family Support of Education***

Two common threads were found in supportive comments. Firstly, the desire for offspring to attain improved educational outcomes compared to themselves and secondly, faith in the power of education to effect positive life chances:

*In the mornings here when we are having breakfast, normally I ask him just as he is due to leave, I will say, "What have you got today [son]? What are your subjects today?" and he will go through and tell me and I say, "Are you looking forward to that?" and he says, "Yeah yeah." ...And I get home from work and that is the first thing I ask him, "How was school?" ...Just to see how he went. Yeah, because I said to him, I wish I had gone further with my schooling and I wish I had access to stuff that you have got today*

*that we didn't back then. Even his older brother said the same thing - just stay at school as long as you can. Make the most of it. (P106)*

*When he has homework we will sit down and talk about it and if he has something he doesn't understand and we will talk about it, his father gets involved if its maths or something like that. We will discuss it and explain it. ...But he is really responsible for his own learning, to do it himself. (P124)*

*...even when we have lack of knowledge through education, because we end school in a school lower level, we try our best to help them. My husband is taking courses as well now. We challenge our children, we talk things over with them. (P135)*

In completion of this section, a final example is offered, although it must be said these words do no justice to this mother's heartfelt burden of commitment, which during the interview was momentarily overwhelming:

*I just want her to do good at school and get a better life when she grow up...so when she ready to have a family she can support her family...because now she is not getting...I just don't want her to be like...very very important...very, very important. I just want her to get a good job and a good life...That's why I'm doing everything to help...Yeah. Read the books. I love my kids. (P146)*

## **6.4 Primary and Intermediate Teachers' Interview Results**

Ten Year Eight teachers completed individual interviews with the researcher. Teachers were asked to keep "Sam" in mind when considering transition success and helpful transition practices.

### **6.4.1 Success**

Akin to questionnaire findings, teachers from the primary sector viewed successful transition via a wide-angled lens. Ultimately judged by future outcomes, students who were on the road to success were recognised by their timely enrolment, regular attendance, positive social and learning relationships, forward thinking attitude and capable self-management or organisation. Teachers also felt school support and the involvement of family were prerequisites for students with learning support needs to experience success. The following comment is illustrative:

*I would see a successful transition as the child being very enthusiastic about the future...feeling quite confident in themselves with self esteem and knowing that wherever they are going, these are the options available to them. That they feel their parents are supporting them...I would hope that they would have the full uniform right down to their shoes. I would hope they would get there on the first day because we know how important that is. I would hope that on the first day they would have their lunch as well and have all their school stationery and equipment because we are having issues with that now, so I would hope that they would be confident and competent enough to know to be very organised and prepared for transition. (T221)*

#### 6.4.2 What Helped?

Thus four emergent themes are discussed in this section: positive relationships, support for transition, information and skills, and transition practice, as presented in Table 19. Extending existing results, teachers placed considerable emphasis on transition practice.

**Table 19**

*Helpful Practices Identified in Primary and Intermediate Teachers' Interviews*

Positive relationships	Support for transition	Information and skills	Transition pedagogy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishing relationships</li> <li>• Face-to-face</li> <li>• Inter-school</li> <li>• Intra-schools</li> <li>• Old school-new school</li> <li>• Triangle (teacher-pupil-family)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family inclusive</li> <li>• Inter-school collaboration</li> <li>• Systemic supports (information transfer)</li> <li>• Transition planning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information for families</li> <li>• Transition preparation for students               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Self management</li> <li>- Learning management</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Addressing student needs</li> <li>• Co-ordination of practice</li> <li>• District initiatives</li> <li>• Improving practice</li> <li>• Inter-school</li> <li>• Intra-schools</li> <li>• Personal experience</li> <li>• Professional development</li> </ul>

##### 6.4.2a Positive Relationships

Teachers' remarks illustrated their commitment and responsibility to nurturing the triadic relationship of teacher-pupil-family by understanding children's background and culture.

They were proactive in the establishment of other beneficial relationships, as the following examples illustrate:

*Well I think there are three important people in this. The students, the parents and the teacher and I think if they all work together and build a positive relationship, then that will be OK. I think as a teacher you need to be committed to your kids...I make sure I ring all my Year 8 parents and make sure they come to see me. And I have a photocopy of the transition form and go through it with them...What I can say is “look he really needs this type of help”. Yes, no other way to do it (face-to-face with whānau). Yeah they are the people you have to get on board... (T236)*

*The kids have a background we will never know of unless we speak to the parents ...with Māori or Pasifika students their background is a lot different and it's important for teachers to realise that so that they can look at their learning needs as well... (T263)*

Relationship building with families was not seen to be a one-off event; various engagement options were offered including coffee mornings, family meetings, drop-ins, and newsletters. It was recognised that home-school relationships were not always easily established but long-term commitment to establishing and maintaining family engagement, with an emphasis upon face-to-face contact, was apparent. Also, positive teacher-family connections were found beneficial for teacher-student relations. The following comments were illustrative:

*We have a newsletter that goes out each week to try to engage the parents. We also have family mornings, which is part of the home/school partnership and they can come in and have a cup of tea...Some parents are concerned about their child's transition into high school. What school they have applied for, which school should they go to and asking questions about what it's like and what they have heard. (T214)*

*I think from my perspective coming from Māori medium education, I think whānau hui are very valuable within the school, so our team holds the whānau hui every term, more if need be. I believe that informing parents of some of the issues that their students may have to face during transition time is really important for them to know so they can also cater, or be conscious that there are things that their child is going to be experiencing or thinking about...we work on making sure that parents are informed, fully informed... We believe interaction with the parents is a vital step because when the children realise that we have connections with their parents, something happens so they become a bit more open to new ideas...So we try to keep our whānau informed right at the beginning of the year, so we start introducing them to think about secondary schooling... (T221)*

*I think the relationship between parents and the teacher can also help the students. If this is a first child going to high school for some of the parents, they don't know what it's all*

*about. If communication is there, the parents will feel more at ease to speak and ask if they don't know. They won't feel totally uninformed; they will feel at least they know something...It restores confidence... (T256)*

*... I ask them what things do you want your child to be prepared for when they go to high school or what would you like to know about the transition to high school ... critical, that's what home-school partnership is. The child is the main focus. But how are we as parents and teachers going to help that child and having that relationship really helps... (T263)*

Positive cross-sector relationships enabled teachers to be better informed about local schooling options and opened up discussion about how schools might better serve students with learning support needs in transition. For example, one teacher who taught within Māori medium education talked of connecting with both mainstream secondary schools and Māori medium educators to discuss transition issues associated with enhancing transition for her students:

*...the relationship I think that we have started with the secondary schools from our transition hui, I think is a fabulous step...I think the relationship that we have right now is one where we can acknowledge each other and we know what the secondary school has to offer our students and they know what we can do to assist our students to transition to Year 9. [Also] I have attended [roopu hui] I think every month...I found that really helpful to be able to hear from a different perspective of what things can be done and how things can be done differently. And it was really good to be made aware about the transition difficulties or concerns that our students might have coming from Māori medium education into an English medium one...So building on those relationships... (T221)*

Connecting students with their new school prior to transition helped. But more importantly, establishing a personal connection with a key person in the secondary school boosted students' comfort levels:

*I have found in the past that once you explain what is going to happen and they have seen where they are going to and talked about it and they have met the people and have seen the new teachers and the staff at the new school they are more confident. (T208)*

*...If the transition is successful that will gear you up for success in the future ... and that is why they need to see a face they can relate to. If it is somebody who comes from the college and comes in [to primary school] and says, hi, I'm Whaea so and so on your first day in the pōwhiri look for me, and children will look for them....Familiarity, yes,*

*yes...So I really think the point of contact is way before the pōwhiri, I think it's right at the gate where parents are starting to come. Even at enrolment. I think if it's not done correctly and students aren't feeling comfortable, I think that will set the tone for the rest of the year... (T221)*

*If they know what people they can go and talk to, so they make a connection to somebody...making connections I think is quite a big transition thing...building relationships. But it doesn't have to be just an adult, you know, you have your senior kids. It's that tuakana-teina/older-younger and the kids seem to like that. I think that is really important because it's not just an adult they can go and see...After knowing what school to go to, the next most important thing for me is for the kids knowing they have someone they can go and talk to, an attachment. Yeah, a relationship... (T250)*

#### **6.4.2b Support for Transition**

Findings revealed widespread belief that the information transfer system was a most helpful supportive practice because it assisted secondary schools to cater for students' specific needs on arrival at secondary school, as follows:

*I had another boy in my class last year who was extremely bright but hard work to maintain behaviour-wise and I was worried about him as well. I thought he might step off the path when he got to high school...He's popped in to see me a few times and is doing well and I'm thrilled about that. I think the high school has catered to his needs. I think the high school knowing the children's needs before they get there and providing the environment that suits that particular kid is really important. The data transfer system is really valuable. (T228)*

*When I work with Māori or Pasifika students their background is a lot different and it's important for teachers to realise that so that they can look at their learning needs as well. So there is a kind of consistency between the schools on how the kids learn ... I think [transfer of information] is important because it's the previous teacher's insight on that child even though it's a transition form, it's what does their current teacher know about that child and what are their strengths, and their new teacher can use that information. (T263)*

As well as passing on information in paper form, teachers sought face-to-face contact and discussion with relevant high school personnel to pass on specific learning strategies, or to agree a transition plan. For example:

*I think that normally if you get a child that you don't know anything about, it might take a couple of weeks to understand where the kid is coming from especially if they have*

*unusual behavioural issues or special learning needs. Whereas to have that conversation with [other teacher] can accelerate that time it takes to understand where that child is coming from...Even behaviour management strategies if they are tricky kids and you have to figure out which buttons to push, what works, what doesn't. Some children respond better to different techniques than others...The more interaction there is the better. (T228)*

*If there is a child with learning needs, everything needs to be on [transfer of information] form that is going to accompany him to high school and that will obviously give the Dean of the high school, or RTLB, a picture of that child. ... I place a lot of emphasis on [making contact with high school] and therefore prior to them going to high school, perhaps late November or early December, I meet with the RTLB at the high school or the Dean, sometimes both of them. We talk about these special children that are being transitioned to their school and, apart from the teacher filling in the form, I give them a picture of the children because I have worked with them in most cases. Just a brief synopsis. We identify who will be the safe person whether it's the RTLB person, the Dean or the classroom teacher and from there we arrange a meeting for the child to meet [that person]. (T270)*

Teacher T270 continues with a specific example of personalised transition support leading to successful transition:

*...I knew that we needed to make him feel happy about going to high school otherwise that first day could go to mush. I took him 3 times in that late November - early December period to the high school ... We walked through the school with the RTLB and she said "this is the Principal's office, and this is the toilet". We showed him [tutor room]; the office lady [said] "if you have an injury you see this person" ...made him feel good and looking forward to the experience about joining next year. Then, I go in the first week and see him...Then, after a month I go back and have a chat...He tells me he is happy, I ask him what made him happy and he said I liked coming to the school before I was due to come. And he said it reassured him that it wasn't going to be as scary as he thought it was. Recently I saw the RTLB ... she said he was doing very, very well and is not on anyone's books as a kid to be watched...It's just introducing them to someone they will know rather than them going there to a whole lot of unknown people...they are one step ahead because they know somebody who is going to know them...by name. (T270)*

Collaboration between RTLB from different sectors enabled continuity through transition for students, families, and teachers and underscored the benefits of a co-ordinated, child-focused system of inclusive support for key stakeholders. Moreover, it was found advantageous to include family in a student's supported transition. Two more examples are offered:

*One of my boys last year that I was incredibly worried about...went with the school counsellor and a parent and had a more personal orientation. I was worried that he wouldn't cope at all ... the issues for him were not learning for him, they were behavioural ... they introduced him to [TA] he would get when he got there. So he had this idea in his head already about who he was going to have...He is doing extremely well and has been put into the gifted and talented class there. I knew he had a lot of ability, but because of past issues and problems that he had had, he wasn't achieving at school...I'm so thrilled that he has had a successful transition and they have recognised his ability that he has always had. (T228)*

*I took the parents along and arranged a meeting and they met with the Dean of the Year 9s...This child was Māori and they wanted to know if there was kapa haka and how would that side of his life be supported in high school. It reassured them that they had made a good choice. They came out of the meeting all smiles and said this was a good meeting. So I asked them if they were happy he was going to the school and they said "yes definitely, we made a good choice". It helps the child because the parents together with the child look forward to starting high school. It's all very positive and when they start off on a positive note then it will all go well for his future. I go to visit student about a month after, in high school. Then I just give the parents a call and ask them if they are happy and do they have concerns and most of the time they say no. (T270)*

#### **6.4.2c Information and Skills**

Information dissemination and teaching for the management of transition and future learning were often inclusive of families, as explained by one teacher: “[Families] want to be informed. They need information. Information sessions are absolutely vital” (T208). Moreover, as the following example illustrates, cross-sector learning opportunities promoted continuity and consistency of understanding across stakeholder groups:

*What the evening whānau hui brings, where all the colleges are together, it allows the parents to query and question and seek confirmation. I know one really big thing that we learnt the other night was that [local high school] doesn't have any Māori as an option, so that was quite, not shocking, but that was like wow, we didn't realise that, that they only have a Māori unit. And so it started us thinking what about Māori in mainstream and do they get an option. If they don't get an option of Māori what happens to them? (T221)*

Teachers reported that students with learning support needs benefitted from sustained and targeted transition preparation focused upon personal management, learning management, and

learning continuity. Priority was afforded to relationship development, independence, and self discipline, as examples show:

*I had tried to prep them with self discipline and self management...When I was thinking of Sam, in particular, self management was something that needed to be worked on a lot. Trying to get them to work on self management and being successful was a goal of mine which I was able to succeed in...My understanding is that if they lose it and don't stay on task with their learning and don't have the management skills to help them, they will have trouble succeeding and tend to fall behind. (T214)*

*I had a student I was worried about because she had had difficulty making friends here. I encouraged her to join sports teams, like netball and also encouraging lots more discussions in groups rather than just sitting back, so involving herself more and also talk to her about how she could be more approachable to other students. (T214)*

*Socially they need to learn to mix with others. If they start learning how to socialise now it will be easier for them...so when they get to high school they don't end up with the wrong friends. It is important that they can think for themselves... (T256)*

*We talk about peer pressure every day with things that happen...I get them to think about what kind of friends are going to help you get through the day and what kinds of friends will help you make bad choices and things like that...It really gets them to think, but at the end of the day it's their decision but at least they know what consequences they will face, either positive or negative and they keep that in the back of their minds. (T263)*

Teachers reported discussing secondary learning routines and standards frequently, and it was apparent that skill development was not addressed arbitrarily, as Teacher 228 articulated in the interview:

*Talking about it with the children right from when they first come into intermediate school that there will be eventually a step into high school. Relating their current learning to what they are going to need to know for high school so it gives them more motivation to be on task I guess ... and we need to work towards it. Part of a continuum...Which is a logical part of the teaching process isn't it, like: Where have I come from? Where am I now? and Where am I going next? ...I also mention [transition] in relation to the curriculum too. For example: "We really need you to get to stage 7 and 8 by the time you leave intermediate school and move on to your high school because then you are going to be a really confident person doing your maths" - comments like that; taking responsibility for their own learning. Making sure they have got the things they need in order to do the task properly; asking for help when they need it; knowing they are going to get help; encouraging risk taking. I see that as all part of helping them make those steps towards high school ...I talk about it all the time. **I teach it.** At the*

*beginning of the year I might get children who are very dependent on me for the next steps in their learning and once I have developed that ability for them to take responsibility for themselves, use their initiative, read the board, look at the task sheet, know where things are in the classroom, learn the routines and are able to take that on board themselves...I never stop thinking about it. Because at intermediate school you have a very short period of time to plug any gaps that might be there before they're moving onto high school. So I see it as imperative that they have those skills before they leave us. (T228)*

Further, three teachers explained that continuity of content and pedagogy provided benefits for the demands of secondary learning:

*I think what helps is that they are moving from a world of Māoritanga into another world of Māoritanga so there is not so much difference. They will continue to have all the things that they have had during primary and that would include karakia, waiata, mihimihi; the things that some people take for granted...And so their moving from one world from primary or from rumaki into wharekura, there is not much difference besides the timetabling of their lessons. (T221)*

*So I make the kids accountable for their own learning. I make them accountable for coming to class on time...I have even started doing goal setting with my reading groups ... I say to the kids: "This is your goal, when do you think you are going to achieve it? Who can help you?" ...looking at enablers and barriers and tasks and breaking a whole big goal down into the little tasks and the kids are finding that a whole lot easier to work through...like even for reading, what their goal is, what was their task, have I achieved that task and they can say yes or no...making it more achievable for them. ...I did it last year with my Year 8s and it worked well ... if something works for the high school kids why not try it with intermediate kids. So that is what I found helpful this year anyway. (T250)*

*One of my kids from last year said that they were doing assignments and were given out a marking criteria for their assignment...I've already started that for my Year 8s ... I am teaching them to teach themselves to make sure they get the best mark they can get ... it's just the fact of teaching the kids to be more responsible for their learning and all I do is show them the way and give them some advice. ...A couple of my kids came back: "Lucky we did that in Māori because we are doing that in science this year and I know what I have to do." Same thing, they are given a marking schedule and have certain things they have to cover and depending on the quality it will show in their marks. So it was them practising and they thought if they hadn't done it the previous year they wouldn't know what to do. Because some of the kids struggled the first time but we did it every term and by the end of the year they were a lot more confident... "I know how to read it" and "I know how to make sure I get the best mark I can" and "I got an A" which was awesome. So it's good to see that what I'm doing with the marking schedule they can do it in high*

*school as well and they can check themselves. And that's the whole point of it ... Even the parents have said they are more prepared...from one of the parents I heard that it had helped her support her son ... that parent has already seen what that child had done the previous year...So she just says, "OK, we will do it one bit at a time", and it's the fact that they can help their children... (T263)*

Planning for the physical aspects of transition was addressed by schools as well. For example, intermediate schools' use of timetables reflected a programming shift that enabled students to familiarise themselves with moving between classes, as one teacher explained: *"We do rotations and they get a chance to work with other teachers. So that's all experience. Just prepping them..." (T214).*

Finally, a focus on the transition itself was reported helpful by teachers, as per feedback from students. To this end, teaching time was dedicated to transition planning and specific information was provided in both written and experiential forms:

*I think it's good that they get a chance to go into all the secondary schools...Yeah, and they get a tour around and just get shown where everything is and a little debrief about what happens at the school; Yeah, which my kids came back last year really glad they went. They thought it was really beneficial. (T201)*

*So individually first I got them to write what they were excited about, what they were scared about and just generally how they think they will cope. And then they got into the groups of the schools they were at and got them to share with each other. Because I think kids are the best teachers to each other sometimes. And I thought it would be really good if someone was scared about a particular thing whereas someone else might be excited about that same thing, they can kind of share why they are excited and hopefully slightly change their view rather than being scared, maybe starting to feel a bit more comfortable with it. (T210)*

*I keep things like the high schools prospectus that come out, I keep those in the bookstand in the classroom and the kids often pick those up and flick through them. And it's just keeping it uppermost in their mind that it's where they're heading to next. (T228)*

*Last year we all went to the hall ... The [secondary] DPs came...and told the kids different things what would happen and the types of programmes. (T250)*

#### 6.4.2d Transition Pedagogy

This section relates to teacher skills and therefore might have been presented as a subset of the previous section. However, it is offered separately to emphasise the value Year Eight teachers placed upon a working knowledge of the pedagogy of transition and actively teaching students about transition. In line with practice recommendations in the literature (Education Review Office, 2012a), comments revealed a universal sense of responsibility for the delivery and on-going development of effective transition practice at personal, school and district levels, as illustrated:

*I felt last year...that they would be most worried about being the little fish in the big pond kind of thing. And when I saw that about 80% of them had written they were more worried about the learning part of it, it changed my view and just helped me to see, that's obviously what I need to do, because that is where their biggest area of worry is... (T201)*

*...some of [feedback] has been really good. I know that some of the things I have been doing has been on the right track. Things like preparing them for keeping up with the required tasks, making sure they keep up their reading and writing. They have come to me and said, you were right and thanks for keeping us motivated to succeed. So that's been a real pat on the back I suppose and it's good to know... (T214)*

Also, teachers found collaboration with their colleagues helped transition practice:

*The school are really encouraging of anything that we do...the Year 8 teachers just all communicate together ... and share ideas about what we are doing to get [Year 8s] ready. We've had lots of PD about the new curriculum ... preparing the students for the future, so it does link in quite well...obviously managing self comes into that... (T201)*

*...working as a group of teachers is helpful...We all have different strengths and different ways we teach. By talking and working with each other and come up with activities...show what has really worked – it's all reflective practice... (T214)*

Feedback mechanisms operated more formally within and between some schools where specific data was collected from students and family members with the intent of improving future transition practice. In essence, discrete action research examples:

*I think [whānau hui] gives us a good opportunity to reflect back on any issues...we have families who have two or three students in here [and] some of the experiences they have had with the past transition and how they can make it easier for their tamariki now ... There are lots of things that have begun, for example the transitioning checks we have. We keep data on our students as to where they think they are going, compared to where*

*they actually end up at the end of the day and how was the transition movement for them. It started me considering organisational planning ... So every hui we have ... we have designed sheets so parents can give feedback on what they found was worthwhile for them and just keeping it monitored ... it's good to look back ... we think of things that will help either the students or the parents so that we can help the future generations coming up as to making that transition a bit easier. (T221)*

*The Principal likes the students to be interviewed - when they are in Year 8, at the end of the year and when they are in Year 9 at [local high school], at the end of the first term to find out how they are going. Initially when they are in this school the questions are all about transition and what they are afraid of. And when they are in [local high school] the questions are all about what did you find useful about the transition process, how do you find high school, the teacher, etc. That's how we improve...I was quite amazed at the level that transition takes. It was the first time I had experienced anything like this. Like, you might think that once a child is out of here they are gone - you just wish them well. But the follow through is so good and it's really important... (T270)*

One teacher found drawing on her own positive transition experience, which was supported by inter-school collaboration, served as a helpful guide in her practice:

*I come from a Māori background myself and I have seen the effect it has had on me because of when I transferred to high school I moved to a whole different town. It was the fact that my previous teachers were conferencing with my new teachers and as soon as you walk into a school the teachers say, "Oh you're from up north", and you feel a lot more settled. That's the kind of thing I would want for my students... (T263)*

Analysis revealed that district co-ordination of transition supported schooling practices through common planning, including a district timetable for transition management and professional development opportunities. Productive cross-sector relationships resulted in enhanced teacher efficacy (Bandura, 1997) related to transition pedagogy:

*...the transitioning hui have been really good...There was a working party day...what they need from us and what we would like from them, so it was a very good forum for learning. [Also] there was a professional day for all educators involved with the transitioning process and I found that really valuable...I think it broadened the spectrum...we are breaking ground and so it's started us thinking about where we would like to go from here. (T221)*

*Yes we went up to [local high school] last year - the whole staff. We went up there after school ... got shown around the school and had discussions about transition. ...I think it was really helpful to go and see...A lot of the teachers haven't had children old enough to*

*go through high schools so they have never looked around ...So I thought that was excellent to have that opportunity. It was just like an orientation day that the children would have but we also had the added bonus of afternoon tea with the staff and discussions with them. We also had a specific discussion in the boardroom on transition issues as well. It was really good... Because there's a lot of preconceived ideas out there about different schools. So it kind of knocks those preconceptions on the head when you've seen it yourself... Unfortunately, we only hear the things that get into the media, don't we, or the rumours that go around the community when something bad has happened. So it's really good to have the opportunity to focus on positive things ... the fact that we have more knowledge to be able to talk to the families...I felt so much more confident talking to parents about [local high school] after that...There was a very positive feeling around the school and we talked about it for weeks after...The whole staff were buzzing. That did more to create a positive atmosphere around transition than anything else I believe - just that physically going there and seeing it; having a discussion with the staff...the chocolate biscuits...yes. I felt a bit reassured. I thought well yes these particular students I had were going to have their needs met. (T228)*

*Yes [co-ordination] is helpful...it's a lot of administrative stuff to be done when the kid is enrolled. ...Our co-ordinator works with the Principals of the schools and does the transition to high school action plan and works with the Principal at [local high school] ...it's like a timetable of events; its strategies that we use to support the children and the families...I ask her lots of questions about high school...So having someone there to co-ordinate this has been a big help because it's given me an insight on dealing with things and preparing them for high school to get them sorted and settled. (T263)*

The district focus on improving transition systems stimulated interest and prompted innovative cross-sector collaborations, which facilitated informed practice feedback. One teacher enthusiastically related her school's collaborative transition focus that she felt contributed to positive transition outcomes for students with learning support needs:

*...[school] take transition to a whole new level. They have a committee set up at school, they have lead teachers that lead the transition process, they work very closely with [local high school] and have meetings throughout the year and have [local high school] involved in the home-school partnership evenings...the evening starts off with cultural items. We have various groups, not only the kapa haka group, but the Samoan group which is quite strong...have a sausage sizzle because that is a good way to draw parents...later in the year we get high school DP coming and he talks to the parents about [local high school] and what [local high school] has to offer. That really helps the parents... (T270)*

### 6.4.3 Additional Findings

Analysis revealed a minor number of points coded as constructive criticism and/or suggestions. Some Year Eight teachers felt there was a need to strengthen connections with the secondary sector and receive more feedback so that they might better serve their students and families in transition. For example:

*I don't think there are enough opportunities for us to go into high schools and to see what is actually happening...Doesn't happen. There is nothing like that.... Closer co-operation yes, a closer relationship between schools, between us and the high schools it would be good. So we can prepare the kids... (T208)*

*...it would be great to attend [pōwhiri] on behalf of handing them over. I don't know if that is a process that happens, but it's a process I would like to support to say that these are our students, we are handing them over to you now and we hope you will look after them the same and take care of them like we have over the years ...I think we feel a bit disconnected...It's part of our custom that we take these children, rather than "see you later, bye" ...We are actually handing our taonga that we have worked with for so many years... (T221)*

*I don't know what goes on at [high school]. The kids are visiting there but I don't have a clue myself. Maybe it's something that should happen to get intermediate teachers to all go visit so they can hear: "this is what we do here, this is what we are expecting". ...Especially because the parents are asking us and we don't know anything. (T256)*

It has been reported that primary and intermediate teachers invested significant effort passing on students' learning information to high schools but some teachers expressed disquiet about whether that information was utilised by secondary teachers. Some primary teachers felt disconnected from their secondary peers; they needed reassurance that transition processes were useful and served students' needs, as these selected examples showed:

*We have a form that goes with a child that is especially designed that gives you the assessments, the reporting on their performance and progress for the year, the literacy and numeracy assessments, and behavioural...quite comprehensive...It depends on the teachers - where they are going...how they use that information; I can't judge how teachers at high schools will deal with kids and their special needs. (T208)*

*We are required to fill out forms for the teachers to give an idea of what that child is like...but whether they are used, I don't know. It would be good to have some feedback as to whether we are writing down the things they want to know about. (T214)*

Finally, it was established that the schooling district placed emphasis upon the supply of enrolment support and information to families to ensure students were enrolled in timely fashion. However, Year Eight teachers' interviews revealed some evidence of concern regarding the adequacy of family engagement to assist in enrolment and school selection. While staff members' remarks showed schools were going the extra mile to facilitate enrolment, there was also a suggestion with comments that some form of added family-friendly enrolment support on a district level might further enhance outcomes.

## 6.5 Secondary Teachers' Interview Results

Ten secondary teachers completed individual interviews with the researcher. Teachers' years of service ranged from one to thirty-plus years and a wide range of subject expertise was represented including technology, science, mathematics, learning support, integrated learning, and humanities. Analysis of secondary teachers' views about successful transition is presented in the first subsection followed by general analysis of interview themes related to the main question of "What helped?"

### 6.5.1 Success

Secondary teachers reiterated attendance, engagement, being settled, participation, and forming relationships as signs of successful transition for students with learning support needs. Emphasis was placed upon demonstration of positive demeanour; students thought to be doing well if they conducted and managed themselves in ways that maximised their schooling opportunities for the future, as follows:

*...the bookwork is really a good emotional diary interestingly enough. So the bookwork is good, the way the kid presents themselves at school is good, and for behavioural, measurable things, the way the kid turns up to classes on time and so on. Normal attending, normal work and [behaviourally] stays under the radar. And the teacher looks at the kid and says, OK, he or she has got it...Forming good relations is absolutely vital and there are other things like developing a sense of humour...In the way they hold themselves, the way they present themselves. (T334)*

Although, there was some evidence of some secondary teachers embracing more inclusive ideals at transition time and taking a broader and more accommodating stance:

*I could say I would consider it successful if all children had their books and pens every day, if they attended all their classes every day, if they spoke politely and nicely to their teachers and their peers every day, but I know that that is not really going to happen for all children all the time. ...They might not be able to have pens and books, based on their situation or whatever, they might not be able to be positive every day, but they might be able to come every day. I would like to see that positivity and that openness of attitude ... I think if a student is able to open themselves to new relationships with other staff members, to new learning experiences...I think that indicates a successful learner. (T311)*

### 6.5.2 What Helped?

The impact of positive relationships permeated the data set and all three themes presented in Table 20, although the first theme was entitled ‘Relationships’ to isolate particular associations between people and institutions.

**Table 20**

*Helpful Practices Identified in Secondary Teachers’ Interviews*

Positive relationships	Support for transition	Information and skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishing relationships and responsibility</li> <li>• Initial contact               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Enrolment</li> <li>- Pōwhiri</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Inter -school               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Shared programmes</li> <li>- Shared resources</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Triangle (teacher-pupil-family)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tuakana-teina</li> <li>• Transition information               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Class placement</li> <li>- Supports</li> </ul> </li> <li>• School support services</li> <li>• Teaching strategies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information provision</li> <li>• Orientation</li> <li>• Transition skills for students               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rules</li> <li>- Self management</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Professional development for teachers</li> </ul>

Pre-transition and welcome times were highlighted as critical junctures to connect with students and families. Associations with the primary sector were on-going and often focused upon enrolment, family engagement and curriculum continuity. Positive relations also underpinned supports for teacher practice, effective dissemination of information to stakeholders, and development of transition skills. In contrast to their primary colleagues who drew considerable attention to transition pedagogy, secondary teachers’ comments about

specific teacher practice to support transition of students with learning support needs were scant. Therefore, a separate category was not justified.

### 6.5.2a *Positive Relationships*

Already endorsed by students and family members, enrolment procedures and orientation activities, including marae welcomes, provided an opportune time for teachers to initiate positive relations:

*The pōwhiri, the official welcome helps...culturally, particularly for our Māori students. I think it's an important thing. ...[Families] are invited to come along... it's good for the ones who do. The kids have their parents or caregivers there with them on that first day. (T380)*

One teacher new to the country put her scepticism aside after experiencing pōwhiri:

*...I didn't know whether the pōwhiri would be a natural thing for catering for my kind of a culture...that was my perception initially...it looks like its dominating towards the Māori culture, but that is not what it is. It's actually fulfilling the needs of everybody there. They spend half of the day in the marae listening to what senior teachers or parents have to say and then spending time with the seniors...[latecomers] miss that opportunity and because of that, you know, it does take longer for them to settle down. (T392).*

Consistent with secondary questionnaire findings but in contrast to primary sector results, statements about family-school connections outside procedural aspects appeared scarce. Nonetheless, shared benefits of further student-teacher-family contact were expressed by a small number of teachers:

*I've rung all my parents [of children with learning support needs] and I've probably met about ten out of 25. I've spoken to most of them on the phone - that would be a good 80-90% of them...very often the parents or the caregivers will volunteer information that is not written down. So then I find out [for example] that the child didn't speak until he was five...So that information is quite useful because then it helps me to get a bigger picture of the student. (T311)*

*...it's when they hear: "Hi I'm Miss...I am the teacher", they go, "ohhhh",...and you find you have certain people you know or a certain family you know or they know a person [of my culture] and so on. And you get off the phone and it's like "oh my gosh", I just met the parents of so and so...that's a connection there. Then you have the kids*

*come and say oh miss, my Mum said to say hello...I think those moments are great when you talk to the parents. (T324)*

Every secondary interviewee expressed that building relationships with students with learning support needs mattered. For example: “*relationships is the key thing when you are settling [students] ...*” (T392); and “*...their learning is kind of in some ways almost secondary. I mean it’s really important, but kind of secondary to my relationship with them. It happens because of my relationship with them...*” (T311). Thus, initiating respectful rapport early was found helpful to establish a platform for trust and positive learning relationships, as illustrated:

*I think it’s the connection. Getting to know them first...is there a certain way to pronounce their name, getting to know their iwi or their village if they are not from New Zealand, or if they are New Zealand born. But if, for example, they are from Niue they can say what village they are from, or from Samoa. ...If you can get that connection going with them when you first get them, a sense of trust starts building up...it opens doors. That, hey there is a genuine care that she wants to know me as a person not me as a student or a number...getting to know them, a personal connection, getting that when they first start. (T324)*

*...Even being out on duty, and saying, hi, how are you doing, see you in the next lesson, it makes them feel good too...So I do make an effort, smile at them, make them feel more welcome...It does work, yeah...positives work, with juniors it does work. (T357)*

Students found assistance provided by senior peers invaluable; teachers agreed:

*Early in the term one, they have peer support where the Year 13s join with the Year 9s...they have a group of students and the seniors are kind of role models to them and help them to settle in. It’s quite positive I think. It’s helpful for the students... because they are students, not adults and they link with them better. (T357)*

That the responsibility for establishing positive relationships with students with learning support needs resided with the teacher or school, was commonly expressed. Teachers also recognised the value of building on student strengths:

*...[some children] aren’t open to new relationships with staff members. And that might be because of their family background, they have been hurt or betrayed in some way and so they are reluctant to create relationships. Or they have a certain way of behaving that makes it difficult for them to create positive relationships with staff members or students...The challenge for us in terms of transition is to overcome maybe that*

*reluctance and that reticence in some students....sometimes they slip back into bad habits or ways of being that they might have created for themselves...and the challenge is to keep that sort of positivity and that openness and that nurturing and that support alive for the student so that they make connections and they achieve academic success. (T311)*

*...every kid has got at least one positive thing. ...So we should be working a lot harder on our side to check what is a positive. Positives could be honesty, coming on time and we can use that as a builder for them to encourage them to work in the classroom. And it works. (T392)*

Although scarce, some interviewees referred to cross-sector professional connections aimed at cross-curriculum development. While not always targeted specifically at students with learning support needs, secondary teachers found shared practice development with their primary and intermediate colleagues helped them to understand more about primary level learning. Furthermore, connections brought benefits for students with learning support needs while they were still in Year Eight; it seemed once connections were made, other possibilities for connection opened up:

*There's has been a local initiative...involves all the primary, intermediate and secondary schools in the area...Just working with them, talking with them and listening to how they do things...You pick up a lot of stuff...how the schools operate and the challenges they've got as well. ...Now we've arranged for some of our students to go to the primary school for a day or so and teach the kids about using word, excel and the internet and so on. That's something else that has come about because of this connection...you build a rapport and a relationship...So breaking down those barriers...there are other spin offs. I know some of our senior students go to some of the primary schools for literacy as well. (T380)*

### **6.5.2b Support for Transition**

Every interviewee identified supports provided by their schools for students with additional needs at transition time. Analogous to students' results and other findings (Anderson et al., 2000; Eccles & Harold, 1996; Ward, 2000), secondary teachers' interviews indicated the presence of senior peers and other family members was beneficial and reassuring during transition, as in the following comment:

*...if they have an elder brother or sister in the high school...they feel that they are supported...and they are not alone. Secondly they already know half of the things about*

*the school, how it works because they discuss it at home. They settle more quickly than the other students. (T346)*

Primary sector interviews highlighted the importance Year Eight teachers placed upon transfer of information to assist secondary teachers meet students' transitional and learning needs. With questionnaire data from secondary teachers suggesting minimal awareness of this system, transfer of information was addressed specifically in secondary teacher interviews. Analysis revealed the widespread utilisation, at predominately management level, of prior-learning information and recently collected test data for class placement and to initiate direct support for students. Illustrative practice was provided by a teacher with responsibility in the area of supported learning:

*...perhaps three years ago, noticed that we weren't really identifying students with literacy needs when they came into the school and that very little was known about the students as we put them in classes. It was just done on the basis of AsTTle testing ... so we much more formally put together [a transition team] - the Head of Year 9, myself, the enrolment registrar, the teacher of the special unit...RTL...The idea was that we would spend a bit of time going into the intermediate schools, prior to...the interviews of students and their parents when they come in to enrol (every student who comes to school has to be interviewed first). And in that way we have quite a good profile on those students before they get here...This year I contacted the DPs of the intermediate schools and asked for a 15 minute session with every teacher of a Year 8 class...the brief I gave the DPs was that I would be asking for students who needed any extra support of any type and that included accelerate, any type of learning, behaviour, physical or whatever. And the teachers were great actually. It was really reassuring to see how well most of those teachers knew the kids, how concerned they were for them. And the other advantage was that I was able to say to the teachers well yes, we will put that child there and you can be sure we will look after them in that way. So I now have a book with about 6 pages of names with notes...DP and I do the class placements...we spend a long time looking at the kids. I actually read every transition form and at-risk form and I don't think anybody else does...Any information we can get is useful...reading the transition forms last year I was able to look at my book and asterisk things I had already written and add things, so yes they were good... (T369)*

*We are certainly getting the classes right, a whole lot better, so we are not having to move kids six weeks into the year, which is good...This is a Te Kotahitanga school and so much of those first few weeks is spent building relationships. If you then find that you've placed the kid in the wrong class and you have to move them, then all that's just gone and they will have missed it in their new class...One thing I've been trying to avoid since I have been helping class placement is putting kids whose behaviour has led to learning deficit into the [supported learning programme]...it's only if kids have an overall*

*learning delay separate from difficult behaviour that I think that they need to be in the [supported programme]. We have actually cut the numbers of classes in the [supported programme] in half...because there was bright, naughty, bored kids really being very, very destructive. So it has worked a whole lot better. (T369)*

*...we have formed two language-based classes and every kid in those classes are English as a second language kids...there is a teacher aide who follows those kids all day ... And the two Samoan classes now have Samoan teacher aides as well...so there is more support on a period by period basis for those kids...But there are individuals who stand beyond that who need one-on-one assistance as well. So we group them carefully but make sure they get support as well. (T369)*

*There are a number of kids I alert the counselling team to on Day One and the counsellor will often just touch base with those kids and say: 'hi, this is where we are'. So we pre-empt problems... (T369).*

In this particular school, information was not made freely available to classroom teachers although alerts were put on the centralised information system:

*I might just put "needs support, referred to counsellor" in [student management system]. I'm much more specific about learning support obviously if it's reading or maths. With the behaviour...every student gets a chance to prove themselves when they come to this school...I might say to DP, look this kid has a history of behaviour but we don't tell the teachers until the kid raises their head...if they say to me, so and so is looking to be a problem, then I will go back and say well yes, there is a history and we need to start doing something about this now...I know the counsellor and his team believe that every kid gets a fresh start when they come here...A lot of kids do turn themselves around when they get to high school. (T369)*

At another secondary school, teachers utilised available information proactively for departmental and classroom planning to tailor teaching and supports, sometimes leading to possibly, unforeseen positive outcomes:

*You need the whole big picture...dealing with students who are particularly at-risk in terms of their social and pastoral needs...So I really think that the sharing of quality information particularly between colleagues is really, really, really important...The picture gives me a knowledge of the student and in terms of where the student is coming from. ...I haven't had any one of my kids need a stand down. I think it's the availability of support. (T311)*

Other comments revealed wide variability in the way transition information passed on from the primary sector was received and utilised within the secondary sector. For example, one teacher chose not to draw on available information: *“I am able to access it, I won’t say I have”* (T416), while another specifically sought it out: *“I speak to [the literacy teacher] - she checks the AsTTle scores and the PAT tests so it gives us an idea”* (T403). Another teacher would have liked information, saying: *“As teachers we don’t get anything. There are things on the form but it certainly doesn’t get through to the classroom teacher. But I think that would be helpful...”* (T380).

Some differentiation and accommodation strategies were reported for the support of students’ transitional and on-going learning needs including individualised learning goals, realistic expectations, recognising student strengths, and adapting the curriculum to students’ capabilities. The first of the examples refers to workbooks compiled by a school mathematics department to assist with mastery learning:

*So its “OK everybody open your books and carry on from where you left off”. So they all start together, by the end of the week 2 they are stretching and they are all at different parts of the books at their own pace...all the teacher has to say is just a simple little phrase like “you don’t need me” and that’s fine. The feedback from the parents is, for the first time my son or my daughter is happy with maths, they find they can do it and they are feeling more confident.* (T334)

*It’s not just about the academic, it’s the whole package we put together...a lot of our students may not be academically talented but they are talented in sport or musically or drama...to have lots of different things going on to try to meet their needs as best you can.* (T380)

*...they gave some surprises because their cultural background...so with a view to making the subject interesting, I actually changed what I was planning to do with them and we did a lot of more expressional artistic stuff - jewellery, stuff like that ...once you have grabbed their attention and their interest in the subject, then stop what you are doing and go back to the original idea of technology education...in terms of differentiation, I changed my target within a week...* (T416)

Teacher’s tentativeness around accommodation strategies has been raised herein. A school’s response to that situation was affirmed by one teacher:

*We’ve just had 2 days where we closed the school, and we had two days of full on differentiated PD and it was fabulous...we’ve taken the mainstream schemes and we are*

*differentiating those for our classes...We might have to put a few more strategies and scaffolding in place to help our students achieve certain things, we might leave certain activities out but the end result is that all the Year 9s are assessed using the same yardstick. (T311)*

Reinforcing questionnaire findings, analysis revealed considerable reliance in secondary schools upon in-house support services including teacher aides; language, literacy, and behavioural support; counsellors; and Te Kotahitanga, a professional development programme to assist teachers cater for diversity. These structures supported students directly and also helped teachers respond to students' needs, as expressed in the following examples:

*I mean a lot of our students have learning difficulties or are way behind where they should be when compared nationally. As a school we try to do as much as we can to put different programmes in place to suit the needs of the kids - with all the youth support and guidance and the programmes they have running, the whole package I think. The school does try a lot. (T380)*

*There's a lot of channels. If there is a personal problem we have the guidance counsellor and the social worker. We've got our own resident policeman for criminal activity and for linguistic problems we have the ESOL programme...its all to promote the wellbeing of the child for them to fit into the class. (T403)*

The next section presents further data about skills and information identified as necessary components of smooth transition.

### **6.5.2c Information and Skills**

Within secondary teachers' interviews, the theme of information provision for transition emerged as a minor theme. Teachers identified student open days, school information evenings, technology classes that Year Eight students attended on the secondary campus and student orientation days as useful events to familiarise students and families with facilities and for the dissemination of enrolment and school information.

Questionnaire findings indicated secondary teachers placed importance on students' early organisation and settled behaviour. Interviews revealed some teachers found being proactive by teaching students personal organisation and management skills was beneficial, as this example shows:

*I think its best that you get them from their first lesson...Get them into a routine first ... I like to lay out the rules and expectations ... Keep going on, OK, make sure you do this, this is what you do now...I always give a why and I keep to that repetitive process in weeks 1 and 2. In week 3 you start seeing them do it themselves without me. (T324)*

Conformity was a student ‘skill’ also found helpful for teacher work; references to students’ ability to “fit in”, or “keep their heads down” were not uncommon within teachers’ comments. For example:

*...they must know what to do. That means to start an activity, to get their books out and get into the swing...Once they understand the routines, then half the battle is won ... it’s important for our kids to fit in. If they want to succeed they have to fit into the requirements of the school, the protocols in your class and the general rules for the school - they need to understand that ... (T403)*

### **6.5.3 Additional Findings**

The concern for students’ regular attendance and timely enrolment has been evident across schooling sectors, being raised by a number of teachers and, as will become evident in the following section, was a key concern for school managers. The last comment in this section highlights the potential negative snowball effect of late enrolment and disrupted transition.

*I’ve got kids in there who have not settled in ... ones who weren’t here on Day One, they came four weeks late because something went wrong...they are the ones that don’t settle in. The transition is disrupted, physically disrupted ... some of them haven’t actually got over that and they are still having problems here. I mean it’s not rocket science is it. If the student is not here on Day One, they miss out. They miss out on that first person who they meet, which is me, so they don’t know who I am ... the most important part of building a relationship is the start of it ... and often you see it and it never ever changes, they never do integrate properly. (T416)*

At the beginning of this section attention was drawn to the apparent neglect by secondary schools to assign importance to transition *per se*. When asked specifically about guidance provided for tutor teachers about how to help with students’ transition into high school, one teacher replied: “No, nothing. I haven’t got anything regarding this” (T346). These findings run counter to current wisdom (Education Review Office, 2012a) which advises treating transition as a process of adaption.

## 6.6 Expert Educators' Interview Results

Ten expert educators with teaching and school management service of between ten and thirty-plus years completed individual interviews with the researcher. The grouping comprised two full-primary Principals and one secondary Principal, three intermediate Deputy Principals and two secondary Deputy Principals, one secondary Head of Learning Support and one RTLB. All these participants held practice, supervisory and/or advisory responsibilities at district or school level and were actively engaged in transition processes. Their thoughts about successful transition and helpful practice in respect of students with learning support needs are reported in the sections to follow.

### 6.6.1 Success

Expert educators identified learning progress, happy engagement and regular attendance, including being present on Day One, as key markers. Other aspects raised were related to: positive relationships; being organised in terms of books, uniform and equipment; settled behaviour; parental involvement; and future trajectories.

One Principal's considered remarks reflected an accommodating approach for students with learning support needs and gave a glimpse of expectation for shared responsibility; an expectation of mutual commitment on the part of students and schools. These remarks mirrored those earlier from teaching staff member T311.

*A successful transition is a kid who gets up in the morning wanting to come to school, is aware of the expectations of the school regarding learning, has opportunities to develop their own learning and personality...has a bag full of school books - that says that learning's important. We have lots of kids who love coming to school but don't bring any books; that to me is not a successful transition. ...[although maybe] it is, because they're here, they come every day and they're not on the road. ...but it's about the learning and got to be about an outcome in the end. In some cases I am quite happy to not worry about the academic learning until they get the personal stuff right. (EE9)*

A Deputy Principal's remarks suggested high expectations:

*I think it's somebody who has taken the skills that they developed so far in their education and felt comfortable enough to set them down here as a foundation and build on them ... somebody who comes to school regularly and who is not late, is punctual and is appropriately dressed, has their gear and is performing to the ability level that you*

would expect them to perform at and progressing. And it also looks like somebody who is not badly behaved on a regular basis, and is involved in the wider activities at the school too because they feel very comfortable and has their parents come into the parents interviews. So I think that's what it looks like. What I believe is that successful transition means that a student is maximising their potential. Please don't tell me that everybody is going to go to Yale or Harvard and come out with first class honours...or Oxford or Cambridge. What any employer wants is somebody who is going to turn up on time, someone who is going to be reliable, somebody who can work in a team situation, somebody who can show initiative, someone who can work on their own when they are left on their own and somebody who knows the product which the company is making money out of. That's what an employer wants and I don't care if it's a lawyer in New York or whether it's someone who is working for Jerry's Ice Cream or whatever. (EE4)

In sum, successful transition was viewed through a multifaceted, outcome-focused lens and there was agreement among experts of the need for collective responsibility.

### 6.6.2 What Helped?

Experts' responses to the key research question generated rich and comprehensive data revealing an area-wide focus upon transition pedagogy and systems improvement centred upon the district, schools and students. This tripartite division was employed for analysis and reporting in this section, as presented in Table 21. Once again, the influence of relationships, support for transition and provision of information were found to permeate the data set.

**Table 21**

*Helpful Practices Identified in Expert Educators' Interviews*

District transition	Within-school practice	Student-centred practice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• District relations</li> <li>• District transition pedagogy and practice</li> <li>• Enrolment</li> <li>• Information transfer</li> <li>• Family engagement</li> <li>• Student orientation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Timely enrolment and attendance</li> <li>• Professional Development</li> <li>• RTLB</li> <li>• Transition co-ordination within schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building relationships</li> <li>• Providing student-friendly information</li> <li>• Support structures               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mentors</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Using information to respond to student needs</li> </ul>

### **6.6.2a District Transition**

District transition processes were supported by a collective focus on advancing a non-competitive schooling district with common transition systems, including information transfer between schools, working school partnerships, enrolment collaboration, and shared professional development. This section focuses on processes initiated at a district level, although some between-school differences were apparent in practice.

#### ***District Relations***

Experts declared the inter-relationship of key processes and people formed a serviceable foundation for district transition practice and united vision, resulting in constructive outcomes including: shared awareness of needs, student-centred planning, shared planning and evaluation of systems, elevation of the importance of transition pedagogy, seamless curriculum, purposeful relationships, and engagement of families. The following remarks are offered as examples:

*[cross-sector relationship] removes the fact that kids are just numbers. It lets us think that we can explain that Mary has this problem and she is coming to your school and be aware of it...the more we can do to break it down the better. (EE2)*

*It's child-centred good will. Yes it is...we sat down and did an old fashioned brainstorming of what would facilitate the transition of these kids [with learning needs] and we've got a several page action plan and we definitely review it every year and update it, look at what we have done, look at what we could do better, look at what we haven't done, review why...the students who come from [partner primary school] settle in really well. (EE4)*

*The form that we fill in is for all the three high schools, so there is not that perceived competition. ...the physical meeting of people is really important and people that you can see are committed and passionate about what they are doing... it's about teachers seeing other people's viewpoints and seeing that student as a person coming through in that transition and how it might be for that child. (EE6)*

*I think where high schools prioritise it, staff have consistently given some stability to the transition process and it becomes worthwhile. Culture is important, relationships are important, transfer of academic information is important. I think the most useful thing though is when teachers from Year 9 and teachers of Year 8 spend time together talking about the learning outcomes of individual children...I think where there are very clearly identified relationships between the feder schools and the high schools it gets easier. (EE8)*

*...it can be seen as quite a daunting place and be seen as somewhere that is unknown particularly to those kids or families who don't have a big connect with higher education. So it's about working with the feeder schools first because that is the school that they're already closely associated with...say what transition practices would you like, what worked and what didn't work. (EE9)*

### ***District Transition Pedagogy and Practice***

A local transition development project instigated by schools and subsequently supported by the Ministry of Education enabled educators from primary and secondary sectors to convene learning forums where practices and processes were developed with an eye on students with learning support needs. One local primary Principal captured the shared sentiment that appeared to drive this practice:

*The transition was one area we saw as hugely important because so many of our children didn't make it. They just didn't get there for one reason or another and if they didn't have the groundwork done for them and the support in place then they didn't make it on that first day. It just broke our heart to see a year later, the girl is pregnant and the boy is on drugs, or whatever, so it was really, really important for us to get a system in place. (EE6)*

The professional development and practice support was highly valued by all interviewees and positive outcomes emerged for teachers and students:

*I have only just been introduced to the transition initiative...now that I know what I know I don't see how the high school can be successful for a lot of students unless the transition process is in place. Well particularly with the at-risk ones. I really mean that...the intermediate and high schools now in this cluster are realising. What I've noticed this year is that stand downs are less and exclusions are less particularly at this school. There was a high rate of stand downs last year with our students. (EE3)*

*Through [local initiative] we worked really hard setting up systems...the liaison with them, and the networking, with all the high schools in the area, has just been wonderful...the whole communication and integration and learning from each other and celebrating what we have done...The high schools coming on board and working together made it so easy because they weren't competing with each other ...hearing what we were saying about why our children needed to move on successfully to high school. So the programme has evolved and we have got better at doing it. The standardising of forms...the standardisation of dates...I think the high schools talking to each other...the information going through is standard so we're not doing one set of information for one school and different for another - and that makes a huge difference for teachers and for*

*ease of talking to each other about the information that we are passing on....What we've got is transition procedures. (EE6)*

*My feeling, anecdotally, is that this year's Year 9 has been very, very good in the way they transitioned and the way they came into the school and essentially we have had very few major behaviour problems and we've had the fewest board referrals in terms of disciplinary hearings for Year 9 that we've had for years...I think there is a bigger awareness of transition in the way we bring Year Eights into Year Nine. (EE7)*

However, while practice and development was sustained via a collective of committed school representatives who met a number of times throughout the year, one of the participants felt on-going facilitated co-ordination would be essential to sustain momentum and successes:

*I think area-wide there is probably a need for some sort of transition type co-ordinator to keep things going for two terms each year...raising awareness, supporting the systems being put in place. Getting the personnel together, providing the nuts and bolts person. (EE2)*

One of the question prompts utilised for this grouping of educators was related to curriculum continuity. Findings uncovered a shared desire to initiate systems of continuity, and indeed some trials were in place involving cross-moderation of work, cross-bridge units of work and shared use of technology facilities. However, it seemed other factors took precedence leading into transition time; as Galton and colleagues' (1999) found this aspect of transition was not afforded priority. One Principal described the potential benefits for systems of continuity and expressed his frustration at the poor uptake from secondary schools:

*We try every year and the biggest barrier is that the transition into the high school process tends to be dominated by Deans sorting classes, not by teachers talking about continuity of learning. [Curriculum continuity initiatives] are difficult to sustain. ...We want to moderate the samples of work outcomes from children who are going to [high school] and that is very, very difficult, it's very low priority for high schools...We send home a reading contract for the parents to sign about what they are going to do with their children in the summer to sustain their reading. (So the children that returned their contracts signed by parents at the beginning of this year lost one month, the average for the school was a loss of 8 months in the summer drop.) We give those contracts to [high school] for the Year 8 students and we encourage them to pick up on it in February when they go back to school. If the high school literacy teacher can say right here is my copy of your reading contract, where is yours, have you signed it, did you fill it in, how is your reading going, let's give you a test to see if you have dropped or not. Then they have immediately got a tool for engagement with the family and with the child. (EE8)*

### ***Enrolment***

That enrolment was afforded the highest priority in the district was reflected in the frequency and content of comments. With a history of competition between high schools, a lack of co-ordinated process, and poor inter-school relations revealed, the remarks about current process and practice were heartening. Schools utilised a variety of strategies to ensure timely enrolments, especially with children and families considered vulnerable in transition. These tactics included early initiation of process, provision of information, administrative assistance, personal approaches, and follow-up, as evident in the following selection:

*We tell the kids to take that form and fill it in – [then] at least you are somewhere on Day One. Not rock up on Day One and enrol ... I talk all the time to the Year 8s about [enrolment] ... The DP has been onto them and we even give them house points if they get their enrolments in. The house competition is a real huge thing so kids are happy to get a point. (EE1)*

*Last year and the year before there were four sequential personalised letters went out to families that hadn't enrolled over a chronological period of time and we made phone calls as well. And I've sent out our youth support workers to knock on doors as well. (EE4)*

*...we started a process of talking to the colleges in Week 1, Term 3 and we told them that we were having a parents meeting in Week 3 and asked them to have their enrolment packs ready... That way all the people who were in the zone automatically got their application form for the appropriate college when they came to the information evening ... we currently support the enrolments into our local school first - that's been our initiative in [this schooling district] ... I set myself a target every year as to the percentage of enrolments I would like to see and I know I'm not going to get 100%, but certainly its within the 90s. That's a goal because it drives me... It's all about making sure they are enrolled somewhere. ... The community with which we work have a large number of parents who are not English first language speakers so they struggle a bit with filling in forms ... So we need to find a way to make that easier for parents to get their kids enrolled. If we can simplify that, it would make it much better ... (EE5)*

*Consistent systems make it easier for those who are transitioning. And it makes it easier for parents because they all know the dates. Simple things like the enrolment packs come to the school now and they have the names and addresses of the kids and they get a pack, the parents have to fill it in and it comes back to the school. It all helps and guides parents through the process because I think that can be really scary... if we have any children who are at-risk, the teachers talk with the children. The Year 8 team leader is very involved with that and we follow up with the children and parents and making sure things are in place and on time. (EE6)*

*...a lot of the kids come through with really sad stories and they are the ones whose parents, well I shouldn't say don't care, but it feels like that. Maybe it's because they have other things to do, maybe they are both working... We have gone into the highways and byways - I've got our four social workers...they go out and do home visits. ... So they take enrolment packs out to the families... We contact them by phone, send letters...we put hours and hours and hours into this The personal contact works... We win some. ...I feel it's a huge issue. (EE7)*

The link between enrolment and successful transition was widely acknowledged however one participant felt the system required further refinement to plug known gaps:

*We probably need to look at those [families] who aren't (engaging with) the process and try to find out why and give them some support. The enrolment process is the beginning of the transition as far as kids are concerned. ...[For] kids at-risk I think, there we have really got to identify them and work with them and I don't know whether we are doing that that well. I think we are waiting too late to see if they need support in getting enrolled. If they need support getting enrolment you can almost guarantee they will need support in transition as well. I think the two go hand in hand. (EE2)*

### **Information Transfer**

Combined systems involving electronic, paper-based and/or personal transfer ensured information about student learning, behaviour and strengths, and successful teaching methods was passed on to secondary schools. This practice was highly valued by all expert interviewees; they felt better able to respond appropriately to students' individual learning needs and make suitable class placement decisions, as follows:

*We already knew them; we had enough information to place them straight away ...the school is ready for them...they knew they were coming. (EE1)*

*...we have the developed forms and here we make sure the teachers fill them out with as much information as possible and the feedback from the high schools is that what we do is pretty good...[they] have a great place...I think that's something that needs to continue and is important...we have to look outside the kids that are identified as having needs...it's the fringe ones; that we haven't got support for. (EE2)*

*Once all the enrolments have closed, we are going into the intermediates and interviewing the teachers, so we will have all our information on students with learning disabilities or who are at-risk by the beginning of Term 4...we will still have the transition support forms, but you get a lot more information face-to-face. We want to get it early on so the class placement is more streamlined and we're not rushing it at the end of the year. So students are properly placed and start off the year well and are not*

*moved...the first week or two is when they make their friends. We're trying to do it better. (EE3)*

*These are students who have unique needs, whether they are emotional, social or maybe even if they need to be challenged academically. So the teachers will be talking to the staff from [our two main high schools] ...highlighting students they believe are of concern at either end of the scale. So they don't get misplaced in college or incorrectly placed...So we are hoping to overcome those initial barriers to enable that settling in period to be successful and short...For example a few who are truly English language learners and I have a couple who are in our Māori enrichment unit. So they will specifically be talking about what the college could be offering the students coming from those two areas. (EE8)*

### ***Family Engagement***

Interview analysis revealed a growing district emphasis upon engaging parents and caregivers in the transition process, especially leading into and during enrolment, the timely completion of which was recognised to be a critical step in successful transition. Collaborative, often innovative, arrangements between schools guided families through the transition period via provision of accessible information and resources and by facilitating connections. Data showed that primary sector personnel were purposeful in their attempts to build relationships of trust with families, setting the tone for future home-school links at high school. One primary Principal said: “*We deliberately connect parents*” (EE8). The power of personal contact was also recognised in the secondary sector with engagement foci including enrolment, orientation, community groups, welcome (pōwhiri), and parent reporting. There was some evidence of on-going efforts to sustain positive relationships, especially in culturally-focused learning units.

*I think one of the things we do really well at this school is that we insist on a parent and student interview before they enrol and I think that is of immense value to us ... but we think it's of immense value to the families as well. ...A lot of our families, I believe, feel threatened by the high school environment. Many of them weren't successful when they were in the high school environment themselves and bringing in their child for the first time, maybe it's the first time they have been back in high school...so we go out of our way to make our families feel comfortable and welcome and we do that by the personal touch in the interview. Not just anybody can interview the parents, we hand pick people who will do, we hope, an appropriate job. ...There are some youngsters that I cherry-pick and I will personally say that I want to interview that one. ... once they [families] get in the interview, and they understand what we are trying to achieve and with the kind of questions we ask, I'm sure they value it ... For me, it's critical, it's a critical point of*

contact. ...I find it a really good ice breaker with the families...So what you are doing is paving the way for whenever there is an issue, they trust you enough to come in and talk to you. (EE4)

...I think as professionals we have a responsibility to ensure that we look at all the possibilities to facilitate the effective transitioning of our students from intermediate to college. ...think outside the square...to ease some of the burdens that especially for our non-English speaking parents have with filling in forms because [enrolment] seems to be an area we are failing in. ...When I get the application forms back and it is simply handed to me as a stack of papers and I find in there an original birth certificate, it's a clear indication that the parents are far too trusting and that they don't understand the importance of an original document ...that shows the level of communication that needs to take place. (EE5)

...If that family, that whānau, haven't learned to engage with the primary school, the whole transition of that relationship to the high school is much more difficult and much more critical. That tends to rely on personal relationships. So if we can connect those people, those caring families, with someone at the high school that they can trust and build a relationship with, it's a great sense of relief often...they know there is something on the other side of the divide...someone they can make contact with and deal with any issues that arise. I think that works very well. There are a number of families who have had very negative experiences at high school, in their own lives, and they find it much more challenging to go into a high school and to raise issues...

Culture is important here. For our Māori and Pasifika students, some of whom we get really worried about sustaining in high school but who are doing well here. We introduce them to [head of Māori unit] or to the wider kapa haka group and they are welcomed in and the parents choose that and they want that connection. The first issue for those parents is getting their children safely into high school, knowing that they are going to go every day and that they are going to have good values. ...we really see that our Māori and Pasifika boys in particular are at-risk in terms of transition. So [engaging families through culture] helps.

...We run a home-school partnership every term...we've got almost like a trade fair in the hall with about 25 different stalls. One of those is [high school], RTLB, SENCO, Strengthening Families...if parents get a signature from every store, they get a free sausage sizzle for the family...And that's a way for parents to talk to the high school and the DP will be there with some students who are good role models ...a lot of the work involved in that partnership is connecting parents. (EE8)

Communication is a huge factor, communication with the families...in that first week make contact with the homes of every single student...Just ring them and touch base...I think it is extremely important. My parents know because I've rung them up so many times, they will feel they can come up to me any time if they are worried...a lot of them

*will email me, the ease of communication is really good. But it had to be worked on a lot in the beginning because some parents have a view that because they are going to secondary they are not welcome in the school anymore...Communication, I think is the hugest, most important key because you can have all the information in the world and if you don't communicate it properly to the families coming into the school then it is all lost... (EE10)*

Two interviewees passed on particular examples of beneficial outcomes arising from the district's family-focused transition initiatives:

*...his Mum had come in here personally and we showed her around the school ... she came in quite feisty actually and I thought we were going to have difficulties but she was asking hard questions but they were fair questions. ...we just walked around the school and she fell in love with the school and now we can't do anything wrong, she is just a great lady in terms of supporting us. But her son is a good example of a boy who could easily not have settled well. He's flying really. (EE4)*

*We had a parent come in who is from a family who is fairly chaotic and she was concerned about the older one who was in Year 8 and the possibility of getting some things in place for a reader-writer for him because he has diagnosed concerns ... I was quite surprised when she came in June to say what do we need to do to get that process under way. ...I think it has probably come from that whole awareness when we keep talking to the children and the liaison with the high school ...there are some great things happening. (EE6)*

### **Student Orientation**

Questionnaire data indicated widespread utilisation of orientation activities to engage students with learning support needs and/or their families. Interviews threw light on specific orientation practices; some required district collaboration, others were organised at individual school level. Orientation events included personalised school visits for families, meeting key personnel, high school for a day visits, sample lessons and introductory units about schools early in Year Nine. Sometimes connections made with families were nurtured through personal contact, for example: *"those parents have my cell phone number and they can contact me at any time"* (EE3). Other comments included:

*Having a tour of the high school, introducing the teachers to them, introducing the students to them...depends on the issues of the child but if they have a lot of fears, it takes them away. Meeting the parent and reassuring the parent as well. So it's liaising with them before they come to high school. The information from the intermediate school is absolutely critical. (EE3)*

*I think the orientation of the environment is obviously helpful but I don't think it's as important as them feeling comfortable with the people because I think, except the very, very weak, all children will find their way around a school pretty quickly. But it's the relationships with the people they are going to be working with that is the crucial thing about making them feel comfortable, I think. And it's not just the teachers, it's all the support structures we have...It's the people they are likely to be interacting with, the guidance team, the health team... (EE4)*

*Another process that we really like is bringing the kids into the school for a day. We actually really think its valuable, at the end of their last year. ...they need to come with their own cohort of kids into their future cohort of kids. So that's really key. ...they have a programme and get to use a bit of the facilities. Even stuff that we think is normal, like the canteen and what happens at lunchtime... (EE9)*

### **6.6.2b Within-School Practice**

Data available for categorisation according to individual school practice was sparse compared to that related to district processes. Exceptions were commentary offered in regard to students' timely arrival into Year Nine and practice related to professional learning, RTLB support and transition co-ordination within schools, as follows:

#### ***Timely Enrolment and Attendance***

Analysis of questionnaire and interview data thus far has revealed widespread opinion that regular attendance marks and facilitates successful transition. Secondary experts provided further detail to this area of thought, identifying attendance on Day One as a critical step for students with learning support needs and suggested that missing that day could jeopardise longer-term transition success. The extracts offered are from participants representing three different secondary schools:

*I get a really good sense of students who are settling OK and those who aren't and we get that from a whole range of internal meetings. One of the things I look at when there is a disciplinary issue is the enrolment date for the student. And it is of some interest and of some concern to me that often our most acute behaviour management issues are related to students who have not had a successful transition, or have transitioned late in the process rather than when they should have...One of the common factors, for example when we stand students down and take them to the Board, significantly more often than not, they are students who have arrived at school late. And not because they have moved into the area but because the family haven't been able to get them enrolled on time for whatever reason. ...[A while ago] I ended up standing five students down and four of*

*them had been a late enrolment and that's what made me start looking regularly when I deal with students on a behavioural issue...Its remarkable how many times they are late transition kids. It's one of the first pieces of information I look for now when I go onto the database. So, I think there is definitely a link there, but we haven't done any evaluation or research over that link but I know it's there...Absolutely, definitely with no shadow of a doubt. (EE4)*

*That comes to the real problem of the kids who don't show up until two or three weeks into the year and don't get that transition...it's those kids who are most at-risk because those are the kids that don't get comfortable...I would say they settle worse and have the biggest discipline problems, the biggest problems with their teachers ... More of them were stood down compared to the others. So the ones who came in and got the transition, did the orientation day, and other activities tended to settle in way better than the ones who showed up 2, 3, 4 weeks into the term...I think its powerful. Although it's anecdotal ... I know their names because they were always coming over my desk...I think it's very important. (EE7)*

*Generally speaking the kids who are here on time are a lot more settled...if they have done those two days they understand what the [system] is all about, they have more understanding. (EE9)*

### **Professional Development**

Little reference was made to professional development opportunities within schools, although, as previously highlighted, the emphasis on practice development at a district level was considerable. However, one expert noted greater understanding of the information transfer system had the potential to enhance outcomes, while another threw added light on the professional learning opportunity endorsed by Teacher T311, as cited in Section 6.5.2b:

*They provide some school data for learning programmes ... If schools could give them time to educate staff - to do PD with staff, it would be better. ... They can forewarn people ... bringing awareness with the [student transfer information] form ... better than a form going along cold. (EE2)*

*There is a transition co-ordinator who is a DP for the Year 9s for next year...and there has already been talk about [transition research]. At the beginning of the year we talked at the PD days before the kids came in about the misconceptions and the worries about students concerns and teachers concerns and how different they were, so we talked about that and how best to try and cater for these students beforehand...We had PD on differentiation a couple of weeks ago for a couple of days...I was quite surprised because people became quite excited and then there was all these really amazing resources that were being made... (EE10)*

### ***Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour (RTLB)***

While some cross-sector instances were offered, most examples described within-school support for students and teachers, as follows:

*...it happens very well. ...I think the RTLB mediate between different departments in high schools...someone to monitor and advocate and I think the RTLBs do that exceptionally well in the high schools and they can move between different camps in the school and advocate for children. (EE8)*

### ***Transition Co-ordination Within Schools***

Steered by district process, interviewees maintained commitment to in-house transition management through routine systems that relied upon solid professional relationships, sound transition pedagogy, had a student-focus, and were on-going. Some examples given were:

*We have a transition team which is made up of RTLB, enrolment registrar, literacy co-ordinator and the Head of Learning Support area as well, and [DP], so there is 5 of us...We meet about once a month and that's the team that is involved in the enrolment interviews, it's the team that is involved in going out to the feeder schools to get the info and it's the team that brainstorms about what we can be doing around transition to ease it, a bit of a think tank really... (EE4)*

*We also have pastoral meetings here which happen every fortnight and that is with the health nurse, the truancy officer, RTLB, one of the DPs, Head of Supported Learning, SENCO and Head of Guidance. And we will talk about students who are at-risk and for the first 2 terms it's a lot of Year 9s who are focused on. We all feed into what we know about those specific students and you get a better picture of how they are and you can cater for their needs a little more. ...you will get an email from someone if someone looks unhappy or is miserable at tutor group...comes down to communication. (EE10)*

#### ***6.6.2c Student-Focused Practice***

Expert educators espoused growing emphasis upon student-centred transition pedagogy and practice within their schooling district. This sub-section attends to reported practice with a student focus including relationship building, the provision of student-friendly information and supports, and utilising quality student information for teaching.

#### ***Building Relationships***

Data revealed the importance placed by experts upon building positive relations with families and students, particularly during enrolment, orientation, school welcomes, cultural occasions,

tutor group activities, and early lessons. One comment captures the spirit of sentiment expressed: *“I think the colleges really want to make a difference. They are trying to make sure the settling-in period for them in Term One is short and productive and then the kids can get on with their learning”* (EE5).

### ***Providing Student-friendly Information***

Participants believed the provision of accessible and relevant information to students with learning support needs before and soon after entry to high schools helped to allay fears, promoted self-confidence and gave them a sense of control in their own transition:

*Removing some of the myths and apprehensions that the kids have...Some of the myths about local high schools being big dens of iniquity, where you will get bashed up especially if you don't behave and you have to be careful. There is a lot of that going on in this community that we are trying to break down. The perception that high school is going to be harder learning when in fact it's only a level up. We have done it by having students from the [high] schools come in and talk to them, answer both off the cuff and prepared questions...it's been very successful. Talking to kids about the real life of high schools rather than the mythical life...putting it into perspective.* (EE2)

*They've got to have that [knowledge] underpinning the transition but they've got to know that they've got that underpinning the transition as well. So it has to be a conscious thing with them.* (EE4)

*...We talked [with high schools] about what our children needed and what might have been going on. Because teachers in the past have said things like, “you wait till you get to high school and you won't know” and all that sort of stuff. It's just turning it around and saying, “We want you to work hard because you need those skills.” Kids being in charge of their own learning ... We know transitions are difficult for our kids and we've got to make them the best we can, and that includes teachers having high expectations...but also the kids knowing where they have got to be.* (EE6)

### ***Support Structures***

Mentoring programmes often supplemented other supports. The reported success of structured tuakana-teina connections, either internally or externally funded, endorsed students' reports of positive relationships with older students during early days at secondary school. The following comments are illustrative:

*...meeting his mum early. She said he's got a lot of energy and we've found when he gets bored that is when a lot of the problems happen. ...He has also had one on one*

*counselling ... He's also had a Year 13 mentor - an older student, and I got that organised early on ... been very successful. He actually went away to one of the camps with that mentor. (EE3)*

*We run programmes for them that really help. The ones with real learning needs are away on a camp at the moment being mentored by our Year 13 outdoor education kids...well thinking of [one boy]...he has come ahead in leaps and bounds. Our RTLB is working with him, so I'm really proud of the teamwork that we get in this school of taking kids and really working with them. It would be nice to be 100% successful with every kid, but what we do I'm really proud of. There is room for improvement but we're getting there. (EE7)*

*There has been a mentor programme so kids that have come through from one of the local intermediates have had a mentor from outside working with them...A lot of them are no longer high risk students so it's had a good success rate. But I think it's because there are so many other structures in place. ...Every Monday my Year 9s and 10s will talk to the Year 12s and 13s about their goals. ...It's a family type atmosphere but very focused on learning still ... I have heard some of my seniors talking to my juniors about their goals and I have seen them catching up with them, saying "did you get that maths done?" The seniors take it quite seriously I think... (EE10)*

### ***Using Information to Respond to Student Needs***

Transfer information provided the basis for many student-centred responses in social, emotional, cultural, behavioural and learning domains. Such use of information has been endorsed in the literature, especially for appropriate class placement known to contribute to more settled transition (Education Review Office, 2012b; Felner et al., 1993; Galton et al, 2003; Ministry of Education, 2010a):

*...we can say we knew you were coming, in you go...it made the kids feel better, they felt welcome. So that worked. (EE1)*

*...what has happened, which is excellent, is that the most at-risk were picked up by all of [social support systems], and those students have been red flagged. A red flag means that they are not at risk of going to the board or being stood down... until the DP has spoken to Guidance or RTLB. For example we have one girl here who was quite high on the list...and this year her attendance has been shocking - she is hardly ever here. But there is a lot going on at home and we have red flagged her and she is still at school. The DP has given her a lot of rope actually; she probably wouldn't have lasted at any other school. She is getting a lot of input from social support and social services. It's holistic, whole child, ecological. ...what it has also done is shifted the mindset of senior management who looked more within a deficit model. So it's helped. A paradigm shift*

*has happened...now the deputy principals are looking favourably towards more restorative processes. (EE3)*

*...we need to make quite sure that we place them in appropriate receiving classes and appropriate receiving tutor groups. A good example is that our Samoan students are in the house that our Samoan Dean looks after...It's vital that we try and get that placement accurate to start with and that we are not moving youngsters. ...the less you end up having to move a child then obviously it's much better in terms of them settling in. ...We load information onto our database about the students, and we have a little note section in the database so we tell the staff it's there...we are a bit mindful of the self-fulfilling prophecy stuff, we are mindful of that. But at the end of the day you have to accept that you are dealing with professionals who have checks and balances in place - the form teacher, the Dean, the Senior Management Team meetings and Te Kotahitanga meetings, literacy meetings ... So I don't think we are exposing the youngsters to tinged treatment by teachers by releasing that information...the HOD of Learning Support gives a heads up to the teachers of kids with [identified needs] ... or it might be that we have alerted the school counsellor. There are a number of strategies or resources we can bring to bear in the school that can pick up those kids... (EE4)*

*...we knew they were very low in terms of their literacy and numeracy...And we've put literacy strategies in, and the Head of Maths has put in a lot of numeracy strategies...So we are starting at the point where they are...So because the kids are actively engaged in the classroom, because we know where they are at, there is less behaviour problems. ...We encourage our teachers to actually begin to do differentiation and we do integrated learning. (EE7)*

*If a child has had intervention of some sort we like to know...It's not about labelling them to expect trouble, it's about turning around and saying this type of approach works with that kid...and doing the follow up on that. (EE9)*

*When the Year 9s come in on that first week there's [tutor house] days. So the first three days of the term are not curriculum based, they are [house]-based where the students in the school are divided into five houses and the tutor groups are levelled from Year 9 to 13. So they will spend those days just with those tutor groups and it's all team building activities and working together and it culminates in an inter-[house] competition which is normally athletics. (EE10)*

*They are quite special on that first day they come in. I work with the at-risk students and I haven't actually seen the students come in and be too worried. So by the time they have had that scaffolding into the school, they are quite confident by the time they get here. (EE10)*

*All of the at-risk students have the same teacher for their core subjects...I do English, Science, Social Studies and Maths with them in the same classroom...so they still have*

*that connection with the one teacher they see a lot. [Placement] can make or break their year. A lot of the students that have been put in this class came with pretty huge warnings on them, a lot of them had had stand downs, suspensions, exclusions, but just knowing what their needs were before they came in, means I can cater for them and they are able to access the curriculum. They still have the same schemes as the other Year 9 classes but...the programme is hugely differentiated...Because you have the prior knowledge of how they were, you are able to give them that start because you can put more hooks in place for them, more rungs in the ladder when they start to fall down. ...There is a lot of flexibility in our programmes here...For example the teacher next door was teaching a huge amount of Samoan students and the project was on traditional Māori life and she changed it around so that it was focused on traditional Samoan life and they were more engaged...The quality of work that has come out is owned by the students but you can see there is a pride in that work as well, so she hasn't had many behavioural problems with those kids. I think if kids don't own their stuff then they don't feel part of the school and never really settle I guess. (EE10)*

### **6.6.3 Additional Findings**

Some aspects of disconnect within the district were apparent in general teachers' interviews. In a similar vein, some primary sector experts described what they saw as a pedagogical gap between sectors, suggesting constructive feedback from their secondary peers in the areas of information transfer, curriculum continuity and students' learning progression as opportunities for development:

*Often my staff believes that the work they have done [on transition information forms] is not valued when [students] get to college. So it's good for us to know what they actually want over there...If we can provide useful data then the staff at my school are more than willing to do that. (EE5)*

*...it's very difficult to scaffold good processes between year 8 and 9 teachers about learning outcomes and individual students learning outcomes. Where that happens I believe it really helps that child engage successfully and quickly. ...Very difficult to have a focus on how children are doing over time – longitudinally. And we have given high schools the information on the students learning for 3 years now and we are really interested in what happens to those children in Year 9, 10 and 11 but don't get anything back. (EE8)*

## 6.7 Interview Results Summary

It must be said, in terms of understanding the case, the total richness of the data set was striking; therefore the task of reducing complexity (Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003) presented a challenge. It was not possible within the confines of the current work to present an exhaustive analysis of materials collected. However, bearing in mind pointers from situational analysis (Annan, 2005; Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000), the aim was to keep students central while focussing upon systems and interactional spaces (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) and, in so doing, isolate and present the most salient findings for this unique group of students with learning support needs and of associated stakeholders in the transition between primary and secondary school. Thus, four key themes are duly presented at the end of this section and will be carried forward to discussion.

As requested, interviewees concentrated on positive aspects of transition and therefore necessarily, findings manifested an optimistic and affirmative expression of transition practice for students with learning support needs at both schooling district and personal levels. Some emerging themes from previous phases were corroborated between and within participant groupings, some were expanded, some differences emerged. Interview comments about success highlighted participants' conscientious commitment to favourable transition process and outcomes. Common success indicators raised by all interviewee groupings (albeit with differing priority) were: happy engagement in learning and school life; attendance; learning progress; the existence of positive relationships; competent student self-management in terms of behaviour and day to day organisation; and demonstration of forward thinking.

Students thought being responsible and meeting challenges important; while adult interviewees identified attendance as a critical element of successful transition. The latter notion was expanded by expert educators to include attendance on Day One, while parents and caregivers liked to see their child happy and wanting to attend school. There was general consensus among educators of the need for school and family support to be in place to ensure students' timely transition, reiterating the importance of a robust and supportive family-student-school relational triangle.

Discussion about successful transition led constructively to consideration, by participants, of what helped their transition experience and that of their offspring or students with learning support needs. What developed was some replication of thoughts but also considerable expansion of ideas about what successful transition looked like. So, as anticipated, markers of helpful practice emerged from nominated indicators of success. Moreover, considerable parallels between and within groups were evident, although some differences in prioritisation between participant groupings were found.

During interview discussion, opportunities for further practice development were sometimes broached by participants; more especially by teachers, who expressed a will and need for greater support of parental engagement in the transition process, especially at enrolment time. Also, it was thought increased opportunities for cross-sector professional collaboration related to curriculum continuity, information transfer and outcome feedback would improve transition practice. Furthermore, concerted development around timely enrolment and attendance for students with learning support needs and continued growth in student-focused transition practice were called for.

The overall impression gained was one of committed teachers who aimed to do well for their students' learning and social needs; of dedicated parents and caregivers who steadfastly supported their children, and of students who were staunch about making a positive move to high school. In response to the research question "what helps?" identified themes encompassed process, pedagogical and cognitive aspects. While those themes were inter-related, with elements of one inevitably permeating the other, the four universal themes that will form the basis for discussion in the next chapter are:

- Deliberate responsibility to the transition process;
- Purposeful and timely engagement;
- Knowledge, information, skills, and practice; and
- Support

## **6.8 Chapter Six Summary**

This chapter presented findings and thematic analysis of Phase Three interviews with 50 selected participants drawn from student, parent and caregiver, primary teacher, secondary teacher and expert groupings. Tentative themes emerging from Phase One and Phase Two questionnaire findings were carried forward and explored in greater depth seeking completeness and enhancement (Bryman (2006a) according to articulated aims for data collection within the sequential, mixed-method design. The result was a comprehensive data set that affirmed and extended findings from the previous two phases, providing rich information for analysis from which four main themes were isolated.

Part Three follows; beginning with a discussion of findings in Chapter Seven centred upon the major themes, and finishing with a summary and conclusions in Chapter Eight.

# **PART THREE**

## **DISCUSSION, SUMMARY, AND CONCLUSIONS**

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## **PART THREE**

### **DISCUSSION, SUMMARY, AND CONCLUSIONS**

Part Three of this thesis comprises two chapters.

Chapter Seven discusses findings in the context of existing literature and the key research question of what helps?

Chapter Eight concludes the thesis with a summary and conclusions of the study. Key results in response to the research question are graphically presented by way of a model; implications of those findings and other emergent issues provide the basis for practice implications that are offered next. Then, along with strengths and limitations, suggestions for further research are put forward.

# **CHAPTER SEVEN**

## **DISCUSSION**

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# CHAPTER SEVEN

## DISCUSSION

### 7.1 Introduction

Before starting the discussion it is timely to reiterate that all findings to be interpreted and examined in this chapter resulted from students', family members', and teachers' reports of their personal experiences. Those personal accounts were gathered over three sequential phases of data collection, which included questionnaire and interview methods during the transition period from primary to secondary school. The resulting data set was therefore summative, wherein each data collection phase built on the previous and contributed to the next, in line with mixed method analysis (Greene, 2007) and parallel tracks design (Li et al., 2000). With the research being strength-orientated (Maton et al., 2004; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011) and focused upon positive transition experiences, the analysis of student and family data paid particular attention to interviews with students who had reported a more positive transition relative to their peers, and the experience of their respective family members.

During interviews, participants often raised ideas in the context of concerns or suggestions for change. These matters will be afforded attention as they fit within the discussion of main themes.

This chapter examines results in the context of the literature and the key research question:

What home, school, and personal practices do students with learning support needs, parents or caregivers, and teachers from a local community of schools perceive to be helpful for transition from Year Eight to Year Nine?

First, consideration is given to success which was a supplementary focus that purposefully directed participants to examine transition in terms of positive outcomes; to orientate them towards thinking about helpful people and practice. The exploration of views about

successful transition provided an initial opportunity to investigate potential differences within the participant population. Then consideration is given to four major themes that emerged during analysis: deliberate responsibility to the transition process; purposeful and timely engagement; knowledge, information, skills, and practice; and supports.

## 7.2 Successful Transition

Common markers of successful transition mimicked general quality of school life aspects (c.f. Australian Council for Educational Research, 2015) and those related to students' engagement in school, shown by active participation in classwork, homework tasks, and extra-curricula activities; enjoying school; and making learning progress paralleled other findings (Anderson et al., 2000; Evangelou et al., 2008).

A solid family-student-school triangle was thought to situate students well in terms of moving forward; indicative of a positive move to secondary school. However, while contributing schools demonstrated many working partnerships in action, aside from some initial connections attached to administrative processes, and language units actively encouraging family participation, the lack of instances provided by secondary teachers suggested a weakening triangle after the move. Thus, while Epstein's (2009) partnership model wherein parents maintain a position of strength represents the ideal, actual findings were consistent with those found elsewhere (Cox & Kennedy, 2008; Vinson & Harrison, 2006).

Also reminiscent of previous works (Ministry of Education, 2007; Peters, 2010), the establishment of positive relations with peers and teachers was thought both means and outcome of schooling success. However, perhaps indicative of students' and family members' common desire to make a new start, preservation of friendship groupings into high school received equivocal comment: *"...he has latched onto a lot more friends since he has been there...only there a couple of days, come home and start talking about other people he had met that he didn't know from a bar of soap"* (P106). Similarly, Evangelou and colleagues (2008) found pupils soon made new friends at their new schools, while Wylie and others' (2006) showed the majority changed friendships or made a new friend during their transitional year.

Points of divergence with the literature provided food for thought. That academic progress did not emerge as the number one success marker for any post-transition grouping sat at odds with some (Anderson et al., 2000; McGee et al., 2003), although appeared more in concert with a one-step-at-a-time approach (Howard & Johnson, 2004; Ministry of Education, 2010a). The latter position seems reasonable since the initial period of transition is probably regarded as ‘early days’; a time for formative assessment. What’s more, with New Zealand Curriculum promoting a developmental stance: “The development of the competencies is both an end in itself (a goal) and the means by which other ends are achieved” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 12), and current policy (Ministry of Education, 2013e) placing emphasis upon students’ unique learning paths, it came as no surprise that features of successful transition in the current study were compatible with the five key competencies of the New Zealand Curriculum (thinking; using language, symbols, and texts; managing self; relating to others; and participating and contributing).

With few exceptions, the norm among secondary teachers, who described settled behaviour as the third most important indicator of successful transition, appeared to be that students would mature quickly into their different learning environment. However, with teachers focused upon controlling disruptive or annoying behaviour lest that interfere with classroom business - not an atypical concern (Fraser & Moltzen, 2000; Prochnow et al., 2000), a mismatch was apparent. In contrast, students, who expressed wishing to improve their behaviour for secondary school, focused more upon making a successful entry or new start; to stay out of trouble so they “*don’t get a growling*” (S13). Equally, secondary teachers saw being organised and having correct equipment or gear for activities as key characteristics of successful transition. As an example, one teacher listed key success indicators as: “*does not create disruption; follows instructions willingly; correct gear and takes part; settled into school routines; and has good habits*” (T335). Yet, students gave little thought to organisational skills.

Discrepancies between adults and students also occurred in relation to attendance. It was not surprising to find presence prioritised by teachers given emphasis within New Zealand policy (e.g. Ministry of Education 2013f) and its known contribution to schooling success (Balfanz et al., 2007; Roderick & Camburn, 1999; Wylie et al., 2006). Parents and caregivers mentioned attendance with greater frequency than academic progress, a point raised

coincidentally by a Deputy Principal, concerned that some parents looked at attendance as the marker, to the detriment of other factors:

*There is a danger that what success looks like in high school narrows enormously and for many of our families; it's if their kids are going to high school and that they're safe. And to have reduced expectations to that extent between primary and secondary is a real worry... (EE4)*

However while parents and caregivers viewed their children getting up and going to school as a marker of having made a successful move, generally, findings reflected an holistic interest and concern for their children's on-going engagement and progress. In contrast, students didn't prioritise presence; instead, successful attendance was couched in a context of having made it to class. It appeared attendance *per se* might have been somewhat of a millstone in the past; maybe it reminded them of previous issues - family interference, anxiety, trouble, "riff raffs" (S41). As Student 24 explained, successful transition for him was "*probably actually getting here*" and Student 41 thought she would have more success getting to school on time by "*having money to take the bus*".

Thus, students' orientation toward the managerial aspects of their secondary school life mismatched with expectations of their teachers. Most secondary teachers expressed lofty standards for their new charges, which, as found elsewhere (Ward, 2000), suggested the 'grace' period might be short-lived and that teachers were viewing transition as an event, rather than perhaps more constructively, as a process (Ministry of Education, 2010a). While setting the bar high might be a desirable strategy for educational success (Benner & Mistry, 2007; Ministry of Education, 2007), given accepted understanding that adolescents' development continues through their teens (e.g. Hattie & Yates, 2014), it is suggested that opportunity existed to recognise that children at transition time were not experienced high school students yet and wouldn't be three weeks into the new term, as suggested by some (T324; T403).

Whether any of the highlighted disparities created problems for students as time went by was not established; those aspects are outside the boundaries of the current research. However, with some of the participating students having experienced truancy and behavioural difficulties in the past, the potential for escalation probably existed. Moreover, knowing that

engagement variables such as lateness, attendance, and preparation impact upon long term schooling success (Finn & Rock, 1997; Reschly & Christenson, 2006), and given attendance and behaviour continue to be key concerns within New Zealand secondary schools (Ministry of Education, 2013h, 2013i), from a pedagogical point of view, successful transition might be more accessible to students were they accepted as apprentices (Rogoff, 1995) rather than professionals (Lahelma & Gordon, 1997). Others (e.g. Wylie et al., 2006) have made similar observations.

The next four sections examine the four identified themes. The first to be discussed relates to the planned actions and commitment; it is presented foremost because it was apparent in findings that this aspect underpinned all other features.

### **7.3 Deliberate Responsibility for the Transition Process**

The consistent expression of active, determined, persistent in some instances, responsibility for achieving district-wide positive transition was an outstanding feature of the data set as a whole; single-mindedness emerged as both driver and outcome. One Principal captured the spirit of district intent, saying: *“I think it [transition] is actually very, very important and it needs to be done deliberately and not accidentally”* (EE8).

Many teaching participants credited the long-running participatory, professional development project for district focus; ample comment left no doubt this facilitated initiative provided traction for district focus. The district development saw stakeholders’ knowledge of transition grow; there was enhanced understanding about the need to prepare for and be accountable for transition outcomes. Contributing teachers revealed the responsibility they shouldered, while secondary teachers reported determination in their efforts to make entry into secondary an agreeable experience for students, both socially and in the classroom.

Analysis uncovered a sense of agentic capability (Bandura, 2000); that “we know what we have to do and we’re going to do it”. From a community systems development viewpoint (Dharan, 2006; Wenger, 1998), productive interdependent effort and belief in collective power to effect desired outcomes and common interests support collective capacity (Fullan, 2010). That these factors were instrumental as positive levers for change (Ainscow, 2005)

was clear; participants noticed discernible effects, reflected as: “[school] take transition to a whole new level.” (T270); “removes the fact that kids are just numbers” (EE2); and “my feeling, anecdotally, is that this year’s Year 9 has been very, very good in the way they transitioned and the way they came into the school (EE7).

Collective leadership was demonstrated via all three secondary schools agreeing to lay aside competitive interests: “we currently support the enrolments into our local school first” (EE5). The outcome of this pragmatic strategy, which apparently put a stop to schools forwarding (“selling”) institutional interests ahead of student advantage, was an increase in enrolment rates: “[enrolment] is getting better all the time. Its communication” (EE2). Additionally, the co-ordination of enrolment and information transfer via a district plan that encouraged cross-sector partnerships was described as “child-centred good will” (EE4); for schools to work toward such organised links had been previously called for in New Zealand (McGee, 1987).

The analysis revealed considerable emphasis upon bureaucratic details. Galton and colleagues (2002) criticised schools in Great Britain for concentrating too much effort upon such arrangements, drawing attention to the need for transition foci to move beyond bureaucratic and social details to address pedagogical and learning aspects of transition. However it is suggested, within the development process that exposed educators to new ways of thinking (Ainscow, 2005; Prochnow et al., 2000), that administrative detail acted as a conduit to professional engagement, opening educators’ eyes to the wider support needs of some students and to transition beyond just settling in (Education Review Office, 2012a). Furthermore, the information transfer system and dogged emphasis upon enrolment should be seen as change makers for students, for whom the transition might have presented as risky.

This change was described as “a paradigm shift” (EE3), whereby students’ strengths were recognised, giving rise to other benefits like alternate behavioural management strategies being supported for new students. Good evidence exists (e.g. Christenson et al., 2012; Tobin et al., 1996) that positive behaviour support is more constructively carried out systemically and there were ample signals that greater attention to inclusive ideals (Booth & Ainscow, 2002) enabled a more accommodating school environment for transitioning adolescents with

learning support needs. Such findings bode well for the improvement of post-transition student outcomes.

Family engagement was prioritised by schools through a variety of means and not only at enrolment time. Many interviewed parents responded enthusiastically; encouraged, wanting to do what was right and be involved: *“When the pānui came from the school about the transition hui at the marae, I was in for that”* (P115). Like elsewhere (Bishop et al, 2003), interviewees expressed quiet determination, wanting their youngsters’ success, where perhaps they hadn’t enjoyed the same schooling opportunities. Students too articulated their determination: *“Me, whatever I do will make the difference”* (S7); they wanted to move on and were ready to accept responsibility.

While the focus of the current work was on helpful practice, a minor number of niggles were raised. The first, not new to the field of transition or cross-sector collaboration (Galton et al., 2002; Hawk et al., 1996; McGee et al., 2003; Sutton, 2000), related to teachers wishing for further opportunities for shared practice development and relationship building between primary and secondary sectors. In terms of transition practices, given the known benefits of feedback (Hattie, 2012; Timperley, Wilson, Barrar & Fung, 2007), it seemed reasonable and pragmatic when some primary teachers sought reassurance that their efforts made a difference to their students’ learning and school life at secondary school. Others found taking such matters into their own hands was useful, reporting that they or their school proactively sought feedback from current and former students or family members, as an aide to reflection and review, reporting practice modifications as a result (T265: T270).

It is proposed a further challenge existed for continuity of energy and processes, signalled by some secondary classroom teachers’ scant knowledge of transition procedures. Thus, indicative of an expertise gap, it seemed the bulk of process knowledge, especially within the secondary sector, resided with experts and thus the need for devolution of transition know-how was evident. Looking ahead, there existed the risk of good systems being lost as staff inevitably turned over.

## 7.4 Purposeful and Timely Engagement

Supported by resolute focus, district-wide commitment to stakeholder engagement emerged as a salient feature. With connectedness in childhood and adolescence critical to healthy development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Howard & Johnson, 2000), and given the significance of teachers' and others in students' micro- and mesosystems (Bishop et al., 2003; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Evangelou et al., 2008; Pumfrey & Ward, 1976; Rudduck et al., 2003), engagement may best be seen not as “an attribute of the student, but rather a state of being that is highly influenced by contextual factors – home, school, and peers...” (Furlong & Christenson, 2008, p.366). Thus, schooling engagement is dependent upon relationships and consequently, from a developmental perspective, may be seen as purposeful connectedness.

Student engagement may be viewed as outcome measure (e.g. attendance, school completion) or process, wherein positive change becomes possible through alterable factors (e.g. homework completion, school responses) and relationships (Appleton et al., 2008). As a connection between learning and the learning context, engagement facilitates successful outcomes (Barber & Olsen, 2004; Glynn et al., 2005), and has been named the “primary theoretical model for understanding dropout and promoting school completion...” (Christenson et al., 2012, p.v). Therefore, via this ecological lens, consideration of engagement has a critical place in the discussion of transition, which as a major educational juncture, offers possibilities for change (Appleton et al., 2008), and opportunity for development of strong mesosystemic links between people/s and learning (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

There is widespread agreement that robust community relationships, especially well functioning family-student-school triangles, and effective cross-sector links focused upon transition, assist positive transition experiences (e.g. Cox & Kennedy, 2008; Eccles et al., 1993; Epstein, 2007; Galton et al., 2003b; McGee et al., 2002; Peters, 2010; Power & Cotterell, 1981; Rudduck et al., 2003; Tilleczek & Ferguson, 2007; Wylie, et al., 2006). In this context, reflecting upon findings of the present engagement process during transition for students with learning support needs, their family members, and teachers, relationship development and timeliness were two features that stood out; they will now be discussed in turn.

### 7.4.1 Relationships

Understanding that district relationships were the keystone of quality transition practice and future learning engagement (Gutman & Midgley, 2000) was epitomised by the Principal who said “*We deliberately connect parents*” (EE8). Accordingly, teachers from contributing schools, who viewed transition as an on-going component of their students’ learning path, nurtured connections between school and families; parents and their children; between families and education in general.

As a result of efforts, most parent and caregiver interviewees felt included by their primary schools in planning what lay ahead for them and their children. In contrast to other reports of parents’ reticence (Bishop et al., 2003), most family members demonstrated assurance or a sense of agency (Bandura, 2000) that enabled them to initiate other useful connections at transition time. Moreover, albeit often prompted by schools, families received and discussed important transition information, so children felt, and were, nurtured during the tentative lead up to transition. That parents’ sense of self-efficacy is enhanced by supportive teachers and schools finds backing in the literature (Bandura, 2000; Eccles & Harold, 1996; Gutman & Midgley, 2000).

Students, in turn, valued the working relationship with their families and accepted their involvement. As found elsewhere (Isakson & Jarvis, 1999; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992), those who experienced the most positive outcomes at transition time (the ten interviewees) compared to their peers, seemed more in tune with their families; an endorsement of the interactive effects of strong support systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Thus, while no causal associations are inferred in the present instance, it is accepted that parents and caregivers were salient figures at transition time, while the demonstrable strength of family-school reciprocity was recognised; these connections helped.

As sources of security and support, significant others strengthen micro- and mesosystems within new contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In this regard, like others (Evangelou et al., 2008; Ministry of Education, 2010a; Watson, 2007), form or house tutors were singled out as being unique touchstones of warmth and support, so too senior students acted as mentors and school guides in the early days. Furthermore, as found in Great Britain (Galton et al., 2003), student interviewees demonstrated agentic capacity (Bandura, 2000), being purposeful about

building more constructive relationships, wanting to make a fresh start. More often than not, friendships were proactively formed on the first day, on arrival at the school gate, or in the first tutor class. These were never to be repeated moments, as described here:

*I have already found a lot of friends. I made them on the first day... at the front gate. I just came in and saw one of these boys doing shuffly dancing and I said "what is that dance?" and they said it's the shuffle... And I started doing that and they said, "hey you are good at this... by the way I'm Joe"... And they ask how old I am, and I say I'm 13 and then their other friends came and they introduced me to them and I said "thanks for introducing me", and now I have a lot of friends... when you move to a new school it can be hard to find new friends, so he helped me a lot. (S35)*

Analysis showed secondary school personnel invested considerable time establishing connections with their primary sector partners and future clientele aimed at information dissemination, enrolment, and class placement processes. In addition, wishing to become more student-focused in their approach to transition, some moves were made to go beyond mechanical details, to considering learning continuity (through some cross-sector sharing) and social integration (by way of tuakana-teina connections, both pre- and post-transition).

Thus, relationship building moved beyond simply smoothing a path for new students to being a functional mechanism aimed at assisting students' on-going learning engagement. Given consensus within the literature that schools are well-placed (Howard & Johnson, 2000; Steinberg et al., 1992), indeed, some say responsible for ensuring students' engagement in school (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Epstein, 1995; Hornby, 2000; Reschly & Christenson, 2006, 2012), the current findings are heartening. Overall, the culture of purposefulness, toward fostering productive relationships, supported primary-secondary transition and comfort levels of stakeholders.

However, while there was considerable evidence of growing reciprocity between sectors, with information transfer and enrolment processes as chief drivers, evidence was drawn still, by especially primary sector teachers of the interfering effect of sector silos (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Power & Cotterell, 1981), especially in respect of curriculum continuity and primary-secondary practice-sharing. For example: *"I don't know what goes on at [high school]. The kids are visiting there but I don't have a clue myself"* (T256). While the district transition initiative supported teachers to establish and maintain connections, this aspect of transition (and indeed general) pedagogy constituted a fracture to seamless engagement, and shouted of

opportunity, especially since it looked as if a solid foundation for future collaboration had been laid.

#### **7.4.2 Timeliness**

While relationship building and engagement were prioritised district-wide, elements of timeliness emerged as important; one related to the pragmatics of timeframes, the other to judicious allocation of time. Both of these aspects are addressed in this section.

As part of the process of transition, many distinct points of engagement within the district's yearly schedule of transition events were counted by participants as critical – parent meetings, enrolment, orientation, and the first day at school, being some examples. Within these findings, particular consistency was noticed within references about students settling in, especially in regard to the initial day of secondary school life - Day One. It seemed that being present on the first day of school was not only important from a practical (class placement, attendance) point of view; reports from numerous staff members pointed to mounting evidence, albeit anecdotal, of Day One being a critical point of connection for students with learning support needs to feel settled, comfortable, understanding of the system, and to establish bonds with their new school and peers, as articulated by Student 35 in the previous section (§7.4.1).

Wylie and colleagues (2006) found a long settling-in period was associated with negative perceptions of school life related to students' confidence, discipline and work expectations, amongst other things. In addition, settling in time was related to school placement and whether students were attending their school of choice. This latter finding was interesting in light of current results.

Many schools in New Zealand have enrolment schemes although families have the right to apply out of zone. One difficulty with this system is that often, within timeframes of acceptances and refusals of places, students do not find out about schooling placements until the last minute and, therefore might feel short-changed (Wylie et al, 2006) and may arrive at their new school either unprepared or late. This situation may be contrasted to systems which

allocate places via centralised systems so students know well in advance where they are headed (e.g. [www.schools.nsw.edu.au](http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au)).

Given experience showed “*a kid who turns up on the first day with their uniform and books ready to go has a massive advantage and that sets the tone for the whole year*” (EE7), the study district was determined to short-circuit this problem by mandating enrolment in the neighbourhood school first. Persistence, articulated by one Deputy Principal: “*I set myself a target every year as to the percentage of enrolments...I’m not going to get 100%, but certainly it’s within the 90s. That’s a goal because it drives me...It’s all about making sure they are enrolled somewhere*” (EE5), was rewarded with increased enrolments reported (EE2).

That timely provision of information enhanced decision-making at enrolment time was voiced unequivocally by parents and caregivers. However, with enrolment rates in the district still below par (EE2, EE5) further attention to parental support at that time seemed warranted. With due regard to the literature that suggests variable outcomes of transition may be reflective of other life events (Howard & Johnson, 2000; Wylie et al., 2006), that timeliness of enrolment and entry to the new secondary school environment achieved a possible ‘immunising’ effect against future hassles was put compellingly:

*...the first day at school regardless of when they are enrolled, that first day at school is another major day in their transition lives. I think it’s a huge day in their life...the focus on that day is very much, very much child-centred because everyone is trying their hardest to make the kids feel welcome. I can’t defend this, but the reality of them getting into the routine of the delivering of curriculum throughout the next 4 terms, they never get that total focus that they get on that one day again. So it’s gone forever and that’s pretty big. I think it’s a pretty significant issue really for all schools. But for us particularly. (EE4)*

Given students not able to attend their school of choice may find it difficult to settle (Wylie et al., 2006), it is suggested that factors of feeling unprepared for school placement or arriving late (after the first day) warrant further investigation. That exploration might also contemplate the significance of pōwhiri on the first day of the school year, as one teacher did:

*I personally feel [latecomers] take longer to settle in well. ...what happens is it’s building relationships...first you need to acknowledge or accept the school as a whole, and then it*

*comes down to individual...what happens with [latecomers], goes the other way around. So maybe the school needs to work on that part, communicating to the parents and the students who are coming why it's important to be part of pōwhiri.* (T392)

So now, introduced by the comment above, to the second significant element of timeliness and engagement, that of finding time.

Pōwhiri has been introduced in the current context as a formal welcome. For all three participating secondary schools, pōwhiri marked the first day of the schooling year; an event where personal connections were made possible; a time to welcome students and their families onto the school grounds. In reality however, pōwhiri “extends well beyond a reception for visitors. It is an encounter calculated to reduce space and distance between groups and to explore the basis of relationships” (Durie, 2003, p.53); an inclusive event wherein differences and commonalities are recognised, and reciprocity, respect, trust and collaboration are sought (Glynn & Bevan-Brown, 2007).

Durie (2005) suggested pōwhiri is about mutual respect, rapport and relationship, but that the latter feature is the most important, so establishing engagement can't be rushed. Accordingly, time is important to pōwhiri; but not being on time, or keeping to time, or running out of time. In pōwhiri, time is not spent; it is given, provided, or expanded (Berryman & Batemen, 2008; Durie, 2005) - building relationships takes time. For Māori, meeting *kanohi ki te kanohi* on marae or during pōwhiri, is core tikanga for making effective connections and establishing relationships between people/s (Bishop et al., 2003; Graham, 2003); furthermore, “a marae encounter becomes robust when people leave feeling stronger than when they arrived” (Durie, 2001, p.82).

Within the milieu of the current study and read alongside previous references to Day One, it is suggested that the positive repercussions of pōwhiri for not only Māori, but for all representative members of this schooling district regardless of ethnicity, cannot be underestimated (T392). Acclaim for pōwhiri was resounding from students: “*The principal welcomed us and said it was a pleasure to have us in the school. It's helpful...*” (S20), and from family members who found the respectful process of engagement, of meeting face-to-face, reassuring: “*...I saw the teacher's face. They smile, give them smile, yeah. It's alright for us*” (P120).

Only one comment recommended a change to the process and was made by way of constructive criticism calling for an additional step in pōwhiri; that of handing over: “...we hope you will look after them the same and take care of them...I think we feel a bit disconnected...We are actually handing our taonga that we have worked with for so many years...” (T221). The process of handing over is common in Māori tikanga, representing the passing of responsibility for something precious (in this case a group of students) to the other party while at the same time articulating aroha and respect for the group moving on. Handing over enables the first party to put some fears to rest; given some of the shared worries of primary teachers about how their children would fare at secondary school, the suggestion appeared to have merit.

A further proposition is offered. Of the two processes, transition and pōwhiri, the latter has much to offer the former. Pōwhiri encapsulates a moment of transition, from alien to friend, from a place of unknown to one of greater comfort. Therefore, in accordance with current wisdom that transition be as regarded a process (Education Review Office, 2012a; Ministry of Education, 2010a), and following Berryman and Bateman’s (2008) suggestion that concepts of pōwhiri might usefully be applied to other occasions of engagement with good effect, it is submitted that thinking about allowing time or the endowment of time, would provide a helpful approach to the transition of students with learning support needs. Further, that to focus upon a short timeframe or set a pre-determined schedule for transition practice, in the classroom especially, ignores the needs of those who may require time to be extended for transition learning (Durie, 2005).

## 7.5 Knowledge, Information, Skills, and Practice

Given previously discussed themes of determined process and purposeful connection, it was unsurprising that data revealed a district commitment to being well-versed in the ‘why?’ and ‘how?’ of transition and to ensure quality information was available to assist students’ transition. This drive was summed up in the comment of one expert educator thus:

*The more knowledge we have about the student, the better the transition process was, from our perspective. The more knowledge the student has about the people that were in the receiving school, the better the transition process was. By more knowledge, I’m talking about familiarity really and that would go for the families of these students as*

*well...that would apply to all students but it becomes exponentially more important to the vulnerable students in the transition process. ...It can be summed up by: mutual knowledge, their knowledge of us, our knowledge of them, the families' knowledge of us, our knowledge of the families, their familiarisation with the people, sound relationships, a comfortable enrolment process that they feel secure in, an understanding of the importance of that first day at school. (EE4)*

Accordingly, the two features to be discussed in this section relate to learning for transition, and using information to assist schools to cater appropriately for students.

### **7.5.1 Learning for Transition**

Given recognised connection between responsive teaching in transition, seamlessness and student adjustment (Education Review Office, 2012a), the district emphasis upon collective understanding of transition pedagogy for children with learning support needs, was well founded. While it has been suggested that separate pedagogy runs counter to inclusiveness (Davis et al., 2004), the current findings showed emphasis upon students with learning support needs provided focus for learning and did not limit scope. For example, new emphases like engagement of families in enrolment became 'mainstream' and, as already discussed in the previous section enhanced transition in the district generally. Thus, while Florian's (2006) findings suggest inclusiveness may best be achieved by adaptation of mainstream methods for those in special education, it appears that the reverse might also be so.

The long-running Ministry of Education initiative provided helpful facilitation (Piggot-Irvine, 2006), but the "nuts and bolts" of systemic operations, including effective community relationship building and in-house sharing, were sustained via the efforts of an area-wide group of teachers and managers. While such externally sponsored initiatives have been shown to produce mixed outcomes (Timperley et al., 2007), in the present instance, analysis suggested a profitable alignment of critical factors (Ainscow, 2005; Bandura, 2000; Fullan, 2010): effective shared leadership; group effort; a mutual and district-wide vision; a key priority of process development for the betterment of transition outcomes of students with learning support needs; and a growing knowledge and sound skill base. Such features are known to support collective efficacy (Adelman & Taylor, 2000; Bandura, 2000) and this characteristic was evident within the buoyancy of some educator's reports: "...we are

*breaking ground and so it's started us thinking about where we would like to go from here"* (T221).

In addition to systemic development, analysis showed that often, learning opportunities for transition encompassed whole school communities wherein families, students and often partner schools came together. The reasoning behind this inclusive practice was put elegantly by one teacher: *"...so that not only the teachers of Year 8 but also the staff as well as the tamariki and the whānau might be able to move amongst that transition a lot easier than what they have found before"* (T221). Information supply for families was approached, not merely by way of a school handout; instead, information provision was viewed as a valuable means of personal connection. Furthermore, learning was viewed by some as a two-way process: *"...I ask them what things do you want your child to be prepared for when they go to high school...what would you like to know about the transition to high school...critical, that's what home-school partnership is* (T263).

Families generally want to maintain an active part in schooling matters (Bishop et al., 2003; Evangelou et al., 2008; Education Review Office, 2012a) and in the current study many family members indicated they wanted information, to be able to share the experience with their children from a place of understanding, and to be reassured that they were doing all they could to make this step a positive one (P115, P103, P121). With communicating transition information to families identified as a significant responsibility for schools (Ministry of Education, 2010a), the present families indicated the strategically offered information and learning opportunities heading into enrolment enabled them to make informed decisions, helped them to understand and manage, to feel better prepared and to cope with the tasks placed upon them. Furthermore, they valued knowing how and where to seek support, should it be needed in the future, pragmatically building their support systems. The findings suggested that many parents and caregivers, like staff members, experienced a greater sense of personal agency (Bandura, 2000); given the many proactive instances of engagement (to be discussed in the next section), it appeared that being informed and included enabled them to feel more proficient and positive about the transition process.

Students too, reported finding information about future learning demands and transition processes helpful. As Nisbet and Entwistle (1969) found, orientation efforts were

appreciated, but still, school environments were confusing so others' help was called upon in the early days (S24). Contrary to teachers' concerns, but like findings elsewhere (Power & Cotterell, 1981), this was not perceived by most students to be an ongoing issue. It was not clear whether their quick adaptation was the result of pre-transition orientation efforts or familiarisation strategies on arrival at the new school, but these findings beg the question whether the reported pre-transition efforts devoted to students' introduction to new environments (e.g. bussing students to their new schools) were warranted. Consequently, more utilisation of senior students for example, since the juniors relished their involvement, may be a more pragmatic approach to environment and staff familiarisation. Furthermore, with environment worries quickly dissipating, time might be more profitably directed, by secondary schools especially, to areas of more persistent concerns related to schoolwork and interpersonal matters (Berliner, 1993, EE4, Wylie et al., 2006); with the proviso that students who display extreme trepidation did benefit from individual visits with accompanying family: *"...if they have a lot of fears, it takes them away"* (EE3).

Attention has been drawn to the need for students to enter secondary school prepared (Wylie et al., 2006). With respect to contributing schools in this study, time was assigned to teaching transition, not in a one-off manner, but rather as part of a continuum of learning toward change, a gradual process started months or years before; an essential element of students' learning; part of the curriculum (T263; T214). Moreover, there was cognisance of the need to ensure students' connection with learning purpose (Bandura, 1997, 2000; Gibbs & Poskitt, 2010): *"They've got to have that [knowledge] underpinning the transition but they've got to know that they've got that underpinning the transition as well. So it has to be a conscious thing with them"* (EE4).

Transition issues including those related to relationships, learning, and personal management were approached realistically by primary and intermediate teachers as learning opportunities (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004). One student with pre-transition worries about scary high school teachers was taught by his primary teacher how to respond to grouchy staff members. Another said *"they told us last year that the reason why a teacher growls is because they want you to learn and they are doing their job"* (S12).

In contrast to primary sector results, but analogous to other findings (Hawk & Hill, 2004; Ward, 2000), there was limited transitional knowledge within the secondary teacher masses. While care devoted to certain events on the transition timeline (e.g. enrolment, first day) ensured adolescents were happy and feeling settled in their new school environment, few teachers paid attention to teaching skills for transition; exceptions were references to teaching rules and routines. Even some tutor teachers, holding considerable responsibility for settling new students reported having received no extra guidance about how to approach transition with students. The apparent result of this breach was that accountability for handling transitional needs of students resided with experts (managers, RTLB, and support staff), whose interview contributions indicated a combined, rich repository of knowledge.

Given students' adaption to high school can take months (Wylie et al., 2006), and the second phase of data collection in the present study occurred around six weeks into the first term, it might have been expected that students would have gaps in their knowledge regarding organisational details, attendance and class preparation. However, since transition learning (orientation administration) in general classrooms was fast-tracked (T403), probably in response to syllabi pressures (Lahelma & Gordon, 1997; Smyth et al., 2000) clearly the mismatch of transitional expectations between teachers and students was not being addressed. With general classroom teachers being critical players in educational outcomes (Hattie, 2012; Roderick & Camburn, 1999) and knowing that "helping students to make sense of what is happening, and supporting the change is crucial to minimising interruptions to their education" (Education Review Office, 2012a, p. 17), this situation manifested a pedagogical gap, the expression of which, in the current study, was sometimes dumbfounding (T341).

These findings raise some important points. First, school practice appears to mirror current Governmental de-emphasis of primary-secondary transition (Ministry of Education, 2013e). Second, with the transitional needs of 'priority students' emphasised, general management of students' transitional needs resides within an "expert" domain of knowledge rather than within the jurisdiction of general classroom teachers (Florian, 2006). Third, it is possible that shifting the responsibility of students' adaption during the early days at secondary school to experts or support staff reinforces general classroom teachers' feelings of inadequacy (Bandura, 1997; T328) and exacerbates a pedagogical gap related to teachers' abilities of catering for diverse needs (Kane, 2005; O'Neill et al, 2009). Fourth, by repositioning the

transition spotlight upon primary preparation, it is possible that the students who continue to struggle even after the best preparatory efforts, become victims of an imperfect transition system (Bauman, 2007; Slee, 2009).

It would be constructive, therefore, to think of transition as domain-specific and an essential element of general teacher pedagogy (Florian, 2006); to take a lead from primary and intermediate teachers who, by incorporating transition into their everyday toolkit, “*teach it*” (T228). Furthermore, in that respect, since aspects of adaption were addressed pre-transition, as indeed was the case for orientation, findings suggest that important management aspects are context specific and need to be revisited on arrival at high school. Thus, it is suggested that in the context of transition as a change process (Anderson et al., 2000; Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Felner et al., 1993; McGee et al., 2003; Smith et al., 2006), there is scope for secondary teachers to be supported so transition learning/teaching may be embraced in more holistic, inclusive and student-centred fashion (Adelman & Taylor, 2000). Such an extended scaffolded approach (Howard & Johnson, 2004; Vygotsky, 1986) would enhance students’ prospects of a successful adaptation to secondary school (Berliner, 1993; Wylie et al., 2006).

### 7.5.2 Information for Transition

Despite its infancy, the information transfer system was nominated by teachers and managers as one of the districts’ most assistive and key transition mechanisms. With consideration of possible expectation effects that using prior information might bring (EE4), it was used to coordinate students’ entry into secondary schools, particularly by way of class placement determined according to students’ learning history, abilities, strengths, prior teaching concerns, and teaching strategies that had worked in the past<sup>4</sup>. This finding is not unique to the current study (Education Review Office, 2012a, 2012b); similar systems elsewhere have been shown to assist smooth transition (Ministry of Education, 2010a). The general sentiment expressed by experts was that “[*placement*] can make or break their year” (EE10), with wide agreement among learning co-ordinators that “*we are certainly getting the classes right, a whole lot better*”, and “*we pre-empt problems...*” (T369). Although, on balance, there was

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<sup>4</sup> The literature (e.g. Bishop et al., 2003; Hattie, 2012; Hornby & Witte, 2014; Howard & Johnson, 2004) reflects considerable discussion about this practice however being outside the scope and direct interest of the study, the topic area was not pursued.

open acknowledgement that new systems were not perfect: “...*what we do I’m really proud of. There is room for improvement but we’re getting there*” (EE7).

Additionally, on the basis of information, supports were put in place for students considered vulnerable in the transition and many successful instances of wraparound responses were recounted, including monitoring by the RTLB, and student placement in homeroom learning situations, or extension classes. Analogous use of information was reported by a more recent study (Education Review Office, 2012b). RTLB often played a part establishing students in their new school and one ‘success’ example was offered:

*...I picked up those two because they were the most at-risk in the intermediate schools. They were the most at risk of being excluded and not fitting in at high schools. They were punching walls, hitting kids and one had attempted [self harm] ...They are both at school and both doing really well ... I will be monitoring them right through to Year 11. They are on my case load, just monitoring.* (EE3)

Since disengagement can be arrested (Catterall, 1998; Galton et al., 2003) and success made more likely if students’ learning needs are accommodated and strengths acknowledged (Alton-Lee, 2003; Bishop et al., 2003, Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996), the use of prior learning information is advocated (Education Review Office, 2012a). However, in contrast to expressed opinion that information enhances schools’ ability to receive and cater for new students’ learning, social and other needs, probably facilitating students to engage and settle better (Wylie et al, 2006), school transfer of information systems have on the whole come up short on collecting quality information and using it in appropriate, student-centred ways (Education Review Office, 2012b). Outcomes cited include poorly assigned class placements, resulting in affective and adjustment issues (Ministry of Education, 2010a).

Bearing in mind findings that Day One was a significant day for making initial, and hopefully enduring connections, it was perhaps predictable that class placement featured large as a district priority; they wanted to get it right first time. As a recorder and interpreter of participants’ views, no evaluative comment is offered herein as to the robustness of information passed between schools, or system efficacy according to standards utilised by the Education Review Office (2012b). However, analysis revealed the following factors:

- emphasis upon class placement for “differentiation of students” (Howard & Johnson, 2004, p.1) rather than the curriculum (T301; T369);
- concerns about the utilisation of information (Education Review Office, 2012a, 2012b; T214);
- secondary staff members either unaware or choosing not to access information (T380; T461);
- variable influence of information on general classroom teacher practice (Education Review Office, 2012a, 2012b);
- teachers’ suggestions that more needed to be done to help them use information and adapt the curriculum (T301);
- teachers’ concerns about the students’ abilities to sustain the required level of application for secondary school (T228; T348; T371);
- teachers’ feelings of inadequacy to cope with students’ varied needs (Avramidis et al., 2000; T328);
- accessing support systems as a system default, rather than on a ‘need to know’ basis (Florian & Rouse, 2001; T351); and,
- use of referral systems to deal with ‘student’ issues rather than seeing problems within the environment (T353; T380) or “for teachers to solve” (Florian, 2006, p. 26).

Therefore, a number of questions remain: Are information systems being used to their full potential? Is enough being done to support secondary teachers to use information to address the diverse needs of their new students? Is students’ learning engagement and continuity being jeopardised? (Bellert & Graham, 2006; Education Review Office, 2012a, 2012b; T214; Howes et al., 2005; Roderick & Camburn, 1999).

As already noted, some development on differentiation and curriculum continuity had occurred in the district, and furthermore, the curriculum of Te Kotahitanga (Glynn et al., 2005) addressed some of the previously cited aspects. These systemic supports received acclaim by teaching participants. Furthermore, given known efficacy of wraparound support (Education Review Office, 2012a) and services (Christenson et al., 2012; Florian & Rouse, 2001) the aforementioned comments are not intended to belittle the comprehensive support systems operating within schools or the work of RTLB. Moreover, remarks in no way infer

that schools were either unaware, or inactive in their efforts to cater for students' learning and other needs on entry to secondary school.

However, given teachers' feelings of efficacy impacts their classroom decision-making (Prochnow et al., 2000; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996), referral judgments and class placement determinations (Bandura, 1997; Soodak & Podell, 1993), these findings reinforce long-standing concerns re students' learning continuity (Galton and colleagues, 1999; MacBeath et al., 2006; Ministry of Education, 2010a) and teacher pedagogy (Barber & Olsen, 2004; Bartak & Fry, 2004; Feeney & Best, 1997). In respect of the current student population, who were not representative of students with the most severe needs, the aforesaid observations are significant and emphasise the need for specialised knowledge and skills of transition pedagogy in secondary schools that is practiced by all general teachers. It is worthwhile to note that similar assertions have been made elsewhere (Durling, Ng, & Bishop, 2010).

## 7.6 Supports

With support being the last feature of transition to be discussed and given considerable overlap of themes, most features of support have already been introduced to this discussion. Being last by no way belittles the significance of support as a helpful aspect in the current representation of positive transition process and practice. Its place in this discussion reinforces that support must be grounded on good evidence, systems and practice. So, by way of reminder, analysis revealed supportive systems, incorporating elements of both the giving and receiving of support, were prominent features of helpful practice. From an ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), just as transition has emerged as both event and process, both proximal and distal aspects of support were found to be assistive for transitional experiences for students with learning support needs, their families and teachers.

In consideration of transition as a process driven by schools, efficacious school and teacher practices have thus far referenced schools' commitment to improving primary-secondary transition through meaningful relationships, increasing knowledge and skill bases, endeavouring to be more student-focused, purposeful engagement of families and students, and sharing practice with colleagues when possible. Widespread endorsement was found for professional learning opportunities which were inclusive of student-family-school

stakeholders. That resolute leadership was a foundational enabler of district processes driving positive systemic growth was an important finding, but not unique to this study (Cox & Kennedy, 2008; Education Review Office, 2012a; Hawk & Hill, 2004).

In regard to the important moments in transition, collaboration between schools, and purposive support of families at enrolment time, profitably concentrated upon improving enrolment rates to ensure students' future presence at high school. The focus upon relationship building as a conduit to engagement was epitomised by pōwhiri. In addition, information transfer was identified as a key support mechanism for students' entry into high school, as follows:

*The immediate positive is that we have kids in school. Because all the ones I will flag are the kids that I have serious concerns about; whether it be attendance which will influence academic achievement and social development. If I can get those ones actively at school and I know the colleges are catering to the needs that we had previously discussed and identified, those kids are going to perform better. If they perform better I think this schooling district will be doing much better; we raise the achievement of the entire schooling district. (EE5)*

One of the positive outcomes of the suite of supports experienced by many study participants was the experience of efficacy and personal agency that came with being resourced, informed, and assisted (Power & Cottrell, 1981; Watson, 2007); they knew what to expect (Bandura, 1997). An exception within the study population was among secondary teachers, many of whom did not feel efficacious, suggesting classroom practice would be compromised (Midgley et al., 1989; Rutter et al., 1979) and students' adaption possibly put at risk (Bandura, 1997; Soodak & Podell, 1993; Ministry of Education, 2010a).

Nonetheless, the sense of 'I can do this' among student interviewees was evident in their goal-setting behaviour and positive focus (Gibbs & Poskitt, 2010; Wentzel, 1998). They felt boosted by their old teachers, while teachers at their new schools were warm and welcoming and concerned about their particular learning needs; moreover senior students added to their support group. As found elsewhere (Cox & Kennedy, 2008; Evangelou et al., 2008; Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009), friendship networks featured within adolescents' supportive microsystems, however in consideration of family-student-school triangle, the two sources of support considered most pertinent for students with learning support needs during transition were

teachers/schools and their families (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Epstein, 1987, 1995; Rutter, 1987); it is the latter to which the discussion now turns.

### 7.6.1 Family Supports

Research has consistently shown a connection between family influences, including family involvement, support, and parenting style, with positive educational experiences and achievement (Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987; Epstein, 1987; McGee et al., 2003; Paulson et al., 1998; Rumberger, 1995; Steinberg, et al., 1992). Current families who approached the transition with intention found support forthcoming from extended family members, siblings, cousins, ex-partners, and grandparents who collaborated to fulfil required administration, accompany children to school functions or to offer guidance during their first days. Furthermore, churches and schools provided helpful guidance in the form of personal involvement and information at whānau hui and enrolment events, for example. In turn, many parents and caregivers were proactive about making connections with schools and felt able to bolster their children and nurture them effectively into their next stage of education. The general sentiment of willing support was captured by this parent:

*...this triangle that we have for the child and then the teachers and the parents need to work alongside each other. ...Teachers cannot change your child's education alone, they need the parents to be alongside and that is part of why we are very close to the school. ...when there is something concerning our children in school I will ring the school or the DP, I don't care who, as long as I get through and they can hear what I'm trying to say. Because at the end of the day it's the wellbeing of my child - that is the foremost. (P142)*

Perhaps reflective of this particular population's prior learning histories, some parents and caregivers went to extraordinary lengths to support their child's transition. For example, Parent 115 attended a shared information session for teachers, students and families; had a private visit to the school to see the language unit; attended the pōwhiri on the first day; ensured her son attended each day; and kept in touch with the D.P. after the transition in case problems arose. She was frank about her motivation: *"I don't want to be a statistic, I don't want my children to be statistics."* Given dropout behaviour is significantly influenced by levels of educational expectations in the family, and parental support for learning (Rumberger, 1995), it must be said these efforts were not unsound. Benner and Mistry (2007)

reported even in the absence of appropriate school responses to students' needs, parental involvement was found to produce an insulative effect.

Another parent just *“bowled in and said, ‘I’m here to listen in and see how things run and I just want to sit at the back of the class...I was the only parent there”* (P106). It was a lovely instance of a school's accommodating and supportive stance on Day One enabling a parent to go away having developed a level of trust in the school, thinking *“He came across as a real nice teacher ... I was real confident in what he said”* (P106).

While not all family members managed the aforementioned level of input, nonetheless, without exception all parent and caregiver interviewees ensured a connection with their children and schools at his time, and modelled their support of education through reading, checking about their child's day, personal involvement in learning, attending meetings, getting involved in sport or management, and keeping in touch with schools. With parental involvement associated with students' positive attitudes toward school (Paulson et al, 1998), in the light of the support provided by participant families, it was perhaps unsurprising that the young interviewees had completed, what they viewed to be, a successful transition.

## **7.7 Chapter Seven Summary**

This chapter presented a discussion and interpretation of study findings, with reference to relevant literature; first considering success and then focused upon systems and practices that facilitated transition for students with learning support needs and other stakeholders.

Overall, success features showed considerable alignment to key competencies of the New Zealand Curriculum. Working partnerships within the school community were identified as prerequisite to successful student engagement however findings indicated gradually weakening family-school connections into the transitional year. Regular attendance was considered by adults to be a pre-requisite factor, although students placed less emphasis on this aspect. Teachers viewed students taking advantage of opportunities willingly and getting along with others in a positive light.

Four key themes were discussed in the context of the literature. These were: deliberate responsibility for the transition process; purposeful and timely engagement; knowledge, information, skills, and practice; and support. A graphic representation of these themes is presented as a concluding model in Chapter Eight. In addition, arising out of the discussion were factors that provided food for thought in respect of ways to further improve existing systems or new ways of approaching practice; these aspects indicate possible avenues for development and are taken forward to the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

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# CHAPTER EIGHT

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

### 8.1 Introduction

This chapter returns to the objective of the study and the research question. Starting with a brief synopsis of general findings including aims, methodology and key result, a model of findings is forwarded as a starting point for dialogue according to the study objective of wishing to make a positive contribution to practice within schools. The chapter underscores implications for transition practice for schools according to the study's findings and identified opportunities for improvement. Strengths and limitations are outlined and recommendations for future research are offered.

### 8.2 Synopsis of the Research

This thesis examined transition from primary to secondary school. The exploratory study originated from an identified paucity of New Zealand research that considered experiences of students for whom transition represented a time of vulnerability (Cox & Kennedy, 2008; McGee et al., 2003; Thomson, 2004), and paid mind to recommendations from the literature to listen to the views of students (Booth, 2009; McGee et al., 2003; Rudduck et al, 1996), parents (Adelman and Taylor, 2000; Hornby, 2000; Lumby, 2007) and teachers (Adelman and Taylor, 2000; Hargreaves, 1996), as key partners in transition. The research question was:

What home, school, and personal practices do students with learning support needs, parents or caregivers, and teachers from a local community of schools perceive to be helpful for transition from Year Eight to Year Nine?

The research aimed to gain unique insight of transitional experiences from key stakeholder groupings; particularly from representative students, who did not meet prerequisite criteria for on-going support in the mainstream (Ministry of Education 2012c); whose learning histories in primary school indicated the road through to secondary school might be rough. It was

intended that findings would offer possibilities for educational practice improvement (Crotty, 1998; Rorty, 2002; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011).

Mindful of the acknowledged benefits of strength-focused research and practice (Maton et al., 2004; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011) and systemic approaches (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000), the study was framed to intentionally focus upon helpful and facilitative practices to provide a fresh approach to the study of transition (Cox & Kennedy, 2008; McGee et al., 2003; Thomson, 2004). The pragmatic approach, incorporating questionnaire and interview data collection methods, reflected commonsense philosophy well suited to strength-based inquiry (Greene & Hall, 2010; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004) and the subject area (Berliner et al., 2008; Cox & Kennedy, 2008).

Representing the broadening effect of triangulation (Flick, 1992; Morrow, 2005), interviews extended questionnaire results, adding richness and depth to results. Simultaneously, emergent findings were cross-referenced during the interview phase according to the more traditional sense of triangulation (Cohen et al., 2007; Greene et al., 1989; Merriam, 1998) and exceptions were identified. Thus, the combination of divergent and convergent analyses provided varied insight, while at the same time contributed to the data quality process.

With analysis approached from a systemic standpoint (Annan, 2005), helpful transition practice was found to be underpinned by a district sense of commitment; purposive engagement; targeted information sharing and learning for transition; and supportive guidance. The combination of shared knowledge, consistent processes and widespread supports were shown to be facilitative factors for students with learning support needs, their families, and teachers; enhancing not only students' sense of future security and/or control (Bandura, 2000) but supporting stakeholders' personal efficacy in transition (Fullan, 2010).

Additionally, a number of possibilities or opportunities for district development that might help in the future were raised in the analysis. Those aspects of practice related to: reception time and process; teaching transitional skills to students in secondary school; cross-sector collaboration connected with continuity of learning and supporting families during enrolment; the use of information transfer systems and information in secondary schools; teacher

pedagogy for transition; and, support for general secondary teachers' classroom practice in relation to catering for students' diverse needs.

### **8.3 Summary of Findings**

Generally, students with learning support needs expressed increasing positivity in attitude as they moved through the initial transition period; findings consistent with previous research of general student populations in New Zealand (Cox & Kennedy, 2008) and in the United Kingdom (Evangelou et al., 2008; Galton et al., 2003). Transition was valued by family members and students as a time to move on; for students to demonstrate increasing maturity. Key findings in response to the research questions are summarised in the next five subsections.

#### **8.3.1 Success**

Generally teachers thought students' open demonstration of self-management skills, positive demeanour, participation in school life, and engagement in learning were indicative of students' successful transition. Adults recognised the importance of students being present at the commencement of the new school year and thereafter attending school on a regular basis. With students placing less emphasis upon attendance and managerial aspects of student life, it was suggested that transition might profitably be regarded as an apprenticeship process (Rogoff, 1995). Since unsettled transition is associated with possible future difficulties (Wylie et al., 2006), these discrepancies signalled opportunity for development.

#### **8.3.2 Deliberate Responsibility to the Transition Process**

Stakeholder groupings shared a sense of responsibility to make the transition to secondary school a success. The area-wide push to improve processes, assisted by Government backing, raised the profile of transition, which helped the district develop a sense of collective capability (Fullan, 2010), confidence, and enthusiasm approaching transition (Bandura, 2000). Enrolment and transition processes were enhanced by robust family-school connections (Eccles & Harold, 1996; Gutman & Midgley, 2000) nurtured by schools' cross-sector co-operation (P115). Possibilities for enhancement of cross-sector continuity process were identified, with contributing school teachers suggesting feedback from their secondary

colleagues would help them improve their processes and curriculum alignment. In addition, while those with transition responsibility in secondary schools held a wealth of knowledge, it appeared that general classroom secondary teachers' knowledge of transition practice was either lacking or not prioritised, highlighting the need for devolution of expertise.

### **8.3.3 Purposeful and Timely Engagement**

An emphasis upon purposeful and timely engagement by schools fostered the family-student-school triangle to good effect, with families feeling connected to the transition process (EE8; Epstein, 1995; P106). As part of student-focused practice, schools developed successful working partnerships concentrating mainly on enrolment and transition administrative processes. Some managers and teachers wanted more contact and the interfering nature of learning silos was raised again as an impediment to practice sharing and curriculum continuity (Galton et al., 2002).

A number of moments along the transition timeline emerged as critical engagement points. The first being enrolment when positive outcomes resulted from greater community engagement and targeted assistance for families, although some believed there was still room for improvement, that continued support of families was critical to maintain enrolment rates and on-going district co-ordination of transition was required (EE2, EE5; EE8). Second, Day One at school was found seminal, never to be repeated, when the process of making connections and forming new bonds began; a 'make-or-break' occasion. Since late arrival at the beginning of the school year appeared to increase the likelihood of students being unsettled (EE4; EE7; T392), it was proposed there was good reason for more investigation down this avenue. The third moment was reception. In the present context, pōwhiri was accepted, not merely as a welcome (Ministry of Education, 2010a), but as an occasion of consequence that set the foundation for future relationship development and engagement. It was further suggested that the opportunity to "hand over" at pōwhiri departing students would enhance students' reception and allay their teachers' concerns (T221). A lesson to be taken from pōwhiri is that using the concept of allowing time and providing time so that newcomers feel comfortable, has merit (Berryman & Bateman, 2008). This association has applicability to transition as both event and process (Appleton et al., 2008; Ministry of Education, 2010a), because settling in requires time (Education Review Office, 2012a).

### **8.3.4 Knowledge, Information, Skills, and Practice**

Knowledge about transition enabled participants to understand, make decisions, apply themselves to the work of transition, and feel as if they were doing a good job (P115; S20; S41; T221). Given the district development focus, this outcome of demonstrated efficacy (Bandura, 1997, 2000) cannot be described as accidental (Fullan, 2006).

Information transfer was hailed as a useful and pragmatic tool to assist secondary schools cater for students, by way of class placement mainly, but also through support provision. Effective information transfer aids transition (Wylie et al, 2006), but not all secondary teachers felt efficacious in regard to preparing for or responding to students' diverse learning needs, with or without information. Given the heterogeneity of students' learning needs on entry to secondary school and responsibility for their learning residing with the teacher (Florian & Rouse, 2001), knowledge of curriculum differentiation is critical. Such gaps in secondary teachers' general pedagogical knowledge and transitional knowledge suggested students' progress might be put in jeopardy (Bandura, 1997; Soodak & Podell, 1993; Ministry of Education, 2010a).

Clearly, teachers require greater support to build up skills of differentiation and adaptation of the curriculum and to develop a pedagogy for transition, to ensure the particulars of their school's transition processes, the ways to support their students to adapt to high school life, and the topic areas around transition that require specific teaching are clearly understood. In this way students' chances of positive adaptation to secondary school will be enhanced (Berliner, 1993; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Vygotsky, 1986).

### **8.3.5 Supports**

Elements of both receiving and giving support were helpful and student-family-school partnerships flourished when schools took the lead. Family bonds based upon strong educational support in the home, shared understanding of transition, and shared responsibility for transition supported efficacious behaviour at transition time (P106; P115; P124; P141) and were foundational to adjustment (Isakson & Jarvis, 1999). Senior students and tutor teachers were singled out as particularly helpful school alliances (Cox & Kennedy, 2008; S21; S41).

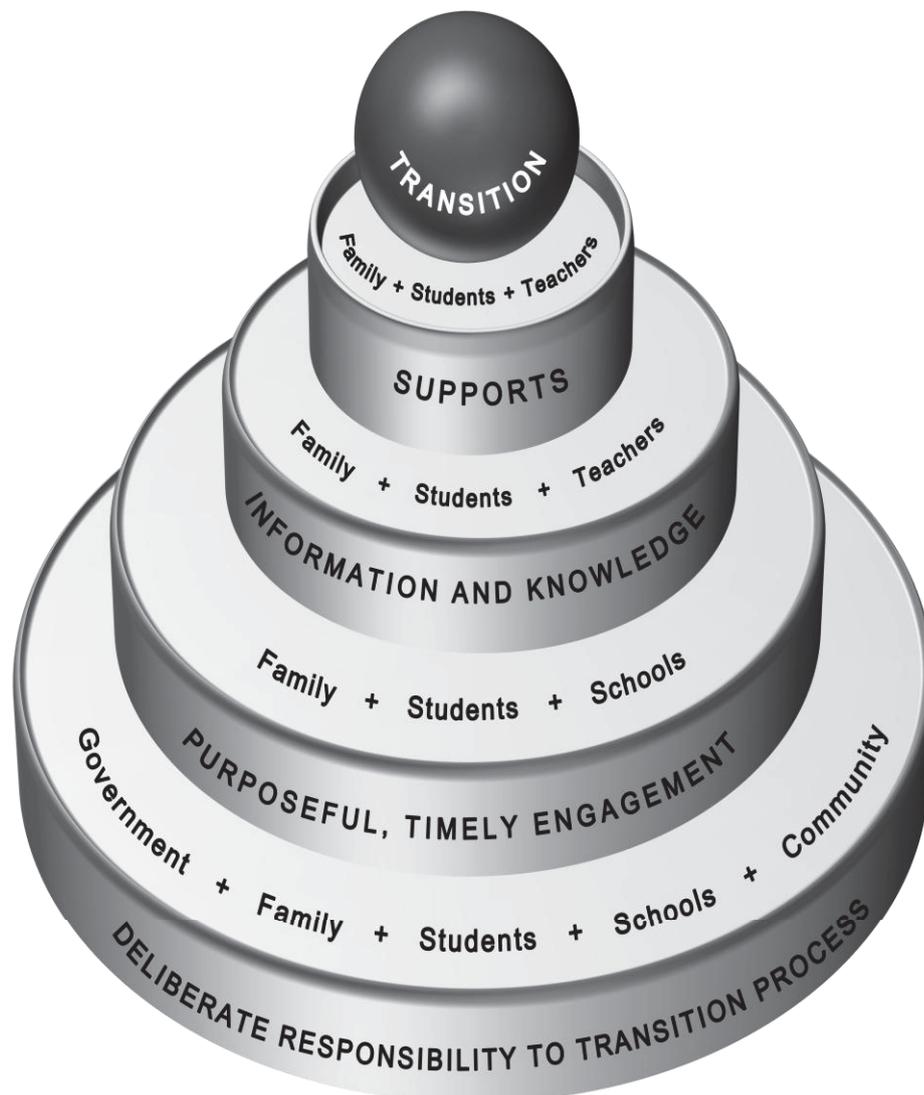
These fundamentals of helpful practice are presented in the next section by way of a conceptual model.

#### **8.4 What Helps Transition? A Systemic Model**

To make research findings more accessible (Bassey, 1984), a conceptual model can prove useful. In the present case, since the research followed a positive perspective, a model was not sought to emphasise the ‘shoulds’, rather it needed to reflect the strengths of a system known to assist helpful practice. Thus, the model presented in Figure Five was derived, in conjunction with the literature, from current exemplars contributed by those who experienced the transition first-hand – students with learning support needs, their parents and caregivers, and teachers; in this way it is unique.

The process of representation of the current interpretation of case findings (Maxwell, 1992; Smith, 1992) was approached much as the methodology of the current project; rumination time was assigned to factors of accountability (Grix, 2002), trustworthiness (Bassey, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and practicality (Smith, 1992). Such a pragmatic approach was aimed at bringing strength (Cohen et al., 2011; Kvale, 1996; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995) and transparency to a proposition (Smith, 1992; Wolcott, 1994), increasing the likelihood of the product’s defensibility (Bassey, 1984; Eisenhart & Howe, 1992; O’Cathain, 2010; Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006) and appeal to the intended audience (Anderson, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003).

Accordingly, a two-dimensional system of concentric circles (after Bronfenbrenner, 1979) showing proximal and distal aspects, and interactional factors was considered. However, such a depiction would not have captured the critical nature of process or significant foundational aspects distinctive in these findings; hence a three-dimensional pyramidal form was developed to reflect the seriousness with which transition needs to be approached, incorporating deliberate responsibility, purposive and timely engagement, a sound knowledge base; and supportive mechanisms that are inclusive of all stakeholders. It reflects a determined, positive stance on a solid foundation; like the system it represents, it was not arrived at accidentally (EE5).



**Figure 5.** What Helps Transition? A Systemic Analysis

The circular supportive layers represent inclusive and systemic ways of working; not necessarily hierarchical but ordered to reflect practice observed and reported effective. Transition, balanced on the top reflects the priority necessitated to serve students with learning support needs, their families and teachers (Education Review Office, 2012a; Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2014; Ministry of Education, 2013f). It also represents vulnerability; like the position students with learning support needs can experience at primary-secondary transition time (Howard & Johnson, 2004); like the status currently afforded primary-secondary transition generally in New Zealand (Ministry of Education,

2011, 2013g; 2014b, 2014c); and like transition practices and processes that participants were constantly seeking to improve (EE7).

Thus, this model is humbly proposed following serious contemplation of current findings and the literature. In the spirit of this research, the model is by no means intended as a last word or blueprint; rather, as a focal point of practice questions offered in the following section, the model opens the possibility of relating findings from this case to other situations (Bassey, 1984). It is hoped that practice will be discussed, questions about transition will be asked, and the possibility of incorporating these ideas into practice and learning will be contemplated (Eisner, 2005; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). In this way alone, these ideas will cross-fertilise and transition pedagogy will be enhanced (Annan, 2005; T221; T228).

## **8.5 Implications for Practice**

The stated objectives for the current study were to inform: transition practice and pedagogy; professional development and action learning research in schools; and school policy. In addition, it was envisaged that findings would initiate discussion about transition; in short, put primary-secondary transition for students with learning support needs, indeed for all students, back on the map.

To this end, the following sets of questions have been developed to incorporate key facilitative factors identified in the study with ideas that emerged as opportunities for development. The questions ought not to be seen as exhaustive, rather as action practice and learning facilitators which will increase in number or change as schools apply them to their settings. It will be noted that there is no set related to supports because those aspects have been incorporated into other sets to preclude repetition. The sets of questions are presented in the suite of tables (Tables 22 – 25) that follow:

**Table 22***Transition Development - Deliberate Responsibility to the Transition Process*


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**Deliberate Responsibility to the Transition Process**

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**Systems**

- a. Do we have community responsibility to transition?
- b. What are the shared systems in the district?
- c. What systems are in place to ensure transition systems are sustained?
- d. Does our school take responsibility for the transition process?
- e. Are we determined about making transition a priority?
- f. How can we elevate the importance of transition in our district?
- g. Do we have a transition co-ordinator who also takes responsibility for staff development around transition?
- h. Where do we get information about transition and what we have to do?
- i. What is the best way to engage families with transition and enrolment processes?
- j. How can we be inclusive of cultural differences when we engage families?
- k. Do we encourage our families to take responsibility in transition?
- l. Do we encourage our students to take responsibility in transition?
- m. Have we created opportunities for cross-sector planning and collaboration?
  - Shared timeline
  - Regular, shared practice development
  - curriculum differentiation and continuity
  - feedback mechanisms aimed at process improvement around information sharing

**Teacher Practice**

- n. Do I take responsibility for the transition of students in my classroom?
  - o. What sorts of feedback from secondary schools would be helpful for primary teachers? And vice versa?
  - p. What is the best way to get together with other teachers for shared planning?
  - q. Do general classroom teachers have an understanding of curriculum from the other sector?
  - r. Have classroom teachers been to other sector schools?
    - Observe practice
    - Understand school practices and routines
-

**Table 23***Transition Development - Purposeful and Timely Engagement*


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**Purposeful and Timely Engagement**


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**Systems**

- a. Do we prioritise district relationships around transition?
- b. Does our school take the lead for developing relationships for transition?
- c. Have we discussed our transition practices with our contributing schools?
- d. What do we do to prioritise family engagement?
- e. Do we partner with our contributing schools and enjoy shared family events routinely?
- f. Do we open up secondary schools to students and families before transition?
- g. Are families made welcome to meet with management before transition to discuss their concerns?
- h. Are families included in transition learning opportunities alongside teachers?
- i. Do we include families on their terms?
- j. Do we embrace and accommodate cultural and language differences?
- k. Is information for transition made available in a timely and family-inclusive way?
- l. Have we put competition between schools aside and prioritised presence, in regard to transition and enrolment?
- m. Can we do enrolment better?
- n. Would it help for school choice/placement to be decided earlier to ensure students have their school place before the end of term?
- o. Does the community understand the importance of being enrolled and present on Day One?
- p. Has handing over of students from primary been discussed as a possibility with contributing schools?

**Teacher Practice**

- q. Do I take responsibility for establishing strong bonds with transitioning students in my classroom?
  - r. Do I embrace and accommodate cultural and language differences?
  - s. How do I support families with school choice?
  - t. How can I include families with transition and enrolment processes?
  - u. How can I encourage students and families to work together with me to ensure transition is a success?
  - v. Are there shared understandings of the importance of first day attendance?
  - w. Do families feel welcome and are they encouraged to attend on the first day?
    - Pōwhiri
    - Face to face
-

**Table 24***Transition Development - Knowledge, Information, Skills, and Practice*


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**Knowledge, Information, Skills, and Practice**

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**System**

- a. Do we prioritise district understanding of transition pedagogy and processes?
  - b. Are families kept informed in a variety of ways about transition?
  - c. Do we understand that transition is both an event and a process?
  - d. Do we have a school transition policy and practice manual?
  - e. Do our school practices reflect common understandings around transition?
  - f. What can we do to elevate the importance of transition pedagogy in our school for our staff?
  - g. How is transition knowledge disseminated and shared throughout the staff?
  - h. How can we support staff to develop their transition knowledge and skills?
  - i. How can we support staff to teach transition management skills to students?
  - j. What is the best way to ensure new students adapt to their new environment?
  - k. How can we involve senior students in the school life of juniors?
- 

**Teacher Practice**

- l. Do I take responsibility for the transition of students in my classroom?
  - m. Do I teach my students about transition?
  - n. How can I involve families?
    - o. Have I asked my students and families what they need to help them with transition and what they would like to know?
    - o. How can I communicate positively with families about transition?
    - o. Do I welcome their presence in my classroom around transition time?
  - o. How do I support families to develop transition knowledge and skills?
  - p. What is the best way to engage students in transition learning?
  - q. Do I support students to develop transition knowledge and skills?
  - r. Do I actively teach new students management skills?
  - s. As a tutor/classroom teacher what must I teach students about transition?
  - t. How I can I help students understand the importance of secondary organisational features – attendance, class preparation?
  - u. If settling in is like an apprenticeship, how long do I allocate to the transition process?
  - v. How can I be respectful of students' culture?
  - w. Do I understand and have a working knowledge of curriculum differentiation?
  - x. What do I need to know about teaching students with learning support needs?
-

**Table 25***Transition Development - Transfer of Information***Transfer of Information****Systems**

- a. Is there a common district system?
- b. Is the system effective? Has it been evaluated/reviewed?
- c. Are information systems being used to their full potential?
- d. Is there common understanding about information transfer systems use at district level?
- e. Have we discussed transfer of information practices with our contributing schools?
  - Types of information
  - Timeframes
  - Use of information
- f. Have we provided feedback to our contributing schools about usefulness and use of information?
- g. Is information used at all school system levels – management to classroom
- h. Do our school practices reflect common staff understandings around the use of transition information?
- i. Have we discussed the practice of transfer of information as a staff?
- j. How do we support classroom teachers to use information to address the diverse needs of their new students?
- k. Are referral systems accessed on a ‘need to know’ basis?
- l. Do systems support teachers to solve concerns?

**Teacher Practice**

- m. Do I have to use information?
- n. How do I get hold of information?
- o. Do I know what the information means?
- p. Do I know what to do with the information?
- q. What do I have to be aware of in using student information?
- r. How do I use information to influence my practice and adapt the curriculum?
- s. Is students’ learning engagement and continuity being jeopardised if I don’t use information?
- t. I want to be responsible for my students’ learning, but what do I do about differentiation?
- u. Will my new students cope with secondary school?
- v. I don’t feel capable, how will I cater for my new students’ needs?
- w. What should I do if I have a concern about a new student’s learning?
- x. What are the options to access support in my classroom?

Finally, while the topic of streaming was beyond the scope of the Discussion, staying true to the inclusive ideals of the study means it would be remiss not to briefly revisit the use of information transfer for class placement. It was suggested that information transfer was under-utilised in respect of general classroom teachers catering for students' learning needs. Therefore, it is further postulated that if schools wish to be truly student-focused in their transition practice, then managers, teachers and schools must have a conversation about information transfer and streaming in full view of the literature (e.g. Ainscow, 2005; Ballard, 2004b; Bishop et al., 2003; Hattie, 2012; Hornby & Witte, 2014; Howard & Johnson, 2004). The question of what helps students must be approached open-mindedly and honestly. Yes, information transfer will help, but only if the information is used to address students' learning needs effectively (Education Review Office, 2012b), otherwise, information transfer might be seen as a mere guise, serving only teacher and system purposes.

## **8.6 Recommendations for Educational Policy**

Two propositions are offered:

1. The case has been put strongly to elevate the status of primary-secondary transition within general policy. By assigning this critical juncture to a 'special' category attached to 'priority learners' (Ministry of Education, 2014b), traction has been lost within schools and expertise is being siloed within schools. As a result, students' diverse needs are not necessarily being met by classroom teachers upon entry to high school (T301; T328; T351; T353). It is suggested, therefore, that planning for and managing transition ought to be seen as domain-specific, as an important component of teacher training and of all classroom teachers' tool kits. Furthermore, under an umbrella of inclusiveness (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Ministry of Education, 2014c), such inclusive practice (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Ministry of Education, 2014c), takes nothing away from 'priority learners', it simply means that transition practice that helps students with learning support needs, will become one practice for all (Florian, 2006).
2. With enrolment and attendance on the first day of school accepted as critical milestones within the transition process, and given that attendance at a school that is not the first choice can affect student progress (Wylie et al, 2006), it is suggested that the timing of enrolment be moved to an earlier place in the yearly calendar, to ensure

students know where they are going well in advance and be more settled about that decision when the time comes to start the new year.

## **8.7 Strengths and Limitations**

This research adds to the repository of transition knowledge having offered a fresh approach by taking a strength perspective (Fullan, 2006; Maton et al., 2004) and, by looking at transition facilitators rather than barriers (Annan, 2005; Anzul et al., 2001; Bandura, 1997). While other studies (e.g. Cox & Kennedy, 2008) investigated transition in relation to various measureable outcome variables, this case study was exploratory and therefore no attempts were made to establish any causal links between factors. Therefore, the current findings must be regarded as a snapshot and be interpreted in that way; as adding meaning to the existing picture of transition (Bouma & Ling, 2004).

The research contributes to transition discourse by way of a systems view (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) of helpful transition practice according to one schooling district's community approach. In addition, it offers insight into the personal views and experiences of those who navigated the primary-secondary transition, particularly of students with learning support needs. With a range of possibilities for future research and practice improvement emerging, it has been demonstrated that taking a positive approach has not limited findings. This was a unique platform wherein participants freely offered accounts of their experiences; in this way it has been shown to be a legitimate focus within transition research.

Aside from limitations highlighted throughout the text, a number of factors related to design, method and focus, intentionally limited the scope of the study. Alongside some words of justification, these aspects will now be addressed:

1. This research focused upon what helps transition; the question was specific and suited to the positive orientation. There may be other ways of investigating effective transition practice within these school communities.
2. The case study was context-specific, conducted within a particular schooling district within a New Zealand urban setting. What helps primary-secondary transition for children with learning support needs will also need to be investigated elsewhere.

3. The study was designed to look at immediate impressions of transition. While the ten student interviewees rated themselves as having made a good transition at the time of the study, it is not known whether these students would rate themselves similarly at another time. Longitudinal data collection, perhaps two years apart would be an ideal improvement on the present design.
4. There were students who participated in the introductory phases of this study whose ratings indicated a less positive attitude post-transition. According to the study design the contributions of those students were not sought after the questionnaire stage. However, given an alternate design, interviews with students who had not enjoyed a positive transition could have added valuable insight as to the barriers they faced.

## 8.8 Future Directions for Research

There is a rich and comprehensive literature available to those who wish to develop or improve primary-secondary transition practice, but still, students fall by the wayside as they progress between primary and secondary school (Ministry of Education, 2013d, 2013h, 2013i). The research described in this thesis has replicated and extended prior research endeavours (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Cox & Kennedy, 2008; Evangelou et al., 2008; McGee et al., 2003; Vinson & Harrison, 2006; Wylie et al, 2006), and in so doing, signalled areas of improvement and further exploration. Some possible avenues may be ascertained from the limitations listed, other suggestions follow:

1. It has been suggested that there are long-term repercussions from students' late arrival at the beginning of the school year; these findings were found compelling and warrant further investigation.
2. Enrolment practices have been identified as a critical area for improvement. There is an opportunity here for an action research project to investigate alternative systems.
3. The use of information transfer in schools was found to be variable; these findings require teasing out.
4. In respect of the point above, findings around secondary teachers' self efficacy about receiving new students and catering for their needs suggest avenues for further study.
5. Longitudinal study of positive transition remains open for exploration.

## 8.9 Concluding Words

This research has shown that positive transition is underpinned by a common, community culture of deliberate responsibility wherein respectful, purposeful relationships between students, families, and teachers enable students' needs to be prioritised. Transition is helped by 'thinking' school communities who proactively seek timely engagement, access relevant transition wisdom and practice, and facilitate functional and effective supports.

These final comments come from participants. The first from one of the managers:

*It is in relationships but it's also the knowledge of the importance of the transition process ... I would say it's the knowledge that if the student isn't transitioned properly, it is going to be a disaster ... (EE3)*

The last word comes from one of the students, who demonstrated that strong family and school support facilitated navigation of a positive path to secondary school:

*"I feel alright because I have family members here who will help me...A lot of support from my family, friends and teachers from my old schools...I mean I'm not mental or anything, I was just really naughty and they wanted me to have a better life...My Mum said you need to have some goals...I asked my teacher how to get [a certificate] and she said keep up with all your grades and try to come to school every day, at least 5 days a week and just be good...I know I've been a mature person... I achieve much more in my work...the teachers they help us a lot." (S41)*

With continuing determined, positive, inclusive and "unrelenting" (Ministry of Education, 2013e) focus upon the shift from primary to secondary school, all students with learning support needs will be less likely to become casualties of the process (Bauman, 2007; Slee 2009) and will instead be one step closer to flourishing through transition and beyond (Berliner, 1993; Florian & Rouse, 2001; Seligman & Csikszentihalyi, 2000).

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## **APPENDICES**

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- A Information Sheets**
- B Consent Forms**
- C Access Letters**
- D Questionnaires**
- E School Process**
- F Interview Guides**
- G Transcript ion Forms**
- H Sample Interview**

## APPENDIX A: Information Sheets

### Appendix A1: Information sheet for students



**SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**  
Private Bag 102 904  
North Shore MSC  
Auckland  
New Zealand  
T 64 9 443 9681

#### MOVING TO HIGH SCHOOL. WHAT HELPS? Information Sheet for Students

**Kia Ora, Talofa lava, Malo e lelei, Fakaalofa lahi atu, Ni sa Bula Vinaka, Namaste, Kia Orana, Mauri lava, Taloha ni, Nǐ hǎo, Greetings**

My name is Pamela Higgins and I am studying at Massey University for a Doctor of Philosophy in Education. I am trying to learn more from students, family members, and teachers about what helps students when they move to high school. I would like to invite you to take part in my study by doing a short survey taking about 30 minutes. I am interested because sometimes adults don't know what students think. What you say might help teachers and schools make moving to high school better for students and families in the future.

About 100 students will do the survey at school before and after the move to high school. The survey asks about how you feel about going to high school and about what made it go better - it's not a test. Your family members and teachers will also be invited to do a survey. In Term One next year a small number of people will be invited to tell me more about what was helpful in the move to high school. I can't interview everyone so about 20 students and their parent or caregiver and their teacher will be selected at random. Interviews will take about one hour and will be audio taped and then typed out. If you are interviewed you will be able to read your words, make changes and agree to what you have said being used in my study.

**All information you give will be strictly confidential and your family and teachers will not be able to read it. Your name will not be used in any writing.** You will be given a short report about the study when it is finished.

You do not have to agree to do the questionnaire or the interview but if you do you have the right to:

- not answer any question and that will be fine
- answer questions knowing that all answers will be kept private and your name will not be used
- withdraw from the study at any time and nothing will happen to you
- ask any questions about the study at any time

- be given information about the research when it is finished
- ask for the audio tape to be turned off at any time during the interview if you are one of the students interviewed

**Thank you for thinking about this invitation.** If you agree to take part please complete the consent form and return to school. Please keep this information sheet. If you have any questions or wish to know more, please email me at [pamela.higgins.1@uni.massey.ac.nz](mailto:pamela.higgins.1@uni.massey.ac.nz) or write to me at: School of Education, Massey University, PO Box 102904, North Shore Mail Centre, .

My supervisors are:

Professor Michael Townsend  
Head of School  
School of Education  
PO Box 102 904  
North Shore Mail Centre  
Auckland  
Tel: 4140800 X41099

Associate Professor Jill Bevan-Brown  
School of Curriculum and  
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This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application 08/050. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Denise Wilson, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, telephone 09 414 0800 x9070, email [humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz).

## Appendix A2: Information sheet for parents and caregivers



### SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Private Bag 102 904  
North Shore MSC  
Auckland  
New Zealand  
T 64 9 443 9681

### MOVING TO HIGH SCHOOL. WHAT HELPS?

Information Sheet for Parents and Caregivers

**Kia Ora, Talofa lava, Malo e lelei, Fakaalofa lahi atu, Ni sa Bula Vinaka, Namaste, Kia Orana, Mauri lava, Taloha ni, Nǐ hǎo, Greetings**

My name is Pamela Higgins. I am a student at Massey University enrolled for a Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education and I am trying to learn more from children, families and teachers about what helps make a move to high school successful. All full primary and intermediate schools pass on information to high schools about children who might find moving schools or learning at high school challenging. I would like to invite you and your child to take part in my study. Information might help teachers and schools make the move to high school better for students and families in the future.

About 100 students, their parents and caregivers and their teachers are being invited to take part in the study. For you and your child, this means doing a survey that takes about 20-30 minutes this term and again after the move to high school in Term One. The surveys ask about what helps to make a move to high school go well. Students will do the survey at school at a time that will not disrupt their learning. Family members will do surveys at home or at a school meeting and return them to school in a sealed envelope.

Next year you may be invited to tell me more about what was helpful in the move to high school. I can't interview everyone so about 20 students, their parents or caregivers and teachers will be selected at random. Interviews will take about one hour and will be audio taped and then typed out. All people interviewed will be able to read their words, make changes and agree to what they have said being used in my study.

**All information given will be strictly confidential and will not be available to schools or teachers. No-one will be identified in any writing or publications.** All people who take part will be given a summary of the findings when the study is complete.

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate both you and your child will have the right to:

- not answer any particular question
- answer questions knowing that all answers will be kept private and your name will not be used
- withdraw from the study at any time
- ask any questions about the study at any time
- be given information about the research when it is finished
- ask for the audio tape to be turned off at any time during the interview if you are interviewed

**Thank you for thinking about this invitation.** If you agree to take part please complete the consent form and return to school. Please keep this information sheet. If you have any questions or wish to know more, please ring Mrs Fasavalu at school on 2620594, email me at [pamela.higgins.1@uni.massey.ac.nz](mailto:pamela.higgins.1@uni.massey.ac.nz) or write to me at: School of Education, Massey University, PO Box 102904, North Shore Mail Centre, Auckland.

My supervisors are:

Professor Michael Townsend  
Head of School  
School of Education  
PO Box 102 904  
North Shore Mail Centre  
Auckland  
Tel: 4140800 X41099

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School of Curriculum and Pedagogy  
College of Education  
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Palmerston North  
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This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application 08/050. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Denise Wilson, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, telephone 09 414 0800 x9070, email [humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz).

## Appendix A3: Information sheet for teachers



**SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**  
Private Bag 102 904  
North Shore MSC  
Auckland  
New Zealand  
T 64 9 443 9681

### MOVING TO HIGH SCHOOL. WHAT HELPS? Information Sheet for Teachers

**Kia Ora, Talofa lava, Malo e lelei, Fakaalofa lahi atu, Ni sa Bula Vinaka, Namaste, Kia Orana, Mauri lava, Taloha ni, Nǐ hǎo, Greetings**

My name is Pamela Higgins. I am a student at Massey University enrolled for a Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education. I am trying to learn more from children, families and teachers about what helps make a move to high school successful, especially for children who might find moving schools challenging. It is hoped that by finding out about what is working well, the transition process might be enhanced to benefit schools, teachers, children and families in the future. I would like to invite you to take part in my study.

Participation will involve completing a short survey taking about 20 minutes. About 100 students and their parents and caregivers will also complete surveys before and after the move to high school. The survey asks you to think of a child with support needs and to identify school processes that might be helpful in transition. Both Year 8 and Year 9 teachers will participate in the study before and after transition respectively. In Term One, a small random selection of students, family members and teachers (approx 20) will be invited to tell me more about what was helpful in the transition to high school in an interview. Interviews will take about one hour, at an agreed time and place, and will be audio taped and transcribed. Transcriptions will be made available for you to review, amend and give authorisation for release.

**All information will be confidential and will not be accessible by other members of staff, management or the Ministry of Education. You will not be identified in any writing or publications.** You will be given a short report about the study when it is complete.

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

- \* decline to answer any particular question;
- \* withdraw from the study at any time;
- \* 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;
- \* be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.
- \* ask for the audio tape to be turned off at any time during the interview if you are interviewed.

**Thank you for your consideration.** If you agree to take part please complete the consent form and return to Pam. Please keep this information sheet. If you have any questions or wish to know more, please email me at [pamela.higgins.1@uni.massey.ac.nz](mailto:pamela.higgins.1@uni.massey.ac.nz) or write to me at: School of Education, Massey University, PO Box 102904, North Shore Mail Centre, Auckland.

My supervisors are:

Professor Michael Townsend  
Head of School  
School of Education  
PO Box 102 904  
North Shore Mail Centre  
Auckland  
Tel: 4140800 X41099

Associate Professor Jill Bevan-Brown  
School of Curriculum and Pedagogy  
College of Education  
Private Bag 11 222  
Palmerston North  
Tel: 4140800 X8764

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## APPENDIX B: Consent Forms

### Appendix B1: Consent form for students



**SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**  
Private Bag 102 904  
North Shore MSC  
Auckland  
New Zealand  
T 64 9 443 9681

### Moving To High School. What Helps?

#### CONSENT FORM

This consent form will be held for a period of five (5) years

#### Students

I have read the Information Sheet.

I have been able to ask questions and am happy with the way my questions have been answered. I know that I can ask more questions at any time.

I have been able to keep a copy of the Information Sheet

I understand that I may be asked to talk with Pam about moving to high school

**I agree/do not agree** to the interview being audio taped.

**I agree** to take part in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

**Signature:**

**Date:**

**Full Name - printed**

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application 08/050. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Denise Wilson, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, telephone 09 414 0800 x9070, email [humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz).

## Appendix B2: Consent form for parents and caregivers (English)



**Massey University**  
**COLLEGE OF EDUCATION**  
 Te Kupenga o Te Mātauranga

**SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**  
 Private Bag 102 904  
 North Shore MSC  
 Auckland  
 New Zealand  
 T 64 9 443 9681

### Moving To High School. What Helps?

Dear Parents and Caregivers

Pamela is a student at Massey University. She wants to learn from children, families and teachers what helps make the move to high school successful. Sometimes parents, caregivers and children aren't asked for their opinions, this is your chance to have a say about your child's move to high school.

The school supports this survey because we want to know how to make schools better for children. You are invited to a meeting at the school on \_\_\_\_\_ to discuss the survey. Or you can sign below and return the form to school by \_\_\_\_\_ and then a survey will be sent home for you to complete.

### CONSENT FORM

This consent form will be held for a period of five (5) years

- I have read the Information Sheet.
  - I know that I am able to ask questions at any time and that I can stop being part of the survey if I want.
  - I have been able to keep a copy of the Information Sheet.
  - I understand that my child and I may be invited to talk with Pam about moving to high school.
  - **I agree** to take part in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.
- **I also agree** that \_\_\_\_\_ who is under my guardianship can take part in this study.

**Signature:**

.....

**Date:**

.....

**Full Name - printed**

.....

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application 08/050. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Denise Wilson, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, telephone 09 414 0800 x9070, email [humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz).

## Appendix B3: Consent form for parents and caregivers (Māori)



**Massey University**  
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
Te Kupenga o Te Mātauranga

**SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**  
Private Bag 102 904  
North Shore MSC  
Auckland  
New Zealand  
T 64 9 443 9681

**Moving To High School. What Helps?**

Tena koe.

E tauira a Pamela i te Whare Wananga o Massey. Ko tana hiahia kia mohio a-ia mai i nga tamariki, nga whānau me nga kaiako o te Kura, ma hea atu te huarahi pai mo nga tamariki ki te Kura Tuarua.

E tautoko ana te Kura ki tenei rangahau, ko te hiahia kia mohio me pehea e pai ake ai nga kura mo nga tamariki. E pōwhiri tenei i koe kia haere mai ki te hui i te Kura a te **Thursday 20th November at 5.30pm** ki te whiriwhiri i te rangahau. Ki na kore e taea te haere mai, ko te tono kia haina-tia e koe ki raro ake nei ka whakahoki mai ai ki te Kura mua atu o te ra o \_\_\_\_\_ kia tono – hia atu ai te rangahau nei mau e whakatutuki.

Pamela is a student at Massey University. She wants to learn from children, families and teachers what helps make the move to high school successful. Sometimes parents, caregivers and children aren't asked for their opinions, this is your chance to have a say about your child's move to high school.

The school supports this survey because we want to know how to make schools better for children. You are invited to a meeting at the school on \_\_\_\_\_ to discuss the survey. Or you can sign below and return the form to school by \_\_\_\_\_ and then a survey will be sent home for you to complete.

**CONSENT FORM**

This consent form will be held for a period of five (5) years

- I have read the Information Sheet.
- I know that I am able to ask questions at any time and that I can stop being part of the survey if I want.
- I have been able to keep a copy of the Information Sheet.
- I understand that my child and I may be invited to talk with Pam about moving to high school.
- **I agree** to take part in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.
- **I also agree** that \_\_\_\_\_ who is under my guardianship can take part in this study.
- 

**Signature:**

**Date:**

.....

**Full Name - printed**

.....

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application 08/050. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Denise Wilson, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, telephone 09 414 0800 x9070, email [humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz).

## Appendix B4: Consent form for parents and caregivers (Samoan)



**SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**  
Private Bag 102 904  
North Shore MSC  
Auckland  
New Zealand  
T 64 9 443 9681

### Moving To High School. What Helps?

#### Talofa Lava!

O Pamela o se tamaitai e aoga ile Univesite o Massey. E fia maua e ia se talanoaga ma alo ma fanau a'o'oga, faapea matua ma faiaoga, e uiga ile mataupu lea: o a ni tulaga taua e fesoasoani ma fa'aleleia ai le a'e atu o alo ma fanau i aoga maualuluga.

O le tele o taimi, ua le fesiligia matua fa'apea alo ma fanau i ni o latou manatu fa'aalia i lenei mataupu taua; o lea la, o lou avanoa lenei e te fa'asoa mai ai i nisi o tulaga ua fa'amanuia ai le a'e atu o lou alo i le aoga maualuga.

Ua lagolagoina e le aoga lenei su'esu'ega; ma e mo'omia sou finagalo i nisi o tulaga e fa'aleleia ai a'oa'oga mo alo ma fanau. O lea la, ua vala'au atu ai ma le fa'aloalo tatou te 'auai fa'atasi ile fonotaga e faia ile aoga ile \_\_\_\_\_ e fa'atalanoa ai lenei mata'upu taua. Ae afai olea le mafai ona e 'auai mai i lenei fonotaga fuafuaina, fa'amolemole ia saina lou suafa ile pepa ma toe fa'afo'i mai ile aoga ia le silia le .....  
E taunu'u mai loa le pepa lea, ona momoli atu loa lea o le pepa o le su'esu'ega (survey) e te fa'atumu mai i le fale.

#### Ma le agaga fa'aaloalo

### CONSENT FORM

This consent form will be held for a period of five (5) years

- I have read the Information Sheet.
- I know that I am able to ask questions at any time and that I can stop being part of the survey if I want.
- I have been able to keep a copy of the Information Sheet.
- I understand that my child and I may be invited to talk with Pam about moving to high school.
- **I agree** to take part in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.
  
- **I also agree** that \_\_\_\_\_ who is under my guardianship can take part in this study.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Full Name - printed  
.....

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application 08/050. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Denise Wilson, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, telephone 09 414 0800 x9070, email [humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz).

## Appendix B5: Consent form for parents and caregivers (Tongan)



**Massey University**  
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
Te Kupenga o Te Mātauranga

**SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**  
Private Bag 102 904  
North Shore MSC  
Auckland  
New Zealand  
T 64 9 443 9681

### Moving To High School. What Helps?

Malo e Lelei Kau Tauhi Fanau,

Ko Pamela, koe ta'ahine ako ia 'oku ako 'ihe 'Univesiti 'o Mesi. 'Oku 'ne fiema'u ke ako meihe fanau', pea moe ngaahi famili' pea pehe foki kihe kau faiako', pe koe ha ha ngaahi me'a 'e ala lava ke tokoni ke fakalalakaka ai 'ae ako 'ae fanau' 'ihe taimi 'oku nau hu atu ai kihe ngaahi ako ma'olunga'.

'Ihe ngaahi taimi lahi, 'oku 'iai 'ae ngaahi matu'a', pea moe kau tauhi fanau,' pea moe fanau, 'oku 'ikai kenau lava 'e kinautolu 'o lea pe 'eke ha fa'ahinga me'a 'oku nau fiema'u pe loto kiai. Ka koe taimi faingamalie pe 'eni kiate koe, keke lava 'o lea pe 'eke ha me'a 'o fekau'aki pea moe ako 'a ho'o fanau 'ihe taimi 'oku 'nau hu ai kihe ngaahi ako ma'olunga'.

Koe 'apiako' ni foki, 'oku nau tokoni'i 'ae fakatotolo ko'eni, pea 'oku mau loto lelei pe ke mau hanga 'o 'ilo'i pe koe ha 'ae anga 'a ho'o fakakaukau, he koe me'a ia tene tokoni'i 'ae fanau' ke lelei mo fakalalakaka 'a 'enau ako'. 'Oku ou loto fiefia ke fakaafe'i atu koe keke lava mai kihe fakataha 'e fai pe 'ihe 'api ako' ni 'ihe aho \_\_\_\_\_ pea te tau potalanoa ai 'o fekau'aki pea moe ki'i fakatotolo 'ni. Pe ko ho'o fakamo'oni pe ho hinga i lalo pea ke fakafoki mai 'ae ki'i foomu 'ni kihe 'apiako' ni 'ihe 'aho \_\_\_\_\_ pea 'e toki 'oatu leva 'ae ki'i fakatotolo 'ni kia te koe pe ki 'api, keke toki fakakakato mei ai.

### CONSENT FORM

This consent form will be held for a period of five (5) years

- I have read the Information Sheet.
- I know that I am able to ask questions at any time and that I can stop being part of the survey if I want.
- I have been able to keep a copy of the Information Sheet.
- I understand that my child and I may be invited to talk with Pam about moving to high school.
- I agree to take part in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.
- I also agree that \_\_\_\_\_ who is under my guardianship can take part in this study.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Full Name - printed \_\_\_\_\_

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application 08/050. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Denise Wilson, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, telephone 09 414 0800 x9070, email humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz.

## Appendix B6: Consent form for teachers



**SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**  
Private Bag 102 904  
North Shore MSC  
Auckland  
New Zealand  
T 64 9 443 9681  
F 64 9 443 9717

### Moving To High School. What Helps?

#### CONSENT FORM

This consent form will be held for a period of five (5) years

#### Teachers

I have read the Information Sheet.

I have been able to ask questions and am happy with the way my questions have been answered. I know that I can ask more questions at any time.

I have been able to keep a copy of the Information Sheet

I understand that I may be invited to talk with Pam about transition to high school

**I agree/do not agree** to the interview being audio taped.

**I agree** to take part in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

**Signature:**

.....

**Date:**

.....

**Full Name - printed**

.....

**Please keep the information sheet and return this consent form.**

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application 08/050. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Denise Wilson, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, telephone 09 414 0800 x9070, email humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz.

## APPENDIX C: Access Letters

### Appendix C1: Access letter to high school boards of trustees



**SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**  
**Private Bag 102 904**  
**North Shore MSC**  
**Auckland**  
 New Zealand  
 T 64 9 443 9681

15 August 2008  
 MX XXXXXX  
 Chairperson  
 Board of Trustees  
 XXXXXXX  
 XXXXXXX

Dear MX XXXXXX

#### Re: “Moving to High School: What Helps?”

My name is Pamela Higgins and I am currently enrolled for a Doctor of Philosophy degree in the College of Education at Massey University. I am a registered psychologist and registered teacher and for the past two years have worked on transition with schools in South Auckland. I am conducting research on the transition to high school of children with support needs for social, cultural, learning or behavioural reasons because there is a need to understand the school practices and home-school connections that may facilitate seamless transition for these students. It is hoped that by finding out about what is working well, the transition process might be enhanced to benefit schools, teachers, children and families in the future. I would like to invite your school to participate in my study.

The proposed research will be structured around “pyramids” of schools each comprising a secondary school and contributing full primary/intermediate schools. The focus is students with transition support needs identified by schools using routine pre-transfer school procedures. I would like to learn from students, parents and caregivers, and teachers, using questionnaires and interviews, about what helps make a move to high school successful.

I propose to invite approximately 100 Year 8 students with support needs across the district, their parent or caregiver and their classroom teacher to participate in this research. Students and family members will complete a questionnaire before and after transition, while Year 8 and Year 9 teachers will do the questionnaires either pre-transfer or post-transfer as appropriate. Questionnaires ask students how they feel about their transition and ask all participants to identify school processes that are helpful in transition. Random subsamples of 20 of the target students and their parents/caregivers and 20 teachers (both intermediate and secondary) will then be interviewed about school procedures and home-school strategies that were helpful and assisted the transition process.

Participation for your school will involve:

- Students who have already completed the first stage of the survey process in Term Four at their previous school will complete a 30-minute follow-up survey in Term One at your school. They will

also take a questionnaire home to their parent/caregiver to be returned to school in a sealed envelope.

- All teachers of identified students will be invited to complete a short questionnaire about helpful transition practices.
- A small number of students, their parent/caregiver and their teachers (approx 5 from each school) will be invited to participate in a personal interview about what helped in transition.

Questionnaires and interviews will take place at an agreed time that will cause minimal disruption to teaching or learning schedules. The rights and privacy of all participants will be respected in this study and all information will remain confidential to the researcher and supervisors. **No school or person will be identified in any writing or publications and the collected information will not be accessible by the Ministry of Education.**

At the completion of the research a summary of findings will be provided to your Board and school. I am very happy to talk about the process of research with students and would also welcome the opportunity to address a school or school community meeting if you would like me to.

I would be pleased to discuss this proposal or address any questions you might have. Please email me at [pamela.higgins@xtra.co.nz](mailto:pamela.higgins@xtra.co.nz) or Ph: 021666032. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

My supervisors are:

Professor Michael Townsend  
Head of School  
School of Education  
PO Box 102 904  
North Shore Mail Centre  
Auckland  
Tel: 4140800 X41099

Associate Professor Jill Bevan-Brown  
School of Curriculum and Pedagogy  
College of Education  
Private Bag 11 222  
Palmerston North  
Tel: 4140800 X8764

Yours sincerely

Pamela Higgins

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application 08/050. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Denise Wilson, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, telephone 09 414 0800 x9070, email [humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz).

## Appendix C2: Access letter to high school principals



**SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**  
**Private Bag 102 904**  
**North Shore MSC**  
**Auckland**  
 New Zealand  
 T 64 9 443 9681

15 August 2008

MX XXXXXXX  
 Principal  
 XXXXXXX High School  
 XXXXXXX  
 XXXXXXX

Dear MX XXXXXXX

### Re: “Moving to High School: What Helps?”

My name is Pamela Higgins and I am currently enrolled for a Doctor of Philosophy degree in the College of Education at Massey University. I am a registered psychologist and registered teacher and for the past two years have worked on transition with schools in South Auckland. I am conducting research on the transition to high school of children with support needs for social, cultural, learning or behavioural reasons because there is a need to understand the school practices and home-school connections that may facilitate seamless transition for these students. It is hoped that by finding out about what is working well, the transition process might be enhanced to benefit schools, teachers, children and families in the future. I would like to invite your school to participate in my study.

The proposed research will be structured around “pyramids” of schools each comprising a secondary school and contributing full primary/intermediate schools. The focus is students with transition support needs identified by schools using routine pre-transfer school procedures. I would like to learn from students, parents and caregivers, and teachers, using questionnaires and interviews, about what helps make a move to high school successful.

I propose to invite approximately 100 Year 8 students with support needs across the district, their parent or caregiver and their classroom teacher to participate in this research. Students and family members will complete a questionnaire before and after transition, while Year 8 and Year 9 teachers will do the questionnaires either pre-transfer or post-transfer as appropriate. Questionnaires ask students how they feel about their transition and ask all participants to identify school processes that are helpful in transition. Random subsamples of 20 of the target students and their parents/caregivers and 20 teachers (both intermediate and secondary) will then be interviewed about school procedures and home-school strategies that were helpful and assisted the transition process.

Participation for your school will involve:

- Students who have already completed the first stage of the survey process in Term Four at their previous school will complete a 30-minute follow-up survey in Term One at your school. They will also take a questionnaire home to their parent/caregiver to be returned to school in a sealed envelope.

- All teachers of identified students will be invited to complete a short questionnaire about helpful transition practices.
- A small number of students, their parent/caregiver and their teachers (approx 5 from each school) will be invited to participate in a personal interview about what helped in transition.

Questionnaires and interviews will take place at an agreed time that will cause minimal disruption to teaching or learning schedules. The rights and privacy of all participants will be respected in this study and all information will remain confidential to the researcher and supervisors. **No school or person will be identified in any writing or publications and the collected information will not be accessible by the Ministry of Education.**

At the completion of the research a summary of findings will be provided to your Board and school. I am very happy to talk about the process of research with students and would also welcome the opportunity to address a school or school community meeting if you would like me to.

I would be pleased to discuss this proposal or address any questions you might have. Please email me at [pamela.higgins@xtra.co.nz](mailto:pamela.higgins@xtra.co.nz) or Ph: 021666032. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

My supervisors are:

Professor Michael Townsend  
Head of School  
School of Education  
PO Box 102 904  
North Shore Mail Centre  
Auckland  
Tel: 4140800 X41099

Associate Professor Jill Bevan-Brown  
School of Curriculum and Pedagogy  
College of Education  
Private Bag 11 222  
Palmerston North  
Tel: 4140800 X8764

Yours sincerely

Pamela Higgins

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application 08/050. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Denise Wilson, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, telephone 09 414 0800 x9070, email [humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz).

**Appendix C3: Access letter to contributing school boards of trustees**

**SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**  
**Private Bag 102 904**  
**North Shore MSC**  
**Auckland**  
 New Zealand  
 T 64 9 443 9681

12 September 2008

MX XXXXXX  
 Chairperson  
 Board of Trustees  
 XXXXXXX  
 XXXXXXX

Dear MX XXXXXX

**Re: “Moving to High School: What Helps?”**

My name is Pamela Higgins and I am currently enrolled for a Doctor of Philosophy degree in the College of Education at Massey University. I am a registered psychologist and registered teacher and for the past two years have worked on transition with schools in South Auckland. I am conducting research on the transition to high school of children with support needs for social, cultural, learning or behavioural reasons because there is a need to understand the school practices and home-school connections that may facilitate seamless transition for these students. It is hoped that by finding out about what is working well, the transition process might be enhanced to benefit schools, teachers, children and families in the future. I would like to invite your school to participate in my study.

The proposed research will be structured around “pyramids” of schools each comprising a secondary school and contributing full primary/intermediate schools. The focus is students with transition support needs identified by schools using routine pre-transfer school procedures. I would like to learn from students, parents and caregivers, and teachers, using questionnaires and interviews, about what helps make a move to high school successful.

I propose to invite approximately 100 Year 8 students with support needs across the district, their parent or caregiver and their classroom teacher to participate in this research. Students and family members will complete a questionnaire before and after transition, while Year 8 and Year 9 teachers will do the questionnaires either pre-transfer or post-transfer as appropriate. Questionnaires ask students how they feel about their transition and ask all participants to identify school processes that are helpful in transition. Random subsamples of 20 of the target students and their parents/caregivers and 20 teachers (both intermediate and secondary) will then be interviewed about school procedures and home-school strategies that were helpful and assisted the transition process.

Participation for your school will involve:

- You will be asked to supply the names of the students identified as requiring support in transition.
- Identified students will be issued with a consent form and information about the study to take home. Students who have consent to participate will complete a 30-minute questionnaire in Term

Four. They will also take a questionnaire home to their parent/caregiver to be returned to school in a sealed envelope.

- All teachers of identified students will be invited to complete a short questionnaire about helpful transition practices.
- Next year a small number of students, their parent/caregiver and their teachers (approx 5 from each school) will be invited to participate in a personal interview about what helped in transition.

Questionnaires and interviews will take place at an agreed time that will cause minimal disruption to teaching or learning schedules. The rights and privacy of all participants will be respected in this study and all information will remain confidential to the researcher and supervisors. **No school or person will be identified in any writing or publications and the collected information will not be accessible by the Ministry of Education.**

At the completion of the research a summary of findings will be provided to your Board and school. I am very happy to talk about the process of research with students and would also welcome the opportunity to address a school or school community meeting if you would like me to.

I would be pleased to discuss this proposal or address any questions you might have. Please email me at [pamela.higgins@xtra.co.nz](mailto:pamela.higgins@xtra.co.nz) or Ph: 021666032. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

My supervisors are:

Professor Michael Townsend  
 Head of School  
 School of Education  
 PO Box 102 904  
 North Shore Mail Centre  
 Auckland  
 Tel: 4140800 X41099

Associate Professor Jill Bevan-Brown  
 School of Curriculum and Pedagogy  
 College of Education  
 Private Bag 11 222  
 Palmerston North  
 Tel: 4140800 X8764

Yours sincerely

Pamela Higgins

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**Appendix C4: Access letter to contributing school principals**

**SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**  
 Private Bag 102 904  
 North Shore MSC  
 Auckland  
 New Zealand  
 T 64 9 443 9681

15 August 2008

MX XXXXXXX  
 Principal  
 XXXXXXX Intermediate School  
 XXXXXXX  
 XXXXXXX

Dear MX XXXXXXX

**Re: “Moving to High School: What Helps?”**

My name is Pamela Higgins and I am currently enrolled for a Doctor of Philosophy degree in the College of Education at Massey University. I am a registered psychologist and registered teacher and for the past two years have worked on transition with schools in South Auckland. I am conducting research on the transition to high school of children with support needs for social, cultural, learning or behavioural reasons because there is a need to understand the school practices and home-school connections that may facilitate seamless transition for these students. It is hoped that by finding out about what is working well, the transition process might be enhanced to benefit schools, teachers, children and families in the future. I would like to invite your school to participate in my study.

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I propose to invite approximately 100 Year 8 students with support needs across the district, their parent or caregiver and their classroom teacher to participate in this research. Students and family members will complete a questionnaire before and after transition, while Year 8 and Year 9 teachers will do the questionnaires either pre-transfer or post-transfer as appropriate. Questionnaires ask students how they feel about their transition and ask all participants to identify school processes that are helpful in transition. Random subsamples of 20 of the target students and their parents/caregivers and 20 teachers (both intermediate and secondary) will then be interviewed about school procedures and home-school strategies that were helpful and assisted the transition process.

Participation for your school will involve:

- You will be asked to supply the names of the students identified as requiring support in transition.
- Identified students will be issued with a consent form and information about the study to take home. Students who have consent to participate will complete a 30-minute questionnaire in Term

Four. They will also take a questionnaire home to their parent/caregiver to be returned to school in a sealed envelope.

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- Next year a small number of students, their parent/caregiver and their teachers (approx 5 from each school) will be invited to participate in a personal interview about what helped in transition.

Questionnaires and interviews will take place at an agreed time that will cause minimal disruption to teaching or learning schedules. The rights and privacy of all participants will be respected in this study and all information will remain confidential to the researcher and supervisors. **No school or person will be identified in any writing or publications and the collected information will not be accessible by the Ministry of Education.**

At the completion of the research a summary of findings will be provided to your Board and school. I am very happy to talk about the process of research with students and would also welcome the opportunity to address a school or school community meeting if you would like me to.

I would be pleased to discuss this proposal or address any questions you might have. Please email me at [pamela.higgins@xtra.co.nz](mailto:pamela.higgins@xtra.co.nz) or Ph: 021666032. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

My supervisors are:

Professor Michael Townsend  
Head of School  
School of Education  
PO Box 102 904  
North Shore Mail Centre  
Auckland  
Tel: 4140800 X41099

Associate Professor Jill Bevan-Brown  
School of Curriculum and Pedagogy  
College of Education  
Private Bag 11 222  
Palmerston North  
Tel: 4140800 X8764

Yours sincerely

Pamela Higgins

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application 08/050. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Denise Wilson, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, telephone 09 414 0800 x9070, email [humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz).

## APPENDIX D: Questionnaires

### Appendix D1: Student questionnaire (pre-transition)

#### Changing School Survey (Pre-transition)

My name is _____
I am a boy / girl. I am _____ yrs old
My ethnic group is _____
My class is _____
My teacher is _____
My school is _____



This is Sam

Sam goes to school like you. Sometimes, Sam gets a bit puzzled by life. What do you think about changing school Sam?

#### What Sam and I think about changing school

Sam says	I say this is			
	A lot like me	A bit like me	Not much like me	Not at all like me
1. I think my new school will be really interesting.				
2. I think I will do well at my new school.				
3. I am worried about going to my new school.				
4. I wish I could stay at this school for another year.				
5. I am excited about going to my new school.				
6. The idea of going to my new school scares me.				
7. I feel OK about doing homework at my new school.				
8. I think the work will be quite easy at my new school.				
9. I worry that I won't be with my friends at my new school.				
10. I think I will work hard at my new school.				
11. I am looking forward to going to my new school.				
12. I think the teachers will be stricter at my new school.				
13. My parents/whānau are helping me to feel OK about my new school.				
14. My teacher is helping me to feel OK about my new school.				
15. I think my parents/whānau will help me with my schoolwork next year at school.				

**16. One word...**

**17. Add a comment**

**18. Look into the future.....**

**19. School/s**

**20. Teacher**



**21. Moving on**

**22. Whānau/Family**

**23. You**

**24. Most important thing**

**25. Any ideas to help**

Sam and friends wish you well next year. Thanks for doing the survey.

**Directions: All questions will be read aloud**

**Section One:** To help people like Sam at school, we need to know how people like you feel today, so we can make things better for Sam and friends tomorrow.

I have written down a lot of Sam's thoughts about changing school. Please give your feeling about each of the thoughts as I read them out. Work as quickly as you can by making a tick mark in the box you choose. Please make sure you are ticking in the right line as you look across.

There are no right and wrong answers. Just make sure you tick what you really feel. Your answers are very special. Don't show the tick marks to anyone else.

This is not a test. Off you go.....

**Section Two:** It will help people like Sam change schools if people like you tell us about your experiences.

Please answer the following questions if you can as they are read out. This is your own work, so please don't discuss your answers with your friend. You have a little bit of time to think about your answers; don't worry about your spelling.

16. Please write one word that describes how you feel about going to high school next year.
17. Add a comment about going to high school if you like in this space.
18. If you could look into the future and see yourself in May next year, how would you know that your move to high school had been successful?
19. What is your school or the high school doing that you feel is helping you to make a successful move to high school?
20. What is your teacher doing that you feel is helping you to make a good move to high school?
21. Sometimes children are a bit worried about moving to high school. Please write down up to 3 things that you are worried or scared about when you think of moving to high school.
22. What are your parents or whānau doing that you feel will help you make a good move to high school?
23. What are you doing that will help you make a good move to high school?
24. Please describe the one most important thing that you feel will help your move to high school be successful.
25. Please use this space to make any suggestions that you think would help you make a successful move to high school.

## Appendix D2: Student questionnaire (post-transition)

### Changing School Survey (Post-transition)

My name is _____
I am a _____ (boy/girl)
My form class is _____
My form teacher is _____
My school is _____



This is Sam

Sam goes to school like you. Sometimes, Sam gets a bit puzzled by life. What do you think about changing school Sam?

#### What Sam and I think about my new school

Sam says	I say this is			
	A lot like me	A bit like me	Not much like me	Not at all like me
1. I think this school is really interesting.				
2. I think I am doing well at this school.				
3. I am worried about being at this school.				
4. I wish I could have stayed at my last school.				
5. I am excited about being at this school.				
6. Being at this school scares me.				
7. I feel OK about doing homework at this school.				
8. I think the work is quite easy at this school.				
9. I worry that I am not with my old friends at this school.				
10. I think I am working hard at this school.				
11. I like being at this school.				
12. I think the teachers are stricter at this school.				
13. My parents/whānau are helping me to feel OK about this school.				
14. Teachers are helping me to feel OK about this school.				
15. My parents/whānau are helping me with my schoolwork this year.				

---

**16. One word...**

**17. Add a comment**

**18. Look into the future.....**

**19. School/s**

**20. Teacher**

**21. Moving on**

**22. Whānau/Family**

**23. You**

**24. Most important thing**

**25. Any ideas to help**

Sam and friends wish you well this year. Thanks for doing the survey.

**Directions: All questions will be read aloud**

**Section One:** To help people like Sam at school, we need to know how people like you feel today, so we can make things better for Sam and friends tomorrow.

I have written down a lot of Sam's thoughts about changing school. Please give your feeling about each of the thoughts as I read them out. Work as quickly as you can by making a tick mark in the box you choose. Please make sure you are ticking in the right line as you look across.

There are no right and wrong answers. Just make sure you tick what you really feel.

Your answers are very special. Don't show the tick marks to anyone else.

This is not a test. Off you go.....

**Section Two:** It will help people like Sam change schools if people like you tell us about your experiences.

Please answer the following questions if you can as they are read out. This is your own work, so please don't discuss your answers with your friend. You have a little bit of time to think about your answers; don't worry about your spelling.

16. Please write one word that describes how you feel about being at high school this year.
17. Add a comment about being at high school if you like in this space.
18. If you could see yourself in May this year, how would you know that your move to high school had been successful?
19. What is the high school doing that you feel is helping you make a good move?
20. What is your teacher doing that you feel is helping you make a good move to high school?
21. Sometimes children are a bit worried about moving to high school. Write down up to 3 things that you are worried or scared about being at high school.
22. What are your parents or whānau doing that you feel is helping you make a good move to high school?
23. What are you doing that is helping to make the move to high school successful?
24. Please write the one most important thing that you feel has helped your move to high school.
25. Please use this space to make any suggestions that you think would have helped you make a successful move to high school.

### Appendix D3: Parent and caregiver questionnaire (pre-transition)

MASSEY UNIVERSITY  
College of Education

## CHANGING SCHOOL SURVEY Parents and Caregivers (Pre-Transition)

This survey is about children moving to high school, especially about **what helps** to make the move successful. Sometimes parents, caregivers and children don't have the opportunity to say what they think, so this is a time for you to have a say. Information might help to make the move to high school better for students, families, teachers and schools in the future.

**THANK YOU**

- *The survey will take about 20 minutes. There is space at the end to add more comments if you wish.*
- *Please DO **NOT** DISCUSS the questions or answers with your child until after the survey is finished. This survey is to get the adult's ideas.*
- *Please complete the survey and return to school in the envelope provided. Thank you.*
- *Please make sure you have written your name and details at the bottom of the page.*
- *Please contact Pam if you have any questions - details are on the Information Sheet.*

### SECTION ONE: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

My Name: \_\_\_\_\_ My Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Child's Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_

*This information will be used to match family responses and for follow up interviews if needed. The information on ethnicity will be used to describe the participants in my write up.*

**You will not be identified in any writing or publications. The collected information will be strictly confidential and will not be accessible by the school, teachers or the Ministry of Education.**

**SECTION TWO: QUICK THOUGHTS**

Please place a tick in the box of the best answer

**What do you think your child thinks about changing school?**

My child .....	How much is this like your child?			
	A lot	A bit	Not much	Not at all
1. Thinks the new school will be really interesting.				
2. Thinks they will do well at the new school.				
3. Is worried about going to the new school.				
4. Wishes they could stay at this school for another year.				
5. Is excited about going to the new school.				
6. Thinks the idea of going to the new school is scary.				
7. Is OK about doing homework at the new school.				
8. Thinks the work will be quite easy at the new school.				
9. Worries that they won't be with friends at the new school.				
10. Thinks they will work hard at the new school.				
11. Is looking forward to going to the new school.				
12. Thinks the teachers will be stricter at the new school.				
13. Please add a comment if you would like to:				

**SECTION THREE: YOUR SAY**

Please use the back of any page to extend your answers or write comments if you wish

**First, thinking about a successful move ...**

14. If you could look forward now and see your child in May next year, how would you know they had made a successful move to high school?

a.

b.

c.

---

**Now back to today...** questions about what is helping in the move to high school.

15. How is **the school or the teacher** helping to make **your child's** move to high school be successful?
- a.
- b.
- c.
16. What is **your child** doing to help make a successful move to high school?
- a.
- b.
- c.
17. How are **you and your whānau** helping **your child's** move to high school to be successful?
- a.
- b.
- c.
18. Describe the **ONE** most important thing you feel will help **your child's** move to high school to be successful.
19. How is the **school or the teacher** including **you and your whānau** in your child's move to high school?
- a.
- b.
- c.

20. List things about the move to high school that **you and your whānau** are thinking about or worried about.
- a.
- b.
- c.
21. Describe the **ONE** most important thing you feel is helping **you and your whānau** in the move to high school.
22. Please use this space to make suggestions about **anything else** (e.g. school activity, information, advice, relationship) that you think could help your child make a successful move to high school.

😊 Thank you very much for doing the survey 😊

Please return to school in the envelope provided

**Appendix D4: Parent and caregiver questionnaire (post-transition)**

**MASSEY UNIVERSITY  
College of Education**

**CHANGING SCHOOL SURVEY**  
Parents and Caregivers (Post-Transition)

This survey is about children moving to high school, especially about **what helps** to make the move successful. Sometimes parents, caregivers and children don't have the opportunity to say what they think, so this is a time for you to have a say. Information might help to make the move to high school better for students, families, teachers and schools in the future.

**THANK YOU**

- *The survey will take about 20 minutes. There is space at the end to add more comments if you wish.*
- *Please DO NOT DISCUSS the questions or answers with your child until after the survey is finished. This survey is to get the adult's ideas.*
- *Please complete the survey and return to school in the envelope provided. Thank you.*
- *Please make sure you have written your name and details at the bottom of the page.*
- *Please contact Pam if you have any questions.*

**SECTION ONE: BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

My Name: \_\_\_\_\_ My Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Child's Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_

*This information will be used to match family responses and for follow up interviews if needed. The information on ethnicity will be used to describe the participants in my write up.*

**You will not be identified in any writing or publications. The collected information will be strictly confidential and will not be accessible by the school, teachers or the Ministry of Education.**

**SECTION TWO: QUICK THOUGHTS**

Please place a tick in the box of the best answer

**What do you think your child thinks about changing school?**

My child .....	How much is this like your child?			
	A lot	A bit	Not much	Not at all
1. Thinks the new school is really interesting.				
2. Thinks they are doing well at the new school.				
3. Is worried about being at the new school.				
4. Wishes they could have stayed at their last school.				
5. Is excited about being at the new school.				
6. Thinks the new school is scary.				
7. Is OK about doing homework at the new school.				
8. Thinks the work is quite easy at the new school.				
9. Worries that they aren't with friends at the new school.				
10. Thinks they are working hard at the new school.				
11. Likes being at the new school.				
12. Thinks the teachers are stricter at the new school.				
13. Please add a comment if you would like to:				

**SECTION THREE: YOUR SAY**

Please use the back of any page to extend your answers or write comments if you wish

**First, thinking about a successful move ...**

14. If you could look forward now and see your child in July this year, how would you know they had made a successful move to high school?

a.

b.

c.

---

**Now back to today...** questions about what is helping in the move to high school.

15. How is **the school or the teacher** helping to make **your child's** move to high school be successful?
- a.
- b.
- c.
16. What is **your child** doing to help make a successful move to high school?
- a.
- b.
- c.
17. How are **you and your whānau** helping **your child's** move to high school to be successful?
- a.
- b.
- c.
18. Describe the **ONE** most important thing you feel is helping **your child's** move to high school to be successful.
19. How is the **school or the teacher** including **you and your whānau** in your child's move to high school?
- a.
- b.
- c.

20. List things about the move to high school that **you and your whānau** are thinking about or worried about.
- a.
- b.
- c.
21. Describe the **ONE** most important thing you feel is helping **you and your whānau** in the move to high school.
22. Please use this space to make suggestions about **anything else** (e.g. school activity, information, advice, relationship) that you think could help your child make a successful move to high school.

☺ **Thank you very much for doing the survey** ☺

Please return to school in the envelope provided

**Appendix D5: Teacher questionnaire (pre-transition)**

**MASSEY UNIVERSITY**  
**College of Education**

**CHANGING SCHOOL SURVEY - Teachers**  
(Pre-Transition)

This survey is about children moving to high school, especially about **what helps** to make the move successful. Sometimes teachers don't have the opportunity to say what they think, so this is a time for you to have a say. Constructive thoughts and information you provide might help to make the move to high school better for students, families, teachers and schools in the future.

**THANK YOU**

- *The survey will take about 20 minutes to complete. There are 12 questions including a place for comment at the end.*
- *Please make sure you have written your name and school at the bottom of the page. Some teachers will be invited to participate in interviews to gain a fuller understanding of what processes facilitate successful transitions.*
- *Please contact Pam if you have any questions - details are on the Information Sheet.*

**SECTION ONE: BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

My Name: \_\_\_\_\_ My School: \_\_\_\_\_

This information is required to enable follow up for interviews.

You **will not** be identified in any writing or publications and the collected information **will not** be accessible by other members of staff, management or the Ministry of Education.

## SECTION TWO: SAM'S TRANSITION

To answer the following questions please think of a Year 8 child called Sam who is transitioning to high school at the end of this year and has a transition support need because of learning, behavioural, social, cultural, or other reasons. Please use the back of pages to extend your answers or write comments if you wish.

### Looking into the future....

1. If you could look forward now and see Sam in May next year, what things about Sam would tell you that the move to high school had been successful?
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  - d.
  - e.

### Back to today....

Questions 2 & 3 ask about helpful school processes. Questions 5 & 6 ask about your own helpful processes.

2. Please identify 3 things that you feel **your school or the high school** is doing to help **Sam** make a successful move to high school.
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
3. Please identify 3 things (or more) that you feel **your school or the high school** is doing to include **Sam's parents, caregivers or whānau** in the move to high school.
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.

- 
4. Please describe the **ONE** most important thing (e.g. school process, strategy, information, advice, relationship) that has helped **you** prepare children like Sam for successful transition.
5. Please identify 3 things that you feel **you** have been able to do to help **Sam** make a successful move to high school.
- a.
  - b.
  - c.
6. Please identify 3 things that you feel **you** have been able to do to include **Sam's parents, caregivers or whānau** in the move to high school.
- a.
  - b.
  - c.
7. List 3 things you think **Sam** might be thinking about or worried about for the move to high school.
- a.
  - b.
  - c.

8. List 3 things you think **Sam's parents, caregivers or whānau** might be thinking about or worried about for the move to high school.
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
9. List 3 things **you** think about or worry about for Sam's move to high school.
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
10. Please describe the **ONE** most important thing (e.g. school process, strategy, information, advice, relationship) that you believe will help ensure Sam makes a successful transition to high school.
11. Please use this space to make suggestions or comment on anything else you think might help Sam's successful transition.
12. Please use this space for further comment if you wish and use the back of the page if you need to.

**Thank You for Your Participation in this Research**

**Appendix D6: Teacher questionnaire (post-transition)**

**MASSEY UNIVERSITY  
College of Education**

**CHANGING SCHOOL SURVEY - Teachers**  
(Post-Transition)

This survey is about children moving to high school, especially about **what helps** to make the move successful. Sometimes teachers don't have the opportunity to say what they think, so this is a time for you to have a say. Constructive thoughts and information you provide might help to make the move to high school better for students, families, teachers and schools in the future.

**THANK YOU**

- *The survey will take about 20 minutes to complete. There are 12 questions including a place for comment at the end.*
- *Please make sure you have written your name and school at the bottom of the page. Some teachers will be invited to participate in interviews to gain a fuller understanding of what processes facilitate successful transitions.*
- *Please contact Pam if you have any questions - details are on the Information Sheet.*

**SECTION ONE: BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

My Name: \_\_\_\_\_ My School: \_\_\_\_\_

This information is required to enable follow up for interviews.

**You will not be identified in any writing or publications and the collected information will not be accessible by other members of staff, management or the Ministry of Education.**

## SECTION TWO: SAM'S TRANSITION

To answer the following questions please think of a Year 9 child called Sam who has just transitioned to high school and has a transition support need because of learning, behavioural, social, cultural, or other reasons. Please use the back of pages to extend your answers or write comments if you wish.

### Looking into the future....

1. If you could look forward now and see Sam in May this year, what things about Sam would tell you that the move to high school had been successful?
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  - d.
  - e.

### Back to today....

Questions 2 & 3 ask about helpful school processes. Questions 5 & 6 ask about your own helpful processes.

2. Please identify 3 things that you feel **your school** is doing/has done to help **Sam** make a successful move to high school.
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
3. Please identify 3 things (or more) that you feel **your school** is doing/has done to include **Sam's parents, caregivers or whānau** in the move to high school.
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.



8. List 3 things you think **Sam's parents, caregivers or whānau** might be thinking about or worried about in the move to high school.
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
9. List 3 things **you** think about or worry about in Sam's move to high school.
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
10. Please describe the **ONE** most important thing (e.g. school process, strategy, information, advice, relationship) that you believe is helping to ensure Sam's successful transition to high school.
11. Please use this space to make suggestions or comment on anything else you think is helping Sam's successful transition.
12. Please use this space for further comment if you wish and use the back of the page if you need to.

**Thank You for Your Participation in this Research**



**Appendix E2:        Newsletter entry**

Dear Parents, Caregivers and Families

Transition to high school is just around the corner for many of our children and families and this time can bring with it a mixture of excitement and anxiety.

Most children take the move in their stride but not much is known about what helps to make the move successful. We don't know much about what parents, family members or children think about what schools do to help.

This year Pam Higgins from the Ministry of Education who has been working in [our district] schools is doing some research about transition. Pam is studying for her PhD and would like some children and parents or caregivers to complete surveys so that she can look at what schools are doing well. This knowledge can help schools plan for transition in the future.

This is your chance as parents and students to have your say about transition. Some children will bring consent forms home and information about the study. If you would like to take part please sign the form and return it to school with your son or daughter.

Thank you ☺

## APPENDIX F: Interview Guides

### Appendix F1: Student Interview Guide

My PhD is looking into the question: what helps children make a positive transition from Year 8 to Year 9? You will remember from the questionnaire you completed, I am interested in who or what helped you in the transition process to secondary school. The main question for today's interview is: What helps? Who or what do you think helped or is helping you during this transition from intermediate/primary through to high school – to make it a positive transition? So, please tell me about what you think helps.

#### Housekeeping and rapport building

- You have been chosen for interview because your questionnaire showed you think you made a positive transition.
- Confidentiality/anonymity; What will happen to the data; Transcripts
- General discussion about school

#### Expand on questionnaire items (prompt only if needed)

- helping you / you helping
  - How did you prepare yourself?
  - What was helpful to you actually getting to school (e.g. on the first day or week)
  - Tell me about when you think the help was most useful?
  - Did anyone talk with you about anything in particular about moving?
  - Who helped you once you got to high school?
- families helping
  - How did your family help you?
- teachers helping
  - your school; high school;
  - How did your teacher help you?
  - What about your school? Or the high school?
- worries
  - You mentioned a few things that you were worried or scared about. What helped you to manage those things?
- successful transition

#### *Student questionnaire responses*

- myself – relationships, responsibility, attitude
- family – independence, friendships, learning
- teachers/school structures – learning support, transition preparation, relationships
- triangle (as above)

### Possible pointers

Focus	Structures (c.f. Galton et al., 2002)	Questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- student</li> <li>- family</li> <li>- teacher</li> <li>- school</li> <li>- you</li> <li>- community</li> <li>- district process</li> <li>- in-house</li> <li>- departmental</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- administrative (school choice, enrolment, class placement, presence)</li> <li>- student-focus (induction, social aspects, connection with family)</li> <li>- learning continuity</li> <li>- teacher pedagogy (transition pedagogy, teaching chn with learning needs, supporting teachers, professional development)</li> <li>- management of learning (preparing students, independence)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- how?</li> <li>- when?</li> <li>- who?</li> <li>- what?</li> <li>- where?</li> <li>- why?</li> </ul>

### Possible prompts and probes

- I'd like to know more about that
- Please tell me more about .....
- Please think about your parent/caregiver/family
- Paint a picture for me
- What is your opinion?
- Please give me some examples
- What do you feel/think about that?
- What does that mean?
- How does that work?
- How does that help?
- What did they do?
- How do you know it was helpful?
- Do you mean ...
- I think you are saying ...
- You have mentioned.....please will you tell me more about that
- Did I miss anything?
- Is there anymore you would like to add about what you think helps or helped?

## **Appendix F2: Parent/Caregiver Interview Guide**

My PhD is looking into the question: what helps children make a positive transition from Year 8 to Year 9? You will remember from the questionnaire you completed, I am interested in what or who helped you and your child in the transition process.

The main question for today's interview is: What helps? Who or what do you think helped or is helping (*son or daughter's name*) and you during this transition from intermediate/primary through to high school – to make it a positive transition? So, please tell me about what you think helps.

### **Housekeeping and rapport building**

- You have been chosen for interview because (*son or daughter's name*) feels he/she has made a positive transition (in questionnaire).
- Confidentiality/anonymity; What will happen to the data; Transcripts
- General discussion about school

### **Expand on questionnaire items**

- helping students / students helping
- helping families / families helping
- worries
- successful transition

### ***Parents and caregiver questionnaire responses***

- being included – some gaps, reassurance
- myself – relationships, responsibility, meeting school personnel
- child – independence, friendships, learning
- teachers/school structures – learning
- triangle (as above)

**Possible pointers**

- helpful people, helpful administrative systems/aspects, helpful structures and systems

Focus	Structures (c.f. Galton et al., 2002)	Questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- student</li> <li>- family</li> <li>- teacher</li> <li>- school</li> <li>- you</li> <li>- community</li> <li>- district process</li> <li>- in-house</li> <li>- departmental</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- administrative (school choice, info transfer, enrolment, class placement, presence)</li> <li>- student-focus (induction, social aspects, connection with family)</li> <li>- learning continuity</li> <li>- teacher pedagogy (transition pedagogy, teaching chn with learning needs, supporting teachers, professional development)</li> <li>- management of learning (preparing students, independence)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- how?</li> <li>- when?</li> <li>- who?</li> <li>- what?</li> <li>- where?</li> <li>- why?</li> </ul>

**Possible prompts and probes**

- I'd like to know more about that
- Please tell me more about .....
- Please think about your son/daughter
- Paint a picture for me
- What is your opinion?
- Please give me some examples
- What do you feel about that?
- What do you think about that
- What does that mean?
- How does that work?
- Do you mean ...
- I think you are saying ...
- You have mentioned.....please will you tell me more about that
- Did I miss anything?
- What are the real positives that are happening for students and families
- Is there anymore you would like to add about what you think helps or helped?
- Any crystal ball gazing about what might help?

## Appendix F3: Teacher Interview Guide

My PhD asks: what helps children with learning support needs make a positive transition from Year 8 to Year 9? You will remember Sam, from the questionnaire you completed, required support because of a learning, behavioural, social or cultural need. Also, I am interested in what helps others involved in the transition process like families and teachers.

The main question for today's interview is: What helps? Who or what do you think has helped or is helping Sam, Sam's family and schools/teachers/yourself during this time of transition from intermediate/primary through to high school – to make it a positive transition. So, please tell me about what you think helps.

### **Housekeeping and rapport building**

- Confidentiality/anonymity; What will happen to the data; Transcripts
- General discussion about school

### **Expand on questionnaire items**

- helping students in transition
- helping families in transition
- helping teachers with transition
- worries
- successful transition

### ***Secondary teacher questionnaire responses***

- school structures
- school consistency
- teacher support
- student support
- within-school information transfer

### ***Primary teacher questionnaire responses***

- school structures
- school consistency
- teacher support
- student support
- information transfer (intra- and inter-school)
- teacher pedagogy
- learning support
- responsibility
- district/stakeholder relationships
- orientation
- support systems (buddies)
- friendships
- attendance

**Possible pointers**

- helpful people, helpful administrative systems/aspects, helpful structures and systems, teacher pedagogy, teacher learning

Focus	Structures (c.f. Galton et al., 2002)	Questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- student</li> <li>- family</li> <li>- teacher</li> <li>- school</li> <li>- you</li> <li>- community</li> <li>- district process</li> <li>- in-house</li> <li>- departmental</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- administrative (school choice, info transfer, enrolment, class placement, presence)</li> <li>- student-focus (induction, social aspects, connection with family)</li> <li>- learning continuity</li> <li>- teacher pedagogy (transition pedagogy, teaching chn with learning needs, supporting teachers, professional development)</li> <li>- management of learning (preparing students, independence)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- how?</li> <li>- when?</li> <li>- who?</li> <li>- what?</li> <li>- where?</li> <li>- why?</li> </ul>

**Possible prompts and probes**

- I'd like to know more about that
- Please tell me more about
- Please think about Sam
- Paint a picture for me
- What is your opinion?
- Please give me some examples
- What do you feel about that?
- What do you think about that
- What does that mean?
- How does that work?
- Do you mean ...
- I think you are saying ...
- You have mentioned.....please will you tell me more about that
- Did I miss anything?
- What are the real positives that are happening with regard to transition of students with learning needs?
- Is there anymore you would like to add about what you think helps or helped?
- Any crystal ball gazing about what might help?

## APPENDIX G: Transcription Forms

### Appendix G1: Transcript release form (students)



SCHOOL OF EDUCATION  
Private Bag 102 904  
North Shore MSC  
Auckland  
New Zealand  
T 64 9 443 9681  
F 64 9 443 9717

### Moving To High School. What Helps?

#### AUTHORITY FOR THE RELEASE OF TRANSCRIPT

This form will be held for a period of five (5) years

I confirm that I have had the opportunity to read and change my written interview.

I agree that the edited interview and parts of the interview may be used by Pamela Higgins in reports and publications arising from the research.

**Signature:**

**Date:**

.....

**Full Name - printed**

.....

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application 08/050. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Denise Wilson, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, telephone 09 414 0800 x9070, email [humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz).

## Appendix G2:

## Transcript release form (adults)



SCHOOL OF EDUCATION  
Private Bag 102 904  
North Shore MSC  
Auckland  
New Zealand  
T 64 9 443 9681  
F 64 9 443 9717

## Moving To High School. What Helps?

### AUTHORITY FOR THE RELEASE OF TRANSCRIPT

This form will be held for a period of five (5) years

I confirm that I have had the opportunity to read and amend the transcript of the interview conducted with me.

I agree that the edited transcript and extracts from this may be used by Pamela Higgins in reports and publications arising from the research.

**Signature:**

**Date:**

.....

**Full Name - printed**

.....

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application 08/050. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Denise Wilson, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, telephone 09 414 0800 x9070, email [humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz).

## Appendix G3:

## Transcriber's confidentiality agreement



SCHOOL OF EDUCATION  
Private Bag 102 904  
North Shore MSC  
Auckland  
New Zealand  
T 64 9 443 9681  
F 64 9 443 9717

## Moving To High School. What Helps?

### TRANSCRIBER'S CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

I ..... (Full Name - printed) agree to transcribe the tapes provided to me.

I agree to keep confidential all the information provided to me.

I will not make any copies of the transcripts or keep any record of them, other than those required for the project.

**Signature:** .....

**Date:** .....

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application 08/050. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Denise Wilson, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, telephone 09 414 0800 x9070, email [humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz).

## APPENDIX H: Sample Interview Transcription

The following interview was slightly edited to protect the anonymity of the participant.

### **Expert Educator 4 (EE4)**

*The first question is just a general question about what helps. As you know, I'm specifically looking at those kids with learning support needs, so what helped in their transition?*

The more knowledge we have about the student, the better the transition process was, from our perspective. The more knowledge the student has about the people that were in the receiving school, the better the transition process was. By more knowledge, I'm talking about familiarity really and that would go for the families of these students as well. I suppose that's a generalised statement that would apply to all students but it becomes exponentially more important to the vulnerable students in the transition process. They've got to have that underpinning the transition but they've got to know that they've got that underpinning the transition as well. So it has to be a conscious thing with them. Its all very well me introducing myself to somebody but its that extra effort to make that somebody feel comfortable with me for example or whoever the staff are. So I think those would be the key things I would reflect on straight away. I think the orientation of the environment is obviously helpful but I don't think its as important as them feeling comfortable with the people because I think, except the very, very weak, all children will find their way around a school pretty quickly. But it's the relationships with the people they are going to be working with that is the crucial thing about making them feel comfortable, I think. And its not just the teachers, it's all the support structures we have... its the people they are likely to be interacting with, the guidance team, the health team, that kind of thing as well.

*So you have mentioned... the first thing was that information about the child is important, so tell me more about that ?*

When they come into the school, when they are transitioning from a relatively small environment to a relatively large environment, in order for us to cater for a whole range of youngsters that we are going to get, we need to make quite sure that we place them in appropriate receiving classes and appropriate receiving tutor groups. So I need as much information as I possibly can to place them in one of 15 groups that takes account of the sort of person who is going to be look after them, whether that is the tutor or the activities coordinator or the Dean. A good example is that our Samoan students are in the house that our Samoan dean looks after, even though he is not allocated Samoan students, he is allocated a house, but I make quite sure that the Samoan students are in the house he looks after. And in

terms of where the curriculum is concerned, we have 13 different classes from accelerate to culturally based classes to classes where students speak English as a second language or where students need support in their learning. It's vital that we try and get that placement accurate to start with and that we are not moving youngsters. Inevitably with a cohort of over 300 there is one or two you get wrong, but the less you end up having to move a child then obviously it's much better in terms of them settling in. But another key thing is that we need that information because it helps to assist in making sure these vulnerable youngsters are going to be included in terms of peer groups. We are quite sensitive to...., well, I mean an obvious thing would be to make sure there are students in the receiving class from the school that they've come from but another issue is to make sure that the students who are from the providing school are from classes in primary school are students they got on with anyway, so it's not good putting them in the same class if they don't like each other. All that information we get from the transition forms, not strictly true to say that, but that's what we would rely on for the heart of that information, but what we do is go into the feeder schools anyway. In fact the week after next it is. We go into the feeder schools and one of our teachers sits down with each member of staff in the feeder schools and talks through the class of kids and particularly the vulnerable ones. So the sources of information we use and the reasons for using them are in written form but also from us being pro active in going to schools and sitting down and getting that information. The [HOD of Learning Support] does that. So it's slotting them into a school social and academic environment that works for them and that's really important.

*You are saying I think, that placement in a class or a well thought out class at the beginning is helpful for a positive transition.*

Absolutely.

*How do you know that is helpful ?*

I suppose from our point of view there is a couple of...it's not exactly anecdotal, but I get a really good sense of students who are settling OK and those who aren't and we get that from a whole range of internal meetings. The student care management meeting for example. One of the things I look at when there is a disciplinary issue, I look at the enrolment date for the student. And it is of some interest and of some concern to me that often our most acute behaviour management issues are related to students who have not had a successful transition, or have transitioned late in the process rather than when they should have done.

*So something about their transition process? It could be a range of things....*

Yes absolutely. But it does seem interesting to me that one of the common factors when for example when we stand students down and take them to the board, more often.. significantly more often than not, they are students who have arrived at school late. And not because they have moved into the area but because the family haven't been able to get them enrolled on time for whatever that reason is. It hit me when I ended up standing 5 students down and 4 of

them had been a late enrolment and that's what made me start looking regularly when I deal with students on a behavioural issue; because I'm a DP, usually by the time a behavioural issue has got to me it's more serious and it's remarkable how many times they are late transition kids and it's one of the first pieces of information I look for now when I go onto the database. So, I think there is definitely a link there, but we haven't done any evaluation or research over that link but I know it's there, but it's supported by experiential and anecdotal evidence rather than empirical evidence.

*So working back...you would say that if children are enrolled in a timely fashion...*

Yes

*and are present in a timely fashion?*

Yes

*bodes well for settling into high school?*

Yes. Absolutely definitely with no shadow of a doubt and I would take it a step further and say that the first day at school regardless of when they are enrolled, that first day at school is another major day in their transition lives. I think it's a huge day in their life and I guess looking back on the experience I've had of those, the focus on that day is very much, very much child-centred because everyone is trying their hardest to make the kids feel welcome. I can't defend this but the reality of them getting into the routine of the delivering of curriculum throughout the next 4 terms, they never get that total focus that they get on that one day again. So it's gone forever and that's pretty big. I think it's a pretty significant issue really for all schools. But for us particularly.

*Tell me about families. What have you found that is helpful to engage families in the transition?*

I think one of the things we do really well at this school is that we insist on a parent and student interview before they enrol and I think that is of immense value to us which is why we do it, but we think it's of immense value to the families as well. So, I think a lot of our families I believe feel threatened by the high school environment, many of them weren't successful when they were in the high school environment themselves and bringing in their child for the first time, maybe it's the first time they have been back in high school. So it's crucial that they're made to feel comfortable as well, so we go out of our way to make our families feel comfortable and welcome and we do that by the personal touch in the interview. We hand pick our interviewers as well, not just anybody can interview the parents, we hand pick people who will do, we hope, an appropriate job.

***Do you particularly target the families of children with learning support needs and ensure those kids are interviewed?***

Well they would have to be interviewed anyway to get accepted into school. They are not accepted into school without an interview.

***Even if they are late, they still have to have a face-to-face?***

Yes. I think we have a 100% hit on that. I can't think that youngsters come into school without an interview. There are some youngsters that I cherry pick and I will personally say that I want to interview that one.

***Because...?***

Usually the information on the enrolment form or the transition form would indicate that I want to be sure it's done properly, but what I really mean, I want to be sure its done my way is probably the honest answer.

***So there is no system at the moment of targeting the kids with the learning support needs to ensure that all of them are early enrolments. Considering they are the most vulnerable supposedly and therefore potentially the ones who aren't going to transition well.... I'm just working back.***

Yes I know. I think our internal antenna go up with the kids that have a learning support form filled out, but we don't treat them differently. For instance last year and the year before there were 4 sequential personalised letters went out to families that hadn't enrolled over a chronological period of time and we made phone calls as well. And I've sent out our youth support workers to knock on doors as well, so that happens to all our students who are late enrolments, so we are treating them all the same in that respect and we think we are valuing them all the same. Whether we could go a stage further than that with the ones who are more vulnerable than the others then I suppose that boils down to the relationship we have with the intermediate schools and also making quite sure we have a partnership driving that forward I guess.

***I know that you do have a partnership with some of the intermediate schools***

Its getting better

***Is that partnership a helpful part of the transition process?***

Very much so. I will cite [our local full primary] to you because it's a good example. I suppose one of my frustrations is that I do think there is a model there that we need to try and build on and roll out to the other major feeders for us including [two large intermediate schools]. We are getting better in those two and I will go so far as to say with the change of principal at one of the intermediate schools has facilitated the kind of work I want to do with

them which I wasn't able or didn't feel comfortable doing before. But back to the [primary school], I have been going to that school on their home-school partnership evenings, which is week 7 every term, with a group of youngsters from this school for the past 3 years. So those youngsters in Year 5 three years ago are coming to us and they know me. And I walk around the school and they say, hi Mr. B how are you and the parents know me as well because in the home-school partnership evening our kapa haka or our Samoan cultural group will do something and I will address the school, Im invited to by the principal down there and I'm in and out of that school a lot.

***Have you got any anecdotal feeling that your relationship with those families is better because of that long term relationship?***

No I don't have any anecdotal evidence. What I do know is that, you know when you speak to a group of people, you know the degree of warmth to the group of people you are speaking to. I mean its just evident when you've been in that position a number of times and there is no doubt we are made welcome down at [that primary school] by the community of the school and Im not just talking about teachers and kids, Im talking about the families as well and I suppose I can give you an example. The board chair there who is a parent and her daughter has now come to our school and she is in Year 9 in the Māori Unit and she personally tells me of the value of us going down there. It was us going down there that made her choose this high school rather than sending her daughter out of area, so that's quite powerful that kind of feedback. Also she speaks on our behalf too when we are at those home-school partnership evenings. So there is a lot of little threads of evidence that illustrate what I'm not really sure of through hard evidence. Even at the home-school partnerships evening, the relationships with the families, its like I am a teacher down there.... well I am a teacher but obviously not at that school, but I'm made to feel like one of the staff really.

***Curriculum continuity, tell me about that and what you have found useful for children?***

Well, I don't think we are very good at it for starters. However, we have got one or two little pilots out there which are showing the way and I do think we could do better but I think we might have to wait some time before we can actually action that. We don't have an open evening where we could show off different areas of the curriculum and the youngsters could tie that in with their experience currently and it won't happen until there is a change of thinking at the top end. It's the way it is, so I have to work within that. Again just speaking about [primary school], we bring them up for their technology classes and have done for the past three years now, they have their technology here, a 4 week course up here. We have got it on our action plan but not done anything, although we said we would do it last year and we will do it this year that [primary school] buy like a transition English and Maths book which the children do English and Maths in at primary school and that is delivered to us and then they do English and Maths here.

***So it's a continuation in the same book, you mean an exercise book.***

Yes and then we send it back to them so that they have a look at the quality of the work that is happening. It will happen this year. We send copies of our reports back to [the primary school] so I have sent copies of our progress report and our mid-year report back to [the primary school] so they can see what the youngsters are doing and we have dabbled in but haven't got a firm system in place yet, we have dabbled in cross phase moderation of work as well so our teachers can have a look and see what level 2 and level 3 work is on a regular basis and [the primary school] teachers can now look at 4, 5 and 6.

***Tell me about sending the reports back to [the primary school], what do they get out of that and how is that helping ?***

Well its part of the transition process in that because they have more experience of those youngsters they know the level at which they should be working and they have a view understandably of where they should be 6 months down the track once they come to high school so what they are looking for is evidence of under achievement or..

***And they would feed that back to you.***

Yes that's the point of us doing it.

***So it's a relationship of goodwill that you have developed.***

Yes it is, but its child-centred good will. Yes it is. What we did was we sat down and did an old fashioned brain storming of what would facilitate the transition of these kids and we've got a several page action plan and we definitely review it every year and update it, look at what we have done, look at what what we could do better, look at what we haven't done, review why.

***So in some ways it keeps you on the same page?***

Yes. There are two outcomes of that. One is that we are getting more and more students from that area and the other outcome is that we are, well, the students who come from [the primary school] settle in really well. I am trying to think of an example of a [the primary school] student who hasn't settled in really well and we've had some really challenging ones. We had a really tall lad, student A, and he was actually removed from this school by his family after a bit of time. He didn't want to go, he loved it here and he went up the line or down the line or somewhere... anyway he's back now. He didn't settle and badgered his Mum and Dad and he is back, so there's one example. Another example of a boy called J who's here at the moment. His Mum is a lively character and he has medical issues and he has settled in brilliantly, everyone thinks its amazing. I'm sure its linked to the feel that the families have. I have thought about another bit of anecdotal evidence regarding families... and that is his

Mum that come in here personally and we showed her around the school. She had known me from the Māori Unit, from my visits down there and she came in quite feisty actually and I thought we were going to have difficulties but she was asking hard questions but they were fair questions. And then we just walked around the school and she fell in love with the school and now we can't do anything wrong, she is just a great lady in terms of supporting us, so that's going back to one of your earlier questions. But her son is a good example of a boy who could easily not have settled well. He's flying really.

***As far as induction for families here, do you have anything that you think is helpful for the families?***

Yes. I suppose there are two things. I don't think we do this area well at all. I think the best idea would have to have an open evening, but... All our families, and its made clear to them through the enrolment pack, plus my talks to the kids and there is some opportunity for this message to get lost, but through the enrolment packs, they can ring me and I will show them around the school personally. And I do do that and in fact I have one next week actually that I am showing around. The other thing is that I went into [the intermediate] when it was their parents evening, and I have to say that I need to be invited to do that, but I do offer it and then wait for the invitation. So I've been to [the intermediate] for the parents evening but it didn't work that well because the parents didn't know who I was or where I was and you are relying on them giving them that information to be able to approach me. But that's an area that's definitely the right context, its just how parents should be informed of who I am and where I am on that evening. It's the same with [the primary school] but I had a much bigger uptake of parents of year 8 students in [the primary school]. They give me a classroom and they know me anyway and the principal announces where I'm going to be and in which classroom, there's notices up there and they find me and I'm regularly in a room with 20 20 parents who have got questions to ask me.

***The enrolment interview must be an important touch with the families?***

Yes, it is. I'm sure they value it, but I will tell you what I think. What I really think is that the families think it's probably a pain in the neck to have to come here, but once they get in the interview, and they understand what we are trying to achieve and with the kind of questions we ask I'm sure they value it. I mean we are restricted to 15 minutes of an interview and I'm always over-running and for me, its critical, its a critical point of contact.

***Maybe its their only contact?***

Well yes, it probably is their only contact with me in most cases, not all cases.

*Or with the school even?*

Yes.... other than parents evenings, yeah. I find it a really good ice breaker with the families and I mean when you have a lot of interviews some of them don't always go brilliantly but most of them go really well most of the time. So what you are doing is paving the way for whenever there is an issue, they trust you enough to come in and talk to you. I guess the other occasion is the pōwhiri, but it's a proper open pōwhiri to the community not just for the kids. It is for the kids but for their whānau too and we are blessed with our marae and its location but we have four hundred, five hundred people down there on the marae sitting in the quadrangle. And my talk is as much for the families as it is for the kids. [the principal] usually welcomes the kids but I talk in a bit more depth. You should come to our pōwhiri and experience it actually thinking about it. Its just because culturally it's a very comfortable occasion, because it's Māori based but multi cultural as well and because of the way we organise it, it is just a really nice occasion. And we do the whole lot, the kai after the official ceremony and its really so great, its a great morning. I'm usually organising the kids into their various groups for their orientation around their environment so don't get to socialize with the parents but I get the prime spot for speaking, so I have a good opportunity for a proper welcome, and a proper introduction of myself really I suppose, not talking about myself, but talking about the role that I do on behalf of them.

*I've had good feedback about it, by the way, from the people I have spoken to.*

*I was going ask how information helps with teaching and learning?*

I was hoping that was the question that was going to come out. What we used to do was take the transition form and keep them and let teachers know that we have them and if they wanted to find out any information about the students that they might have made them a bit more alert for whatever then they could approach us and look at the transition form. But the reality of that is that either the teacher forgets that that offer was made a month later or two months later, or secondly forgets about the transition form. So what we do now, and we started this last year I think, is that we load what we see as the information onto our database about the students, and we have a little note section in the database so we tell the staff its there and they can go onto our intranet themselves and have a look. So we are a bit mindful of the self-fulfilling prophecy stuff, we are mindful of that, but at the end of the day you have to accept that you are dealing with professionals who have checks and balances in place anyway with the form teacher, the dean, the SMT meetings and co-construction meetings, literacy meetings - loads of checks and balances all over the place, so I don't think we are exposing the youngsters to tinged treatment by teachers by releasing that information should the teacher want to look at it. What happens in reality is that the teachers don't look at it unless they have a need to look at it. There's not many teachers that know that they've got a tutor group and say right I'll look down all these notes to find out more about the kids. Although there is a strong argument to say they should do that, but we encourage the staff to use it should they

feel the need to use it. We leave it as flexible as that. That will mean different things to different people, I suppose.

*And the people who are teaching, particularly the children with those extra needs, would you expect them to have access to that information so they were planning for the need?*

Yes.

*Do you know that it happens?*

We go a bit further than that. I think we go a bit further than that right. I'm pretty sure that the HOD of Learning Support gives a heads up to the teachers of kids with the transition support forms, I'm pretty sure she does, so we prepare them in that way. That heads up might lead to other strands, it might lead to them being brought up as a case in other meetings, it might be a one on one, or it might be that we have alerted the school counsellor. There are a number of strategies or resources we can bring to bear in the school that can pick up those kids and those issues.

*That sort of brings me back to information which is where we started right at the beginning and you said something about provision of information is good also. I took from that that families need information as well, is that what you were saying?*

Yes. We give out a general guide and we give out a prospectus and that has got the general information in it that is relevant I think.

*Clearly the information you are providing has been helpful in planning the kids entrance into school because they are obviously reading it (they tell me) so it must be presented in a way that is helpful.*

That's really interesting you should say that because I was in charge of the prospectus. And in charge of something I have no ownership over, and I never wrote it, was a bit of a poison chalice. And if you want my view, it will get me into trouble, I thought it was rubbish, right. It wasn't that it didn't have everything it should have had in there, but lots of small font, Times New Roman, high literacy levels, not many pictures and 9 sides of this closed type and it was just....even I found it boring. So when I managed to persuade the principal to change the prospectus, I took a decision, not exactly unilateral, but I was determined to get my own way however I did it, but its much more simple. I chopped rafts out and its very visual and its got a Pasifika and Māori feel to it and then what we do, cunning that we are, in the back of it we put all the information stuff that we chopped out of the prospectus. So we engage them with the prospectus and then they say oh what'a this here, etc and it seems to work. But I had a helluva a battle and it took a long time.

*And are the rules and regulations in the back as well?*

Yes.

*Making good choices and picking good friends and that sort of stuff, is there anything about that in the prospectus?*

Yes there is a little guide. A student guide.

*Because I have had feedback about that as well, good feedback, so that has come from somewhere.*

Cool. I will tell you something we haven't done yet, but were going to do but I binned it because I didn't think it was professional enough was a transition booklet and we are going to bring it up at the next transition meeting, we have a transition team and we have a meeting shortly.

*Tell me about the school transition team.*

I will finish off with the transition booklet and then I will come to the transition team. The booklet was something we lifted from somewhere, I don't know where, but anyway it was one of those booklets that... with different fonts on different pages and was like one of those resources you got in the 60s and 70s. But also part of it needed to be done when they were in Year 8 and part of it needed to be done in Year 9, so in the end altho' I had 300 done, I wasn't happy with it so we pulled it and decided not to do it. So the HOD of LS and I are working on another one, but we haven't got it sorted yet, but we know we have time because we think that needs to start being done sort of half wayish thru term 4. Because that's when the reality of, oh my God I'm going to be in high school next year will start hitting people, even though they will be enrolling in a couple of weeks hopefully, I think the reality of, we are nearly there will start hitting the kids towards the end of their second year of intermediate. So that when we are going to target it.

But we have a transition team as well which is made up of RTLB, enrolment registrar, literacy co-ordinator and the Head of LS area as well, and me, so there is 5 of us and I wont let it get any bigger than that. We meet this term and next term about once a month and that's the team that is involved in the enrolment interviews, its the team that is involved in going out to the feeder schools to get the info and its the team that brainstorms about what we can be doing around transition to ease it, a bit of a think tank really I suppose.

*I want to ask you about successful transition, what is successful transition to you?*

Now how to answer that one. It means that they have become a ....ooo how do I verbalise it....settling into the high school is not the right language. I think its somebody who has taken

the skills that they developed so far in their education and felt comfortable enough to set them down here as a foundation here and build on them. Now what that looks like in terms of a child in this high school, it looks like somebody who comes to school regularly and who is not late, is punctual and is appropriately dressed, has their gear and is performing to the ability level that you would expect them to perform at and progressing. And it also looks like somebody who is not badly behaved on a regular basis, and is involved in the wider activities at the school too because they feel very comfortable and has their parents come into the parents interviews. So I think that's what it looks like.

***And would that be the same whether they have been identified as having transition support needs or not?***

Yes it would be. The only difference should be the curriculum level at which....well no, yeah it would, the only differentiated aspect to that would be the curriculum level anyone is working at, not just to say a vulnerable child is necessarily at a low curriculum level, but the only difference you would see is the level the child is working at I think.

***So does it cover everybody, really?***

Yes. It does. The common criteria would be the behaviour, the attendance, punctuality, the gear, the uniform and the variable would be the curriculum level they are working at.

***How does that differ to being successful at school?***

Well..... you are starting to ask me to define education by that question.

Well here is success for me. It's somebody who develops the skills of being able to work on their own. Somebody who develops the skills of being able to work in groups. Its somebody who has effective communication skills, its somebody who has problem solving skills and somebody who has evaluative skills and its somebody who also takes on board the context of all that delivery which is the knowledge and understanding in the learning areas the new national curriculum talks about. I have pushed that philosophy in education since the early 1980s, so what I should be doing is quoting the key competencies out there.

***Well you almost did really.***

It's just in my language.

***But you haven't said passing exams.***

Well I have because I have talked about the knowledge and understanding which is the context of the learning.

***If you go back to children with transition support needs, they may not pass ‘the’ exams, OK.***

What I believe is that successful transition means that a student is maximising their potential. Please don’t tell me that everybody is going to go to Yale or Harvard and come out with first class honours, please don’t tell me that, or Oxford or Cambridge. What any employer wants (and I’m going to get passionate now), is somebody who is going to turn up on time, someone who is going to be reliable, somebody who can work in a team situation, somebody who can show initiative, someone who can work on their own when they are left on their own and somebody who knows the product which the company is making money out of. That’s what an employer wants and I don’t care if it’s a lawyer in New York or whether its someone who is working for Jerry’s Ice Cream or whatever.

I went to one of the most definitive seminars I ever went to, it was an industry business education linked thing just outside Swindon in the UK years ago and it was either the UK director or he was the south of England director of Rank Xerox, photocopiers and all that. And it is a huge multi national company, and it was just fascinating, there were two previous presentations done by Powerpoint and one person delivering and one person operating the computer and the technology was relatively new and keep breaking down and then this Xerox guy came on with an overhead projector and himself. And I just sat there thinking, mate its horses for courses, you have it right and they have it wrong. He then proceeded to reel off those skills that I mentioned, he didn’t phrase the same way as I phrased them and he said, “and we can teach them about our Company and then he said, we just want them to come to work on time” and I thought, yeah, that really resonated with me and it shaped my thinking in education. So that is what I bang on about in assembly, banging on to the kids, nicely, about attendance and how that is the one thing they can do in order to, you know.

***If you had to reflect on everything you have talked about, what are the real positives for you for kids with learning support needs? What are the real helpful things, the real positives that are happening for those kids?***

It can be summed up by: mutual knowledge, their knowledge of us, our knowledge of them, the families knowledge of us, our knowledge of the families, their familiarisation with the people, sound relationships, a comfortable enrolment process that they feel secure in, an understanding of the importance of that first day at school...yeah, how’s that for a summary?