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Transition to school for children with challenging behaviours:
Family/whānau and teachers' perspectives

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Abstract

Challenging behaviours are complex and are exhibited in a range of ways as a result of many different personal and environmental factors. When a child who is already predisposed to exhibiting these behaviours transitions from early childhood to primary school, the new and unknown circumstances can add to those challenging behaviours and create a negative experience for the children, families and teachers involved. Upon reviewing existing literature on transitions to school, there is an apparent gap in the literature on how to create a positive transition experience for children with challenging behaviours, particularly in the New Zealand context. This study started to address this gap by gaining the perspectives of parents and teachers on the transition to school for children with challenging behaviours. Semi-structured interviews involving 11 adults (parents, teachers/management) who were involved in transitioning three children to school in the last 12-18 months were used to draw out their voices. A qualitative approach within the framework of appreciative inquiry placed positive experiences as the focus. This meant barriers were addressed as a starting point for positive change. A thematic analysis was used to identify positive factors and barriers to successful transitions. The findings of this research highlighted that the building of positive, collaborative and trusting relationships, and open communication within transition teams was at the centre of positive transition practices, whether it be for children with challenging behaviours or for all children. The study also highlighted the importance of ecological adaptations needed in both the early childhood centres and schools for transitions to be effective. Children and parents needed to be well prepared for what to expect when starting school. This drew

attention to the importance of bridging existing pedagogical gaps and gaps in policy between early childhood education and primary school. As is common in the New Zealand context, where Māori values such as aroha, whanaungatanga and manaakitanga are well integrated into practice, the teachers in the study were committed to providing children and their families with the best level of support possible during their children's transition. However, issues of funding, time and professional expertise were identified as barriers. It is hoped that changes proposed under the government's *Learning Support Action Plan* (Ministry of Education, 2019) will be a step in the right direction to address these barriers.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	<i>ii</i>
Acknowledgements	<i>iv</i>
List of Figures	<i>ix</i>
List of Tables	<i>x</i>
Chapter One: Introduction	2
1.1 Background of the researcher	3
1.2 The concept of challenging behaviours	4
Chapter Two: Literature Review	6
2.1 Introduction	6
2.1.1 Challenging behaviours	7
2.2 Part 1: Contemporary literature on transition to school	8
2.2.1 A socio-ecological theory of development	8
2.2.2 Understanding the child in the transition process	13
2.2.3 A child ready or school ready approach?	14
2.2.4 Collaborating across environmental settings	16
2.2.5 Alignment in pedagogy and policy across the early childhood and primary sectors	23
2.2.6 Factors that contribute to a seamless transition from one sector to another	26
2.3 Part 2: Transitions for children with challenging behaviours	31
2.3.1 New Zealand Ministry of Education support services	32
2.3.2 Māori behaviour frameworks	32
2.3.3 Transitions for children with challenging behaviours in practice	34
2.3.4 Conclusion	43
2.3.5 Rationale for study	44
Chapter Three: Methodology	46
3.1 Introduction	46
3.2 Appreciative inquiry framework	46
3.3 Methodology	49
3.3.1 Qualitative research	49
3.3.2 Epistemology (constructivism)	50
3.3.3 Theoretical perspective (interpretivism)	51
3.3.4 Method	51
3.4 Ethics	54
3.4.1 Ethical considerations	54
3.4.2 Informed consent	54

3.4.3 Confidentiality and anonymity	55
3.4.4 Transcription	55
3.4.5 Reliability and validity	55
3.5 Summary	56
<i>Chapter Four: Findings</i>	58
4.1 Introduction	58
5.1.1 Case study 1 (Adam)	60
5.1.2 Case Study 2 (Billy) and Case Study 3 (Carl)	62
5.2 The interconnected network of relationships	65
5.2.1 Collaboration and reciprocity	66
5.2.2 Openness, honesty and trust	69
5.3 Preparing for effective transitions	75
5.3.1 Preparing children for transitions	82
5.3.2 Preparing parents for transitions	85
5.4 Commitment and consistency across the learning environments	86
5.4.1 Commitment	87
5.4.2 Consistency in strategies and behaviour management	90
5.5 Resources to support transition practices	91
5.5.1 Funding	91
5.5.2 Time	93
5.5.3 Knowledge	95
5.6 Summary of findings	98
<i>Chapter Five: Discussion</i>	100
6.1 What practices make the transition from early childhood to primary school effective for all students, including the additional factors for students with challenging behaviours?	103
6.1.1 Relationships and collaboration between adults and children	104
6.1.2 Relationships and collaboration between professionals and parents	106
6.1.3 Relationships between adults and children that supported the transition process	110
6.1.4 The empowerment of children through their existing relationships	111
6.1.5 Strategies specific to children with challenging behaviours	113
6.2 What are the barriers when transitioning children with challenging behaviours from early childhood to school?	116
6.2.1 Collaboration to strengthen the transition process	117
6.2.2 Teacher expertise	118
6.3 Implications for practice	120
6.4 Conclusion	122
6.5 Limitations and future suggestions	123

<i>References</i>	125
<i>Appendices</i>	132
Appendix A – Ethics Approval Email	132
Appendix B – Example of information sheet	133
Appendix C – Interview schedules	135
Appendix D – Section of a concept map created on ‘Coggle’	137
Appendix E – Map of overall themes in the study	138
Appendix F – Example of permission slip (from Early Childhood Management)	139
Appendix G – Transcriber confidentiality agreement	141

List of Figures

Figure 1. 'Levels of learning' developed from Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (MOE 1996, p. 19).	9
Figure 2. Collaborative relationships to support successful transition.	17
Figure 3. Connections between learning in early childhood and primary school.	22
Figure 4. Links between the early childhood and primary curriculum and beyond (MOE, 2007a, p. 42).	25
Figure 5. Priorities from the Learning Support Action Plan that may support smooth transitions for children with challenging behaviours to school (MOE, 2019, p. 14).	30
Figure 6. The appreciative inquiry process.....	48
Figure 7. The research process.....	50
Figure 8. The aspects of relationships which were key in the transitions of Adam, Billy and Carl, and how these connect to each other.	66
Figure 9. Preparation for transition involves interactions amongst settings, children and families.	76
Figure 10. Factors that support a positive learning environment during transition.	87
Figure 11. The theme of resources in this study encompassed funding, time and knowledge of adults.....	92
Figure 12. Bridging the gap: Existing positive practices and Māori values that work together to support smooth transitions from early childhood to primary school for all children.	101

List of Tables

Table 1. The child's questions	14
Table 2. Cross sector relationship constraints and enablers.....	20
Table 3. Early childhood centres and schools in this study.....	59
Table 4. Pseudonyms of participants.....	59

Chapter One: Introduction

“Whāia te iti kahurangi. Ki te tūohu koe, me he maunga teitei.

Aim for the highest cloud so that if you miss it, you will hit a lofty mountain”

- Māori proverb

Literature on the transition from early childhood education to school has been an area of focus in New Zealand, and internationally, for the last few decades (Boyle & Grieshaber, 2017; Broström, 2003; Bulkely & Fabian, 2006; Education Review Office [ERO], 2015; Featherstone, 2004; Henderson, 2012; Kagan, Moore & Bredekamp, 1995; Moss, 2013; Peters, Paki & Davis, 2015; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000; Wright, 2009; Yeboah, 2002). However, it is only within the last 15 years or so that transitions specifically for children with challenging behaviours have been explored empirically and to a limited extent (Bourne, 2007; Burgon & Walker, 2013; Larson, 2010). Standard transition practices such as collaboration between teachers from both educational settings, parents and children, are well documented as effective for the transition of all children (Wright, 2009). Children with diverse needs which can result in challenging behaviours, may require additional strategies to make the process of starting school successful; additional strategies that require further research to be uncovered (Burgon & Walker, 2013; Larson, 2010). It is essential that a child’s first experiences of school are positive, due to the risk of disengagement and a negative attitude towards schooling evolving otherwise (Peters, 2010). Therefore, it is important that all involved in their transition try their absolute best to make it successful, so that if some barriers occur, there is still a ‘lofty mountain’ to land on. Although early childhood education and primary school do have some curriculum alignments when it comes to their goals,

strands, principles and dispositions (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2007, 2017a), they are also two sectors which vary greatly in policy and pedagogy (Boyle & Grieshaber, 2017; Moss, 2013). Despite this, many early childhood centres and schools have not yet worked together effectively or frequently enough to establish a joint *Transition Curriculum*, or way of ensuring that all children starting school feel they are prepared and that the new environment they are going to is prepared for them (Boyle & Grieshaber, 2017).

1.1 Background of the researcher

As a qualified, experienced early childhood teacher, I have worked with many children whose needs were often very high and very diverse. I have supported children who exhibited a range of challenging behaviours, some who have required input from outside experts and agencies. Having been a teacher in both New Zealand and England, my own experience is that care is a central aspect of education, it is something we do very well in 'our little corner of the world'. I personally, have invested a great deal of care in all the children I have had the good fortune to meet and work with. The development of positive relationships with children/families has always been a priority to me. Therefore, I have always been curious to know what happens to these children and families once they leave the early childhood environment, particularly for those children who had complex needs. I have always wondered about those who have not had any intervention before starting school and how they will fare as they carry on through the long and for some children, challenging journey of education. Will they feel supported in their new environment? What is it that will ensure this feeling of support from the very beginning? My own experiences

and curiosity are what led me to explore the topic of ‘transitions from early childhood to school for children with challenging behaviours’.

1.2 The concept of challenging behaviours

“Despite teachers being well meaning and having the best intentions in the world, if teachers are led to believe that students with whom they are interacting with are deficient, they will respond to them negatively” (Bishop, Berryman & Wearmouth, 2014, p. 7). For this reason, it is important to note that although this thesis often refers to the concept of ‘*challenging behaviours*’ it does not mean that this behaviour is viewed as a within child issue. The researcher is a strong believer in the stance that behaviour is often a result of the environment not being appropriately able to meet the complex needs of some children. Therefore, this research uses an environmental perspective to conceptualise how children’s transitions to school can be a positive experience when challenging behaviours are involved. Parents and teachers in this research were asked questions designed to uncover environmental factors (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) that may have an impact on transitions.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines literature on effective transitions from early childhood education to primary school for children with challenging behaviours. Literature on transitions from both New Zealand and abroad for all children, as well as those with challenging behaviours, will be explored. In this chapter the challenging behaviours within the context of the study are defined, and literature on the barriers to transitions for children with challenging behaviours, and ecological adaptations to support the transition of these children are explored.

The first section of this review looks at contemporary literature on transitions to school within the framework of ecological theory to understand how the environment affects transition. It discusses the ecological adjustments for children during the transition process. This discussion is followed by a review of the literature on the importance of collaboration across sectors and between the educational setting and the home. After this the value of alignment in policy and pedagogy across early childhood and school is discussed, and factors which aid transitions to school both internationally and in New Zealand.

Subsequently, literature on how challenging behaviours can manifest in the classroom is reviewed, including support services available in New Zealand, and an explanation of Māori frameworks that support culturally affirming pedagogical approaches to behaviour in New Zealand schools. It continues on to explore transition to school for children with challenging behaviours specifically and finally, rationalises the need for this particular piece of research.

2.1.1 Challenging behaviours

“A challenging behaviour is any repeated pattern of behaviour that interferes with learning or engagement in social interactions” (McCabe & Frede, 2007, p. 1). It can also include behaviours that are harmful to the child, or to other children and adults (Kaiser & Raminsky, 2012). This behaviour is persistent for longer and at a higher frequency than the behaviour of age-related peers (Tyler-Merrick & Church, 2012). These harmful, concerning and/or disruptive behaviours are complex; they can manifest as either internalising or externalising behaviours. Examples of challenging behaviours can include: frustration, aggression, delayed or impaired communication skills, low self-esteem, attention issues, anxiety and withdrawal (Porter, 2008).

The MOE (2019) reported that one in every five children and young people are now requiring extra learning support, such as those who demonstrate any of the behaviours mentioned above. Nearly all of these students with extra needs are attending early childhood services and public schools. This warrants a shift in how support is provided in the New Zealand context, which is a work in progress for the New Zealand government. There is an emphasis in the New Zealand Ministry of Education’s new policy, the *Learning Support Action Plan 2019 to 2025* (MOE, 2019) on getting “the right support at the right time,” including putting practices in place to better identify a need for supporting neurodiverse children much earlier, such as improving teacher capability and searching for and addressing gaps in transitions.

The MOE (2019) describe a neurodiverse child to be one with learning support needs. They suggest neurodiversity as including “(but is not limited to) dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, autism spectrum disorder, foetal alcohol spectrum

disorder, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, trauma related disorders, and auditory or visual processing disorders” (p. 32). By definition, this umbrella of neurodiversity encompasses children with challenging behaviours as these neurodiverse children tend to have a range of needs, with differing intensity, making it challenging for them to learn or be taught. Therefore, the government in New Zealand is working to address how these children can be better catered to.

2.2 Part 1: Contemporary literature on transition to school

A period of educational transition begins when a child is preparing for a shift to a new environment and ends when the child and his/her family/whānau feel fully immersed and settled into their new learning community (MOE, 2017b). There are many types of transitions in a child’s life, and moving from early childhood education to primary school is just one of them. However, it is arguably one of the most critical transitions, as it is a major milestone in the learning journey of children who are still young, vulnerable, and very much reliant on those within their interconnected network of relationships (Bulkely & Fabian, 2006; Dockett, 2008).

2.2.1 A socio-ecological theory of development

Bronfenbrenner’s socio-ecological theory of development (1979) aligns well as a framework for this study, as it allows for the consideration of factors within the environment, such as relationships, which impact on the behaviours of children and their experiences as they transition to school, rather than focusing on the deficits which may be within the child.

The socio-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) takes the stance that the child does not develop in isolation, but rather their development and learning

influences, and is influenced by, interactions within and between different settings, environments or communities of which he/she is a part (Smith, 1998). Socio-ecological theory supports the need for reciprocal and collaborative relationships within and across systems, including for example, within communities of learning (Wenger, 1998; Wright, 2009). The nature and quality of these relationships will determine whether children's transitions to school are either facilitated or hindered (see Figure 1.).

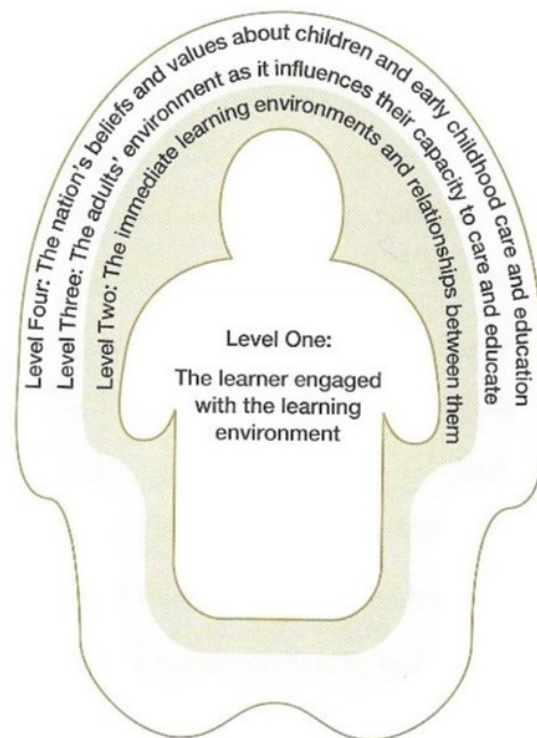


Figure 1. 'Levels of learning' developed from Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (MOE 1996, p. 19).

2.2.1.1 The microsystem (Level 2)

The microsystem contains the contexts that the child is in direct contact with, for example early childhood settings, schools, the child's neighbourhood and the home (Kamenopoulou, 2016). It draws attention to the relationships that occur within these settings, such as within family units/whānau, or between teachers and management

within the school or early childhood centre (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). It is important for such relationships to be positive to allow for the child's emotional well-being to be nurtured. For example, in quality early childhood provision where children feel safe, secure, valued and respected in their relationships, they become more engaged and empowered learners, contributing to a smooth transition (Bulkely & Fabian, 2006). However, if the transition from one aspect of the microsystem to another (e.g. from early childhood to primary school) does not provide continuity or respect by, for example, honouring a child's unique interests and prior knowledge in the new entrant classroom, there is a risk of stress, withdrawal, and impaired learning (Broström, 2003; Featherstone, 2004).

2.2.1.2 The mesosystem (Level 2)

The mesosystem encompasses the connections and relationships between the environments which make up the microsystem. This layer draws attention to the fact that effective and open communication between the child's educational settings is important. Effective collaboration between staff across educational sectors which surround the child, and with family members of the child, can support the child's transition into the new environment (Edgington, 2004). Therefore, the mesosystem makes us innately aware that strong parent-teacher relationships are important at all times, including times of transition (Eisenhower, Hurst Bush & Blacher, 2015), and especially for children with challenging behaviours (Gonzalez-Mena, 2010).

2.2.1.3 The exosystem (Level 3)

The exosystem may appear to be less relevant to the child, as it involves those settings which the child does not attend, but it is "the adults' environment as it

influences their capacity to care and educate” (MOE, 1996, p. 19). This can include settings such as the parents’ workplace or places they attend for recreation, or perhaps a place the child’s teacher goes to socialise. The exosystem does have an impact on a child’s learning journey through events that occur in the lives of the adults around them. These events can in turn, change the priorities of some of the adults involved in the transition, meaning that circumstances change unexpectedly for the child, such as the breakdown of the protective barrier that may have been previously formed around them. This can happen at times of transition and make it a more challenging experience than it already is (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Dockett, 2008). For example, if a parent or teacher is stressed by a situation outside of the school or home environment, they may be somewhat disengaged from the transition process, therefore not effectively stepping into that collaborative role with the others in the transition team (Edgington, 2004).

2.2.1.4 The macrosystem (Level 4)

The macrosystem includes those ideologies, customs, laws and cultural practices inherent in each individual society or community that impact on the life of the developing child (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Government and school policies, such as the *Learning Support Action Plan* (MOE, 2019) are part of the macrosystem and although they do not directly interact with the child, they influence schools and families at the micro and meso level. For example, the government has control over the funding and provision of material and human resources in educational settings; monitoring and evaluating practice; and ensuring teachers get the training required to effectively support transitions (Boyle & Grieshaber, 2017; Yeboah, 2002). The policies

that are in place within the school are what dictate how the transition process works (Yeboah, 2002). For some schools these will be highly effective and for others this is an area that may require some work and research. Limited time and resources to do this, as allocated by the government, can mean that this will not be a priority in terms of school development. For children with challenging behaviours, they require a time and resource heavy process when moving into school which may not be realistic to expect within certain macrosystems (Boyle & Grieshaber, 2017; Gonzalez-Mena, 2010).

2.2.1.5 The chronosystem and the biosystem

In more recent research, there is the addition of the lesser known aspects of Bronfenbrenner's model, the chronosystem and the biosystem (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 2005). The chronosystem is where changes to systems and the members within them occur over time. One of the best examples of this is times of transition, such as the move from the early childhood environment to primary school (Kamenpoulou, 2016). The biosystem includes the individual characteristics of each child, including the more challenging aspects of personality or behaviour (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). This is particularly relevant for children diagnosed with learning disabilities such as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), where the behaviour they exhibit can be challenging due to what is occurring within the environment, which means they struggle to control themselves. The chronosystem can be a protective factor during transitions, as research and understanding about how to adapt the environment to support children with challenging behaviours and possible disabilities such as ASD is continuously improving (Eisenhower et al., 2015).

2.2.2 Understanding the child in the transition process

Every child is unique; therefore, it is important to remember that there is no one size fits all approach when it comes to planning for the transition to school. Each child should be treated as an individual with their own values, culture, background, interests, strengths and weaknesses (Alton-Lee, 2003; Wright, 2009). Ethnicity and culture help to determine individual differences of children, such as social skills and language. These differences must be understood as they impact on the child's oral skills and understanding, important factors to be considered when planning transitions (Bulkely & Fabian, 2006; Yeobah, 2002).

Podmore, May and Carr (2001) have developed a list of *child's questions* (Table 1.) which educational professionals can opt to ask themselves, and possibly use as discussion points when making decisions about quality transition practices for each individual (Wright, 2009). The questions are derived from the strands of the New Zealand early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (MOE, 1996), as shown in the left column of Table 1. These strands are ecologically based, taking environment and relationships into consideration. They provide the opportunity for adults to observe the world, and their actions within it, through the eyes of the child, and to respond with empathy and understanding in relation to each child's ecological make up (MOE, 1996).

When thinking about transitions for children with challenging behaviours, it can be difficult to put oneself in their shoes. The questions proposed by Podmore et al. (2001) are valuable for gaining new perspectives on what to consider to turn transitions into a positive experience for every child. For example, is a child with

communication delays having the opportunity to be properly heard in their new environment? Have the child's family been asked for their perspectives and advice on this? Are their unique interests and skills understood and being challenged to give them a sense of achievement and belonging? Does the classroom environment represent the child's language and culture? It is important for such considerations not to be overlooked during transition, as a child is more likely to grow to new heights when they are in a trusting environment that is fair and just, and where they are given opportunities to excel (Alton-Lee, 2003; Broström, 2003; Bulkely & Fabian, 2006; Featherstone, 2004; Podmore et al., 2001).

Table 1

The Child's Questions (Podmore et al., 2001, p. 9)

Te Whāriki strand	Reflective question	Simplified version
Belonging	Do you appreciate and understand my interests and abilities and those of my family?	Do you know me?
Well-being	Do you meet my daily needs with care and sensitive consideration?	Can I trust you?
Exploration	Do you engage my mind, offer challenges, and extend my world?	Do you let me fly?
Communication	Do you invite me to communicate and respond to my own particular efforts?	Do you hear me?
Contribution	Do you encourage and facilitate my endeavours to be part of the wider group?	Is this place fair for us?

2.2.3 A child ready or school ready approach?

The transition to school is a time of social and organisational adjustment where the child is expected to fit in with a new daily routine, adjust to new adult to child

ratios, new types of relationships and become a valued member of a large group (Timperley, MacNaughton, Howie & Robinson, 2003). For this reason, many educational professionals internationally have explored the idea of *school readiness* – a state of being, where children have the necessary social, emotional, physical, language, and cognitive skills to do well in the primary school environment (Kagan et al., 1995; Lazarri & Balduzzi, 2013; Moss, 2013). This notion of school readiness tends to lean towards an emphasis on the early childhood teacher being responsible for a child’s preparedness for school. This is a somewhat narrow view of the aim of early childhood education, especially in New Zealand where the world renowned and very first early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (MOE, 1996), has an ecological and sociocultural focus, which continues to be the favoured approach to early childhood education.

This original curriculum document was designed to meet the needs of children, parents and communities with the goal of helping children “to grow up as competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society” (MOE, 1996, p. 9) as opposed to just getting children ready for school in an academic sense (MOE, 1996). The revised version of *Te Whāriki* (MOE, 2017a) is no different in the way it speaks strongly to the potential of each child and positions early childhood education as a place for building a strong foundation for the future, with the involvement of others such as family/whānau and community members (MOE, 2017a). *Te Whāriki* places considerable importance on a child’s sense of security and belonging in aiding their future endeavours, such as transitioning into a new classroom environment (MOE 1996, 2017a).

Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) propose the Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition which demonstrates how environmental aspects of a child's life are linked together to make a "dynamic network of relationships" (p. 492) that directly and indirectly influence the transition to school. These influences can be either positive or negative, depending on the nature of the relationships, which change over time. As a child develops they require different types of support and are required to interact in different ways. For this reason, Alton-Lee (2003) and Bishop et al. (2014) have detailed that caring, responsive in-class relationships, are crucial for an environment that breeds a culture of quality provision at all stages of education.

In keeping with this ecological perspective of transition, the Education Review Office (2015) recommends a shift in focus on how school ready the child is to how child ready the school may need to be. Ackerman and Barnett (2005) argue that schools also need to adjust the environment to ensure they have the resources to provide necessary support to the child and their family and adopt teaching and learning strategies which are adaptable to individual strengths and needs.

2.2.4 Collaborating across environmental settings

With parents, teachers, children and their family/whānau mutually interested in the transition process, negotiations and decisions can and should be made as a team. Teachers and parents bring their own knowledge and expertise of their unique setting, and that of the child (Alton-Lee, 2003; MOE, 2007a; Peters et al., 2015; Wenger, 1998). Wright (2009) discusses not only the necessary involvement of teachers in both the early childhood and primary settings, but also other adults when it comes to a child's transition. To do so teachers from early childhood settings and

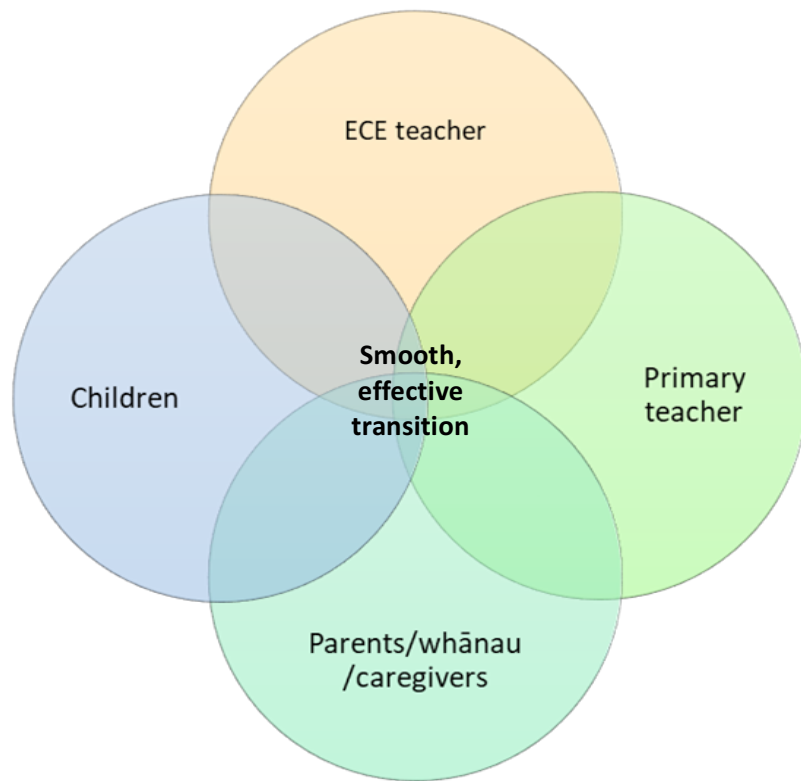


Figure 2. Collaborative relationships to support successful transition.

schools require a sound understanding of each other’s curriculum and should be equipped to answer parent’s/whānau queries and settle their anxieties. Where possible children should be involved in decision making discussions. Figure 2 below, is based on Wright’s (2009) view and is used to inform this study as parents and teachers/staff from both settings were included in this study.

2.2.4.1 Cross sector relationships

Moss (2013) describes the relationship between early childhood and primary school as political as the perspectives of each sector can be bound by differing identities, values and assumptions. Early childhood can sometimes be seen by other educational professionals as “an intervention that can improve the performance of children in CSE (compulsory schooling education)” (Moss, 2013, p. 4). However, this is a potentially damaging stance, as the functional and developmental divide between

the early childhood world and the primary school world can cause disruptions in the seamless continuum of a child's education.

Peters et al. (2015) studied the transition to two schools from three early childhood centres in Te Awamutu and Hamilton, in New Zealand. They focused on what enhanced the process, specifically for Māori children, utilising consistencies they found between the early childhood and primary curriculum. They discovered that cross sector relationships were particularly useful for bridging the gap between the two types of settings. During their research they worked in teams of at least 12 teacher researchers, which included both early childhood and primary teachers who had to collaborate to make the transition process work. The collaboration of staff across the sectors revealed that the differing philosophies and curricula did cause tension at times, and it was important for each professional to remain respectful towards each other during times of disagreement.

Similarly, in New South Wales (NSW), Australia, Boyle and Grieshaber (2017) discovered a hierarchical issue in their research on cross sector relationships. They intentionally explored early childhood services that are located on the same site as the primary schools, working with two EC teachers and two primary teachers in a community of learning (COL) type scenario. Even with the physical connection created by location early childhood teachers felt there was power play between sectors where the early childhood sector was considered to be on a lower par than schools. All teachers expressed a lack of knowledge or understanding of each other's sectors, due to the lack of opportunity to build relationships.

This is consistent with Henderson's (2012) description of what she refers to as an invisible barrier which exists between early childhood and primary school. Her action research took place in an early childhood centre in a private school in Australia, where the researcher worked with three early childhood teachers to co-construct new knowledge. The teachers discussed a feeling of disconnect similar to those in Boyle and Greishaber's (2017) study, a point which is troubling considering how important it is that children experience a transition from one sector to another which is as seamless as possible.

Broström (2003) explored transitions from kindergarten (early childhood) to K Class (primary school) in Denmark, looking at the lives of four children for four weeks before they started school, during the first week of school entry, and three months after starting school. There appear to be many similarities between this study and the aforementioned studies in New Zealand (Peters et al., 2015) and Australia (Boyle & Grieshaber, 2017; Henderson, 2012) in terms of the issues faced during transitions. For example, often the two settings did not communicate effectively leaving children to have to adapt quickly in unexpected ways. Broström (2003) found that, while those involved in transitions had good intentions, these intentions alone were not enough to create success. Some children who were shining in early childhood education could not maintain their confidence and skills in their new context. The research concluded that this could be due to the historic concept of *contextual learning* (Rogoff, 1990).

Contextual learning implies that a child works together with others in a certain context in order to learn, linking knowledge to the circumstances in which it was acquired. Learning that is heavily tied to context can be hard to transfer to a new

environment (Broström, 2003; Rogoff, 1990). However, Billett (1996) builds on Rogoff's (1990) ideas, saying that if the two environments are very similar then the learning can be transferred successfully. This is why strong relationships between sectors, allowing for effective communication, is important for transitions. It means that consistencies between early childhood and primary school become easier to achieve, meaning that children's learning can be transported from one context to another with less challenge (Billett, 1996; Broström, 2003; Rogoff, 1990).

It is important to consider ways to be continuously developing these relationships. Boyle and Petriwskyj (2014) provide a list of teaching practices which they consider to be constraints when trying to form relationships between sectors, and what they found to enable strong relationships to develop, as explained in Table 2.

Table 2.

Cross sector relationship constraints and enablers

Relationship constraints	Relationship enablers
Timetable misalignment	Altering timetables to suit
Lack of consultation time	Classroom visits by teachers
High staff turnover	Alternating meeting venues
The pressure of aligning programmes	Mutual respect, trust and reciprocity
Unwillingness of teachers to engage	Knowledge and discussion of the curriculum
<i>Different of environments/strategies</i>	

In a similar fashion to Boyle and Petriwskyj's (2014) work, Fabian (2002) made some suggestions for the UK context including teachers of each setting swapping roles for a day. Walking a mile in another's shoes could open up many possibilities, however, this may be difficult to achieve in New Zealand. A strategy that the participants in Peters et al.'s (2015) study in New Zealand found to be particularly enabling for their relationship building was to send early childhood teachers to primary schools and

primary teachers to early childhood centres. There they made running record observations of what was going on in the class in general to use as discussion points with the respective teacher to gain deeper understandings of the context. Other useful ideas from Fabian's (2002) study were: to have meetings between teachers to discuss the focus for school visits and to plan the transition programme; and for the preschool staff to come up with a list of questions each child had about transition for their primary school teachers.

In Henderson's (2012) Australian study, though all teachers were from early childhood, they wanted to create visibility between the sectors in a "multidirectional manner" (p. 22). The teachers were initially interested in continuing the use of narrative assessment from early childhood into primary school to blur the lines between the different curricula. However, eventually some participants in this study felt the outcome of blurring the lines would create an educational system that may be too conformist and could strip the sectors of their unique identities (Dunlop, 2007; Henderson, 2012). However, discussions with primary teachers about early childhood portfolio documentation made the learning that occurred in the early childhood environment more visible and was able to debunk the view that early childhood is just a place of play (Henderson, 2012).

Contrarily, in a South Auckland research project Hartley, Rogers, Smith, Peters and Carr (2010) used portfolios as the key to open the door to strong cross sector relationships. Children from the early childhood centre were given the opportunity to share their portfolios with children at the local primary school. The researchers then implemented other projects that would align teaching practices between early

childhood and school, and provide smoother transitions. They called these *mutually interesting projects* which included working together on making welcome DVDs about the school, transition pamphlets and display boards, to name a few (Hartley et al., 2010). Working together on creating shared resources that would benefit each sector was effective in strengthening relationships across the board.

2.2.4.2 Relationships between the educational setting and the home

Because “Children do not grow and develop in isolation” (Dockett, 2008, p. 274), it is important that cross sector collaboration is effective and parent-teacher partnerships are strong (Alton-Lee, 2003; Biddulph, Biddulph & Biddulph, 2003; Peters, 2002; Timperley et al., 2003; Wright, 2009). Transition becomes more successful when families/whānau are involved before, during, and after the transition, as the child transfers from the familiar and less formal world of the early childhood setting to an unfamiliar, more formal, and structured world of school (as shown in Figure 3).

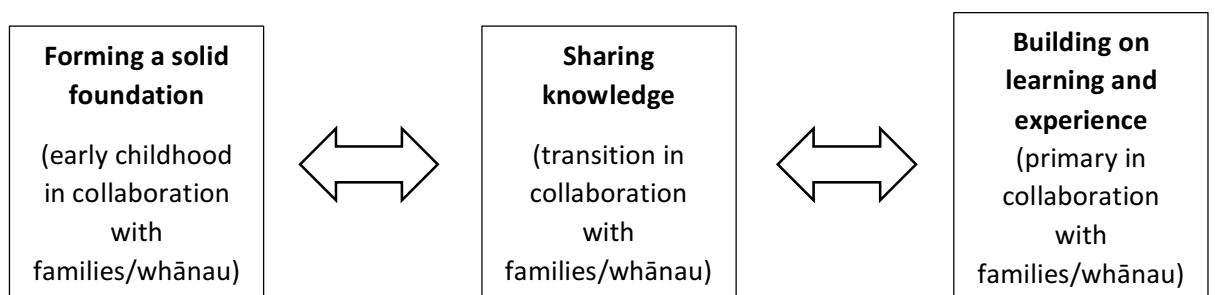


Figure 3. Connections between learning in early childhood and primary school.

Dockett (2008) and Gonzalez-Mena (2010) explain how parents have special insights and knowledge about their children that may not be known to teachers in the classroom. For example, the teacher may not know the child’s method of transport to school and how long it takes to get there even though it could contribute to

engagement levels and mood. When it comes to challenging behaviours, the parent has had a lot of practice with the particular internalising or externalising issue as presented by their child, and the things that can trigger it, such as a long journey to school (Gonzalez-Mena, 2010). Positive parent-teacher partnerships where critical information is shared and respected, provides reciprocal support and valuable resources to both parties. This is especially important when children start school and are completely new to the teachers and the environment as no one knows more about children than their parents (Alton-Lee, 2003; Dockett, 2008).

This parental involvement becomes particularly valuable for children with disabilities and other challenges. Parents can be advocates for their children sharing knowledge about their needs and attributes to the new setting and also can be informed about what the expectations are for their children as they move forward (Hutchinson, Pyle, Villeneuve, Dods, Dalton & Minnes, 2014). The more that each adult knows about the child and their behaviours, the more consistency the child will have in their behaviour management between settings (Gonzalez-Mena, 2010).

2.2.5 Alignment in pedagogy and policy across the early childhood and primary sectors

As the pioneer of early childhood curriculum in New Zealand, *Te Whāriki* (MOE, 1996) paved the way for an ecological and holistic approach to education. The introduction of the new curriculum for primary and secondary school, *The New Zealand Curriculum* (MOE, 2007a), saw this approach continuing on throughout formal schooling aiming to provide a strong connection between early childhood and primary school, because it is also underpinned by ecological theory. Despite the range of differences in policies and pedagogy between the sectors there are also commonalities

between the *Te Whāriki* principles and the *NZ Curriculum* key competencies. Both curriculum documents are also underpinned by NZ cultural practice and Māori values such as aroha (love), whanaungatanga (family connections) and manaakitanga (care and respect) (Metge, 2015; Mead, 2016). It is important for teachers to find the common grounds that underpin these values in order to support the transition process. This is pertinent to all children transitioning to school, including those who have behaviours that can be challenging.

2.2.5.1 *Te Whāriki*

Inspired by educational theorists, Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Lev Vygotsky (1962), the flagship early childhood curriculum document (MOE, 1996) aims to provide “a foundation for children to become confident and competent and, during the school years, to be able to build on their previous learning” (p. 93). This is achieved through an emphasis on social contexts (including the home and community) and a dedication to lifelong learning (by making children feel valued in society from a young age). It weaves together the principles of empowerment, holistic development, family and community and relationships with the strands of well-being, belonging, contribution, communication and exploration. Simultaneously, it promotes values such as aroha (love), whanaungatanga (family and close relationships) and manaakitanga (care, respect and hospitality) (Macfarlane, et al., 2019; Metge, 2015). These principles, strands and values are the main underpinnings of daily practice in early childhood education, open to interpretation and mainly explored through child-initiated play-based activities and daily routines such as meal times and nappy changing (MOE, 1996, 2017a; Nuttall, 2003). As Nutbrown (1996) persuasively said “the best way to help a

child to get ready to be five is to let her be three when she is three and let him be four when he is four” (cited in Fabian, 2002, p. 10).

2.2.5.2 NZ Curriculum

The *New Zealand Curriculum* (MOE, 2007a) could be considered more prescriptive in its outlining of the subject areas of English, the Arts, Health and Physical Education, Learning Languages, Mathematics and Statistics, Science, Social Sciences and Technology. The curriculum document does however, also mention links between the *Te Whāriki* strands and the key competencies.

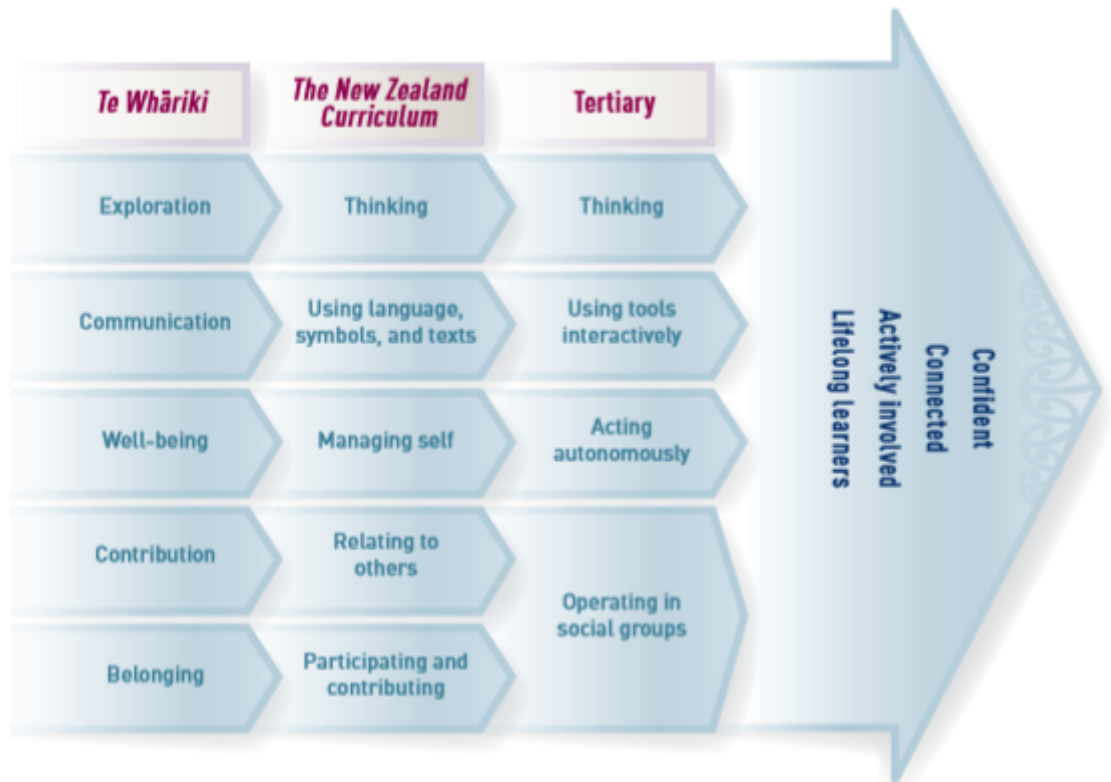


Figure 4. Links between the early childhood and primary curriculum and beyond (MOE, 2007a, p. 42).

These connections are represented in Figure 4. For example, the key competency of *thinking* is related to the *Te Whāriki* strand of *exploration* as both provide opportunities for children to experiment in order to make sense of their

theories about the world and to become critical and curious thinkers (MOE, 1996; 2007a). *The New Zealand Curriculum* states that “schools can design their curriculum so that students find their transitions positive” (MOE, 2007a, p. 41). It may be questionable how effectively this is being realised as mentioned by Peters (2002) and Wright (2009) as there are variations in practice. However, within these variations there is still a dedication to the aforementioned values which have been woven into our cultural context in New Zealand.

2.2.6 Factors that contribute to a seamless transition from one sector to another

2.2.6.1 *Play as a tool*

Fabian and Dunlop (2005) and Yeboah (2002) suggest that play can be used as a powerful tool in the process of transition to allow the continuity of curriculum and consistency of practice. It allows for the familiar child-initiated learning environment to remain the same within a different context, supporting the well-being of new students whilst still alluding to the key competencies (Davis, 2015). Davis describes a school in Christchurch which introduced a play time for almost two hours every morning called ‘*Relating to Others Time*,’ where areas were set up by the teachers to inspire learning and provoke thought. Children were able to engage creatively in activities independently and with others in a context similar to that of an early childhood classroom, something which was viewed by one of the teachers in Davis’s (2015) study as important for the majority of children who were finding the shift into school life difficult. The addition of a special play time from 8.30 am to 10.15am every day proved to be successful in terms of providing the continuity needed for those new to the classroom and meant that even those who did not speak English could take part. It was

also noted that “those in year 1 who had previously needed significant support (including interventions from Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour), no longer needed this level of guidance” (Davis, 2015, p. 8). Being able to see the ways children interacted during their play also provided teachers with ideas for discussion in order to get to know the children better and contribute to their sense of belonging (Davis, 2015).

2.2.6.2 *Learning stories*

In addition to incorporating play successfully into the primary school day, the use of narrative assessment, such as learning stories, has been seen as helpful during transition (Henderson, 2014). Learning stories were developed to assess children on the way they achieve within the strands of the *Te Whāriki* curriculum, using naturalistic observations and a narrative writing style (Carr, 2001). They were carefully designed to show certain aspects of childhood, such as the unpredictability of development (as opposed to developing in stages) and the unique perspective of the child as a learner. Learning stories focus on the process of learning rather than a ticking off of learning outcomes, using compilations of observations which can be done easily and provide opportunities for informing future planning (Carr, 2001). At their core learning stories are simply stories written by people who know the child well highlighting their interactions with people and things within the environment. The use of the child’s voice provides a deeper level of understanding of the child in context, and can even be used to demonstrate aspects of development such as emotional intelligence. This information can be valuable when gaining an understanding of children with challenging behaviours (Carr, 2001; Lyle, 2000). Davis (2009) suggests that it is

important to observe and listen to children's perspectives in the way that is made available through learning stories throughout the transition process, including after the transition has occurred.

2.2.6.3 Kāhui Ako

Kāhui Ako (Communities of Learning [COLs]) were set up by the New Zealand government as part of the IES (Investing in Educational Success) initiative. Within these 'communities' staff from different settings work together to help a student to meet their potential (MOE, 2018a). Joining a Kāhui Ako is optional, however the government is attempting to promote membership by increasing awareness of the benefits for children, such as having teachers directly sharing information to gain understanding of each other's practice, and consequently, smoother transition experiences (MOE, 2018a). These communities of learning provide teachers with a formal, collaborative space in which early childhood and school staff can engage with each other around aspects of the teaching and learning process. They also provide opportunities to consider the factors that will support smooth and effective transitions of all children, including those whose behaviours are challenging.

2.2.6.4 Impact of policy on transitions

Educational policies can also have an impact on the effectiveness of transitions. For example, an Australian study on transitions and cross-sector policies was undertaken by Boyle and Grieshaber (2017) in New South Wales at a time when collaboration between early childhood settings and schools during the transition process was limited. Establishing continuity between the two settings was not mandatory within this state, and policies for bringing seamless transitions to fruition

had not begun to develop. However, discussions between staff to align their work with each other was encouraged through the introduction of the *Australian Curriculum*.

Boyle and Grieshaber's (2017) research involved four teachers, two each from early childhood and primary school, and four members of management from educational settings in NSW. All participants were given release time to work as a learning community, similar to the Kāhui Ako in New Zealand. This was a chance for staff to see the things that are working well for transitions, and also the barriers that stop transitions from being as successful as possible.

During their meetings as part of the research project, they worked together to develop an outcomes framework called a 'Transition Curriculum' to replace the previously used transition checklist, which had been less effective as it was a tick box exercise. This Transition Curriculum was designed to converge and diverge the differing curriculums and pedagogies used in early childhood and primary school, therefore linking the learning between the two sectors. There were many transition practices that were changed as result of participating in the study, such as: using transition statements to link learning; matching observations of children to the outcomes of the statements; using these to develop a profile of the child that included strengths and areas that needed attention; and adapting how information was gathered at the time of enrolment at school (Boyle & Grieshaber, 2017).

The Learning Support Action Plan 2019 to 2025 (MOE, 2019) is a new policy to New Zealand made up of six priorities for improving educational outcomes for neurodiverse students. Figure 5 shows the most relevant three out of the six priorities of the *Action Plan* to the transitions of children with challenging behaviours. Early

screening for identification of children’s challenging behaviours should allow for them to be addressed earlier than currently, and for supports for children to be in place before they start school (Priority 2 and 3). Providing teachers, parents, families, whānau, and experts with a more in-depth education on diverse needs should allow the needs of children with challenging behaviours to be met before and after they reach school in a more seamless manner (Priority 4).

<p>Priority 2: Screening and early identification of learning support needs</p> <p>2</p>	<p>Early Identification and response to need has long-term benefits for children and young people. We need to be more systematic in how we identify a child’s learning support needs, so they get assistance as quickly as possible. We will add a new set of screening tools to assess all children at certain stages, and work with the Ministry of Health (MoH) to ensure these are integrated into a coherent system of measurement with health checks and screening.</p>
<p>Priority 3: Strengthening early intervention</p> <p>3</p>	<p>We will identify the volume, mix and additional types of services needed, including information and support for families and whānau, and build on services introduced since 2017. We will work with other agencies to integrate and provide more flexible supports eg with MoH on Mana Whakaha, and with Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust on an awareness campaign.</p>
<p>Priority 4: Flexible supports for neurodiverse children and young people</p> <p>4</p>	<p>The focus in this priority is on building the understanding and capability of early learning services, schools and kura to teach and respond to neurodiverse children and young people to progress their learning at an appropriate depth and pace.</p> <p>We will work with the education and disability sectors, parents, whānau, young people and experts to develop new tools and resources for teachers, design new supports for children and young people, and address gaps in specialist services. There will need to be room for innovation and flexibility in the types of support.</p> <p>We will also have some specific work streams to provide for particular needs, eg dyslexia and autism spectrum disorder.</p>

Figure 5. Priorities from the Learning Support Action Plan that may support smooth transitions for children with challenging behaviours to school (MOE, 2019, p. 14).

Part 1 of this review has explored both international and New Zealand literature on transitions from early childhood to primary school for all children. How the environment affects transition and the ecological adjustments often required for children during the transition process have been discussed. Also emphasised in this discussion is the importance of collaboration across sectors and between the educational setting and the home, including the value of alignment in pedagogy and policy across early childhood and school. It is evident through the literature reviewed that strong relationships between and across environments is crucial for easing the transition to school. With all of these factors in mind, Part 2 of the review continues on to explore literature on how transitions can be successful for children with challenging behaviours, specifically those who require additional support to participate in their learning.

2.3 Part 2: Transitions for children with challenging behaviours

Transition can be difficult for any child as they move into a relatively unknown context (Devine, 2016) and it can be even more daunting for children who require more support (Larson, 2010). Challenging behaviours are multifaceted and therefore, require a range of effective interventions and support networks to ease the transition process. This section provides some examples of challenging behaviours, the current MOE support services available for different educational contexts and frameworks for use with Māori families/whānau. Then, it explores transition practices for challenging behaviours, including barriers to effective transitions and strategies that can help make a transition more successful.

2.3.1 New Zealand Ministry of Education support services

Currently children with challenging behaviours in early childhood in New Zealand can be referred to the Ministry of Education to receive support through Early Intervention (EI) services. EI teams undertake assessment and if children qualify for support they work with the child, family and school until the child is five years old, or until they are well settled at primary school. Once in primary school, children and families can access Special Educational Needs (SEN) services through the Ministry of Education instead. Support can come from psychologists, speech and language therapists, early intervention teachers, occupational therapists and other health professionals (MOE, 2007b; Larson, 2010). Primary schools also provide a Resource Teacher: Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) service for children whose needs are moderately complex (Larson, 2010).

2.3.2 Māori behaviour frameworks

Hei Āwhina Mātua is an ecological Māori behaviour intervention framework which simply means to strengthen parents and other adults (Berryman, 2015). It implies the utilisation of the expertise of the child's teachers and whānau members with shared accountability, to create desired outcomes for learning and behaviour (Berryman, 2015). Durie (2006) emphasises the need to involve parents and whānau at all stages of the learning journey to plan according to students' strengths and potential. Close collaboration and meaningful discussions with family/whānau about the child help to build trustworthy and respectful relationships to understand the child's behaviours (Berryman, 2015). At times of transition, the Āwhina Mātua

framework provides further support to well-established parent-teacher partnerships to allow for consistent and collaborative support during the time of transition (Gonzalez-Mena, 2010).

The Huakina Mai framework is a way to build on the positive and collaborative relationships between children and adults that have been established within the Hei Āwhina Mātua framework. The framework which means “opening doors” (Berryman, 2015; MOE, n.d.), is a school-wide approach and part of the Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L) initiative, where all stakeholders of a learning community are jointly responsible for developing a positive culture that is reflective of all those who are part of it. Opportunities are provided for interventions to be contextualised and individualised (MOE, n.d.). It is ecological and sociocultural in nature, exploring multiple environments to find solutions to problems, meaning it is an approach that fits well within the framework of this study (Savage, Macfarlane, Macfarlane, Fickel & Te Hēmi, 2012). This is because of the collaborative nature of the transition process where it is important for the transition team in its entirety to bring their knowledge and opinions to the table (Wright, 2009).

Using a team approach, with the child with challenging behaviours at the centre, contributions to the transition process can be well informed and based on first hand evidence and experience of the child within the learning environment and wider contexts. Burgon and Walker (2013) note that relationships during transition for children with challenging behaviours were just as important for children as the literature has been mentioning for decades. These relationships extended across many different environmental settings and “positive relationships provided a way forward

when challenges arose” (Burgon & Walker, 2013, p. 27). This is consistent with the idea of having a strong connection between educational settings and family/whānau at all times in the Hei Āwhina Mātua and Huakina Mai frameworks.

“Waiho i toipoto, kaua i te toiroa.

Let us stay close together and not far apart”

- Whakatauki, cited in MOE, 2014

2.3.3 Transitions for children with challenging behaviours in practice

Peters (2010) states that “almost any child is at risk of making a poor or less successful transition if their individual characteristics are incompatible with features of the environment they encounter” (p. 2). Therefore, it is particularly crucial that transitions for children with challenging behaviours are done with care, consideration and planning to allow the child to find their place at school as easily as possible. However, it is important to be aware of possible barriers to smooth transitions, as well as strategies and guidelines that can help make a transition more successful.

2.3.3.1 *Barriers to successful transitions*

Transitions for children with challenging behaviours at times can become difficult due to systematic and environmental reasons, rather than the children themselves. Continuity of support from one educational setting to another seems to be a main barrier. Research has found that other barriers include ineffective relationships and communication, and resourcing and funding challenges (Burgon & Walker, 2013; Larson, 2010).

Burgon and Walker (2013) explored a number of transition cases for children who had diverse needs in a report to the Ministry of Education. They found that a lack of continuity of support was a major barrier to successful transitions.

El staff were seen as playing a pivotal role in transition. In many instances the lead worker had a very long association with the child... some of those interviewed talked about the value of the EI staying with the child for a longer period in the school setting. This was to maximise knowledge exchange.

(Burgon & Walker, 2013, p. 47)

However, they also identified issues such as staff turnover, staffing changes, as well as the limited time EI staff had to get involved in the transition process often interfered with the ability to do this (Burgon & Walker, 2013).

Similarly, Larson's (2010) study on the transition of a child with behaviour challenges in early childhood indicated that continuity of support was interrupted. During the child's transition there was a change of key workers from an Early Intervention (EI) staff member to Resource Teacher for Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) services, causing discontinuity in care and provision. This discontinuity was a particularly serious issue because the type of emotional and sensory support that the child received in his early childhood setting was not available when he moved into primary school, thus causing *melt downs* (Larson, 2010).

The type and extent of support previously received by children in early childhood not being available immediately in school is something which is known to occur fairly often (Burgon & Walker, 2013; Larson, 2010). A gap in receiving continued support was a barrier to effective transitions, interrupting the seamless shift from one

environment to another. Early planning and more school visits for the transition of a child with challenging behaviours was noted as important. However, a change of plans with a school or family and differing views on a longer transition often prevented this practice from being implemented (Burgon & Walker, 2013).

Ineffective relationships and poor communication/role clarity were other common issues expressed by participants in both Larson's (2010) and Burgon and Walker's (2013) work. In Larson's study the EI teacher was the lead worker in the transition, which meant the parent and class teachers were not always clear about the plans for transition and their roles. The early childhood teacher felt her involvement was not even required. This goes against the literature which indicates that close collaboration between all parties in the transition is critical for all children (Boyle & Petriwskyj, 2014; Peters et al., 2015; Wright, 2009). Perhaps with better communication about her expectations she would have been more involved and able to share her unique knowledge of the child, therefore leading to a more successful transition.

Burgon and Walker (2013) discovered that less effective relationships between MOE staff and other adults involved in the starting school process was a cause for concern. Poor role clarity such as who is responsible for co-ordinating resources was a factor impacting on successful transitions. A lack of understanding about what ongoing MOE supports were available created barriers to the transitions in the cases studied as well. The researchers often found that meetings between MOE and other adults did not even occur during the transition process. This meant there was no opportunity for specialist or early childhood knowledge to be shared between each other. Also schools

sometimes felt there was a lack of paperwork given to them about children and their previous support services (Burgon & Walker, 2013).

Poor communication was discovered in Larson's (2010) study when ideas about when an EI team should withdraw support was debated. Being settled into school can look different to different people. For example, in Larson's study the EI teacher felt the child was considered to be settled at school once a routines-based checklist could be ticked off, whereas the parent felt his transition would only be complete once his social and emotional needs were met (Larson, 2010). Disagreements and misunderstandings such as this appeared to be major barriers for transitions for children with challenging behaviours (Burgon & Walker, 2013; Larson, 2010). This is not surprising, when it has long been said by theorists such as Bronfenbrenner (1979) that:

Learning and development are facilitated by the participation of the developing person in progressively more complex patterns of reciprocal activity with someone with whom that person has developed a strong and enduring emotional attachment and when the balance of power gradually shifts in favor of the developing person. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 60)

Hence, it is crucial for all adults involved in the process to collaborate, establish their roles clearly, and decide the best plan of action for the child together (Alton-Lee, 2003; Bishop et al., 2014; Eisenhower et al., 2015; Wright, 2009).

Resourcing and funding challenges during transition and afterwards in the settling period, were another barrier which arose from Burgon and Walker's (2013) research. They found that schools were often having to fight to get the support they

needed for their children with diverse needs. Due to teacher aide shortages there was a lot of sharing of teacher aides between children who ideally needed one on one support. In some instances the teacher aides and RTLB support had not even been arranged. There was a common trend where schools were taking a *wait and see* approach to the children with challenging behaviours that transitioned. This meant that the extent of the need for support was only being realised after there had been an escalation in the severity of behaviour. After escalation the behaviour was much harder to address than if it had been prevented with the proper interventions from the beginning (Burgon & Walker, 2013; Larson, 2010).

2.3.3.2 *Strategies for smoother transitions*

“School entry is one period of transition that is relatively universal across cultures” (Eivers, Brendgen & Borge, 2010, p. 844). In the studies by Bourne (2007) from New Zealand; Graziano, Slavec, Hart, Garcia and Pelham Jr (2014) from America; and Marsh, Spagnol, Grove and Eapen (2017) from Australia detailed below, challenging and antisocial behaviour during transition to school was explored. This behaviour was severe enough that there were concerns for behavioural problems or poor relationships in the children’s futures.

Bourne’s (2007) and Marsh et al.’s (2017) studies detailed specific strategies that were employed to support challenging behaviours during transition and to promote as positive a start to school as possible. This involved the direct teaching of social skills and scaffolding children’s independence using visual resources such as cue cards and social stories, and providing children with support groups.

Bourne (2007) carried out a case study on a child - 'Aroha' in New Zealand.

Aroha was previously diagnosed with attention deficit disorder which caused challenging behaviours and sparked concerns for her teachers and parents for moving her into a new environment. Bourne's (2007) study found that Aroha's early childhood centre had planned ahead for her transition, something that the MOE (2010) stresses as valuable (Burgon & Walker, 2013). They discussed with Aroha that her time in early childhood was ending, scaffolded her to develop her independence further by slowly withdrawing support step by step, and actively taught her social skills such as turn taking.

Aroha's primary teacher was invited to visit the early childhood setting to observe Aroha's interaction with peers, look at her profile book and engage in informal discussions about her school day and friends. The teacher could see that Aroha had visual cue cards which needed to be taken into the primary school for continuity, and how to use these (Bourne, 2007). The Ministry of Health and Education (2008) outline how using social stories and visual resources such as the ones used with Aroha is useful for transitioning children with additional needs.

During Aroha's transition she had a support group around her which was made up of her extended whānau, early childhood teachers, Ministry staff, the school principal, and the new entrant teacher, who all engaged in discussions with each other and with Aroha. Parents were given advice on how to prepare Aroha for transition at home (Bourne, 2007). Bourne stresses the importance of this type of holistic support for a transitioning child with challenging behaviours, as it alleviates potential stress and anxiety for all involved.

Children diagnosed with ASD often present with a unique set of challenging behaviours due to their social communication and interpersonal difficulties (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Marsh et al., 2017; MOE, 2019). When starting school social skills are one of the most important things for children to be confident with (Marsh et al., 2017). Accordingly, Marsh et al. (2017) state that when children in their study diagnosed with ASD transitioned to school they had additional challenges that needed to be addressed in order to avoid negative outcomes such as bullying, rejection, or school exclusion. “In order to provide a successful start to school for these children, it is therefore important to develop school-based programs that target a range of skill development across behavioural and social as well as academic domains” (Marsh et al., 2017, p. 185). Subsequently, the results of their international literature review suggested that particular interventions in early childhood that continue into school can be effective, such as *TeachTown: Basics*, a computer assisted intervention and *Strategies for Teaching based Autism Research (STAR)*, which involved intensive teacher training. Therefore, teacher education and direct teaching of social skills to children with challenging behaviours, such as those with ASD like symptoms, prior to and after transition can be a very worthwhile strategy and protective factor for a successful school start (Bourne, 2007; Burgon & Walker, 2013; Graziano et al., 2014; Marsh et al., 2017).

Canadian research study by Coplan and Arbeau (2008) uncovered the difficulties shy (wary, nervous or anxious) children have during transitions to school. Shyness can be a symptom of many other issues in neurodiverse children, can cause extreme reactions to certain situations and can often require intervention (Coplan & Arbeau, 2008). Risks such as loneliness, withdrawal and misunderstanding were

explored. Protective factors for supporting shy children during transition included encouraging children to participate verbally in activities through subtle forms of communication, as opposed to direct questioning; using games which encourage speaking in turns; praising children in private; and maintaining order in the classroom (Coplan & Arbeau, 2008). A strong teacher-child relationship was also highly valued, one where the teacher was also able to encourage the child to interact with their peers (Coplan & Arbeau, 2008). This is a prime example of the type of challenging behaviours that would require collaboration and communication amongst all adults, in order to achieve consistency as the child shifts into their new school environment and to avoid potential misunderstandings (Dockett, 2008; Wright, 2009).

Graziano et al. (2014) explored the feasibility of providing an early intervention program over the summer to target specific behaviours and academic requirements for children with 'behaviour problems' who were soon to start school. These behaviours included inadequate self-regulation skills or behaviour control, aggression, defiance and impulsivity, among others. They studied 30 preschool children and targeted developmental aspects such as "abilities to follow through with instructions, complete tasks accurately, comply with teacher requests, and interact cooperatively and positively with peers" (Graziano et al., 2014, p. 559). They also underwent social skills training using puppets, the *Turtle Shell Technique*, and *circle games*. Parents and counsellors involved in the program reported high levels of improvement in children's behaviour, therefore contributing to a smoother transition with a shorter settling in period (Graziano et al., 2014).

Pulling together the range of studies from both NZ and worldwide, a range of factors contribute to the successful transition of children with challenging behaviours from early childhood settings to schools. The key factors include close collaboration between teachers, and between teachers and families, knowing the child well, careful planning, the use of visual resources, teacher education and the direct teaching of skills to children.

2.3.3.3 Ministry of Education guidelines for transition

The MOE (2017b) provides clear guidelines for transitioning children with learning support needs which includes those with challenging behaviours. The guidelines are evidence-based and stress the importance of parent engagement and strong relationships, and that decisions need to be made in a team in terms of the school visits (Bourne, 2007). These children may require a longer transition period with more scheduled visits. Therefore, the process needs to be started 6 to 12 months prior to starting school. There needs to be open and clear communication within this team about the child's interests, strengths and needs, what type of support the child has been receiving and the resourcing required. Portfolios and any assessment reports will need to be passed on to the school (MOE, 2017b).

The document *Starting School: Information for parents and caregivers of children with special needs* (MOE, 2010) alerts parents to their rights, guiding them on how to choose a school, what support to expect when they get there, and special education services that are available such as the Severe Behaviour Service, now known as Behaviour Support (MOE, 2018b). Burgon and Walker (2013) suggest that providing parents with information on documents that are available such as this is a helpful

strategy. *Transitions to School: Guidelines for Early Intervention Providers* (MOE, 2014) provides suggestions to early intervention teams such as the Ministry and school-based practitioners working to support children and their families. It includes indicators and key elements of a successful transition and is a useful starting point for collaborative discussion when clarifying whether a child has completed their settling in period at school or not (Larson, 2010).

2.3.4 Conclusion

This chapter examined literature on effective transitions for children with challenging behaviours from early childhood education to primary school. Transitions from both New Zealand and abroad for all children, as well as some with challenging behaviours, were explored. Challenging behaviours within the context of this study were defined along with the identification of some barriers that exist in transitions for children with these challenging behaviours. Some support services and strategies that can be used to lower the occurrences of challenging behaviours during transition times were presented.

It has been demonstrated how it is important to understand that major life adjustments, such as transition, are difficult for all children but even more so for those with behavioural challenges. It has also been made clear that strength in the relationships between and across environments is crucial for easing the shift to a new place especially when a child shows a need for extra support.

The literature on additional factors to consider during transitions for children with challenging behaviours specifically, overseas and in New Zealand is limited. Gathering relevant literature for this study has been a challenge, and suggests a need

for more research. It is important to be able to clearly identify what makes a successful transition to school for children with challenging behaviours, and how to use any barriers that may currently exist to drive future change.

2.3.5 Rationale for study

The literature review underscored the limited recent empirical research both in New Zealand and internationally on transitions from early childhood to school, especially in terms of what works and barriers for children with challenging behaviours. There is a need for listening and highlighting the voices of those involved in the transition process. The overall aim of the research was to contribute to and increase this area of knowledge using information gained directly from people who have been involved in transitioning children with challenging behaviours. Therefore, my research objective was to explore:

What are families' and teachers' perspectives on effective transitions from early childhood education to primary school for children with challenging behaviours?

To gain a full understanding of these perspectives, the following sub questions were addressed:

- 1) What practices make the transition from early childhood to primary school effective for all students?
- 2) What are the additional factors that need to be taken into consideration when supporting the transition of children with challenging behaviours to school?
- 3) What are the barriers when transitioning from early childhood to primary school for children with challenging behaviours?

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research process used to find the perspectives of parents and teachers of children with challenging behaviours on effective transitions from early childhood to primary school. A qualitative methodology was used nested within the framework of appreciative inquiry. A semi-structured approach was used to interview individuals, collecting data with a strength-based focus. The ideas deemed most useful for practice have been drawn from transcripts of the interviews using comparative analysis of themes. Considerations were made with regards to the ethics involved in the study, in accordance with and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (Appendix A).

3.2 Appreciative inquiry framework

Appreciative inquiry is a dynamic process and requires much energy and creativity but provides rewarding outcomes (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2008). This approach to research moves the focus away from a deficit-based approach to improvement in practice and explores “solutions that are present within organisations – either as already in use or lying dormant in participants’ imaginations” (Deuninck, 2015, p. 15). In looking to make a difference to young learners it was crucial that throughout this research project ideas were framed in a positive light and focused on the strengths of those concerned.

An appreciative inquiry approach within organisations is designed to bring about positive change. In the present study the approach uses “the positive as a focus

of inquiry” (Watkins, Mohr & Kelly, 2011, p. 112), giving participants the opportunity to discuss what they know already works well in their learning communities, and to dream of what a future could look like when effective transitions for children with challenging behaviours are the norm (Watkins et al., 2011). This study did not aim to prove a truth or theory but instead sought out the most meaningful and useful themes that emerged from the discussions with the participants to inform recommendations (Cooperrider et al., 2008; Gray, 2014). Teachers and parents had a wealth of unique knowledge about their students/children that needed to be acknowledged, appreciated and utilised in this explorative research

In appreciative inquiry the themes and ideas discovered are only the beginning of an on-going process where action is continuously taken to fine tune teaching practice (Gray, 2014; Lewis & Winkelman, 2016). Cooperrider et al (2008) call this the 4-D cycle, outlining the stages of the appreciative inquiry process as Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny (or Delivery), as seen in Figure 6. This study had a particularly strong focus on the dream aspect as there has been limited exploration on this topic in the past.

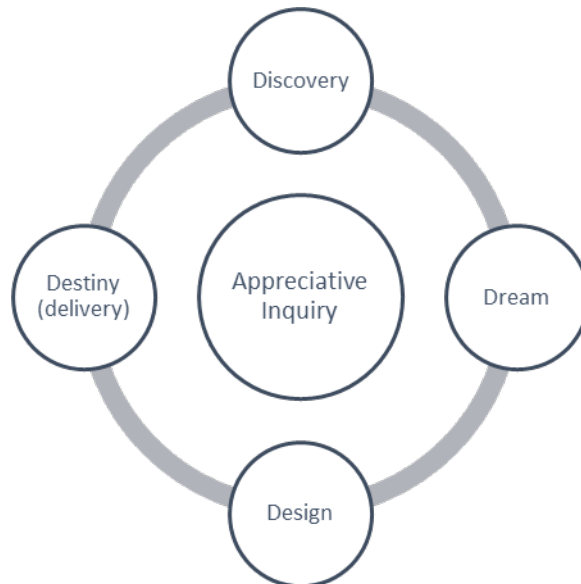


Figure 6. The appreciative inquiry process.

Beginning with the discovery phase, interviews were carried out and perspectives were shared and discussed with questions carefully framed to draw out examples of positive experiences. The dream phase involved thinking about what an ideal world may look like and using the information found to create a vision of what might be. Moving into the design phase would have been beneficial, however time constraints meant that this was not possible for this particular study. In this phase collaboratively constructed ideas would have been allowed the chance to become reality. The destiny/delivery phase would have allowed the sustenance of new practices introduced using empowerment and education (Cooperrider et al., 2008). Perhaps another researcher could build on this research in the future by exploring the final two phases of appreciative inquiry.

3.3 Methodology

3.3.1 Qualitative research

Creswell (2015) describes a qualitative researcher as someone who looks at the bigger picture yet sees the finer details in what people discuss and the connections between these. Qualitative research discovers the thoughts and feelings of participants and records stories about their experiences allowing new ideas to unfold (Creswell, 2015; Mutch, 2005). This research inquiry used a qualitative methodology to uncover the perspectives of families and teachers, about the effective transitions of children with challenging behaviours from early childhood to primary school, based on their first-hand experiences.

Contrary to some beliefs that qualitative research is not scientific enough and can be subjective (Atkins & Wallace, 2015), it is argued that this methodology provides credible and trustworthy information as the ideas come 'straight from the horse's mouth' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher is required to be with and connected to the people they are studying, as opposed to creating a disconnect with quantitative approaches such as sending out surveys or doing research in a laboratory (Creswell, 2015). The implication of qualitative research, therefore, is that findings are often useful for application in professional practice (Wellington, 2000). It is hoped that, by uncovering what has subjectively worked well in the lives of those going through challenging transitions, these discoveries will be able to applied to others. The research process used is represented in Figure 7.

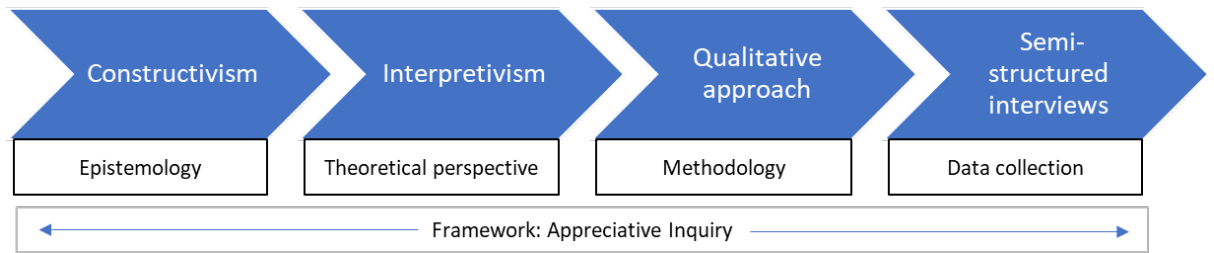


Figure 7. The research process.

3.3.2 Epistemology (constructivism)

Epistemology refers to the discovery of meaning behind what we do. It provides the reader of the research with theoretical reasons why certain ideas, discoveries, and outcomes should be taken seriously, by explaining how we know the things we know to be true, and what it means to know these things (Crotty, 1998; Gray, 2014). It is the knowledge that underpins the theoretical perspective and the methodology which has been chosen (Crotty, 1998). The method of data collection is determined by the methodology (Gray, 2014).

The epistemology of this study is located in constructivism. Essentially, meaning is viewed as socially constructed through interactions with people and things (Crotty, 1998; Gray, 2014). In the case of the present study, meaning in relation to effective transitions for children with challenging behaviours was constructed through the interviews between the researcher and the participants. In the constructivist world-view, subject and the object work together to create truth out of our realities. There is no correct interpretation of a phenomenon, only useful and not useful ones (Crotty, 1998). Constructivism even goes as far as to say that objects existed without meaning before human beings gave meaning to them, for example, a tree is called a tree and has the associations that go with it because of us. It is even possible that a tree has

different meanings to different societies such as in a logging town versus a treeless slum (Crotty, 1998). Applying this philosophy to research required the researcher to remain open-minded and aware of any of their own biases that may have been constructed by their own social world. When looking at what can have an impact on challenging behaviours, it was important to keep this constructivist epistemology in mind, as useful and meaningful information for a range of children and situations was sought.

3.3.3 Theoretical perspective (interpretivism)

The theoretical perspective of interpretivism further supports this, as it is based on interpreting the world through historical and cultural understandings (Crotty, 1998). Ideas from participants were interpreted using a bottom-up, inductive process, where the information was gathered first and then the meaning was attributed to it (Gray, 2014). Interpretivists accept that they cannot completely remove themselves and their experiences from the information they are analysing, meaning that the researcher's own values and beliefs play a part in creating the final picture of their findings (Ryan, 2018), much like it did in this study.

3.3.4 Method

3.3.4.1 *Participants*

Finding participants for this study was extremely challenging. The researcher had tried hard to keep the criteria relatively broad in the hope of finding a large enough sample of children with challenging behaviours. She communicated with many of her own contacts sending out information sheets (see Appendix B), as well as using

various Facebook groups to attempt to attract people. Emails were sent directly to many school principals and SENCOs, and friends and family were asked to help in spreading the word. The researcher acknowledged that the search area may have been too small and therefore looked further afield to other parts of the city and country. Even with all this it took four months of searching to get the three cases which were used for this study.

There were 11 participants in total. The three mothers and one father of children who had transitioned from early childhood to primary school within the last 12 months, four early childhood teachers involved in the transitions and three primary teachers (two from one case and one who was involved in two of the cases).

3.3.4.2 Participant selection

The selection criteria for participants in this study were:

1. Parents and teachers (Early Childhood/New Entrant/Year 1/SENCO) who were part of a team that involved the transition to school of a child who has challenging behaviours (behaviours requiring additional support).
2. Family/teachers of children who have transitioned a child to school within the previous 12 months.
3. No more than three key members of each transition team based on whoever has had the most involvement with the child. Two parents being interviewed together were considered as 1 key team member, as were two teachers who had worked on a child's particular case.

3.3.4.3 Data collection: Semi-structured interviews

Qualitative semi-structured interviews were the most suitable way of collecting data in this study, as their open ended nature allowed for rich discussions of opinions and experiences, such as was required for the discovery and dream stages of appreciative inquiry (see Appendix C for interview schedules) (Cooperrider et al., 2008; Mutch, 2005). Interviews were recorded by the researcher and transcribed using a university approved transcriber and the researcher. After transcription they were analysed by the researcher.

Semi-structured interviews are common in qualitative interviewing as they permit a combination of set questions with set objectives and informal questions that may be needed for elaboration on certain points. There was enough flexibility for the participants to take the discussion in any required direction (Mutch, 2005), which was particularly important when dreaming of what could be (Cooperrider et al., 2008). Interviews were conducted face-to-face and individually, except in the case of two parents of the same child taking part, who were interviewed together. One of the early childhood centres had two staff members involved in the transition, so they also took part in a joint interview.

3.3.4.4 Data analysis: Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is widely used in psychological research due to its flexibility of application (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry, Hayfield, Braun & Clarke, 2017). It requires the researcher to let the data “speak for itself” as much as possible (Mutch, 2005). Thematic analysis involves a fine balancing act between being precise and sound without limiting itself. Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that using this type of analysis

means it is important to describe the way data has been analysed and make the assumptions underlying the analysis clear. It is not enough to passively allow themes to emerge from the data, the researcher must search for them with intent, therefore, their preconceived ideas on the topic are intertwined into the analysis work.

In this study the thematic analysis of the entire data set was a combination of inductive and deductive (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017). It involved a process of browsing all of the information in the interview transcripts, highlighting words, patterns and information of interest with a focus on the research questions. Imagery, metaphors and controversial/conflicting arguments were identified, the data was coded with coloured highlighters, and key words and ideas were written into the margins. Simultaneously, ideas were grouped into categories with specific code labels, using a series of concept maps on the website called "*Coggle*", as in Appendix D (Mutch, 2005). The larger concept maps were merged together into one big mind map as seen in Appendix E, of which the findings were drawn from.

3.4 Ethics

3.4.1 Ethical considerations

This study was reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee No: 18/16 (see Appendix A for HEC approval email).

3.4.2 Informed consent

Consent forms were given to and signed by all participants as well as the school principals, board of trustees and early childhood centre managers associated with those partakers (see Appendix F for an example consent form). Participants were told that their involvement was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time.

3.4.3 Confidentiality and anonymity

Any information detailed in this report was stripped of any identifying information using only pseudonyms when referring to particular people's perspectives. Care was taken to select appropriate quotes and ideas when talking about particular people and educational settings, especially when it came to barriers, as to keep the tone positive and improvement focused.

3.4.4 Transcription

Four of the interviews were transcribed by professional university approved transcribers and the remaining interviews were transcribed by the researcher. Transcribers were requested to sign the transcriber confidentiality agreement (Appendix G).

3.4.5 Reliability and validity

Lincoln and Guba (1986) explain how the introduction of qualitative inquiry initially led to concerns about the relaxation of experimental rigor. With a new method to research, it was not possible to use the same models and criteria that was used in quantitative scientific research to examine how reliable and valid a piece of research was. Qualitative research allows for the researcher's opinions and views to be included as a trustworthy source in addition to the opinions of participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). The relationship between the researcher and the participants is one which encourages the co-construction of learning throughout the process, such as in this study where the researcher had pre-existing knowledge of early childhood education, transitions, relationships and challenging behaviours to build upon. This was

particularly the case during the semi-structured interviews where the researcher had the ability to focus conversation to support participants in constructing knowledge. The epistemology and theory the research was grounded in is what kept it reliable and true to itself (Lincoln & Guba, 1986), along with a clear description of; the research design; techniques used for gathering data; and methods of data analysis (Mutch, 2005).

It is likely that the position of the researcher/author as a former early childhood teacher, with a particular interest in the nature and impact of relationships, had some impact on the interpretation of data. “Any theoretical framework carries with it a number of assumptions about the nature of data” (Braun & Clarke, 2007, p. 81) and the researcher’s personal knowledge and experience may have occasionally controlled what was deemed as important or noteworthy (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017). The researcher’s opinions that have been developed over years of teaching were a lens in which the interview data was viewed through and were an advantage for providing care to be taken in accurately interpreting data.

3.5 Summary

This research was designed to find authentic perspectives from parents and teachers of children with challenging behaviours on the effective transition from early childhood to primary school. This was done using a qualitative paradigm involving the collection of data using semi-structured interviews aimed to draw out the experiences of the participants. Interview questions were framed in such a way that existing and imagined positive approaches could be explored.

Using the epistemology of constructivism and a theoretical approach of interpretivism, the researcher and participants were able to construct knowledge together on themes related to improving transitions for children with challenging behaviours in the future. The sample size was small; however, this study should make a valuable contribution to the limited amount of existing literature on this topic in New Zealand.

Chapter Four: Findings

4.1 Introduction

This research project aimed to contribute to the limited information that currently exists in New Zealand on transition from early childhood to school, for children who have challenging behaviours. The research questions were designed to examine current positive transition experiences for all children, and the additional practices used in the transition of children who are identified as having challenging behaviours. Lastly, it set out to explore the factors that may be barriers during transition for these children, whilst identifying areas of possible improvement.

The perspectives of teachers and parents in one area of a large metropolitan city were sought within an appreciative inquiry approach (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2008; Gray, 2014). This approach provided the optimal chance to focus on the positive aspects of transition and how to improve on them. Although there were some barriers all participants spoke positively of their experiences of transitioning *Adam*, *Billy* and *Carl* to school, providing a platform for building more positive experiences of transition in the future for children with challenging behaviours.

The tables below show the participants in each case that was explored.

Table 3.

Early childhood centres and schools in this study

	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3
Child	Adam	Billy	Carl
ECE	Centre A	Centre B	Centre C
Primary	School A	School B	School B

Table 4.

Pseudonyms of participants

Names	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3
ECE teacher(s)	Abby	Brenda Brianna	Christina
Primary teacher(s)	Anna Alice	Bridget	Bridget
Parent(s)	Ariana	Britney Brett	Carrie

In this findings section each ‘case’ is reported on separately (Case study 1 followed by Case study 2 and 3 together, as these children went to the same school). First the profile of each child is presented along with their learning contexts. The profile is followed by parents’ and teachers’ perspectives on the success of, and the barriers to, transitions. A concept map of the themes from the interview data and their relationship is in Appendix E. The initial concept map was revised and reorganised to obtain major themes identified by the adults involved which included: *the interconnected network of relationships surrounding the children; how early childhood*

services and primary schools prepare for effective transitions; the learning environment and its ability to cater to individual needs of diverse learners; and the resources being utilised to support transition.

5.1.1 Case study 1 (Adam)

Adam is a six-year-old boy who transitioned from Centre A to School A in late 2018. In December 2018 his paediatrician suspected that he had mild Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and autism. Labels such as these can be useful to get the financial support needed to meet the needs of a child better, but it is also important to understand that a label often denotes a problem that is within the child. This study reports on the views of the participants, but does not take the stance that a diagnosis is necessarily the most helpful answer to a child's behavioural issues. The child and their behaviour need to be considered within the broader context of the environments that children spend their time in (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Lyle, 2000).

Adam's parents had known that he was different from other children his age even prior to obtaining a diagnosis. For example, Adam could make a very well-structured prawn out of Lego at just three years of age. The behaviour that was considered most challenging by his teachers in school such as violence, aggression, and disregard for people and property were not really seen by his early childhood (EC) teachers. On the contrary, they found it challenging to keep up with Adam's intelligence and capability. He was described by the EC centre as a child who has an incredible memory, extensive vocabulary and likes to ask a lot of intellectual questions.

He was challenging intellectually to us, coz he'd ask questions and he already knew the answers, but he would just be testing to see if we knew the answers...

We didn't have the resources to be able to answer all the questions that he was asking. (Abby, EC teacher, Centre A)

Adam's mum Ariana describes Adam's behaviour at home as being difficult to manage, as she is a single parent with three young boys, and Adam was impulsive, rough, accidentally destructive, and found it difficult to manage his emotions. However, she also mentioned his level of intelligence:

When you meet him and he has these really intense conversations about like really fascinating stuff you're just like gosh, your brain could go anywhere, you've got so much potential. But it became really obvious that that potential was being limited by his ability to focus in class, participate in group activities, and hold back his temper from situations he didn't like. (Ariana, mother)

During the time of Adam's transition, his parents were in the process of separating. They moved house and their live-in au pair went back to Germany all within a very short period time. This was a time of massive change for Adam. He was lucky to have had the support of his grandparents on both sides of the family, cousins, and his two brothers during these times.

Centre A is part of a small New Zealand chain of private daycare centres that are family owned and run. The buildings are aesthetically modern, their philosophy is centred around child-led plans, and they use a lot of natural resources. They have a very dedicated pool of staff with a low staff turnover. The children are separated into four rooms depending on their age. On a Wednesday they take the older children to spend the day at a local beach. Adam's family have been a part of Centre A's learning

community for many years, as Adam's older brother also attended the centre, while his younger brother is currently there.

School A is a large, decile 10 primary school in close proximity to Centre A. The school vision is to create life-long learners and excellent citizens of the community. They have a large number of international students, which brings substantial funding that helps to support local children's learning. Their practices are based on the values of whakaute/respect, atawhai/kindness and manawanui/resilience. When Adam started at School A they did not have a permanent teacher for his class so he had Anna, the Year 1 Team Leader, as his teacher for a couple of months before Alice took over as his teacher.

5.1.2 Case Study 2 (Billy) and Case Study 3 (Carl)

Centre B, attended by Billy, is a small privately owned daycare in a large metropolitan city which has been operating for many decades. The centre is split into two age groups; however, they encourage children from all ages to mix together and learn from each other. They have a strong focus on relationships and respect. Their philosophy is influenced by Pikler/Resources for Infant Educators (RIE) and Reggio Emilia. The teacher in-charge of transitions has been working at the Centre for 13 years with other experienced staff.

School B is a culturally diverse, decile 4 primary school in the same metropolitan suburb as the above early childhood centre, where 33% of children enrolled are Māori and 23% are of Pacific heritage. This school stands out amongst most other schools in the area, as it has a reception room especially designed as a middle ground between early childhood education and school. All new children to

School B begin in this classroom and stay for a minimum of 6 weeks before being carefully transitioned into their regular classroom. The teacher of the reception room, Bridget, is trained in early childhood education and even used to teach at Centre C. Therefore, she is well equipped to meet the needs of children who are fresh into school.

Billy and Carl are five-and-a-half-year-old boys who transitioned to School B in the beginning of 2019. Billy came from Centre B and Carl came from Centre C, and had the same transition teacher, Bridget, who runs the reception room for all new children at the school. Billy comes from a fairly small family, consisting of his mum, dad, and younger sister. He has four cousins and two sets of grandparents who live nearby. Billy's mother, Britney, describes him as intelligent, funny, and quirky, someone who likes to talk a lot, play sports, and is active and very caring towards his younger sister. She says that his behaviour has not been very challenging at home, but that he does struggle with instructions if there are too many. She and her husband Brett, began to notice delays in his fine motor skills after it was drawn to their attention by his early childhood centre and also after watching his sister develop. Their paediatrician suspected that Billy may have ADHD inattentive type, but he was not officially diagnosed. The family wanted to wait until he was older, or until it started to become a barrier for his learning. His teachers in Centre B had noted Billy to be aggressive but that was not noticed at home. His school teacher, Bridget, observed that Billy's behaviour was well under control at school and that her main concern was his auditory processing and his spatial awareness.

I was a little bit worried about his processing and the fact that you'd say [Billy] here's your book bag, go and put it in your school bag, and he'd get to the door and go... What? Where am I... What am I doing? ... And he was very, was unaware of his body movements in space. (Bridget, teacher, School B)

However, both his parents and Bridget had started seeing some improvement in both these areas. "His fine motor skills, they're the ones that he seems to be really falling behind on, but most other things he seems to have made good, steady progress on," stated his father, Brett. Britney added "Even with his social skills."

Centre C is a smaller daycare, attended by Carl, which is family owned. They are mixed age, meaning all children play and learn together, however, there are teachers dedicated to work with certain age groups and children. They pride themselves on their large outdoor area which was an important contributor to the learning and development of Carl. They believe in exercise and nutrition and provide gymnastic sessions with *Jumping Beans*. They value parent contribution to their child's learning journey and encourage independence.

Carl's paediatrician deemed him to have qualities that warranted a diagnosis of anxiety and low emotional IQ, two things which his mother, Carrie, explained can make for a very challenging boy at home and in the educational setting. His behaviour can sometimes appear symptomatic of ADHD as he is always on the go, struggles in social settings and finds it hard to express his emotions.

He'd do something like he'd roll himself up in the mat and then leave it there and then he'd pull the cushions off the couch and then, you know, it's just one

thing after the next, you know, and if I let it go it would go on all day long, it's just he'd go annoy his sister. He'd go whack her with a stick or something so then she's upset, then, um, he'll do something else, he'd whack the stick against the house. (Carrie, mother)

He has an older sister who is 10, and who seemed to be a very positive role model and supportive addition to the family and to Carl. Carl is also a caring and empathetic boy especially towards his sister and her friends. He loves puzzles and fixing things, just like his father and grandfather.

Centre C took Carl under their wing after he was nearly excluded from his previous daycare due to behaviours that were seen as too challenging. Centre C saw his potential, worked with Carrie and the Ministry of Education Early Intervention team to have consistent behaviour management strategies, toilet trained him, and therefore got him ready for school. While his initial school teacher, Bridget, could see his challenges, she worked with all the family members and professionals who knew him to create an environment that suited his needs within School B. She could see that he tried very hard to do the right thing and that he wanted to be at school.

5.2 The interconnected network of relationships

The network of relationships that surrounded each child had a large impact on the success of transitions to school for the children in this study. Figure 8 is designed to show how the theme of relationships within and across educational settings and the home (mesosystems) was demonstrated in the interviews through the close related subthemes of collaboration and reciprocity; communication; and openness and honesty. Parents in the study felt it was important for relationships to be reciprocal,

with early childhood and school staff communicating openly and honestly with them, while also consulting with them about the needs of their child. Parents needed to feel like their views and opinions on their child were heard. They felt it was also important to be trusted and to trust in return. This caused some issues for teachers who wanted to pass information on to others, but were afraid of breaching privacy at times.

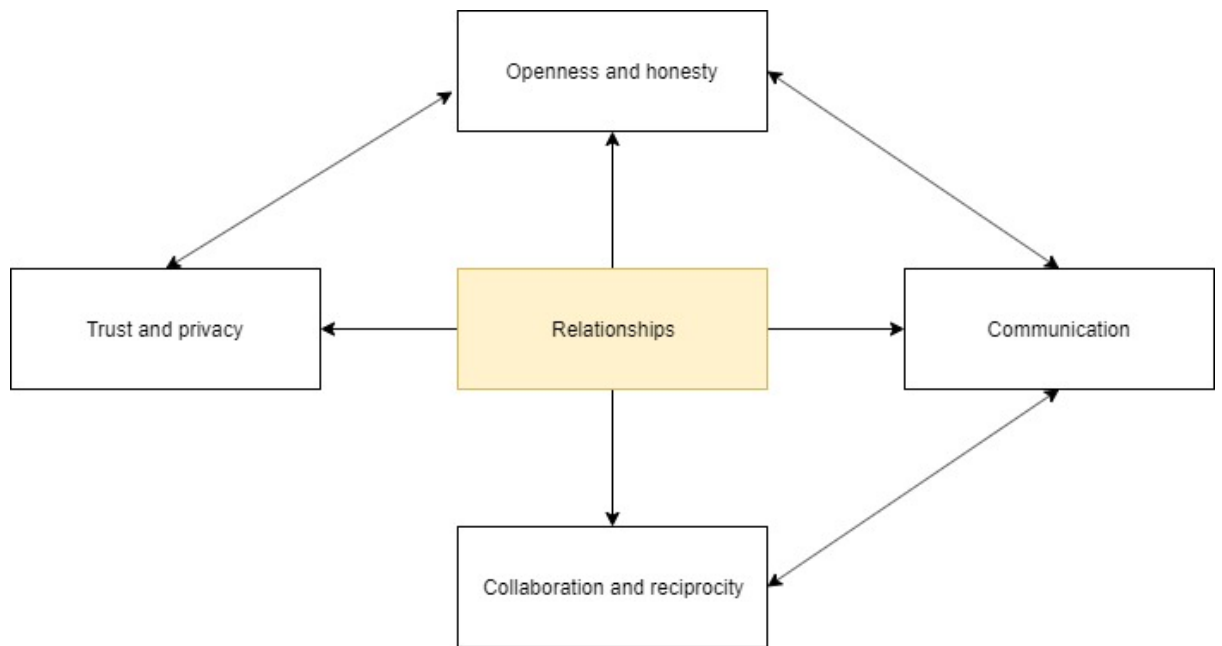


Figure 8. The aspects of relationships which were key in the transitions of Adam, Billy and Carl, and how these connect to each other.

5.2.1 Collaboration and reciprocity

Teachers from both early childhood and primary school spoke about the benefits of the new Kāhui Ako or COLs being established in their local areas and how these groups could be utilised for further strengthening of relationships and allowing extra opportunities for collaboration, with communication that is multi-directional:

We are now part of a local Ako group, which is all the local primary schools and early childhood centres, which is helping a lot...We're now meeting once every 6

weeks and it's a chance for informal chats... It's good to get everyone together...

making that continuous learning from the word go. (Abby, EC teacher, Centre A)

Anna from School B mentioned that in "the COLs, we have started a liaison now with the early childhood... that's where we would see that the kindys might be able to make some sort of transition with us."

As well as the COLS, teachers reported on collaborating with others, including parents, as best they could during transitions. Bridget from School B had a systematic way of collaborating with early childhood centres in the local area: "I go out once a term, so four times a year, I spend a whole morning and we go out and visit all the centres so that we can steal all their fabulous ideas." While some early childhood teachers spoke of their experience of primary teachers not having time to read children's portfolios, Bridget made it very clear that the early childhood services had given her "A really good insight" into the background of Billy and Carl during their transitions. She also talked about being "Hugely supported by the family" during the transition of Billy, who was not receiving any additional resources or supports at the time of the interviews. Support from the family included the filling out of any required forms for support, the mirroring of strategies at home that were used in the classroom, and honing in on skills at home, such as his fine motor skills, that needed further development.

In terms of Carl, she felt well supported by the collaborative processes in place with his early intervention team. There was open sharing of information in the relationship between Carl's early childhood centre, Centre C, and School B and its reception class teacher, Bridget. The early childhood teacher, said "I have a really good relationship with her. We say to them [the primary school] if you've got any more

questions, if you need some advice like... we're right here. Just ring us, email us..." (Christina, early childhood teacher, Centre C).

Written reports from early childhood centres were mentioned by a lot of participants as a form of collaborative communication. "[Brenda] writes an amazing report that talks about their dispositional learning," said Brianna. The report includes a range of information such as who the child's friends are, some of the things they struggle with, and the things the child is good at and enjoys doing. The primary teacher, Bridget, also mentioned that she visits Centre B on a regular basis, so is aware of the children who will be transitioning to her room soon and will do informal observations. Christina from Centre C also mentioned that they provide the school with a report for all children, called a *Ready for School Profile* which looks at strengths, challenges and where children are at with reference to the early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*.

Collaboration within the early childhood environment and within the school environments was also discussed. Abby spoke about how her experience usually led her in trying to meet children's needs, but that she had never met anyone like Adam before. Therefore, she would seek support from other teachers who worked at her centre, one in particular who had a daughter with Down Syndrome. They decided that they would put Adam under the umbrella of gifted and talented, because of his intelligence and exceptionality. She also mentioned how sometimes the staff would say "He's just [Adam]," because he was a unique type of person, something those at Centre A very much appreciated and missed once he had gone to school.

5.2.2 Openness, honesty and trust

Processes of collaboration and communication that were characterised by openness and honesty were described as very important for teachers and parents during times of transition. Ariana, Adam's mother, stressed the importance of being open in communication from early on in the child's learning journey and talked about how lucky she was to have honest early childhood teachers for Adam, which made her relationship with them stronger and her trust in them deeper. "The teacher started telling us we are finding it really hard to move him on from one station to another. Or to participate in stuff," she explained. Ariana made an analogy about her perspective of teachers in Adam's early childhood centre and being transparent with each other about their child's behaviour:

If you have a 4 or 5-year-old who's falling into tears and they don't have the language or understanding to express it... Whatever it is... Like I have found with them [Centre A], those little 1 on 1 interviews I had, or, you know, [Abby] was straight up like when we take him to [the beach] he can't stop screaming at the ducks and it's becoming an issue. Do you notice this at home? ... Because I'll say that, I'll be like my 3-year-old has started calling me a fucking idiot, has he ever said that at daycare? But... if they were to say we've noticed an increase in bad language... At the end of the day, I know he's safe, and his happiness is a spectrum just like everyone else. It's your job to keep him safe. I don't expect you to keep him happy. (Ariana, mother)

She compared the way that primary school teachers communicated with her as opposed to what she knows about most day-care teachers:

'Teacher teachers' are straight up honest. Like a classroom teacher will be like no other child in my class is like this, but early childhood teachers... because they are probably nervous themselves, if a day has gone bad they won't tell you. Because they don't want you to worry... This is part of the transaction of daycare, right? I have a job to do, I don't wanna leave my kid here crying, you're gonna tell me they'll be fine when I go... I've always really appreciated when the early childhood teachers have said he's had a great day BUT there was an issue. (Ariana, mother)

When Adam was settling into school, his teacher Alice and his mother Ariana both found it helpful to speak openly about Adam's behaviour on a very frequent basis, so they could know what to expect of Adam each day in the morning or when he got home, and prepare for it. This was achieved through emails, as well as face to face catch ups and a joint "*Google Doc*" they shared. Ariana would tell Alice if Adam had a rough morning so she could set something up specifically to engage him, and Alice would tell Ariana if Adam had a rough day, trying to achieve as much consistency and positivity for Adam as possible while going through so much change.

Adam's early childhood teacher, Abby, talked about how lovely it was to already know Adam's family well, having had his older brother go through the centre. She felt she could be honest with her and speak her mind. Of Adam's transition she said "Everyone is just so comfortable talking to [Ariana] that we just, it was kind of a group thing... Having an older brother as well, there was lots of talk around being at school".

The open and honest nature of Abby's relationship with Ariana meant she always remained well informed about Adam and possible reasons she was seeing certain behaviours in the classroom leading up to his transition.

He did go through a phase about talking about hurting himself. And I don't know if that was a reflection on his home life as well as here, and going to school, like coz a lot of things happened for him at the same time. (Abby, EC teacher, Centre A)

She also mentioned the importance of being open with the host primary school teachers in terms of not just sharing learning portfolios with the positives of the child's learning journey but also "Sometimes you need to tell them the negatives." She said that this is much easier done over a face to face conversation, such as those they can have in the Kāhui Ako.

Teachers also wanted parents to share information openly with them. Adam's teacher, Alice, felt that Adam's mother was advised by professionals outside of the centre that they should not tell School A anything about Adam's difficult behaviours, so that he would not be pre-judged at school. Thus, the decision was made by Adam's parents to withhold this personal information. While School A respected the wishes of Ariana and Adam's father, the teachers who worked with Adam wished they had been trusted with more information about Adam. "With [Adam]'s parents they said nothing... [Adam] had nothing in place... It was just a surprise" (Anna, teacher, School A). A genuine partnership was formed when the family started sharing information with the school more openly.

Anna, who was Adam's first teacher at School A talked about the "Experience or maturity" of younger teachers being a factor in their level of honesty in their conversations. She says it can be hard to articulate sensitively when you are a new teacher, and perhaps it is a matter of finding the right balance of experienced staff to collaborate with parents and build open and trustworthy partnerships. While strong and trustworthy relationships are important for all children, it is particularly necessary for those with challenging behaviours. In line with what Anna mentioned about speaking with honesty and confidence, it was demonstrated that a deep level of trust was important for relationships to remain positive.

Billy's teachers at Centre B mentioned how they had to be tactful in communicating with the host school, so as not to break anyone's trust or breach privacy. "How the report is written, when the teacher sees it, she looks at it and goes ok I'm reading between the lines and I'm understanding what you are trying to say here without actually saying it," Brianna from Centre B confided.

Abby from Centre A had a similar concern, speaking of how she was worried about breaching privacy by passing too much information on about a child during transition, especially when it came to their challenging behaviours. She mentioned wanting to have the chance to "Teacher speak" to others without having to explicitly state the issue.

We all had a bit of a joke with [Ariana] after [Adam] left that we wanted to put a note in his bag to his parents - to his next teachers – to say he's going to ask questions; these are the things you need to check up on. (Abby, EC teacher, Centre A)

During Adam's transition there were no opportunities for the early childhood centre and school to come together to discuss the transition, however this is now being addressed through the new local Kāhui Ako cluster. Abby would have liked the chance to talk to the school about their routines in the classroom, so she could tell the school how they could support Adam. However, without the permission from parents she was unable to communicate with the school. "We're trying to get round the whole privacy statements in things", she said of their Ako group.

When asked if there was an opportunity to share knowledge between early childhood and primary during Adam's transition, Anna said "No, because we don't even know if they've been to kindy or not, we don't get that information unless you've asked Mum... or we ask [the children] and what kindy did you go to?" She said, "It's just a fishing expedition for us." Anna was unsure if this was perhaps a barrier created by the passing on of sensitive information from the school office.

An additional factor that was noteworthy during Carl's transition was the meeting of all adults involved in Carl's learning journey before the transition, arranged by Carl's early intervention worker. Carrie (his mother) understood this to be part of the early intervention process. When asked who was at the meeting she said "The intervention teacher... [Christina] from [Centre C], she came over to that meeting too... the school support person... the other new entrant teacher... Yeah just about everybody that needed to be there was."

When talking about what happened in that meeting, she explained:

Trying to figure out when the best time to start him is, if everybody, if he's ready right now, is he emotionally ready? Is he gonna cope? How do we think, you

know, worst case scenario what do we think might happen? Is he a runner? No...

It was a huge team effort... and even now we're all always on the same page.

(Carrie, mother)

Christina from Centre C said that this was the first time she had ever been part of a meeting like this, and that she found it very good. She felt "Very positive" for Carl after leaving the meeting. Bridget also spoke about this meeting, her perspective being:

We set up a transition meeting with us and the daycare he was at and [EI teacher] and mum and dad so that we all knew how we were gonna make sure it was a smooth transition, how mum and dad felt, um, things that the daycare had noticed and things that would be helpful for when he started school so that before he even arrived we had a picture on who he is, what makes him tick, what worked, what didn't. (Bridget, teacher, School B)

The level of trust and disclosure of sensitive information during this meeting gave Bridget a thorough understanding of Carl and his needs. She could implement special strategies for him in the classroom from early on, such as "The mat trick" as Carrie called it. This involved giving Carl his own carpet spot to sit on in the classroom, contributing to his sense of belonging, as it was a place that belonged to him where he could feel safe.

Subsequently, Carrie, Carl's mother spoke about her trust in School B and the staff there. She felt like she had told them everything they needed to know about Carl and they were well equipped to meet his needs. "They seem happy and very able to manage anything that happens. Which is really good... It's just peace of mind for me when I drop him off, I know that, you know, they've got it covered," told Carrie.

5.3 Preparing for effective transitions

Effective, advanced preparation of the early childhood and primary environments, and of people's knowledge, was frequently mentioned by teachers and parents as a significant factor in the transitions of all children, including those with challenging behaviours. Figure 9 is designed to reveal how the theme of preparation for a transition involves many different factors. The children and families needed to be well informed about what to expect before a transition occurred, removing the element of surprise in order for children to feel lower levels of anxiety. For the three children in this study, it was mentioned that the option of changing the timing of the transition to suit the children needs was offered in an attempt to help the early childhood centre and the school to be better prepared for the transition, one which could take more time when challenging behaviour is involved.

Children's preparation involved introducing them to key aspects of the school setting and the people in it. Preparation for parents meant helping them know what to expect of school and the way it works. The educational settings needed to understand each other's policies and pedagogies, and use this knowledge to prepare the teaching and learning contexts appropriately for the child either leaving or joining their environment.

The early childhood centres and primary schools each had developed a range of approaches that prepared children to make the transition to school smooth for all involved. In the early childhood centres, there was a pedagogical focus on self-help and self-management in preparing 4-year-olds for the move to school. On the primary school side, teachers made a real effort to try and support children through making their

environment mimic or have aspects of the early childhood environment to ease children into school life.

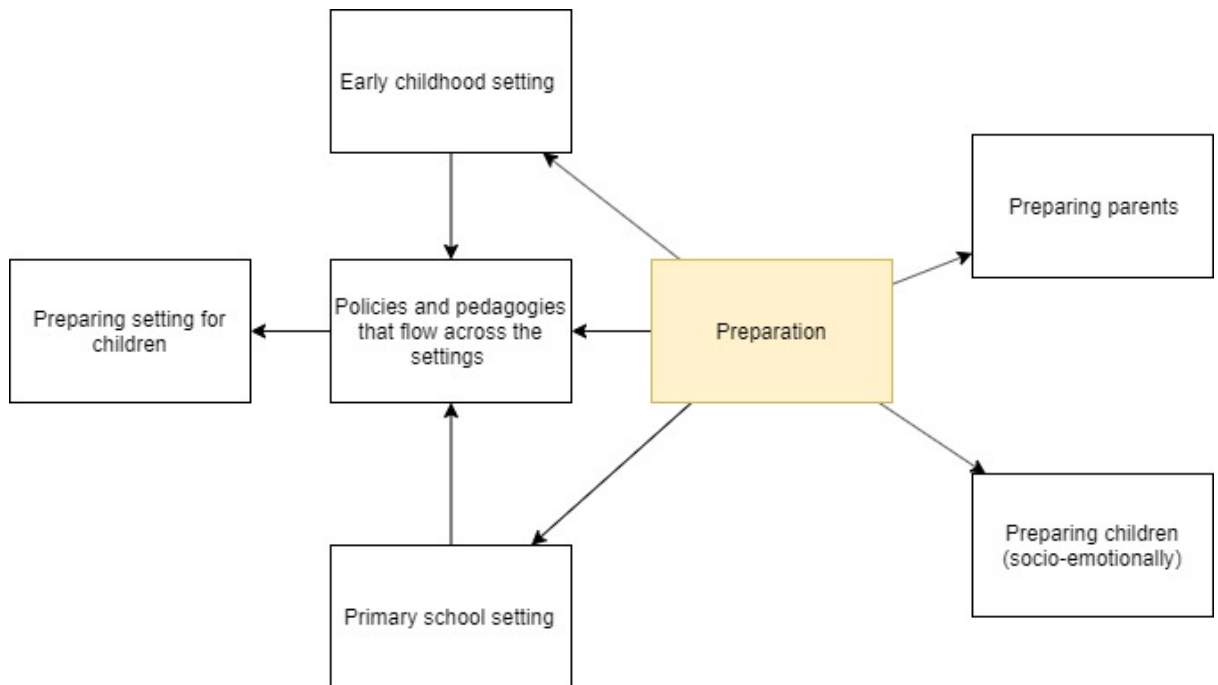


Figure 9. Preparation for transition involves interactions amongst settings, children and families.

“We really concentrate on social competencies and self-help skills,” said Brianna from Centre B. Abby from Centre A referred to this focus on self-management in early childhood as “Freeing up the brain space” to be able to take on more complex, academic knowledge in future. That is, once children feel secure and confident and able to take care of their basic needs, it is much easier for them to be in the correct headspace to learn about things such as reading, writing and mathematics.

I went to a workshop about a year and half ago and the phrase that always stuck with me was, we’ve got to make the unknown known. So we’ve taken out all the academic side of it and look at things which may be a challenge to a child going

to school like lunch boxes, using a water fountain, knowing where to put their belongings, self-management skills. (Abby, EC teacher, Centre A)

She does, however, mention that they will work with a child's interests, so if a child is very keen on writing or any other academia related skills, they will still incorporate that into the curriculum for that child.

Lunchbox days were mentioned by all early childhood participants as part of their transition practice. Brianna from Centre B made the point that lunch boxes are quite a change from the hot cooked meals that children are used to receiving in early childhood. In Centre C, the children prepare their own lunch boxes for lunch box day which happens once a week, as opposed to once a month in Centre A. Christina from Centre C spoke about additional transition practices at her centre to give them some responsibility and slowly introduce children to the idea of sitting and listening:

We also encourage them to take care of their own belongings and just do spontaneous mat times that they don't have to sit in. But we encourage them to join in and then they can go, but yeah that's not set in stone. (Christina, EC teacher, Centre C)

Bridging the gap between the physical difference in the two types of environments is achieved in a variety of ways often due to the policies in place that dictate practice. Some early childhood centres, such as Centre A and Centre C, take their children to a local primary school in the school holidays and have a picnic, or explore the playground, and scope out where important facilities like toilets and fountains are located. Centre A also has a parent who teaches at the local primary school, so the centre takes their soon to be transitioning children into her classroom to see how it is

set up and to notice the differences in comparison with their early childhood centre. Abby from Centre A did, however, wish that School A was physically closer to the centre so they could walk children there to visit, as it is one of their main feeder schools and is too far away for this to be possible.

All participants talked about how the early childhood teachers had been visiting the primary schools, but also that primary teachers had started to visit the early childhood centres more frequently. This means that they can see what the children are doing before they get to school, and gain a better understanding of pedagogical aspects of early childhood education, helping the transition to be smoother. The teachers can offer advice to each other during these visits as well.

It's seemed up until now that the ECEs are doing all the work. Making sure we know what the school looks like but I think that it's about time the primary schools came down and saw what the children were like in this environment that some of them have been in for 5 years, so they're comfortable here, they're confident. (Abby, EC teacher, Centre A)

For the children in this study, Adam, Billy and Carl, it appeared that they took part in these preparations for school in early childhood in the same way as everyone else. There was no discussion about policies or formal documentation that outline how a child who exhibits challenging behaviours in the early childhood classroom should be transitioned to school. However, catering to children's interests is a big aspect of early childhood education (Carr, 2001), and the teachers who knew the children were particularly focused on this. This was evidenced in the interview with Adam's mother, Ariana, where she showed Adam's early childhood portfolio which was full of stories

about things Adam enjoyed such as dinosaurs, architecture, geometry and science. There was even a story about “Finding Focus” and another called “Branching Out”, where the teachers at Centre A used Adam’s interest in dinosaurs to try and get him to share information and interact with other children. While this was not specific to Adam’s transition, it speaks of the culture of filling in gaps in social skills from a young age. Adam was 2 and a half when this began occurring.

For Billy and Carl, both their parents talked about focusing on toilet training at the early childhood centres before starting school, an aspect of self-management that was really important to be well developed before the transition. Billy’s mother spoke of Billy as “Quite confident” and his father mentioned “His self-esteem is high,” which put him in good stead for starting school. Carl’s early childhood teacher, Christina, explained how Carl “Seemed to lack empathy” and they worked on that with him before going to school using the ‘*you hurt, you sit*’ strategy given to them by his early intervention worker.

Teachers at the two primary schools involved in this study mentioned that they make the classrooms suitable for new entrants, demonstrating an awareness of young children’s pedagogical journey so far. Each of the schools had a variety of approaches that they used to ensure children transitioning felt comfortable in the school environment. Alice mentioned that at School A “There is not the expectation to learn when you start school”.

Alice spoke highly of their *Building Blocks for Literacy* programme, which promotes reading books with others; phonological awareness; and understanding letters and sounds, using play-based activities. She even jokingly said that when her yet

to be born son is of school age, she would send him to School A specifically to access this programme. She supports the programme whole heartedly as it allows children to work at their own pace and at their own level so they are not made to feel inadequate.

Lucky at this school the transition is Building Blocks... Now I'm in Term 2 with my class, and pretty much all of them bar two are ready to write. Because they are not ready to write they don't write. They draw a picture and [Anna] is going to write for them and we are just practicing shapes... This school is rare, that it is accepted that a child will not learn until certain things are in place and you have to develop those first... If you try and teach them before things are in place, they disengage massively... and they want to be back at kindy. (Alice, teacher, School A)

Anna also mentioned the *Building Blocks* programme she oversees saying that all of Year 0/1 are involved in it. She talked about how the Year 0s and Year 1s have become more integrated in recent times, since the transition of Adam. "The school was really segmented, so we didn't have all our little Year 1s and Year 0s together," she said. She explained the environmental changes that have occurred just this year. She pointed out the window and showed how the classrooms are placed in a U-shape facing a shared playground in the middle and a shed with play resources and building equipment that children can access. The whole area is fenced in, which means teachers can supervise the children at all times.

School B is different from School A, in that Bridget runs a transition room which mimics the type of classroom you would find in the early childhood environment, but on the school grounds, ruled by the school bell. Bridget is an experienced early

childhood teacher supporting her ability to provide this pedagogical mimicking of an early childhood setting. She talked of how she really values play areas such as the home corner, and how she tries to plan according to the children's interests. Christina in Centre C corroborated this, saying "[Bridget] made sure that she had resources that were similar [to ours], well that linked to [Carl]'s interests or similar to what we have available so he had that link." At School B, children still attend school assemblies and play in the big playground, so they are part of the school as a whole without having to be capable of focusing solely on academic learning during class time.

So the day, you know, I come, I set up, I, you know, whatever. Everything is done through play, just because they're 5, they're not gonna sit down, read, write and do maths... I am a true believer in going with what the children's interests are, so as you can see we've been doing robots. So that all came out of um something one of the children had said. As much as I do plan, but it goes with what the children's interests are... They still write in their writing books, um but writing might be, you know, writing a list of words they found in a magazine. (Bridget, teacher, School B)

Bridget explained that children generally only move on to a regular classroom when they are ready in a holistic way. That is, not just ready in terms of reading, writing and maths, but they would need to be able to sit on the mat, be comfortable at school and not feel anxious to be there. Billy's mother, Britney, mentioned this saying "He's been in the transition class just up until last week, with you know the reception teacher... who's been deliberately keeping hold of him until she thinks he's ready." She did also say that it was tough for Billy to watch his friends move into another class when he had

to stay, but was happy once he had some time to get used to it. Christina from Centre C spoke positively of the reception room environment stating “I think it would have really helped him [Carl] because it would have been very similar to what he’s used to here and had that play based programme.”

5.3.1 Preparing children for transitions

Children, especially those with challenging behaviours, need to be aware of what to expect when they start school in order to remove anxiety and to make the transition successful (Bourne, 2007; Education Review Office, 2015; Larson, 2010). Teachers and parents in the study talked about some ways this was achieved, such as the use of information booklets and photo walls, taking children on transition visits to the school and also, for one parent (Carrie), attending the Home Interaction Programme for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY) programme with her child.

Not knowing really phased [Carl], he needed to know what was happening, when it was happening and if there was gonna be a change to his day he needed to be warned and worked with as you worked through the day with him. (Christina, EC teacher, Centre C)

Brenda talked about making an information booklet for children based on her own visits to the schools where she takes photos and gathers all resources she needs:

We go and visit the school before the children leave, take photos of the teacher, we take photos of the classroom, we take photos of the outside environment, the toilets, the office, the Principal, all those people that that child is going to be seeing, and [Brianna] makes them a little booklet. (Brenda, EC teacher, Centre B)

Similarly, Bridget from School B makes an information booklet for children about her classroom to take home and familiarise themselves with before they start school. It contains photos of important people and examples of the activities they do, as well as a sheet of the phonics they use. It means children can start practicing before they start so they have a foundation to build confidence.

Additionally, Centre B uses the photos they gathered from the school visits to make a photo wall in the classroom which is used for talking to children about what it means to go to school. “We talk about the relationship between their friends there, or siblings and things like that, so we try to make it a really positive thing for them,” Brenda explained. Bridget mentioned how from her perspective as a primary teacher “99% of them [early childhood centres] have a *transition wall*, you know this is the teacher from [School B] and these are the children going to [School B].” Billy’s mother mentioned how the early childhood teachers visit the school and “Take photos and other kids that have moved on as well, they’ll keep linking that back, so and so’s gone to school now” (Britney).

All teachers and parents interviewed mentioned that school visits were an essential part of their transition programme. These visits involved parents being invited to take their children to see the school and the classroom so they get a feel for what to expect. Invitations were extended on at least two separate occasions and in one of these visits the parents were encouraged to stay with the child. Bridget talked about how she had spent a lot of time and effort making the timing of visits the most beneficial for the child.

On Monday morning which is typically a child's first day at school we have assembly and it, the hall, is full of parents, teachers, adults, it's quite loud, there's singing, you have to sit still, you have to sit in your line. So, I decided a couple of years ago that I would change one of the visits and do it when assembly was on so that children could come with their mums and dads and sit at the back and actually see what happens... And then they do another visit. So they do one from 9 til 11, including assembly. So assembly, Jump Jam, come back to the classroom. We do another one sometime during the week... and it's from 11.30 til 1 [PM].
(Brenda, teacher, School B)

Anna from School A discussed how, during the visits to their school, they do not expect children to be "Acting like school kids yet." The aim is just to get involved in whatever the class is doing with their parents with them, to give them confidence. It is also a chance for teachers to begin to observe how the children work and interact which was crucial for beginning to gather information during the transition of Adam. School A and School B both talked about the children staying for a morning tea or lunch time with the other children on their second visit.

Abby from Centre A discussed how she felt the nature of the child-led work they do at the centre sets up the children with the confidence they need to go into school and feel a strong sense of belonging, and to ask questions about anything they may not know. Brianna mentioned how after the children have transitioned into school they go to the school and visit them to see how they are doing. Britney and Brent mentioned that they took Billy for only two visits to school "Which for him was enough".

Carl's mother spoke about taking him for some lessons in the HIPPY programme to give him some extra information and support as part of transition.

I was worried about him sitting and actually reading a book and understanding it; so I wanted to prepare him for what school's gonna be like, so there is gonna be some um, you know, questions and figure out the answers and problem-solving skills like discrimination as well... I wanted to give him a head start on those sorts of things. (Carrie, mother)

5.3.2 Preparing parents for transitions

As much as children need to know what to expect so do the parents, as they are the main support system for the child during transition. "I had the advantage of knowing what to expect of the school system... Knowing what to expect makes it easier to prepare your kid," said Ariana, Adam's mother. Some of the ways this can be achieved, as discovered in this study, was parent information evenings at the early childhood centre, and at school and parent-teacher meetings. Parents also learnt from the transition visits to school with their children.

Centre A holds information evenings for parents with children about to transition with teachers and staff from local primary schools. Ariana said these are held at the schools as well however, it is good when they are at the centre when parents have not yet decided on a specific school for their children. It helps them make a well-informed decision. The centre also invited Ariana to speak at one of these evenings because she had already transitioned her oldest son, explaining what the experience was like for her, to talk about what she found surprising and what she wished she had known.

Britney talked about how they got to know School B before selecting it for Billy. Though Centre B had recommended it she also saw for herself that the reception room would be beneficial for Billy with a nice closed off area, while still allowing children to be integrated into the main school for play times and certain activities. She said the teachers slowly introduced children to the rest of the school grounds using chalk to mark off areas where they can and can't go. Carrie was fortunate enough to have her older daughter attending School B already, so like Ariana, she was familiar with the processes, teachers, and she felt confident leaving her son there knowing he could go and find his sister if he needed.

Ariana also mentioned that Centre A held frequent meetings between parents and teachers to talk through a range of issues.

They went through a period of time where they were doing effectively like parent-teacher interviews, which was SO good... You go in and there was a sign-up sheet and it was 10-15 minute blocks where over the day you could talk with their head teacher. (Ariana, mother)

5.4 Commitment and consistency across the learning environments

Supporting children across the two learning environments of early childhood and primary school required commitment from both parents and professionals in terms of their time, energy and money. Outside of regular commitments there were times where all adults involved in the transition, including specialists, would meet to discuss needs and expectations of the child with challenging behaviour, such as in the case of Carl. This meant his school teacher was well equipped to settle Carl into his new classroom. Figure 10 illustrates how adults being committed to children's positive

transitions connects with the theme of a supportive learning environment in this study. Passion, dedication and aroha (love) were helpful in this commitment being achieved across the learning environments of early childhood and primary school during transition. Consistency of behaviour management and the use of similar visual resources across the child’s environments of home, the early childhood centre, and school, also contributed to the successful shift of the children into their new and unfamiliar classroom contexts. They were able to feel more comfortable in their new learning environments when there were activities and practices in place that were familiar to them when it came to their challenging behaviours.

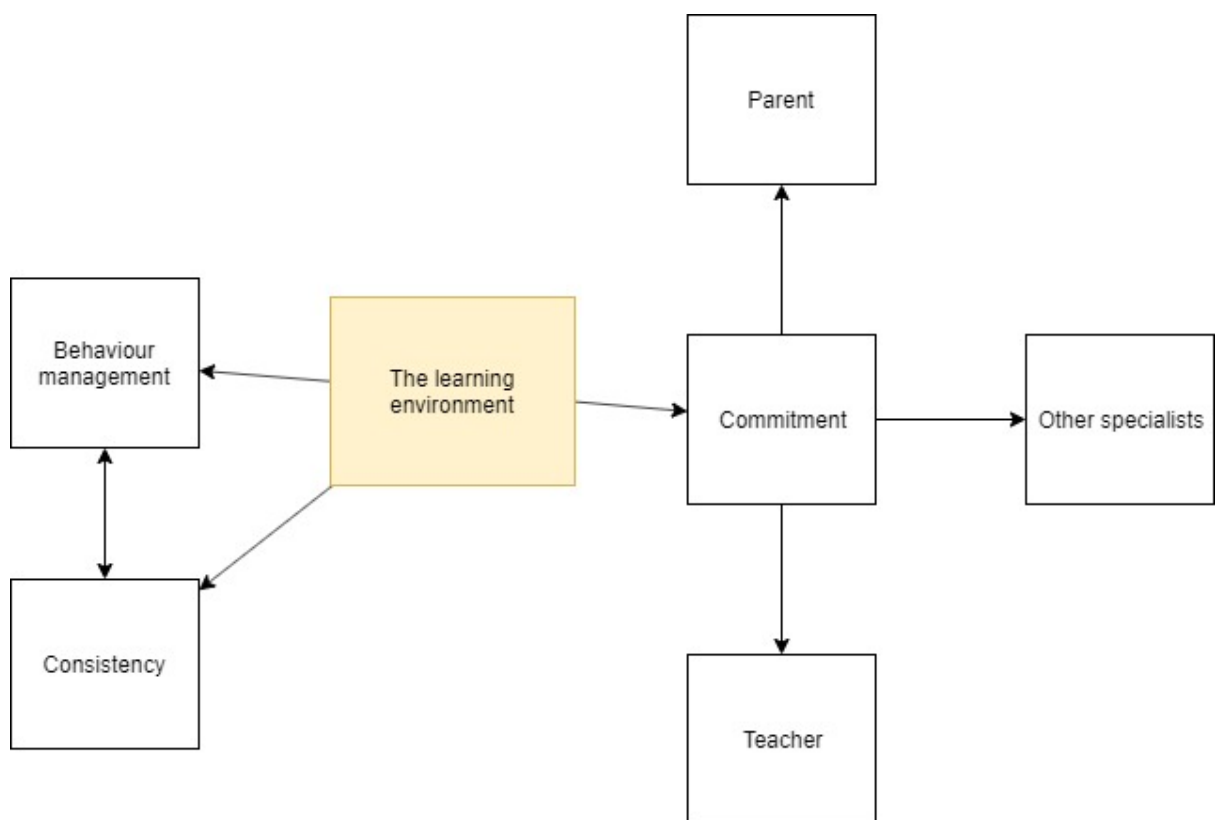


Figure 10. Factors that support a positive learning environment during transition.

5.4.1 Commitment

For teachers it was a matter of passion and dedication, as well as support from management, that seemed to drive them to go the extra mile when necessary. Abby

talked about how she gets tearful when they have their graduation ceremony for children leaving the centre, and how much she loves it when they come back and visit her. She was proud of the strong connection she, and other staff at the centre, have with the children.

I don't have children of my own and people say how many kids do you have and it's like at the moment 32. Every single one of them's mine. I lose sleep over them; I'm planning things over the weekend for them to do during the week... I think we are really lucky here; we've got a group of teachers where this is their passion, it's not just a job... There's nothing impersonal about us, and the owners believe in us... We're not being depleted. (Abby, EC teacher, Centre A)

Carl's mother Carrie, reported on how effective the support was both from the early childhood centre and the school. When speaking of Bridget (Carl's reception class teacher), she said she really went out of her way and worked hard to keep Carrie focused on the emotions Carl was feeling:

Bridget would pick me up from work and we'd go for a coffee and just have a catch up and just go over recent behaviours that have been causing an issue and she'd just remind me to think of how [Carl]'s feeling. (Carrie, mother)

Bridget mentioned that Carl's father had expressed concerns about whether such great support would continue for Carl if his behaviour became more challenging. "So I said to him well I'm stubborn, I'm not gonna give up on your son... He will be part of this class, and that's the way it is".

The teachers at Centre B were also highly supportive during Billy's transition, and respectful towards his parents. However, Billy's teacher, Brianna, mentioned how hard

it can be to find time to go the extra mile, such as having a meeting with all adults involved. She asked the question “Is that just out of love or is it funded, you know?” She went on to say “We’re doing very, very long days anyway” but “You stick at it, because you do feel like you’re making a difference.”

In terms of Adam’s transition, his mother was seeking support from outside agencies both before and after the transition occurred. Adam’s parents had decided not to disclose any explicit information about Adam’s behaviour to the primary school during the transition itself, however, teachers from both early childhood and primary were very committed and determined to get the right support for Adam and his mother when requested. Abby spent a huge amount of time getting to know Adam, so she was well informed when Ariana asked her to fill out forms about Adam’s learning and behaviour.

There were days when... our ratios were lower that we could take time to do a little one on one... at the time he was a big fan of the National Geographic magazine, so he would just come to us and spout out like information he had read there and things about monkeys. He corrected me because I called something a monkey and it was an ape (Abby, EC teacher, Centre A)

Ariana said that she felt well supported when she was asking a lot of questions of Abby and the other staff in the centre. They would talk at drop off and pick up times and sometimes email at other times too. Abby gave Ariana some great resources such as websites and books to refer to, as well as tips on how support agencies work and what you need to know. Unfortunately, the help from outside agencies was declined suggesting they try again once Adam started school.

Therefore, support was required again, after Adam's transition, from different staff. Ariana mentioned that "His teacher was quite committed" when talking of his primary teacher, Alice. She also said the SENCO was really good, implementing teacher aide support and getting RTLB involved. Alice's commitment to Adam meant that she kept working closely with Ariana to come up with a plan for the classroom, without the support they were hoping for.

5.4.2 Consistency in strategies and behaviour management

Consistency between the school and home was crucial for Carrie during Carl's transition. Carl struggled with anxiety so keeping routines and resources familiar and sticking to the teaching approaches that worked across environments was very helpful. For example, Carrie talked about how Bridget had given her a CD of some music that she uses to relax children in the classroom. Carrie tried this CD in her car on the way home as there are often dramas that occur during the journey. She said the transformation in Carl's mood was amazing. He said "Something like this makes my brain feel soft... this feels nice on my brain," said Carrie.

Consistency in visual resources to support the routine and environment was also useful. For example, 'Stop/Go' signs were used to help manage Adam's behaviour at home and at the early childhood centre and school, and Carl had pictures of emojis for adults to use to help him to identify the emotions he was feeling. Adam's mother Ariana, also mentioned a timer on her phone that she used at home to count down until the end of an activity to give Adam warning that something would be ending. When she told School A about this they began using their own timer to help Adam to

learn how to transition from one activity to the next as he settled into his new classroom.

5.5 Resources to support transition practices

The theme of resources is represented in Figure 11. Participants referred to the impact of a range of resources on children's transitions, both physical resources (such as funding and personnel), as well as the allocation of time, and the development of various people's knowledge about positive transitions. Although the case studies of the three boys in this study were consistently described as positive, at times there were aspects of resourcing during transition that were lacking. Specifically, these barriers to successful transitions were: the discontinuity of funding between early childhood (EI) and primary school (SEN/RTLB); difficulty passing key knowledge about the child on to school by parents and EC teachers; the timing and length of transitions; teachers having a lack of knowledge in how to support diverse needs; and teachers being confused about specialists' roles. Parents also talked about their personal limitations when it came to finance and time.

5.5.1 Funding

Children with challenging behaviour can require extra support and funding in order to make an effective transition to school. While this would be a barrier for many it was not the case in this study. Both primary schools in the study had the ability to access the funding they needed for the purpose of transition of children into the schools.

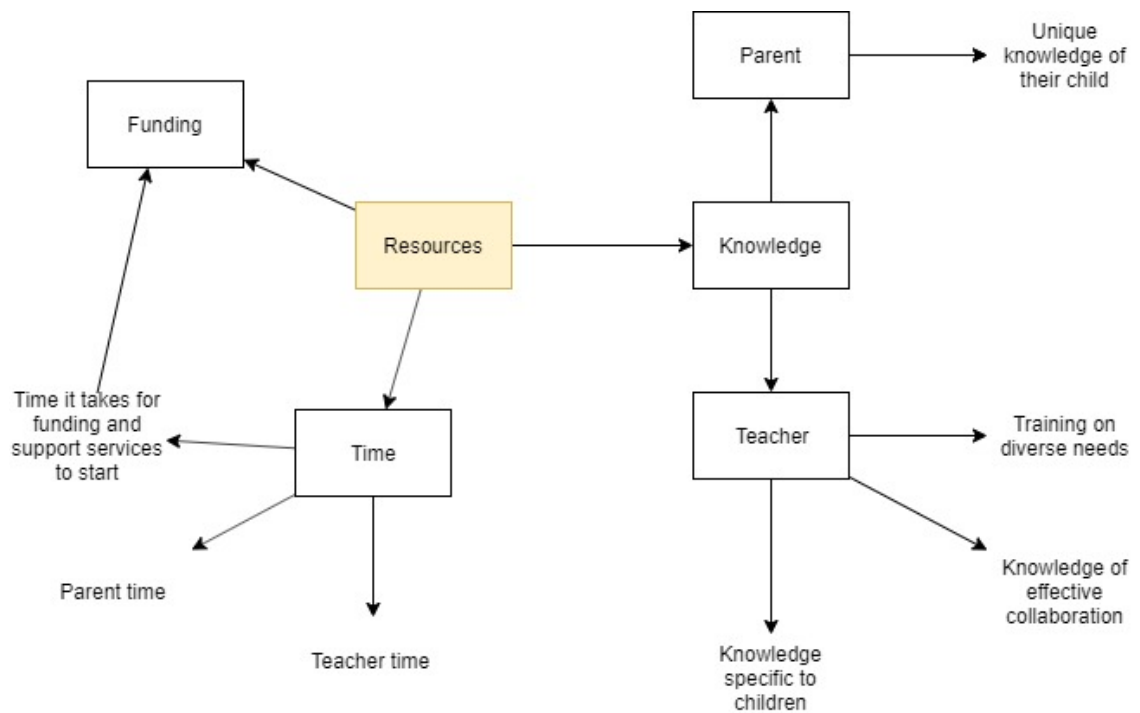


Figure 11. The theme of resources in this study encompassed funding, time and knowledge of adults.

Ariana and Alice said that School A had a high number of international students who pay international fees, which was used to support those who needed extra assistance to learn. Without the school knowing about Adam’s challenges, and needing to wait to watch them unfold, it was useful to have the funding to support him earlier than he would have if relying on outside agencies. However, it was not until Adam moved into third different classroom that he received teacher aide support, so Alice and Anna were unable to explain what work the teacher aide would be doing. Carrie explained that the new deputy principal at School B had good connections within the community, and therefore knew where to get the support when she needed it for the children. She also directly supported the children when required.

Christina discussed a different aspect of funding used as support for families. Her centre (Centre C) offered parents the opportunity to keep their children there longer if

they wished to, or to draw out the transition for a longer period of time. However, as mentioned by the teachers at Centre B who offer a similar option, parents often do not want to pay the private daycare fees for longer than they have to. Christina explained that although the centre would not receive government funding for a child who was over the age of 5, the option for children who need the additional support to stay longer was available for families.

5.5.2 Time

A main concern for teachers and parents during transition was the time it took for children to get support for their needs after their transition, and, in some cases, the lack of continuity this caused between early childhood and primary school.

Anna from School A referred to the delays in the waiting time to get outside support as “Crazy” by which time some children, including those with behavioural challenges, started “Floundering”. Adam had this issue for months after starting school, which resulted in challenging situations, such as violent outbursts. Although he did not have any additional support in the early childhood centre, as his mother pointed out, the teacher-student ratio was very different in the school and the need for support was, therefore, going to be higher. His first primary teacher, Anna, mentioned that he transitioned and then “The supports and stuff came in later. You know how they are usually at school for a little while before anything like that.” His second teacher, Alice, explained how Adam’s behaviour escalated to the point of throwing things around the classroom. As a consequence, the previously strong relationship between Adam and Alice fell apart, with Alice requesting that Adam be shifted to another class.

Bridget from School B explained this process and subsequent barriers further having worked with Carl during his transition, where he did have support in early childhood.

Once a child comes to school any teacher aide funding they had before they came to school stops, so you then have to reapply, and of course, wherever you go for support or in a funding aspect they have to be at school for a certain amount of time so that you actually know the child... They arrive, had support at where they've been, they have nothing. Which is really, really hard, particularly for the child. (Bridget, teacher, School B)

Bridget explained how fortunate they were in her school to have a principal and a SENCO who knew how to get *interim response* to help out in these cases, so it was not an issue in Carl's situation. However, this would not be the case in all schools and the lack of continuity in the type of wrap around support the child and family were used to would be a cause for concern. "If a child obviously has support in early childhood, I don't understand why it can't be crossed over," (Bridget).

When talking about Billy's transition, Bridget said that she knew Billy needed support, but she also knew he would not be able to receive it until he had moved out of the reception class into a regular classroom. She felt that he needed to stay with her longer so she could focus on a few areas of learning and development, meaning it was a "Waiting game" in terms of funding for Billy.

Christina from Centre C felt that not only continuity of the type of support provided by funding was important, but also the person providing the support:

I think making sure you have that person for them [the child] to bond with is essential. It doesn't matter what age, it's consistent through, like you see it in studies from like infants all the way through, how important the bond is between children and their teachers... the attachment... it's just creating that really crucial bond to make sure they have that person they feel safe with, who they can trust.

(Christina, EC teacher, Centre C)

Teachers from Centre B discussed how hard it can be for primary teachers to get relievers in order for them to have the release time required to visit the early childhood settings and see children. In the same light, teachers from Centre B did not always have the time to take children to visit schools due to their difficulty in finding staff and having to sustain legal ratios. Similarly, Christina at Centre C explained she did not get the time to take Carl to visit the school, and left this up to his parents, because timing and ratios made it difficult. Teachers in both the early childhood and primary setting mentioned how time (and funding) for visits of this nature would be valuable for allowing opportunities of knowledge sharing about transitioning children between those concerned.

Abby from Centre A mentioned another time constraint in that teachers from both settings struggled to find the time to get in touch with each other. "What would help the most is that conversations with the primary school and being able to get in touch with them. Sometimes it is a struggle."

5.5.3 Knowledge

Parents in this study sometimes felt they had limited knowledge on why their children exhibited certain challenging behaviours, as well as being surprised by the

behaviour they were hearing about from teachers, such as in the case of Billy. Ariana was mainly aware of Adam's possible struggles because her best friend had four children who have been given diagnoses of either autism or ADHD. The same friend "Speaks very highly of [a psychiatrist] ... she's been getting good results with them" (Ariana), so she was going to visit them once she could afford the time and money. Expert knowledge such as this was spoken of as a valuable resource for parents and teachers, but hard to access.

The support services available for children was not always clear to parents. Carrie discussed how she had only heard about specific support services through friends who had children with challenging behaviours. "Two of my friends who have used [a service provider], um, told me to get a referral for that and it was only because I asked that I got it" (Carrie).

While parents did not always understand the nature of their child's behavioural challenges they did have unique knowledge of their children that was valuable for all adults involved in their transition. Knowledge such as "He doesn't naturally make good friendships... [but] he fakes it because [his brothers] are always around, like helping him along" (Ariana); or "He is just so caring, so thoughtful, if it's somebody that he really connects with" (Carrie); or even "He'll clock onto things overnight... his progression is very much in leaps and bounds" (Britney), are all examples of the special dispositional quirks that parents have come to know about their children that others may not, and yet could be so helpful for their educators if given the chance to discuss them.

Early childhood teachers too, have unique and useful knowledge about the children they have worked with, some for a number of years, and in the case of Adam

and Billy, since they were very small. Brenda from Centre B noted that she passed on information to Bridget, such as “You’ll be getting [Billy], there are some things that we see with him that could be challenging... it was all about what was in front of him, he couldn’t carry on with anything outside of that,” just to prewarn her of what to expect, so she could plan accordingly. She did however, wish there was an opportunity to ask teachers such as Bridget to come for more focused visits. This would mean spending time with specific children with diverse needs that will be going to her school. Similar to Brenda, Christina from Centre C spoke to school staff and gave “The school knowledge we had that could support him” in Carl’s transition meeting. However, this information was much more specific. “They were taking notes, so they knew it was valuable information,” she stated.

Teachers from both the early childhood and primary sectors have a wealth of knowledge on their own settings and the children they teach. However, teachers in this study frequently attested to the fact that they had not had adequate training to confidently support the diverse needs they are seeing more and more of. This includes knowing specific strategies for dealing with each unique display of challenging behaviour and how to cater to these during transitions to school.

Multiple participants, particularly Abby, Alice, Anna, Brenda, Brianna and Christina, said they reached out to service providers, who were seen as the potential saviours once the classroom/home environments reached a state of crisis. However, these service providers did not always come through for the children, families and teachers. Alice disclosed her negative experience when reaching out to a service provider for support with settling Adam:

[Provider] was of no help. They are hilarious. When they spoke to me about him it was so weird. I felt I had more knowledge on children than they did. It was bizarre. But I am not really sure what they do... They put it back onto [Mum's] parenting... I was so shocked... She [provider] said to me, it sounds like you know a lot about what you're doing with him already. And what, I don't understand. That's why we got you involved.

5.6 Summary of findings

The findings of this study demonstrated that in the case of the three children, their families, and teachers in the present study, there were a range of strategies in place in early childhood and primary school environments that supported positive transitions for all children, including those with challenging behaviours. Aspects of practice such as: developing strong, positive and, collaborative relationships amongst the team of adults involved in the transition (Alton-Lee, 2003; Burgon & Walker, 2013; ERO, 2015; Macfarlane et al., 2019; Wright, 2009); preparing the children, the adults, and the environments for children in order to maintain consistency and familiarity (Boyle & Petriwskyj, 2014; Featherstone, 2004; Larson, 2010; Peters et al., 2015); and appropriately distributing and utilising resources (Eisenhower et al., 2015; MOE, 2019) can help to overcome potential barriers that may be seen to exist when transitioning children who have diverse needs such as Adam, Billy and Carl.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Many researchers have identified a successful transition into primary school as being crucial for children's emotional wellbeing, social competence and cognitive development. (Hartley, Rogers, Smith, Peters & Carr, 2010, pp. 19-20)

Times of transition, such as the one from early childhood to primary school, can be challenging for any child (MOE, 2017b). For children with challenging behaviours there may be a particular need for extra support, an aspect of practice that is currently under-researched in New Zealand (Bourne, 2007; ERO, 2015; Larson, 2010). In attempting to fill this knowledge gap, this research used an appreciative inquiry approach to explore the perspectives of parents and teachers involved in the transition of three children with behavioural challenges to school, in the previous 12-18 months. Participants discussed what worked well during transitions for all children, as well as highlighting some additional strategies specific to children with challenging behaviours.

The 'Discovery' phase provided participants with an opportunity to share their experiences of Adam's, Billy's, and Carl's transitions to school, with the 'Dream' phase of the inquiry drawing out what was known by participants about positive values and practices. Collaborative relationships, preparation, commitment, learning environment and resources, and Māori cultural values of whanaungatanga, aroha and manaakitanga emerged as central themes. These themes created a vivid picture of the 'Dream' stage of the appreciative inquiry that framed this research. Figure 12 illustrates how the

themes of the study and the Māori values that underpin teaching practice in New Zealand work together to overcome barriers to smooth transitions.

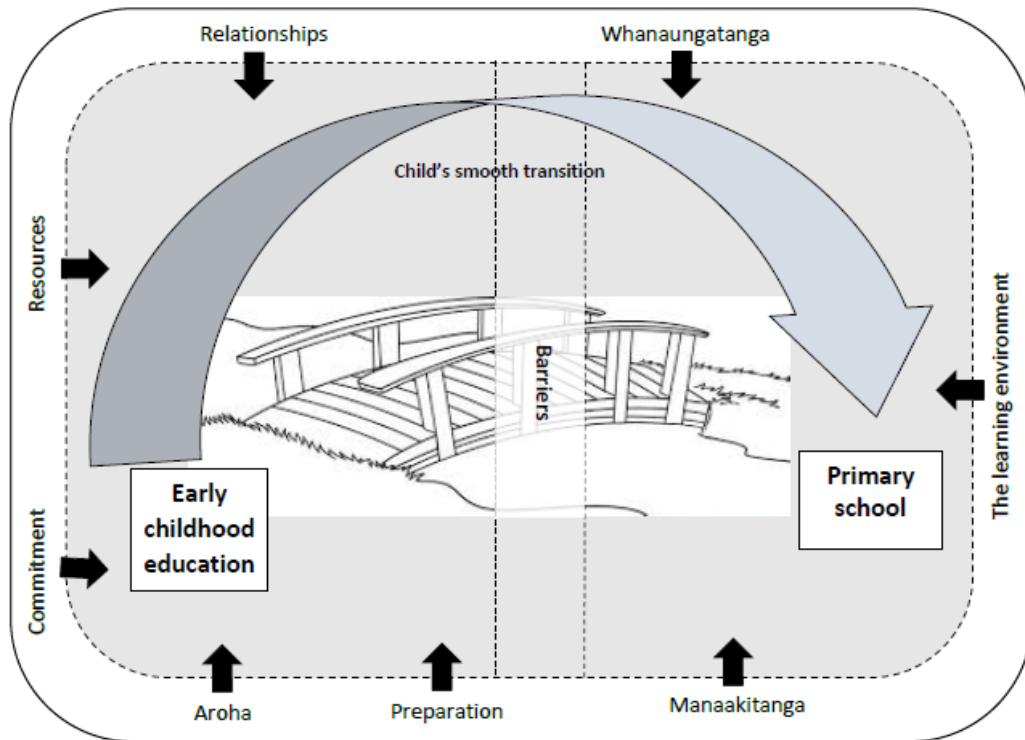


Figure 12. Bridging the gap: Existing positive practices and Māori values that work together to support smooth transitions from early childhood to primary school for all children.

Although the participating children and families in this study were Pākeha/New Zealand European, core Māori cultural values such as the importance of aroha (love), whanaungatanga (relationships) and manaakitanga (the deep level of care for others), were clearly evident in practice at the time of the children’s transitions to school.

Burgon and Walker (2013) describe similar relational aspects of the teaching and learning process in their study of transitions to school in New Zealand for children with diverse needs. The nature of these relationships reinforced the values that are at the heart of who we are as a bicultural nation (Durie, 2006; Metge, 2015). New Zealand’s commitment to biculturalism through the Treaty of Waitangi is embedded strongly in

curriculum documents, such as *Te Whāriki* (MOE, 2017a) and the NZ Curriculum (MOE, 2007a). The Māori concept of whanaungatanga is strong in both the early childhood (MOE, 2017a) and primary school (MOE, 2007) curricula and has been reflected in the findings of this research. Whanaungatanga implies a deep connection with one's family, such as close friends, as well as direct blood relatives (Durie, 2006). The case studies of Adam, Billy and Carl demonstrate just how crucial relationships are, especially during the move from early childhood to school. The themes identified will be discussed in this chapter with the discussion organised around the research questions.

This chapter is structured around the study's research questions, which were:

- 1) What practices make the transition from early childhood to primary school effective for all students?
- 2) What are the additional factors that need to be taken into consideration when supporting the transition of children with challenging behaviours to school?
- 3) What are the barriers when transitioning from early childhood to primary school for children with challenging behaviours?

In the interviews participants did not explicitly separate out transition practices for all from those exclusively for children with challenging behaviours. Therefore, the first part of this discussion chapter combines the first two research questions. It delineates the effective practices that the parents and teachers in this study highlighted as important for promoting smooth transitions from early childhood to primary school for all students, including the additional factors for those with challenging behaviours. This is followed by a discussion of the parent and teacher perspectives on the potential

barriers to smooth transitions from early childhood to primary school, with a focus on children with challenging behaviours. Subsequently, this chapter explores the implications for transitions to school for children, families and teachers in the future. The chapter concludes with limitations of the study along with suggestions for future research on this topic.

6.1 What practices make the transition from early childhood to primary school effective for all students, including the additional factors for students with challenging behaviours?

“He aha te mea nui o te ao

What is the most important thing in the world?

He tangata, he tangata, he tangata

It is the people, it is the people, it is the people”

- Māori proverb

People and their collaborative and caring relationships were undoubtedly the main key to the success of transitions for all children in this study, a point that is emphasised in the extant literature on transitions in New Zealand and internationally (Bourne, 2007; Burgon & Walker, 2013; Dockett, 2008; Eisenhower et al., 2015; Featherstone, 2004; Hartley et al., 2010; Henderson, 2012; Hutchinson et al., 2014; Peters et al., 2015). The relationship focused framework of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological theory provides a theoretical context for considering how relationships that are open, honest, collaborative, reciprocal, and positive, enhanced children’s transitions in the present study. Relationships within the exosystem allowed parents to seek advice from their friends about support services for their children. The chronosystem empowered teachers to use recent developments in their communities

to share and collaborate to further develop their knowledge about children in general, the specific children in question, and about diverse needs (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Eisenhower et al., 2015; Kamenpoulou, 2016). However, the most obvious impact on successful transition was at the level of the mesosystem and involved collaboration between the early childhood settings and the schools that was responsive and reciprocal, and where information about the children was shared openly and freely between teachers and parents (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Dockett, 2008; Edgington, 2004; Eisenhower et al., 2015; Henderson, 2012).

6.1.1 Relationships and collaboration between adults and children

Three key relationships impacted positively on the transition to school, including the relationships between professionals and parents; the relationships between professionals (early childhood and primary school teachers); and the relationships between teachers and children. This section of the discussion will explore the aspects of these relationships that support transitioning children.

Both early childhood centres and primary schools in this study were consistent in building and maintaining strong partnerships with children and their whānau during transitions. Consistent with Wright's (2009) work, these strong relationships between teachers, children and their families were highlighted for all three children in the present study. Ariana noted the sharing of useful books and other behavioural management resources between herself and the teachers at Adam's early childhood centre and school. She described the staff she had worked with during Adam's transition as "Just so supportive". Teachers described the inclusion of parents and their

knowledge and opinions as very helpful for supporting all children in transition, a finding also highlighted by Brendto and Mitchell (2011) and Eisenhower et al. (2015).

Parental collaboration with teachers at every step of the transition process is crucial as parental knowledge is unique and valuable and allows for quality provision (Alton-Lee, 2003; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Dockett, 2008; Gonzalez-Mena, 2010). Hutchinson et al.'s (2014) Canadian research also found that collegial relationships between parents and teachers was critical during transitions. They interviewed parents in three cases similar to those in this study, where children had additional needs, and found that teachers' perceptions of the children's needs were informed by sharing parental knowledge. In the case of Billy in this study, having supportive parents who were strong advocates for him meant that he was able to be confident in his new environment, that fostered his wellbeing (Brendto & Mitchell, 2011; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Hutchinson et al., 2014).

The collaborative and respectful relationships between teachers in the early childhood settings and teachers at primary schools was also an important aspect of a smooth transition for the three children in this study (Dockett, 2008; Hartley et al., 2010). Successful transitions were shown to be reliant upon the effective collaboration, communication and knowledge-exchange between the early childhood teachers and the primary school teachers. This collaboration allowed for teachers to be equipped with suitable knowledge, such as School A knowing that Carl really struggled with new situations, therefore ensuring the children were well prepared for their new environment, and more importantly the school was prepared for them (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005; Moss, 2013; Wright, 2009).

Where face to face discussions were too difficult to organise there were other ways that early childhood and primary teachers supported each other during the transition process. Bridget disclosed that she really valued reading the children's learning stories from their early childhood journey in order to gain more of an insight into those children's interests and quirks (Carr, 2001; Lyle, 2000). Brenda, Brianna and Christina described the process of writing a short progress report for their children to give to the schools upon the beginning of their transition.

In the case of Carl in this study, an interprofessional team gathered to share information openly to identify the best ways to support his transition, consistent with Bourne's (2007) research. Carl's mother Carrie, was pleased to see that during the meeting of adults before the Carl's transition occurred, she saw teachers and other staff writing a lot of notes, as it meant that the information she was sharing was valued. Carl's support network is also an example of the *Hei Āwhina Mātua* approach to behaviour support where an extended whānau of adults and experts was developed around the child to protect him during the transition process, just like they were for Aroha in Bourne's work (Berryman, 2015; Bourne, 2007;).

6.1.2 Relationships and collaboration between professionals and parents

The early childhood teachers in this study had worked hard to establish reciprocal parent-teacher relationships where providing advice and a support network to parents, and non-judgementally welcoming parents' own special knowledge of their children was the norm (Alton-Lee, 2003). Parents spoke of the sense of being part of the early childhood centre as synonymous with being part of a wider community/whānau where relationships were strong and based on

manaakitanga/respect and hospitality (Berryman, 2015; Henderson, 2012; Macfarlane et al., 2019; Metge, 2015). Parent evenings and parent-teacher meetings held by one of the centres twice a year provided an opportunity to bring the early childhood centre family together to discuss school expectations, the differing curricula and policies, and how the transition works. Abby and Ariana (Case 1) also described regular meetings with families to discuss teachers' observations of the children, and parents' concerns. This is another example of an approach that enhanced effective collaboration between adults, and led to a sense of 'family' and whanaungatanga (Metge, 2015; Macfarlane et al., 2019).

The positive early childhood teacher-primary teacher relationship was strengthened through the access of ongoing joint professional development (PD) (Lazarri & Balduzzi, 2013). This joint PD where early childhood teachers and primary school staff can build their knowledge about each other's fields together was highlighted by teachers in this study as an important requirement for a smooth transition, with Anna mentioning that "We have started having a liaison now with early childhood and we had a professional development day at the Easter weekend."

Henderson's (2012) and Boyle and Grieshaber's (2017) research in Australia highlighted the need to break down the invisible barriers much like the "*them and us*" feeling that Moss (2013) discussed in his work and that some participants in this study disclosed. Henderson (2012) spoke of professionals needing to head in the direction of "A better appreciation of differences [and] promoting a collaborative approach for new and shared understandings" (p. 21). She discussed the idea of engaging in conversation where there could be tensions between the early childhood and primary

sectors in relating and communicating openly (Henderson, 2012). This is where shared PD could be purposeful, as many discussions and debates could occur in a safe space, and knowledge and discussion of each other's curriculums could happen (Boyle & Petriwskyj, 2014).

This type of PD and collaborative conversation among the teachers from different sectors commonly emerged from interviews as lacking, but participants reported that the beginnings of useful, collaborative PD are occurring. The fact that joint PD has started to happen can give hope for future transitions. This is crucial to note as teachers are expected to provide smooth and appropriate transitions for all children and their families, regardless of the level of ongoing joint training on diverse needs they have received. The *Learning Support Action Plan* (MOE, 2019), particularly priority 4 of the plan, will create affordances for collaborative and combined-sector teacher PD in the future.

Boyle and Petriwskyj's (2014) list of relationship enablers had many similarities with the nature of interprofessional relationships that had been formed between the participants in this study. For example, Bridget from School A went to visit local daycares such as Centre B and Centre C on a regular basis, in order to see the children who would be going to her school in a space where they felt comfortable. "I go out once a term... I spend the whole morning and we go out and visit all the centres," Bridget explained. The early childhood teachers from all three centres (Abby, Brenda, Brianna and Christina) discussed going to visit feeder schools in their community with the children who would be transitioning to that school.

The insight gained from extended whānau and interprofessional relationships, alongside teachers' own observations of the children, created a unique understanding of the child that was valuable for schools to know about during transition. By passing on important information such as the children's interests, and the type of support and strategies that were effective in the early childhood settings, the transitions were made more seamless (Bourne, 2007; Featherstone, 2004; Larson, 2010). Parents in this study spoke positively about the open and honest lines of communication with both early childhood and primary teachers that supported their children's transition experiences. For example, Ariana reported on the honesty she experienced saying: "I've always really appreciated when the early childhood teachers have said [Adam's] had a great day BUT there was an issue" and "A classroom teacher will be like, no other child in my class is like this." She also reported on the regular use of emails and *Google Docs* to keep communication lines open. Carrie said that everyone was very open during Carl's transition, that "It was a huge team effort" and "Even now we're always on the same page". This supports previous literature/research by Gonzalez-Mena (2010) and the work of Docket (2008) who described the transition to school as "A process of relationship building" (p. 275). In fact, Carrie details the building of relationships as being the core of the transition, a position that was strongly reinforced by all participants in this study.

Open communication between the primary school and parents in the initial days following transition was equally important, as the positive relationships between school staff and parents allowed the children to settle into their new environments. Findings by Burgon and Walker (2013) noted the misperceptions that parents have about service providers, who are often viewed as being non-consultative during times

of transition. In contrast, the results of this research suggested that the communication between parents and the school teachers was respectful, reciprocal and open. This allowed them to access additional resources and put the necessary practices in place to support the learning of the children, such as Bridget who organised a special carpet circle for Carl, and Alice who soon learned that Adam needed to be given special jobs to do to keep him busy, such as helping the caretaker to water the garden.

6.1.3 Relationships between adults and children that supported the transition process

The early childhood teachers in this study were aware of the importance of preparing children for transition to school, as they focused on “Children’s dispositional learning, independence and social competence” (ERO, 2015, p. 13). ERO (2015) reinforce the importance of this claiming in their research on transitions that a strong focus on these aspects of learning was important to prepare children for their transition to school. Abby, from Centre A, referred to this as “Freeing up the brain space” and “Making the unknown known” for the children who started school. Primary schools in turn were responsive by having a sound knowledge about the children who had transitioned from early childhood settings (Davis, 2015; ERO, 2015; Moss, 2013). These recommendations were well demonstrated in this study.

Early childhood centres all spoke about the development of social skills, self-care and independence as being at the forefront of their transition practice. However, schools talked about having an environment that was suitable for the newcomers by having some aspects that mirrored what they were used to in early childhood, such as time to play, and room to develop at their own pace (Fabian & Dunlop, 2005; Yeboah,

2002). This mirroring of early childhood was a reflection of Davis's (2015) research where the school classroom was designed to give children time to play and relate to others as part of their transition programme.

6.1.4 The empowerment of children through their existing relationships

Children being empowered by their interconnected network of relationships (with teachers, families, peers, and siblings) was a strong theme across this study. It is a reflection of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) view that children feel confident in the sense that they have "A strong and enduring emotional relationship" (p. 60) with their parent(s), and also their teachers, where there is reciprocity and aroha, and where the power is gradually handed over to the child. While there is a growing expectation for schools to be prepared for catering to the needs of their new entrants (ERO, 2015), there are some parts of the school day that encourage children to be independent, with lunch times being one of them. The promotion of independence has long been recognised as important for a successful transition to school (Macfarlane et al., 2019; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). Each early childhood setting in the study mentioned the use of lunch box days as an introduction to school life and the independence required. Easing anxiety during times of transition is crucial for all children (Hartley et al., 2010), but particularly for those such as Adam, Billy, and Carl, who already had a predisposition to feeling anxious in new situations.

A relationship that appeared to have a strong impact on children's confidence during transitions in this research was the child-sibling relationship (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The trusting and familiar relationships between children and their friends and siblings also contributed to the effectiveness of the transitions as distinguished by

Alton-Lee (2003) and Peters et al. (2015). This relationship was especially apparent in Adam's case. Adam's older brother was already at School A when Adam started school, and this seemed to be a positive factor for Adam. His mother quickly learned that dropping Adam off at the school gate with his brother, rather than walking Adam into the classroom, made him happier to go to school. The school demonstrated a good understanding of Adam's needs when it came to his relationship with his brother and his settling process. Adam's teacher Anna, mentioned that Adam was allowed to walk to his brother's classroom to spend a portion of the day there when he felt he needed it. Carl's mother Carrie, revealed how she was thankful for her 10-year-old daughter, as she provided someone familiar for Carl to spend time with during break times at school. Despite the age gap, Carl was able to play nicely with his sister and her group of friends at school and at home, and even became protective of them when conflicts arose in the playground. Likewise, Peters, Paki and Davis (2015) detailed the relationship between siblings as a factor for the success of transitions through the story of '*Roger's journey*' (p. 12), that was evident in the part played by Carl's 10-year-old sister in his transition to school.

For Billy, he was supported through whanaungatanga in that he had a close friend from his early childhood centre who transitioned to school at the same time as him. Billy's parents explained how this close friendship made Billy stronger and enhanced his transition to a completely new setting. This is consistent with Peters et al.'s (2015) study on transitions for Māori children, where they spoke to the children in the study about their experiences of moving to school. They found that children's main priority was "Famil(iar)ity," (p. 7), meaning that the role of family and having familiarity were very closely linked and equally as important as each other during

transitions to school. Siblings, cousins, and friends were mentioned as supporting factors to the success of the transition, similar to this study. Billy's father also mentioned that School B is "A welcoming environment [where Billy] feels safe and looked after," only further contributing to the sense of family/whānau the school has developed.

In summary, current research on transitions to school for all children, including those with challenging behaviours, has highlighted the importance of collaborative and positive relationships amongst teachers, parents, children, siblings, cousins, and friends as being critical factors for a successful transition to school. Best outcomes were achieved when families and educational settings involved in a transition were guided by aroha, whanaungatanga and manaakitanga to work well together and relate to each other for the benefit of the child.

6.1.5 Strategies specific to children with challenging behaviours

As identified by Larson (2010), one of the main issues for transitioning a child with additional needs to school is the issue with "The apparent delay in providing support for children with moderate special educational needs within the primary school system" (p. 48). Currently, funding that is received for EI in early childhood stops once a child transitions to school. The school then has to provide evidence of learning and behaviour and reapply for funding through the appropriate channels for a child to get funded support in the primary school context (MOE, 2017b). The discontinuity of funding when shifting from early childhood to school is currently under review in New Zealand, as it poses a high risk for children finding their start to school to be a negative experience (Burgon & Walker, 2013; MOE, 2019).

The continuity of care and support that Carl received upon starting school is particularly important given the current educational climate and discontinuity of funding between early education and primary schools (Burgon & Walker, 2013; Larson, 2010). For Carl's transition, his mother Carrie, made it particularly clear that the meeting of all adults in the learning whānau was the key to success in his move to school. Carl's teacher Bridget subsequently knew a lot about Carl's needs before he started school and then decided she would need to use a special carpet circle for Carl to sit on, in order for him to feel safe and secure. This meant he had his place and did not need to be anxious about the new classroom environment, as is noted as a common concern for children who have challenging behaviours (ERO, 2015; MOE, 2019). He was able to fall back on the whānau that had been formed around him in terms of his support network (Bourne, 2007), while waiting for external specialist support.

Many of the teacher participants (Abby, Christina, Anna and Bridget) discussed how the option of starting transitions earlier, having the transition extend over a longer period of time and increasing the number of visits, was given to families of the children in this study, and to other families if they felt their children would struggle with the transition process. Similarly, Burgon and Walker (2013) and Bourne (2007) support the notion of having extra visits and making frequent contact with the school, saying that staggering and having more visits aided the effectiveness of transitions for all children. Anna detailed how it is made clear at the parent information evening before starting school that transition visits were flexible to suit the needs of the child. For example, parents could opt to take their children for visits that lasted a whole day,

or do extra visits. The school teachers invited parents to make these visits, making parents feel welcome.

There was consistency for the children during the transitions in this study in terms of visual sources and prompts. Some examples included the use of stop/go signs (for Adam) and emoji pictures (for Carl) to familiarise themselves with the new place and routines. The uniformity between home, early childhood, and school, in terms of these familiar strategies, helped to ease the transition (Bourne, 2007; Burgon & Walker, 2013; Moss, 2013).

A strong commitment by teachers in this study to the best outcomes for children also contributed to the success and positivity of the transitions explored (Alton-Lee, 2003; Biddulph et al., 2003; Bishop et al., 2014). This commitment was evidenced in a variety of ways by the participants. For Bridget, it meant picking Carrie up from work and taking her for coffee to talk about Carl and his adjustment to school. For Alice, it meant encouraging Ariana to keep pushing for specialist support to support Adam in his new classroom even after being rejected. For Brianna it meant being brave enough to inform Billy's parents about the difficulties he had been having, so he could get the right support before starting school.

In summary, the transition practices used for all children were applicable to the children with challenging behaviours in this study. However, there were some additional strategies and resources that were tapped into by participants that were specifically designed with the three boys' needs in mind. For example, having meetings with all adults prior to the transition; having the option to alter the timing and amount of transition visits; providing unique allowances to make the children feel comfortable,

being very committed to the best outcomes for children, and creating resources to visually support the routine and environment. Due to the fact that currently there is typically waiting time for support in the primary school classroom in New Zealand after starting school (MOE, 2019), these extra strategies were particularly important for aiding the effectiveness of transitions.

6.2 What are the barriers when transitioning children with challenging behaviours from early childhood to school?

This study was approached using the appreciative inquiry framework, focusing on what was currently working well in practice for effective transition of children who have challenging behaviours to school. However, teachers and parents also described barriers to the transition process and considered how these might be overcome in future transitions. These barriers included the discontinuity of funding between early intervention (EI) and Special Educational Needs (SEN)/Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTL) (and lack of in class support as a result); limitations of information passed on to the school by parents and teachers and having to reinvent the wheel (sometimes due to privacy issues); the time involved in completing a thorough transition; juggling the time of transition around the child's learning needs versus their social needs; teachers having a lack of training in diverse needs; and teachers being confused about what specialists roles are and why certain specialists are not more willing to help.

Parents also talked about the cost of assessment and time constraints in order to get support in place before starting school. They felt that doctors were not always helpful enough, saying children were too young or "Just a boy" (Ariana and Carrie). The

strengthening of linkages between the early childhood and primary school policies and pedagogies were valuable for helping to break down these potential barriers, along with development of teacher expertise on diverse needs. This final section of the discussion considers the strategies that helped to overcome the barriers identified.

6.2.1 Collaboration to strengthen the transition process

Times of transition can be difficult for everyone, as they involve a sudden and significant amount of change for a child and their family (Broström, 2003; Featherstone, 2004; MOE, 2017b). Parents in this study spoke about how daunting it was especially when their first child goes to school, as they do not always know about the school context. Systemic linkages, and sometimes the lack thereof, were identified by Boyle and Petriwskyj (2014) as a crucial factor impacting successful transitions to school in Australia. “Differing theoretical perspectives” (Boyle & Petriwskyj, 2014, p. 4) and varying pedagogies appeared to be where a lot of the breaks in systemic linkages occurred. In the New Zealand context systemic linkages are frequently under the microscope (ERO, 2015), meaning professionals in both the early childhood and primary sectors are continually searching for ways to better connect the two educational contexts together. Teachers from both early childhood and primary school in this study (Abby and Anna) discussed the notable gap between pedagogies and policies in their interviews, with Abby admitting that “Making sure we know what school looks like” was important for transition planning. They both mentioned the introduction of Kāhui Ako/COLs as a possible advantage in that this could be a collegial place where early childhood and school staff could develop systemic linkages that support positive transitions (Boyle & Greishaber, 2017; MOE, 2018a). Teachers such as

Abby and Anna made it clear that the COLs should allow opportunities for using “Teacher speak” with each other (Abby) and discussing certain children’s struggles in a professional manner.

6.2.2 Teacher expertise

Both early childhood and primary teachers are professionals, and therefore have a level of expertise in their sectors. However, they may need access to additional knowledge about children with disabilities or challenging behaviours given that catering to all children is not always a focus during the gaining of their qualifications (MOE, 2019; Yeboah, 2002). Participants reflected this claim often discussing how they did not feel adequately equipped to support the children in the case studies. They would lean on internet sources, other service providers, or colleagues, to try to improve their practice for each individual. Abby from Centre A even discussed how she had never met anyone like Adam before, in all her years of experience as an early childhood teacher, and followed her gut instinct most of the time to cater to his needs. Teachers perceived themselves as ‘*generalists*,’ who welcomed the skills and resources that experts from outside the classroom could bring to their environment to support children with challenging behaviours in the best possible way (Burgon & Walker, 2013).

Using appreciative inquiry’s stage of dreaming what could be, there may be some value in considering the opportunities provided by to the *Learning Support Action Plan* (MOE, 2019), which aims in part to give teachers themselves a better education on catering to diverse needs in the classroom, through it’s priority number 4. Priority 4 indicates the development of new tools and resources to support teachers in their professional development on the subject of disabilities and specialist services.

This new policy has the potential to have a large impact on transitions in the future. In a similar fashion, the Australian policies in Boyle and Greishaber's (2017) drew attention to what was lacking in terms of collaborative policies, therefore beginning to bring about change in practice.

The expertise teachers have about pedagogy and child development should not be overlooked. Joining together in a Kāhui Ako/COL situation means that teachers from both sectors can collaborate over a transition framework that is specific to them, that will be effective for their unique community context. One of the early childhood teachers in the study acknowledged this possibility. She alluded to the idea that within her āhui Ako they were beginning to form a document together that could be used to ensure consistency of all children being transitioned from any early childhood environment to any school environment – a 'Transition Curriculum'. This would focus on dispositions that would be helpful for children to develop before they start school and would outline any challenges the children may have. Such a curriculum could be used between the early childhood centre and school to ensure clarity of expectations and roles (Boyle & Greishaber, 2017).

In the *Action Plan* (MOE, 2019) there is mention of a focus on identifying children's learning challenges earlier, through its Priorities 2 and 3. These priorities encompass early screening to discover children's support needs as early as possible, and early intervention to provide them with the support they need quickly. Perhaps these screening results could be useful for helping to plan a transition and an appropriate Transition Curriculum, where a child's support continues with them into school.

In summary, using an appreciative inquiry framework allowed for identifying strategies for possible barriers in transitioning children with challenging behaviours to school. The MOE (2019) has already started the process of addressing transition barriers for children and young people in their *Learning Support Action Plan*. However, it is still important that all adults involved in the transition process continue to improve their practice through ongoing collaborative partnerships between the early childhood and primary environments. Identifying transition frameworks that work for local contexts can further strengthen and support all children's transition to school.

6.3 Implications for practice

“Never believe that a few caring people can't change the world. For, indeed, that's all who ever have.”

-Margaret Mead

The way that a deep level of care and respect towards one another is represented in educational contexts is arguably unique to the New Zealand context (Macfarlane et al., 2019; Mead, 2016; Metge, 2015). In this study it was apparent that teachers both in the early childhood setting and the schools acted in the best interests of the children and cared for their well-being (Bourne, 2007; ERO, 2015; Macfarlane et al., 2019; Peters et al., 2015). They cared enough to form strong relationships with each other that were required in order to provide the best outcomes for the children. Though the study was very small and findings cannot be generalised, there were some implications from this study that others may find useful. The appreciative inquiry framework drew upon positive perspectives of parents and teachers (Cooperider et al.,

2008) on *relationships, community, care* and *commitment* that could be fostered in all transitions to school.

- Relationships: Working hard to form positive, respectful, honest, reciprocal relationships between all adults who could be, or are, involved in the transition, and maintaining these before, during and after the shift to school supported success for those children at the heart of the transition. Supportive relationships built on aroha involved not only immediate family/whānau, but extended to close friends and other experts in the community, through the establishment of whanaungatanga in practice.
- Community: Teachers and families who felt welcome as part of a wider community (manaakitanga) were able to share vital knowledge and advice with each other that was unique to the child and their educational context. Such membership in the wider professional community can be achieved through joint PD, Kāhui Ako/COLs or transition meetings/support groups.
- Care: The sense of mutual trust and care for children strengthened partnerships between teachers and families, to work together for a successful transition.
- Commitment: Having heart, aroha, and being committed to the successful learning journeys of children was supportive in overcoming barriers during the transition. In the current educational climate, teachers are having to commit to a lot of extra hours and educate themselves on diverse needs of their students.

Due to the critical impact transitions to school can have on children's future success and attitude towards education (Bulkely & Fabian, 2006; Featherstone, 2004; Peters, 2010), it is an ongoing field of research internationally. Recent studies such as

Hartley et al. (2010) and Peters et al. (2015) highlight some key practices that contribute to successful transitions. It is clear that all involved, adults and children, need to agree on transition requirements. In the extant literature that was explored in this research, occasionally the adults involved in transitions did not feel they were in a position of agreement and joint understanding where roles and responsibilities are not made explicitly clear (Bourne, 2007; Burgon & Walker, 2013). For a child with challenging behaviours, the removal of any type of confusion is essential (Burgon & Walker, 2013; ERO, 2015). Adults being unclear of their roles and expectations can only disadvantage children, especially when the children have the added difficulty of adjusting to a new and unfamiliar environment. This study provided some examples of how to improve on communication and clarity for the people involved in transitions.

6.4 Conclusion

Overall, the context of transitions from early childhood to primary school for children with challenging behaviours in New Zealand is full of positivity. A lot of this can be attributed to the values, such as whanaungatanga, manaakitanga and aroha, that are embedded in the early childhood and school curricula. These are some of the values we live and breathe as a bicultural nation dedicated to the Treaty of Waitangi. Perspectives of parents and teachers who have been involved in transitions were invaluable for identifying provisions that are currently effective, despite some systemic barriers. Support from the MOE (2019) in providing funding and training to help teachers and children with diverse needs during transitions can only give hope for the future.

However, it is not enough to sit on priority 2, 3, and 4 of the *Action Plan* (MOE, 2019) and wait for changes to occur. The findings of this study support the notion that the adults surrounding a child in their transitions need to be committed and proactive in developing strategies that support the development of powerful, trusting relationships, and the clear transfer of information from one person to the next. Only then will the children of the future develop into “Competent and confident learners and communicators... secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society” (MOE, 2017a, p. 5).

6.5 Limitations and future suggestions

Although this study intended to research more than three cases finding participants proved to be extremely difficult. This was due to a combination of reluctance to commit to a research project and to obtain participants who met the research criteria. Therefore, the study was restricted to the cases of three children, two of whom moved into the same primary school. This small sample size is certainly a limitation, although some useful information on successful transitions have been identified in this study.

The focus of this study was in one area in a large metropolitan region of New Zealand. Although there were both a high decile and low decile school involved, it is important to note that there is a large amount of variation in transition practices across the country. The demography is also more varied than what is represented in this research.

Drawing on Wright’s (2009) research, among others, it is stressed that the child’s voice is crucial in developing the whole picture when it comes to matters that

concern them. This thesis was designed to draw out how the children found their transition experience from the perspectives of the adults involved and with the child's questions created by Podmore et al. (2001) at the forefront of the mind. However, this data will never be as rich as if the children had the opportunity to speak for themselves about their transitions. Unfortunately, this was not possible within the scope of this thesis. The lack of inclusion of the children's voices is, therefore, a limitation of this study.

This project can be seen as a starting point to inform what effective practices can look like in the transition of children, particularly those who have challenging behaviours, to school. More research is needed to contribute to the literature on effective transitional processes. It is important for future studies to include the voices of children as much as possible. Those who read this research may wish to draw on the values and practices created by the 'Dream' stage of the inquiry, therefore continuing into the 'Design' phase of the study. While barriers in bridging the gap between the two educational environments of early childhood and primary do exist, they need not be seen as a hurdle, but rather, an opportunity to bring their core values and practices together to achieve better outcomes for children and their families. As further research in this area emerges and practice is developed the barriers hindering smooth transitions to school can hopefully be minimised.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Ethics Approval Email

Human Ethics Application SOB 18/16 Approved  



humanethics@massey.ac.nz
to Gina.MacMillan.1, humanethics ▾

Jul 6, 2018, 4:19 PM   

HoU Review Group

ReviewerGroup
Dr Jude MacArthur

Researcher: Gina MacMillan
Title: Transition to school for children with challenging behaviour: Family/whanau and teachers' perspectives

Dear Gina

Thank you for the above application that was considered by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Human Ethics Southern B Committee at their meeting held on 06/07/2018.
On behalf of the Committee I am pleased to advise you that the ethics of your application are approved.

Approval is for three years. If this project has not been completed within three years from the date of this letter, reapproval must be requested. If the nature, content, location, procedures or personnel of your approved application change, please advise the Secretary of the Committee.

If you wish to print an official copy of this letter, Please logon to RIMS (<http://rims.massey.ac.nz>) , and under the Reporting section, View Reports you will find a link to run the Ethics Committee Report.

Yours sincerely
Associate Professor Tracy Riley, Dean Research
Acting Director (Research Ethics)

Appendix B – Example of information sheet



MASSEY UNIVERSITY
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Transition to school for children with challenging behaviour: Family/whānau and teachers' perspectives

INFORMATION SHEET for School Principal/Board of Trustees

Researcher(s) Introduction

My name is Gina MacMillan and I am completing a research project as part of my Masters in Educational Psychology. For my research I intend to explore parents/caregivers and teachers' perceptions of effective transitions from early childhood education to primary school, for children with challenging behaviour.

Project Description and Invitation

Moving to school is a time of social and organisational adjustment, where a child must fit within new daily routines and meet new people. Positive outcomes for achievement in the primary school years can be heavily dependent on a successful transition into school life. As the Ministry of Education notes, continuity between the early childhood and primary sectors is of significant importance to children. They have provided information for families and professionals on effective transition from early childhood to school. However, there is little evidence in New Zealand as to what makes this transition successful for those children with challenging behaviour. This study is designed to contribute to this limited research. I invite you to take part in this project which will contribute to our knowledge about transitions of these children.

Participant Identification and Recruitment

Step 1: Schools on the North Shore of Auckland will be approached to participate in the study to identify new entrant/Year 1 teachers and possibly their Special Needs Coordinator (SENCO), as not all schools have a SENCO.

Step 2: The teachers who agree to participate will be requested to identify parents of children with challenging behaviours who have transitioned to their school in the previous 12 months.

Step 3: After obtaining details from participating parents, the Early Childhood service will be approached and invited to participate. If the early childhood service agrees, staff and parents involved in the transition will be invited to participate in the study.

I am aiming to carry out 3 case studies, interviewing up to 3 key members of the transition team (early childhood staff, new entrant teachers, parents/caregivers), based on whoever has had the most involvement with the child. If two children are identified from the same school this would be acceptable, however, only the first 3 children who meet the criteria in Step 1 will be selected.

Project Procedures

The research involves conducting semi structured interviews with consenting teachers and parents/caregivers to better understand their perspectives on transition experiences to school. Each interview will be for up to 45 minutes. All interviews will be audio recorded.

Data Management

The raw data recorded in the interviews will be transcribed by the researcher or a university approved transcriber, and stored in a password protected device/computer. It will be analysed thematically, in order to draw conclusions about common practices that have worked well for transitioning children and areas of improvement that are needed. All hard copies of data and the consent forms will be stored in a locked drawer that can be accessed only by me and my supervisors. Any information gathered will be kept for five years, after which it will be deleted. Participant identities will be kept anonymous at all times, and only pseudonyms of people and schools will be used in the thesis and any subsequent publications. A summary of the research findings will be provided to all participants after the thesis has been examined.

Participants' Rights

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

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study within 2 weeks of an interview being carried out;
- 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 recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview.

Project Contacts

- Supervisors -
Dr. Jude MacArthur
Senior Lecturer
Institute of Education
e-mail:
Dr. Vijaya Dharan
Senior Lecturer
Institute of Education
e-mail:
- Researcher –
Gina MacMillan
email:
mobile:

If you need further information please do not hesitate to contact the above project contacts.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 18/16. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Rochelle Stewart-Withers, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 06 356 9099 x 83657, email humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz

Appendix C – Interview schedules

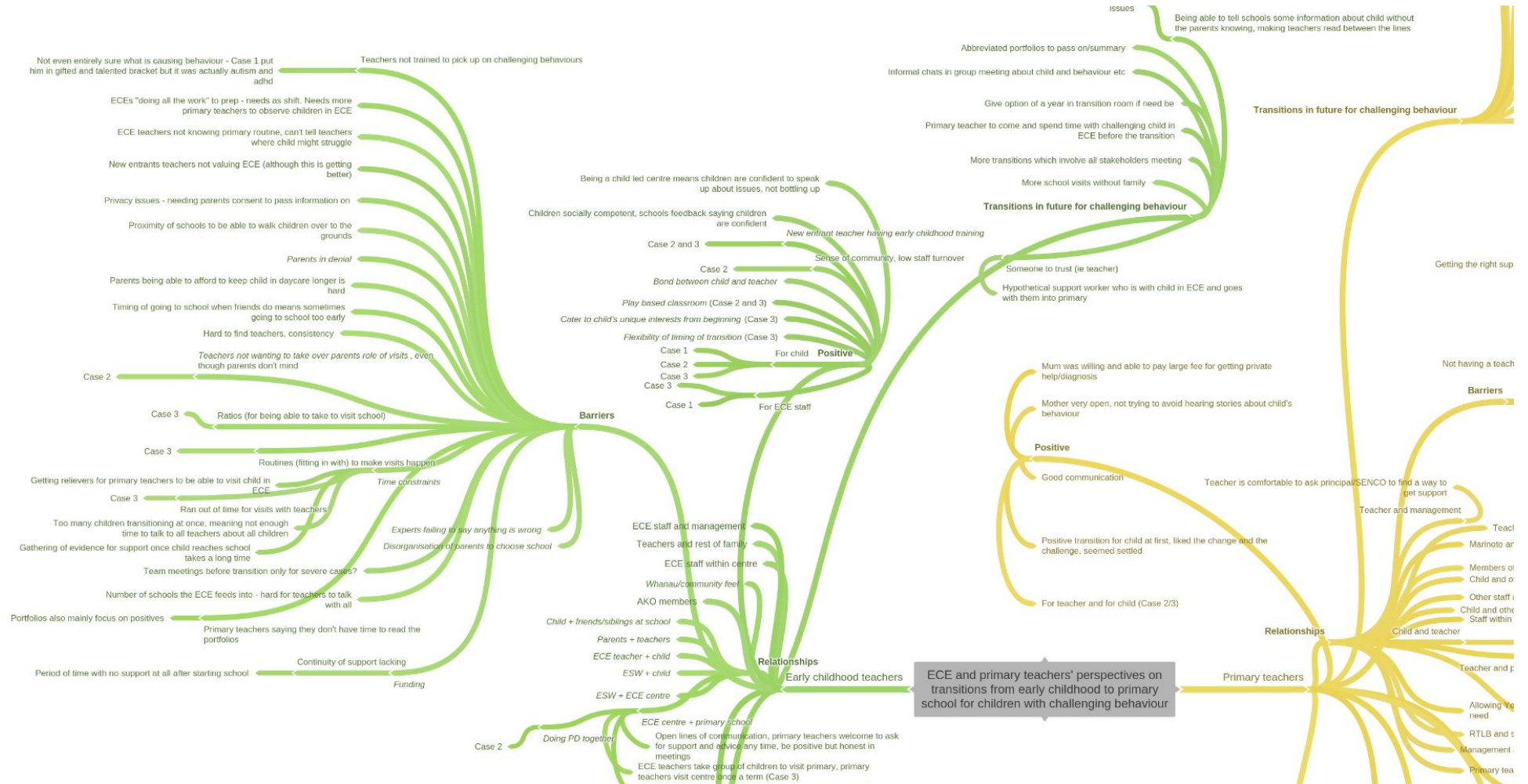
SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PLAN FOR TEACHERS AND OTHER STAFF

- Introduction of the interviewer and project
- Background questions about child from early childhood service/school perspective (these will cover pragmatic topics such as funding, support)
 - About transition to school experience
 - What are your current transition practices/policies at the early childhood service/school for all students?
 - How do you feel the transition to school/from the early childhood service process for this student went? From your perspective? From child's perspective?
 - Can you tell me who does what in terms of the roles and responsibilities?
 - Are there particular things that were done by any member of the transition team (other teachers, SENCO, parents/caregivers etc) that you found helpful during the transition period?
 - Was there an opportunity for the sharing of knowledge between the early childhood and primary sectors? Please can you explain this? What did you know about (child?). What more would you like to have known and how could this knowledge have been shared?
 - Did you feel there were any barriers for yourself and/or the child when going through the transition process? If so, could you please explain these?
 - When thinking of future transitions for challenging children, what do you think you would like to see improved on, to have more positive results for children?
- Is there anything else I should know about your transition practices?
- Conclusion and appreciation given for the time and effort.

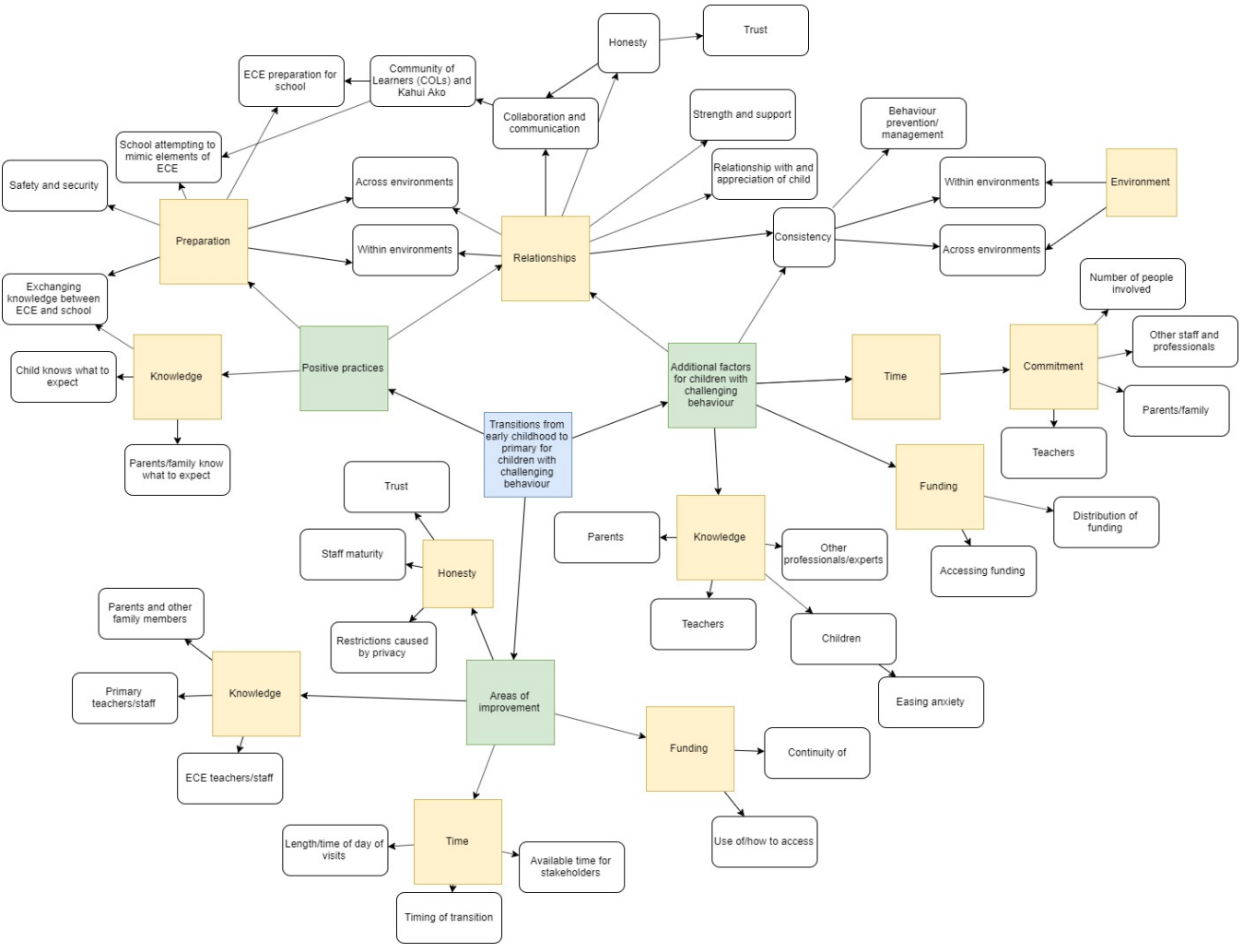
SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PLAN FOR PARENTS/CAREGIVERS

- Introduction of the interviewer and project
- Background questions about family
 - a. Can you tell me about your family?
 - b. Can you describe your child for me?
 - c. How would you describe the challenges they have had with their behaviour (at home, early childhood, school)?
 - d. What do you do when your child's behaviour becomes difficult at home?
 - e. What support has your child had at their early childhood service?
 - f. What support do they have at school to help with their learning and behaviour?
 - g. What did they like about their early childhood centre?
 - h. What do they like about school?
 - i. What things do they find hard at school?
 - j. What do they do when they find things hard?
- Questions about transition to school experience
 - How do you feel the transition to school process went? Why?
 - Are there particular things that the early childhood teacher did for you and/or your child, that you found helpful during the transition period?
 - Are there particular things that the new entrant teacher or other members of the school did for you and/or your child that you found helpful during the transition period?
 - Did you feel there were any difficult times for you and/or your child when transitioning to school? If so, could you please explain these?
 - If you were to go through this process again, what do you think you would like to do differently to have more positive results for your child?
 - Do you have any other children who have transitioned to school? Are you able to report on any major differences between the transition experiences?
- Is there anything else I should know about the transition experience?
- Conclusion and appreciation given for the time and effort.

Appendix D – Section of a concept map created on 'Coggle'



Appendix E – Map of overall themes in the study



Appendix F – Example of permission slip (from Early Childhood Management)



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Transition to school for children with challenging behaviour: Family/whanau and teachers' perspectives

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM for Early Childhood Management

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree/do not agree to the interview being sound recorded.

I wish/do not wish to have my recordings returned to me.

I wish/do not wish to have summary report of the findings.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature: _____

Date: 08th July 2019

Full Name – printed _____

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 18/16. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Rochelle Stewart-Withers, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 06 356 9099 x 83657, email humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz

We agree to allow this study to proceed in our school under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signed:

Principal: _____ (Date) 10/7/19

BOT Chairperson (or representative): Quinn

Appendix G – Transcriber confidentiality agreement



MASSEY UNIVERSITY
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TE KURA O TE MĀTAURANGA

Transition to school for children with challenging behaviour: Family/whānau and teachers' perspectives

TRANSCRIBER'S CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

I (Full Name - printed) agree to
transcribe the recordings 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:
Southern B, Application 18/16. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please
contact Dr Rochelle Stewart-Withers, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B,
telephone 06 356 9099 x 83657, email humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz

Te Kunenga
ki Pūrehuroa

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