The Efficacy of Using the New Zealand Child and Youth Profile in Planning for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder Transitioning to School: Stakeholder Perspectives

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Abstract

This research explores use of the New Zealand Child and Youth Profile (NZCYP), an in-depth information gathering and assessment tool designed specifically for New Zealand educational contexts. The research centres on educational planning for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) transitioning to school. Research shows that while it is essential to have successful educational transitions, particularly for children with additional needs, the processes involved in planning do not always meet best practice standards.

This study takes a phenomenological approach to exploring participants' perceptions regarding the efficacy of using the NZCYP in planning for children with ASD transitioning to school. This is answered by considering two key aspects: how stakeholders perceive the functionality of the NZCYP in planning for children with ASD transitioning to school, and how stakeholders perceive the impact that using the NZCYP has on planning for children with ASD transitioning to school.

The stakeholders (parents and teachers) of two children with ASD approaching school age trialled the use of the NZCYP and were then interviewed individually. The findings of this research indicate that the majority of participants did find that the NZCYP helped to facilitate the planning for transition to school of a child with ASD. Participants noted both an improvement in their understanding of the child, and a higher standard of collaboration and communication between stakeholders. It is hoped this study will inform educational practitioners and parents about the suitability and benefits of using the NZCYP in educational planning, particularly for children with ASD.

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Table of Contents

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

Human beings go through many transitions during their lifetimes. In the early years, educational transitions are particularly prevalent and important. The most common educational path in Western societies tends to be that of moving from an early childhood setting to primary school, from primary school to intermediate or middle school, from intermediate to high school, and for some, from high school to further education such as tertiary education or vocational training / trades. The ability to adjust successfully to these transitions is largely attributed to three factors: an individual's executive functioning skills (Blankson, et al., 2017), planning by both the departing and receiving educational institutions (Ministry of Education, 2014), and involvement of parents and other stakeholders in the planning process (Connolly & Gersch, 2016).

The majority of children weather these transitions well and find themselves fitting in within the new environment and enjoying the growth and challenges that come with these changes (Ministry of Education, 2014). Research has shown how vitally important this is to an individual's growth and development and has identified how strongly a positive or negative educational transition experience can impact an individual's future. Academic and social success, mental well-being and confidence can all be affected (Education Review Office [ERO], 2015; Peters, 2010). Some children, however, find these transitions very challenging. This is particularly so for children with learning support needs (Burgon & Walker, 2013; Janus, Lefort, Cameron & Kopechanski, 2007), who are more likely to need extra support and greater planning for their specific needs.

Research points to the importance of collaboration between parents, teachers, specialists, and educational settings in being able to meet the needs of these children through educational planning (Hedegaard-Soerensen, Jensen, & Tofteng, 2017; Ministry of Education, 2011). However, studies have identified that collaboration in educational planning is often missing, or at least diminished (ERO, 2015; Trach, 2012). Several barriers have been recognised including lack of time, lack of understanding between parties, and a strong feeling by parents that their voices are not valued (Harris & Goodall, 2008; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Hornby & Blackwell, 2018). Therefore, new methods for assisting collaboration in planning for educational transitions could be of value. The New Zealand Child and Youth Profile (NZCYP) was developed for the NZ context and could be used to help ensure collaborative practices in educational planning.

Research Aim and Questions

The overarching question for this research was "What is the perceived efficacy of using the NZCYP in planning for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) transitioning to school?" Two research questions were formed to guide this study. These were:

- How do stakeholders perceive the functionality of the NZCYP in planning for children with ASD transitioning to school?
- How do stakeholders perceive the impact that using the NZCYP has on planning for children with ASD transitioning to school.

Research Rationale and Value

One educational transition that is particularly important is the one from early childhood to primary school (Peters, 2010). The experience of this initial introduction to a more formal stage of education has been identified as being crucial to a child's success in school (ERO, 2015). If the transition goes well then the child will be better engaged in learning, have a positive identity of themselves as a learner and feel a sense of belonging in their school (Peters, 2010).

Due to the particular importance of this stage for children with learning support needs (Ministry of Education, 2014), this research centred on educational planning for children with ASD. ASD is a complex neurodevelopmental disorder which is characterised by behavioural, social, communicative and sensory challenges (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). These challenges can manifest in ways that can make transitioning between educational settings a struggle. Examples include difficulties managing change, challenges with social skills and communication skills, and the presence of non-neurotypical behaviours such as obsessive interests and repetitive behaviours (Kilroy, Aziz-Zadeh, & Cermak, 2019). Accordingly, higher levels of support and planning are required to meet these challenges and the extra needs they impart. This support will have better outcomes if carried out cohesively across the settings the child interacts within, such as their home, school and community (Ministries of Health & Education, 2016). The rationale for this study is to seek the perspectives of those involved in the educational planning of children with ASD to determine whether the NZCYP is able to positively impact these challenges.

Given the impact that successful educational transitions have on a child's school 'career', particularly for children with additional learning needs, research identifying methods that help or hinder this endeavour is vital. This may provide valuable insights to early childhood educators, primary school teachers, special education needs coordinators (SENCOs), researchers, parents, specialists and educational managers regarding tools that can help in fostering collaboration and planning between stakeholders.

Justification. Having worked as an early childhood teacher and teacher aide in additional needs classrooms in schools, I have experienced the difficulty of trying to make effective plans for children either without all stakeholders involved, and / or without all the necessary information. In addition, as a parent of a child with ASD, I have experienced the frustrations of sharing information to have it not be documented and utilised, and of not always being part of the planning process. Through conversations with colleagues and fellow parents, I know my experiences are not limited to myself. Upon being introduced to the NZCYP I was intrigued about the potential for its capacity to improve information sharing, as well as collaborative and planning processes.

Background

This section will consider some of the theories and concepts significant to this study including the theoretical model underpinning the research, Autism Spectrum Disorder, and the New Zealand Child and Youth Profile. It will also explain the importance of participant perspectives in the phenomenological process.

Theoretical model underpinning research. A theoretical model that allows for an understanding of the various influences and processes (both direct and indirect) that impact upon a child's transition to school experiences is Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of human development (Wilder & Lillvist, 2018). The bioecological model is an extension of Bronfenbrenner's original ecological systems theory, an approach which encapsulates the influences on an individual's development from the different environments they are immersed in, and the interactions between those environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This was conceptualised by Bronfenbrenner as a series of ever larger systems, within which the smaller systems lay, and at the centre of which is the child. These layers – the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem – denote the manner in which these environments within the ecological system impact the individual.

The microsystem refers to the layer closest to the individual at the centre (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). It encompasses the environments that the individual participates in at a local level, and includes relationships and interactions with school, family, friends and peers, and community. These relationships incur bidirectional influences, with the individual both affecting and being affected by each interaction. This interplay and connection between elements in the child's microsystem is referred to by Bronfenbrenner as the mesosystem. Following this, the exosystem (Onwuegbuzie, Collins, & Frels, 2013) exists outside the micro and mesosystems, and contains structures that the child is not involved with, but which impact on those contained in the microsystem. This includes the parents' employment status, neighbours, health services, media, and the local schooling system. The furthest system from the child at the centre is the

macrosystem (Wilder & Lillvist, 2018). This layer consists of all the overarching wider elements of society that impact the population, such as the political systems, laws, cultural values and customs, and the economy. The chronosystem is a later addition to Bronfenbrenner's original theory development, and incorporated into what is now referred to as the bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). It reflects how the bidirectional interactions between individuals and systems influence each other over time, acknowledging the evolving nature of development over an individual's life-span.

The bioecological model of human development tells us that a child's development is impacted by factors beyond the obvious in their immediate environment, their relationships or their developmental challenges. Development is considered to occur through the interplay of these factors, and over the course of time. Understanding this provides a lens through which the research data can be viewed and analysed, providing a supportive framework for this study.

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD). ASD was a newly created classification by the APA in the fifth iteration of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. It encompasses previously separate diagnoses of *Asperger's syndrome*, *autism*, *childhood disintegrative disorder* and *pervasive developmental disorder-not otherwise specified* (APA, 2013). As noted above, ASD is a neurodevelopmental disorder with a wide-ranging spectrum of effects (Dharan, 2016). Largely impacting social, behavioural, emotional and communicative development, ASD is a life-long disorder that impacts an individual's education, relationships and understanding of the world (Ministries

of Health & Education, 2016). It is estimated to affect over 40,000 New Zealanders (Ministries of Health & Education, 2016).

New Zealand Child and Youth Profile (NZCYP). The NZCYP is an information gathering tool developed by three researchers at Massey University, New Zealand (McLaughlin, Budd, & Clendon, 2017). It is a collection of forms designed to gather and document specific information about a child across a range of domains and from a range of perspectives. Described by its developers as a *toolkit*, the NZCYP is designed to be used by the various stakeholders in the child's life, such as the parents, teachers, specialists, and others involved in their care, support and education. The NZCYP was developed to facilitate collaboration in educational planning (McLaughlin et al., 2017), allowing stakeholders to document, share, and collate their findings. This allows for the formation of a comprehensive overview and background of the child's needs, strengths, challenges, abilities, interests, sensory function, adaptations and specialised equipment currently utilised and participation in their environment (home, school, community). The creation of this multi-dimensional view of the child provides a basis for ongoing planning for their needs. Such an approach considers a child's development across a range of domains, incorporating biomedical information, functional attributes, social and ecological influences, as well as psychological factors, in what has become known as a *biopsychosocial* approach.

This biopsychosocial approach is inherent in the World Health Organisation's (WHO) functional profile for children and youth, the *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health* (ICF-CY), from which the NZCYP was largely influenced (McLaughlin et al., 2017). The basis of the ICF-

CY was to allow for a child's needs to be viewed primarily in light of their function and abilities (Norwich, 2016), rather than being determined via a broad set of commonalities and descriptors characteristic of their diagnostic label and disabilities. A further feature of the ICF-CY, also reflected in the NZCYP, is the use of a shared language and conceptual framework that works across a range of disciplines (Allan, Campbell, Guptill, Stephenson, & Campbell, 2010), encouraging inter-professional collaboration.

Research by the developers on the use of NZCYP, centres predominantly on how participants used it and their perspectives of using it (McLaughlin et al., 2017). There are no current studies on its impact on planning for children with additional learning needs transitioning to school.

Perspectives. The perspectives of participants' are essential to qualitative research that seeks answers to the impact a phenomenon such as the NZCYP may have. Capturing these perspectives allows the researcher an insight into the lived experiences of others, enabling them to explore the phenomenon through them (Davidsen, 2013). This creates knowledge that can be built on, and that others can learn from.

Chapter Summary

A successful transition between early childhood and primary school bodes well for a child's learning at school. Ideal transition practices require sound educational planning and collaboration between stakeholders, but research has shown this does not always happen. While reasons for this have been identified through research, how to facilitate better planning and collaborative practices has been rarely studied. For children with additional

learning needs, including ASD, a successful transition to school is even more crucial. This research will investigate whether the NZCYP can help or hinder these planning practices. Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of development underpins this research, with its focus on the influence that interactions between people and places in the child's environment have on their development.

Thesis Outline

The following chapter reviews the literature pertinent to this research. It begins with the characteristics and challenges of ASD, followed by the importance of successful educational transitions, what denotes a successful transition, and instances where this isn't happening. Further, research regarding the barriers to educational planning is explored, as well as the impact of this upon educational transitions. Chapter 3 details the phenomenological, qualitative approach applied to this research, and outlines the data gathering and analysis processes used. In chapter 4, the findings of the study are outlined, presenting an analysis of the themes that emerged from the data. These findings are discussed in Chapter 5 in relation to the literature review and research questions. Chapter 6 offers a conclusion of the research, and a consideration of the validity and limitations of the study. Implications of the research are discussed along with suggested directions for future research and concluding thoughts from the researcher.

CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review

Transitions between educational settings are important for children's success at school (Connolly & Gersch, 2016; Denkyirah & Agbeke, 2010; Mardiyanti, 2016; Quintero & McIntrye, 2011; Starr, Martini, & Kuo, 2016). These educational transitions, particularly between early childhood and primary school, signify a time where children must learn to adapt their behaviour to the expectation of the school environment (Eisenhower, Bush, & Blacher, 2015; Mirkhil, 2010), and develop the skills and resilience to deal with a common life experience: transitions (ERO, 2015). Successful transitions translate to academic achievement at school (Connolley & Gersch, 2016) and are crucial to children's long-term well-being (ERO, 2015; Quintero & McIntrye, 2011). They have a "significant long-lasting impact" (Fontil & Petrakos, 2015, p. 774) with positive effects on children's development and achievements (Hacıibrahimoğlu & Kargın, 2017). This is particularly so for children with additional needs (Peters, 2010).

The review of literature begins with discussing what a successful transition looks like, why it is important and current practice in New Zealand. This is followed by an in-depth look at best practice for ensuring successful transitions, delving into two major facets that impact upon the process; collaborative relationships and educational planning. What is required for effective collaboration is explored, followed by parental experiences and potential barriers. The review then explores the requirement for effective educational planning, what this looks like in the New Zealand context in both schools and early childhood, and the use of individual education plans (IEPs).

This is followed by a discussion of the characteristics of ASD that warrant extra support for children with these challenges, and a look into previous research regarding use of the NZCYP.

Successful Transitions

The need and desire for a successful transition between early childhood and primary school has been well established (Blankson et al., 2017; Strnadová & Cumming, 2016). For all children, a successful transition will give them a sense of belonging at school and help them engage in learning (Peters, 2010). For children with additional needs, a successful transition will also provide a continuation of support for their needs (Burgon & Walker, 2013).

The expectations for what a successful transition looks like can differ between stakeholders. Mirkhil (2010) conducted a qualitative case study to explore the perspectives of adult stakeholders' regarding the transition to school process, and identified varying views of what matters. Of the key adult stakeholders from three early childhood centres and three primary schools in Melbourne, parents considered a transition to be successful if their child appeared happy and enthusiastic to be going to school, whereas early childhood educators and primary school teachers identified a child's social success as a main indicator of a successful transition to school. Alternatively, New Zealand's Ministry of Education guidelines for children transitioning from early intervention services to school outline what they consider a successful transition looks like. They specify a successful transition to school entails parents and whanau feeling like they belong at school, the school team feeling

confident they have the information and resources needed to support the child, and the child coping with attending school all day (Ministry of Education, 2014).

Transitions in NZ

The Education Review Office (2015) reviewed the experiences' of children transitioning from an early childhood service to primary school, from the view of both educational settings. The report emphasised that it is imperative teachers collaborate with parents and whanau to meet the needs of children as they progress through the educational system. While the report found that just over half of early childhood services were conducting transition to school practices in line with guidelines, many early childhood services and schools were falling short of ideal standards. The report found that while the majority of services had good collaborative relationships, 43% of early childhood services did not have a good collaborative relationship with parents and whanau during the transition process, 48% did not have good collaborative relationships with the receiving schools, and 45% did not have collaborative relationships with external agencies. Exacerbating these issues was the finding that 64% of early childhood services were not conducting effective self-reviews of their processes.

The ERO report contained a number of suggestions for improving collaboration. These included improving their knowledge of how the early childhood curriculum Te Whãriki supports the NZ Curriculum, having better strategies in place to keep parents informed of transition processes, developing and maintaining relationships with receiving schools and external agencies, and

viewing the opportunities for early childhood staff to act as advocates for children transitioning to school (ERO, 2015).

These findings resonate with an earlier report by Burgon and Walker (2013) pertaining specifically to the transition of children with learning support needs from early intervention to school-age services. They found that the transition to school process was a stressful and anxious time for most families in their case study (n=14). The case study involved interviewing the parents, early childhood teachers, receiving school teachers and specialist Ministry of Education staff. The parents' main concerns about their children's' transitions were whether their children would be safe, whether they would cope academically, and how their child would interact with others at school. The report found that participants in half of the case studies (n=7) felt that the transition had gone well. Five cases did not go as well as they could have, and two were not successful at all. Interestingly, in half of the cases there were conflicting responses from participants in relation to different facets of the transition process. For example, there was disagreement over whether there was suitable communication, whether the transition was successful, and whether the relationship between stakeholders was respectful. In the latter finding, it was mostly related to the Ministry of Education believing their relationships with others were sound, when the school or early childhood centre disagreed.

Burgon and Walker (2013) contend that in cases where there had been effective transitions there were three critical components: (a) strong relationships between stakeholders, (b) effective systems and processes

(including planning, communication and an understanding of roles), and (c) availability of resources.

The Burgon and Walker (2013) report contains parallels with the ERO (2015) review above, most notably in the percentage of successful transitions (roughly 50%) and in noting the importance of relationships between stakeholders.

Ensuring Successful Transitions

While there are many contributing factors that facilitate successful educational transitions (ERO, 2015; Mirkhil, 2010; Peters, 2010; Starr et al., 2014), the evidence suggests there are two that have the greatest impact on the success (or not) of transitions: Collaborative relationships and Educational planning. Educational planning is at the crux of ensuring successful transitions to school (Cavendish & Connor, 2018), and at the heart of planning is the need for strong collaborative relationships between stakeholders (Cavendish & Connor, 2018; Doyle, McGuckin, & Shevlin, 2017).

Collaborative relationships. Mitchell, Morton, and Hornby (2010) when discussing children with learning support needs, contend that "…there are few areas of education that call upon so much collaboration and teamwork." (p. 19). Collaborative relationships allow for the development of a transition plan that encompasses multiple viewpoints (Hedegaard-Soerensen et al., 2017), generating a fuller picture of the challenges facing children (Denkyirah & Agbeke, 2010). The evidence maintains that this creates better transition experiences for children (Connolly & Gersch, 2016; Hedegaard-Soerensen et al,, 2018; Tucker & Schwartz, 2013).

Communication. Strong relationships and collaboration require clear communication among all stakeholders (Ministry of Education, 2014). It is a vital component in stakeholders' abilities to convey information about the child, their experiences and assessment data (Ministry of Education, 2011) and a central step in ensuring all voices are heard (Griffin, 2014). Open communication also allows for a sharing of the often diverse expectations of stakeholders (Mirkhil, 2010), a crucial step in the planning process. Peters and Roberts (2015) concur, arguing that as any experience can be viewed differently by each stakeholder, it is important to the process of planning that these are shared. This allows for what Connolly and Gersch (2016) term "a look through a family lens" (p. 246), where clear communication with families, and opportunities for them to share, increase the likelihood of a sound transition. Fontil and Petrakos (2015) also contend that good communication is essential in helping families for whom the language of the country they reside in is not their native language, or those whose cultural norms make speaking up difficult.

Indeed a lack of communication limits collaboration between all parties, something that Denkyirah and Agbeke (2010) contend can create unmet expectations among the stakeholders across the different settings (teachers, children, parents and special service providers), causing confusion between them and the children. A common sentiment in this review of literature was the desire for a continuity of services between educational settings when facilitating transitions (Burgon & Walker, 2013; ERO, 2015; Peters, 2010). This requires a transfer of information which can only happen when lines of communication are open, clear and reciprocal. Further to this, Trach (2012) considers the importance of communication to effective collaboration and suggests the need

to define collaboration in order to measure its impact on transition. He states that successful collaboration requires all who are involved to have an agreed understanding of what their roles and responsibilities are, what the expectations are of the other team members, and a mutual, well-defined understanding of what goals are to be achieved. Essential to this, Trach (2012) posits, is a high level of communication between all parties. This resonates with Hurlburt et al.'s (2013) qualitative study into the capacity for interagency collaboration to implement evidence-based practice which found that communication was one of *the* crucial elements necessary.

Communication isn't just about what is communicated, but how. In the New Zealand context, culturally responsive practice honours the Treaty of Waitangi. Communicating biculturally with Māori means valuing the culture, values, language, identity and background of the child and their family (ERO, 2015). Communicating in a culturally appropriate manner improves engagement, participation and collaboration in educational planning (Burgon & Walker, 2013).

Stakeholder participation. Stakeholder participation is an essential element to collaboration. Tucker and Schwartz (2013) contend that in practice, good collaboration entails involvement by all stakeholders. In their research regarding how interdisciplinary collaboration can contribute to inclusive learning environments, Hedegaard-Soerensen et al. (2018) acknowledge the benefits of collaboration in educational planning to teaching practice. They state that "formalised collaboration is highlighted as most significant in contributing to the development of inclusive teaching practices…" (p. 392). Furthermore, they assert that this leads to a shared responsibility in planning, teaching and

evaluating. Trach (2012) also discusses the shared nature of collaboration and identifies two impacts: it reduces an overlap in individual programming that can occur when planning is carried out by various stakeholders separately, and reduces the chance that a component integral to the success of an individual be mistakenly omitted.

Conversely other research points to a lack of buy-in by stakeholders. In Ihmeideh and Oliemat's (2014) research examining the effectiveness of family involvement in early childhood programmes, these researchers categorically state that involvement of the family "…can no longer be considered a luxury but is rather a main component of early childhood programmes" (p.181). However, despite this assertion, the principal and teacher participants in their research indicated that they considered family involvement in planning practices to be ineffective (p. 192). Additionally, Bodvin, Verschueren, and Struyf (2018) cited in their focus group study regarding the perspectives of school counsellors collaborating with parents, that counsellors felt frustrated with parents, on occasion labelling them as "annoying" (p. 422).

Relationships. The requisite for good relationships between all stakeholders (parents, children, sending and receiving school teachers, and specialists) was a consistent finding that appeared across the literature reviewed. Strong relationships build trust and respect (Denkyirah & Agbeke, 2010), help engender a feeling of confidence in educational professionals (Burgon & Walker, 2013), and contribute to a sense of belonging felt by children and their families (Peters & Roberts, 2013). Additionally, teachers who know their children well are better able to see their challenges in a more positive light (Peters, 2010). Denkyirah and Agbeke's (2010) teacher-centric research found

that 97% of American participants and 93% of Ghanaian participants considered the relationship between sending and receiving schools to be important to the success of transitions, a finding echoed in Burgon and Walker's (2013) case study. They found that the theme of relationships was the factor most frequently stated in participant's interviews. Burgon and Walker (2013) further argued in their report that while relationships are undoubtedly vital to a successful transition experience, that they alone weren't enough. Rather, they provided a solid footing on which other transition practices could stand.

In addition to the previously mentioned studies, the quality of relationships arose in Eisenhower et al.'s (2015) research and framework development for examining the aspects which impact on the transition to school experiences of children with ASD. These authors discussed the need for a connectedness between school and home, and quality engagement between student and teacher. They consider that a quality relationship between the student and teacher provides a protective factor for children with ASD, and that positive parent-school relationships are vital to establishing such a relationship. This is particularly so for children with behavioural challenges, as well as social and economic risks.

Furthermore, Peters' (2010) review of transition to school practices and experiences in New Zealand determined that successful transitions require "responsive, reciprocal relationships between all concerned…" (p. 73).

Parental perspectives. A desire to work more closely with stakeholders and frustration over a lack of communication with them has been commonly expressed in research regarding parent perspectives of transition to school

processes. This was evident in the findings of Quintero and McIntyre (2010). Their USA-based study of the transition to school experiences of 95 parents and teachers of children with ASD or other developmental disorders found that both teachers and parents expressed a desire to work more collaboratively with each other during the transition planning process, as well as with the teachers in the receiving school. Furthermore, they identified that parents often felt that their attempts to maintain communication with and between pre-school and primary school, was dismissed by staff. This finding is consistent with a phenomenological study by Connolly and Gersch (2016) in Ireland. While this was a much smaller study with just six parent participants, the phenomenological nature of the study captured the experiences of six parents of children with ASD as they started school. One of the overarching themes to emerge from the study was that parents wanted to be heard and believed and felt that they were instead being judged and ignored. This is a common sentiment, further found in Tucker and Schwartz's research (2013). They used a mixed methods survey to canvas what 135 parents from the state of Washington, USA, thought amounted to good collaboration. While 91% of participants mentioned the need for regular communication from the school regarding their child, only 46% of participants felt that this was happening. Further, 66% expressed unhappiness at feeling left out of the collaborative process of educational planning for their child.

Barriers to collaboration and communication. While much of the research shows that educators and parents agree on the need and desire for communication and collaboration when planning for children, especially those with learning support needs (Bodvin et al., 2018; Harris & Goodall, 2008;

Hornby & Blackwell, 2018; Tucker & Schwartz, 2013), in many cases a gap was found between the rhetoric and the reality (Bodvin et al., 2018; Mitchell et al., 2010; Taylow, Morgan, & Callow-Heusser, 2016; Trach, 2012). Fontil and Petrakos (2015) and Starr et al. (2016) found that despite research and evidence highlighting the preferable criteria and contexts for successful transitions across educational settings, documented experiences of families, educators and other support workers show that many challenges abound, particularly for children with learning support needs. Overall the evidence suggests that many of these challenges stem from a lack of communication and collaboration between parents and educators (Fontil & Petrakos, 2015; Iadarola et al., 2018; Starr, Martini, Kuo, 2016; Strnadová & Cummming, 2016).

There are several contributing factors creating barriers to collaboration. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) developed an explanatory model for these barriers, adapted from Epstein's (2001, in Hornby & Lafaele, 2011) framework consisting of three overlapping influences on child development: family, school and community. Hornby and Lafaele's (2011) adaptation elicited four factors to categorise and explain the barriers: parent and family factors, parent-teacher factors, societal factors, and practical barriers. These categories are used here to group findings in other literature also.

- **Parent and family factors**. This considers parents' own experiences of school when they were younger, their education levels, and attitude to education (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018). Additionally, Harris and Goodall (2008), in their UK case study (n=314) of the relationship between the engagement of parents and student achievement, posited links between levels of parental education, attitudes to school and material deprivation,

determining that the impact of their engagement is dependent on these factors, Cavendish and Connor (2018) reported further findings in their mixed-methods study investigating influences on parental and student involvement in IEP transition planning. Their USA study of 32 participants noted work and transport related scheduling challenges as a barrier to involvement in educational planning.

- **Parent-teacher factors.** A lack of time for teachers to engage with families is commonly mentioned across a variety of research regarding collaboration in educational planning (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017; Hedegaard-Soerensen et al., 2018), with teachers regretting that they don't have as much time as they would like to meet with parents and attend to queries.

  Another contributing factor is whether teachers lack the confidence in dealing with parents, something which Da Fonte and Barton-Arwood (2017) suggests needs to be addressed by way of programmes to teach teachers the skill of collaboration and teamwork. Mitchell et al. (2010) contend that this lack of confidence is exacerbated by teachers being used to working alone, and thus, along with parents, find working collaboratively to be outside their comfort zone.

  Additionally, Bodvin et al. (2018), and Tucker and Schwartz (2013) maintain that parental distrust of school staff, and a lack of confidence in staff disability-specific knowledge can contribute to a wariness from families to engage with the school. Doyle et al. (2017) also address this in their mixed methods research regarding parent perspectives in transition planning for students with learning support needs. They explain

that there is often a divergence found "…between the aspirations of pupil and the expectations of practitioners…" (p. 275), which creates barriers to the involvement in transition planning processes. Further to this, Denkyirah and Agbeke (2010) found that a lack of understanding or experience (in regard to specific learning support needs) by the receiving schools and teachers can contribute to unreasonable expectations regarding the nature of support needed.

- **Societal factors.** Hornby and Blackwell (2018) describe the societal pressures on families that can influence their engagement with the school, including parents missing meetings due to work commitments or parents who lack the resources to attend meetings. Cultural differences in protocol, language and beliefs can be another barrier (Mitchell et al., 2010).
- **Practical barriers**. Hornby and Blackwell (2018) contend that simple practical issues may cause barriers to parental engagement and collaboration. For example, if parents are not fully aware when teachers are available, how to approach the school, or even have limited access to the internet, access and desire to engage can be limited.

Educational Planning. Educational planning appears frequently in literature regarding successful transition practices (Cavendish & Connor, 2018; Zeitlin & Curcic, 2014). It allows for setting goals (Denkyirah & Agbeke, 2010), determines challenges the child and family may face in the transition process (Cavendish & Connor, 2018), finds ways to assist in preparing for these challenges, and ensures that the receiving school has all the information they need to be prepared (King, Bhroin, & Prunty, 2018). Burgon and Walker (2013)

add that the mainstay of planning is to ensure that there is a continuation of the child's needs being met.

Planning Practices. For planning specific to educational transitions, Mitchell et al. (2010) contend that there are four fundamental factors: the involvement of the student and whanau, collaboration between stakeholders, a focus on individualised planning, and emphasis on transition needs. In addition, Mardiyanti (2016) cites a key goal is preparing children with learning support needs with the skills that will help ensure success in their new educational environment.

Ensuring all participants have knowledge of the support and resources available within the education system and the community is another key practise in planning (Denkyirah & Agbeke, 2010; Ministry of Education, 2013). Burgon and Walker (2013) concur, with their research making it clear that effective transition planning requires all parties to have a clear understanding of the resources available, and who is responsible for accessing them. This correlates with a key indicator of a successful transition to school specified by the Ministry of Education (2014). Unfortunately, a lack of understanding by stakeholders of what support and help is available can compound issues. Peters (2010) found this in her literature review of transition practices in New Zealand, lamenting that "an increasingly complicated web of connections between early childhood services and schools." (p. 8) can hamper effective transition planning.

NZ guidelines and requirements. Provisions for children with learning support needs in New Zealand, such as ASD, are laid out in the National

Administration Guidelines (NAGs) (Ministry of Education, 2017a) and the National Educational Goals (NEGs) (Ministry of Education, 2004). These are requirements for education providers to follow. The NAGs set out the requirements for school boards, principals and staff in regards to educational provision in New Zealand. The most recent review specifies eight NAGs. NAG 1.c.iii states that schools must identify children with learning support needs, while NAG 1.d. specifies that schools must address the needs of these students through teaching and learning strategies. Further to this, in the NEGs, which provide goals for the education system, are directives for the creation of programmes that meets the needs of children with ASD, specifying that education programmes permit all children to reach their full potential, and that barriers to this are identified and removed.

In addition to the NAGs and NEGs, the New Zealand Autism Spectrum Disorder Guideline (Ministries of Health and Education, 2016), provides more specific guidance, outlining evidence-based research regarding the identification, diagnosis, assessment and intervention practices for individuals working with children with ASD.

Te Whãriki. The early childhood curriculum Te Whãriki (Ministry of Education, 2017b) contains underlying principles which support the transition to school for children (ERO, 2015). The principles of empowerment, holistic development, family, whãnau and community, and relationships, underpin recommended practices when planning for children with learning support needs. ERO (2015) emphasises the need for continuity between Te Whãriki and The New Zealand Curriculum, and recommends that services involved in transition planning use these principles to guide their decision making. Te Whãriki further

supports transition to school with five learning strands which encompass goals and learning outcomes that serve to support the step between educational settings. These learning strands – Mana Atua/Wellbeing, Mana Whenua/Belonging, Mana Tangata/Contribution, Mana Reo/Communication, and Mana Aotūroa/Exploration – provide the backdrop against which early childhood services can fulfil the expectations specified in The Curriculum Standard. That is to "plan, implement and evaluate a curriculum that is designed to enhance children's learning and development through the provision of learning experiences…" (ERO, 2015, p. 7).

Individual Education Plans (IEP). A cornerstone of educational planning for children with learning support needs is the IEP process (King et al., 2018). An IEP is intended as a tool to facilitate inclusive education (Cavendish & Connor, 2018; Jachova, Kovačević, & Hasanbegović, 2018) by providing a working document developed by and made available to all stakeholders detailing all aspects of needs and the support needed to meet them, alongside goals and objectives for the child (Ministry of Education, 2018; Mitchell et al., 2010). New Zealand's Ministry of Education (2011) describes it as a continual process of collaboration to provide a plan that can be amended and adapted to each child's needs as they grow and develop.

While much of the research regarding IEPs endorses their usage in planning for children with additional needs, this viewpoint is contested in a number of studies highlighting deficits to the IEP process. Zeitlin and Curcic (2014) canvased the perspectives of 20 parents in the USA regarding the IEP process. They determined that there were "unintended consequences" (p. 385) inherent in the IEP process. These included impersonal meetings and an

emphasis on complying with the process concerning collaborating with parents. Similarly, Mitchell et al (2010) consider in their review of IEPs, the criticism that the efficacy of IEPs in improving student outcomes has not been adequately proven. It would appear from the literature on IEPs however that there is no universally accepted usage of IEPs (King et al., 2018; Zeitlin & Curcic, 2014). As such it may not be the IEP process itself, but the manner in which it is carried out that hampers the efficacy. The effectiveness of the IEP may well be predicated on the information elicited from all stakeholders.

As has been established above, a lack of collaboration and communication between stakeholders pervades planning processes, hampering the gathering of information. One method that has been identified as improving the process and impact of IEP planning is using a strength-based rather than deficit-based approach. For many years planning focused on the gaps between an individual's abilities and skills and the ideal or average in terms of societal expectations (Elder, Rood, & Damiani, 2008). More recently however, educational planning has moved strongly towards a strength-based model. Lopez and Louis (2009) sum up this philosophy aptly: "a strengths perspective assumes that every individual has resources that can be mobilized toward success in many areas of life" (p. 2). Describing it as a "paradigm shift" (p. 6), a strengths-based approach starts from a point of what the child can do and is capable of, not what they cannot do (Lopez & Louis, 2009). Elder et al. (2018) advocate for the implementation of personalised and holistic IEPs. They note that special education has been slow to take up strength-based planning. They argue that a strengths-based approach leads to more effective IEPs and allows for the student to be seen as an individual, not as a problem.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Working to ensure a successful transition is particularly important for children with learning support needs, who may face more challenges that may exacerbate the transition process (Stradnova & Cumming, 2016). One such developmental disorder is ASD. Indeed, New Zealand's Ministry of Education considers that for students with high learning and social needs, "…the transition from school is probably the most crucial process for determining how the rest of their lives will unfold." (para 2, 2019).

Characteristics of ASD that make transitioning a challenge. Behaviourally, children with ASD can find it more difficult to settle into new routines and be more sensitive to changes in their environment (Attwood, 2007). Children with ASD often have delayed or impaired social skills, which can negatively impact on their ability to establish friendships in a new setting and to understand new social rules (Ministry of Education, 2016). Hand in hand with social skills deficits, many individuals with ASD find communication challenging, both in regard to language used and the understanding of others (APA, 2013). Further to this, children with ASD can have sensory issues, where they are overwhelmed by the noise or busyness of the environment (Kilroy et al., 2019).

Impact of challenges to the transition process. These challenges can impact on the success of educational transitions (Fontil, Sladeczek, Gittens Kubishyn, & Habib, 2019). Quintero and McIntrye (2010), in their comparative research of parent and teacher practices in preparing children with ASD to transition from preschool to kindergarten, reference two of the challenges facing

children with learning support needs. These challenges - poor social communication and interaction skills, and difficulty adapting to new environments and transferring skills between settings - are often a characterisation of ASD. Marsh, Spagnol, Grove, and Eapen (2017) concur in their systematic review to ascertain the factors that have a positive impact on school beginnings for children with ASD. They report that externalising behaviours, which are typical of children with ASD, coupled with self-regulation difficulties, can hamper engagement in school and key relationships (such as with teachers and peers) necessary to successful transition. They further stated that children with ASD were emotionally less prepared to start school, and often had difficulties with self-regulation that contributed to a poorer transition experience.

In line with the above are Li and Lau's (2018) findings in their research investigating the role of self-regulation in mediating kindergarten to primary school transitions. They cite research asserting links between good self-regulation skills and the ability to accept and follow social rules, as well as healthier psychosocial adjustment. Of further interest, is their assertion that key to the development of self-regulation abilities is the relationship between the child and the teacher (p. 3). Adding weight to this, research involving 209 first grade classroom teachers in Ankara, Turkey, was conducted by Hacıibrahimoğlu and Kargın (2017) to determine the challenges that children with learning support needs (including ASD) face in transitioning to primary school. They contend that extra challenges in the educational transitions of children with learning support needs arise from the "emotional and behavioural

competencies" (p.1489) of not only the child, but also their support network: parents, family, teachers and the community.

To further complicate things, Denkyirah & Agbeke (2010), in their survey of the transition practices of 275 Ghanaian and American preschool teachers of children with ASD, posit that an additional challenge is that diagnosis is often delayed, leading to an unawareness of the need for ASD centric transition preparation.

NZCYP: Previous Research

As established, transitions between educational settings require a great degree of collaboration and planning to ensure their success. Achieving this is not without its challenges, however, and this research seeks to determine whether the use of an information gathering tool specifically developed for the NZ context – the NZCYP – would help or facilitate these processes. This tool, inspired by the ICF-CY seeks to "…facilitate cross-disciplinary educational planning" (McLaughlin et al., 2017, p. 3). To date there has only been one study concerning the impact of the NZCYP on collaboration and planning in New Zealand educational contexts. This research by McLaughlin et al. (2017) was a pilot study to determine how the NZCYP was used across a range of settings. These included a special school, an intervention centre and an educational resource centre, serving children aged five to 21 years, birth to five years and birth to 21 years respectfully. While developed to enable interagency collaboration, the NZCYP was not used in this manner in the original trials (McLaughlin et al., 2017). However, participants did find it useful in learning about and documenting aspects of the child's development they had not

previously considered. This current research uses an updated version of the NZCYP and includes participant training on how to use the tool collaboratively.

Chapter Summary

This body of literature establishes the importance of a successful transition between an early childhood setting and school for children with ASD. The research clearly shows how impactful collaborative practices are on the transition planning process. Many studies both internationally and in New Zealand illustrate not only the importance of sound collaborative practices, but also the frustrations of parent and teachers in communicating and collaborating with each other as well as other stakeholders. In addition, the importance of educational planning in meeting the needs for children with additional needs is well established. However, the most effective way of achieving this is less clear cut. New Zealand guidelines require schools to plan for and meet the needs of children with learning support needs and advocate the use of IEPs. Both the Ministry of Education's guidelines for early intervention providers and the early childhood curriculum Te Whãriki aim to keep the child central to the planning process. This is in keeping with a recent change in direction to adopting a strengths-based approach to planning for a child's needs, which research identifies as improving the efficacy of IEPs.

The NZCYP is an information gathering tool that seeks to understand the child from a strengths-based functional view. The NZCYP has been trialled once prior to this research, but not in the context of planning educational transitions. Because of its development specific to the New Zealand context, it

is being used in this research. The following chapter details the methodological approach used in this research and how the research was conducted.

CHAPTER THREE: Methodology

This research project involved stakeholders of two preschool children with ASD who used the NZCYP for collaboration and educational planning for transition to primary school. This involved training in the use of the NZCYP and a trial of its use. Following the trial, semi structured interviews were carried out to gather stakeholder perspectives in using the NZCYP. This chapter describes the methodology used in this research study. The overarching research question and sub-questions are presented first, followed by the research design and positionality statement. This is followed by a discussion of the participants, data collection, and data analysis procedures. Finally, the ethical considerations are outlined.

Research Questions

The overarching research question guiding this project was "What is the perceived efficacy of using the NZCYP in planning for children with ASD transitioning to school? Two sub-questions are derived from this:

- How do stakeholders perceive the functionality of the NZCYP in planning for children with ASD transitioning to school?
- How do stakeholders perceive the impact that using the NZCYP has on planning for children with ASD transitioning to school?

Research Design

Qualitative Research Approach. Qualitative research is well used in social research (Phillipp, 2015). Its exploratory nature seeks to explore the

perspectives, experiences and underlying themes of the phenomenon of its focus, and as such can develop further hypotheses in research (Phillipp, 2015). Accordingly, qualitative research tends to be flexible and data-driven, with the data, once analysed, generating the categories, rather than being placed into pre-ordained ones (Hammersley, 2013). There are a number of different approaches to qualitative research, each with their own focus and approach. The approach used in this research is phenomenology.

Phenomenological Research. Phenomenology has its roots in the work of philosopher Edmund Husserl, who did not think it was possible to separate the subject from their experience (Chelstrom, 2013). Instead, he contended that people's subjective experiences shape their interpretations of the world. As such, research based on phenomenology is concerned with describing the lived experience of a phenomenon (Mapp, 2013), in a way which authentically captures the participants' perceptions of their experience in the context within which it occurs (Davidsen, 2013). As this research seeks to capture the perceptions and experiences of its participants, phenomenology is a good fit.

Individual Interviews. In phenomenological research, the primary data is participants' perspectives on the phenomenon in question. Common methods used to gather participants perspectives are interviews, focus groups, participant diaries and close observation of the participant (Phillipp, 2015). In the current study, the use of participant diaries was discounted, as although these can support an accurate recalling of the experience, especially if they are filled out close to the experience taking place, they do not allow for the same level of nuanced language as for example interviews do (Englander, 2012). Observations were also not considered appropriate as it was not practical for

the researcher to observe each stakeholder using the NZCYP. Additionally, close observation reflects the perspectives of the researcher's observations of the participants' experiences, rather than the participants' perspectives themselves. (Phillipp, 2015) Both focus groups and semi-structured interviews after the event are suitable methods for gathering data on the participants' experiences, as the researcher can prepare questions earlier, but also allow for natural diversions to take place in conversation (Alshenqeeti, 2014).

For this research, semi-structured interviews were used to gather stakeholders' perspectives. This method was chosen in favour of focus groups, as the interviews allowed individuals to speak freely about their experiences and allowed the researcher to more readily explore further comments by each participant where warranted (Alshenqeeti, 2014).

Positionality. The researcher brings to the research worldviews that have been influenced by upbringing, experiences, values and beliefs. This, particularly in qualitative studies, is likely to influence the choice of research subject matter, the development of the research and interview questions, and the analysis of the research (Alshenqeeti, 2014; Phillipp, 2015). Understanding and acknowledging this is good reflexive practice and can help contextualise the impact of the researcher's influence, although it isn't likely to eliminate it altogether (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Consequently, it is important to recognise and outline my own worldview in relation to this research. My eldest child has mild ASD and dyspraxia. We were supported in his transition to school by an early intervention teacher, which went very well. I am well aware that this is not always the case for many children with learning, behavioural, or developmental disorders. I am also an experienced early childhood teacher and, in this

capacity, have worked occasionally with special education services and early intervention teachers to support children with ASD, as well as other developmental disorders such as global developmental delay, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), speech problems, and hearing problems. I recognise that my experiences could impact on how I conduct and interpret this study. I have countered this by being conscious of not projecting my own experiences onto those of others, and by documenting my thoughts throughout the research process in a journal (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Ethical Considerations

Key ethical considerations for this study were identified and analysed with assistance from the researcher's supervisors. The research was deemed to be low risk due and a low risk ethics notification was submitted to the Massey University Human Ethics Committee. The notification was recorded (see Appendix I) and issued for a maximum of three years. The key ethical considerations are outlined below.

Informed consent. A corner stone of ethically principled practice in social research is that of obtaining informed consent from participants. People have a right to determine what happens to them (Biros, 2018), and ensuring informed consent from participants is one way of safeguarding their ethical rights. Seeking informed consent requires that prospective participants fully understand where their participation begins and ends, what it entails, and how their information will be used (Punch, 2014). Additionally, having the risks and benefits to being part of the study explained, and understanding the right to withdraw consent at any stage of the research process will ensure a fully

informed decision can be made (Phillipp, 2015). Obtaining informed consent in this study involved providing prospective participants with Information Sheets that contained all the relevant information needed to understand the aims, procedures and requirements of the research. Furthermore, the risks and benefits of partaking in the study, and their rights around the giving and withdrawal of consent were explained. The researcher's contact details and that of their supervisors were supplied in the Information Sheet, should the participants have any questions. Consent to both being interviewed and having the interview recorded for later transcription was given via the completion of a consent form.

Confidentiality and privacy. When engaging in social research, it is paramount that participants are able to trust the researchers with both the processes of the research and the information they divulge to them. Disclosure of information is often done on the assurance that all data will be stored securely and that the participant will not be identifiable in the research report (Punch, 2014). One way to ensure this is anonymisation of participants (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012). Coded numbers were used to identify participants when transcribing interviews and presenting analysis, and these documents were kept separately from the consent forms. Furthermore, all identifying features of participants were removed from the report. To uphold confidentiality in this research, all digital data collected in interviews (both written and recorded) was securely stored with password protection only accessible by the researcher. Hard copies of notes and drafts, as well as signed consent forms, were kept in a locked safe at the researcher's home. These will

be kept for five years following the completion of the project. Additionally, at no time did the researcher have access to any data relating to children.

Conflict of interest. Conflicts of interest can impinge on the integrity of a study, calling into question the legitimacy of the research (Mecca et al., 2015). One possible conflict of interest was that the researcher has a primary school aged child, and has been employed in local early childhood centres. To ensure that she didn't already know potential participants, the researcher did not approach any early childhood centres or schools for the study that she had prior associations with.

Cultural considerations. Cross-cultural differences can mean that agreed ethical practices in one culture do not always translate across to other cultures (Durham, 2014), which may create challenging situations for researchers. The document *Te Ara Tika Guidelines for Māori Research Ethics* (Hudson, Milne, Reynolds, Russell & Smith, 2010) was read by the researcher to guide culturally sensitive practice in line with the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi. Although not required in this research study, cultural advisors at the Institute of Education, Massey University were available to the researcher.

Participants

The participants for the research were a purposive sample of two teams of people; the parents and teachers (the stakeholders) involved in the educational planning for two four-year-old children with ASD. Purposive sampling is a widely used method in qualitative research (Palinkas et al., 2015) where a need for generalisability gives way to the need for developing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of interest. It entails

choosing an initial pool of prospective participants that the researcher knows will have the appropriate experience and knowledge to meet the needs for the research (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Recruitment. Recruitment of the first set of participants involved emailing a letter of introduction (see Appendix A) to the Centre Managers of 30 early childhood centres in West Auckland, inviting them to participate in the research project. Centres were chosen from the New Zealand Childcare Centre Directory (Childcare Online, 2018). Childcare centres in West Auckland are listed under 18 different suburb categories. The researcher discounted three local areas she had been employed in, and randomly chose two centres each from the remaining 15 suburb listings. There was no interest expressed from the first round of letters sent out and so a further 10 centres were approached first via letter and then with a phone call. This elicited one group of participants. The second group was found via the purposeful method of *snowball sampling*. This method of recruitment is acceptable in qualitative research when target participants are not easy to acquire (Naderifar, Goli, & Ghaljaie, 2017). In this instance, a prospective participant responded that they were unable to participate in the research, but could put the researcher in contact with someone who may be interested. This new contact was approached and agreed to take part in the research.

When interest in being involved was expressed, the Centre Managers were asked to forward an Information Sheet (see Appendix B) detailing the research to the parents of children with ASD to seek their consent to being involved in the research. Once this was obtained, Information Sheets (see Appendix C) were given to the early childhood teachers and individual Consent

Forms (see Appendix D) were sent to both teacher and parent participants. The head teacher received a form to grant consent for research to be carried out in their early childhood centre (see Appendix E). Consent forms from the parents and early childhood teachers were gathered by the Centre Manager and collected by the researcher.

Training. Once participants had been recruited, a date was arranged to provide training in the NZCYP toolkit. The training was delivered by the researcher to the two groups of stakeholders. It involved an explanation of the background and development of the NZCYP, and a detailing of what it includes and what is involved in using it. The information was presented via Power Point (see Appendix F). There was time for questions and clarifications during the training session, and the researcher was also available to be contacted by phone and email subsequent to the training in case of queries. After the training, the participants were asked to complete the NZCYP individually, before coming together to collaborate as a team. It was hoped that this would allow multiple perspectives to be heard in the planning process. Stakeholders were advised that they could attend the training and use the NZCYP but choose not to participate in the research.

Data Collection

Instruments. Data collection for this research involved the use of semi-structured interviews. The suitability of this type of interview for data collection in qualitative research has been widely acknowledged (Waters, 2017). The questions and topics to be addressed are determined beforehand, but the order and depth of the line of questioning can vary, prompting more of a conversational style of questioning. The advantages of this type of interview are

that the researcher is able to delve deeply into pertinent areas, ask follow up questions, or clarify answers if necessary (Phillipp, 2015).

Interview Guide Development. The quality of data in qualitative research determines its reliability (Leung, 2015). The value of data when conducting interviews can be influenced by the skills of the researcher in a number of ways, the most important of which is being able to develop questions that will illicit the most in depth and pertinent data (Phillipp, 2015). To facilitate this, interview questions were proposed in the initial stages of the project which the researcher shared with fellow thesis researchers and supervisors. The feedback received helped to finalise the questions. A pilot interview was also carried out, in order to acquire practice in interviewing and to test the suitability of the questions. This is a practice that Majid, Othman, Mohamad, Lim, and Yusof (2017), say is crucial due to the researcher being the "primary instrument in data collection" (p. 1073). The questions for this interview included 18 pre-prepared and open-ended questions (see Appendix G) designed to elicit the perspectives of the participants in order to answer the research question. Interview questions one to seven were regarding the usability and utility of the NZCYP, and questions eight through to 18 concerned the suitability and impact of using the NZCYP to plan for a child with ASD transitioning to school. An example of a question asked is "How did the NZCYP facilitate collaboration with others involved in the educational planning for the child?" The responses to these questions were then explored further allowing more clarification of, and insight into, the participants' experiences (Galetta & Cross, 2013).

Due to a relationship breakdown, the first team of participants completed the NZCYP forms individually, but did not complete the team planning portion.

Consequently, they were interviewed regarding their perspectives of the NZCYP as an information gathering tool, but not regarding the planning. Instead, some interview questions were amended for this team to determine what they hoped to get out of the planning process had it gone ahead.

Interview Procedure. After the training had been completed, a time-frame was established with the participants to ascertain when they would use the NZCYP, and when the children for whom educational plans were being devised would be starting school. Interviews were arranged for a mutually agreed time within four to six weeks of the stakeholders using the NZCYP. Interviews were conducted one-one-one and took place at the participants' place of work where possible, or over the phone if necessary. At the start of the interview, to establish rapport (Galetta & Cross, 2013), the participants were thanked for giving up their time for the study, and reminded of their right to withdraw from the study, to decline not to answer any particular question, and to choose whether or not they are recorded during the interview. Interviews took no longer than 30 minutes. Each interview was recorded in its entirety on the researcher's mobile phone, whether in person, or over the phone using the TapeACall Lite app. These recordings were uploaded to the researcher's password protected computer and subsequently transcribed verbatim by the researcher. The transcription documents were sent by email to each participant to check for accuracy.

Data Analysis

The interpretation and analysis of data in a qualitative research study first requires the data to be organised in such a way that emergent phenomena

(ideas, activities, experiences, behaviours) can be identified and categorised (Gibbs, 2007). Breaking transcribed interview data down into commonly found themes creates a framework for the researcher, allowing examination of the data. One method that achieves this is thematic analysis (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). Thematic analysis is widely used for analysing interviews (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, & McCullock, 2011). It is particularly well-suited for research that seeks out the perspectives of participants (Nowell et al., 2017), making it an appropriate method to use with this research.

Data analysis framework and procedures. Braun and Clarke (2006, as cited in Nowell et al., 2017) suggest six phases to the process of thematic analysis: (1) becoming familiar with the data, (2) creating initial codes, (3) looking for themes and connections, (4) reviewing themes, (5) providing definitions and labels for the themes, and (6) producing the report. These phases inform the data analysis procedures used in this research.

Becoming familiar with the data: After each interview was conducted, the recordings were transcribed by the researcher. To familiarise themselves with the data, these transcripts were then read multiple times by the researcher, with initial thoughts noted in the margins.

Creating initial codes: The transcripts were analysed and coded manually using two methods. Initially *In Vivo Coding* was used in order to capture the language of participants. This is done by assigning a label to a section of the transcript that is taken from that text (Saldaña, 2016). While useful, this method did not create enough codes to fully capture all the data. A second round of coding was then completed, utilising the *Descriptive Coding* method. Descriptive coding allows the researcher to summarise passages of

data by assigning a descriptive word to it (Saldaña, 2016). Using two methods, particularly for smaller groups of participants, allows the researcher a greater perspective when analysing data (Saldaña, 2016). Codes were identified by colours, with two running lists for each method of coding kept. Where there were overlaps or ambiguities, the transcripts were further analysed with codes either amalgamated or separated until all the data was attributed to a code. A codebook was generated (see Appendix H) to manage and organise codes. This practice makes it easier to see and group codes together into themes (Saldaña 2016), and adds to the validity of the research by ensuring all narrative data is represented and clearly defined (Franklin, Cody, & Ballan, 2019).

Looking for themes and connections: Nowell et al. (2017) describes themes as "…significant concepts that link substantial portions of the data together" (p. 8). Themes were identified by searching for any repetitions of ideas, terms used, topics, similarities and arising issues among the codes. These were then grouped in a way that made sense in light of the data and research questions. Initial themes included the utility of the NZCYP, it's perceived purpose and impact on communication.

Revising themes: In this phase, the themes were reviewed against the transcripts and codes to determine whether they were an accurate reflection of the data. This helped to assure the validity of the themes and provide the researcher with an overview of how the themes fit together (Nowell et al., 2017). The revised themes were altered to encompass how participants found the NZCYP to use, and the impact of its use on both educational planning and collaboration.

Providing definitions and labels for themes: Labels that clearly identified each theme were applied in this phase (Nowell et al., 2017). By defining the themes, the essential can be identified (van Manen, 1990, in Saldaña, 2016) capturing the essence of phenomenon at the centre of the research. The labels given to the revised themes were *Usability of the NZCYP*, *Influence of the NZCYP on educational planning processes,* and *Influence of the NZCYP on stakeholder collaboration.*

Producing the report: In this final phase, an analysis of the data findings was written up according to the established codes and themes. Direct quotes were embedded in the analysis to punctuate and give weight and merit to the findings (Nowell et al., 2017). One example of a quote used to illustrate the data was *"… it made it clearer to see what his strengths and weaknesses are. I don't always remember it, so putting it down on paper and going through these questions especially, [it] asks a lot of questions I hadn't asked myself…"*

Chapter Summary

The methodology used in this research study reflects the goals of the researcher to capture the perceptions of the participants' experiences in using the NZCYP. Purposeful sampling was used to find suitable participants, and interviews were conducted to determine the participant's views. The data analysis methods of in vivo coding and descriptive coding ensured that participants' voices were central to the analysis. The following chapter explores the results of this analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR: Results and Analysis

Data was collected via individual semi-structured interviews with five participants from two teams. Team One (who, as discussed in the methodology chapter, completed the filling in of the forms but not the collaborative planning) consisted of one teacher participant and one parent participant. Team Two consisted of two teacher participants and one parent participant. For clarity and ease of reporting, participants have been assigned a label according to which team they are in and their role within that team (see Table 1 below).

Table 1

Participant Labels

Team	Role	Label
1	Teacher	T1/T
	Parent	T1/P
2	Teacher 1	T2/T1
	Teacher 2	T2/T2
	Parent	T2/P

Themes and Codes

Analysis of the data was guided by the six step method of thematic analysis described by Nowell et al. (2017), referred to in the methodology chapter. This analysis identified three themes; *Usability of the NZCYP*, *Influence of the NZCYP on Educational Planning Processes,* and *Influence of the NZCYP on Stakeholder Collaboration* (see Table 2 below). Within these

three themes were nine codes that represented the experiences and perspectives of the research participants. This chapter will present the findings of the interview data according to these themes.

Table 2

Themes and Codes

Global Themes	Themes	Codes
Efficacy of the NZCYP	Functionality of the NZCYP	Comprehensibility
		Ease of Use
		Content
		Barriers
	Influence of the NZCYP on educational planning processes	Planning processes
		Planning for transition to school
		Understanding the child
	Influence of the NZCYP on stakeholder collaboration	Communication
		Collaborative Relationships

Theme One: Functionality of the NZCYP

Functionality refers to the way in which the toolkit was able to be understood, how it was able to be used, and whether it met its purpose as a planning tool. As is imperative to phenomenological research, the perspectives of the participants are at the forefront of this research. The participants' perspectives of the functionality of the NZCYP are essential to capture due to its impact on the viability of use. Four codes were encompassed in this theme; *Comprehensibility, Ease of use, Content, and Barriers.*

Comprehensibility. Comprehensibility describes whether participants found the NZCYP (and the inherent forms) easy to understand or not. This refers to whether they thought that the initial training they were given was sufficient to use the NZCYP, as well as whether they felt they had a sound understanding of the purpose of the seven forms. Participants from both teams indicated that they were able to understand the purpose of the individual forms, although the confidence they had in their own understanding (and that of others) varied. Participant T1/P commented "…*it [the training] was useful and I could understand what everything meant*…", while in contrast Participant T1/T expressed that they found it a lot to take on board "*It was quite complex, a lot of things to see and think and yeah, we both found it quite a lot*…". Additionally, Participant T2/P expressed concern that while they understood the contents, others may not "*Personally I found them all quite easy [to understand], all readable but I was just thinking, some people I realise wouldn't quite get it*". This concern was echoed in the comment of Participant T1/P, who remarked "*I thought some of it could have been worded maybe a bit better, like I guess*

dumbed down a bit, for someone who's not… yeah… some of the lingo was a bit much for the average person."

In addition, while all participants communicated an ability to understand the NZCYP, two participants expressed desire for more training at the outset. ParticipantT2/T2 made the comment that "*Maybe a little more training, like examples of how to fill it out, so that we're doing it properly, would help. Just because it is quite, it can look daunting when you do see it*."

Ease of use. Participants described whether or not they found the NZCYP straightforward to use. Participants were asked about each of the forms and there was agreement across the board regarding their usability; while six of the forms were reported to be straight forward to fill in, all participants expressed difficulties with using the *Functional Ability Profile*. This profile, which documents a child's abilities across a range of 11 functional ability areas, requires participants to rate each child's current ability in each of the 11 areas on a four point scale: *Enhances participation*, *Supports participation*, *Somewhat limits participation*, and *Significantly limits participation* (McLaughlin et al., 2017). When asked which aspects of this form were problematic for them, Participant T2/T1 commented that "*we didn't know whether we had to check it or scale it when we were filling out the form*". Participant T2/T2 also experienced concerns regarding its use "*We felt the wording was quite tricky, and you know having to sort of come along a box and down, you know, one across and down, that seemed to be a bit clumsy, but maybe that's just us*!" While the participants indicated that this profile was confusing, all five participants stated that they understood how to use it in the end. Aside from the Functional Ability Profile, participants indicated that the six other forms were

simple to understand from the outset. Participant T2/T1 explained "…*the other things seem to be fairly straight forward and we didn't have any problem filling in those*".

In regards to completing the forms, all participants reported filling out the forms separately, as suggested in the training, although each team approached this in slightly different manners. While the parent participants in each team reported filling out the forms immediately as suggested in the training, all teacher participants took longer to complete the forms, and made slight modifications. Participant T1/T mentioned leaving aside forms they felt weren't useful, while T2/T1 described collating the parents answers with their own, prior to their planning meeting "So what we did, we filled ours in and when we spoke to [the parent], we put his answers close by the margins, so we could see whether there was any patterning."

Content. Through the course of the interviews, participants shared their perspectives regarding the content of the NZCYP. Both positive perceptions and critical feedback were vocalised by participants, although there wasn't shared agreement across all points discussed. Regarding the overall content, Participant T2/T1 commented on the breadth of information the forms collect "*And when I looked at it I thought now that's pretty comprehensive really and there is quite a lot to work with there*." This was further acknowledged by Participant T2/T2, finding that the profile forms covered all bases of development, and provided a holistic look at the child.

The comprehensiveness was not viewed in a positive light by all participants however, with Participant T1/T remarking:

We get enough information from the parents about how to, you know, approach the child, what they like, and what's their favourite, what we should do and stuff. But this form was way formal, we feel like it was more for older age children. For early childhood we don't really consider any of those serious things.

Four participants commented on needing space to document additional information they thought was relevant. While Participant T2/T1 voiced this opinion regarding further information in general, Participant T2/P specifically spoke of wanting a form that would collect information regarding the mood of the child, commenting "…*if he's in a good mood he is obviously going to be more, you know, easier to deal with and if he's having a not so happy day, it'll be a totally different outcome, but nothing like that was mentioned*." Participant T2/P also spoke of needing space to document changes in a child's development across time. They indicated that they had filled out the forms several weeks before another participant and that by the time they came together there were already changes in the child's development. This thought was also shared by Participant T2/T1, who suggested having "*Something to track progress and then, like we do here, we re-evaluate… we do it every three months because a lot happens in a month."*

Barriers to using the NZCYP for planning. More than half of the participants mentioned perceived barriers to the way they used the NZCYP, or to how they imagine using it the future. The main barrier that was talked about was *time*. The time it took to fill in the forms, and the time it took to come together and plan. Participant T1/T considered that it resulted in a doubling up of work, stating that *"Because we do it in individual time, we had to arrange*

another meeting. Yeah, I don't think it's really practical for both parties." Participant T2/T2 talked about the time pressures on staff, particularly with regard to taking care of children with learning support needs. They expressed *"… we have a demographic of children that really need our help and we're stretched to the limit…"* and further voiced *"It's just about the time factor I guess, that's the only thing. If we had one high needs child we'd be fine, but you know, I'm talking to so many people that it's hard..."* However when asked if they would use the NZCYP for other children with learning support needs, the participant stated "*Yes, but then I wouldn't use anything else*", preferring the NZCYP to what they were using with outside agencies. Further comments by both Participants T2/P and T2/T1also indicated that the time taken was an issue, but both accepted that this was important to the process. Participant T2/T1's statement when asked if there was anything about the NZCYP that could be unhelpful to the planning for transition process explains this position:

> *The time factor, it's quite labour intensive really isn't it? But having said that, maybe if we did this regularly, it would get easier and quicker, and this was a first for us so it probably took us longer than it should have.*

Another barrier alluded to was that of getting all parties on board. Participant T2/T1 wondered how realistic this was, commenting *"…I don't know whether all our parents would be a) willing and b) able because it is quite tricky in parts."*

Summary of theme one. While the participants found the forms in the NZCYP were straightforward to understand for the most part, nearly half would have liked further training on their use. Furthermore, while some participants

indicated that they were able to understand the forms, they wondered if others may not, with several participants mentioning that the language used in the forms could be simpler. Regarding the ease of use of the NZCYP, participants considered the majority of the forms were easy to use. The only form that proved to be a challenge initially was the Functional Ability Profile, although this was understood by all participants once they had worked with it. All participants considered the content of the NZCYP to be comprehensive, with all but one viewing this as a positive feature. Two barriers were identified to using the NZCYP, with *time* being the most commonly referred to.

Theme Two: Influence of the NZCYP on Educational Planning Practices

This theme encompasses three codes: *Planning processes*, *Planning for transition to school*, and *Understanding the child*. It reflects how participants perceived their experiences using the NZCYP for educational planning.

Planning processes. Participants were asked about what they perceived the impact of using the NZCYP on planning processes to be (if any). Participant T1/T regarded the NZCYP as making the planning process less efficient, preferring the method that is currently used in the centre she works in. She stated:

> *If I was doing the form with you talking, talking to you and getting more explanation from you or when it was happening with the parent, then one person can mark who's using the form… having the meeting with the teacher and parent altogether would be easier for us to go as one goal, we can have a chat while we are using the form*.

This was not a view point shared by other participants however. Both teacher participants in Team Two referred to the Priority Planning Page in the toolkit, as being beneficial to the planning process. This page collates the data from the seven forms used to gather information. Participant T2/T1commented on the fact that while initially daunting, use of the NZCYP to support planning improved processes. She commented:

> *I actually quite liked it by the time I got to the end and by the time I started to put things onto this [the Priority Planning Page]. You know some things that maybe we would miss in our planning… we would pick up from these forms.*

Participant T2/T2 concurred, saying "…*it was a good way to get everybody's perspective and gauge where everyone thought that he was at and bring it together*".

Planning for transition to school. This research focused on the transition to school planning for a child with ASD. Alongside questions regarding the impact the NZCYP has on planning processes, perceptions of participants regarding its role in transition planning for children with ASD were also sought. The parent participants on both teams commented that the information collected by the NZCYP would provide necessary information to the receiving teachers, helping the teachers to understand their child with ASD, supporting the transition process and beyond. Participant T2/P stated *"It would probably be something that you would implement not just during the transition, but throughout their education…"* This perspective was also voiced by the teaching participants in Team Two, who stated that using the NZCYP to plan for

transition to school could include sharing the summary of information (collated on the Priority Planning Page) with the child's receiving teacher at their primary school. Participant T2/T2 commented:

> *Because you can kind of give comprehensive feedback to the teacher that's going to take on the next role to support the child… all of this information is relevant in terms of their progress to kind of gauge where they're at and what support they need*.

When asked if they would use the NZCYP to plan for other children with ASD, participant T2/T1 said that they would, but expressed concern about whether it would be supported by outside Special Education Advisors that work with the children commenting *"I think that it would be quite useful but we're also governed by the Special Ed. people that come and do their own assessments and give us planning for each child"*. Participant T2/T2, concurred with its use in planning for not just children with ASD, but all with additional learning needs, citing both its "*holistic*" nature and the fact that it can "*make the lines clear between each party that's trying to contribute towards that learning*".

Understanding the child. Planning for educational transitions requires an understanding of the child, and this was referred to many times throughout the interviews. The main consensus was that using the NZCYP led (or could lead) to a greater understanding of the child and their needs. All participants reflected that the use of the NZCYP led them to considering aspects of the child's learning and development that they had not thought of before. Participant T1/P specifies this by commenting that *"… it made it clearer to see what his strengths and weaknesses are. I don't always remember it, so putting it down*

on paper and going through these questions especially, [it] asks a lot of questions I hadn't asked myself…" Participant T2/P further described understandings made through using the NZCYP *"Yeah definitely some insights, especially the sensory ones, thinking about whether he used taste to explore the world, things like that. It makes you think about things you hadn't considered."* In addition to this, Participant T1/T also commented:

> *…having this form, I had to go back [to] where he was coming from, what language he was speaking. We do consider about those [things], but not big things… so it was good for me to go on again from scratch to start… who he is really?*

Participant T2/T1 shared a similar view, stating that using the NZCYP for educational planning brought "*everything to the surface*" in regards to what they know about the child.

Summary of theme two. The impacts of the NZCYP on educational planning were largely viewed to be positive. Both teams considered that using the NZCYP allowed them to know the child better, bringing to light aspects they hadn't previously considered. With regards to planning processes, while one participant felt that the NZCYP created more work than necessary, others appreciated the breadth of information that was collated. This information and its ability to be easily shared, was widely held to be beneficial to the transition to school planning process.

Theme Three: Influence of the NZCYP on Stakeholder Collaboration

Stakeholder collaboration largely impacts planning processes, and this theme covers participants' perceptions of how use of the NZCYP influenced

this. There are two codes in this theme: *Communication and Collaborative relationships.*

Communication. Communication between stakeholders was referred to frequently by participants in relation to a range of areas, such as information gathering, planning and transitions. All but one of the participants expressed how using the NZCYP in planning had improved information sharing between stakeholders. Participant T2/T1 remarked *"I think sometimes we miss out on the parents' thoughts, so it was really good from that angle, that we got a lot of parent information."* This same sentiment was shared by both parent participants. When asked if using the NZCYP helped with information sharing, Participant T2/P responded "*Yeah it definitely did, that would be the biggest advantage, being able to share it with the teachers and outside therapists…"*

Not all participants agreed with these positive impacts however, with Participant T1/T unsure of how trustworthy the information some parents contribute to the NZCYP could be. She remarked "*My concern… I don't think if they can be honest with their documents…when we address things, children's weaknesses or needs in development and stuff, I feel like parents get aggressive.*"

Poor communication with outside agencies was brought up by participants T2/P and T2/T2, and while there were no outside stakeholders involved in this research, these participants expressed hope for how using the NZCYP could improve communication with others. Participant T2/T2 voiced this by sharing the following:

…you know the people who assess and provide the extra funded support based on their observations and assessments don't have a clear picture. They only have what they see in that one or two hours and they haven't strongly communicated with staff enough to gauge where they're [the child] at with their learning or how far they've developed since attending. So it is that, looking at that, it was good to kind of have the overall picture and have others look at it as well, the overall picture. Gives them a better idea. I was thinking about it and I was like this *[the NZCYP] is what they need.*

Collaborative Relationships. Collaborative relationships between stakeholders was a common theme apparent across interview data. As noted in the methodology, Team One completed the filling in of the NZCYP but a communication breakdown meant that they were unable to follow up with the sharing and planning. Instead they were asked about what they hoped to get out of planning with the NZCYP. Participant T1/P shared that they were hoping for a better relationship with other stakeholders and a better understanding of each other *"I felt like it would be a better understanding for children with ASD for that side to understand, but what I saw is that they weren't wanting to understand."*. This was further referred to in a follow up comment *"I think the toolkit would be educational for parents and teachers, for us to come together to get a more in depth look at the child and work together."* Participant T1/T also commented on the desire for the NZCYP to improve their working relationship with the parent to improve planning, with the comment *"…because we can't prepare him to go to school by ourselves, because he's only spending a certain part of the day, like four to five hours [with us]."*

Within Team Two, who were able to collaborate and plan, there was agreement across the board regarding the value to parent-teacher relationships in using the NZCYP to include all voices. This was explained by Participant T2/T1 *"When they're actually writing it and they feel as though it's an important thing [to us] and they come back and discuss it with you… I found that good."* She further followed this up with *"… that's what we felt was useful, finding out what [the parent's] ideas were in relation to ours so that we didn't feel that we were overriding him in any way, and taking… his thoughts into consideration."* Participant T2/P concurred, stating:

> *It's definitely helpful as far as being able to take time to think about it and getting everyone's perspective. Like I say, kindy only see it from one side, we have our own side, you know an outside observer would get their own perspective. Being able to collaborate all those sides is definitely going to be useful.*

Summary of theme three. While one participant queried whether the use of the NZCYP helped to promote better communication, the majority of participant founds this to be the case and were hopeful it would also prove useful in working with outside agencies. The positive influence of the NZCYP on collaboration was noted by all members of Team Two, and although not utilised in planning by Team One, both members considered it would have helped to establish a better working relationship.

Chapter Summary

This analysis of data indicates that using the planning tool the NZCYP helped teachers and parents alike to communicate and collaborate well with

each other. While some participants found the content confusing in places and too in depth, the majority perceived it as a useful tool in educational transition planning that assisted in gaining a better understanding of the child and their needs. Potential barriers including the time it takes to utilise the tool and being able to get all stakeholders on board were voiced, but more than half of the participants stated that they would use the tool again for children with a range of learning support needs, including children with ASD. The following chapter explains and evaluates these findings.

CHAPTER FIVE: Discussion

The overarching aim of this research was to explore the efficacy of using the NZCYP in planning for children with ASD transitioning to school, according to stakeholders' perspectives. The participants in this study, two teams of stakeholders each supporting a child with ASD, were provided with training on how to use the NZCYP and encouraged to fill it in individually before coming together to plan collaboratively as a team. Between four and six weeks after the training, they participated in individual interviews to give their account of their experience with using this planning toolkit. This chapter will discuss the research results according to the research sub-questions and key findings, incorporating a synthesis of the findings and their relationship to the literature presented in Chapter Two, along with Bronfenbrenner's (1994) bioecological theory and the early childhood curriculum Te Whãriki (2017).

Research Sub-Question One

The first research question was *"How do stakeholders' perceive the functionality of the NZCYP in planning for children with ASD transitioning to school?"* Having a toolkit that is practical and manageable to use increases the likelihood of it being utilised. Participants perspectives pertaining to this question are discussed under two sections: *Ease of use*, and *Barriers*.

Ease of use. In general, participants' perspectives of their ability to understand the purpose and content of the NZCYP was favourable, but not without reservations. Though all stated that they could understand the purpose of each profile, three expressed reservations about the vocabulary used in the

toolkit and the complexity of the content. This prompted one participant to wonder whether the language should be “dumbed down” somewhat because some of the terms used were “tricky”. Similar concerns were expressed in earlier research of the NZCYP by McLaughlin et al. (2017), where participants expressed the need for a clearer understanding of terms and definitions. However, in this study participants were concerned that while *they* understood the terminology used in the NZCYP, others may not. This was articulated by both parent and teacher participants. This could indicate that the participants had a lack of confidence in the competency of their fellow stakeholders. Interestingly, Tucker and Schwartz (2013) found parents had this same lack of confidence in their research and contended that the reasons needed further exploration. Despite these concerns, every participant expressed that they had developed a sound understanding of the content and purpose of the NZCYP.

Perspectives were also sought on participants’ views on the usability of the NZCYP, both in terms of completing the individual profiles and using the NZCYP to plan. There was a clear consensus regarding the usability of the profiles; of the seven profiles within the toolkit, all were easy to use except for the Functional Ability Profile. This profile details 11 areas of functional ability across which each child is rated according to their level of participation. This profile was similarly problematic in the research of McLaughlin et al. (2017), and while all participants said that they understood it eventually, it does suggest that more training and guidance by the researcher may be needed on this particular profile.

Regarding the usability of the NZCYP as a whole, some participants reported finding the NZCYP daunting at first due to the comprehensiveness of

the content, although appreciated the holistic perspective this gave of the child. The holistic nature of the NZCYP supports its alignment with the early childhood curriculum in New Zealand, Te Whãriki (2017b) which is grounded in part in Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory (1994). Both regard the child's development occurring in light of their experiences and relationships within the environments that impact upon them. Despite the already extensive nature of the NZCYP, four participants indicated needing more space to note additional information. Of these, one parent reported wanting space to report the mood of their child in various settings and times, as he felt this would impact both the information collected and how it would be viewed. Further to this, one participant spoke of wanting somewhere to track changes over time, noting how quickly these can occur. Both of these perspectives speak to the desire of stakeholders to plan as comprehensively as possible while keeping the child and their needs at the centre of the planning. These views strongly reflect those found in the review of literature, with research by Cavendish and Connor (2018), ERO (2015), Jachova et al.(2018), and Mitchell et al. (2010) asserting the importance of planning which reflects the needs of the child.

One participant shared a different perspective regarding the usability of the NZCYP. They thought the process of having each stakeholder fill in forms individually before coming together to share and plan made planning less efficient and constituted a doubling up of work. They shared that they would prefer to go through each profile of the NZCYP with the parent, taking notes as they go. At first glance, this view appears to correspond with that of Trach (2012) who cautions that there may be an overlap when individuals work separately. However, the process of using the NZCYP begins with individuals

completing the forms in order to ensure all views are documented prior to planning, with collaborative planning being the end goal (McLaughlin et al., 2017).

Barriers. While the majority of participants felt confident using the NZCYP, two barriers to its use were noted; the time it took to plan and getting all participants on board. Both teams perceived using the NZCYP to be very time-intensive, although it was acknowledged that this was a necessary aspect of a tool that collected so much information. One teaching participant expressed that with more use they believed they would become more proficient in using it, and reflected that the time taken was due to her lack of experience in using it. Further to this, a teacher from the same team voiced concerns that with a number of children with additional learning needs on their roll, finding the time to use the NZCYP for each one may not be feasible. However she also indicated that they would have time to use this form of planning (and if fact would prefer to) if it was the only one they needed. However they felt obligated to using planning tools specified by an outside agency who helped them access and secure additional support for children with needs. These findings regarding time constraints correspond to research by Da Fonte and Barton-Arwood (2017) and Hedegaard-Soerensen et al. (2018), whose research identified teachers often found it challenging to fit planning practices into an already demanding schedule. That both teams (particularly the teachers) expressed concerns about the time they have available for planning raises questions about the workload of early childhood teachers. While this issue is outside the scope of this current research, the problem was noted by Peters (2010) in a literature review analysis of transition to school practices and experiences in New Zealand. This research

appears to show that nine years later the issue of time pressures for early childhood teachers still exists.

Research Sub-Question Two

The second research question asked *"How do stakeholders perceive the impact that using the NZCYP has on planning for children with ASD transitioning to school?"* Participants perceived the NZCYP to be an effective tool in planning; both for its positive impact on planning practices and processes in general and for planning for children with ASD transitioning to primary school. Participants' experiences and perceptions are discussed under five subheadings*: Understanding the child, Planning practices, Communication and collaboration, Interagency collaboration, and Information sharing.*

Understanding the child. The results from this research show that participants feel they gained a deep understanding of the child as a result of the depth of questions contained in the NZCYP. Mitchell et al., (2010) considers this imperative to planning and creating an IEP tailored to the child. The results show there was agreement that using the NZCYP gathered in depth information about the child, creating a space to document things participants already knew, had known previously but forgotten about, or hadn't considered prior. Four of the five participants spoke of the importance of this to their planning, and indicated the value of having this information come from a range of viewpoints. As reported in the literature review, both international and local research acknowledges the importance of acquiring a wide range of information from many perspectives for the development of effective plans (King et al., 2018; Mitchell et al., 2010).

One participant however, questioned whether in-depth information was necessary. While conceding that using the NZCYP bought up information they had not considered before, they deliberated that their own simpler version was more efficient and provided enough material to plan with. Conversely, the parent participant in this team spoke of her hope that the information she was collating and had intended to share with the teachers would have helped them to understand her child better. At this point, the parent thought that the teacher "*didn't want to understand*". A relationship breakdown meant this team did not proceed with the planning section of the NZCYP, however it is clear that the parent was keen for the teacher to have a better understanding of her child. The importance of stakeholder relationships were discussed by both Eisenhower et al. (2015) and Fontil and Petrakos (2015) who reported the impact these relationships have to the success of transition planning for children with ASD.

Interestingly, the teacher in this team spoke of her distrust in the information a parent would provide, wondering whether it would be accurate. It wasn't made clear whether the teacher was referring to this parent in particular, or all parents in general, so assumptions can't be made in this regard. However, that distrust can occur between team members is noted in research (Bodvin et al., 2018; Starr et al., 2016;Tucker & Schwartz, 2013). Notably however, these instances all refer to a distrust of teachers by parents, not the other way around. Despite the teaching participant voicing their distrust in the parent's information she acknowledged there would be the need for some input by the parent in planning for her child's educational transition. This presents an interesting dichotomy: needing input from the parent, but not trusting they will be honest. Mitchell et al., (2010) comment a number of times in their review of IEP usage

in New Zealand about the need for trust between stakeholders, but also that there was not enough inclusion of parents and whanau voices in educational planning. The dichotomous situation presented above shows one example of how this lack of the parents' voice in planning can occur.

This belief that a parent or parents may not be truthful might speak to the perceptions some teachers have regarding collaborative planning. Ihmeideh and Oliemat (2015) discovered that teachers' perceptions of the value of parental involvement in kindergarten planning was low, a finding that correlated with research by Bodvin et al. (2018). In both of these studies, the researchers contended that poor perceptions of collaborating with parents were associated with less effective planning practices. Additionally, the reasons for the teachers perspectives were given, which ranged from the extra time needed to involve parents, to low expectations of parent knowledge, to shouldering a greater workload. However, while those studies noted a reluctance on the part of teachers to collaborate with families, other research shows the desire (if not always the practice) of teachers who do wish to engage collaboratively with families (Fontil & Petrakos, 2015; Starr et al., 2016). These conflicting findings perhaps indicate that teacher perceptions of involving families in planning vary according to the value they place on parental knowledge and job stresses relating to time.

Planning practices. The majority of participants found that the NZCYP had a positive effect on planning practices. Three participants particularly referenced the Priority Planning Page in the NZCYP which summarises the information from all stakeholders, finding that bringing all perspectives together on one page allowed them to pick up on things they would have otherwise

missed. The teaching participant in Team One held a mostly negative view of the NZCYP, at odds to other participants. However she also made particular mention of the Priority Planning Page and its value to the planning process.

Having a clear understanding of all stakeholders' perspectives contributes to the implementation of evidence based practice (EBP), a practice advocated by the Ministry of Education in a literature review of IEPs (Mitchell et al.,2010). EBP in educational planning allows for the voices and experiences of the parents and whanau to be considered alongside those of practitioners such as teachers and psychologists, as well as current research. These results suggest that the majority of respondents agree with an EBP approach to planning and value the role of the NZCYP in helping them to put this in practice.

Communication and collaboration. The participants' perceived a strength of the NZCYP to be that it improved communication and collaboration between stakeholders. Both teacher participants in Team Two recognised that parents' voices can often be missed in their planning. They communicated that it wasn't their wish to exclude the parent, but they weren't always able to adequately capture their opinions and ideas. This is an issue commonly reported in the literature (Connolly & Gersch, 2016; Quintero & McIntyre 2010; Tucker & Schwartz, 2013;). The teachers' experience with using the NZCYP for planning was that it allowed for the inclusion of the parent's voice. Both parent participants also expressed the positive effects that using the NZCYP had had on communication in planning, with T2/P declaring the opportunity to share his voice to be *the biggest advantage* of using this toolkit. These comments reflect a stated aim of the developers of the NZCYP, which is to "assist educational teams to discuss key aspects of children's functional experiences and abilities

to inform educational planning." (McLaughlin et al., 2017, p.3). They also substantiate research that has shown that both parents and teachers desire a greater degree of communication in the planning process (Connolly & Gersch, 2016; Tucker & Schwartz, 2013).

Participant perceptions of improved collaboration were also identified, with all participants either stating that the NZCYP had a positive impact on their collaborative practice, or that they hoped it would. This finding is heartening in light of the 2015 ERO report discussed in the literature review, which reviewed experiences of children transitioning to primary school. Their finding that 43% of early childhood centres do not have good collaborative planning practices is concerning, especially considering the overwhelming contention argued in many studies that better collaboration leads to more effective planning, particularly for children with additional needs (Bodvin et al., 2018; Taylow et al,, 2016; Trach, 2012). This evidence suggests that tools such as the NZCYP could make an significant difference to communication and collaborative practices in early childhood settings.

Interagency collaboration in planning. While this research consisted of teams made up of teacher and parent participants, concerns regarding communication and collaboration with outside agencies involved in meeting the additional needs of the children with ASD were brought up by three participants. Participant T2/T2 voiced particular frustration that planning decisions were being made by outside agencies who had spent little time at the centre and with the child in question. And as addressed earlier, this participant would prefer to use the NZCYP over the planning tool used by the outside agency, but did not have time to use both. They stated that if the outside agencies used the

NZCYP, then they would have the same overall picture to work with as the teachers. The frustration expressed by this participant correlates to research by Hedegaard-Soerensen et al. (2018) regarding interagency and interdisciplinary communication and collaboration in education. Their findings show that both teachers and parents find collaboration with other agencies challenging, but sorely needed. This is also upheld by Hurlburt et al. (2013), and King et al. (2018), who discuss the importance of interagency collaboration with regard to planning for children with additional learning needs. The findings of this research raises the question of whether a planning tool, such as the NZCYP, used universally across different agencies and by all stakeholders could help address this problem.

Information sharing. Another way in which participants found the NZCYP to be beneficial to their transition to school planning for a child with ASD was the ease with which the information documented could be collated and shared. As discussed earlier, some participants found that the information collated on Priority Planning Page helped them to make sense of everything they had uncovered. These participants also indicated that this page would be a useful and easy way of sharing comprehensive information about the child with their receiving school teacher. This is an important finding as information about children with additional needs is often lost during educational transitions, leading to a lack of suitable support at the receiving school (ERO, 2015). Denkyirah and Agbeke (2010) support the sharing of information between educational services, contending that it can lead to improved transition experiences for children with ASD, and it appears that using the NZCYP could help to facilitate that.

Chapter Summary

This discussion shows that while there were some initial concerns with using the NZCYP (most notably the overall comprehensiveness of the toolkit and the Functional Ability Profile) all participants found they could understand and use it well. The majority of participants consider that the NZCYP helped them to improve communication and collaboration between each other and with outside agencies. Additionally, a positive effect on planning practices was perceived by most participants, especially in regards to gaining a more thorough understanding of the child and their needs.

The use of NZCYP in planning for children with ASD was also viewed positively, with the majority of participants finding that it allowed them to effectively collate the voices of all stakeholders. Furthermore, the ease with which the information gathered by the NZCYP could be shared with others was lauded by all participants. The following chapter presents a summary of this discussion in reference to the research questions and discusses the limitations, implications and recommendations inherent in the research.

CHAPTER SIX: Conclusion

This research sought to explore the perceived efficacy of using the NZCYP in planning for two children with ASD who were transitioning to school. Based on the qualitative analysis of the participants' perspectives, it can be concluded that the NZCYP was effective in facilitating educational planning for two children with ASD transitioning to school. This chapter discusses the validity and limitations of this research, as well as the implications of the findings on the educational sector. Recommendations for future research are suggested, finishing with some final thoughts from the researcher.

Validity of Research

To strengthen validity, the researcher took a number of steps. Reflexivity was accounted for in a journal kept throughout the research process. Journaling thoughts and ideas about the process, methods, findings and results allowed the researcher to consider their responses and opinions about aspects of the research. When researchers are aware of their own biases in qualitative research, it helps to ensure a valid result (Ortlipp, 2008). The researcher also used two different methods to explore the data, to allow for a greater perspective and strengthen its dependability (Mills, 2014). Additionally, the researcher held regular meetings with her supervisors to debrief and discuss insights, a method which can improve the credibility of the research (Guba, 1981, in Mills, 2014).). A further method used for strengthening validity was to share the interview transcripts with the participants. This enabled them to make certain that their words and ideas were captured accurately, and clarify ambiguities (Alshenqeeti, 2014).

Limitations

There are several limitations to acknowledge in this research when considering the analysis and results. First and foremost was the small number of participants (n=5). While over 60 early childhood centres were approached to participate in the study, less than half responded in any manner. Many of those who did respond expressed that they either did not have the time to take part, or did not have any children with ASD for whom they were planning a transition to school. A further limiting factor was the breakdown in relationship of one team of participants. The parent removed their child from the early childhood centre after each participant filled in the NZCYP, but before the forms could be used for planning. Research involving these participants carried on, as it was decided that eliciting their perspectives regarding the functionality of the NZCYP as an information gathering tool would still provide an important contribution to the data.

An additional limitation involving participants was the lack of input from the receiving teachers of the child's new school. Due to time constraints on the researcher, and the fact that planning for transition to school often begins some months before the child begins school, it wasn't possible to include receiving teachers in the research. A longer term study would be able to involve the receiving teachers and gain valuable insight into their perspectives on the value of information resulting from the use the NZCYP in transition planning.

A further limitation was the researcher's inexperience with conducting interviews. While interview questions were trialled by the researcher, and interview skills increased as each participant was interviewed, a more skilled

researcher may have elicited better responses and responded to participants' questions with more informative follow up questions (McGrath, 2018).

Implications for practice

The literature review identified compelling evidence showing the importance of successful educational transitions for children with learning support needs, and two factors that contribute to this success: collaboration and educational planning. Also established was the strength of feeling among parents of children with learning support needs regarding their lack of participation in planning processes (Bodvin et al., 2018; Connolly & Gersch, 2016; Quintero & McIntyre, 2010; Tucker & Schwartz, 2013). Similarly, common barriers to participation and collaboration in planning were well documented in the literature (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017; Harris & Goodall, 2008; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Accordingly, it is important to find ways to overcome these barriers.

The results of this study indicate the majority of participants perceived that the NZCYP helped with educational planning for the transition to school of two children with ASD. This was particularly with regard to the wide range of information gathered, the improvement in collaborative planning, and the ease with which information could be shared once collated.

Implications for practice from these results are twofold. Firstly, use of the NZCYP in planning appeared to support stakeholder voices being heard and shared. Secondly, the NZCYP appeared to allow for a greater depth of information to be collected and utilised in the planning for children with learning support needs, in this case children with ASD. Both of these aspects in planning

have been stated in a review of IEP practices in New Zealand (Mitchell et al., 2010), and in the Ministry of Education Transition to School Guidelines (2014) to contribute to the planning of successful educational transitions.

Recommendations for future research

This research was based on a small sample of participants with a narrow scope: early childhood teachers and parents of four year old children with ASD transitioning to primary school. Further research on a wider scale involving children with other learning support needs would be useful. Additionally, widening the cohort of participants to include any specialists working with the stakeholders and the receiving teachers in the child's primary school would provide perspectives from others involved in the child's life. This could help to further ascertain the efficacy of the NZCYP as both a planning tool and as a tool in facilitating closer collaboration and communication between stakeholders across a range of situations.

Final Thoughts

In the many educational transitions individuals experience in life, the one from early childhood to primary education is especially crucial to get right. A positive transition to school can help a child adapt to their new environment and feel supported, providing the right building blocks for success. Smooth educational transitions are particularly important for children with additional needs, such as ASD. Children with ASD often find change difficult (Ministry of Education, 2016) and can lack the skills needed to succeed in a new setting such as understanding social rules and emotional regulation (Attwood, 2007). As such, careful planning is needed to ensure the best chances for success,

and much research shows that the most successful transitions have several elements: extensive knowledge of the child, effective communication, and sound collaborative relationships between all concerned. While this is indeed the gold standard, it is unfortunately not always attained. There are professional, personal, and circumstantial barriers that negatively impact educational planning processes.

This study is the first to determine the efficacy of using the NZCYP when planning for the transition to school for a child with ASD. The research indicates that use of the NZCYP in this situation not only had positive effects, but also facilitated improved relationships between stakeholders. These findings demonstrate that the majority of participants welcomed the opportunity to improve participation and the sharing of ideas in educational planning. While the participants felt there were constraints in using such an in depth planning tool, most notably lack of time, all five contend that they would use this tool again to plan for either their child, or other children in their care with learning support needs.

Improved transition planning practices undoubtedly improve school experiences for children, and fundamental to this is involvement of all stakeholders. The NZCYP has been shown to improve planning practices for two children with ASD transitioning to school, and could be a key tool for supporting planning practices across other support teams of children in New Zealand with learning support needs.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Letter of Introduction – ECE

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
TE KURA O TE MATĀURANGA

IN WHAT WAYS DOES THE NEW ZEALAND CHILD AND YOUTH PROFILE (NZCYP) FACILITATE OR HINDER EDUCATIONAL PLANNING FOR A CHILD WITH ASD TRANSITIONING TO SCHOOL? STAKEHOLDERS' PERSPECTIVES.

My name is Shelley de Graaf and I am a Masters student in the Educational Psychology program at Massey University. I am writing to inform you about a research project that I am conducting, and to request your assistance in recruiting suitable participants.

The aim of this project is to explore educational team's experiences in using the NZCYP to support the educational planning of children with ASD who are transitioning from an early childhood to a primary school setting. The NZCYP was developed by McLaughlin, Budd, & Clendon (2017), researchers at Massey University to support teams to reflect on and organise their understanding of a child's strengths and limitations; sensory function; participation at school, home and in the community; and interests and preferences. Transitioning between settings can be challenging for children with ASD, and this research seeks to determine *in what ways does the NZCYP facilitate or hinder educational planning for a child with ASD transitioning to school?*

The project will begin in Term 1, and continue throughout Term 2, 2019. I am recruiting two teams supporting a child with ASD to transition from early childhood to primary school during this period. I would like to request your permission in facilitating the process by:

1. Sharing the attached information sheet with your centre's Head Teacher.
2. Asking your centre's Head Teacher to contact parents of children with ASD and obtain their consent to proceed with the project.
3. Once parent/caregiver consent has been obtained, asking your centre's Head Teacher to share the information sheet with the child's educational team

Prior to the child starting school, the team will attend an initial one-hour training session in using the NZCYP. They will then be asked to complete the NZCYP individually and then to meet together to share the information and engage in collaborative planning. Within four weeks of the child beginning primary school, the researcher will conduct individual interviews with the team members. These will take 20-30 minutes and will occur at a time convenient to each team member. Team members can attend the training and engage in the use of the NZCYP but can elect not to participate in the research. At no time will the researcher obtain any child data. Further details are provided in the attached Information Sheet.

If you have any questions relating to the project, please call either myself on [redacted] or my research supervisors Dr. Julia Budd on **06 356 9099 Ext. 84412** or Dr. Sally Clendon on **09 414 0800 Ext 43537**.

Thank you for considering this request for assistance. I would be most willing to meet with you to provide further information and explanation about the project.

Yours sincerely,

Shelley de Graaf
Masters Student
Educational Psychology Programme
Institute of Education
[redacted]

Appendix B: Information Sheet for Parents

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
TE KURA O TE MATĀURANGA

Use of the New Zealand Child and Youth Profile (NZCYP) with children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), as they transition from early childhood to primary school: Stakeholders' perspectives.

INFORMATION SHEET

Hello. My name is Shelley de Graaf and I am a Master's of Educational Psychology student at Massey University. I am currently undertaking a research project to gather stakeholder feedback on the use of *The Child and Youth Profile (NZCYP)*. The NZCYP is designed to support teachers, teacher aides, families, and specialists to reflect on and organise their understanding of a child's strengths and limitations; sensory function; participation at school, home and in the community; and interests and preferences. It was developed by Julia Budd, Tara McLaughlin and Sally Clendon, academic staff in Massey University's Institute of Education.

My research will involve recruiting two teams (parents, teachers, and other specialists) who are supporting a child with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) to transition from early childhood to primary school. I will explore the individual team members' perspectives of using the NZCYP to support educational planning for these children.

I have approached Centre Managers and asked their permission to recruit teams working with children with ASD. You have shown interest as a parent in using the NZCYP, therefore, this Information sheet and Consent form have been shared with you.

As a team member I invite you to participate in four key activities. Please note that team members can participate in Key Activities 1 and 2, but choose not to participate in the research study.

Key Activity 1: I will provide *team training* and support to use the NZCYP. This will involve a one-hour session to learn about the NZCYP and the different forms available. The session will be semi-structured and you will be provided with opportunities to ask questions.

Key Activity 2: Each team member will complete the NZCYP individually, and then meet together as a team to collaborate in educational planning for the child.

Key Activity 3: If you choose to participate in the research study, you will be required to provide the researcher with information about yourself, including your gender, ethnicity, and role in the team, for summative descriptive purposes only.

Key Activity 4: I will interview you to gather your feedback about the NZCYP. To enable accurate recording of the interview, an audio recording will be used that will later be transcribed. The transcribed data will be given to you for approval and if necessary emended before being used. Interviews will take between 20-30 minutes

per participant. Please note that following the use of the NZCYP, the receiving school teacher and SENCO will be interviewed as well.

It is not expected that you or other participants will experience any harm or discomfort as a result of your participation in the project. Potential benefits may include learning about alternative methods for educational planning and contribution to the development of the NZCYP.

The researcher is available to you and the team should you have questions while using the NZCYP. *The researcher will not have access to the children's data collected.*

All data gathered for this study will be kept in a secure manner. Confidentiality and anonymity of participants will be maintained; no personally identifiable information will be shared. A summary of project activities will be provided to all team members at the completion of the project.

Please note that 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 project prior to signing the transcription approval form;
- Ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview;
- Ask any questions about the project at any time during participation;
- Provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher; and
- Be given access to a summary of the project activities when it is concluded.

Please feel free to contact myself or my research supervisors at any time if you have any questions in relation to this project.

Shelley de Graaf
Masters Student, Massey University
[redacted]

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Appendix C: Information Sheet for Teachers

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
TE KURA O TE MATĀURANGA

Use of the New Zealand Child and Youth Profile (NZCYP) with children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), as they transition from early childhood to primary school: Stakeholders' perspectives.

INFORMATION SHEET

Hello. My name is Shelley de Graaf and I am a Master's of Educational Psychology student at Massey University. I am currently undertaking a research project to gather stakeholder feedback on the use of *The Child and Youth Profile (NZCYP).* The NZCYP is designed to support teachers, teacher aides, families, and specialists to reflect on and organise their understanding of a child's strengths and limitations; sensory function; participation at school, home and in the community; and interests and preferences. It was developed by Julia Budd, Tara McLaughlin and Sally Clendon, academic staff in Massey University's Institute of Education.

My research will involve recruiting two teams (parents, teachers, and other specialists) who are supporting a child with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) to transition from early childhood to primary school. I will explore the individual team members' perspectives of using the NZCYP to support educational planning for these children.

I have approached Centre Managers and asked their permission to recruit teams working with children with ASD. Your Centre Manager has shown interest in using the NZCYP, therefore, this Information sheet and Consent form have been shared with you.

As a team member I invite you to participate in four key activities. Please note that team members can participate in Key Activities 1 and 2, but choose not to participate in the research study.

Key Activity 1: I will provide *team training* and support to use the NZCYP. This will involve a one-hour session to learn about the NZCYP and the different forms available. The session will be semi-structured and you will be provided with opportunities to ask questions.

Key Activity 2: Each team member will complete the NZCYP individually, and then meet together as a team to collaborate in educational planning for the child.

Key Activity 3: If you choose to participate in the research study, you will be required to provide the researcher with information about yourself, including your gender, ethnicity, and role in the team, for summative descriptive purposes only.

Key Activity 4: I will interview you to gather your feedback about the NZCYP. To enable accurate recording of the interview, an audio recording will be used that will later be transcribed. The transcribed data will be given to you for approval and if necessary emended before being used. Interviews will take between 20-30 minutes

per participant. Please note that following the use of the NZCYP, the receiving school teacher and SENCO will be interviewed as well.

It is not expected that you or other participants will experience any harm or discomfort as a result of your participation in the project. Potential benefits may include learning about alternative methods for educational planning and contribution to the development of the NZCYP.

The researcher is available to you and the team should you have questions while using the NZCYP. The researcher will not have access to the children's data collected.

All data gathered for this study will be kept in a secure manner. Confidentiality and anonymity of participants will be maintained; no personally identifiable information will be shared. A summary of project activities will be provided to all team members at the completion of the project.

Please note that 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 project prior to signing the transcription approval form;
- Ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview;
- Ask any questions about the project at any time during participation;
- Provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher; and
- Be given access to a summary of the project activities when it is concluded.

Please feel free to contact myself or my research supervisors at any time if you have any questions in relation to this project.

Shelley de Graaf
Masters Student, Massey University
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Appendix D: Individual Participant Consent Form

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
TE KURA O TE MATĀURANGA

IN WHAT WAYS DOES THE NEW ZEALAND CHILD AND YOUTH PROFILE (NZCYP) FACILITATE OR HINDER EDUCATIONAL PLANNING FOR A CHILD WITH ASD TRANSITIONING TO SCHOOL? STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM – INDIVIDUAL (Stakeholder Participant)

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

Signature: ..... **Date:** .....

Full Name - printed .....

Appendix E: Head Teacher Participant Consent Form

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
TE KURA O TE MATĀURANGA

IN WHAT WAYS DOES THE NEW ZEALAND CHILD AND YOUTH PROFILE (NZCYP) FACILITATE OR HINDER EDUCATIONAL PLANNING FOR A CHILD WITH ASD TRANSITIONING TO SCHOOL? STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES

HEAD TEACHER CONSENT FORM

This consent form will be held for a period of five (5) years from the date of the study

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 study being conducted at ..... *(Name of early childhood centre)*

I agree to the participation of the staff members .....

..... *(Name of staff members)*

Signature: ..... **Date:** .....

Full Name - printed .....

Appendix F: NZCYP Training Slides

New Zealand Child and Youth Profile (NZCYP)

Shelley de Graaf - Massey University

What we will do today

- Introduction and background to the NZCYP
- Overview of the Study
- Review of the NZCYP
- Next Steps

Introduction and Background to the NZCYP

New Zealand Child and Youth Profile

The toolkit is a collection of forms, profiles, and planning documents to consider and document child and youth characteristics, participation, and preferences. It is designed to:

- Gather in-depth knowledge about a child/youth
- Facilitate team collaboration and communication
- Simplify information sharing and interdisciplinary exchange
- Aid educational planning

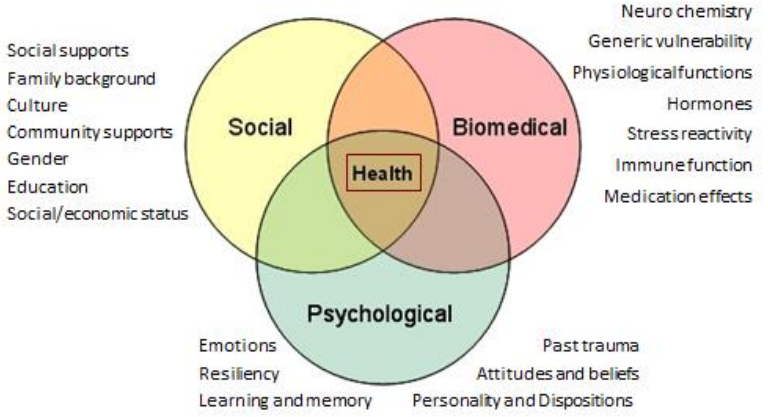
Development

- Developed by Tara McLaughlin Ph.D, Julia Budd Ph.D and Sally Clendon Ph.D, from Massey University.
- Together their specialties encompass early childhood and special education, rehabilitation, low vision and blindness, and speech language therapy. They have a shared interest in collaboration and interdisciplinary work.
- Developed for early intervention, early childhood education, education, special education, or community education settings in Aotearoa/ New Zealand.
- Based on International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health; Child and Youth Version (ICF-CY)

Biopsychosocial Approach

- Is the basis for the **International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health; Child and Youth Version (ICF-CY)** - a World Health Organization (WHO) resource designed to specify the strengths and areas for improvement in the functioning of each individual in relation to a context.
- Is viewed as the most complete way of conceptualizing human development and disability; combining medical, social and functional perspectives.

Biopsychosocial Model



The ICF-CY and the NZCYP:

advantages and benefits to using a biopscyhosocial approach

- Provides a framework for interdisciplinary practice
- Provides a common language across sectors (e.g., medicine, allied health, psychology, education and family services)
- Can yield profiles of functioning to understand individual characteristics and needs without labels
- Clarifies individual variations from diagnostic norms
- Gives teams relevant information for educational services including planning, individualizing interventions, assessment, and evaluations

Questions, Comments, Concerns, Ideas

Overview of the Study

Purpose of the Study

To hear about your experiences and learn about your perceptions of the NZCYP by exploring the following research question:

- *In what ways does the NZCYP **facilitate or hinder educational planning** for a child with ASD **transitioning** to school: Stakeholder perspectives.*
  - What worked? / What didn't work?
  - What process did you follow to use it?
  - How did you use the information?
  - Who have you shared the information with?

Study Processes

Four-step process to gather your feedback on the NZCYP. I will ask you to:

1. Provide me with information about yourself, via a short demographic form
2. Participate in this training/information session
3. Use the NZCYP with your team for the educational planning for a student with ASD
4. Participate in individual interviews to give me feedback about the toolkit

Review of the NZCYP

- Component parts (10 forms)

NZCYP includes

- Background Information (BI)
- Sensory Modality Profile (SMP)
- Communication Profile (CP)
- Participation and Access Profile (PAP)
- Functional Ability Profile (FAP)
- Adaptations & Specialised Equipment Profile (ASEP)
- Interests & Preference Profile (IPP)
- Priority Planning Page (PPP)

Background Information (BI)

Name of child/youth: _____

Name of person completing form _____ In collaboration with: _____

Background Information (BI)

Directions: Provide information about a child/youth's cultural identity, living situation, educational placement, funding, supports and the professionals who work with them to provide a context for the educational planning and interventions.

Name of Learner:		DOB:	Age:	Gender:
Cultural Identity:	Home Language:	Living Situation:		Funding Category eg ORS, ACC etc:
Educational Placement Past: ☐ Early education environment ☐ Mainstream without withdrawal ☐ Mainstream with withdrawal ☐ Special unit or school ☐ Home school Other (specify)	Educational Placement Now: ☐ Early education environment ☐ Mainstream without withdrawal ☐ Mainstream with withdrawal ☐ Special unit or school ☐ Home school ☐ Other (specify)	Services Provided Now: ☐ None ☐ Speech Language Therapist ☐ Developmental O & M ☐ Physiotherapist ☐ Occupational Therapist ☐ Educational Psychologist ☐ Resource Teacher Learning and Behaviour ☐ Resource Teacher Deaf ☐ Early Intervention Teacher ☐ Teacher aide or Education Support Worker ☐ Other Health Service Provider (specify) Other (specify)		Services Provided Past: ☐ None ☐ Speech Language Therapist ☐ Developmental O & M ☐ Physiotherapist ☐ Occupational Therapist ☐ Educational Psychologist ☐ Resource Teacher Learning and Behaviour ☐ Resource Teacher Deaf ☐ Early Intervention Teacher ☐ Teacher aide or Education Support Worker ☐ Other Health Service Provider (specify) Other (specify)
List Key Family Members/Whānau and Roles: (parents, siblings, grandparents, etc.)	Family Supports Provided: ☐ Respite care ☐ In-home support ☐ Parent support group ☐ Parent training programs ☐ Counselling services ☐ Financial supports or grants ☐ Specialised equipment for home ☐ Other (specify)	Names of Key Family Supports:		Notes or Other Background Information:

Sensory Modal Profile (SMP)

Name of child/youth: _____

Sensory Modality Profile (SMP)

Directions: Indicate with a tick if the child/youth can use the different sensory modalities to perceive objects, explore their world, discriminate between objects and/or undertake a task such as reading or mobility. Also indicate if there are any sensory integration issues. Use the notes section to specify any other information relating to sensory modalities that need to be considered in terms of educational planning not included elsewhere in the profile.

Sensory Modality	Perceive Objects	Explore their World	Discriminate between Objects	Undertake a Task (e.g. reading, mobility etc.)
Does the child/youth use their sense of **sight** to ...				
Does the child/youth use their sense of **hearing** to ...				
Does the child/youth use their sense of **touch** to ...				
Does the child/youth use their senses of **taste and/or smell** ...				
Does the child/youth use their sense of **balance** to ...				
Does the child/youth use their sense of knowing **where their body is in space** to ...				
Does the child/youth have sensory integration issues (if yes please describe)				
Notes:				

Communication Profile (CP)

Name of child/youth: _____

Communication Profile (CP)

Directions: Respond to each of the questions related to key information about the child/youth's communication. Consider how the child/youth expresses different communicative functions and provide a brief description.

Does the child/youth have a reliable and consistent communication system?	☐ Yes – everyone can understand his/her communications ☐ Somewhat – some people can understand his/her communications ☐ No – everyone is taking a best guess at his/her communications	If somewhat, list the reliable communication partners for the child/youth:
How does the child/youth typically communicate?	☐ Non-symbolic communication (e.g., vocalisations, body movements, gestures, or facial expressions) ☐ Unaided Symbolic Communication (e.g., speech, Makaton, New Zealand sign language) ☐ Aided: Low-Tech AAC (e.g., objects, choice boards, picture exchange, communication book, single message device) ☐ Aided: High-Tech AAC (e.g., dedicated speech devices such as Dynavox, mobile speech device such as iPad with communication app)	
Does the child/youth have a consistent yes/no response?	☐ Yes – specify method used _____ ☐ No	
Notes or comments on child/youth's communication system:		
For each of the following areas provide a brief description		
How does the child/youth **initiate communication**?	How does the child/youth express **wanting more**?	How does the child/youth express **wanting to stop**?
How does the child/youth express wanting to **do an activity**?	How does the child/youth express **wanting help or assistance**?	How does the child/youth **express feelings** (e.g., happiness/joy; sadness, anger)?
Notes or comments on current strategies used to support communication:		

Participation and Access Profile (PAP)

Name of child/youth: _____

Early Childhood, School or Special School Setting
Participation and Access Profile (PAP)
(The activity can be undertaken with or without adult support as age appropriate.)

Early Childhood, School or Special School Setting Activities	*Is the activity a priority for the child/youth?*	*Does the child/youth have the opportunity to participate in the activity?*	*Can the child get to the activity?*	*Are adaptations made to help facilitate participation for the child/youth in the activity?*	*Is the child/youth actively involved in the activity?*	*Do others accept the child/youth while they are participating in the activity?*
Daily program and activities						
Social interactions						
Special trips or special events						
Other: (use the following rows to add your own activities these may include things such as leisure activities during break, transitions between classes, school clubs, groups etc.)						
Notes:						

Participation and Access Profile (PAP)

Name of child/youth: _____

Home and Community
Participation and Access Profile (PAP)
(The activity can be undertaken with or without adult support as age appropriate.)

Home and Community Activities	*Is the activity a priority for the child/youth and/or family?*	*Does the child/youth have the opportunity to participate in the activity?*	*Can the child get to the activity?*	*Are adaptations made to help facilitate participation for the child/youth in the activity?*	*Is the child/youth actively involved in the activity?*	*Do others accept the child/youth while they are participating in the activity?*
Daily family activities such as involvement in family meals, household chores, family games evenings etc.						
Special family events or trips such as family reunions, weddings, vacations etc.						
Host guests or family friends for dinner, tea, BBQ or social gathering						
Play dates, friends' parties, or social gatherings with peers						
Recreation or leisure at home such as reading, watching television, or computer etc.						
Regular trips into the community such as grocery shopping, park visits, church, synagogue, temple etc.						
Special trips into the community, museums, zoos, cinema etc.						
Play sports or involvement in clubs or groups e.g. gymnastics, swimming, dance, singing group, kapa haka etc.						
Manage public transportation e.g. walking to bus stop, using bus or train or using taxi etc.						
Other (specify)						
Notes:						

Functional Ability Profile (FAP)

Name of child/youth: _____

Functional Ability Profile (FAP)

Directions: Consider the children/youth's abilities on each of the 11 functional ability areas. Based on knowledge of the child, make an overarching judgement about the extent to which the child/youth experiences limitations in functioning that influences his/her participation in daily activities. Place a tick in the corresponding ability/participation box. For each ability area, read the general description of each area (next page) and refer to the age-specific guidance that corresponds with the child/youth's age to inform your ratings.

*Indicate whether the child/youth typically uses (circle the + symbol) or does not use (circle the - symbol) adaptations, augmentative and alternative communication systems, assistive technology, or adaptive devices on a regularly basis. Ratings should be based on child/youth's ability with these adaptations or devices present. In some cases, ratings focus on the extent to which the child/youth is able to use the ability serving the same function without reference to differences in the form of how the ability is performed (e.g., child who uses a wheelchair may move around the environment similar to same aged peers even though the form, using a wheelchair, is different than what same aged peers might do).

** Indicate yes or no to the whether the child is currently receiving supports or services to enhance this area. Based on the level of limitation consider whether new supports or services are needed. Use the notes section following the general descriptions as needed.

		Functional Abilities: Integration of Skills to Participate in the Activities of Life										
		Express Meaning to Others	Comprehend Meaning from Others	Learn New Things	Form and Apply Ideas	Focus Attention and Action	Regulate Emotion	Interact with Others	Daily Care of Oneself	Manipulate Materials	Move Around Environment	Orient Self in Space
Current Ability	Enhances participation											
	Supports participation											
	Somewhat limits participation											
	Significantly limits participation											
*Adaptations, AAC, assistive technology, or adaptive devices		+ –	+ –	+ –	+ –	+ –	+ –	+ –	+ –	+ –	+ –	+ –
**Is the child currently receiving supports or services to enhance this area? Yes / No												

Adaptation and Specialised Equipment Profile (ASFP)

Name of child/youth: _____

Adaptations and Specialised Equipment Profile (ASEP)
(Adaptations, augmentative and alternative communication systems, assistive technology, or adaptive devices)

Directions: In the functional ability profile, teams indicated whether the child typically uses or does not use adaptations, augmentative and alternative communication systems, assistive technology, or adaptive devices on a regularly basis related to each of the functional domains. In this Profile you will record those which the child has previously used, currently uses and/or which might be desirable for future use. Adaptations and specialised equipment are grouped by general categories. The general categories are not intended to be mutually exclusive; nor are the lists exhaustive. Please describe other adaptions and equipment as needed.

Communication - Literacy	Previously Used	Currently Used	Possible Future Use	Orientation – Mobility - Positioning	Previously Used	Currently Used	Possible Future Use	Other	Previously Used	Currently Used	Possible Future Use
Large print				Pre-cane				Glasses			
Screen enlargement software				Cane				Hearing aides			
Screen reader				Walking frame				FM system			
Talking books				Standing frame				Hearing amplifier			
Daisy Reader (or audio books)				Lift				Timer			
Magnifiers or monoculars				Modified chair				Talking watch			
CCTV				Seat cushion				Talking calculators			
Reading guides				Wedges				Adapted utensils			
Adapted keyboard				Orthotic devices				Liquid level indicator			
Adapted mouse				Resonance Boards				Individualised schedule			
Touch screens				Maps				Adaptive switches			
Large handled writing devices				GPS software				Joysticks or trackballs			
Braillers				Models				Electronic pointing device			
iPad				Slope board				Audio recorders			
Computer				Wheelchair – describe (e.g., powered, self-propelled, attendant)				PDA or Smart Phone			
Visuals – describe (e.g. visual timetables, visual stories):								Specialised software - describe:			
Low-Tech AAC – describe system(s) & access mode:				Other:				Specialised app - describe:			
				Other:				Environmental control - describe:			
High-Tech AAC – describe system(s) & access mode:				Other:				Daily living equipment (e.g., toilet) – describe:			
				Other:				Other:			

Interests & Preferences Profile (IPP)

Name of child/youth: _____

Interests and Preferences

Directions: Consider the child/youth's likes and dislikes related to key areas indicated. Within the space provided, list things the child is known to avoid, show an interest in or has a favourite related to the key areas. Fill out information that is most relevant for the child/youth (i.e., not all spaces need to be completed).

Key areas	Avoids	Shows an Interest In	Has as a Favourite Thing or Activity
Clothes, toys & materials			
Activities or games			
Types of electronic or social media			
TV, Movie, other dramatic themes and characters			
Books or Stories			
Songs or Music			
People (adults or peers)			
Food & drinks			
Other (Specify)			
Are there any things the child/youth likes or dislikes that are inconsistent with family preferences, aspirations, or routines? *(e.g., child likes to use the computer but the family wants him to spend more time outside)*		Note how rapidly or slowly the child/youth's interests and preferences change.	

Priority Planning Page (PPP) Information Summary

Priority Planning Page (PPP) – Information Summary

Directions: Record key information from sections of the toolkit (i.e., what the team learned about the child that is relevant for setting priority goals & designing interventions).

Record Key Information from Each Profile					
Sensory Modality Profile (SMP)	**Communication Profile (CP)**	**Participation and Access Profile (PAP)**	**Functional Ability Profile (FAP)**	**Adaptations and Specialised Equipment Profile (ASEP)**	**Interests and Preference Profile (IPP)**
List key sensory strengths:	Describe the child's method of communication:	List key activities currently actively participating in:	List key functional ability strengths:	List current adaptions and equipment in use:	List child preferences and interests:
List key sensory difficulties:	List the reliable communication partners:	List key activities to strengthen participation in:	List key functional ability difficulties:	List possible future adaptions and equipment:	List un-preferred or avoided items:
Other notes:	Describe how the child communicates key information:	Describe current barriers:	List adaptations or assistive technology used or desired:	Consider pathways to access new equipment:	Other notes:

Priority Planning Page (PPP) Educational Plan

Priority Planning Page (PPP) – Educational Planning

Directions: Engage in collaborative goal-setting and decision-making with children/youth and families based on an integrated view of the children/youths' needs in the home, school, and community.

Based on Information Gathered about the Child/Youth			
Setting:	**Identify priority goals** for learning and participation *(needs)*:	**Describe the planned supports and interventions** *(building off strengths, interests and preferences)*:	**Indicate who will support** the child/youth **and when**:
Home			
School			
Community			

Questions, Comments, Concerns, Ideas

Next Steps

Where to from here?

- Take the profile and fill it out individually
- Families can work together with their young person
- Come back together in two weeks
- Fill in the PPP summary pages together
- Keep educational planning for transition as your focus when completing the forms
- I will be back in four weeks to ask you about your experiences and perceptions of the toolkit

Thank You!

Ka kite anō

Appendix G: Schedule of Interview Questions

Thank you again for participating in my research, it's very much appreciated. The basis of my research is to find out whether the NZCYP facilitated or hindered your planning processes when planning for the transition to school for a child with ASD. The purpose of this interview is to gather your experiences and opinions regarding the NZCYP, which I will be referring to as the toolkit during the interview. Just to remind you too, you have a right to choose not to answer any questions I ask if you wish to do so. And as already discussed, I will be recording this session as I don't want to miss any of your comments. Anything you say is confidential. No names will be used in my research, I will refer to people as Participant A, Participant B, etc.

First of all I just want to talk to you about how you found the toolkit to use.

Did you find the training I gave you was enough for you to use the toolkit?

How did you find the individual profiles to understand?

In your perspective, how useful did you find the profiles in documenting different aspects of the child's development? Starting with the first one, strengths and limitations? Sensory function? Participation in school, home, community? Documenting interests and preferences? Functional abilities? Adaptations used in the centre?

And in your perspective was there any information that wasn't gathered by the toolkit that you think would be beneficial in the planning for the child?

In what ways do you perceive that the toolkit would be useful in the educational planning for transitions?

In what ways do you perceive that the toolkit would be useful in the educational planning for a child with ASD transitioning to school?

And was there anything about the toolkit that you felt would be unhelpful in the educational planning?

Now in regards to the aspects of collaboration, planning and transition, I want to ask a few questions about how you perceived using the toolkit either helped or didn't help. (Participants who did not complete the planning part were asked if they thought the NZCYP* could *have helped).

Do you feel that the toolkit helped to develop a detailed picture of this student?

Do you think using the NZCYP made it easier for you to share information with other team members and parents?

And them with you?

If so, how? If not, why?

Did use of the toolkit change or uphold any ideas you already held about the student? For example did it help you to understand anything new about them that you hadn't considered before but would be useful in knowing?

Did you get out of the planning meeting what you had hoped you would?

Regarding this child's transition from early childhood to school, do you perceive that this toolkit has helped in the planning process?

How do you think use of the NZCYP helped in the transitional planning for a child with ASD specifically?

Is there any way that the toolkit has been unhelpful in the transition process?

Do you think you would use the toolkit in planning for other students?

Is there anything else you want to share about your experience?

How did the NZCYP facilitate collaboration with others involved in the educational planning for the child?"

Thank you so much for sharing your experience and opinions with me. After listening to the interview, I may need to contact you to clarify something you said, is that ok with you? Once I have transcribed it I'll send it to you to read over so you can check that it is an accurate summation of what we have discussed.

Prompts used to elicit further information:

Could you tell me more about that?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Do you have any further thoughts on this?

Could you give me an example?

Appendix H: Codebook

Codes	Sub code	Description	Example
Comprehensibility		Participant describes whether they found the NZCYP easy to understand or not.	"Yeah, it was quite complex, lot of things to see and think and yeah, we both found it quite a lot… and big words."
Ease of use		Participants describe how they found the NZCYP to use.	"The only one we found a bit clumsy to use was the Functional Ability Profile. At first we weren't quite sure how to answer that one."
Content		Participants discuss what they found beneficial about the content of the NZCYP, and what changes (if any) they would make.	"When I looked at it I thought now that's pretty comprehensive really, and there's quite a lot to work with there."
Barriers		Participants comment on barriers to using the NZCYP	"My only misgiving is the length of time it takes."
Planning processes		Participant describes how use of the NZCYP impacted the planning process.	"It's definitely helpful as far as being able to take time to think about it and getting everyone's perspective. Like I say, kindy only see it from one side, we have our own side…"
Planning for transition to school		Participants describe how use of the NZCYP impacts on planning for transition to school.	"…you can give comprehensive feedback to the teacher that's going to take on the next role to support the child…"
Understanding the child		Participant expresses whether or not the toolkit helps, or could help, with understanding the child.	"We do consider about those but not big things that we hold onto, so it was good for me to go again from scratch to start, who is he really?"
Communication		Participants comment on how use of the NZCYP impacted on stakeholder communication.	"I think sometimes we miss out on the parents' thoughts, so it was really good from that angle, that we got a lot of parent information."
Collaborative Relationships	Parent-teacher	Participants comment on how use of the NZCYP impacted on stakeholder relationships.	"When they're actually writing it and they feel as though it's an important thing and they come back and discuss it with you… I found that good."

	With outside agencies	Participants make reference to their relationship with outside agencies.	“You know the people who assess and provide the extra funded support based on their observations and assessments don’t have a clear picture…. this gives them a better idea, this is what they need.”

Appendix I: Low Risk Notification Letter

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND

Date: 27 February 2018

Dear Shelley De Graaf

Re: Ethics Notification - **4000019012 - Use of the New Zealand Child and Youth Profile (NZCYP) with children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) when transitioning to primary school: Stakeholders' perspectives.**

Thank you for your notification which you have assessed as Low Risk.

Your project has been recorded in our system which is reported in the Annual Report of the Massey University Human Ethics Committee.

The low risk notification for this project is valid for a maximum of three years.

If situations subsequently occur which cause you to reconsider your ethical analysis, please contact a Research Ethics Administrator.

Please note that travel undertaken by students must be approved by the supervisor and the relevant Pro Vice-Chancellor and be in accordance with the Policy and Procedures for Course-Related Student Travel Overseas. In addition, the supervisor must advise the University's Insurance Officer.

A reminder to include the following statement on all public documents:
"This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named in this document are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you want to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Associate Professor Tracy Riley, Acting Director - Ethics, telephone 06 3569099 ext 84408, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz. "

Please note, if a sponsoring organisation, funding authority or a journal in which you wish to publish requires evidence of committee approval (with an approval number), you will have to complete the application form again, answering "yes" to the publication question to provide more information for one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. You should also note that such an approval can only be provided prior to the commencement of the research.

Yours sincerely

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

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