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Supporting continuity of learning through assessment information sharing during  
transition: A comparison of early childhood and new entrant teachers beliefs,  
experiences and practices

A thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
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Melanie Irene Fletcher

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## **Abstract**

Recent policy initiatives in New Zealand and internationally have focussed on the importance of continuity of learning for children transitioning to school. Effective transitions occur when continuity of learning is supported, with the sharing of assessment information seen as an important strategy to support continuity of learning for children transitioning to school. The perspectives of those directly involved in the sharing of assessment information between early childhood services and schools are underrepresented in the research literature. This study therefore aimed to compare the beliefs, experiences and practices of New Zealand early childhood and new entrant teachers regarding the sharing of assessment information to support children's continuity of learning as they transition to school. Using self-administered online surveys, qualitative and quantitative data was gathered from early childhood and new entrant teachers in the Canterbury region.

Analysis of the data identified several areas of similarity within and between the sectors including valuing continuity of learning whilst experiencing barriers to information sharing. A number of significant differences in perspectives emerged from the data, in particular regarding the utility of information shared, given the reported emphasis on the provision of strengths-based information. Findings suggest that inconsistent information sharing practices have led to new entrant teacher dissatisfaction with current processes, and a desire to see more formalised processes enacted.

The study identifies several recommendations, including that there is a need for greater collaboration and communication between the two education sectors to ensure assessment information is shared effectively. The provision of guidelines and the development of a template would improve the utility of the information supplied and ensure a more consistent approach to information sharing. The sharing of assessment information should be made compulsory, thus removing the inconsistencies in information sharing practices that are currently occurring



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## **Chapter One Introduction**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Transition to school is a significant milestone for children (Ahtola, Silinskas, Poikonen, Kontoniemi, Niemi & Nurmi, 2011; Cassidy 2010). The majority of children in New Zealand transitioning to school have experienced early childhood education and care services (Advisory Group on Early Learning, 2015). These services have a wealth of information about the children who they care for and educate and this information, particularly assessment information, can be used by teachers in both early childhood services and schools to support the transition process and promote continuity of learning between the education sites. In New Zealand there is no obligation to share assessment information, with the early childhood sector and schools left to negotiate their own ways of sharing information that has led to inconsistencies.

This thesis reports the findings of a study that explored the beliefs, experiences and practices of early childhood and new entrant teachers in the Canterbury region of New Zealand with regards to the sharing of assessment information for children transitioning to school, to support continuity of learning. This chapter begins by discussing the background to the study, providing a context for the research and continues with a rationale for the study including an overview of the researcher's background and an introduction to the research questions. The chapter concludes with an overview of the thesis.



## **1.2 Background to the study**

### **1.2.1 Context**

The focus of this research is to identify the views of teachers who are involved in the process of transitioning children to compulsory schooling. In New Zealand formal schooling has traditionally begun for a child on or after their 5th birthday (Peters, 2010), although legally children are required to attend by their 6th birthday, putting New Zealand at odds with most OECD countries by having one of the youngest starting ages for compulsory schooling (Peters, 2018). Another anomaly experienced by children transitioning to school in New Zealand is that children often start school individually depending on when their 5<sup>th</sup> birthday falls, rather than as a group at the beginning of the school year.

Starting school at five has long been seen as a rite of passage (Peters, Hartley, Rogers, Smith & Carr, 2009), but this is now under review in the reforms signalled in the update to the Education Act 1989. The change in the Act allows primary schools to adopt cohort starts for children transitioning to school. At the time of this research it is too early to see what the impact of this change will be on the transition to school for children in New Zealand.

### **1.2.2 Early childhood education in New Zealand**

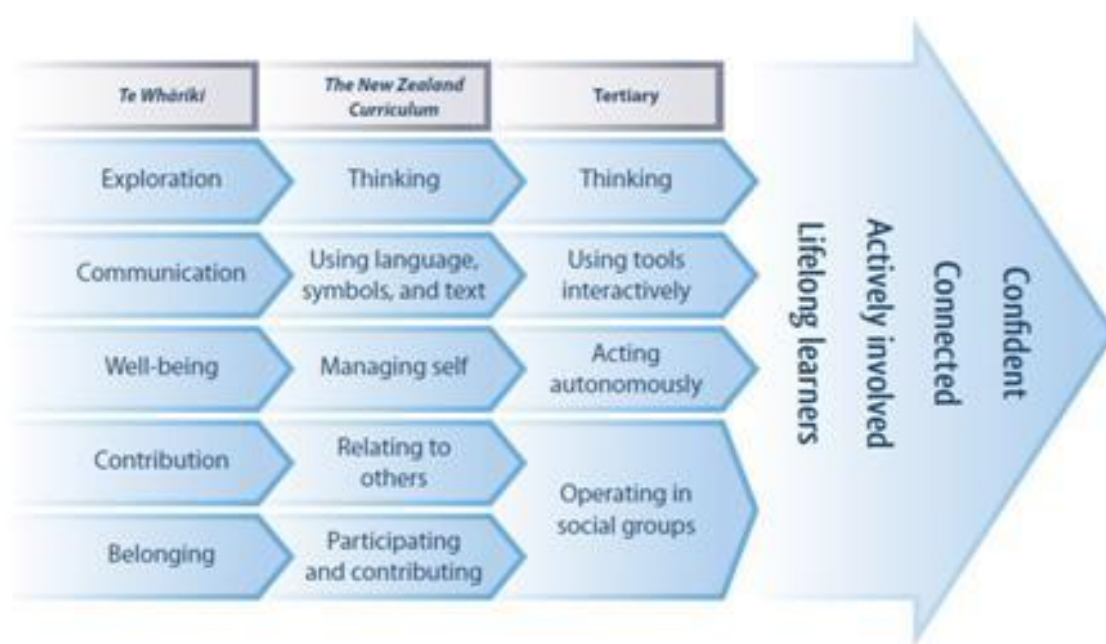
Early childhood education is a term used to describe the range of services that provide non-compulsory education and care for children aged 0-6. In New Zealand there are a number of different forms of early childhood education that includes teacher led services such as kindergartens; education and care, both

community based and privately operated; and home-based care. Parent led services include playcentre and playgroups and Māori and Pasifika services such as Te Kōhanga Reo. Pedagogically, early childhood education in New Zealand adopts a play-based approach (Daum, 2014) with all early childhood services required to follow the holistic early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996; 2017) for children aged 0-6. Unlike the school curriculum, *Te Whāriki* is a non-prescriptive curriculum that requires early childhood services to interpret the curriculum to suit the needs of their learning community. The curriculum was originally published in 1996 and following recommendations from the Advisory Group of Early Learning (AGoEL, 2015) the curriculum was updated in 2017 to reflect changes in theory and practice as well as shifting contexts of the 21st century. For the purposes of this research it is important to note that the curriculum has been updated to reflect the ongoing focus on transition to school. The updated early childhood curriculum more strongly states the expectation of continuity of learning for children as they pass through both the early childhood and primary sectors, emphasising the roles that teachers in both sectors have in ensuring children's continuity of learning.

### **1.2.3 Primary school context in New Zealand**

In contrast to the early childhood sector, primary schooling is compulsory for children aged six, with the majority of children starting school on their fifth birthday (AGoEL, 2015). The curriculum adopted in schools, the *New Zealand Curriculum* (MoE, 2007), is a curriculum for children in English medium schools and covers children in the primary and secondary years. The curriculum is built around eight learning areas and in order to support children's continuity of

learning the curriculum also includes key competencies. These key competencies (thinking; using language, symbols and texts; managing self; relating to others and participating and contributing) align with *Te Whāriki's* five curriculum strands and tertiary education, indicating continuity of learning throughout the levels of education (Figure 1).



**Figure 1 The key competencies: cross-sector alignment (ERO, 2013, p.6)**

#### 1.2.4 Defining transition to school

There is no universal definition of transition to school, but as Fabian states (2007, p.6) it is generally understood to be a "process of moving from one setting to another often accompanied by a move from one phase of education to another". Historically a child's transition to school was seen as having been completed once a child started school. However contemporary perspectives now acknowledge that transition is an ongoing process, one that takes time from initial contact with, and visits to school, through a range of orientation

activities and is not deemed to have been completed until the child feels established in their new environment (Education Review Office, 2015). The concept of transition from early childhood education to school incorporates many interchangeable terms including settling, adaption and adjustment to school. For the purposes of this research the term transition is used throughout.

### **1.2.5 Defining continuity of learning**

The notion of continuity of learning is prevalent in education policy documents in New Zealand in particular the curriculum documents (MoE, 2007; 2017) and the Education Review Office report *Continuity of Learning: Transitions from Early Childhood Services to Schools* (ERO, 2015) hereto referred to as the *Continuity of Learning* report. Continuity of learning emphasises the importance of building upon children's prior learning experiences to support the transition to school process, which in turn lays down the foundations for life-long learning.

### **1.2.6 Assessment and information sharing practices.**

Teachers in the early childhood and school sectors utilise different assessment methods, due to differences in pedagogical approaches (Cassidy, 2005; Dunham, Skouteris, Nolan, Edwards & Small, 2016). Assessment in schools takes a formalised approach that focuses on improving students learning (MoE, 2018) including the use of tests, an approach that is not pedagogically suited to the early childhood sector. Assessment methods used by teachers in the early childhood sector focus on adopting a strengths-based perspective that seeks to acknowledge children's interest based learning through documenting their learning dispositions and working theories (Blaklock, 2008). Dispositions are a

blend of knowledge, skills and attitudes to learning that focus on how children learn.

Working theories are defined as:

“the tentative, evolving ideas and understandings formulated by children (and adults) as they participate in the life of their families, communities and cultures and engage with others to think, ponder, wonder and make sense of the world in order to participate more effectively within it” (Hedges & Jones, 2012, p.36).

There is currently no obligation for information to be shared by the early childhood sector with schools in New Zealand, yet research has suggested information sharing is a strategy that can support a successful transition to school and enhance continuity of learning (ERO, 2015; Mitchell et al., 2015).

### **1.3 Rationale for the study**

A current focus in early years education is on enhancing continuity of learning for children as they move from the early childhood sector into the primary years. To do so, new entrant teachers need to be able to build upon children’s prior learning and to be provided with useful, valuable assessment information supplied by children’s early childhood teachers. The Education Review Office report noted that good transition to school practices for early childhood services included the provision of summative assessment information that was shared with schools. In turn schools were deemed as being *very responsive* if they had knowledge of the child who was transitioning to school (ERO, 2015).

In New Zealand there is limited research which examines information sharing between the early childhood sector and schools and in light of the ERO (2015) report it is important to ascertain the current situation within New Zealand with regards to the sharing of assessment information. The purpose of this research is therefore to conduct an exploratory study to describe and compare early childhood and new entrant teachers' beliefs experiences and practices in relation to how assessment information is used to support continuity of learning as children transition to school.

#### **1.4 Researcher background**

I have been a qualified early childhood teacher for nine years, having the privilege of building and owning a small, rural early childhood centre in North Canterbury. During these nine years I have been involved in supporting many children as they transitioned to a number of local schools. I am passionate about children experiencing successful transitions and have sought to implement effective research-based practices within my centre. In 2015 the centre was involved in a local learning cluster, working with other early childhood services and schools. Although short-lived, the experience highlighted the different perspectives towards transition to school held not only by the other early childhood services but also the local schools we transitioned children to. At the same time, the ERO report *Continuity of Learning* (ERO, 2015) was published.

On reading and reflection, I believed that many of the findings reported by ERO were typical of the group of educators in my cluster. For example, my centre had begun to generate a summative assessment that, with parental consent, was forwarded to the new entrant teachers, yet no other service was producing such assessment information and some were pedagogically opposed to doing so. An absence of feedback from schools regarding the assessment information we shared, coupled with an apparent lack of understanding of continuity of learning had me contemplating how widespread my experiences of information sharing were within other teaching communities.

I began to explore the transition and continuity literature and it became evident as Ahtola, Björn, Turunen, Poikonen, Kontoniemi, Lerkkanen and Nurmi (2016) reported, that there was very little research that focused on teacher's perceptions of transition to school and information sharing practices. While the expectation of curriculum continuity is articulated in the New Zealand curriculum documents *Te Whāriki* and the *New Zealand Curriculum* and other guiding educational policies, it was apparent that little research had been conducted into teacher perspectives and practices regarding information sharing to support continuity of learning. Given this context, the current study is guided by the following research questions:

- What assessment information do early childhood and new entrant teachers believe to be important to support children's continuity of learning as they transition to school?
- What are early childhood and new entrant teachers' experiences of sharing assessment information to support children's continuity of learning as they transition to school?
- What assessment practices do early childhood and new entrant teachers currently use to support children's continuity of learning as they transition to school?

### **1.5 Overview of thesis**

This thesis is organised into five chapters. This introductory chapter is followed by a review of the literature within Chapter Two, and focuses on continuity of learning and information sharing between the sectors. The literature review identifies relevant policies, research and practices both in New Zealand and internationally. Chapter Three then outlines the rationale for and design of the study, including ethical considerations, before discussing how data were collected and analysed. Chapter Four presents the survey findings from both the early childhood (EC) and new entrant (NE) participants, both individually and comparatively. Chapter Five provides a discussion of key findings, both within each and across the sectors with areas of similarity and differences highlighted. The chapter draws to a close with recommendations for policymakers, early childhood services and schools before the strengths and limitations of the study are outlined.



## **Chapter Two: Literature review**

### **2.0 Introduction.**

A literature review was undertaken to gain insights and understandings of the current theoretical and practical issues relating to information sharing for children transitioning to school. This chapter commences by explaining the search strategy undertaken. Key definitions of transition and transition to school are examined, before the notion of continuity of learning and its importance for a successful transition to school is introduced. Continuity of learning is discussed further with a focus on international and national policies and practices. Assessment in early childhood and primary schools is introduced and differences between the sectors identified. The sharing of assessment information in New Zealand is discussed and contrasted with international policies and practices. An examination of the body of comparative research both internationally and nationally regarding teacher's beliefs experiences and practices is undertaken, prior to the conclusion of the chapter.

### **2.1 Search strategy.**

The literature search was conducted during the period September 2016 to September 2018 with a focus on literature and research produced since 2000. Literature searches were conducted using Massey University Library's Discover search tool. Databases used include A+, ERIC and Google Scholar. Web searches were conducted on relevant educational websites including the New Zealand Ministry of Education sites. Education journals were researched in particular journals published in Australasia notably the Australasian Journal of

Early Childhood, Early Childhood Folio and New Zealand Journal of Teachers Work. The search terms initially used were *starting school*, *transition to school* and *early childhood education* and these provided an initial overview of the field. As knowledge of the subject area and the scope of the research were developed, the search was amended to include the terms *continuity of learning* and *assessment*. Searches were conducted frequently to ensure new material was accessed and all material was then assessed for relevance to the research topic.

## **2.2 Transitions**

It is inevitable that individuals will undergo a number of "transitions" throughout their lives, many planned others unexpected. Bronfenbrenner (1979) states that a transition occurs when an individual's position is altered, usually as a consequence of a change in role, setting or both. Transition is a process that takes place over time, with individuals passing through a number of phases. These phases require individuals to accept the notion of a situation ending, passing through a neutral phase of being in-between situations, before accepting and moving forward with the new situation (Bridges, 2009).

### **2.2.1 Transition to school**

In New Zealand, transition to school has historically taken place on, or soon after, a child's fifth birthday. A successful transition to school can set the platform for a child's future success (Dockett & Perry, 2007; Dunlop & Fabian, 2002; Fabian, 2007). Conversely, a failure to adjust to school successfully can have long term consequences with children experiencing ongoing behavioural

and academic problems (Ladd & Price, 1987). Wylie, Thompson and Lythe's (2001) longitudinal study followed the educational paths of 500 children in New Zealand. At the age of ten, the study found a correlation between children who had experienced a difficult transition to school and their subsequent competency score.

### **2.2.2 Defining a successful transition to school**

Historically, a successful transition to school was seen as a child's ability to be "ready for school". Readiness was seen as a maturational characteristic of the child, with the level of transition success determined solely by how the child adapted to the new environment (Graue, 2006; Peters, 2003), ignoring influences on the child that account for much of how well a child negotiates a transition to school. Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) identified that only one quarter of a child's adjustment to school is a result of their "readiness". Through their research, they introduced their 'Dynamic Effects Model: The Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition' (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000) building on Bronfenbrenner and Morris' (1998) Bioecological Model. The Dynamic Effects model acknowledges a combination of influences on a child's transition to school. The model identifies the importance of the child's interactions with different contexts and acknowledges the changes in these contexts via interactions and the patterns of relationships over time. This model has been influential in switching the focus from solely being on a child's readiness for school, to acknowledging the impact that stakeholders - parents, schools and the wider community- have on the success a child experiences as they transition to school.

In addition to impacting on the success of a child's transition to school, different stakeholders have contrasting perceptions of what constitutes a successful transition to school from their own perspectives. Dockett and Perry's extensive 'Starting School Research Project' in Australia (Dockett & Perry, 2001; 2004) saw researchers working with representatives from the early childhood sector, parents and the wider community, to investigate the perceptions and expectations of all the stakeholders involved in transition to school.

Questionnaires were distributed to early childhood services and schools with 355 responses from parents, 162 responses from early childhood teachers and 54 new entrant teacher responses gathered. The research identified differences not only between the views of children and adults, but additionally between the various groups of adults. The predominant focus for all respondents was on social adjustment. Social adjustment itself was defined differently depending on the role of the adult. For example early childhood teachers focussed on children's ability to work as part of a group whereas teachers in schools placed more emphasis on how children felt about school, and adjusted to school, particularly the ability to follow routines. Parents views focussed on children's ability to adjust to unfamiliar adults.

Peter's (2010) substantive literature review, carried out in New Zealand, identified several indicators of a successful transition, concurring with Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) that a successful transition is not something that is entirely dependent on the child. The indicators identified in Peter's literature review as impacting on children's successful transition to school included a child

having a sense of well-being, belonging and feeling suitable; teachers' recognition and acknowledgment of culture; responsive, reciprocal relationships between all stakeholders; the child having an engagement in learning, a learning disposition and an identity of a learner; positive teacher expectations and teachers building on funds of knowledge from early childhood education and home at school. This latter indicator is supported by the work of Howie and Timperley (2002) and Cunningham (2011), who identified a successful transition to school as one in which a child can use the skills and knowledge developed in other settings, including the home and early childhood education, in their new setting to continue their learning journey uninterrupted. This concept of 'continuity of learning' for children as they transition vertically through the education system has become the focus of transition to school research and policy in New Zealand and internationally.

### **2.3 Continuity of learning**

The idea of continuity of learning emphasises consistency and smooth progression in learning through the years and across settings, allowing children's learning to progress steadily. Children's development and learning is continuous and educational experiences should reflect this (Scully, Seefeldt & Barbour, 2003). Recent developments in education policy both in New Zealand and internationally have seen a focus on the notion of continuity of learning for children transitioning to school.

### **2.3.1 International policy**

In Europe and Australia there is a strong focus in educational policy on continuity of learning. In 2010, Scotland implemented the *Curriculum for Excellence (CfE)*, (The Scottish Government, 2004) a national curriculum for children aged 3 to 15 emphasising connections and coherence across curriculum areas. In England there is an expectation that the final year of the *Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)*, (Department for Education, 2017) should lay the knowledge and skills foundations for children to support their first year of formal schooling. Finland's *Core Curriculum for Pre-school Education in Finland 2000* (Turunen, 2012) expresses the expectation that continuity of learning will be interpreted at local levels. In Australia *Belonging, Being and Becoming. The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace, 2009) is the Australian early childhood curriculum document and expresses an expectation that early childhood teachers should support continuity of learning through documenting children's learning via transition statements.

### **2.3.2 New Zealand policy**

The notion of continuity of learning is prevalent in education policy documents in New Zealand. The revision of the *New Zealand Curriculum* (MoE, 2007) demonstrated the policy intent of encouraging continuity of learning through the alignment of the key competencies with the strands and goals of *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996). The Advisory Group on Early Learning (AGoEL) was established by the Ministry of Education in 2014 to make recommendations on how to strengthen the implementation of *Te Whāriki*, and to support the continuity of

early learning. Amongst its recommendations published in 2015, was the updating of *Te Whāriki* and making the links between the two curriculum documents more explicit. The early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki* was revised in 2017 and the document strengthened further the expectation that teachers would support children's continuity of learning through the connections between the two curriculum documents in terms of principles and approaches to learning, stating: "kāiako recognise and show where and how children's early learning connects with the key competencies, values and learning areas of *The New Zealand Curriculum*" (MoE, 2017, p. 58).

A key recommendation of the AGoEL and the subsequent ERO report *Continuity of Learning* (ERO, 2015) was that teachers in both sectors understood the links between the two curriculum documents in order to better support continuity of learning. To date, there is limited research that has been conducted into the understandings each sector has of the other's curriculum and the links between them, although Peters, Paki and Davis (2015) reported that teachers in both sectors had limited awareness of the links between the two curricula documents.

In 2015 the Education Review Office report *Continuity of Learning: Transitions from Early Childhood Services to Schools* (ERO, 2015) addressed the current practices of early childhood services and schools for children transitioning to school. It identified a number of points as critical to support continuity of learning. For early childhood services, these included linking the curriculum documents, *Te Whāriki* and the *New Zealand Curriculum*; providing a

summative assessment for a child based on *Te Whāriki* and encouraging families to share assessment information from the early childhood centre with a child's school teacher. For schools, the report identified responsive schools as being those that were able to make links between the curriculum documents and had knowledge about the child through observation and information supplied and that children's prior knowledge was used to support their learning.

There has been limited criticism levelled at the idea of continuity of learning in New Zealand and the links between the curriculum documents, with Alcock and Haggerty (2013) arguing that the alignment of the early childhood curriculum with the school curriculum is at odds with the essence of the early childhood curriculum because of the learning outcomes focus of the school curriculum.

### **2.3.3 Continuity of learning in practice**

Children transitioning to school tend to experience continuity of learning through the provision of experiences that they are familiar with from their early childhood education settings. Some schools in New Zealand have moved towards a play-based learning environment where activities and resources such as music and movement, sand and water play, play dough and construction materials are provided, that more closely reflect the developmental, play based approach of early childhood (Postlewaigh, 2018). However, the focus for continuity of learning should not necessarily be on replicating what has gone before but gaining an understanding of what has happened previously in order to support children's future development. This requires teachers building upon children's funds of knowledge, including the skills and experiences they bring from their



families, culture and early childhood settings (Cunningham, 2011; Peters, 2010).

## **2.4 Assessment**

The sharing of assessment information is advocated as a strategy to support continuity of learning for children transitioning to school. The following sections describe and contrast assessment practices in the early childhood and school sectors.

### **2.4.1 Assessment in early childhood education**

In New Zealand early childhood settings, the predominant form of assessment is formative assessments commonly known as Learning Stories (Cameron, 2014; Zhang, 2015). Carr (2001) defines a Learning Story as:

observations in everyday settings designed to provide a cumulative series of qualitative ‘snapshots’ or written vignettes of individual children displaying one or more of the five target domains of learning disposition. The five domains of disposition are translated into actions: taking an interest, being involved, persisting with difficulty or uncertainty, expressing an idea or a feeling, and taking responsibility or taking another point of view. (p.96).

Learning dispositions are defined as “combinations of children’s emerging knowledge, skills and attitudes to learning” (ERO, 2007a, p. 11). The predominant dispositions or “domains of learning dispositions” (Carr, 2001, p. 23) documented in early childhood are *taking an interest; being involved;*

*persisting with difficulty or uncertainty; communicating with others and taking responsibility.* Episodes of learning are written from a strengths-based perspective, identifying what a child can do rather than what they cannot do, as interpreted by the writer of the narrative. It is claimed that learning stories can highlight unseen elements of learning, capturing the invisible (Arndt & Tesar, 2015) such as a sense of belonging, confidence, independence, respect and curiosity. It is argued that these unseen elements and dispositions are the foundation for future learning (Carr, 2001).

The learning story format incorporates visually attractive elements, often photographs, and encourages parents and children to be involved in the assessment process, thus gaining multiple perspectives on a child's learning (Carr, 2001). Learning stories are collated in what are usually known as "portfolios" (Carr, 2001). Traditionally these portfolios have been physical collections of learning stories and other artefacts including art work and work samples such as emergent writing, but with technological advances many centres are now moving towards online portfolios. These portfolios provide rich information about a child and are a primary assessment tool to support continuity of learning for children as they transition from early childhood centres to school.

The learning story approach to assessment is widely used in the early childhood sector (Blaiklock, 2013; Cameron, 2014) but is not without its critics. For example the ERO report *The Quality of Assessment in Early Childhood Education* (ERO, 2007b) found that the quality of assessment practices varied

within and across early childhood services. More recently Fraser and McLaughlin (2016) in their article agreed with Cameron (2014) who called for discussion around assessment practices, and Cameron, McLachlan and Rawlins (2016) who argued the reliance on learning stories needs to be addressed.

Blaiklock (2010; 2013) has identified a number of concerns with the reliance on the learning story approach to assessment in the early childhood sector. He argued there are a number of problems with establishing the credibility of the learning story approach. He criticised current approaches including a lack of guidance as to what to assess and an over emphasis on assessing dispositions. Furthermore, he argued there are problems with defining dispositions and the focus on assessing dispositions leads to the assessment of skills and knowledge being neglected. McLachlan (2008) also discussed the vagueness and subjectivity of early childhood assessment with regards to literacy learning. She argued that the content of portfolios needs to be broadened beyond learning stories to include other artefacts to support children's transition to school and continuity of learning. Loggenberg (2011) in her research highlighted the inadequacies many teachers felt regarding the reliance on the learning story approach for assessing children. Zhang (2015) contends that learning stories alone cannot provide adequate assessments required for children termed exceptional; those who are gifted or require additional support.

Learning stories use a strengths-based approach but differing definitions of what strengths-based assessment looks like exist. For example, Hopps-Wallis, Fenton and Dockett (2016) identified how teachers interpreted strengths-based approaches to assessment from a positive psychology approach. This interpretation led to teachers expressing concern that only positive information was shared and this in turn failed to identify any challenges a child may have as they transitioned to school. A strengths-based approach to assessment is largely welcomed by parents but a more realistic view of the child is also wanted that identifies gaps and needs in children's development (Mitchell et al., 2015).

#### **2.4.2 Assessment in primary schools**

In contrast to assessment in early childhood settings, the focus of assessment for children in primary schools is on explicit skills and knowledge (Boereboom & Cramman, 2018). Children are usually formally assessed within 6 to 8 weeks of starting school via one or more of an array of tools that are available for new entrant teachers, and continue to be formally assessed throughout their educational journey. The assessment tools available include the Record of Oral Language (ROL), Junior Oral Language Screening Test (JOST), School Entry Assessment (SEA) and the Junior Assessment of Maths (JAM) as well as assessments designed by teachers to suit their own requirements (MoE, 2018). These assessments test children's skills and knowledge in the areas of literacy and numeracy, are a 'tick-box' approach, and act as a benchmark to measure academic progress. Such assessment tools are not widely used in early childhood, and as Alatalo et al. (2017) reported there is a resistance to this form

of assessment in the early childhood sector. These forms of assessment do not sit comfortably within the assessment ideology of formative assessment that is prevalent in early childhood.

Differing forms of assessment and beliefs about what constitutes valued learning can be a barrier to successful transition to school. Timperley and Robinson, (2002) reported early childhood teacher concerns that children were unable to use the expertise they had gained in the early childhood environment in the school classroom and were unable to replicate their learning in the new setting.

From the perspective of the school sector, research indicates assessment information received from the early childhood sector is unsatisfactory. Cassidy (2005), Sherley (2011) and Hopps (2014a) all reported that school teachers believed the information they received was not useful. Dunham et al. (2016) found that the strengths-based language used in transition statements was not always useful to school teachers and Alatalo, Meier and Frank (2017) reported the information received was too general in nature. Schools often ignored information supplied as teachers preferred to take a 'clean slate' approach to children transitioning to school, wanting to make their own judgements about the child rather than be influenced by the information supplied by early childhood services (Alatalo, et al., 2017; Timperley & Robinson, 2002).

## **2.5 Sharing of Assessment information**

Early childhood teachers have a wealth of knowledge about children and when this information is shared with schools, teachers are in a better position to build on what children already know and can do (Dockett & Perry, 2006; Mitchell, et al., 2015; Peters et al., 2015). Teachers in school settings need to be familiar with children's backgrounds and learning to support learning and development and this can be achieved through the sharing of assessment information.

### **2.5.1 Sharing of assessment information: New Zealand policy**

Recent New Zealand education policy documents have made continuity of learning through sharing of assessment information an expectation (ERO, 2015). The terms of reference for the AGoEL included making recommendations as to the strategies that could be used to develop continuity of learning for children aged zero to eight. Amongst its recommendations was the strengthening of the links between the two education curricula documents. The revised early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki* makes explicit the links and continuity of learning between itself and the school curriculum. The links between the two documents are identified in the section “Pathways to school and kura” (p. 51 to 58) for all the strands and key competencies. Information sharing for children transitioning to school is an expectation, yet the document provides no guidance to support teachers to undertake information sharing to support continuity of learning.

### **2.5.2 Sharing of assessment information: Practice**

In New Zealand, local learning communities are invited to negotiate their own ways of sharing information. Neither the *Continuity of Learning* report nor *Te Whāriki*, provides a clear or comprehensive guide as to what assessment information should be shared or how information should be shared.

Consequently, wide disparities exist in terms of what assessment information is shared and how it is shared and significant barriers to effective information sharing exist. Differing educational structures, time constraints and concerns regarding the privacy of information has led to early childhood settings placing the responsibility on parents and whānau to share their child's portfolios with new entrant teachers (Alatalo et al., 2017; Gray, 2014). This approach relies on parents and whānau being willing and able to share these with schools and this can prove problematic (Timperley & Robinson, 2002). Parents may not wish for their child's portfolio, often considered a "taonga" or treasure, to be taken to school or parents may not see the value in sharing these with their child's school. Ahtola et al., (2016) reported that despite teachers in schools valuing the receipt of written information, parents ranked the sharing of assessment information as the least important transition activity. Parents may not be encouraged by the child's school teacher to share as the portfolios may voluminous, or teachers may not value the assessment information contained within the portfolios.

### 2.5.2.1 Transition portfolios

In response to the criticism regarding traditional portfolios being too large, collaboration between early childhood teachers and new entrant teachers has resulted in the development of abridged transition portfolios and summaries of learning. *Tōku Mātauranga Oranga. My Journey in Learning* (Carr, Clarkin-Phillips, Resink, Anderson & Jack, 2013) was a product of teachers from both sectors working together to create indicators that applied to both the learning dispositions of *Te Whāriki* and the key competencies of the *New Zealand Curriculum*. Clear links between the strands of *Te Whāriki* and the *New Zealand Curriculum*'s key competencies were made, with indicators of what the key competency might look like in an episode of learning identified. The transition portfolio contained a template and examples of learning stories that highlighted the child's learning against the disposition/key competency.

Similar work was conducted within the Mangere Bridge Centre of Innovation project between 2006 and 2008 where action research was used to look at transition to school practices. An outcome of this work was the production of transition portfolios (Hartley, Rogers, Smith & Lovatt, 2014). These portfolios built on the work of Carr et al., (2013) and included learning stories chosen through collaboration between teachers, family and children that included a page that identified the child's learning with the key competencies from the *New Zealand Curriculum*.



Inc another transition focused study Peters et al., (2015) undertook case studies and action research projects between early childhood services and schools that resulted in a number of transition to school initiatives being developed, including the development of a “leavers page” (Peters et al., 2015 p.11) that provided summary information regarding a child’s interests.

#### **2.5.2.2 Cross sector relationships**

The examples explored in this section highlight successes when collaborative relationships between the sectors occur, but they are isolated examples of services and schools working together and cannot be seen as indicative of assessment information sharing practices throughout New Zealand. Information sharing by its very nature relies on cross sector communication, either formally through the transfer of records or informally via conversations between the sectors (Margetts, 2002). For effective information sharing to occur, participants are required to have mutual respect for each other and the information shared. However, research by Ashton, Woodrow, Johnston, Wangmann, Singh and James (2008) suggests there is little respect for the information shared. Ashton et al. (2008) conducted semi structured interviews with nine kindergarten teachers and found little communication between the sectors. Their findings highlighted that school settings appear to have a lack of respect for the information supplied by early childhood settings, and reports were largely ignored. Similar findings were reported by Hopps (2014a) with early childhood teachers reporting a lack of interest from school teachers about the information provided and their attempts to share information with the school sector were rebuffed. The AGoEL (2015) found a failure to acknowledge prior learning was

widespread and recommended schools improve the uptake of information prepared by early childhood services. ERO (2015) criticised schools for not seeking or valuing information about children's learning received from early childhood centres.

### **2.5.3 Sharing of written assessment information: international policy and practice**

The laissez-faire approach taken in New Zealand to information sharing contrasts with a more prescribed approach to information sharing for children transitioning to school in other countries, where emphasis on information shared via written documentation is evident. In America, for example, Rous, Hallam, McCormick and Cox (2009) surveyed teachers and the variety of transition practices adopted, including information sharing. They reported information sharing was a widely used and valued practice with three quarters of respondents reporting that information was not only made available but was used. Research undertaken in Finland indicated that the provision of written information about individual children was a significant indicator of future academic success (Ahtola et al., 2011).

In Scotland the *Curriculum for Excellence Preschool into Primary Transitions* (Education Scotland, 2010) advocates the transfer of information between settings and the use of shared profiles in the first term of formal schooling. Research undertaken in Scotland by White, Connelly, Thompson and Wilson (2012) showed that teachers welcomed individual profiles that highlighted strengths and needs. In Ireland teachers from both sectors worked

collaboratively to develop a tool, the '*Child Snapshot*' (O'Kane & Hayes, 2013) to share information between the sectors using mutually agreed definitions and expectations with a recommendation for the '*Child Snapshot*' to be adopted nationally (O'Kane & Hayes, 2016).

Information sharing is also mandatory in England where *The Early Years Foundation Stage Profile* (Department for Education, 2017) is produced for children transitioning to school. This profile assesses children against the 17 early learning goals and the three characteristics of effective learning with the assessment supplied to both parents and teachers.

In Australia there has been extensive work conducted in the area of transition statements. Boyle and Petriwskyj (2014) conducted an action research project in Australia that resulted in teachers working together to develop mutual understandings of continuity of learning and the creation of a transition statement. The Australian state of Victoria requires a *Transition Learning and Development Statement* (Department of Education and Training, 2016) is prepared for all children transitioning to school. In order for teachers to plan learning experiences and gain an understanding of the child, the statement focuses on a child's abilities and dispositions in addition to information regarding their interest. In New South Wales the main tool used to support transition to school is the *Transition to School Statement* (Hopps-Wallis & Perry, 2017). The decision to produce the strengths based statement is voluntary with parents expected to share the statement with their child's teacher.

## **2.6 Comparative research**

The body of research regarding information sharing to support children transitioning to school is limited, particularly research that compares the beliefs experiences and practices of teachers in both sectors, and has tended to adopt small scale case study approaches. The following section discusses both international and New Zealand research that compares perspectives of teachers in early childhood education and schools regarding assessment information sharing.

### **2.6.1 Comparative research: International research**

There are several examples of research that has attempted to gain the wider perspectives of teachers in both settings for comparative purposes. For example, Thorsen, Bø, Løge and Omdal (2006) surveyed Norwegian teachers in both sectors and parents about what the information they believed was needed by schools. All parties agreed that knowing about children's special needs and social competence was most important and teachers from both sectors valued information sharing. Einarsdóttir, Perry and Dockett's (2008) comparative study used a questionnaire-based approach to compare transition beliefs and practices of teachers in 64 early childhood centres and 28 schools in Iceland, and 26 early childhood centres and 46 schools in Australia. This study sought views regarding readiness, transition practices, barriers and the sharing of assessment records. The results showed that 57% of Icelandic preschool teachers used written records as a transition activity and 81% of school teachers were involved in this practice. In Australia the reported percentages of teachers in preschool and schools using written information as a transition

activity were 76% and 51% respectively, with parent permission, but research did not ask how the information shared was used in the school settings.

Hopps' conducted a large-scale communication survey and focus-group interviews as part of her doctoral studies with Australian early childhood and school teachers to elicit their experiences regarding communication experiences with the other sector (Hopps, 2014a; 2014b). The findings highlighted a lack of communication and understanding between the sectors with those in the early childhood sector not knowing if information supplied to schools is used and, if it is used, in what way (Hopps, 2014b). This lack of feedback led to mistrust and impacted on the willingness of the early childhood sector to share information (Hopps, 2014a; 2014b). Hopps-Wallis and Perry (2017) reported the findings of the former's doctoral study and identified the problems teachers experience in both sectors with using written communication. Problems reported included the use of various formats to share information, the infrequency of receipt of information and concerns about how the information supplied is interpreted.

### **2.6.2 Comparative research: New Zealand**

In New Zealand there is a dearth of research that investigates teacher views regarding information sharing. One study that does exist is that undertaken by Timperley and Robinson (2002), who found that teachers, although willing to collaborate, had very differing expectations of each other and there were high levels of dissatisfaction with transition arrangements in general. The researchers interviewed 20 school and 27 early childhood teachers regarding

their beliefs about transition to school and how these beliefs impacted on their practices. Teachers in both sectors reported that in order for transitions to be successful, transitions should be a shared responsibility between the sectors, yet few teachers were satisfied with each other's role and held differing expectations of each other. Their research further inquired into assessment records and results indicated little information sharing, with teachers in schools appearing unreceptive to the information received, noting that they preferred to assess the children themselves.

Gray's (2014) New Zealand wide survey solicited perspectives on transition to school practices in general, with a small focus on the sharing of assessment information. 196 early childhood and 534 new entrant teachers, as well as parents and children responded. This study found that there was little widespread sharing of assessment information, particularly early childhood learning portfolios. Sharing of information by early childhood teachers was not commonplace, with only 50% of respondents stating they shared information. Reasons for not sharing information included concerns over privacy; only sharing information if schools requested information or parents wanted information to be shared; schools having differing expectations and schools not valuing portfolios. The survey asked new entrant teachers about their use of portfolios. Only 39% of the respondents said they made use of portfolios, but how portfolios were used was not explored. The survey provides a glimpse into transition practices, but conclusions are limited as the survey did not delve deeper to ask detailed questions regarding the content and format of information, teachers understanding of continuity through alignment of the

curricula documents; their beliefs about what information should be shared and the mechanisms for sharing.

Mitchell et al. (2015) were contracted by the Ministry of Education to look at assessment practices around learning outcomes in early childhood education and early school years. The nested case study approach used a purposive selection of eight primary and 19 early childhood services and one kura kaupapa Māori and the families of the children involved in the transition to school. All parties spoke about the value of sharing information, but practices did not match the beliefs expressed. This research found that despite expectations from parents for information sharing to occur, little information was shared. School teachers showed a lack of understanding of the information shared and were unable to interpret the information received, with some school teachers reporting they did not find the information useful. Teachers in schools reported wanting information that identified strengths and concerns. Effective information sharing occurred when documentation was exchanged between teachers, with ongoing communication between the two sectors to ensure information was both understood and valued.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

This literature review has looked at the importance of continuity of learning for children as they transition to school from early childhood centres, and the growing attention placed on sharing of assessment information to facilitate this. The limited body of research has shown that sharing of assessment information from early childhood centres to schools is typically occurring in an ad hoc

manner. The research currently offers limited insight as to the reasons why information sharing is not occurring from the perspectives of early childhood teachers and new entrant teachers. Considering recent policy initiatives and expectations, particularly the *Continuity of Learning* report and *Te Whāriki*, it is imperative that the perspectives and practices of those involved in the transition process are investigated with regards to the sharing of information to support continuity of learning.



## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

This chapter discusses the approach taken to explore teacher's experiences of assessment information sharing to support children's continuity of learning as they transition to school. The chapter begins by looking at the purpose of the research, before providing an outline of the research paradigm and the research design adopted in this study are presented. These sections are followed by a description of the methods of data collection and the survey design used. Ethical considerations are discussed and followed by a section outlining the pilot testing and recruitment of participants. The approaches taken to analyse the data are discussed before the chapter is concluded.

### **3.1 Research purpose**

The purpose of this research was to describe and compare early childhood and new entrant teachers' beliefs, experiences and practices in relation to how assessment information is used to support continuity of learning as children transition to school. Teachers in both the primary and early childhood sectors are instrumental in supporting children to make a successful transition to school, and therefore teachers from both sectors were included in this study. Information sharing, in particular assessment information, is a key element that supports continuity of learning (ERO, 2015) and hence the focus of this study.

A review of the literature has highlighted a gap in the current body of research regarding the beliefs, experiences and practices of early childhood and new entrant teachers, particularly in the area of sharing of assessment information. There has been no large-scale research in New Zealand that examines what teachers' practices look like, nor their views regarding information sharing to support continuity of learning. Research conducted in the area of transition to school has typically taken a case study approach (Einarsdóttir et al., 2008; Hopps, 2004; Mitchell et al., 2015), and has not focussed on identifying specific assessment information sharing practices that are adopted. Further, the research has not explored whether the teachers involved are sending and receiving assessment information that is deemed valuable, appropriate and informative in supporting children's learning journeys. The early childhood and primary education sectors traditionally adopt different pedagogical approaches and models of assessment. Therefore, it is important that the perspectives of teachers in these sectors are identified and compared in order to understand and support shared understandings of assessment to facilitate greater continuity of learning (Mitchell et al., 2015).

The research design therefore focussed on obtaining answers to three research questions:

- What assessment information do early childhood and new entrant teachers believe to be important to support children's continuity of learning as they transition to school?
- What are early childhood and new entrant teachers' experiences of sharing assessment information to support children's continuity of learning as they transition to school?
- What assessment practices do early childhood and new entrant teachers currently use to support children's continuity of learning as they transition to school?

### **3.2 Research paradigm**

All research is underpinned by a paradigm or worldview that provides a foundation for the research. In conducting a research study, it is necessary to be clear and transparent about the worldview being used as these beliefs influence the standpoint taken by the researcher (Creswell, 2014).

This research adopted a pragmatic worldview. Pragmatism emphasises looking at, or dealing with, problems in a practical way, rather than by using a structured theory or abstract principles. Approaches and solutions are adopted that work to answer the research questions, rather than emphasising research methods (Creswell, 2014). Adoption of a pragmatic approach allows the researcher to be flexible and utilise a range of tools, beliefs and assumptions to address the research questions (Creswell, 2014). Early in the design phase of the study it

became clear that both quantitative and qualitative data would be required to address the research questions. The research design adopted in this study sits comfortably within a pragmatic paradigm, as design decisions were guided by the notion of best fit. A pragmatic approach acknowledges the limitations of both types of data, yet seeks to use both in a complementary manner (Feilzer, 2010).

### **3.3 Research design**

Within this pragmatic perspective, a research design was required that focussed on effectively answering the three research questions posed. Rich data needed to be gathered that captured and described the perspectives of a significant number of respondents within the target populations. To gather both breadth and depth of data, a survey design was needed that would collect both quantitative and qualitative data. A combination of quantitative and qualitative data was able to capture the beliefs, experiences and practices of the target populations providing a greater understanding of the research problem than by using either quantitative or qualitative approaches alone (Creswell, 2014).

Quantitative data was required to address questions regarding frequency of practices and experiences regarding assessment information sharing, and to measure to an extent teacher's beliefs, experiences and practices for comparative purposes.

What quantitative data alone did not achieve was the ability to investigate further what beliefs underlay the practices. The focus of the research was not only to gather data on specific practices that could be measured discretely, but

for respondents to provide data that explained the reasons behind their beliefs, experiences and practices. The research design needed to gather qualitative data that allowed respondents to provide more in-depth insights into their beliefs, experiences and practices. In the context of the research being undertaken, the qualitative data was seen as complementary to the quantitative data gathered, allowing respondents to provide clarification to their responses and elaborate on their perspectives. Providing opportunities to supply qualitative data offered the opportunity to clarify and expand data findings as opposed to closed quantitative data alone as respondents were not forced to select solely from a pre-determined list and allowed for unexpected responses to be generated (Sue & Ritter, 2012; Tourangeau, Conrad & Couper, 2013).

### **3.4 Data collection**

A survey approach was adopted as this enabled the perspectives of a broad range of teachers to be gathered, and quantitative and qualitative data to be collected in an efficient manner.

#### **3.4.1 Administering surveys**

There are a variety of ways of administering surveys including via telephone, mail and face to face. With the rise of the internet, online surveys have become prevalent with the most widely used form of internet survey being web-based questionnaires due to the availability of computer programs at a low cost (Denscombe, 2014). Online surveys can be administered in a number of ways including an email questionnaire, online groups or web-based questionnaires

(Sue & Ritter, 2012). Web-based surveys are ideal for research that can identify a specific target population who are connected to the internet and a sampling frame exists for the entire population (Callegaro, Lozar Manfreda & Vehovar, 2015). Collecting data using an online survey is a fast, efficient, cost effective method of data collection, with fast data turnaround and with few errors (Regmi, Waithaka, Paudyal, Simkhada & van Teijlingen, 2016; Sue & Ritter, 2012; Toepoel, 2016). Coupled with ease of collection, is the ease of processing and analysis of the data, with online programs providing analytical tools for simple statistical analysis. Online surveys also include the ability to send reminders that increase response rates at very little extra cost (Callegaro, et al, 2015; Sue & Ritter, 2012); increase the speed of response, and reduce costs (Regmi et al., 2016). From an environmental perspective, as Denscombe (2014) explains, sending surveys via email greatly reduces the environmental impact of research, as online surveys do not have a requirement for paper copies to be produced.

Denscombe (2014), highlights three distinct processes in the use of web-based surveys. Firstly, the design of the questionnaire. Using an online tool allows for features to be used that are not available in traditional surveys such as drop-down menus. Secondly, the distribution of the surveys is facilitated through emails and websites. Thirdly, the retrieval of data is conducted automatically with answers transferred into the data file at time of the collection.

### **3.4.2 Online surveys**

The use of online surveys allows for a number of response effects to be reduced, such as social desirability bias, where respondents answer questions in a socially acceptable way (Sue & Ritter, 2012; Tourangeau et al., 2013). The removal of the interviewer through the use of self-administered surveys, provides opportunities for anonymity for respondents that can lead to respondents more readily providing information deemed to be sensitive or potentially controversial. Although the focus of the research was not of a sensitive nature, respondents may have been more willing to be open about challenges in their practice in an anonymous forum. Respondents are more likely to provide honest responses if surveys are self-administered (Tourangeau et al., 2013). Self-administered surveys also allow respondents more time to answer and control the pace of the survey, compared with interviewer led survey, reducing what is known as 'cognitive burden' (Callegaro et al., 2015; Tourangeau et al., 2013).

The validity and reliability of the research data would have been enhanced by the use of an existing questionnaire. At the time the research was undertaken there was no suitable survey instrument to use that satisfied the research questions.

### 3.5 Survey design

Two separate online surveys were designed and distributed, comprising of 28 questions for early childhood teachers (Appendix 1) and 29 questions for new entrant teachers (Appendix 2). An additional question regarding the use of the New Zealand early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki 2017* in the new entrant classroom, was included in the new entrant teacher survey. An important consideration was survey length. There is no definitive guide to an ideal length of a questionnaire but in line with Callegaro et al.'s (2015) recommendation, the design of the survey meant that the time to complete the survey was limited to under twenty minutes.

The first set of questions focussed on gathering demographic and background data related to the respondent's qualifications and teaching experience, geographical location and current teaching roles. The next group of questions focussed on asking about who was currently responsible for initiating the sharing of assessment information, and sought respondent views on who they believed should be responsible for initiating of assessment information sharing. Respondents were also asked about their beliefs around assessment information sharing, notably the benefits, frequency, content, and format of the information shared. A specific question (Question 11) was asked regarding whether information in the form of summative assessment was received or sent to schools as this was an explicit recommendation of good practice highlighted in the Education Review Office report *Continuity of Learning: Transitions from Early Childhood Services to Schools* (ERO, 2015).



Subsequent questions focussed on the barriers to information sharing and whether the assessment information was understood by the new entrant teachers receiving it or perceived to be understood by new entrant teachers from the perspective of early childhood teachers. Respondents views on the usefulness of the assessment information supplied were sought as well as information about whether the assessment information was used, or believed to be used, by new entrant teachers and the reasons for the use or non-use. Respondents were asked about their current levels of satisfaction with assessment information sharing processes and the survey provided respondents with the opportunity to comment on what improvements could be made to the content, format and mode of communication of assessment information.

A section of questions addressed the levels of direct communication between teachers' preceding and subsequent to children starting school. Familiarity with, and use of the New Zealand early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki 2017* in new entrant classrooms was investigated. Additionally, respondents were asked about their understanding of the links between the two education curricula documents, *Te Whāriki* and the *New Zealand Curriculum. Continuity of Learning* (ERO, 2015) The *Continuity of Learning* report, (ERO, 2015) highlighted these areas as important to support continuity of learning for children transitioning to school.

The questions were largely written as closed questions, comprising a combination of dichotomous (yes/no/don't know), multiple choice, 5-point rating scales or ranking questions. Respondents were afforded the opportunity to

elaborate and explain their responses further through the use of text boxes attached to each question. In allowing respondents to elaborate on their responses, the use of a text box also acknowledges that it is not possible to identify all the potential responses that can be selected for a question. The amount of opportunities for open-ended responses was considered with regards to cognitive burden and time commitment for respondents. The use of numerous open-ended questions may impact on the quality of responses with more opportunities for break off or non-responses, (Callegaro et al., 2015), but as Sue and Ritter (2012) report, research findings are mixed. However, it was felt the use of numerous open-ended response boxes was a necessary requirement to fulfil the research objectives. It is argued that a key limitation of self-administered surveys is whether a question adequately measures a concept of interest. By providing respondents the ability to provide comments and clarification of their responses, this can be mitigated.

### **3.6 Ethical considerations**

Prior to undertaking the research, an application was made to the Massey University Human Ethics Committee in order to gain ethics approval. The project was assessed and notified as low risk (Appendix 3). Access to potential respondents was gained in an ethical manner through utilising a publicly available email directory sourced via the Ministry of Education's '*Education Counts*' website. Additional potential respondents were approached via social media groups on Facebook. When invited to complete the survey, respondents received a full and open description of the purpose and nature of the survey and

why it was of benefit as a focus of research (Appendix 4) Respondents were also informed that their participation was voluntary, that they had the right to choose to not answer any, or all questions, and that their completion of the survey was deemed to imply consent.

Confidentiality cannot be absolutely guaranteed but all efforts were made to maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of respondents. The survey was conducted via an online survey tool, *Survey Monkey*, data was held online and only accessible to the researcher through the use of a password. The survey was anonymous meaning that no identifying information was attached to individual survey responses and respondents were not asked to provide any identifying information. Responses were aggregated and care taken that no individual respondent was identified in reporting findings. Data will be stored only for the purpose of the research and will be destroyed five years after the completion of the research project.

### **3.7 Pilot testing**

To ensure the integrity of the research instrument, the survey was pilot tested prior to email invitations being sent. Postgraduate education students participating in an Early Years Research Lab at Massey University were asked to complete the survey and provide feedback to the researcher. Adjustments were made to the surveys on receiving feedback from the pilot respondents with regards to the categories of teacher qualifications identified and question/answer ambiguity.

### **3.8 Participants and recruitment**

This study invited the participation of two groups of educators in the wider Canterbury region; early childhood teachers and new entrant teachers directly involved or experienced in working with children transitioning to school. Both of these groups of educators play a significant role in supporting the transition of young children from early childhood services into formal schooling, and yet there is a dearth of research that identifies what their beliefs, experiences and practices are, particularly with regards to the sharing of assessment information. It was essential to capture the perspectives of both groups, and to consider points of similarity and difference. The intent of the research was to target those directly involved in the process; early childhood teachers working with four and five-year-old children and new entrant teachers who received and taught children starting school for the first time, irrespective of the year make-up of their class. These parameters then defined the potential participant group.

#### **3.8.1 Participant recruitment**

Respondents were recruited via invitation emails (Appendix 5) sent to early childhood centres and schools in Canterbury, drawing from the publicly available early childhood and school directories supplied on the *Education Counts* website. These directories provide lists of all early childhood services and schools within New Zealand and contact details for these providers. From these lists, a convenience sample was selected in order to make the data collection manageable. The email invitation was sent to all teacher-led early childhood centres in Canterbury region, as well as all state schools. The

decision was-made to omit parent-led services such as homebased care and playcentres, as well as immersion Māori and Pasifika services. The selection of Canterbury as the geographical region reflects the location of the researcher, as well as providing a large sample size that was manageable for the nature of a master's research project.

The research was reliant on the accuracy of the education databases and email addresses contained within them. It was inevitable that a proportion of email addresses were out of date or obsolete and there would be omissions creating 'bounce backs'.

### **3.8.2 Email invitation**

The email invitation was sent to the email address listed in the directory, which may have been a school or centre leader/manager/administrator. The email recipients were asked to further distribute the survey invitation to the relevant teachers in their settings; those that worked with the 4-5 year-old children experiencing transition. A consideration of the digital age we now live in is the concept of digital overload (Denscombe, 2014) where people are in receipt of many email requests that compete for their attention. Consequently, invitations were sent to contacts at the beginning of the school year. This strategy aimed to prevent the invitations being missed or forgotten at the end of the school year. The research also relied on the invitations being disseminated by the initial contact to other eligible teachers. A disadvantage of distributing emails to individuals and organisations without whom the researcher has a relationship, is the recipient ignoring the email, failing to share with eligible participants, or the

recipient computer server rejecting the initial email, interpreting it as spam (Sue & Ritter, 2012).

The invitation provided information regarding the purpose and nature of the research, as well as a more detailed information sheet that described the research questions, data management and ethics. As part of the email invitation potential respondents were given a direct link to the online survey, hosted by the online survey tool *Survey Monkey*. Two separate surveys were created, one for each sector. The two versions of the survey closely mirrored each other in intent and content, to support later analysis and comparison.

In order to gain the support of relevant potential respondents to engage with the survey process, the email invitation emphasised the value and importance of the research to teachers in both sectors, in order to promote the idea of 'social exchange' (Dillman, Smyth & Christian, 2009, p. 44). The concept of social exchange argues that potential respondents are more likely to comply with requests if they believe and trust the rewards of completing the survey outweigh the costs (Sue & Ritter, 2012).

### **3.8.3 Response rates**

The challenge for any survey is non-response rates and it is claimed that online surveys have lower response rates than traditional methods of data collection (Tourangeau et al., 2013). There appears to be no benchmark of what constitutes acceptable levels of response for online surveys but it is suggested that researchers look at response rates of similar surveys (Denscombe, 2014). However, at the time the research was undertaken there were no comparable

surveys or response rates. In addition to a quality design and targeting appropriate people, response rates can be increased by the appropriate timing and number of reminder emails, as the research can experience diminishing returns (Callegaro et al., 2015). The research followed the recommendations of sending two emails; the initial invitation and then a reminder, with the second email sent two weeks after the original invitation (Callegaro et al., 2015; Sue & Ritter, 2012). Emails were sent in the middle of the week rather than the beginning of the week when respondents were likely to be busier (Sue & Ritter, 2012).

The survey response rates relied not only on making contact with potential respondents but co-operation from the target population. Non-completion or break off rates are more common for self-administered surveys than interviewer led surveys. To mitigate this, the value of the research was emphasised in the invitations and the survey length was kept to under 20 minutes.

#### **3.8.4 Data collection period**

Data was collected between February 2018 and April 2018. The initial invitations yielded mixed response rates. For the early childhood survey, a total of 20 responses were received of which 17 met eligibility criteria. The new entrant survey yielded only three responses, necessitating further promotion of the survey via the use of the social media platform *Facebook*. A *Facebook* group designed for new entrant teachers was targeted and this boosted the response rates considerably. In total 60 responses were received, however only 13 of these were from teachers in the Canterbury region. For both data sets

responses for teachers outside the Canterbury region were removed prior to analysis.

### **3.9 Data analysis**

The results of the two surveys were analysed separately before being compared with each other in order to identify emerging similarities and differences. The data from each survey comprised quantitative and qualitative data that required different methods of analysis. The two sets of survey data were exported to Microsoft Excel and prior to analysis, data from both surveys was cleaned to remove responses received from participants outside the Canterbury region. The removal was determined by answers provided to a question requiring respondents to state where they currently resided. One respondent to the early childhood survey who taught outside the target age range was also removed. The final data sets used for analysis comprised 16 early childhood respondents and 13 school respondents.

#### **3.9.1 Quantitative analysis**

The quantitative data was analysed using simple statistics to summarise and describe the data. Measures of frequency including counts and percentages were calculated for both sets of data to enable comparisons between the surveys.



### **3.9.2 Qualitative analysis**

The qualitative data was analysed using thematic coding and content analysis. Thematic coding sits within the research design as thematic analysis is not tied to any particular paradigm (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process was inductive and iterative allowing the researcher to develop codes from the data rather than working to a prewritten codebook (Braun & Clarke, 2006), at the same time acknowledging the influence and experience the researcher brings to the research.

Once the raw data had been cleaned, the researcher went about familiarising themselves with the data by reading and rereading of the data. Categories or codes were then created identifying important features of the data. Through analysis of the codes, themes were developed and critiqued using the underlying data to justify or redefine the themes and compared within the parameters of the research question. The themes were then named and defined with the themes from in the separate surveys compared and contrasted for similarities and discrepancies.

### **3.10 Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined the use of a survey approach to collect and analyse qualitative and quantitative data to explore early childhood and new entrant teachers' beliefs experiences and practices regarding the sharing of assessment information to support children's transition to school. Data were collected via separate online surveys from teachers in both sectors in the Canterbury region. The data were then analysed using descriptive statistics and

thematical techniques with the results compared and contrasted. The next chapter presents the key findings generated from the analysis of the data.

## **Chapter Four: Findings**

This chapter outlines the results of the online surveys from Canterbury early childhood respondents, (referred to as EC respondents) and new entrant respondents (NE respondents). The chapter begins by outlining demographic data relating to the survey respondents, followed by reporting of the benefits of sharing assessment information, levels of satisfaction with current practices and an identification of the barriers to sharing of assessment information.

Respondent views regarding responsibility for sharing of assessment information and channels used for communicating assessment information are explored before the frequency of sharing and the nature of assessment information shared is identified. The following sections look at respondents' beliefs regarding their levels of understanding of the assessment information shared, beliefs and practices around how information is used, and views of the usefulness of assessment information. The final section highlights recommendations suggested by respondents to improve the sharing of assessment information before the findings are drawn to a conclusion.

Direct quotes from respondents are used to illustrate the qualitative data and affirm the emerging themes. For clarity, all respondents have been allocated a sector-based identifier. Early childhood respondents are identified as (EC) and new entrant respondents as (NE).

## **4.1 Demographic data**

To gain an understanding of the characteristics of the sample, respondents were asked to identify their highest level of qualifications, years of teaching experience and current roles.

### **4.1.1 Qualifications and teaching experience**

All respondents held approved teaching qualifications, as required for their sector. The most prevalent qualification for both groups was the Diploma of Teaching with 44% of EC respondents and 46% of NE respondents respectively reporting holding these qualifications. The Bachelor of Teaching (ECE) was held by 25% of EC respondents and Bachelor of Teaching (Primary) held by a further 15% of NE respondents. Postgraduate qualifications were held by 25% of EC respondents and 30% of NE respondents. Respondents to both surveys indicated extensive teaching experience with 81% of EC respondents and 75% of NE respondents respectively indicating they had taught for more than 10 years.

### **4.1.2 Roles of survey respondents**

In relation to roles, respondents to the EC survey (69%) held predominantly managerial roles, however it should be noted that the role of head teacher in many early childhood services comprises a combination of administrative and managerial duties in addition to time involved in direct teaching. 39% of NE respondents held management roles, including as syndicate leaders, a principal and Head of Primary.

## **4.2 Benefits of sharing assessment information**

Respondents to both surveys were asked to rank the benefits of sharing assessment information. The highest ranked benefit reported by both groups was "*supporting children and their families to experience a smooth transition to school*" by 50% of EC and 31% of NE respondents respectively. NE respondents also rated "*fast tracking of funding for children with additional needs*" as equally important. Both groups felt that "*knowing whether a child is ready for school*" as the least important benefit, with only one EC respondent and one NE respondent ranking this option as the most important benefit of sharing information.

## **4.3 Satisfaction levels**

Respondents were asked to indicate how satisfied they were with current assessment information sharing practices. As shown in Table 1 (p.65) the satisfaction levels varied considerably within and between groups of respondents. EC respondents reported mixed views with 57% of respondents stating they were "*satisfied*" or "*very satisfied*". However, 38% stated they were "*dissatisfied*" with current practices, a view widely held by their NE counterparts. Sixty-nine percent of NE respondents reported they were "*dissatisfied*" or "*very dissatisfied*" with current practices. Only one NE respondent expressed satisfaction.

**Table 1. *Levels of satisfaction with current assessment information sharing practices.***

<b>Level of satisfaction</b>	<b>Number of EC respondents</b>	<b>Number of NE respondents</b>
Very satisfied	3	0
Satisfied	6	1
Unsure	1	1
Dissatisfied	5	5
Very dissatisfied	1	4
Not answered	0	2
<i>Note</i>	N=16	N=13

#### **4.4 Barriers to sharing of assessment information**

Barriers to sharing assessment information were reported by both survey groups, with differing perspectives on what these barriers were and the degree of significance attributed to these barriers. Fifty per cent of the EC respondents reported that the biggest barrier experienced to sharing of assessment information were their limited relationships with schools. Relationships with teachers in the early childhood sector was not perceived as a barrier by most NE respondents, with only 15% of respondents reporting limited relationships as a barrier experienced when sharing assessment information.

EC respondents reported a lack of understanding by schools of the early childhood curriculum and assessment practices (54%) as a barrier, a view not supported by the majority of the NE respondents. Seventy-six percent of NE respondents indicated they had a good understanding of the early childhood

curriculum and 60% reported understanding of the links between *Te Whāriki's* learning dispositions and the *New Zealand Curriculum's* Key Competencies. One third of respondents in both sectors believed that concerns regarding privacy and a lack of time were the main barriers to sharing information. Time to visit centres was reported as a barrier by NE respondents as highlighted by this quote: "I actively seek to form bonds with the centres, but with seven possible "feeder" centres it is hard to make time to visit all during my CRT [classroom release time] time" (NE3).

#### **4.5 Responsibility for initiating the sharing of assessment information**

Respondents to the surveys were asked to identify the individuals who *were* currently responsible for initiating the sharing of assessment information. In addition, their views were sought as to who they believed *should be* responsible for initiating information sharing.

##### **4.5.1 Current responsibility for information sharing**

The two sectors had very different views as to who they believed currently held the responsibility for initiating the sharing assessment information, as shown in Table 2 (p. 67). Eighty-eight percent of EC respondents indicated that they, or early childhood management, held the responsibility. EC respondents believed families and whānau had lesser involvement in the sharing process, with a third of EC respondents indicating families and whānau had direct involvement in the sharing of the assessment information.

**Table 2. *Current responsibility for initiating the sharing of assessment information.***

<b>Individuals responsible</b>	<b>Number of EC respondents</b>	<b>Number of NE respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of EC respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of NE respondents</b>
Teachers in EC	14	5	88	38
Management in EC	5	2	31	15
Teachers in schools	2	4	13	31
Management in schools	0	4	0	31
Families/whānau	5	7	31	54

*Note.* Respondents were able to choose from more than one category.

NE respondents reported different information sharing experiences from their early childhood counterparts. Thirty-eight percent of NE respondents indicated that teachers in early childhood were responsible for the sharing of information. In contrast to the EC respondents, 54% of the NE respondents indicated that families and whānau were the group most responsible for initiating the sharing of assessment information, as highlighted in the following quote: “This is generally supplied by the parents of the child who is transitioning” (NE6).

#### **4.5.2 Beliefs about responsibility for information sharing**

Respondents from both sectors were asked to share their beliefs about who *should be* responsible for initiating the sharing of assessment information (Table 3, p. 69). Respondents from both sectors indicated that they believed the main



instigators should be teachers in early childhood. However, 75% of the EC respondents expressed the view that teachers in schools should have an almost equal level of responsibility. However, fewer NE respondents believed that they themselves had a responsibility, with only 46% of NE respondents indicating that they believed they should be responsible for initiating the sharing of assessment information.

In addition to teachers in both sectors having joint responsibility for information sharing, the majority of respondents from both sectors believed that parents/whānau had a responsibility to share assessment information. Sixty-nine percent of EC respondents and 54% of NE respondents believed that families should have responsibility for sharing assessment information. Issues of privacy were a recurring theme, as shared in the following quote: “They (ECE teachers) tell us frequently that they are bound by confidentiality” (NE9). EC respondents reported that they advise parents to share the information rather than sharing directly themselves, due to privacy concerns and time constraints but acknowledged they could be more proactive in encouraging parents to share the information.

**Table 3. Beliefs about responsibility for initiating the sharing of assessment information**

Individuals responsible	Number of EC respondents	Number of NE respondents	Percentage of EC respondents	Percentage of NE respondents
<i>Teachers in EC</i>	14	10	88	77
<i>Management in EC</i>	4	6	25	46
<i>Teachers in schools</i>	12	6	75	46
<i>Management in schools</i>	2	2	13	15
<i>Families/whānau</i>	11	7	69	54

*Note.* Respondents were able to choose from more than one category.

#### **4.6 Communication channels used for information sharing**

Survey respondents were asked to identify the channels of communication used to share assessment information. The channels identified varied considerably between the two sectors, with verbal communication, either face to face or by telephone, reported as the most widely used method for sharing assessment information by 15 of the EC respondents (94%). Statements such as the following outlined how verbal communication was used: "At the moment teachers talk informally to teachers at school. Parents talk to teachers before and when the child starts school. If any other information is needed the teachers from school contact the ECE centre" (EC7).

In contrast, NE respondents reported verbal communication as a minor channel of communication, with only 38% of respondents indicating this was a method of communication they used. Eighty-five percent of NE respondents reported physical documentation as the most prevalent method of sharing assessment information, making statements such as: "we really only get this information through the profile books" (NE10).

#### **4.7 Frequency of information sharing**

Respondents were asked to identify the frequency with which they either shared or received assessment information. Survey respondents indicated contrasting patterns with regards to the reported frequency of information sharing. Findings suggest information was more likely to be shared where communication and collaborative relationships had been established between the sectors or when children transitioning to school had additional learning needs. Table 4 (p. 71) compares the frequency of information sharing practices as reported by the respondents in each sector. Wide disparities in the reported frequency of sharing of information were noted. Fifty-six percent of EC respondents reported sharing information on a regular basis. However, 44% indicated they shared information "*occasionally*", "*almost never*", or "*never*". EC respondents believed the onus was on families to share, as communicated in the following statement: "we encourage parents to share their child's profile book with the new entrant teachers" (EC13). EC respondents reported their belief that teachers in schools should be responsible for initiating requests to early childhood services to provide information, noting that "as very little information is sought we rarely send anything out" (EC8).

**Table 4. *Frequency of information sharing***

<b>Frequency of sharing</b>	<b>Number of EC respondents</b>	<b>Number of NE respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of EC respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of NE respondents</b>
<i>Every time</i>	4	1	25	8
<i>Almost every time</i>	5	0	31	0
<i>Occasionally</i>	3	5	19	38
<i>Almost never</i>	1	4	6	31
<i>Never</i>	3	3	19	23
<i>Note</i>	N=16	N=13		

NE respondents reported receiving information rarely with only one respondent reporting receiving assessment information on a regular basis. Privacy issues were cited as a significant reason for not receiving information, with respondents making statements such as: "...very rarely receive any assessment information from ECE teachers and often get told that they are not allowed to share information" (NE10).

Respondents from both sectors indicated that contact between services and schools is more likely to occur when children who have additional needs are transitioning to school. Early childhood respondents reported providing schools with information regarding children who require help toileting, have speech or language delays and/or children with behavioural concerns. NE respondents reported contact came about as a consequence of the involvement of specialist

services to develop coherent transition plans for children with additional learning needs, with statements such as the following providing evidence of respondent's experiences: "I never receive any records, paperwork for any child unless they have had speech funding or a referral." (NE3). Sixty-nine percent of school respondents reported contacting EC services after a child has started school if the child presents with behavioural concerns, with this practice experienced by 63% of EC respondents.

#### **4.8 The nature of assessment information shared**

Respondents were asked to indicate the types of assessment information shared and received.

##### **4.8.1 Transition information shared and received.**

EC respondents indicated sharing a broad range of information. Across all categories, at least 50% of the EC respondents indicated that they shared assessment information relating to the categories detailed as shown in Table 5 (p.73). By comparison, less than half of the NE respondents indicated receiving information across the eleven categories.

**Table 5. Nature of information shared**

<b>Information shared</b>	<b>Number of EC respondents</b>	<b>Number of NE respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of EC respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of EC respondents</b>
<i>Additional needs</i>	14	5	88	38
<i>Social/emotional</i>	13	6	81	46
<i>Interests/strengths</i>	12	6	75	46
<i>Self-help skills</i>	11	5	69	38
<i>Language/ communication</i>	10	5	63	38
<i>Dispositions</i>	10	5	63	38
<i>General knowledge</i>	10	3	63	23
<i>Emerging literacy</i>	8	6	50	46
<i>Emerging numeracy</i>	8	6	50	46
<i>Physical development</i>	8	4	50	31
<i>Fine motor skills</i>	8	4	50	31

*Note.* Respondents were able to choose from more than one category.

The most prevalent type of information reported as being shared by EC respondents was information regarding children with additional needs (88%) and information regarding children's social and emotional development (81%). In the four most prevalent categories reported by NE respondents, social and emotional development, children's interests and strengths, emerging literacy

and emerging numeracy development, were the most commonly reported areas in which information was received, with 46% of respondents indicated receiving this type of information.

The sharing of information regarding children's interests and strengths and learning dispositions were reported by 75% and 63% of EC respondents respectively. This contrasts with NE respondents who reported receiving these types of information significantly less frequently, at 46% and 38% respectively. The least reported categories by EC respondents were those pertaining to academic skills, such as children's emerging literacy and numeracy development and their physical development, both gross and fine motor skill. These areas were amongst the most reported types of information received by the NE respondents.

#### **4.8.2 Sharing of summative assessment information**

In light of the *Continuity of Learning* report (ERO, 2015) recommendation that NE teachers receive a summative assessment for a child transitioning to school, a further question was asked focusing on the frequency of sharing of summative assessment information. EC respondents reported mixed practices in regard to sharing this form of assessment documentation, with nine of the sixteen respondents (56%) indicating they shared summative assessments "*every time*" or "*almost every time*". EC respondents reported that they believed that families should take the responsibility for sharing this information with schools due to concerns regarding privacy and confidentiality, as indicated in the following

quote: "all children transitioning have one, we rely on parental permission to share with school" (EC5).

In contrast, five EC respondents reported rarely sending summative assessment information, with one respondent expressing the view that they did not agree philosophically with the notion of summative assessment, stating that "summative assessment is a very formal way of looking at a child's transition to school. Teachers should feel open to communicating freely and openly and with every format possible to them" (EC1).

NE respondents reported rarely receiving summative assessment information with four respondents reporting receiving a summative assessment "almost never" and six others "never". Only one NE respondent reported frequently receiving a summative assessment, and respondents appeared unaware of the recommendation that this information should be produced as indicated by the following quote:

With four early childhood centres, two play centres and sometimes children attending preschool further afield, in one year I could have 14 children at school entry from seven different organisations and I've never received a summarised assessment in the four years I've been in my role at this school. (NE3).



## **4.9 Understanding and using the information supplied**

EC respondents were asked whether they believed the assessment information supplied was understood by the NE teachers. Additionally, they were asked their views about how they believed the information was used. Conversely NE respondents were asked to identify their levels of understanding of the information and how they used the information supplied.

### **4.9.1 New entrant understandings of assessment information: EC beliefs**

A lack of communication, in particular feedback to early childhood services from schools, has resulted in EC respondents being unsure if the assessment information they share is either understood or used. When asked if they believed NE teachers understood the assessment information sent to schools, 50% of EC respondents indicated that they did not know if the information sent is understood. However, no NE respondents indicated that they did not understand the information sent.

### **4.9.2 New entrant teachers understanding of the early childhood curriculum: EC beliefs**

EC respondents reported that they believed that understanding of assessment documentation occurs when NE teachers have an understanding of the early childhood curriculum, as articulated in the following quotes: "If the entrant teacher is familiar with learning dispositions I feel they should be able to understand what our centre send(s). It is in plain language with descriptions and examples" (EC14) and "we feed into five primary schools, those that have an

understanding of our curriculum document appreciate our reports" (EC15).

Some respondents reported that where communication and collaboration occur between centre and school, increased understanding is fostered, as shared by respondent EC16 who stated that: "we held a meeting with all schools and ECE in our area to help bridge the gaps between how we assess and how they assess – we each have a better understanding of each other's priorities because of this".

#### **4.9.3 How assessment information is used: EC beliefs**

The EC respondents reported being unsure about whether the assessment information they shared was used by NE teachers, with 56% of EC respondents unsure if the assessment information they send to schools is used. Statements such as "I have seen no evidence to suggest school use our assessment information to their or the child's advantage" (EC4) provide evidence of the respondents experiences.

EC respondents reported that if information is used they believed it was used primarily to inform NE teachers of a child's strengths and interests (69%). Other perceived uses included using the information as a settling tool (63%), and to plan for individual children (50%) as indicated by this statement: "I have seen first-hand teachers coming in and reading the child's profile books with them and then taking ideas from their books to add to the classroom" (EC1).

When asked why they thought the assessment information they shared was not used, 44% of the EC respondents reported that they believed NE teachers like

to make their own judgements regarding children. In addition, 19% reported that they believed that the information shared is not valued or trusted by NE teachers because of a poor perception of the role and importance of early childhood education by other teachers and wider society, as highlighted in the comment: "some do value it. Others do not and don't value EC teachers input preferring to make those judgements themselves" (EC 5).

Another EC respondent explained that:

misconceptions by many people in society that think we are just babysitters and my colleagues have shared comments from primary teachers they have heard in the past saying ECE don't prepare tamariki for school enough. This and a lack of understanding about our curriculum may lead to a lack of trust in ECE viewpoint. We talk as a team regularly about trying to change societal perceptions of ECE, so that it is seen with more value (EC14).

#### **4.9.4 How assessment information is used: New entrant experiences**

The main reason identified by 31% of NE respondents for not using assessment information was that it was not received. When information is received, NE respondents aligned with EC respondents as to how information is used. Sixty-two percent of NE respondents reported using the information to inform them about a child's strengths and interests. Additionally, information is used to engage with whānau by 62% of the EC respondents and as a settling tool by 54%. While 50% of the EC respondents believed that the information was used

to plan for individual children, only 23% of NE respondents indicated that they used the information in this way. Twenty three percent of NE respondents concurred with EC respondents that a reason for not using assessment information was that they preferred to make their own judgements, sharing that: "I like to create my own picture of the child" (NE10).

#### **4.10 Usefulness of transition information**

Respondents views regarding the usefulness of the information sent and received was sought. Contrasting views were held by the two groups of respondents regarding the usefulness of the assessment information shared. EC respondents strongly believed that the information they shared is of use to schools with 88% of EC respondents indicating that the information they share is "*useful*", "*quite useful*" or "*very useful*".

However, NE respondents reported that they do not receive the type of information they require. In contrast to the EC responses, 46% of the NE respondents reported the information received as "*somewhat useful*" (15%), or "*not useful*" (31%). For example, one NE respondent stated: "from my experience preschools have not connected well with schools and asked what info the school would find most helpful" (NE12). Criticisms reported by NE respondents included that the information received was vague, or too focused on strengths and interests while omitting information that is deemed as 'negative'. Evidence of these beliefs is provided in the following quotes: "have to read between the lines it is not specific"(NE10) and "I read it, but it isn't always helpful; can be a bit fluffy and "nice", doesn't always get the real issues" (NE12).

A minority of respondents, 39%, indicated that the information they receive is "*quite useful*" (8%) or "*very useful*"(31%). Fifteen percent of NE respondents expressed no opinion.

#### **4.11 Curriculum continuity**

Research in New Zealand and internationally has identified the importance of curriculum continuity to support effective transitions for children transitioning to school (ERO, 2015). Respondent's views regarding continuity of learning were sought with regards to the links between and blending of the curriculum documents and the use of *Te Whāriki* in new entrant classrooms.

##### **4.11.1 Links between the curriculum documents**

Continuity of learning via the use of curriculum documents was widely reported by respondents from both sectors. Fourteen of the EC respondents indicated that they were familiar with the links between *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017) and the *New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007). Several of the EC respondents commented that they used the links between the documents to support curriculum planning and assessment for children transitioning to school:

As a child gets closer to transitioning to school we assess with the school curriculum in mind and have a checklist which is formulated from *Te Whāriki* and school curriculum/new entrant needs. The new *Te Whāriki* is fantastic because it has the NZ curriculum links in it for each strand and these can be used for planning and learning story assessment (EC2); and

The new *Te Whāriki* gives the links to the NZC very clearly, I incorporate NZC where appropriate in our programme and use the key competencies and learning areas in our planning and sometimes use the terminology in the children's stories (EC1).

#### **4.11.2 Use of *Te Whāriki* in schools**

Respondents were asked their opinions regarding the use of *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 2017) in the new entrant classroom. There was widespread support for its use by respondents from both sectors with 88% of EC and 85% of NE respondents respectively reporting that the early childhood curriculum has a place in the new entrant classroom, as indicated by this comment: "Te whāriki covers development and learning up to the age of 6. Many children in NZ start school before this age so there is a "shared year" of the two curricula" (EC3). NE respondents were asked an additional question regarding their current use of *Te Whāriki* with 54% of the NE respondents reporting using the early childhood curriculum regularly in their classrooms.

#### **4.11.3 Blending of curriculum documents**

Respondents across the sectors believe that both curriculum documents should be used together. They acknowledged the importance of fusing the two curriculum documents to support continuity of learning: as suggested by respondent (EC4): "a blend of both might help in ensuring a smooth transition for children" (EC4). Another NE respondent compared the information sharing process to ongoing medical care: " ...like nurses handing over patients at the end of a shift" (NE2). Other respondents noted the overlaps in terms of children's ages

between the two documents with *Te Whāriki* designed for children to the age of six and the *New Zealand Curriculum* commencing at the age of five.

#### **4.12 Recommendations for improvements**

Respondents from both sectors suggested a number of areas where information sharing practices could be improved including communication and collaboration, the content of the information shared, the provision of guidelines and making information sharing obligatory.

##### **4.12.1 Improved communication and collaboration between the sectors.**

EC sector respondents reported wanting to see more collaboration and links between the two education sectors. Two EC respondents highlighted how collaboration could improve the effectiveness of information sharing: "having feedback from schools as to what they would want included and how we can best provide that so that we could design a format together" (EC8); "input from NE teachers about what they want to know" (EC5). This view was shared by the NE respondents as indicated by the following response: "I would be happy to work alongside ECE colleagues to arrive at an agreed format and content to suit purpose" (NE7). Two EC respondents expressed the desire to take the responsibility for sharing away from families/whānau and to collaborate directly with schools: "we do leave it in the hands of the parents to pass on info, so this could be strengthened by direct contact with teacher" (EC2).

#### **4.12.2 Content and format of information shared**

NE respondents' views on how the sharing of assessment information could be improved focused on the delivery and content of the information shared. NE respondents' main desire was to enhance the frequency of receiving information, as three respondents reported that they did not receive anything at present, with a further nine receiving information on an ad hoc basis. NE respondents also reported wanting to receive information prior to a child starting school, in a simple format with many suggesting utilising digital channels. Some NE respondents wanted to receive information that was less generic in nature and which focused on children's social and emotional competence. NE respondents indicated that they believed that information should be supplied that not only identified children's strengths but also highlighted learning difficulties, making statements such as "I would like honest and relevant information on social, emotional and communication skills" (NE9). One EC respondent concurred, noting that "at present it is strengths-based and teachers have to read between the lines or see what has been omitted to gauge where the child is at" (EC 5).

#### **4.12.3 Provision of guidelines**

Respondents from both sectors reported an interest in having specific guidelines to support the sharing of assessment information, with 69% of EC respondents and 69% percent of NE respondents indicating such an interest. Respondents from both sectors suggested the development of a standardised "template" that would provide consistent assessment information as indicated by the following statements: "it would be beneficial for a universal document for



us all to refer to and use. Simple and clear set of transfer details/information relating to the learner dispositions, interests and useful data" (NE7); and "I think that if we had a template to use nationwide then all ECE services are supplying the same information, new entrant teachers may understand this better if we used the same jargon" (EC15).

#### **4.12.4 Making information sharing compulsory**

Other respondents suggested making communication a requirement. For example respondent NE7 commented that "effective communication between the 2 providers should be statutory" and NE2 asked "it is only recommended. Should it be compulsory?" One NE respondent expressed a desire to make the sharing of information compulsory, noting the expectations to share information exist in other areas of the education sector: "It would be great to have a 'requirement' that this happens. Primary school pupil transfers have to include 'passing on' of all data for the pupil to ensure the new school has access to this vital information" (NE7).

#### **4.13 Conclusion**

This chapter has reported the results of EC and NE respondent surveys identifying the beliefs, experiences and practices of both groups with regards to the sharing of assessment information for children transitioning to school. The findings highlight differences within and across sectors. Areas of congruence included the benefits of assessment information and curriculum continuity. Areas of difference include the frequency of sharing and receipt of assessment information, the communication channels and individual responsible for sharing

assessment information, and the usefulness and uses of assessment information. Both sectors expressed differing levels of satisfaction and made a number of suggestions as to how the sharing of assessment information can be improved. The following chapter discusses these findings in light of the current body of literature.

## **Chapter Five: Discussion and conclusion**

The aim of this study was to gather data relating to the beliefs, experiences and practices of EC and NE teachers regarding the sharing of assessment information for children transitioning to school. Survey responses from both EC and NE teachers have offered insight into the way these teachers view the transition between early childhood services and schools, and in the particular, the nature of assessment sharing to support transition and continuity of learning. The findings from this study suggest there are areas of significant difference between the beliefs, experiences and practices of EC and NE teachers.

This chapter discusses the significance and implications of the main findings identified in chapter four, in consideration of the extant literature. In structuring the discussion, the data sets are initially considered separately, highlighting what is important to each group of teachers, before exploring the areas of similarity and differences between the two groups of teachers, with regards to their beliefs, experiences and practices of assessment and presents ideas from the sectors to improve information sharing processes. Recommendations for policy makers, teachers and management in both sectors are presented. The strengths and limitations of the study are discussed before areas for future research are identified. The chapter concludes with a final personal reflection and conclusion.

At the heart of the discussion are the research questions initially posed:

- What assessment information do early childhood and new entrant teachers believe to be important to support children's continuity of learning as they transition to school?
- What are early childhood and new entrant teachers' experiences of sharing assessment information to support children's continuity of learning as they transition to school? and,
- What assessment practices do early childhood and new entrant teachers currently use to support children's continuity of learning as they transition to school?

## **5.1 Key early childhood sector findings**

This study provided an opportunity to capture deeper understandings of early childhood teachers' perspectives of information sharing to support children transitioning from their services to schools. Key findings highlighted a variety of information sharing practices are undertaken and suggests that respondents valued the importance of information sharing with their primary colleagues but experienced a range of barriers in fostering successful and effective communication with their school counterparts.

### **5.1.1 Frequency of information sharing**

One of the most significant findings from the early childhood survey data was a lack of consistent information sharing practices by EC services with schools. Only one half of EC respondents indicated sending information to schools regularly, with the remaining respondents indicating they shared information on

ad hoc basis. These findings echo the work of Gray (2014) who also found that less than 50 percent of EC teachers shared information with schools. For some EC respondents in this study, there was an expectation that they would be approached by NE teachers with their information needs, concurring with Alaçam and Olgan, (2016) who suggested that many EC services only share transition information if schools have requested information. It is worth noting that EC respondents reported information sharing was more likely to occur when a child had been identified as requiring additional learning or behavioural support. It appears that information sharing is more likely to occur if external professionals are involved in the transition process.

#### **5.1.2 Curriculum continuity**

The revised early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* in addition to the *New Zealand Curriculum*, emphasises the importance of continuity of learning through the connections between the documents and respondents reported a willingness to use both *Te Whāriki* and the *New Zealand Curriculum* in the EC sector to support children's lifelong learning journey. EC respondents reported that the emphasis placed on continuity of learning in the revised early childhood curriculum has led to them to use the transition section of *Te Whāriki* to support curriculum planning and assessment. This group of respondents expressed widespread support for *Te Whāriki* to be used in the new entrant classroom to support continuity of learning, supporting the recommendation of the AGoEL (2015) but believed that the early childhood curriculum was not well understood by NE teachers.

### **5.1.3 Levels of satisfaction**

EC respondents reported mixed levels of satisfaction with current processes and practices. In this study it appears that satisfaction is greater, and more frequent information sharing practices occurred, when EC respondents took responsibility for initiating the sharing of transition information and developed collaborative relationships with NE teachers. In contrast, lower levels of information sharing occurred when teachers in the early childhood sector placed the onus on other stakeholders, notably parents, to take the initiative to share information. This finding supports previous research undertaken by Timperley and Robinson (2002) who reported that EC respondents expressed dissatisfaction with sharing processes and wanted schools and parents to take more responsibility for sharing transition information.

### **5.1.4 Barriers to information sharing**

The nature (or lack of) of existing relationships with schools was identified as a significant barrier in terms of EC respondents sharing assessment information with schools. The AGoEL (2015) reported a lack of relationships between the sectors as a barrier to continuity of learning. A number of EC respondents in this study believed that NE teachers held negative perceptions of the EC sector. Furthermore, a number of EC respondents believed that the information they produced may not be used by NE teachers because they either did not trust the information, or NE teachers preferred to make their own judgements about children. Such a view was also evident in Ashton et al.'s (2008) and Hopps' (2004) studies where primary teachers expressed a lack of appreciation and understanding of the EC sector.

### **5.1.5 Collaboration and communication**

EC respondents reported understanding the need to take responsibility for sharing information, yet they held a strong belief that information sharing should be a collaborative effort involving all stakeholders in the process. Findings indicate that EC respondents held an expectation that parents should have the main responsibility for sharing information about their child with teachers in the primary sector. This finding suggests a contradiction with the views expressed in Mitchell et al.'s (2015) research where parents reported an expectation that information about children's learning would be shared directly by the EC sector. As Gray (2014) and Hopps (2004) have reported, privacy concerns are a significant reason for responsibility for information sharing being placed with parents and this was frequently cited by the respondents in this study. As Ahtola et al. (2016) indicate, teachers in the early childhood sector cannot rely on parents to pass the information between sectors as parents may place a low priority on sharing information. A number of EC respondents expressed the view that if privacy concerns were clarified, that they would be willing to consider taking the responsibility for sharing information out of the hands of parents.

EC respondents to the survey reported that they communicated with teachers in schools yet there appears to be potential issues with the effectiveness of that communication. A lack of feedback from NE teachers has led to the EC respondents being unaware of how teachers in the school sector utilise the transition information produced. The EC respondents reported that they believed the information they send to schools is of use and is used by schools,

yet also acknowledged having little evidence to support this belief due to a lack of communication between the sectors.

## **5.2 Key new entrant findings**

The study allowed for the gathering of NE teacher perspectives related to the way in which they received and utilised assessment information from contributing early childhood services. In general, the findings from the NE respondents suggested that they were dissatisfied with the current information sharing practices, highlighting a lack of receipt of information as a significant barrier. Information, when received, may not be seen as useful and was infrequently used for planning purposes. NE respondents expressed that they were keen to receive information, requesting a more formalised approach to information sharing between the sectors.

### **5.2.1 Frequency of receipt of transition information**

The most significant issue for this group of respondents was the non-receipt of transition information from the early childhood sector, despite teachers in schools reporting that written information sharing was a useful transition activity (Einarsdóttir et al., 2008; Rous et al., 2009). The findings from this study support those of Einarsdóttir et al. (2008), Gray (2014) and Hopps-Wallis and Perry (2017) who reported that a major challenge for school teachers is receiving assessment information regularly. The sharing of summative assessment information was even less likely to occur, concurring with Peters et al. (2015) who found only one third of centres generated summative information. These findings are striking given that information sharing, including



summative assessments, are an expectation embedded in key Ministry documents and evidence of good practice that supports continuity of learning (ERO, 2015; MoE, 2017).

The NE respondents acknowledged that information sharing was more likely to occur when children who have additional learning needs are transitioning to school, perhaps because of the involvement of external services. This finding concurs with previous research that suggested that school teachers viewed the sharing of information for children with additional needs as extremely important and expressed an expectation that this should occur (Ashton et al., 2008; Gray, 2014; Thorsen et al., 2006).

### **5.2.2 Curriculum continuity**

It is imperative that schools have information about children's prior learning and that schools understand the importance of receiving information for children transitioning to school to support continuity of planning and assessment (Alatalo et al., 2017). The importance of curriculum continuity is supported by the NE respondents in this study and many reported using *Te Whāriki* in their classrooms. When asked about their level of familiarity with the alignment between the curricula documents, the NE respondents reported that they had a good understanding. This finding contrasts with the work of Peters et al. (2015) who reported that NE teachers were not necessarily aware of the alignment between the early childhood curriculum's strands and dispositions, and the *New Zealand Curriculum's* key competencies. Concern was expressed by some NE respondents that the use of *Te Whāriki* in the new entrant

classroom may lead to a watering down of the school curriculum, suggesting teachers in schools may not value or understand the learning that occurs in the prior to school years.

NE respondents reported little use of assessment information for planning purposes, with only a small proportion of the study's NE respondents reporting that they used the assessment information to inform them of children's strengths and interests. If information is used solely by NE teachers to engage with transitioning children, a strategy described by Peters et al. (2015) as using information as 'conversational tools' (p.11), the information is not being used to fully support continuity of learning. This finding concurs with Cassidy (2005) who noted that assessment information is rarely used to support planning, yet is at odds with Hopps (2014b) who suggested that there was some evidence to imply that assessment information was used to inform programmes. Failure to use information limits continuity of learning and children may experience problems successfully transitioning to school.

### **5.2.3 Levels of satisfaction**

High levels of dissatisfaction were reported by the NE respondents in this study regarding information sharing processes. The main reason identified for dissatisfaction was the non-receipt of information from the EC sector, particularly summative assessment information. Other reasons for a lack of satisfaction centred on the usefulness of the information received concurring with previous research such as Alatalo et al., (2017), Cassidy (2005), Mitchell et al., (2015) and Timperley and Robinson (2002) which found that there were

significant levels of dissatisfaction with transition practices that related to the sharing of information.

In particular NE teachers commented on the nature of the information supplied, indicating that they believed that they did not receive information that provided a true representation of the transitioning child. The use of strengths-based language in the assessment information supplied to the NE teachers appears to not give teachers what they believed to be an accurate picture of the child as potential issues and concerns were not made explicit in the information shared. Of particular note was the belief that information regarding difficulties that children might be experiencing was omitted, reflecting the strengths-based approach that typically underpins EC assessment practices. Such findings suggest a tension between the pedagogical approaches of the two sectors, and the need for more cross sector collaboration to understand the assessment principles and practices at play.

A group of NE respondents in this study questioned the usefulness of the information received, reporting that they therefore chose to ignore the information supplied. The reasons given in this study mirror previous findings (Ashton et al., 2008; Cassidy, 2005; White et al., 2013) and included that the respondents found the information too vague and not explicit enough for their needs. A lack of specificity regarding the information was a criticism reported by the NE teachers in the current study and has been widely reported elsewhere in the literature (Alatalo, Meier & Frank, 2017; Hopps-Wallis et al. 2016). A proportion of the NE respondents agreed with Cassidy (2005) that they

preferred to make their own judgements regarding children transitioning to school.

#### **5.2.4 Barriers to information sharing**

NE respondents reported the main barriers to information sharing were not receiving assessment information, largely as a result of privacy concerns. When assessment information was received, the findings suggested that NE teachers believed they understood the information shared. This finding is somewhat at odds with Mitchell et al.'s study (2015) where the NE teachers reported that they did not understand the information contained within the learning portfolios.

#### **5.2.5 Collaboration**

The NE respondents welcomed working collaboratively with their early childhood colleagues and reported they were content with the level of the relationships they currently had with the early childhood sector. However, as previous research has highlighted, the belief amongst the NE respondents was that the onus should be on teachers in early childhood to initiate cross sector the relationships (Ashton et al., 2008), which potentially establishes a barrier to closer collaboration from the outset.

#### **5.2.6 Recommendations from the sector**

NE respondents reported the main improvement in information sharing processes would come about from more consistent receipt of information for children transitioning to school. Many NE respondents called for the sharing of information to be made mandatory and suggested the development of guidelines to support the sharing of relevant transition information. Additionally,

NE respondents suggested that assessment information should be less generic in nature, depicting a broader image of the child that could indicate potential difficulties and areas for support, as well as strengths.

### **5.3 Similarities and differences between sector perspectives**

The findings offer insight into the beliefs and practices of EC and NE teachers in relation to transition and continuity of learning. Capturing data from both sectors also offered the unique opportunity to engage in comparative analysis of the different participant groups. Such analysis identified several areas of similarity within and between the sectors, including valuing continuity of learning whilst experiencing barriers to sharing information due to privacy concerns. However, a number of significant differences in perspective emerged from the data, particularly in relation to information sharing practices, views regarding the utility of information shared and means of enhancing continuity of learning for children transitioning to school. Such findings suggest that there are potentially systemic divisions between teachers in the two sectors related to both pedagogy and practice, and compounded by the time and resource limitations to meaningful collaboration.

#### **5.3.1 Frequency of information sharing practices**

The current study found wide variation in information sharing practices with respondents in the two sectors reporting differing experiences both within and between the sectors. Although there was not a direct relationship between participants, in that there is not an established match between schools and feeder centres, findings do suggest a mismatch in perception in relation to both

giving and receiving of information that is problematic. The sharing of more formalised summative assessment information occurred less frequently than general transition information with both groups indicating this practice typically occurred rarely. The notion of summative assessment information sharing is a relatively new concept in New Zealand having been a recommendation of the Education Review Office report *Continuity of Learning*) and the work of the Centre of Innovation at Mangere Bridge Kindergarten (Hartley et al., 2014) and this may account for why the practice was reported as being used infrequently.

A number of reasons for the lack of information sharing emerged from the data. The most significant barrier to information sharing that was reported by both groups in this study, was concerns regarding privacy of information. The EC respondents were reluctant to share information directly with schools for fear of breaching privacy rules. To circumvent this, teachers in the EC sector relied on parents to share documentation with schools. Concerns over privacy have been widely reported elsewhere (Alatalo et al., 2016; Einarsdóttir et al., 2008; Gray, 2014; Hopps, 2004). The concerns regarding privacy stem from a lack of understanding by the EC sector about what information they are able to share with schools. Many EC respondents indicated a willingness to share information if there was clarity about what information could be shared with schools.

### **5.3.2 Continuity of learning**

The importance of curriculum continuity was identified by respondents from both sectors and the blending of the two curriculum documents was supported. Concerns were expressed however by both sectors about the impact on their

own curriculum from using the other. The use of *Te Whāriki* in new entrant classrooms was perceived by some NE respondents as a ‘watering down’ of the school curriculum. Conversely, respondents in the EC sector were concerned about the possibility of a ‘push down’ of the school curriculum into EC. These concerns mirrored those reported by Daum (2014) and Alcock and Haggerty (2013) who argued that education policies in New Zealand could be seen as encouraging the EC sector to ensure children are ready for school. The notion of school readiness has little widespread support in the EC sector and as other research has identified (Peters, 2010; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000) there are a number of factors beyond the child’s deemed “readiness for school” that impact on the success a child experiences transitioning to school.

### **5.3.3 Use of transition information**

For continuity of learning to be effective, it is necessary for teachers to build on the learning which has gone before. To achieve this information should be both shared with and used by teachers in schools. However, the provision of information alone is not sufficient to ensure continuity of learning. Findings from this research indicated that information is not well-utilised by NE teachers to support continuity of learning and various reasons for the non-utilisation of information have been suggested in this study. Some NE respondents reported wanting to see children with fresh eyes. The belief is that by disregarding the information supplied, teachers do not form preconceived ideas (Ashton et al., 2008; Hopps, 2004; Hopps-Wallis & Perry, 2017; Timperley & Robinson, 2002). Further, a number of respondents from both sectors reported that information was ignored or rejected because teachers in schools did not trust or value the

information supplied, concurring with the findings of Ashton et al. (2008), Cassidy (2005), Gray (2014), and Hopps-Wallis and Perry (2017).

Researchers, including Gray (2014), have reported that some school teachers believed that children's early learning journeys were not relevant to schools. Similarly, Ashton et al. (2008) have reported that some teachers in the school sector did not believe in continuity of learning as they felt the differences between the two sectors were significant, likely to do with conceptions of play-based learning versus academic learning. Such views however did not emerge from the data in this study, with the NE respondents appearing receptive to receiving transition information echoing those reported by Thorsen et al., (2006), who noted that teachers were aware of the importance of the prior learning children brought with them to school.

So how then to understand the limited use of assessment materials? The reluctance by the school sector to use the information generated by the EC sector may result from inconsistent information sharing practices by the EC sector, as well as issues related to format and utility. If EC teachers feel assessment information supplied is under-valued or ignored they may be reticent to generate and share such information. The AGoEL (2015) recommended that enhanced transition practices should improve respect and understanding of EC practices and uptake of information shared, but based on the findings of this small-scale study, this does not yet appear to be happening.



The limited use of shared assessment information may be indicative of the value placed on early childhood education by some in the school sector, although this may be more a case of perception. Concern was expressed by many of the EC respondents about their status and respect for them as professionals. Poor perception of the EC sector from their NE colleagues and the wider population was reported by some EC respondents. These perceptions are not new and can prove a barrier to quality transition processes. For example, Timperley and Robinson (2002) and Ashton et al., (2008) reported that teachers in schools expressed respect for the job EC teachers did but did not value the curriculum followed or the experiences children had in EC. Such issues relate then not only to assessment information sharing, but also to much deeper systemic issues that need to be addressed if the principle of life-long learning enshrined in key education policy is to be meaningfully enacted.

#### **5.3.4 Cross sector relationships**

The views of the two groups in this study as to the nature and extent of cross sector relationships highlighted different levels of satisfaction and notions of what collaboration should look like and involve. Satisfaction with the level of relationships with schools amongst the EC sector was low, a view at odds with the one expressed by the NE respondents who expressed satisfaction with current relationships with the EC sector. Previous research identified both sectors felt dissatisfied with relationships and a lack of communication was seen as a significant weakness of early childhood and school relationships (Hopps 2014a; Timperley & Robinson, 2002). Inadequate collaborative relationships can act as a barrier to continuity of learning that leads to a lack of

congruence in planning and continuity for children's learning (Ashton et al., 2008), and can impact on their early school experience and learning outcomes.

While there is an openness to collaborate and share information, there appears to be a significant issue in relation to taking responsibility for such actions.

Findings revealed an expectation the EC sector would take the responsibility for initiating the sharing of information, but both sectors expressed a difference of opinion regarding the role of the primary sector in the process. The majority of EC respondents in this study reported wanting to see NE teachers having as much responsibility for initiating the sharing of assessment information as themselves, a view not shared by the NE respondents. It has been widely reported nationally and internationally that teachers are willing to collaborate with each other to support transitions (Ahtola et al., 2016; Ashton et al., 2008; Cassidy, 2005; Timperley & Robinson, 2002) yet factors such as time constraints continue to be a major barrier to ongoing relationship development (Cassidy, 2005; Hopps-Wallis et al., 2016). A recent development that may provide opportunities for relationship building and collaboration in the future are the Communities of Learning. These groups were created to bring together teachers from both sectors to work collaboratively but the opportunities for EC participation have to date been limited (MoE, 2016).

The physical locations of services and schools impacts on the development of collaborative relationships. Collaborative relationships are enhanced and the likelihood of information sharing increases if the EC service is located close to, or on existing school grounds (Gray, 2014; Timperley & Robinson, 2002).

Historically, provision of early childhood services through state kindergartens, resulted in many EC services being located close to the schools they served. The recent growth of privately provided EC services in New Zealand, has resulted in many services being located on sites that are not close to schools. As a consequence, the development of cross sector relationships has become problematic as it is not feasible for services and schools to maintain the numerous relationships needed with each other for children transitioning between them.

### **5.3.5 Channels of communication**

In the current study, respondents from the two sectors appeared to have differing perceptions regarding the way transition information is transmitted and received. EC respondents overwhelmingly believed they shared transition information via verbal channels. In contrast, the NE respondents believed that information sharing occurred when they received physical documentation. There is a lack of consensus regarding the preferred or optimum channels to be used to communicate transition information. The provision of written information is seen as useful and favoured by school teachers (Ahtola et al. 2016; Einarsdóttir et al., 2008) yet Cassidy (2005), Hopps, (2014a) and Hopps-Wallis et al. (2016) reported verbal channels were preferred to written communication by school teachers. Meanwhile Mitchell et al. (2015) indicated that NE teachers in New Zealand valued both verbal and written documentation. Verbal channels of communication were preferred by EC teachers as these minimise misunderstandings that can arise from written information (Hopps-Wallis & Perry, 2017).

The reliance on using written documentation to communicate information has a number of problems. Written information does not necessarily encourage ongoing conversations because, as Hopps-Wallis and Perry (2017) identified, written documentation is seen as a one directional exchange of information that does not encourage dialogue and feedback. Differing interpretations of the information can also occur with written documentation (Cassidy, 2005; Hopps-Wallis & Perry, 2017), whereas sharing information verbally can minimize misunderstandings (Ahtola et al., 2016; Hopps-Wallis & Perry, 2017). The use of verbal conversations allows information to be shared between teachers that would not necessarily be reported in written documents (Hopps-Wallis & Perry, 2017). Mitchell et al. (2015) have suggested that written documentation should be used as a bridge to support effective working relationships between the two sectors. The importance of using written documentation in some form cannot be underestimated, for as Ahtola et al. (2011) reported, written information was the best predictor of future academic success.

### **5.3.6 Usefulness of transition information**

Limited relationships and conversations with schools as experienced by the EC sector in this study, has resulted in a lack of feedback that has left the EC respondents unsure of the validity and utility of the information they send to schools, affirming previous findings (Cassidy, 2005; Hopps, 2014b). A further consequence of a lack of feedback has the EC respondents in this study believing that the information they provided was useful, but they did not know if this belief was accurate. As Hopps (2014b) suggested, the EC sectors

willingness to share information with school teachers may be compromised and early childhood sector may be reticent to share information about children if they do not know if or how information is used, or the information is not valued.

### **5.3.7 Assessment tools**

The assessment information supplied to the NE teachers in this study was reported as being rarely used because the information did not meet the sector's needs. The predominant assessment tool used in the early childhood sector are learning stories (Mitchell, 2008; Cameron, 2014), an approach widely promoted by academics and educational authorities (Zhang, 2015). Learning stories adoption of a strengths-based approach to assessment, focuses on what a child can do rather than a deficit perspective that identifies gaps and needs. Hopps-Wallis and Perry (2017) reported in their study that a criticism of the assessment information received by schools was that the information was written positively, and NE teachers had to 'read between the lines' (p.26) to determine what a child's learning or behavioural needs might be. NE respondents in this study offered some potential criticism of the assessment information received for being too vague and general in nature, thereby supporting the findings of Hopps-Wallis and Perry (2017). Information that was seen as honest and that identified difficulties as well as strengths was desired by the NE teachers. Cullen (2006) and Fraser and McLaughlin (2016) state that teachers have a responsibility to identify gaps using assessment methods that not only highlight strengths but identifies needs, and this point is reinforced in *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 2017, p.64) which states "identifying the learning, progress to date, next possible steps, and whether additional support is required are the

core elements in a formative assessment process". Further research has identified the need of NE teachers to receive information that depicts a truly holistic image of the learner (Cassidy, 2005; Hopps-Wallis et al., 2016; Mitchell et al. 2015).

The use of learning stories has, as Fraser and McLaughlin (2016) suggested, led to other forms of assessment being marginalised. Blaiklock (2013) and Zhang (2015) assert that a range of assessment tools, including learning stories, are required to be used to assess children's learning. Further support for the use of a range of assessment comes from the EC teachers in Zhang's (2016) study. In addition, McLachlan (2008) recommends that children's learning portfolios should be comprehensive and include samples of children's work, observations and other artefacts alongside of learning stories in order to help capture the complexity of children's learning and this is supported in the revised version of *Te Whāriki*. There is no requirement in the early childhood sector to document specific areas of children's learning such as language development, and social development (Blaiklock, 2013) and this may lead to skills and knowledge development being ignored (Blaiklock, 2008; McLachlan et al., 2013; Nuttall, 2005). These key areas if assessed and shared with schools would enhance the holistic picture of the transitioning child.

## **5.4 Recommendations**

This study has identified a lack of consistency regarding the sharing of transition information to support continuity of learning, however positively, teachers in both sectors showed a willingness to engage with each other and shared similar ideas as to how information sharing practices could be improved.

### **5.4.1 Recommendations for policy makers**

Given the systemic nature of the some of the challenges to emerge from this study, the first layer of potential recommendations relates to the broadest policy level, including the suggestion that information sharing become a mandatory action, combined with the development of an information-sharing template. These would help to mitigate the significant barrier that currently exists where the EC sector is reluctant to share information due to privacy concerns.

#### **5.4.1.1 Making information sharing compulsory**

At present information sharing for children transitioning to school is only an expectation. However, within the current study respondents from both sectors expressed a desire for this to become an obligation. Within the small geographical scope of this research, it is evident that there are widely varying patterns of information sharing. A lack of obligation to share information has, in part, led to differing understandings and beliefs about the how information should be shared and the content of the information. Privacy concerns for a number of teachers in the EC sector has seen them abdicate responsibility for sharing assessment information and instead placed the onus on parents to share information with schools. An obligation to share information is not a new

concept and occurs in other countries. For example, in Victoria, Australia the generation of transition information is linked to funding with an expectation that the 'Transition Learning and Development Statement' will be completed (DEECD, 2009).

#### **5.4.1.2 Development of a universal template**

Currently there are no guidelines for teachers in New Zealand to support them in their assessment information sharing practices. Levels of involvement and participation are left to local communities to negotiate, leading to widely disparate practices. A major barrier reported in this study was concerns over privacy issues and the sharing of information with schools. A significant proportion of respondents to both surveys called for a template or transition statement to be developed that provided a guide as to what information should be shared. Standardised documents are used in Australia including in Victoria, with its 'Transition Learning and Development Statement' (DEECD, 2009) and the 'Transition to School Statement' in New South Wales (New South Wales Department of Education, while Ireland is currently working to roll out a national system (O'Kane, 2016).

For optimum continuity of learning, information sharing practices and documents should be negotiated locally via professional conversations between the EC services and schools (AGoEL, 2015; Ahtola et al, 2016; McLachlan, 2008; Mitchell et al., 2015). The '*Child Snapshot*' (O'Kane & Hayes, 2013; 2016) demonstrates that teachers in both sectors can come together to develop a transition statement and develop shared understandings. In New Zealand some



work has been undertaken to develop transition portfolios and statements collaboratively (Carr et al., 2013; Hartley et al., 2014). While internationally, Dunham et al. (2016) found that when teachers worked together they were able to build joint understandings of language used in transition statements that improved the quality of the information and usefulness.

Systematising transition practices and joint meetings to transfer information are the ideal however the reality of the current provision of EC services in New Zealand means that there are numerous potential relationships between schools and EC services that need to be developed. Many children attend services that are in an area not geographically located close to the school they transition to. The adoption of a nationwide standard document would provide teachers in both sectors with guidelines and expectations as to completing the document and provides confidence about the consistency of the information supplied. A standardised document allows for information to be sent electronically, minimizing time constraints and can be sent in advance of a child starting school (Cassidy, 2005; Hopps-Wallis et al., 2016).

#### **5.4.2 Recommendations for EC teachers and management**

Services should ensure that information is consistently shared with all schools irrespective of whether a school has requested information. Teachers and management should actively seek and gain parental consent to share assessment information directly with schools. Information should be generated, including summative assessments, which identify strengths and potential areas for support thus providing a realistic picture of the transitioning child. Current

assessment information supplied by early childhood services adopts a strengths-based approach but there is an expectation from parents, as reported by Mitchell et al., (2015) and school teachers in this study that the information shared should provide a true holistic picture of the child.

The reasons for assessment information not being used are varied and complex. It is imperative that EC teachers understand why assessment information is not used and take responsibility to ensure useful information is supplied to schools. This requires effective relationships and communication channels to be established including early childhood visits to schools.

#### **5.4.3 Recommendations for new entrant teachers and management**

Teachers and management in schools need to work more collaboratively with EC services and provide feedback, both written and verbal, to services regarding the information shared. This feedback should indicate how useful the information is and how it is used to support continuity of learning. The information shared by EC services about individual children should be used in classroom planning by NE teachers to support continuity of learning. This may require additional resources and professional development being invested to ensure curriculum continuity is optimised. The use of teacher release time should be used by NE teachers to visit early childhood services to develop relationships and enhance their understanding of the early childhood curriculum.

## **5.5 Strengths and limitations of the research**

This study yielded valuable insights into the beliefs experiences and practices of teachers in both sectors who are involved in the sharing of assessment information for children transitioning to school within the boundaries established by the research questions posed.

### **5.5.1 Strengths of the research**

A particular strength of this study was the opportunity to compare the beliefs, experiences and practices of teachers on both sides of the transition process. There has been few studies to date in New Zealand that has sought perspectives from both education sectors. The use of a self-administered questionnaire allowed participants to respond to the survey at their own pace and provide answers that they may not have been willing to provide in an interview situation.

Adopting a survey approach enabled more respondents to be reached and thus a broader range of perspectives was gained compared with interview and case study approaches. A particular strength of this study were the recommendations from the respondents in relation to potential ways to improve practices. These teachers are at the forefront of the transition process therefore gaining not only their current experiences but their suggestions for improvements is invaluable.

### **5.5.2 Limitations of the research**

The most significant limitations of the research were the size of the sample and response rates. In order to make the research process manageable, the sample was restricted to respondents within the Canterbury region and therefore generalisability to the wider population is limited. The response rate to the surveys from both sectors was small, but this did allow for more in depth analysis of the data. Other explanations for the lack of response from both sectors could be workload issues or a lack of interest in the subject matter of the study.

### **5.6 Areas for Future Research**

The scope of this research was limited due to the constraints of a master's thesis. The geographical scope was restricted to Canterbury and teacher-led services. Widening the scope of the research to include other regions would allow a fuller picture of information sharing practices to emerge and corroborate the findings of this study.

Teachers in both sectors expressed a desire to have specific guidelines to support the sharing of assessment information. Some work has been conducted in this area in New Zealand (Carr et al., 2013; Peters et al., 2015) but further work is required to identify what information NE teachers want and can use to support children transitioning to school.

NE teachers in this study were receptive to using the early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki* and its emphasis on supporting continuity of learning. Further research is recommended that identifies how effectively the early childhood curriculum is being used in the NE classroom, particularly to support continuity of learning.

### **5.7 Final Reflections**

This study has indicated that the sharing of assessment information for children transitioning to school is an important yet neglected element of the transition to school process. The study confirmed my views that there are widely varying practices that leads to inconsistent receipt of assessment information by schools. Teachers in both sectors believe that information sharing is valuable, but the current practices are inadequate. The study has suggested that teachers in both sectors would welcome guidelines and resources to support their assessment information sharing practices and I believe that assessment information sharing should become mandatory, with a template provided by the Ministry of Education to ensure consistency of assessment information shared.

The lack of relationships and communication has some teachers in the EC sector feeling their work is undervalued and has led to many being reticent to share information. The importance of the learning and development that children experience in the EC sector requires further understanding by teachers in schools and society in general, in order for children's continuity of learning to be supported.

## **5.8 Conclusion**

The findings of this current study mirror the work of Mitchell et al. (2015) and Hopps (2004) who highlighted the contradictions between what teachers believe and their practices in the area of assessment information for children transitioning to school. Early childhood respondents understood the importance of continuity of learning but exhibited inconsistencies in their information sharing practices. NE respondents welcomed information sharing yet were reluctant to take the initiative to collaborate with the EC sector and reported not using the transition information when supplied to support continuity of learning.

It was generally agreed by respondents from the two sectors that improvements need to be made to the current processes for sharing assessment information as a means to support children's transition to school. In particular, findings suggest respondents from both sectors may like to see assessment information sharing become obligatory, with guidelines established to support assessment information sharing that meets the needs of the teachers in schools so that they can support continuity of learning for children. NE respondents also reported a willingness to receive assessment information they deemed useful, especially information that identified both a child's strengths and potential areas for support. Having clear guidelines will help ensure that the assessment information shared by EC teachers is useful to school teachers, and therefore utilised to support children's positive transition to school.

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## Appendix 1: EC teacher survey

### Assessment Information Sharing ECE Teachers Survey

#### Early Childhood Teachers - Assessment Information for Children Transitioning to School

My name is Mel Fletcher and I am currently working towards a Masters Degree at Massey University. As part of my research thesis, I am seeking to identify the beliefs, experiences and practices of ECE and new entrant teachers regarding assessment information sharing to support continuity of learning for children transitioning to school.

To this end, I am conducting an online survey to gather insights from both centre based early childhood teachers who have experience in transitioning children to school and primary teachers who work with children transitioning to school from early childhood centres.

I would be grateful if you could take 15 minutes to help me with my research by completing this online survey.

The aim of the survey is to gain early childhood and new entrant teachers' perspectives about sharing assessment information to support continuity of learning as children transition to school. Information sharing is a crucial element of supporting continuity of learning. This survey hopes to fill a gap in research and identify beliefs, practices and experiences of those teachers involved in the process, both in the early childhood and primary sectors.

All responses you provide will remain confidential and you will not be expected to provide any identifying information. Responses will be aggregated and data stored only for the purpose of the research.

Your participation is voluntary and you have the right to choose to not answer any or all questions.

Completion of the survey will be deemed to imply consent to participate.

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk (MUHEC/40000181990).

If you have any questions regarding the study or survey please feel free to contact either myself or my research supervisors Karyn Aspden on 063569099 ext. 84389 or at [k.m.aspden@massey.ac.nz](mailto:k.m.aspden@massey.ac.nz) or Monica Cameron at [m.j.cameron@massey.ac.nz](mailto:m.j.cameron@massey.ac.nz).

Many thanks for your contribution,

Mel Fletcher

1. Please indicate your qualifications. Please select all that apply.

- ☐ Diploma of Teaching (Early Childhood Education)
- ☐ Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood Education)
- ☐ Postgraduate qualification (Early Childhood Education)
- ☐ Bachelor of Education (Early Years)
- ☐ Graduate Diploma of Teaching (ECE)
- ☐ Primary Teaching Qualification
- ☐ No teaching qualification
- ☐ Other (please specify).

2. How many years teaching experience do you have? Please select one option.

- ☐ Less than 1 year
- ☐ 1-2 years
- ☐ 3-5 years
- ☐ Other (please specify).
- ☐ 6-9 years
- ☐ 10 years plus

3. Where is your service situated? Please select one option.

- ☐ Christchurch city
- ☐ Canterbury urban
- ☐ Canterbury rural
- ☐ Outside Canterbury
- ☐ Other (please specify).

4. What is your current role? Please select one option.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="radio"/> Teacher of 4-5 year olds | <input type="radio"/> Head Teacher           |
| <input type="radio"/> Teacher of 3-4 year olds | <input type="radio"/> Service/Centre Manager |
| <input type="radio"/> Teacher of 2-5 year olds | <input type="radio"/> Owner                  |
| <input type="radio"/> Teacher of 0-5 year olds | <input type="radio"/> Supervisor             |
| <input type="radio"/> Other (please specify).  |  |

5. Who is **currently responsible for initiating** the sharing of assessment information regarding children transitioning to school? Please select all that apply.

- ☐ Teachers in your early childhood service
- ☐ Management in your early childhood service
- ☐ Teachers in primary schools
- ☐ Management in primary schools
- ☐ Families/whānau
- ☐ Other (please specify).

6. Who do you believe **should be responsible** for initiating the sharing of assessment information regarding children transitioning to school? Please select all that apply.

- ☐ Teachers in your early childhood service
- ☐ Management in your early childhood service
- ☐ Teachers in primary schools
- ☐ Management in primary schools
- ☐ Families/whānau
- ☐ Other (please specify).

7. What do you believe are the **benefits of sharing assessment information**? Please rank in order of importance with 1 being the most important and 5 being the least important.

Intentional planning for a child

To provide links between the ECE service and school

Fast tracking of funding for children with additional needs

Supporting children and their families to experience a smooth transition to school

Knowing whether a child is ready for school

8. How **frequently** do you send assessment information about individual children to schools? Please select one option.

☐

Never

☐

Almost every time

☐

Almost never

☐

Every time

☐

Occasionally

Please give more details.

9. What assessment information have you sent to schools when children transition to school? Please select all that apply.

- ☐ Approaches towards learning/dispositions, for example, curiosity, perseverance
- ☐ Language and communication development, such as asking and answering simple questions, naming and identifying objects
- ☐ Emerging literacy development, such as letter identification, concepts about print, interest in mark making
- ☐ Social/emotional development, such as compliance with adult requests, taking turns, playing and co-operating with other children, self regulation
- ☐ Emerging mathematical knowledge and skills, such as numeral recognition and one-to-one correspondence
- ☐ Physical development, such as gross motor skills like hopping, throwing and catching a ball
- ☐ Fine motor development, such as ability to hold a pencil, use scissors, manipulate small objects
- ☐ Self-help skills, such as looking after belongings, toileting independently
- ☐ General knowledge
- ☐ Children's interests and strengths
- ☐ Children's needs/additional support, such as support to develop friendships, communicating ideas, emotional regulation
- ☐ Other (please specify).



10. In what **formats** have you sent assessment documentation for children transitioning to school?  
Please select all that apply.

- ☐ Physical portfolios shared by families
- ☐ E-portfolios shared by families
- ☐ Physical portfolios shared directly with new entrant teachers  
by ECE teachers
- ☐ E-portfolios shared directly with new entrant teachers  
by ECE teachers
- ☐ Email from the service to school containing learning stories  
or other documentation
- ☐ Verbal conversations with new entrant teachers
- ☐ Do not send assessment information for children  
transitioning to school
- ☐ Other (please specify).

11. The 2015 ERO report "*Continuity of Learning - Transitions from Early Childhood Services to School*" recommends that new entrant teachers receive a **summative assessment** for a child transitioning to school. How frequently do you send such statements? Please select one option.

- |                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Never        | <input type="radio"/> Almost every time |
| <input type="radio"/> Almost never | <input type="radio"/> Every time        |
| <input type="radio"/> Occasionally |   |

Please give more details

12. What do you see are the barriers you experience in sharing assessment information regarding children transitioning to school? Please select all that apply.

- ☐ My own lack of understanding of the New Zealand Curriculum and school based assessment practices
- ☐ Lack of time
- ☐ Lack of understanding from schools regarding the early childhood curriculum Te Whāriki and ECE assessment practices
- ☐ Privacy/ parental consent
- ☐ Limited relationships with schools
- ☐ Organisational issues, for example not knowing what school a child is going to
- ☐ Differing philosophies and/or values between ECE and schools
- ☐ Other (please specify).

13. Do you think that new entrant teachers understand the assessment information you send? Please select one option.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

Please give more details.

14. How useful do you believe the assessment information is that you send to schools? Please select one option.

- |   |                                    |
|---|------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Not at all useful | <input type="radio"/> Quite useful |
| <input type="radio"/> Somewhat useful   | <input type="radio"/> Very useful  |
| <input type="radio"/> Useful            |                                    |

Please give more details.

15. Do you think the assessment information you send to schools is used? Please select one option.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

Please give more details.

16. If you think new entrant teachers use the assessment information you send, how do you think they use it? Please select all responses that apply.

- ☐ To plan for individual children
- ☐ To plan for groups of children
- ☐ To inform the new entrant teacher about the child and their strengths and interests
- ☐ As a settling tool for the child
- ☐ To engage in conversation with the child and their family/whānau
- ☐ Other (please specify).

17. If you think new entrant teachers do not use the assessment information you send, why do you think they do not use it? Please select all responses that apply.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I do not send assessment information                            | <input type="checkbox"/> The information is not up to date  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> New entrant teachers do not understand the information supplied | <input type="checkbox"/> The information does not focus on subject knowledge areas such as mathematics and literacy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The information is not useful                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> The information is received in differing formats   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The information requires analysis before being used             | <input type="checkbox"/> New entrant teachers do not trust the information  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The information is not user friendly                            | <input type="checkbox"/> New entrant teachers like to make their own judgements                                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify).   |   |

18. In your opinion, what improvements could be made to the content of the assessment information you send to schools for children transitioning to school? Please comment.

19. In your opinion, what improvements could be made to the format of the assessment information you send to schools for children transitioning to school? Please comment.

20. In your opinion, what improvements could be made to how you send assessment information for children transitioning to school? Please comment.

21. How satisfied are you with current assessment information sharing practices? Please select one option.

☐ Very dissatisfied

☐ Satisfied

☐ Dissatisfied

☐ Very satisfied

☐ Unsure

Please comment if applicable.

22. Would you welcome specific guidelines on what assessment information should be sent to new entrant teachers?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Please give more details.

23. In the last 2 years, have you contacted a school regarding a child prior to a child starting school?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Unsure

Please give more details.

24. In the last 2 years, has a school contacted your service regarding a child, after a child has started at a school? Please select one option.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

Please give more details.

25. How familiar are you with the New Zealand Curriculum? Please select one option.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Not at all familiar | <input type="radio"/> Moderately familiar |
| <input type="radio"/> Slightly familiar   | <input type="radio"/> Extremely familiar  |
| <input type="radio"/> Familiar            |   |

Please comment if applicable.

26. Do you believe that Te Whāriki should be used in the new entrant classroom to support continuity of learning for children transitioning to school? Please select one option.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

Please explain your choice

27. How familiar are you with the links between the dispositions and learning outcomes of Te Whāriki, and the New Zealand Curriculum's key competencies and learning areas? Please select one option.

☐ Very familiar

☐ Unfamiliar

☐ Quite familiar

☐ Very unfamiliar

☐ Unsure

Please comment on how these links are reflected in your assessment information

28. Do you have any other comments that you would like to make related to the topic of this survey?



## Appendix 2: NE teacher survey

### Assessment Information Sharing New Entrant Teachers Survey

#### New Entrant Teachers - Assessment Information for Children Transitioning to School

My name is Mel Fletcher and I am currently working towards a Masters Degree at Massey University. As part of my research thesis, I am seeking to identify the beliefs, experiences and practices of ECE and new entrant teachers regarding assessment information sharing to support continuity of learning for children transitioning to school.

To this end, I am conducting an online survey to gather insights from both centre based early childhood teachers who have experience in transitioning children to school and primary teachers who work with children transitioning to school from early childhood centres.

I would be grateful if you could take 15 minutes to help me with my research by completing this online survey

The aim of the survey is to gain early childhood and new entrant teachers perspectives about sharing assessment information to support continuity of learning as children transition to school. Information sharing is a crucial element of supporting continuity of learning. This survey hopes to fill a gap in research and identify beliefs, practices and experiences of those teachers involved in the process, both in the early childhood and primary sectors.

All responses you provide will remain confidential and you will not be expected to provide any identifying information. Responses will be aggregated and data stored only for the purpose of the research.

Your participation is voluntary and you have the right to choose to not answer any or all questions.

Completion of the survey will be deemed to imply consent to participate.

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk (MUHEC/40000181990)

If you have any questions regarding the study or survey please feel free to contact either myself or my research supervisors Dr Karyn Aspden on 063569099 ext. 84389 or at [k.m.aspden@massey.ac.nz](mailto:k.m.aspden@massey.ac.nz) or Monica Cameron at [m.j.cameron@massey.ac.nz](mailto:m.j.cameron@massey.ac.nz).

Many thanks for your contribution,

Mel Fletcher

1. Please indicate your qualifications. Please select all that apply.

- ☐ Diploma of Teaching (Primary)
- ☐ Bachelor of Teaching (Primary)
- ☐ Postgraduate qualification (Primary)
- ☐ Bachelor of Education (Early Years)
- ☐ Graduate Diploma of Teaching (Primary)
- ☐ ECE Teaching Qualification
- ☐ No teaching qualification
- ☐ Other (please specify).

2. How many years teaching experience do you have? Please select one option.

- ☐ Less than 1 year
- ☐ 1-2 years
- ☐ 3-5 years
- ☐ Other (please specify).
- ☐ 6-9 years
- ☐ 10 years plus

3. Where is your school situated? Please select one option.

- ☐ Christchurch city
- ☐ Canterbury urban
- ☐ Canterbury rural
- ☐ Outside Canterbury
- ☐ Other (please specify).

4. What is your current role? Please select one option.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="radio"/> New Entrant Teacher (Year 0)       | <input type="radio"/> Syndicate Leader    |
| <input type="radio"/> New Entrant Teacher (Year 0/1)     | <input type="radio"/> Associate Principal |
| <input type="radio"/> New Entrant Teacher (Year 0/1/2)   | <input type="radio"/> Deputy Principal    |
| <input type="radio"/> New Entrant Teacher (Year 0/1/2/3) | <input type="radio"/> Principal           |
| <input type="radio"/> Other (please specify).            |   |

5. Who is **currently responsible for initiating** the sharing of assessment information regarding children transitioning to school? Please select all that apply.

- ☐ Teachers in early childhood services
- ☐ Management in early childhood services
- ☐ Teachers in primary schools
- ☐ Management in primary schools
- ☐ Families/whānau
- ☐ Other (please specify).

6. Who do you believe **should be responsible** for initiating the sharing of assessment information regarding children transitioning to school? Please select all that apply.

- ☐ Teachers in early childhood services
- ☐ Management in early childhood services
- ☐ Teachers in primary schools
- ☐ Management in primary schools
- ☐ Families/whānau
- ☐ Other (please specify).


7. What do you believe are the **benefits of sharing assessment information**? Please rank in order of importance with 1 being the most important and 5 being the least important.

- Intentional planning for a child
- To provide links between the ECE service and school
- Fast tracking of funding for children with additional needs
- Supporting children and their families to experience a smooth transition to school
- Knowing whether a child is ready for school

8. How **frequently** do you receive assessment information about individual children from early childhood services? Please select one option.

- ☐ Never
 ☐ Almost every time  
☐ Almost never
 ☐ Every time  
☐ Occasionally

Please give more details.



9. What assessment information have you received from ECE services when children transition to school? Please select all that apply.

- ☐ Approaches towards learning/dispositions, for example, curiosity, perseverance
- ☐ Language and communication development, such as asking and answering simple questions, naming and identifying objects
- ☐ Emerging literacy development, such as letter identification, concepts about print, interest in mark making
- ☐ Social/emotional development, such as compliance with adult requests, taking turns, playing and co-operating with other children, self regulation
- ☐ Emerging mathematical knowledge and skills, such as numeral recognition, one-to-one correspondence
- ☐ Physical development, such as gross motor skills like hopping, throwing and catching a ball
- ☐ Fine motor development, such as ability to hold a pencil, use scissors, manipulate small objects
- ☐ Self help skills, such as looking after belongings, using the toilet independently
- ☐ General knowledge
- ☐ Children's interests and strengths
- ☐ Children's needs/additional support, such as support to develop friendships, communicating ideas, emotional regulation.
- ☐ Other (please specify).

10. In what formats have you received assessment documentation for children transitioning to school?  
Please select all that apply.

- ☐ Physical portfolios shared by families
- ☐ E-portfolios shared by families
- ☐ Physical portfolios shared directly by ECE teachers
- ☐ E-portfolios shared directly by ECE teachers
- ☐ Email from a service containing learning stories or other documentation
- ☐ Verbal conversations with ECE teachers
- ☐ Do not receive assessment information for children transitioning to school
- ☐ Other (please specify).

11. The 2015 ERO report "*Continuity of Learning - Transitions from Early Childhood Services to School*" recommends that new entrant teachers receive a summative assessment for a child transitioning to school. How frequently do you receive such statements? Please select one option.

- |                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Never        | <input type="radio"/> Almost every time |
| <input type="radio"/> Almost never | <input type="radio"/> Every time        |
| <input type="radio"/> Occasionally |   |

Please give more details.

12. What do you see are the **barriers** you experience in sharing assessment information regarding children transitioning to school? Please select all that apply.

- ☐ My own lack of understanding of the early childhood curriculum and ECE assessment practices
- ☐ Lack of time
- ☐ Lack of understanding from ECE services regarding the primary curriculum and school based assessment practices
- ☐ Privacy/ parental consent
- ☐ Limited relationships with ECE services
- ☐ Organisational issues, for example not knowing which service a child has come from
- ☐ Differing philosophies and/or values between ECE and schools
- ☐ Other (please specify).

13. Do you **understand** the assessment information you receive from early childhood services? Please select one option.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

Please give more details.



14. How useful do you find the assessment information you receive from early childhood services? Please select one option.

- |   |                                    |
|---|------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Not at all useful | <input type="radio"/> Quite useful |
| <input type="radio"/> Somewhat useful   | <input type="radio"/> Very useful  |
| <input type="radio"/> Useful            |                                    |

Please give more details.

15. Do you use the assessment information you receive from early childhood services? Please select one option.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

Please give more details.

16. If you **do use the assessment information** you receive, how do you use it? Please select all responses that apply.

- ☐ To plan for individual children
- ☐ To plan for groups of children
- ☐ To be informed about the child and their strengths and interests
- ☐ As a settling tool for the child
- ☐ To engage in conversations with the child and their family/whānau
- ☐ Other (please specify).

17. If you **do not use** the assessment information you receive from ECE services, why not? Please select all responses that apply.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I do not receive assessment information             | <input type="checkbox"/> The information is not up to date  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I do not understand the information supplied        | <input type="checkbox"/> The information does not focus on subject knowledge areas such as mathematics and literacy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The information is not useful                       | <input type="checkbox"/> The information is received in differing formats   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The information requires analysis before being used | <input type="checkbox"/> I do not trust the information   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The information is not user friendly                | <input type="checkbox"/> I like to make my own judgements   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)                              |   |

18. In your opinion what improvements could be made to the **content** of the assessment information you receive for children transitioning to school? Please comment.

19. In your opinion what improvements could be made to the format of the assessment information you receive for children transitioning to school? Please comment.

20. In your opinion what improvements could be made to how you receive assessment information for children transitioning to school? Please comment.

21. How satisfied are you with current assessment information sharing practices?

☐ Very dissatisfied

☐ Satisfied

☐ Dissatisfied

☐ Very satisfied

☐ Unsure

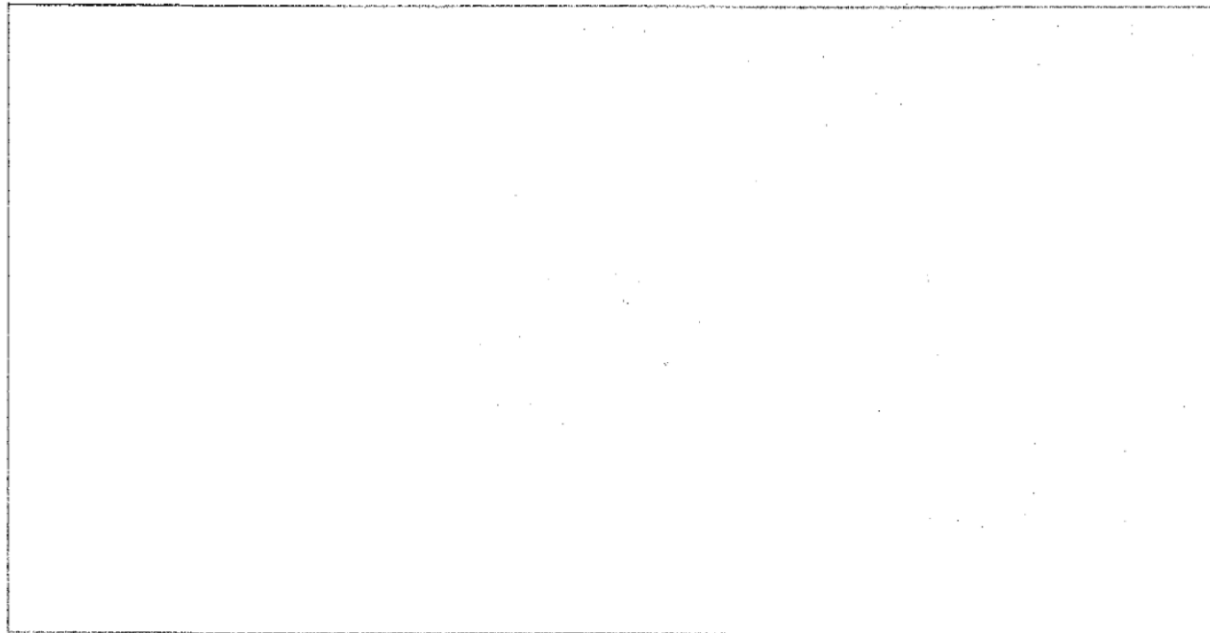
Please comment if applicable.

22. Would you welcome specific guidelines on what assessment information should be received from ECE services?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Please give more details.



23. In the last 2 years, has an early childhood service contacted you regarding a child prior to a child starting school?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Unsure

If yes please give more details.



24. In the last 2 years, have you contacted an early childhood service regarding a child after a child has started school? Please select one option.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

If yes please give more details.

25. How familiar are you with the New Zealand early childhood curriculum Te Whāriki? Please select one option.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Not at all familiar | <input type="radio"/> Moderately familiar |
| <input type="radio"/> Slightly familiar   | <input type="radio"/> Extremely familiar  |
| <input type="radio"/> Familiar            |   |

Please comment if applicable.

26. Does Te Whāriki influence your classroom practices? Please select one option.

- |                                    |                                    |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Never        | <input type="radio"/> Regularly    |
| <input type="radio"/> Almost never | <input type="radio"/> All the time |
| <input type="radio"/> Occasionally |                                    |

Please provide more detail

27. Do you believe that Te Whāriki should be used in the new entrant classroom to support continuity of learning for children transitioning to school? Please select one option.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

Please provide more detail

28. How familiar are you with the links between the dispositions and learning outcomes of Te Whāriki and the New Zealand Curriculum's key competencies and learning areas? Please select one option.

- |                                      |                                       |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Very familiar  | <input type="radio"/> Unfamiliar      |
| <input type="radio"/> Quite familiar | <input type="radio"/> Very unfamiliar |
| <input type="radio"/> Unsure         |                                       |

Please comment if applicable.

29. Do you have any other comments that you would like to make related to the topic of this survey?

### Appendix 3: Ethical approval



Date: 25 July 2017

Dear Mel Fletcher

Re: Ethics Notification - 4000018199 - Assessment to support continuity of learning during transition to school: a comparative study of early childhood and new entrants teachers

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 go to <http://rims.massey.ac.nz> and register the changes in order that they be assessed as safe to proceed.

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 Dr Brian Finch, Director - Ethics, telephone 06 3569099 ext 86015, email [humanethics@massey.ac.nz](mailto: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

Research Ethics Office, Research and Enterprise  
Massey University, Private Bag 11 222, Palmerston North, 4442, New Zealand T 06 350 5573; 06 350 5575 F 06 355 7973  
E [humanethics@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethics@massey.ac.nz) W <http://humanethics.massey.ac.nz>

## **Appendix 4: Information sheet**



**MASSEY UNIVERSITY**  
**INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION**  
**TE KURA O TE MATĀURANGA**

### **Information sheet**

#### **Assessment to support continuity of learning during transition to school :**

#### **a comparative study of early childhood and new entrant ECEs**

Kia ora

My name is Mel Fletcher and I am currently working towards my Masters Degree at Massey University. As part of my research thesis, I am seeking to identify the beliefs, experiences and practices of ECE and new entrant teachers regarding assessment information sharing to support continuity of learning for children transitioning to school.

To this end, I am conducting an online survey to gather insights from both centre based early childhood teachers who have experience in transitioning children to school and primary teachers who work with children transitioning to school from early childhood centres.

#### **Purpose of the study**

The aim of the survey is to gain the perspectives of early childhood and new entrant teachers regarding assessment information sharing to support continuity of learning as children



transition to school. Information sharing is a crucial element of supporting continuity of learning. This survey hopes to fill a gap in research by identifying the beliefs, practices and experiences of those teachers involved in the process, both in the early childhood and primary sectors. With the revision of the New Zealand Early childhood curriculum Te Whāriki in 2017 (Ministry of Education, 2017) there is a greater emphasis on ensuring continuity of learning for our children. This research aims to discover the realities of this for teachers in both sectors.

### **Participants**

I am inviting centre based early childhood teachers and primary school teachers who are teaching children aged 4 to 6 who are within the Canterbury region to respond.

### **Format of the survey**

The survey comprises a mixture of closed and open-ended questions. Questions explore beliefs and experiences around content, formats, barriers, usefulness and satisfaction with assessment information sharing between the ECE and primary sectors as well as relationships between the sectors and the understandings and practices of curriculum continuity.

It is intended that the survey should take approximately 15 minutes to complete. You can access the survey by clicking on the link in the email.

### **Participant rights**

Please be aware that there is no obligation to accept this invitation. Your participation is voluntary and you have the right to choose to not answer any or all questions. Your responses to survey questions will be deemed to imply consent to participate. All responses you provide will remain confidential and you will not be expected to provide any identifying information. Responses will be aggregated and data stored only for the purpose of the research.

### **Data Management**

Responses from the survey will be password protected and accessible only by the researcher and supervisors for the sole purpose of completing the thesis, and as the basis for publications/presentations. Data will be destroyed five years after the completion of the research project.

### **Ethics and consent**

“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 named above is responsible for the ethical conduct of this research. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Dr Brian Finch, Director, Research Ethics, telephone 06 356 9099, ext. 86015, email: [humanethics@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethics@massey.ac.nz)

If you have any questions regarding the study or survey, please feel free to contact me

Mel Fletcher: [REDACTED] or my research supervisors:

Dr Karyn Aspden 06 3569099 ext [K.M.Aspden@massey.ac.nz](mailto:K.M.Aspden@massey.ac.nz)

Monica Cameron 06 356 9099 ext:84393 [m.j.cameron@massey.ac.nz](mailto:m.j.cameron@massey.ac.nz)

Thank you for your consideration of my invitation.

Kind regards,

Mel Fletcher

## **Appendix 5: Email invitation to participate in online survey**

Dear colleague

My name is Mel Fletcher and I am an early childhood teacher currently working towards a Masters Degree at Massey University. As part of my research thesis, I am seeking to identify the beliefs, experiences and practices of ECE and new entrant teachers regarding how assessment information is shared to support continuity of learning for children transitioning to school.

With the revision of the early childhood curriculum Te Whāriki in 2017, there is a greater emphasis on ensuring continuity of learning for our children. This research aims to discover the realities of this for teachers in both sectors.

To this end, I am conducting an **online survey** to gather insights from both centre based early childhood teachers who have experience in transitioning children to school and primary teachers who work with children transitioning to school from early childhood centres in the Canterbury region.

The survey is completely anonymously and no identifying information will be used in the study. The survey is expected to take no more than 15minutes to complete. Participation is voluntary. If you are a centre or school leader, I would be grateful if you could take a moment to **share this email with your teachers** so that they might have the opportunity to participate. I am particularly interested in receiving responses from teachers who are currently working with children who are about to or have recently transitioned to school i.e. **teachers working with 4 to 6 year old children.**

The survey will be open from 13<sup>th</sup> February 2018 to 13<sup>th</sup> March 2018

**Please click on the following link to access the survey**

Ethical approval has been granted by Massey University Human Ethics Committee. If you have any questions regarding the study or survey please feel free to contact either myself or my research supervisors Dr Karyn Aspden on 063560900 ext. 84389 or [K.M.Aspden@massey.ac.nz](mailto:K.M.Aspden@massey.ac.nz) or Monica Cameron [M.J.cameron@massey.ac.nz](mailto:M.J.cameron@massey.ac.nz)

Many thanks

Mel Fletcher

Massey University Masters in Education student