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Literature Review: Transition from Early Childhood Education to School

Report to the Ministry of Education

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Literature Review:
Transition from Early Childhood Education to School

Report Commissioned by
Ministry of Education

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Executive summary

The Literature Review: Transition from Early Childhood Education to School was commissioned by the Ministry of Education. The review's purpose was to deepen understanding of transition to school by critically analysing research literature. The focus was on what successful transitions to school look like, the factors that play a role in how well children transition from ECE to school, and the ways in which children can be supported to transition as successfully as possible.

The selection of literature drew primarily on work published between 2004 to mid 2009, with particular attention to New Zealand literature, and research in "broadly similar" countries such as Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Systematic searches of library and web databases were supplemented by drawing on personal networks to find relevant information. The selection of overseas literature on transitions was based on work that appeared most relevant to the research questions. Consideration of international literature has to take account of the different starting ages, enrolment practices and ethnic composition of school entrants compared to New Zealand.

Overall, the research ranged from very small case studies to large-scale longitudinal studies. Some theoretical literature was included to deepen the critical analysis. Quality assurance was addressed through careful searching and analysis and by a review of a draft document by local and international experts in the field.

Important issues

The review systematically examined the evidence regarding transition to school. In doing so it recognised the complexity in the multiple factors that influence each child's learning and transition experiences, and the diversity that exists within groups as well as between groups of children. It also acknowledged that transitions are not an event but a process. Analysis of success is most usefully looked at over time, considering long-term learning trajectories rather than focusing solely on initial skills and adjustments.

When examining what success looks like, different theoretical views shape what is valued, and there are also different perspectives to consider. Starting school involves not just the child but also a range of other participants, including families and teachers in ECE and school. Determining success must therefore take into account the different perspectives involved.

Key findings

A successful transition to school

Although children make many transitions in their lives, the move to school has important implications for their learning and is therefore worthy of particular attention. Research shows that no matter how academically capable a child is, unhappiness over lack of friends, problems in the playground or toilets, a poor relationship with the teacher, inappropriate challenges, low expectations and so on, have negative consequences for their learning. The themes regarding successful transitions are interrelated and create the context for positive learning trajectories.

Overall, one of the key findings is that successful transitions depend on the nature of the relationships between all involved. For children, their friendships, peer relationships and the relationship with their teacher appear central. Respectful, reciprocal relationships between the adults involved are also key factors in a successful transition. This is important for all children but seems to be especially influential for the success of Māori children. Relationships

permeate the other key themes for success that were identified in the literature, such as a sense of belonging and wellbeing at school, engagement in learning, learning dispositions and identity as a learner. Children, whose teachers take time to get to know them, affirm their culture, recognise and build on their prior learning, and see promise rather than deficits, reflect many of the features of a successful transition that will support their learning.

Characteristics that play a part in how well children transition to school

This review of recent research on children starting school highlighted that the part played in this transition by any characteristic of the child and family will always depend on the nature of the context they enter. Almost any child is at risk of making a poor or less successful transition if their individual characteristics are incompatible with features of the environment they encounter. This allows adjustments to be made to the contexts and strategies implemented to support more positive experiences. For example, children who do not share the language or dominant culture of the school may be particularly vulnerable if the school contexts are not tailored to support them. However, this is not inevitable. The literature included examples of ways in which schools could be culturally responsive and support the learning of all children.

For Māori children and Pasifika children, positive, responsive relationships between children, teachers and families, and culturally responsive teaching and assessment are strong themes in ensuring success. Māori and Pasifika researchers are providing important insights into the experiences of these two groups, although more research is required, especially regarding children's and families' experiences of transition to school.

The situation for children from low socio-economic backgrounds is complex. Research suggests that children in this group are at risk of making less successful transitions than their more advantaged peers. The research reviewed, however, gives few clear indicators regarding exactly how coming from a lower socio-economic household plays a role in a child's transition to school. It can be inferred from other research findings that these may, in part, be due to low teacher expectations, lack of recognition or connection with the funds of knowledge they bring, problems with home-school relationships and so on. Parental employment, neighbourhood support and resources also correlate with children's experiences on entry to school, and are therefore worthy of consideration.

The limited research literature regarding transition to school for children with special needs suggested generally positive findings, although there was little data on children and their families' actual transition experiences. The New Zealand research on this topic focused largely on adult perspectives and emphasized the importance of respectful and reciprocal relationships between all involved.

Supporting children's transition to school: messages for ECE and school teachers

The literature included many ways in which teachers in both sectors can support children's transition to school. It reminds teachers that while orientation programmes help children to become familiar with school, transition programmes take a much broader focus and should be planned and evaluated by all involved. It is important that these are developed and evaluated in local contexts, as there are no simple recipes. When ideas that had been successful in one context were implemented more widely, new issues and considerations sometimes arose that needed to be identified and addressed.

With these cautions in mind, the literature nevertheless had a number of strategies that teachers could implement. These include working with the child, sharing information, and working with families. The personal qualities of teachers have a vital impact on their relationships with children and families and in their willingness to be proactive in exploring barriers to successful transitions. Some of the specific strategies within these themes include:

- connecting with funds of knowledge that children bring to school from home;

- culturally responsive teaching;
- appropriate assessment practices that recognise the situated nature of learning and the cultural construction of assessment practices;
- making links between children's learning in ECE and school;
- fostering children's relationships and friendships and creating contexts which reduce the negative consequences of not having friends;
- considering children's whole experience of school, including lunchtimes and using the toilets;
- providing opportunities for play that enables children to explore experiences, develop language and foster understanding and meaning;
- understanding the impact of rules and the way these can support belonging but can also constrain children's behaviour and create anxiety;
- providing information and familiarisation activities for children and families;
- learning about children and their families; and
- developing home-school partnerships.

To implement the strategies above, and to work with others involved to review their effectiveness, teachers will be assisted by having time and support to find out about children's home culture, as well as small class sizes, a flexible curriculum, training and professional development (including cross-sector professional development), and acknowledgement of the special role of the new entrant teacher. Dedicated ongoing resourcing for transition activities is important if they are to be maintained.

Supporting children's transition to school: messages for families

Although there is quite a lot of advice literature for parents and families, the review focused on research literature when exploring the messages for families. Given the literature that shows the value of high-quality early childhood education, this is clearly something which families might like to consider. However, very few studies looked directly at the starting school experiences of children who have not attended ECE services.

Fostering their children's friendships with other children is an important step that families can take to support children's transition to school. Networking with other parents and caregivers can be helpful too. Rich learning experiences are also important and do not have to cost money. What parents do to support their children's learning and learning dispositions has been shown to be more important than parent/caregiver occupation, education or income. Supporting children's learning dispositions are likely to be particularly relevant for long-term success.

As children approach school entry, families can ensure children have lots of opportunities to find out about school before they start, and to get to know other children who plan to go to, or are attending, their child's school. Once children are at school, families who get involved and advocate for their children are likely to assist their transitions. Having positive expectations, ensuring children have health checks, and developing suitable routines were also mentioned in the literature.

Gaps in the literature and directions for future research

Although a wealth of literature was reviewed, there is limited New Zealand information in relation to many of the questions of interest raised for this review. It appears that more New Zealand research is urgently needed for all of the groups discussed in Chapter Three (Māori children, Pasifika children, children who are linguistically diverse, children with special educational needs, and children living in lower socio-economic households). Further research into the nuances of classroom life during transitions could usefully explore aspects of language and practice that shape how children are positioned as learners, as well as the wider influences on their experiences. Very few research designs address multiple perspectives, and some of the voices of children and families that perhaps most need to be heard, especially to shed light on how less favourable transitions can be improved, are underrepresented in research findings. New approaches to research may be required to gain access to these perspectives.

This review captures a moment in time, and in 2009 little transition to school research has been reported since the 2007 curriculum school curriculum, with its alignment to the early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki*. With a focus on learning dispositions and key competencies, many teachers are trialling new pedagogies and more holistic assessment practices. Anecdotal evidence suggests that across the country a number of early childhood services and schools are working together to support transitions. More research into these initiatives will be important in guiding future directions.

Chapter One: Background and methodology

Introduction

This review has been commissioned by the Ministry of Education and sets out to analyse recent literature regarding the transition from early childhood education to school. It addresses three broad questions:

1. What do 'successful' transitions from ECE to school look like?

2. How do the characteristics of the child, their family and whānau, the ECE service(s) they have attended, and the school they transition to play a role in how well children transition from ECE to school?

3. How can children be best supported to transition as successfully as possible?

In addressing these questions (and their sub-questions described in the method section) this review recognises the complexity involved. This complexity is evident in the multiple factors that influence each child's learning and transition experiences, and the diversity that exists within groups as well as between groups.

The primary focus is on New Zealand literature, but the review also draws on work from Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom (UK), the United States of America (USA), and occasionally from European countries beyond the UK. Published and unpublished literature from the last five years (2004 to the beginning of 2009) has been sourced, although some material from outside this period has been included if it appeared to be significant. In some cases, where there is little or no literature, the gaps have been noted.

Background

Various plans and strategies over the last seven years have drawn attention to the transition to school as being of key interest. Firstly, the Ministry of Education's (2002b) 10-year strategic plan for early childhood included a goal of promoting collaborative relationships between ECE services, families, other services and programmes and schools. The vision for 2012 included teachers from both sectors regularly meeting "to discuss curriculum linkages, children's learning needs (including special education needs) and how best to manage transition from ECE to school" (Ministry of Education, 2002b, p.17). The following actions were suggested towards achieving the proposed strategy of *Promoting coherence of education between birth and eight years:*

- *promoting better understanding between ECE teachers and primary teachers about the links between Te Whāriki and the New Zealand Curriculum Framework*

- *promoting better understanding between ECE teachers and primary teachers about the pedagogical approaches in ECE and schools*

- *distributing information about effective transition from ECE to school practices*

- *better align policy between early intervention in ECE and special education in schools* (Ministry of Education, 2002b, p. 17)

For Māori and Pasifika children, the relationship goals included "smoothing" children's transitions between home, ECE and school for all children, including those children with special education needs. The plan also noted that special effort may be required for children moving from immersion ECE to English-medium schooling (pp.16-17).

The Office of the Children's Commissioner's 10-year, long-term vision for the wellbeing of children in New Zealand (*Te Ara Tukutuku Ngā Whanaungatanga o Ngā Tamariki*, 2006) also highlighted transitions as being points of key interest. Assessment at key transition points, such as school entry, was recommended with a view to ensuring resources were available to manage the transition well (The Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2006). Health initiatives such as *B4 School Checks*, started in 2008 (Ministry of Health, 2008; "Healthy beginnings", 2009), fitted within the framework's proposal to have a plan for each child and to identify where additional support was required. "For most children, their needs will be met within universal education and health services. But we also must be able to identify children who have additional needs" (The Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2008, p.1). Within *Te Ara Tukutuku Ngā Whanaungatanga o Ngā Tamariki*, the Office of the Children's Commissioner also noted school engagement for five to nine year olds as a core goal.

Most recently, improving transitions to school has been identified as a key goal in *Ka Hikitia Managing for Success: The Māori Education Strategy 2008-2012* (Ministry of Education, 2008a) and as a key factor in Pasifika success in the *Pasifika Education Plan 2008-2012* (Ministry of Education, 2008b). *Ka Hikitia* sets out the following actions to support the goal of improving Māori children's transitions to school:

- *Support whānau and their children to make an effective transition to school through the provision of resources and information programmes to whānau.*
- *Develop a 'transition toolkit' and, through professional development, support teachers in early childhood education and schools to work with whānau and improve the transition from early childhood education to school for and with Māori students.*
- *Establish evaluative reviews to report on the effectiveness of the transition to school for Māori children as a priority in 2008/09 and 2009/10.*
- *Support schools to use the best evidence about effective teaching and learning in early childhood education settings to influence quality teaching in the first years of school.* (Ministry of Education, 2008a, p. 30)

Other goals within *Ka Hikitia* also related to the points covered in this review such as strengthening the participation of Māori whānau in their children's learning in the early years at school, and strengthening teaching and learning for Māori students.

The *Pasifika Education Plan* included the following as part of the goal to increase effective teaching for Pasifika bilingual students:

- *Improve transitions by ensuring there are clear pathways available from:*
    - *home to Pasifika bilingual, immersion and mainstream early childhood education services,*
    - *early childhood to schooling,*
    - *within schooling,*
    - *schooling to further study and/or sustainable employment.*

- *Support the transitions of Pasifika bilingual students (into, within and between Pasifika bilingual ECE services, Pasifika bilingual classrooms, and English medium classrooms).* (Goal 17, Ministry of Education, 2008b)

Like *Ka Hikitia*, the *Pasifika Education Plan* also aimed to increase the engagement in education of Pasifika parents, families and communities as well as their involvement in education partnerships with schools that focused on achievement. There were also consistencies with the Office of the Children's Commissioner's (2006) vision, in that student engagement was viewed as essential for success.

Although there has been clear policy direction and commitment in relation to the transition from early childhood education to school, May (2009) commented that, "the reality left a chasm caused by a range of industrial, delivery, funding and philosophical divides" (p. 254). To realise the goals of the three strategic plans (Ministry of Education, 2002b, 2008a, 2008b) it is important to consider what is known about the transition to school.

Starting school in New Zealand and the implications for this review

In Aotearoa/New Zealand, although not compulsory until age six, school entry for almost all children happens when they turn five. This contrasts with the more common annual, biannual or termly intakes that occur elsewhere (see for example: Corrie, 1999; Dunlop & Fabian, 2007; Graue, 1993; Sharp, Hutchinson & Whetton, 1994). Overseas, cohort entry means a focus on transition often forms one aspect of the school year cycle, with "timely" support and advice, eg, themed journals (Mantei, Latham & Kervin, 2009, p. 3). In addition, transition to school programmes described in overseas literature usually relate to groups of children starting together rather than the continuous enrolment of individuals. However, in New Zealand, teachers are continually overseeing school entry.

Although it has been proposed that starting on the child's birthday provides a more individualized and personal event for the child (Neuman, 2002), the reality is that children often find themselves involved in bewildering large group activities during their first days, with no particular arrangements made to support their transition (Ledger, 2000; Peters, 2004). However, it is impossible to generalise about the New Zealand experience. In a rural area, or other locations where new children start less frequently, or where new entrant classes are smaller, there may be more time to provide support for new children when they start.

The practice of starting on or just after their fifth birthday means that children in New Zealand, although not the youngest internationally, are relatively young on entry to school compared to children in other Western countries. For example, Suggate (2009) noted that in a recent *Programme for International Student Assessment* (PISA) study, only 4 out of 56 countries had a school entry age under six (see Table 1 for details). Suggate's (2009) analysis of reading achievement indicated no benefit from early entry to formal schooling and some potentially negative consequences for some children's long-term success. It seems reasonable to conclude that because of their young age on entry, New Zealand children may require particular kinds of support compared with older counterparts overseas. In addition, age is a relevant consideration when interpreting some international data on school entry because the participants could be up to two years older than New Zealand children.

Table 1: Age of entry to school (in years) in 56 countries (Suggate, 2009)

School entry age (in years)	Number of countries
4	1
5	3
6	33
7	19

Enrolment practices mean that a child's relative age ranking in the class changes, at least in the first year, as new children arrive, and the timing of the child's birthday often determines the size of class that he or she joins. Another feature of continuous enrolment is that in some schools, as the new entrant classes get larger, the older children are taken out to form a new class, resulting in a second transition within the first year, both for those who move, and for those who remain in an altered peer group. In contrast, class size, peer groupings and age-ranking within the class tend to be more static overseas. Overall, these unique features of enrolment practices need to be taken into account when considering the implications of research from overseas for New Zealand.

Diversity

There is a diverse range of early childhood services in New Zealand. The Ministry of Education provides information range of options (eg, "Choosing an Early Childhood Education service", Ministry of Education, n.d.). This diversity of ECE provision, coupled with complex arrangements that mean children may attend more than one early childhood service, and the mobility of families (who may travel to attend the ECE service of school of their choice) is creating an increasingly complicated web of connections between early childhood services and schools.

In addition, the increasingly multicultural population and the widening gap between rich and poor (Blaiklock, Kiro, Belgrave, Low, Davenport & Hassall, 2002), are making the composition of school classes more diverse than they have ever been. Statistics for 2008 indicate that of over 57, 000 Year 1 students, around 54% were Pākeha, 24% Māori, 10% Pasifika, 9% Asian, 2% other, with a small number of scholarship or foreign fee paying students (Ministry of Education, 2008c). Understanding this complexity, and the challenges created by it, is an important aspect in the development of any policies and practices that seek to enhance the experiences of children and their families during the transition to school. This review has attempted to provide insights into this complexity, whilst acknowledging the gaps in the available information.

Curriculum

The nature of curriculum documents, and approaches to learning, can create two quite different cultures of early childhood education and school. May (2009) notes that globally there has been increased political interest in the connections between ECE and school in recent years. In considering these links it is important to remember that an early childhood curriculum "should not be predetermined by a school curriculum because the school curriculum is not intended to be appropriate for the learning needs of infants, toddlers and young children" (Brewerton, 1996, pp. 14-15). This helps to explain the tension in several countries, including New Zealand, the UK and Australia, between early childhood curriculum and pressure to prepare children for a different approach to learning at school (Anning, Cullen & Fleer, 2004). In contrast, in Scandinavian countries there appears to be more recognition of early childhood as a phase with its own value and purpose (Petriwskyj, Thorpe & Taylor, 2005). However, the New Zealand context, taking account of the OECD work (Rychen & Salganik, 2003) and other research on learning for the 21st century, is changing.

From 1993-2007 the *New Zealand Curriculum Framework* (NZCF) (Ministry of Education, 1993), and its associated learning area documents, covered learning during the school years. A major stocktake of the New Zealand school curriculum in 2000 (Ministry of Education, 2002a) was followed by extensive consultation as part of the *New Zealand Curriculum/Te Marautanga o Aotearoa Project* (see Cubitt, 2006 for details). The result was a much shorter core school curriculum, with a lot more freedom for schools to design and implement their own curriculum "so that teaching and learning is meaningful and beneficial to their particular communities of students" (Ministry of Education, 2007a, p. 37). With its focus on key competencies, explicit acknowledgement of the importance of the transition to school, and clear alignment between the strands of the early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) and the key competencies at school, this recent curriculum provides a very different focus on learning to the 1993 NZCF, and a promising approach to curriculum alignment between sectors. Now early childhood services and schools in New

Zealand have curriculum documents that focus on engaging children as lifelong learners, and consider the 'how' as well as the 'what' of learning (for example, Carr & Peters, 2005; Carr et al., 2008; Chamberlain, 2008; Hill & Robertson, 2004; Hipkins, 2008). As this review goes to print, National Standards have just been published. However, these connections and the curriculum alignment remain important. The introduction sections of the National Standards highlight the importance of critical thinking, making meaning, and so on, as reflected in the key competencies. They also acknowledge the importance for children's learning of teachers' cultural responsiveness and cultural understanding, connecting with children's lived experiences, and teacher relationships with students (Ministry of Education, 2009a, 2009b); issues which are also relevant to transitions.

Methodology

Questions to be addressed

This review addresses three research questions, which were proposed by the Ministry of Education, paying careful attention to the sub-questions within each section:

1. What do 'successful' transitions from ECE to school look like?

    - What do successful transitions look like in relation to how children learn and achieve during the transition from ECE to school?
    - What do successful transitions look like from immersion ECE to non-immersion schooling?
    - What are indicators of 'successful' transitions? What are indicators of 'unsuccessful' transitions?

2. How do the characteristics of the child, their family and whānau, the ECE service(s) they have attended, and the school they transition to play a role in how well children transition from ECE to school?

    - Are there observed differences in how well different groups of children transition from ECE to school? Do some groups of children tend to transition better than others? Which groups of children are at risk of making poorer or less successful transitions?

      Of particular interest are:

      Māori and Pasifika children;

      children living in lower socio-economic households;

      children with special educational needs;

      children who are linguistically diverse and/or come from linguistically diverse homes; and

      children who have attended immersion/bilingual ECE services.

    - What underlies these observed differences? How do the characteristics of the child, the characteristics of their family and whānau, the characteristics of the ECE service(s) they have attended, and the characteristics of the school they transition to play a part in or interact with each other in creating these observed differences? What factors are more important than others and why?
    - Under what circumstances do the best or better transitions occur? Under what circumstance do the poor or poorer transitions occur? What facilitates or hinders a smooth transition and why?

3. How can children be best supported to transition as successfully as possible?

ECE Services and Schools

- How can teachers (at an individual level) best support children to transition as successfully as possible from ECE to school?
- How can teachers be supported and resourced to support children to transition as successfully as possible from ECE to school?
- How can ECE services and schools (at a service level) best work together to support children to transition as successfully as possible from ECE to school? What is required to support this happening?

Parents, family and whānau

- How can parents, family and whānau members best support children to transition as successfully as possible from ECE to school?
- How can parents, family and whānau members be supported and resourced to provide the support required by their children to transition as successfully as possible from ECE to school?
- Do some parents, family and whānau members have special or particular needs in relation to support as a result of their own characteristics (for example, past schooling experience, language skills and capabilities)?

Accessing literature

The methodology firstly involved searching for and accessing academic literature. This included systematic searches of relevant electronic databases (eg, Proquest, ERIC, A+ Education, CBCA Education, etc.), Masters and PhD theses databases, education websites, and library catalogues. These searches were systematically recorded, showing what databases had been searched and the search terms used. In addition, personal contact was made with Ministry of Education staff and a range of national and international experts in the field to assist in obtaining new work and also unpublished data such as theses. Reference lists in relevant articles and reports were also followed up.

As requested by the Ministry of Education, the selection of literature focused on the last five years (2004 to early 2009), with particular attention to New Zealand literature, as well as research in "broadly similar" countries such as Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Petriwskyj et al.'s (2005) analysis of academic literature on transitions from 1999-2004 provides insights into some of the questions of interest from the period immediately prior to this review. Fabian and Dunlop (2006) have also provided a comprehensive review of earlier literature on this topic.

The number of published New Zealand items for the time period of interest was quite limited. It therefore seemed appropriate to include some material from outside the five-year time span, especially where this related specifically to the groups of particular interest outlined in the research questions.

The overseas literature on transitions from early childhood education to school for the same time period was extensive and some selections, in addition to the date of publication, were necessary. Notes were made on the readings to show which of the research questions they helped to address. From this initial reading, the literature that appeared most relevant to the research questions was selected for deeper reading and analysis.

Analysis, synthesis and writing

To aid the analysis, a summary table was developed noting the study, aims and country, the sample and analysis, findings in relation to each of the three main research questions, and comments.

The material relating to each research question was then grouped, re-read and notes taken. Emergent themes were identified in relation to the questions being considered. A critical approach was taken throughout, exploring the strengths and weaknesses of the research approaches and findings in relation to the central questions.

An initial draft was sent out for review and a number of national and international experts provided helpful feedback, which was taken into account when writing the final draft. This process was also used to ensure that the search process had located all the relevant material. Reviewers contributed two unpublished sources (in press and 2009), but no additional published articles for the time period of interest were suggested by the reviewers. This indicated that the search strategies had been reasonably comprehensive.

While the aim has been to provide a comprehensive picture of the available material in the field, this review does not claim to provide a complete understanding of transition to school in New Zealand. It draws together a wealth of literature, but in doing so also highlights the "cracks, tensions and fractures in our understanding" (Suri & Clarke, 2009, p. 404). It became clear that there were many gaps in relation to the questions of interest.

Structure of the report

Each main research question has been addressed in turn, although the material intersects and overlaps. Chapter Two explores question one: what do 'successful' transitions from ECE to school look like? Chapter Three focuses on the second research question: how do the characteristics of the child, their family and whānau, the ECE service(s) they have attended, and the school they transition to play a role in how well children transition from ECE to school? The third research question, how can children be best supported to transition as successfully as possible, is addressed over two chapters (Four and Five). Chapter Four examines the role of teachers and Chapter Five looks at families. The report concludes with a short summary, consideration of the limitations, and recommendations for further research in Chapter Six.

Chapter Two: Successful transitions

Introduction

Chapter One highlighted the interest in successful school entry and effective transition practices inherent in a number of Strategic Plans (Ministry of Education, 2002, 2008a, 2008b) and visions for children (eg, Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2006). This desire to understand transition experiences and foster 'successful' transitions underpins much of the transition to school research. However, this aim is not as simple as it first appears. This chapter first outlines some important issues to consider and then, with these factors in mind, critically analyses the themes in the literature that show what successful transitions to school look like. The chapter concludes by discussing indicators of successful and unsuccessful transitions.

Important issues to consider

Three key issues to be considered in relation to any findings on transition are

- the theories underpinning the research and subsequent advice,
- the length of the transition period being researched, and
- whose voices are heard about the experience.

Theoretically there are many different ways to conceptualise transition. The theoretical stance underpinning a study impacts on what features of transition are seen as important, the data which are gathered, and how they are analysed. Acknowledging both explicit and implicit theoretical views is important in exploring different views regarding 'success' and helps to make sense of the range of approaches evident in transition research and the many ways in which 'successful' transitions have been conceptualised.

The length of the transition being researched is an important consideration because several studies have found that children's experiences could change over time (Carr et al., 2009; Gallagher, 2005; Peters, 2004; Smith, in press). Children who find the initial transition difficult may eventually settle, while for others there may be no obvious signs of distress but their learning may be affected by transition-related issues (see Peters, 2004). The six gifted children in Gallagher's (2005) study were initially positive about their school experiences but the lack of challenge for the children, and the parents' increasing distrust of teachers, led to problems over time. Hence, "definitions of successful transition now consider long-term trajectories rather than focusing solely on initial adjustments" (Petriwskyj, et al., 2005, p. 66).

A further consideration in the analysis of 'successful' transitions is whose voices are heard. Peters (2004) found that family/whānau, ECE teachers, primary school teachers and children sometimes had different views regarding the same transition. What was seen as successful by one group was not necessarily viewed in the same way by another group. An example of this was the arrangements between one ECE service and their local school, which both sets of teachers agreed was working well. However, interviews with parents in that setting revealed that many of them felt confused and excluded by the practices. This impacted on the parents' ability to support their children when difficulties arose. Several Australian studies by Docket and Perry have also shown that parents, teachers and children have different concerns regarding transition (eg, Dockett & Perry, 2004c, 2007). The review identifies which voices are currently being heard, and where there are gaps.

Theorising 'successful' transitions from ECE to school

This review analysed the ways in which transitions have been theorised in recent years to provide an indication of what might characterise a successful transition. (See Peters 2003b for a brief overview of different theoretical approaches to transitions, and Peters, 2004 for a more detailed discussion.) Current thinking about this issue acknowledges the complex interplay of personal and environmental features. While in the past children's individual 'readiness' was often discussed and seen as essential for school success (eg, Gesell & Ilg, 1965), now readiness is also seen as a condition of families, of schools, and of communities (LoCasale-Crouch, Mashburn, Downer & Pianta, 2008). Petriwskyj et al.'s (2005) literature review traced this change. Nevertheless, these approaches continue to be discussed, although in the 2004-2009 literature interest in 'readiness' (in its different forms) seemed to feature in material from the USA more than those from other countries (eg, Graue, 2006; Ladd, Hearld & Kochel, 2006; LoCasale-Crouch, et al., 2008; Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005).

In moving beyond the focus on the individual to understand the complex interaction of personal and environmental features, Bronfenbrenner (1979) directed attention to the different levels of the environment (micro-, meso-, exo- and macrosystems), and how they both influence and are influenced by a developing person. The microsystems are patterns of activities, roles and relationships experienced in a given setting. The mesosystem comprises the interrelationships between the microsystems. Events in one mircrosystem can affect what happens in another (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). There may be connections between them, (eg, a child's siblings and friends may be present at both home and school). Communication between settings is also important. Smith (1998) stated that if there are "warm, reciprocal and balanced relationships between pre-school and school teachers the transition will be supportive of development" (p. 14). The exosystem refers to settings that do not involve the developing person but affect or are affected by what happens in the microsystem. One exosytem that is likely to be particularly influential on a child's development is the parents' workplace (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). The macrosystem refers to the overriding beliefs, values, ideology, practices and so on that exist, or could exist, within a culture. Some of the features of the New Zealand macrosystem context, with regard to school enrolment policies and curriculum, were outlined in Chapter One.

Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1997) described the interactions, or proximal processes, that vary substantially and systematically "as a function of the characteristics of the developing Person, of the immediate and more remote *Environmental Contexts* and the *Time* periods in which the proximal processes take place" (p. 994, emphasis in the original). Person characteristics included dispositions, resources and demand characteristics. These interact with features of the environment that invite, permit or inhibit, engagement.

The part played by the environment is perhaps why Crnic and Lamberty (1994) concluded from their review of literature on school readiness, that "we currently have no theory or credible empirical evidence" to identify specific skills required for school success (p. 96). Skinner, Bryant, Coffman and Campbell (1998) noted that:

> *there are classroom practices and constructions that, even in the first weeks of school, begin moving some children into the track of school failure. That a child can be on a trajectory for school failure by the age of 5 has led us to examine closely how various meanings and practices, which are historically and culturally constructed, work to define both kindergarten teachers and children and place them in certain relationships vis-a-vis one another.* (p. 307)

Most of the factors that were identified in this review connected in some way to the relationships alluded to by Skinner et al. (1998). As Erickson (1985) noted, social class or early childhood experiences do not 'cause' school achievement (or problems with school). Instead, '*people*' influence patterns of experience "in specific interactional occasions" (p. 129, emphasis in the original).

In addition, Macfarlane, Glynn, Cavanagh and Bateman (2007) remind readers that notions of success cannot be based on external and observable behaviours only. For example, achievement may be seen by Māori as "encompassing physical, emotional, and spiritual as well as intellectual growth" (Hirsh, 1990, cited in McGee, Ward, Gibbons & Harlow, 2002, p.61). Some of the themes discussed in this chapter encompass these internal dimensions, as well as more tangible behaviours.

What do successful transitions look like in relation to how children learn and achieve during the transition from ECE to school?

The following sections outline and discuss a number of overlapping and interconnected themes that were evident (either implicitly or explicitly) in the New Zealand literature regarding what successful transitions might look like in relation to how children learn and achieve. Relevant international literature has been woven through as appropriate. The themes regarding successful transitions have been broadly identified as:

- belonging, wellbeing and feeling 'suitable' at school;
- recognition and acknowledgement of culture;
- respectful, reciprocal relationships;
- engagement in learning;
- learning dispositions and identity as a learner;
- positive teacher expectations; and
- building on funds of knowledge from early childhood education and home.

Most of the themes focussed on the child's experience at the microsystem level. However, some research looked at mesosystem factors (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) as a feature of a successful transition, in particular the relationships between the adults involved.

Belonging, wellbeing and feeling 'suitable' at school

A predominant theme in the literature was the idea that a successful transition would be one where children developed a sense of belonging in the new setting (Bulkeley & Fabian, 2006; Burley & Wehipeihana, 2005; Brooker, 2008; Broström, 2002; Carr & Peters, 2005; Fabian, 2002; Macfarlane, 2004; Margetts, 2007; Penman, 2006; Podmore, Wendt Samu and the A'oga Samoa, 2006; Simpson & Callaghan, 2005; Tamarua, 2006; Woodhead & Brooker, 2008). UK writers Woodhead and Brooker (2008) provide a detailed overview of this concept, in a volume of the *Early Childhood Matters* journal devoted to the topic of belonging. They use terms such as 'feeling secure', 'feeling suitable', 'feeling like a fish in water', 'feeling recognised' and 'feeling able to participate', to provide insights into the concept of belonging.

There are clear links to children's learning and achievement. Laevers' work at the Research Centre for Experiential Education highlighted the connection between wellbeing, the sense of being a 'fish in water', and deep involvement: a condition that brings about deep level learning at the very limits of a child's capabilities (Laevers, 2005). Efforts to enhance involvement will only have an impact if children and students feel at home and are free from emotional constraints (Laevers, n.d.). Similarly, Broström (2002), a Danish writer, stated that "feeling suitable is crucial to the child's learning and development, as well as to a fundamental and continuous sense of wellbeing" (p. 52). A small study

in the UK by Bulkeley and Fabian (2006) identified "the importance of social and emotional wellbeing in providing a firm foundation from which children can explore and become active learners" (p. 28). A sense of belonging has been linked not only to school success, but also to later life success (Capps, 2003, cited in Clinton, 2008, p. 32).

Some points covered by Woodhead and Brooker (2008), especially in relation to feeling suitable, overlap with 'learning to do school'. This has been identified as important in earlier studies. For example, Hill, Comber, Louden, Rivalland and Reid (1998) proposed that before children could focus on the content of schooling, learning the culture of the school, and their role within it (that is, what it means to 'do school') was a necessary step. However, the two are considered as related but separate ideas in this review because in some cases learning to 'do school' may require leaving behind what is valued at home and in the community. Thomson (2002) commented that in these cases a child may choose not to become differentiated through school success, and research with older children highlights the value of being known for who one is (an authentic self, as opposed to a front or mask) whilst also keeping open a range of new possibilities (Warin & Muldoon, 2009). Therefore, contexts where a child has to dress, speak, play and behave 'suitably' (Woodhead & Brooker, 2008) is rather different to the sense of belonging being discussed here, which is more to do with knowing one's self, being known by others and being valued and accepted for who you are.

Simpson and Callaghan (2005) describe Mana Whenua, a related concept from a Māori world view:

> *From a Māori perspective, the concept of Mana Whenua (Belonging) becomes even more important when you examine the individual terms "Mana" and "Whenua."*
>
> *Whenua is a term that can be used to denote the placenta, the term whenua is also used in relation to land. This highlights the important connection between people and the land. Traditionally, the identification of prominent landmarks such as mountains, rivers and lakes helped to establish tribal and sub-tribal connections. The whenua in the traditional context was therefore fundamental to identity.*
>
> *The word Mana is often used in reference to prestige, power and influence. It is very difficult to have prestige and exert power or influence when you do not know who you are.*
>
> *When you introduce both terms together, Mana Whenua, the relationship between identity and prestige is emphasised. Mana Whenua can only be achieved when you are accepted and valued for who you are and where you come from. We believe that Mana Whenua (Belonging) provides the foundation for relationships, communication, managing oneself, thinking and making meaning about ourselves, others, and the world.* (p. 39)

Macfarlane (2004), writing about culturally responsive teaching with a class of Year 1 and 2 Māori students, also mentioned the value of belonging and its connection with the relationships students experience with their teachers. All of the children had previously been identified as having learning and behaviour difficulties in their regular classrooms, but in this class, where the teacher felt belonging had been established, the children were motivated to achieve better; withdrawn children became vocal contributors and impulsive children seemed more in control of themselves. This highlighted that the problems were contextual, as was their resolution.

Given the evidence of its importance for student engagement and learning, the place of belonging in the New Zealand school curriculum was hotly debated during the consultation phase (see Rutherford, 2005), although in the end *Participating and Contributing* (Ministry of Education, 2007a, p. 13) replaced the draft competency of belonging. *Mana whenua - Belonging* is, however, a key strand in the early childhood curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1996), and this is aligned with Participating and Contributing in the school curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007a).

Although the terminology is different, the notion of inclusion seemed to fit within this theme of wellbeing and belonging. Successful transitions in Rietveld's (2003, 2008) study of boys with Down Syndrome and 'typically developing boys' included becoming a valued and contributing member of the class and school, and participating in the full range of culturally-valued roles of that setting. Inclusion (and exclusion) was subtly played out in the language and power evident in classroom observations, with teachers playing a key role in determining how children were positioned in a setting and the nature of their peer interactions.

Recognition and acknowledgement of culture

The role of the environment in fostering a sense of belonging relates to recent New Zealand literature which draws attention to the importance of children experiencing school contexts where their values, languages and cultural knowledge are an implicit part of teaching and learning practices (Fletcher, Parkhill, Fa'afoi, Tufulasi Taleni & O'Regan, 2009; Macfarlane, 2007). This is particularly noted for Pasifika students (Fletcher, et al., 2009; Podmore, Suavao & Mapa, 2003) and Māori students (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Macfarlane, 2004; Macfarlane et al., 2007; McGee et al., 2002). Although most of these writers were not looking at starting school, their work provides implications for viewing successful transitions. Success in the classroom should not require students to "leave their cultural identity at the gate" (Macfarlane et al., 2007, p. 74). This fits with Ministry of Education's (2008a) aims to step up the performance of the education system to ensure "Māori are enjoying education success as Māori" (p. 10).

Research with Aboriginal parents in Australia found that families felt that visible evidence of their culture in schools, along with the presence of Aboriginal people within the school such as teachers, aides, general staff, members of school councils and committees, was crucial in helping Aboriginal children to "feel as if they belong in the school environment" (Dockett, Mason & Perry, 2006, p. 114).

Respectful, reciprocal relationships

Relationships are frequently cited as being "core to a successful transition" (eg, Dockett & Perry, 2008b, p. 275). This theme has several components. For children, having friends is widely recognised as a feature of a successful transition. Another aspect is the relationships between children and teachers, and finally, the relationships between the adults involved in the transition, most notably the family, school teachers and early childhood teachers.

Friends

Developing and maintaining children's friendships has been identified as a key feature of a successful transition to school (Belcher, 2006; Brooker, 2008; Bulkeley & Fabian, 2006; Denham, 2006; Docket & Perry, 2005a, 2005c; Ladd et al., 2006; Margetts, 2006; Peters, 2004). Ladd et al. (2006) noted that children must succeed at forming relationships with their same-age peers, whilst also competing for resources and attention due to the higher ration of children to adults than they would experience in early childhood settings or at home. It appears that those children who can negotiate classroom life and build relationships are likely to make a successful transition (O'Kane, 2007). Even in a study of new entrant mathematics, friendships were a dominant theme. As Belcher (2006) notes, "whilst grappling with their role as a learner in a new environment, ways of relating to others were uppermost in children's minds" (p. 46).

Neuman (2007a) noted:

> *…children's siblings, friends and their wider peer group can be highly significant as sources of shared experience and social support, collectively bridging the familiar and the unfamiliar. This is especially true in situations where children feel solidarity with friends in making transitions.* (p. 56)

Case studies in Peters' (2003, 2004) research identified the scaffolding and support friends provided.

Ladd et al. (2006) and Denham (2006) cite a number of studies linking poor transitions with not having a friend and peer group rejection to school avoidance, loneliness and underachievement. In contrast, having friends and making new friends was associated with positive feelings about school and better academic achievement than children with few friends. Similar findings have been found for children with special needs (Carlson et al., 2009; McIntyre, Blacher & Baker, 2006). However, as with all correlations, the nature of the relationship between friends and attitudes is not clear. For example, whether children who are happy and engaged at school are able to make more friends, whether making friends leads to greater enjoyment and engagement, or whether other mediating factors may also be at work.

Children's relationships with teachers

Within the new peer milieu, school children also have to negotiate a new relationship with their teacher (Ladd et al., 2006). Looking at influences on achievement, Hattie (2009) found that "the most critical aspects contributed by the teacher are the quality of teaching, and the nature of the student-teacher relationships" (p. 126). Myers and Pianta (2008) discuss the link between problem behaviours and negative student-teacher interactions. The quality of the teacher-child relationship has been shown to affect the child's adjustment to school (Harrison, Clarke & Unger, 2003; Murray, Waas & Murray, 2008). Positive relationships appeared to be particularly important for children in low-income urban areas (Murray et al., 2008). Mashburn and Pianta (2006) cited a range of literature which indicates that the nature of the child's relationship with teachers is not only important at the transition time, but can have a long-lasting effect on the child's success at school. This has been evident in New Zealand in Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai & Richardson's (2003) research with Māori children at high school, and in Belcher's (2006) observations of the way new entrant children's relationship with the teacher appeared to impact on their experiences in school. In Carr et al.'s (2008) study, Tina Williams and Mary Simpson, the Māori members of the research team, likened the relationship between teacher and learner to a tuangi:

> *One side of the shell represents the resourceful learner (akonga) and the other side represents the resourceful teacher (kaiako). There is no separation between the two, both the teacher and the learner are positioned at the centre of the teaching learning process. If there is distance between the teacher and the learner, the learning process is compromised.* (pp. 47-48)

Rietveld (2008) found the nature of the relationships in each setting influenced inclusion; this applied to adult relationships with the child as well as between peers.

Adult relationships

Pianta (2004) proposed that a child's competence at the beginning school level "may not be the only or the best outcome measure of a successful transition. Instead, the quality of the parents' relationships with teachers, with school staff, and with the child's schooling may be an equally valid indicator of transition outcome" (p. 6). Dockett and Perry (2006) described the establishment of collaborative and respectful relationships as the basis of a positive transition to school, and this is a feature of many of their projects.

When children have special needs, positive relationships between all parties, including specialist staff, are seen as an aspect of a successful transition (Faloon, n.d., Ministry of Education, 2005; Rosenkoetter, Hains & Dogaru, 2007; Salter & Redman, 2007). This includes parents being able to trust that teachers have their child's best interests at heart and that parents and teachers feel they are partners (Ministry of Education, 2005). By the same token, when parent-teacher relationships break down, as in Gallagher's (2005, 2006) study, it raises questions about the success of the transition when considered in the longer term.

Engagement in learning

There are clear links between engagement in learning and the deep involvement discussed in the earlier section on *belonging*. Relationships play a part in this too, especially if the teacher is to get to know the child well enough to find learning contexts and challenges that will be engaging.

Deep involvement is only possible when an activity is appropriately challenging (Laevers, 2005). Csikszentmihalyi (1990) described the state experienced by people who are completely absorbed in a task that they find enjoyable as "flow". Challenges that are too great produce frustration, worry and eventually anxiety, while too little challenge may lead to boredom (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 1997). This is important for learning because in order to keep experiencing the intrinsically rewarding state of flow, learners must engage in more progressively complex challenges (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2005).

While "the flow experience acts as a magnet for learning – that is, for developing new levels of challenges and skills" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 33), Mitchell (1998) noted that an individual is unlikely to experience flow all the time. However, an ongoing mismatch between the challenges faced and a person's perceived skills is problematic (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Mitchell, 1998). Although Mitchell and Csikszentmihalyi were not writing about new entrants, children appear to indicate that engagement in learning is part of a successful transition (Belcher, 2006; Gallagher, 2005, 2006; Peters, 2004). A child's response to such engagement was summed up nicely by the delight one boy in Belcher's (2006) study expressed after an incident when he was deeply involved and working at a high level. The teacher noted that "Your brain is really thinking" and he responded "And my heart is thinking" (p. 51). When Carr et al. (2009) found evidence of deep engagement in new entrant classes, these episodes were characterised by a balance between ability and challenge, and there was usually plenty of time. In contrast, work that was too easy has been shown to be as problematic as work that was too hard (Belcher, 2006; Peters, 2004), especially for gifted students (Gallagher, 2005, 2006).

Although engagement in learning is seen as a key aspect of a successful transition, small case studies prior to the 2007 school curriculum reflected some New Zealand teachers' frustrations with school demands and approaches to learning that seemed to the teachers involved as inappropriate, because they found that they worked against fostering children's engagement in learning (Burley & Wehipeihana, 2005; James, 2005).

Learning dispositions and identity as a learner

Another view of success that was evident in the literature was for children to establish a positive identity as a learner at school, and to develop positive learning dispositions, so they are "ready, willing and able" to engage with learning and utilise the knowledge and skills that develop (see for example, Carr, 2001; Claxton, 2006, 2007; Claxton & Carr, 2004). Carr et al. (2009) noted that dispositions "act as an affective and cultural filter for trajectories of learning in the making. They can turn knowledge and skill into action…[they] are strengthened, adapted, transformed or interrupted by circumstances and experience" (p. 15). They should be viewed as verbs rather than nouns (things to be acquired) as a learner becomes more or less disposed to respond in particular ways (Claxton & Carr, 2004).

Learning dispositions are central outcomes for early childhood education (Ministry of Education, 1996). Recent research describes reciprocity, imagination (Carr et al., 2009) and resilience (Brooker, 2008; Carr et al., 2009) as important for children's learning in the long-term. Similarly, Claxton's (2002) description of developing "learning power" includes increasing the four "Rs" of reciprocity, resilience, resourceful and reflectiveness. The learning dispositions described by these authors are closely aligned with the key competences that originated in OECD work (Carr et al., 2008; Rychen & Salganik, 2003), and are now reflected in the New Zealand curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007).

This has important implications for transition, as research documenting children's learning over 18 months as they moved from early childhood settings to school, led Carr et al. (2009) to conclude that "children's learning dispositions are fragile in the onslaught of any school curriculum that is packed with compulsory tasks, tight scheduling and summative assessments – and does not recognise learning dispositions in practice or in documentation" (p. 220). They argue that if these learning dispositions are to become robust, both curriculum and pedagogy should focus more deliberately on their enhancement. A successful transition is likely to be enhanced by a classroom programme that encourages children to "give things a go", try something new, and persist when it's difficult (Carr et al., 2008; James, 2005).

Related to this is children's identity as a learner. Penman's (2006) review cites research to suggest that positive self-identity as a learner is even more important than a positive cultural identity in relation to academic outcomes. However, the majority of the literature identified this aspect of success implicitly in response to the negative consequences of *not* developing a positive identity as a learner at school. The claim that new entrant children know "nothing" or "come in with nothing" is still occasionally raised by teachers (eg, teacher interviews in "A better start for the future", 2009, p. 3; Tamarua, 2006, p. 99) and this overlooking of the strengths that children bring can have implications for their success as learners.

The literature reviewed suggested a complex interplay between children's achievement on school tasks, how they were positioned as a learner, and the impact on their ongoing learning experiences. Some children are positioned early on as being 'poor learners' in some way. A number of studies show the negative cycles of experience that can develop from this (Chapman, Tunmer, & Prochnow, 2004; Peters, 2004). For example, children viewed by their teachers as poor readers were rated as being less happy, having less adaptive classroom behaviours and more classroom problems (Chapman et al., 2004). Although the focus of Chapman et al.'s study was on the teaching of reading, it can also be seen to raise questions about the nature of the relationships these children had with their teachers. Research with older children has shown that problem student behaviour may arise from the nature of the interactions within the classroom, and that success depends on changing the environment (Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai & Richardson, 2003; Macfarlane, 2007; Macfarlane, et al., 2007). Findings like Chapman et al.'s indicate a need for more research to understand the reasons behind correlations of behaviour with low achievement.

Where detailed case studies are available, they have shown how quickly a bright, enthusiastic child can be positioned as having difficulties, and how a number of factors combine to lead to a dislike of school (Peters, 2004). The way a child is positioned academically in the classroom has been shown to influence not only the learning experiences that are offered (McNaughton, 2002) but also the way they are perceived by peers, and therefore their social experiences too (Peters, 2003a, 2004; Pollard & Filer, 1999; Rietveld, 2008).

New Zealand teachers have been trialling new ways of assessing and reporting which provide richer, contextualised information about both key competencies and learning areas (eg, Carr et al., 2008; Davis & Molloy, 2005; Wilson, 2005). This, along with changes in curriculum and what is recognised as valued learning, will hopefully assist children in maintaining or developing positive identities as learner, but further research may be necessary to explore this in practice.

Positive teacher expectations

Linked with the points discussed above, successful transitions may be ones where teachers have positive expectations for their students. Peters (2004) found that children's (sometimes erroneous) reputations start to be developed early, as teachers formed opinions based on early childhood service attended, family composition and prior contact with families, and these impacted on the experiences children had and the way their behaviour was interpreted. Docket et al. (2006)

identified low teacher expectations for Aboriginal children. Despite their communicative competence, teachers tended to form an opinion that many Aboriginal children had major deficits in literacy skills.

Based on their research into teacher expectations and judgements, and the reading achievement of their pupils, Rubie-Davies, Hattie and Hamilton (2006) noted that expectation effects were one explanation for the limited progress of the Māori students in their project. For Pacific Island, Asian and New Zealand European students, positive self-fulfilling prophecies may have been operating. The researchers suggested that future research could investigate the learning opportunities provided to these ethnic groups and the relationship of these to teachers' expectations. Hattie (2009) reminds teachers, if they are going to have expectations they should make them challenging, appropriate and checkable.

Although outside the period for this review, Skinner et al.'s (1998) study of former Head Start children was significant because of the insights it provided. Their research showed how a teacher's expectations and actions helped children whose skills and behaviours were not those deemed as successful by school standards, to do well in her class. Teacher practices that worked best included high expectations, an emphasis on what children could do, praise, gentle redirection of inappropriate behaviour, and a caring attitude. The study drew attention to the ways school contributes to a child's notions of self as a good or bad student, and the importance of creating promise instead of risk.

Building on funds of knowledge from early childhood education and home

Children often experience sharp differences in the curriculum when they begin primary school (Neuman, 2007a; Petriwskyi, Thorpe & Taylor, 2005). Navigating these differences and making connections is identified in the literature as another feature of a successful transition. However, how to achieve this is a topic of debate in the starting school literature. One approach to continuity focuses on encouraging families to engage in school-like activities and behaviours, something which, although potentially helpful, "runs the risk of a form of cultural imperialism" (Turoa, Wolfgramm, Tanielu & McNaughton, 2002, p. 6) and may run counter to belonging and recognition of culture that were discussed earlier. An alternative is to change school practices to reflect those that are valued in the community.

One way of thinking about community practices is Thomson's (2002) description of 'virtual school bags', which children bring to school filled with knowledge, experiences and dispositions. These virtual school bags are "variously opened, mediated and ignored" (p. 9). If this practice continues, the gap grows between the children who are born fortunate by virtue of their class, heritage or gender and whose 'virtual school bags' are opened and welcomed, when compared with those whose existing knowledge and dispositions are ignored. To counter this, teachers in Kamler and Comber's (2005) Australian study began to think about what might be hidden away in children's virtual school bags, and became ethnographers of communities to learn about cultural resources. This helped teachers re-assess their students' potential and design pedagogies to connect them to the literacy curriculum. In New Zealand, Tamarua's (2006) smaller study of Māori children starting school also attributed successful transitions and literacy learning to teachers' ability to incorporate familiar features of children's expertise into a classroom activity that was unfamiliar.

After moving to England from Australia, Thomson noted the impact that curriculum has on teachers' ability to incorporate children's existing funds of knowledge. Writing with Hall, she commented that in the current context of English schooling there was "little official opening for family, local and community knowledge, despite ongoing research which suggests that the inclusion of such 'funds' can be important 'scaffolding' for children whose languages, heritages and ways of being in the world are not those valued in schooling" (Thomson & Hall, 2008, p. 87).

Where the school curriculum requires learning that is different to that valued at home, and there is little room for flexibility, another approach is to recognise and affirm children's identity and expertise, and ensure that bridges are made between the learner's current resources and those being taught (Turoa et al., 2002). It is, therefore, clear that ideas

about successful transitions in this instance are mediated by the cultural context, in particular, the nature of the school curriculum guiding practice.

Phillips, McNaughton and MacDonald (2004) indicated that a degree of discontinuity is probably inevitable. Providing that there is appropriate support and scaffolding to bridge the differences, some discontinuity can be negotiated and may actually be a basis for learning (Phillips, McNaughton & MacDonald, 2004; Peters, 2004). Research with children suggests that they expect some changes when they get to school, and look forward to new achievements (Brooker, 2008; Einarsdóttir, 2007).

Therefore, while the topic is the subject of much debate, the general consensus seems to be that rather than offering exactly the same kinds of learning experiences in both sectors, or at home and at school, there should be sufficient connections between learning at school and prior learning. In a successful transition it seems that schools will pick up and build on the funds of knowledge and ways of learning that children bring.

Indicators of 'successful' transitions and 'unsuccessful' transitions

The complexity of individual experiences, and the multiple factors that influence each child's learning, mean that rather than defining indicators of successful and/or unsuccessful transitions, this review has indicated a number of issues that teachers and families can be alert to. In developing the themes in this chapter, ideas have been inferred from findings where the transition appears less than satisfactory (for example, where children have been unhappy, disengaged or encountered deficit approaches), as well as from positive experiences. Overall, this chapter has indicated that key issues for consideration relate to:

- belonging, wellbeing and feeling 'suitable' at school;
- recognition and acknowledgement of culture;
- respectful, reciprocal relationships;
- engagement in learning;
- learning dispositions and identity as a learner;
- positive teacher expectations; and
- building on funds of knowledge from early childhood education and home.

Some of these features are not directly observable in children, although they may be inferred. They require supportive microsystems at school and positive relationships between settings (mesosystem links) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For example, a focus on belonging, involvement and wellbeing "places the onus for the outcomes for children on the adults, making a judgment about the context, rather than the child. It gives immediate feedback about the effect of the educators' approach and the environment they establish" (Laevers, 1999 cited in Goldspink, Winter & Foster, 2008, p. 3).

Therefore, as discussed earlier, any indicators that are based solely on assessments of the children are likely to be problematic. Pianta (2004), a leading transitions researcher in the USA, noted, "Our analysis of over 70 published studies has shown significant instability in the way children perform on formal assessments of academic and social skills during the transition period" (p. 5).

Indicators of successful or unsuccessful transitions should therefore take a wide approach and acknowledge the many factors involved. As Dockett and Perry (2004c, p. 187) noted, "promoting a successful start to school for children requires that educators focus on the perspectives, experiences and expectations of all involved in the process. Only then can we work towards strategies and approaches that value participants, and promote genuine collaboration". They advocate a community approach and provide information about how this might be achieved (eg, Dockett & Perry, 2006, 2008b).

With this in mind, it is also acknowledged that indicators of successful transitions look beyond the immediate interactions of the participants to the wider exo- and macrosystem factors (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Graue (2006) outlined the Wisconsin 'readiness indicators' which focused primarily on family and community support; for example, access to health care, parental income and employment, parental support, early childhood education, community conditions, and so on. Canadian researchers Lapointe, Ford and Zumbo (2007) also focused on the need to provide safe and supportive neighbourhood environments when considering success at school. These important contextual features must be addressed in addition to the features of the school environment, in order to foster healthy children with positive approaches to learning and well developed social and cognitive abilities (Graue, 2006).

Finally, it is important to ensure that when a transition appears less than successful, this is not treated as inevitable but rather an opportunity to explore strategies to assist in developing a more positive cycle of experience.

This chapter has explored successful transitions for all children. Chapter Three will consider whether there are particular characteristics of the child, family, ECE service or school which appear to play a role in how well children transition. The themes covered here in Chapter Two underpin the overview of different groups discussed in Chapter Three, and are picked up again in Chapter Four and Chapter Five as the ideas regarding success impact on the range of ways of supporting transitions.

Chapter Three: Characteristics

Introduction

Chapter Two looked at successful transitions for all children. This chapter considers the Ministry of Education's second research question and explores whether there is any evidence in the literature to indicate that there are special issues to be taken into account in relation to how the characteristics of the child, their family and whānau, the ECE service(s) they have attended and the school they transition to, play a role in how well they transition. Based on the research questions provided, the groups that are focused on in this chapter are:

- Māori children;
- Pasifika children;
- children who are linguistically diverse and/or come from linguistically diverse homes and children who have attended immersion/bilingual ECE services;
- children with special educational needs; and
- children living in lower socio-economic households.

Clearly these groups are not discrete as children may identify with more than one of these categories. It is also important to note that the issues already discussed in Chapter One and Two continue to apply here. Literature relating to all children, including the groups now being given individual attention, was used to establish the themes relating to successful transition presented in Chapter Two. The aim of this chapter is simply to highlight whether any additional points should be taken into account for specific groups. In doing so, full recognition must be given to the diversity that exists *within* these groups, and the analysis has been sensitive to exploring this. Considerations of the measures used, whose voices are heard and not heard, and what time frame has been analysed, continue to be relevant. Inevitably there will be some overlap with points already covered.

The chapter ends with brief consideration of the characteristics of the early childhood service children attend, and reflection on the circumstances under which better or poorer transitions tend to occur.

Interaction of individual characteristics and features of the context

The apparently simple question, which forms the basis of the chapter, becomes incredibly complex when, as discussed in Chapter Two, one takes into account that the characteristics of the child and family interact with the characteristics of the school setting they enter, leading to different developmental outcomes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1997). The same child would have very different experiences in settings that invite, permit or inhibit different forms of engagement (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1997). Consideration of the characteristics of both person and context has the potential to identify ecological niches: "regions in the environment that are especially favorable or unfavorable to the development of individuals with particular personal characteristics" (Bronfenbrenner, 1992, p. 194).

This interaction of individual characteristics and features of the context was illustrated in Skinner et al.'s (1998) study of 21 Head Start children, and the ways in which features of the classroom structures and larger social processes interacted with characteristics of the children in ways that led to risk or promise. In some contexts "children whose

behaviours and skills were not those deemed 'successful' by school standards" could still do well. They described one teacher who achieved such results.

> *Ms. Kompton structured each activity and space for optimal learning, not only of content, but of critical thinking. She devised innovative tasks that required children to think and make logical comparisons, and she provided the scaffolding, through her questions and detailed steps, that allowed them to accomplish a task that some of them might not have been capable of on their own… [She] differed from most other teachers in the way she thought about, talked about, and acted toward children. She had high expectations for all her children and exuded compassion and love for them …. Ms. Kompton gave all of her children individual attention and encouragement. She did not view them as being at risk but constructed her students to be children of promise.* (p. 307)

Similar findings were documented in a New Zealand study where Māori students who had been identified as having learning and behaviour difficulties, showed marked improvements in a class that appeared to have many features in common with Ms Kompton's, especially with regard to the teacher's relationship with students, expectations and teaching approaches (see Macfarlane, 2004). Some of the literature reviewed in the following sections highlights these interactions. However, not all research designs address the complexity required to fully answer the sub-questions within Research Question Two.

Māori children

Overall there appears to be very little research literature that provides insights into the actual transition experiences of Māori children in the period 2004-2009. The studies that were located tended to focus on literacy. Key themes for Māori children fitted closely with the points covered in Chapter Two and included the extent to which the school context welcomed their culture (Macfarlane et al., 2007), the nature of their relationships with teachers and others (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Bishop et al., 2003; Macfarlane, 2004, 2007; Macfarlane, et al., 2007), the nature of the teachers' expectations for their success (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Rubie-Davies et al., 2006) and whether a sense of belonging was fostered (Macfarlane, 2004; Simpson & Callaghan, 2005).

Tamarua's (2006) PhD study was one of the few studies that looked specifically at the transition to school. Tamarua explored the experiences of four Māori children, their whānau and their teachers. Although the number of participants was small, there was valuable detail about the experience from a number of perspectives. The families reported participating in a wide range of literacy activities prior to the children starting school, integrating principles of kaupapa Māori teaching/learning processes within activities, alongside conventional (ie, school related) teaching and learning. The parents felt confident about their child's literacy knowledge and the initial transition went well, with the children adapting to the classroom environment (although this took a little longer for the three children who initially did not know anyone at school). Case studies provided a very detailed picture of children's literacy at home and at school. Children were observed to engage more effectively in classroom activities where a transfer of learning between familiar to unfamiliar instruction was made. The findings suggest "the need for teachers to develop wider and more diverse awareness especially about children from diverse cultural backgrounds" and indicated that "formal literacy assessments can limit teachers' knowledge of the social and cultural bases of literacy development at home" (p. 262).

Teachers who support Māori children to connect with familiar knowledge may help to foster children's sense of belonging at school. Simpson and Callaghan's (2005) small study explored mana whenua/belonging over one child's transition by interviewing her ECE and primary teachers and main caregiver. The three participants and the authors, who were all Māori, felt that a sense of belonging was essential. The primary school teacher described some of the practices, which she felt had been helpful:

> *An emphasis on whanaungatanga is fundamental to the ethos of my classroom. It includes positive relationships (tuakana/teina), fostering whanau connections and including whanau in all aspects of our curriculum (whakawhanaungatanga), a buddy system (manaakitanga), caring for and supporting each other's learning (tiakina tatou i a tatou), sharing responsibilities and looking after our environment (kaitiakitanga), respecting our kuia and kaumatua and marae protocols (tikanga) (Teacher B, Primary).* (p. 44)

Relationships were also identified as important in very early research on children moving from Kohanga Reo to mainstream schools. Ka'ai (1990) noted that pedagogical differences between these contexts included less emphasis on tuakana/teina (sibling/peer teaching) roles, and on whanaungatanga (relationships) at school. More recently, Tamarua (2006) showed that tuakana/teina relationships were a prominent characteristic within the four Māori families that she studied, and children engaged in similar collaborations in the classroom.

> *This style of learning together in groups resembled culturally preferred ways of learning which Māori identify, and that occur within the concept of whanaungatanga (incorporating family values, care and nurturance). A significant feature of the tuakana-teina relationship is the responsibilities that children have of each other within the whānau. The process by which children come to understand their role and responsibilities within the whānau are not exclusive to the home environment, but are easily transferable into other contexts.* (p. 234)

Recent initiatives where Year 5 children become mentors for kindergarten children and support them through their transition to school (Hartley, Rogers, Smith, Peters & Carr, 2009) might be worth exploring further as initial analysis suggest these tuakana/teina relationships have potential benefits for all children, and for both the older and younger members of the pairs.

Another study that raises issues to consider for Māori children is Rubie-Davies et al.'s (2006) research with 21 teachers in Auckland to explore teacher expectations for students. This was not a transition study as most of the teachers taught older children. However, six teachers taught Year 1/ 2 so the study has been included here. The study found that the teachers had low expectations for Māori children.

> *Teachers had expectations for Māori students' achievement in reading that were below their expectations for other ethnic groups. This was despite the finding that Māori students' performance was not below that of any other ethnic group at the beginning of the year…. Teachers judged the achievement of Māori to be low by the end of the year and, by that time, their achievement had fallen to be significantly below that of both New Zealand European and Asian students.* (p. 439)

The authors discussed possible reasons for these concerning finding, and the limitations of the study. Nevertheless, this study does raise questions as to whether Māori children's transitions are affected by expectation effects, something which warrants further investigation, given that teacher expectations, relationships with the teacher, and teacher understanding of culture and a caring attitude have been found to be a key factor in Māori children's success (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Bishop et al., 2003; Macfarlane, 2004, 2007; Macfarlane, et al., 2007). For example, Year 9 and 10 students described their frustration when they perceived their teachers held low expectations, and commented that they welcomed teachers who showed appropriately high expectations and encouraged them to work hard to meet them (Bishop & Berryman, 2006). While most of these studies have been with older children, there is some evidence that this an issue for Year 1 and 2 Māori students too (Macfarlane, 2004).

Rubie-Davies et al.'s (2006) findings regarding teacher expectations leading to lower literacy outcomes for Māori students (reported above) raise other important issues to consider. Concern has been expressed that early literacy

difficulties persist and may lead to further issues, including attitudinal and behavioural challenges (Ministry of Education, 2008a). This was evident in Chapman et al.'s, (2004) study (discussed in Chapter Two) where children viewed by their teachers as poor readers were rated as being less happy, having less adaptive classroom behaviours and more classroom problems than their peers. Teacher expectations and relationships with children are important aspects of the context to consider when exploring the transition experiences of Māori children. Where problems occur, disrupting these patterns is likely to depend on changing the environment (Bishop et al., 2003; Macfarlane, 2007; Macfarlane, et al., 2007).

Philips et al. (2004) examined the impact of an intervention aimed to enhance literacy achievement in the first year of the school. Their study involved 72 teachers in 12 low-decile schools. Of the 343 children involved, 90% were identified as Māori or Pacific Island, or having both identities. The intervention took the form of intensive professional development for teachers. The findings were compared for an intervention group of children, a non-intervention group (who were in the same class as the teachers receiving professional development, but not the focus of the intervention) and a baseline group (who provided data on achievement in the first year of school prior to the intervention). The research found that the children in the intervention group made accelerated progress and gained higher levels of achievement across a broad band of literacy measures compared with the other two groups. Although this study did not look at transition per se, and looked only at one aspect of the children's experience, it concluded that "it is possible to manage the potential mismatches children face on arriving at school and reduce the degree to which being at school carries risks for achievement" (p. 322).

Overall, while there is information about concerns, and advice regarding the ways transition can be supported, there is very little literature in the last five years on the transition experiences of Māori children and their families, and their voices are noticeably absent from most of the literature. Even less is known about transition to Māori medium settings, with only Simpson and Callaghan's (2005) very small study appearing to be from te kohanga reo to a Māori medium classroom. Two potentially valuable studies appeared to be in progress. A major longitudinal study of children in kōhanga reo and kura kaupapa *Te Rerenga ā Te Pīrere* (the flight of the fledgling) is a longitudinal study of children in kōhanga reo and kura kaupapa. Although the study will hopefully yield information about the transition to school, this was not covered in the Phase One report (Cooper, Arango-Kemp, Wylie & Hodgen, 2004) and no further publications on the study were located. Another project is underway, exploring transitions in education from ECE to secondary but the findings were not available yet (personal communication, Anne Hardman, Te Puni Kōkiri).

Pasifika children

Relationships were also a key feature of literature on Pasifika children's transitions, along with teachers' cultural understanding, affirmation of children's language and cultural identity at school, and home-school connections supported by Pasifika liaison officers.

A key study regarding Pasifika children's experiences of transition to school was Podmore, Wendt Samu and the A'oga Fa'a Samoa's (2006) Centre of Innovation project. Some key features of this setting included the fact that the A'oga and the school were on the same grounds and the children entered a bilingual classroom at school. When a child was about to start school, the primary caregiver from the early childhood setting accompanied him/her to school and was part of the transition experiences. In addition, children and families had opportunities to join in with school assemblies and powhiri, and four-year-olds visited the school library each week to borrow books.

Only brief data were presented regarding the children's actual experiences of transition but the authors noted that their observations showed evidence of a sense of belonging, with the children's cultural identity being affirmed at school and their Samoan language used at school. Parents noted the importance of the children's familiarity with the school setting,

the strong sense of relationships between all involved, the presence of siblings and also older children who the new entrants knew from the A'oga, warm caring and friendly teachers, and parents who were enthusiastic and passionate in supporting the primary school. Overall the study concluded that the following were important features of enhancing transition experiences:

- Having the caregiver move to school with the children, which supported their sense of belonging and security;
- Transitioning as part of a small groups of peers, which fostered a sense of belonging and contribution to the group;
- The establishment of a buddy system at school; and
- Time spent in the bilingual class at school and the language immersion practices, which supported both confidence and competence in communication as well as the children's cultural identity.

The approach taken in this setting seemed to overcome some of the issues noted in earlier research such as Podmore, Sauvao and Mapa's (2003) study, where 27 children moved from Pacific Island early childhood centres to English speaking schools. In this situation, all groups involved (children, families and teachers) identified concerns related to the transition. Most of these concerns centred in some way around discontinuity in language and culture, although the children also had concerns about being lonely or bullied. The authors recommended more involvement of Pacific communities at school "and systematic representation of Pacific peoples in educational management, policy, and research" (p. 41). McKenzie and Singleton (2009) show how even in a Palagi mainstream school, Pasifika students' transitions can be supported through working in partnership with the local Pasifika community. Key factors were the teachers knowing the children, knowing their culture and providing opportunities for the children's Samoan language to be used at school. The authors make the point that "the culture of the child cannot enter the classroom unless it has first entered the consciousness of the teacher" (p. 5).

Some of the points raised by Podmore et al. (2003) were reiterated in Fletcher et al.'s (2009) more recent study, which conducted focus groups with teachers of Pasifika students and with Pasifika parents and community members from five schools. The aim was to uncover what these groups perceived as supports or barriers to learning for Pasifika students. Although the focus of the study was not transition, the findings are relevant to considering transition to school for Pasifika students.

Literacy issues: It was felt that while Pasifika students generally had strengths in decoding words, they may not understand the meaning of some words if these relate to things that the Pasifika students had not yet experienced and/or were unfamiliar concepts, or were words that were not commonly used or did not have equivalent translations in their first language.

Risk taking: It was suggested that Pasifika students may prefer not to take risks or to put themselves in a position where their possible lack of knowledge would be exposed to their peers.

Recognition of the different Pasifika languages and cultures: The parents considered it important that their children were confident speakers of their first language, as this enabled access to their cultural community.

Cultural capital: Several of the teachers in this study mentioned the importance of acknowledging the cultural capital that the Pasifika students brought to their schools.

> *As a group, the teachers offered a range of additional ways of integrating Pasifika cultures into their classroom programmes. These included bringing Pasifika music, drama, dance, journals, visual arts,*

> *myths and legends into classroom lessons and activities; having the class study the different countries represented by their Pasifika peers; using different languages to call the register; and establishing a ''Pacific Studies'' journal containing examples of phrases from the different Pasifika languages of the students in the school and what these phrases meant in English.* (p. 29)

Family involvement with the school: Both the Pasifika parents and the teachers stressed the importance of strong family support and interest in the children's progress at school. However, it could be challenging to find appropriate ways of helping all parents to acknowledge and understand their role in the home–school partnership, and due to work and other commitments, some parents did not have time to be involved. It was felt that Pasifika liaison officers in schools or school clusters could help support family involvement. Three parents explained how having a Pasifika person would support and encourage them and other Pasifika parents to feel more comfortable about being involved in their children's schooling.

Literacy through the Bible: The study noted that out of school, many Pasifika children are involved in reading the Bible. This has implications for their learning approach at school:

> *Pasifika children learn that questioning Biblical text in any form is considered completely inappropriate and seen as challenging fa'asamoa (traditional Samoan knowledge). There is thus a conflict between fa'asamoa where children listen and obey without question, and opportunities for discussion between children and adults that typically is encouraged in New Zealand classrooms.* (p. 31)

Behavioural mores: The study noted that Pasifika students were generally well behaved in class and that this benefited their learning. However, their cultural approaches to learning, of listening and obeying may be at odds with teaching and learning approaches such as working with peers and engaging in discussion. Pasifika parents in Australia expressed similar concerns about whether their children interact with teachers in the ways in which schools might see as appropriate (Dockett & Perry, 2005b). Each point offers information that could be incorporated into pedagogy. However, it is important to acknowledge that these are all adult opinions, and whilst based on the participants' experiences, they do not appear to have been tested in relation to strategies to improve the transition to school. Robinson and Timperley (2004) offered contrary views on some points and it seems this is another area where further research is warranted.

Finally, some important insights were highlighted by the transition experience of the one Tongan child in Peters' (2004) study. Western frames led to deficit theorising by teachers (for example the teacher's concern regarding older siblings' care for their younger sister and the new entrant child's lack of engagement with playmates of the same age) but when analysed from other cultural perspectives (tuakana/teina relationships, play in traditional Polynesian society generally including a mix of ages) the strengths in the family were evident and could provide a basis for supporting the child's transition. It was not so much the child and family's behaviours that were problematic, but how they were perceived and responded to. This is a key point when considering how the characteristics of the child and family interact with features of the environment, and is likely to be relevant when considering other groups covered in the chapter.

Children who are linguistically diverse and/or come from linguistically diverse homes and children who have attended immersion/bilingual ECE services

There is considerable overlap between this section and the previous one as many New Zealand studies that have a bilingual focus include Pasifika children and families. A key factor to consider with regard to language characteristics is whether children move to a school where they are able to use a language they are fluent in. For example, Podmore et al.'s (2006) study, discussed in the previous section, suggested a number of benefits related to belonging, competence, confidence and identity for the Samoan children involved, when they were able to use their Samoan language in the

bilingual class at school. In contrast, for many children who might be considered 'linguistically diverse', starting school involves entering a context where they may have little or no knowledge of the language being used.

A second consideration is how the adults involved view the child's bi- or multi-lingual development. Burman (2008) and Gregory (2008) remind readers of the value of knowing more than one language, and the ways in which this has been overlooked and problematised in monolingual research (Burman, 2008). Sensitivity to the additional complexities involved in these children's transition to school is likely to assist teachers in supporting the transition to school for this group of learners.

Most of the studies that were found on this topic looked at children entering schools where they were not fluent in the language of instruction. Tagoilelagi-Leota, McNaughton, MacDonald and Farry (2005) studied children from Pasifika Early Childhood services, which provided full immersion in their home language (L1) of either Samoan or Tongan, moving to English-medium schools (L2). The focus of this study was bilingual and biliteracy development, not successful transitions, but some important points can be inferred. The results indicated that the schools concerned provided high-quality instruction in English, which led to rapid development in English language and literacy. An intervention study by Philips et al. (2004) also showed that children for whom English was not the home language were able to make high gains in literacy in English, despite their levels of English language on entry to school.

However, an additional factor to consider is that gains in English may be at the cost of continuing development in the heritage language. This was evident in Tagoilelagi-Leota et al.'s (2005) findings at age six years. On a smaller scale, observations of children and interviews with families in Peters (2004) study showed similar findings, and revealed the parents' frustration at being unable to maintain their child's first language development in the face of the rapid development in reading, writing and speaking English. If L1 skills are not to be lost, Tagoilelagi-Leota et al.'s (2005) study implies that strategies to maintain home languages will feature in a successful transition to school. For Pasifika students, Tanielu's (2004) doctoral thesis suggests one avenue for this is through Pastor Schools (cited in Tagoilelagi-Leota et al., 2005). However, this may not be possible in all locations.

Interestingly, Neuman (2007b) cited evidence that suggests children do better if they are taught in their mother tongue until around age six to eight years, and that once they have learned to read and write in their mother tongue this is easily transferable to other languages. The material has been drawn from a UNESCO report and it is unclear how the findings relate to the New Zealand context. However, it does raise possible questions that are worthy of further exploration about the value of moving children, whose home language is not English, from immersion settings into instruction in English, at age five.

The Phase One report from *Te Rerenga ā Te Pīrere* (Cooper, et al., 2004) included an informative review of literature on bilingualism. It is beyond the scope of this review to cover this detail here. However, extrapolating what this might mean for the transition from immersion ECE to non-immersion schooling indicates that many of the features already discussed in Chapter Two are relevant, along with an understanding by their teachers of bilingual development and fostering learning for bilingual children. Many of the points covered corresponded with issues raised by parents of children with Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Samoan, Turkish and Vietnamese language backgrounds starting non-immersion schooling in Australia (Dockett & Perry, 2005b). These studies find, for example, that second language learning takes time and does not develop in well-defined measureable stages, that children will exhibit long silent periods, and that comprehension precedes and exceeds the ability to produce the language. In addition, in the parents' eyes a successful transition for the child would include teachers who:

- are patient when children need things repeated;
- recognise that children get confused when they can only use English at school;

- are aware children can be shy in speaking English with unfamiliar adults; and
- know that children can find it difficult to operate in more than one language, and may need time to understand and respond to teaching and learning experiences in English (Dockett & Perry, 2005b).

Learning to read in a new language is a particular aspect of these children's experiences, and again there is considerable literature on this topic, which is beyond the scope of this review. For example, Gregory (2008) provided detailed insights into children's experiences that are likely to be helpful for New Zealand teachers. Similarly Wang, Young and Smith (in press) commented on the value of Chinese reading material being available to support first language development and cultural identity for Chinese students in English-medium schools.

Other issues that potentially impact on the transitions of children whose first language is not the language of instruction relate to assessment. Li, D'Angiulli and Kendall, (2007) noted the problems of assessments of bilingual children carried out in English, which position young children as having poor scores, when in fact they may speak their own language very well. In Australia, Aboriginal parents voiced concern that their children's use of Aboriginal English rather than Standard English was interpreted as 'bad' English rather than a genuine dialect, and the communicative competence of Aboriginal children was overlooked by teachers because they did poorly in standard assessments. This then works against the children developing a positive self-identity as a learner (Dockett et al., 2006).

Finding ways for teachers to gain insights into the children's abilities seems to be an important feature of transitions for this group. Hartley et al.'s (2009) study provides insights into the ways in which one school effectively utilised the children's early childhood portfolios to achieve this. It began with one child, Gaurav, who spoke fluent Hindi. He was very outgoing and playful at home, but at kindergarten remained quiet, non-verbal and diffident. His kindergarten portfolio reflected his interests and capabilities and showed how well he had pursued his strengths and interests within the kindergarten programme. When he took his portfolio to school his new entrant teacher recalled:

> *I've been teaching for 12 years … and previous to this I hadn't known about the portfolios … and then this little boy brought his portfolio in and he was a very quiet boy, ESOL, didn't speak a word for probably a week or so and then he brought his kindy book (portfolio) in and it was like a new child emerged and it was like this is me and this is who I am and even though I don't necessarily have the language to tell you I can show you with pictures.... and I would turn around at all times of the day and hear little murmurings and laughing and there would be pockets of children sitting around this little boy with his kindy book.*

Soon all the children were being encouraged to bring their portfolios to school and the teacher found this was beneficial not only in helping her to identify the skills and interests of children, but also in supporting their engagement with other children in the class. This was relevant for all children but perhaps invited more interaction from children whose first language was not English than would normally have occurred:

> *Again with those ESOL children only having one or two words but being so excited about wanting to talk about something. The fact that they're having a go at talking to a group or the teacher, whereas they may not have done that for 6 or 7 weeks, they're doing it within that first week which again gives the teacher a much better picture rather than sitting back waiting or hoping or just observing. It's another form of assessment as such for us to see what those children know.* (Teacher D, Final Interview, p.12)

Dockett and Perry (2005b) found that other issues of concern for parents related more to culture than language. Views about appropriate ways of interacting with adults could be very different at school to at home, and this could impact on the child's interactions with teachers. Parents were also aware that they may have different expectations of teachers and school than English-speaking parents, and some found the Australian schools hard to understand. They were concerned

about their child's adjustment and ability to 'fit in' and many parents tried to assist with this. Sometimes they had similar concerns to English-speaking parents but for different reasons, eg, concern re sharing food for religious reasons. Sangavarapu and Perry (2005) found the 10 Bangladeshi families they interviewed had similar concerns.

Depending on the parents' language skills, they may be disadvantaged in communicating their concerns to school. Pasifika parents in New Zealand noted that parents are better able to advocate for their children if they can use their first language (Fletcher et al., 2009). However, if a parent is able to communicate with the school, even if this is not their home language, then this can be an asset in supporting their children. One Japanese child in Peters' (2004) study started school knowing very little English but her mother was able to visit and translate a lot of information about rules and routines.

In Australia, Margetts' (2007) study of 155 children starting school, included 6 children from families where English was not spoken. Although the number involved was small, Margetts noted that these children were potentially at a disadvantage because speaking English at home was correlated with a number of factors that supported children's transition to school, such as participation in three or more school visits and informal family functions, and starting school with a familiar playmate or best friend in the same class. Speaking English at home was also related to cooperation and academic competence, leading to the conclusion that "if children have difficulty understanding the language of instruction as they commence schooling, they are more likely to have difficulty following directions, expressing what they know, and staying focused" (p. 46). The 10 Bangladeshi parents whose children entered schools in Australia, whose views were gathered in Sangavarapu and Perry's (2005) study, also worried about children's "limited or lack of proficiency in English conversational skills and its concomitant impact on their social or emotional adjustments, learning at school and relationships with teachers and peers" (pp. 47-48).

While it is important to be mindful of these potential problems, there are likely to be some subtleties in how language issues affect transition. Detailed observations of New Zealand children's experiences indicated that while both language and culture provide additional 'layers' or factors to consider when understanding children's transitions, these cannot be viewed in isolation. For example, it was useful to look also at socio-economic status. Even when English was not their home language, some families had the knowledge, skills and ways of behaving, which confer status and privilege in society. Perhaps more importantly, this capital was in forms that were visible to the school (parental occupations, a degree of confidence in communicating with teachers, children's accomplishment of skills the teachers valued), and could support the child's successful transition, even though language issues provided some challenges (Peters, 2004).

For children who are linguistically diverse, issues of language, culture and socio-economic status are interrelated factors in their transition to school. In addition to the more general transition issues, such as belonging and friendships, questions arise as to whether, ideally, instruction would be in their home language, or if English is the language of instruction, how this can best be developed and whether first language support is available. Whatever the language of instruction, it is important that teachers find ways to identify the children's strengths and support their learning so that engagement in learning and a positive identity as a learner can be developed. Family fluency and confidence in the language of the school appear to affect whether the parents/caregivers participate in transition activities, are able to assist the child by explaining things, and in the nature of the family-school relationships that form. Cultural as well as language factors are also relevant considerations. Overall, there are potential issues of concern in relation to all the features of a successful transition for this group, and research suggests that many parents are aware of, and concerned about, the potential vulnerability of their children if the school context is not supportive. There is a shortage of recent research to show how such transitions are actually experienced in New Zealand but it seems clear that "linguistically and culturally diverse children can find themselves in a vulnerable situation where school contexts are not tailored to meet their specific needs" (Sanagavarapu & Perry, 2005, p. 49).

Children with special educational needs

As for the other groups discussed in this chapter, there is considerable diversity within this category. Firstly the nature of the special need will be an important consideration. As one parent's account of her child's transition explained, starting school is not likely to be a high priority for parents if they are not sure their child will survive (Wilson-Burns, 2009). Further, not only are there a wide range of special needs but also, two children with the same condition may function quite differently. The nature of the setting will also be important, including whether they are resourced so that environmental factors (such as access) do not lead to disadvantages or restrictions. A recent study of 3,104 children from the USA found that:

> *the ease of transition, according to parents and teachers, varied by child characteristics, such as severity of impairment, academic ability, and social skills. Parent report of perceived ease of transition also varied by race/ethnicity and family income. Parent and teacher report of ease of transition varied depending on 1) whether the school initiated actions to facilitate the transition process and 2) how much support was provided to teachers. Finally, the data on transitions to kindergarten indicate that teachers of children with disabilities used a variety of strategies to facilitate this transition; the number of strategies differed depending on whether the teacher was a regular or special education teacher.* (Carlson et al., 2009, p. 41)

When children have special needs, the transition may be particularly stressful for parents and extra support may be required (Rous, Teeters Meyers & Buras Striklin, 2007). Early research on the impact of special education policy in New Zealand noted the poor liaison between early childhood education and primary for children with special educational needs (Carroll-Lind & Cullen, 2001). In recent years there have been steps to address this. The Ministry of Education (2005) has set out clear guidelines for the parents of children with special needs when their children start school. It describes the roles for families, school and early intervention teams. Parent stories (eg, New Zealand Down Syndrome Association, n.d.) explain how helpful the additional support from Group Special Education (GSE) can be as their children make the transition to school.

Salter and Redman (2006, 2007) provided findings on a pilot project where Early Intervention and School Focus GSE teams collaborated to provide seamless support for children who had received early intervention but did not qualify for Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Scheme (ORRS) funding. They found that the extra support helped children to settle into school as their needs were identified and met. It was noted that school staff took responsibility for the children much earlier and expressed less anxiety about the children joining their school. Parents and children felt more welcome and supported. The 2006 article described a 2007 project following this pilot but the findings from this were not yet published. Faloon (n.d.) also described positive outcomes of a project for children who had not attended early childhood education and presented at school with moderate learning and behaviour needs. The children received 10 weeks of support from Resource Teacher: Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) clusters working collaboratively with psychologists in GSE. Although few details of the research were given in the article, the support apparently helped the children to participate in class and strengthened the relationships between schools, families and special education staff. All three projects are based on surveys of adult perspectives. The findings relate to research in the USA, which also indicated that a supportive infrastructure is necessary for such collaborations to be effective (Rous et al., 2007).

Bourne (2007) gave a brief account of one child with special needs, Aroha, moving from early childhood education to school, and the partnership between the different professionals involved. This article gave an insight into the complexity of the relationships involved and the author noted the value of forming collaborative and reciprocal partnerships. Strategies to support Aroha's transition took a broad focus and included discussions and activities with the child, the new entrant teacher visiting and observing her at kindergarten and looking at her kindergarten portfolio, and the parents involving Aroha in community sports to foster friendships with children who would attend the same school. Planning

ahead and having policies and strategies in place to support children and families were noted as key ways to reduce stress for children and parents during the transition to school.

Rietveld's (2003, 2008) research provided detailed insights into the transition to school for four boys with Down syndrome and two 'typically developing' boys. The findings indicate the ways in which inclusion and exclusion play out in the classroom, the subtleties of language involved, and the key role played by the teacher in determining how children were perceived and responded to by peers. Where there was a focus on academic outcomes, but no consideration of relationships, it was difficult for a child to become a valued member of the class. The data provided valuable insights into the ways in which the classroom culture can become more inclusive and responsive to diversity.

The following examples of inclusive approaches are from one child's story:

> *The teacher and teacher aide recognised and interrupted demeaning or illusory inclusion, e.g. excessive hugging, picking up. The staff scaffolded children to re-frame any problems they interpreted within a deficit framework to one that focused on the context. They helped children develop strategies whereby Ian could be included. For instance, when Ian's peers complained to the teacher about him putting too many cars on a cooperatively-built block structure, which subsequently broke, she said, 'If there's a problem, tell Ian what it is. Tell Ian if there's too many cars, it'll break. Tell him where he can put the cars and blocks.'*
>
> *The teacher also openly interpreted the likely intent of any unconventional behaviour (a potential site for exclusion) in a positive and valuing manner. For instance, when Ian moved some little chairs from the desks over to his mother and sister during a pre-entry visit when the class was involved in a mat activity, and a child called out to the teacher, 'Look what Ian's doing', she responded calmly and positively by interpreting the likely intent of Ian's behaviour: 'Yes, Ian's mum can now sit on a chair.' Peers were later observed interpreting the likely intent of Ian's behaviour themselves.*
>
> *The teacher and teacher-aide included activities that highlighted Ian's competencies and interests in a way that made the overall class culture more inclusive for a greater number of children…. The staff also facilitated Ian's inclusion within peer group norms, which at times differed from adult and classroom norms.* (Rietveld, 2008, pp. 5-6)

A paper by Schischka (2005) described her proposed PhD study to look at the relationships children with special needs have with people at home, and how these might impact on relationships with teachers, teacher aides and peers in the first year of school. However, no results have been published yet (personal communication, Janice Schischka).

The limited picture for New Zealand children with special educational needs was dominated by research which emphasized the importance of respectful and reciprocal relationships in order to foster successful transitions. The subtleties of inclusion and exclusion as experienced by both 'typically developing' boys and boys with Down Syndrome highlighted the complexity involved. The picture from the available literature was generally positive and documented successful approaches, although as for the other groups, there was limited data on children and their family's actual transition experiences. New Zealand literature on this topic has focused largely on adult perspectives and the positive outcomes of adults working together to support the transition of children with special needs (Bourne, 2007; Faloon, n.d.; Salter & Redman, 2006, 2007). From the children's perspective, Bourne's (2007) article provides only a brief teacher's account of one child's transition, and Rietveld's (2003, 2008) data are from her 2002 PhD and therefore collected well before 2004. There appears to be very little New Zealand research from 2004-2009 which gives insights into how the characteristics of children with special needs, their families, early childhood services and the schools they join might impact on their transition to school.

Children living in lower socio-economic households

There is a wealth of literature exploring the relationship between socio-economic status and educational achievement, which although relevant, is beyond the scope of this review. For the purposes of considering how living in lower socio-economic households may be related to how well children transition, Smart, Sanson, Baxter, Edwards and Hayes' (2008) Australian report on Home-to-school transitions for financially disadvantaged children includes some valuable insights, even though the approach taken of measuring children's 'readiness' is critiqued elsewhere (eg, Pianta, 2004). Their overall conclusions showed that:

> *Children from financially disadvantaged families are at greater risk of poor school readiness, due to the much higher rates of risk factors evident among this group and the accumulation of risks experienced… and the experience of FD [financial difficulties] compounded the probability of poor school progress, especially if it was experienced at both 4–5 and 6–7 years.* (Smart et al., 2006, p. xi)

The findings were based on a large cohort (over 4000) of children who were part of a *Growing up in Australia* project. The report goes on to explore some of the reasons why children from lower socio-economic households may be disadvantaged at school. They discuss the interrelation of two models, one based on parental/caregiver stress in families that experience financial difficulties. Parental stress can impact on parenting by draining parents' psychological and emotional resources, which in turn can disrupt parent–child interactions and parenting styles. The second model considers the relationship between income and the resources a family may be able to invest in a child, such as advantageous environments and material resources, such as the number of books in a home. They noted that the two are interlinked and difficult to tease apart for analysis. For example, "low levels of reading to a child, and allowing high amounts of TV viewing, can…be interpreted as a response to family stress or a sign of low investment" (p. 46).

Smart et al. (2008) also found that the relationship between family income and achievement was more complex than these two explanatory models suggest. Not all children from financially disadvantaged homes started school with low skills, as measured on the social/emotional and cognitive tests that were used. However, among children who showed, "adequate school readiness at 4–5 years, more children from financially disadvantaged families exhibited later school achievement, engagement or adjustment problems than did children from better-off families" (p. 37). This suggests that there may be school and/or other factors underpinning such findings. A qualitative study may help to shed light on the reasons behind Smart et al.'s (2008) results.

Neighbourhood environment has also been found to be a relevant consideration. Various features of neighbourhood disadvantage, as opposed to analysis based on individual family socio-economic status (SES), were correlated with poorer outcomes on a range of 'readiness' assessments for over 53,000 children in a Canadian study (Lapointe et al., 2007).

On a much smaller scale, Margetts (2007) explored the relationships and contributions of transition activities and other background factors to 155 children's adjustment.

> *Father level of employment (unemployed, part-time, fulltime) in the year children commenced schooling predicted and added to the variance in measures of adjustment. Having a father in full-time employment was statistically and significantly related to higher scores of self-control, summed social skills and academic competence, and to lower scores for externalising behaviour, hyperactivity and summed problem behaviours. Children with fathers who were unemployed were at higher risk of difficulties in these areas.... Higher socioeconomic status/father in full-time employment contributed significantly to higher academic competence.* (pp. 48-49)

However, only five of the sample had fathers who were unemployed and the reasons for the correlations are also potentially complex. For example, it was noted that none of the children with unemployed fathers commenced school with a best friend in the same class and were less likely to have a familiar playmate in the same class. Given the relationship between friends and successful transitions there may be several factors at work in relation to the correlations that were found.

A further point to consider in relation to children from low socio-economic households is that if the quality of the parents' relationships with teachers, school staff, and the child's schooling is an important indicator of a successful transition (Pianta, 2004, p. 6), then parents who were not successful at school themselves may be disadvantaged in developing these relationships. Children from middle-class homes in Stephen and Cope's (2003) Scottish study had families who were proactive in negotiating their relationships with schools. In contrast, Dockett et al. (2006) describe Aboriginal parents' concerns regarding the unfamiliarity of school, power issues such as teachers talking down to parents (perceived or real), and poor memories of their own schooling, which can work against developing home-school relationships. However, while the article notes that many Aboriginal people experience chronic disadvantage (something documented in detail by Penman, 2006) the SES of the actual participants was not provided. In New Zealand, teachers and parents in Fletcher et al.'s (2009) study noted that some Pasifika parents of the children attending the schools in their research were on low wages. This could mean that both parents were working, sometimes in more than one job, which made participation in school activities difficult. However, this low participation in school activities could also be due to the parents feeling unwelcome or uncomfortable at school. Where teachers in disadvantaged communities find that families are reluctant to engage in school activities, it is possible that both cultural and economic factors may be at work.

Schulting, Malone and Dodge (2005) found that in their USA study, impoverished parents demonstrated very low levels of school involvement overall. Transition practices were related to a slight increase in their involvement at school, perhaps by increasing parents' comfort at school or their knowledge of opportunities to become involved. Nevertheless, the researchers concluded that the current transition practices offered in the schools concerned, "did not adequately address the needs of this high-risk population or reduce the substantial barriers to their involvement" (p. 870). It seems that research into what would be effective is needed.

Barnett and Taylor's (2009) article provides a detailed review of parental involvement and intergenerational academic socialisation. Their study explored the general positivity or negativity of 78 mothers' school recollections, and assessed their activities pertaining to their children's transition to school, including the frequency of academic activities and social discussions. Parental recollections of school and current parent and family factors, such as income and self-perceptions, were also considered. The findings from a diverse community in America disrupted some common assumptions about parental involvement. Mothers who reported lower monthly incomes also reported engaging in more academic transition activities than those on higher incomes, and recollections of their own relationships with teachers did not predict engagement in academic activities with their children. However, there was some suggestion of an intergenerational trend as "mothers who recalled the school involvement of their parents more positively reported engaging in more academic transition activities with their own children, even after controlling for income, and current self-esteem and self-efficacy" (p. 146).

Margetts (2007) also analysed the relationship between parental employment and family income with the child's involvement in preparatory activities. However, the pattern of findings was complex. For example, a higher percentage of children in families where the father was employed full-time participated in school visits/orientation sessions than did children with fathers who were unemployed. However, this trend was reversed for attendance at open days and informal family functions. Like Barnett and Taylor (2009), Margetts found that families with the lowest household income tended to participate in more familiarisation activities.

Overall, it appears that children from lower socio-economic homes are at risk of making less successful transitions than their peers, given that income and/or socio-economic status has been correlated with a range of negative measures. The evidence points to the need to address the disadvantage that these children face. However, the research that was reviewed provides few clear indicators regarding exactly how coming from a lower socio-economic household plays a role in a child's transition to school. Lower skills on entry and problems with home-school partnerships were identified as potential factors, although the studies showed that children in this group were still found more likely to be at risk of a less successful transition than their more economically advantaged peers, even when they started school with comparable skills or had parents who were actively involved in activities to support them. Based on the kinds of assessments being used, it might be inferred that the children who had low initial scores were at risk of poorer transitions because of low teacher expectations and lack of recognition of, or connection to, the funds of knowledge that they bring; but equally, other factors could be at work, including those at the neighbourhood or societal level. It appears that the reasons for problems, when they occur, are complex.

Which groups of children are at risk of making poorer or less successful transitions?

Almost any child is at risk of making a poor or less successful transition if their individual characteristics are incompatible with features of the environment they encounter. For example, in Scotland, it is suggested that owing to the behaviours typically favoured in the classrooms there, "any child who prefers to work alone, is reluctant to speak in a group, who needs adult reassurance about his or her work or who speaks little to his or her teacher is at a disadvantage and can be considered a 'problem' by the teacher" (Stephen & Cope, 2003, p. 271). Wider social and cultural factors also influence these experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

This chapter has looked only at very broad characteristics such as ethnicity and language. Within these groupings there will be a raft of individual differences of child and family that play their part in the interactions with the features of the environments they encounter. Keeping this complexity in mind, all of the groups considered in the present chapter are potentially at risk of making a less than successful transition in relation to one or more of the following areas (outlined in Chapter Two):

- belonging, wellbeing and feeling 'suitable' at school;
- recognition and acknowledgement of culture;
- respectful, reciprocal relationships;
- engagement in learning;
- learning dispositions and identity as a learner;
- positive teacher expectations; and
- building on funds of knowledge from early childhood education and home.

Theoretically, more successful transitions will occur where these features are promoted and supported. However, there is a shortage of research on each of the characteristics being considered, let alone exploration of the complexity within the groups or the settings they enter, which makes conclusions in relation to these specific features somewhat tenuous.

Also, although the findings have been summarised in relation to the broad categories in the research question, these groups are not discrete. A child could potentially have all of these characteristics and the inter-relationship should be

taken into account. For example, Carlson et al. (2009) found that parent reports of ease of transition for children with special needs varied by race/ethnicity and family income.

Overall, it appears that more New Zealand research is urgently needed for all of the groups discussed in this chapter in order to understand their transition to school and the ways in which successful or unsuccessful transitions develop, the factors involved, and the perspectives of the different participants. The shortage of research for some of these groups is perhaps not surprising. Some of the stories that potentially most need to be told, in order to shed light on why some children make the least successful transitions, require participation in research by families who may be least inclined, or able, to take part. Dockett et al. (in press) are currently attempting to reach out to families with 'complex support needs' who are often hard to engage in research. This Australian study aims to explore the transition experiences of the families and children over a transition period of between 6-18 months. Preliminary insights (Dockett & Perry, 2008a) suggested the findings, when they are available, are likely to be a valuable addition to the literature, especially in relation to children from lower socio-economic families and children with special educational needs.

Characteristics of the ECE service(s) children have attended

Research Question Two included a sub-question regarding the part played by the ECE service(s) the children have attended. No New Zealand research was found for the period 2004-2009 that looked specifically at the characteristics of the early childhood service attended and how these play a part in the transition to school. The *Competent Children* study found that some features of early childhood provision were still associated with performance on a range of measures at age 14 but these children had started school well before the period covered by this review (Rivers, 2006; Wylie & Hipkins, 2006; Wylie, Hodgen, Ferral & Thompson, 2006). Nevertheless, it was interesting to note that the findings from this study showed:

> *early childhood education staff's interaction with children—their guidance to children in the use of activities, and joining children in their play, which would include aspects of language use and awareness of individual strengths and needs—is the most enduring aspect, particularly for mathematics and reading comprehension. The length of early childhood education experience appears to benefit attitudinal competencies; as did attending a service for children from mainly middle-class families. The use of open-ended questions, as well as the service being "print-saturated" appeared to benefit reading comprehension.* (Wylie & Hipkins, 2006, p. 2)

While not a feature of the recent New Zealand literature, this kind of analysis is included in some studies in the USA (eg, National Early Literacy Panel, 2008; Winsler et al., 2008) and the UK (Taggart et al., 2006). Taggart et al. (2006) found that some forms of early childhood provision in England were correlated with a movement out of aspects of their 'at risk' category, but these correlations show the relationship rather than an explanation for it. Attendance at all forms of early childhood education was associated with being less likely to be identified as having special needs on entry to school. Having examined many studies, the National Literacy Panel (2008) in the USA concluded that:

> *there is great interest in the impact of instructional programs on the learning of different racial, ethnic, linguistic, and economic groups of children. The data on preschool and kindergarten programs simply were not adequate to permit this kind of analysis. Future research will need to explore this issue more directly.* (p. 200)

However, Chapter Five will show that attendance at quality early childhood services (without specifying the exact type) is widely reported to support all children's transition to school and Hartley et al. (2009) demonstrated what could be achieved when early childhood teachers took a proactive role (in partnership with school teachers) to support transitions within their community.

Under what circumstances do the best or better transitions occur?

Chapter Two has already provided insights into the ways in which better or poorer transitions may occur, and this chapter has expanded on that picture by exploring the literature relating to different groups of children. However, as each of the sections in this chapter have shown, there is a need for more New Zealand research on each of these groups in order to address all the questions of interest for this chapter.

With regard to when better or poorer transitions occur, the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter Two helps to explain how the characteristics of the child, the characteristics of their family and whānau, the characteristics of the ECE service they attended, and the characteristics of the school they transition to, interact with each other during the transition to school. Children's culture, socio-economic status, special educational needs, and language background are all features that form part of the characteristics that they bring to school. These, along with other personal features, interact with features of the environment that invite, permit, or inhibit engagement (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1997). The school contexts that the children meet may provide environments that are especially favourable or unfavourable to the development of individuals with particular personal characteristics (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). This complexity means there are no easy answers. For example, Peters (2004) found that transition practices that suited one group of participants were sometimes viewed as problematic by others, and children who started the same class, on the same day, had different experiences at school. Nevertheless, there are many ways in which schools can support children's transitions and aim to create favourable niches for a diverse range of pupils. At the same time, responsibility for successful transitions does not rest with the school alone. Early childhood services and families, along with the wider levels of Bronfenbrenner's model (1979), are also influential. These aspects will be discussed further in Chapters Four and Five.

Chapter Four: Supporting children's transitions: ECE services and Schools

Introduction

This is the first of two chapters that address the question, how can children be best supported to transition as successfully as possible? This chapter looks at the role of ECE services and schools, while Chapter Five explores factors associated with parents, family and whānau.

The literature from 2004-2009 contains a wealth of advice regarding the ways in which children's transition to school can be supported. The nature of a 'successful transition' has to be taken into account when considering what support to offer, and these two chapters (Four and Five) therefore link closely with the views about success identified in Chapter Two. The findings in this chapter have been considered in relation to the following questions regarding what teachers could do to support children's transitions:

> How can teachers (at an individual level) best support children to transition as successfully as possible from ECE to school?
>
> How can teachers be supported and resourced to support children to transition as successfully as possible from ECE to school?
>
> How can ECE services and schools (at a service level) best work together to support children to transition as successfully as possible from ECE to school? What is required to support this happening?

While the range of advice appears somewhat overwhelming, experienced transition researchers Dockett and Perry advise having a plan and aiming to improve and refine processes, rather than radical change, noting that, "it is better to do some things very well than try to do lots of things and do them badly" (Kirk-Downey & Perry, 2006, p. 48), and having clear guidelines, with indicators to track progress towards goals (Dockett & Perry, 2006). This is explored in more detail in Chapter Six.

Transition and orientation

This chapter focuses on supporting children's transition to school. Dockett and Perry (2001) make a useful distinction between "orientation-to-school" and "transition-to-school" programmes, and this differentiation comes through in much of the recent advice about supporting transitions.

> *Orientation programs are designed to help children and parents become familiar with the school setting. They may involve a tour of the school, meeting relevant people in the school, and spending some time in a classroom. Orientation programs are characterized by presentations by the school to the parents and children.*
>
> *Transition programs may include an orientation time but tend to be longer term and more geared to the individual needs of children and families than orientation programs. Transition programs can be of indeterminate length, depending on a particular child or parent's needs. They recognize that starting*

> *school is a time of transition for all involved: children, families, and educators. Transition programs may be planned and implemented by a team of people representing all those involved in the change.* (Dockett & Perry, 2001).

Supporting children's transitions: An ecological model

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model (described in Chapter Two) provided a useful framework for considering the levels to be targeted for action. The research questions focus on what families and teachers can do to support children's transitions and it is important to note that these responsibilities also include advocating and supporting wider changes at the exo- and macrosystem levels, which address issues such as family and community support. For example, as discussed in Chapter Three, there is a marked relationship between family income and achievement in school literacy (Penman, 2006), and high socio-eonomic status and the father being in full-time employment was correlated with a range of measures of children's adjustment to school and academic competence for the 155 children in Margett's (2007) study. Smart et al. (2008) found that financial disadvantage was detrimental to children's school progress even if they entered school with reasonable skills. There is much to be considered in order to understand the relationship between these factors. However, it is clear that access to health care, parental income and employment, parental support, early childhood education, community conditions and so on (Graue, 2006), as well as providing safe and supportive neighbourhood environments (Lapointe et al., 2007), are key sites for action. Given its impact on students (Doucet, 2008; Penman, 2006), tackling racism at the community and institutional level is also relevant. As noted in Chapter Two, these important wider contextual features must be addressed in addition to the features of the school environment, in order to foster healthy children with positive approaches to learning and well developed social and cognitive abilities (Graue, 2006).

Working as a society to support quality early childhood provision is also likely to improve school transitions and student outcomes. The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education [EPPE] study in England (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart, 2004) noted "that improving staff training and qualification levels may be strategies that can help raise the quality of [early childhood] provision" (p. 31). Access to high-quality early childhood services in turn supported children's social and emotional development, as well their academic achievement at school. This is discussed further in Chapter Five.

Finally, whilst supporting macro- and exosystem factors that assist children, teachers can also be cognisant of the impact of these factors on the lives of the families and children they work with, and try to minimise negative effect. For example, Fletcher et al. (2009) discuss how for Pasifika parents in their study, working long hours, cultural commitments, and lack of wider family support if the extended family members were not in New Zealand, all impacted on family involvement with school. Such factors should be taken into account for all families when planning transition to school activities, so that they are not disadvantaged.

How can teachers (at an individual level) best support children to transition as successfully as possible from ECE to school?

Responsibility for an effective transition to school lies with all those involved in the process (Dockett & Perry, 2003a). Therefore, although teachers are identified in the research question, many of the points raised are likely to require school-wide support. Teachers may also initiate community-wide approaches. There are numerous examples of such programmes in Australia, and recently New Zealand teachers have been developing similar initiatives (for example the Taumarunui 'Kick Start to School Day' held in December 2007, see Peters et al., 2009).

The findings of the review have been organised into factors associated with:

1. Working with the child
2. Sharing information
3. Working with families
4. Personal qualities of teachers

Working with early childhood services (or in the case of early childhood teachers working with schools) is also a key theme, but this has been addressed separately in relation to the third research question considered in this chapter.

Working with the child addresses microsystem factors, while working with the family or teachers in the other sector are aspects of the mesosytem. However, in the first section there is overlap between these two levels as much of the advice to teachers regarding practices and interactions with the child in the microsystem involve making links with home and early childhood settings to inform their practice.

Before presenting the findings from the 2004-2009 literature, it is interesting to consider the recommendations offered by Fabian and Dunlop (2006, p. 16) based on their review of literature that (apart from five articles) was published before 2004. These were:

- *schools having a named person, or a small team, to take responsibility and a strategic overview of the process;*
- *schools providing pre-entry visits for children and their parents that involve parents and children learning about learning at school as well as familiarisation with the environment and people;*
- *schools having systems that allow for high quality communication and close interaction between family, pre-transfer settings and school, where information is both given and received about children's experiences;*
- *schools being sensitive to the needs of individuals and particular groups and having strategies in place to support them;*
- *flexible admission procedures that give children and their parents the opportunity to have a positive start to their first day;*
- *children starting school with a friend and schools having systems in place to help children make friends; (repeating a year can cause friendship problems at the next transition);*
- *schools having strategies to help children develop resilience to cope with change and to be active in making the transition work for them;*
- *curriculum continuity across phases of education, that comes about from establishing the prior learning that has taken place and where children are helped to learn with and from each other; 'looping' where pre-school and school staff plan together and work alternate years in each phase;*
- *schools evaluating induction and the management of transitions and transfers from the perspective of all participants, and that help to question the assumptions of the setting and see life from the child's perspective; and*
- *special training for staff working with those children who are starting school.*

Although not exactly the same, there is considerable congruence between these points and the themes evident in the recent literature. The following sections outline the current recommendations and also provide insights into their implementation.

1. Working with the child

The literature was analysed for themes relating to supporting children's transitions. There was a wealth of advice and this review has focused on the most dominant themes that were identified. These were:

- connecting with funds of knowledge that children bring to school from home;
- culturally responsive teaching;
- appropriate assessment practices;
- making links between learning in ECE and school;
- fostering relationships and friendships;
- consider children's whole experience of school;
- providing opportunities for play; and
- understanding the impact of rules.

Connecting with funds of knowledge that children bring to school from home

The key features of a successful transition to school that relate to children's achievement and sense of belonging in school appears to be fostered when teachers are able to reduce the mismatch between what is valued in school and the child's funds of knowledge from home and early childhood. Recent research and discussion has explored the ways in which schools can be more inclusive of the range of experiences that children bring. As noted in Chapter Two, Thomson (2002) proposed that children come to school with virtual school bags filled with knowledge, experiences and dispositions. Although in some contexts school only draws on the contents of selected bags, "those whose resources match those required in the game of education" (Thomson & Hall, 2008, p. 89), ideally schools will recognise and celebrate the learning and experiences that all children bring to school (Thomson, 2002), and build on these as a starting point for curriculum development (Broström, 2005; Timperley, McNaughton, Howie & Robinson, 2003). This helps to develop confidence (Gregory, 2005) and overcome the problems of school being disheartening if children discover what they know, think and find important is not necessarily on the agenda of their teacher (Brooker, 2008).

Thomson (2002) suggested that it was insufficient to open the backpacks in order to help learn what is mandated – rather the object was to also change what counts as important knowledge so that more inclusive models of knowing are recognised and taught to all. Teachers in Kamler and Comber's (2005) Australian study became ethnographers of communities to learn about cultural resources. This helped teachers re-assess their students' potential and design pedagogies to connect them to the literacy curriculum.

This seems important because where children's learning is not identified and built on, lack of challenge can lead to negative perceptions of school (Gallagher, 2005). It appears that more research would be helpful to explore the ways in which New Zealand teachers can learn about and connect with funds of knowledge from home, although findings from two recent New Zealand studies (Hartley et al., 2009; Ramsey, Sturm, Breen, Lee & Carr, 2007) provide some insights. These are discussed in the section on sharing information.

Culturally responsive teaching

Making schools more inclusive of different ways of knowing and building on children's funds of knowledge was identified in the literature as important for all children. However, teachers working hard to understand children's cultures, where these were different to their own, was such a dominant theme that this has been addressed separately here. Where schools are predominantly monocultural, many perspectives are unknowingly silenced (Fleer, 2004) and this can present problems for children whose cultural capital does not match that which is recognised and valued at school (Thomson, 2002). Chapter Two identified recognition and acknowledgement of the child's culture as an important feature of a successful transition, and it follows that strategies to support this will be important. Reviewing literature from 1990 to 2004, Petriwskyj et al. (2005) concluded that:

> *Expectations of homogeneity in school entrants may be yielding to a recognition of the reality of diversity in young children, families and communities, as well as presenting the potential for diversity to be positive in teaching and learning contexts. A consequence of realizing diversity, linked to the unlikely reality of having a group of homogeneous learners ready for entry to school, brings broader constructions of transition to school into focus. Flexibility in services and curriculum, and coherence between learner characteristics, cultural contexts and educational provisions offer opportunities to enrich the educational experience of all children while enhancing outcomes for children with developmental, social or cultural differences.* (p. 65)

Instead of aiming to assimilate children into Western ways, "post-colonial [early childhood] programs may be poised to take a lead role in preserving indigenous culture" (Prochner, 2004, p. 14), and increasingly research has shown that fostering and respecting children's culture is important at school too. Penman (2006), writing about the Australian context, suggests there is a moral obligation to teach indigenous students in ways that respect their culture in addition to the value in terms of student outcomes.

However, not everyone agrees. In New Zealand, Robinson and Timperley (2004) noted an underlying assumption in the views of researchers and Pasifika teachers that improving achievement is likely to occur through, "teachers giving greater recognition to Pasifika children's culture, improving the interface and understandings between home and school, increasing bilingual provision and resources and giving more positive publicity to the achievement of those who have succeeded", but the authors indicated that there has been little research to systematically evaluate this (p. xvi). Nevertheless, this view continues to be articulated by those who do not share the dominant culture of many schools. For example, Fletcher et al. (2009) note the importance of Pasifika values, languages and cultural knowledge being an implicit part of teaching and learning practices, suggesting that teachers should be sensitive to Pasfika students' approaches to learning and provide learning environments that are comfortable for their cultural expectations.

Research with Māori students offers similar suggestions. McGee et al.'s (2002) review found building relationships and having high expectations of Māori students were important, as was having a positive attitude and valuing the experiences they bring to the classroom. Culturally inclusive environments are important in fostering Māori achievement (Macfarlane, 2004, 2007; Macfarlane et al., 2007). Rau and Ritchie (2009) similarly note that Māori children should be given the opportunity to thrive in culturally responsive environments. Although drawn from research with older students or ECE settings, these strategies seem equally relevant to improving the transition to school and are supported by transition to school research overseas. For example, Dockett et al. (2006) found that supporting successful transitions to school for Aboriginal children may include Aboriginal culture being visible and valued in schools, and children being aware of and proud of the Aboriginal identity. These features, and the active engagement of Aboriginal children in their learning, tended to be characteristics of schools where Aboriginal children, "are achieving to their potential" (Dockett, et al., 2006, p. 2).

However, there is diversity within cultures that should also be acknowledged. Writing about Aboriginal children, Fleer (2004) reminds teachers that while they need to acknowledge each child's Aboriginality, they also need to see each child's individuality, and respond accordingly. "In planning for individuals it is important to work closely with families, as they provide the greatest insight into the individual and her/his special needs and strengths" (Colbung and Glover 1996, cited in Fleer, 2004, p. 63).

For all cultures, teacher awareness of different cultural approaches to learning is helpful. For example, whether it is socially acceptable for children to speak up or ask questions in their communities, or whether watching and listening is more valued (Li et al., 2007; Penman, 2006). Doucet (2008) cites literature suggesting that the "problem" of low achievement is not with children themselves, but with the inflexibility of curricula that do not allow for variations in learning styles and abilities (p. 111). This may require new forms of assessment, rather than utilising Western frameworks, which may not be appropriate for all children.

Appropriate assessment practices

Closely linked to understanding children's culture is the appropriate assessment of children on or near school entry. A body of literature from the USA and Australia discusses and critiques tools such as the Early Development Index (EDI), which is used to screen children on entry to school (Forget-Dubois et al., 2007; Guhn, Janus & Hertzman, 2007; Keating, 2007; Li et al., 2007). Although New Zealand does not use such a tool, B4 School Checks and new entrant assessment in literacy and numeracy do take place, so some of the critiques of assessment practices are relevant to consider when looking at ways to support children's transitions.

Children's reputations as learners may be formed on the basis of testing on a narrow range of skills (Peters, 2004). This has been revealed to show more about the child's familiarity with the teacher language used in such testing (Brooker, 2008) and their experience of the school context (Timperley & Robinson, 2002), than their actual cognitive ability. For example, Timperley and Robinson (2002) described early childhood teachers' concern when they found that school teachers assessed children as unable to achieve things which their early childhood teachers knew they had been able to do. A child's lack of success was viewed by the school teachers as located within the child, and schools didn't appear to be aware that the atmosphere of school and the ways things were assessed impacted on what the children did. As one kindergarten teacher explained:

> *I mean we've had things come back from the school saying that these children don't know their colours or they don't know how to count to such and such and we know full well they do. But because this is an atmosphere that they are used to doing those things in, and maybe we're checking that they know those things in a different way than they would do at school, they maybe are not getting the same results.* (Timperley et al., 2003, p. 37*).*

Brooker (2008) suggests that, "the question to be asked is not, 'do they know it or don't they?' but 'are they happy to apply their knowledge in this setting?' a very different matter" (p. 8).

Li et al. (2007) noted the problems of assessments of bilingual children carried out in English, which position young children as having poor scores, when in fact they may speak their own language very well. In addition, tests which value particular cultural ways of responding and valued knowledge may mistakenly interpret other cultural approaches as evidence of poor language and overlook strengths and knowledge that children from a different culture may excel in. Teachers need to be careful not to misinterpret children's abilities or actions (Thomson, Pope & Holland, 2006).

For all children, understanding what is required in assessments may impact on their performance. A clear illustration of this is a child in Brooker's (2008) study who, when asked to "sort" unfamiliar farmyard animals into fields, assembled a

cat, a farmer, a chicken and some sheep, describing them as having been put together "because they are friends". The teacher classified her as unable to sort, and on the basis of this narrow definition of sorting the child, "was presumed to have limited understanding of mathematics" (p. 137). However, Brooker (2008) discusses how what the child lacked was an understanding of what school teachers required of her. She was able to sort objects in her own context but the task with unfamiliar farm animals was not interpreted as "put all the same ones together".

In a related issue, Corsaro, Molinari and Rosier (2002) described tasks where young children were to achieve the 'right' answer, even though this was ambiguous even to the adult researcher, or where answers were deemed incorrect if not given in full sentences, even though they were appropriate responses to a question. Such practices seem to set children up to be confused and hesitant about responding in such situations and work against developing active learners. In contrast, in an intervention by Phillips et al. (2004), teachers were encouraged to ensure mutual understanding and to use conflict and ambiguity as a basis for children learning to be more expert.

A number of writers recommend the development of culturally appropriate assessment to adequately identify the capabilities of children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (eg, Harris, 2008; Li et al., 2007). It has been noted that many of the developmental frameworks that children are assessed against are based on Western models, which may not reflect other ways of thinking. This is particularly evident in literacy (Harris, 2008; Carr & Peters, 2008) and numeracy (Peters, 2005), two learning areas which are given significance in the early years of school (Ministry of Education, 2007a). It is important to remember that such progressions, "are not discovered; they are constructed. They are constructed from beliefs and ideologies and particular approaches to learning – as well as from research" (Carr & Peters, 2008, p. 1). Harris (2008) has researched different cultural ways of assessing aspects of literacy, story-writing and story-telling. Her research points out that Western modes of assessing stories use particular criteria, which may not be appropriate for stories from non-Western frameworks (Māori or Pasifika for instance). Very different evaluations of the same story were evident depending on whether Western or Māori criteria were used (Harris, 2008). This suggests that not only should culture be recognised and acknowledged, but also incorporated into the assessment practices that help to establish children's identity as a learner. Rameka (2009) has also been exploring ways of developing kaupapa Māori assessment. This appears to be an important area for further research.

Penman (2006) discusses low academic outcomes for many Aboriginal students and notes that the documentation of poor attendance, poor retention, and lower levels of literacy and numeracy all reflect judgments made from a non-Indigenous perspective. "Poor outcomes from a non-Indigenous perspective could be seen from another perspective as a failure of the school system or as a rejection by the students themselves of that school system" (p. 52).

Assessment practices that make the learning visible and acknowledge the context, become more permeable and open to discussion and contributions by child and family as well as the teacher (Cowie & Carr, 2004). Several school teachers have been exploring such formats (see for example Carr et al., 2008).

Making links between learning in ECE and school

Connecting with the funds of knowledge that children bring to school involves links between learning in early childhood education as school as well as between home and school. Although, as noted in Chapter Two, research with children suggests that they expect some changes when they get to school, and look forward to new achievements (Brooker, 2008; Einarsdóttir, 2007), making connections between learning in the two settings can impact on a sense of belonging as well as on learning. For example, describing an alphabet activity that the children had been involved in at kindergarten, one school teacher noted the children's excitement when this was introduced in the new entrant class, "the first time they see us do it they're so excited that they've seen it before" (Hartley et al., 2009). Teachers have also been exploring connections between dispositions in early childhood and key competencies at school (Belcher, 2006; Carr & Peters, 2005; Carr et al., 2008; Hartley et al., 2009; Peters, 2005; Winter, 2005). This means children find similar

approaches to learning are valued in the two contexts, even though some of the content may be different. Children begin to see opportunities for applying their knowledge and skills in the new setting, adding to their perception of themselves as capable and confident learners. This is illustrated in the example of a child in Hartley et al.'s study (2009) who, when offered help during an activity on a school visit, responded confidently to her teacher, "I don't need any help, thank you", and as the entrant teacher noted, "she didn't".

A number of New Zealand authors have also explored the links between *Te Whāriki* and the learning areas of the school curriculum. Mawson (2003) focused on technological practice in early childhood education and school, and saw technology education as a possible bridge between learning in each sector. He recommended focusing on literacy and numeracy in the mornings at school, and basing the afternoon programme on *Te Whāriki* for the first six months of school. Case studies of teachers in practice (eg, Carr & Peters, 2005; Carr et al., 2008) show other examples of integration and interweaving.

Belcher (2006) recommended that teachers of new entrant children read and reflect on the content and pedagogy of *Te Whāriki* in order to understand its links with the key competences at school. This followed her research on perspectives on numeracy, which found that the Early Numeracy Project (ENP) appeared to limit "the range of meaningful numeracy in the new entrant classroom". She also suggested that the Numeracy Development Project should "provide further information on the pedagogy of numeracy knowledge which could bridge early childhood and primary school numeracy learning" (p. iv).

While schools are increasingly encouraged to draw on *Te Whāriki*, it is acknowledged that childhood centres can provide, "a range of language, literacy and numeracy activities, thereby creating channels for the development of those skills and understandings that increase engagement in classroom activities" (Timperley et al., 2003, p. 38). For example, Mangere Bridge Kindergarten's Centre of Innovation research explored learning connections through a rich multiliteracies approach in early childhood that involved children in a range of literacies including script-writing and movie-making. "Where print literacies privileged some learners over others, multimodal literacies enable a more open architecture in which to learn and the conversion of the passive print classroom audience into active cultural participants" (Healy, 2008, cited in Hartley et al., 2009). The teachers came to think of this as valuable in its own right, but also serving as priming events.

> *Priming events involve activities in which children, by their very participation, attend prospectively to ongoing or anticipated changes in their lives. Such events are crucial to children's social construction of representations of temporal aspects of their lives (including important life transitions) because children's social representations do not arise from simply thinking about social life, but rather from their collective, practical activities with others.* (Corsaro, et al., 2002, p. 325).

Priming events can serve as continuities or discontinuities in transition experiences, something that is illustrated in two case studies discussed by Corsaro et al. (2002). For example, while some activities in one pre-school were intended to prepare children for the passive listening and responding of school classroom, they led to anxiety in the children and a focus on perfection that was not necessarily helpful for learning.

Fostering relationships and friendships

Much of the research literature supports the development of positive relationships between the child, parents and educators as a key feature of the transition to school (Brooker 2008; Dockett & Perry, 2006; Dockett, Perry, Campbell, Hard, Kearney & Taffe, 2007; Ladd, 2006; Peters, 2003a, 2004; Margetts, 2003b). In fact, Pianta et al. (1999) described transitions as a "process of relationship formation" (cited in Brooker, 2008, p. 151). Sometimes these relationships are

easily forged, at other times they are fraught with difficulty. The relationships may be most important when they are most difficult to construct or sustain (Brooker, 2008).

For children, their friendships with others have been shown to be central to their experience of school (Belcher, 2006; Dockett & Perry, 2006; Margetts, 2007, 2008; O'Kane, 2007; Peters, 2004; 2003a). Teachers can be proactive in supporting the development of children's friendships, by providing opportunities in early childhood services for children going to the same school to develop familiar playmates (Margetts, 2007) and assisting families with children going to the same school to connect with each other (Dockett & Perry, 2006; Peters, 2004). Once at school, teachers can provide support in the way they group children, create opportunities for families to meet and form relationships, and provide time and activities to assist children in developing and maintaining friendships (Dockett & Perry, 2007). Teachers should also be alert to the subtle ways in which they influence how a child is perceived by peers (Peters, 2003a; Rietveld, 2008), and avoid positioning children in the classroom in ways that are detrimental to the development of friendships. For example, Rietveld (2008) described how a teacher may position a child as not being an integral member of the class, whilst according a superior position to other children, and she contrasts this with evidence of a more inclusive approach. Cultural issues are likely to be relevant here too. Children from different cultures may have different styles of interaction (Corsaro et al., 2002) and when these differ from the teacher's, teachers should take care to support children's multicultural interactions and not position difference as a deficit in the child.

Teachers can also take steps to support children's confidence and communication, along with social skills such as listening to others, cooperation, taking responsibility for their actions, and avoiding hurting others (Berne, 2003; Margetts, 2003b; O'Kane, 2007) which may enhance their social acceptance. Teachers in Moore's (2001) New Zealand study used a range of strategies to support children's friendships such as teaching games children could play together, establishing a meeting place during playground breaks so children didn't lose each other, helping children find someone to play with and reading books about friendships. The *Health and Physical Education* learning area in the New Zealand school curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007a) contains goals regarding relationships with other people and contribution to healthy communities and environments, that are directly relevant, and could be a feature of the new entrant programme.

However, it is important to remember that social skills are not just features of a child but also influenced by context. This was evident in the experiences of the boys in Rietveld's (2008) study where children showed different social skills in different contexts. Even an intensive 13-week intervention programme, designed to enhance children's social and emotional development in order to prepare them for the school playground, led to the conclusion that lunchtime routines should be addressed as well because, despite the programme, lunchtimes proved upsetting for some children (Smith, 2002). Ensuring environments are supportive and nurturing are therefore likely to be a key feature to implement (Carr & Peters, 2005; Simpson & Callaghan, 2005) alongside any efforts to support children's development of particular skills to enhance friendships. In addition, early childhood portfolios may provide a resource that supports positive interactions to happen in the school classroom (Hartley et al., 2009), and having resources available to play with may facilitate entry into social groups, especially for children who do not share the dominant language of the school setting (Peters, 2004).

Buddies and tuakana teina relationships

Teachers can also develop programmes that ultilise the support of older children to assist children starting school. Tamarua (2006) noted that support from older family members such as a sibling or cousin can be helpful. "Extended whānau who manaaki or take care of another member of the same family or same identity" may be particularly familiar for Māori children (Tamarua, 2006, p. 87). Elsewhere, buddy programmes have been arranged where older school children care for and support children during their transition. At Mangere Bridge Kindergarten, Year 5 buddies from the

local school work with the children at kindergarten and later take the child and family on a tour of their school. Once the child starts school, the older partner becomes a 'read to' buddy and looks out for the new entrant in the playground. The programme has made a big difference to overcoming some children's initial feelings of reluctance about starting school (Hartley et al., 2009). Buddies also feature in a number of Australia transition programmes (eg, Dockett & Perry, 2005a; Mayo, 2005). Appropriate training of the big buddies may be an important feature of such a programme (Dockett & Perry, 2005a).

In New Zealand, where children join new entrant classes throughout the year, slightly older children in the class may enjoy supporting new arrivals. Observations in Peters' (2004) study showed how effective some five-year-olds could be in scaffolding each other's learning and adaptation to the classroom. However, such support was not evenly distributed, and some children received very little peer assistance, or even experienced gate-keeping peers who made it difficult for then to engage in learning activities.

Peer support, when it happens, can be beneficial to both parties. Two of the mothers of the four Māori children in Tamarua's (2006) study noted that when their children took on the role of supporting other younger ones this helped the slightly older child to settle into the classroom. It may be helpful for teachers to observe when this is happening naturally and perhaps take steps to foster a supportive culture, although taking care to ensure that children are not positioned as always needing help, or always helping, but instead enjoy reciprocal opportunities (Rietveld, 2008).

Consider children's whole experience of school

Closely related to the issue of friendships is the importance of teachers recognising that the child's whole experience of school is an important aspect of transition. The playground is a common cause of concern for children on entry to school (Brooker, 2008; O'Kane, 2007, Peters, 2004; Smith, 2002). Lunchtimes may be particularly difficult for new children (Peters, 2004). Comments from parents and children give a flavour of some of the children's concerns about lunchtimes (Peters, 2004, pp. 360-362):

> *He said to me 'I like Mrs Knight and my classroom but I don't like lunchtimes'... He knew this boy from kindy. ... The boy would run off and leave him. One time the duty teacher found him crying and he said 'I want my mummy, when does lunchtime finish?' And that really tugs. And in the end he actually hated lunchtimes.* (Mother 9)
>
> *He had one day when he didn't want to go to school and I asked him why and he said 'Because nobody plays with me at lunchtime'.* (Mother 11)
>
> *I think she found lunchtimes at school really hard, and I think she still does [after several weeks]. I think her only concerns were the lunchtime thing, I think, just the playing. I think she handled everything in the classroom all right.* (Mother 12)
>
> *Lonely ... Bored, 'cos you have got no idea what to do.* (Child S)
>
> *I couldn't find any of my friends so I sat under a tree and cried where no one could see me.* (Child 12)
>
> *The big kids sometimes bully the little kids, and I thought it was going to happen to me. ... And people throw other people's shoes down the gully.* (Child N)

Some schools are exploring providing more resources for children to play with during breaks as these both support children's interactions and overcome the problems associated with not having anyone to play with.

Toilets may be another issue. In Peters' (2004) study only three children experienced concern about using the school toilets, but this was significant for the children involved. Robinson, Timperley and Bullard (2000) found that when children experience toilet accidents during their early weeks at school, teachers may believe that this is due to the children not being sufficiently socialised into toileting routines, without realising that it could be as simple as the children not knowing the location of the toilets.

An important aspect in supporting children's transitions is therefore to identify children's concerns and address them (Brooker, 2008; Margetts, 2006; Peters, 2004; Potter & Briggs, 2003).

Providing opportunities for play

Some aspects of play can act as valuable priming events for school (Hartley et al., 2009), and Broström (2005) wrote about the possibilities of play to be a transitory activity, which helps the children involved to be active, rather than passive learners. Fabian and Dunlop (2005) devoted a whole chapter to exploring how play can support transitions, including addressing social and cognitive challenges. Play has also been used to familiarise children with aspects of their new role. Mayo (2005) described how providing resources such as school uniforms, school bags and pretend lunches for dramatic play allowed children to explore their feelings about the change of role from kindergarten child to school child, and support them in coping with this. Dockett and Perry (2006) also recommend providing props for socio-dramatic play about school, and for teachers to prompt 'what if games' to work through possible problems and strategies.

Play at school has been found to be especially valuable for bilingual children who used home language in their socio-dramatic play, gradually inserting English words and experimenting with language. Through such play and 'playful talk' the extraordinary flexibility of some emergent bilingual children was evident (Gregory, 2005). Similarly, Lange and Thomson (2006) cited a range of literature supporting the value of creative and narrative play in enhancing vocabulary and problem solving ability in children with special needs.

Real experiences are also important for fostering understanding and meaning (Fletcher et al., 2009; Gregory, 2005). For example, Fletcher et al. (2009) describe how reading is more than just decoding words. Some Pasifika students struggled to understand the meaning of unfamiliar words and concepts, and a literacy programme may benefit from practical activities to address this (such as exploring the word soil by planting something together) in addition to drawing more on aspects that are familiar (Fletcher, et al., 2009).

Understanding the impact of rules

Where children's views have been gathered, they frequently identify rules as a key aspect of starting school and are focused on all the new rules that need to be learnt to manage the school environment (Dockett & Perry, 2003a, 2007; Margetts, 2008; O'Kane, 2007). Rules can be helpful as they provide children with explicit guidance about 'doing school' which can assist in establishing a sense of belonging. Margetts (2008) found children seemed to accept them as part of a rite of passage. However, teachers should be aware that pressure to conform doesn't become too concerning. Belcher (2006) describes how one child's anxiety about doing the 'wrong thing' impacted on his engagement, perhaps harming his identity in this context. Similarly, case studies in Peters (2004) showed how fear of doing the wrong thing could lead some children to do nothing in situations where the demands weren't clear, or they feared failure, when in fact playful exploration may have been more beneficial for their learning (Peters, 2004). Potter and Briggs' (2003) interviews with 100 children in their first year of school found that being told off by teachers, especially in a loud voice, was a common concern (42%).

2. Sharing information

While this review has discussed the benefits of changing what is valued at school to be more inclusive for a diverse range of pupils, it seems inevitable that children will still have to learn to 'do school' and their transitions supported through assisting with this. Earlier research has shown that children who required the most help actually received the least support (Brooker, 2002), and so teachers need to be aware of this and take steps to ensure that children are not disadvantaged by lack of information and assistance. At the same time, schools should be proactive in learning about children and their families. Carlise (2008) described this as both providing a map (information about school) and opening the child's 'suitcase' of funds of knowledge (to gain information about the child). Together these helped to build a bridge from home to school and support full participation in the class. Perhaps because of the historical dominance of the notion of children fitting in to school, and that the consideration of schools adapting to children is more recent, the literature currently has more suggestions about the former.

Providing information and familiarisation activities

There are a wide range of strategies evident in the research literature that support children and their families in gaining information, learning to 'do school' and supporting a sense of belonging in the new context. These include:

- visits;
- welcome DVDs;
- books about their school;
- general picture books about starting school;
- social stories;
- school display board;
- transition pamphlets;
- community day;
- websites; and
- parent expo.

In the USA, Schulting, Malone and Dodge (2005) found that parental involvement in a range of transition practices organised by the schools (home visits by teachers, family visits to school, orientation session, etc.) had a modest positive effect on students' academic achievement and on parent-initiated school involvement during the kindergarten year, even when SES and other demographic factors related to these outcomes were controlled for.

Pianta (2004) suggested that communication should start in the year before the child starts school and continue through the first year. Fabian and Dunlop (2006) noted that if too much information is given very rapidly, or the terminology is unfamiliar, this may alienate parents. At the same time too little information might lead to anxiety. Information that is accessible in both quality and quantity is more likely to be helpful. Parents in Peters' (2004) study said that timing was important too. For them a tour of the school and an informative morning tea session was provided during their child's first term. The parents commented that if that had been provided before their child started school it would have alleviated a lot of their concerns and provide an opportunity to have their questions answered. Pianta's (2004) large-

scale research across the USA agrees, concluding that in the contexts he studied, many meetings, letters and other practices to connect homes and schools and provide information were "too late, too impersonal, and too cursory to have much of an effect" (p. 6).

While teachers in both early childhood and school settings can support children's transition to school by providing both children and their families with relevant information, Chapter Five will show that this may not be the same for all families. For example when children and their families have language backgrounds other than English, parents have highlighted the importance of having access to people who speak their home language, and that the information they require may not be the same as required by English speaking parents (Dockett & Perry, 2005b).

When children have special educational needs, additional information may be required. In New Zealand, Jamieson (2008) found lack of understanding about different funding models for children with moderate needs, even amongst professionals, was a source of concern. For families there are many issues to address in relation to their children with special needs starting school. Case studies (eg, New Zealand Down Syndrome Association, n.d.) illustrate the challenges parents face and how responsive schools can alleviate fears in the way they address and answer the questions parents have.

Visits

Having opportunities to visit the school prior to starting is widely documented as a helpful strategy (eg, Dockett & Perry, 2004b; Fabian, 2002; Hartley et al., 2009; Margetts, 2003a; Peters, 2004). Children who have experienced the school through repeated contact of visits are more likely to hold realistic expectations about school (Dockett & Perry, 2004b).

No evidence was found of any information regarding the exact nature or ideal number of visits. In fact, flexible and relevant transition experiences are recommended by Margetts (2007). Planning and evaluating visits is important. Peters (2004) found that while some school visits were well planned and both informative and reassuring for children, others that were more ad hoc sometimes led to children developing fears and concerns, so that after the visits the children involved were more reluctant to go to school than they had been before.

The opportunity for parents to visit as well as children is important. Where parents were prevented from visiting the school they felt disempowered and unable to help their child as the following examples (from Peters, 2004) illustrate:

> *At [another school] they encouraged parents to come and spend one morning and one afternoon and one other period during the day at the school with your child for three hours so that the child knows what to expect, this is the morning routine and this is the afternoon routine and this is how things work. It was really good because it made me aware of what they were doing. Here [Kowhai school] I came and said to the secretary, 'Oh [child's name] will be starting next term, should I schedule these half day visits?' and she said 'Oh no, they just come with Azure Kindergarten one day'. I thought that was a little bit poor. I felt very uninformed with that, even though I have a daughter here. And I wasn't there when they came with the kindy. They didn't let us know that that was the day they were coming to school, so I didn't get to see how she related in that…. I found that really hard here [Kowhai] because you know what little children are like, they don't volunteer a lot of information, to know what she's doing in the daytime…* (Mother 20)

> *I would have liked to have gone into the classroom and actually, physically, seen where it was, and who was in his classroom, just so I could key him up a bit more, because he was asking questions about the*

> *classroom and I had no idea.... I didn't have any idea of what he'd do with his bag or if they sat at desks or tables or anything.* (Case Study Mother 3.2)

Fabian (2002) also suggested that 'virtual visits' might be included, where websites or CD-ROMs could allow children and their families to take virtual tours of school and 'meet' the teachers prior to visiting.

Welcome DVD

Similar to Fabian's (2002) idea of a virtual online tour, children at Mangere Bridge School made a DVD about their school, which was then shared with new children and families. The DVD documented features of the school context and key members of staff. It was filmed and narrated by children. The feedback from those families that utilised the DVD as a preparation tool for school was positive. Families felt they had more idea of who was who at school, and more familiarity with the school environment. Children were able to identify their teacher and know the teacher's name and their classroom number more confidently after viewing the DVD. It did require updating though, to keep track of staff changes (Hartley et al., 2009).

Books about their school

A number of studies have found that books about school are useful ways of helping children become familiar with the school environment. Often these are made from photographs taken of the school environment and staff. They have been developed by kindergarten teachers (Hartley et al., 2009; Lee, 2005) and school children (who made books for new entrants to show the things that they felt were important to know when you start) (Dockett & Perry, 2005c). In Hartley et al.'s (2009) study personalised books were made for children, developed from photographs taken during a visit. Various areas of the school were documented: the playground, the toilets, the office, the staff room and the classroom, and a short written commentary provided on each. The kindergarten children and their families expressed their delight at receiving this record of the visit, and parents said they found it useful for discussing the imminent start to school for their children.

Although these books have usually been written for children, Lee's (2005) research found that they also seemed to help parents become more informed about school.

General picture books about starting school

There are a wide range of picture books with stories that consider aspects of starting school. Dockett, Whitton and Perry (2003) analysed the messages in 70 picture books and found that they addressed many concerns raised by children, parents and educators. However, adults' concerns predominated, and the images portrayed tended to be stereotypical. It appears that picture books might be a useful basis for discussing school, but that teachers should evaluate their appropriateness when making a selection.

Social stories

Although not a research article, Briody and McGarry (2005) described how 'social stories' (short stories following a particular structure, and illustrated with photographs of the child) can be created for children to assist them in their transition by offering information about what will happen and when it will happen. They become visual scripts and can help children organise and interpret daily events such as entering the classroom. Although they were originally designed to support the social and emotional adjustment of children with autism spectrum disorders (Briody & McGarry, 2005) they could be tried with any child who was finding a transition difficult.

School display board

Hartley et al. (2009) developed a school board in their kindergarten. Each side of this moveable display board showed one of the two major schools their children went on to, and included pictures of the entrance to the schools, the Principal, Deputy, office staff, junior school teachers and the school uniform. Under the photographs of the classroom teachers, the kindergarten children placed their photographs when they commenced their pre-entry visits to school. They then had a ready reference to who their teacher would be and the other children from kindergarten who would be in their new entrant class with them. The board became the focal point of conversation for children with their families, their peers and their kindergarten teachers.

Transition pamphlets

Another strategy is the use of information pamphlets. Hartley et al. (2009) developed transition pamphlets that provided information, with photographs, in 'bite sized' portions, rather than handing parents several typewritten pages. There were two pamphlets: "Nearly Five" and "First Days at School", and these were made available at different times. "Nearly Five" detailed the kindergarten practices around the child's last day at kindergarten, and the parents' responsibilities to do with enrolling their child at school. "First Days at School" was written differently for each local school, and provided a brief synopsis about the procedure for the first days at school, including any expectation of parent involvement and a general timetable of the classroom programme.

In some areas of Australia, information pamphlets have been developed in the families' home languages, for example, Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Samoan, Turkish and Vietnamese (Dockett & Perry, 2003a).

Websites

Both families and teachers can gain information related to starting school from relevant websites. One example is the *Illawarra Families NSW Transition to School* website: http://www.transitiontoschool.com.au/index.html. This has general information, pages for children, teachers and parents along with examples of a range of transition programmes operating in the area. In New Zealand the *Team Up* website has a range of pages that contain valuable information about starting school: http://www.teamup.co.nz/1.

Community day

Although their research is not yet published, a group of Taumaranui teachers instigated a 'Kick Start to School Day' as part of a series of transition activities developed by early childhood and primary school teachers in the community (Peters et al., 2009). Inspiration was drawn from the Wollongong starting school picnic (Kirk-Downey & Perry, 2006) and adapted for the New Zealand context. At the 'Kick Start to School Day' parents were encouraged to enrol their children for early childhood services and school, and all four-year-olds received a kete filled with resources to support starting school. This included Ready to Read books from the Ministry of Education, Team Up pamphlets, scissors, crayons, glue sticks, sellotape, rubbers, rulers, stickers and paper.

Parent expo

One way of parent's families gaining some initial insights into starting school was a parent expo held as part of Parkhill, Cushing and Read's (2005) research. Questionnaires completed by parents who attended noted that their understanding of transition issues had improved by having the opportunity to meet with the school staff who attended.

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[1] At the time of publication these web pages can now be found at http://www.minedu.govt.nz/Parents.aspx.

Learning about children and their families

The strategies listed above focus largely on families and children gaining information about school. However, supporting children's transitions involves a more reciprocal sharing of information, allowing teachers to gain insights from families and the children that will help them to support individual children. Home visits may be part of this process (Fabian, 2002; New Zealand Down Syndrome Association, n.d.).

Once at school, strategies trialled in early childhood, such as loaning children cameras to document activities they are involved in at home and in the community (Ramsey et al., 2007) may help foster an understanding of the child's background.

Another practical strategy to assist teachers in connecting with funds of knowledge from home and early childhood is to utilise the early childhood portfolio in the new entrant classroom. Hartley et al. (2009) found that there were advantages for school teachers, as the portfolios helped to teachers to find out about children's earlier learning and interests:

> *what the kindy books do is tell me so much more…it gives me an insight into where the child is socially – who their friends are, what their interests are – which for me as a new entrant teacher is far more valuable because I can find out myself easily enough if they can write their name or know their colours … but in fact their interests and personality takes a lot longer to get to know* (New entrant teacher Emma, First Video Interview)

The portfolios also appeared to support the children's sense of belonging and engagement in the new context:

> *I guess it's like us starting a new job and moving to a new country, everything is new but if they come with this little treasure, that's something that's theirs, something they can talk about, something they share and particularly for children who are really shy or having English as a second language, they don't even need to talk, they can just sit and show and share and often you see that happening and you realise they are really valuable and really powerful. They have helped settle quite a few children over the past years that I'm absolutely sure would have taken a lot longer to settle had they not had those, so it's just keeping those up and talking to the parents about the value of having those and that it will help their child settle and helps how they work.* (Teacher D, Final Interview)

> *I've noticed that even the most shy of children when they've got their portfolio with them they just seem to have this sense of confidence, it's that ownership over something and the fact that the other children in the class are acknowledging their prior learning and lots of rich experiences for the kids in that the children here remember friends from the kindergarten, they remember the teachers, they see Carol or Pat or Stephanie [the kindergarten teachers and administrator] in the picture "oh there's Stephanie".* (Teacher C, Final Interview)

However, as Hartley et al.'s (2009) report explains, families may be reluctant to allow their child's treasured portfolio to spend time at school unless a back-up copy is available. They also wanted to feel that the teacher valued the portfolios.

Jones (2006) also described the benefits of the early childhood portfolio at school, as it allowed the child's routines, knowledge, skills and previous learning experiences to be shared with the new entrant teacher. Broström (2005) offered a similar approach to connecting with the child's background. This involved children bringing photographs, drawings and favourite stories to school, which were welcomed, displayed and discussed in the classroom.

Talking to children

Because children's perspectives may be very different to those of the adults involved it is important to understand transitions from the child's perspective. Some issues may be fairly unique to a particular child. As noted earlier, in one study, only three children experienced concern about using the school toilets, but this was significant for the children involved. In addition, an aspect that one child dislikes about school maybe something that another really enjoys (Peters, 2004).

Research with children has shown that they are able to articulate their concerns about school, and what they feel other children need to know about school (Belcher, 2006; Dockett & Perry, 2003a, 2003b, 2004a, 2004c; Einarsdóttir, 2007; Fabian & Dunlop, 2006; Margetts, 2006; O'Kane, 2007; Potter & Briggs, 2003). They also have suggestions about what schools can do to help children who are starting school (Margetts, 2006). Teachers could undertake their own investigations into children's concerns and explore ways of addressing these in their own contexts. Various strategies have been used to support children sharing their views, including children taking photographs (Dockett & Perry, 2003a), drawing (Dockett & Perry, 2004a) and taking part in discussion groups (O'Kane, 2007) which might prove helpful.

3. Working with families

The benefits of a home-school partnership are well documented (Brooker, 2008; Bohan-Baker & Little, 2004; Dockett et al., 2007; Fletcher et al., 2009; King & Boardman, 2006). Fletcher et al. (2009) consider that developing home-school partnerships, "is the most powerful way for schools to understand and meet the needs of diverse students" (p. 26). However, these are not always easy to achieve. For example, Gallagher (2005) found that parents/caregivers in her study hoped for strong, reciprocal relationships with their child's teacher, but experienced distrust and negative responses from some teachers. Over time, these parents of gifted students turned away from schools and looked elsewhere for support, often enrolling their children in gifted programmes.

Mutual respect and acknowledgement of each other's knowledge seem to be important (Gallagher, 2006). Better home-school communication is likely to foster understanding on both sides and strengthen respectful relationships (Brooker, 2002) and finding both time and place for dialogue is key (Gallagher, 2006; Peters, 2004). Peters (2004) found that many parents indicated how much they would have appreciated an opportunity to talk to their child's teacher. Although teachers felt that they operated an 'open door' policy, not all parents experienced it as such, and it appeared that communication could be enhanced by creating 'official' time and space for this to happen with all parents/caregivers.

Report formats can also be adapted to share the information parents are most interested in. In a small study exploring reports based largely on the key competencies, Wilson (2005) found that these reflected the parents' crucial concerns regarding whether their child was happy at school and had friends to play with. As discussed earlier, assessments can invite family contributions and involvement.

Another way of supporting home-school partnerships is for teachers to evaluate their own ideas about parental involvement. Typically, parents and families who do not participate in schools are deemed not to care about their children's education, when the reality may be very different (Doucet, 2008; Peters, 2004). However, parent work hours may make it difficult for parents to participate in school activities (Fletcher et al., 2009) and flexible approaches may be needed. A parent's reasons for staying away may be even more complex. One mother described how she felt that teachers would look down on her and this would disadvantage her children so she kept away from school in the hopes this would enhance her children's chances of doing well (Peters, 2004). The solutions for building trust in cases like this would have to be developed with care. As well as assisting family involvement in school, it is recommended that teachers should also value unnoticed work of parents (Doucet, 2008). This invisible support can be as important as the on-site support parents provide (Brooker, 2002). At the same time, schools should take care not to disadvantage

children whose families, for whatever reason, do not participate in their child's education or develop a relationship with the teachers.

The feelings and experiences of families who have children with special needs starting school may be worthy of particular teacher consideration. Teacher enthusiasm and confidence regarding the child with special needs joining their class was important to parents (New Zealand Down Syndrome Association, n.d.; Wilson-Burns, 2009). Applying for ORRS funding led some parents to revisit the grief cycle, as they had to document all the ways in which their child was performing below other children (New Zealand Down Syndrome Association, n.d.). It may be helpful for teachers to be aware of potential sources of increased emotion for parents. Another mother's account noted how important it was to her that she was allowed to act like all the other parents, for example dropping off and leaving her child at school gave a brief sense of normality (Wilson-Burns, 2009).

Listening to parents' stories is an important step in gaining understanding to developing meaningful relationships (Doucet, 2008). Parents who do not share the dominant culture of the school may have particular concerns not shared by other families (Dockett & Perry, 2005b; Peters, 2004; Sangavarapu & Perry, 2005). Language may be a barrier when parents do not share the same language as the teacher. For example, parents may feel more able to advocate for their children using their first language (Fletcher et al., 2009). Obviously, access to those who can translate and support home school communication may not be available in some areas, but where possible this could be put into place. For example, Pasifika liaison officers to support school's communication with Pasific Island families (Fletcher et al., 2009).

As with other aspects of transition, it is important to check that policies are working. The school at the centre of Peters' (2004) study had developed a number of methods for sharing information with families. However, the fact that many parents did not actually receive the information shows that distribution polices need to be monitored.

Doucet (2008), Gregory (2005) and McTurk, Nutton, Lea, Robinson and Carapetis (2008) all suggest more attention should be paid to the role of the extended family in supporting children's learning and that home-school links should not just include the parents.

4. Personal qualities of teachers

There are clearly a huge number of strategies that early childhood and school teachers could implement to support children's transition to school. However, the strategies alone will not effect change unless teachers are willing to be proactive in exploring barriers to successful transitions, rather than accepting the status quo when things aren't working. This applies to pedagogy too. Chapman et al. (2004) critiqued reading interventions that offered more of the same when children weren't successful, rather than trying a different approach. Teachers are likely to be successful in supporting transitions if they adapt their practices in response to difficulties that children experience, instead of locating problems, when they occur, in the child (Stephen & Cope, 2003).

A positive teacher attitude is likely to be a vital aspect of this process (Ministry of Education, 2008a). A review of practices by Bohan-Baker and Little (2004) concluded that the degree to which families are involved in their child's educational experiences appears to be based on the attitudes of teachers toward that involvement. In turn, teachers' attitudes and behaviors can be strongly influenced by the attitudes of their supervisors. Teacher attitudes can be especially important when children have special educational needs. Parents rated the attitude of the teacher as the most important factor in their child's transition (Kemp, 2003), and appreciate teacher enthusiasm and confidence (Wilson-Burns, 2009).

How can teachers be supported and resourced to support children to transition as successfully as possible from ECE to school?

This chapter began by recognising that whilst there are many strategies for action, responsibility for an effective transition to school lies with all those involved in the process (Dockett & Perry, 2003a). Keeping this wider responsibility in mind, this review has also identified a number of ways in which individual teachers could be supported and resourced in order to support children's transition to school. These include:

- time and support to become ethnographers of culture;
- small class size;
- a flexible curriculum;
- training and professional development;
- acknowledge the special role of the new entrant teacher; and
- resourcing for transition activities.

Time and support to become ethnographers of culture

Teacher knowledge and respect for other cultures and ability to recognise and foster children's culture through pedagogies and approaches in the classroom has been a dominant theme in this review. However, developing these cultural understandings is not easy. Fleer (2004) noted that for many western teachers, effective linkages cannot take place and appropriate mediation cannot occur since Indigenous cultures are not well understood by non-Indigenous teachers. To overcome this teachers have to work hard to find out about the ideals, values and assumptions of the families in their community. Therefore, time and support for teachers to become ethnographers of communities to learn about cultural resources (as in Kamler and Comber's (2005) study) will be important.

Time to implement the results of this teacher learning is also important. Noting that even when teachers were aware of the challenges children faced, they may not have time to address them in a busy classroom, Thomson (2002) recommended that teachers' working conditions, "must be such that they are able to find, use and value each child's particular configurations of knowledges, narratives and interests" (p. 8).

Small class size

Literacy research on entry to school has shown that small class size is associated with gains in literacy achievement at the beginning school level, both in the USA (Magnuson, Ruhm & Waldfogel, 2007a) and in New Zealand (Phillips et al., 2004). Magnuson et al.'s (2007a) longitudinal study found that children who entered school behind their peers in aspects of literacy were able to catch up quickly in small classes with high-quality instruction, while initial disparities persisted for children experiencing large classes and lower levels of reading instruction.

On its own a small class does not guarantee a high-quality learning experience, as the ethos is also important (Stephen & Cope, 2003). This was evident in Hattie's (2009) synthesis of a range of studies. Hattie noted that reducing class size will not lead to changes unless the teachers also change the way that they teach to optimise the opportunities presented by having fewer students. Hattie's findings may also be affected by the range of ages involved. Blatchford (2009) notes that evidence supports the use of small classes immediately after entry to school and Carr et al. (2009) found that some of the most deeply engaging episodes in school classrooms occurred in small classes where the teacher was able to achieve intersubjectivity (shared meaning and understanding) with the group and to personalise a task. At the new entrant level a smaller class is likely to support teachers in getting to know children and enabling them to take a

proactive role in scaffolding children's thinking and supporting their transition to school. Observing the same teachers over a year showed that they were more able to do these things when the class sizes were smaller, although individual teachers varied in the degree to which they found a large class challenging (Peters, 2004).

A flexible curriculum

Changes to the school curriculum during the period covered by this review mean that New Zealand teachers now have a school curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007a), which sets a clear direction for teaching and learning, but allows teachers considerable flexibility when determining the detail. This allows teachers to connect with the funds of knowledge from home and ensure that children experience school contexts and learning activities where their values, languages and cultural knowledge are an implicit part of teaching and learning practices. This may be particularly important in raising achievement for students who have not in their past had their culture recognised at school (as documented by Dockett et al., 2006; Fletcher et al., 2009; Macfarlane, 2007), but there are benefits for all students (Li et al., 2007).

This valuable curriculum resource contrasts with more negative experiences overseas, where, for example, Thomson and Hall (2008) note the negative impact of the English National Curriculum on teachers' opportunities to support children from diverse backgrounds, and Gregory (2005), also in England, found the curriculum led to more instruction by teachers rather than teachers having time to listen to children and bridge understanding. It potentially avoids the situation described frequently elsewhere (and at earlier times in New Zealand) where curriculum demands meant that children were pressured to meet narrow targets (Wesley & Buysse, 2003), lesson formats did not provide time for the teacher to carefully observe and talk with children about their play with a view to scaffolding their learning (Belcher, 2006), and teachers felt constrained by expectations that did not reflect the learning process (Burley & Wehipeihana, 2005).

Training and professional development

Given the many suggestions for teachers outlined in this review, teachers are likely to benefit from training and professional development in some key areas. For example, in America, Doucet (2008) notes teacher education students receive little preparation to build mutually respectful relationships with a wide range of families. Given the importance of family involvement, it seems that teachers would be assisted if they received support with this aspect of their role. It would be relevant to research whether New Zealand teachers feel adequately prepared in this respect, as small scale studies (eg, Gallagher, 2005; Peters, 2004) indicate this could be helpful.

Related to this, awareness of how to gain information about children's background and culture, and how to use this effectively in the classroom, will help support teachers in some of the key aspects this review has identified regarding ways of supporting children's transitions. This may include learning specific information about children's language and culture (Podmore, Sauvao & Mapa, 2001), along with more exposure to parents' actual stories (Doucet, 2008).

Another area where it has been identified that New Zealand teachers required more professional development was in educating gifted children (Gallagher, 2005). The section on children moving from immersion early childhood services to non-immersion schools also indicated that teacher awareness of working with bilingual and multi-lingual children is another aspect that could be developed through training and professional development.

Given the complexity outlined in this review, professional development regarding supporting children's transitions would also be valuable. Cross-sector professional development may be particularly powerful for this topic. This could include developing knowledge of the curriculum and pedagogy in the other sector, something that will be discussed further in the section looking at ECE services and schools working together. Understanding more about key

competencies and learning dispositions is likely to be important in developing the connections outlined in the school curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007a) between *Te Whāriki* and the key competencies at school.

Acknowledge the special role of the new entrant teacher

Teachers at the new entrant level have an important role in establishing a sense of wellbeing and belonging for children and families. Peters (2004) found that this was enhanced by teachers being available at the start of the day to welcome children and parents to the classroom, and having time to ensure that children have found their lunch and a place to eat at lunchtime. Teachers at this level also have other liaison activities, such as contact with the local early childhood services. Hence, freeing new entrant teachers from other school responsibilities, such as crossing and lunchtime duties, and allowing time for liaison and communication with families and ECE services, could be another way of supporting them in their role.

Resourcing for transition activities

Dockett and Perry (2006) identify dedicated funding and resources as key to an effective transition programme, and suggest these should be recognised as part of the core business of schools. This applies to small initiatives as well as larger programmes. A number of schools and early childhood centres in New Zealand have explored ways of supporting transitions. Not all of these are formally documented but they include a dedicated transition worker to liaise with families and ECE services, release time for teachers to visit the other sector's setting, programmes on-site for pre-school children, 'fish and chip' nights where new families are welcomed to the school and have the opportunity to mix informally with each other and with staff, making DVDs, books, pamphlets, etc., providing a kete of resources for children to gain familiarity with books, pencils, scissors, and so on. Dedicated funding and ongoing resourcing are important if such projects are to be maintained. There are also establishment costs where new entrant classrooms have been resourced to allow more responsive and culturally appropriate programmes.

Funding for other services will also assist teachers. Salter and Redman (2006, 2007) found that GSE support for children who did not receive ORRS funding assisted the children involved to make a successful transition. The GSE support aided the development of relationships between home and school, and school staff reported feeling less anxious about children with special needs joining their class because children's needs were identified and arrangements made to accommodate them.

How can ECE services and schools (at a service level) best work together to support children to transition as successfully as possible from ECE to school? What is required to support this happening?

Of the 390 submissions received on the Strategic Plan for early Childhood, 37% mentioned the importance of a good liaison between early childhood education and school (Ministry of Education, 2007c). However, research immediately prior to 2004 in 20 schools and 27 early childhood services in some of Auckland's poorest suburbs painted a disturbing picture of the relationship between early childhood services and schools (Timperley & Robinson, 2002; Timperley et al., 2003). Despite a commitment to collaborate, teachers from the two sectors (ECE and school) had very different expectations of each other and most were dissatisfied with the current arrangements. A recommendation from the study was that ECE-school teacher relationships need to be more focused on how well they achieve the task of a satisfactory transition that creates sufficient continuity across the two settings for children to recognise their knowledge and skills (Timperley et al., 2003).

Recently Hartley et al. (2009) found that where goodwill and interest exist, joint projects that were mutually interesting were a valuable way of fostering relationships, not just between teachers in school and early childhood, but between

other members of the school and early childhood communities too. A framework for analysis was developed which considered who the tasks were of interest to and the relationships between different groups. Their report documented the range of projects which included a Welcome DVD, school buddies, phonics DVD and activities, school display board in kindergarten, early childhood and primary school cluster groups.

Effective professional relationships between early childhood and school teachers involved mutual respect and a balance of power. After working together for several years Hartley et al. (2009) noted the following in relation to their cross-sector relationships:

- misunderstandings could arise which could lead to individuals feeling frustrated and that their voices were not heard or valued;
- someone has to take the initiative and make the first contact;
- teachers hoped for an equal partnership and two-way discussions; and
- teachers hoped for opportunities to have input and to take turns to host meetings and raise their concerns.

These school teachers had worked through these issues and articulated a very different partnership to the teachers in Robinson et al.'s (2000) study, which had found that some early childhood educators felt dominated by the school sector and did not voice their concerns and opinions. Instead, school teachers in Hartley et al.'s (2009, pp. 51-52) study commented:

> *I don't want to see this as a school thing thinking up things... and telling the kindy. I think the conversations need to keep happening between the kindy teachers and the school teachers. This is going really well, what else could we do? How else could this progress?* (Teacher E, Final Interview)

> *I thought 'this is good because I'm learning and we're not coming here [to visit the kindergarten] to tell'. Yes we're opening up a partnership or a dialogue so I think it's going to get stronger.* (Teacher C, Final Interview)

As well as respectful, reciprocal relationships, to enhance continuity between early childhood education and school, teachers in both sectors need to have knowledge of the curriculum and pedagogy of both ECE and school (Broström, 2002; Einarsdóttir, 2006; Hartley et al., 2009; Ministry of Education, 2002b; Peters, 2005). A number of cross-sector early years groups in New Zealand have found value in sharing practices and discussing issues (Hartley et al., 2009; Wright & Molloy, 2005). These discussions may help to clarify the language used in each sector and to develop some shared understandings, given that the same words may describe rather different concepts in each sector, or different words may actually mean the same thing (Fabian & Dunlop, 2006; Wright & Molloy, 2005). Visiting each other's settings may be helpful. School teachers in Hartley et al.'s (2009) study were surprised by the capabilities they observed children display in the kindergarten programme and this helped them to connect with the learning documented in the children's portfolios:

> *We had some wonderful discussions back at school. Some of the teachers were saying "I've been limiting the children when you see them, what they do at kindergarten building these huge buildings and using hot glue guns" and those kinds of things, so that was really good.* (Teacher D, Final Interview, p. 3)

However, visits alone, without goodwill and understanding may not foster effective cross-sector relationships. Timperley et al. (2003) found that cross-sector visits failed to resolve differences in expectation because teachers from the two sectors were concerned about different things. Time, ongoing shared discussions and a study tour to explore

transition practices have been another way in which cross-sector relationships have been enhanced and led to a range of initiatives to support transition (work in progress as part of the Haere Whakamua EHSAS project).

As with other aspects of transition, teacher qualities are important in supporting cross-sector collaboration. Hartley et al.'s (2009) study found that flexibility, commitment and a 'can do' attitude were important in developing cross-sector relationships. Their data illustrated that relationships take time and persistence to develop, and have to be renegotiated through staff changes and as projects develop. From time to time, teachers in both sectors may feel discouraged, but the positive benefits for all the transition participants (children, teachers and families) indicated the value of developing these connections.

For most children, early childhood services, schools and home form the three main overlapping contexts at the time of their transition to school. This chapter has provided detailed information on the range of ways in which early childhood and primary school teachers, their wider educational settings, and the community, can support the transition to school of children and their families. The review has documented different sites for actions and the supports that may be required to assist teachers in their task. The next chapter takes a close look at the role of parents, family and whānau and how they can also support children's transition to school.

Chapter Five: Supporting children's transitions: Parents, family and whānau

Introduction

Chapter Four looked at themes from the literature regarding the role of teachers in considering: how can children be best supported to transition as successfully as possible? This chapter continues to explore this research question by exploring the role of parents, family and whānau. It focuses on the following questions:

- How can parents, family and whānau members best support children to transition as successfully as possible from ECE to school?
- How can parents, family and whānau members be supported and resourced to provide the support required by their children to transition as successfully as possible from ECE to school?
- Do some parents, family and whānau members have special or particular needs in relation to support as a result of their own characteristics (for example, past schooling experience, language skills and capabilities)?

Chapter Four contained a wealth of information in relation to the role of teachers. However, the literature from 2004-2009 had less explicit comment on the role of families in supporting their child's transitions. There are implicit recommendations in relation to the points covered in Chapter Four, for example, if teachers are to connect with families and learn about the culture and ways of doing things then this requires families who are willing to supply this information. Some of these inferences have been drawn, in addition to analysing the themes covered in the literature. However, for some of the questions above there was little or no data in the material that was sourced.

An important point to consider is that parents are not only playing a role in supporting their children as the children start school, the parents themselves are also making a transition to the role of school parent. Dockett and Perry (2007) provide a detailed overview of parents' perspectives on a range of issues related to their children starting school.

How can parents, family and whānau members best support children to transition as successfully as possible from ECE to school?

This section draws together the themes regarding the role of parent, family and whānau in supporting their children's transition to school from the range of academic literature that was analysed for this review. It has not drawn from advice literature for parents, although a number of these sources are available. For example, Dockett and Perry (2006) developed a handbook for parents and carers to support their children's transition to school. Many of the points covered in this detailed Australian guide are relevant for New Zealand parents. Other shorter New Zealand articles are also available, such as the section on starting school in the early childhood booklet published in the *Team Up* series (Ministry of Education, 2007b) and Eden-Calcott's (2009) article in *Little Treasures*. Oliver (2008) provides tips for parents of children with special needs, which may be applicable for other children too.

Early childhood education

A range of research findings suggest that one of the first steps that families can take to support their children's education is to ensure that they attend a high-quality early childhood service. This section explores what some of these studies indicate regarding the role of early childhood education and the transition to school. In general, studies have

been selected where this relationship has been explicitly started, although it is sometimes implied through the gains made by those attending quality services in comparison with their peers.

When exploring the role of early childhood education it is relevant to note that while there are many large-scale studies which correlate ECE provision with later measures, very few studies looked directly at the starting school experiences of children who have not attended early childhood services. The only New Zealand study that was reviewed on this topic was Faloon (n.d.) which looked only at children with moderate learning and behaviour needs who had little or no early childhood education. Extra support provided for these children through RTLB and GSE was reported to assist the children's transition, but the study did not compare their experiences to similar children who had attended ECE services.

The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) project in England was a major longitudinal study of a national sample of young children's development (intellectual and social/behavioural) between the ages of 3 and 7 years. To investigate the effects of the child's home background and pre-school education, the EPPE team collected a wide range of information on over 3,000 children (Sylva et al., 2004). The findings from EPPE showed that children without pre-school experience had lower scores for social and emotional development as well as for academic achievement, compared to children with similar backgrounds who had pre-school experience. The benefits of pre-school experience (compared to none) were evident through the early years of school. Disadvantaged children were found to benefit significantly from good quality early childhood experiences, especially when there was a mixture of children from different social backgrounds (Siraj-Blachford, Taggart, Sylva, Sammons & Melhuish, 2008). Pre-school attendance was found to provide significant benefits for cognitive development while the effects upon social behaviour, though evident at age 6 years, did not remain statistically significant up to 7 years. The researchers noted that "it is not possible to conclude with certainty that the much lower attainments of the 'home' group are directly due to lack of pre-school experience. Nonetheless, the statistical analyses strongly suggest that pre-schooling provides a significant cognitive boost" (Sylva et al., 2004, pp. 28-29).

Similar findings were evident in a smaller study of children who were perceived to be 'at risk' of special educational needs due to their low sores on the initial assessments of children in the main EPPE study reported on above (Sammons et al., 2003a, 2003b; Taggart et al., 2006):

> *It appears that pre-school centre quality has a positive role in promoting cognitive development for children who are at the lowest end of the attainment spectrum at entry to pre-school, and that high quality provision may be seen as an effective intervention, which can help improve cognitive development, and thus provide more vulnerable children with a better start at primary school.* (Sammons et al., 2003, p. 5)

An earlier longitudinal study in New Zealand, with a smaller sample, also found that a year after the children left pre-school, early childhood education continued to make a contribution to children's competency levels (Wylie & Thomson, 1998). Features of early childhood provision and length of attendance were still related to performance in some areas at age 14 (Rivers, 2006; Wylie, Hodgen, Ferral & Thompson, 2006).

In Australia, Penman's (2006) literature review looking at the 'growing up' of Aboriginal and Torres Straight Island children stated that the "most important thing" when looking at what helped prepare children for school was pre-school experience (p. 9). Research in the USA has also shown that quality pre-school programmes support children's development in a range of ways that are relevant both to school entry and later outcomes (Barnett, Lamy & Jung, 2005; National Early Literacy Panel, 2008; Magnuson, Meyers, Ruhm & Waldfogel, 2004, Magnuson, Ruhm & Waldfogel, 2007a; Ramey & Ramey, 2004; Winsler et al., 2008). Magnuson et al. (2004) noted that the gains were evident even

after controlling for a host of family background and other factors that might be associated with selection into early education programmes and relatively high academic skills. Larger and more long-lasting gains were found for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Magnuson et al., 2007b). However, for children who had attended some types of service there were also increased teacher reports of negative behaviour at school. This finding appeared to be associated with the quality of the service, but the researchers noted that more research was necessary in order to understand the reasons for the finding.

In a review of international literature Arnold, Bartlett, Gowani and Merali (2006) concluded:

> *Studies from around the world - whether they have followed children for only a few years or through adolescence - show clear evidence of significant differences between children who have participated in early childhood programmes and those who have not. ECD programmes are associated with higher levels of achievement and better adjustment in school. It is not only their marks which are better. These differences are attributed mainly to differences in attitude and motivation.* (p. 13)

Although many steps have been taken since the Strategic Plan (Ministry of Education, 2002b) to improve participation in early childhood education in New Zealand, we cannot assume that all families have access to quality early childhood services (eg, see Hammond, 2008), or that every family wishes to use such services even when they are available. It is therefore reassuring that at least one study found that schools could apparently make a difference to the patterns discussed in this section. Magnuson et al. (2007a) found that in their study of over 7000 children the schools the children attended played a part in determining whether the differences associated with pre-school attendance continued. "Whether their peers overcome their early deficits, or whether pre-school attendees maintain their advantage, is in part a function of the subsequent classroom environment" (p. 33).

Foster friendships

Chapter Two discussed the social demands of schooling and the requirements for children to negotiate classroom life with a large group of same-age peers (Ladd et al., 2006; O'Kane, 2007). Those children who are able to form friendships are likely to be advantaged. The relationship between having friends and successful transitions is widely documented and features in research literature from New Zealand and around the world (eg, Belcher, 2006; Brooker, 2008; Bulkeley & Fabian, 2006; Denham, 2006; Docket & Perry, 2005a, 2005c; Ladd, 2006; Peters, 2003a, 2004).

This may be one of the reasons why attendance at early childhood services is so important, as in addition to the other benefits; children are engaged in social interactions with a range of peers. However, the case studies in Peters (2004) showed that just attending an early childhood service did not mean that children automatically developed strong social skills. The teachers in some settings appeared to assist children with this as part of their programme, for example, by discussing strategies to solve problems. Parents/caregivers could assist with this too. Supporting children's friendship could include offering suggestions as to how to approach peers. Ladd et al. (2006) cites a number of Ladd's own studies, which over time have found that children who are pro-social may develop stronger more supportive relationships, while prolonged aggression may lead to less positive relationships with both peers and teachers. Parents/caregivers and teachers may need to work together to support children in developing skills for interaction with others. This should include identifying and addressing contextual factors too. For example, Rietveld (2008) found that:

> *Neil (a competent typically developing child who was well-liked at preschool) could not gain access to more advanced forms of inclusion [at school], despite considerable efforts on his part involving a range of mature strategies, yet Ian [a child with special educational needs], who engaged consistently in anti-social behaviour at preschool, gained access to peer inclusion when he began to use more socially appropriate behaviours within his first week of school. This strongly suggests that inclusion and exclusion were not related to disability, but rather related to curriculum and management issues.* (p. 3)

Creating opportunities for social interactions that may lead to friendship can also be helpful. In Peters' (2004) study some families found that inviting children home to play appeared to help move some children from 'acquaintance' to 'friend'. When none of a child's existing friends were moving to their school, a number of parents were proactive in finding out who was going to be in their child's class and creating opportunities for children to be involved in activities together before school started. One mother, who enrolled her daughter at a school where she did not know anyone, used the school visits as a chance to connect with other parents and arrange contact with other children out of school before her daughter started. The parents in Bourne's (2007) did this by enrolling their child in a soccer group where the children involved also attended their child's school.

Networking with other parents and caregivers

Parents in Dockett and Perry's (2005b) study talked about the importance of establishing their own networks to provide mutual support and information and provide contexts where their children get to know each other before they start school. As noted in the previous section, Peters (2004) found that some parents were proactive in making connections with other families, and assisted their child's transition by supporting the child having out of school contact with other children who would be in their school class.

Rich learning experiences

The EPPE study (a major project in the UK, discussed earlier in this chapter) found that the quality of the home learning environment had:

> *a stronger net effect on intellectual and social development that the net effect of other important influences, including (notably) parent occupation, education or income…. What parents do to support their children's learning was therefore found to be more important than who the parents are.* (Siraj-Blachford et al., 2008, p. 25)

Mashburn and Pianta (2006) cited a range of studies that suggest sensitivity and stimulation are two key qualities that are associated empirically with children's competencies on entry into school. "Specifically, a sensitive caregiving approach by parents, ample learning materials, opportunities for cognitive stimulation, and predictable routines promote children's motivation to learn, self-regulatory capabilities, language, literacy, and social–emotional skills" (p. 160).

Supporting children's development as learners is also implied through the research that links children's abilities on entry to school with later progress. As noted at the beginning of this review, Crnic and Lamberty (1994) concluded from their review of literature on school readiness, that "we currently have no theory or credible empirical evidence" to identify specific skills required for school success (p. 96), and readiness is as much a context of the environment as the child (LoCasale-Crouch, et al., 2008; Petriwskyj et al., 2005). Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to conclude that families play a role in supporting their child's learning dispositions of reciprocity, imagination (Carr et al., in press) and resilience (Brooker, 2008; Carr et al., in press) and positive self-identity as a learner (Penman, 2006).

Opportunities to find out about school before they start

Chapter Four described a wide range of ways in which teachers might help children and their families to find out about school. It seems important, therefore, for families to take advantage of these. Parents/caregivers can be proactive in asking what resources and opportunities are available in their area. If early childhood services do not have information to support transition (school display boards, books about the local school, etc.) families could suggest that these are developed. Many of the initiatives in Hartley et al.'s (2009) came in response to comments and suggestions from parents.

Families may also need to be proactive in approaching schools and requesting visits (Peters, 2004). Margetts (2007) found that having many opportunities to become familiar with school was important in overcoming some of the potential difficulties children may face. Dockett and Perry (2004b) noted that children who have experienced the school through repeated visits or contact are more likely to hold realistic expectations about school, which can help their transition. Some parents have found it helpful to visit schools out of hours to explore the playgrounds and layout (Peters, 2004).

Get involved with the school

There is a body of evidence showing the value of family/whānau involvement in schools (Dockett & Perry, 2005c; Dockett et al., 2006). The reasons for this are likely to be complex and beyond this review to explore, however, it does appear that where possible families should aim to participate in their child's schooling. The research on the benefits of involving families in their children's education indicates that families are a critical partner in providing continuity as children move between systems of care and education (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2004). Willingness to share information with schools that are trying to connect with family cultures and interests is one way of supporting their child's transition. However, it is important not to judge parental involvement in their children's education only by the visible involvement on school premises. Many parents provide a "mountain of *invisible* investment … compared with the visible molehill" (Brooker, 2002, p. 119, italics in the original).

Expectations

Some parents can experience feelings of anxiety when their child starts school (Tamarua, 2006). In particular, they were fearful of leaving their child, fearful of their child not making friends, or how their child was going to cope with classroom instructions, as well as other concerns about their child being bullied by others in the classroom. Despite their personal fears and the nature of their own experiences, it appears to be helpful if parents express positive views about school (Dockett et al., 2006). Positive parent expectations of children as learners have also been shown to be influential (Ry & Schulenberg, 2005).

Health checks

Ensuring that children are not disadvantaged by unrecognised health issues is also an important step. For example, undetected hearing problems can have a negative impact on children's experience of school, impacting on both learning and social experiences (Penman, 2006). Health initiatives such as *B4 School Checks*, started in 2008 (Ministry of Health, 2008; "Healthy beginnings", 2009), should assist families with this.

Routines

Wildenger, McIntrye, Fiese and Eckert (2008) explored routines as part of family life around the children's transition to school. They recommended regular meal and bedtimes, and if necessary, families adjusting children's routines to fit with the school day. For example, if children will need to get up earlier than they are used to doing, parents could gradually adjust the child's sleep patterns prior to school entry rather than having an abrupt change to sleep routines.

Advocate for children

Gallagher (2005, 2006) found that while parents in her study initially placed their trust in the school teachers, they were willing to advocate for their children when problems arose and took steps to find ways in which their children's unhappiness could be addressed. Fleer (2004) includes examples of where Aboriginal parents advocated for their children, as K explains in the following quotation:

> *A lot of parents are afraid of going to the school, the teacher is still someone they don't feel comfortable with, having personal relationships with. If you have a problem need to go and talk to the teacher, if no satisfaction go to the Principal they say no; I say yes. You can make suggestions about what you want to see changed. Our cousin had a hearing problem. He was missing out on stuff. He was sat down at the back of the classroom 'cause he was fidgeting. So move him down the front and make some allowance and Edward started to improve. Go and have your say. You are valued as parents. (K)* (Fleer, 2004, pp. 62-63)

Parents can also mediate the process of school entry by helping children to make meaning in the new context (Carr et al., 2009).

How can parents, family and whānau members be supported and resourced to provide the support required by their children to transition as successfully as possible from ECE to school?

Dockett et al. (2007) recognise the importance of wider community supports for families, such as schools, childcare and health services, as well as a web of rich relationships that both buffer and support families. Chapter Two discussed the role of income, employment, health care, safe neighbourhoods, and so on, that are vital in resourcing families to support their children.

At the early childhood and school level, flexible transition programmes and opportunities for school involvement seem to be an important way of providing parents/families with information to support their children's transition. Parent involvement in transition programmes, and in school activities once their child starts school, may be limited due to working hours (Fletcher, et al., 2009) and/or having younger children to care for (Peters, 2004). When activities are offered only at a given time this may limit who can attend. In addition, some parents in Peters' (2004) study hoped that schools would understand that even though they wished to become involved, they were unable to do so because the school did not allow babies and toddlers at some events (eg, trips). While the families understood the reasons for these decisions, those families without alternative care for younger children could not participate. They hoped that schools would provide some alternative ways of being involved, which did not exclude them.

Families may feel fear, discomfort and a sense of worry in their interactions with schools (Fleer, 2004) and parents may not understand their role in the partnership with schools (Fletcher et al. 2009). Therefore parents and families can be supported by practices that disrupt traditional power imbalances in home-school relationships by involving families and other community stakeholders in planning transition arrangements. Dockett and Perry document such programmes in Australia (Dockett & Perry, 2006; Dockett et al., 2007). Some Aboriginal parents in Fleer's (2004) research discussed the value of seeing schools as a service, providing education that their children were entitled to. They felt that this could help parents feel more empowered in their interactions.

Parenting programmes

Some parents may find parent education programmes are supportive. Sanders et al. (2008) report positive outcomes for the wide-scale implementation in Australia of an initiative known as *Every Family*:

> *Every Family is a preventive intervention designed to promote better mental health outcomes in children during the transition to school period. It is based on the Triple P-Positive Parenting Program developed by Sanders and colleagues (Sanders 1999), which is one of the few evidence-based parenting interventions designed as a public health strategy to promote better parenting.* (p. 199)

Their findings suggested that a small increase in parental exposure to the programme was associated with a significant population level reduction in problems with children and reduced parental distress at the transition to school period.

Few details were provided in the article regarding the nature of the programme itself, although it indicated that the focus was on parenting rather than specifically transition issues. Smart et al. (2008) referred to a range of parent programmes, and commented that evaluation of the long-term effects of the Triple P programme were not yet available. Auckland University is about to begin a research project exploring the programme's delivery to New Zealand parents ("Triple P research to help New Zealand families", 2009).

Do some parents, family and whānau members have special or particular needs in relation to support as a result of their own characteristics (for example, past schooling experience, language skills and capabilities)?

There are likely to be as many differences within groups as there are between them, and so any consideration of people who may have special needs in relation to support must take this diversity into account. This section draws on material that was found in the literature in relation to this question, but does not imply that all members of a group will share the same needs in relation to support. Instead it raises issues which might need to be considered.

Parents/caregivers educated overseas may find New Zealand schools very different to those they are used to. Sometimes they have deliberately made the move to New Zealand for educational reasons and welcome these changes (Peters, 2004). Nevertheless, it can be challenging when schools and school practices are hard to understand (Dockett & Perry, 2005b). Child-teacher relationships may differ from those a parent is used to (Dockett & Perry, 2005b) and parents may have issues in relation to their own involvement with teachers. When the home language differs from that of the school, parents may have concerns about their child's language proficiency at school (Dockett & Perry, 2005b; Sangavarapu & Perry, 2005).

Even when parents have grown up within the setting where their child is going to school, their own memories of school may not be positive, and the physical and social environment of school very different to those they are used to. This was noted in Dockett et al.'s (2006) consideration of successful transitions to school for Aboriginal children. Tamarua (2006) also found that school felt like a foreign place for some Māori families. Dockett et al. (2007) provided a comprehensive discussion of issues related to the successful transition of Aboriginal students. These included:

- *involvement of Aboriginal families and key Aboriginal groups in decision-making;*
- *positive relationships and genuine collaboration between families, schools, early childhood services, key community groups and local service providers;*
- *a learning community that promotes the sharing of information, cultural insights and expertise by all parties concerned with children's transition to school;*
- *a holistic approach to addressing the specific health, development and wellbeing needs of Aboriginal children in the context of strengthening the capacity of families and communities to meet those needs;*
- *a dual focus on providing information and support for parents as well as quality early learning experiences for children.* (NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group and NSW Department of Education and Training, 2004, cited in Dockett et al., 2007, p. 48).

Parents may also worry about bullying or isolation due to their child's colour or culture (Dockett & Perry, 2005b; Peters, 2004). Parental concerns may also be related to their specific culture or religion. Parents in Dockett and Perry's (2005b) study expressed concern regarding a range of ways in which children would have to negotiate the differences between home and school.

For children and their families who have language backgrounds other than English, parents highlighted the importance of having access to information about school and to people who spoke their home language (Dockett & Perry, 2005b). In these Australian settings, Community Language Teachers played an important role where these were available. In schools where there were no Community Language Teachers, parents wanted information about how to access interpretation and translating services. Dockett and Perry (2005b) also found that it cannot be assumed that the information requested by, and available to, English-speaking parents is the same as that required by parents for whom English is an additional language. Fletcher et al. (2009) noted that Pasifika parents might be supported by Pasifika liaison officers who could help with home-school communication.

Parents, family and whānau play a key role in working alongside early childhood and school teachers to ensure children are supported to transition as successfully as possible. Although the literature from 2004-2009 focuses more predominantly on the role of teachers, in some contexts families may have to take on more responsibility than others. Despite a number of positive initiatives by teachers, such as Hartley et al.'s (2009) project, a national survey (60% response rate for at least one response from the 531 services) found that many New Zealand early childhood services regarded the transition of individual children to school as largely a parental responsibility (Mitchell & Brooking, 2007). Anecdotal evidence suggests this picture may be changing but few of the current initiatives seem to be published. It seems important, therefore, that advice regarding their role is provided to both teachers and families. As Timperley et al. (2003) concluded, if the adults caring for the children do not take responsibility for supporting the children's transition to school, "it becomes the responsibility of the children to make sense of what is occurring - a major challenge with which to start school" (p. 38).

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Introduction

This review has examined a broad range of literature, predominantly from sources that were published from 2004 to early 2009. The analysis of this material explored the notion of successful transitions to school, considered how characteristics of the child, family and early childhood service play a role in how well the children make this transition, and provided a range of suggestions from the literature regarding how children's transition to school can be supported. The review has provided many useful insights but has also highlighted many areas where there is little research. This final chapter briefly summarises the key findings and possible steps for evaluating progress towards improving transitions. It also outlines suggestions for further research, notes the limitations of this review, and indicates areas for further reading, before drawing some overall conclusions in the final comment.

Key findings

Transitions are dynamic, multifaceted (Ghaye & Pascal, 1988), and complex, and the notion 'successful transitions' must be constantly revisited and evaluated within local contexts, taking into account the views of the multiple participants in the process. In addition, the definition and scope of a 'transition' period makes a difference to the discussion, and the criteria for the domains of 'successful' are diverse as well.

With these cautions in mind, the main findings regarding successful transitions (see Chapters Two and Three for details) can be summarised in relation to the features of a school environment that foster children's wellbeing, belonging and positive engagement with learning. Responsive, reciprocal, relationships between all concerned is a key feature of a successful transition. Related to this, a successful transition will include teachers who affirm the child's identity and culture, connect with and build on the children's funds of knowledge from early childhood education and home, and hold positive expectations for success which includes seeing *promise* in new entrant learners rather than deficits. Chapter Three noted some additional features to consider for children who do not share the dominant language of the school: 'success' in this case, while consistent with the above points, raises some additional issues with regard to language and literacy development.

While in the past approaches to transition looked at the 'skills' a child might require, this review of recent research has highlighted that *the part played by any characteristic of the child and family* (including children's assessed skills on a range of measures, ethnicity, socio-economic status) *will always depend on the nature of the context they enter*. The same child would have very different experiences in settings that invite, permit or inhibit different forms of engagement (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1997). Children without the individual skills traditionally seen as valuable on school entry have been shown to do very well in contexts that enhance the kinds of successful transitions set out in this review (Skinner, et al., 1998). In contrast, even when children started school with the same assessed skills, children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds had more problems with school engagement and achievement than their more advantaged peers (Smart et al., 2006). The poor predictive value of individual skills in relation to successful transitions (Pianta, 2004) is not surprising given that performance on assessments (eg, measures of literacy and numeracy) do not predict how children will navigate the effects of a poor relationship with their teacher, peer rejection, fear of the playground, lack of engagement with learning, cultural alienation, and so on. Even an intensive programme to help children develop social skills in early childhood led to the conclusion that lunchtime routines at school should be addressed as well if the children's transitions were to be enhanced (Smith, 2002).

The review has also analysed the ways in which the transition to school can be supported. In describing the features of successful transitions highlighted by this review, some implications for action can already be discerned. Figure One summarises the literature findings about features of a successful transition and some of the strategies that wider society, early childhood services and schools can undertake in order to support children to transition as successfully as possible. These strategies are discussed in detail in Chapter Four. Of key importance is to ensure that a less than successful transition is not treated as inevitable, rather it becomes an opportunity to explore strategies to assist in developing a more positive cycle of experience.

Families have a part to play too, and Chapter Five explored the literature on strategies for families. These include fostering children's friendship, networking with other parents and caregivers and providing rich learning experiences. This may include attending high-quality early childhood services. As children approach school entry, parents/caregivers can help children to find out about school before they start, develop supportive routines and ensure health issues are identified. Once at school, having positive expectations and advocating for their children is likely to be beneficial.

There are a number of ways in which teachers can be resourced and supported so that they can implement the strategies described (discussed in Chapter Four). These include: recognising the special nature of the new entrant teacher's role; providing time and support to gain understandings of the children's home cultures and to utilise this learning in their pedagogy; small new entrant class sizes that allow teachers to get to know children, and actively share meanings and understandings that lead to deep engagement; and a flexible curriculum that allows teachers to connect with funds of knowledge from home and early childhood services. Training and professional development are important for both early childhood teachers and new entrant teachers (eg, regarding building mutually respectful relationships with a wide range of families, how to be more culturally responsive in their teaching, developing understandings of bi- and multi-lingual education, and cross-sector understandings of key competencies and learning dispositions). Finally, dedicated ongoing resourcing for transition activities is important if they are to be maintained.

As other communities draw on insights from this review it will be important to remember that there are no easy answers, or simple recipes. Ongoing evaluation of any efforts to support transitions is therefore important, and responsive and reciprocal relationships are central.

Transition to school programmes

In order to support successful transitions, local transition to school programmes need to be established and reviewed. Personalised goal setting and evaluation of progress is important. Review is essential as potentially useful strategies may be "too late, too impersonal, and too cursory to have much of an effect" (Pianta, 2004, p. 6). Also, research over three years by the Mangere Bridge Centre of Innovation team found that when ideas that had been successful in one context were implemented more widely, new issues and considerations could arise which needed to be identified and addressed (Hartley et al., 2009).

Work on transitions from Australia (Dockett & Perry, 2006) provides an example of a range of possible transition programme goals, with four levels within each goal. This allows transition teams to identify their starting points and desired goals, and evaluate their progress. Figure 2 below shows one example, from the 36 pages that map different levels across aspects of transition associated with the 10 key elements in the authors' 'effective transition to school programs'. This model could be adapted for use in other contexts. Dockett and Perry (2006) recommend that transition teams document their current situation and goals for transition to school programmes, later evaluating progress achieved towards these goals and affirming or refining goals for the next year.

Goal setting and evaluations should take into account the perspectives, experiences and expectations of all those involved (Dockett & Perry, 2004, 2005a, 2007; Peters, 2004). A recent Masters thesis exploring parental views on a Preparatory Year Programme noted the importance of never assuming uniformity in the views of even a relatively small group of individuals (O'Gorman, 2007). Failure to take the full range of perspectives into account can lead to situations like the one described in Chapter Two, where arrangements, which both early childhood and school teachers felt were working well, left parents feeling disempowered and uninformed (Peters, 2004).

Directions for future research

As this review has shown, there is a wealth of literature on starting school. However, there is limited New Zealand information in relation to many of the questions of interest raised for this review. Some specific areas where more research might be helpful in order to shed light on our understandings of transitions are outlined below.

1. Firstly, it appears that more New Zealand research is urgently needed for all of the groups discussed in Chapter Three (Māori children, Pasifika children, children who are linguistically diverse, children with special educational needs, and children living in lower socio-economic households) in order to understand their transition to school, the ways in which successful or unsuccessful transitions develop, and the factors involved. This should include detailed research that looks over time and includes the perspectives of families, children and teachers. Within this general recommendation some additional specific gaps were noted:

    - Current research, especially for Māori and Pasifika children, seems to have focussed largely on literacy rather than exploring transitions more widely and considering what the issues are for children and families.

    - More research on transition from immersion ECE to non-immersion schooling is required, a recommendation which an earlier review, devoted to Pasifika education issues (Anae, Coxon, Mara, Wendt-Samu & Finau, 2001) has also made. In addition, transition issues for this group are connected with broader aspects of when and how new languages are introduced, which also seems worthy of further exploration.

    - There has been considerable documentation of the relationship between family income and achievement, but the reasons for this appear complex. A qualitative study may help to shed light on the reasons behind some of the patterns that have been identified in quantitative studies.

2. The voices of families and children who may potentially be at risk of making less successful transitions are the ones that most need to be heard, as their experiences may shed light on possible supports to overcome this risk. However, this requires participation in research by families who may be least inclined, or able, to take part. Therefore, new research approaches may need to be developed in order to gain these perspectives.

3. More research would be helpful to explore the ways in which New Zealand teachers can learn about and connect with funds of knowledge from home. Related to this, the value of being culturally responsive (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Fletcher et al., 2009; Macfarlane, 2004, 2007; Macfarlane et al., 2007; Podmore et al., 2003) and ethnographers of communities (Kamler & Comber, 2005) is widely documented but it may be helpful for teachers who are unsure how to address this in their teaching to have more examples that document this in practice.

4. Doucet (2008) noted that teacher education students in the USA receive little preparation to build mutually respectful relationships with a wide range of families. It would be relevant to research whether New Zealand teachers feel adequately prepared in this respect, as small scale studies (eg, Gallagher, 2005; Peters, 2004) indicate that further support in this aspect of their role could be helpful.

5. This review has included a number of studies, which have provided valuable detail of the nuances of classroom life during transitions (eg, Carr et al., 2009; Peters, 2004, Rietveld, 2008; Tamarua, 2006). Further research of this type, on a wider scale, could usefully explore aspects of language and practice that shape how children are positioned as learners, as well as the wider influences on their experiences.

6. New Zealand teachers have been trialling new ways of assessing and reporting which provide richer, contextualised information that can connect key competencies and learning areas (eg, Carr et al., 2008; Davis & Molloy, 2005; Wilson, 2005), and also connect the learning dispositions in early childhood services with key competencies at school (Carr et al., 2008; Hartley et al., 2009). These approaches will hopefully assist children in developing and maintaining positive identities as learners at school, but further research may be necessary to explore this in practice.

7. Finally, much of the research reported in the New Zealand literature in this review was gathered prior to the current school curriculum. Now there is alignment between the strands of *Te Whāriki* and the key competencies at school (Ministry of Education, 2007a, p. 42). There is also a focus on transitions in the school curriculum. For example, in recognising that the transition from ECE to school is supported when the school:

   - *fosters a child's relationships with teachers and other children and affirms their identity;*
   - *builds on the learning experiences that the child brings with them;*
   - *considers the child's whole experiences of school; and*
   - *is welcoming of family and whānau.* (Ministry of Education, 2007a, p. 41)

   This means that the New Zealand curriculum provides an ideal framework for supporting the aspects of successful transitions identified in this review. There is a wealth of advice about how this might be achieved through the support of wider systems, communities, teachers and families, and a range of issues to consider and practices to trial and evaluate. However, there is a need for more research to fully understand the processes involved that lead to successful outcomes for all children.

Limitations of the review

This review has focused predominantly on the New Zealand literature, drawing in some of the research from other countries where this seemed applicable. The aim was to provide as comprehensive a picture as possible in the time provided for its completion. The author was supported in this by her existing knowledge of the field and networks with other transition researchers. Support from colleagues was much appreciated in sourcing literature in addition to the material located through databases and library catalogues, and valuable feedback was also provided on the initial draft. However, the review does not claim to have located every relevant project related to starting school, or to have fully analysed every single item that was discovered.

One challenge for the review was the lack of detail for some studies in New Zealand. While theses and Ministry of Education reports included details of the studies and how they were conducted, for other projects there was only limited information available in the public domain. Given the word limits for journal articles, the lack of information is understandable, and it seems likely that more depth lies behind some of these studies. However, this review could only report on what had been published. In addition, anecdotally, there appeared to be many groups who were working to improve the transition to school but these initiatives were either not being researched or the research was not yet published.

Further reading

Many of the issues associated with the transition to school have touched on whole bodies of literature that are worthy of reviews in their own right. These include, but are not limited to, the purpose of schooling and the kinds of learners and learning that are valued in New Zealand in the 21st century, culturally responsive teaching, Māori education, Pasifika education, factors associated with bi- and multi-lingualism and learning to read in a new language, the relationship between SES and school success, relationships, friendships and relational pedagogy.

Final comment

Smooth seas do not make skilful sailors.
African proverb

The literature from 2004-2009 has moved on from an earlier focus on 'smooth and seamless' transitions (Ministry of Education, 1994, 2002a), and the accompanying pressure in the 1990s to push down school curriculum and pedagogy into early childhood (Anning, Cullen & Fleer, 2004; Corrie, 1999; May, 2009). Today there is a clear recognition that an early childhood curriculum "should not be predetermined by a school curriculum because the school curriculum is not intended to be appropriate for the learning needs of infants, toddlers and young children" (Brewerton, 1996, pp. 14-15) and that early childhood is a phase with its own value and purpose (Petriwskyj et al., 2005). This is accompanied by the recognition that transitions are a normal part of life and an opportunity for new learning (Beach, 2003).

However, while 'smooth seas do not make skilful sailors', leaving children to 'sink or swim' on entry to school potentially leaves many children at risk of failure. This review has provided many insights into ways in which children can be supported to navigate the challenges involved. It has also highlighted some features that might indicate that their transitions have been 'successful' and supportive of their ongoing learning. Two chapters have documented the ideas in the literature regarding the ways in which this success can be promoted. The recommendations go beyond simplistic, and widely challenged (eg, by Li et al., 2007; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; Petriwskyj et al., 2005) assessments of children's individual skills, to acknowledge the power of classroom practices and other contextual factors that shape their experiences. Some of the advice requires disrupting traditional ways of doing things. These changes are important if the patterns of achievement, which have indicated some of the characteristics of the children who are likely to be advantaged in school, and along with those characteristics that have been associated with disadvantage, are to be altered to be more inclusive of the diverse learners that characterise New Zealand schools today. With 46% of the Year 1 population coming from backgrounds other than European (Ministry of Education, 2008c), it is timely to take account of research that focuses on culturally appropriate pedagogy and assessment practices, and ways of building on valued learning from home. The Māori and Pasifika researchers whose work has been reviewed have provided important insights into what is likely to support children from these groups.

The review drew on research evidence which substantiates Bronfenbrenner and Morris' (1997) theoretical view that children's characteristics interact with features of the environments that they are part of. To improve outcomes for all children, the literature indicates that changing the features of both the immediate school contexts and the wider contextual influences, along with fostering supportive relationships between school, home and early childhood settings, are important strategies for transforming environments that are unfavourable to the development of individuals with particular personal characteristics, to ones that lead to more favourable educational trajectories. Interestingly, the approaches this review indicated are likely to enhance outcomes for children potentially seen to be 'at risk' of less successful transitions, are ones which should enrich the experience of all children.

Figure 1: Features of a successful transition for children and some of the strategies that wider society, ECE services and schools can undertake to ensure children transition as successfully as possible.

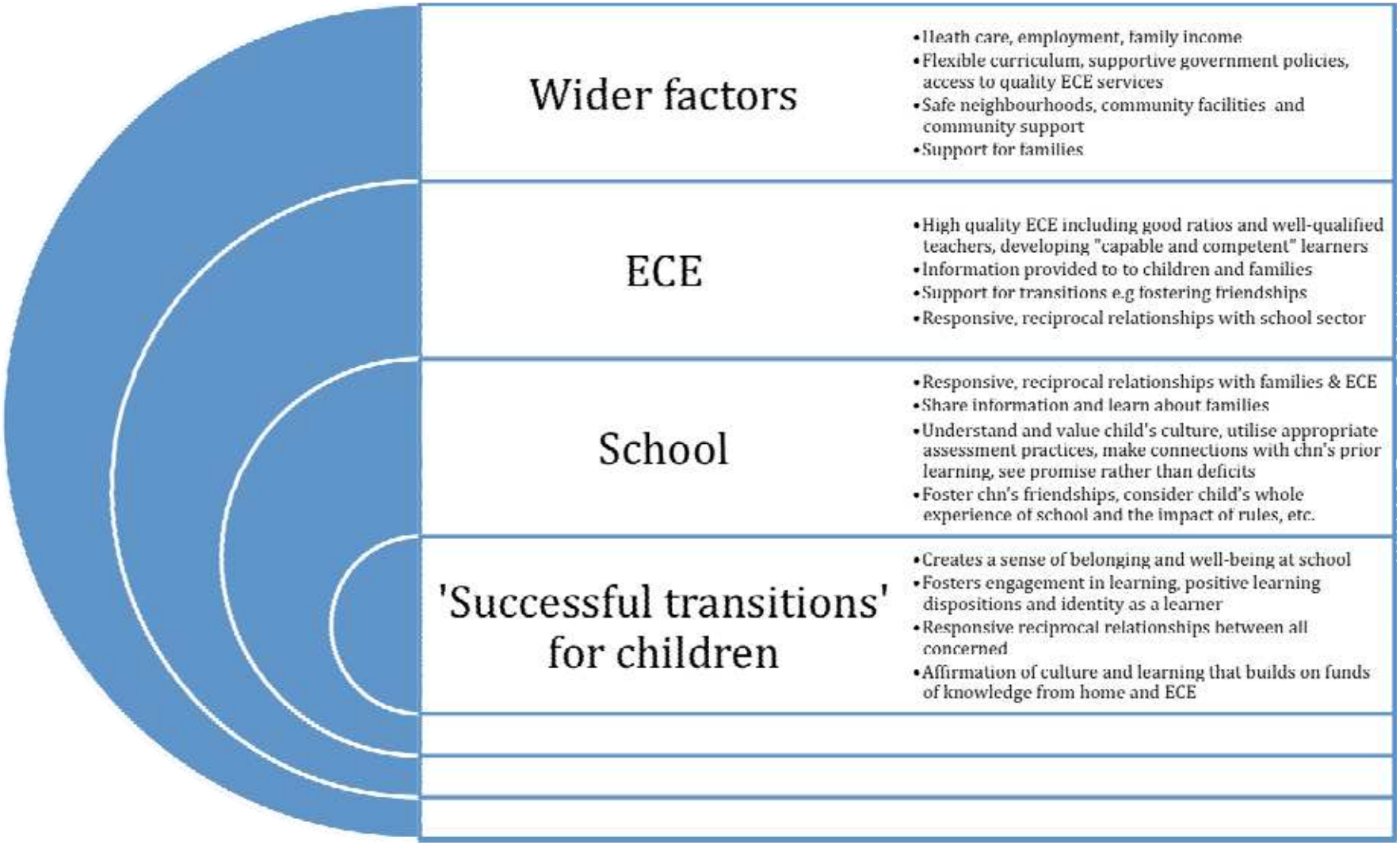

Figure 2: An example of indicators of progress for one aspect of one key element in Dockett & Perry's guidelines for effective transition to school programmes (from Dockett & Perry, 2006, p. 164)

1. Effective transition programs establish positive relationships between children, parents and educators				
Key elements	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
1.1 building relationships between children	Children have limited acquaintance with others starting school and/or children at school. Transition programs provide limited opportunities for children to interact in self-initiated or play situations. There are no strategies for promoting interaction between children who do not access prior-to-school services.	Children have opportunities to engage in a range of positive social interactions with children attending school, or with whom they will attend school. These interactions may have occurred in school or prior-to-school settings, as well as in other community settings such as libraries, the local health centre, community groups or church groups. There are opportunities within transition programs for children to be with friends and to make friends.	Children starting school know and interact positively with each other. Children already at school interact positively with children about to start school. Children who have similar interests or backgrounds (for example language backgrounds) are grouped in ways to promote interactions. Adults model strategies for initiating and maintaining positive relationships. Siblings, other family members and children from other grades, are welcome participants in transition programs.	Children have opportunities to develop confident relationships with other children, in prior-to-school, school or community settings. Strategies to support these relationships include buddy programs, peer support and sibling programs. These programs are well planned and evaluated. These programs are recognised as a resource by broader community. Strategies are in place to promote positive interactions among children who do not access prior-to-school services. Adults actively support the positive relationships among children. This involves more than modelling, and could include discussion of ways of making and keeping friends and different ways of interacting.

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