

# TRANSITION TO SCHOOL BEST PRACTICE

**Sabbatical Report – (24 July – 29 September)**

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**Albert Einstein said** *“Play is the highest form of research”*



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have greatly appreciated the opportunity to undertake this sabbatical, to complete my research project and for some time for reflection and relaxation.

Undertaking this research project has been possible due to the support of others who I would like to acknowledge and thank:

- The support of my board of trustees for allowing me the time to complete this research project.
- My deputy principal who took on the role of acting principal during my absence
- The Ministry of Education for providing the funding to make it possible for principals to undertake research and to enjoy some time to relax and reflect
- The early childhood services who welcomed me into their centres and allowed me the time and freedom to observe their programmes in action, view learning portfolios and transition documents
- The many early childhood teachers who met with me to discuss and share information and answer my questions about transition to school.

## PURPOSE OF MY SABBATICAL

To undertake research and professional learning into best practice for transition to primary school. Currently the recommendations from the April 2015 ERO report are being used to guide myself and my lead junior teacher to review and make improvements to our transition process so our students can settle into learning successfully.

### By undertaking

- professional reading;
- visiting all Early Childhood Education services in my Inglewood cluster which involved observations of children in their ECE environments and discussions with early childhood teachers;
- visiting the new entrant classrooms at Inglewood Primary to observe how they are integrating Te Whariki and the NZC and discussions with head teacher.

### I hope to develop ways to:

1. Establish strong relationships and work collaboratively with early childhood services our students attend. Establish a good line of communication so we can communicate about the children in our community and how we can best support a successful transition to school.
2. To become familiar with Te Whariki so I am able to understand and link it to the NZC.
3. Become better informed about early childhood records of learning / portfolios and learning stories, sharing these so we can get to know our students better.
4. Work together with ECE to ensure our students have a basic readiness for school. How do they focus on ensuring 5 year olds are ready for school. What are the students learning six months prior to starting school? Do they focus on listening carefully to stories, follow instructions, sit quietly on the mat, raise hands to ask questions, put on shoes, put bag away, wash hands, sit and eat food, hold a book correctly etc. Establishing common expectations.
5. How ECE use assessment based on children's interests and ways of learning?
6. How can we improve the transition processes we currently have in place to better support our students?
  - Frequency and timing of transition visits
  - Sharing learning profiles
  - School story
  - Student story
  - Flying Start Pack and programme for parents
  - Valuing parents as child's first educator and the importance of establishing an excellent partnership between home & school.
  - Supporting the child to settle in and making the first day memorable and easy for both student and parent
  - Offering a gradual transition when necessary, building this up over time
7. How can we adopt play based learning to reflect the Te Whariki Early Childhood Curriculum, integrating it with the NZC to better support continuity of learning between home, ECE and school?
8. How can we go about recognising and building on the skills and knowledge of children moving from Early Childhood to Primary?

## **METHODOLOGY**

I focused on three main pieces of literature around Early Childhood Education and transition to school. This included published books and published reviews and reports from the Education Review Office and Education Review magazine on the Internet. Through professional reading I was able to improve my understanding of the early childhood curriculum and how it links to the New Zealand Curriculum, and gather insight and knowledge as to what is good practice for transitioning children to primary school. This allowed me to make judgements about what would be good practice for Egmont Village School and to develop next steps for improving our transition process. Visiting early childhood centres provided me with insight into how they prepare children for primary school, the planned transition practices they follow, how child focused and play based learning engages and motivates the learner and how they link Te Whariki to the New Zealand Curriculum. This allowed me to reflect on and make decisions about how Egmont Village School could better meet the learning needs of our new entrant students by improving our transition practice and implementing a play based programme. The conversations with early childhood teachers gave me the time to discuss, share and evaluate ideas and begin to build collaborative relationships for future working together to ensure the smooth transition of our students. Through discussions with teachers I was directed to other sources of professional reading that would support me in my research.

### **Professional Reading**

1. Te Whariki Early Childhood Curriculum
2. Crossing the Border – A community negotiates the transition from early childhood to primary school by Carol Hartley, Pat Rogers, Jemma Smith, Sally Peters, Margaret Carr
3. Education Review Office May 2015 report – Continuity of learning: transitions from early childhood services to schools
4. Articles published on the Internet about Play Based Learning including the Discovery Time website.

### **Intended Outcome:**

To develop and document a revised transition process including resources for students, teachers and parents that will improve on and better meet the needs of our new entrant students. To investigate including play based learning within the classroom programme to link Te Whariki and NZC to better support continuity of learning between home, ECE and school. Establish and strengthen relationships with ECE services so we can work together to ensure a smooth transition to school for all students.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

### **(A) EDUCATION REVIEW OFFICE**

#### **Continuity of learning: transitions from early childhood services to schools. May 2015**

In May 2013, the Education Review Office evaluated how well early childhood services and schools supported children through the transition to school. The following is a summary of what ERO found and the implications for improving my school's transition process.

#### **THE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PERSPECTIVE**

1. **The Ministry of Education highlights the need for continuity between children's experience of Te Whariki and The New Zealand Curriculum.** This can be achieved by early childhood teachers sharing information about children's learning with schools by providing parent and whanau with useful information to share, teachers from early childhood services and primary becoming familiar with both curriculum documents, and making comparisons and links to better support children. International research shows that sharing and subsequent use of assessment information enhances the links between learning at an early education service and at a school, and helps children see themselves as competent and confident learners. Assessment information, such as documented in portfolios, empowers children, enhances their identities as learners, it is a resource to connect knowledge of home and service with new learning at school, and fosters a sense of belonging and engagement. (1)
2. **Providing a supportive curriculum as children approach their time to transition to school. Providing meaningful and authentic learning contexts that have clear links between the principles and strands of Te Whariki and the New Zealand Curriculum.** This means that children experience a relevant and meaningful curriculum and teaching practices based on teachers' understanding of both Te Whariki and the NZC. Connections can be made between the key competencies of the NZC and children's dispositions. Teachers could work collaboratively to plan units of work that link the two curricula.  
E.g. in one of the centres visited as part of the ERO study, a nature study programme was a feature where the oldest children regularly spend a morning in the bush. The purpose is for the children to develop a deeper interest in taking care of the natural environment, independence, greater observational skills, deep enquiry, and negotiation, making friends, mathematics, literacy and physical skills.
3. **Supportive assessment practices and information** – early childhood services providing parents with summative assessment reports about their child's learning and encouraging them to provide a copy to their child's teacher at school. Good practice included comments on children's dispositions, and literacy and mathematical knowledge and skills. Some of the services in the study were part of professional learning cluster with primary schools. This involvement helped increase awareness and understanding of what assessment information is helpful to schools and new entrant teachers. New entrant teachers also are more aware of what assessment information is collated by early childhood services. Examples of assessment that support transition includes:
  - Learning journals. These are used as a formal means for teachers to identify trends and patterns in children's learning and to provide focused support for individual children. They contribute to conversations between teachers and parent about what children are learning and how this learning support their transition to school
  - Learning stories integrate the vision of the daily four year old programme, which aims to support children's developing dispositions, skills, understanding, and relationships. The stories are comprehensive, show progress over time, and include children's voice. An assessment is done when children are four and half as part of the transition to school programme. This focuses on three strengths of the child and one area the child is developing. Another assessment is made when children are about to start school, which provides information about their learning in relation to each strand of Te Whariki.
4. **Collaborative relationships with parents and whanau.** Examples of good practice where early childhood services strengthened their relationships and supported and collaborated with parents and whanau as children approached transition to school included:
  - Providing a key teacher for each child as they approach transition so parents have a go to person for information and support
  - Providing information packs about local schools
  - Providing individual transition books for children about their new school

- Holding parent evenings to explain the transition process and inviting new entrant teachers and /or junior school leaders to attend
- Developing school boards – who’s going / gone to school and where, to maintain friendships e.g. school wall display with photos of the local schools and recently transitioned children attending each school.
- Facilitating school visits at a number of schools so parents make informed choices
- Offering individual help for parents not familiar with New Zealand schools
- Seeking feedback from parents about the transition process
- Encouraging return visits to the centre/services after children have started school.

An example of good practice triggered by a services self-review: The service looked at whether strengthening relationships with the schools in their area would make the transition from kindergarten to school easier and better for the children. The service visited schools to observe and talk with new entrant teachers to get a better understanding of the new entrant programme. The leader encouraged visits by principals and new entrant teachers once a term, and had reciprocal visits to the new entrant classroom at one school. As a result of PLD about transitions, the kindergarten met with new entrant teachers to get to know each other and to share how the kindergarten curriculum feeds into the school curriculum, particularly in relation to learning dispositions. The teachers made links to the key competencies of the NZC. They talked about expectations, and how the services and schools could work together to ensure children and their families were supported to transition to school as successfully as possible. Since then the kindergarten has had alternate visits with the new entrant classroom at the adjacent school every two weeks. This has led to a better understanding of each other’s curriculum.

#### 4. Collaborative relationships with other agencies

External agencies that services work closely with include the Ministry of Education staff (including specialists such as speech-language therapists, early intervention teachers, advisers on deaf children, Ministry for Vulnerable Children , ‘B4 school checks’ such as Plunket, and District Health Board staff such as public health nurse). Evidence of good practice included:

- meeting with schools, parents, and agencies to smooth transitions and share information and strategies
- Arranging for Education Support Workers (ESW) to attend school visits with children with special needs
- Helping secure funding and teacher aides for children with special education needs when they start school
- Attending Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings with new entrant teachers of children with special needs.

## CONCLUSION

ERO found that the most effective practices supporting children at they approach transition to school included:

- A responsive and holistic curriculum focused on dispositional learning, independence and social competence as outlined in Te Whariki
- Assessment information that makes children’s strengths, dispositions and interests visible, identified their progress and shows continuity of learning over time
- Relationships with parent and whanau, and other adults, focused on learning and supporting the child (including their language culture and identity)
- Collaborative relationships between teachers in services and schools so expectations, philosophies and curricula are shared, valued and understood
- Evidence of the impact of processes and practices around transition, with self-review resulting in changes in support for children

**ERO recommended the following next steps for early childhood services and schools:**

- Review the extent to which their curriculum and associated assessment practices support all children to experience a successful transition to school
- Establish relationships with local schools and services to promote community-wide understanding and sharing of good practice

## **THE NEW ENTRANT PERSPECTIVE**

ERO gathered information during regular education reviews in 100 schools during term 4, 2013. The overall evaluative questions were:

- What does successful transition to school look like, in particular for priority learners?
- What challenges do schools experience when supporting children to transition?

ERO found that 70 of the 100 schools visited were 'generally responsive' in the way they supported children as they settled into school. The remaining 30 of the schools had a 'less responsive' approach to transition.

The very responsive schools could demonstrate that they had real knowledge about their newly enrolled children. They took care to translate that knowledge into providing the best possible environment and education for each and every child. Leaders ensured the transition was flexible and tailored to the individual child.

### **ERO found:**

- Strong leadership – They emphasised the importance of successful transitions. They provided appropriate resourced, support and care for the new entrant teacher.
- Relationships between school/ early childhood services/parents and whanau were positive and mutually respectful – Teachers gathered good information that they used well. Parents felt welcome and able to talk with teachers about their child's progress through transition. Parents input was both respected and valued. The child's well-being was at the centre of the process.
- Teachers had a good understanding of Te Whariki and the New Zealand Curriculum and their differences. – The school's curriculum helped to bridge differences by using similarities and built on the children's prior learning. It was flexible and built on the diverse needs of the children.
- The school had robust systems in place to determine the effectiveness of transitions – teachers regularly monitored how transitions worked and continuous improvement was a feature. Expectations were clearly stated for leaders, teachers and parents. Teachers promptly addressed any difficulties the children experienced.
- School leaders and teachers took care of priority learners – They identified and addressed specific learning needs quickly. Leaders and teachers responded well to the diverse needs of Maori and Pacific learners.

### **The following features were found in very responsive schools:**

#### **1. Leadership**

- Built strong relationships with early childhood services, parents and child
- They developed a curriculum that placed the children at the centre, focusing on them as individuals and providing them with relevant learning, targeted to their needs. They responded to the child's strengths, needs and culture.
- They had a robust self-review in place which is improvement focused. They constantly reviewed transition processes and outcomes for children – which led to refinements in transition policies and practices.
- Valuing transition in tangible ways by:
- Appointing the most appropriate teacher to the new entrant class
- Support provided through professional learning and development, including allocated resources and time for transition. Resources included a teacher aide, class size restrictions, an environment tailored to the age/needs of children, time to visit early childhood services and establish relationships with parents, whanau, and management units.

#### **2. Foundation For Transition** – these elements were present in most schools and were identified by school leaders as features that they viewed as important contributors to successful transitions in their schools.

- Transition seen as important
- School visits arranged before enrolment – these varied from one visit to nine or more to familiarise the child with the school environment and classroom culture. Schools were flexible in the number of visits offered, some formalised the visits into a transition programme and others had both a formal programme and flexible visits. The success of each strategy depended on the individual circumstances of the school and the children.
- Teachers arranged a buddy to help the new entrant settle

**Very responsive schools also focused on:**

- Improvement through formal self-review
- Teachers having a good understanding of Te Whariki
- Their use of familiar features from the child's experience of early childhood education

**3. Curriculum – a curriculum that supports children's transition**

- Schools knew Te Whariki and had worked with early childhood teachers to bridge the learning experiences from ECE to school
- New entrant teachers found out about each child's interests, strengths, culture and capabilities before they started school through:
  - Observations in the early childhood service and on school visits
  - Talking with the services teachers and child's parent and whanau
  - Referring to the child's portfolio or learning story journal
- After starting school, the new entrant teachers learnt about the child through:
  - Ongoing observations and discussions with parents and whanau
  - Formal and informal testing. This varied from school to school. Many designed their own tests, some drawing from elements of the Standard Entry Assessment (SEA).
- New entrant teachers used this information to:
  - Provide new entrant children with familiar settings and ways of learning
  - Make links between Te Whariki and the New Zealand Curriculum
  - Design a curriculum that valued and built on the child's prior knowledge and experiences

**An example of good practice noted by ERO was a small, urban full primary**

*The new entrant teacher encourages all new entrant children to bring their early childhood portfolio to share with her and their new classmates. The teacher uses the information to identify children's skills, interests, strengths and needs. She uses it in her initial discussion with parents alongside the 'school readiness checklist'. These are questions to find out as much as she can about each child. When the children have been at school for a week or two she makes contact with parents to talk about how the transition is going for their child.*

- **Knowing the child is particularly important for learners at risk of poor educational outcomes.** Most schools respond well with children with special education needs. School leaders and teachers take time to find out about the children before they reach the school. They set up meetings with appropriate people and external agencies to develop individual education plans (IEPs) and ensured that applications for appropriate funding were made well in advance of the children starting school. Often for children with special needs, transition started a year to six months before they enrolled in the school. Partnerships with external agencies eased transitions and provided a 'wrap-around' support for the children.

**Examples of good practice include:**

- Providing teacher aide support in the lead up to transition
- Developing a transition plan and tailoring the transition to suit the child
- Meeting with early childhood, parents and agencies to educate school about the child particular needs and how the school can support the child
- Meetings with early childhood service where child attends, parents and whanau prior to the child starting school to develop an IEP to develop the child's programme and support his/her learning and engagement in school
- Working with the early support worker as the child transitions to school
- Working closely with parents and whanau to support them in the process
- Changing the physical environment of the classroom and school e.g. painting the edge of steps for a physically impaired child
- Providing in-class support where necessary e.g. teacher aide, resources such as learning aids
- Making provision for Maori children to ensure they have a sense of belonging in the school, that their culture and identity and values and strengths are recognised.

**Very responsive schools showed this by:**

- Building relationships with Maori parents and whanau
- Providing professional development for staff focused on Kahikitia and Tataiako leading to culturally responsive teaching and opportunities for Maori to succeed as Maori

**An example of good practice noted by ERO**

- Maori are well supported and have a sense of belonging in the school

- Integration of te reo and tikanga Maori into programmes
- School values included in programmes are based on tikanga values and are supported by the community
- A strong kapa haka group that is popular which is starting to include the junior syndicate

#### 4. Collaborative Relationships

Teachers and leaders need to develop several two-way relationships focused on the child and their learning. Very responsive schools took time to build relationships with the parents and whanau, with the children's early childhood teachers, with the children themselves, with external support agencies.

- **Parents and whanau** – school leaders met parents and whanau when they enrolled their child. Usually they also interviewed the parents and whanau, although in some cases this was delegated. These interviews gave parents and whanau the opportunity to meet the key people in the school and to find out important and useful information. Leaders recognised that parents were transitioning too. These relationships were more than providing opportunities for visits to the school and telling parents and whanau what was expected of them and their children. Teachers and leaders in responsive schools learned about the children being enrolled, their dispositions, their strengths and their cultures. They learnt about the family and their aspirations for their children.

**An example of a school that was reviewing their transition policy and practice to improve the way they worked with parents to support the children's learning wellbeing.**

With the many immigrant families they were aware of the importance to provide as much information as possible so parents can understand the New Zealand education system and the teaching approaches used. They need to make the families feel welcome and develop a sense of belonging to their school community. They use a range of effective strategies to achieve this:

- Opportunities for the families to visit the school with their families
- Opportunities for the families to socialise with other families
- A formal welcome ceremony for parents
- Information evenings
- A staff member who speaks several of the languages accompanies the children on the bus
- A new entrant teacher displays photographs of children before they start school so that other children know they are coming and can welcome them
- The teacher contacts the parents after the first week of school to develop the whole picture of the child's experience and check the parents' and family's experience of transition
- Providing a new entrant pack that provides information to help parents understand the process. It also provides prompts for reading and writing, mathematics, oral language skills, and social and emotional competency. This is used with the early childhood portfolio, as the basis for a conversation with parents about their child as they transition to school. Teachers learn about the child's family, their hopes and aspirations for their child and the child's strengths and interests. They use this information to tailor the curriculum, to smooth the transition to school
- Parents are encouraged to attend information meetings which cover a range of topics. School leaders take parents through the teaching approaches used, including restorative practices, and model strategies parents can use at home. They explain writing, reading and mathematics development, National Standards, and support for children with English as a second language
- **Working with early childhood teachers.** Transition is strengthened when teachers build effective relationships with early childhood teachers. **Benefits include:**
  - Observing the children in their familiar early childhood environment – teachers noted children's socialisation and 'dispositions to learn' which enriched the information provided by the early childhood teachers
  - Arranging two-way visits between the children at the school and early childhood service – children got used to the school environment and made connections with older children already at school
  - Arranging two-way visits between the teachers so they understood what the teaching and learning looked like for each other, They shared strategies that helped 'bridge' the learning experiences of the service and school. An example of this is one visit resulted in a learning story in the child's journal. The story talked about the visits to school, the new entrant teacher and who the new classmates were, and included a map showing where the new entrant would keep their belongings.

**An example of one very responsive school making connections with key people**

The new entrant teacher, who is the syndicate leader, makes effective links with the parents, whanau and early childhood service staff to focus the transition on the wellbeing and success of children in their first year at school. She plans on knowing each child as an individual, building relationships and raising their familiarity with the school environment and school expectations. On their visit before they start school the children are welcomed and issued

with book bags and books to take home and share with their families. Parents and whanau are invited to be part of the child's transition to school – with the child to meet the teachers separately. Parents also have opportunities to talk about their child's learning journey portfolio from early childhood and to 'write about my child in a million words or less'.

5. **Other Students** – more than half the schools visited had a formal buddy system to support new entrant. Buddies were either classmates or senior students in the school.

**One example of a buddy system**

*The teacher appoints a class buddy to support children as they learn to participate in class tasks and experiences.*

*Parents, trustees and teachers are proud that children take responsibility for each other's wellbeing and give help and companionship in classrooms and the playground.*

6. **Support agencies** – establishing effective relationships with support agencies for children with special needs is critical to the success of their transition. ERO found that the schools that established good relationships with parents and whanau, early childhood teachers and intervention providers developed strong individual education plans (IEPs). The careful planning in these IEPs meant that children had continuity of support that ensured a smooth transition to school.

7. **Self-Review – identifying the impact of practices and processes**

ERO found that very responsive schools had robust, formal self-review processes and their responses were proactive. They analysed data and looked for how they could improve the transition process. They considered children's wellbeing as well as assessment data and sought parents and children's views.

An example of a review triggered by a school after they recognised they did not have processes in place that would mean every child was likely to successfully transition. Relationships with early childhood centres near the school were unproductive and parents had made children anxious about coming to school by telling them how they would have to behave when they started school.

The school leaders decided to trial a new process and involve parents in the review of the process. The principal followed two groups of children who were transitioning to school. The principal met with parents twice throughout the process to hear how it was going for them. They used that time to talk about their child's strengths, interest and abilities. They appreciated knowing the person who they could talk to once their child started school and also liked being able to socialise with the other parents in the group. Parents and teachers identified what worked and what needed to change. As a result changes were made to the transition cycle.

**ERO FOUND FIVE KEY ASPECTS FOR ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING SUCCESSFUL TRANSITIONS:**

- Building relationships
- Planning and working with key partners
- Responding to the needs of the community
- Linking children's early learning and prior knowledge to school
- Evaluating and reviewing the programme

**ERO Concluded that what is most important for continuous learning is:**

- High quality leadership that recognises the importance of transition.
- Early childhood services and schools working together.
- Understanding and linking Te Whariki and The New Zealand Curriculum.
- Early childhood services using assessment based on children's interests and ways of learning. Schools using early childhood records of learning and interviews to get to know their new entrants.
- Knowing the child's culture, background, interests, strengths and what they've already learnt – and using this to tailor learning.
- Early childhood services and schools having strong relationships with the child and their parents and whanau.
- Self-review of transition practices – analysing what's working well and what isn't – and making improvements.

## (B) Crossing the Border – A community negotiates the transition from early childhood to primary school.

From 2005-2008 Mangere Bridge Kindergarten carried out a Centre of Innovation research project exploring the transition between early childhood education and school. Three teacher-researchers Carol Hartley, Pat Rogers, and Jemma Smith, supported by two university research associates Sally Peters and Margaret Carr, developed and researched a range of strategies for supporting children's learning as the children and their families "crossed the border" between sectors. The following are some of the project's key findings and ways in which transition to school can be supported:

### 1. Fostering belonging and engagement in the new place

Activities or artefacts that familiarised the children and their families with the school helped bridge the gap and give them a sense of belonging in the new context. These included:

- A DVD about the school made by a group of school children aged nine in conjunction with the school and kindergarten communities. This resource helped the child and family prepare for the transition by becoming familiar with the people and places at the school.
- A DVD of one of the new entrant teachers giving a phonics activity used in one of the schools
- Children's portfolios included: personalised group learning stories, individualised learning stories, photographs of their work, celebrations at the kindergarten, excursions and visits, group learning stories, and contributions from the family. The use of children's kindergarten portfolios in the new entrant classroom, they should be highly valued and frequently accessed. They provided insights into each child's knowledge. New entrant teachers wrote learning stories to include in the portfolios outlining the school visit experience. When later read at kindergarten they provided insights about school. The project found the portfolios could empower children, enhance their identify as a learner and connect the learning from home and early childhood with new learning at school. The findings did suggest that they revisit and discuss the use of portfolios as problems such as storage, having backups in case they got lost, changing staff etc. could cause a number of issues that needed to be resolved.
- Targeted transition visits to school by children, teachers and parents/caregivers.
- Visits to kindergarten by school staff to meet children and get to know them in a familiar environment
- Pamphlets developed by the kindergarten teachers for families, covering a range of related topics including detailing parents responsibilities for enrolling their child at school, and the kindergarten practices for the child's last day at school. Another pamphlet called '*First Day at School*' was written in conjunction with each contributing school and provides parents with a brief synopsis of the procedure for the first days at school, including any expectation of parent involvement and a general timetable of the classroom programme. The pamphlets were a result of information shared in parent focus groups and were designed to address many of the concerns that had been raised by parents.
- Personalised transition books about the school context utilising photographs taken in school visits, these help address concerns about the new environment. Including features of the school environment e.g. where the toilets are, what is in the playground, the drinking fountain, key staff members etc. helped children and families become more confident and addressed any concerns they may have had.
- School boards in the kindergarten displaying school teachers and the children who had, or were about to, join their class
- Buddies project. *Children who are nearly five at kindergarten and older students from school form relationships in activities that became mutually familiar and mutually interesting. This practice of an older child mentoring a younger one is important in Maori culture. The tuakana/teina relationship refers to the relationship between an older (tuakana) person and younger (teina) person, one that is specific to teaching and learning. Children learn school social behaviour through forming relationships that involve negotiation, adjustments, and understanding peer culture. In the tuakana/teina relationship, in the transition experience, the school child is able to model language and behaviours acceptable in school situations. Talk about what happens in a classroom, demonstrate positive learning attitudes, and become a friendly face within the new setting. (3)*

The buddies' project involved Year 5 children who read to buddies for new entrant children when they started school. This was extended to kindergarten buddies. A portfolio is prepared for each school buddy which includes a job description, contract and ethics, qualities they will need to display when they visit the kindergarten. The contract emphasised the importance of getting to know their buddy, being a friend and a positive role model for

their school. The buddy visits the kindergarten once per week during the transition process. Learning stories are written of their visit to put in the child's portfolio.

## 2. Goodwill and professional relationships between teachers in action

The project found that joint projects between groups was a valuable way of fostering relationships between teachers, and members of school and early childhood communities. The Welcome to Mangere Bridge DVD was particularly effective in fostering relationships because it involved all groups such as children at the kindergarten, children at the school, families, and teachers at both, involved in tasks familiar to both. Their analysis showed that successful projects involved more parties, it created more opportunities for relationships to be established and strengthened across all sectors. Over time trust and collaboration was built, providing a strong foundation for future projects. Participants needed to be flexible in order to work together, willing participants, and projects needed to be sustained over time. Developing an idea they were willing to collaborate on was key to its success and in some instances this took a while. Equal partnerships was also a key, teachers wanted to have input, take turns hosting meetings, and raise their concerns and ideas. Reciprocal relationships where early childhood and new entrant teacher have equal power, visit each other's learning environment, share responsibilities, take turns hosting meetings and two way discussions occur is essential to building successful cross sector working relationships.

## 3. Recognising the continuity of learning journeys

The kindergarten provided rich opportunities to learn. Learning opportunities were explored through integrated multiliteracies that the children were engaged in. e.g. the children created movie clips involving drawing, orally telling the story, using the scripts and acting them out and filming the results. The DVD of the movie clip was able to be revisited several times and valued by the children.

Key competencies were also evident in documentation in children's portfolios. New entrant teachers picked up and built on these competencies and portfolios recorded this continuity. Both the NZC and Te Whariki have goals advocating building on previous learning. The project concluded that early childhood and new entrant teachers can build a bridge to support children and their families through the transition process, and support the continuity of learning as shown in the alignment of Te Whariki and the key competencies in the New Zealand Curriculum.

*The direct link between learning dispositions, key competencies and the working theories of the two curricula creates opportunities for continuity of learning experience (Carr 2016).*

*'Te Whāriki includes five curriculum strands: Exploration – Mana Aotūroa, Communication – Mana Reo, Wellbeing – Mana Atua, Contribution – Mana Tangata, and Belonging – Mana Whenua. Together, they provide a foundation for lifelong learning. These strands correspond to the key competencies identified in this document.*

*The transition from early childhood education 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 experience of school; • is welcoming of family and whanau.'* (New Zealand Curriculum document page 41)

The research team were inspired by the alignment of Te Whariki leaning strand with the NZC key competencies to explore:

1. How did the documentation of children's learning, with Te Whariki in mind, also reflect the children's preparation for school, with the NZC in mind?
2. In what ways did the curriculum in action provide opportunities for the teaching of the key competencies?

Entries in one child's portfolio were analysed and coded according to which key competencies learning was taking place and the early childhood strand it aligned with. Many examples were found and showed like all the portfolios in the kindergarten taking part in this research that the children were progressing towards the vision of the NZC, 'Young people who will be confident, connected, actively involved, lifelong learners'. (Page 7 NZC)

*The alignment between the early childhood curriculum and the school curriculum provides a potential bridge to support children's learning across sectors, but the strength of the bridge depends on the connections that are deliberately made by both early childhood and school teachers (Sally Peters 2008)*

**CONCLUSION** (chapter 10, page 90-92)**Good will and professional relationships between teachers in action**

Joint projects that were mutually interesting was a valuable way of fostering relationships between teachers, and members of school and early childhood communities. Effective relationships involved mutual respect and a balance of power. Flexibility, commitment, and a 'can do' attitude were found to be important to developing effective relationships.

**Recognising the continuity of learning journeys**

Providing rich opportunities to learn, engaging children in integrated multi-literacies and linking these to the key competencies. This can be evidenced in the children's portfolios. New entrant teachers picking up on these rich learning experiences and building on the competencies, recording the continuity in the child's portfolios.

**Fostering belonging and engagement in the new place**

The bridge between sectors was strengthened by the many artefacts and activities that fostered both the children's and their family's sense of belonging in the school context. E.g. DVDs about the new school, children's portfolios and learning stories, personalised transition books, targeted visits to school, school buddies etc.

## (C) PLAY BASED LEARNING

### What is play based learning?

Play based learning draws from children's natural desire to engage in experience based on their interests, strengths and developing skills. When children initiate play they are more motivated to learn and develop positive dispositions towards learning.

*"Play based learning enables children to use and develop thinking skills such as problem solving, reasoning and lateral thinking. They interact with others, develop communication strategies and work in collaboration with their peers and adults. It can foster literacy and numeracy and the development of scientific concepts. As children are empowered to make decisions and initiate play, they become confident and motivated learners. This in turn fosters responsibility and self-regulation. It provides children with many opportunities to resolve conflict, challenge unfair play and embrace diversity" (Debbie Cole, Play Base Learning. Ascot Kindergarten Victoria Australia)*

### ACCORDING TO THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT 2009, VICTORIAN EARLY YEARS LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

#### What does it look like in practice?

- It should be child focused as children are constantly engaged in meaningful learning experiences. Child's interests form the basis of the programme
- The environment needs to be carefully planned and presented so it is inviting to the children
- Experiences that are a balance of child and adult initiated ideas and investigations
- Specific play areas to engage children in different areas of learning e.g. art, drama, sensory, construction etc.
- In each area children would be offered a range of open ended and loose materials that can be used across different abilities and interests
- Utilise children's ideas and interests to extend and create new experiences
- Utilise indoor and outdoor areas to facilitate play and learning
- Offer a range of open ended experiences and materials
- Enable children to self-select materials and play independently
- Allow children to play for extended lengths of time at an activity
- Cater for different abilities and learning styles
- Connect experiences to children's lives
- Link children's investigations to strands and dispositions and key competencies

**Role of the adult** - The teacher is vital and their many roles include:

- Interact with and observe children to gain insights into their interests, skills and knowledge
- Seek information from families to better understand the child and plan for their learning
- Create inviting play areas with open-ended materials
- Give children time to explore and extend their investigations
- Seek out resources to extend children's interest and learning
- Offer suggestions to encourage children to learn from each other
- Modify play areas as interests change
- Be an active learner
- Providing a balance between child led, child initiated and teacher supported learning
- Creating learning environments to support learning
- Supporting the inclusion of all children in play
- Recognising teachable moments as they occur

*"When play and learning are woven together, children are more likely to develop positive dispositions towards learning and real understandings of the world around them." (Early Years Learning and development framework, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2009 Victoria)*

## WHY INTRODUCE PLAY BASED LEARNING

Stephanie Masters completed her Master of Education degree, with her final assessment on play-based learning. In an article in the Education Review February 2015 titled “Play based learning: producing critical, creative and innovative thinkers”, Stephanie argues that it is time primary school teachers brought the play back into the classroom.

Most of our values and key competencies in the National Curriculum can be taught through play based learning. Instead of primary schools saying children need to be ‘ready for school’ new entrant teachers could adopt a play based pedagogy to reflect the Te Whariki early childhood curriculum. There are many reasons why primary teachers may not want to adopt play based learning; organisation of time, materials, activities and spaces; the classroom may be noisy and messy, students may be talking and laughing and moving around; and as a teacher you may feel you are losing classroom control and management. However at all the early childhood services I visited the children were on task and fully engaged in play based activities. Play based environments encourage children to think outside the square and be creative. It encourages exploration, learning and enquiry, supporting them to be critical and creative thinkers which is necessary to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It lets children test social boundaries, produces curiosity, openness, and resilience, develops their language skills, and enhances their social skills and capacity for self-motivated learning. Children are engaged in pretend play that simulates the type of activities they will need to be able to do as adults. Why wouldn’t we want to promote learning by play in our new entrant classrooms?

Resources for play ideas:

- [www.pinterest.com](http://www.pinterest.com)
- [www.backtoblocks.com](http://www.backtoblocks.com)
- [www.playbasedlearning.com.au](http://www.playbasedlearning.com.au)

## DISCOVERY TIME - Introducing play based learning at Egmont Village School

Play is an essential part of a child’s social, emotional, physical and cognitive development. My year-2 classes have been undertaking Discovery Time every Friday for the last year. This programme provides opportunities for the children to be involved in a range of activities as an individual or as part of a group. It involves symbolic or pretend play, exploratory play activities, and physical play activities. Activities can be totally student directed, mostly student directed (with some adult direction in questioning), and student and adult directed learning (collaboration, learning together). Discovery Time is a vehicle for personalised learning, encouraging IT skills, extending gifted & talented, building inquiry skills, exploring science, extending oral language and developing social skills. Discovery Time allows them to test ideas, work through uncertainties, explore, problem solve create, imagine, have social interactions, develop creative and critical thinking skills and make sense of the world around them. It allows the children to develop the key competencies through activity based child directed learning in meaningful and authentic contexts. A typical session begins with an explanation of the key competency focus and ends with a sharing of what they did and a reflection time. This links back to the key competency. Student’s reflect and share examples of the key competency focus. When I have observed this programme in my junior classes I have heard six year olds reflecting on their learning, using powerful language to describe what they have discovered, and the problems they encountered and how they solved them.

As this programme is already successfully being implemented in years 1-3 we will investigate how we can introduce this programme in the new entrant class for one session of 1.5 hours every day. It may be necessary to adapt the programme to meet the needs and learning of the new entrants but the programme could be a basis for introducing play based learning.

*“Students who are actively involved in their learning are more likely to be motivated and engaged and able to make connections with prior learning”. (Michael Irwin Discovery Time page 61)*

## VISITS TO EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES INCLUDED:

- Inglewood Community Child Care Centre
- Inglewood Playcentre
- Inglewood Kindergarten
- Topkids Inglewood
- Henwood Kindergarten

I thoroughly enjoyed my visits to all centres. I was warmly received and welcomed and introduced to staff members. I was given time to view the learning environment, ask questions, and see the different learning areas and observe the children in child focused play based learning. What astounded me was the fact that although the children were actively engaged in a range of activities around the rooms, there was definitely a certain amount of structure to what was happening. I observed children practising at being adults, dressing up then tidying up the clothes when they had finished, I watched a little boy cutting up an intricate shape then gluing it carefully on his creation, and one child who recognised me from visiting my school proudly showed me his portfolio from cover to cover. Teachers obviously set high expectations, the children knew what was expected of them, I saw skills being learnt, evidence of key competencies in their play and was hugely impressed with the children who after finishing their morning tea, put the food scraps in the bin and the plastic cup and plate in a wash up bin. Children were without exception in all centres I visited, actively involved, on task, having fun and engaged in their play based learning. This was exciting to see especially as I am looking at introducing play based learning for a session every day in our new entrant class.

I discussed the purpose of my sabbatical and what I wanted to achieve. We agreed that:

- The sharing of portfolios was important so schools get a picture of the child's prior learning, their interests, strengths etc. The portfolio was also very important for the child's sense of belonging, they are proud of them and want to share them with others. Judy invited me to Storypark so I could view portfolios, view what is happening at the centre and communicate with them about children transitioning and keep the centre and parents informed about coming events at the school. Teachers will be invited on by individual student's parent so they can view their portfolios.
- My new entrant teachers would be very welcome to visit at least once per term, possibly at the beginning of the term to build relationships with early childhood teachers and the students, to observe the children participating in familiar environments in the play based programme and to share their portfolios.
- We talked about the possibility of establishing a community of professionals and agreed this is something that might come out of iCOL
- We talked about students bringing their portfolios on their first or second transition visit to school and for the parents informal pre- enrolment interview 2 weeks before they start school
- Some of the early childhood centres have generic information books about the schools or intend creating them, I explained that we will be creating personalised 'Welcome to Egmont Village School' books for children to take home on their second visit to school. All thought this was an excellent idea.
- We discussed the possibility of working together on shared projects to help bridge the gap between ECE and school, supporting continuity of learning
- All ECE services I visited have an open door policy and teachers are welcome to come in and observe, participate in the programme and talk with the staff. This is a reciprocal arrangement, early childhood teachers are welcome at Egmont Village School at any time and we encourage, if possible, teachers supporting the child for at least one transition visit.
- The new entrant teacher writing up a learning story about a child's transition visit and sharing it with the early childhood service they attend so it can go in their portfolio.

By strengthening links between school and early childhood education, collaborating more with early childhood teachers to support each other, we can only improve the transition process and ensure all children experience success as they start school. I look forward to strengthening the relationships established and working collaboratively with them to ensure effective transition for all my students.

## VISITS TO EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES

### 1. Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> August – Inglewood Community Child Care Centre

I was made to feel very welcome by the Manager Jennifer Black and head teacher Linda Moeller. As Linda showed me around the centre she introduced me to staff members who all without exception welcomed me. The Kowhai room for 3-5 year olds is divided into a range of centres of interest. Learning is play based, child focused and centred on a child's interest. There is a music corner, dress up room with clothes, chest of drawers, mirror etc. a quiet time corner where children can read the learning portfolios, a creative/art corner with a range of materials set out for children to use to develop their creative skills, an alphabet table to encourage development of literacy skills and a centre of interest corner where there is currently an incubator with hatching eggs.

The programme is child centred with learning focused around the child's interests. If staff members see the need to develop a particular skill e.g. using scissors confidently, they provide learning activities centred on the child's interest so they can practice the skills of using scissors. They build on prior learning by providing activities to further develop knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions.

Assessment is gathered as they observe children at play. Learning stories are written and documented as:

- What learning has happened?
- Possibilities / opportunities
- Parent / whanau comment.

These are shared with parents / whanau online and as a hard copy in a clear file folder. The children are very proud of their learning stories and were keen to share them with me. One child whose two brothers attend my school and had obviously met me before at school was very keen to share his folder with me. He confidently and proudly shared every story in his learning journal including what he enjoyed, his interests and little anecdotes about his family. This was a tremendous insight into how these portfolios give the children a sense of belonging and how valuable it would be to visit the early childhood service where we have students due to transition, to meet them and observe them in familiar environments where their true nature is to the fore.

In the entrance to the kowhai room is a family tree. On each branch is written a different school within the Inglewood cluster and on it are pictures of the children who are transitioning to the school. On the trunk are pictures of the Inglewood Community Child Care Centre staff. Pictures of the children are left on the tree for several weeks after they have enrolled in primary school.

Four children will be transitioning to Egmont Village School within the next year. I was able to look through their learning journals/ portfolios to get a picture of who they are, what they like to do and what they have learnt to date.

I talked with the manager and head teacher about the sharing of these learning journals. They were happy for the children to bring them along to their first transition visit and for the school to keep them for a week so we could get to know the child. They were excited about the prospect of our junior teachers visiting the centre regularly to get to know the children who would be transitioning to Egmont Village. We talked about EVS introducing a play based learning session every day and the manager and head teacher were very excited about this prospect and offered to help us set it up. We talked about how we could find the resources to set up the classroom and how the play based learning programme would be recorded and linked to both curricula in planning. They offered to support us with this also.

The teachers were very interested in the idea of setting up a community of professionals for early childhood teachers and primary teachers to meet at least once a term and welcomed the opportunity to develop collaborative relationships with our new entrant teachers.

## **2. 7 August – Inglewood Playcentre**

Playcentre philosophy is based on child-initiated play and recognises the parents as the first and best educators of their own children.

*Playcentre offers a programme of education for whanau/parents that emphasises parenting and early childhood education including learning in child development, play and learning, parenting skills, planning and delivering early childhood education, facilitation and management skills. Unique within the early childhood sector, Playcentres are cooperatively managed by parents with support from experienced Association and Federation personnel. (Inglewood Playcentre website)*

Once again I was warmly welcomed and shown around the centre. The parents are rightly very proud of the centre and work cooperatively to provide a play based learning environment for their children. While it is volunteer work it was explained there are job descriptions (26 in fact) to ensure everyone knows what their responsibility is. The structure and organisation of playcentre was explained to me including how parents need to have acquired enough credits to run learning sessions. I was shown a display with explanation of the 16 areas of areas of play available to the children in the play based & child focused learning sessions. After each session a parent is responsible for writing up the daily evaluation which also includes photos of the children playing and learning. The evaluation is in a large scrapbook which is available for all parents and whanau to view.

Portfolios / records of learning are the responsibility of each parent and are a collection of photographs, artwork, observations and learning stories.

What goes in a child's Playcentre portfolio? (*taken from Inglewood Playcentre display board*)

- Stories or observations written about a child (by themselves or in a group)
- Writing that reflects on the learning that is happening for a child
- Photos that capture special learning moments of a child, ideally with a caption explaining the learning
- Artwork that shows examples of a child's special milestones, interests or progress, ideally with a caption describing why it has been chosen
- Photos of a child working on a creation that won't fit into a portfolio so that the process of the child working on a creation can be captured
- Might be a sequence of photos- steps in the learning process – this might be during one play experience or on different days that links to Te Whariki principles, strand/goals, or dispositions.

At the end of each term a PLOD is written up (Possible Lines of Direction) for sessions. The format is:

1. Revisit previous term's learning journey – did any of the ideas happen? Why / why not?
2. The story of now (Notice & recognise)  
What's been happening for you at Playcentre? (sum up stories, artwork, play, photos, and sessions)  
What's been happening for you at home?
3. The story to come  
How might we support your interests, strengths, ideas, play and conversations now?

Why have Playcentre Portfolios? (*taken from Inglewood Playcentre display board*)

- It ensures a sense of belonging for children and families in a playcentre
- To capture special moments in a child's early years
- So adults can follow up on a child's interests and ideas
- To document a child's on-going learning during their playcentre years
- To recognise the successes and milestones that a child reaches
- So that children and their families can re-read about special moments
- Children are learning early literacy skills from this personal book
- So that connections and links can be made between home and playcentre by children, parents and other adults in the centre
- Because it fits well with the model of 'noticing, recognising and responding'

Parents at the centre who I spoke to welcomed the idea of our new entrant teachers visiting the centre once a term to observe the play focused learning, to meet the parents and children and build working relationships. We also welcome visits by the playcentre to our new entrant classroom. As many of our students have attended the playcentre this will be a distinct possibility in the future.

They also valued the importance of the sharing of the children's records of learning with the primary schools.

### **3. Inglewood Kindergarten 9<sup>th</sup> August**

I met with Sally Wooller, the head teacher and she explained the structure of Kindergartens, and answered my questions related to assessment, portfolios, play based programme and linking Te Whariki to the New Zealand Curriculum.

Te Whariki is embedded in the children's learning stories. The programme has a holistic approach rather than a focus on a single learning disposition or competency. Learning activities are play based and there are a range of areas of play set up around the room. These are changed or resources at these activities changed to meet the current interests of the children. Activities are open ended, they don't put parameters around the activities but sometimes have to provide guidance. Sally said "Interest is the vehicle we use to achieve the goal". E.g. when a teacher identifies a child who has difficulty with trust and playfulness, having fun with play, then a game they enjoy playing will be changed slightly to include a bit of nonsense and playfulness. Gradually the child will be encouraged to take part in games where they are encouraged to have fun and let go.

Parents were surveyed to determine what they would like in their child's portfolio. These have evolved into a picture of the child as a learner. They include snapshots in time, both group and individual. Kaikiako comment on the learning and the whanau are encouraged to make a comment. There is a termly story, a rich story which evaluates the previous goal for the child and links with what they are currently working on or where to next. The strands and dispositions of Te Whariki are embedded in the learning stories. No tick boxes said Sally, if you have a good understanding of Te Whariki, primary teachers can see the links clearly in the language in the learning story. For parents the stories also provide a rich summary of what the child has been involved in and what learning has been going on. They have the opportunity to comment and connect this to activities at home and make suggestions for what they think their child needs to become more confident with. The portfolios are one way of collaborating and connecting with parents. A wall display visually shows what school the students will be attending. Students who have left kindergarten and moved on to primary school in recent time stay on the wall display so students transitioning can see familiar faces and know when they go to school someone they know will be there.

Sally firmly agrees that establishing a strong relationship with new entrant teachers is paramount. She believes this relationship is already there, that primary schools know they can contact her at any time if they need information and advice about a child. Sally is also looking at having an information book about all schools on display at the kindergarten so that the children and parents have an opportunity to read about what is available at all the schools in the Inglewood area. She agreed we could build on this in a number of ways e.g. new entrant teachers visiting the kindergarten to get to know the students in an environment they are already comfortable with, meeting teachers and observing how the kindergarten operates. Sally said new entrant teachers are welcome at any time and thought taking part in a session, being involved with the students in the activities would be a great way of building relationships with all involved in the child's transition to school.

#### 4. TopKids Inglewood – August 14<sup>th</sup>

Once again I was warmly welcomed and then Judy took me through what she planned to show me. I was then shown around the centre and an explanation given about each area. I was immediately impressed by the on task behaviour of the children, how they were actively engaged in their play based learning. Most impressive were the children who were seated at the table having rolling kai (their morning tea). When finished they got up, emptied their plates of food scraps which they put into a food bin and then plate and cup were put into another bin. They were learning about recycling and composting probably without realising it. The teachers quite clearly set clear expectations of the children, have consistent rules which clearly the children can follow. The materials were set out in provoking and inviting ways to encourage exploration, learning and inquiry. The staff were amongst the children, engaging them in conversation and no doubt watching and listening for that teachable moment. With a ratio of 1-10 in the under-fives room this can be hard, but the teachers were wandering around observing the children, listening to conversations, giving help and support and engaging them in conversation when the time was right. On one wall was a large display with pictures of all the children. Underneath were results of consultation with parents about their aspirations for their child. Interestingly the comments were largely the learning dispositions and key values and competencies of the NZC.

Back in her office Judy showed me some of her resources.

1. Transition folder – this included an All About Me form which is filled in when the children transition from infants to pre-school. Judy offered to assist us to create our own 'All About me' form for transition to primary school. A learning story is written about transition visits to the new room or school. A graduation ceremony is held and invitations sent out to whanau. A certificate is presented to the child at the ceremony. The certificate is linked to the key competencies "to continue your learning journey you have developed skills in these areas" then it lists the key competencies. Copies of these are placed in the child's portfolios.
2. Portfolios – There are both hard copies stored with easy access for children in the centre, and e copies on Storypark. Judy explained that parents like Storypark because they can look at it regularly without their child taking their portfolio home. They can share comments about their child's learning and also read about TopKids news and events coming up. Judy invited me to Storypark. This now enables me to view portfolios and read about what is going on at Topkids and keep up to date with events etc. I can also add comments about children transitioning, talk about their school visits etc. and share news about coming events etc. at my school. Judy will ask parents whose children are going to my school to invite the new entrant teachers. This will enable them to view their child's portfolio. The learning stories in the portfolio show what is happening here? Evidence of Te Whariki strands, learning dispositions and links to key competencies is embedded in the story.
3. Transition Internal Evaluation – this involved a meeting with parents to discuss transition procedures. Judy provided me with a copy of TopKids transition to school procedure which was reviewed in May 2017.

4. A parent evening was held recently and Judy presented a slideshow titled Whanau Literacy – Language, Literacy and transitions at TopKids. It was an information sharing evening for parents about language development, how TopKids support literacy, an overview of the curriculum links with the NZC, what matters for children as they start school (what local teachers say is important for children) developing writing skills, and Storypark. Judy said she will invite local new entrant teachers to attend the next presentation she organises. This would be another positive step towards collaborating and building positive relationships with early childhood teachers and whanau.
5. Be School Ready Programme – This programme has been formulated to facilitate quality transition programmes. The assessment tool has been designed to assist teaching teams in their assessment of current practice and programmes for transition to school. Two examples of the principles are - Teachers / educators build relationships across and between members of the learning community and Teachers / educators provide akonga with opportunities to promote connectedness between centre and school learning environments. Indicator for successful practice includes such things as transition to school displays are presented at akonga level, e.g. photographs of school environments, Teachers/ educators highlight the alignment between learning dispositions and key competencies and have knowledge of the NZC.

It is clearly evident that they have an effective transition programme and we could certainly learn from looking at the processes they have in place. I thoroughly enjoyed my time at the centre and was extremely impressed with the professionalism and knowledge and commitment of the manager, Judy Brady. She is passionate about her job and excited about what we can achieve through the transition focus of iCOL.

#### **5. Henwood Kindergarten – Wednesday 23 August**

I visited Henwood with my head junior teacher. On the day we visited it was the first day of sunshine we have had for several days and the kindy were making the most of the sunny weather by spending the day in the paddock. This is a communal space that both classrooms enjoy together. There are no toys other than playground structures, guinea pigs and a turtle, a range of fruit trees, and creative play areas. The children engage with the area making up games, practising social, physical and creative skills and learn about caring for animals and the environment. The animals and the paddock are an important part of learning as the children help feed the animals, recycling their food scraps to feed the rabbit, guinea pigs and chickens. They learn to respect, understand and have an interest in the natural environment.

*“The nurturing of our animals, the garden and sustainable practices are a valuable part of our learning culture. The essence of nature in our environment engages the senses, cultivate a curiosity and creates wonderment and curiosity.” (Henwood Kindy Philosophy)*

*“The provision of authentic learning experiences, such as caring for animals and the garden, in sustainable ways, are key aspects.” (ERO Report 10-06-2015)*

Both classrooms are vibrant and exciting learning environments. They have an abundance and rich variety of resources for motivating and engaging the children in a range of learning activities. Activities are provided that encourage the development of literacy, maths, science and arts in meaningful ways through play based learning. Jolly phonics is undertaken in one of the classrooms, not as a structured lesson but incorporated into the programme as a fun activity. This was introduced to support some children who have speech /language difficulties. Outdoors a range of creative play areas that make use of natural resources encourage creativity, curiosity, interest in the natural environment, development of fine motor skills, and curiosity, knowledge and understanding of science. We were very impressed with the creativity of the outdoor learning space, and could see numerous opportunities for child led learning. We are now keen to recreate this environment back at school.

Assessments are less formal than in school. These include observations and conversations which are recorded in the leaning journals. Parents are encouraged to share these with the school as the child is transitioning.

Just before the child starts school a summary is written under the Te Whariki strand and linked to the key competencies. This is provided approximately 3 weeks prior to the child starting school and 2 copies provided so parents can provide the new entrant teacher with a copy.

The kindy provided us with a copy of their transition to school policy and procedures. The procedures include four key stages on a timeline starting at age four. When the child is due to start school the final summary is prepared (copy for parents and a copy for school), a poroporoaki is organised and photos are provided of the child’s time at kindy. These go into the learning journal.

We discussed new entrant teachers visiting the kindy in terms one and four to get to know the children and build collaborative relationships with the staff. It was also suggested that a teacher could possibly bring a child who is transitioning for a visit to our school. One teacher suggested they could come as a group for a school visits. We look forward to building on the relationship established, strengthening our ties with Henwood Kindy, and learning more about how we could set up outdoor creative play areas. Head teacher and owner Jane Jurd invited us to attend two parent evenings titled 'Urges' and 'Imaginations' facilitated by Kimberley Crisp. She also recommended we purchase the book "The Sacred Urge to Play" by Kimberley Crisp and Pennie Brownlie. Jane shared supporting transition to school documents from their Kura/School folder. These documents are shared with parents and outline how Henwood Kindergarten supports parents/ whanau and children in the transition process. The documents include learning outcomes that state what they hope children are able to do when transitioning to school.

Henwood Kindy hope children will be able to do the following when transitioning to school:

- take care of their belongings, put their bag away and look after their own clothing;
- be responsible for their self-care;
- work independently as well as alongside others;
- show commitment to see tasks through until the end;
- demonstrate consideration for others, practices self-control and has an understanding of rules;
- confidently talk about themselves their family and community experiences;
- have an understanding of empathy;
- ask questions and has a willingness to problem solve;
- participate in groups and able to contribute their own ideas alongside listening to others;
- show an interest in caring for the natural environment;
- express an interest in the wider world and different cultures;
- recognise their own name and display an interest in being able to write their name;
- understand familiar symbols and signs;
- use fine motor skills such as scissors and holding a pencil;
- identify shapes and colours;
- display an appreciation for books and knowledge of book conventions;
- view themselves as a capable learner and display joy in learning.

All these points sit well with what Egmont village school would like children to be able to do when they begin school. The documents also provide information about ways parents can support their child when transitioning to school.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR EGMONT VILLAGE SCHOOL'S TRANSITION PRACTICE

### WHERE TO NOW? - AS A RESULT OF MY RESEARCH WHAT CHANGES HAVE I DECIDED TO MAKE TO OUR CURRENT TRANSITION PROCESS?

In 2016-2017 we decided to undertake a review of our transition to school process. We had identified key areas in our transition process that needed to improve such as relationships with our early childhood services, transition visits and the resources we provide to help support the transition to school. Our aim was to identify what is working well and what isn't, and to make improvements so that our students settle into learning successfully.

### CURRENTLY OUR TRANSITION PROCESS INVOLVES:

1. Every term we implement a programme called 'Flying Start'. This programme helps to build a home & school partnership, and a smoother transition to school for both parents and child. It aims to provide a supportive environment for students and parents during the transition process between home and school. They have the opportunity to meet other new parents and socialise with them. The programme is a starting point for providing further opportunities for parents to be involved in their child's school experiences and further parent education programmes. We also aim to boost the literacy skills of early readers and encourage parent participation in literacy learning. A group of parents attend an afternoon session with the new entrant teachers and principal the term prior to their child starting school. A range of topics are covered including early literacy and numeracy, what to expect when starting school e.g. social and behaviours, nutrition, clothing, lunches, general school information and how the daily class programme operates. The programme is funded by a local business. This provides a welcome pack for new parents which includes picture books, crayons, alphabet card, and nursery rhyme picture book, school prospectus and general information about the school, and an enrolment package etc.
2. Initially parents and their child attended two school visits for half a day prior to starting school. As a result of our transition review we increased this to 10 visits every Friday morning for the term prior to the child starting school. Parents are initially expected to attend with their child but if the visit is going well we encourage them to leave the classroom and relax in the staffroom or library etc.
3. The review also initiated the implementation of an official welcome for students by having a powhiri. This is led by our kapahaka group. New students are invited to be welcomed onto the school along with their parents and whanau. Parents can choose whether to be part of his or not. We intend to offer a powhiri to welcome students every term.
4. Pre-schoolers are invited to come and participate in school events but this is not as frequent as we would like it to be.

CURRENT PRACTICE	CHANGES TO BE IMPLEMENTED TO TRANSITION PROCESS
<p><b>LEADERSHIP</b> – Attends Flying Start programme and provides information about the school including enrolment. Meets new parents but does not have a formal interview. Values transition and sees a need to improve the process.</p> <p>Principal welcomes new entrant children into her office. Display of principal's family, pets etc. are on the wall. This provides an excellent starting point for talking about herself, her family, interests etc. and getting to know each other</p> <p>Support provided through professional learning and development, including allocated resources. Resources include a teacher aide within class for most of the morning, class size restrictions, teaching resources and an environment tailored to the age/needs of children.</p> <p>Attended hui for Community of ECE &amp; Primary Professionals. The aim is to establish a community of professionals that support young children and their whanau as they transition to Primary School. Regular</p>	<p>Initiate pre-enrolment interviews where principal and possibly head junior teacher meets with parents individually to share information about the child. This is an opportunity for the parents to share their child's interests, skills and abilities, aspirations, prior learning at home and early childhood service and sharing information about their family.</p> <p>Budget for providing release time to visit early childhood services and establish relationships with parents, whanau.</p> <p>We would like to establish a similar community of professionals within our iCOL for the new entrant teachers and early childhood teachers. The purpose of</p>

<p>meetings will be held to establish &amp; build relationships between ECE &amp; Primary. Head Junior teacher now a member of Community of Early Childhood and Primary Teaching Professionals meeting once per term in New Plymouth.</p>	<p>this group would be to build relationships, establish collaborative relationships and practices by sharing their learning programmes, sharing assessment practices, identifying how we can build on the learning experiences the children bring to school, discussing children who are transitioning and talking about ways we can improve on supporting our children to transition successfully.</p>
<p><b>FOUNDATION</b></p> <p>Transition process has been increased from 6 weeks to a full term. Parents and child now visit the school for 10 weeks every Friday morning prior to starting school. This is variable, dependent on the child and their family. For some children who have specific concerns either social, behavioural, health etc. a transition plan is implemented so they can make a gradual transition to school. Support is also put in place to assist the child to transition successfully.</p> <p>A comprehensive enrolment pack is provided for parents that includes picture books, crayons, alphabet card, and nursery rhyme picture book, school prospectus and general information about the school, enrolment package etc.</p> <p>A buddy system is established within the junior classroom to help them settle within the class and become familiar with class routines etc. This also helps them socialise within the playground.</p> <p>Generally effective relationships are established with support agencies for children with special needs. Parents and whanau, early childhood teachers and intervention providers usually support development of individual education plans (IEPs) when needed. Meetings with appropriate people and external agencies to develop individual education plans (IEPs) and applications for appropriate funding are made. However often knowing who and what is available and how the special education service can help is a bit of a minefield. Changing the physical environment of the classroom and school to support the child. Providing in-class support where necessary e.g. teacher aide, and physical resources</p>	<p>Increasing the number of visits is working well. Most families are taking the opportunity to visit regularly. Most children are settling well and their parents are able to leave to meet with other new parents and socialise in the staffroom, or help out within the school.</p> <p>Provide each child a book bag and the welcome to school book on their first visit to school. Include in the enrolment package a story book for each child "Welcome to Egmont Village School". This would be written after their first transition visit and include photos of them around the school. It will provide them with information about the school e.g. principal, staff members, leaders, playground, toilets, library, staffroom etc. Provide a child story book "All About Me" that is given out at the Flying Start session. Families are asked to complete it and bring it to their pre enrolment interview which will be held just before the child starts school. This will give valuable information about the child such as their interests, their family, pets, likes, a learning experienced they most like etc. Create a display board in the new entrant classroom such as the family tree seen on one of my visits, of photos of all staff in the school, children in the new entrant class and children who are transitioning. Nominate a school leader to support the new entrant during their first week at school. Meeting them before school in the classroom, showing them around the playground, making sure they are making friends in the playground etc.</p> <p>Support teachers to have a better understanding of the support agencies available to assist students with special needs transitioning to school. Ensure early planning for their move to school is in place and a longer transition period planned for. Scaffolding transition by developing a transition plan and tailoring the transition to suit the child. Meetings with early childhood service where child attends, parents and whanau prior to the child starting school to develop an IEP to develop the child's programme and support their learning and engagement in school Working with the early support worker as the child transitions to school</p>

	<p>A key contact special education advisor from the local office of the MOE has been appointed to our school. This will mean we have a liaison person to provide advice and guidance and support the school with inclusion of all students</p>
<p><b>CURRICULUM</b></p> <p>While the head junior teacher has an understanding of the early childhood curriculum the principal is not familiar with it. The new entrant programme does not clearly show links between Te Whariki and the New Zealand Curriculum. There is no working with early childhood teachers to bridge the learning experiences from ECE to school so that we can provide new entrant children with familiar settings and ways of learning and use of familiar features from the child's experience of early childhood education.</p> <p>While positive relationships are established with Maori parents and whanau, we could improve how we are culturally responsive in our teaching. Introducing a powhiri to welcome the child and their family is a positive step and shows we recognise and value Maori language, culture and identity. The buddy system supports Maori in their transition.</p> <p>New entrant teachers hold ongoing discussions with parents and whanau to learn about the child and to keep parents informed about how the transition to school is progressing.</p>	<p>Principal and new entrant team to become familiar with the principles and strands of Te Whariki by reading the curriculum and visiting early childhood services to observe it in action. Explore the links between Te Whariki and the New Zealand Curriculum so teachers can build on the foundations already been laid.</p> <p>Find out about each child's interests, strengths, culture and capabilities before they start school through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Observations at the early childhood service and on school visits</li> <li>- Talking with the services teachers and child's parent and whanau</li> <li>- Referring to the child's portfolio or learning story journal</li> </ul> <p>Working with early childhood teachers to bridge the learning experiences from ECE to school, from familiar experiences to ones that extend their learning. Investigate working with early childhood teachers on shared learning projects. Meeting to develop and share ideas for rich learning experiences for students that align with the strands of Te Whariki and the NZC key competencies. Using these opportunities to build successful cross sector relationships. Provide release time for new entrant teachers to visit the early childhood services once per term to initiate contact with their new entrants and to observe them in a familiar setting to find out what their interests are, their social &amp; emotional behaviours, how they prefer to learn, and what they are currently learning. Use the insights gained from these visits to inform their curriculum planning</p> <p>The buddy system could include older siblings which models the tuakana teina relationship, an integral part of traditional Maori society. Improve the use of te reo Maori in the classroom. Build on children's cultural strengths and experience to support their learning, linking unfamiliar learning to something they are familiar with.</p> <p>Encourage all new entrant children to bring their early childhood portfolio to share with the new entrant teachers and their new classmates. A good time for this would be on their first transition visit, request they bring it the next Friday and leave it for a week so the new entrant teacher can read it to gather information about the child. Share it with the principal. Use the information to identify children's skills, interests, strengths and needs. This can also be used in the initial discussion with parents alongside a 'school readiness checklist'. Questions to find out as much as we can about each child. When the children have been at school for a week</p>

<p>Informal and informal testing undertaken after approximately 6 weeks at school, test designed by teachers, drawing from elements of SEA.</p> <p>Although inquiry based learning (providing learning experiences through the exploration of an area of the child's interest) through a Discovery Time programme is a feature in the 2 year 1-2 classrooms this is not undertaken in the new entrant classroom.</p> <p>The head new entrant teacher has suggested reviewing their programme to include play based learning. Although the children have the opportunity to play with play-dough, use a range of materials such as paint, mobilo etc. to create with, there is not a designated time for play based learning where play based pedagogy reflects the Te Whariki early childhood curriculum.</p>	<p>or two make contact with parents to talk about how the transition is going for their child.</p> <p>To use this information better to provide new entrant children with familiar settings and ways of learning, Make links between Te Whariki and the New Zealand Curriculum and design a curriculum that values and builds on the child's prior knowledge and experiences. Document the links between Te Whariki and the NZC in planning.</p> <p>New entrant teachers to investigate ways to introduce an inquiry based programme that is centred on the interests of the child, providing experiences that are familiar and of interest to the children.</p> <p>Investigate ways of introducing play based learning for a designated part of the daily programme, building on what is already happening every Friday in the Year 1-2 classrooms during Discovery Time. The aim is to support the students to explore what interests them and develop a range of skills including social skills, engage with each other, negotiate, take risks, make friendships, imagine, explore, think creatively and critically, make decisions and take risks. By discovering new ideas and putting these into action, meaningful learning will take place. The values and key competencies in the NZC can be taught through play based learning.</p> <p>Document the play based learning in the weekly plan showing how it links to NZC values and key competencies and Te Whariki. Inglewood Community Child Care Centre has offered to help us set up the programme. Visit to schools where Discovery Time and or a form of play based learning is implemented e.g. TaWhiti School. Frankley School, Inglewood Primary.</p>
<p><b>RELATIONSHIPS</b></p> <p>New entrant teachers and principal host Flying Start programme each term for parents of children beginning the following term. This programme helps to build a home &amp; school partnership, and a smoother transition to school for both parents and child. It aims to provide a supportive environment for students and parents during the transition process between home and school. They have the opportunity to meet other new parents and socialise with them. The programme is a starting point for providing further opportunities for parents to be involved in their child's school experiences and further parent education programmes. A range of topics are covered including general school information, how to support their child's learning and school expectations. Parents have the opportunity to ask questions about anything they are unsure of.</p> <p>Teachers keep parents informed about how well their child is transitioning.</p> <p>Because of the school's location between Inglewood and New Plymouth some years we enrol children from up to 14 early childhood centres. This has made it</p>	<p>Initiate pre-enrolment interviews where principal and possibly head junior teacher meets with parents individually to share information about the child. This is an opportunity for the parents to share their child's interests, skills and abilities, prior learning at home and early childhood service and sharing information about their family.</p> <p>Principal and new entrant teachers to visit early childhood services once per term or twice a year. The purpose is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Get to know the children and talk with them about their learning stories</li> <li>- Observe them in an environment familiar to the children so we can see what interests the child, their interests, social behaviours and how they like to learn</li> <li>- To talk with the early childhood teachers about the children to gather information about children's strengths, interests, and prior learning.</li> </ul>

<p>difficult to establish and build collaborative relationships with all centres.</p> <p>Historically visits have not been made to early childhood centres by the principal and head new entrant teacher or reciprocal visits by early childhood to the school. Since beginning my research I have visited all the early childhood services in Inglewood and to Henwood Kindy to establish and build relationships with them so we can get to know our children, their interests and prior learning and better support continuity of learning. Some students share hard copies of their records of learning/ learning stories, however this is not consistent.</p> <p>On occasion pre-schoolers are invited to come to special events held at school e.g. visiting shows, pets day etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sharing of assessment information gathered by the early childhood service</li> </ul> <p>Talk with early childhood services about the possibility of them visiting the school when a child is on a transition visit. This will help support the child in the new learning environment and offer another opportunity for the teachers to share more information about the child.</p> <p>Working with early childhood teachers to share the records of learning. Early childhood services providing passwords so teachers can view the portfolios. Request students bring a hard copy on their first or second visit and leave it with the school for a week.</p> <p>Regularly update the school information packs sent to the early childhood services. Send weekly newsletters to the early childhood services.</p> <p>We recognise the value in developing prior relationships with children transitioning to school and therefore need to improve on how we include them in school events. We will invite all children transitioning in the current year to participate in school events such as pets' day, school picnic, visiting shows.</p>
<p><b>SELF REVIEW</b></p> <p>Principal and head junior teacher currently undertaking a review of the transition process to identify what is working well and what needs to be changed to ensure all students enjoy a successful transition to school.</p> <p>Principal undertaking sabbatical to research about best practice for transition, to inform our review of transition and to make improvements to our current practice</p>	<p>Regular review of transition process. Survey parents to find out what they need, and what worked for them. Ensure evidence of best practice identified in research is documented in our school review and changes to be implemented documented in our revised transition process. Oversee implementation of revised transition process. Review in a year's time to determine whether changes implemented and if they have been successful. This can be done through surveying parents and using the evaluation framework for schools Appendix 4 from ERO publication Continuity of Learning.</p>
<p><b>CONCLUSION</b></p> <p>As a result of this research improvements to my school's transition practice will include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Establishing collaborative practices with early childhood services within my schools catchment. This may include establishing a community of professionals among iCOL new entrant teachers and early childhood teachers to meet each term to share learning programmes, assessment practices, and sharing ideas about how we can build on the learning experiences children bring to school, and talking about ways we can improve on supporting children through the transition process.</li> <li>2. New entrant teachers and principal to become familiar with Te Whariki and understand the alignment of Te Whariki strands with the key competencies in the NZC</li> <li>3. Improve the resources we use to support the child through the transition e.g. use of portfolio, personalised transition books about the school (Welcome to EVS) and the child's family (All About Me), greater use of the buddy system, providing a book bag and reader on their first visit, making a display board with photos of new entrants and school staff</li> <li>4. Visits to early childhood services by new entrant teachers so they can: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- observe children in a familiar setting to find out about their social and emotional behaviours, how they prefer to learn, and what their interests are.</li> <li>- talk with early childhood teachers about the child to gather information about their strengths, interests and prior learning.</li> <li>- share assessment information gathered by early childhood service</li> <li>- share records of learning, learning stories (passwords to view e-portfolios)</li> <li>- work with early childhood to bridge the learning experiences from ECE to school. Use insights from observations and discussions with early childhood teachers to inform curriculum planning, building on prior knowledge, experiences and interests of the child and linking between the two curricula</li> </ul> </li> </ol>	

5. Improving and building relationships with parents and children by making changes to our transitions visits by involving them more in the process and inviting pre-schoolers and their families to participate in school events.
6. Investigate how to implement play based learning, linking between Te Whariki and the New Zealand Curriculum, aligning the strands of Te Whariki with the values and key competencies of the NZC.

## Transition to School Procedure

We believe in working collaboratively with parents/caregivers and whanau, and early childhood services to support the smooth and successful transition from early childhood to primary education.

### Purpose:

1. To provide a procedure to follow during transition from early childhood education to meet each individual child's needs and those of his/her parents/caregivers and whanau.
2. To improve the transition process and to ensure it is effective for both child and family
3. To build strong relationships with the child, their parents and whanau.
4. To establish professional relationships with early childhood to work collaboratively to support the child and family during the transition process.
5. To work in collaboration with iCOL members on the transition focus in the Achievement Plan.

### Procedures:

1. Two terms prior to the child starting school parents will be contacted by letter and invited to attend the 'Flying Start' session for parents. All parents who attend the session will be presented with a gift pack containing resources (picture books, alphabet card, coloured pencils, nursery rhyme book etc.) funded by a donation from Mitchell's Concrete. This programme helps to build a home & school partnership, and a smoother transition to school for both parents and child. It aims to provide a supportive environment for students and parents during the transition process between home and school. They have the opportunity to meet other new parents and socialise with them. The programme is a starting point for providing further opportunities for parents to be involved in their child's school experiences and further parent education programmes. A range of topics are covered including general school information, how to support their child's learning and school expectations. Parents have the opportunity to ask questions about anything they are unsure of. The parents will be given the 'All About Me' booklet to take home. Families are asked to complete it and bring it to their pre enrolment interview which will be held just before the child starts school. This will give valuable information about the child such as their interests, their family, pets, likes, a learning experience they most like etc.
2. Ensure photos of new students transitioning to school are added to the new entrant family trees.
3. The principal and new entrant teachers will liaise with early childhood services, this will include regular emailing of school newsletters, attending iCOL community of professional meetings, visiting the centre at the beginning of the term to observe children at playing in familiar surroundings, talking with early childhood teachers to discuss child's interests, strengths, needs and skills needed for school. They will also ask the child to share their portfolio with them.
4. For one term prior to starting school students and a parent or grandparent as support are invited to attend transition visits every Friday morning. Children may attend as few or many as they are comfortable with but are encouraged to attend at least two mornings prior to starting school. On their first visit the student will be presented with a book bag with their name on and reader. Encourage students to bring their early childhood portfolio to share with the new entrant teachers and their new classmates on their next visit. On their second visit their buddy will take them around the school taking photos to paste into the 'Welcome to Egmont Village' story book which when completed they will take home on their next Friday visit.
5. Parents / whanau are invited to a pre-enrolment informal interview with the principal and head junior teacher 2 weeks prior to the child starting school. This is an opportunity for the parents to share their child's interests, skills and abilities, aspirations, prior learning at home and early childhood service and sharing

information about their family. They will be asked to bring along their child's portfolio to share. An information sheet / readiness checklist will be completed, this includes general information about the child such as interests, strengths, needs (social, emotional, physical, learning), aspirations of parents, family information etc. that will support us to make the transition a successful one. The parents will be introduced to their child's buddy who will support them at school during their transition visits and for the first few weeks of school as a new entrant.

6. When the child has been at school for a week or two the new entrant teacher will make contact with parents to talk about how the transition is going for their child.
7. Regular review of the transition process - analysing what's working well and what isn't – and making improvements. Survey parents to find out what they need, and what worked for them. Consider children's wellbeing as well as assessment data and seek parents and children's views. Ensure any revision of our transition practice takes into account these views.

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