

2018 Sabbatical Report
Transitions to and from a sole charge school
He waka eke noa. We are all in this together.
Written by Angela Davy Principal, Mokoia School

Acknowledgements

I acknowledge the support of my dedicated Board of Trustees, to the relieving Principal and to the staff who may have had extra work/responsibilities during my term of leave.

I thank the Principals/Head Teachers and staff of the learning centres I visited for arranging, discussing and sharing in order to assist me with improving transitions for children in a sole charge school.

Purpose

To establish stronger connections between the various learning centres that our school contributes to or feeds into, so that children and whanau are better supported and informed.

Rationale

Transitioning can be stressful and create anxieties for both parents and child if not handled sensitively.

Children transitioning to a sole charge school as a 5 year old, may be the only 5 year old child in that school. These 5 year olds often arrive with a wide range of preschool experiences. We have had children with no preschool or playcentre experience due to the rural nature of some of our school community.

As well, children leaving at the end of Year 6, may be the only child from our school going to their new learning centre.

There was a need to ensure that these two stages of transition to and from our school were supporting the needs of whanau and the children.

This was an opportunity for a sole charge Principal to visit a variety of learning institutions and to engage in professional learning.

Methodology

Visits were made to centres and professional reading to find best practice, so that the schools transition documents and practices could be strengthened.

Findings

The definition of transition was taken from the NZC p41 2017 that transition was to be “positive and have a clear sense of continuity and direction”, and the children’s first schooling experience should make “connections with early childhood learning.”

Transitioning to Primary from Kindergartens

All had:

- An emphasis on child based learning to support the development of capabilities in children. The aim for children to be confident and competent learners with the 5 strands of: *Well Being, Belonging, Contribution, Communication and Exploration*.
- Assessment folders and on-line folders. Kindergartens were using using Eduka.

To varying degrees:

- Contact with a close school
- Visits to or by a close school
- Mat time
- Information about some of the schools that children may go to as a 5 year old. This ranged from a large permanent display with info packs to a small shelf area with info leaflets stacked like book spines on a shelf.

Some had:

- Curriculum sharing between the kindergarten and school. eg Magenta readers at the school transition programme were re-read during a reading or mat time at the kindergarten.
- Technology evident for children to use/view eg a computer, ipad, screen for photos to be displayed.
- Parents encouraged to share their child's assessment folder with the school to be attended.

Transitioning from primary to an intermediate:

A lot of effort goes into the transitioning of children from contributing primary schools to the intermediate. The process is modified and evolves each year after consultation and feedback from staff, parents, whanau and children. The main focus is to assist children and whanau reduce any anxieties. There is a real move towards establishing relationships between the child and their new teacher before the start of the new school year.

There is a clear and timetabled transition process which starts in Term 3 each year. This includes visits to the transition schools, discussion with transition teachers, visits by children to the school, visits and interviews available to parents, written information packs, discussion panels and a teacher dedicated to the transitional process.

General Implications

- Each early learning centre had a slightly different environment. Many were strong on a natural environment with one having a natural bush environmental type setting. Others focussed on a wide range of play equipment. Each had a slightly different curriculum emphasis eg te reo Maori, environmental, wide

range of activities. All endeavoured to cater for the developmental needs of the children.

- Smaller schools did not necessarily have their information packs actively on display at learning centres due to the infrequent transition into these schools.
- That children and parents were increasingly anxious about transitions from contributing schools but that the current transition process was addressing, understanding and in most cases allaying unnecessary stress.
- Primary schools visited were all having, to varying degrees, play based learning for the entry children and juniors. A particular mention goes to *Greenmeadows School* in Hastings. Here I observed their prospective of how playbased learning is developing to meet the needs of their children and how it is implemented and records of children's learning kept.

Reading into the research conducted on transitions and play-based learning helped to provide a rationale for what I had observed.

- I have a greater understanding of how Te Whariki links to the New Zealand curriculum.
- The importance of strong relationships and communication between all parties involved.

Interviews with parents:

- Most parents of preschoolers, who were spoken to, took advantage of visiting the school of choice prior to enrolment/start date. They were keen to participate in pre-schooler programmes at the school.
- Several parents of eldest children said that this took some courage.
- Many relied on the spoken word of others.
- Most were appreciative of the pre-schooler programme offered for their child.
- Some parents expressed their own anxiety.
- Parents wanted their children to be 'happy' and to have 'friends' at their new school. This seemed more important than the educational opportunities that a school offered.
- The importance of transitioning parents themselves needed to be recognised.
- Parents of children leaving at Year 6 commonly expressed the desire for their child to continue at the contributing primary school for Years 7 & 8, rather than take the next step. However, the robust transition process allayed most of their fears. From my past experience on contacting families in Week 3 of the new year, the parents and children are enthusiastic and settling well into their new environment.
- Transitioning of special needs children is generally stronger with parents, teachers and agencies meeting to discuss and share ways of supporting the child. The common link of the agency across this time period is invaluable.
- Most primary schools mentioned the importance of the new child having a buddy. With a small school this is part of the school family culture. It is also

identified as supporting Maori in their transition. Having a buddy was not mentioned for children arriving in Year 7, but was not specifically asked. However, the organisation of composite classes means that each class has supportive children who have been in the system a year. This would be a form of buddy support system.

Benefits

Having the time to visit schools during term time assisted me to gain a deeper understanding of the entry level experiences that children are getting from Te Whariki, the role of playschools and ways to ease transition to the Intermediate/area school.

- The transition procedure from early childhood centres has been strengthened.
- An updated information pack has been written and distributed
- An inclusion of play-based learning will be trialled with the whole of our sole charge school (more structure will be given to the Years 3-6)

I now feel in a strong position to make judgements about what is good practice for transitioning to/from Mokoia School.

Conclusions

All early learning centres, contributing schools and Year 7 schools were aware that there needed to be a transition process in place so that the needs of children and their family and whanau were being supported.

The community of learning inclusion of early learning centres was seen as a positive step by all kindergartens and everyone recognised the need for the transition process to be as seamless as possible to ensure continuity of the learning process.

Being able to actually observe programmes in action over a number of learning centres, seeing children engaged in their own learning and discussing with them their learning, has been very valuable.

Our school can now proceed with updating the transition process and implementing some changes.

References

- Te Whariki Early Childhood Education
- The New Zealand Curriculum
- Education Review Office May 2015 report - Continuity of learning: transitions from early childhood services to schools
- Play based learning – in particular Green Meadows School.
- Feed the Mind Ministry of Education 99189, 99188, K20106, 10132

- Early Learning: From your child's birth until they start school. Ministry of Education. www.minedu.govt.nz/Parents
- First Steps Literacy Resources
- Parents as first partners
- One Eye, Two Eyes, Three Eyes, Four: Why Reading aloud to children changes their lives forever: Meme Fox 2002
- SKIP: Strategies with kids/Information for Parents. Variety of booklets. www.familyservices.govt.nz/skip/
- Play Matters by Kathy Walker and various youtube clips.