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**“CROSSING THE BORDER”:
AN INTERPRETIVE STUDY OF CHILDREN
MAKING THE TRANSITION TO SCHOOL**

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Abstract

This thesis explored the experiences of children and their families as the children started school at one Aotearoa/New Zealand primary school. The study followed the progress of seven case study children and their families, from the children's last months in early childhood education, when they were four-years-old, until the children were eight, and had been at school for three years. Their stories are nested within a broader framework, looking at the transition experiences of 16 other children and families. Using an interpretive methodology, interview and observation data were gathered from the children, their parents, their early childhood and new entrant teachers, and other relevant school personnel. This provided a 'rich description' of the year in which the children's transitions took place. A series of interviews over the four-year period captured the case study participants' ongoing experiences and reflections.

An ecological framework was used to analyse the ways in which the children learned to 'do school' and took on the role of school pupils. It revealed the complex interweaving of characteristics of individual children, and their immediate and more remote environments, that led to different patterns of experiences. This helped to uncover why some children apparently settled happily into school, and for others the experience seemed more challenging. In understanding the children's experiences, it was important to look at the influences over time, rather than a single characteristic of either the child or context. It appeared that most difficulties were short-lived, but some children had ongoing problems that were potentially detrimental to their progress. The study provides insights into why this happened, and indicates possible actions to address the difficulties.

In the interrelated experiences of children, parents and teachers, the beliefs and practices of the adult participants helped to shape what happened for children. Complexity was evident here too, with transition practices that suited one group of participants sometimes viewed as problematic by others. There were also many, (sometimes contradictory), ideas, that appeared to be underpinned by different views about development. For example, an important issue for the school was the children's development of independence. This was at odds with the more sociocultural and ecological positions evident in the parents' and some early childhood teachers' beliefs about how children could be supported. The focus on independent children carried through into assessment practices at school, which tended to measure isolated skills,

and overlooked the influence of the teacher-created environment on children's learning and behaviour.

Different views about learning led to differing ideas about how children should be prepared for school. These beliefs were also played out at the macro level in systemic differences between early childhood education and school. Hence, the children's journey to becoming a school pupil involved crossing a cultural, as well as a physical border. The differences between the 'cultures' of home and early childhood center on one side, and school on the other, have been well documented in previous research. This study provides new insights into how these could be negotiated. Instead of eliminating differences to provide a smooth or seamless transition, I argue for sociocultural approaches, which capitalise on the developmental possibilities of coping with change. This involves supporting children in the process of becoming a pupil, where the difficulties appear to be beyond those that they can negotiate alone. Overall, it is proposed that enabling children and their families to become 'border crossers' into school requires those supporting them to recognize the multiple, interwoven influences on the process, to know what the hazards are from the border crossers' point of view, and have sufficient understanding of different perspectives to communicate in ways that are 'intelligible' to those involved.

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Chapter One

Introduction

“I want my mummy. I want to go home. I want my mummy.” After several minutes of trying to comfort the distressed child the teacher, aware of the 28 other five-year-olds in the class, some of whom also look ready to cry, adopts a brisk ‘no nonsense’ tone and says *“Well mummy doesn’t want a rowdy boy at home.”* Momentarily the tears cease and the boy states in a clear voice, *“But if I was at home I wouldn’t be crying”*.

The child’s logic in this anecdote captures the essence of a difficult transition to school, when children are compelled to be somewhere, that, at this moment at least, they are not happy to be. Teachers have to cope with both the distressed child and the rest of the class, and the parents/caregivers are likely to be feeling anxious, and perhaps wonder whether this initial distress signals temporary or ongoing problems. Hence, this can be a challenging time for all concerned. It gains significance because it is frequently viewed as a ‘high stakes’ transition, as the child and his/her family come into contact with the formal education system for the first time. This is perhaps because it embodies what Beach (in press, p. 9) calls a “lateral transition”, where participation in one activity “precedes and is replaced by” participation in another activity, and there is a notion of progress embedded in the sequence. Children themselves have been shown to view this transition as signaling that they are moving into the ‘big’ or ‘real’ world (Carr, 1997; James & Prout, 1997; Ledger, 2000). Earlier transitions (such as to an early childhood service, or between different early childhood services), may involve a change in role or identity, but generally have a less pronounced sense of progression. Further, the nature of children’s move to school is seen as having important implications for their later success (Alexander & Entwistle, 1988; Dockett, 2002; Dockett & Perry, 1999a; Early, Pianta & Cox, 1999). In recent years, research interest in this topic has grown rapidly, largely fueled by such assertions.

The aim of this study is to explore the experiences of children and their families as the children start school. It considers why, for some children, the move appears to go well, and for others, like the boy above, it is more challenging. The study offers insights into transitions, which have implications for parents and educators involved in the process. When it began, the main research in Aotearoa/New Zealand on transition to school was Renwick’s (1984) study. Since then a number of studies have been conducted. Some have looked specifically at children’s experiences (Ledger, 2000; Norris, 1999); others have considered the perspectives of early childhood and new entrant teachers regarding their beliefs and expectations (Robinson, Timperley, &

Bullard, 2000), or looked at ways of enhancing children's learning during the first year of school (Phillips, McNaughton, & MacDonald, 2002; Timperley, Robinson & Bullard, 1999). This research attention has been echoed in Australia (Dockett, 2002; Dockett & Perry, 1999a, 1999b, 2001a; Margetts, 1999, 2000, 2002a), the US (Graue, 1993b; La Paro & Pianta, 2000), the UK (Brooker, 2002; Dunlop, 1998a, 1998b, 2002; Fabian, 1998; 2002b; Pollard, 1996; Pollard & Filer, 1999; N. Smith, 2002, 2003), and other European countries (Broström, 2002; Griebel & Niesel, 1999; Kienig, 2002; Pramling & Williams-Granelid, 1993). These, and other studies, will be explored in more detail in the literature reviews chapters. Nevertheless, despite the growing body of research on this topic, there are still a number of questions to be answered. Chapter Six sets out the rationale for the present study.

In line with the academic interest, there has been increasing government attention to the transition to school, both locally and internationally. The New Zealand Ministry of Education has proposed "seamless" (Ministry of Education, 1994b) or "coherent" (Ministry of Education, 2002g) educational provision. Inherent in this seamlessness is the idea of a "smooth" transition. For example, the strategic directions *Education for the 21st Century* (Ministry of Education, 1994b) included drawing attention to the common elements in the early childhood and school curricula so that "early childhood educators and school teachers would support children's smooth transition to school" (p. 9). In a recent curriculum stocktake report, it was stated that a "smooth transition between early childhood and school is important to minimise the barriers to learning faced by young children" (Ministry of Education, 2002a, p. 43).

Within both the academic literature and the Ministry documents relating to the transition to school there appears to be two related threads. The first considers the connections between children's learning in prior-to-school and school contexts, and advocates that the latter builds on children's existing knowledge. A second aspect considers children's emotional well-being and advocates untroubled transitions. In claims regarding the importance of "smooth" transitions, it is not always clear which is being referred to.

This study addresses both the connections in children's learning and their emotional responses. It questions the extent to which educational provision can, or should be, 'seamless'. Firstly, because although recognizing and building on prior learning is important, economic and education policy that focuses on achieving seamless transitions generally advocates making the old setting more like the new one (Beach, in press). With regard to the transition to school, this appears to have been the case in many Western countries, evident in the pressure in the 1990s to push down school

curriculum and pedagogy into early childhood (Carr, 2001; Corrie, 1999; May, 2000). The recommendation for seamlessness or coherence therefore requires further interrogation, to clarify what is meant. Making early childhood education like school is likely to raise, rather than solve, problems because early formality is not necessarily in the best interests of children's learning (Blakemore, 2000; Elkind, 1990). Secondly, the goal for seamless or smooth experiences appears to have arisen in the context of a social climate in Western society where the avoidance of risk has, Furedi (2001, 2002) suggests, reached the point of obsession. Protecting children from potentially difficult situations overlooks the developmental possibilities of new challenges (Beach, in press; Furedi, 2001; Vygotsky, 1978a), and may create new problems for children who have not learned to manage small risks (Furedi, 2001). An alternative approach is to consider the overall picture of a child's experience and to be alert to how and when support might be offered.

The research focus

The design of this study was underpinned by research that has shown that children's experiences are influenced by complex social factors (Pollard, 1996) and that starting school is a "dynamic, multifaceted, interactive process between all participants involved" (Ghaye & Pascal, 1988, p. 206). Bronfenbrenner and Morris's (1997) framework for considering the reciprocal interactions of people with their environments provided the main theoretical base for exploring this complexity. They propose that these interactions vary systematically as a joint function of "the characteristics of the *developing person*; of the *environment* – both immediate and more remote – in which the processes are taking place; the nature of the *developmental outcomes* under consideration; and the social continuities and changes occurring over *time...*" (p. 996, emphasis in the original). Hence, this provides a useful framework for investigating different paths to different outcomes. In Chapter Two, I explain how I incorporated other perspectives into this model to provide the theoretical approach for this study.

My study contributes to the growing body of knowledge regarding transitions by addressing some unanswered questions regarding the interwoven patterns of influence that shape the pathways of those involved. As I discuss in Chapter Six, the initial research focus related to assessment within the context of school entry. The research questions developed as the study progressed, and the aims of my study became to explore how children and their families experience transition, the beliefs and practices that helped to shape the transition experiences, and some of the key issues for children in the process of them becoming pupils.

An interpretive methodology was used, resulting in a “rich narrative that is at once general and particularistic, broadly focused while thickly descriptive” (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p. 13). In keeping with this methodology, a case study approach was adopted, the setting being one Aotearoa/New Zealand primary school, and three of its contributing early childhood centres. The study follows the progress of seven case study children and their families from the children’s last months in early childhood education, when they were four years old, until the children were eight. Their stories of transition are nested within a broader framework, looking at the transition experiences of 16 other children and families, the children’s early childhood and new entrant teachers and other school personnel. A detailed picture is provided of the year in which the children’s transitions took place, drawn from the experiences of multiple participants, as well as a longitudinal dimension capturing ongoing experiences and reflections.

The intensely local focus of interpretive inquiry means that the sample is not selected to represent a population (Bassegy, 1999; Graue & Walsh, 1998; Holliday, 2002). Therefore the study does not seek to cover all types of early childhood services, school programmes, ethnic groups or levels of socio-economic status. However, within this case study the nature of the participant families varied enormously. For example, families ranged from a mother raising six children (and often two grandchildren) on her own, with the only income being a domestic purposes benefit, to families with one or two children being raised by two professional parents with high socioeconomic rankings; from recent immigrant families with so little English they were unable to interpret some of the information sheets and letters sent home by the school, to established New Zealand families where, in one case, the father of the current new entrant had attended this school when he was a child (see Chapter Eight for a full description of the participants).

Bronfenbrenner and Morris’s (1997) framework acknowledges the influence of expectations and events in the larger society. Therefore, to understand transition it is important to look broadly, both at the interaction of the different participants, and at the wider context in which the transition takes place. The following section briefly introduces the Aotearoa/New Zealand context that forms the setting for this study.

The Aotearoa/New Zealand context

The 1877 Education Act introduced free, universal, secular education into Aotearoa/New Zealand. It made education available for children aged 5 to 15 and compulsory for those aged 7 to 13. In 1901 the years of compulsory schooling were changed to 7 to 14. The 1964 Education Act lowered the age of compulsory education

from 7 to 6, giving legal recognition to what had, at that time, long been standard practice (UNESCO, 1972). Today schooling is compulsory from age 6 to 16, although the norm is to start at 5 and continue until 17 or 18 (Mutch, 2001).

The age of school entry is consistent with many other OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries. Although compulsory schooling starts at age four in Northern Ireland, and seven in Denmark, Finland and Sweden, for most OECD countries compulsory schooling starts at age six, and in some countries children may typically begin before the compulsory age. For example, in the UK the compulsory age is five but almost all children start in a voluntary basis at age four (Neuman, 2002).

What is less common worldwide is the New Zealand practice of starting on or just after the child's fifth birthday, (although Denmark has a similar 'rolling start'; see Neuman, 2002). Those children who start school between July and December, aged 6 or less are classified as Year 0. Children who start school from January to July are classed as Year 1. The year indicator increases by one each January, which is the start of the school year. Although officially classified as Year 0 or Year 1, children in their first year of school are often referred to as "new entrants", and the term is used frequently throughout this thesis. The practice of continuous enrolment means that new entrant classes grow in number throughout the year.

Early childhood provision

The majority of New Zealand children do receive some form of early childhood education, although attendance is not compulsory. Participation rates have increased almost 45% since 1990 (Blaiklock et al., 2002). Figures for 2001 suggested that around 15% of under one-year-olds, rising to more than 90% of 3- and 99% of 4-year-olds, were attending early childhood services, although these figures are inflated by concurrent enrolments in more than one service (Ministry of Education, 2002b). Information from schools suggested that around 91% of children had attended early childhood education (Ministry of Education, 2001c). Participation rates are higher for children from European backgrounds and those from families with higher incomes (Smith et al., 2000), and strategies are being developed to increase the participation of children from Maori and Pacific Island families (Ministry of Education, 2002g).

There is a wide range services. These include kindergartens, education and care centres, playcentres, nga kohanga reo, playcentres, Pacific Island language nests, home based services, correspondence school and others (see Ministry of Education, 1998a, 2002g for details). The two largest providers are education and care services, which

provide sessional, all-day, or flexible hour programmes for children from birth to school age, and kindergartens, which provide sessional programmes for mainly three and four-year-old children. These two services account for 43% and 26% of the total enrolments respectively (Ministry of Education, 2002b).

Intensity of participation varies, with many children attending early childhood services for only a small number of hours (Smith et al., 2000). In 2001, for licensed services the average attendance per child, per week, was just over 14 hours (Ministry of Education, 2001c). It is common for children to attend more than one early childhood service, either concurrently, or sequentially (Podmore, Sauvao & Mapa, 2001; Smith et al., 2000). Children therefore make both *vertical* transitions, such as those from home to early childhood service and from early childhood service to school, and *horizontal* transitions where the individual moves backwards and forwards between two activities within one day (Neuman, 2002).

Systemic differences between early childhood education and school

The situation in Aotearoa/New Zealand reflects many of the differences Kagan and Neville (1996) have described between schools and early childhood services in the US. Firstly, school attendance is seen as a right, and required by law, while early childhood education has never been fully legitimized. Instead it is tied up with the role of women in society (May, 1997), and attitudes towards it are subject to change. For example, in the 1950s, when women were encouraged to stay at home and care for their children, children attending early childhood services were seen as unfortunate. By the end of 20th century in response to new ideas about childhood and mothers, children who were not receiving early childhood education became the ones seen as unfortunate, or even at risk (May, 2000, 2001).

Secondly, their mission, as set out in the curriculum documents, is quite different. Curricula will be explored in more detail in Chapter Five, but, in brief, the early childhood curriculum *Te Whaariki* is based on the principles of empowerment, holistic development, family and community and relationships, with five 'Strands' arising from these: well-being, belonging, contribution, communication and exploration (Ministry of Education, 1996) while the school curriculum is based on more traditional 'Essential Learning Areas' (such as science, social studies, mathematics), 'Essential Skills' (e.g. physical skills, communication skills, problem solving skills) and 'Attitudes and Values' (Ministry of Education, 1993b). For each of the seven 'Essential Learning Areas' there is a separate curriculum document.

Finally, school education has been seen as a worthwhile investment by the state since 1877, and schooling is provided free of charge to all within the public sector. Early childhood education was less successful at accessing government funding (May, 1997) and although government investment in early childhood has increased, differential funding still exists. Early childhood services are often “caught in the vortex between being a public good and a market commodity” (Kagan & Neville, 1996, p. 398).

These differences affect the approaches of the two sectors to pedagogy, parents and families, and their sense of professionalism (Kagan & Neville, 1996). Both sectors draw on a largely child-centred pedagogy but external requirements and the structure of the curriculum documents means there are more constraints in putting this into practice in school. From its earliest beginnings, those involved in kindergartens in Aotearoa/New Zealand were skeptical about the instruction methods that characterized state education (May, 1997). Parents and caregivers can be involved in schools in a number of ways: as members of the board of trustees or Parent Teacher Association, and helping with the activities of the school. Nevertheless, parents tend to have a less powerful influence in schools than in early childhood services, perhaps due to the tradition of schools acting ‘in loco parentis’.

Schoolteachers are generally accorded a higher level of professionalism than early childhood teachers as a result of their training, conditions of service, and pay. In 2001 around 50% of New Zealand early childhood teaching staff had a Diploma of Teaching, or higher qualification (Ministry of Education, 2002b), which is significantly less than the school sector. Even highly qualified early childhood teachers maybe still be accorded a less professional status. In Australia, Corrie (1999) found early childhood teachers were often the butt of primary teachers’ jokes, and told they were ‘baby sitters’ and not ‘real teachers’, a lay view that is not unheard of here. Early childhood teachers also receive considerably less pay than their primary colleagues. Pay parity discussions in 2002 indicated that a new kindergarten teacher with a degree would receive an increase of 53% to achieve parity with primary by 2006 (“Kindy teachers ratify pay parity”, 2002). Early childhood teachers in other settings are dependent on the “flow on” effects of pay parity for kindergarten teachers to raise their salaries (Ministry of Education, 2002g, p14).

Addressing the differences between early childhood education and school

Given the systemic differences described above it is not surprising that, despite a government focus on “seamless” education, a number of tensions between the sectors were evident when a national seminar on *Transition to School* was held in Wellington in 1997. Reporting on the two-day event, Tony Holmes (1998) commented that

although there was apparent congruence in the philosophical and pedagogical approaches of the early childhood and primary keynote addresses, the “relationships between the early childhood and school practitioners remained strained.... There was little sharing of experience with goodwill, or initiatives about coming together...”. He concluded, “while some teachers from each sector reported that they are working together to ease the transition into school, it was evident that much more needs to be done” (p. 51).

In 2001 a working party was involved in extensive consultation to develop a 10-year strategic plan for early childhood education. Their report included a range of recommendations, one of which was that transitions between early childhood services and schools should be improved, and that this would require “further policy work in consultation with the EC [early childhood] sector and schools” (Ministry of Education, 2001b, p. 11). In the final version, one of the strategies was to “promote coherence of education between birth and eight years” (Ministry of Education, 2002g, p. 17). Some of the ways it was proposed this would be achieved was through:

- promoting better understanding between ECE [early childhood education] teachers and primary teachers about the links between *Te Whaariki* and the New Zealand Curriculum Framework
- promoting better understanding between ECE teachers and primary teachers about the pedagogical approaches in ECE and schools
- distributing information about effective transition from ECE to school practices. (p. 17)

What is not clear in the plan is the nature of the ‘understanding’ that is to be developed. One promising view is that it is about ensuring children’s early primary school experiences “interface” appropriately with their early childhood experiences, so that “they are likely to be confident that they can participate fully and successfully in all learning opportunities” (Ministry of Education, 2002a, p. 43), but even this statement is open to different interpretations. Further, moving forward to promote ‘understanding’ has to take account of the systemic differences between the sectors.

Discontinuity between preschools and schools extends to what people think, welling up as biases, suspicion, and feelings of superiority between the two domains, conditions both contributing to and reinforced by lack of communication between school and preschool practitioners. (Kagan & Neville, 1996, p. 401)

Exactly what is involved in an “effective” transition is also unclear. As Chapter Four will show, the flood of research on transitions has led to a wealth of advice, but in some respects this has made the task more challenging for parents and teachers, as there are many conflicting ideas. Further, the feasibility of some of the recommendations needs to be considered. This study provides a picture of the transition experiences of the participants with the level of detail that allows the interwoven patterns of influence to be examined. Given the current focus on transitions, in both policy and practice, its findings are even timelier now, than when the study first began.

Personal perspective

My interest in the transition to school started over twenty years ago when I read an article in a woman’s magazine that described the experiences of six children, from diverse family backgrounds, starting school in an urban English primary school. As a new parent I found it very interesting and the memory of the children’s stories stayed with me, as did the idea that recognising and celebrating diversity was important in education. A full account of the research project is reported in *Starting School* (B. Jackson, 1979), and reading this book many years later was like revisiting old friends. By this time I had already embarked on my doctoral study of transition, brought there by reading, research, and a question frequently posed by parents attending early childhood workshops I have run, namely, “What happens when my child goes to school?” My personal background made this a particularly appropriate topic for me to investigate, as I have been involved in both early childhood and primary education for many years. I trained as an early childhood teacher but was subsequently involved in extensive research with children aged four to seven. As an academic I have had a long standing interest in the early years (0 to 8). My tertiary teaching includes teacher education programmes for both early childhood and primary school teachers.

The years of this study are characterized by a “transition” in my own thinking about the topic I was studying. My initial literature review led me to set out with the view that the well-documented difficulties during transition were ‘a problem to be fixed’, with ‘smooth transitions’ as a goal. As I explored the experiences of the participants I came to see transitions as complex events ‘to be understood’, and ‘smooth’ transitions as more problematic than policy documents implied. The notion of ‘border crossing’ developed as I prepared to share the findings with teachers, and between 2000 and 2002 I ran several professional development workshops entitled “Crossing the border”. This metaphor seemed apt because it did not imply that transitions would be difficult, but also did not negate the fact that some are. I drew parallels with traveling between countries. Some borders, such as the one between England and Scotland, are hardly

noticeable, and while there are some differences in culture, these are generally easy to adapt to. In other places borders involve checkpoints, and even armed guards. Crossing may be difficult, and life on the other side can be very different, with new laws, customs and so on to adapt to. However, even when a new setting is very different, the journey can be a pleasant one. It all depends on the nature of the experiences and how these are perceived by the traveler. Chapter Two shows how the ideas of border crossing was refined and incorporated into a theoretical model for exploring transition experiences.

The structure of the thesis

Chapter Two outlines the theoretical background that provides a framework for the thesis. Maturation, sociocultural and ecological theories for studying transitions are considered, and the relevance of other theories, including notions of social and cultural capital, and rites of passage is acknowledged. A framework is proposed for understanding the broad range of influences on children's pathways as they make the transition to school. Chapters Three and Four review the research literature relating to the transition to school. Chapter Three focuses on the experiences of children. It considers some of the challenges posed by the discontinuities that commonly exist between school and prior to school contexts. Children's experiences as they negotiate this transition can be thought of as a pathway or journey as they take on the role of school pupils. Chapter Four looks at parents/caregivers, and the wealth of advice offered to families and teachers regarding the ways children's experiences of starting school can be enhanced. Chapter Five expands on the information in this introduction, to provide a more detailed consideration of the Aotearoa/New Zealand context. Chapter Six describes the position taken in the original proposal for this study, and sets out the rationale for the final research questions. Chapter Seven reviews literature on research methods to provide a rationale for the interpretive methodology that was selected to address the research questions. The research method is described in Chapter Eight.

The findings of the study are presented in five chapters. Firstly, the stories of the seven case study families are told in Chapter Nine. These stories span a time frame of nearly four years and shed light on important aspects of the transition experience. Chapters Ten through Thirteen focus on the initial transition year by exploring the views and experiences of the 23 participant children and families, their teachers, and others who impact on the transition. Chapter Ten explores the way families and schools were positioned in their early contact with one another, and the beliefs and practices of the adults that framed what happened for children at the beginning of the transition process. Chapter Eleven continues the story, and looks at how beliefs and

practices continued to shape the participants' experiences once the children started school. Chapter Twelve examines different ideas about early learning and how these gave rise to tensions and conflicts in the adult's beliefs about preparing children for school. Chapter Thirteen concludes the presentation and discussion of findings. It explores key issues in the process of becoming a pupil, including the regulation of time for work and rest, using the school toilets, curriculum and pedagogy, relationships with peers, and specific issues for the children who did not share the predominantly European culture of the school. Chapter Fourteen brings together the many different aspects outlined in the results chapters to provide an overall discussion of the key findings and conclusions, and considers their implications for practice and further research.

Chapter Two

Theoretical context

There are a number of theoretical perspectives that inform the study of transition to school. This chapter reviews some of the dominant theories in this field, including maturational approaches, sociocultural and ecological theories, Sameroff's (1975, 1991) transactional model, notions of social and cultural capital, and rites of passage. The relevance of these for studying transition is considered, followed by a rationale for the broadly sociocultural and ecological perspective chosen for the conceptual framework for this thesis.

Before proceeding, it is relevant to note that in any study of children and school it is important to keep in mind the complex interaction between ideas about children and child rearing (including education) and ideas about society. The 'transition to school' only occurs when children are educated outside the home. To document the rise of universal schooling in the countries from which the literature in this, and the following three chapters, was drawn is beyond the scope of this thesis, but it is important to acknowledge that the 'taken for granted' assumptions about education that underpin many school practices should be recognized as products of both time and place. For example, mass schooling gave rise to a particular type of childhood: separating children from society; devaluing the knowledge they gained from their parents and others; and emphasizing children's value as investments for the future, a future for which they had to be appropriately trained (Hendrick, 1997). It has been argued that the school practices that developed were based on preparing a population for the regularity and control of work in factories (Fernie, 1988; Scott, 1982), the legacy of which remains, even though society has changed substantially.

Ideas surrounding the care and education of young children also reflect attitudes to the role of women in society (May, 1997; Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989). This is touched on here, and considered further in Chapter Four. The availability of early childhood services also reflects societal attitudes to the care and education of children, as does the age at which the child makes the transition to school.

Age of school entry

Today there is variation around the world in the age at which children start formal schooling, but in most Western countries this occurs at some time between the ages of four and seven (Fabian & Dunlop, 2002; Neuman, 2002; Sharp, 1988). The structure of educational provision is often governed by early childhood and school regulations that specify type of service, group size and adult-child ratios based on the

chronological ages of the children they serve. In an overview of eight European and Australasian countries provided by Fabian & Dunlop (2002) a similar pattern can be seen in each, with much higher adult to child ratios for younger children and all children having moved to school by age seven. Where school entry is below seven, the first years (e.g. the kindergarten year in North America, reception and infant classes in the UK, and new entrant and junior classes in Aotearoa/New Zealand) are generally seen to be less formal than the years that follow.

The organization of education by age has a long history, within which the ages six and seven have often been distinguished as significant. For example, in Ancient Greece both the Spartans and the Athenians chose age seven as the time formal education should begin (Curtis & Boulton, 1956). Sameroff & Haith (1996) have documented historical evidence that indicated awareness of differences in children's behaviour after about age six that allowed them to take on adult-like tasks, such as care of other children, finding food and providing labour. Even in medieval times, when it appears that children were depicted and treated as little adults, full involvement in adult work and play usually occurred from age six or seven (Aries, 1973; Clarke-Stewart & Koch, 1983). Therefore, although modern schooling separates children from adult life (May, 2000), rather than including them in adult tasks, it follows the earlier trend of signaling a change in role around this age, and provides discipline and training of mind and body in preparation for adult life (Germeten, 2000; Scott, 1982).

Age-related organizational structures imply, in part at least, a belief in stages associated with particular ages. Concerns expressed about the experiences of four-year-olds in school imply that four-year-olds are qualitatively different from five-year-olds (Dowling, 1995; Ghaye & Pascal, 1988; Griffin & Harvey, 1995; Judd, 1999; Neuman, 2002; Sharp, 1988; Sharp, Hutchison & Whetton, 1994). Interestingly, in Norway similar concerns were expressed about six-year-olds, when a new law in 1997 lowered the age of school entry to six instead of seven years (see Germeten, 2000). To explore transition practices and experiences it is therefore helpful to consider the long history of maturational theories in Western history.

Maturational theories

Maturational theories suggest that development is a process of unfolding or blooming with age, in a predictable fashion, and represents an outward expression of innate biological structures (Clarke-Stewart & Koch, 1983; A. Smith, 1998). This idea is evident in the work of Rousseau (1712-1778) (Lucas, 1972; White, 1996), and later in the evolutionary theories of Spencer (1820-1903) and Hall (1844-1924), who saw development of the human race mirrored in the development of the individual child,

and proposed that education should follow this development (Banks, 1980; Hall, 1883; Spencer, 1968). The resulting child study movement in the US and later the UK (Selleck, 1968) challenged that idea that children should be fitted to the school, and instead focused attention on the nature, needs and development of the child (Cremin, 1961).

The work of Hall and his associates was largely rejected after World War I as being amateur and sentimental (Schlossman, 1981), with the underlying theoretical ideas drawing from the major evolutionary ideas of the times (Travers, 1983). The postwar period looked to more 'scientific' research to understand children. At the same time, parent education, which had formed part of the child study movement, flourished (Schlossman, 1981). The new scientific approach was evident in the work of Gesell (1880-1961), a student of Hall's, whose large-scale systematic data collection resulted in very detailed descriptions of the ages at which most children reach developmental milestones (Clarke-Stewart & Koch, 1983). Traces of recapitulation theory were still evident in Gesell's claim that development was primarily the expression of the ancient processes of evolution. Age five stood out as a nodal age, where the child has "scaled the steepest ascent" (from infancy) and has "reached a sloping plateau" (to maturity) (Gesell & Ilg, 1965, p. 62).

At age five he [sic] has already come a long way. He has surmounted a hilltop. He is no longer a mere baby. He is "a little fellow"! He is almost self-dependent in the elementary routines of life at home. He is ready for the simple community life of a schoolroom.... The 5-year old at least presents a preliminary vision of the ultimate adult. Perhaps he registers in a dim way what was once a plateau of full maturity in the remote racial past. (Gesell & Ilg, 1965, p. 14)

Gesell and Ilg (1965) gave a detailed description of general traits and trends of behaviour for each age. At age five these "*underlying pervasive traits constitute his 5-year-oldness*". They are the maturity traits which make him somewhat different from the 4-year-old and the 6-year old" (p. 62, italics in the original). These were *not* to be regarded as "rigid norms, nor as models", but simply illustrated "the kinds of behaviour (desirable or otherwise) which tend to occur at this age" (p. 5). However, they have a history of being used to measure the progress of children against documented descriptions (Clarke-Stewart & Koch, 1983; Spodek, 1973). The idea of being able to judge children to a standard underpinned the baby contests that became popular in the mid 20th century, where babies could be judged on their uniformity to physical norms (Wrigley, 1989) and is implicit in the notion of a child who is 'ready for school', where the traits that are believed to make up this readiness are seen as located solely within the child.

Writers from the Gesell Institute went on to develop a battery of tests to determine the child's developmental level, and made the influential recommendation that "regardless of age in years, we consider a child's general performance needs to be at a 5-year-old level before he [sic] enters kindergarten, and at a 6-year-old level before he enters first grade" (Ilg & Ames, 1964, p. 18). In addition to a verbal interview and paper and pencil tests, examiners were advised to inspect a child's teeth. Delayed eruption of the second teeth, it was proposed, should sound warning bells for educators as the child was at a lower 'biological age' than the chronological age suggested. Earlier, Steiner (1861-1925) believed the change of teeth signaled a change in thought processes, making this the appropriate time for formal schooling to begin (Harwood, 1963). Ilg and Ames (1964) raised the question as to whether the fact that in boys the second teeth often erupted without the first teeth being lost, meant that they had "greater difficulties in transitions, that they are more apt to hold onto their past" (p. 238).

Such readiness tests made expectations explicit, however questionable they now appear in their validity. Implicit measures may also be used. For example, in Aotearoa/New Zealand the critical comments teachers made about some children's lack of attention or language skills in Renwick's (1984) study indicated that children were being assessed against an image teachers had of what they expected of a five-year-old. Burman (2000) has discussed how there is often a slippage from such constructed norms being acknowledged as *descriptions*, to them acting as *prescriptions*. When this happens, the conditions and assumptions that gave rise to them often become invisible and the constructed norms can be accorded a "natural" status (p. 3). It seems likely that implicit norms such as those suggested in Renwick's (1984) data would render their underlying assumptions even more invisible than the explicit norms underpinning readiness tests. Hence, while the results of such judgments are likely to have implications for children, especially given that deviation from norms are typically seen as deficits (Burman, 1997, 2000), the basis of such judgments may go unquestioned. This can raise issues for transition because descriptions such as "retarded, backward, abnormal, deprived or even deviant" are sometimes applied to those whose patterns seem different to dominant norms (May, 2001, p. 14).

Understanding the role of environmental influences did not feature strongly in the early maturational theories, although it was often acknowledged. For example, Rousseau, advocated children being allowed to unfold 'as nature intended', but believed that the environment could impact negatively on this development. Hence, from age five, children would ideally be raised in the countryside where they could be

protected from the harmful influences of society (cited in Lucas, 1972, pp. 348-349). Much later, Gesell and Ilg (1965) acknowledged that while “our task is to point out the influence of age on the growth of behavior”, children grow up in very different contexts and “that must make some difference” (p. 61). In contrast, Piaget (1969/1970) said it was impossible to determine the boundary between the contributions made by the mind’s structural maturation and the influences of the environment, but the environment could play “a decisive role” in a child’s development (p. 173). Piaget’s position has been described as interactionist (Hunt, 1969).

Piaget’s research findings suggested a sequence of stages; sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational and formal operational, that always succeeded one another in the same order. Although he described the sequence as universal, he acknowledged that the social environment and “acquired experience” could influence the age at which an individual passed through each stage (Piaget, 1969/1970, p. 37). However, Piaget believed that adults could not impose new ideas onto a child prematurely. ‘True’ understanding was only achieved when the child developed new concepts independently and spontaneously (Piaget, 1953).

The roles of parents and teachers

Piaget’s theory was particularly popular during the 1960s and has been credited with being a key force, along with earlier writers such as Dewey and Isaacs, in the progressive, ‘child-centred’ approach to education in Britain, America (Burman, 1997; Morss, 1991; E. Sullivan, 1967) and New Zealand (May, 2001). Child-centred developmental theories fostered an interest in children’s physical and psychological well-being, and parents and teachers were deemed responsible for providing suitable conditions for the development of the next generation.

Early in the 20th century Freud (1856-1939) had stated that how infants and children came through each stage of development depended on how mothers handled their behaviour (Clarke-Stewart & Koch, 1983). By the mid 20th century the child’s relationship with his/her mother was seen by Bowlby (1965) as a crucial influence on the child’s mental health. However, there was also some ambivalence towards mothers, especially those from the lower classes, whose parenting style made them, in the eyes of psychologists, ‘bad’ or incompetent (Singer, 1992). These ideas about parenting will be explored further in Chapter Four.

For teachers, Piaget’s work offered valuable insights into the way children actively construct knowledge as they manipulate and explore their world (Ebbeck, 1996),

challenging the dominant view in American psychology at the time that everything could be reduced to stimulus and response (Hunt, 1969). Piaget's ideas were generally taken to mean that the teacher should identify the child's current stage of development and plan the curriculum according to the concepts the child is deemed ready to make sense of. The teacher should not instruct children but could create opportunities for children to confront inconsistencies in their own thinking, that would hopefully stimulate further self-discovery, leading to structural change in thinking (Brainerd, 1978). In Piaget's (1969/1970) opinion, this required well-trained teachers who had received specialized theoretical and practical instruction. Within the child-centred pedagogy that developed, Burman (1997) noted that pupil success could be seen as due to the appropriateness of the pedagogy at school, but pupil failure was attributed to home background. This idea has a continued legacy in some quarters. As Mayall (1994) explained it:

Many school teachers... [including those studied by Mayall] think of their schools as child-centred, as model environments, as havens of ideals and good practices in an imperfect world. The school's goals, delivery of the curriculum, social norms and practices are founded on knowledge of 'facts' of child development.... If children challenge school norms, teachers find it irrelevant to attend to the points underlying the challenge. Since the school is a model environment, the fault must lie with the children – or their homes – if they dislike it. (p. 122)

Overall, maturational theories have led to the belief that all children change in the same predictable sequence, that education should be matched to developmental level, and that children should not be taught what they are not ready to learn, an approach that has proved problematic in practice (Burman, 1997; A. Smith, 1993, 1998). Also, from being purely descriptive, identifying features associated with a particular age (in a particular historical and social context), maturational theories can lead to a fictional image of the individual "stripped of all that tied her [sic] to time, place and position", which then functions as an unquestioned norm, deviation from which can be seen as a deficit or problem (Burman, 2000, p. 3). Thus the child becomes an object of normalisation, and the abstract map of development provided by the theory can lead people to conclude 'children of this age are like (or should be like) that', and lose sight of the complex, contextualised reality of the children's everyday lives (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999). Equally problematic is the emphasis on the role of mothers and the pathologising of home background, where this is used as the sole explanation for children not meeting socially constructed norms. Such a view is disempowering for both children and teachers, and offers few solutions to the problems many children experience in the transition to school. It is important to be aware of how these ideas

influence practice in a setting, but more promising theoretical perspectives for *understanding* the complexity of individual experiences can be found in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (van der Veer & Valsiner, 1993, 1994; Vygotsky, 1978a, 1978b, 1978c), which has been extended by others (e.g. Bruner, 1985; Rogoff, 1990, 1997), and in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1992; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1997).

Sociocultural theories

Vygotsky (1896-1934) proposed two lines of development, firstly the organic growth or maturation of the child, and secondly the line of "cultural improvement of psychological functions, the working out of new methods of reasoning, the mastering of cultural methods of behaviour" (Vygotsky, 1994, p. 57). Consistent with the theories outlined in the previous section, Vygotsky's (1978c) recognised that both maturation and the environment play a role in development, but he described maturation as only a secondary factor in the development of the most complex, unique forms of human development. "The processes of development display such complicated qualitative transformations of one form into another... that the notion of growth cannot be applied" (Vygotsky & Luria, 1994, p. 100). For Vygotsky (1994), the cultural context was central to development. He felt that mental functioning in the individual could only be understood by examining the social and cultural processes from which it derives (Wertsch & Tulviste, 1992). A key feature of this was the child's interactions with others. Higher psychological functions emerge first in the "collective behaviour of the child", in cooperation with others, and only subsequently become internalized (Vygotsky, 1935 cited in van der Veer & Valsiner, 1993, p. 317). In Vygotsky's view, human mental functioning, even when carried out by an individual in isolation, was inherently social, or sociocultural, in that it incorporates socially evolved and socially organized tools (Wertsch & Tulviste, 1992).

The child is not passive and simply moulded by the environment. Instead it is a mutual relationship (van der Veer & Valsiner, 1993). Vygotsky's view that human beings are culture-producing and culture-produced (Bronfenbrenner, 1992) offers possibilities for studying how children shape and are shaped by the culture of the school and the classroom. His observation that the structure of the mind is affected by the tools for thinking in a given culture (John-Steiner & Soubberman, 1978) also has implications for pedagogy in multicultural classrooms. This is highlighted in Pinxten's (1994a, 1994b) work in mathematics, where he found that part-whole thinking fits with Western views of the world but may be marginal or non-existent in other cultures. He gave the example of Navajo Indians, whose cultural tools for thinking were dynamic and focused on events and processes, rather than on things or

structures that can be viewed as wholes comprising constituent parts or parts in a whole.

The following aspects of Vygotsky's theory are also relevant to transition. Although Vygotsky (1978a) appeared to accept in general the idea of norms of development, (i.e. describing children as being at an 'eight-year-old level') he felt it was incorrect to suggest that they function only at one level. He distinguished between a child's actual level of development, which he defined as functions that have already matured, and those functions that were in the process of maturation. A key idea was the zone of proximal development, described as:

the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (Vygotsky, 1978a, p. 86)

Vygotsky (1978a) explained this further using the example of two ten-year-old children who both function at what he calls an eight-year-old level when solving a set of tasks independently. If these children are then shown ways of dealing with the task with adult assistance, and one child is, in these circumstances, able to deal with problems to a twelve-year-old level and the other to a nine-year-old level the difference between twelve and eight, and nine and eight, are their respective zones of proximal development.

Learning in the zone of proximal development:

awakens a variety of internal development processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his [sic] environment and in cooperation with his peers. Once these processes are internalized, they become part of the child's independent developmental achievement. (Vygotsky, 1978a, p. 90)

Therefore, rather than waiting for developmental 'readiness', adults and peers stimulate development by challenging the child within the zone of proximal development. School learning and instruction should be ahead of the child's cognitive development, creating a zone of proximal development (John-Steiner & Soubberman, 1978; van der Veer & Valsiner, 1993). New experiences such as transition can therefore be seen as actually promoting development, provided the child receives appropriate support. However, as the example shows, the zone of proximal development may be different for each child. Vygotsky (1978a) argued that if the challenges are beyond the level of the zone of proximal development, the child will not be able to benefit from the help that is offered.

Bruner and his colleagues looked at the nature of the tutorial process where an expert helped a novice accomplish a task. They called the help provided “scaffolding” (Wood, Bruner and Ross, 1976, p. 90). It involved engaging the novice’s attention and interest, reducing the complexity of the task (in effect letting the learner do as much as he/she can manage and the tutor filling in the rest), keeping the learner on task, highlighting crucial features of the task, reducing the learner’s frustration and demonstrating or modeling behaviours until the tutee is “checked out to fly on his [sic] own” (p. 96). Although Wood et al.’s (1976) study was a controlled experiment, such tutoring is evident in many aspects of everyday life. Tomasello (1999) proposed that it is this intentional instruction that distinguishes humans as a species.

Later Bruner (1985) used the idea of scaffolding specifically in relation to the role of the tutor in the zone of proximal development. He proposed that the tutor serves as

a vicarious form of consciousness until such a time as the learner is able to master his [sic] own consciousness and control.... The tutor in effect performs the critical function of “scaffolding” the learning task to make it possible for the child, in Vygotsky’s words, to internalize external knowledge and convert it into a tool for conscious control. (pp. 24-25)

This approach is evident in apprenticeship models of learning that are found in many cultures (Cole, 1985; Rogoff, 1990, 1997), and is consistent with the Maori practice of tuakana/teina where an older child assists a younger one in his/her learning (Royal-Tangaere, 1997). With regard to transition, it is not only adults, but older siblings and peers who can support the child within the zone of proximal development.

Intersubjectivity

The relationship between the child and the more capable ‘other’ has been explored by those who followed Vygotsky, even though this wasn’t a feature of Vygotsky’s own work (van der Veer & Valsiner, 1993). Rogoff (1990) called the mutual understanding between people in communication ‘intersubjectivity’. This requires a context of shared meaning and understanding to be established, so that the person working with a learner can sensitively adjust the scaffolding to extend the learner’s development. Although a teacher cannot focus on the individual learning of one student for more than brief moments at a time (Nuthall, 2001), children do need to feel accepted and tuned in to teachers, and vice versa (A. Smith, 1998). However, research suggests that this may not always be achieved, firstly because teachers often do not listen sufficiently to what children have to say (Ledger, 2000; Volk, 1997). Also, children do not get equal attention from their teachers, and the presence of so-called invisible

children in educational settings is widely documented (e.g. Meade, 1985; Pye, 1988; Young-Loveridge, Carr, & Peters, 1995). Consideration of intersubjectivity (or the lack of it) provides one theoretical lens for looking at their experiences.

Building on the work of Vygotsky, who had claimed that we base ourselves on what has preceded us, Rogoff (1997) saw no boundary between the individual and the environment because the individual forms part of the environment. She also saw no separation of past, present and future. “Acting in the present involves reference to prior events and activities as well as others that are anticipated in the future” (p. 272). Rogoff’s view provides impetus for a longitudinal approach that considers how both prior events, and ideas about the future, contribute to transition experiences.

Sociocultural theories therefore provide a useful base for exploring the transition to school. However, two criticisms of Vygotsky’s view need to be kept in mind. One is that the role of the social other is presented as always helpful, when it may not always be the case. van der Veer & Valsiner (1994) drew attention to the possibility that those working with the child could promote ignorance, or be potentially detrimental in other ways. Secondly, while Vygotsky is credited with being the first modern psychologist to suggest the mechanisms by which culture becomes part of each person’s nature (Cole & Scribner, 1978), his focus was largely on small group and adult-child dyad interaction, and made little mention of broader historical, institutional or cultural processes, although there were indications that he was moving towards considering these links in his later writing (Wertsch, 1991). An approach that considers how a person’s biological dispositions interact with environmental forces in a complex system of relationships, affected by multiple levels of the environment, is Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1992; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1997).

Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory

Bronfenbrenner (1992) defined the ecology of human development as:

the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation, throughout the life course, between an active, growing human being, and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the person lives, as this process is affected by the relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded. (p. 188)

Concerned about the widespread context-free study of human development at the time, Bronfenbrenner (1979) directed attention to the different levels of the environment, (micro-, meso-, exo- and macrosystems), and how they both influence and are

influenced by a developing person. The microsystems are patterns of activities, roles and relationships experienced in a given setting. The mesosystem comprises the interrelationships between the microsystems. Events in one microsystem can affect what happens in another (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). There may be connections between them, (e.g. a child's siblings and friends may be present at both home and school). Communication between settings is also important. Anne Smith (1998) stated that if there are "warm, reciprocal and balanced relationships between preschool and school teachers the transition will be supportive of development" (p. 14). The exosystem refers to settings that do not involve the developing person but affect or are affected by what happens in the microsystem. Three exosystems that were likely to be particularly influential on a child's development were the parents' workplace, the parents' social networks and community influences on family functioning (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). The macrosystem refers to the overriding beliefs, values, ideology, practices and so on that exist, or could exist, within a culture.

Central to Bronfenbrenner's theory is the notion of development as the joint function of person and environment, and yet, reflecting on the impact of his initial work, Bronfenbrenner (1992) concluded that in seeking to draw attention to the impact of environment on development, he had downplayed his interest in the individual. This had had the effect of generating a substantial body of research where development was viewed as a product of environment only. He noted the range of research designs where differences in development were attributed to social addresses, such as social class, family size, family composition, nationality or ethnic group, type of child care and so on "through some process or processes that remain unspecified" (p. 193). These provide a useful frame for looking at the surface of a new area of investigation, but gave little indication of what the actual experiences were that gave rise to the findings (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

A more profitable approach in Bronfenbrenner's view was to consider characteristics of both person and context. This has the potential to identify ecological niches; "regions in the environment that are especially favorable or unfavorable to the development of individuals with particular personal characteristics" (1992, p. 194). Although many studies focus on groups that are deemed at risk, "probably because of the greater concern, both on the part of professionals and of the general public, with problem behavior" (1992, p. 195), such a model can identify ecological niches that are favourable to development.

Introducing the idea of a chronosystem, Bronfenbrenner (1992) added the element of time to his model, noting that the environment is not a fixed entity (for example,

family structure or social class can change over time). The chronosystem model might be long-term, e.g. examining the cumulative effects of a sequence of transitions such as the different developmental paths set in motion by the Great Depression, or short term, considering the same group of people before and after a life transition (such as the changes in parent-child interaction induced by the impending arrival of a sibling). These changes might be normative (e.g. starting school) or non normative (e.g. a death in the family). As in Vygotsky's theory, Bronfenbrenner (1986) saw these transitions as potentially providing impetus for developmental change.

Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1997) revised the model further into a more complex and dynamic structure. At the core of the model are proximal processes; the interaction of individual and environment over time. The power of such processes to influence development was shown to vary substantially and systematically "as a function of the characteristics of the developing *Person*, of the immediate and more remote *environmental Contexts* and the *Time* periods in which the proximal processes take place" (p. 994, emphasis in the original). Person characteristics included dispositions, resources and demand characteristics. These interact with features of the environment that invite, permit or inhibit, engagement.

Starting school is an example of an ecological transition, which occurs "whenever a person's positioning in the ecological environment is altered as a result of change of role or setting, or both" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 26) and a number of writers have used ecological systems theory in studies of this event (e.g. Dockett & Perry, 2001b; Dunlop, 2002; Ledger, 2000; N. Smith, 2002). Most have considered the two-way influence of child and contexts, the connections among contexts, such as the relationship between home and school, and the importance of attending to the wider contextual influences. In its attention to transactions between individual and the environment over time, Bronfenbrenner and Morris's (1997) framework offers further potential for exploring the different cycles or pathways that develop.

Sameroff's transactional Model

Bronfenbrenner's (1992) description of ecological niches, vicious and benign cycles in the process of human development, and his notion of proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1997) are similar to the transactional model described by Sameroff (1975, 1991). Like Vygotsky and Bronfenbrenner, Sameroff (1975) described the interaction of individual and environment, where characteristics of both individual and environment change over time. He saw development not as a set of traits but "the *processes* by which these traits are maintained in the transactions between organism and environment" (p. 281, emphasis in the original). Sameroff

(1975) illustrated this with an example looking at infant-mother relationships. He described how an anxious mother may influence an obstetrician to use techniques that speed the delivery, these may result in the baby being fussy and unresponsive, which in turn could lead to anxiety and hostility in the mother. The mother's own emotional health may then prevent her from adapting to the temperament of the child, so that the child becomes increasingly difficult, and the mother finds it harder to cope (see Figure 1). He used this example to show that not one factor (e.g. the complicated delivery, the child's temperament or the mother's anxiety), led to the outcome, but instead it was due to the complex interweaving of several factors. Hence, negative outcomes for a child resulted not from a single trait or experience, but as a function of a continuous "malfunction in the organism-environment transaction across time", that prevents the child from organizing his/her world adaptively. He believed that forces influencing the child's integration with the environment act not at one point, but throughout the child's development (pp. 281-282).

In a later discussion, Sameroff (1991) suggested three potential ways of intervening, which also offer useful insights for transition. The first he called remediation, and looked at changing the child. In relation to transition to school, interventions that focus on empowering children to cope with change (Fabian, 2000a) or through ensuring they have specific skills, could be placed in this category. However, remediation may need to be used with caution as it could reflect the decontextualised focus on 'norms' discussed earlier.

The second potential intervention was in a redefinition of the situation. In Sameroff's (1991) case redefinition looked at helping parents to focus on redefining their reaction to a baby with birth problems. For example, parents may have very limited expectations of their child, which affects their child-rearing practices, and in turn leads into a negative cycle in the child's learning and behaviour. Redefining would help the parents see that while the child's problems may require some special skills on the part of caregivers, the child can be raised within the caregiving system they already know, so that the child is guided to "normative developmental outcomes" (p. 184). This can be seen in the New Zealand work of Timperley et al. (1999). Teachers' negative views of new entrant children's literacy skills led to low demands in the classroom and low achievement at Year Three. When the children were assessed and shown to have, on average, 74% of the skills teachers said were desirable on entry to school, the situation was redefined, the teachers' expectations and teaching methods changed, and so did the children's performance.

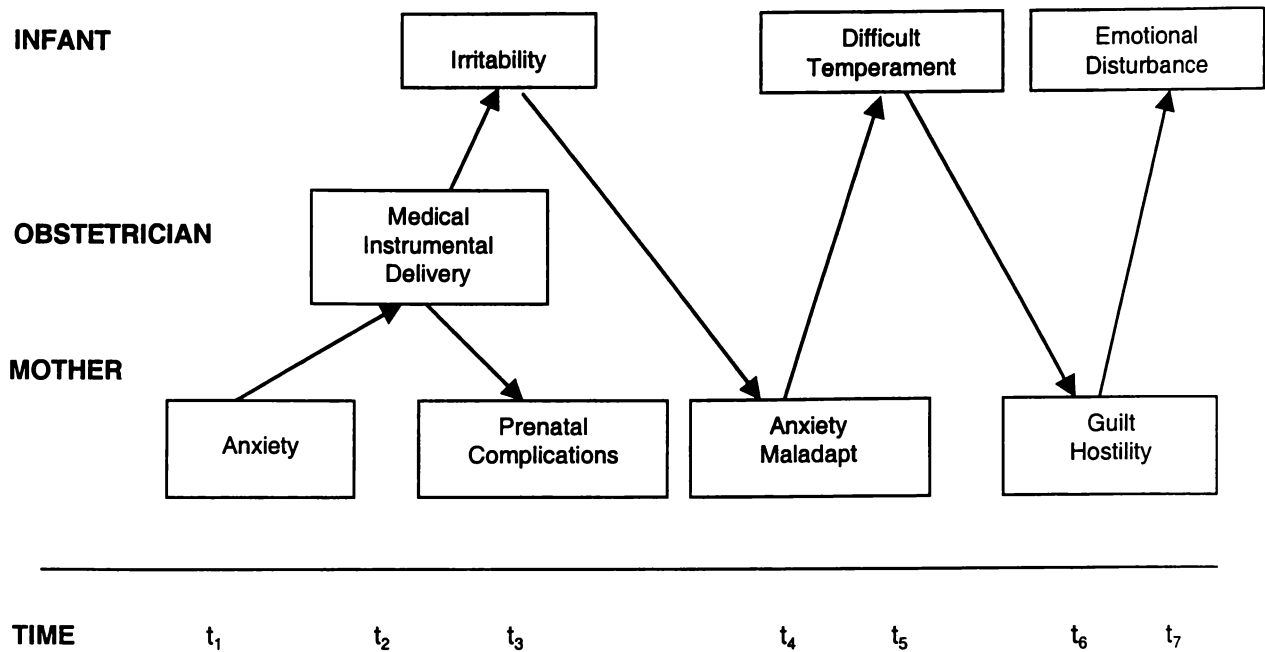


Figure 1. Sameroff's hypothetical sequence of transactions in the etiology of emotional disturbance (Sameroff, 1975).

The final intervention suggested by Sameroff (1991) is re-education. In relation to infant care, he believed that redefining was only useful if parents already had the skills to rear their child in a positive way. Where these skills were missing re-education was necessary. Re-education was evident in Phillips et al. (2002) study of early literacy, where new entrant teachers learnt more about literacy practices in the wider community and changed their classroom programmes accordingly. In this example, re-education of teachers perhaps allowed more shared meanings and understandings to be established, so that the intersubjectivity (Rogoff, 1990) between teacher and students was enhanced.

The patterns of transactions Sameroff (1975) described between mothers and infants can be related to Thomas and Chess's (1989) notion of the "goodness of fit" between the child's traits and the parents' attitudes and practices (p. 257). Thomas and Chess's research led them to conclude that when the child is able to master the demands and expectations of those around him/her, positive development is likely to occur, while a poor fit between temperament and expectations would be likely to lead to difficulties. As in the transactional model, both parties influence this process. Where certain traits are valued within the family or wider culture, these may be particularly appreciated in the child (and vice versa).

Keogh (1989) considered the goodness of fit between ability and tasks, values and expectations at home and school, and child temperament and teacher expectations. She noted that children who fit Thomas and Chess's (1989) description of 'slow to warm up' are typically negative or withdrawing to newness and slow to adapt, and may need extra time to prepare for changes. Highly active, distractible children may be prone to behaviour problems during transitions in the school day. The Centre for Child and Family Studies (1990) provided a similar guide for early childhood teachers, noting that 'easy' children may show very deep feelings with only a single tear. Understanding children's different patterns of responses, where they occur, and being sensitive to possible cultural differences in adults' responses to these (Thomas & Chess, 1989) may assist understanding the nature of the 'fit' that occurs when children start school.

The notion of goodness of fit is also relevant in considering which children different teachers find rewarding to teach and therefore gain the most attention (see Pye, 1988), and in considering the way in which pupil identity is shaped differently in different classes. For example, in Pollard and Filer's (1999) study of pupil career, over a seven-year period the same child could be seen as an asset or a problem by different teachers. Where teachers were able to accommodate a child's preferred approach to learning and identity, and the pupil felt valued and appropriately challenged, a positive cycle of learning and relationships was likely to develop. Where a child's preferred approach was not affirmed or valued it could become part of a negative cycle of deteriorating relationships and loss of motivation. They demonstrated the relationship between teacher-organized contexts, the ways in which a child is perceived by teachers, and the child's role and status with respect to peers.

Capital

Sociological theories relating to capital are useful for exploring further the "consistent patterns of differentiation" within societies, referred to within the macrosystem level of Bronfenbrenner's theory (1979, p. 26). Coleman (1997) described capital as financial, human or social. Financial capital is wealth, income, physical resources, materials and the money to smooth family problems. Human capital is based on the parents' education, and the cognitive environment that this creates for the child in the home. Social capital is the time and effort spent on the child. Regardless of the human capital parents possess, this will not be transmitted effectively without social capital. Thus, in his eyes, anything that dilutes the time and attention a parent can devote to a child, such as working parents, single parents and large families, has a negative impact. While he accepted that social capital does exist in forms outside the family, such as in social networks, he did not consider what else children have access

to that might be beneficial. For example, in looking only at parental time and attention, he did not consider the benefits of participation in high quality early childhood education, and yet as May (2000) noted, today children *not* attending early childhood services are considered “at risk” (p. 118).

Potentially more useful in considering the experiences of children starting school are Bourdieu’s (1993, 1997) descriptions of cultural and social capital. Cultural capital is the knowledge acquired through schooling, and other forms of knowledge, skills and ways of behaving which confer status and privilege in society. According to Bourdieu (1997) cultural capital can exist in three forms, in the embodied state, in the objectified state and in the institutionalized state. In the embodied state it is something that is transmitted over time and becomes an integral part of the person, “a habitus” (p. 48). It may be acquired unconsciously and is often a hidden investment in the child. In the objectified state, cultural capital consists of material objects and media such as books, paintings, instruments and machinery. While such objects can be appropriated through economic capital, to benefit from their use requires cultural capital. In the institutionalized state, cultural capital is sanctioned by legally guaranteed qualifications that confer institutional recognition on the cultural capital possessed by an individual. Social capital is the actual, or potential, resources an individual has access to through membership of a group, and the product of investment of effort in producing or reproducing useable social relationships (Bourdieu, 1997).

Brooker (2002) described social capital as combining the individual’s status and esteem, and the reflected esteem of others in the individual’s social network. Parents may gain esteem through their own high-status occupations or through their connections with others who are held in high esteem. If social or cultural capital is to benefit children at school it needs to be visible. For example, one Bangladeshi family in Brooker’s (2002) UK study was held in considerable esteem in their own minority culture within a British city, but this was invisible to the school, where all Bangladeshi families were allocated a low social status regardless of their individual differences in capital.

Lareau (1997) made the point that while Bourdieu implied that the culture of ‘elites’ is intrinsically more valuable, capital is not a given entity. Instead, what constitutes capital is determined by historical context (and I would add place). Both Lareau (1997) and Delpit (1997) argue that all social groups have cultural capital, but some have capital that is valued by dominant institutions at a particular moment in history. Success in schools often requires acquisition of the culture of those who are in power, (although some schools actively work to change this). While all families transmit a

culture at home that is relevant to life in their community, for some this is also the culture of power. Delpit (1997) explained that others must learn this culture at school, but this can be problematic because the codes or rules for participating are often communicated implicitly between members of a culture. For those who do not share the culture it can be difficult to learn, unless the rules are made explicit.

Brooker (2002) took this idea further, using Bourdieu's notion of habitus to consider primary habitus, resulting from learning to be a child (in the family), and secondary habitus, learning to be a pupil (at school). She described a continuum of advantage for children whose social and cultural capital was evident to their teachers and who experienced continuity between home and school. For others, learning to be a pupil meant learning to be someone quite different from their primary habitus. The idea of different habitus is particularly useful as it helps to explain findings such as those documented by Ledger (1997b), where children from wealthy, well educated families, from the dominant culture (who one would assume had both social and cultural capital) had transitions that were "fraught with difficulties" (p. 7). The fact that primary habitus is not the same, even for members of one social group, is also evident in Bronfenbrenner's (1986) consideration of the features of individual microsystems.

Krasnow (1990) found that some schools in America seemed to see it as their mission to separate children from the effects of their home culture and family, where this was different from the school's. In addition, school entry assessments in many countries are often loaded with aspects of social and cultural capital. Brooker (2002) showed that the children's performance on these reflected on families, and influenced teachers' expectations of children. Delpit (1997) gave examples of early instructional activities at school that actually just provide an opportunity for children who already know the concept to exhibit what they know, or perhaps build one or two new concepts. In contrast, those who did not come to school primed with what was to be presented "would be labeled as needing 'remedial' instruction from day one.... before he or she was ever taught" (p. 586). Consideration of capital and habitus are therefore useful factors in exploring the nature of transition experiences. However, drawing on the sociocultural and ecological theories, it is important not to see the child simply as a bearer of capital, which Lareau (1997) noted is one criticism of Bourdieu's theory, but to acknowledge the interaction of the individual's personal characteristics with the environment.

Rites of passage

Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1992) drew attention to the different microsystems in which a person exists and the different roles and relationships that might be experienced in

each. The move to school is sometimes seen as a more significant change in role than other moves between microsystems (such as from home to early childhood education) and a number of writers have drawn on the work of Van Gennep to consider the notion of rites of passage as children make the move from one context to the next (e.g. Fabian, 1998; Ghaye & Pascal, 1988; Norris, 1999). Van Gennep used the term 'rites of passage' to describe the various forms of ritual by which an individual comes to occupy a new position in a social structure (Piddington, 1957). Fabian (1998) provided a detailed study of how this applies to the transition to school. She considered the preliminal rites (rites of separation), liminal rites (rites of transition) and postliminal rites (rites of incorporation) that form this process. Parents too are involved in a transition to 'parent of a school child', but using the concept of rites of passage, this would only apply to the induction of the first child (Fabian, 1998). Turner (1968, cited in James & Prout, 1997, p. 247) noted that in the liminal zone, demanding feats of endurance may be required from those being initiated, which implies that transition is supposed to present some challenges. James and Prout (1997) considered transitions, such as the one to school, as being prolonged periods where the rituals are spread out, rather than a concentrated ritual moment. This can be thought of as a corridor, rather than a threshold (Turner, 1977).

The theoretical approach taken in this study

A topic as complex as the transition to school lends itself to a range of theoretical approaches, as there are so many different aspects that can be considered. This review has covered the main ideas that provide the conceptual framework for this thesis. It has identified the transition to school as an ecological transition (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), where there is an abrupt change of microsystem, and also an extended process of becoming a pupil, consistent with the idea of a rite of a passage (James & Prout, 1997). Therefore, to study the experience it is relevant to consider both the ecological transition point, and an extended time frame. Points raised in this chapter, such as the way in which children are viewed (e.g. the nature of norms in a setting), the influence of capital (Bourdieu, 1993, 1997), access to scaffolding (Bruner, 1985), and the nature of that scaffolding (van der Veer & Valsiner, 1994), are just some of the influences on their experiences. Drawing on Rogoff's (1997) view of the present being influenced by both the past and the anticipated future, in considering the extended period it would be useful to look at transition from before school entry, into the first years of schooling.

Bronfenbrenner's and Sameroff's view of children shaping and being shaped by their contexts offers a framework for considering the nature of children's experiences over time as they navigate their way into the role of school pupil. Sameroff's (1975)

transactional model continually assesses the transactions between a child and the environment to determine how these transactions facilitate or hinder adaptive integration as both child and surroundings change and evolve. Such an approach could be applied to consideration of the transition to school because many features of the transition experience interweave to produce particular outcomes. However, Sameroff's model draws quite precise links between transactions and, perhaps due to the time in which it was written, included the sense of the process being judged against a norm, with potential for remedial action. This, on its own, is not ideal for capturing the complexity of the transition process, but its notion of a series of transactions between person and environment can be combined with Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986, 1992, Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1997) to highlight the variety of influences on individual children's journeys.

Figure 2 shows my adaptation of Sameroff's and Bronfenbrenner's approaches. The child's transition journey is depicted as the central arrow. Although this has been drawn as a solid arrow (to simplify the diagram) it should be visualized as a complex spiral or cycle of interactions. Features of the child, the setting, and the interactions between them, influence these cycles. The small curved arrows symbolize these two-way transactions. The large curved arrows indicate that the child's experience is also affected by transactions between aspects of the environment, for example, interactions between teacher and family. Looking beyond the immediate setting will also be important. The whole process is influenced by exosystem and macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1992) factors that exist beyond those captured in the diagram, all of which are changing over time (Bronfenbenner & Morris, 1997). Theories and beliefs at the macrosystem help to shape school practices and inform people's thoughts about transition. The background to the model is shown as a weaving to acknowledge the very complex interactions of many factors that affect each child's path. A weaving metaphor is also central to the early childhood curriculum in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 1996). In Figure 2 it represents interwoven influences, not curriculum strands, but it draws from a similar idea, in that the patterns of influence will be different in different settings.

The model shows each child's experience across three chronological times frames, prior to school, first weeks, the second term and beyond. This illustrates the extended process of becoming a pupil. The first vertical line, between 'prior to school' and 'first weeks' shows the ecological transition as the children move into school. This can, in some cases, be seen as a border between two (or more) cultures where different habitus (Bourdieu, 1997) are in contact. Giroux (1992) has described the desirability of creating conditions in which people can become border crossers who "understand

otherness in its own terms” (p. 28). In a rather simplistic appropriation of this idea, it allows a view that the ‘cultures’ (of home/early childhood service and school) on either side of the ecological transition require the child to move into different realms of meaning, knowledge and social forms. To enable learners to cross such a border, it has been proposed that those supporting them need to know what the hazards are from the learner’s point of view (Mullholland & Wallace, 2000).

Summary

This chapter has shown that a number of theoretical approaches are relevant to the consideration of the transition to school. It has established the sociocultural and ecological framework for the study, whilst acknowledging that notions of capital, drawing on sociology, and rites of passage, from anthropology, are also useful in coming to understand the social world in which people operate. These ideas have been combined in the model (Figure 2) that was introduced, which will be used to analyse the case study children’s experiences in Chapter Nine. Chapters Three and Four go on to explore local and international literature on children, parents/caregivers and pedagogy in relation to transition to school. Chapter Five describes features of the Aotearoa/New Zealand macrosystem that are relevant to the transition to school. Together these chapters provide the rationale for the study, which is outlined in Chapter Six. The sociocultural and ecological approach taken draws on a theoretical base that rejects broad universal explanations and seeks to understand the specific processes that shape development. Chapter Seven establishes the relevance of an interpretive approach for uncovering the nature of these specific processes, and the factors that influence them.

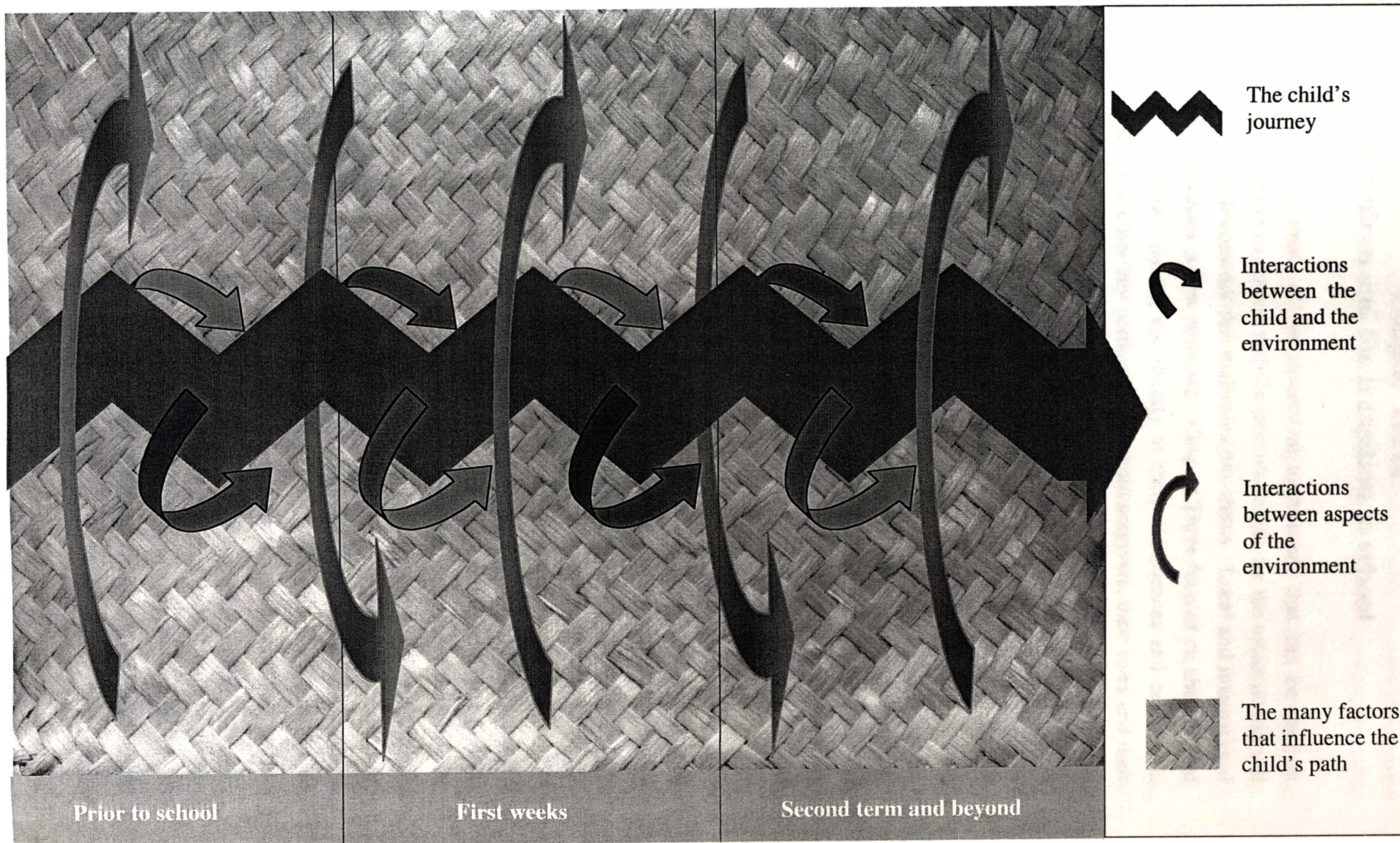


Figure 2. A theoretical framework for looking at children's experiences as they make the transition to school.

Chapter Three

Children and the transition to school

Chapter Two outlined many of the theoretical approaches that can be used in considering the transition to school, and the case was made for the sociocultural and ecological conceptual framework that underpins this thesis. Local and international research on starting school is now reviewed. Chapter Three focuses on children and the transition to school, looking specifically at their experiences and comments. Chapter Four looks at other key participants; parent/caregivers, their roles and their relationships with schools and teachers. An overarching influence on the participants is the pedagogical milieu that shapes how people are positioned, and the advice that is offered. Although the material in these two chapters has been organized into discrete sections, the interactive nature of transition means that there is considerable interweaving of issues.

Appendix 1 provides a descriptive summary of a number of key studies on the topic of transition to school (and in some cases to other educational settings) that are referred to in this literature review. It provides a chronological picture of work in this field, details of the location of each study, and includes notes on the participants and the methods used.

Interest in children's initial school experience has often been fueled by a concern that there are potentially stable pathways, which are established very early. In the first paragraph of her doctoral thesis Hilary Fabian (1998) includes the statement, "the importance of achieving an untroubled start to school is now recognized" (p. 1). Margetts (1997) has noted that children who adjust adequately to the first year of school are likely to be "more successful in their future progress than children who have difficulty adjusting to the new situation" (p. 54). Likewise, Dockett and Perry (1999a) have claimed that the way the transition is managed "sets the stage not only for children's success at school, but also their response to future transitions" (p. 1). Interest in these pathways was an underlying motivation for my selection of this topic. This chapter starts by exploring the evidence relating to such statements, and considers the different ways in which children's transition to school has been studied. It then considers some of the discontinuity that has been identified as often occurring between school and earlier settings, and the impact this has on children's experiences. The nature of these differences is a feature of the ecological transition that children make as they move into the new microsystem of school (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1992). Negotiating these differences can be considered to be part of the process of becoming

a pupil, and this approach is outlined. The chapter concludes by looking at the influence of friends during children's transition to school.

Stable trajectories?

Assertions relating children's initial transition experience to their later school progress appear intuitively plausible. This view is supported by some longitudinal studies that indicate stable trajectories of performance relating to the nature of a child's early experience at school. However, there is other evidence to suggest that a child's school career is not necessarily so predictable. To explore this more fully it is important to look at the nature and timing of the measures that are taken.

An early US study found that children's first assessments seemed particularly influential, and suggested "a lack of mobility starting at the earliest possible point, before much is known about the child's talents or habits" (Entwistle & Hayduck, 1978, p. 39). Alexander and Entwistle (1988) gathered data on a range of measures over the first two years of school. They found the first year was "a period of considerable consequence for shaping subsequent achievement trajectories" (p. v). There was even more consistency over time in academic test scores for the black children in their sample than for whites, which they concluded indicated that recovering from initial difficulties was more challenging for this group. Early et al. (1999) reviewed a number of studies that also support the idea that "the period of early schooling is of unique significance in children's school careers" (p. 27). However, despite the range of studies citing such findings, the results may not be as convincing as they first appear. La Paro and Pianta (2000) carried out a meta-analysis of 70 published reports of longitudinal studies in America (62 independent samples) that reported a correlation between academic/cognitive and social/behavioural measures taken in early childhood or the first year of school, and similar measures taken later in the child's schooling (but before age seven). Social/behavioral measures appeared particularly subject to change. La Paro and Pianta questioned whether the measures used were informative, and also noted that behaviour is complex and multidetermined, and often different in different contexts. However, even in relation to academic factors their analysis indicated that specific skills on entry to school, such as letter knowledge or counting, were only "part of the story of children's success in later grades, even in the same performance domain" (p. 476).

In Aotearoa/New Zealand there has been similar interest in the relationship between early measures of skills and later performance. Again, in general, predicting children's later levels of competence from measures taken at age five appeared problematic, although research has shown stable patterns of mathematics achievement (Wylie &

Thompson, 1998; Young-Loveridge, 1991), and to a lesser extent, in literacy and logical problem-solving (Wylie & Thompson, 1998). By age 10, mathematics and reading scores still appeared to be related to measures taken before children went to school. Levels of parental education and income were influential in determining whether children with low scores were able to improve (Wylie, Thompson & Lythe, 2001). Specific interventions to support children's development of number concepts have also been shown to disrupt stable patterns of achievement (Young-Loveridge, 1993; S. Peters, 1991), as have literacy programmes where teachers knew how to capitalize on children's experiences and find their relevant strengths (Phillips et al., 2002).

Another approach to looking at stable trajectories has been to ask teachers about children's experiences. Griffin and Harvey (1995) found that half the Australian teachers they surveyed believed that children who started school behind their peers generally remained there. One important factor that may help to explain stable patterns, where they exist, is the reputations children establish with their peers and their teachers (Alexander & Entwisle, 1988; Ladd & Price, 1987). Ladd and Price (1987) explained that these reputations sometimes stay with children for long periods of time and can potentially enhance or inhibit their learning and development. In their eyes, entry to school could be viewed as "a time of both opportunity and risk" as it is an occasion when children develop new reputations (p. 1187). As noted earlier, Timperley et al. (1999) found teacher beliefs about children were particularly influential. Poor results were attributed to low teacher expectations and a lack of knowledge of the children they taught (i.e. erroneous reputations), rather than the children's actual skills on school entry.

A more comprehensive picture of children's pathways or 'careers' was provided by Pollard and Filer's (1999) qualitative case studies of English children over the first seven years of school. They found both continuity and change within the cases, showing that while children do develop characteristic patterns of action and orientations to learning as they pursue social and learning goals, these patterns are open to disruption and could be altered if they were no longer viable or appropriate. This was especially evident when children made the yearly move to new classes, where they encountered new teachers and responded to the different peer groups against which they were measured, and measured themselves. Teachers played a particularly influential role in creating classroom contexts that enhanced or threatened a student's sense of self as a pupil, thus creating the potential for either consistency or change in children's behaviour. The nature of teacher-pupil relationships was also important. These were characterized by either empathy and rapport or

incomprehension and exasperation (highlighting the 'goodness of fit' mentioned in Chapter Two). The same child could be viewed differently by different teachers and this in turn affected his/her relationships with peers. Students also drew on identities developed in the home and community in "elaborating and evolving their identities as pupils" (p. 301). Overall, the findings showed that how the children saw themselves as learners and as pupils, and how others perceived them, "was not a smooth, cumulative process towards the end-point of leaving the school. Rather it was a dynamic, fluctuating process, to varying degrees appearing to be open to possibilities for change" (p. 284).

Instead of seeing children's experiences being fixed as a stable trajectory based on their skills or experiences on entry, Pollard and Filer's (1999) research suggests the potential for children's experiences to be improved. This is important, given that the instances of problematic transitions appears high. For example, in America up to 46% of more than 3000 teachers surveyed reported that half their class or more had problems on entry to school (Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta & Cox, 2000). However, there are no clear patterns in the research evidence regarding the nature of the problems children face and how long these last. For example, the 'majority' of the 36 English children whose parents Cleave, Jowett and Bate (1982) interviewed, were reported to have shown signs of bewilderment, fatigue or distress, especially on the first day. In contrast, in Ledger's (2000) New Zealand study, all the children were judged to make a successful transition on the first day, although problems sometimes developed later (Ledger, Smith & Rich, 1998). These may represent different experiences in the two contexts in which the studies were conducted, or different ways of analyzing those experiences.

Overall, it appears that more research is needed to understand children's transition to school, and to clarify the nature of the variables that are used to analyse this experience. In addition, although there are longitudinal studies in Aotearoa/New Zealand, which track the long-term development of children (e.g. Wylie et al., 2001), studies that provide detailed insights into experiences of transition have tended to focus only on the first year of school, making it difficult to evaluate claims regarding links between this initial experience and children's ongoing lives as pupils. It would be useful to explore the applicability of the insights provided by Pollard and Filer's (1999) English study to the Aotearoa/New Zealand context.

Children's thoughts about their transition

In coming to understand transition it is important to consider how the children themselves view this experience. Initially few studies asked children how they felt

about starting school, although Renwick (1984) attempted to expand on a rather brief picture obtained from the children by asking parents, pre-school teachers and new-entrant teachers what they thought New Zealand five-year-olds expected school to be like. The adults believed that most children looked forward to school with pleasure, tinged with uncertainty about the unknown. Many children appeared to expect rapid success in activities such as reading and writing and were frustrated when progress was slower than expected. This was characterised by a child who, after three days of school, complained, "I can't read, I can't write, and I can't even tie up my shoe laces" (Renwick, 1984, p. 20).

With the increasing interest in children's rights and 'children's voices' a number of recent studies have explored children's views on their transition. Two large studies reported on by Broström (2002) revealed that 12% and 24% of Danish children reported feeling insecure or nervous about starting school, often due to outdated views of schools as places where they would have to sit quietly, and that teachers would scold and smack. The German children interviewed by Griebel and Niesel (2002) were all looking forward to school, but some were unsure what it would entail. After they started, they commented on the large number of other children, the compulsion of having to do things, instead of choosing to do them, and their enjoyment of their teachers and learning new things. In Australia, Dockett and Perry (1999b) found 20% of children indicated feeling sad or scared when they first started school. However, the majority (75%) mentioned positive feelings such as being happy or having fun. Rules featured strongly in the children's comments, and in this respect they were very different from their parents and teachers, who talked more about adjustment (Dockett & Perry, 2002; Perry, Dockett & Howard, 2000). More recently, Dockett and Perry (2003a, 2003c) followed classroom discussions with an invitation to small groups of children to take photographs of things in the school context that they considered were important. These photographs, and the children's reasons for taking them, were collated into books, analysis of which showed that rules again featured strongly in the children's talk about school. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, Ledger (2000) found that children's common dislikes on entry to school were lunchtimes, singing, printing, sitting still, noise, aggression from other children and being told off. The aspects of school that were frequently mentioned as things they liked were drawing, playing and using the computer. After six months, playtimes and lunchtimes were also enjoyed.

Gathering children's thoughts is important, because although a parent might give an accurate account of the child's feelings, the parent's interpretation of the child's response could arise from his/her own feelings or beliefs (Renwick, 1984). However, it might not be easy for children to express their concerns verbally. Children may

remain silent about the confusing aspects of school, although their confusion could be expressed through silent or disruptive behaviour (Blenkin, 1992). In her research on children's perspectives, Ledger (2000) concluded that "it was difficult to access exactly how the children perceived the transition from what they told me, as they showed a preference to talk about events and activities they enjoyed more than school" (p. 278).

Overall, despite predominantly positive responses regarding their transition to school, it appears that children's excitement is often tinged with fear or uncertainty (Dockett & Perry, 1999b; Griebel & Niesel, 2000; Ledger et al., 1998; Renwick, 1984), and as an experience it can be both challenging and stressful, as well as fun (Mayall, 1994). A common theme in children's comments about school is the discontinuity they experience. Although Dockett and Perry, (1999a) found that children expected school to be different from earlier settings, and for their experiences there to reflect their new status as a 'big' child, many studies have shown that discontinuity is a common source of distress for a number of new entrants (e.g. Cleave et al., 1982; Ledger, 2000; Margetts, 1997; Renwick, 1984).

Discontinuity

Differences between school and earlier settings are a dominant feature in the literature on transition to school. In a review of literature on this topic, Richardson (1997) found that even when children have already experienced group educational settings in early childhood, the discontinuity can be considerable.

Time

One aspect of discontinuity relates to time. Human understanding of time was changed by the industrial revolution, and a new 'mechanical' time was introduced that regulated activity by the clock. This concept is taught in schools (Scott, 1982), so that while children in early childhood have more opportunities to follow their own inclinations, and to complete tasks to satisfy their own criteria, in school experiences tend to become more regulated, with set times for certain activities and less say for children in how they spend their time (Hill, Comber, Loudon, Rivalland & Reid, 1998; Scott, 1982).

The orientation to time in schools can be seen as part of the discipline and control of children (Germeten, 2000). Teachers usually decide the structure of the day and when and where to start and stop activities. Williams (2002) cites one five-year-old's response to such regulation as, "You know, I like school, but there's no time to *do* anything" (p. 6). While in early childhood a child may be praised for spending a long

period of time on an activity, in school this might be seen as being too slow (Hill et al., 1998). This can be understood in relation to the pressure school teachers often face to 'cover' a set amount of curriculum material in a prescribed amount of time (Marshall, 1992; Williams, 2002).

Scott (1982) suggested that in the school context children learn to develop 'time' not 'task' orientation, and the quantity of work to be produced in a given time frame overrides children's internal judgments of quality. Instead, the teacher determines the quality required in the time frame provided. Some children learn to "do school" by completing work, rather than learning what a task is intended to teach. Marshall (1992) related this to children's learning goals (an idea that is discussed in more detail in Chapter Four). Scott believed that time orientation to learning means that children learn to do what is required, but often their minds might be elsewhere. Ledger (2000) observed such daydreaming among new entrants, and suggested that this became a substitute for play.

Scott (1982) saw secondary schools as being rather like a conveyor belt, where students receive measured amounts of information from a teacher in a set period, but noted that there tended to be more flexibility at primary school. However, in some places it is evident that primary teaching is becoming more constrained. An example of this is the literacy and numeracy hours in England, which are based on the requirement that English and mathematics are allocated a set number amount teaching time at each level. "Literacy Hour" itself is prescribed into the number of minutes to be spent on each activity (Department of Education and Employment, 1998, 1999).

Interestingly, the concept of time introduced by school includes with it the pressure to avoid wasting time (Scott, 1982), and yet the amount of work done in a given time is often remarkably small, with the rest of the time spent waiting; waiting for everyone to be quiet, waiting for the teacher to begin, and so on (Cullingford, 1991). Curtis (1986) and Margetts (1997) found that children tend to spend more time waiting at school than they did in early childhood.

Daily routines

In line with the regulation of the day by time, activity and rest, eating, drinking, and going to the toilet, all become subjected to the demands of the school day, and, as Mayall (1994) has pointed out, are often mediated by the teacher. Children may find that each of these becomes more restricted and controlled than they have experienced previously. Two features that are identified in a number of studies as particularly problematic are using the toilets and the school lunchtimes.

Toilets

Toileting may cause difficulties due to the unfamiliar nature of the facilities, for example, boys may be faced with using a urinal for the first time (Curtis, 1986). The gendered allocation of space (such as toilets) is often new to children (Hill et al. 1998). Sometimes children complain that school toilets are dirty or smelly (Clarke & Sharpe, 2003). Other concerns relate to the teacher refusing permission to go (Mayall, 1994). Children rarely meet these constraints at home or in early childhood. Robinson et al. (2000) found that when children experience toilet accidents during their early weeks at school, teachers may believe that this is due to the children not being sufficiently socialized into toileting routines, without realizing that it could be as simple as the children not knowing the location of the toilets.

Play and lunchtimes

Difficulties with lunchtimes relate to regulation of activity and rest, and changing attitudes to play, that children experience on entry to school. Although many primary school teachers use play as the basis of their classroom programmes, it is likely that for most children there will be a more obvious division between work and play at school than is evident in most early childhood settings. Certain controlled forms of play may be allowed within the classroom, (and children may engage in unsanctioned play, which Dockett and Flear (1999) term illicit play) but in general, classroom activities become 'work', with play relegated to specified play and lunch breaks. In particular, Margetts (1997) found that play involving gross motor activities became confined to PE and playtimes, while Ledger (2000) observed less imaginative play at school than in early childhood education.

To a degree such changes in opportunities for play may be due to the physical amenities at school, such as having less available space for children's play (Corrie, 1999), or the unsuitability of the play space. For example, young children may be daunted by a large physical space with very few resources (Curtis, 1986).

The changes also relate to views about pedagogy. Many forms of early childhood education are based on a tradition of children 'learning through play' and play is usually an integral part of the programme, rather than allocated to separate playtimes. In school, while play that is planned by the teacher may be valued, the play that occurs outside of the classroom during breaks may be viewed as more akin to recreation than to learning. Teachers may exert control by restricting children's access to such play, by, for example, keeping children in during playtime if time has been wasted during 'work'. Scott (1982) likened this to a worker's wages being docked. The priority

given to work over playtime in schools was evident in a recent UK survey. More than half of the primary schools that responded indicated that there had been a reduction in break-times over the previous five years, and one of the reasons for this was to increase the amount of time spent on teaching to meet the requirements of the National Curriculum (Blatchford, 1999; Pellegrini & Blatchford, 2000).

Adults generally view playtime as pleasurable for children, but the dichotomy of work and play at school can lead to play contexts and experiences that are not enjoyed by all. In fact, one factor that has frequently been found to be difficult or stressful on entry to school in the UK and New Zealand is the school lunch break (Cleave, et al., 1982; Curtis, 1986; Ledger, 2000; Ledger et al., 1998; Mayall, 1994; N. Smith, 2002, 2003). In contrast, in Sweden, where children traditionally start school at age seven, eating in the dining room was mentioned as a positive feature of school (Pramling & Williams-Granelid, 1993). It is not clear what factor(s) lead to this contrasting finding, although, it is relevant to note that the Swedish children were talking about eating together at a table, rather than playing in the playground.

Difficulties in peer relationships may make playtimes less pleasurable for some children (Blatchford, 1999; Moore, 2001; N. Smith, 2002, 2003). Three years of playground observations led Sluckin (1987) to conclude that verbal skills were a key asset in children's play, which implies that children with language difficulties may find lunchtimes particularly difficult. Children's play preferences and feelings of safety may also be issues. Research suggests that although boys tend to enjoy outdoor play, many girls, when asked, said they would prefer to stay in, and younger children of both sexes often disliked older children invading their space when the older children were charging about the playground (Pellegrini & Blatchford, 2000; Pellegrini & Smith, 1993).

Nanette Smith (2003) developed a nursery school programme that was intended to promote children's social and emotional development, in order to assist them in adapting to the challenges of the school playground. The programme ran over two terms prior to children starting school. The results suggested that it did assist children in the short term as all 13 participants were judged to make a positive transition to the playground and to have a special friend on entry (all the children started the same school at the same time). However, even with this intensive preparation some children were became tired and "socially vulnerable" after four weeks and the lunchtime routines were upsetting for some (p. 12).

Once children settle into school their attitude towards lunchtime may change. Ledger (2000) found that after six months at school, children reported enjoying playtime and lunchtime, even though this had been one of the main dislikes on entry.

Debates about playtime and lunchtime

Pellegrini and Blatchford both identify considerable debate in the UK and the USA regarding the value of children's playtime and lunchtime breaks (Blatchford, 1999; Pellegrini & Blatchford, 2000; Pellegrini & Smith, 1993). These debates are summarized here as they provide different insights into looking at this particular aspect of schooling, and how it relates to transition. (The term breaktime is used in this section to cover playtime, lunchtime and recess.)

Many pro-breaktime arguments include the view that it is important for children to release energy in periods of active play, after sitting for long periods. Therefore the provision of specified playtimes is seen as necessary in order to increase children's attention and concentration in the classroom (Pellegrini & Smith, 1993). This 'surplus energy' theory has been challenged as an inadequate explanation of children's need for play (Dockett & Fleer, 1999; Evans & Pellegrini, 1997), although developmental notions associated with this view may help to explain Blatchford's (1999) finding that schools tended to arrange for younger children to spend more of the school day in breaks than older children. Evans and Pellegrini (1997) acknowledged that children become restless and inattentive after prolonged periods of sitting but expressed concern that surplus energy theory underestimates the importance of providing children with breaks. They suggested that inattention and fidgeting is likely to be a result of boredom with tasks, and discomfort from seating arrangements. Breaks therefore provide important novelty and an opportunity for children to do things that are of interest to them. In providing space between periods of concentration, children (and adults) may be more able to apply themselves and learn more during the concentrated tasks.

Another benefit that has been cited is the opportunity for interaction with peers that breaks provide. Pellegrini and Blatchford (2000) reviewed a number of studies that suggest cognitive benefits from children's playground interactions with peers. Some writers go so far as to claim that the skills learned during unsupervised play with peers are important for later life, and to reduce children's opportunities to develop them may have, as yet unforeseen, negative consequences (Furedi, 2002; Pellegrini & Smith, 1993; Sluckin, 1987). In fact, because of reduced opportunities for peer interaction out of school, these breaktimes have been identified as particularly significant because

they may be school pupils' main opportunity to interact and develop friendships (Blatchford, 1999; Evans & Pellegrini, 1997).

However, whilst cited as a support for breaks, some of the evidence relates to providing opportunities for play, as opposed to set break times. It seems play may provide some important cognitive and social functions. Breaks from classroom activities provide times when children can go to the toilet and have a drink and something to eat (Evans & Pellegrini, 1997). Both of these could also be achieved by allowing children to exercise more choice in the pace and timing of their activities, as they typically do in early childhood centres. However, in school the nature of the facilities and the teacher-child ratio may make this unrealistic.

Arguments against breaktimes include the view that it interrupts children's sustained work, does not improve concentration, and uses time that can be devoted to instruction (see Blatchford, 1999; Pellegrini & Blatchford, 2000; Pellegrini & Smith, 1993). Like many of the pro break arguments, these points relate to particular views of learning. Concern has also been expressed over problem behaviour during breaks, especially in relation to bullying and aggression (see Blatchford, 1999; Pellegrini & Blatchford, 2000; Pellegrini & Smith, 1993). The aggression argument is challenged by research which suggests that while play fighting may occupy from 5-10% of children's free playground time (Schafer & Smith, 1996), the incidence of actual aggression is low (Pellegrini, 1989; Sluckin, 1987). Although it is possible that there may have been changes since these studies were conducted, another important consideration is that reports of increased aggression have come from teachers and the press, and yet several studies have noted the difficulties adults have in distinguishing between rough-and-tumble play or play fighting, and genuine aggression (Schafer & Smith, 1996; Sluckin, 1987). Teachers, mostly female, tended to view such play, (which is engaged in predominantly by boys) as unfavourable, potentially noisy and disruptive, and likely to lead to real fighting (Schafer & Smith, 1996; Sluckin, 1987), and yet for boys it appeared to be positively correlated with social competence (Pellegrini, 1989) and may serve important functions in social affiliation (for popular children at least) (Pellegrini, 1991) and in initiating and sustaining play (see E. Wood, 2000). Also, although children's behaviour is cited as a reason for reducing breaks, in some schools it has led to initiatives to improve breaktime experiences by greater involvement of pupils in planning playgrounds, and in school-wide initiatives to improve personal relationships (see Blatchford, 1999).

These debates regarding the pros and cons of breaktimes appear largely absent from the New Zealand literature. Also, although it has been noted that lunchtimes prove

difficult for some children on school entry here (Ledger, 2000; Ledger et al., 1998), as they do in the UK (Cleave, et al., 1982; Curtis, 1986; Mayall, 1994; N. Smith, 2003), very little has been written about children's actual experiences of lunchtimes and other break times. In seeking to understand children's transition experiences it would be useful to look more closely at when and why lunchtimes prove difficult.

Rules

Related to the increased regulation of children's activities, is the increase in formal rules at school compared to prior-to-school contexts (M. Jackson, 1987; Ledger, 2000, Margetts, 1997). Australian children's explanations of 'what you needed to know' regarding school most frequently mentioned rules, especially conventional rules relating to social behavior (Dockett & Perry, 1999b). Ledger (2000) found children were expected to submit unquestioningly to the school-teacher's rule and authority. The children's comments showed they were aware of a loss of choice, with words like 'have to' and 'allowed' appearing in their descriptions of school. After six months at school the children she observed had become compliant and obedient. Some studies have shown that much of a child's first year may simply be about learning the rules (Brooker, 2002; Cullen & St George, 1996). In Graue's (1993b) study one school placed particular emphasis on children learning to follow directions in completing a worksheet, rather than the final product (an example being a worksheet where children joined the dots to form triangles. One child's work was rubbed out by the teacher because, although he had a page of perfectly formed triangles, he had not followed directions as to the path the pencil was to take in connecting the dots). Margaret Jackson (1987) has suggested that conforming to rules during classroom activities allows children to demonstrate their learning in ways that are recognizable to the teacher. She found it was difficult for a teacher to be aware of the learning that was happening if a child engaged in activities other than the set one, and the child might be seen as wasting time.

Cultural and linguistic discontinuity

Children entering school may experience cultural and/or linguistic discontinuity (see Gregory, 1997). This reflects differences in the primary habitus and secondary habitus (Brooker, 2002), as explained in Chapter Two, and can impact on learning as children struggle with the demands of the curriculum, while acquiring academic competence in the language of school (Dury, 1997; Hill et al., 1998). When children's first language is not the one used in the classroom, bilingual staff may help in mediating between home and school (Brooker, 2002; Dury, 1997). However, even for children who share the language of the classroom, there may be discontinuities in the way it is used. Many authors have explored the differences between children's talk with teachers and the

conversations that happen at home with their parents (see for example, Tizard, 1985; Tizard & Hughes, 1984; Volk, 1997; Wells, 1983). These studies, and others (e.g. Ainley, 1987) have shown that the language patterns used between teachers and students tend to be very different from those used in normal conversations. For example, teachers often ask questions to which they already know the answer (Ainley, 1987; Wood & Wood, 1983). They also use questions which require acquiescence from the child rather than a reply ("Is this where the scissors belong?" "Is everyone ready?"), and make statements which do not have the grammatical form of questions, and yet require a response from the student ("This shape has four sides so we call it a..."). Ainley (1987) and Delpit (1988) indicated that there are class and cultural differences in accepting the language style described above. For example, Ainley (1987) suggested that to Aboriginal children, asking questions to which you already know the answer is "clearly verging on insanity" (p. 25). Volk (1997) found children themselves did not ask this 'known information' form of question, they only asked questions to which they did not have the answer, or when confirmation was sought.

Rogoff (1990) highlighted the difficulties children have in functioning in a system that is not familiar enough with their background to provide sensitive support. If differences are handled with respect, children can benefit from learning the new system while maintaining their home approach. Alternatively, the new culture (e.g. of school) may eradicate features of the home culture. Sanchez and Thorp (1998) proposed that culture provides young children with a sense of identity and a frame of reference, which helps them understand their worlds. Adults may foster the development of children's own cultural identity, or may subvert the process by subtly communicating indifference to their home culture, or being more overtly disrespectful.

The discontinuities outlined so far in relation to time, routines, rules, and so on, may be exacerbated for children whose cultural and linguistic background is not understood by their teachers. Back in the 1970s, Brian Jackson (1979) explored the experiences of six children from different cultural backgrounds as they started at one school in an English city. Within the first week Jackson noticed that children who had most in common with the teacher came to the teacher's attention, while the rest of the class were not really picked out as individuals. Those for whom the difference was greatest, and arguably needed the most "delicate reception", were those who remained very much in the background. The teachers had only limited and stereotyped ideas of the children's home lives, and Jackson's descriptions of a child's domestic life only a few hundred yards away from the school "were like the after-work tales of a traveler from unknown lands" (p. 99). Overall, he concluded that difficulties arose because the teacher was governed by one cultural perspective, and from this frame of reference the

children sometimes did not 'add up', leading either to deficit theories or to the matters simply being passed over.

More than twenty years later, Brooker's (2002) study of Anglo and Bangladeshi children starting school in England showed striking similarities. She found teachers still had very little understanding of the children's home background when this was different to their own. The children who were able to access the highest level of teacher support were those who needed it least, while those children, who, in the teachers' eyes were seen as lacking the attributes for learning, received the least support from teachers and other adults. Questions were still being raised as to how well the pedagogy at the beginning school level was meeting the needs of children from different backgrounds.

The population of Aotearoa/New Zealand is increasingly multicultural, and the gap between rich and poor is widening (Blaklock et al., 2002), making the composition of school classes more diverse than they have ever been. Understanding the part that teachers play in shaping children's experiences during their transition is important for changing earlier patterns of interaction that have disadvantaged children who do not share the teacher's background.

As this section has shown, there is considerable evidence that the move to school heralds a number of changes. Starting school can therefore be understood not just as a physical transition to a new location, but a time when children have to learn to do things differently. The nature and the extent of these differences is likely to vary considerably, depending on the demands of the particular context, and the degree of congruence between this role and other roles on the child's life. In seeking to understand the nature of children's transition, it is therefore relevant to consider how children come to understand and take on the role of school pupil.

Learning the pupil role

A number of writers have proposed that the child's main task on entry to school is learning to become a pupil (Blenkin, 1992; Brooker, 2002; Fields, 1997; Hill et al., 1998; M. Jackson, 1987). To cope successfully with the demands of school, children have to acquire a body of "school specific, social knowledge" (Fields, 1997, p. 7). This involves internalising the many rules that define the teacher's expectations and the children's role in the setting. "Children need to become aware of the expectations and demands of the school situation so that their own learning will become appropriate to the constraints of the situation in the classroom" (M. Jackson, 1987, p. 81). This can include very subtle behaviours, such as children learning to hold their bodies in

certain ways that signal listening and attention (Hill et al., 1998). Balaban (1985) believed that social and emotional adjustment was also part of this process and M. Jackson (1987) saw the development of social competence as crucial. The role of social relationships and friendships is explored in more depth in a later section.

Hill et al. (1998) proposed that before children could focus on the *content* of schooling, learning the culture of the school, and their role within it, that is, what it means to 'do school', was a necessary step. Pye (1988) highlighted the challenge that becoming a school pupil may present to some children. He made an analogy between entering the school environment and being on a submarine, asserting that his own personal characteristics (e.g. anxious, claustrophobic, desires solitude) make him unsuited to life on a submarine. While he might cope, he would not impress, and most of his energy would be taken up with coping. However, "submariners are carefully selected; but everyone goes to school. *And schools are as unlike life as is a submarine*" (p. 37, italics in the original). At school, he has suggested, children become a version of themselves, the version being tailored to the individual's "particular predicament of being in school" (p. 37).

Fernie (1988) found that in some cases the new role may be so different that children must unlearn their first notions of about participation, developed in preschool, in order to adapt to the new requirements of school. "Thus the process of becoming a student may, in some sense, be an unbecoming one" (Fernie, 1988, p. 9). Brooker (2002) also found some children had to unlearn their old concepts in order to acquire the learning behaviours approved of by the school. Sometimes children with the largest adjustment to make seemed to have given up trying to understand what was expected of them.

Although for many children this new role will be negotiated successfully, documented examples of difficulties are plentiful. These include Rietveld's (1996) study of the development of literacy skills in four boys with Down Syndrome during the children's transition to school. A kindergarten teacher had described one of the boy's behaviour as a 'delight', but at school his teacher's focus at his first IEP (Individual Education Plan) meeting was on his inattention and inappropriate behaviour. This showed interesting parallels with Norris' (1999) study where one of the boys went from being 'the star of the crèche' to 'a new entrant with problem behaviour'. Ledger (1997b, 2000) found more subtle, but also negative, changes in a number of children's identities as learners. In the UK the story of 'O', told by Batholemew and Gusafsson (1997), is another example of a boy who flourished in a nursery setting who did not appear to engage in the kind of learning opportunities offered in his primary school.

This change in role on entry to school may help to explain why there are sometimes wide discrepancies between school teachers' views of the capabilities of children, and their early childhood teachers' assessment of the same children (see for example, Dunlop, 2002; Robinson et al., 2000). However, children might go from being viewed as competent and accomplished in early childhood settings to incompetent novices at school, simply because teachers in the two settings had different ideas about children as learners (Dunlop, 2002). Carr (2001) demonstrated the two very different images of the same child that can emerge when different forms of assessment are used, which in turn orient teachers to different approaches in their work. Thus, assessments may contribute to the construction of a new image of the child. The child's structural position in the class (in relation to peers, rather than in terms of absolute ability), and the nature of the child's relationship with the teacher, may also be influential (Pollard & Filer, 1999).

Together, these studies support the view that the process of becoming a pupil can be a challenging one. Rogoff (1997), however, saw learning to manage different expectations, identities and roles as an inherent aspect of development, and therefore not necessarily detrimental (and potentially desirable). There is evidence that children look forward to a more grown up identity associated with starting school (Dockett & Perry, 1999a; Fabian, 1998), but perhaps for some the anticipated status is difficult to achieve in practice. Certainly there are typically some inconsistencies in the messages children receive, which may add to the challenges.

Inconsistencies in the messages children receive

Status and independence are two areas where there are often inconsistencies in the messages children receive. Fabian (1998) drew attention to the contradiction for children when they are told they are about to be a 'big' school girl or boy, but then find themselves as 'one of the little ones' when they arrive. Enrolment policies in Aotearoa/New Zealand mean that this is possibly exacerbated here because children are generally not just *one* of the littlest, but move from being *the* oldest in early childhood education to being *the* youngest at school.

While increased independence is expected at school, this occurs alongside the increased emphasis on rules, noted earlier, and the majority of the day spent on activities selected by the teacher. Brooker (2002) identified the rhetoric of independent time management in the class she studied. Children were expected to make choices and act independently, but this was undermined by frequent summons, without warning, to work in an adult-directed group. She felt that children's autonomy would have been supported by clear information about how long they might get to

spend at an activity. Finally, although, children experience a much higher ratio of children to adults than in early childhood services and at home, which implies greater independence, in practice they may experience more adult attention and surveillance than they have been used to receiving (Curtis, 1986). Some children may seek to avoid this level of contact with the teacher (B. Jackson, 1979; M. Jackson, 1987). Overall, it seems that aspects of school act to quash children's independence, and conformity is rewarded.

Explanations as to why children are more or less successful in adapting to the role of pupil relate to the theoretical positions outlined in Chapter Two. These will be revisited in Chapter Four in relation to the changing pedagogical milieu in which parents/caregivers and teachers find varying advice in relation to handling such differences. One aspect which children themselves frequently identify as influential is their relationship with other children and the development of friendships. The final section in this chapter explores the role of friends.

Friends

The move to school involves becoming part of a much larger peer group than most children will have experienced previously. School provides a central place for the development of friendships, but there is also potential for isolation and bullying (Cullingford, 1991). Pellegrini and Smith (1993) classed social competence and popularity with peers as part of a successful adaptation to school. Several studies have identified a correlation between having friends and other measures of children's adjustment during the transition to school (Ladd, 1990; Ladd & Price, 1987; Margetts, 1997). Ladd (1990) has suggested that prior friendships provide a context for immediate companionship, conversation, and play, and that having access to close friends during school entrance may be especially important in establishing positive school perceptions.

Ladd (1990) found that developing new friendships, as well as maintaining old ones, was also important. A more supportive learning environment may be established if a child has a number of friends in the classroom. In contrast, children without friends were likely to have less favourable school attitudes, increasing school avoidance, and lower levels of performance. However, as with all correlations, the nature of the relationship between friends and attitudes is not clear. While it was proposed that lack of friendships may lead to negative attitudes, Ladd also suggested that poor attitudes towards school may reduce children's opportunities to nurture and maintain relationships with peers, or that other mediating factors may also be at work.

Pollard and Filer (1999) have provided further insights into the complex relationship between academic performance and peer relationships. They describe how some children work to create a 'pupil identity' that is acceptable to their peers. This may involve trying to achieve an appropriate balance between maintaining their peer group status and satisfying school goals through learning. They also revealed an important connection between teachers' actions and perceptions of a child and his/her role, acceptance and status within the peer group. Where a teacher's actions facilitated and promoted a positive image of a child, this supported the child's peer relationships, and a positive cycle of learning and development was likely to occur. In contrast, if a child's approach to learning and identity was not accommodated or valued by the teacher, this could become part of a negative cycle of deteriorating relationships and loss of motivation, often accompanied by unhappiness and a lack of enthusiasm for school. Teachers appeared largely unaware of the important role they played in influencing a child's degree of acceptance and status within the peer group.

Margetts (1997, 2000) measured children's adjustment to school using a Social Skills Rating System (SSRS) and found the presence of a familiar playmate in the same class had a significant effect. Interestingly, having a familiar playmate in the same class compensated for many factors which the study found placed a child at risk of not adjusting well to the first year of school, such as being a younger child in the class, being a boy, attendance at childcare services for more than 12 hours a week, and not having English as a home language (Margetts, 1997). However, the precise relationship between playmates, and the ways in which their presence is so helpful was not explained. On the other hand, in Ledger's (2000) study friendships did not seem to be important on entry to school, and lasting friendships were rare.

Children's own comments have suggested that they measured their success at school by whether or not they had friends. Some children were devastated when they did not have friends, while others went to school in order to make friends (Dockett & Perry, 1999a, 1999b). Moore (2001) found that friendship problems accounted for 65% of five-year-olds' reported playground difficulties during the first weeks of the school year. Research with older children has shown that they spend considerable time working to be accepted and valued by peers (Meritt & Dyson, 1992; Cullingford, 1991; Pollard & Filer, 1999). In the U.K., Cullingford's (1991) interviews with children in the last year of primary and first year of secondary school indicated that they knew "that their happiness in school depends not so much on the quality of their lessons as on the way they develop their relationship with other children" (p. 48). Children of this age spent much of their time subconsciously reflecting on how to make a friendship or how to avoid being isolated or teased, and Cullingford concluded

that "a school's virtues derive from the pleasures of friendship; its terrors from loneliness and isolation" (p. 48).

Friends and peers often play an important role in assisting each other. Ledger (2000) and Ka'ai (1990) both found that peer scaffolding (or tuakana/teina relationships) were less evident in school than in early childhood settings. However, other researchers have indicated considerable peer scaffolding in new entrant classrooms (Higgins, 1992; St George & Cullen, 1999; McDonald & Kidman, 1991). Cullingford (1991) noted that children's sense of personal achievement in a task was not diminished when help was received from another pupil, and that there was often considerable pleasure for pupils involved in working with a partner. Interviews with German children found that children who simultaneously entered school and day care after school (similar to after-school care in New Zealand) were able to develop relationships with older children in the day care setting, which proved useful in school. The older children provided role models and a degree of protection for the younger ones. The context of play afforded at the after school care was perhaps more conducive to the development of friendship than the more structured nature of the school day (Griebel & Niesel, 1999). However, when children have not had these opportunities to develop relationships with older children, new entrants may find the bigger children frightening, which can add to their concern about starting school (Dockett & Perry, 1999b).

Chapter summary

As this chapter has shown, while there has been considerable research on children's experiences of starting school, this has served to highlight the complexity of the event and raised new questions. For example, although there is evidence to suggest that the nature of the initial transition could have long-term consequences, these findings are drawn from large quantitative studies and the results appear to depend on the nature and timing of the measures taken. Qualitative methods have revealed a more variable picture. Thus, more information is needed on exactly how cycles of positive or negative experiences are established, and the ways in which these are open to change.

A common theme in many of the studies on this topic is the discontinuity that children experience on transition to school. While often portrayed as a negative aspect of transition, which can be a source of stress, children's comments indicate this can be experienced positively. One way of understanding the diversity of responses is to consider the ways in which children learn to take on the pupil role, which includes negotiating the changes arising from discontinuities in settings, roles, relationships and so on. Looking closely at how children experience the transition to school, and the

nature of the influences on this process, could provide insights into ways in which children can be supported, and when such support might be appropriate. The presence of friends has already shown to be influential in many cases, although the precise relationship between friends and the nature of children's experiences requires further exploration. Families too are likely to play an important role. The place of families, especially parents/caregivers is interesting because they are potential supports for the child's transition, but are also transition participants in their own right, as they make the move to becoming 'school parents'. The following chapter explores some influences on the transition process relating to parents/caregivers, and to the pedagogical advice that helps to shape the actions that people take.

Chapter Four

Parents/caregivers and children's transition to school

Parents/caregivers may find that their child's entry to school means "learning, in a new sense to be a 'parent', a school parent", a role that carries with it some specific expectations (Brooker, 2002, p. 113). Just as children may find their role as pupil varies in the degree of congruence with other roles in their lives, the role of 'school parent' may or may not be congruent with the parents' other roles, and, where the role is dissimilar, the school's expectations may, or may not be explicit. Parents/caregivers' beliefs and experiences can affect their children in a number of ways. This chapter begins by exploring ideas about parenting, parent-teacher relationships and parent involvement and the impact of these on transition. (The term parents is used here to refer to both parents and caregivers.)

The different theoretical perspectives outlined in Chapter Two, and the range of literature relating to children starting school reviewed in Chapter Three, signal the wealth of different advice to parents and teachers regarding the most appropriate steps they can take in order to enhance their children's experiences. The second part of this chapter provides a brief overview of the changing pedagogical milieu showing how ideas have changed from a developmental point of view, with successive ideas offering different advice about what is best for children. Aspects of many differing views can be present at one time, leading to conflicting and often confusing advice. Each view carries with it ideas about what children 'need'.

Parents and caregivers

Ideas about parenting

In Western society, urbanization and industrialization led to the withdrawal of women, particularly middle class women, and their children into the home. James, Jenks and Prout (1998) suggest the new proximity "thus signified the relationship between mother and child and defined domestic space as 'home'" (p. 53). In the early 20th century motherhood was promoted by some as "an intellectual challenge, as demanding as the boldest business ventures of men" (Schlossman, 1981, p. 286), and mother's role within the home was described as important for the welfare, not just of children, but of society as a whole (see May, 1997). Chapter Two noted the proposed implications of child-centred theories for parents, and by the mid 20th century the influence of the home was seen as a crucial factor in children's development. At the heart of Bowlby's (1965) influential theory was a nuclear family, where an infant or

young child experienced a “warm, intimate and continuous relationship with his [sic] mother (or permanent mother substitute...) in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment” (p. 13). The term ‘maternal deprivation’ was used to describe situations where a child did not receive “the loving care small children need” (p. 140). The father’s role was to provide for the mother, to enable her to devote herself “unrestrictedly to the care of the infant and toddler”, and to offer love and companionship that supported the mother emotionally, so that she would maintain “that harmonious contented mood in the atmosphere of which her infant thrives” (p. 15).

Many of Bowlby’s views were challenged by research both at the time and later (see for example Rutter, 1972), and yet a legacy of these ideas was that mothers were placed as central to children’s development (Burman, 1997). The ‘good’ mother should be always available and always attentive, making the roles of devoted mother and working-woman incompatible. Even at home, the message was that the child, not the housework, should be the focus of attention. However, as the ‘ideal’ home was also clean and well ordered, the ‘sensitive’ mother had to “walk a tightrope of conflicting and impossible demands” by transforming household tasks into a pedagogy that could aid her child’s development (Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989, p. 75). Those (often working class) mothers who did not conform to these ideals were portrayed by many researchers and writers as pathological and requiring correction. In addition, mothers were seen as responsible for any problems the child might later exhibit, with a degree of ‘mother blaming’ being pervasive in developmental literature (Burman, 1997; Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989). Failure to meet the high demands of being a good mother could result in feelings of guilt or failure (Wetherell, 1995). Although ideas about the roles of women have changed, even in the late 20th century Dalli (1999) found a number of New Zealand women felt their choice to work and place their children in child care were at odds with traditional ideas of good motherhood that eschew work or career. This is perhaps not surprising when contemporary writers like Max (1990) reiterated many of the early views of mothers in her discussion of child care, while the current focus on safety sees ‘good’ parents providing as much time as possible supervising their youngsters (Furedi, 2001).

In contrast, research on the role of fathers in children’s development is more recent (see Burman, 1997 for an overview). In Aotearoa/New Zealand, until the 1960s the Western views of motherhood legitimized men’s relative freedom from childcare, and while the nuclear family was seen as ideal, the message was that the physical involvement of the father in the day-to-day care of the child was unimportant (Kedgely, 1996). From the 1960s onwards, changing family patterns have suggested a

more active participation of fathers in childcare (Bird & Drewery, 2000; Kedgely, 1996), but in many cases employed mothers simply found themselves carrying a dual load (May, 1992, 2001). In relation to shaping their children's school experiences, Lareau (1989) found in her American study that for most children it was their mothers who played the major role. Nevertheless, there has been an increasing emphasis on education for fatherhood in recent years, something Furedi (2002) noted is part of the increasing professionalisation of everyday life in Western society.

Overall, Furedi (2002) observed that in Britain and North America there has been a weakening of human bonds, and many areas of human activity that people previously learned as they went along are being increasingly assigned to experts. In this context, parenting for both men and women seems to have moved from something people "just get on with", to a role that requires special training, so that, "what humanity has coped with since the beginning of time now requires the certification of experts" (p. 134). However, Furedi is perhaps referring to an increased emphasis on parent education, as this idea is not completely new. Parent education has featured strongly in progressive educational ideals since the late 19th century. For example, in Europe, Key (1914/1970) claimed that "We are ready to deplore the colossal mismanagement which has gone on century after century in allowing women to come unprepared to their most important vocation... the bearing and rearing of children" (p. 158). It is also evident in contrasting theoretical views, such as Truby King's (1858-1938), for whom child-centred approaches were anathema (1937, cited in May, 1997, p. 141). Truby King created the Plunket society in New Zealand, whose aim was to educate women about motherhood, not just to improve the health of infants, but because it was believed that the fate of the nation was in their hands (Kedgely, 1996; May, 1997).

The role of the school parent

The structure of the school day and the organisation of the school year, with its long summer holidays may present particular challenges for parents of school age children. Dockett and Perry (1999a) found that parents expressed a range of concerns in regard to the organization involved once children started school. Some parents felt that just getting out of the house on time was a major achievement. Belle (1999) drew attention to the fact that in America the present school day and calendar were suited to a time when children's labour was required on family farms, before and after school, and during the summer, but is poorly suited to the modern reality for most families. The organization of Aotearoa/New Zealand schools mirrors the pattern described by Belle. School days are shorter than the full-time work day and the many holidays, early closures, teacher only days, and so on, exceed the leave allowance of most employed parents. This structure of schooling also fits with the view of parenting described

above, where mothers were expected to be at home to care for their children, while fathers went out to work to support their families. Belle described how parents may seek to tailor their work lives to their children's school hours, making economic and professional sacrifices to do so, or make, often complicated, arrangements to cover the children's out-of-school hours, while their parents work.

Cullingford (1991, p. 16) has suggested that for parents, "the school is a center for respect and hope as well as suspicion". As was signaled in Chapter Two, where schools are viewed as "havens of good practice" (Mayall, 1994, p. 122) the school often presupposes what it means to be a 'good' parent of a school child. The school's expectation of parents may be "more or less visible, more or less explicit, and thus more or less difficult to learn" (Brooker, 2002, p. 114). The degree to which the parent is aware of these expectations, and conforms to them, will affect the parents' status within the school setting. A 'good' school parent is likely to be one who has the most middle-class, teacher-like behaviour (Brooker, 2002), thus relating to Bourdieu's (1993, 1997) notion of cultural capital. In contrast, some families fail to meet the schools' implicit expectations, and exacerbate their low status within the school setting. Hence, the need to be explicit in letting parents know what is expected of them is widely documented (Brooker, 2002; Delpit, 1997; Keyes, 1995). Delpit (1997) explained that this is particularly important for parents whose home cultures are not the same as the school's, and who therefore do not share in the codes and rules for participation in the culture of the school. While information is implicitly communicated to those who share the same culture, explicit presentation makes it easier for those who do not share the culture to learn what is required.

Parent-teacher relationships

Lareau (1997) proposed that while all the parents in her study hoped for their child's academic success, parents and teachers can be "natural enemies", because of teachers' focus on the universal and the parents' interest in the particular. Katz (1980) explored the distinction between mothering and teaching in some depth. She identified seven dimensions where the roles of mothers and teachers overlap, such as scope of function, intensity of affect and scope of responsibility. In each of these the central tendency could be expected to be different. For example, the scope of function of mothers is diffuse and limitless, that of teachers is specific and limited. The intensity of affect is high for mothers and low for teachers, and so on. Katz suggested that teachers might find it helpful to acknowledge a mother's advocacy for, and partiality towards, her own child as normal. With this in mind, teachers might respond less defensively to demands mothers might make, and respond with more respect and understanding. They may also see the adversarial aspects in their contact as inherent in their different

roles and not as personality conflicts. (Later Katz (1995) said that if she were to rewrite the paper she would change it to the differences between parenting and teaching, although the basic tenets remained the same.)

Another potential tension in the parent-teacher relationship is that some schools may see it as important to separate children from the effects of their home and family (Krasnow, 1990). For children whose primary habitus (in the family) is quite different from the secondary habitus (valued at school), teachers may view the parents' informal teaching as irrelevant or harmful (Bernstein, 1997). When teachers adopt this attitude, parents may be seen as requiring either resocialisation, or to be kept out of the way. At the same time, while teachers may value parents with the most teacher-like behaviours (Brooker, 2002), such parents may be seen as too pushy (Graue, 1993b; Lareau, 1997), and again teachers may seek to mediate parental influence.

When attempting to establish good relationships between teachers and families, research suggests that first impressions are likely to be important (Balaban, 1985; Cleave et al., 1982; Renwick, 1984, 1989). Unfortunately, during the early days of school, contact is often made only at the beginning and the end of the school day. At the start of the day children may be distressed at separation and teachers often encourage parents to leave quickly, believing this is best for all concerned (Richardson, 1997). The end of the day, when parents are collecting children, may not be any better. Cleave et al. (1982) described how chance remarks which were made when "over-anxious mothers... confronted weary teachers" (p. 120) could sometimes be damaging to the establishment of good parent-teacher relationships. The attitude of staff is particularly important. Interviews with early childhood teachers and parents showed that teachers tended to underestimate how influential their approach and policies were in determining the level of parental involvement (Renwick, 1989) while the teacher's relationship with the parents was an important factor in determining the success of the mathematics interventions where parents came into the classroom to play maths games with children (S. Peters, 1991, 1994).

Parental attitudes towards school are likely to be affected by their perception of the quality of the education and its potential for assisting their children in adult life (Boyden, 1997). Boyden gave examples of cultures where parents believe that their main duty is to prepare children for adulthood by teaching them a trade. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, when universal schooling was first introduced, parents were frequently indifferent or hostile because formal schooling was at odds with the lifestyle of the colonial child (UNESCO, 1972). In the mid 20th century the child-centred approaches that could lead teachers to view school as an ideal

environment (Mayall, 1994), could equally be viewed by parents as inappropriate. An example of this was provided by Holt (1964), who cited a parent's comment that school work should not be interesting because children "are going to have to spend most of their lives doing things they don't like, and they might as well get used to it now" (p. 160). Similar issues were evident in Brooker's (2002) study. Bangladeshi families who were confident in instructing their children at home were likely to view play (albeit planned by the teacher) as a novel and naïve approach to teaching in school, while the Anglo parents' expressed their desire to see some tangible evidence of their children's learning. Graue (1993a) found some tensions in parents' concerns regarding the academic and social purposes of kindergarten. She reflected that parental dissatisfaction with teachers' actions arose from "restricted definitions of learning used by parents" (p. 69). For example, parents saw classes that did more worksheets as more 'academic'. Differences in attitude and values go beyond their impact on parent-teacher relationships. Brooker (2002) described how a passive child, willing to learn, but expecting to be taught, made it difficult for teachers to implement their chosen pedagogy, which expected children to take the initiative, make choices and act independently.

Parent involvement

According to Lareau (1997), family-school relationships are socially constructed and carry "the imprint of the larger social context" (p. 705). Acceptance of a particular type of family-school relationship emerges as a result of social processes. She documented changes in the degree to which parents have been involved in the children's education in American schools, noting that while parents provided practical, economic and financial support in the past, recently parents have been increasingly involved in reinforcing the school curriculum at home, promoting cognitive development, monitoring children's educational achievement and participating in the classroom as volunteers. Today parental involvement in children's education is widely heralded as important and beneficial. However, it is by no means universal (Brooker, 2002; Lareau, 1989, 1997; Renwick, 1984,1989).

Epstien has described six different types of family-school involvement: 1) positive home conditions that support children's development and keeps them healthy and safe, 2) two-way communication between families and schools, with information about school programmes and children's progress shared in ways that are understandable to parents, 3) parent volunteering to help in school, attending school events, or offering other supporting other ways, 4) parents assisting children in learning at home, with homework and other activities, 5) parental involvement in governance and decision making at school, and 6) collaboration and exchanges with community organizations,

and integrating services to support children, families and schools (Epstein, 1995; Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Thus parental involvement in their children's education can occur at many different levels.

Lareau's (1989) very detailed study of how social class influences parent involvement in schooling revealed that there were major differences in the extent to which groups of parents she identified as 'working-class' and 'upper-middle-class' participated in their children's education. Although both groups placed a high value on education, the parents identified as working-class tended to view education as separate from home, something that happened during school hours, and the responsibility of teachers. Extensive efforts to involve these parents met with little success. Lareau (1989) identified a number of reasons for this. The parents saw teachers as having specialised training and knowledge, and they looked up to them and respected their professional status. They viewed the role of the teacher as specialised (in the way that they viewed doctors) and therefore did not feel that they should be involved in their child's education. In many cases they also lacked the confidence or competence to provide help. In contrast, the upper-middle-class parents' relationships with their children's school were characterised by interconnectedness. They were extensively involved in many aspects of their children's education, believing that home and school shared responsibility for education, and they took steps to customise their children's schooling if they felt this was necessary, both by supplementing school activities and seeking to change the child's school experience (by requesting particular teachers or programmes).

Research like this may lead teachers to assume that some groups of parents do not want to be involved in their children's schooling, and overlook the specific reasons for nonparticipation, such as the part played by the teacher's attitude (Krasnow, 1990) and wider constraints on parents (e.g. difficulties with work, transport, childcare and so on) (Lareau, 1997). Timperley & Robinson (2001) found that some teachers in an area of Aotearoa/New Zealand with a high proportion of families from low socio-economic backgrounds thought that low parental involvement was due to parental belief that school was responsible for the formal education of children, and yet, when they actively tried to involve parents in a home reading scheme, they were pleasantly surprised at the interest and enthusiasm shown by parents, the high number of parents (80%) who listened to their child read every night, and the very high return rate of books that were sent home. Hence, while close involvement may not be what either teacher or parent wants (Renwick, 1989), assumptions can often present a major barrier.

For parents who feel they lack the confidence to support their children at school (Goode, 1987; E. Holmes, 1993; Lareau, 1989; S. Peters, 1994), early involvement may be beneficial. Parents were less confident in supporting the mathematical development of seven-year-old children than they were with five-year-olds (S. Peters, 1991, 1994). Anecdotal evidence from those involved in the 1991 study indicated that if parental involvement was encouraged at the new entrant level, parents were more likely to remain involved as their children progress through the school. Supportive programmes, which involve parents from the beginning, may help to avoid the separateness, which Lareau (1989) found characterised the relationships between some families and school.

A further factor to consider when planning family involvement is that many home-school programmes are based on what educators assume parents need, rather than on the actual wishes of the parents (Fredericks & Rasinski, 1990). Farquhar's (1991) study of quality in early childhood centres revealed that while staff and experts in the field felt that parent involvement and close linkages to family were important, the parents themselves did not view their involvement to be closely linked to centre quality. Research to look at the type of involvement families would like could be important in facilitating communication between teachers and families. Also, schools need to be aware that the expectations they have of parents may be implicit, and therefore difficult for the parents to learn (Brooker, 2002; Delpit, 1997).

Finally, schools tend to judge parental involvement in their children's education by the visible involvement on school premises, even though many parents provide a "mountain of *invisible* investment... compared with the visible molehill" (Brooker, 2002, p. 119, italics in the original). Involvement at home (Epstein's levels One and Four, Epstein, 1995; Epstein & Dauber, 1991) is easily overlooked. For example, teachers in Lareau's (1997) study found it hard to judge how often parents read to their children at home.

Parental involvement at school, although generally heralded as positive, has been shown to have both advantages and disadvantages. Some of the documented benefits of parent helping (in addition to the teacher receiving assistance with tasks), include improved parent-teacher relationships, parent education and parental appreciation of the teacher's job (Renwick, 1989). A good relationship with parents can provide teachers with insights that help them to understand children's behaviour (Foote, Stafford & Cuffaro, 1992). Disadvantages include conflict over approaches and methods, changes in the child's behaviour, parents congregating and lack of space, the

presence of babies and toddlers, and organizational problems for the teacher (Renwick, 1989).

Further disadvantages relate to the problem of children being judged on the basis of their parents' actions. Lareau (1989) found that in the working-class school she studied, because parental involvement was unusual, there was a tendency for teachers to overestimate the ability of children whose parents were very involved in the school, and disapproval of the (seemingly indifferent) uninvolved parents' behaviour could lead teachers to overlook some very capable children. This was less of a problem in the upper-middle-class school, where high parental involvement was the norm. However, Lareau (1997) described a different 'dark side' of parental involvement in the middle class school. Teachers were concerned that some parents placed too much pressure on their children. However, teacher interpretations of this varied. For example, one teacher might consider a parent was putting too much pressure on a child, whereas a second teacher might see the same parent as supportive. Nevertheless this pressure from parents is noted in other studies. Graue (1993b) found middle-class parents were active in advancing an agenda for their children. Katz (1980) has suggested that such parental anxiety over children's accomplishments is exacerbated by the trend to smaller family sizes. She proposed that when large families were the norm, parents felt satisfied providing some children did well. "A family with only one or two children may be putting too many eggs in the proverbial basket for it to be carried safely" (p. 163).

Sharing information

If the role of school parent is supported by explicit information and sound relationships with teachers, then it is important to consider how information is shared between home and school. Several studies have found parent-teacher communication to be problematic. In the school Brooker (2002) studied, the only way for a parent to have any contact was to "catch" the teacher. This implied there was no barrier, so therefore no special arrangements were needed to overcome it. However, a parent with something to say required "persistence and skill, as well as linguistic, social and cultural capital" (p. 125). Only parents with linguistic and social skills were able to engage the teacher in conversation, which allowed them to share information about their child or gain information about the classroom. Lareau (1997) found that middle class parents contacted school with apparent ease, but low SES families had much less contact with teachers. Both authors have used the notion of social and cultural capital to explain the differences, and suggested that the type of family involvement and contact promoted in these schools served to create growing inequalities of access and opportunity.

To assist with transition, information meetings have been held at school. Fabian (2000b) compared large and small group meetings and found that in small groups, parents (and children) felt more welcomed and found it easier to get to know the teacher and the learning environment. However, regardless of the group size, the amount of information and the terminology used could be confusing and overwhelming. She recommended that information be kept accessible in both quantity and quality. Dowling (1995) noted that written information is also helpful for parents, but however well presented, it is not a sufficient means of communication.

Obtaining information from parents about children's individual interests, capabilities and personality may also be important. Some work has been carried out in Australia to involve parents in the formative assessment of children's progress (see Withers, 1991). The extent to which new entrant teachers in Aotearoa/New Zealand seek information from families regarding a child's cognitive development is unclear, but the survey of school-entry practices conducted by Thackery, Syme and Hendry (1992) indicated that schools were more likely to gather data on a child's behaviour, health needs, social development and family background from parents than information on their child's performance or interest, in areas such as language and mathematics. An earlier study by Renwick (1984) also found that teachers were more interested in collecting information from parents on their child's health, family circumstances and social emotional development than on the child's particular skills, interests and abilities. However, parent nominations are sometimes used to select children for programmes for gifted children, based on the premise that no one knows children better than their own parents (Davis & Rimm, 1994).

Transition programmes

Several authors have developed guidelines for transition programmes from their research findings. The most detailed of these is Fabian's (2002) guide to successful transitions, which covers the role of the coordinator, flexible programmes that are based on local circumstances, collaboration, finance, timing, visits, sharing information, and early links and ongoing collaboration between home and school.

Dockett and Perry (2001b, p. 5) have provided ten guidelines for "effective transition to school programmes": 1) establish positive relationships between children, parents and educators; 2) facilitate each child's development as a capable learner; 3) differentiate between orientation-to-school and transition-to-school programmes (with the latter being longer term, more geared to "individual needs" (p. 7) and likely to involve a wider range of people); 4) draw upon dedicated funding and resources; 5)

involve a range of stakeholders; 6) are well planned and effectively evaluated; 7) are flexible and responsive; 8) are based on mutual trust and respect; 9) rely on reciprocal communication among participants; 10) take into account contextual aspects of community and of individual families and children within that community.

Margetts (2002b) offered similar recommendations, based on collaboration, clear goals and objectives, understanding the challenges facing children, written plans and strategies, and evaluation in relation to the aims and objectives. Margetts makes confident claims for the benefits of transition programmes where the guidelines have been followed, but there may be barriers to their actual implementation. These include factors such as lack of time and/or resources, too many early childhood services to liaise with, differences between the groups involved in collaboration, lack of interest, reluctance or aversion by one or more parties, and administrative difficulties such as delays in establishing class lists (see Broström, 2002; Fabian, 2002; Robinson et al., 2000). Further, even in collaborative approaches, it is likely that some voices will carry more weight (Robinson et al., 2000). Also, different traditions and understandings of the groups involved (Broström, 2002) and biases and suspicion (Kagan & Neville, 1996), can impact on communication. Therefore, Dockett and Perry's (2001b) guideline regarding establishing mutual trust and respect is likely to be a fundamental aspect of a programme's success, and yet one that is not easily achieved.

The changing pedagogical milieu

Chapter Two included some of the history of different theoretical approaches to child-raising and education as they relate to transitions. This chapter has considered what Furedi (2002) described as the increased professionalism of the parenting role in Western society, along with the pressure for greater parental involvement in their children's education. This section explores aspects of the current pedagogical milieu, including ideas associated with readiness, strategic learners, dispositions, well-being and belonging, and avoidance of risk. Underpinning each of these different approaches to managing children's transitions are not only different theoretical positions but also different constructs of children and different views about what children 'need'. The section therefore starts by considering the concept of needs.

Children's needs

James (1998) has suggested that whilst earlier in the 20th century the nature of developmental and educational theory meant that those in the Western world were

increasingly sure of what children needed, by the end of the century there was less consensus. Jenks (1996), writing about the UK, stated “public perceptions of what children need are indeed in disarray” (p. 132). However, it appears that this uncertainty is not reflected in a lack of advice to parents and educators; instead it seems to result in many, often conflicting, views about what children ‘need’.

Woodhead (1997) reflected on the predominance of ‘needs’ statements, many of which tell more about “the cultural location and personal values of the user” than the nature of childhood (p. 63). He outlined four categories of need statements; need as a part of children’s nature, need that is inferred from what is known of the consequences of particular childhood experiences, need as a judgment about which early childhood experiences are most culturally adaptive, and needs that prescribe the childhood experiences that are most highly valued in a society. Although the different categories of need statements have quite different status he found they were used indiscriminately in professional discourse and policy statements, suggesting that what was described was a timeless and universal quality of children’s nature, rather than (in most cases) a judgment by adults about what is good for children. Bird (2003) notes that children are very rarely asked by policy makers to comment about what they believe their own needs to be. Woodhead drew researchers’ attention to the fact that needs are culturally as well as biologically constituted, and it is important to be aware of the hidden assumptions that surround concepts of development and need. In a multicultural society like Aotearoa/New Zealand, simple generalizations about needs are likely to be problematic, and it is important to accept that there can be many different developmental pathways (Bird, 2003). This is an important factor in the study of transition to school, because the way people think about children and their development is the foundation of the early childhood and school programmes they provide (Graue, 1993b).

Ideas about children’s ‘needs’ and the roles of adults in meeting these needs are inherent in each of the approaches discussed in the following sections.

Readiness

Historically, ‘readiness’ implied measurable levels of physical, intellectual and social development that allowed children to meet the requirements of school. It was seen as biological and maturational (Crnic & Lamberty, 1994; Gesell & Ilg, 1965; Ilg & Ames, 1964). Decisions about what constituted readiness were often based on norms of development. The child who had difficulties could be seen as simply ‘not ready’. However, more recently readiness has been identified as a controversial construct (Crnic & Lamberty, 1994). By contrasting different views of readiness evident in

different school communities, Graue's (1992a, 1992b, 1993a, 1993b) research has clearly shown that readiness is socially constructed idea. It is developed and shared in a setting, and includes ideas about how children grow and what it means to be a 'good' parent or teacher.

Red shirting

The idea of 'readiness' raises questions as to appropriate action for children who are deemed 'not ready'. In some cases, the advice is to keep children out of school. In the USA this practice is called 'red shirting': "postponing entrance into kindergarten of age-eligible children in order to allow extra time for socio-emotional, intellectual, or physical growth" (Katz, 2000, p. 1). (This term for delaying school entry in the hope of giving children an advantage when they do start was originally used when a [usually male] college athlete's participation in regular season games was postponed for one year to give him an extra year of further growth and practice with the team in the hope of improving the player's skills for future seasons.) Graue (1992b) found the percentage of children 'red shirted' in different areas of the United States ranged from 0 to 70 per cent. Delaying school entry is supported by research that suggests that it is an advantage to be an older, rather than younger, child in the class (Crnic & Lamberty, 1994; Griffin & Harvey, 1995; Sharp et al., 1994; Margetts, 2000). However, Graue (1998) explored some of the problems with this approach. Firstly, while holding children out of school may provide them with time to mature, it can also be seen as a "theft" of opportunity for the child to be part of the group, of the parents' opportunity to support the child's growth, and of the teacher's responsibility to make a place for the child in the class (p. 13). In addition, the practice of holding out may create a solution for a particular child, but the long term consequences of keeping many children out of school until they are older is likely to be a change in classroom programmes that eventually drives up the expected norms, so that those who were previously seen as 'ready' become 'not ready' or at risk (Crnic & Lamberty, 1994; Graue, 1993b). Finally, even if one supported the practice of holding out, the question arises as to what evidence the decision should be based upon. As noted in Chapter Two, one approach has been the use of readiness tests.

Readiness testing

In the USA readiness tests have a history related to a benign intention to avoid including children in the classroom "who simply could not keep up with the work, let alone understand what was expected of them" (Ilg & Ames, 1964, p. 20), thus avoiding "failure and strain on the too-young child" (p. 15). However, few are reliable or valid and their use has been increasingly questioned (Crnic & Lamberty, 1994; Miesel, 1992). Kagan (1994) and Meisels (1992) claimed that attempts to utilise

standardised tests to determine readiness for kindergarten entrance in some American states has had disastrous consequences both for classroom programmes and for individual children. Meisels (1992) suggested that the whole premise on which readiness testing is based is faulty, instead of deciding if a child is 'ready' for school, educators should "focus on a child's current skill accomplishments, knowledge and life experiences, and then proceed in a differentiated way to extend a child's mastery to different and more complex levels" (p. 169). Young-Loveridge (1987) made a similar recommendation with regard to mathematics. She challenged dominant views at that time, which had suggested that teachers should wait until children were 'ready', instead of building on their existing knowledge. Readiness tests may also function as a gate-keeping exercise, and keep out of school the children who might benefit most from exposure to academic opportunities (Crnic & Lamberty, 1994). In one of the schools studied by Graue (1993b), all children were admitted for precisely this reason.

'Filling the gaps'

An alternative response to children deemed 'not ready' for school is to focus on 'filling the gaps'. Rather than waiting for readiness to mature, pedagogical practice is taken over by preventing and correcting deviations from what has been deemed to be the norm (Dahlberg et al., 1999). This approach is reflected in what Dockett and Perry (2002) call an environmental view of readiness, where the focus is on external evidence of children's skills and knowledge such as naming colours, shapes and the letters of the alphabet. Aspects of environmental views of readiness are evident in compensatory education programmes, (e.g. Head Start in the US), which aimed to overcome inequalities arising for children whose home habitus was very different from that of the school. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, Jane Ritchie's (1978) *Te Kohanga* project was an example of an early childhood programme designed to teach Maori children from disadvantaged backgrounds specific language skills and concepts believed to be important for school.

Hence, the determinants of readiness broadened from a maturational view to acknowledge the importance of early experience in helping children develop particular skills. In the US, the 1990 National Education Goal that: "By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn" (Shore, 1998, p. 1) was unfortunate in its wording (implying children had not been learning prior to this point), but did justify demands for the provision of high quality early childhood education programmes, access to support and training for parents, and improved health services for young children, in order to foster the desired readiness.

From 'ready children' to 'ready schools': Changing attitudes to readiness

In New Zealand by the 1980s, rather than 'filling the gaps' and assimilating children to European norms, as the *Te Kohanga* project had done, an alternative early childhood service, *Te Kohanga Reo*, began. This focused on teaching Maori language and values and was based on the principle of *tino rangtiratanga*, or self-governance by Maori (May, 2001). Hence, the focus was on changing the nature of the school. Similarly, by the 1990s the emphasis in the US had shifted from 'ready children' to 'ready schools', argued for by Graue (1992a) and Kagan (1994) and discussed in depth in Shore's (1998) report on policies and strategies that assist schools in becoming "ready for the particular children they serve" (p. 3). Graue (1998) proposed that the big question for teachers was 'How am I ready for this child?' She has argued that children are only unready when responsibility is placed on them to meet the demands of teachers and parents, and that adults should be aware that such demands are created by "age-bound notions of the ideal child - not the myriad of individuals who challenge us to meet their changing and dynamic needs" (p. 14).

The pervasive influence of ideas about readiness

Despite its problems and challenges being well documented, the issue of children's school readiness remains a focus in recent education debates in the US (see Kagan, 1999; Pianta & La Paro, 2003), and elsewhere. For example, when discussing a survey of principals and teachers in Australia, Griffin and Harvey (1995) argued for some form of assessment of readiness, citing support from some of the principals they surveyed for a 'certificate of readiness', rather than age, to determine school entry. As recently as 2002 the journal *Early Years* published an article where the author claimed, "The standpoint taken in this article is that the average child's ability to learn or adapt quickly to the new environment is essentially a function of his or her readiness for school" (Yeboah, 2002, p. 6). It is also evident in the way that parents think about their children's experiences. For example, Dalli (1998) found New Zealand mothers of children entering childcare used the notion of readiness to question whether their children were developmentally ready, or too young, to make this transition. Clearly readiness, although problematic, remains a powerful idea.

Learning strategies and dispositions

Rather than considering specific skills that children bring to school, some authors have focused on learning strategies or dispositions. Hill et al. (1998) described the analytical or strategic tools and dispositions that made 'playing the game of school' easier. Cullen (1992, 1998) described strategic learners, who were engaged in activities which included persisting at challenges, using self-directing language, purposeful use of resources, and using adults and peers as resources. Patterns

developed in early childhood appeared to continue in the first year at school, with strategic children maintaining their strategic approach to tasks they encountered in school, although this was affected by the constraints of the primary classroom.

A slightly different approach draws on the idea of learning dispositions, which Carr (1998c) has suggested is one of the key things that children take to school. A number of writers have described learning dispositions (e.g. Brooker, 2002; Carr, 1998a, 1998b, 1998c, 2001; Katz, 1993) or habits of mind (e.g. Costa, 2002). The notion of habitus is reflected in the focus on dispositions. Brooker (2002) has reflected that the classroom offers children quite specific ways of learning, and an important aspect of acquiring a school-like habitus is adapting to these ways. In the setting in which her study was conducted, compliance, prosociality, independence and involvement were found to be appropriate. These required (respectively) the child to; feel at home and accepted, be secure in his/her relationships with others, feel secure and knowledgeable about his/her own abilities and classroom expectations, and be motivated to participate and supported by others when necessary (Brooker, 2002, pp. 149-150).

Carr looked at more general learning dispositions, rather than those appropriate to a particular classroom. She focused on the learning dispositions of courage and curiosity, trust and playfulness, perseverance, confidence and responsibility (Carr, 1998a, 1998b, 1998c, 2001). These relate respectively to Belonging, Well-being, Exploration, Communication and Contribution, which are the strands of *Te Whaariki*, the early childhood curriculum in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 1996). Fostering these dispositions is now an important part of the pedagogy of the early childhood education in Aotearoa/New Zealand. They also relate to assessment practices. Carr (2001) described the domains of the dispositions listed above as: taking an interest, being involved, persisting with difficulty or uncertainty, expressing an idea or feeling, and taking responsibility (see Figure 3). These domains are translated into observable behaviours, and together the sequence described here has been called a Learning Story (Carr, 1998b, 2001). This is illustrated in Figure 4.

Carr (2001) has noted that, “dispositions provide the learner with a narrative (or a number of narratives) about what learning is, *and ought to be*, all about” (p. 39, italics in the original). The focus on dispositions encourages an orientation towards learning goals where children persist with difficulty and strive to understand or master something new. This contrasts with performance goals, where children strive to gain favourable judgments or avoid negative judgments (Smiley & Dweck, 1994). Carr (2001) has extended Dweck’s decontextualised psychological view of learning orientations, to suggest that the goals are enmeshed within a particular sociocultural

context. Pedagogical advice relates to fostering particular habitus, learning strategies or dispositions. Claxton and Carr (2004) have explored this in some depth. They describe dispositions as verbs (rather than nouns), so that persisting (for example) is not seen as something a learner acquires, but a response that an individual engages in “more or less frequently, or skillfully, or appropriately” (p. 2). Learning environments may be a) *prohibiting* (where it is dangerous or impossible to express a particular kind of learning response); b) *affording* (where there are opportunities to develop a range of learning responses but no particular attention is drawn to these or value placed on them); c) *inviting* (which not only affords but highlights particular responses as valued); and d) *potentiating* (where there are jointly constructed opportunities for the development of powerful learning responses).

Strands of <i>Te Whaariki</i>	Learning Dispositions	Actions and Behaviours
Belonging Mana Whenua	Courage and Curiosity To find something of interest here	Taking an interest
Well-being Mana Atua	Trust (and Playfulness)	Being involved
Exploration Mana Aoturoa	Perseverance To tackle and persist with difficulty or uncertainty	Persisting with difficulty, challenge and uncertainty
Communication Mana Reo	Confidence To express an idea, a feeling or a point of view	Expressing a point of view or feeling
Contribution Mana Tangata	Responsibility For justice and fairness, and the disposition to take on another point of view	Taking responsibility

Figure 3. The relationship between curriculum strands, dispositions and actions and behaviours (adapted from Carr, et al., 2000, p. 9)

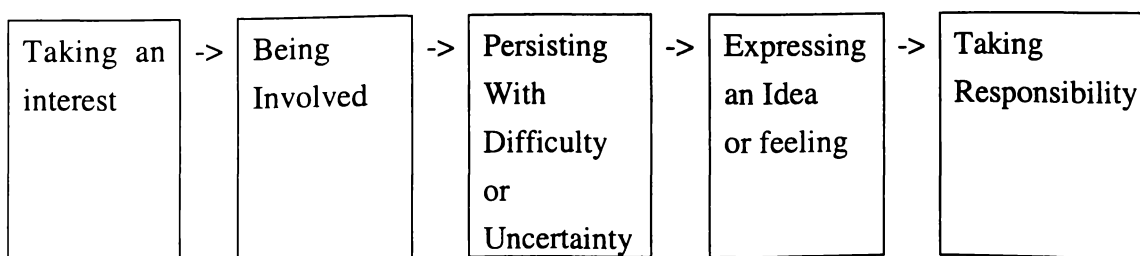


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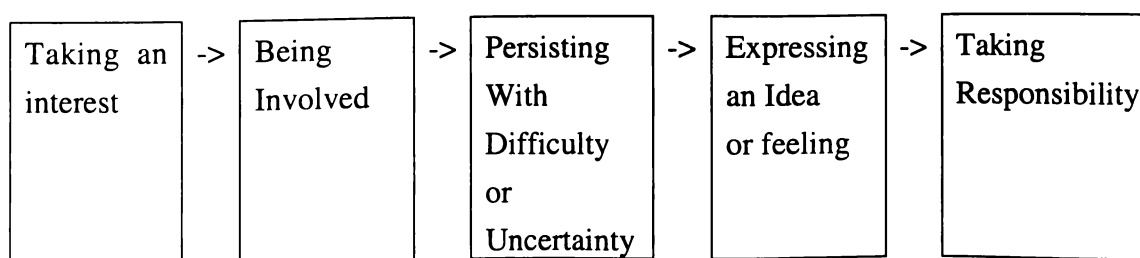


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Well-being and belonging

Other advice regarding the transition to school focuses specifically on well-being. Laevers et al. have proposed that children with high levels of well-being feel 'like fish in water' in their educational environments, "with the ability to maximize their learning potential" (1997, cited in Fabian, 2000b, p. 142). The importance of teachers focusing on children's social and emotional well-being in order to understand their experiences and promote their learning (both in early childhood and at school) is discussed by a number of writers (Broström, 2002; Fernie, 1988; Fraser, 2000; Mayall, 1994; Rietveld, 1996). Drawing on Maslow's work, Rietveld (1996) felt that it was important for children to feel safe and part of the group before their learning could progress. Waters et al. (1992) stated that acceptance of children, making them feel listened to and respected, was an important part of developing that safety. Broström (2002) summed this approach up nicely, saying that a fundamental goal should be for children to have a feeling of well being and belonging that meant they feel "*suitable*" in school (p. 53).

The actions and attitudes of the teacher seem to be particularly important in establishing an appropriate climate. Although an excessive focus on rules and routines can potentially constrain children's learning (Cullen, 1992), some predictability may be helpful. Gregory (1997) noted that:

The hubbub of the early years classroom makes it easy to forget the importance of shared rituals and experiences in enabling children to feel a sense of *belonging* to the group. (p. 1)

Fabian (1998, 2000b, 2002) has offered strategies for supporting children's social-emotional well-being on entry to school through a calm atmosphere, small classes where the teacher has the opportunity to get to know the children, helping children learn each others' names, a child starting with a friend, and helping children and families learn about school. Teachers in Moore's (2001) study used a range of strategies to support children's friendships such as teaching games children could play together, establishing a meeting place during playground breaks so children didn't lose each other, helping children find someone to play with and reading books about friendships.

The issue of safety, inherent in a focus on fostering well-being and belonging is connected to the next pedagogical approach to be considered, which is avoidance of risk.

Avoidance of risk

According to Furedi (2002), safety and risk are dominant issues in Western society today. Furedi claimed that this approach is part of a culture of fear that is a feature of some societies, especially the US and Britain, where the dangers and risks people face are often inflated, so that what in the past might have been seen as bad luck is now interpreted as a major danger, and exceptional events (such as the abduction of a child) are treated as a normative risk. These risks include those associated with health (e.g. medication, sports, exercise and food), the environment and personal relationships (Caplan, 2000; Furedi, 2002).

This cultural climate has a huge impact on the way children are positioned in society, and the related messages for parents and teachers. For example, Furedi (2002) warned that parents are educated to “worry about their offspring’s security as they emerge from the womb” (p. 112). Maternity hospitals seeking to protect babies from kidnapping “indicates a preoccupation with safety that can never start too soon” (p. 1). In the US, there has been an increasing use of technology, such as webcams to allow parents to keep an eye on what happens to their children when they are in the care of other adults (at early childhood centers and at home). Schools in both Britain and the US have increased security to the point where some appear like minimum-security prisons. Children are socialized to view strangers as dangerous, and parental responsibility is increasingly associated with their willingness to supervise and chaperone children, even to the extent that children should not be left alone to watch television, but should have a parent there as co-viewer. This represents a major change in pedagogy from the mid 20th century when parents were more likely to be concerned that they were ‘smothering’ their children (Furedi, 2001).

Furedi (2002) believed that close parental supervision was, in part, linked to the fact that other adults in the community could no longer be relied upon to keep an eye on children and act in ‘loco parentis’ if necessary. Interestingly, although he believed that greater public responsibility for children resulted in less parental supervision, and therefore greater independence for children, Jenks (1996) described attempts to foster greater community involvement as being constraining, and therefore at odds with the “enlightened philosophy” of greater liberty for children (p. 134). Both these views show evidence of the tensions noted by Woodhead (1997) between asserting children’s rights to autonomy and self-determination, and their right to be protected from harm.

The pedagogy of risk avoidance means many activities that were previously seen as healthy and fun are now perceived as posing too great a risk to health. For example,

walking to school, a number of outdoor activities and many school outings (Furedi, 2001, 2002). Safety conscious schools may put restraints on a range of traditional games such as skipping, conkers and ball games (Kirkman, 2000). In this way risk management becomes a controlling tool for organizations such as schools (Caplan, 2000).

Within an atmosphere of anxiety and fear, Furedi (2001) argued that it is no wonder that parents become paranoid about their children's safety. Parental supervision and caution about exposing children to potentially risky situations are seen as positive virtues. Alongside an intolerance to risk taking, there is a view that when negative events do occur, someone is at fault and can be blamed (Furedi, 2002). Adults can be condemned and blamed for putting others at risk, and change is often perceived as a risk (Furedi, 2002). This is reflected in particular attitudes and pedagogy, which can be applied to the transition to school. Both parents/caregivers and teachers may view change negatively and therefore support approaches that minimise the differences children experience between school and earlier settings, to avoid the distress caused by the various forms of discontinuity described in Chapter Three. Parents/caregivers who have learned that to be a 'good parents' involves constant supervision of their children, and have warned their children to be wary of strangers, may experience more concern at releasing their children to the care of the school environment than parents do when the care of children is seen as a shared community responsibility.

Concern about change overlooks the developmental possibilities of coping with challenges (Beach, in press; Rogoff 1990; Vygotsky, 1978a). Also, concern has been expressed that adults' obsession with safety and prevention of risk (including change) can potentially be more damaging than the changes themselves, and may leave children unable to cope with difficulties and develop healthy relationships (Furedi, 2001, 2002; Freely & Bright, 2001; Lowe, 2002; Toner, 2003). Applied to the transition to school, this brings with it a belief that school does not have to be exactly like early childhood. Certainly the four-year-olds described by Carr (1997), who were anxiously awaiting their fifth birthday and the world of school, would no doubt be disappointed to find that nothing had changed, as would the children in Dockett and Perry's (1999a) study, who anticipated a number of differences from prior to school contexts. For Swedish children, the most valued aspect of the change from preschool to school was their pleasure in learning new things, and Pramling and Williams-Granelid (1993) recommend that school teachers capitalise on this, and the child's feeling of being 'big', as the basis for enhancing transitions. Within this approach, the central issue is not so much one of maintaining continuity and avoiding risk, but of

avoiding discontinuity that is beyond the child's ability to negotiate, and creating scaffolds to help the child make connections (Sanchez & Thorp, 1998).

Chapter Summary

The first part of this chapter looked at the role of parents, and more specifically the role of school parents, and how these roles have been shaped in Western society, and can be judged against implicit or explicit notions about what it means to be a 'good' parent in a given context. Parent/teacher relationships are likely to be affected by each party's beliefs, experiences and capital. Therefore, in the study of transition it is important to identify the nature of these beliefs and practices, and their impact on the experiences of participants in a given context. In addition, parental involvement in children's education and the sharing of information between home and school are heralded as beneficial, and fit with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) view of strengthening the mesosystem. However, work is still needed to see how these can be fostered.

The second part of this chapter explored contrasting views of pedagogy, which draw on different constructions of what children need. This pedagogical milieu provides a range of, sometimes conflicting, advice to parents and educators. These contrasting views often coexist at one time (Hill et al., 1998). In coming to understand the experience of starting school, it seems important to understand how the event is currently understood and constructed by parents and educators in a given context. It is also important to explore how this social construction gives rise to particular images of children and parents, which in turn influence the experiences of those involved. It is likely that school entry is a time when different constructions of children and their needs comes to the fore, because of historic differences between early childhood and school sectors. These issues, as they relate to the Aotearoa/New Zealand context, are explored in Chapter Five, which follows.

Chapter Five

A closer look at the Aotearoa/New Zealand context

The literature on children and parents reviewed in Chapters Three and Four has been drawn from a range of countries. Internationally it appears there are many common themes. However, to gain an in depth understanding of transition in a given context it is useful to consider specific aspects of that context, as these macrosystem factors influence the beliefs and practices that shape the participants' experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Chapter One briefly outlined early childhood and school provision in Aotearoa/New Zealand. This chapter describes school enrolment policies and the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices of the two sectors. Systemic differences between the two constitute part of the transition that is made in the move from early childhood education to school.

School enrolment practices

In Aotearoa/New Zealand, although not compulsory until age six, school entry for almost all children happens when they turn five. This contrasts with the more common annual, biannual or termly intakes that occur elsewhere (see for example; Corrie, 1999; Graue, 1993b; Sharp et al., 1994 who describe W. Australia; USA; England/Wales, respectively). It seems there are advantages and disadvantages to each method. Neuman (2002) has suggested that continuous entry, as practiced in Aotearoa/New Zealand and Denmark, has pedagogical benefits, because it provides a more individualized and personal event for the child. It may also have economic benefits because it reduces the financial burden of remaining in more expensive early childhood provision. New Zealand teachers indicated their preference for this practice in Renwick's (1984) study, although some commented that *group* entry might facilitate greater individual attention because the teacher could plan for and work with the group, instead of the individual child having to fit into the established class. Hughes, Pinkerton and Plewis (1979) also noted the pedagogical benefits of all the children being new at one time, because the teacher can devote more time to settling the children in. Certainly entering an established class as the only new person can sometimes lead children to be faced with bewildering experiences during their first days (see Ledger, 2000). However, overseas alternatives, such as when a termly intake joins an existing class, can also be difficult for both groups (Fabian, 1998). Richardson (1997) found no conclusive evidence regarding the best procedure for enrolment.

The practice of starting on their fifth birthday means that children in Aotearoa/New Zealand, although not the youngest internationally, are relatively young on entry to

school compared to children in other Western countries. There is considerable concern in the literature that younger children may be at a disadvantage when they start school. For example, in Australia Griffin and Harvey (1995) found principals and teachers rated younger children as having more problems, both academically and socially. In a larger study, Margetts (2000) found that teachers rated older children more academically competent than younger children in the same class, but not on other measures of adjustment to school. In the UK, Sharp et al. (1994) found that children who started school near to their fourth birthday did less well than children born at the same time of year who started later. However, in these studies it is not clear whether the problem is the children's actual age, or the relative age within the class, or a combination of both, that gives rise to difficulty. Overall, these studies indicate possible trends, but give little indication of the children's actual experiences in the classroom that might lead to such differences, although Sharp et al. (1994) did propose a number of possible reasons, including the view that the curriculum was not appropriate to the youngest children's needs and to teacher expectancy effects, where teachers may label younger children as immature and underestimate their ability, whilst overestimating the capabilities of the older children.

Enrolment practices in Aotearoa/New Zealand mean that a child's relative age ranking in the class changes, at least in the first year, as new children arrive. The timing of the child's birthday often determines the size of class that he or she joins. Continuous enrolment means that in some schools, as the new entrant classes get larger, the older children are taken out to form a new class, resulting in a second transition within the first year. Hence, there are some unique features of enrolment practices to be considered when investigating transition experiences in this context.

Curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in Aotearoa/New Zealand

Both early childhood (May, 1997, 2001) and school (Simon, 2000) provision in Aotearoa/New Zealand has been influenced by local and international philosophers. Different interest groups also try to shape the education system according to their own values and concerns. This section traces some recent influences in the development of curriculum and looks at pedagogy and assessment in the two sectors.

Curriculum development

The 1980s in Aotearoa/New Zealand were dominated by New Right ideologies, which contrasted with the humanist and liberal ideas that had influenced education in the preceding decades (Marshall, 2000; May, 2001; Mutch, 2001; Sullivan, 1997). Prior to the New Right influence, New Zealand governments had not been concerned with curriculum in the early childhood sector, but by the early 1990s there was pressure to

develop a national curriculum framework for both early childhood and schools. May (2001) noted that this reflected an international trend, which emphasised the links between education and the economic success of a nation. The draft version of the early childhood curriculum *Te Whaariki* was published in 1993 (Ministry of Education, 1993a). Hence, the early draft of the current childhood curriculum, *Te Whaariki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) and the *New Zealand Curriculum Framework* (NZCF) (Ministry of Education, 1993b) were developed during a similar time-frame, and in the same context. The English language and te reo Maori versions of the school curriculum documents for the seven “essential learning areas” were published in their current forms between 1992 and 2001, and implemented progressively from 1994 (see Ministry of Education, 2002a for details).

Analysis of *Te Whaariki* and the NZCF, and the forces that helped to shape them, provides useful insights into the tensions between the early childhood and school sectors that are evident in Aotearoa/New Zealand today. *Te Whaariki* translates as “a woven mat for all to stand on”, and this is a central metaphor for the early childhood curriculum (May, 2001, p. 245). The principles, strands and goals provide a framework that allows for different programme perspectives to be woven into the curriculum in a given setting. *Te Whaariki* draws on a liberal progressive/socially critical discourse. It is not aligned to traditional subject areas, but is holistic, viewing the child’s learning as complete and contextual. In contrast, essential learning areas are represented as separate entities in the NZCF, each with individual curriculum documents. Although there is some blurring and overlap in primary schools, the nature of the curriculum achievement objectives means skills and knowledge are often assessed, recorded and reported under each of the essential learning areas (e.g. mathematics, the arts, science) (Mutch, 2001).

Although at the time it was written there was pressure to align the early childhood curriculum with school, this was resisted (Carr & May, 1993). In fact much of the motivation for developing an early childhood curriculum, which the early childhood community feared might constrain the independence and diversity that had been a feature of this sector, came from a concern that not defining a curriculum would lead to the school curriculum moving downwards (May, 2001). The resulting *Te Whaariki* curriculum, developed in consultation with the early childhood community, went against the economically driven agenda of the time (Mutch, 2001), although in moving from the draft to the final version there were subtle changes that suggested this influence. These included the deletion of a position statement regarding the inappropriateness of simplistic assessments such as checklists because they were

imprecise, and a greater emphasis on measurable outcomes for accountability purposes (see Haggerty, 1998).

Nevertheless, the conceptual frameworks of the school and early childhood curriculum documents are very different. Mutch (2001) questioned how such disparate developments were possible and speculated that while the Business Roundtable and other New Right lobby groups influenced the school curriculum, they may not have considered early childhood education as important, or not understood the learning and teaching of young children. Also, Carr and May (1993), co-directors of the early childhood Curriculum Project that produced *Te Whaariki*, described the influential support and commitment of Maori working-group members during the development process. The nature of the resulting bi-cultural document reflected the emphasis on holistic development that is evident in Maori developmental theory (see Macfarlane, 2000; Pere, 1988; Royal-Tangaere, 1997). As noted in Chapter Four, many different views can coexist at one time, and the early childhood curriculum “produced an alternative voice in education policy and curriculum” (Mutch, 2001, p. 83).

Connections between early childhood and school curricula

Given the very different approach taken in the school curricula, the distinctive early childhood curriculum (and training) was viewed by May (2000) as a positive. However, perhaps because the nature of the *Te Whaariki* curriculum was unfamiliar, and went against the level of prescription inherent in the New Right ideology (K. Sullivan, 1997), it initially attracted criticism from the Education Review Office (ERO, 1998). They said that it failed to give clear direction or guidance to early childhood educators “to ensure that they are contributing positively to young children’s educational development” (p. 4), and went on to state:

In failing to identify a positive relationship between early childhood education and school education *Te Whaariki* creates the impression that early childhood education exists in a vacuum, is complete in itself and has no relationship with further learning. This has ramifications for children’s readiness for school programmes especially in terms of literacy and numeracy. (ERO, 1998, p. 12)

The Education Review Office’s (1998) criticism of *Te Whaariki* (above) was harsh in view of the fact that the final section of *Te Whaariki* does outline the connection between each of its ‘Strands’ and the ‘Essential Learning Areas’ and ‘Essential Skills’ of the school curriculum. In contrast, none of the school curriculum statements (several of which were published after the final version of *Te Whaariki*) make reference to the early childhood curriculum. It is interesting that despite the Ministry

of Education's (1994b) strategic direction for a "seamless" education, copies of *Te Whaariki* were not issued to new entrant teachers. Instead, school teachers could, if they wished, purchase their own copies from the publisher (Learning Media, personal communication, March 4, 1999). When the early childhood curriculum was introduced, school teachers had been faced with many new curriculum documents, so there may have been little incentive for teachers to consider something seen as relating to a different sector, and which they had to locate and pay for themselves.

A focus on literacy and numeracy

In recent years, the interest in literacy and numeracy, signaled in the ERO (1998) quotation above, has been a major influence on the school curricula. The National Administration Guidelines now state that priority should be given to "student achievement in literacy and numeracy, especially in years 1-4" (National Administration Guidelines 1, i, b, Ministry of Education, 2001d). In schools this has led to considerable developments in the form of the Numeracy Development Project, including the Early Numeracy (Ministry of Education 2002f; Thomas & Ward, 2002) and the Advanced Numeracy (Higgins, 2002) Projects. The Numeracy Project includes a developmental framework that describes children's increasingly sophisticated number knowledge and strategies for problem solving (see Ministry of Education, 2002i).

The developmental framework underpinning the Numeracy Project is echoed in the work of the school Exemplar Project in mathematics (see for example, Ministry of Education, 2002c, where there are three levels within Level One for measurement). The intention is to show progressions and possible pathways (Chamberlain, 2001), and some teachers have found specific frameworks and benchmarks useful as a guide to practice and ensuring their programme's efficiency (Timperley, et al., 1999; Thomas & Ward, 2002). Nevertheless, some concerns have been raised. Teachers are encouraged to use the assessment tools that have been developed to gather data and report on student achievement (Ministry of Education, 2002h). However, Hill (2002) has suggested assessment may simply be used summatively, which will not necessarily improve student achievement as this appears to be related to formative assessment, and teachers recognizing and responding to student learning.

In contrast, in early childhood, *Te Whaariki* acknowledges broad developmental progression, but in its integrated approach draws more on sociological and ecological theory, and avoids separate learning areas or fine-grained curriculum progressions. Perhaps because of the support, both internationally and locally, for the image of the learner that is central to the *Te Whaariki* curriculum, especially with regard to

dispositions, (e.g. Blakemore, 2000; Carr, 1997, 1998b, 2001; Katz, 1993, Smiley & Dweck, 1994), by 2000 there appeared to have been a growing acceptance by the Education Review Office that there were good reasons for avoiding assessment of specific achievement outcomes in early childhood. In a report on literacy and numeracy they stated:

Research on the long term effects of various curriculum models suggests that the introduction of academic work into the early childhood curriculum yields good results on standardised tests in the short term, but may be counterproductive in the long term. For example, the risk of early instruction in reading skills is that the amount of drill and practice required for success at an early age will undermine children's dispositions to be readers. It is clearly not useful to learn skills if, in the process of acquiring them, the disposition to use them is lost. (ERO, 2000b, p. 10)

Fostering both skills, and the inclination to use them, is consistent with the current early childhood philosophy in Aotearoa/New Zealand, and the definition of numeracy underpinning the Numeracy Strategy, which states: "To be numerate is to have the ability and inclination to use mathematics effectively in our lives - at home, at work, and in the community" (Ministry of Education, 2001a, p. 1). The idea of focusing not just on skills but also on learning dispositions (Carr, 2001) therefore provides a potential link between the sectors.

Such an approach would have been supported by part of Strategy Three of the *Report of the Working Group for the Strategic Plan for Early Childhood* (Ministry of Education, 2001b), that recommended schools be encouraged to incorporate the principles and strands of *Te Whaariki* into the teaching of new entrants. However, when the final document was released, this had been changed to proposing that coherence of education between birth and eight years would be achieved by promoting a better 'understanding' between early childhood teachers and primary teachers about the links between curricula (Ministry of Education, 2002g). Nevertheless, there have been recommendations from a recent curriculum stocktake to revise the eight groupings of essential skills in the NZCF to five groups of essential skills and attitudes, and that these five should be consistent with *Te Whaariki*, and incorporate capability to use the skills, discernment in their use, and willingness to use the skills (Ministry of Education, 2002a). However, this recommendation is not a statement of government policy and to date, beyond the work of a few interested individual teachers (e.g. Chapman, 2002, who is using *Te Whaariki* as the curriculum for her new entrant class), making curriculum connections has rested largely with the early childhood sector.

Since 2000, early childhood professional development contracts have had as one of their aims 'to increase educator and parent/whanau knowledge and understanding of practices that support children's positive transitions between services and school or Kura Kaupapa Māori' (J. Delaney, Early Childhood Professional Development Programme, personal communication, November 9, 2002). The Early Childhood Learning and Assessment Exemplar project includes illustrating links to the school curriculum framework as one of the functions of exemplars (Ministry of Education, 2002d), and an early childhood mathematics group has been involved in developing a framework for use in early childhood that is consistent with the principles and strands of *Te Whaariki*. The group explored a metaphor of lenses to allow specific aspects of mathematics to be illustrated within authentic meaningful activities. These specifics could then be connected to the school curriculum. A similar working group has been established for literacy. Hence, early childhood educators are trying to negotiate some connections to support transition between the two sectors, without relinquishing the philosophical approach that underpins what they do.

Pedagogy

Just as there is a history of difference in curricula, there is a long-standing sense that early childhood and primary school pedagogical approaches differ. Although progressive educational ideals did bring play into the early years of New Zealand schooling (May, 1997, 2001), it is generally acknowledged that learning through play has a more central role in early childhood than at school, and there tends to be more constraints on time and activity, and a more teacher-led approach in school classrooms (see for example, Ledger, 2000; Norris, 1999). However, in recent years early childhood teachers have been advised to take a more proactive role in scaffolding children's thinking than they have in the past (Meade, 1998; Meade & Cubey, 1995; A. Smith, 1993, 1998), consistent with sociocultural theories. Recent examples of children's involvement in complex, authentic tasks such as concrete making (Mitchell, 2002) and sewing (Carr et al. 2001) suggest that in some centers at least, early childhood education is taking on an apprenticeship model to real tasks, but with the child taking a leading role in its instigation and procedure (unlike a traditional apprenticeship where the child follows the adult). The degree of control, as well as the nature of the pedagogy and tasks, is likely to be different on entry to school. For children moving from Kohanga Reo to mainstream schools pedagogical differences may include less emphasis on tuakana/teina (sibling/peer teaching) roles, and on whanaungatanga (relationships) (Ka'ai, 1990).

Where more formal methods are used in schools, it is often argued that these should be introduced into early childhood education as a preparation for what is to come.

Research has shown that new entrant teachers value early childhood services that prepare children for structural aspects of school (Robinson, et al., 2000). When working to improve children's transitions, the Robinson et al. study found that some early childhood educators felt dominated by the school sector and did not voice their concerns and opinions. Using one teacher's experience of simply being told by the school what the early childhood centre could do to 'better prepare children for school' as an example, they stated:

More equal influence was unlikely to be established until the early childhood teacher was able to express her concerns about the school's approach and treat as contestable the differences between their theories about preparing children for transition. (p. 106)

This is an important consideration for future projects, as historically, links between early childhood and school seem to have been characterized by a push down of school curriculum and pedagogy into early childhood (Corrie, 1991; Neuman, 2002). However, there have been some attempts at collaboration across the sectors in literacy education. Studies in Auckland have involved both early childhood and school sectors working together (Phillips et al., 2002; Robinson et al., 2000), with apparently promising results for children's learning, although only measured in specific tests of this particular domain (see Phillips et al., 2002). However, even the validity of these claims have been challenged, due to features of the research design and the interpretations of the findings (Education Policy Group, 2003).

Assessment issues

Although little support has been given to familiarizing school teachers with the nature of the early childhood curriculum, in the 1990s increased attention was paid to recognizing children's prior learning, fueled largely by the findings of research, such as Young-Loveridge's (1989) study, which showed that some children were at school for two years before they were taught concepts about number that they did not already know on entry. Starting school was identified as a 'key transition point' at which assessment should occur to enable teachers to make appropriate decisions about each child's future learning programme (Ministry of Education 1993b, 1994a). Initially there was debate about the form that school entry assessment should take. The Curriculum Framework (Ministry of Education, 1993b) and the handbook on assessment policy (Ministry of Education 1994a) both stated that at school entry, assessment procedures would be based on a more systematic use of current diagnostic procedures for five-year-olds, and yet a survey in 1992 of the existing assessment procedures revealed that more work was necessary to produce suitable assessment tools (Thackery et al., 1992). Little progress appeared to be made until School Entry

Assessment (SEA) was developed and released in 1997. SEA provided materials for assessing children's concepts about print, oral language ability (through a story retelling task) and their understanding of number (revealed through playing a supermarket shopping game) (Ministry of Education, 1997).

According to the NZCF, the "primary purpose of school-based assessment is to improve students' learning and the quality of learning programmes" (Ministry of Education, 1993b, p. 24). Assessment in school is focused largely on the child's subject knowledge, with the intention of providing a starting point for teachers placing children in "the appropriate level" within classroom programmes (Ministry of Education, 1994a, p. 4). Assessment is also used to provide feedback to parents and students, awarding qualifications, and monitoring overall national educational standards (Ministry of Education, 1993b).

Te Whaariki posed challenges for the development of new forms of assessment that would ensure the processes were in the interests of children and families and fit alongside the principles of the curriculum (Carr, May & Podmore, 1998). Carr has focused considerable attention on this issue, looking specifically at children's learning dispositions. She proposed a Learning Story framework for assessment in early childhood that is consistent with the principles and strands of *Te Whaariki* (Carr, 1997, 1998a, 1998b, 1998c, 2001). This was described in Chapter Four.

The learning stories are "a pedagogical tool for: the transformation of participation (encouraging further and deeper learning), the prevention of narrowing of learning, the transmission of classroom culture to the participants", and the reframing of deficit narratives to more positive stories (Carr, 2001, p. 101). Carr (2001) contrasted this with what she calls her "folk model" of assessment, which checked children's performance against a short list of fragmented and context-free, school-oriented skills. Such a check-listing approach foregrounds deficits and gap filling, while the Learning Story is a credit model aimed at enhancing dispositions. Learning Stories are not the only form of assessment used in early childhood, but to be consistent with the Desirable Objectives and Practices assessment practices (and curriculum) must: a) reflect the holistic way that children learn; b) reflect the reciprocal relationships between the child, people and the learning environment; c) involve parents/guardians and where appropriate, whanau; d) enhance children's sense of themselves as capable people and competent learners (Ministry of Education, 1998b).

Chapter Summary

The Aotearoa/New Zealand context is characterized by systemic differences between early childhood and school. Different objectives, approaches and methods, such as those noted in this chapter, not only contribute to discontinuity between early childhood and school, they may work against cooperation between the sectors, because closer connections may be seen as a threat to the different ways of working with children that are characteristic of each setting (Neuman, 2002). Bias and suspicion can also work against developing communication between the two sectors (Kagan & Neville, 1996). Even when early childhood and school practitioners *espouse* the same principles and philosophies, their views of children as learners has been found to differ markedly (Dunlop, 2002). These factors are important considerations for understanding the move that children make from early childhood education services to school. In many respects it is not just a transition to a new physical context, but an entry point to a new 'culture' where teaching, learning and assessment are different, and hence what it means to be a learner is constructed differently. Efforts to address this have tended to look at making the two sectors more aligned and the transition more "seamless" but as Chapter Four has indicated, complete continuity between sectors may not be desirable. Hence, work is needed to see how "coherence", as recommended by the strategic plan (Ministry of Education, 2002g) might be defined, and to explore some of the issues to be considered in this process. This study will provide important information on how systemic factors impact on actual experiences, and what lived experiences can show regarding potential ways forwards. The following chapter describes the rationale for this study and the questions that it addresses.

Chapter Six

Rationale for the study

This chapter describes the position taken in the original proposal for this study and ways in which the research questions were refocused in the light of the ongoing investigation. It sets out the rationale for the study, and the final questions that are addressed by this thesis.

When this study was first planned there was an identified need for research to inform new entrant assessment practices (Thackery et al., 1992), and it seemed important to explore both why assessment data were collected and how/if these data were used. Informal conversations with teachers during the mid 1990s indicated that accountability requirements had led to a lot of assessment and recording, which teachers did not find particularly useful. In studying assessment, it appeared helpful to understand the feelings and experiences of children, teachers and families. These three groups are adapting to one another during children's transition to school (Ramey & Ramey, 1994) and I wanted to explore how their views and experiences impacted on any assessment that was carried out. At that time, studies conducted by Cleave et al. (1982), Renwick (1984), Lareau (1989) and Graue (1993b) had provided a detailed picture of children, teachers and parents at the beginning school level. Lareau (1989) considered (briefly) how this impacted on assessment, mentioning that for the working-class children in her study, the teachers' view of the parents' attitudes and actions tended to influence their assessment of the children. Graue (1993b) provided useful insights into the social construction of ideas about starting school, and the place of assessments in this process. However, of the studies noted above, only Renwick's (1984) had been conducted in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Given that Renwick's data were collected in the late 1970s, and many changes had occurred since then, both in educational policies and in New Zealand society, it seemed important to conduct new research in this area.

The main research question focused on exploring what information was gathered during a child's transition, who gathered it, from whom it was gathered, and how this information was used. In order to consider this question within the context of school entry, a second question focused on exploring how children, families, new entrant and early childhood teachers viewed the transition to school. Taking account of these multiple perspectives was an important feature of the proposed research. Ghaye and Pascal (1988) had identified the interactive nature of the transition process, and recommended further research that "documents, assesses and then acts upon the

‘experience’ of starting school as recorded and discussed with the children, parents and teachers involved” (pp. 206-207).

Chapter Seven makes the case for the interpretive methodology that was selected to address these original questions. My initial proposal identified qualitative methods as the most appropriate, but gave a tentative outline, acknowledging that modifications might be necessary, once data collection was in progress. The interpretive methodology (Erickson, 1985) involved extending the literature review throughout the study, and the process of data collection, reading and analysis, continued to shape the focus. Although my first thoughts had been that assessment would play an important part in the transition to school, once I started to gather and analyse data, it became clear that for the participants there was much that concerned them about the transition to school, but assessment was not seen as an issue that was of particular importance. As the research progressed it highlighted the complexity of the *transition* aspect of the topic, which was, as Ghaye and Pascal (1988, p. 206) had noted, a “poorly understood” phenomenon. Thus, assessment issues were included in the final study as one aspect of the transition experience, but these were no longer the primary focus.

During the years of the study many other researchers also came to believe that more work in the area of children’s transition to school was necessary. The summary in Table 1 and the reviews in Chapters Three, Four and Five show that from my study’s beginning in 1996, local and international literature on the topic burgeoned. The material in these chapters provides an overview of some of the major findings of relevant previous research, but is by no means an exhaustive account of all the research on this topic. The growing interest in transitions can be understood within the culture of fear that Furedi (2001, 2002) described as a feature of many Western societies in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. If adults become more concerned about protecting children from risk, then greater concern can be expected regarding events that involve change, as this in itself is often perceived as risky. Furedi’s work helps to position the recent interest in this field within a cultural framework that pathologises negative events. However, the rationales for much of the research on transition to school have not been focused on increased safety and the avoidance of change. Instead, research interest has been fueled by suggestions that children’s initial transition to school has implications for their later success (Alexander & Entwistle, 1988; Dockett & Perry, 1999a; Early et al., 1990; Fabian, 1998; Margetts, 1997; Ramey & Ramey, 1994).

Although these claims of stable pathways, set in motion by the nature of a child’s transition appear plausible, as Chapter Three showed, findings from a range of large

survey-type studies that sought to explore the relationship between measures taken on transition to school and later success have been inconclusive, and provide “only part of the story” (La Paro & Pianta, 2000, p. 476). Other approaches are necessary to understand specific processes that shape cycles of experience. As Pollard and Filer (1999) found, the influences are likely to be complex and interwoven.

It is important to understand these experiences because, even if pathways are not necessarily stable, there are many examples of children for whom the school experience is problematic. Where children have problems taking on the role of the pupil, and this is constructed as deviant or deficit because they do not meet expected norms (Burman, 1997, 2000; May, 2001, McNaughton, 2002), schools can become “risky places for promising children” (McNaughton, 2002, p. 17). This is a more specific risk than the generalized notion of change alluded to by Furedi (2001, 2002). Deficit models appear to work against children, by setting up differential learning experiences. Those who appear to require the most support seem least able to access it (B. Jackson, 1979; Brooker, 2002). McNaughton (2002) and Phillips et al. (2002) describe how children who are seen as having deficits in areas such as literacy often receive less profitable learning experiences than children who appear more capable. The gap between these two groups is likely to widen, unless deliberate steps are taken to change this pattern.

It appears that children’s learning is enhanced when teachers understand and capitalize on the strengths that children bring to school from their primary habitus (Brooker, 2002; McNaughton, 2002; Phillips, et al., 2002). In Aotearoa/New Zealand, the considerable recent interest in literacy learning during the transition to school reflects the priority accorded to achievement in literacy and numeracy during the first years of school (National Administration Guidelines 1, i, b, Ministry of Education, 2001d). However, overseas research has shown that at the new entrant level, children are also learning what it means to ‘do’ school (Hill et al., 1998). This is a complex requirement that involves children’s knowledge of the expectations within the specific context in which they find themselves, and their ability to meet these expectations (Brooker, 2002; Fernie, 1988; Fields, 1997; M. Jackson, 1987). Although Ledger (2000) has explored New Zealand children’s voices regarding their experiences, further work is required to explore how children in this country take on the role of pupil, and how this impacts on their abilities to become what Brooker (2002) calls a ‘good learner’.

In addition, although there is a wealth of literature on various aspects of the process of becoming a pupil (see Chapter Three) some specific questions remain. Firstly with

regard to understanding children's experiences during lunchtimes, to see why this is an aspect of the beginning school experience that frequently proves to be difficult (Cleave et al., 1982; Curtis, 1986; Ledger, 2000; N. Smith, 2002, 2003). Secondly, further research is required to explore the relationship between friends and the nature of children's experiences. Friendships have frequently been identified as an important issue for children as they make the move to school (Dockett & Perry, 1999a, 2003b; Ladd, 1990; Margetts, 1997, 2000b; Pellegrini & Smith, 1993; Pollard & Filer, 1999; Renwick, 1984) but this is not always the case (see Ledger, 2000).

Exploration of these specific issues, within the overall context of children's experiences, will help to identify the processes that lead to particular cycles of experience. As part of this process, the experiences and ideas of parents and teachers will also be influential. Chapter Four identified some of the issues for parents in becoming a 'school parent', and possible tensions in the relationships between parents and teachers. Chapter Five demonstrated that the interweaving of the different participants' experiences also has to be understood within the wider context. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, curricula, pedagogy and assessment are quite different in the early childhood and school sectors, which adds to the complexity surrounding the transition to school.

In the face of this complexity, a goal of the strategic plan for early childhood education is to "promote coherence of education between birth and eight years" (Ministry of Education, 2002g, p. 17). Research in this area is therefore important and timely because, as I discussed in Chapter One, "effective transition practices" form part of the plan to promote "coherence", and yet what constitutes an effective transition is still unclear. There are some useful guidelines on transition programmes (Dockett & Perry, 2001, 2003b; Fabian, 2002; Margetts, 2002), but the raft of pedagogical advice described in Chapter Four shows that there are many, (sometimes conflicting), views about how transitions should be managed. Another strategy in the plan is to achieve a better understanding between teachers in schools and early childhood services regarding curriculum links and the pedagogy of the other sector. Developing an 'understanding' sounds promising in terms of establishing a supportive mesosystem for children and families (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) but there has been a long history of attempts to 'push down' school curricula to early childhood (Corrie, 1999; Neuman, 2002), and very little information on the process of achieving a shared understanding across sectors. Recent research on this topic showed that early childhood educators did not feel that they had an equal voice in the process (Robinson et al., 2000). Hence, further research is required to inform the implementation of this plan.

Overall the picture that has emerged from existing research on transition to school is one of complexity. Although there is a considerable body of knowledge that informs our understanding of aspects of transition, many questions remain unanswered. Research is required that tells the 'story' of transition, with the level of detail that allows the interwoven patterns of influence to be examined. The purpose of my study was to address this issue. It was hoped that exploring the specific processes that shape transition experiences would offer important insights for practice and policy. The main research question are:

How do children and their families experience transition?

What are the beliefs and practices that helped to shape the transition experiences of children and their families?

What are some of the key issues for children in the process of them becoming pupils?

Chapter Seven reviews relevant research methods for addressing these questions and identifies the issues that were taken into consideration in planning and conducting this study. Chapter Eight describes the final research design.

Chapter Seven

Review of research methods

This chapter considers literature on research methods that informed the approach taken in addressing the research questions identified in the previous chapter. It locates the study within an interpretive methodology and considers the relevant methods of data generation, analysis, accountability and generalization.

Several writers have distinguished between two broad paradigms or world-views in educational research. The positivist view is based on the notion that reality exists and can be discovered and measured, and expressed as factual statements and law-like generalisations, while the interpretive approach assumes that concepts of reality vary from one person to another and the task is to understand and interpret the subjective world of human experience (Bassey, 1999; Cohen & Manion, 1989; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Holliday, 2002). My initial research questions could be drawn from either paradigm, but my ecological and sociocultural theoretical perspective and intent aligned them with an interpretive approach, as the intention was not to test data against a preconceived hypothesis, but to explore the experiences of different participants in the transition to school, and try and gain an understanding of what shaped and affected transition experiences in a natural setting. While survey techniques could have been used, this would have distanced the data from the actual experience of transition, and provided only one part of a picture that has already been shown to be complex (Ghaye & Pascal, 1988; Norris, 1999; Pollard, 1996; Pollard & Filer, 1999).

Interpretive data is usually described as qualitative. In fact, a number of authors seem to use the terms interchangeably. However, while interpretive data is not normally open to the quantitative statistical analysis used by positivists, it can sometimes be analysed numerically (Bassey, 1999). For this reason, Erickson (1985) preferred to use the term *interpretive methods*, as opposed to qualitative methods, because this avoids a simplistic comparison with quantitative approaches. This distinction also seems useful because within a qualitative framework there may still be positivist assumptions. For example, a researcher may gather observation data, with the positivist assumption that it is possible to minimize observer effects and “tell it like it is” (Holliday, 2002, p. 20). Alternatively, some researchers argue that people construct social worlds and that researchers themselves are involved in this construction through their interpretations and writing. Instead of considering the researcher to be an invisible ‘fly on the wall’ the researcher’s influence is acknowledged as unavoidable, and even “a *resource*, which must be capitalized on”

(Holliday, 2002, p. 145, emphasis in the original). In interpretive research the task becomes one of understanding, rather than eliminating, this influence.

Interpretive methods

Erickson (1985) has described interpretive methods as the most appropriate for uncovering the “meaning-perspectives” of the particular actors in particular events (p. 121). He argued that everyday life is largely invisible and we do not see the patterns in our actions as we perform them. Interpretive research seeks to answer questions that concern the invisibility of everyday life by making the familiar strange. “The central questions of interpretive research concern issues that are neither obvious nor trivial” (p. 122). For example, as Bronfenbrenner (1986) suggested, two families may share the same demographic features but operate within their family group in radically different ways. The interpretive researcher seeks to understand these differences.

Graue and Walsh (1998) suggest that there are three levels the researcher moves through in using an interpretive methodology. The first is the everyday observable, where the researcher sees only that which is immediately visible. Through careful recording at the first level, the researcher begins to notice things that have been there all along but were not so obvious. The rich description generated at the second level includes crosschecking hunches, collecting data from many sources, looking for patterns and developing themes. At the third level theoretical explanations broaden the scope of the rich description to attempt to explain why things happen the way they do. It moves the isolated observations to “instances of something” (p. 95). Erickson (1985) described the process as looking first with a wide-angle view, then focusing more closely but occasionally looking wide again to look for outside influences. The result can be “a rich narrative that is at once general and particularistic, broadly focused, while thickly descriptive” (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p. 5). This approach resonates with that of ethnography.

Ethnography

Ethnography was described by Lutz (1981) as:

a holistic, thick description of the interactive processes involving the discovery of important and recurring variables in the society as they relate to one another, under specified conditions, and as they affect or produce certain results and outcomes in the society. (p. 52)

Pollard and Filer (1999) add that it focuses on “understandings, interpretations and subjective perceptions, as well as patterns in actions and behaviour” (p. 2). This is

evident in Brooker's (2002) ethnographic research on transition, where she looked for patterns that helped to 'explain' children's experiences and outcomes.

A true ethnography requires total immersion in the field of study for a considerable length of time (see Lutz, 1981), and ethnographers often take on the role they are studying (Bassey, 1999; Holliday, 2002). This may not always be possible for the education researcher. However, elements selected from ethnographic research methods, such as interviewing, participant observation, and qualitative analysis (Ramsay, 1985) are useful research tools, and can be used to provide an in depth study of what actually occurs in the classroom. Holliday (2002) proposes that the ethnographic method of thick description can be achieved even in small case studies, providing suitable data have been gathered to explore and consider many facets of a situation. He contrasts thick description, which gives the context, and states meanings and intentions that organise the experience, with thin description, which simply reports the facts.

Case study

Case studies are distinguished less by methodologies than by the subjects/ objects of their enquiry, but they sit well with an interpretive approach (Cohen et al., 2000). Natural groups are the typical unit of analysis studied in interpretive research (Erickson, 1985). Graue and Walsh (1998) suggest that the focus of interpretive research should be intensely local as a researcher who looks too widely loses the chance to look very closely. The aim is to study a setting in detail and understand particular events, and not to select settings or subjects that represent a population (Bassey, 1999; Graue & Walsh, 1998; Holliday, 2002). Bassey (1999) describes this as "a study of singularity" (p. 47), bounded by time, place and culture (Holliday, 2002; Miles and Huberman, 1994). Case studies may have sub-cases within them (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Graue and Walsh (1998) and Erickson (1985) remind researchers that the local context being studied is nested within larger, overlapping contexts, which may also need to be taken into account in order to understand what is happening (such as looking at the family and community to understand what happens in the classroom). This is consistent with the Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1992, Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1997) ecological theory, which underpinned the conceptual framework I proposed in Chapter Two.

Data generation

The three basic data generation strategies in interpretive research, referred to in slightly different terms by different authors, are interviewing, observing and artifact/document collection. Interviewing and observation are discussed in detail below.

Interviewing

Bogdan and Biklen (1982) described an interview as "a purposeful conversation, usually between two people (but sometimes involving more) that is directed by one in order to get information from the other" (p. 135). From an interpretive perspective, it is not merely a data collection exercise, but a "social, interpersonal encounter" (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 279). A number of authors suggest that the quality of the data obtained from interviewing depends on the quality of relationship the researcher builds with the interviewee(s) (Measor, 1982; Powney and Watts, 1987). Time is likely to be conducive to building good relationships. Measor (1982) has described how successive interviews with the same people generated much richer information, as trust was developed between the participants and the interviewer. When interviews are carried out in conjunction with participant observation, the interviewer and interviewee will already be familiar with each other, which can facilitate the establishment of a comfortable relationship. In cases where this kind of shared history is not possible, the researcher may need to devote more attention to developing a relationship with the participant (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Measor, 1982).

Measor (1982) suggested several strategies to help researchers establish a rapport with participants, including appearance management, discussion of shared interests (beyond the research topic), and the use of non-verbal strategies such as eye contact, smiles and reassurance (although, as Metge and Kinloch (1989) noted, there are cultural differences in the way that body language and eye contact is interpreted, and the researcher needs to be aware of this). It is important that the interviewer focuses on finding out what the respondent believes, and does not evaluate the responses that are given. The setting also needs to be considered when conducting interviews. Human behaviour is significantly influenced by the setting (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Yarrow & Waxler, 1979) and the interviewer should try and select locations where interruptions can be avoided, distractions are minimized (Cohen et al., 2000), and the respondent feels comfortable. It is also important to be aware that people feel different with, and say different things to, different interviewers (Connelly, 1997; Scheurich, 1995). Characteristics such as the age, gender, class and ethnicity of the interviewer may have an impact on what the interviewee says (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Cohen et

al., 2000; Measor, 1982; Scheurich, 1995), as might the respondent's concern as to who will see the researcher's report (Bassey, 1999).

This section has considered some of the general issues that relate to interviewing. The following section focuses on special considerations that should be taken into account when attempting to discover children's ideas by interviewing.

Interviewing children

In recent years there has been increasing attention paid to understanding children's perspectives in research (Brooker, 2001; Cullingford, 1991; Dockett & Perry, 1999a, 1999b, 2003a, 2003b; Gollop, 2000, Ledger, 2000; Pollard, 1996; Polard & Filer, 1999). Although gathering data on children's opinions through accounts provided by parents (Ghaye & Pascal, 1988; Renwick, 1984) can provide a rich source of evidence about children's experiences, actually interviewing children potentially "allows us a glimpse of their cognitive processes" (Garbarino & Stott, 1992, p. 170) and a more detailed picture of their knowledge (Carr and Ritchie, 1991).

The clinical interview method is often used to find out children's ideas. This involves "a dialogue or conversation held in an interview situation between an adult, the interviewer, and a child, the subject of study" (Hunting, 1983, p. 48). It is designed to probe an individual child's understanding (Borg, 1981; Miller, 1982), and the approach is flexible, with the style and language of the questions adapted to suit the vocabulary and experience of the child (McGurk & Glachan, 1988). Nevertheless, interviewing young children is often challenging. Several authors provide examples of unsuccessful interviews where children are not interested in the researcher's focus, or are unwilling to talk (Carr, 2000; Ledger, 2000; Hatch, 1990; Nicholls & Thorkildsen, 1997). Useful strategies may include; having a clear introduction (Gollop, 2000; Graue & Walsh, 1998), having something to talk about, implying that the researcher needs help and guidance, and ceding control over the topic (Gollop, 2000; Carr, 2000). Carr (1997) used a storybook with an incomplete ending to check out four-year-olds' interpretations about their goals and their responses to difficulty. Ghaye and Pascal (1988) used an album of photographs to elicit children's thoughts about transition. In both cases these seemed to overcome some of the difficulties inherent in interviewing young children by providing something to talk about. Burgess (1994) invited children to draw a picture about teachers and what teachers do, and the drawings both stimulated conversation and provided insights into the children's thinking. Other interviewing techniques include hypothetical questions like 'suppose I was a little kid...' and third person questions, about 'what kids do' rather than 'what you do' (Graue & Walsh, 1998). Pair or group interviews or discussions have also been used

in a number of recent studies (Dockett & Perry, 1999b, 2003a, 2003c; Moore, 2001). Dockett and Perry (2003a, 2003c) also invited groups of children to take photographs of things they considered were important. Overall, it seems that flexibility is important.

In interviewing, it is important to remember that young children are not equally competent at expressing themselves verbally, and some children are able to communicate in certain situations without using any language at all (Tough, 1985). Another problem is that children perceive adults to have a lot of power, especially in a questioning situation (Garbarino & Stott, 1992; Hatch, 1990; Wood & Wood, 1983). Children may be used to answering questions to which they know that the adult already knows the answer (Brooker, 2001; Wood, 1980; Wood & Wood, 1983). They therefore assume that there is a correct answer to a question, and, instead of reflecting on their own perspectives, they play a guessing game, trying to give the answer that they think the adult is looking for (Hatch, 1990). Interviewers can try to overcome this problem by stressing that it is the child's meaning that is important (Bell, Osborne & Tasker, 1985; Garbarino & Stott, 1992). Wood and Wood (1983) found that simply by altering their conversational style, for example, by reducing the number of questions and participating in more equal conversational turns (e.g. making personal contributions, using phatics like "Mmm", "Ah-ha", etc.) adults could reduce their 'power' in a situation. When the adult's power was reduced the children took more initiative, and there was an increase in the cognitive level and the length of the children's responses. The notion of power has been discussed more recently by Fasoli (2001, p. 11), as "contextual, complex and relational". She discussed the power relations within transcripts from her research and noted that where children ignore a speaker, or don't respond, this is a subtle power negotiation. Scheurich (1995) also noted power resistance operating when a participant turns an interview question from its intended focus to something the participant wants to talk about.

Different communication styles can also lead to problems when trying to find out children's ideas (Cazden, 1988, 1990; Clay, 1991), and communication may be facilitated when an adult has an understanding of the home culture of the child (Cazden, 1988, 1990). Paley (1986), Garbarino and Stott (1992) and Ledger (1997a) also suggest that it is important for the adult to be genuinely curious about, and interested in, what the child has to say. When children feel that what they have to say is interesting to the adult, they feel respected (Gussin Paley, 1986). Ledger (1997a) suggests, "if a child perceives someone is *listening* then a child will talk" (p. 131). However, her study indicated that the talk might not be on the topic the researcher had in mind. In addition, as with adults, it is important to remember that children offer

different voices to different people and no research on children's perspectives can claim to be the true and definitive account (Connolly, 1997).

Recording interview data

Researchers have to decide how to record the information obtained during interviews. This is likely to involve audio tape-recording, taking notes or video recording. An advantage with tape recording is that the researcher can attend to the direction, rather than the detail, of the interview, and can listen to the tapes afterwards (Bassey, 1999). Graue and Walsh (1998) support the use of notes as they feel the presence of a tape recorder may influence what is said, with some people being reluctant to talk freely into a recorder. In addition, they suggest that children especially may respond well to an interviewer taking notes, as this signals that what they are saying is being taken seriously. Cohen et al. (2000) acknowledge the constraints that might arise from taping but suggest that for some people having the researcher take notes during the interview could be highly off-putting. Inevitably note taking is going to reduce the amount of detail that the researcher can capture. A third option is video tape recording, which has the benefit of capturing facial expressions as well as words, but can be even more intrusive than tape recording (Graue & Walsh, 1998), although some children in Ledger's (2000) study wanted to be on video, so were motivated by this. The researcher, therefore, has to select a recording technique that seems most appropriate in the circumstances, bearing in mind the twin requirements of making the respondent feel comfortable enough to share information, and getting the level of detail required.

Transcribing interviews

When interviews have been tape-recorded, transcribing everything that is on a tape is time consuming, and some of the text may be repetitious, or off the topic. Bassey (1999) suggests that an alternative is to paraphrase and make a shortened report of the tape, but this may mean some of the original nuances will be lost. Nevertheless, even when a transcript is produced in full, it provides only a decontextualised account of the words that were used, and the physical, non-verbal aspects of the interaction are lost (Cohen et al., 2000; Scheurich, 1995). This means that the data obtained provides only a limited picture of what actually occurred. The researcher may attempt to include other data in addition to the words spoken, such as pauses, tone of voice, emphasis and so on, but as soon as other data are included this becomes a matter of interpretation. Therefore, Cohen et al., (2000) caution researchers to be aware that transcription is a selective transformation of the interview and that the data on transcripts are *already interpreted* (p. 281, emphasis in the original).

The following section considers observation as a way of investigating classroom experiences, which can provide between-methods triangulation when used in conjunction with interviewing, as a check on the validity or trustworthiness of the data (Cohen & Manion, 1980; Cohen et al., 2000). Although this implies a positivist approach to validity (Cohen et al., 2000), as will be discussed later, interpretive researchers also advise the researcher to look from many angles and in many ways in order to understand a situation (Erickson, 1985; Graue & Walsh, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). If the different data sources do not corroborate the findings, this helps to avoid “inappropriate certainty”, and may lead the researcher to new lines of thinking (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 267).

Observation

Bell et al (1985) stated that "a great deal can be learnt about children's thinking, and attitudes, by observing their interaction with the teacher and amongst themselves during ordinary classroom activities" (p. 159). Many authors have provided descriptions of possible observational methods, (see for example Borg, 1981; Cohen et al., 2000; Garbarino & Stott, 1992; Genishi, 1982; A. Smith, 1998). The observational method selected depends on the behaviour of interest. Wright (1960) described behaviour as being “in the nature of a stream that can never be seen in its entirety” (p. 73). Observational methods such as event sampling and time sampling attempt to divide behaviour into observable segments (see Cohen et al., 2000; Garbarino & Stott, 1992; Genishi, 1982). Unfortunately, any observational method that limits the focus also limits the ability to discover something important which originates outside that focus (Lutz, 1981; A. Smith, 1998). Continuous narrative recording attempts to record all of the behaviour that occurs. This involves describing the setting, the participants, and the actions, words and interactions of the people involved (Garbarino & Stott, 1992; A. Smith, 1998).

The level of detail required, and the nature of the observational method used, will determine the extent to which the observer participates in the setting. The observer’s role lies on a continuum ranging from full participant in the setting of interest, to non-participant who is fully occupied in systematic observation (Cohen & Manion, 1980). The complete participant takes on an insider role in the group being studied, while the complete observer may not be evident to those being studied at all, perhaps because he/she is watching through a one-way mirror. Between these two extremes there is participant-as-observer, who is part of the social life of participants and documents and records for research purposes, and observer-as-participant, who is known as a researcher but may have less extensive contact with the group (Cohen et al., 2000).

Observers may vary the extent of their participation at different times during a study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982).

Whatever method of observation is selected, it must be remembered that observing is a human process, and human beings may be unreliable in their observations (Garbarino & Stott, 1992). The speed and simultaneity of action present problems for the researcher (Gerritsen, 1987). Yarrow and Waxler (1979) suggest that the greatest source of error in observations comes from 'extra' or 'missed' behaviours. Video-taping is one way of recording data, but pointing a camera draws attention to the situation being observed (Bassey, 1999), and may be inappropriate in certain contexts. For example, Ledger (2000) found the use of video too intrusive in school classrooms although it was useful in other contexts.

Another possible way of increasing the accuracy and the level of detail in continuous narrative recording is to tape-record all of the verbal language, while the observer concentrates on recording the non-verbal behaviour of the participants. However, although observations conducted in naturalistic environments have 'ecological validity' (Genishi, 1982), such environments may present technical difficulties when trying to tape record the verbal language of the participants. Some researchers have suspended microphones above an area of interest (Corsaro, 1981; Nuthall & Alton-Lee, 1990) or placed tape recorders on a table in a setting (Carr, 1997) but this may prove unsatisfactory unless the target of the observation is going to remain in one place throughout the observation, or, as in Carr's (1997) study, the focus of the research is a particular place. In an environment like a primary school classroom, where children are likely to move around the room during a lesson, if the focus of the research is a particular child's experiences it may be more effective if the target wears individual broadcast microphones. Gerritsen (1987) found it difficult to persuade preschool children to wear microphones, but other researchers have used this method successfully with both preschool and older children (see Nuthall & Alton-Lee, 1990; S. Peters, 1994; Young-Loveridge et al, 1995). In addition to collecting clear recordings of the target's verbal language, this method allows data to be gathered away from the presence of the researcher, and has been found to reveal fascinating data on children's 'under the breath' conversations, which occur when the children are not in direct contact with adults (see Alton-Lee, Nuthall & Patrick, 1987; S. Peters, 1994; Young-Loveridge et al, 1995). Recording these verbal exchanges, which adults would not otherwise have been aware of, provides much richer data on children's experiences in the classroom than would be possible using other methods.

Another factor, which needs to be taken into consideration by observers, is that the presence of the observer may influence the behaviour of the participants. Where the researcher is part of the same environment as the person or event being observed it is impossible to separate the observer from the phenomena around him/her (Genishi, 1992). Observers should try and understand the effect they are having on the people being studied (Bogdan & Biklen, 1981) and take steps to become accepted by the participants so that there is minimal behavioural change because of the researcher's presence (Corsaro, 1981). Some ways in which this can be achieved are by establishing rapport with the participants, fitting in with existing dress codes and behaviour patterns, and minimising disruption to the environment (Bell et al, 1985; Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Genishi, 1982, Jorgenson, 1989). Staying with the participants for a substantial period of time can also reduce the effects of the researcher on the participants (Cohen et al., 2000). However, it is unlikely that the participant observer can achieve a completely unobtrusive 'fly on the wall' presence. The interpretive researcher therefore seeks to understand the nature of his/her influence (Holliday, 2002).

Understanding the influence of the observer also relates to the data recorded. Although positivist views of observation have recommended that the observer be objective, more recently it has been acknowledged that total objectivity is impossible, and research must take into account the social experience and thinking of the observer (Genishi, 1992, Holliday, 2002; A. Smith, 1998). "The researcher's own value base and assumptions about children and childhood remain the most important factor in shaping the way that data on young children are collected, analysed and written up" (Connolly, 1997, p. 35).

Bias

The researcher's attitudes and beliefs are clearly one source of potential bias in a study (Erickson, 1985; Graue & Walsh, 1998; Holliday, 2002). Potential sources of bias are also introduced by the research methods. Exclusive reliance on one method may bias or distort the researcher's picture of the topic of the investigation (Cohen & Manion, 1980; Cohen et al., 2000). In addition, observations may only be conducted at certain times of day, or interviews may be conducted with a select group. There is also potential bias towards sampling frequently occurring events, so that these come to be more fully understood over time. There is an additional danger that researchers attend more to aspects that confirm emerging theory, and they must be alert to disconfirming evidence (Erickson, 1985). During interviews both researcher and participant bring considerable conscious and unconscious 'baggage' to the interaction (Holliday, 2002; Scheurich, 1995). While this cannot be avoided completely, the researcher can take

steps to try and identify his/her own possible sources of bias when conducting and writing up the study (Scheurich, 1995).

Analysis and report writing

Dalhberg et al. (1999) describe the socially constructed nature of our understanding of the world, which develops through active interaction with others in a given community. Applied to research, it is important to remember that any attempt at meaning-making will be influenced by the nature and extent of these interactions. A researcher cannot capture every aspect of a given social system. Therefore, the act of data collection is in fact the first act of interpretation (Holliday, 2002). The raw data that are collected have to be turned into a data record. Graue and Walsh (1998) recommend constructing the record as the data are gathered, thus organising the data into a form for analysis. The analysis has to make sense of the body of data that has been collected. In most interpretive studies it is organized into themes, but the process of arriving at these themes may be difficult (Holliday, 2002). Early analysis may lead to decisions regarding future data collection. Similarly, literature is reviewed at the beginning but also throughout the study, as often it is only in the middle of interpretation that it becomes clear what literature the researcher should be reading. The whole process is complex and recursive (Graue & Walsh, 1998), as the researcher seeks deeper meanings that make sense of the material that has been gathered (Holliday, 2002).

Although Cohen et al. (2000) described report writing as a final step in the process, after data analysis and leaving the field, other authors see writing as a key part of the process of investigation (Erickson, 1985; Graue & Walsh, 1998; Holliday, 2002). Thus, writing the report becomes part of the interpretive act. It is not a neutral process but is strategically undertaken to tell a particular story to a particular audience (Graue & Walsh, 1998). The aim of the interpretive researcher is to allow the reader to experience vicariously the setting that is described, and survey the evidence on which the analysis is based. The researcher pieces together the evidence for the assertions he/she makes, like a mosaic, to show an inherently incomplete picture, but one that can be shown to be more robust than other interpretations (Erickson, 1985).

Accountability

The literature on qualitative research presents a number of views regarding the validity of such research. Graue and Walsh (1998) talk about methodological, interpretive, textual and praxis-oriented validity. Methodological validity requires appropriate methods to be selected to answer the research questions. Interpretive validity comes from sharing enough evidence so that the assertions made seem plausible. Erickson

(1985) suggested that providing sufficient information allows the reader to become a co analyst, who can judge the validity of the author's analysis. Textual validity is determined by writing in ways that others can understand what has been learned and praxis-oriented validity is determined by the possibilities for new understandings that will promote action to improving lives (Graue & Walsh, 1998).

Bassey (1999) suggests that the concepts of validity and reliability are problematic for case study research, and instead proposes the notion of 'trustworthiness' as a useful guide for accountability. He presents a series of eight questions as a guide for researchers establishing the trustworthiness of their studies. The first three questions relate to data collection and ask, "Has there been prolonged engagement with data sources? Has there been persistent observation of emerging issues? Have raw data been adequately checked with their sources?" (p. 76). The fourth question relates to analysis and questions whether there has been sufficient triangulation of raw data to provide confidence in the statements made. Erickson (1985) noted that an important part of this process is searching for disconfirming evidence and discrepant cases. At the level of interpretation Bassey's fifth and sixth guiding questions ask the researcher to test the emerging story against the analytic statements made about the raw data and to ask a critical friend to challenge the findings. The final two questions occur at the level of writing the report and ask whether the account of the research is sufficiently detailed to give the reader confidence in the findings and whether there is sufficient organization in the data record to allow an adequate audit trail. Holliday (2002) maintains that while the expectations of naturalism have been challenged, researchers do not have to "fall into the abyss of cultural relativism" (p. ix). They can maintain rigour through careful articulation of who they are, what they have done and how they responded to the exigencies of the setting. Together these authors offer a broad base for researchers to consider the validity or accountability of their work.

Generalisability

A major criticism of qualitative or interpretive studies has been their generalisability. However, it is naïve to assume that this applies only to qualitative research. Bassey (1999) proposes that there are few absolute generalizations in education, and Firestone (1993) reminds researchers that there are always difficulties in generalizing from data as it requires extrapolation that can never be fully justified. In quantitative research, one can aim for a representative sample by appropriate application of sampling theory, but this is not appropriate for the small samples used in qualitative studies. However, there are other ways in which the findings of qualitative work are generalisable.

The research approach discussed in this chapter looks at ‘these people, in this place and at this time’. It looks at the very concrete particulars of a situation, not at abstract universals, and yet in this intensely local focus it is possible to build theory about the situation that is being studied (Erickson, 1985). This theory may be generalisable to other situations and the research may identify the possible scope of a theory, giving insight into the conditions under which a theory applies (Firestone, 1993). Bassey (1999) offers the notion of fuzzy generalizations, that is, that it is possible, or likely, or unlikely, that what was found in this situation will be found in similar situations elsewhere.

Case-to-case generalisability is perhaps the strongest form of generalization in qualitative research. This is enhanced by thick description. By detailing a broad range of features and processes, readers have enough information to assess the match between the situation studied and their own. The transfer from one case to another is done by the reader (Firestone, 1993). The detail and reality of the situation allow readers to judge the implications for themselves, thus providing a natural base for generalization (Cohen et al., 2000; Firestone, 1993; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Chapter Summary

This chapter has explored the methodological considerations that informed the research approach taken in this study. It has discussed interpretive methodology, case study research, methods of data generation, bias, analysis, accountability and generalization. The chapter that follows describes the resulting research design.

Chapter Eight

Research method

Chapters Two to Four highlighted the complexity of the research topic, and argued the need for studies that provide an understanding of the complex influences on experiences of transition. Chapter Seven located the endeavour within an interpretive paradigm, and discussed the literature on research methods that informed the approach that was taken. This chapter outlines the research method used in this study. It includes detailed descriptions of the settings, participants and procedures and offers explanations and justification for decisions that were made.

As Chapter Six explained, the research questions were refined as the study progressed. The final questions were:

How do children and their families experience transition?

What are the beliefs and practices that helped to shape the transition experiences of children and their families?

What are some of the key issues for children in the process of becoming pupils?

The evolving research design

The study began when the principal of Kowhai School (not its real name), the primary school in which this study was set, contacted the School of Education indicating that he was interested in involving his school in research associated with parental expectations on children's entry to school. At this time my doctoral proposal on transition to school had just been registered and I was engaged in planning for the data collection phase. The principal's contact details were passed to me as it seemed that there was sufficient congruence between my topic and the information that was of interest to the school. After meeting to discuss the project with the principal and the new entrant teachers at the school it appeared that there was an opportunity here for collaborative research. This appealed to me, as from my previous research experience I was aware that being involved in a study of this size placed many demands on the participants. I also wanted the research to be of interest and use to the school.

Following the discussions a tentative plan was formulated. This was developed further on the basis of emerging theories. For example, after initial observations in the new entrant classrooms and interviews with teachers and parents of existing new entrant children, it became clear that in order to understand the transition experience more fully, it would be beneficial to follow some children and their families from their last

few months in early childhood centres through the transition to school. Later, a longitudinal dimension was added to follow the case study families beyond the children's first year at school. As with other interpretive studies, the research process was not linear, but complex and recursive (Graue & Walsh, 1998; Pollard & Tann, 1993). Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggested that this type of sampling gives momentum, purpose and confidence in the enterprise because emerging theories are tested each step of the way, as the researcher looks for evidence that is similar to, or different from, initial hunches. The final design is summarised in Table 1 and described in detail in the rest of the chapter.

Table 1. Summary of the phases of the study

Phase	Data gathered
Phase One	Interviews with new entrant teachers, Assistant Principal & BoT representative. Interviews with parents of new entrant children. Observations in three new entrant classes. Methods for recruiting and interviewing case study parents trialed. Relevant documentation gathered.
Phase Two	1 st interviews with families of case study children who were going to start at Kowhai School in Term Three. Case study chn observed at kindergarten (Azure, Blue and Cobalt Kindergartens). Interviews with the Head Teacher in each kindergarten, and the Principal at Kowhai School. Observations in the three new entrant classes continued.
Phase Three	Observations of the case study children when they started school, and at regular intervals until the end of the year. 2 nd interviews with the case study parents after the chn had been at school for two months. Follow up interviews with three of the other parents. Informal conversations with chn and teachers, and other impressions and experiences recorded as field notes. Example of chn's work gathered. Interview with the school secretary.
Phase Four	3 rd interview with case study families after chn had been at school for approximately 20 months. Interview with case study chn when they had been at school for 3 years.

A case study approach

The study focuses on the parents, children and teachers at one Aotearoa/New Zealand primary school. To highlight the transition experiences for individuals, the stories of seven case study children and the families are told. These case studies are nested within the broader framework of the school structure, teacher, parent and children's experiences. The case study children were involved in many other, sometimes

overlapping, contexts beyond the school. I observed in the main early childhood centre attended by each case study child, interviewed one of the teachers in each of these settings, and visited the children's homes several times.

Although a clear sense of boundedness was created through the selection of settings and participants, it is important to point out that this is something that was imposed by the researcher. Using Holliday's (2002) descriptions, the particular social settings that were selected for study forms a small segment of the much wider *mélange* of social life. Nevertheless, such restrictions are necessary and justifiable as the intention was to explore the topic in depth. The outcome of interpretive research is to identify and analyse the concepts, relationships and issues within a detailed case study (Pollard & Tann, 1993). While it would have been interesting to look beyond the chosen settings to consider the impact of other schools or other early childhood programmes, especially given the diversity of such settings in Aotearoa/New Zealand, in interpretive research, rather than sampling subjects to represent a population, the researcher is "fiercely interested in individuals, particular individuals. The focus of inquiry must become intensely local" (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p. 9). To look beyond the chosen settings would risk looking too widely, missing the opportunity to look very carefully (Graue & Walsh, 1998).

The settings

This study was carried out in Kowhai School, a large (500+ pupils) urban primary school in the North Island of New Zealand, and three contributing kindergartens (Azure, Blue and Cobalt). These settings are described in more detail below.

Kowhai School

Kowhai School is a coeducational state school. It is situated in a middle class suburb of well-established housing, but also serves a rapidly expanding area of new urban development. At the time of the study the school was very popular and an enrolment scheme was in place to limit entry. It appeared prosperous and well equipped. Although individual teachers varied in their enthusiasm there was an overall sense of commitment and innovation in the school and frequent evaluation of current strategies and the development of new approaches. Education Review Office reports of both the management and teaching were very favourable.

Kowhai School had three new entrant classes taught by Ms Knight, Ms King and Ms Keane, and incoming children were allocated to one of these. Continuous enrolment meant that the numbers in each class rose steadily over the year. When the study started at the beginning of March the class sizes were about 18. By June each class

had between 22 to 26 children. In July, children in each of the three classes who had been at school for a while and who were also “more independent, more academically progressive” (Ms Knight pp. 3-4), formed a fourth class, taught by the Assistant Principal, Ms Kent. Prior to this, Ms Kent taught in one of the new entrant classes in the afternoons, to release the teacher to run other programmes within the school. By the end of the third term the new entrant class sizes had risen back up to around 29. In the fourth term a fifth class was created, again taking the older and more capable children selected from each new entrant class.

The school’s decile rating, allocated by the Ministry of Education for funding purposes, was 10, which placed it in the 10% of schools that have the lowest proportion of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The decile rating is based on census information and school ethnicity data for a random sample of students (or the total roll if there are <120 students) and does not indicate the overall socio-economic mix of a school (Ministry of Education, 2002e). Therefore to expand the picture of the student population a number of other sources have been used. Education Review Office reports were published on Kowhai School in 1997 and 2001. The school’s ethnic composition, as presented in these reports, is shown in Appendix B (Table B2), along with the ethnicity of the new entrant intake at the end of the first year of the study, based on the school records (Table B3). The data for the new entrants is based on the 114 children who joined the new entrant classes during the first year of the study. (This includes those who were in the classes at the start of the year and subsequently moved on to other classes in the 3rd and 4th terms.) The figures for the 114 new entrants at the end of 1996 were fairly consistent with the 1997 Education Review Office data on the school’s population as a whole. The 2001 Education Review Office report, published after data collection for this study was complete, indicates that although there was a small increase in the diversity of the school population, through the years of the study the children attending Kowhai School were predominantly Pakeha/European, with Asian children, mostly from Taiwan, Korea, China and Japan, constituting about 11% of the school population. There were a small number of children from other ethnic groups.

To provide an indication of the socioeconomic status (SES) of the new entrant intake during the first year of the study (114 children), the parents’ occupations, as listed in the school records, were rated on a six-point scale using Irving’s (1990) updated Elley-*Irving* Socio-Economic Index (Elley & Irving, 1985). The scale uses median income and educational levels, as shown in the census data, to assign a category to each occupation. Level one is high and level six is low. The number and percentage of parents at each level are shown in Appendix C (Table C1). This is intended as a rough

guide only as data collected from school records are not ideal for this type of coding (see the text in Appendix C for details). Overall, 56% of fathers and 24% of mothers were in occupations rated as 3 or above. Levels 1-3 are largely non-manual occupations (Dale, 2000). The records indicated that 53% of the mothers were at home full time. In 12% of families there was no father's occupation listed and in 3% of families there was no mother's occupation listed. The school records did not indicate the family composition or whether mothers or fathers were living with their children.

Azure, Blue and Cobalt Kindergartens

The three kindergartens were selected because they were the main providers of early childhood education for the seven case study children. Azure and Blue were also the main contributing kindergartens for the school. All three were state-funded and operated sessional early childhood education for children from three years to school age. They had their own parent committees but management responsibility lay with a regional kindergarten association.

Each kindergarten operated a morning session 8.45am - 11.45am Monday to Friday, and an afternoon session 12.45pm - 3.15pm Monday, Tuesday and Thursday. The older children attended the morning sessions, while the younger children attended in the afternoons. As children left for school from the morning session, younger children moved from the afternoon to the morning group, and vacancies in the afternoon sessions were filled by new children starting. A high roll at Azure meant that children were starting later than at the other two kindergartens, often not until they were nearly 4-years-old. The case study children had all graduated to morning kindergarten when they were observed.

Each kindergarten had three teachers. At the time of the study there was a rapid turn over of staff and a number of relieving and seconded staff were employed. Ms Ashby and Ms Bird were permanent head teachers at Azure and Blue Kindergartens respectively, their other teachers were new or relieving staff. Ms Clarke had been seconded as head teacher to Cobalt Kindergarten and the other two teachers there were both relieving.

Education Review Office Reports were published on each of the three kindergartens in 1991 and 2000. These showed that Azure Kindergarten, which was located in close proximity to Kowhai School, and Blue Kindergarten, located a short distance away, had student populations whose ethnicities were fairly similar to those at Kowhai School. Cobalt Kindergarten, which was located further away, served a more diverse

community, with a much higher proportion of Maori children. (See Appendix B, Table B5 for details.)

Participants

The main child participants were 7 case study children and a further 16 new entrant children whose parents were interviewed (23 in all), although many other children were included in the observations and informal conversations. The adult participants in this study were the parents of the 23 children, the three new entrant teachers, a representative of the Board of Trustees, the Assistant Principal, Principal and the School Secretary at Kowhai School, and three early childhood teachers, one from each of the kindergartens attended by the case study children.

The issue of describing research participants is problematic. The term 'background' is frequently used in educational research and yet, ironically, it often is the term used to describe what is most central to the lives of the participants, their family, culture and home (Comber, 1998). Traditional descriptors are used here, but following Holliday's (2002) recommendations for interpretive research, the significance of aspects such as ethnicity emerged from the research, rather than being assumed from these descriptive categories. A fuller picture of many of the participants will emerge in the Results chapters.

The children and their families

Although the invitation to participate was extended to any interested family members, in 21 cases it was the child's mother who elected to be interviewed. In two families the mother and father were interviewed together. The parents completed a background information form identifying their child's ethnicity, languages spoken, number and ages of children in the family, parental occupation and contact details.

Of the 23 children, 17 were described by their parents as European or Kiwi or New Zealanders. As in Hughes et al's (1996) work on the meaning of 'New Zealander' and 'Kiwi' when used by research participants to describe ethnicity, the participants in this study who described their ethnicity in these terms could be broadly categorised as Pakeha/European, whilst acknowledging that there was diversity within this group. Two parents left the space for ethnicity blank but in the school records one was listed as European and the other was listed as Polynesian. Conversation with the Polynesian parent indicated that their family background was Tongan. The other four children were European/Indian, Chinese, Japanese and Arabic. (Appendix B, Table B4 summarises this information.) Three children had English as their second language. There were 13 girls and 10 boys. Nine were only or oldest children, 10 were the

youngest and 4 had both younger and older siblings. Family size ranged from one to six children.

The SES of the 23 families, based on the parents' reported occupations, was also rated on the Elley-Irving Socio-Economic Index. The number and percentage of children at each level based on their mothers' and fathers' occupations are shown in Appendix C (Tables C2 and C3). The coding here was based on data collected from the parents directly, as opposed to school records. The majority (17, or 74%) of fathers and 7 (30%) of the mothers were in occupations coded 1-3. Two fathers were coded level 4 and one was level 6. One father was a full-time student and the other two fathers were not living with their children. Fourteen (61%) of the mothers were at home. Of the other two mothers, one worked in an occupation coded level 4, and the other was a student. The purpose of coding was to provide an indication of the nature of the SES of the participant families, and to allow this to be referred to in broad terms in the analysis, because to refer to the exact occupations could threaten the confidentiality of the participants' identities. However, it is important to recognize the diversity that is masked by these ratings. For example, one family where both mother and father worked in occupations rated as levels 1 and 2 respectively, there was clearly social status in terms of education, but their income was low and they had only recently lost their eligibility for a Community Services card (which provides subsidies on health costs for those on a low to middle income, www.winz.govt.nz).

State-funded kindergartens were the main early childhood service used by all 23 families. Of the 23 children, 16 attended Azure Kindergarten, 4 attended Blue Kindergarten, 1 attended Cobalt Kindergarten and 2 attended other kindergartens. In addition to attending the morning session at kindergarten, three children attended home-based childcare in the afternoons, and two attended a private centre for a few hours a week. Observations were not conducted in these other settings. Thirteen children had attended other early childhood services prior to starting kindergarten; 4 had attended services overseas before attending New Zealand kindergartens, 4 had attended Playcentre, 2 had attended private kindergartens and 3 (one to each setting) had been to either a Steiner kindergarten, a childcare center or a playgroup.

The seven case study families (included in these 23 families) were all European/New Zealanders and had English as their first language. Table 2 sets out the demographic information for each of the case study children at the start of their involvement. Pseudonyms have been used for the participants.

Table 2. Demographic information on the case study children and their families

Code No.	Child	Place in fam.	SES Father's occ.	SES Mother's occ.	Kindergarten	Other ECE
1	Nicola	1 of 2	6	1	Cobalt	Home-based
2	Carl	1 of 2	3	At home	Blue	-
3	Anna	4 of 4	-	At home	Azure	Playcentre*
4	Tessa	2 of 3	3	At home	Blue	Private /Playcentre*#
5	Steve	1 of 2	3	At home	Azure	Playcentre*
6	Heather	2 of 2	1	At home	Azure	Playcentre*
7	Matthew	3 of 3	4	2	Azure	Home-based

* The four children who had attended Playcentres had done so prior to starting kindergarten, while the two children going to home-based care did so concurrently with kindergarten, going to caregivers in the afternoons.

#Tessa attended a private kindergarten for one afternoon a week in the last few weeks before starting school, in addition to morning attendance at Azure.

The new entrant teachers

The three new entrant teachers and the Assistant Principal (who also taught in the new entrants classes) had from 12 to more than 20 years teaching experience, between 3 and 20 years of which had been spent with new entrants. The nature of this experience is outlined below, but the teachers' pseudonyms have not been used to protect the confidentiality of their other data.

Teacher 1 had taught in a number of different countries and in a wide range of different schools. Although she had predominantly taught in rural schools she had more recently worked in urban areas. She had been a teacher for more than 20 years, and had considerable experience in teaching children for whom English was a second language. At one point in her career, she had taught classes of 45 children. Teacher 1 had taught a number of different age groups, and although happy to be teaching new entrants at that time, said that she preferred slightly older children.

Teacher 2 had also been teaching for more than 20 years, and had taught in a number of different countries. For most of that time she had worked with new entrants and was happy in that area of the school. She had a qualification in teaching children for whom English was a second language, and like Teacher 1, was experienced in this field.

Teacher 3 had started teaching more than 20 years earlier, but having had a break for several years, had about 12 years experience in all. When she returned to teaching she started part time and then relieved, which had given her experience of a range of schools and age groups. She had been teaching new entrants for the past three years.

Teacher 4 qualified more than 30 years ago and had taught in a number of different locations within New Zealand. With a break of around 11 years she had more than 20 years of teaching experience. Like *Teacher 3*, she had gained considerable experience by relieving. She had taught at all levels of the primary school, but had been teaching new entrants for the past six years.

For the last three years the team teaching new entrants had been unchanged, so they were used to working together. *Teacher 3* had been at Kowhai School for six years, and the other three teachers had been there for 10 years or more.

Other school staff

The other school staff involved in the study had also been at Kowhai School for some time. The Principal had been there for six years, and the secretary for 11 years. The Board of Trustees representative who was interviewed was in her second three-year term. She also a member of the PTA, and had taught at the school before her children were born.

The kindergarten teachers

The head teacher in each kindergarten was interviewed. *Ms Ashby* had been teaching for about 18 years, most of which had been spent at Azure kindergarten. *Ms Bird* had qualified more than 20 years ago and, with a break to raise her own children, she had been teaching for about 15 years. She had taught in a number of different locations around New Zealand and had been at Blue Kindergarten for just over a year. *Ms Clarke* had 18 years teaching experience, only a few months of which had been at Cobalt Kindergarten.

Codes used for participants in the data record

In the chapters that follow the seven case study children and their parents have been given pseudonyms, as have the early childhood and new entrant teachers. When referring to transcripts and observations for the case study families, these are abbreviated to CS (Case study) and a number from 1 to 7 (see Table 2). For transcripts the number of the interview follows the case study number. For example, (CS1.3, p. 5) means Case Study 1, Interview 3, page 5. In Case Study 2, because both parents were interviewed, the codes also indicate which parent is speaking; CS/M2 for the mother and CS/F2 for the father. Hence, (CS/F2.2, p. 2) is Case Study 2, Father, Interview 2, page 2.

The 16 other children whose parents were interviewed have been given a number from 8 to 23; e.g. Child 8, Child 9, etc. Their parents have been given a corresponding number; e.g. Mother 11 (Mother of Child 11), Father 23 (Father of Child 23). When referring to transcripts and observations these are abbreviated to C8, M11, F23, etc. The other participants are noted by their role, e.g. P (Principal), AP (Assistant Principal), Sec (School Secretary) and BoT rep (Board of Trustees Representative). Where these participants have been interviewed more than once, a numeral is used to indicate the number of the transcript, for example (BoT rep.2, p. 18) is the second interview with the Board of Trustees representative.

In transcripts and observations that include children who are not one of the 23 participant children, these are referred to as Boy or Girl. When there are several boys or girls in a segment they are labeled Boy 1, Boy 2, and so on. These labels are used for any boy or girl and refer only to that segment. (i.e. Boy 1 in one segment is not necessarily the same child as Boy 1 in the next segment.) Occasionally these children have been given a pseudonym to make a piece easier to follow.

Selection of the case study children and their families

Kowhai School operated an enrolment scheme, which meant caregivers who hoped to send their children to the school were required to complete an Application for Enrolment form around the child's fourth birthday. Caregivers were contacted a term in advance of the child's fifth birthday to let them know whether the application had been successful. (Appendix D describes the process by which the school's selection of children was made.) This meant that the school had lists of names and addresses of all the families who were hoping their children would be offered a place at Kowhai School when they turned five. I wrote information sheets about the study, and letters inviting parents/caregivers to participate, and the school sent these to parents of children who were intending to start in the second term in 1996 (see Appendix E). The names and addresses were not revealed to me, but the parent/caregivers were asked to respond directly to me if they wished to take part. A stamped addressed envelope was provided, as well as my telephone number and contact details. The replies came too late to arrange for permission to observe the children at their early childhood centres. Copies of the letters and information sheets were then sent to all of the families with children hoping to start in Term Three. Eight families replied, and all of these were included in the study. (Note: one boy was not offered a place at Kowhai School, so data collection for him ceased when he turned five and his data has not been included in the analysis.)

Selection of the other participants

Three of the other 16 parents in the study had responded to my initial attempt to recruit case study families. Initially, other parents were selected randomly from the returned consent forms, but the later ones were deliberately selected on the basis of their new entrant child's sex and place in the family, as it was beginning to appear that the position in the family might be an important factor with regard to the experience of transition, and I wanted to investigate issues, such as using the toilets, that appeared to relate to the sex of the children. As noted earlier, this form of theoretical sampling allows for emerging theories to be tested (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which is one of the strengths of interpretive research (Graue & Walsh, 1998). Likewise, the new entrant teachers, Assistant Principal and a Board of Trustees representative formed the initial school participants. The Principal and school secretary and were included when it appeared from other data that they played an important role in the families' transition experiences. The selection of kindergarten teachers was determined by the kindergartens attended by the case study children. Within each kindergarten the teacher who had the most knowledge of the setting was selected. This happened to be the head teacher in each case.

Ethical procedure and considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the School of Education Ethics Committee at the University of Waikato before data collection began. However, I was sensitive to the fact that qualitative research of this type can raise new issues during the course of the study.

An important feature of the research was for the participants to give informed consent. Providing information and gaining consent occurred at a number of points throughout the study. After discussing the study at a meeting of the school staff who would be involved, I presented a tentative overview of the research at a meeting of the PTA, where parents/caregivers had the opportunity to ask questions.

Similar consent forms were used for all of the participants. Examples of consent forms for children and adults are included in Appendix F.

Consent procedures for the new entrant teachers

Information sheets describing the proposed nature of the study, the participants' involvement, the use of the information and the confidentiality of the information, were then provided to the new entrant teachers (see Appendix G), along with consent forms for their participation.

Consent procedures for the children

Similar information sheets and consent forms were sent, with an explanatory letter, to the parents and caregivers of new entrant children (see Appendices F and H). Parents were asked to give their consent for their children's involvement. Teachers distributed the information sheets and consent forms to parents and the consent forms were returned via the child's teacher. Letters, information sheets and consent forms were sent out to new families as children joined the class through the year.

When the classroom observations started, a second letter (see Appendix I) and the information sheets and consent forms were sent to the parents and caregivers who had not responded to the first letter, with the aim of gaining consent for as many children as possible to be included in the observations. The parents/caregivers were often aware by then of my presence in the classroom and were able to approach me informally to talk about the study.

Consent procedures for the parents

Those parents who responded to the first letter, and gave consent for their child to be involved in the study, were asked if they would be willing to participate themselves. This was done after the consent had been gained for children, so that it was clear to parents that consent for their child to be involved did not mean they had to be involved. A second letter regarding parental participation was sent out, along with a consent form (see Appendix J). Consent forms were returned via the child's teacher.

Consent procedures for the case study children and their families

For the case study children and their families, the information sheet and the consent form were mailed to potential participants by the school, and those who wished to participate contacted me directly (see Appendix E). After talking with each of the case study families and identifying the early childhood services they were using, consent was obtained from the relevant Kindergarten Association to observe in Azure, Blue and Cobalt Kindergartens and to interview their teachers. This involved a five-page proposal, addressing ten points raised by the Association. With the Association's permission to approach the kindergarten teachers, verbal consent was obtained individually from each teacher before observing the children in their kindergarten settings.

Consent procedures for other participants

The early childhood teachers and other school staff were given information sheets, and consent forms were completed prior to the interviews and observations taking place. Consent was also obtained from student teachers, to observe them when they were in

the target classes. These included the same basic information sheets as those for the new entrant teachers (Appendix G), with slight modifications to the wording depending on the role of the participant.

Ethical issues relating to interviewing

Consent was discussed prior to each interview taking place. If a consent form had not been completed before we met, it was completed prior to the interview starting. When I returned to the case study families for subsequent interviews, verbal consent was sought at each contact point. When the children were interviewed at age eight, the parent's consent was obtained first, and it was stressed that the child was not obliged to participate. When parents signaled (after talking to the child) that their child was willing to participate, a meeting time was arranged. I then obtained the child's verbal consent before proceeding with the interview.

Permission to tape-record was sought verbally before each interview and I respected occasional requests to turn the recorder off at points during the interview when the interviewee wished to say something 'off the record'. Transcripts of the interviews were returned to the adult participants for checking. Participants were invited to amend the transcript where they felt this was necessary to provide a true reflection of their ideas, to add new material, and to delete anything that they did not want to be used in the analysis. Although this practice may not always be appropriate, especially with anyone with poor reading skills (Bassey, 1999), in my study the participants welcomed the opportunity, and it was an important ethical consideration. For example, one mother wrote on the transcript:

I have deleted some sections because I would not want the teachers to guess where such criticism came from – one in particular may well guess because of discussions I've already had with her.... You can use the sentiments in a general way, but please, no direct quotes from the sections I've crossed out, or details about me which may reveal my identity.

When participants were interviewed more than once, some acknowledged that the fact that they had been able to check the earlier transcript(s) made them more relaxed in their conversations with me. Although I was occasionally unable to use material, withdrawal of comments was rare, and this slight disadvantage was more than compensated for by the fact that participants appeared to talk more freely, knowing that if they did say something they regretted, this could later be removed from the transcript. Two of the parents for whom English was a second language provided quite extensive additional written comments, giving richer data than had been gathered

through conversations alone. Hence it appeared that this was an appropriate way of ensuring that their voices were heard in the way that they wished.

Confidentiality

When the children were formally interviewed I did not return the transcripts to them for checking. Although I felt it would be useful to obtain their feedback, I had assured the children that the data they provided was confidential. Returning the transcripts to them potentially threatened this confidentiality because parents were likely to read the material, even if it was addressed to the child. On reflection, it would have been good to meet again with the child to go over the transcripts from the first interview.

The identities of the 23 participant children were not revealed to the teachers in the school to protect the identity of the actual children and families who were involved in the study. Although some parents said they were happy for the school to know of their involvement, others expressed a wish for their identity to be confidential and I thought it ethically appropriate to protect the identity of all those involved. This was possible because a large proportion of each class had permission to be involved, so teachers did not know exactly who was being focused on. In the kindergartens the teachers were aware of the identity of the case study child being observed, as this had to be revealed in order to gain access to the centres to conduct the observations. However, parents seemed less concerned about the identity of their child being revealed in the kindergarten setting because, unlike school, their child would not have an ongoing involvement in that context after the study was complete.

Steps have been taken in presenting the findings to maintain confidentiality. Pseudonyms or codes have been used for all the participants, but other details, which could reveal identity to those involved, have not been used in conjunction with the pseudonym or code. For example, one teacher held a qualification for teaching English as a second language. To indicate which teacher this was could affect the confidentiality of her other data. Similarly, for the parents or children, where features such as ethnicity could identify them within the context, a letter code has been used when this was discussed (See Chapter Thirteen), rather than their numerical codes, to protect the confidentiality of their other data. In some instances it was not relevant to indicate which teacher was involved in an observation. However, occasionally the person's role was significant and had to be mentioned, as in the case of the principal, or school secretary. This raises particular ethical issues (Bassey, 2002; Erickson, 1985) because although their identities remain confidential to anyone outside the actual setting, confidentiality is compromised when other participants read the report. This

was discussed with those involved, and they agreed to have their data used in this way because the material was not of a sensitive nature.

As the study progressed, I reflected on the complexity of gaining informed consent. This appeared relatively straightforward for the parents, who had all volunteered to be involved and seemed to enjoy their participation. One of the case study parents said, "It makes you think about what you are actually doing and how things are going". Another said "You tend to think, stop and question yourself and your values, what you want for your kids, and things like that". One parent said she was keeping the conference papers that featured her child to give to the child when she was older.

However, for the teachers I later reflected that while ethical procedures were followed, and it was made clear that there was no requirement for them to take part in the study if they did not wish to, it may have been more difficult for them to object, given that the principal and a number of their colleagues had expressed an interest in the topic and a desire to participate. For example, it became apparent that the staff had not been equally involved in determining the school's focus. When I asked one teacher to clarify what the teachers were interested in she said "I'm not sure what... the only discussions we have had with him [principal] have been with you present".

I was respectful of the teachers' responses to being involved in the research. Because one teacher was so clearly interested, and appeared to have been delegated by the school to 'look after' me, initial observations focused on her room. This extended then to a second teacher's room, when this teacher had had the opportunity to see my observation method 'in action' in the first room. However, as the class sizes increased the second teacher started to comment on how difficult she was finding it, sometimes saying it was 'ghastly' or 'terrible' in her class after an observed session. Although I aimed to reassure her that it was not 'ghastly' and that it was useful to observe children's experiences of transition as the class size grew, I felt that my presence was putting additional pressure on this teacher and decided to focus more on the other two rooms. The third teacher initially seemed a little reluctant to be 'researched' so no observations were conducted in her room for the first three weeks, by which time a level of trust had been established through conversations in the staff room. By the end of the study, I felt that the highest level of rapport was established with this teacher, who allowed both tape-recording during observations and photocopying of children's work. It was clear that to give fully informed consent it was useful for teachers to actually see what was involved in the classroom observations.

Procedure

According to Graue and Walsh (1998) “a robust data record is multidimensional” (p. 133), and is an important requirement when determining the ‘trustability’ of the findings (Basse, 1999). Therefore a range of different methods was used to construct the data record for this study. These included observations, formal and informal interviews, field notes and document collection and analysis.

Observations

I initially spent 45 hours observing in the new entrant classrooms. A further 52 hours were spent observing the case study children, first at kindergarten (20 hours) and then in the new entrant classrooms (32 hours). This made a total of 77 hours of observation at school and 20 hours in early childhood settings. The observations were conducted from May to December, in one school year.

I used a continuous narrative recording technique (A. Smith, 1998). On several occasions, the language of a target child was audiotaped and later transcribed and matched with the observations of the child’s behaviour. In order to pick up the language used by the target (and those he/she interacted with) the target wore a small remote microphone, which transmitted the sound to recording equipment set up in a corner of the classroom. The microphone and its battery pack were sewn into a calico vest, which had been brightly painted to make it look attractive.

It had been intended that the remote microphones would be used for all the observations, but although I had used these extensively in other settings (Young-Loveridge et al., 1995; S. Peters, 1994) many of the 4- and 5-year-old children in this study refused to wear the microphones. After several sessions in which much time was spent trying to encourage children to wear the microphones, and, if they did agree to wear them, to keep them on, the children's right not to wear the microphones was respected. I decided to proceed without tape recording. The teachers also seemed more comfortable when the microphones were not in operation. Later in the study, when a strong sense of rapport had developed with two of the new entrant teachers, the microphones were reintroduced and used successfully, although only a few children were willing to wear them. Of the 97 hours of observation just under 9 hours were audio tape-recorded.

When the microphones were being used, several children were invited to wear the calico vests containing microphones in order to protect the identity of the child who was being observed and tape-recorded. Child 12 appeared to be the only child who was distracted by wearing a microphone. She said, “Hello everybody. Hi out there”

into the microphone when she first put it on, and at several points during the morning she make some noises directly into it. One of the boys pretended to be a newsreader on the television, but this only occurred for two 30 second intervals.

My level of participation during the observations

The observations involved my participation in a number of settings. I was aware that the presence of an extra adult could produce its own dynamics that would affect the nature of the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1981; Cohen, et al., 2000; Holliday, 2002). This was more obvious in the new entrant classrooms, where I was the only adult apart from the teacher for much of the time, than in the early childhood centres where I was one of a number of adults. I tried to minimise the impact of my presence as much as possible by sitting rather than standing, keeping out of the way of activities and not initiating contact with children. However, I was not completely removed from the life of the settings I was involved in. I was introduced to the children and explained my role as one of 'trying to find out what it is like at kindergarten/school'. During class time at school, or session time at kindergarten, I redirected as far as possible children's bids for attention, and concentrated on my note taking, but during playtimes, lunchtimes and other free times, I sometimes engaged in conversations initiated by children, using this as an informal opportunity to discuss topics related to the research. Hence, my position varied on the participant observation continuum described by Cohen et al. (2000), but I was mostly observer-as-participant, where I was involved in the setting, but my role there was as an observer.

My background as a teacher made it hard to maintain the observer role when the teacher was obviously under pressure. On one occasion I stepped out of my role when a student teacher was left in charge of one of the classes, and had a new child sobbing and clinging to her legs. She tried unsuccessfully to settle the distressed child and direct the rest of the class. I worked one-to-one with the distressed child until she could be integrated into the class. On another occasion one teacher was trying to dress about 28 children in costume for a performance and I felt it was more important to build rapport by helping to organise the children than to maintain a non-participant role as an observer. When I was the only adult present, I tried to minimize my impact by not responding to children's behaviour in the way that a teacher would. My non-teaching role was clearly evident in the way the children attempted to quieten each other when the teacher was observed approaching the classroom, while my presence had not had this effect. At the same time I was alert to safety issues and ready to intervene if necessary. As Carr (1997) proposes, "children have a right to expect adults to protect them; and teachers have a right to withdraw hospitality from an adult researcher who did not intervene in a crisis" (p. 93), although even this raises

dilemmas as to what constitutes a crisis. Taking the lead from other adults in the setting, I overlooked a degree of rough play or child confusion over a task, that, had I been in a teaching role I might have addressed. I did, however, step in to prevent a child from standing on a wobbly chair, assisted when a heavy board was about to fall, and, as noted above, supported a child who appeared particularly distressed.

Interviews

Fifty-seven interviews were conducted. Fifty of these were with adult participants. Most were interviewed once, apart from three parents who were interviewed twice and the seven case study parents who were interviewed three times. Interviews with the case study families were conducted before the children started school, when the children had been at school for about two months, and again eighteen months later.

Interviews were semi-structured, and the basic questions used in some of these interviews are included in Appendices K to illustrate the type of questions that were asked. Further questions and probes were used as necessary. Interviews with early childhood and school teachers related to assessment, and beliefs and practices surrounding transition. Parents were asked about their views and their own and their children's experiences. Both parents and teachers were asked about their perceived understanding of the role played by themselves and other participants in the process. The follow-up interview with parents included ongoing experiences and reflections on earlier thoughts and events.

The interviews were conducted at a time and place that was suitable for the interviewee. The early childhood and school staff were all interviewed at their place of work. Some parents chose to be interviewed at home, others at school. The school allowed the staff room and other quiet interview rooms to be used for this purpose. All the adult interviews were tape-recorded and the transcripts returned to the participants for checking. The interviews lasted from approximately 30 minutes to over two hours, with most parent and teacher interviews being about an hour in length.

The seven case study children were interviewed when the children were eight years old. These interviews were conducted at the child's home (and in one case, at the parent's request, at school). The children were asked to help me find out about what it is like for children when they start school. I explained that the findings would be included in two books that, one to help adults understand about what it was like to start school, and one for four-year-olds to tell them about school. The interviews were arranged with a semi-structured format covering a number of points (see Appendix L) followed by the child being invited to draw something about school to be included in

the book for four-year-olds. All of the children agreed to draw something and paper, crayons and pens were provided. I continued to chat to the child as he/she drew. Although the whole interview was designed to be relaxed and informal it was noticeable that the balance of power, in relation to the nature of the conversational turns (see Wood & Wood, 1983), shifted during the drawing time to become more equitable. This was evidenced by the children volunteering more information, and with two children, engaging in an exchange where they asked me questions. Apart from the usefulness of the children's drawings, having a time where there was space to talk if the child wished, but not pressure to do so, proved particularly valuable.

Although the tape recorder was an invaluable research tool it did sometimes constrain the information that was gathered. Some participants asked that the recorder be turned off while they shared information that they did not want to be used in the study. Even children were obviously conscious of limiting the nature of the information that was provided on tape, evidenced by one case study girl's emphatic reminder "The tape's on Mum!" when the mother made a negative comment about the girl's experiences. As noted earlier, the participants seemed to gain trust in the process, knowing that they could change or eliminate material on the transcripts that they did not want used.

Overall, having participants check the transcripts was beneficial. Most made no changes, but some added words to clarify a sentence, or extra information they had thought of, or corrected grammar so the material read more smoothly. Occasionally I asked for more information. For example, one mother had said her child had really enjoyed his Rudolf Steiner early childhood service, and she had only moved him to kindergarten "to gently ease him" into a system she felt was more like Kowhai School, so that school wouldn't be such a shock. When I transcribed the tape, I realized I had discovered her reasons for her actions, but not what her preference for schooling might have been, so added the question "If it had been possible, would you have liked to send [child's initial] to a Rudolf Steiner school? Why/why not?" Mother 16 added in pen to the transcript "No. In [city] R. S. school is just starting. I felt it was not organised enough and in too early stages of development here". When participants were happy for the data to be used, they returned the transcripts to me.

Field notes

I used field notes to record information from informal conversations with adult and child participants during the study. I also included other notes from meetings, and observations that were not as detailed as the continuous narrative recordings conducted in classrooms (such as at a new parents' morning tea).

Document analysis

A range of relevant documentation was gathered and analysed. This included an information booklet provided by the school, copies of letters to parents, examples of the teachers' assessments tools (from school and kindergarten), Education Review Office reports on the kindergartens and school, a prospectus for a private kindergarten used by a number of parents, copies of timetables and policy documents.

The school records provided information on the sex, date of birth, family position and size, ethnicity and parents' occupations of the total new entrant cohort for the first year of the study. (This data was provided as a computer printout and did not include the names of the children or the families.)

In one class, photocopies were made of a range of work done by 10 of the children whose parents were interviewed. These were selected to provide examples from each child's first days at school up until the end of the observation period. Work in the children's mathematics books and conferenced and unconfereced writing books was copied. Where possible, work was included that had been carried out during an observed lesson. Some of the drawings provided by the eight-year-olds at the final interview were included in the analysis, although it was intended that the main function of these will be as illustrations in a children's book about starting school.

Constructing a data record, data analysis and report writing

Field notes were typed, dated and organised in chronological order. All the handwritten observations for each kindergarten and new entrant classroom were typed and organised in chronological order. Where the children's language had been tape-recorded, this was transcribed and matched with the written observations. Annotations and comments were added to the margins. Each observation was checked against the list of children who had permission to be included in the study. Data on children without permission were deleted, unless they were engaged in activities with the participant children, where, in some cases it seemed appropriate to note the presence or behaviour of another child. Each target child was allocated a colour code and this was used to highlight every mention of the child in the observation pages. The children's work and other documents were catalogued and organised into folders. The interview tapes were transcribed, and listened to a second time to check for accuracy. Note was taken of pauses and tone of voice.

Decisions were made in the light of early analysis regarding the sampling (e.g. adding the case studies, including the school secretary because parent interviews revealed her gate-keeping function). Initial themes were analysed and written about as conference

papers. These were shared with the teachers and case study families, and their responses provided further information. For example, after one mother read that she was the only parent to manage to arrange four school visits for her child, she reflected in the next interview on how she had managed to achieve this and the reasons behind her actions. The principal shared with me steps the school had taken to facilitate transition, based on the initial findings, and parents sometimes commented on these in later interviews.

The data collection became what Erickson (1985) described as a process of progressive problem solving. At the end of the fieldwork phase I had developed and written up several basic themes. Following a supervisor's advice I then reanalyzed all the data, in a number of different ways, creating tables to show the frequency of some events or comments, checking for alternative themes, discrepant cases and alternative explanations. I used coloured pencils to highlight printed sections of data that related to a theme. Sometimes I summarized these in handwritten notes, but for larger themes I copied the relevant material from the computer word files of transcripts and observations into a new file, so that all the material relating to a particular theme was collated. These new and expanded themes were written up, and the whole process was repeated as themes were checked, and reanalysed. While the recursive sorting, categorizing and re-categorizing themes was labour intensive and time consuming, there were some advantages associated with the approach taken. Frequent contact with the data made me very familiar with it (Graue & Walsh, 1998) and maintained a holistic awareness of the content (Erickson, 1985). The understanding and knowledge gained of the data by constant re-reading and revisiting in context was particularly beneficial, and avoided the concern expressed by Carr (1997), that the coding required to prepare the data for computer analysis might lead to "interpretive closure" (p. 109).

The literature review was ongoing throughout the study and both shaped, and was shaped by, the interpretation of the findings. Both the data record and the literature were used in shaping and checking the emerging theories. The experience was consistent with Graue and Walsh's (1998) description of writing being part of the interpretive act and strategically undertaken to tell a particular story to a particular audience. Aspects of the story have already been told to different audiences in different ways (e.g. S. Peters, 1998, 2000, 2002a, 2002b, 2003). Writing these articles and discussing them with others, has further shaped my thinking, as has feedback from supervisors on earlier drafts of the thesis. In the final analysis, the resulting themes were much richer than those I had formulated during earlier stages of the study.

The researcher's position

In this section I have reflected on my own position in the research. While in earlier studies, researchers prided themselves in taking an objective stance, today many researchers are aware that observation "has to take into account the social experience and thinking of those who do the observation" (A. Smith, 1998, p. 41). Research reflects how the researcher looks, as much as what was seen (Graue & Walsh, 1998). It is clear that the researcher cannot detach him/herself from her beliefs and attitudes. However, while bias cannot be removed, it can be identified and its effects explicitly monitored (Graue and Walsh, 1998; Scheurich, 1995).

As a qualified early childhood teacher, who has also spent considerable time in primary school classrooms during a number of research studies (Young-Loveridge, 1993; Peters, 1991, 1994), and in my role as a university lecturer supervising students on placement, I found my role throughout the study was closely aligned with that of the school staff. I was treated very much as a staff member, sharing breaks (when I was not collecting data) in the staff room, and having access to the school in the way that a professional colleague would have. I felt my familiarity with both primary schools and early childhood centres allowed me to establish rapport with the teachers who were involved. Familiarity with the two contexts also helped me bring insights into the transition process. However, my early childhood training, practical experience and ongoing engagement with literature on teaching and learning, led me to be less comfortable with some of the more formal aspects of schooling, and the attention to routine and procedure. In some respects this was a benefit. Holliday (2002) argues that the interpretive researcher seeks to make the familiar strange, and my bringing different insights to school context assisted in this. However, it was also a potential source of bias, and in writing up the study I have been alert to this, and frequently checked myself to see whether this was affecting my analysis. I have actively looked for, and acknowledged, alternative explanations and disconfirming evidence.

Although the teachers treated me collegially, I felt that the parents saw my position, as a university researcher, as clearly independent from the school. I found it interesting that they revealed so much to me but did not voice their concerns through the channels provided by the school, such as a suggestion box that was provided in the office area, or through communication with the Board of Trustees community representative. I believe that the issue of confidentiality was important here. Parents sometimes commented that they did not want to do anything that would make life difficult for their child, and so, while they were pleased to have their voices heard in a confidential way through the research, they would not share their concerns directly with the school. Their concerns for their child's future well-being at the school meant it was important

to maintain confidentiality for these children and their families, which prevented the gathering of some information that would have been useful. The face-to-face nature of the interactions with me was also likely to have been important.

Being a mother myself, even one whose child was much older than the children involved in the study, helped me to establish rapport and credibility with the parents and they sometimes asked me questions about my own family. Some parents mentioned that knowing someone was keeping an eye on their child (through the observations) was comforting. Many were interested to know what I had observed. I tried not to discuss the observations with parents, but if asked directly about what I had seen I tried to share something verbally, in a way that did not threaten the confidentiality of other participants, including the child. For example, one mother responded to my question about her child's strengths by saying she thought she might be strong "in the writing side of it", but then asked me if I could confirm this through my observations. I was able to answer honestly that I hadn't observed for a little while as I had been teaching at the university. "Today was my first day back. They didn't do a lot of writing today. They were making Christmas cards...".

The seven case study families who were visited over a period of four years became like friends, and each visit was characterised by a chat about what had been happening in our lives, in addition to the more formal interviews. I witnessed changes of house, new jobs, new babies, major decisions about retraining and new careers, and so on. I felt increasingly relaxed in their company and I think that this was reciprocated, evidenced by the fact that one of the mothers hugged me when I arrived for the fourth visit. Another mother initiated contact through telephone and email, in addition to the scheduled interviews, to report on things she thought I might find relevant.

While I was both parent and teacher and had much in common with the adult participants, I had only vague recollections of my own experience of starting school. Therefore, with the children I was more professional (and occasionally maternal) rather than directly empathetic with their experiences. As Graue and Walsh (1998) state, when doing research with children one remains "a very definite and identifiable "other"" (p. xiv). This is not intended to construct childhood as conceptually and physically separate from the adult world (see James & Prout, 1997), but to acknowledge that in the school context, there are distinct differences in the rights and roles accorded to adults and children, and I enjoyed the place of an adult. It did not feel appropriate to attempt to be a 'big kid', adopted by Corsaro (1981) in an early childhood study, as this would be difficult for both teachers and researcher to achieve with any authenticity at the new entrant level, although it has been successfully

employed with high school students (Jones, 1991). An alternative stance, used by Ledger (1997a, 2000) was to be a friend of the child starting school. While this revealed useful data on the children's perspectives, for my study I felt a friendship role had the potential to influence the dynamics I was hoping to observe. However, although I was not a 'friend' per se, like Carr (1997, p. 101), I could be a "safe place" for a child to stop and have a chat, share something of interest, or sit companionably beside, especially before school or during playtimes and lunchtimes.

I felt my role as an adult researcher who was interested in all children's experiences of school proved more useful for the purposes of this study than being a friend of the case study children. By the time the case study children started school, I was an established participant in the three new entrant classes. I had observed many experiences, and talked to many of the participants. Although the case study children were familiar with me from kindergarten and sometimes from home visits, the other children in the class were also familiar with me, so my relationship to the case study children was not unusual. I was not there *for them* (as in Ledger's 2000 study). Where a researcher accompanies a child to school this is likely to affect the nature of the child's experiences. Even when the child seems unaware of the researcher, the researcher may wonder if the teacher is giving more attention to the child than normal, something Norris (1999) commented on in her study of boys' transition experiences. The approach taken in my study meant that when I observed the case study children's experiences of school it was not obvious to either the teachers or the children who I was particularly interested in, thus protecting the children's confidentiality, and minimising disruption to their classroom experiences.

My role as researcher in this context, rather than teacher, perhaps made it more difficult to obtain the children's initial views of their transition. I was aware that the children did not necessarily share my interest in the research question and my attempts to discuss their experiences with them as four and five-year-olds were not always successful, and they generally steered the conversations to topics that were of more interest to them. This can be seen as a subtle negotiation of power (Fasoli, 2001; Scheurich, 1995), with the children making choices about when and how to respond. In a study by Moore (2001), published after the data in the present study were gathered, the children's teachers elicited the children's ideas through classroom discussions, a format that the children were already familiar with and which may have proved useful here. Innovative methods and alternative researcher roles, such as accompanying children taking photographs of things in the school (Dockett & Perry, 2003a, 2003c) may also have been beneficial.

When I revisited the case study children as eight-year-olds, the children were willing to share their thoughts and experiences in relation to starting school, and in most cases seemed delighted to be in the role of having a visitor who had come to talk to them. One child proudly announced to her father who arrived home during the interview “This is Sally and she is interviewing me!” We seemed at this point to have more of a shared interest in the topic than when they were younger, but I was still aware that their world was different in some respects to mine. Talk of ‘Pulp shoes’ and ‘snooze-ums’ reminded me that there were aspects of the childhood culture that were unfamiliar to me.

Personal experiences of transition

My own experiences of the transition to school were uneventful. Despite not having any early childhood education outside of the family, I recall my own entry to school as a fairly routine event that was neither particularly exciting or traumatic. Some twenty years later, perhaps by good luck rather than good management, as this was well before my interest in transitions began, my daughter started school without any apparent problems. Some of her later changes of school were more challenging, often for me, as much as for her. The years of study represented by this thesis included a number of personal and family transitions. Through my own experiences I have been aware of the many emotions that often surround a transition and that, in the long term, difficult transitions do not necessarily have negative outcomes.

Accountability

There are a number of ways in which validity can be considered in qualitative research. Graue and Walsh (1998) talk about methodological, interpretive, textual and praxis-oriented validity. In my study, methodological validity was ensured by selecting methods that were appropriate to the research questions. In the rich description phase, decisions were made to extend the planned data collection to see the situation from different perspectives, and to cross-check and triangulate findings. This proved important, because it avoided “inappropriate certainty” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 267), and opened new lines of thinking, where different sources provided different pictures. After ten months of fieldwork, the end of the school year provided an appropriate place to stop, thus providing a time boundary to the broad consideration of transition at Kowhai School. The case study children and families, who formed subcases within the wider case study, were revisited at intervals until the children were eight years old. At this point, three years from their initial transition, while it would have been interesting to continue to follow them, I felt that sufficient data had been gathered for the purposes of the study.

Interpretive validity is provided within the thesis by sharing sufficient evidence so that the assertions made seem plausible. The thesis seeks to provide textual validity by writing the findings in such a way that they are accessible to others. Praxis-oriented validity has been achieved by providing new insights into understanding the experience of transition, with a view to reviewing policies and practices in relation to children, families and teachers engaged in this process.

The approach taken was consistent with Bassey's (1999) discussion of trustworthiness. There was prolonged engagement with the data sources, there were persistent observations of emerging issues, and triangulation of raw data. The raw data were checked with their sources, and the themes were checked and re-checked against the data. The findings have been shared through conference presentations, publications and with supervisors, to provide opportunities for what Bassey called 'critical friends' to challenge the findings. The resulting thesis has been written to include sufficient detail, and provide access to enough data to allow an adequate audit trail for the reader.

Chapter summary

This chapter has described the interpretive approach taken in addressing the research questions. The focus was on one school, and nested within this there were case studies of particular participants. I have described the decisions I made about where and when to observe, who to interview, how often to interview them, and about the nature of documents that were collected. To understand the issues within this case study it was sometimes necessary to look beyond the case to understand what was happening (Erickson, 1985; Graue & Walsh, 1998). The steps I took were chosen with care in order to illuminate the topic with rich description, but it is important to remember that it is the researcher who creates the sense of boundedness in a case study, in order to keep the project logistically and conceptually manageable. The data collected represent just part of the rich *mélange* of social life in the focus setting (Holliday, 2002). The nature of the selected boundaries are summarised in Figure 5.

Ethical procedures and considerations have been described in this chapter, along with the process of analysis that led to the findings. In the chapters that follow I have provided both rich description, and analytic interpretation, with the intention of showing how the particular themes were played out in the lived experiences of the participants. In coming to understand the situation from the perspectives of the participants, the idiosyncratic experiences were as important as those that were more common, which is an important feature of this form of research (D. Peters. 1993). While my analysis is not the only plausible one, Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggested

that the type of systematic study of the data I have engaged in, provides confidence in its credibility.

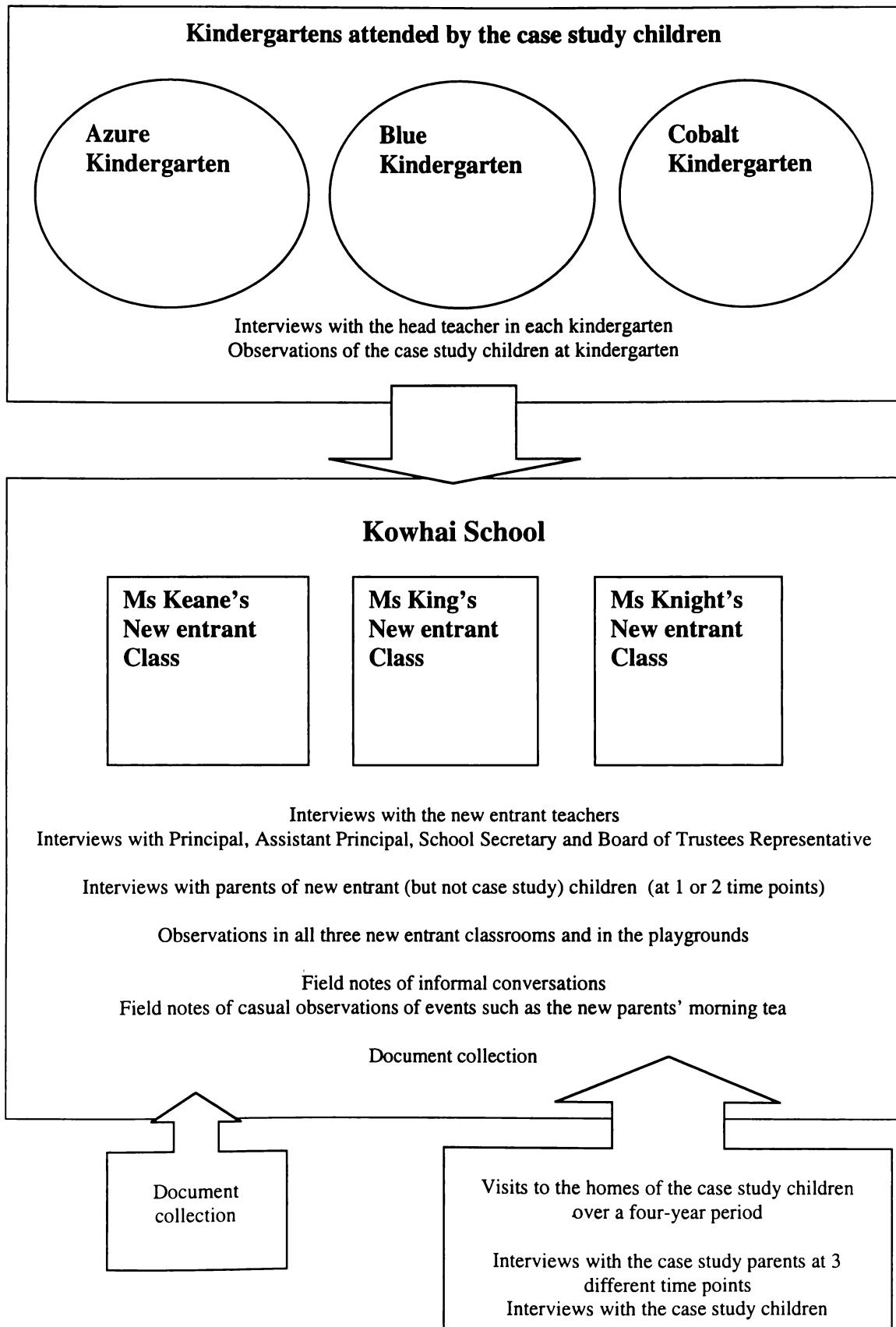


Figure 5. A summary of the boundaries of the case study, showing the data collected

Chapter Nine

The Case Study Stories

This chapter presents the stories of the seven case study children and their families as the children made the transition from early childhood education to school. It addresses the main research question, *How do children and their families experience transition?* Each story follows the family over a four-year period from the child's last term at kindergarten until the child had been at school for more than three years. In Chapters Ten to Thirteen the data for the 23 children and their families has been organized into themes, but this approach, while highlighting issues, loses the overall picture of lived experience. Hence the seven complete stories are told first, to illustrate the diversity and complexity of the transition experience. The stories have been grouped according to the new entrant class the children joined (see Table 3) and the individual stories are told in chronological order within each class.

Table 3. The case study children's kindergartens and their allocation to the new entrant classes

Name	Kindergarten	Class
Nicola	Cobalt	Ms King
Tessa	Blue	Ms King
Steve	Azure	Ms Keane
Carl	Blue	Ms Keane
Anna	Azure	Ms Keane
Heather	Azure	Ms Keane
Matthew	Azure	Ms Knight

The case study stories are told in detail, allowing readers to draw their own conclusions. Each case study has its own particular area(s) of focus relating to that child and family's experiences, and these are discussed in my reflections sections that follow the stories. By analyzing these individual stories of it is possible to get a sense of the issues for children in the process of them becoming "a school pupil", and how positive or negative cycles of experience can develop. The stories touch on the beliefs and practices that shape both the children's and the families' experiences, although this aspect is addressed in more detail in Chapters Ten, Eleven and Twelve. The chapter concludes by highlighting and discussing the overall findings from the case studies, and the potential implications for practice arising from the data.

In my discussion sections I draw on my adaptation of Sameroff's (1975, 1991) transactional model and Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1986, 1992) ecological theory, described and illustrated in Chapter Two (Figure 2). Both Sameroff and Bronfenbrenner agree that looking only at the child or only at the environment is less fruitful than a consideration of the complex interweaving of different aspects of both. The background to the model in Figure 2 is shown as a weaving to acknowledge the very complex interactions of many factors that affect each child's path. The specific features which are the focus in each case study story are not necessarily the only influential aspects, but are selected threads from this weaving that were evident in the data. The whole process is also influenced by exosystem and macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1992) factors. A further layer of complexity is evident in the stories because not one, but several, series of transactions could be seen to be operating within each case. For example, although I have chosen to focus on the child, a similar process was taking place for parents/caregivers. A complex interweaving of factors also affected the teacher.

Ms King's class

Two of the case study children, Nicola and Tessa, joined Ms King's class. Nicola, the oldest case study child, started school early in the third term and Tessa started on the first day of the fourth term, having turned five during the holidays. They attended Cobalt Kindergarten (Nicola) and Blue Kindergarten (Tessa), prior to starting school.

1. Nicola and the North family

Background

At the start of the study Nicola was 4 years and 9 months old. She lived with her parents, Mr and Ms North and her baby brother, Noah. They had a comfortable family home, situated some distance from Kowhai School. Nicola's grandmother was a frequent visitor to their home, and appeared to provide some help in running the household. Health reasons prevented Mr North from providing assistance with the children and Ms North reflected that while they were not a solo family they were a "mother dominated family" (CS1.1, p. 12). Ms North was the main income earner and at the time of the first interview she worked 8am to 4pm on three days a week. Nicola and Noah went to a family day care provider in another district during Ms North's working hours. On these days the carer took Nicola to morning sessions at Cobalt Kindergarten. Ms North took her to kindergarten on the other two days.

Ms North described Nicola as having good language skills (which were evident during Nicola's contributions to the interview and in her conversations with her mother) and said that Nicola was quick and bright, and good at counting. Nicola enjoyed dancing,

singing and dressing up at home, but appeared to dislike doing these activities with a group. They had tried dancing classes but abandoned them because "with a whole class where the teacher's up the front saying 'do this' she [Nicola] does it but doesn't put any effort into it but here [at home] she's floating around singing and dancing and dressing up and stuff". Ms North wondered if it was because Nicola liked to be "center-stage". "If there's a group of kids and you say to them 'Sing a song' she will not do it. Absolutely will not do it. When the others finish she'll do it" (CS1.1, p. 11). Similarly, when the kindergarten children went to a concert and the other children had been "up and dancing", Nicola had refused to get involved and "sat the whole time" (CS1.2, p. 15).

Observations at kindergarten showed Nicola was involved in a variety of self-selected activities. She was able to write her own name correctly and she asked adults to help her write longer sentences. She appeared to enjoy adult contact and spent a lot of time with teachers and the researcher. The teachers were impressed with her verbal skills. She was confident in approaching adults and asking them to assist her in a variety of ways, including supplying the resources or help she needed for activities she wished to undertake. The kindergarten teachers commented on how capable Nicola was, and she often seemed to be the recipient of special attention and resources. Teachers tended to negotiate with her rather than making direct requests. As well as spending time with adults she also spent time alone or with a small group of girls. At mat times she was quiet and attentive.

Ms North had put a lot of thought into selecting a school for Nicola, and had prepared a list of questions to ask each school to assist her decision. In the event, the first school she approached apparently took a negative view of being checked out in this way and would not let her meet with the new entrant teachers. Nicola's mother commented that she felt "a bit squashed" by this experience, and based the rest of her research on talking to friends and neighbours and studying the school prospectuses (CS1.1, p. 9). Kowhai School was eventually selected, without visiting, on the basis of its good reputation and its fairly convenient location. She was concerned about Kowhai's overall size and the size of the classes but she felt these disadvantages were outweighed by the positive features of the school and comforted herself that a larger school could also offer things that a smaller school could not.

Having made the selection and enrolled Nicola the family then had to wait to see if she would be allocated a place. This was unsettling as whenever school was talked about, they had to say Kowhai School 'might be' Nicola's school. Ms North described having

to rush home and "out to the letterbox" every day when they were waiting to hear (CS1.1, p. 8).

At the time of the first interview Ms North said her only information about schools came from talking to friends and her own memories. She thought that Nicola probably knew more about school than she did because Nicola's friend Nancy, the daughter of her day carer, had recently moved from Cobalt kindergarten to Cobalt's local school. Nicola had witnessed first hand her friend's transition, and had been into Nancy's class a few times. Nicola told me that at school "They always give you reading books and you have got to read them". She described features of Nancy's school but said, "I don't know what the inside of my school looks like because I've never been in the classroom. My school might be different to Nancy's" (Nicola in CS1.1, pp. 6 - 8).

Ms North said she and Nicola were both excited about Nicola going to school. She felt that Nicola was becoming a little bored at kindergarten and was starting to be reluctant to go. "She wants to learn to read and I think she's ready for it" (CS1.1, p. 4). Ms North was particularly looking forward to the new routine that school would bring. She planned to adapt her working hours from three full days to five part time days. Currently she had to get herself and the children up and out early on three days a week so that the children could be at the day care home in time for her to start work at eight, then in the afternoons:

I leave work at 4.00, get to the babysitters at 4.15, leave there at 4.30, get home at 4.45. They are tired, they are hungry, they want feeding NOW and it's just go, go, go, go, go and feed them as quickly as you can, then they are tired, get them in the bath and suddenly the night has gone and it was all a great stress. (CS1.1, p. 4)

Coming home when Nicola finished school she felt would "slow the whole thing down" and she was looking forward to having time to talk with Nicola about what she had done at school. "I want to be able to be there, so I am really looking forward to that " (CS1.1, p. 5). However, along with her excitement Ms North felt the transition to school was also a little frightening because it "signaled the end of them being little children. From now on this education thing is going to be with us for 15 to 20 years" (CS1.1, p. 10).

Before Nicola started school Ms North's main concern was that Nicola would not have any friends at Kowhai School. Nicola herself also commented "at my school on the first day I won't know anyone" (Nicola in CS1.1, p. 8). Ms North said that she felt it was her job to ensure that they met people and she asked if I could put her in touch

with other families. As confidentiality of the other participants was an issue here, I arranged for the Board of Trustee representative at Kowhai School to contact the Norths and help to facilitate introductions to the families of children in Nicola's class.

Ms North's other worry was that Nicola would be overlooked by her teacher "if there are 25 or 30 kids in the class, if one of them is stropky or can't be bothered trying then they are not going to bother. They have kids that want to learn. So I guess I am concerned that she won't behave herself" (CS1.1, p. 6). However, on hearing this Nicola (who had appeared at the time to be out of earshot and engaged in playing with her friend) retorted "I will so behave myself!"

In preparation for school Ms North and Nicola had been reading books and Nicola had been encouraged to write, by copying messages into birthday cards. The day carer had found when Nancy started school that letter recognition was an important skill for new entrants, so Ms North had been teaching Nicola not only the names of the letters but also the sound that they make. This had been kept fairly low-key though. "I guess you don't want to rush it. They are little children for such a short time we don't want to be pushing them into serious stuff before they absolutely have to" (CS1.1, p. 10).

Ms North was enthusiastic about becoming involved with the school once Nicola started. Her working hours would make parent helping difficult but she thought she'd like to join the PTA:

People tend to sit back and complain but to me, I want to be involved in her education and make sure she gets the right thing. I want to know the teachers so I think you have got to be involved... you get out what you put in really. (CS1.1, p. 12)

School visits

As soon as Nicola was offered a place Ms North had contacted Kowhai School to see if school visits could be arranged. She knew from what happened at Cobalt kindergarten that visits were important, and because of her concern about sending Nicola to a school where she didn't know anyone she was anxious to start the visiting process as quickly as possible. On the first visit Ms North decided to stay, even though Ms King told her that they preferred mothers not to. "I thought it was pretty daunting for Nicola to go into this class full of strangers" (CS1.2, p. 1). Unfortunately, the class were involved in folk dancing in the school hall, which Nicola really disliked. This was perhaps a little like the dancing classes that the Norths had already rejected. On a subsequent school visit Ms North telephoned me at 8.30 am to report that Nicola was screaming in the car because she did not want to go to school (Field notes, 5.7).

Her dislike of folk dancing was still apparent four months later. Overhearing her mother talking about it Nicola cried anxiously "I don't like folk dancing. When is it going to be folk dancing?" (Nicola in CS1.2, p. 1).

They changed the day of the visit in order to avoid the activity, but Nicola remained unenthusiastic. She had two visits alone and then on the fourth one her mother stayed because that morning Nicola had been again been "crying and saying that she did not want to go to school" (Field notes 30.7). Ms North reflected that by the fourth visit "I think we had almost blown it" as Nicola was becoming "more fussy about it" (CS1.1, p. 2). Aspects of the visits certainly appeared to be quite daunting, as the summary from the observations in Figure 6 indicates.

Nicola and her mother arrive for Nicola's fourth school visit as the morning bells ring. They join the other children on the mat, Nicola clinging to mum, who gently rubs Nicola's back. The teacher, Ms King, sits at the front of the mat and after greeting the class, calls the roll. Nicola's name is called but she doesn't respond. Ms King tells the class Nicola will start on Monday. After routine jobs are completed Ms King explains the class is having a mini Olympics this morning. She hands out flags. One is given to Nicola, who doesn't want it. Ms King says she might want it later. C is told to partner Nicola, and C takes her hand when they line up, but Nicola returns to her mother. They all go to the school hall. On two previous visits Nicola was very distressed by folk dancing in the hall. Now it is full with about 50-60 children and many parents and teachers. The events are unfamiliar, like triple jump, which involves a hop, skip and a jump, and rowing which requires children to sit in pairs and shuffle backwards. Ms King asks if Nicola would like a turn at the first event. She refuses. She and Ms North sit together and watch the Olympics from 9.15 until 10.00.

At the end of the events the children pick up their flags and march around the hall. At 10.00 two classes squash into a nearby classroom for the medal ceremony. Nicola is curious to know what the triple jump is (one of the medals is given for triple jump), and Ms North explains. Nicola is given a medal for gymnastics, which she shows me, saying "Even though I didn't do anything". Nicola starts to practice hop, skip and jump (the triple jump) in a space by one of the painting tables.

At 10.10 Nicola's class goes back to their classroom. Nicola wants the toilet and won't go alone so she and mum go together. When they return the class is involved in a writing activity. There is nothing for Nicola to do and she hangs around uncertainly. Her teacher didn't seem to be aware that she and her mother were there. (Ms King may have thought they had gone home.) Not surprisingly, after about five minutes Nicola is reluctant to stay. Prompted by her mother Nicola politely says goodbye to Ms King and the two girls she is friendly with. Seeing that they are leaving Ms King suggests that Nicola stay and play at morning tea but by now Nicola has had enough and she and her mother leave before the bell for morning tea. (Summary of observations, 30.7)

Figure 6. Nicola's final school visit

Based on the earlier information about Nicola it seemed that she was unwilling to be centre stage in a unfamiliar activity, although she appeared willing to try and master some of the demands, such as the hop, skip and jump, when she could do so without being observed directly by the teachers and others.

Ms North felt it had been unfortunate that Nicola had been put off by the folk dancing because when she had been involved in activities in the classroom she had seemed quite happy. The Olympic event too seemed to be quite an overwhelming and confusing experience and there was little sense of Nicola establishing a sense of belonging in this final visit. Months later Ms North looked back and wondered if the teacher's view that visits were more useful without the parent would in fact have proved correct, and whether "because I was there that first day it made the situation worse" (CS1.2, p. 15). On reflection she also wondered whether four visits had perhaps been too many as they had not really seemed to facilitate the transition process. However, as it was the content of the visits that had upset Nicola it was perhaps the timing, rather than the number, that had been problematic. The main advantage of the visits was that Ms North was able to make contact with the families of two other girls in Nicola's class and she arranged some activities out of school so that Nicola had the chance to get to know them before she started.

Ms North's concerns had been signaled to the Board of Trustee representative, who invited Ms North to attend the new parents' morning tea that was usually attended by parents after their child had started. Ms North was pleased to be asked but a little disappointed in the event, because although they were given a tour of the school they "Didn't introduce us, ask our names, ask our children's names or anything... I thought a bit more could have been done on that day to include us to make us feel as if we were going to be part of it" (CS1.3, p. 6).

As Nicola's fifth birthday approached it was clear that both Nicola and Ms North had been enthusiastic and excited by the notion of Nicola starting school but they had been somewhat unimpressed by their actual contact. Nevertheless the main concern of not having friends had been overcome, as Nicola now knew two of the girls in her class.

First weeks at school

Nicola's first day at school appeared quite successful. Her teacher commented to me that she had "fitted in so well" and Nicola seemed proud to announce to me that "It's not a school visit, I'm really five" (Obs. 5.8, p. 2). Observations at lunch time and during the afternoon showed Nicola looking quite happy but facing several instances

when she was challenged by other children and told that she was not allowed to do something she was doing, or not allowed to ignore the teacher's requests to do something. The frequent demands for unexplained compliance are illustrated in Figure 7, which shows 9 instances of Nicola personally receiving such comments in a 30 minute period, as well as overhearing 2 comments directed at the girl she was friendly with, while having to also comply with 4 directions to the group. This presented a marked contrast to the child who was used to negotiating and planning her own activities at home and kindergarten.

Key: Comments directed to Nicola = **bold**
 Comments directed to others = underlined
 Directions to the whole group = *italics*

1.10 Nicola and three other girls draw on the newspaper that covers the tables. Another girl, S **tells them they are not allowed** to cut the paper. Nicola's friend is told by S that she is naughty and the teacher wanted the picture on the newspaper for something. Nicola moves to another table but S follows **and tells her she is not allowed to draw**. Nicola argues and continues with her drawing.

1.15 *Nicola joins the other children on the mat. Older children tell them to get a book and start reading.* Nicola follows a girl to the book corner. *The older children tell them to put the books away and sit on the mat.* Nicola didn't actually get as far as choosing a book.

1.20 Nicola's friend and S are told by the teacher to tidy the table they were working at.

1.25 Nicola sits at the front of the mat by Ms King's feet. Nicola is given a letter and **told to put it in her bag**. She doesn't. **The children tell her** she is "not allowed" not to. **The teacher calls her to collect** a piece of written work. **She is told by the teacher to put the written work and the letter in her bag**, which she does.

1.30 Nicola returns, now seated at the side of the mat. There is some discussion, which Nicola doesn't participate in, and then the teacher reads two stories.

1.35 After the story **the teacher tells Nicola** to go and get her bag and put it by the door. K (another girl) takes Nicola and **tells her to get her bag** (Nicola is finishing at 2 o'clock which is why she is being asked to do this). K 'polices' the process with Nicola protesting "Why do I have to then?" a question which is not answered.

1.40 *The children line up.* Ms King notices a piece of paper has fallen out of Nicola's bag and **tells her to put it in the bag**. *Nicola and other recent new entrants are placed at the back of the line and they all walk to the school hall for assembly.* (Summary of observations 5.8)

Figure 7. An example of the frequent demands for unexplained compliance at school

Nicola's first day ended with assembly where she was taken to the front, along with one other new child, and introduced to the whole of the junior school.

After the first day her mother reported that leaving Nicola at school in the mornings "got progressively worse and worse, screaming, clinging, these few friends trying to drag her back into the class as I left. It was just awful" (CS1.2, p. 2). Ms North was really upset by this, but reflected that she had no choice but to leave her. Her new working hours meant that after leaving Nicola at school she still had to drive across town, get Noah to the daycarer and then get to work by 9.30 am. This left little time for delays at school. Ms North was busy at work and also unwell which added to the pressure:

I shouldn't have been at work but I was too busy not to be, which is stupid isn't it? So I don't think that helped either. By Thursday night Mum rang up to see how I was and I burst into tears and she ended up coming over and taking her [Nicola] home with her and she took her to school, which was sort of the conclusion I had actually come to that day anyway, was to get someone else to take her other than me, and that worked. (CS1.1, p. 2)

The following week they instigated a sticker chart, where Nicola gained a sticker for each day that she went to school without making a fuss, and when she obtained five stickers in five days she was able to select a small prize. "That worked reasonably well. There were a few days where we were marginal" (CS1.2, p. 3). However, once Nicola moved into her second term at school there was

no problem at all. Like today, she couldn't have cared less if I was there or not. She was so busy on the computer she hardly bothered to say goodbye. That's just wonderful really. We have got over all that. (CS1.2, p. 3)

Nicola's mother felt that Nicola's "performance" over starting school had been partly to "wind mum up", although she acknowledged that "she certainly didn't enjoy folk dancing, I don't think that helped" (CS1.2, p. 4). Ms North reflected that with "anything different, she doesn't like to be on show when she is doing it" (CS1.3, p. 8), which seemed to be borne out in the observation of the mini Olympics too. Also, folk dancing, like the mini Olympics and the assembly on her first day involved going out of the classroom. Even after she had been at school for some time Nicola seemed happier when she could remain in her usual classroom, commenting to me that she disliked the days when they had to go outside to eat lunch. Other than this Nicola gave few verbal clues as to what she found upsetting. Asked whether school was what she had been expecting, Nicola said "No. I thought it would have playdough and it doesn't... I thought it would have a gate around the sandpit" (Nicola in CS1.2, pp. 4-5). Although she did comment that "before I was hoping I could go to school, but now I don't want to" (Nicola in CS1.2, p. 8).

Ms North believed the problems arose partly because of the compulsory nature of having to attend. "She wasn't being given any choice. She usually likes to be in control and she couldn't. I wasn't having any not goings" (CS1.2, p. 8). At the time, I (the researcher) felt that Nicola may also have had problems adjusting to the demands for unexplained conformity required at school, and the lack of adult contact. Ms North also felt that they made the mistake of arriving at school too early. The school recommended that children arrive early and Nicola and her mother were always there by about 8.40am. However, because "she didn't know many people or what to do, she was just left standing around" (CS1.2, p. 8). This uncomfortable waiting time increased Nicola's clinginess, so her mother decided to ignore the school's suggestion and started to arrive at about five minutes to nine. This had been more successful, "straight in and ready to go" (CS1.2, p. 8). Later she reflected that "the best thing I did was to change to arriving at two minutes to nine, just dump and go" (CS1.3, p. 7).

The class size had been in the upper 20s when Nicola started, and continued to rise. It was difficult for Nicola's mother to talk to the teacher. "It was just so busy in the mornings, if you wanted to ask something there was just no way you would get near her" (CS1.2, p. 11). The teacher also forgot to give her the usual forms and letters. "They came in dribs and drabs and she'd suddenly remember that she didn't have such and such from us" (CS1.2, p. 10). The difficulties of keeping track of who had what also affected Nicola, who was upset not to have received a reading book for the first school holidays "only me didn't get to read and everybody else did". This also seemed to be connected to not understanding all the language of the classroom. As Nicola explained "When she [teacher] said 'I want all the Herons' I didn't know what I was because I was quite new" (Nicola in CS1.2, p. 6).

The second term and beyond

Early in Nicola's second term the class size fell from 29 to 19 because a number of children had moved on to the new class that was formed. Ms North reported that Nicola was now enjoying many aspects of school, especially publishing her stories, giving news, using the listening post and going to music. The more relaxed atmosphere of the smaller class may also have contributed to Nicola feeling more settled.

Observations showed Nicola receiving more adult contact as she discussed things with her teacher, a student teacher, and a parent helper. During one observation she typed her own story onto the computer to publish it. She completed the writing and mathematics tasks she was given with ease, and quickly conformed to the requirements of the school routines, often anticipating what would happen next. For example, moving into place for mat time before the teacher asked the class to do so. There were

no more observed instances of Nicola being told by peers that she wasn't allowed to do something.

Despite the traumatic start, Ms North felt that Nicola had been more than ready for school. Ms King had communicated to Nicola's mother that Nicola's initial assessments had shown her to be very capable, especially in oral language and the Norths were "pretty proud of that" (CS1.2, p. 10). However, Ms North was a little concerned about Nicola's behaviour in the classroom. She had observed while parent helping that although Nicola wanted to answer the teacher's questions, she seemed unable to catch her eye. Her mother felt that Nicola's tendency to sit with her head down and chew her nails was leading her to be overlooked. She had advised "Sit up. Sit tall and look", and "when Mrs King looks round she should see you looking straight at her and then she will pick you" (CS1.2, pp. 9-10). Ms North felt that being noticed by the teacher was important if Nicola was going to "keep up with it" (CS1.2, p. 10). "She only gets one chance at this sort of thing and she has got to do it right... the teacher isn't going to notice her or pick on her when she is looking for someone to answer if she is sitting there looking down" (CS1.2, p. 9).

By this stage Ms North would have liked more information about how Nicola was doing. Her impression was that she was capable of a lot more than she was being asked to do, but would have appreciated some direct feedback and the opportunity to discuss Nicola's learning with the teacher. She gleaned what information she could from looking at Nicola's books, but had "no idea what they are doing in maths" (CS1.2, p. 12). Her impression was that they were just doing the activities involving sorting and shapes that Nicola had already been doing for a couple of years. With reading, they had successfully instigated their own reading project with a 40 page book from a book club. This was "so much more involved than the little books she has been getting" (CS1.2, p. 12). The classroom observations tended to support the view that Nicola was not particularly challenged by any of the work. Nicola's mother was not complaining, but she did want to know if there was an academic reason for moving so slowly. "I feel she could be pushed a little harder on things but then I don't know, I am not a teacher so I don't know" (CS1.2, p. 12). She would also have appreciated more guidance as to what was to be achieved with the work that came home. "That home book thing that they bring home, we get it for a whole week and it's one poem and I am never quite sure what we are supposed to do with it" (CS1.2, p. 13).

After four months at school, observations showed Nicola looking confident in the classroom and organising other children in some activities. She was still completing the tasks with ease, although this may not always have been recognised by her teacher.

Nicola completed things so quickly a busy teacher could easily miss seeing what she had done, as the following example illustrates.

Nicola completes a set task (creating sets of tens with rods). She has made ten sets of ten, which she counts. As she has now run out of sticks Nicola suggests an extension to a boy who was working with her (using crayons to make more sets), which they do. Other boys then take all of their sticks, so that when the teacher comes to their table they appear to have done nothing. (Summary of observation notes, 12/12)

Ms North's enthusiasm about joining the PTA had been thwarted when she had been advised that most of the things that needed doing for the PTA needed doing during the school day, making it difficult for working parents. However, she was still keen to be involved in whatever way she could. So far she had managed to rearrange her working hours twice to allow her to be a parent helper and she had found that valuable. She thought that parental involvement was important, and could also have positive spin-offs for her children.

What came through quite strongly throughout this case study was both Nicola's and her mother's desire for explanations regarding school routines and practices, rather than blind acceptance of the status quo. The other salient feature was her mother's desire for Nicola to make the most of the educational opportunities she was offered, and her willingness to do whatever was in her power to assist Nicola with this.

Looking back

I revisited the Norths nearly two years after Nicola first started school. As Nicola looked back on the process she said that she liked school "because it was different to being at kindy... because people would tell you what to do". (This was the complete opposite of my earlier analysis of her experiences, and possibly reflected her adaptation to the structure.) She also liked "long playtime [lunchtime] and short playtime" and playing "Spice Girls" with her friends. She didn't like it when "big kids sometimes bully the little kids, and I thought it was going to happen to me". She also didn't like it when her friends "didn't want to play with me". Asked what she would tell a younger child about school she said "It was fun. 'Cause you get to play with people and you get fun things to do there" (Nicola in CS1.3, pp. 1-2).

Ms North reflected that she expected to be much more relaxed with Noah's transition, partly because of his nature, and partly because they were all so much more aware of what happened at school now. Noah had been in and out of school with Nicola and Ms North felt that she now understood the routines so it was going to be a "breeze" (CS1.3, p. 3). After reading some early analysis of the data she questioned, in

retrospect, whether the four visits she arranged for Nicola had been as much for her benefit as for Nicola's. She also wondered how she had managed to achieve four visits when so many children were only allowed one and concluded it was because "I just took no notice basically, and did it anyway" (CS1.3, p. 3).

Ms North was pleased with Nicola's progress. Nicola and two other children had been in the top reading group for two years "streets ahead of the rest of the class" (CS1.3, p. 8). She felt that Nicola was overcoming her reluctance to contribute and that her current teacher seemed to understand Nicola and her need to be stimulated rather than being allowed to simply cruise along. However, there were still times when she felt Nicola could be challenged a little more and she would have liked some changes to the homework. Nicola's long time friend Nancy, although in Ms North's opinion no more capable than Nicola, was in an extension class in another school and Ms North saw the way Nancy was developing "study habits" on self directed homework projects and contrasted this with Nicola's homework which consisted of reading, spelling (four words which they did repetitively for a week) and spelling projects which Ms North was supposed to invent:

Well I'm not very good at imagining what to do. They give us a few types, but even then you have got to imagine how to do it and she finds it boring, she won't do it. It's the same sort of thing. The four words, I ask her to write sentences on, well that's one day. Even then, she hasn't done this week's because it's boring, she doesn't want to write sentences, it's not challenging enough. (CS1.3, p. 11)

She was delighted with the opportunity for feedback that she was now able to get by talking informally to Nicola's teacher, but concluded that Nicola's first year had been very frustrating. Not only had she never been able to get near to the teacher to talk to her, the written report, sent home on the last day of the school year, raised more questions than it answered. Ms North felt the format of the report would have been adequate if it formed a basis from which the parent and teacher could then discuss the child's progress, but because it was given on the last day there was no opportunity to follow up on any of the comments. When the children returned the following year they were in a new class with a new teacher.

Ms North felt that Nicola's language skills had been an asset on entry to school, both socially and academically, and the time spent reading, recognising letters and counting prior to school had also helped. As Noah's fifth birthday was approaching she was trying to ensure that he had some of these experiences too. Her advice for other parents was to read to their children as much as possible, and for schools to allow plenty of contact before the children started. She admired the visits and shared lunches

that happened at some kindergartens but realised that it was more difficult to meet the needs of families like theirs who came from a kindergarten outside the school's immediate area, so felt that responsibility for transition activities had to rest more with schools than with early childhood services.

Nicola's final comments

When I visited the Norths for the last time Nicola was a tall, fashionably dressed eight-year-old who appeared relaxed and confident during the interview. Noah, no longer a baby, had recently started as a new entrant at Kowhai School. Nicola was a Year Three child in a Year Three and Four composite class. She appeared to be doing very well, and from her and Ms North's comments it seemed that Nicola relished that challenge of competing with the more capable Year Four children. Nicola said she particularly liked the SRA comprehension cards, which allowed progression up through different colour levels. She was intrigued that both Ms North and I had used such cards at school. She also enjoyed activities seen as a challenge and discussed at length some hard maths problems they had been solving that day. However, she said that she didn't much like writing because she couldn't always think of what to write. "You start off writing but then you get stuck 'cause you don't know what to write. At the moment I'm writing a magic carpet adventure and I haven't finished yet because I haven't been thinking about what to write" (Nicola, p. 3). In addition to her school work she described a number of friends and also the way in which she worked with one of the boys who was "SO brainy, the brainiest in the class.... Sometimes I help him out a bit when we do something and he helps me out a little bit" (Nicola, p. 7).

Ms North said that Noah's transition was going well, although Nicola commented that she thought Noah was finding some of the work hard. Asked how school could be improved for new entrants like Noah she said:

Only make them write one sentence, something like that at first. Then go on to two, then three... Not having teachers yelling at you too much and not such hard work. Like Noah does quite a lot of hard work and he's only just new at school. (Nicola, p. 4)

Later she repeated that you should "have it [school] so the teachers don't growl too much". Nicola also thought "six hours is quite a long time for new entrant people. Even though they only go to 2 o'clock they are quite new when they start being a 3 o'clocker and it is quite a long time for them". She suggested that the initial school day be shorter and "every year you could add on an hour until you get to six hours and then stay at that. That would be good" (Nicola, p. 5). She also thought the children "that

have been there for a bit longer could try and make friends with them [new children]. Like on my first school visit I got two new friends straight away" (Nicola, p. 5).

Looking back on her own transition to school she said:

When I first started I didn't much like mummy leaving me and I didn't much like the work 'cause I didn't really have any friends until one day I saw a girl going into Room 9 and she had really long orange hair and then the next year I met her and we were in the same class and we are really good friends and we are in the same class now. (Nicola, p. 1)

She recalled nothing of the folk dancing that had proved so traumatic at the time. However she said she did remember noticing a difference between kindergarten and school "at kindy you could usually always play most of the time and at school there is more work than playtime. I thought 'Hmmm. Not much playtime here'". She said "I didn't really expect so much work all the time" and commented that she would have preferred more playtime as "when you are working, you hardly ever get to talk to your friends, except when you get to work in two pairs and sometimes we whisper", although this final comment may have applied to her current situation rather than at the new entrant level.

Nicola said that four-year-olds needed to know the name of their teacher and the location of their classroom. They should be told "that there's not one toilet that they share, there's the girls' toilet and the boys' toilet and which one they go to. And they need to know there are three playgrounds" (Nicola, p. 3). She explained the rules at Kowhai School about who could play on each of the playgrounds. She also said that four-year-olds needed to know:

It's quite hard to read. Same with writing. At first it's quite messy but you get older and it gets neater and neater" (Nicola, p. 1).

Tell them it [school] won't be too bad. That they will learn to enjoy it and sometimes it's quite fun and that they will be able to play and not work all the time (Nicola, p. 3).

Nicola drew the playground to illustrate to four-year-olds what school was like. She also completed a hasty sketch to explain of the placement of the desks and children in her current classroom.

Discussion: Reflections on Nicola and the North family's story

Nicola was extremely competent and capable and yet she experienced one of the most outwardly traumatic transitions. Rather like Joe in Norris's (1999) study, where "the "Star of the Creche" had turned into a new entrant with problem behaviour" (p. 188), at first there was little evidence in the school context of the very competent learner Nicola had shown herself to be at kindergarten. Fortunately her initial distress did not lead to a stable trajectory of ongoing problems. This discussion section explores Nicola's pathway (see Figure 2) and the interweaving influences that appeared to lead to both her difficult transition and the positive cycle that developed later.

A difficult transition

Nicola's initially a negative cycle of experiences began in the weeks prior to her starting school. One of the contributing factors appeared to be the class size and her teacher's response to this. In the third term, when the Norths first had contact with the school, the new entrant classes were large, and the teachers knew that they would continue to grow until the fourth term. Although Ms King was an experienced teacher she appeared to find the number and behaviour of the children in her class challenging, commenting to me as early as May that "this is ghastly" as she tried to organise the class in preparation for a mathematics lesson (Field notes 17.5, p. 5). Nicola's school visits and first weeks of school were therefore at a time when her teacher was particularly busy, and had little time to devote to a new child's transition, which may explain why Ms North received the forms and other information "in dribs and drabs" (CS1.2, p. 10).

In addition, a teacher who is already stretched is likely to place more emphasis on compliance as a desirable quality, and this was something that Ms King valued in the children she taught. As Chapter Twelve will show, Ms King was a little skeptical about how well early childhood centres other than Azure prepared children for conforming to the structure of school activities. Nicola's refusal to participate in the folk dancing or the mini Olympics during her visits were consistent with the sort of behaviour Ms King disapproved of, thus confirming her preconceived view that having attended Cobalt Kindergarten, Nicola might not meet the compliance criteria. Therefore Ms King's *initial* impression of Nicola may not have been positive, as Nicola did not fit with Ms King's image of a 'good' child. Certainly Nicola's unhappiness on her school visits, followed by her more acute distress at the morning separations from her mother during her first week, gave little indication of the delightful, competent and engaging child that had been evident at kindergarten and at home.

Similarly, based on first impressions, Ms North also did not fit with Ms King's view of a 'good' mother of a school child. Ms North was confident and articulate, and overrode the school's policy of a single, unaccompanied visit, to obtain four school visits for Nicola, staying for two of these visits. Her belief that it was too daunting to leave Nicola in a class full of strangers was in direct contrast to Ms King's view that, "We prefer the mum not to stay with them because the children who are clingy can't cling to mum if she is not there and will actually fit in quicker" (Ms King, p. 13). The fact that Nicola did cling no doubt reinforced Ms King's view.

At the same time, initially the school context did not appear to live up to Nicola's expectations. She was reportedly becoming bored with kindergarten and was certainly enthusiastic about the notion of school, but the reality was rather different, leading her to say, "before I was hoping I could go to school but now I don't want to". The timing of the visits was unfortunate in that they coincided with activities that Nicola disliked, thus giving a negative impression. Chapter Ten will show that visits, other than the planned ones for children from Azure, were often ad hoc in their timing and were not always helpful. In addition, the constraints and demands of the new entrant class were very different to Nicola's earlier experiences at home and in early childhood services. At kindergarten she followed her own agendas, with warm responsive teachers who challenged and extended her, often in one-to-one interactions. During the interviews Ms North treated her with respect and valued her contributions. Nicola was therefore used to being on close and fairly equal terms with adults. It was likely to be very daunting to be placed in a large class of children, where there was little contact with the teacher, no negotiation and little explanation regarding the set tasks she was expected to perform. Also, she was faced with routine tasks, which seemed to offer little to capture her interest. This meant that the role of pupil was not initially associated with a gain in status. Hence, although the process could be thought of as a rite of passage (Piddington, 1997), Nicola's new position in the social structure was not attractive to her, and this was likely to have impacted on her motivation to tackle the demands of adapting to a new role.

The model illustrated in Figure 2 draws attention to the different levels of influence contributing to this initially negative cycle. Nicola's own characteristics, evident in other settings, can be viewed as contributing to her responses in school. She had already disliked performing in a group at dancing classes and during a concert. Her mother wondered if it was because Nicola preferred to be the center of attention, but these earlier patterns also suggested that she preferred to observe before participating, something that was evident on the school visit on the Olympics day, where she tried out the 'triple jump' privately behind the easels, once everyone else had finished.

(This suggests that allowing children legitimate opportunities to observe new activities could be a useful strategy, instead of new tasks having to be performed immediately and in full view of the rest of the class.) Also, the compliance with directions valued at school contrasted with her mother's view that Nicola liked a sense of control in situations. Finally, although verbally very competent, she was unable to explain what she found so distressing about school, other than her dislike of certain activities such as folk dancing, leaving Ms North with a suspicion that to some extent Nicola was "winding her up". Certainly teachers, in this study and others (e.g. Norris, 1999) can see children's distress on separation as manipulative. If this view is taken, the approach used to handle the child's behaviour is unlikely to assist in revealing, or dealing with the cause, if the distress is in fact due to other factors. It is important to remember that children may not always be able to explain exactly what is upsetting them (Blenkin, 1992).

Although Nicola's earlier microsystems offered warm, responsive relationships, where there was a reasonable balance of power and opportunities for Nicola to have control over situations, features Bronfenbrenner (1979) described as supportive of development, at first the school context offered little opportunity of either power or control, and thus was less supportive of her development. Also, there were no direct links between Kowhai School and either of Nicola's early childhood services. The only links in Nicola's mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986) were the initially fragile ones formed during the school visits. The issue of friends was of particular importance here. In the past Nancy had been a welcome role model in new settings and a link between microsystems. However, Nicola did not know anyone who would be attending Kowhai School, and this provided Nicola's and her mother's main source of anxiety in the weeks before Nicola started school.

Ms North's demands at work affected days that were available for visiting, the time that she could spend settling Nicola into school, and provided additional stress as she was aware of how tightly scheduled her routine had to be in order to get everyone to their appropriate destinations before she started work. This illustrates Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1986) view that pressure from the demands of an exosystem, such as the parent's place of work, is a less obvious but important level of influence on a child's experiences.

Fortunately, although Nicola's initial transition was difficult, by her second term she seemed to be enjoying school, and in the long term her experiences of school were very positive. It is therefore useful to consider what factors may have helped to

overcome her initial distress and the successive transactions that led to her positive pathway.

Assisting Nicola's transition

Firstly, although Nicola's responsive home and early childhood environments provided a sharp contrast to the new entrant classroom, and the move between environments was initially distressing, Nicola's early childhood experiences appeared to have left her with a very positive view of herself as a learner and effective learning strategies (Cullen, 1988) and leaning dispositions (Carr, 2001), which she was quickly able to apply to school tasks. She also had a number of skills that were valued in the school context, but initially didn't display all of the behaviours that would draw attention to these (adopting a posture on the mat that her mother worried didn't signal sufficient eagerness, and completing tasks for her own interest rather than ensuring the results were displayed to the teacher). It was therefore fortunate that Ms King's initially negative impression of Nicola was changed through Nicola's performance on the new entrant tests. This did much to improve Nicola's experience of school because Ms King, who out of all the teachers involved placed the most value on academic capability, developed a view of Nicola as being very able. This enhanced Ms King's image of, and responses to, Nicola and also meant that Nicola was provided with activities that were of interest to her, even though she may not have been challenged to the extent that Ms North would have liked.

Nicola was also socially competent and was able to establish some friendships fairly quickly when the opportunity to do so was provided by Ms North. As in Pollard and Filer's (1999) study, it appeared that there was a complex interplay between the nature of the context provided by the teacher and the peer relationships Nicola formed, which contributed to the nature of the pupil role she was able to achieve. Her combined learning and social skills, and her identity as a capable learner (reinforced by Ms King's assessments) allowed Nicola to assume some agency within the school environment. Rather than being continually told what to do and what not to do, Nicola began to figure out the rules and routines of the classroom, allowing her to assume a modicum of control over her experiences, whilst fitting within the accepted behaviour of the 'good' pupil. Comber (2000) described this as being able to 'read' the institutional ethos. Bronfenbrenner (1979) argued that relationships that encourage development are those where there is a balance of power. This suggests that not only did her acknowledged skills enhance her status within the environment; the resulting agency would also foster further learning. This was accompanied with an increased enjoyment of school, and her initial distress was short-lived.

At the same time the class size reduced, which reduced the demands on Ms King's time and energy and allowed her to spend more time getting to know the parents and children. With a smaller class, the classroom programme was more responsive to individual children, further enhancing Nicola's interest in, and enjoyment of, school.

Overall, it was clear that Nicola's experiences were not due solely to her own characteristics, or to specific features of the environment. Instead, as suggested in Figure 2, her pathway was shaped by the complex interweaving of several aspects of both.

A Learning Story framework

It appeared that Carr's (2001, 1998a, 1998b) work on Learning Stories as a framework for assessment, developed after the data were collected, could have important implications for children's transitions by providing a framework for considering their early learning. The first step in the learning story assessment looks at whether the child has found something of interest here. For Nicola there was much that was of interest in early childhood settings, but perhaps little of initial interest or challenge at school. Ensuring a very capable child like Nicola found something of interest may have been helpful in the early days of her transition. She had the necessary skills to become involved, and once she found tasks of interest to apply these to she blossomed. There was a sense that Nicola was willing to persist with difficulty, but liked the opportunity to process the task first, making the very visible unfamiliar activities such as dancing and the Olympic events somewhat threatening. Carr (2001) found that 4-year-olds appeared to be making quite firm decisions about whether it was worth tackling difficulty and risk making a mistake. For Nicola, the performance element of these particular tasks may have led her to refuse to participate rather than risk a negative judgment (Carr, 2001; Smiley & Dweck, 1994). The final elements of the Learning Story are communicating with others, and taking responsibility, and Nicola's early childhood experiences had been rich with examples of these. There was evidence that her learning of the pupil role would have been enhanced by opportunities to discuss the demands of the classroom, but although this was not a feature of the classroom climate it seemed likely that Nicola's persistence eventually led to her being able to engage in reciprocal and responsive relationships with at least some members of the school context, while Ms North continued to foster these at home. In this and other ways, Ms North was also crucial in ensuring Nicola's school success.

Ms North's influence

Ms North was passionately interested in Nicola and Nicola's education. Of all the parents in the study, Ms North had devoted the most time to considering what school

to send Nicola to and was most certain about what she needed to do to assist Nicola in making her transition. Although Nicola was only just starting school, Ms North was keen for things to go well as she foresaw long-term consequences of Nicola's current experiences. She therefore took steps to ensure that Nicola had more than the set number of school visits, and stayed with Nicolas for two of these. During those visits she ensured that contact was made with some girls that Nicola appeared to like and she arranged for Nicola to meet with them in other contexts before she started school. According to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory, this was an important step for Ms North to have taken, because the developmental potential of a setting is enhanced "if the person's initial transition is not made alone, that is, if he [sic] enters the setting in the company of one or more persons with whom he has participated in prior settings" (p. 211).

Throughout Nicola's school career Ms North mediated between home and school, helping to shape Nicola's experiences and trying to ensure that Nicola had the skills to overcome problems. Ms North had both social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1993), which she was able to use to Nicola's advantage. As with other middle class parents (e.g. in Lareau's (1989) and Graue's (1993b) studies) she had the confidence and ability to shape Nicola's experiences. Although Mr North's health issues meant Ms North was the primary caregiver and income earner for the family, Ms North was supported in her parenting role by a number of friends, a family day care provider and her own mother. This external support for Ms North provided an exosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986) that had important benefits for Nicola. Through the family day carer Nicola had also had the opportunity to participate in a school environment at Cobalt, prior to starting at Kowhai, so had some idea of what to expect.

The story reveals how the child's transition can be aided by providing the parents with information to assist in the transition. Ms North clearly needed to be involved in the school visits for both her own and Nicola's sakes. As someone so closely involved with Nicola's progress she needed to be reassured and informed about what happened in the classroom. At the same time, her knowledge could be used to assist Nicola by helping her to make sense of school. As time went on, it was clear that the one issue Ms North had with Kowhai School was that she would have liked a lot more information, both about Nicola's progress and also about how to help her and what was required with regard to homework and so on. As Ms North commented, she was not a teacher and there was much that was a mystery to her. Even stronger home-school partnerships could be developed with more informed parents. Nevertheless, a child could have a positive experience of transition, even without a parent being well informed or involved. This is explored in the next case study story.

2. Tessa and the Trent family

Background

At the beginning of the study Tessa lived with her parents, Mr and Ms Trent and her older sister, Theresa and younger sister Trudy. In the second year of the study the Trents had another baby, Thomas, making Tessa the second child in a family of four. Mr Trent was the family's income earner and although Ms Trent noted her occupation on the research forms, she was not engaged in work outside the home during the years of the study. Ms Trent said they had no extended family locally and she seemed to take the main care-giving role with the children, with few, if any, external support people.

When I first met the Trents Tessa was four years and eight months old, Theresa was six and Trudy had just turned one. Tessa was a small (still wearing age three sized clothes), lively child, whose best friends at that time were all boys. Her mother explained that Tessa liked the boys "because they like what she does" (CS4.1, p. 3). She described Tessa as:

Quite a likeable child. I'm biased I guess but I think... she has got a wicked sense of humour for a child her age and she is quite likeable. She is not a nasty child. She can cope in situations that normally a child might crumble under, like someone can say something quite cutting to her but she doesn't take it in that way... She's quite a likeable, very bouncy, bubbly child... She's a trier. She's a real trier. If she's determined to do something then she'll do it no matter what... She is a very, very, determined child. (CS4.1, p. 11)

Ms Trent went on to give examples of Tessa's determination, including a recent trike-a-thon at kindergarten where she had completed 20 laps of the course, rather than the two or three that most children did, and a fun run where Tessa had continued to the finish even though her mother later discovered Tessa's feet were covered in blisters.

Ms Trent described Tessa's interests as being in outside things "like running and climbing trees and kicking balls and swinging on bars and all those sorts of things... Nothing scholastic stands out. It's all physical" (CS4.1, p. 12). She said Tessa was proving "very, very different" from her older sister Theresa, who had been a very obedient and intellectual child (CS4.1, p. 4). Ms Trent wondered if, in fact, Tessa deliberately rejected some things simply because her sister was so good at them, and focussed her attention on activities like running and climbing trees because these were the things that she could do better than Theresa.

Tessa had followed Theresa to a private kindergarten, which Ms Trent liked because it

required children to complete one set activity each morning, which she saw as good preparation for school. However, Ms Trent had moved Tessa to Blue Kindergarten when Tessa turned four, explaining:

My oldest child went right through [private kindergarten] but it just got too hard [to travel to the kindergarten] with having the new baby and she [Tessa] is not a structured kid the same. My oldest will sit there and do puzzles, read books. Tessa is more search and destroy. She is very different. She is more outdoorsy and outgoing. (CS4.1, p. 2)

Blue Kindergarten had been selected over Azure because Ms Trent liked the atmosphere and "the teachers were really nice". Tessa had settled well "which surprised me because she didn't settle at [private kindergarten]. We had lots of tears. Lots of tears" (CS4.1, p. 2).

Tessa was apparently enjoying the freedom at Blue Kindergarten.

There isn't really any structure at [Blue] kindy. They eat when they are hungry or when they feel like it. They can play outside all day and she often does. I'll say did you do anything [make any products] at kindy today?' and she'll say 'Nah I forgot'. If she had the choice to run around outside and play or sit inside and do something constructive she would rather run outside and play. (CS4.1, p. 3)

Ms Trent was pleased Tessa was happy but worried that school would prove to be a "real shock to her... I think it's going to be a real shock to her and I think she is going to have real trouble, she is going to want to eat her lunch at nine thirty and go out to play at quarter past so I don't know how she will go that way" (CS4.1, p. 4). She was therefore arranging for Tessa to go to another private early childhood centre one afternoon a week for the last few weeks before she started school. The private centre offered what they called a 'four-year-old programme', which involved children working on a set activity with a teacher. "I feel like I am giving her this stepping stone to school so it is not going to be such a shock to her" (CS4.1, p. 19).

The observations at Blue Kindergarten were consistent with Ms Trent's description, but also showed that Tessa played with a greater range of activities and children than had been suggested. However, this is perhaps partly due to the fact that on the first occasion it was a wet day and the children were confined to indoor and undercover play only. Tessa seemed to be almost constantly in motion. At mat time, after a brief period of stillness as she listened to the story being read, Tessa crawled around, grabbed at one of the boys, lay on her back lifting the end of the puzzle shelf with her feet, crawled to the edge of the mat, lay on top of one of the boys, chased a boy and

knocked over a puzzle and replaced the pieces.

On the second occasion Tessa arrived at kindergarten mid-morning. It was a fine day and she spent the first 20 minutes energetically using a variety of outdoor equipment, as the Figure 8 shows:

10.40 Tessa swings energetically by holding herself up on two hand-held hoops. Twists so that the ropes holding the hoops twist together, then lets herself be swung as they unravel. Walks over the obstacle course.

10.45 Goes to the top of the fort with a small group of boys. Looks over the edge. Calls to children below. Runs to the bottom of the fort. Swings on a trapeze-like swing. Boy twists the swing. Tessa lets it untwist and swing her around. Climbs onto cable reel and slides down plank. Boys follow her. Climbs up and does it again and the boys follow again. This time she crawls through a plastic tunnel at the end of the slide. Runs around with two boys chasing her. Runs the full length of the kindergarten, doubles back, continues to run even when the boys stop chasing.

10.50 Partially climbs a small tree. Rests there for a few moments. Gets down and looks over the fence. Back to tree. Climbs fort with a boy. Looks over edge. Climbs down onto cable reel. Goes onto a tyre swing. Swings on tyre swing. Puts chest onto swing and swings. Goes to trapeze swing, hangs upside down, back of her knees over the bar. Pulls herself up to sit on the bar. Swings as if it's an ordinary swing. (It is quite high above the ground.) Gets down by holding swing with hands, transferring her weight to the backs of her knees than getting her feet off. Adjusts her clothes. Goes over the cable reel and slide combo again. Swings on rope swing, then tyre swing (chest on tyre). Swings high. Stands on tyre swing and swings.

10.55 Several boys watch Tessa swing. She propels the swing with her body, making it move in a wide arc. Sits down while the swing is in motion then continues to swing by propelling herself with her legs. Talks to two boys as she swings.

11.00 Continues to swing then gets off the swing and goes inside. (Summary of observation 27.8).

Figure 8. An observation of Tessa at kindergarten

Inside Tessa completed several jigsaws and also read a book to a group of other children, with a teacher's help. The teacher turned the pages and encouraged Tessa to tell the story. It was unclear whether Tessa was actually reading, and seemed more likely that she memorised the story, however, she was able to recount most of it with confidence. The teacher encouraged her in parts where she was unsure, and prompted her with the start of some sentences but let Tessa take over where she wanted to. At the end of the story the teacher congratulated Tessa, saying "Well done Tessa, you did very, very well" and Tessa replied she had been learning to read at school and had been on "heaps of school visits" (Observation 27.8, p. 8).

Tessa appeared to enjoy the company of other children and apart from mat times when all the children had to be together, she spent most of her time in the company of two or three other children. She was very rarely alone. Although her mother had said that Tessa played mostly with boys she was observed playing with both boys and girls. Tessa acted as a resource for others, bringing materials (sellotape, dried flowers, etc.) to a girl who was making a birthday hat, offering another child a container of pens, and reading the story to a group of children. Children often seemed to follow her and copy her actions, but she also observed others (watching and supporting the hat making process without joining in). She was assertive in obtaining materials for herself and in her interactions with other children, simply taking a hammer from a boy (despite his protests) when she wanted to use the shapes and tacks, and at mat time when a boy accidentally kicked her while trying to get his shoes on she turned round and moved his foot away from her.

The Trents had considered three local schools when their first child, Theresa, started. Kowhai School had eventually been selected because Theresa was seen as a very bright child who needed the competition a city school could provide, and because it was the closest to their home and covered by the school bus route. They had been happy with Kowhai and intended that the younger children would also attend there when the time came.

With one child already at the school Ms Trent was confident that Tessa would be offered a place. Ms Trent had requested Ms King (Theresa's new entrant teacher) for Tessa because Tessa was convinced that "You go to school and you have her" and because she believed that Ms King had the right approach for Tessa. "She has a very lovely way. Gentle persuasion and that is what Tessa will need, quite a bit of guidance when she first gets to school" (CS4.1, p. 4). "I would really like her to [have Ms King], just because she has known her. I feel I could go and say to her 'I don't feel she is settling in as well as Theresa did'.... I just think she is a lovely teacher" (CS4.1, p. 20).

Although Theresa had been at school for more than a year Ms Trent didn't feel that she was "too familiar" with the school. She said she had never been "on a tour or anything" (CS4.1, p. 3). She hadn't had a visit when Theresa started and thought she would "quite like to do that with Tessa" once she knew what class Tessa was going to be in (CS4.1, p. 8). She had attended a parents' evening after Theresa started and found that useful, but the morning tea for new parents had been less successful:

It was good to go to but you didn't get to meet any of the teachers. They

stood up and said the teachers' names but they did the whole junior school and once the person sat down you forgot who they were... I prefer the teacher knowing who I am rather than the other way round (CS4.1, p. 9). I found that a total waste of time because I walked into this big room full of people. I didn't know the people so I didn't talk to them. It didn't get the new mothers together.... I'm not a particularly shy person but I didn't talk to anybody because I didn't know anybody.... I was a little bit on an out and out because Theresa didn't go to kindy around here so perhaps if I had gone to a kindy I might have known a few of the mothers (CS4.1, p. 18). I had a toddler with me and I was pregnant and it was very hard to concentrate and I think I was just shoveling food into this one [Tessa] (CS4.3, p. 2).

As a four-year-old, Tessa already knew quite a lot about school because when Theresa had been a new entrant, Tessa had gone into the classroom with her every morning and often sat on the mat with the older children. For the last nine months they hadn't been going to class with Theresa but they had still been around the school on a number of occasions. Tessa was also reportedly looking forward to catching the school bus. This was something Theresa had been quite scared of and was only recently starting to do, so perhaps this was another area (like tree climbing) where Tessa believed she could out-do her older sister.

Ms Trent thought that Tessa knew what to expect in terms of bringing books home and learning to read. Tessa had also been involved in quite a bit of school play at home, where Theresa played at being a teacher and "Tessa is always happy to sit there and be the child" (CS4.1, p.5). Ms Trent reflected that Tessa seemed to have picked up quite a lot of learning in this informal way.

Despite her own concerns about how Tessa would cope, Ms Trent thought Tessa was looking forward to starting school. "I think she is going to be quite happy but I do worry about how she will go concentration wise. But I don't think I'll be in tears over it. She's ready" (CS4.1, p. 5). Tessa was also looking forward to being five and being allowed to participate in the after-school activities that her sister was involved in, that did not accept preschool children. These included going to gym class with the 'big kids' and to 'real' jazz ballet rather than her current dancing class.

Ms Trent thought Tessa had particularly good social skills, which would stand her in good stead at school. In recent months Tessa had been forced to keep making new friends at kindergarten because she had tended to befriend the older children, who after being her friend for a few weeks would turn five and go off to school, leaving Tessa "back to square one with no one to play with" (CS4.1, p. 6). She had observed how

Tessa kept bouncing back, continually making new friends as that had happened. Ms Trent felt that Blue Kindergarten had prepared Tessa much better in this respect than the private kindergarten had prepared Theresa. At Blue Kindergarten she had noticed:

The kindy is very much into, if someone is doing something that you don't like, this is how you cope with that situation. If you have no one to play with and you want someone to play with, this is how you cope with that. They actually drum those things home very well which [private kindergarten] never talked about. They didn't actually deal with any of those things. That's why I am not so worried about her being picked on in the playground even though she is a little midget. (CS4.1, p. 10)

Overall her main concern was the one noted earlier, about Tessa's willingness to adapt to the structure of set activities:

Really with her, it's just will she last the distance with pen and paper? I just don't know if that's her. Give her a field and a ball and a couple of boys to run around with and she'd be home and hosed but I have a feeling that she thinks school is a lot of play. (CS4.1, p. 6)

For herself Ms Trent had mixed feelings about Tessa starting school. On the one hand, it would simplify her routine:

Because of the running around of kindy. Because with the baby, just getting difficult putting her down now [in the morning] and she is not ready for a sleep now but I need her to sleep now and wake her up so I can get her up and go [to collect Tessa at lunchtime]. And also ... morning kindy is tiring but it's not enough for her [Tessa]. She needs some other outlet so in the afternoon we have gym one afternoon, we have other things, so I do more running round than I would like to, so when she is at school that will stop (CS4.1, p. 5).

I'll have all this wonderful time to myself that I have never had. I am looking forward to it more from the running around point of view... when you have got one at school, one at kindy, it's not like we come home from kindy and 'Phew that's it for the day'. It's ongoing and then we go off to the after school things (CS4.1, p. 15).

On the other hand she was a little sad too. "I am sort of sad because she is my baby and it seems funny. Your first going off to school is something you can't wait for and you really can't wait.... But with her [Tessa] I have started buying all these school clothes and I feel 'Oh!' [Sad noise] (CS4.1, p. 5). She thought that she would miss Tessa's company and thought she might even be a little upset when she started school.

It will sort of be a new era... It's not like I don't have another one at home because I do, I have a baby... but it will change our life quite dramatically because I'll no longer be going off to gym and to friends'

houses, I won't be doing that with my one-year-old. It will change my life quite dramatically (CS4.1, p. 15)

Ms Trent was disappointed that she had been unable to participate very much in school activities with Theresa, especially when Theresa had pleaded with her to go on trips and things, but had found that she couldn't at first because she was eight months pregnant and had Tessa as a toddler, and later, with a new baby and a preschool child "I really couldn't because you are not allowed to take younger ones" (CS4.1, p. 14). She was hoping to have more involvement with the school once Tessa started because she would only need to find someone to look after Trudy.

As Tessa's fifth birthday approached it appeared that Tessa was a lively, independent, sociable child who persisted with difficulty in physical challenges. Although her mother worried that Tessa may not be interested in more formal activities such as reading and writing, kindergarten observations had shown Tessa competently telling a story to a group of children and listening quietly to stories read by a teacher.

School visits

To Ms Trent's delight Tessa was allocated to Ms King's class, as she had requested. Once she knew which class Tessa would be in she called in to see Ms King and to arrange for Tessa to visit. She hadn't visited at all with Theresa, because at that time she "actually didn't know there was such a thing as school visits" (CS4.3, p. 19), but was under the impression that Tessa would be allowed at least three or four visits. She was therefore disappointed to learn that Tessa was only allowed one visit and felt this was particularly unfortunate because Tessa's birthday fell at the start of the holidays, so after her visit at the end of the previous term they had to wait nearly three weeks until Tessa could start school. Tessa's earlier comment that she had had "heaps of school visits" therefore presumably referred to the times she had been to school with Theresa.

After Tessa's one official school visit Ms Trent said that Tessa changed, from having been really looking forward to starting school to feeling "a bit nervous" and that the unavoidable delay did not help matters. "If she'd had a birthday and gone to school I think it would have been fine but she had time to dwell on it and that put her off a bit" (CS4.2, p. 1). Tessa had apparently said, "I want another school visit. I don't want to start, I want another visit'" (CS4.3, p. 13). Despite this Ms Trent thought that the visit had been useful to give Tessa "an idea about what to do," although the timing (an hour and a half) perhaps gave a false sense of the length of the school day.

Prior to Tessa starting, Ms Trent had completed the enrolment forms but was reluctant to offer too much information about Tessa to the school. She thought that she could give one picture of Tessa that might prove completely incorrect. "She may go to school and turn out to be the top scholar and not interested in anything outside... She might totally surprise me" (CS4.1, p. 13).

First weeks of school

Despite the few weeks of anxiety after the school visit, Tessa's first days went well. Ms Trent said, "There was never a tear.... I had no trouble at all.... She just loved it" (CS4.2, p. 3). "I'm really pleased. It's just been no trouble... I just did expect it [trouble] with Tessa. It's just been such a nice surprise" (CS4.2, p. 12). Tessa had been excited to be at school and Ms King had found her so relaxed in the classroom that she had started her new entrant assessments on the first day. Tessa was soon happily going to and from school on the bus. "She's just a grown up kid now" (CS4.2, p. 4).

In the event, Ms Trent's fears about Tessa not adapting to the structure of set activities were unfounded. Tessa appeared to Ms Trent to not only be doing all the work that was required of her but to be "thriving on it" (CS4.2, p, 4). Within days of starting school Tessa was observed finding things of interest, even if these were sometimes based on her own agendas rather than the teacher's, as Figure 9 shows.

9.30 After mat time the children move to the tables to start writing their stories. The new children are seated together. Ms King rules lines in the new children's books and puts pencils, crayons and alphabet cards on their table.

9.35 Tessa draws a picture in her book (which only takes minutes). She takes two alphabet cards, but a boy takes one away from her claiming "These are mine". Tessa and H, one of the boys, compare the lengths of their pencils to see which is longest. They search through all the pencils in the tub looking for the smallest ones which Tessa calls "teeny tiny". They decide the largest pencils are "daddy pencils".

9.40 Tessa takes her book to Ms King, informing her "I'm up to my story". Ms King tells her she'll be over soon and to practice [writing letters]. H calls "Come back here Tessa". Tessa goes back to her table and taps a pencil on different surfaces, making different types of sound. She hands round the alphabet cards again.

9.45 H also starts banging on a card with his pencil and sings "Where did Ms King go?" H starts comparing pencils with one of the other boys and Tessa joins in claiming "The blue one is the biggest. I've got the blue one. It's the biggest". It's the biggest blue one". H and the other boy 'sword fight' with their pencils, Tessa watches, chewing her pencil.

When the boy leaves to see Ms King, H says that the other boy does "Yucky, yucky pictures" to which Tessa replies "And you do silly pictures. I do the best pictures". H claims "I don't do yucky pictures" but Tessa changes the topic to talking about

teeth. Having compared teeth and how they grow from "a bump" (which Tessa informs him is "your gum") H concludes that without teeth you couldn't chew, although Tessa explains "you could drink milk from your mum".

9.50 Ms King still hasn't come to their table so Tessa again joins the queue to speak to her. Ms King writes a story under Tessa's picture and Tessa puts her book away. (Summary of observations 18.10).

Figure 9. An observation of Tessa finding things of interest at school

At maths time, when asked to draw a repeating pattern on a headband Tessa used four colours even though most children only used two. At reading time Tessa seemed competent, reading with the teacher and by herself. From this early observation Tessa appeared relaxed and happy and seemed to be included within the classroom, having opportunities to head the line when lining up, being selected by other children to sit with them, and being given materials by the teacher.

Ms Trent felt Tessa had not appeared to need the six weeks of 2 o'clock finishes and she explained how much she disliked the early finishing time.

You go round at 2.00 and you go round at 3.00 and often you have got a baby sleeping and so you've got to wake them at 2.00 and they can't go back to bed because you have got to go out at 3.00... I actually started putting my first child on the bus much to her distress but otherwise it meant I was barely home and had to go back out again. I found that a real pain. I don't know why they do it whether it's some old rule they haven't bothered looking at... I think they do it for the teachers.... But I think you've got a school age kid who should be entitled to be at school (CS4.3, p. 3).

After weeks of annoyance, the early finishing time became a more acute source of distress to Ms Trent when she had misunderstood Ms King's directions, resulting in Ms Trent being "growled at like a child in front of the whole class". After Tessa had been at school for five weeks Ms King had said that Tessa could stay until three o'clock for a special event, explaining that Tessa had "been coming long enough, she might as well stay until 3 o'clock". Ms Trent (with some relief) had taken this to mean "from then on" but it had in fact only applied to the day Ms King had in mind. When Ms Trent arrived at 3 o'clock the following day she reported that Ms King had "growled in front of the class, 'There are no exceptions, even for you Ms Trent!'". Ms Trent said she "felt dreadful" because it was simply a misunderstanding (CS4.3, p. 3).

Although there were other children from Blue Kindergarten at Kowhai School they had gone into the other classes, meaning that Tessa didn't know anyone in Ms King's

class. However, Ms Trent reflected that this hadn't seemed to worry Tessa "She's that sort of sociable kid" (CS4.2, p. 2). At lunchtimes Tessa played with Theresa and some of Theresa's friends. Ms Trent had tried to get Tessa to play with children her own age but Tessa said that Theresa's friends (who also played at their house) were her friends too and Ms Trent thought "As long as everybody's happy I'm not going to rock the boat" (CS4.2, p. 6).

The rest of the term

Tessa was perhaps fortunate that very early in her first term the class size reduced, with the older children being taken to form a new class. This reduced the overall class size, and with new children continuing to join the class Ms Trent thought Tessa had quickly come to see herself as "one of the big kids" (CS4.2, p.7).

Ms Trent concluded that Tessa had been "over ready" for school and believed in retrospect that there could be more challenge provided in the last months of kindergarten. She thought the few sessions she had paid for Tessa to have at a private early childhood centre in the weeks before school had provided a useful basis because of the one-to-one attention Tessa received there, focussed on activities like learning to write her name.

I think the main thing is as long as they don't feel stupid or dumb when they start school they will be ok. If they feel silly. If they feel 'I can't do that' I think that they will not bother. I think that maybe it can start from there, if you can get a good start right at the beginning... Obviously she [Tessa] doesn't feel too dumb to be able to do it and that's the biggest thing really. I think they could cope with anything else as long as they don't feel that they can't do it and everyone else can. (CS4.2, p. 7)

Tessa's first certificate had been the source of much excitement but other than that, after two months Ms Trent said she had had little feedback on her progress. She was aware that Tessa had been assessed but "I actually don't know how she went on that test" (CS4.2, p. 8). Like Ms North, she found it very difficult to speak to Ms King. "It's very tricky. Every time you go in there Ms King has got half a dozen mothers that want to ask her questions... I try not to do that if I can because I am just one more" (CS4.2, p. 9). Also, Ms King often wasn't there until the bell rang. "I'd often say 'All right I'll come in the morning and talk to your teacher' but the teacher often doesn't come until the bell goes and all these other mothers have hung around.... We've been there, waiting to talk but there's nobody there" (CS4.3, p. 4).

Not realising that the first parent interview would not be until the following year, Ms Trent comforted herself that all would be revealed at the parent interviews. She

expected these to be held towards the end of Tessa's first term and thought by then it would have given Tessa time "to show what she's like" (CS4.2, p. 9). Meanwhile her information was based on her own observations of the work Tessa was doing. Later Ms Trent reflected that for new entrant classes parent interviews should be held more frequently, perhaps every three months, so that every parent had a few moments when they didn't have to feel they were interrupting the teacher, and the teacher's role was "at that time, at that moment, just to talk to you, to give you five or ten minutes" (CS4.3, p. 1).

With Tessa, Ms Trent said she hadn't been invited to any events (such as the morning tea) or received "the information pack" and concluded that this must be because Tessa was her second child at the school (CS4.2, p. 3). Although Ms Trent had planned to be involved as a parent helper, as the first term drew to a close she hadn't been involved at all and reflected "I've been really useless". By now she was pregnant with Thomas and she felt that this, combined with having no one to look after Trudy, meant that she would be "more of a hindrance because I'd be spending my time chasing the other one [Trudy] around" (CS4.2, p. 10).

Towards the end of her first term Tessa was in the same group as Nicola for most things. Tessa was writing her own stories and, having completed a maths worksheet which involved putting the teen numerals in order, moved on to one which required appropriate numbers of sets of tens to be circled, claiming "this is easy". She seemed socially competent in the classroom.

Looking back

When the Trents were revisited about 20 months after Tessa started school Ms Trent looked back on Tessa's transition with satisfaction, saying that after her earlier concerns she had been "pleasantly surprised" by how things had worked out (CS4.3, p. 3). She credited much of this to Tessa having Theresa at school, and being able to play with her at lunchtimes until Tessa had made her own friends, and also to Tessa's personality. She said that Tessa was "progressing very well. She's finally learned to read and write, much to her satisfaction" (CS4.3, p. 5). The only problem Ms Trent could recall was other children eating Tessa's lunch. She had been pleased at the way Ms King had handled this, telling the whole class "Your mother makes your lunch for you, she doesn't make your lunch for anybody else". At various times since then Tessa had been able to use this line, both to refuse food that was offered by others and to stop children taking her lunch (CS4.3, p. 10).

Communication was the one area where Ms Trent felt the school could assist families. Homework worksheets would arrive home and she had no idea when they were to be completed by, or, if the child struggled, whether she was allowed to help. She felt that some guidelines from the school could simplify things a great deal, citing an example with Theresa where "she used to come home with these huge sheets" which Theresa really struggled with, only to discover later that they were designed for a composite class and children like Theresa, in the younger age group, were not supposed to finish them (CS4.3, p. 6). Also, although she did receive the school newsletter, she felt that something more focussed on the child's actual class would be more helpful. She also thought that teachers relied a little too much on children to pass on information, and that some direct communication, even in the form of a letter, would facilitate a great many things. She had many instances to cite, of school activities that didn't get off the ground because parents weren't warned that resources needed to be provided, and how even the school photos were "botched up" because the notice didn't say that it had to be returned the following day. After-school activities were similarly a mystery:

I'd like to know more about what's available like the music and the choir and the school gym, all those things they've got. I don't know what else they've got. We asked about netball but your child has got to be some certain age and if you don't remember when they get to that age you miss out.... I asked about the school gym but I never heard.... You get a child who hasn't done it before but would like to and they think they are not allowed.... I think a standard newsletter to say what day and time they are on... you have to be this age... that would be helpful. (CS4.3, p. 9).

Ms Trent was starting to consider Trudy's future transition and reflected that while this would be her third child, the school really needed to treat each child's transition as a first because it would be three and a half years since her last child started. Despite having two children at school, she had never had the opportunity to go on one of the tours and her one parents' morning tea had not been very successful.

Whereas if I could go along with Trudy it would be different and I would actually be able to sit and concentrate and go on the school tour... I think they need to treat each child as a first time *parent*, regardless of their position in the family. (CS4.3, p. 2)

The issue of parent helping was a matter of concern to Ms Trent, who with the new baby and a preschooler found she was still unable to participate in the school's activities and had resorted to not even getting out of the car. "I stop the engine, open the door, throw you out" and while she had tried to participate in trips and classroom activities she had found that the school was "not very toddler friendly". She reflected that it would be helpful if schools didn't make parents feel quite so guilty about their

inability to help, although she acknowledged that the guilt was perhaps "just a mother thing" and that "all mother often feel guilty", rather than something the school intended. However, she said it would be so much nicer to feel that the school understood that the reason she didn't help was because she was not allowed to "because they won't allow you to take toddlers along.... You want them to know that it's not that you are not interested in what your child is doing or that you are not interested in helping them, it's just that it's impossible. They won't have little children along so you can't do it" (CS4.3, pp. 4-5).

Based on her experiences, Ms Trent's advice for other parents whose children were starting school was to "stick up for yourself a bit better... I'd like to have said [re the school visits] 'I want this, why can't I have it?'" (CS4.3, p. 13). She said that she "wouldn't call myself an informed parent.... I don't know what they could do better or different as I don't know what they do now" (CS4.3, pp. 15-16).

Tessa's final comments

Tessa was one of the easiest children to interview because she was so relaxed in her interactions and interested in the project. We were left at the kitchen table, with Ms Trent and Thomas in the adjoining livingroom. After the interview Tessa drew several detailed pictures which provided lots of time for informal conversation about school and for Tessa to ask questions about the study and provide advice on how she thought the final book should be constructed.

Although she had been physically small for her age at the start of the project Tessa had grown into a tall, mature eight-year-old. Like the other case study children, Tessa was now in Year Three, in a composite Year Three and Four class. She said that she liked school and was good at artwork and "pretty good at reading". Her favourite thing was painting. She felt that her teacher also liked painting "because it is fun making a big mess and then we always clean it up afterwards" (Tessa, p. 7).

Her current teacher was "really nice" (Tessa, p. 3) and "normally gives us anything we want" (Tessa, p. 5). She seemed to enjoy the company of teachers and recounted a number of instances of approaching different teachers or spending time with them. Asked if she had friends in her class Tessa was fairly noncommittal at first, saying "Mmm. But next year I won't because we'll be living in [city] 'cos we are going to move" (Tessa, p. 6). But later she said she was friends with [girl]:

because she doesn't really know how to spell 'How' 'cause it's a really tricky word in our class and most people can't spell it but I can so I went

to help her out. But I forgot as well and I made her spell 'Why' and she said "That's not how you spell 'How' and then I spelt it right. (Tessa, p. 7)

Looking back to her own transition Tessa recalled feeling "pretty scared" for "about a week and a half". She said she felt scared "because I didn't know what school was going to be like" and she had stopped feeling scared "'cos I had made heaps of new friends" (Tessa, p. 2). She thought feeling scared was probably a pretty common occurrence on starting school, commenting that I (the researcher) "must have been scared that day" and anticipating that Trudy would probably also feel scared "for about a week and a half" too (Tessa, p. 7 & p. 4).

Tessa remembered being in Ms King's class, "We did lots of art work and reading, and we made up these stories" and at lunchtime "I'd play with my friends and usually we went down to the back of the field... Sometimes we played on the little kids' playground" (Tessa, p. 1). She thought she liked "the playground the most" (Tessa, p. 2) and recalled that "I fell over heaps and sometimes I played with the big kids 'cause the little kids are allowed to play with the big kids but the big kids aren't allowed to play with the little kids. There's heaps of splinters in the bark so I got heaps of splinters and I also went to the sick bay to help my friends out" (Tessa, p. 8).

Tessa remembered Ms King as being "a bit grouchy" but "heaps of the time she was quite nice". Ms King was credited with teaching her "how to draw things and what you should do when you can't fit something into a space and that you can but you don't really know how, you should sharpen your pencil and write really little on the line". She went on to give examples of when that had come in useful.

Tessa's memories of kindergarten centred largely on one teacher leaving and the details of the "really yummy cake" they had. When she got to school Tessa recalled surprise at the size of the premises. "I didn't really expect three playgrounds and I didn't expect an enormous field and heaps of classrooms 'cos in kindy there was just one big room" (Tessa, p. 4).

She thought that four-year-olds needed to know "What the teachers are like. How they can make their way around the school. What different type of playgrounds there are and they might wonder what classroom they are going to be in". She went on to explain that "what the teachers are like" meant "That they sometimes get grumpy, if they're normally always happy" (Tessa, p. 1). She thought the four-year-olds should also be told:

that it is fun to play at school and there's lots and lots of fun friends who want to be your friends and there's Friday goodies.... Every Friday adults have a table set up and it's got all these goodies on... they used to have lollies and instead of lollies they have got popcorn, and they already had chips and drinks and iceblocks 'cause it is normally hot on Friday.... Some of the things are 70 cents and some are one dollar" (Tessa, pp. 3-4).

If new entrants found themselves without anyone to play with at lunchtime Tessa thought, "They should either go see a teacher or walk around with the duty teacher (Tessa, p. 8).

Teachers could make things easier for new entrants by knowing if children are "good at doing things or not", which she thought could be determined by giving children "a test". Asked if she thought her teacher had been aware of what she was good at she replied "I was good at gymnastics, which I still do on the back field now, and I'm good at art work because it's my favourite thing" (Tessa, p3). Tessa believed that parents needed to be told "What we do at lunchtime and playtime and how hard we work.... I think they should know if you do quite well in assembly and sit up the straightest. Teachers normally tell mums and dads if the children have been good in their reports" (Tessa, p2).

Her first illustration, was of "the field" at school, with "the trees and the rugby posts and the big sand part 'cos they're building a new shed on it" and the new fence around it (Tessa, pp4-5). The second drawing was of her classroom, with children looking out because "some children in our class always peep out the window". The final picture was of a teacher relaxing in the staff room, "sitting on a couch and she's got a plate and a drink and she's happy" (Tessa, p. 8). (See Appendix M for two of Tessa's drawings.)

Discussion: Reflecting on Tessa and the Trent family's story

Although Ms Trent worried that Tessa had shown little interest in 'academic' activities prior to starting school, and predicted a difficult transition, Tessa appeared to adopt the pupil role with ease. However, the Trents' story was particularly complex because there were many aspects of Tessa's transition that were less positive for her mother, and Ms Trent's cycle of increasing dissatisfaction and withdrawal from school involvement can be viewed as running counter to Tessa's positive cycle. This illustrated that while informed and involved parents can enhance children's experiences of school, they are clearly not essential for all children. The following sections consider what may help to understand Tessa's very positive transition, in the face of her mother's lack of involvement. In a later section Ms Trent's situation is explored in more depth.

Tessa's learning strategies

While Ms Trent worried that Tessa rejected what she saw as scholastic activities in favour of more energetic pursuits in early childhood, it is clear that Tessa was developing effective learning strategies, and a positive view of herself as a learner. Carr's (2001, 1998a, 1998b) Learning Story framework again provides insights into some of the positive features of Tessa's learning experiences. Firstly, Tessa appeared to find plenty of interest at kindergarten and while many of these were not the directly school-related tasks that her mother felt would be helpful, there were important opportunities for learning spatial skills, science, mathematics and literacy in the observed activities. It seemed that Tessa had taken on some of the culture's roles to do with 'being a learner' (Carr, 2001, p. 27) and although many of the activities at school were different from those she had been most interested in prior to starting, she was able to find topics of interest within the new entrant classroom, even when her agenda was sometimes slightly different to that of the teacher.

Tessa also had the skills to become involved. Her early childhood and early school activities were characterised by a sense of well-being, or 'feeling at home', 'being oneself' and/or 'being happy', components of involvement described by Carr (2001, p. 29). This was perhaps fostered by her familiarity with Ms King's class, following regular visits when Theresa started, having Theresa and a number of other older girls as friends and supports at school, and experiences at home and in early childhood that helped her develop the skills that were valued in the school context. In addition, Tessa seemed able to involve herself intensely in an activity.

Persistence with activities was a feature of Ms Trent's description of Tessa and was also evident in the kindergarten observations. This applied both to completing tasks and also in her social interactions, where she had continued to make a series of new friends. As the third domain in Carr's (2001) Learning Story, this can be seen as illustrating an important orientation towards learning goals. Smiley and Dweck (1994) looked at how children oriented to learning goals strive to increase their competence, to understand or master something new. Given the apparent importance of friends, persistence with friendships may have been one of the key factors assisting her transition.

Carr's (2001) fourth disposition is communicating with others, and again there was evidence in Tessa's story that she was able to interact positively with others and share her ideas. Positive relationships with peers and adults also connect to Carr's (2001)

fifth disposition of taking responsibility for shared activities, curriculum and assessment, and social justice.

Tessa's actions also provide evidence of what Cullen (1988) called effective learning strategies. Again, persistence is a feature of effective learning. She also experimented with resources, used adults as a resource and acted as a resource for others. These strategies seemed to continue through Tessa's school career and were still evident in her comments as an eight-year-old. Although Blue Kindergarten was described by a number of participants (including Ms Trent later in the study) as lacking 'structure' and therefore not preparing children adequately for the transition to school, it is relevant to note that Tessa did not appear to be disadvantaged by her attendance there. The opportunity to develop an orientation to learning (as opposed to performance) (Carr, 2001; Marshall, 1992; Smiley & Dweck, 1994) seems to have been particularly important, as does the explicit support provided by Blue's teachers to foster children's development of social skills.

It is difficult to know to what extent the few weekly sessions at a private centre in Tessa's last weeks before starting school contributed to her transition but it is relevant to note that Ms Trent had not persisted with a private kindergarten with a formal structure that Tessa had not enjoyed as a three year old, but had added a few sessions at another private centre in the last weeks before school as a "stepping stone" so that the structure of the new entrant classroom would not be a shock to Tessa. In effect Ms Trent bought the equivalent of the weekly school visits, offered by some other schools in the last four to six weeks before a child starts.

Other influences

Taking on the role of the school pupil was something Tessa was eagerly anticipating. If the move to school is viewed as a 'rite of passage', with challenges to be faced in coming to occupy a new position or role (Piddington, 1957), then it seems reasonable to assume these challenges would be faced more positively if the person concerned values the role that they lead to. Tessa had witnessed Theresa's positive transition and she was particularly motivated by the notion of being a 'big girl' and participating in the same after-school activities as Theresa. These aspects of status would endure regardless of the actual nature of the role itself. Hence, there appeared more motivation for Tessa to take on the role of pupil than for Nicola, for whom the realities of the pupil role initially reflected a loss of status. Capitalising on the potential to enhance children's sense of progress and status seems to be a useful strategy for teachers, and fits with the findings of other studies, such as Dockett & Perry's (1999a)

and Fabian (1998), where children expected their new 'big' status to be reflected in their experiences of school.

Also, the challenges of the rite of passage were reduced for Tessa because she had a reasonably clear idea of what the new role would entail. She had visited Ms King's classroom frequently when Theresa started and had even participated in some activities such as sitting on the mat, so she was familiar with the classroom environment. Curtis (1986) suggests such familiarity reduces the challenges for children because the transition is gradual rather than abrupt. Therefore, although Tessa's one official school visit was perhaps only marginally helpful, there had been plenty of opportunities for her to become familiar with Kowhai School and the pupil role.

Although Ms Trent had little involvement with the school, mesosystem connections (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986) were provided through Theresa and a number of Theresa's friends, with whom Tessa also played at home. At school she had company during the potentially difficult lunchtimes and role models to scaffold her into the lunchtime culture. Although, as Chapter Thirteen will show, the teachers at Kowhai School disliked new entrant children playing with older siblings, other research has demonstrated the benefits of relationships with older children during the move to school, because of the modeling and protection they can provide (Griebel & Niesel, 1999). Modeling and scaffolding also occurred at home in the role-playing of 'schools' and Ms Trent had noticed that Tessa had learned quite a few skills through these informal interactions.

Favourable impressions?

Favourable impressions on all sides were likely to contribute to Tessa's positive cycle of experience. Rapport had already been established between Ms Trent and Ms King. Ms Trent thought that Ms King was "a lovely teacher" and had "a lovely way" (CS4.1, p. 20 & p. 4). She had requested her as a teacher for Tessa based on her positive experiences when her older daughter Theresa started school. In turn, Ms King had been delighted with Theresa, who was a very able and obedient child. Conversations with Ms King indicated that she largely attributed children's academic skills on entry to the parenting they had received, therefore Ms Trent had already established herself as satisfactory in this respect and Ms King probably anticipated another child like Theresa. Interestingly, Ms Trent was careful not to shatter any positive illusions by sharing her own concerns that, as someone who was "more search and destroy," Tessa may prove to be very different from her sister. Ms Trent herself was willing to bow to the school's authority, even when she didn't agree with their policy (as in the number

of school visits). Thus both Tessa and Ms Trent appeared to fit the school's model of 'good' child and 'good' parent.

However, Ms Trent found it difficult to gain access to Ms King to talk to her about Tessa's experiences. Waiting patiently for the school to provide a meeting meant that Ms Trent didn't get a parent interview in the year that Tessa started. Her somewhat unsatisfactory experiences at school, coupled with the demands of the younger children, contributed to her decision to drop the older two at school without getting out of the car. These experiences are considered in more detail in the following section.

Ms Trent: The path to becoming a 'drop and go' parent

A number of other participants made derogatory comments about parents who simply dropped their children at school and were not involved in their children's education. The Trents' story sheds light on what life was like for one such family, and the combination of influences leading to Ms Trent's rather negative cycle of experience, especially in home-school relationships. Mr Trent seemed to leave the day-to-day care and education of the children largely to Ms Trent, and despite a keen interest in her children's education, Ms Trent experienced ongoing difficulties that prevented her involvement in school. This had started when Theresa, the oldest child, went to school, when Ms Trent had not known that school visits were possible, and had been to one, somewhat unsatisfactory 'new parents' morning tea'. Prevented from parent helping by the demands of her younger children and a school policy that discouraged the involvement of younger siblings, Ms Trent anticipated much more involvement once Tessa started. However, this did not eventuate and even when Tessa had been at school for some time Ms Trent concluded that she wasn't an informed parent. In fact, the lack of information was one of her biggest frustrations with Kowhai School.

Far from not caring about the children's education, which is the attitude that people who disapproved of 'drop and go parents' attributed to this behaviour, Ms Trent expressed considerable guilt about her lack of availability for parent helping. This issue of guilt is interesting to explore. Chapter Four showed that from the work of Bowlby in the 1950s came the idea that the good mother must be always available and attentive, "devoted to, attending to and attuning to" her children (Burman, 1997, p. 79). Hence, the roles of devoted mother and working women were seen as divergent and incompatible. In the late twentieth century, Dalli's (1999) research showed that a number of mothers still experienced a strong sense of ambivalence regarding their decisions to work and place their infants in childcare, seeing this as being in opposition to traditional ideas of "good motherhood". Daniel (1998, p. 5) has argued that women are affected by "historic and hegemonic views regarding the 'roles of mothers'",

which result in many women experiencing a sense of guilt when balancing childcare and work. Ms Trent's story raises new insights into the pervasiveness of the guilt that some mothers experience. Even *as* a full-time mother, the demands of her younger children prevented her from what seemed to have been constructed in this setting as an optimum level of parental involvement in school. In her case, guilt arose from her inability to balance these competing demands. Messages about 'good' motherhood therefore seem based on a mother-child dyad. In reality this can be hard to balance not only with work, but also with being a 'good mother' to other children in a family. DeSteno (2000) suggested teachers should relieve any possible guilt for those parents who prefer not to become involved in school. While this is important, Ms Trent's story indicated that there are also parents who might become involved if this was facilitated. Therefore, rather than assuming parents don't want to be involved, schools may need to take steps to overcome common barriers to participation (see for example Kieff & Wellhousen, 2000; Timperley & Robinson, 2001).

Another key aspect of Ms Trent's experiences was her inability to access the information that she wanted. Ms Trent's view that regardless of the child's place in the family, for each child starting school the parent should be treated as a 'new' parent, in terms of being offered information booklets, morning tea visits and so on, would be a useful one to pursue. As her circumstances had changed she felt that she would have benefited from some of the activities and information aimed at new parents, something that will be explored in more depth in Chapter Ten.

Overall, although informed and involved parents can play an important role in children's transition to school, the Trents' story illustrated that when other aspects are favourable, parental in-class involvement is not an essential component of a successful transition. Tessa's story has also highlighted the frustration parents can feel when they cannot access the information they desire, and has shown that schools may need to consider how information can be communicated to those families who do not have regular on site participation.

Ms Keane's class

Four of the case study children joined Ms Keane's class. Steve and Carl started towards the end of the third term, and Anna and Heather started on the first day of the fourth term, having turned five during the holidays. Carl had attended Blue Kindergarten. The other three children came from Azure Kindergarten. As these children started school within a five-week period, they were often grouped together for activities, so their stories occasionally overlap. Ms Keane allowed examples of the children's work to be photocopied for inclusion in the study. Where appropriate, some examples from these have been included in the four case study stories that follow.

3. Steve and the Samson family

Background

At the time of the first interview Steve was four years and nine months old. The family consisted of Mr and Ms Samson, Steve and his baby brother Sean. Mr Samson was self-employed and Ms Samson seemed to take the major role in caring for the children and also supported Mr Samson with his business. Ms Samson said that they had no extended family locally with whom she could leave the children, although the boys did see their cousins quite regularly.

Steve had been going to playcentre but they had recently moved house and Ms Samson had enrolled Steve at Azure Kindergarten. When we first met he had been going to Azure for one term and Ms Samson had found it quite a change:

It took me a while to get into the training at kindergarten because I was quite trained to playcentres and how they worked.... Playcentre is parent run and you seem to have a bit more involvement with the child. (CS5.1, p. 1)

Moving from a small rural playcentre to a large city kindergarten had been a bit of a shock to Steve too. "I think they found when he first went to Azure he wasn't interacting with a large group of children because he just wasn't used to interacting with them, but they adjust" (CS5.1, p. 1).

Ms Samson described Steve as "an average kid really". He was interested in the skiing that his parents did, and he liked books and "loves having stories read to him". At that time Steve had developed a particular interest in worms and Ms Samson talked about a book on the topic that Steve kept getting out of the library. She felt that Steve had "a lovely nature" and noticed that he "shares very nicely", with other children. She also thought he knew right from wrong "and he'll hold to it, he doesn't buckle under peer pressure" (CS5.1, p. 8). He could be quite stubborn:

He's quite stubborn when it comes to what he wants and what he doesn't like to have. He won't paint at kindy because they tell him he's got to wear one of those painting aprons and he doesn't like them so he won't paint..... He goes to playcentre and they don't make them wear painting aprons. He'll go out there and he'll paint six pictures because he really likes it but he won't do it because he's got to wear an apron at kindy (CS5.1, p. 9).

At kindergarten Steve was observed during a number of mat times, where he sat quietly, joining in with action songs but only participating in discussion once, when asked direct questions by Ms Ashby during a teacher-led discussion about teddy bears. Steve was also observed engaged in a number of other activities, such as puzzles and hand puppets.

Kowhai School had been selected for Steve as soon as the Samsons bought the section for the house that they subsequently built. It was chosen simply because "living across the other side of town I didn't know what schools there were so that was the first one I saw. Now, since we have been building over here I realise there are a few other schools but everyone seems to think that it's a pretty good school" (CS5.1, p. 2). The Samsons felt sure that Steve would be offered a place, "because I enrolled him so early there was a pretty good chance that he was going to get in" (CS5.1, p. 5).

Ms Samson was finding it quite hard to prepare Steve for school. It had been "a long time" since she was at primary school, "I don't really know what to tell him when he asks... I just can't remember what school's like" (CS5.1, p. 3). His main source of information about school had been his older cousins, who Steve saw occasionally. The eight-year-old cousin had occasionally played school with Steve and pretended to be a teacher. For example, saying 'Now Steve you are going to read me this book'. "Steve's got absolutely no idea but his cousin will stand over him and say the word and Steve will repeat it" (CS5.1, p. 6). Other than this Ms Samson felt that Steve didn't really "know what he is going to.... He's got no idea" (CS5.1, p. 4). Nevertheless, at this stage she thought that Steve was "quite happy" about starting, although he had recently said that he didn't want to go if it meant tidying up and sitting on the mat.

Considering her own feelings about Steve starting school, Ms Samson reflected how in early childhood "you're always there for them but once they start school they have got to fend for themselves. That's scary" (CS5.1, p. 2). She went on to say:

I suppose that you want to know that they are going to be able to achieve, and hopefully the teacher will pick up on them and they won't get lost in the mass and get to seven or eight, and realise that there is something that

they can't do that should have been corrected when they were a little bit younger. (CS5.1, p. 3)

She was "apprehensive about things like lunchtime and worried a little because although Steve "mixes well with other children and he plays well, sometimes he can hang back a bit and not move himself forward". She hoped that this would not prove to be a disadvantage at school "because I think sometimes if they do hang back they miss out" (CS5.1, p. 4).

At four years and nine months old Steve was seen as "ready for school". Ms Samson explained that he "really enjoys writing out words and things like that" but also noted that "I'm not a teacher. I'm not sure how, where to push him. I just try and take him as far as I can" (CS5.1, p. 4). She believed that new entrant children should be:

Capable of writing their name; counting to at least 20; being able to toilet themselves; being able to dress and undress themselves without an adult helping them. That's what I've aimed at getting Steve ready anyway. And I've tried to get him to recognise most letters of the alphabet. (CS5.1, p. 7)

Ms Samson hoped to be involved in parent helping at the school, explaining: "I'm interested in his education and I'd be keen to go along and help, parent help, things like that" but wondered if this would be possible as she didn't have anyone who could look after Sean and presumed "they [school] wouldn't appreciate having a baby in there" (CS5.1, pp. 8-9).

School visits

During the first interview Ms Samson said that she assumed that Steve would go on a school visit and that she would like to be present. She thought "It would be good to meet the teachers and have a show around the school or something like that" (CS5.1, p. 5). The other thing that Ms Samson thought would be really useful would be to know who else was going to Kowhai School:

I don't know who he will be going to school with from kindergarten... he might be making really good friends with someone, which he already has, that is going to school, so it would be quite handy to know what children are going to Kowhai School.... Who is going to the school and who isn't going to the school and when they are starting because he has said to me a few times 'Is he going to Kowhai mummy?' and I said 'Darling I don't know'. 'When's he going to school?' 'Will he be starting at the same time as me?' And I don't know and I don't know where to get that information from, failing going up to the parents and saying 'When's your child starting school?' (CS5.1, p. 5)

In the end Steve had one school visit with a teacher from kindergarten and Ms Samson "didn't even know that he had been. He came home and said 'I went to my new classroom today'" (CS5.3, p. 3). Following that they had both attended the meeting at Azure Kindergarten where the school staff visited one lunchtime. Ms Samson had been told at that meeting what class Steve would be in and met his teacher, "but it was pretty quick".

When Ms Samson was interviewed two months after Steve started school she said she was disappointed that she "never actually went to the classroom before he started. There was no contact, nothing" (CS5.2, p. 2).

I suppose I would have liked to have gone into the classroom and actually, physically, seen where it was, and who was in the classroom, just so I could key him up a bit more. Because when he was asking me questions about the classroom I had no idea... I had no idea of anything. I didn't have any idea what he'd do with his bag, if they sat at desks or tables or anything. I really had no idea. 'Specially for me because he's my first child at school". (CS5.2, p. 2)

Although she had hoped to find out who else would be going to be in Steve's class she didn't actually know who would be there until they got to school on the first morning, when she discovered "He is the only boy [from Azure] that's gone into Ms Keane's class". She said "All the other children that had started, the majority of them were from other kindergartens or little girls, which isn't such a problem but they tend to stick to their own sex when they start playing with the kids" (CS5.2, p. 3).

First weeks of school

Although they had had very little contact beforehand, Steve's first week started well. Steve was keen to get to school and appeared to really enjoy his first day, apart from the lunchtime, which was "a bit hard because he didn't know what to do". The second day he was still quite keen to go although a little more clingy to his mother than on the first day. He said he didn't like lunchtime and wasn't sure what to do so Ms Keane paired him up with another boy, which his mother thought "worked relatively well", but then on the third day Steve had "a terrible day", where a boy in his class jabbed him with a pencil and made him bleed, which "really, really, hurt". When Ms Samson collected him after school he burst into tears and from then on she had "a real uphill battle" to get him to school, partly because he was scared of being hurt again and partly because he disliked the lunchtimes so much (CS5.2, p. 4).

He kept saying he wanted to go home at lunchtime. 'Why do I have to stay here now?' 'Why can't I go home like I did at kindy?' 'Why do I

have to stay and have lunch here and then go back to school?' (CS5.2, p. 5)

Mornings became increasingly difficult. "He got up and he said he didn't feel well. He felt tired and he didn't want to go to school. He cried every morning before he went to school and he didn't want to go" (CS5.2, pp. 3-4). Ms Samson said after a few weeks she reached the point where "I'd just had enough. I didn't know what else to do" so one morning she said to him "Okay that's fine. Stay home today. Stay home with mummy". She said she was "really scared" when she made that decision, feeling at the time that "I'm either making a really bad decision here or a really good one. And I thought I'm going to have to suffer the consequences if it's a really bad one" (CS5.2, p. 4). In retrospect she decided that it had been a good decision. As the morning went on Steve brightened up and she had said "I think you are feeling all right now, shall we take you to school after morning tea?" and Steve had agreed. They had arrived at school during morning tea and Steve had joined his friends and gone back into the classroom with them, waving goodbye to his mother "as happy as a sandboy" (CS5.2, p. 4). Ms Samson's thought "he just needed to know that I still cared about him and that I wasn't just shunting him off to school because I didn't love him any more. I think he was starting to feel really unloved. And after that he went ahead in leaps and bounds" (CS5.2, p. 4), although it was still some time before he enjoyed the lunchtimes.

Lunchtimes for Steve seemed typical of a number of new entrants' experiences. "By the time he gets out of his classroom and finds somewhere to sit.... By the time he got himself organised and sat down the bell would go and all the other kids would run off and he said 'If I don't run off with them I'm left sitting there all by myself'" (CS5.2, p12). This had resulted in Steve not eating his lunch because he was too anxious about staying with the other children that he knew. Ms Samson had mentioned the problems that he was experiencing with lunchtimes to the Board of Trustees representative who telephoned to ask how Steve was settling into school, and got the impression that the school saw it as something that every child simply had to go through. Ms Samson thought it would be helpful to have a buddy system where older children could be asked to look after the new entrants and sit with them while they ate their lunch. The buddy could reassure the child that he/she would stay with them and "When you have finished your lunch we will go and find your friends" (CS5.2, p. 12). Later when Child 12, who was a friend of Steve's, started school she too had found lunchtimes very difficult. Ms Samson had suggested that Steve, could sit with her, but he had refused because "She's a girl!" Ms Samson was interested that he was unwilling to

play with Child 12 at school, even though they were the "best of mates" at home (CS5.2, p13).

Ms Samson commented that another issue was they had had to retrain Steve in the way that he went to the toilet.

He used to pull his pants right down and then go to the toilet. Apparently some of the older children will go into the toilets and laugh at the little new entrants children for pulling their pants right down instead of the boys just pulling their penises out and doing wees. They'll say 'Oh we can see your bottom' and apparently some of these boys are getting really upset and it's been a problem because they won't go to the toilet even though they really really need to because these older children are laughing at their bottoms. One of the other parents told me that was happening so we have had to retrain Steve how he goes to the toilet (CS5.2, p13-14).

The second term and beyond

Despite some of the difficulties with lunchtimes and toilets Steve seemed to cope with the work at school. At the start of his second term he was writing stories independently (see Appendix N for an example) but was not following the teacher's rule of leaving a two-finger space between words. He correctly completed worksheets, some of which required him to write over dots to form the words, and also drew pictures and wrote his name correctly in the allotted spaces on the sheets. In maths he completed a worksheet where he created patterns using two alternating colours. He seemed comfortable in the company of the other children and included in the activities of the classroom, but observed rather than participated in play fights and cried when another boy dropped a lunchbox on his toe.

In his first weeks of school Steve had made friends with another boy in his class and they played together at each other's houses. Steve was disappointed when, early in the following term, his friend was moved to the new class. Ms Samson thought "it was around this time that he started packing a paddy and wouldn't get out of the car". She recounted what she referred to as a "really bad day":

He sat in the car and wouldn't get out and so I sat in the car with him. In the end we got out of the car and he walked to the classroom and he just turned around and followed me back out again. So we sat in the car until twenty past nine. I said 'Well I'm not going home and you are not going into the classroom so we just have to sit here all day until the bell rings at 3 o'clock'. In the end he said 'All right, I'll get out of the car then'. So he got out of the car and slammed the door shut and slapped his feet all the way down and he got to the classroom and Ms Keane said 'Hello Steve, I wondered where you were' because she saw him run off out of the

classroom and I'd said 'Just leave it, I'll sort it out' and she got him involved very quickly into the class and I said 'Bye' and he said 'See ya'. (CS5.2, p. 4)

Although this had been a difficult time Ms Keane had persuaded Ms Samson that it was probably a good thing that Steve and the other boy had been split up, explaining that the other boy was "really disruptive and Steve was really focussed but she [Ms Keane] wondered how long that would last" (CS5.2, p. 5).

Steve's protest had been short lived and after two months at school Ms Samson felt that Steve was "really settled now. It's not a problem. He loves going to school now". She also thought that "he loves lunch-times now" (CS5.2, p. 5). She had noticed that Steve had gained in confidence since being at school and was impressed with the way that he would now converse with adults.

Steve's increased confidence in talking with others was also evident at school. He volunteered information during a number of mat time discussions and towards the end of term he was tape-recorded in his news group. He presented his news clearly, and although Heather and Child 21 tried to get the others to say 'pass' and thus complete the news more quickly, he twice persisted with the routines of news giving, and brought the group back on track, as the following excerpt shows:

Steve is allocated to a news group with Heather, Child 21 (girl) and another boy. Heather gives news first and is questioned by Child 21. At the end of her news the other two children say pass and someone claims "We're finished". Steve says "No" and proceeds to give his news:

Steve At Christmas, I mean in the holidays, my cousins are coming over. We are going to my cousin's party and we are going to have heaps of blow up stuff where you have things and all that papery kind of thing comes out and we are gonna do that and have pass the present...

Heather Pass the present! (Laughs.)

Steve ...And you get to keep the present and (unclear).

C21 If you said pass and I said pass and Heather said pass we are all finished!

Heather Pass, pass, pass. We're finished!

C21 Pass.

Heather Pass.

Boy Pass.

Steve Oh, any questions?

Boy Why did you go there?

Steve I am going there this weekend. They have got a dog. Okay Heather.

Heather How old are your cousins?

Steve One is 15. One is six.

Heather I remember

Steve One is seven and the other one is just ten.

This prompted Heather to want to talk about her cousins. Steve complained to Ms Keane that Heather had already had a turn. He moved rapidly to the mat when news time was finished (Summary of observation11.12).

Other than Steve telling her that he had been playing on the fields at lunchtime, Ms Samson said she knew little of what happened at school. "I have to grill him really to get any information out of him.... If I grill him he'll say 'Why do you always ask me that?'... He's not coming out with any comments at all" (CS5.2, pp. 5-6). Even when Steve had been given a Principal's Award, he hadn't mentioned it until they passed the principal that night in town and Steve said, "I've already seen him today". Further questioning revealed that Steve had been to the principal's office and "I got this sticker on me.... Some Principal Award they give ya". Ms Samson thought that if they hadn't seen the principal in town she would probably never have heard about the award (which Steve told her had been for "Good clapping and singing") (CS5.2, p. 1).

After two months Ms Samson said that she'd had "not a lot" of feedback on how Steve was doing at school. Her impression was that:

He likes outdoor things really, and he doesn't have to concentrate... He really enjoys singing and he likes sports... he does like reading books and he likes to go to the library and getting books. He's not too good on the old writing yet. That will come.... He can't read many words. I don't know at what age they are supposed to be able to read words. I know that some kids in his class.... Some kids can read quite well before they even start. (CS5.2, p. 6)

Ms Samson was aware an information letter (see Appendix O) had been given to other parents but said that she had not received one. She thought the information about what the children were doing would be useful, so that she could ensure that Steve had his library book on the right day, and sunblock and a hat on the days they were going to have sports. She also thought it would be useful to have a bit more warning about what was happening at school, citing an example where Steve had reported as she put him to bed that "You've got to come to school tomorrow and watch a video". She had checked his bag and there wasn't a notice but the next day she found that she was in fact expected to go and watch the "Keeping Ourselves Safe" video. She knew of other parents who hadn't gone because they hadn't known about it. Another time Steve had apparently told her "We are going to a farm tomorrow and I need blah, blah...". Again there wasn't a notice (CS5.2, p. 9). She thought that teachers entrusting children to pass on messages in this way was "a heck of a load on a five-year-old" and that Steve

was having enough trouble remembering everything about school without expecting him to be a reliable message carrier.

Looking back

When Ms Samson was interviewed again, two years after Steve started school, she said that Steve was enjoying school and was "really, really settled" (CS5.3, p. 2). Although she thought some of the novelty had worn off as Steve had realised "he's got to go every day" she had noticed that after a holiday he couldn't wait to get back to school (CS5.3, p. 5). She thought Steve liked his current teacher, but in her opinion his teacher was "a little bit soft" on the children and she wondered "whether she pushes him hard enough" (CS5.3, p. 2). Ms Samson reiterated her earlier view that Steve was "pretty average" and reflected "I don't think he's going to be any great scholar. He hates doing his homework at home. He doesn't enjoy doing his homework at all" (CS5.3, p. 2). She thought that she should probably do more to help Steve at home but found that time was a factor here, and she wasn't entirely sure whether that was necessary as he was "doing okay" and that "they tell you not to compare your child with anyone else" (CS5.3, p. 2).

Consistent with her earlier descriptions, Ms Samson found Steve to be "quite a caring little boy", who got on well with other children (CS5.3, p. 3). She said that he still recalled the time that he had been jabbed with a pencil when he first started school and she thought this had made him empathetic towards other new children, and he had recently been supportive when a child had been hurt on his first day. Although Ms Samson had previously proposed a buddy system as one way of assisting new entrants, she now wondered whether there was perhaps "nothing you can do for them. They just have to learn themselves" how to handle the lunchtimes" (CS5.3, p. 3).

After the first Christmas holidays, Ms Samson had found someone to care for Sean one morning a week and so had been able to be a parent helper in Steve's classroom. She felt that this had been beneficial for both her and Steve. It had allowed her to see what happened in the classroom and to know the people he talked about, and his teacher had reported how much Steve looked forward to her participation. However, after two terms her babysitter had moved away and she hadn't been able to be a parent helper since then. Nevertheless, as Steve had progressed through school she had found it easier to get information from him about what happened at school, although she still had to "grill him" at times. She also felt more confident about walking into his classroom and picking up his books or looking around.

Ms Samson thought Ms Keane had been "a very good teacher" but still felt Steve's transition would have been helped if she had been allowed to visit the school with him before he started "because then I could associate where he was going and who his teacher was and see the other kids in the class... Not knowing the school and not knowing anything about it I think that you probably had that little bit of disadvantage" (CS5.3, p. 3). Her advice to other parents was "to ask more questions and if you don't know, keep trying until you get an answer. I think I was probably a bit more reserved and thought 'Oh well we'll find out as we go along'" (CS5.3, pp. 2-3). Other than that she thought it was "just a trial and error thing. You just have to send them along and hope that they fit in" (CS5.3, p. 3). Other than allowing parents to visit the school before their children started and improving communications a little, Ms Samson didn't think there was much more that schools could do as she felt that "they are busy enough trying to keep their heads above the water with all of their kids" (CS5.3, p. 4).

Steve's final comments

When Steve was interviewed as an eight-year-old he was relaxed and friendly. He said that school was "pretty cool. Much better than when I first started". "Getting older and knowing more" had made it better (Steve, p. 3). Like the other case study children he was in a Year Three and Four composite class. Ms Samson thought that it was unfortunate that having been with the same children since he started school, he had, this year, suddenly been split up from all of his friends. Although he had made new friends he had found it quite a struggle at the start of the year.

Steve was unsure whether he liked his current teacher because "If you don't get all your work done, you have to stay inside and get it finished", but on the whole he seemed quite happy. His only suggestions to improve schools were to have longer books to write in, because his "keep on running out!" and to improve the playgrounds by moving them away from the road and doing something new "because they have been the same just ever since I started school" (Steve, p. 5).

Looking back to his own transition Steve said, "I remember crying because Mummy left.... Because mummy wasn't there and my teacher grabbing onto me telling me to come inside" and "Not knowing what to do 'cause I just got there and I didn't know what was around" (Steve, p. 1). He recalled "drawing pictures and making a little farm and writing. Running over to the office.... If you were a messenger, if someone wasn't at school you'd have to go and tell the office someone was sick or something" (Steve, p. 2). Steve said there had been quite a dramatic change from kindergarten to school, in the physical space, and the size and number of other children. "[At school] there was lots of big people there and the playgrounds were much bigger, and better,

and there was no really small people there except a few new people." He felt lonely and "bored cos you've no idea what to do" (Steve, p. 2). He also noted the loss of choice when he got to school, saying, "at kindy you could just play and everything but at school you have to do what you had to do. At kindy you could really choose" (Steve, p. 3). At school he had felt he would have liked to "go out to play when I had to stay in and do work and everything. Sometimes when I was out to play I actually wanted to go in and do some work" (Steve, p. 2).

The best things at school had been "most of the time doing drawing and going out to play" but he hadn't liked "getting bossed around by the big kids.... You're playing on the field and sometimes, when I wasn't as old as I am now, they come along and tell you to get away 'cause they want to play" (Steve, p. 3).

He thought that four-year-olds needed to be told "What the playgrounds are like and everything.... Big monkey bars and everything. Up and down slides" (Steve, p. 1). They needed to know "When the bell rings you have to go back to your classroom and when the bell rings first, you get out your lunch and go and play in the playground" (Steve, p. 2). They also needed to be told to bring a hat to school because "if you don't have a hat you have to play under the shade in summer". He thought that "hopefully their teacher would tell them to get a library bag and everything because you go to the school library some days to get books out for a week but you have to bring them back". They might also want to bring a pencil and a writing book to school but they "don't really need to bring felts" (Steve, p. 6). He thought that school could be improved for new entrant children if teachers "just let them settle in" by giving them "easy work" and things like colouring in to do (Steve, p. 1 and p. 4).

After the first part of the interview Sean and Ms Samson joined Steve at the dining table, while Steve was drawing. Ms Samson explained that she sent Sean initially to Azure Kindergarten but had found one teacher there tended to ignore him. She had then moved him to the private early childhood centre that Tessa had attended briefly just before she went to school. However, she believed that the programme at the private centre was proving to be inappropriately formal. At three years old Sean was being asked to write his name and complete worksheets where letters were matched to pictures, so she was in the process of moving him to another state kindergarten, which she had heard had a good programme. Steve and Ms Samson both thought that Sean's eventual transition to school would be easier than Steve's had been. Asked if he planned to look after Sean at lunchtimes, Steve replied "Probably. At least when my friends play cricket I'll have something to do" (Steve, p. 7).

Although Steve created an elaborate border for his proposed picture of school he did not complete a drawing during the interview because Ms Samson became increasingly agitated at the time it was taking him. I eventually left a stamped addressed envelope for Steve to post his completed picture to me but it never arrived.

Discussion: Reflecting on Steve and the Samson family's story

Although their stories are quite different, comparing their pathways (Figure 2) Steve's transition followed a similar pattern to Nicola's, with a good first day, followed by a period of distress, then an eventual acceptance of school. Although not as academically eager and capable an eight-year-old as Nicola, Steve came to take school in his stride and seemed reasonably contented.

Issues affecting transition

Looking at some of the initial difficulties, one thing that stood out in Steve's story was how little information about school was available to his family before he started. His parents had had no contact with schools since their own days as pupils and Steve's only school visit was organised by the teachers at Azure Kindergarten and Ms Samson didn't even know that it was going to take place. This arrangement provided the child with an opportunity to visit but did tend to exclude parents, something that will be explored further in Chapter Ten. The brief lunchtime meeting at kindergarten allowed Ms Samson meet Steve's teacher, but didn't answer the questions that were of interest to her. Overall, the policy was disempowering for Ms Samson, who was unable to scaffold the process for Steve as she had no knowledge of what his classroom would be like, who would be in his class, or what they would do.

With only one short visit, and little opportunity to learn about school from other sources, Steve's transition was very much a step into the unknown, which one might expect to be more problematic than when a child had more opportunities to become familiar with school (Curtis, 1986). Of the little he did know, not all of it was positive. When told he there would be tidying up and mat times he had claimed "Well I don't want to go to school then". The new pupil role was not necessarily a desired one for Steve, hence the motivation for mastering the challenges of a rite of passage (Piddington, 1957) was not likely to be as great as for Tessa. As an eight-year-old, Steve reflected that his one short classroom visit hadn't prepared him for the size of the school or the number and size of the other children.

Even after Steve started, Ms Samson still lacked information. As with Nicola, the timing of Steve's birthday meant that the class size was particularly large when he started. Ms Keane was more relaxed about the large class than Ms King, but may still

have found it difficult to keep track of everything and Ms Samson was not given the usual information sheet. They were further disadvantaged because, being fairly new to the area, the family didn't have information about school from others in their social network that some of the more established families had access to. Also, Steve didn't have any close friends in the class that he joined. As with a number of new entrants, this created particular problems at lunchtimes, possibly exacerbated by the fact that Steve tended to "hang back" in social situations. Although only an isolated incident, being jabbed with a pencil also served to put Steve off school. Combined with the difficult lunch times, it seemed there were barriers to Steve's involvement because he was initially unable to establish a sense of well-being or safety in the school environment, something that is widely acknowledged as playing an important role in maximizing learning (Fabian, 2000b; Fernie, 1988; Fraser, 2000; Mayall, 1994; Rietveld, 1996). Ms Samson tried to counter this by reaffirming that Steve was loved by his family, which seemed to give him the strength to persist at school and appeared to mark the turning point to a more positive cycle of experiences.

Steve was fortunate that Ms Samson was sensitive to his needs. Despite her lack of information, she was closely involved in his transition and empathetic to his experiences. Ms Keane worked with Ms Samson, supporting Ms Samson's initiatives when Steve refused to come to school, meaning parent and teacher were working together, in partnership. Ms Keane was also supportive of Steve in the classroom and he made noticeable gains in confidence during his first year. He also made a friend quite quickly, and although he was distressed when this first friend was placed in a different class he went on to make other friends. All of these factors seemed to assist in overcoming Steve's initial distress and by his second term he was persisting with tasks and keeping other children on task too. Utilising Carr's (2001) framework of dispositions to consider his learning, we can see evidence of each disposition in his approach. Steve seemed to have developed an interest in the activities of the classroom, the ability to become involved, a willingness to persist and to communicate with others, and to take responsibility for his own and other children's learning. Despite a dislike of mat times and tidying up in early childhood he adapted to these aspects of school without any apparent difficulty, suggesting that extensive practice of these things prior to entry may be unnecessary.

Gender issues

As the first of the male case-study children to start school, it is interesting that gender issues were mentioned for the first time in this story. Notions of femininity and masculinity are socially constructed, and according to Gilbert and Gilbert (1998), boys have emotional and cultural investment in getting their masculinity right. Masculinity

has been described as being 'transformed' during the transition to school (Norris, 1999), and aspects of this transformation were evident in Steve's story. Steve, a gentle boy who played happily with girls at home explained that he could not sit with Child 12 at lunchtimes at school because she is a girl. He encountered gender-segregated toilets, where the reported comments of the older boys prompted Ms Samson to ensure that Steve adapted his own behaviour to avoid being teased. For Steve becoming a pupil was interwoven with new ideas about what it means to be a boy in this context.

Ongoing issues

Like Ms Trent, Ms Samson was frustrated at the lack of information about what happened at school, and the way in which new entrant children were used to carry messages to their families. She would have appreciated some direct communication from the teacher, especially about events where she was invited to be involved, as in "Keeping Ourselves Safe" programme, and about Steve's progress. The demands of her younger child prevented Ms Samson from participating as much as she would have liked, although she did have a few months when a babysitter could be found. She commented on how valuable she found the participation that this afforded. As in the Trents' story, it seems worth schools exploring avenues to overcoming barriers to parental participation, such as providing or organising childcare for younger children (Kieff & Wellhousen, 2000).

A dichotomy between work and play

Steve's story highlighted the division between work and play that Chapter Three noted is a feature of many school contexts. Steve described his experience of sometimes wanting to play when they were working, and at other times wishing that he could "go in and do some work" when he was playing. For him, part of taking on the pupil role was acquiring this new approach to learning, where classroom activities are positioned as 'work' and the movement between work and play is controlled by the teacher. As an older child he found his access to recreational play 'docked' (Scott, 1982) if sufficient 'work' had not been completed. Steve appeared content to do the work that was required, but seemed to place less value on his academic progress than Nicola and Tessa. His first award had made little impression on him, perhaps because it acknowledged behaviours that were of value to his teachers but not to him. Likewise, although she was interested in his education, Ms Samson was contented with her assessment of Steve as "an average kid". In this respect the Samsons provided an interesting contrast to the Chess family and Carl, the fourth of the case study story that follows.

4. Carl and the Chess family and

Background

The Chess family lived in a large house in an affluent area on the outskirts of the city, some distance from Kowhai School. Carl lived with his parents, Mr and Ms Chess and his younger sister Carol. Mr Chess was the family's income earner and Ms Chess described herself as a "housewife and mum". Mr Chess's occupation involved working shifts and his roster meant that he was often at home during the day. Both parents were actively engaged in caring for their children. They were also regularly in contact with all four grandparents.

The Chesses appeared to be a very close couple, passionately interested in their children's welfare and their progress. They were very welcoming and enthusiastic about their involvement in the study. Both parents made a point of being available for all the interviews. Mr Chess was the only father in the study who regularly participated in this way (Father 23 was also interviewed but only once), even though the invitation to participate was extended to all family members for all of the parent interviews.

At the first interview, when Carl was four years and eight months old, Mr and Ms Chess described him as a "very bright little boy", a view that had apparently been reinforced by Ms Bird, his kindergarten teacher. They also thought he had good language skills and was a very caring boy who was "quite sensitive" (CS/M and CS/F2.1, p. 16). Ms Chess described him as "a little boy that is going to thirst for knowledge" (CS/M2.1, p. 5) and both parents were fascinated by some of his insights:

Sometimes he will bring up and talk about things we may have done months and months ago and I don't even remember and he does. He does come out with that quite a lot. It's interesting really (CS/M2.1, p. 2).

The things he comes out with! We shifted out of our other place when he was two and he rattles off all sorts of other things about the other place. Things I can't remember (CS/F2.1, p. 16).

While they were delighted with Carl's capabilities and talked at length about Carl's toys and learning activities that he was engaged in at home, both parents expressed a number of concerns and complaints regarding Carl's kindergarten experience. For the last year Carl had been attending Blue Kindergarten. His parents talked of bullying, restrictions placed on the snacks children could take, and what they saw as a lack of academic challenge in the programme. Ms Chess appeared to have had a number of confrontations with the kindergarten teachers over these issues:

Carl actually came home just before Easter with great punches, bruises on his arms and I said 'Where did you get these from?' and he said 'A [another boy] did it mummy.' So I went and complained and they [kindergarten teachers] said the problem is under control. (CS/M2.1, p1)

I give him thing like biscuits and raisins and *Fruit Yonks*... But the kindy push it [food restrictions]. No good. Too much sugar. Too much this. Too much that.... He had a muesli bar the other day and they told him he couldn't eat it. They said 'It's too much sugar you can't eat that'. I was quite angry when I found out about that. I don't think they look at the overall picture of what the children eat at home. (CS/M2.1, p. 6)

Carl knew his alphabet and to count to twenty and all that before he started kindy and the kindy teacher said to me a couple of weeks ago 'He has learnt such a lot at kindy' and I said 'Well no, sorry, he actually hasn't'. (CS/M2.1, p. 2)

Both parents valued what they called a more 'structured' approach to early childhood education than they believed was usually provided at Blue Kindergarten, although a relieving teacher had recently introduced a home book, which required the children to "paste in pictures, write their name or whatever". The relieving teacher had also introduced 'group times' once a week where the children worked in groups of about 15 with one of the teachers. Mr and Ms Chess saw this as important preparation for school. However, its inclusion was interesting because it was in direct contrast to the philosophy at Blue Kindergarten as explained to me by the head teacher. "We try very hard to tell them [parents] that it's not how we work with children. That we are not all going to sit and cut a circle because you have to do it type of thing" (Ms Bird, p11).

Two group activities of this type were observed. The first lasted less than ten minutes and involved cutting pictures out of magazines. Carl cut out a square picture, pasted it onto a piece of paper, wrote his name on the paper and was then allowed to go and look at books until the others had finished. On the second occasion the task for Carl's group was to cut out the numerals from one to twelve and glue them into the correct places on a drawing of an analogue clock face (see Figure 10).

9.10 The children move off the mat to their groups. Carl goes straight to the correct group without needing to be reminded of which one he is in. The teacher talks about the numbers on a clock and where else the children see numbers. She hands out the worksheets.

9.15 Most children start cutting straight away but Carl hesitates for a few moments. He cuts out the first number and tries several times (unsuccessfully) to attract the teacher's attention. "I got this number out". When he doesn't get a response he neatly glues the number onto the clock face and proceeds to the next number.

9.20 Most children have interpreted the task differently to the teacher. Some have cut out their clock faces instead of the numbers. One has glued over the entire clock face. Some have cut out all their numbers and subsequently lost them. Most require a lot of adult help to keep going. Carl is one of the few who works independently. He cuts, matches and sticks his numbers in the right order.

9.25 One child has destroyed all his numbers and the teacher makes a new set. Carl continues to work quietly and carefully, cutting out the numbers and sticking them onto his clock one at a time. Meanwhile children around him are confused, picking up each other's cut out numbers and wondering where they go.

9.35 Carl has glued all the numbers onto his clock in the correct places. He writes his name on the back and draws three hands on the clock face (for hours, minutes and seconds?). He taps the teacher on the back and shows her the completed clock. He cuts out the clock face with some difficulty (possibly because the paper is now wet with glue).

9.40 He shows his completed clock to a boy and then pegs it onto the drying rack before heading outside to the sandpit. (Summary of observations 27.8).

Figure 10. An observation of Carl completing a structured activity at kindergarten

While there appeared to have been little meaningful learning happening for most of the children engaged in this worksheet activity, for Carl it had been an easy task. This is perhaps why his parents felt such an approach was suitable, because while saying she valued more structure in early childhood education, Ms Chess did not support pushing children academically from too early an age:

Lately he has been wanting to read words so we have encouraged him to do that but when he hasn't wanted to I haven't pushed him because I feel that could create problems where he doesn't want to do it any more. (CS/M2.1, p. 5).

We don't believe in push, push, push. Let kids be kids and learn at their pace (CM/M2.1, p. 19).

It seemed that what Mr and Ms Chess were seeking was not necessarily structure in the form of formal activities like worksheets, but some sense that Carl's interests were being captured. It is questionable whether even the new group times were achieving this. Carl was frequently reluctant to go to kindergarten and they put this down to the lack of challenge provided. The observations tended to support the parents' view. Although actively engaged and apparently happy Carl did appear to drift from one activity to the next with the most sustained play being in the sandpit, or in the bran trough when it was wet.

His observed play in the sand was largely independent or with a small group of boys and involved the construction of smooth roads through damp sand and occasional digging. In the bran trough he spent 50 minutes with another boy pushing trucks through the bran. Other than this he was observed briefly engaged in drawing, moving wooden tool shapes around on a magnetic board, playing with playdough, looking at books and playing with the trolleys. He wrote his name correctly and neatly on anything that he made and showed a careful use of resources like glue. He also appeared careful with his own clothes and possessions. When a boy he was playing with started to pour water out of a watering can onto the trolleys as petrol, Carl got an apron from the stand, put it on and rolled up his sleeves before joining in. At morning tea when a group of boys were passing one boy's sandwiches from lunchbox to lunchbox and laughing, Carl covered his own box, hastily finished his biscuit and stated "That's all I have for lunch", putting his box away in his locker. However, it was unclear whether this was to protect his own food from a similar fate or to avoid being included in the slightly 'risky' atmosphere that the boys' hilarity was generating.

Carl had little contact with the teachers, other than at mat time, where he was obedient (coming quickly to the mat when told) and attentive, and on two occasions he went and asked for resources that weren't immediately available. There was no evidence in the observations of the language skills that so delighted his parents at home, although there were some quiet exchanges with other children.

Mr Chess said he felt that Carl was "getting a little bit bored with kindy, I think. I'm just noticing that if I'm doing something that's a little bit more interesting than kindy he would rather stay home" (CS/F2.1, p. 9). Keen to be included in any jobs around the house (especially anything mechanical), and with a father whose shift work meant that he was often home during the day, Carl did appear to receive more challenge at home:

Like if I'm working out in the garage doing something, he's out there giving me a hand, and he's helpful in what he does. He's not just in the way, he wants to help; and he knows what should be and shouldn't be, and he'll soon tell me if I've made a mistake. (CS/F 2.2, p. 11)

At four years old Carl was growing his own vegetables and flowers, participating in fence building around their property, working with his Granddad repairing a camper van and assisting his father wherever possible:

If he's in there [with his Granddad] and doing something when I'm not there he'll give me a blow by blow account of how it's done. He's dead right too, he knows all about it. (CS/F2.2, p. 12)

He definitely does like to know why things work and why you are doing something. Like that day when you had the wheels off the car looking at the brakes. He just about drives you batty! (CS/M2.1, p. 15)

However, despite their concerns about the kindergarten programme, Ms Chess expressed some mixed feeling about Carl starting school:

I think it's harder to let go a little bit. In some ways I am dreading him going to school but then in others, I think it will be great for my sanity and his too probably. I think he is just to the point now when he is so ready. (CS/M2.1, p. 2)

I must admit I will be sad to see him go really... It will be nice though to have a bit more time. (CS/M2.1, p. 5)

I think it will be really good because I have found it quite hard to handle his behaviour at times. He gets a bit stroppy in the afternoons. I guess it's just because he is tired and he is also looking for things to do. (CS/M2.1, p. 9)

How do you know a teacher is going to be doing the right things for your child? (CS/M2.1, p. 14)

Mr Chess on the other hand felt:

It will be good. He is ready for it.... He needs the stimulation... He is definitely looking for more stimulation.... He needs the extra stimulation of school. (CS/F2.1, pp. 8-9)

With no local schools within walking distance, Kowhai School had been selected by the Chesses because the school bus route covered their area and because they had heard that it was a "very good school" (CS/F2.1, p. 3). Their only concern was the large size of the classes.

They thought that Carl was looking forward to starting school. He had heard a little from one of the older boys in their street and he was looking forward to participating in sporting activities like soccer. His parents' approach was one of positive excitement and they both looked forward to being active participants at school.

I think with me having time off during the day it means that I will be able to get involved in things. We will both be involved, not just one of us and it means when there is things like school trips they go on I have the opportunity to be involved in those... [Ms Chess] doesn't work so it means she is able to do things like that. I think it's important. It shows kids too, if mum and dad are involved in the school I think it becomes their pride in the school too.... I may get involved in the school board too. I'm tossing that idea around. (CS/F2.1, p. 17)

I think these days so many parents do work that there is not a lot left, like even at kindy a lot of caregivers take the children... So I think that we are

perhaps fortunate that we can have that time where we can give a little bit of our time and get involved. (CS2.1, pp. 17-18).

The enrolment policy at Kowhai did not appear to have been a cause for concern, and at four years and eight months Carl had already been offered a place and they had spoken several times to one of the teachers, Ms Knight. Beyond this, the Chesses said they had little information about school, although they were aware from various snippets they had heard that things were different to when they had been pupils.

Asked what they thought it would be useful for children to be able to do when they first started school, Mr Chess observed:

I think the big thing is things that will let them get their confidence with the other kids. Suddenly they are small fish in a big sea. I noticed that with [friend's son]. It came as a bit of a shock to him I think.... Things in that area it would be helpful if kids fit in and friendships and stuff it's a good idea. (CS/F2.1, p. 12)

Ms Chess also hoped that Carl would feel able to tell them if anyone, adult or child was treating him inappropriately (such as bullying or sexual abuse). They were aware that starting school signaled a step into the outside world and were unsure how aware Carl was of 'stranger danger'. Knowing the alphabet and "perhaps count a bit and write their name" were also mentioned (CS/M2.1, p. 12).

School visits

Ms Chess was under the impression that the school would contact her to arrange school visits but as Carl's fifth birthday approached and they had heard nothing she contacted the school and was told that she had to arrange them. She went in and saw Carl's teacher, Ms Keane, who said, "Come when you like". By now there was only time for two visits before he started. The visits went smoothly and Ms Chess thought they had been useful:

Because it was just like a forward introduction to the kids that were in his class, just to see how the day started, and what was expected of you. (CS/M2.2, p. 4)

Carl had apparently reported "School's quite different to kindergarten because you've got to do as you're told... but it's really good. We do all different activities and Ms Keane helps us" (CS/M2.2, p. 4).

First weeks at school

The visits left Carl eager to start and although his parents thought that Carl should have his birthday at home, there was "no way! He was going to school on his birthday come hell or high water" (CS/F2.2, p. 3). On the first day, he immediately joined some children he knew from kindergarten and told his mother that she could leave. Ms Chess had expected that she would cry when he started but:

because he was so happy to stay it just sort of stunned me a little bit I think. I dropped him off and I thought 'Oh, okay, this is it!' But because I was so happy with his teacher, he was happy to go and to stay, and he seemed happy with the kids there, I thought 'Oh well there's nothing really to be sad about, it's a new start for him'. (CS/M2.2, p. 14)

Although happy to go to school, his parents reported that Carl had been very tired and for the first few days was very hungry after school because he hadn't eaten all his lunch. Like a number of children, Carl had thought that the second lunch time bell meant that children had to finish eating their lunch and go and play. His mother explained that he could stay until he had finished eating, and said that things seemed better after that.

Ms and Mr Chess also found that although Carl was pleased to have a reading book to bring home, he was initially too tired to focus on it:

The first couple of nights he just got ratty and 'Oh I can't do this Mummy'. (CS/M2.2, p. 9)
Just got frustrated with it. He was tired. Instead of trying to do it he just got frustrated and wanted to throw it away. (CS/F2.2, p. 9)

They felt they had made the mistake of leaving Carl's homework until later in the evening. "I thought if he has his bath and tea he'll feel a bit better, but it was no good, he just didn't want to know" (CS/M2.2, p. 9) so they had changed to giving Carl some afternoon tea and then tackling his reading and any other work that he had brought home. However, Carl remained "Very stropky", he'd "absolutely had it at the end of the day" (CS/M2.2, p. 1). Later they reflected that his health problems, which they were not fully aware of at the time, might have contributed both to this tiredness and the some of the earlier difficult behaviour after kindergarten. Despite being tired at home Carl appeared to be coping well in the classroom and remained happy to go to school. Examples of Carl's early worksheets and written work are included in Appendix P.

The second term and beyond

Carl started school less than two weeks before the school holidays, so only had a few days in a large class. Soon after the holidays, a number of older children moved to the new class, and there was a third-year teaching student on teaching practice in his room, greatly increasing the adult to child ratio. An observation of Carl showed him answering his name confidently at roll time and he was selected by another boy to partner him on an errand to the office. In a letter writing activity, that will be described again in Anna and Heather's stories, Carl spent 50 minutes colouring in the printed picture on the letter, writing and drawing a picture. At maths time Ms Keane noticed that Carl had gone to the wrong group. She called him over to the correct group and made a space for him to sit down. He completed the maths worksheet which involved making patterns using different numbers of colours.

After this observation, just a few days into the new term, Carl was off school for a fortnight, undergoing a small operation. Ms Chess was a frequent visitor to school while Carl was away, collecting work for him so that he could keep up with what the class was doing. She tutored him at home, in the mornings, on the work provided by Ms Keane. Carl remained keen to come to school despite his period away, and refused his parents' offer to start back attending mornings only. He returned full of enthusiasm, writing in his book on the first day back "I really liked the hospital". Mr and Ms Chess reflected that he had probably been unwell for some time and found that after the operation "He's just a different kid really. So much more energy and he's eating properly, he's much better" (CS/F2.2, p. 1).

From this point onward they felt that Carl had really blossomed. When his parents were interviewed after Carl had been at school for two months they were delighted with his learning in school and reflected:

After seeing what they do at school I am quite disappointed in what they did do at kindy really.... I know that interaction with other children and what not, but really most of the time he only ever played in the sandpit and perhaps painted some pictures. (CS/M2.2, p. 17)

When you see his rate of learning since he's been at school, and you see what he was like when he started kindy to when he left kindy, there was not that rate of learning. (CS/F2.2, p. 17)

They thought that Carl was particularly enjoying artwork at school and learning to read. Ms Keane had apparently reported that Carl was quite shy, but that while he didn't participate in group discussions she felt that he "takes everything in". His

parents didn't see the shyness as a problem as said they had both been shy as children. Their view was:

Ms Chess He has got quite a gentle nature and can be quite shy although he can be stroppy. He's a stubborn little bugger at times. When he makes up his mind...

Mr Chess He's hard to shift.

Ms Chess Like his father!

Mr Chess We are both a bit like that.

Ms Chess And he has got definite ideas about what he wants. He knows where he's going, what he's doing. (CS/M & F2.2, p. 29)

Final observations of Carl showed him to be a quiet but competent participant in the classroom, obedient to instructions and completing whatever was asked of him. He appeared to work slowly but carefully on tasks like writing and coloring in. An example of his later written work is included in Appendix P. At this stage both parents were very pleased with his progress. "You get quite a thrill actually when you see how they are coming along for reading and the spelling" (CS/M2.2, p. 26). Ms Chess was also impressed with the level of responsibility the children, including Carl, assumed at school as they took their turns completing various jobs in the classroom.

After two months at school Carl had received three certificates, which they were very proud of. Ms Chess described how "They gave them out in assembly. I was there one day when he got one which was for reading well.... He went up and all the kids clapped and stuff" (CS/M2.2, p. 5). When he got home Mr Chess had taken the family out to tea to celebrate:

He's done really well and we're proud of him and try and show that we're really pleased with what he's doing, not just come home and 'Oh yeah that's neat', we like to make a thing of it because he did really well at school. (CS/F2.2, p. 6)

A second certificate had resulted in going out for tea again. However, when Carl arrived home soon after with a third certificate, asking, "Where are we going out for tea?" Mr Chess, with somewhat wry humour, wondered if he'd made a mistake, and set a precedent that was going to be somewhat problematic to keep up.

Mr Chess attributed Carl's successful transition largely to him having a number of basic skills like being able to write his name and knowing the alphabet when he started. He said that he had observed a number of children "who haven't got their

alphabet and stuff sussed out struggling already" (CS/F2.2, p. 19). The only apparent problem was Carl's complaint that two boys (including Child 14) that he was friendly with were kicking and punching him. Ms Keane had been informed and she had encouraged Carl to play with other children, but found the boys drifted back together. His mother had advised him to avoid the boys who did this, and yet she found that the same group "still pull together and play together all the time" (CS/M2.2, p. 14). She was puzzled that he persisted in this type of play. It seemed that Carl experienced some ambivalence to this type of interaction, joining in in the school setting but later complaining to his parents about the blows he had received. Perhaps for Carl the social contact this afforded was important. The observations indicated that it was not uncommon for a number of boys to initiate play by punching or kicking another child, then running away, inviting the recipient to chase them. Carl's explanation was that "they want to play but they get all silly" (CS2.2, p. 3).

The boys' interactions had three different adult explanations; I (the researcher) saw it as a strategy for social interaction, in a situation where there were no resources. The teacher viewed it as modeling the play fights of older boys and the parents saw it as aggression and were considering how he should deal with it. Although they had a policy of teaching their children not to hit other people Mr Chess said he did sometimes wonder "whether it would be better to teach him to turn around and thump them back, so that they stop doing it" but on the whole thought it would soon "blow over" (CS/F2.2, pp. 13-14).

Other than this, his parents found that Carl told them very little about what happened at school. "You've got to prod it out of him at times" (CS/F2.2, p. 9). Ms Chess found he sometimes responded, "I can't remember" when asked direct questions about what he had been doing. However, she had been a parent helper a number of times and observed what happened in the classroom. As the end of the year approached, Mr and Ms Chess were disappointed not to have had a formal parent interview but had found the teacher very approachable. "If you want to have a chat she'll take time out to chat" (CS/M2.2, p. 22). "She does give us a bit of feedback on him" (CS/F2.2, p. 22).

Ms Chess was particularly enjoying parent helping. Ms Keane had made her feel very included by discussing the plan for the week with her and she was delighted to be asked for her help with specific tasks.

I found that really neat because I had thought with mother help that you were actually going in to help the kids, because that's what it's like at kindy, but it's not at school, you do things to help the teacher. Which I

found really neat. It was good. Quite stimulating for me just to be able to use your brain just a little bit. (CS/M2.2, p. 22)

Parent helping had also made Ms Chess very aware of how hard the new entrant teachers worked. She was shocked at the amount of out-of-class preparation time and reflected "for the money they are on, it's only peanuts when you think what's involved". She was also pleasantly surprised to find how friendly the teachers were towards her, contrasting that to when she had been a child at school and the teachers were "much more strict" (CS/M2.2, p. 23).

It's not like, I have always imagined that when you approach the teacher you would feel like a student yourself, there'd be that sort of gap, but with Ms Keane and the other teachers you're one to one, you're an adult against an adult... I feel she's really approachable. (CS/M2.2, p. 26)

Ms Chess enjoyed meeting other parents and getting to know the children in Carl's class. She had anticipated that Carl's younger sister Carol would prevent her from being a parent helper but Ms Keane had allowed Carol to come too, and Carol had participated with the class, sitting on the mat listening to stories, or amused herself by quietly drawing at the back of the room.

Not only was Carol learning about school through being there while Ms Chess was helping, Carl was also 'teaching' her at home. Often he would read his book to her or go over some activity he had done. They had also seen him mimicking his teacher, teaching Carol how to write the letters, and Carol could "rattle off the alphabet as good as gold now". They pictured Carol, who was currently only two years old, getting to school saying 'I know all this, now what do I do?' (CS/F, 2.2, p. 17).

The Chess's advice for other parents was to ensure their children had basic skills like alphabet knowledge and counting, and to "be prepared to give them a bit of time and read and stuff" (CS/F, 2.2, p. 19). Ms Chess said it was also important to know that there was an information book available on Kowhai School. She had only heard about this by accident through a friend and had found the information it contained so valuable that she thought all parents should be told about it. Mr Chess felt schools could offer an information evening, held perhaps once a month for the parents of new children. He saw this as an ideal way of telling parents all that they needed to know. "Just a chance to ask questions and stuff and maybe be shown where the classes are and stuff". He felt this would be useful for the school "because I'm pretty sure the receptionists probably get asked the same questions hundreds of times" and for the parents, who currently relied on other parents to answer their questions "and no doubt you sometimes get the wrong answers" (CS/F2.2, p. 20).

Looking back

The Chess family were revisited nearly two years after Carl first started school. They talked about some of Carl's current interests, which included Lego Technic and various educational computer packages. Carl was still an effective tutor for Carol, not just in school tasks but in all the skills he was mastering, like tying his shoelaces and riding a bike. Carol was also credited with extending Carl. They said that Carl was shy and reticent but Carol, now aged four, was "a bit of a dare-devil" and tended to make him try things he otherwise wouldn't, rather than be bettered by a younger sister.

Despite his shyness, they felt that Carl's transition to school had gone well. He remained quiet in the classroom although recent parent interviews had suggested that he was developing more confidence. They thought that he was doing well at school, although he had had some ups and downs over the intervening years since the last interview. They explained that the previous year Carl had been in a reading group where he was really struggling and getting upset. "He'd come home and I'd say 'Come on mate, let's sit down and read your books' and he'd get to the point where he'd cry because he found it too difficult" (CS/M2.3, p. 12.) Ms Chess had been to see his teacher and:

I just said 'Look would you mind giving him some easier books?' and within a couple of weeks he was back up to that group again, but it just gave him enough confidence... He'd got to a point where he said 'Oh Mum it's quite easy now'... And he's come home and he'd say 'Oh I've got my reading book mum' and he'd be happy to read it. I'm glad we did that. (CS/M2.2, p. 3)

Both parents felt Carl had been faced with a step that was just a bit too high and "it's like hitting a brick wall. He just did that. He got to the point 'I don't know. I've gone as far as I can go' and then he hit the brick wall and he didn't want to do it any more" (CS/F2.3, p. 3). They hadn't wanted him to lose his enthusiasm for learning so felt that reducing the level of challenge was the best action as "just making it too hard it's not worth the pain for him" (CS/M2.3, p. 3).

They had noticed Carl's tendency to just give up if he couldn't do something in other aspects of his learning too. As seven-year-olds Ms Chess was aware that the teachers expected a higher level of independence and willingness to have a go at things, but Carl tended to "just sit there and he wasn't even bothering to give it a go" (CS/M2.3, p7). "If he couldn't do something he would just stop. If he couldn't spell a word he would just sit there and 'Well I don't know what to do now 'cos I can't spell this word"

(CS/F2.3, p7). With his parents' encouragement to "get as close as you can and then carry on" (CS/F2.3, p7) they felt that Carl was starting to get over that.

Another problem Carl had experienced was in mathematics, which they had also helped him to overcome, although the advice in this case was quite different. His teacher had commented that he wasn't completing his work and when they asked Carl about it he had apparently said, "'Oh I get stuck and I don't know what to do'. He didn't realise the teachers were there to help him" (CS/F2.3, p. 6). His father had explained that everyone got stuck sometimes and that if that happened he was to put up his hand and ask for help.

I reinforced it for a few days and mentioned it to his teacher as well and he was much happier after that. He just realised. He said 'I got stuck on this and Ms X came and gave me a hand'. He hadn't comprehended that role.... He's prepared to ask for help. He just didn't know that was available.... It's just the basic principles in some things that we take for granted. Teachers are there to show us how to do things and to help but he hadn't grasped that.... Once it was explained he was fine (CS/F2.3, p. 6).

Mr Chess felt that not knowing he could ask for help had probably impeded Carl's progress for some time, but now instead of "just keeping up with the pack" he had "caught up with it" (CS/F2.3, p. 12).

While pleased with Carl's progress the Chesses maintained their earlier view that in their opinion there wasn't enough emphasis on the "basics" at school. They despaired at the poor mathematics and spelling skills they observed in adults, including teachers "The teachers don't know how to spell, so how can they teach the children to spell when they don't know how to spell themselves?" (CS/F2.3, p. 7). (This comment was made in general, and not directed at specific teachers at Kowhai School.) They had therefore taken it on themselves to improve Carl's spelling and said they worked on some activities most days. "I mean we don't pressure him to do it every day but we try and make it a fun thing and he wants to do it" (CS/M2.3, p. 8). They felt that this was giving him an edge at school "because he's the head of the group and he loves being head of the group" (CS/F2.3, p. 8).

Carl had remained friends with Child 14 (one of the boys that used to play 'kick and chase' games with him as a new entrant). Both boys had recently become the targets of girls' affections and they were receiving love notes in their bags. His father noted that Carl usually managed to throw them away before his parents saw but occasionally Mr Chess came across one while cleaning out Carl's bag "He grabs it, screws it up and

runs away with it" (CS/F2.3, p. 6). He had recently started to resist hugs and kisses from his mother at school, so seemed to be becoming more aware of his image in front of his peers.

Mr Chess had earlier hoped to join the Board of Trustees but as a shift worker found that this wasn't really possible. However, they had both been very involved with the school in a number of different ways over the years. Mr Chess thought this was likely to have positive spin-offs in that teachers were "more likely to go the extra distance with your kid as well" (CS/M2.3, p. 14). Ms Chess was still enjoying parent helping, and felt that being in the classroom had "opened her eyes". She had seen the techniques that teachers used and been able to ask how she might approach things. She had progressed from routine jobs to working with children who were struggling and had also been invited by Ms Keane to go back and help in her new entrant class as the numbers were high and she had no parents there available to help her.

Carol had started kindergarten at Blue Kindergarten but Mr and Ms Chess had moved her to Azure Kindergarten. This was partly in response to Carl's experiences when he got to school and partly because they thought Carol was being bullied, and the teachers at Blue Kindergarten hadn't taken any apparent action. On reflection, although they had been very satisfied with Carl's progress when he first started school, Mr Chess now thought their choice of Blue Kindergarten had been "a bit of a set back for Carl" and that he had been behind some of the children who had arrived at school from Azure Kindergarten. However, Carl had managed to overcome it and while he wasn't "leading the pack in the class, he's definitely not trailing behind anyway, he's doing very well" (CS/F2.3, p. 22).

Looking back on their experiences with Carl, their advice to other parents was that providing children with encouragement and support, without pressure was the best approach (CS/M2.3, p11-12). They also thought it was important for parents to get involved with the school. Another suggestion was to try and tackle any health problem a child might have before he/she started school. They hadn't realised how sick Carl had been until the doctor noted that they had been 13 times in 10 months prior to his operation. "It's basically a physical handicap to their learning" (CS/F2.3, p. 13).

Towards the end of the third interview the Chesses reflected that their involvement in the study had been useful because "it makes you actually think about what you are doing, and how things are going" (CS/F2.3, p. 23). "I think you tend to stop and question your values and what you want for your kids and things like that"(CS/M2.3, p23).

Carl's final comments

The final interview with Carl was the first time his voice on the transition had really been heard first hand. He still seemed a little shy and his mother sat with him through the interview and provided some prompting and comments of her own. He was currently in Year Three and like the other case study children was placed in a Year Three and Four class. Ms Chess said that the composite class meant that he was being "extended a bit" which she thought was good, but had also been a little unfortunate as in the previous year he had finally developed

quite a bit of confidence in getting up and talking to people last year with his own age group and this year that has dropped back and we notice that quite considerably... when it comes to standing up and actually doing some things that confidence has gone and in some ways I think that is not too good. (CS/M in Carl, p. 7)

Carol had started school earlier that year and had been in Ms Keane's class, as they requested. Ms Chess said Carol had coped in quite a different way with school and was "more of a social butterfly" (Ms Chess in Carl, p. 5).

Carl said that school was "pretty cool" and the class he was in this year was "good". He liked cricket on Friday and cricket practice "the day before Friday" (Carl, p. 2). There was nothing that he didn't like about school. Reflecting on his own transition Carl said, "We did writing sometimes.... Games, I played on the computer". He recalled that he had been in the *Parrots* groups and explained, "That was sort of in the middle stage of reading... and there were lots of other things we did like publishing, maths and [after prompting by his mother] trips". At lunchtimes he had played with "my friends [names friends] and we played tiggy and octopus quite a lot" (Carl, p. 1).

He said that there was nothing that four-year-olds needed to know about school and asked if there was anything he wished he had known, he said "Not really". Similarly there was "not really" anything he believed parents needed to know, or that they could do to help their children at school. Teachers could help by "giving them [new entrants] some easy work and that" and the older children should "Show the new entrants around the school". He said that this currently happened at Kowhai School but he personally didn't have much to do with new entrants (Carl, p. 3). Asked if there was anything that could be done to make school a better place he thought "a few more playgrounds... just some more adventure playgrounds" (Carl, p. 4).

He said that school was "different to kindergarten by not having all the time being free and all the time outside and having to do a lot more work and have to read books and lots of things like that" (Carl, p. 1). He said that he had felt "excited" when he started and that this was because "I made some new friends and that" (Carl, p. 2). Asked if there was anything that happened at school that he didn't expect he replied "No".

Carl's long-term role as Carol's tutor was reflected in his detailed, labeled drawing of the solar system when invited to draw something to show four-year-olds about school. He explained that when Carol had started school he had "told her things like sums and lots of things like that. I told her about the solar system" (Carl, p4). While he was drawing, Ms Chess described how his new teacher had detected that Carl wasn't finishing his stories because his hand got tired. She had discovered that it was because he gripped his pencil so tightly. Carl had been provided with a rubber grip that had seemed to solve the problem. Ms Chess said she was still providing extra coaching at home, and made little cards up to test Carl and Carol's spelling. As she talked Carl checked the spelling of 'Jupiter' and 'Saturn' with her.

Discussion: Reflections on Carl and the Chess family's story

Although the Chesses, the Trents and the Samsons had the same socio-economic status rating on the Elley-Irving index (Irving, 1990), based on the fathers' occupations, and all three mothers were at home, the patterns of life in the three families were quite different. The most salient aspect of the Chesses' story was the wealth in terms of both assets and time that the parents were able to invest in their children. Young-Loveridge (1989) found that what happened in individual families was more important than socio-economic status in determining the development of children's number concepts. The present study suggests that understanding what happens in individual families is equally important in relation to other aspects of schooling.

Like Tessa, Carl made a happy transition to school. A small operation within weeks of starting did not affect his attitude or progress, both of which remained positive in his first year. His parents were particularly delighted with his transition. However, despite such a positive start and the high level of parental involvement and support that he enjoyed, Carl's school career was not without difficulties. Both the positive start and the later problems are worthy of further consideration, as is Mr and Ms Chess's involvement in Carl's educational experiences.

A positive transition experience

As a four-year-old Carl was not particularly engaged at kindergarten. He was involved in the kind of 'drifting' behaviour that has been observed in other four-year-old

children, who appear bored and restless, awaiting the move to the world of school (Carr, 1997; Norris, 1997). Carl's story helps to show why children may become less engaged, and offers insights as to how this might be overcome. It seemed that for Carl there was little of interest in the kindergarten setting, not because he lacked the courage to take on some of the activities (Carr, 1998) but because there was little to compete with the many meaningful challenges at home, especially his involvement in 'real work' with his father and grandfather. Although Carl had apparently been acknowledged as a bright little boy, there was no evidence of his kindergarten teachers making a particular effort to engage his interest or extend his thinking. The introduction of more formal 'structured' activities pleased his parents but seemed to provide a forum for Carl to display what he could do, rather than extend him further. Carr's (2001) *Learning Stories*, if used as a form of assessment, might have alerted Carl's kindergarten teachers to Carl's situation and assisted in developing appropriate engagement of Carl's interests and talents.

Carl's parents had little respect for the kindergarten programme and were eagerly awaiting his move to school. Carl too was reportedly looking forward to school, especially participating in sporting activities at school like soccer. Gilbert and Gilbert (1998) have discussed how sport provides an entry into the world of men for many boys. Carl was clearly aligned with the work of the men (his father and grandfather) at home. Hence, while kindergarten seemed to offer little to compete with the challenges on offer at home, school may have promised more authentic masculine pursuits, as well as academic ones that were valued by his parents. There was little congruence between the school programme and Carl's earlier interests, but it seemed that he was attracted by what school had to offer, and once he started, he found the activities suitably engaging and within his capabilities. Although there were some challenges in the playground interactions with other boys, these could be viewed as part of a 'rite of passage' to a desired role (Piddington, 1957). For Carl a lack of continuity between early childhood education and school programmes proved to be a bonus, and he was excited and happy about his transition from the start.

However, the image of Carl at school did not completely fit with his parents' description of him. The active thirst for knowledge was not evident in the school observations, and neither were the advanced language skills the Chesses delighted in at home. He was a competent but unexceptional member of the class, doing all that was asked of him in a careful manner. Carl's shyness seemed to be a drawback in the school context and his parents reported that this had been referred to by teachers several times throughout the years of the study. At home, Carl's early learning seems to have followed an apprenticeship model (Rogoff, 1990, 1997), whereas at school the

nature of the new entrant programme and his parents' valuing of external measures of success, may have led Carl to adopt an orientation to performance goals rather than learning goals (as defined by Smiley & Dweck, 1994). Even as a kindergarten child he had been careful to follow the rules. At school, where there were more rules, this may have constrained him further. In later years, this came to be detrimental to his progress. Consistent with an orientation to performance goals (Carr, 2001; Smiley & Dweck, 1994), Carl tended to avoid things that were difficult, rather than risk making a mistake. His parents mediated, helping him to see that he could approach his teacher for help (important advice that perhaps needs to be made more explicit to children as part of their transition to school). However, there were mixed messages because while he was encouraged to ask for help in mathematics he was being told to assert more independence in literacy. These points will be considered further in the next section, in relation to Carl's changing image as a learner.

Carl as a learner

Looking at his parents' descriptions of Carl over the three-year period it can be seen that initial descriptions of a "very bright little boy", were tempered somewhat on entry to school where Carl was "quite shy" but "taking everything in". Two years later, the Chesses felt Carl had, for a time, struggled to "just keep up with the pack" and although things had improved he seemed to be fairly average in comparison to his peers, not "leading the pack" but "definitely not trailing behind it" either.

Graue's (1993b) research in three schools in the USA found a similar pattern in parents' comments in a school called Fulton. Parents were initially excited about their children starting school, seeing them as bright, above average and quick to catch on to things. When the children had spent a term at school, parents were much less likely to speak of their children's ability in glowing terms. Graue (1993b) has attributed this shift in parental opinion to the parents at Fulton having very little understanding of what the kindergarten (first year of school) programme entailed. Given parents' lack of knowledge, their comments about children's ability were not directly related to the child's ability to fit into the school programme. Once the parents experienced the school programme, they seemed to possess more information, which allowed them to make judgements about how their child was progressing.

Certainly the Chesses lacked information about school until after Carl had started. However, it seems that there may be other factors that are also worthy of consideration. In both Kowhai School and in Graue's (1993b) study of Fulton School, there was concern by school staff about parents who were seen (in the teachers' opinion) as having expectations that were too high. The principal at Kowhai talked

about the attitude of many of his local parents and said the "general feeling is that a lot of the kids are gifted". In his opinion most were simply "good average kids" whose parents "have an expectation that goes beyond what the school can provide. And then, if the kids aren't achieving at that high level... the pressure then goes on the teacher to look at their own personal performance to lift the kid's performance" (p. 3). Therefore, in this context, 'good' parents tempered "unrealistic expectations", and the Chesses, keen to do what was wanted, and in tune with the school's attitudes, may have been influenced by this. Later, when they came to feel that Carl had not had the smooth school experience they anticipated, the blame was laid, not with the school, despite the time he had spent there, but back with Blue Kindergarten.

The nature of school learning should also be considered in relation to Carl's transformation from "a very bright boy" to one who was fairly average. As noted earlier, the context in which Carl had excelled was as an 'apprentice', working alongside family members as they engaged in everyday tasks. His language was with familiar adults and revolved around shared meanings. His understanding and mastery of complex tasks was impressive to those around him. In school the measures of learning were different. There were few opportunities for deep conversation with Ms Keane and discussion was generally a whole class or group activity. Carl's reluctance to participate in this forum had the effect of providing few clues as to what he was thinking. The majority of school tasks were narrower than those he had been involved in at home and Carl's concern with following the rules meant he perhaps focussed on 'getting things right' but did not look for ways of extending his learning further. Carl's changing image as a learner can therefore also be understood in relation to the transition between learning contexts. As Marshall (1992) noted, the social context influences not only opportunities to learn but also what it means to learn. Hence, the definition of a learner is socially constructed. Marshall went on to suggest that:

Many children enter school with learning goals or the desire to master something new, but due to traditional behaviourist-derived classroom practices, such as extrinsic rewards, public comparative evaluation, ability grouping and the emphasis on visible products, performance goals become dominant. ...students enter school with goals that have potential consequences for the type of learner students become. What type of learner they actually become is influenced in large part by the classroom environment. (p. 16)

The elements noted by Marshall (1992) were not the only features of Ms Keane's classroom, but perhaps in Carl's case these gained particular salience due to the emphasis Carl's parents placed on such things. In Chapter Thirteen the impact of the

pedagogy and curriculum in the new entrant classrooms will be considered in relation to the 23 children's experiences.

The Learning Story framework (Carr, 2001) provides a useful framework for considering Carl's learning and identifying possible areas in which support could be given. Carl's story suggests different images of Carl as a learner at home and at school. Although at both home and school, Carl was interested and able to become involved, as time went on and the challenges increased, at school Carl's orientation to performance rather than mastery seemed to inhibit him from persisting when it was difficult. Caregivers have been shown to have a crucial role in overcoming temperamental inclinations that may lead to performance goals (Carr, 1998). The adults in Carl's life could have worked with him to foster learning goals rather than performance goals. Communicating with others seemed problematic for Carl at school, but not at home. Carl's interest in supporting his sister Carol's learning could perhaps have been incorporated into the school environment. Placing Carl in a peer-tutoring role may have been beneficial both for his communication and in encouraging him to take responsibility for his own and others' learning at school.

Parental involvement

Carl was the only child in the study who had both parents actively involved in the school context. In common with Lareau's (1989) findings, for most families, mothers were overwhelmingly responsible for shaping their children's school careers. Mr Chess's involvement was therefore unusual. However, the pattern of their involvement was consistent with other families in that Ms Chess still played the major role, even though Mr Chess took a more active role than the other fathers.

Ms Chess's regular parent helping helped her to establish rapport with Ms Keane and gave her insights into the school context. Thus for Carl there were strong, respectful mesosystem links between home and school, which as has already been noted, Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1992) saw as supportive of development. In addition, Ms Chess, and to a lesser degree Mr Chess, devoted substantial time and energy to monitoring Carl's school experience. There are many examples in his story of how the parents were able to identify a problem and mediate between Carl and school to resolve it. It is easy to see that without this constant, sensitive shaping by his parents, Carl's experiences of school may have been very different. Lareau (1989) wrote about the dark side of parent involvement, leading to stress for children and strain and tension in the family. Graue (1993b) picked up on this, saying that in some settings "parents were rabidly active in advancing an agenda for their children" (p. 257). While it is important to be alert to these possible issues, it is also important not to lose sight

of the very positive features of active parental involvement, when an appropriate balance can be found, as appears to have been the case with the Chesses and the teachers at Kowhai School.

While the Chesses were open in acknowledging that they expected that their input would have direct benefits for Carl, Ms Chess also found the experience enjoyable on a personal level. She found her engagement in school stimulating and was gratified to be treated as an equal by Carl's teachers. The fact that it was personally rewarding no doubt helped to maintain her involvement. Given that Ms Chess was highly critical of Carl's kindergarten teachers, Ms Keane's actions appear to have been influential in establishing an early positive relationship between the Chesses and school. The story showed how teachers could nurture the participation of a willing parent like Ms Chess to provide a relationship that was mutually beneficial. In Lareau's (1989) study, the middle-class parents treated the teachers as equals. Although the Chesses had friends who were teachers they had not expected an equal partnership. Their story showed that even when parents didn't expect to be treated as partners the teacher could foster such a relationship. Thus, although the Chess's brought some cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1993, 1997) to their interactions with the school, this was enhanced by the school's response to them. This was very different to the pattern evident in the next case study story, of Anna and her family.

5. Anna and the Arthur Family

Background

Anna lived with her mother, Ms Arthur, and her older siblings, Alan, Alice and Andrew. Ms Arthur described her occupation as 'mother' although she had a number of part time jobs throughout the years of the study. Anna enjoyed occasional contact with her father. "She gets really excited when she sees him or if she hears that she's going" (CS3.2, p. 24), and Ms Arthur's parents also played an important part in the family's life. Anna's drawing of her immediate family from her kindergarten folder is included in Appendix Q.

Ms Arthur was a friendly person who seemed to hold a number of key roles in the local community. She was very interested in educational issues, often citing material she had read and commented how much she was enjoying her two younger children, Andrew and Anna. "I don't think I understood so much when I had my older two 'cause I was still growing up myself probably, I hadn't lived myself, but I just thoroughly enjoy these two" (CS3.3, pp. 9-10). The Arthur's home, although more modest than some of the other case-study families', was filled with toys and appeared very welcoming and child-centred. On the first visit Anna and her friends were sliding down the stairs in sleeping bags. On another occasion the children were avidly swatting flies for cash rewards (10c for ten) and were keen to share with me both the body count and the amount of money earned in recent weeks.

At the start of the study Anna was four years and nine months old. She had been to playcentre from birth until she was four, with a break during the period when Andrew, her closest sibling in age, attended kindergarten. From age four she had attended Azure Kindergarten. Ms Arthur said, "She's been to preschool just about all her life" (CS3.1, p. 2). As a four-year-old Anna was described by her mother as a happy, caring, outgoing child, who enjoyed singing and dancing. However, when they had tried dancing lessons Anna had not wanted to participate. She was interested in writing but tended to do squiggles rather than letters, although she could write her name.

She does these little note books of squiggles all the way through and she's just about filled a whole note book with these squiggles, and she does it on pages and crossword puzzles so she's really wanting to try. (CS3.2, p. 11)

Observations of Anna at kindergarten indicated a quiet child who tended to play alongside rather than with other children and had little direct contact with the teachers. She had several interactions with Heather, who later started school on the same day as

Anna, but they did not appear to be close friends. Anna was purposefully engaged in a range of activities, including jigsaw puzzles and imaginative games with toys and playdough. She did not assert herself socially. For example, when all the dough was being used at the dough table she did not request that the children share with her, and wandered off, returning when some dough became available. At morning tea time when there wasn't a space at the table she sat alone on a cushion in the corner. However, when she was playing with some plastic dinosaurs and had them balanced on a log of wood she did state, "It's mine!" when a boy tried to take the log from her, but then moved slightly away to play with other logs. Anna showed persistence, both with puzzles, and when she attempted to get four plastic dinosaurs to balance on a log and was methodical in tidying up at tidy up time.

Anna's mother had selected Kowhai School for Anna because her other children went there and it was the closest school to their house. Ms Arthur knew many of the teachers and had attended the information evenings for both the junior and middle schools, and talked to other parents. She had found the information evenings very helpful in that they clarified "what the teachers expect" (CS3.1, p. 6). At the time of the first interview Anna had just been offered a place at Kowhai. Her mother had felt confident that Anna would be accepted, but wondered how the children were allocated to classes. Ms Arthur was hoping Anna would be in Ms Knight's class.

Three months before Anna's fifth birthday, her mother had no concerns about Anna starting school. Because of her personality she believed she would fit right in. "She just fits in everywhere.... She's just this outgoing person" (CS3.1, p. 4). Anna had frequently accompanied her mother and older siblings to school. She had also been in her brother Andrew's classroom when her mother was parent helping. Since she was about four and a half Anna had been calling out to children from kindergarten that had moved on to school whenever she visited. Her mother thought Anna was enthusiastic about starting because she kept saying, "That's my school. I'm going there" (CS3.1, p. 4).

Anna's mother was a little sad at the thought of Anna starting school, especially as this was the last child in the family, and also because she was such a pleasant child to have at home. "If she was a sullen little person who needed to be entertained all the time I don't think I would feel quite so sad. It's because she's such good company" (CS3.1, p. 4). However, she believed that she would have plenty to keep her busy when the time came.

They hadn't been involved in any specific activities in preparation for school, although Ms Arthur had made sure that Anna always had access to things like pencils, scissors, pens, etc. so she could learn to use them properly. Ms Arthur had been trying to encourage Anna to write letters but commented that this had been hard "she just did her own writing" (CS3.1, p. 8). However, as Anna neared her fifth birthday she started to show an interest in writing actual letters, but would sometimes get "very uptight" if she thought she couldn't write them (CS3.2, p. 11). Her mother hadn't pushed her because she thought, "well she's not ready" (CS3.2, p. 11).

She's really interested in writing but she won't do real letters, but she can write her name now. She just does these books. She's got a little notebook and pieces of paper, and she just does scrawls.... So she's very interested in writing. Every time I try and show her some letters she just gets frustrated. She hasn't been as bad this week. I wrote a few letters and she wrote them underneath, so maybe she's just getting to that stage where it looks right for her. (CS3.1, p10)

Ms Arthur had also followed the advice of different teachers to "take your children everywhere and anywhere" to give them broad experiences and to support their development of language and other skills (CS3.1, p. 5). She thought that teachers liked children to have a good vocabulary and general knowledge, to be able to hold a pencil and to know "which way to read a book" (CS3.1, p. 9).

Two of Anna's siblings had had traumatic times at school, especially at the beginning. The first, Alan, had hated school and had experienced difficulties learning to read. Ms Arthur recalled having to "drag him to school screaming" (CS3.2, p. 2). The other brother, Andrew, was described by Ms Arthur as a quiet, deep thinker, who had felt very insecure at school and had not enjoyed kindergarten very much either. At school, although academically very capable he had lack confidence socially. She described having to "cajole" Andrew to get him to school and how he had experienced sleepwalking and nightmares throughout his first year. Even now, as a seven-year-old, Andrew was occasionally reluctant to go to school. Ms Arthur reflected that the school's policy of wanting parents to "drop your child off and go" may well be appropriate for children like Anna, who she had found coped with this approach at kindergarten, but was not necessarily helpful with children like Andrew. She believed that Andrew's problems would have been less acute if she had been allowed to stay with him until he felt more settled. Despite these earlier experiences, Anna's mother expected a much easier transition for Anna. "I know she's ready [for school]" (CS3.1, p. 12).

School visits

At the time of the first interview Ms Arthur anticipated that Anna would be allowed one or two school visits and thought that given Anna's knowledge of the school, this would be enough. With her older children she had felt that more visits would have been useful to allow them to become more familiar with school, but the kindergarten teachers at Azure had apparently discouraged her from asking for more, saying, "Oh no. You only do one visit" (CS3.1, p. 6).

In the end Anna had one school visit with a group from Azure Kindergarten. Ms Arthur thought this had been useful because Anna had got to meet her teacher, Ms Keane and had seen her classroom. Anna met Ms Keane again at the kindergarten lunch meeting, which Anna went to with her grandmother, as Ms Arthur was unwell at the time. Ms Arthur had requested Ms Knight as Anna's teacher and so initially felt a little disappointed, especially as she had "had nothing at all to do with her [Ms Keane] at all, so I didn't have any idea what she was like". However, after Anna started she said she was "quite happy" with Ms Keane (CS3.2, p. 3). The explanation Ms Arthur was given was that Ms Knight had already had one of her children and "We like to share them around".

Like Tessa, Anna's birthday fell during the holidays so there was quite a wait after her one school visit until she actually started school. Ms Arthur would have quite liked another visit for Anna but didn't ask for one. "I still think a few more visits would be helpful, just to get them more familiar. It seems to disrupt the classroom too much but even an afternoon visit when they're not doing such structured work you'd think might just get to know the children and the teachers a bit more" (CS3.2, p. 5). Because of her long association with the school Ms Arthur didn't feel the need to observe in the classroom before Anna started but thought that this was important for first time parents. "This is your child's life, it's nice to know what's happening to your child" (CS3.2, p. 6).

In the last weeks before Anna started school, Ms Arthur believed that Anna was "hyped up" and "pretty excited about going". The number of birthday celebrations at Azure Kindergarten just prior to the holidays also added to the "hype" (CS3.2, p. 7). Ms Ashby (the kindergarten teacher) felt that it was important that every child had his or her own special day to celebrate turning five so when a number of birthdays fell in the holidays each child was allocated a day prior to the holiday as a "kindergarten birthday" (Ms Ashby, p. 18). This had resulted in "so many birthdays one after the other. There was a birthday every day" in the last weeks before Anna started school and Anna kept asking, "When is it going to be my turn?" (CS3.2, p. 7).

Once she knew what class Anna was going to Ms Arthur made a point of inviting some of the children who would be in her class to Anna's birthday party at home. As Ms Arthur was still unwell Anna's grandmother had organised the party.

First weeks of school

Anna started on the first day of the fourth term. She had been excited right up until they got into the classroom on the first day, then when the bell rang she clung to her mother, who "hadn't really expected that from her" (CS3.2, p. 1). However, Ms Arthur explained what would happen and got her settled beside Child 15, a boy that she knew, and was able to leave without Anna getting upset.

Considering her own feelings, Ms Arthur said she was "caught up in her [Anna's] excitement and I was trying to make it a really neat experience for her". She hadn't felt as "devastated" as when her first child started and thought that was due partly to being "more adjusted to it", having had four children now start school, and partly "because I felt that Anna was happy about being there, whereas Alan hadn't [been]" (CS3.2, p. 12).

After the first day Anna commented that she didn't know *anybody* in her class. In fact, she knew about eight of the children from kindergarten, including Child 15 and Heather, and some of them had attended her birthday party, but her mother thought the problem might have been that she didn't know *everybody*. Unlike kindergarten, there were a lot of unfamiliar people as well as the ones that she did know. "It was just all these children that she didn't know the names of, whereas at kindy she'd known nearly every name, because she was the oldest. It's just getting to the top and then suddenly you are at the bottom again" (CS3.2, p. 4). Andrew, the only sibling still at primary school, was sympathetic but offered little practical support, saying he "forgot" that he had a sister at school so didn't spend time with her and was delighted that he was sick on the day that he was supposed to introduce Anna to the whole school (Andrew in CS3.2, p. 19).

Anna was pleased with the book that she brought home on the first day, and after three days was telling people "I can read three books" because she had brought home three books on three different days (CS3.2, p. 8).

It wouldn't matter that I could have shown her the same book a few days later and she couldn't read it. She was really excited about that.... She got a lot of kicks out of getting the little book and reading it to S [a younger child]... to actually be able to read a book to someone else. (CS3.2, p. 8)

On subsequent mornings Anna did her classroom jobs and then spent the time before school started walking to her brother's classroom with her mother and her brother. Her mother reported that Anna (like Nicola) was "a bit dubious" about being in the classroom from 8.40 and 9.00 a.m. because there wasn't any routine then (CS3.2, p. 16). Once school started she seemed quite happy, and she learnt the classroom routines quickly. Ms Arthur was aware that the teachers liked the children to be independent so she ensured that Anna carried her own bag and tried to make her responsible for the jobs that had to be done each day.

An observation of Anna just days after she started showed her at the front at mat time, completing the date and weather charts.

A student teacher shows Anna the cards with the days of the week on them and Anna places the one that says Tuesday on the chart. Child 21 says the date is the 15th and Anna finds the numeral 15 and puts in the date space. The student teacher asks what the weather is like. Anna says it's sunny. The children call out "Cloudy". Anna and the student go to the door. Anna comes back saying "It's windy because it's cold".

Anna finds it difficult to put the hands of the clock in the right place to show the correct time. A boy helps her but he has trouble too. Eventually they get the hands in the right place and the student counts the minutes with them in fives, 5 to 25. Anna draws a picture in the space on the weather chart. (Summary of observation 15.10)

At the end of mat time the student asked what the children had been writing about the day before. A few children helped to spell words on the whiteboard that related to the topic of their writing, a recent visit to calf club day. Then the children moved off the mat to their tables. The task was to complete a letter that the children began writing the day before. Anna was away when the letter was started so didn't have one to finish. Figure 11 summarises what happened.

9.35 Anna sits at the table she has been sent to. A boy moves Anna out of the seat she is sitting in and she wanders around. Carl is directed to his letter by the student teacher. The other children are working on letters they have been writing. Anna doesn't have a letter but she does have a new exercise book on her desk.

9.40 Anna continues to stand. Child 15 asks her if she has finished. He reads her name on the exercise book and gives it back to her. Anna stands on the mat looking confused. She plays with her trousers, dances and looks at the words on the board.

Anna moves beside Child 13, who looks upset. The student sharpens a pencil and gives it to Child 13. Anna wanders around and picks up a pencil that has been left on a seat (she has possibly been looking for a pencil all this time).

9.45 Anna goes back to her table and sits beside her book. She lines the pencil up with the edge of the book and reports to the boys at her table "I haven't actually finished my

one of these [letters]". She opens her book, which is brand new and has nothing in it. She makes a tiny mark on the first page and then scribbles on the paper covering the table top, using the wrong end of her pencil. She examines the marks she has made.
 9.50 Anna puts her book up to her face. She scribbles darkly on the paper on the table.
 9.55 Anna goes to look in the pencil tin. She finds a green pencil, which she gives to Heather. She supervises Heather sharpening the pencil and then does it for her. When Child 12 queries why Heather has written on a piece of paper (Heather doesn't have a letter either as she was also away the day before) Anna claims "She's allowed".
 10.00 The student teacher talks to Anna, who hasn't written anything yet. Fifteen minutes later Anna still hasn't written anything. The student returns and writes a sentence in Anna's book and Anna adds the final word 'rabbits' (see Appendix R).

After the writing activity the children tidied up and sat on the mat. Heather invited Anna to sit with her and Jenny. The student complimented Heather on how well she was sitting. It was Heather and Anna's turn to lead the lines of children to the toilet. As the two girls stand by the door the student says how good Heather has been, but doesn't say anything about Anna. (Summary of observation 15.10)

Figure 11. An observation of Anna during a letter writing activity

Later that same morning the children were asked to colour a worksheet using repeating patterns. The wax crayons the children were provided with were quite old and all the dark colours in the tub looked much the same until they were used. Ms Keane may not have understood Anna's explanation that her last pattern contained an unwanted blue flag because "I thought it was black" (Obs. 15.10, p. 8) but the equipment meant this was an easy mistake to make. Apart from this accidental error, Anna's patterns were more advanced than those of the others in her group. Two days later Anna was observed participating during shared reading and then completing a worksheet that involved going over dots to form the letters 'I am' in a sentence that read 'I am happy'. After she finished she wrote her name but had trouble fitting it into the small space provided. She drew a quick picture, as required.

The observations suggested that Anna was capable of the tasks required of her providing she knew what was required and had access to the appropriate materials. They also suggested that while Anna seemed to be part of the group of new children in the classroom she didn't appear to have a 'special' friend. This may also have underpinned her comments to her family that she "didn't know anyone". Later it will be seen that Heather, who started school on the same day as Anna, had very different experiences in the classroom because she had a close friend who supported her. Not having a special friend meant Anna largely had to fend for herself. It was also problematic when children had to line up in pairs (something that happened several times a day) and for activities. Teachers would pair children who were not chosen by friends and often these arranged pairs seemed uncomfortable together, like during a PE

lesson when Anna was put with one of the boys. He refused to hold her hand when they were supposed to, and although Anna enthusiastically took part in the ball activities that followed, the boy spent much of the time just holding the ball instead of throwing or rolling it back to her.

In an attempt to foster friendship Ms Arthur invited a girl from Anna's class to their house to play one day after school. Both girls were excited about the proposed visit. Ms Keane wrote it on the board and Anna and the other girl were observed talking about it during the day. However, Ms Arthur described the actual event as "a disaster". Used to having lots of children in the house Ms Arthur left the two girls playing in Anna's bedroom, but later found Anna had gone outside, leaving the playmate crying by herself. Then they had both gone outside together, but again the visitor was found on her own and crying. Ms Arthur was never sure exactly what had happened but felt that "something went drastically wrong" and the girl was unwilling to come back again (CS3.2, p. 18). She wondered if the girls had been too tired or whether perhaps the two personalities were both too domineering.

Despite a few issues over friends, it seemed that Anna had made a reasonably happy start, but then she caught a flu-type virus in her third week and had to spend a week at home. Ms Arthur said that she normally went to school to collect work for the older children when they were unwell but she had felt that Anna was "too sick to handle that. She was just as weak as" (CS3.2, p. 5). Anna returned for mornings only at first, but her mother wondered if these had been too much for her as she was still tired. After being ill, Anna's whole attitude to school changed and she reported that "I hate school. I only like playing and the eating. I don't like the writing" (CS3.2, p. 1). Although she verbally expressed a dislike of school she didn't "perform or anything" (CS3.1, p. 2), like her brothers had, although some days she was a little clingy and her mother had to ensure that the teacher was talking to her before she could get away. Anna also experienced a nightmare soon after she started (Field notes 15.10) and had a few disturbed nights, but these were not as serious as the nightmares that had been a regular occurrence for Andrew.

Her mother had heard that children often take a step backwards after they had been at school for a couple of weeks (something which Ms Knight firmly believed too) so she wasn't sure if this change of attitude had been caused by Anna's illness, or was something that was likely to happen anyway. Her response to Anna had been "Well everybody has to go to school and there's no way out of it" (CS3.2, p. 2).

The rest of the term

After two months at school Anna was still telling people that she didn't like school, which her mother thought was "a bit of a worry" (CS3.2, p. 9). Her mother felt that Anna was coping with the social aspects, although lunchtimes could be problematic and Ms Arthur noted "every time I've seen her in the playground she's always by herself", something I (the researcher) had noticed too. However, the main issue was that Anna was not coping with the work as well as Ms Arthur had expected. "She's flying with maths but she's just not learning her alphabet. She know five capitals and three lower case" (CS3.2, p. 4). "Writing is the main thing that she doesn't like. She obviously finds that hard" (CS3.2, p. 11).

Before Anna went to school one of her biggest interests had been filling little note books with 'writing', and her mother commented "everybody's fascinated with all these squiggles" (CS3.1, p. 11). However, she had resisted her mother's attempts to teach her to write letters, saying "I don't know how to" (CS3.2, p. 11). By the time she got to school her early writing efforts appeared similar to those of her peers (see Appendix R) but clearly she was not enjoying it.

While Anna expressed a dislike of writing, Ms Keane had also identified Anna's letter recognition skills as a problem. Ms Keane suggested that the family work with Anna to help her learn the letters, and they had been doing this, but without much success:

So we worked on two [letters] over the weekend and at the end of the weekend she still didn't know them. We were doing fun games and doing things all the time so there is a mental block there. (CS3.2, p. 4)

She doesn't even know the letter 'm' and yet we've talked about the letter 'm' every time we've come down the road. 'There's 'm' for McDonalds' but the two haven't connected. (CS3.2, p. 12)

As I said to her [teacher] after the weekend 'Look we've worked on 't' and 'q' all weekend and she still doesn't know them. We've had fun games and finding it in books... taking out the pieces of her jigsaw puzzle and seeing if she can remember which one it is and doing the tongue twister rhymes, and if I point to the 't' or the 'q' she still doesn't know what they are'. (CS3.2, p. 19)

Anna's mother wasn't too sure how she felt about this. On the one hand she believed that the letter knowledge would eventually "just click" (CS3.2, p. 4) but she was aware that the teacher was worried that this wasn't happening fast enough. "I didn't think it [letter recognition] was such a big issue but her teacher seemed to think it was quite a big issue" (CS3.2, p. 19). So the teacher's concern had made Ms Arthur a little fearful

that that this could indicate on-going problems "I have had enough trouble with Alan [the oldest child] not learning how to read and write. It would be nice just to have it a bit easier this time" (CS3.2, p. 5).

Given that Anna was apparently having trouble with learning the letters her mother began to question whether she had in fact been 'ready' to start school. "I think if she had been totally ready she would have picked them up more easily" (CS3.2, p. 12).

Now I know about these letters and things I wonder whether I would have held her back for six months or so, just until she was more ready, because that's going to be a struggle for her if she's not grasping that, she's going to get upset like she does, that's not going to make it a happy experience for her. If she says she hates writing then she's obviously not ready for it, so maybe it was too early. (CS3.2, p. 13)

Ms Arthur knew that Anna's difficulties weren't due to lack of opportunity in her preschool years as they had already been engaged in relevant activities, but "it just didn't work with her, it just doesn't connect" (CS3.2, p. 13). Therefore she wondered if there was a maturational aspect that needed to be taken into account and she was beginning to wonder whether Anna would in fact learn anything in her first year at school.

Having now observed her four children's transitions to school, and the experiences of numerous other friends' children, some of whom were home schooled or had delayed starting school until the children were six, Ms Arthur questioned whether it was appropriate for all children to start school at age five. She wondered if the transition could be less traumatic for some children if they were able to stay at kindergarten a little longer. Looking back to when her older son started Ms Arthur said, "I don't know why I did it now, looking back, but I was only twenty at the time so I didn't really know there were any other options.... If I was as old as I am now I would have just kept him at home until he was six. Maybe he wouldn't have hated school so much" (CS3.2, p. 2). She wasn't sure whether the teachers would encourage parents to hold their children back though, and this being the case, she felt that perhaps the school could have a different focus for the children who experienced difficulties with the existing requirements:

Because she's obviously not ready to do the letters just yet, but a few months in the classroom just doing other things relevant to it, and then gradually go into the letters, rather than pushing her straight into the letters on the first day. (CS3.2, p. 14)

There was much that Anna could do, especially in mathematics, where she seemed more capable than many of her peers, and even in writing, when the motivation was there, as it was perhaps in her letter to Santa (see Appendix R) but her abilities seemed to be overlooked in the face of one or two areas that her teacher was concerned about. Anna's transition was marred by the view that she was a child who was struggling and this seemed to impact on her view of herself as a learner and her willingness to engage in activities.

In both reading and writing Ms Arthur soon found that Anna tended to get upset "if she doesn't think she knows it... if she thinks she's going to have to struggle and you are not going to tell her she gets upset" (CS3.2, p. 11). She didn't really like drawing either, and Anna would often say "I can't draw" (CS3.2, p. 13). At home Ms Arthur noticed Anna tended to be hesitant about tasks that her mother was sure could do:

The TV is one good example. She'll want to watch a video and she knows exactly how to do it. She puts in the video 'Which channel is it?' Every time. 'Which channel is it?' So now I just say 'You know which channel Anna. If you can't figure it out don't watch the video' and she presses the button but every time it's the same thing so I'm wondering if it's the same sort of thing [as the problems recognising letters] and she does really know; she's just not concentrating, or whether she really is struggling with it. It's hard to know with her. (CS3.2, p. 20)

I wondered if Anna was unwilling to risk being wrong. Anna was obedient in the classroom and very proud of was the fact that she hadn't been naughty at school and had never had her name written on the blackboard like some of the other children. Perhaps her desire to be good extended to a view that it was better not to say anything rather than make a mistake.

Observations of Anna, two months after she started school revealed further possible causes and consequences of her 'struggling' label and her attitude. A number of incidences have been drawn from the data to illustrate this:

It is mat time and a boy stands at the front with an object concealed in a box. The children are to guess what is in the box.

Boy It has got a black nose and black eyes. It has got green on it.

? I know.

Boy chooses a girl, Child 12.

Child 12 Is it a moving Santa?

Boy No.

Ms Keane Good guess.

Boy chooses Anna.

Anna Is it a bear?

Boy Yes.

Ms Keane What sort of bear Anna?
 Anna doesn't reply and without allowing any wait time the teacher moves on.
 Ms Keane Anyone else got some ideas? Yes [Boy 3]?
 Boy 3 Teddy bear?
 Boy A teddy bear but it's....
 Boy 2 Polar bear?
 Ms Keane A Santa Bear.
 (A Santa Bear is a white teddy bear sold by one of the large department stores at Christmas time)
 (Observation 11.12/1, p. 7)

Despite making an accurate guess (the object in the box was a bear) there was no affirmation given by the teacher. In fact the second question, lack of wait time for Anna to process an answer and respond, and the teacher's "Anyone else got some ideas?" was perhaps discouraging rather than encouraging. Later that morning the children were guessing a number the teacher was thinking of using questions in the form "Is it between 5 and 3?" "Is it under number 17?" The teacher had a 100 board and turned over the numbers that were eliminated. This form of questioning may have been unfamiliar to the new children and Anna did not venture to ask a question, shaking her head when given the opportunity. No effort was made to explain the nature of the activity further in an attempt to get her to participate. However, when Heather made an incorrect response she was encouraged to have another go.

Ms Keane Heather you ask a question.
 Heather Is it between 1 and 2?
 Ms Keane There is no number between one and two is there? Ask again.
 Heather Is it between 12 and 14?
 Ms Keane No it's not number 13.
 (Observation 11.12/3, p. 6)

The final activity of the morning was to complete a mathematics worksheet. The one for Anna's group involved colouring by numbers. When Ms Keane introduced the activity, her explanation began "Anna you will need to look carefully dear...". Anna was the only child who was specifically mentioned by name, and the teacher's manner seemed to imply that Anna may experience difficulties. However, Anna actually worked more quickly than the other children.

Anna colours in neatly, working more quickly than the other children in her group. She also keeps an eye on the other children's work and corrects one of the boys when he uses dark instead of light blue and points out to Carl that he is using green instead of blue. Carl asserts that "It's a funny blue" and is supported by the teacher who says "It is light blue" [The actual colour was a light green/blue shade.]. As the children

work, the conversation turns to the classroom numbers, which are in the process of being changed. The boys discuss how high the numbers might go up to and Anna offers "Did you know that zero is way up the end of the numbers?" This is immediately squashed by the others:

Boy No. Zero is way at the bottom and 100 is at the top.

Girl Yeah 100 is the last number right?

Boy And zero is the bottomist number. That's first. Zero, one two three, four, five, six, seven.

Anna doesn't speak again, apart from to me, when she shows me that she has coloured light green in the areas marked 6 and 9 and wonders what she should do. I suggest that the required pink colour could go over the top of the green in the areas marked 9. Anna completes her sheet, puts her name on the back and puts in into her school bag. (Summary of observation, 11.12/3&4)

Anna's persistence with tasks was evident, even in the face of direct criticism from peers, as the following excerpt shows. (This is expanded in more detail in Heather's story.)

The children are seated at a table colouring in Christmas cards.

Heather Anna's is dumb eh?

Jenny Anna's is not the dumbest but it is dumb.

Two minutes later....

Heather Look at mine. She [Ms Keane] likes mine.

Jenny And mine.

Anna And mine.

Heather [To Anna] But I don't like yours.

Anna And I don't like yours.

Heather But I like [boy's].

Jenny I like all those people's.

Anna Even mine?

Jenny Yeah.

Despite the negative comments Anna spent a further 25 minutes colouring her card, telling the teacher "It's to me" when told she had to write in it.

(Summary of observation 11.12/2, p. 2)

Ms Keane had given Ms Arthur the information sheet about the classroom routines and invited her to parent help at any time. So far she had managed to do this once, and had enjoyed it, saying it had provided an opportunity to "see how the classroom was working while you were doing your little job" (CS3.2, p. 15). Anna didn't take a lot of notice of her on the day that she stayed to help, Ms Arthur and wasn't sure whether Anna had liked having her there or not. She would have liked to help more often but other commitments made this difficult.

As Anna's first term drew to a close the only feedback from the teacher was on the problems Anna had with letter recognition, and Ms Arthur wasn't sure that Anna had made much progress academically during this time. Anna had changed from being bright and enthusiastic to expressing a firm dislike of school.

Looking back

When the Arthur family was revisited 20 months after Anna started school, Ms Arthur explained that Anna had remained "disgruntled" throughout her first year at school but a turning point had come when Anna was placed in Reading Recovery at age six. In Reading Recovery, Anna had made a dramatic improvement and had been "over the moon". Ms Arthur was also delighted, saying that Reading Recovery "worked beautifully". Now, although Anna was not in the top group, she was enjoying reading. Ms Arthur described how just recently when Anna's grandfather had been visiting:

She [Anna] picked up a Noddy book and went and sat on my father's lap and started reading it to him.... I mean he was just sitting there with his mouth open, saying to me [exclamation] because he'd heard her struggle the last time he heard her read (CS3.3, p. 2).

The Reading Recovery teacher had given Ms Arthur suggestions for things to work on with Anna and things to look out for and she felt that Anna's new teacher was encouraging Anna's writing by having a mail box system where the children could write letters to others in the class. "Anna always writes to [teacher] and she gets these letters back". Ms Arthur viewed the teacher's willingness to engage in this way very positively. "I mean, it's above and beyond the call of duty isn't it?" (CS3.3, p. 3).

Anna's improved reading ability had led to greater confidence and interest in other aspects of learning. "She wants to learn. Like if I want to do little things with her at home she doesn't just go off in a huff.... She wants to learn". Ms Arthur reflected "They say they do most of their learning before three, but she's still very eager" (CS3.3, p. 4). Seeing Anna's current development Ms Arthur reiterated her previous view about readiness, saying that in her view some children were able to read before they went to school, and others simply weren't capable until later. However, she felt the one-to-one aspect of the Reading Recovery programme and the fact that it was fun, coupled with Anna's own determination contributed to the breakthrough.

Looking back on the unhappiness of Anna's first year, Ms Arthur felt Ms Keane's comment that Anna wasn't learning to read and the tasks they had tried to do at home had placed pressure on her and Anna, and generated a fear in Ms Arthur that Anna was going to be a problem all through school. She acknowledged that "I don't think that

was how it was supposed to come across but that's how it did come across to me" (CS3.3, p. 6). Now she thought Anna had only needed to be a bit older and thought teachers needed to appreciate that "some children are ready to go and some aren't" and forcing children could make them "really anti" (CS3.3, p. 7 & p. 6).

As well as improving in reading Ms Arthur though Anna was doing well in mathematics. In a recent Maths-a-thon the teacher had apparently told Ms Arthur that "nobody gets 20 out of 20" but Anna had achieved full marks. Ms Arthur sent the marked paper down to Anna's grandparents and her father had returned it with "Excellent Anna. Grandpa even couldn't have done better.... She [Anna] thought this was wonderful!" (CS3.3, p. 12).

Anna's final comments

When Anna was interviewed as an eight-year-old she appeared a little nervous at first and we stopped for a few minutes for her to get a drink. However she seemed more relaxed as the interview progressed.

Anna said she liked school and that she was "quite happy". Her favourite thing was "artwork" (Anna, p. 2) but she only "sort of" liked writing stories, saying, "I like reading better" (Anna, p. 6). As with Carl and Steve, the move to being a Year Three child in a Year Three and Four class had been coupled with being separated from the three girls she was friendly with. For Anna, for whom establishing friendships had always been difficult, this seemed particularly unfortunate as she was, once again, without a close friend in her class. "I only have one. She's not really my friend but I sometimes play with her... If I don't have anyone to play with I just sort of cry" (p. 6).

Although Anna said she couldn't remember much about when she started school she did recall doing spelling. She said she had felt "a bit scared sort of... 'Cause I had never been to school before and I was used to kindergarten" and she had thought "there might be just one place". After a break for a drink she continued "I didn't expect that there was (pause) books and stuff and I thought there was puppets but there wasn't, 'cause there is puppets at kindergarten" (Anna, p. 1). Asked whether she preferred kindergarten or school Anna responded "I felt both was the same" (Anna, p. 2).

In considering whether parents could do anything to make it easier for children when they first started school Anna said they should "stay with them so that they don't get too scared or something, if they don't have any work. They should just quit work for a little while and then go back". Teachers on the other hand, if children "have done all their homework... could say 'You can play with this much more time to do it'". If new

entrant children appeared to not know what they were supposed to do "The teachers could tell them again if they didn't hear" and all adults "should help children with their homework and stuff" (Anna, p. 4).

In Anna's view four-year-olds didn't need to be able to do anything specific before they started school but she thought they should be told "that they have to do spelling" and "Don't play with matches". They also needed to "listen to their teacher... and do what they're told. And try and sit up nicely and not talk. And not be silly.... [Silly was discussed as meaning] Like taking someone's things and saying 'Ha ha I got your things'". She would tell them that the best thing about school was "That you get some play and you get some work" (Anna, pp. 1-2).

If four-year-olds wondered what to do at lunchtime she would tell them that "you play with your friends or if you have none to play with you can play in the playgrounds". She thought school could be improved by "more playgrounds and make sure everyone's got a friend.... If they have no one to play with you could say 'Do you want to be my friend?'" (Anna, p. 3).

Although she said art was one of her favourite subjects, Anna said "I can't draw very well" (Anna, p. 5) when asked if she would like to draw something to show four-year-olds what school was like. However she was willing to do some pictures provided she could draw stick people because that made it "easier to draw" (Anna, p. 5). She drew two children seated at a table doing their work (see Appendix R). Anna was the only child to do additional pictures, sending a bundle of six drawings to me in the stamped addressed envelope that had been left for that purpose. Two showed the playgrounds, two showed children clearly offering support or friendship but the remaining two were more ambiguous, with a smiling figure who may be offering support but could equally be the perpetrator of the second figure's distress (see Appendix R for an example).

Additional comments

One of the other case study mothers mentioned Anna when her eight-year-old was being interviewed:

Everyday you say to Anna 'Did you have a good day?' 'No! It was awful!' 'Oh.'. I asked her the other day 'How's your day going?' 'Awful. It was terrible!' 'What makes it so terrible?' 'I don't know.'..... Ms Arthur is wonderful with kids but Anna is cross sometimes. She still has these awful days.

Hence, although Anna's comments to me were reasonably positive, it seemed that she did not always convey the same message about her experiences at school to others.

Discussion: Reflections on the Anna and Arthur family's story

Anna's story was very revealing. It showed how a happy, eager little girl, who came to school with lots of skills, and appeared to be well supported initially in her path to becoming a pupil, could very quickly become someone who was identified as having problems and how this, in turn, impacted on her attitude towards school. Although Anna did not show the outward signs of distress displayed by some of the other children, hers was perhaps the most difficult transition. Her story provides useful insights that could prevent other children experiencing similar problems, and these are the focus of this section of reflections.

A potential problem?

Anna and her family were well known to some of the teachers. Ms Arthur was a supportive and involved parent, but two of her children had had very traumatic transitions to school. Although Ms Knight had been asked for, the decision to "share them [the Arthur children] around" could have been the school's approach to sharing the workload of children who were perceived by the teachers as potentially difficult. Ms Keane, who knew nothing of Anna or Ms Arthur personally, may therefore have created an image of Anna based on hearsay about her older brothers.

In addition, teachers may form global expectations about children because of their family background. As noted in Chapter Two, recent research found that teachers formulated erroneous beliefs about the school entry skills of children from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Timperley, 2003; Timperley, et al., 1999). At Kowhai, where the general socioeconomic level was high, Anna's comparatively lower socioeconomic status may have contrasted with that of other children at the school, and influenced Ms Keane's view of her. The self-fulfilling nature of teacher beliefs about children has been well documented (see Timperley, 2003).

While Ms Keane may have viewed Anna as a potential problem, Anna may also have formulated a similar impression of school, based on her older siblings' attitudes. Alan's traumatic transition occurred before she was born, but his comments about school were still negative. With a two-year age difference between them, she would have been aware of Andrew's distress when he started school and his ongoing concerns. Being a girl, Anna may have aligned herself with her sister Alice, whose view of school seemed fairly neutral, and Ms Arthur, who was enthusiastic, but there was considerable evidence within the family that school might not be a positive

experience. Although Anna was familiar with the school grounds, she had only one brief visit to the classroom, so there was little first-hand information to counter the impressions provided by her brothers.

Deficit models of assessment

If Ms Keane was predisposed to view Anna as a potential problem, it may explain why the results of Anna's new entrant assessment had such a negative impact on her transition. The new entrant assessments used at Kowhai School were of the type that Carr (2001, p. 3) described as her "folk model" of assessment, where children's achievement is checked against a list of skills. In Anna's case the new entrant assessment revealed problems in her ability to name the letters of the alphabet. Alphabet knowledge clearly acted as an informal norm in this context, and Anna's performance on the tests contributed to her reputation as a learner. Alphabet knowledge became a major focus for intervention, which overshadowed much of Anna's first year at school. Ms Arthur struggled to fill in the gaps when alerted by Ms Keane, and this created tension for both Anna and her mother. This form of assessment had the effect of highlighting one area of difficulty, rather than providing a holistic picture of Anna's abilities, perhaps leading Ms Keane to overlook Anna's strengths in other areas.

Anna's reputation as a child who was struggling affected her classroom experiences. This was evident even within tasks that she found easy (as in the maths example where her teacher's manner seemed to imply that Anna might experience difficulties). The image of Anna as a learner was further shaped by her difficulties with reading and writing. An alternative model of assessment, looking at the learner in action, would have provided a very different picture. As the example of the letter-writing activity (Figure 11) showed, in this instance Anna was inhibited by problems of finding the materials required, rather than the process of writing. Understanding Anna's experience within the socio-cultural milieu of the classroom gives a far better understanding of Anna's difficulties as a learner than the work she produced. On other days when the task was clear and the resources were available, Anna was capable of meeting the requirements. The Learning Story model of assessment (Carr, 2001), which starts from a credit base and considers interaction of individual and environment, would alert a teacher to the fact that Anna was interested in the tasks, but sometimes experienced difficulties in becoming involved because of the nature of the tasks or the lack of appropriate resources. Being alert to these issues would help a teacher ensure these easily rectified issues do not inhibit children's involvement. Tasks could also be changed to make it easier for children to become involved. Carr (1998) wrote about being playful as a feature of involvement. As earlier stories

demonstrated, some case study children were able to playfully create their own agendas, even within structured tasks. However, it was difficult for a child like Anna, who was concerned with getting things right, to be playful in this way. It is easy to see how such tasks lead to a focus on performance goals, which can inhibit learning (Smiley & Dweck, 1994). Another step in facilitating children's involvement would therefore be to increase the flexibility of tasks to allow for more opportunities for playing around with materials and ideas.

It seems worth exploring credit-based models of assessment, especially at the new entrant level. The assessments used at Kowhai did not pick up Anna's enthusiasm for writing, displayed as a four-year-old in her copious notebooks of scrawl, which could have provided an important foundation for literacy at school. Nor did it pick up on Anna's initial joy in bringing books home to read to a younger child. Anna could have been helped to build on her existing interests and skills, instead of being faced with tasks she was unable to do successfully, leading to a dislike of literacy activities. The deficit model of assessment also overlooked Anna's incredible resilience and persistence. Instead of nurturing these important qualities, the school context seemed designed to weaken them through lack of awareness and encouragement.

Ready or not?

A strong thread in Anna's story is the notion of readiness. Her one kindergarten-organised school visit gave her teachers no cause for concern and Ms Arthur, based on her knowledge of school and her awareness of her other children's experiences, felt Anna was 'ready'. Later, because of the difficulties Anna experienced with letter recognition, reading and writing, Ms Arthur came to question whether Anna had in fact been 'ready', although she did also question the appropriateness of the tasks Anna was faced with. When readiness is located as something within the child it overlooks the interaction between the different elements of transition. As Graue (1993a) has noted, part of readiness depends on what the child is asked to do. Anna's story suggests that readiness is also dependent on the support children are provided with that enables them to do what they are asked. Anna often lacked assistance from either teachers or peers, which meant she was limited to activities she could already do, rather being supported in her zone of proximal development to achieve new skills (Vygotsky, 1978a).

Friends and acquaintances

At kindergarten, Anna's tendency to play alone was not problematic because she was able to select her activities and follow her own agendas. At school, where there was a set agenda to be followed, the same behaviour was detrimental because Anna had little

help from peers to meet the demands of the tasks. This seemed to be influenced by her lack of friends in the classroom. Firstly, she missed the deliberate help friends provided, which will be seen in Heather's story. Secondly, in activities where children were required to work with others, the teacher paired the children who did not have friends to work with. On these occasions, an unsupportive partner could prevent learning, as was the case with the boy Anna was paired with during PE, who prevented her participation. Thus, while Anna was willing to act as a resource for others, something Cullen (1988) has included as an effective learning strategy, this wasn't reciprocated in the observations. Hence she was unable to use peers as a resource, another of Cullen's strategies. Similarly, although there was evidence of her seeking to communicate with others and take responsibility in the classroom (Carr, 2001), for Anna the social context was not supportive of this.

Anna's struggle to become involved in classroom activities without the support of friends, and being overlooked even when she was successful, meant her resulting low status within the class may then have worked against her achieving the acceptance she clearly desired. Pollard and Filer (1999) have provided insights into the complex relationship between academic performance and peer relationships. They revealed the important connection between teachers' actions and perceptions of a child and his/her role, acceptance and status within the peer group. Where a teacher's actions facilitated and promoted a positive image of a child, this supported the child's peer relationships and a positive cycle of learning and development was likely to develop. In contrast, if a child's approach to learning and identity was not accommodated or valued, this could become part of a negative cycle of deteriorating relationships and loss of motivation, often accompanied by unhappiness and a lack of enthusiasm for school. This was exactly the pattern that could be seen in Anna's story.

Ms Keane, although alert to the issue of children's friendships, seemed to have overlooked Anna's social isolation. This was possibly because Anna had been to the local kindergarten and knew a number of children in her class, which teachers and parents saw as an important factor in supporting the transition to school. However, Anna's story demonstrated that familiarity was not always sufficient to move from acquaintance to friend, and her complaint that she didn't know anyone, and description of feeling scared in a place that was very different to kindergarten, suggest that there was little comfort in having acquaintances. When Ladd (1990) distinguished between acquaintances and friends, he also found that there was no correlation between the number of acquaintances children had in the classroom and their adjustment to school. Therefore it may be beneficial for parents and teachers to look a little more closely at the nature of children's peer relationships. As Ms Arthur commented, she wished she

had known that friends were going to prove such an issue, as she would have done more in Anna's early years to foster friendships with the children she would be at school with.

Although she later wished that she had done more, Anna's mother did make several efforts to facilitate friendships for Anna. Anna herself also made many friendly overtures to others, but these were often rebuffed or ignored. On one level Anna's friend-less state was surprising. She was not unattractive, unfriendly or difficult to approach, descriptors Katz and McClellan (1991) give of children who "tend to be avoided or rejected by others" (p. 11). She was, however, a quiet child, who tended to retreat from potentially difficult interactions. Corsaro's (1981) research with nursery-aged children found that young children do not readily accept new playmates, and requests to play were greeted with rejection about half of the time. Howes (1988) found that being rebuffed was more common for children without friends than for those with friends. However, Corsaro (1981) noted that initial resistance did not always result in permanent exclusion. Unfortunately, Anna did not appear to have discovered that initial resistance could be overcome. Despite this she was resilient, and kept trying with initial approaches to other children, although her comment as an eight-year-old that when others didn't want to play with her she just cried, indicates that over time some of her resilience had worn away. Overall, Anna's story suggests that it is important for teachers to foster the development of children's friendships, something Anna herself mentioned as an eight-year-old. This was reflected in a number of the other children's experiences and is discussed in more depth in Chapter Thirteen.

Not only did Anna lack peer support, at lunchtimes her brother Andrew also ignored her. So, although having older sibling at school was often an important source of support, for Anna this was not the case. At the same time Anna seemed to receive less teacher support than many of the other children. Anna's experiences help to show the complex interweaving of factors that appear to contribute to this pattern, identified in other studies, of children who appear to require the most support actually receiving the least (Brooker, 2002). This process, contributing to a downward spiral of more limited teaching and learning, is an example of what is sometimes called the "Matthew effects", where "those who have will be given more. For those who do not have, even what they have will be taken from them" (McNaughton, 2002, p. 20). Anna's independence seemed to contribute to this process.

The value of independence vs seeking help

All the new entrant teachers noted independence as an important trait in children starting school. Anna's story suggests that independence may not always work in a child's favour. Anna had established patterns of independence in early childhood; her mother described what pleasant company she was, and how she didn't need to be entertained; at kindergarten she had very little contact with teachers. This pattern continued at school. A quiet, well-behaved child like Anna is easily overlooked, as she simply did not draw herself to the attention of adults. In his work with older children, Pye (1988) suggested that children like Anna may go unnoticed because they present no problems and because the pleasure they provide for the teacher is limited. Such children act as allies for teachers because they release them to give greater attention to the children who they particularly enjoy interacting with, and to the more difficult children. However, their position in what he called 'Nomansland' is not helpful for their progress. Anna's suggestion that parents should spend time at school with their new entrants is one way of addressing this, but other solutions are also required. It is important that busy teachers responding to the demands of many children should plan time to interact with less demanding children. This recommendation is hardly new (e.g. see Meade, 1985; S. Peters, 1994; Pye, 1988) but it appears that strategies are required to achieve this effectively. Carl and Anna's stories also indicate the importance of making the teacher's role explicit to new entrant children, so that while independence is fostered, children are also reassured that it is acceptable to ask for help or clarification. While this is obvious to adults it does not appear to be something all children are aware of.

Two transitions

Another feature of Anna's story was that in effect she made two transitions to school. Like Carl, she had time off soon after she started, but while Carl arrived back healthy and enthusiastic, with the advantage of having covered most of the work the class had been doing at home with his mother, Anna was still tired and recuperating from an illness and had not been well enough to do school work during her time away. Although some of Anna's problems were evident before she was ill it was only when she returned that she expressed a dislike of school. By then Anna was no longer new but had not had many of the opportunities that the other children who started at the same time had had to familiarise themselves with the demands of being a school pupil, thus widening the gap between Anna and her peers. Tired and tearful, she was less able to tackle the challenges of work she found difficult and started to say that she couldn't do it.

In addition, girls perhaps invest more time in exploring friendships than boys (Dunn, 1993). In her observations of four-year-olds Carr (1997) found a small group of girls developed a characteristic language she called girl-friend-speak. Heather, who started on the same day as Anna, seemed well versed in this. In contrast, Anna may have developed less sophistication in this discourse due to her solitary play at kindergarten. While Anna was away, friendship patterns amongst girls within the class perhaps became more established and the girl-friend-speak more difficult to master for an inexperienced outsider. (For example Heather seemed quite inclusive of Anna in the earlier observations but was actively criticising her in later sessions). In contrast, Carl's 'kick and chase' games were perhaps easier to rejoin.

Moore's (2001) study found that children experienced most friendship problems at the start of the school year. Anna's story suggests that reentry after an illness is also a challenging time. Similar findings were shown in Cleave et al's (1982) study of children starting school. Much of the research on re-entry appears to have focused on children with chronic illnesses (e.g. Sexson & Madan-Swain, 1993; Worchel-Prevatt et al., 1998), or serious medical conditions (Closs, 2000), but some of the points raised by these authors can be applied to the occasional absences of otherwise healthy children. For example, Closs suggested that when keeping up with schoolwork is not possible, planned support should be available on their return to help children fit into the classroom programme. She also recognized the problems caused by disruptions in peer relationships and provided suggestions for supporting these, through classroom practices, and 'remembering' and keeping in contact with children when they are away.

Despite a difficult start, Anna's long-term career as a pupil was reasonably positive, although friendship issues were still prevalent three years later (suggesting friendship issues may be resistant to change unless steps are actively taken to alter the pattern). A number of factors seem to underpin her more positive trajectory, including the Reading Recovery programme and experiences with some of her teachers (such as the teacher who responded to the letters Anna wrote to her through the class mail box). One important and constant influence throughout Anna's experiences was her mother. Ms Arthur was well informed on a number of educational issues, through information from Kowhai School, her involvement in Playcentre, and through other material she had read. She was continually trying to improve Anna's educational experiences.

When Anna's experiences are compared with those of Heather, the next case study story, it demonstrates how different the experience of transition could be for two

children who, on the surface, appeared to share many similarities in their backgrounds, and who entered the same classroom on the same day.

6. Heather and the Hurst family

Background

Heather lived with her parents Mr and Ms Hurst and her brother Harry. When the study began Heather was four years and eight months old and Harry was six and a half. Ms Hurst classed herself as a 'home worker' but went back to work for several months when Heather started school. Later in the study Ms Hurst returned to tertiary education. Mr Hurst was the primary income earner and his occupation placed the family in the highest category for socioeconomic status. The family lived in a comfortable house in an area of established housing, close to Kowhai School. Ms Hurst explained that they had chosen the area specifically because of the school. The family had a number of local friends and at the time of the first interview Ms Hurst had been caring for Jenny (Child 22) every afternoon while Jenny's mother was at work.

Heather was described by her mother as "a hard case!" (CS6.1, p. 1) and "bright and breezy. She's very social" (CS6.1, p. 8). In observing Heather's interactions with Jenny, Ms Hurst had noticed that Heather could be quite stubborn and intolerant of other people's ideas. "I'd get embarrassed. I couldn't listen... Every five minutes I'd be 'Heather that's not nice. You shouldn't say that to Jenny'" but increasingly Ms Hurst had noticed that the girls seemed able to sort things out for themselves so decided not to get involved (CS6.1, p. 8). Ms Hurst said, "I envy her her social ability. She's very open and friendly. She can equally say 'Go away' but she's very vocal and she says exactly how she feels and I think that's a strength. She can be very kind. She's a delight really" (CS6.1, p. 10).

Ms Hurst believed that Heather was bored at kindergarten, but the observations showed that she was actively engaged throughout the sessions. Although she was not challenged to extend herself, she did receive teacher support in her endeavours. For example, on one occasion she painted a life-sized, reasonably anatomically correct skeleton in white paint onto black paper (copied from an illustration in a book). When it became clear that the paper she was using would only allow her to paint the head to the hips a teacher brought another piece of paper and attached it so that the skeleton's legs could be added. The teacher also provided a smaller paintbrush when Heather wanted to add finer details like the toe bones.

Heather often engaged in artwork or puzzles alone, but also took part in sociodramatic play, the most memorable episode being a dinosaur game that Heather orchestrated, which lasted over twenty minutes. She included two boys in an extended story line where the three children were dinosaurs who were being pursued by other dinosaurs, which they alternatively fought, or hid from. When they had pretended to kill one

dinosaur Heather wanted to mourn the death and said regretfully "She was my best friend. Now she is dead." When the boys took no notice of her grief she instructed them in their roles:

Heather Pretend you said "What's the matter baby".

Boy What's the matter baby?

Heather Umm. Mother dinosaur is dead.

Boy Oh. Pretty sad.

Her interactions with other children were generally positive, but on one occasion her attempts to help another girl complete a jigsaw puzzle were rebuffed with: "I don't want you to help. I don't want you to play with me. I'm not inviting you to my birthday." Heather appeared interested in the reason, rather than upset by the response, inquiring "Well... have I done something?"

At home Ms Hurst said Heather enjoyed books and "loves having a story read to her". Heather and Harry played together after school and at weekends, enjoying games like 'Transformers' and playing on their bikes. With Harry at school Ms Hurst found that Heather was bored in the afternoons after kindergarten if she didn't have anyone to play with. "She's a child who will not amuse herself though because she is very social. I say to her 'Go and dress teddy' or something, and she says 'No. I want you to come with me and do it.' And sometimes that's a pain" (CS6.1, p,10). This led Ms Hurst to reflect on the "four long months" of kindergarten still ahead of them, especially now that Jenny was also going to school.

I mean yesterday was the first day without [Jenny] and as soon as I went to pick her up at kindergarten she [Heather] said 'Can we take somebody home?' Anybody! I don't think she cared. 'Please let's not be just the two of us. Can I take somebody home?' It's good that she does morning kindy really because I can do my thing in the morning and then devote time to her in the afternoon, which is nice. I'll just have to play Barbies and teddies, which I don't always enjoy but she does... It's all really boring. The trouble is I sit there playing Barbies with her and I am just thinking about all the things I should be doing. I am really not devoting all my attention to it. (CS6.1, p. 11)

As noted above, the Hursts had selected Kowhai School on the basis of information from people they knew, and they had deliberately moved into the school's local area. It had lived up to their expectations and Ms Hurst described it as "a good school. I like the way they do things. [Principal] is such a hard case. I like the way they think. It's a lot bigger than I thought, but it's a good school. And I love the fact that the kindergarten is so involved with the school. It's lovely" (CS6.1, p. 14).

As a four-year-old Heather was already familiar with school and many of the teachers. Although Harry had had no idea what school was like when he started, Heather had "been constantly every day to pick him up, getting to know the teachers" (CS6.2, p. 7). She had been welcomed into Harry's class and had often sat on the mat with the older children. Ms Hurst said they had talked a lot about Heather starting "because I think it's important that they know what is happening in their lives and the kids are well informed". She believed that Heather was excited and "just can't wait" to get to school. Heather perceived herself to be a big girl and "If I go to school, I'm a big girl". Ms Hurst didn't think that Heather was nervous about starting. "It's just something different. Her life just carries on. She's lucky that way" (CS6.1, p. 4).

Ms Hurst had found everyone at Kowhai School very welcoming towards the family. "They are a lovely bunch.... It's lovely. Kate Keane says 'G'day Heather when are you starting?' and they chatter away. It's lovely" (CS6.1, p. 7). She felt that Heather "seems to think she owns the place". She knew where everything was and the biggest problem was probably going to be to get her to call the teachers by their appropriate titles. At the moment Heather copied her mother and would say "Hi Kate" rather than "Ms Keane" (CS6.1, p. 6).

Heather's friend Jenny, who Ms Hurst had been looking after in the afternoons, had recently started school and was in Ms Keane's class. Harry was good friends with Jenny's brother Jack, and the two boys had been having morning tea and lunch with Jenny since she started. Heather therefore knew quite a lot about Jenny's transition to school. As Ms Keane had also been Harry's teacher, Heather was convinced that she too would be in Ms Keane's class when the time came and Ms Hurst felt "she might be a bit miffed" if she wasn't (CS6.1, p. 4). Ms Hurst wished that she knew which class Heather would be in so that she could talk to her about it and prepare her if she wasn't going to be with Ms Keane.

Having had "a terrible time" at primary school herself Ms Hurst didn't want her children to be pushed around or to have no one to play with. She hated the thought of them being left on their own (CS6.1, p. 13). Despite these concerns Ms Hurst believed that Heather was ready for school and that "it will be good for her", explaining "She is very social so she will do okay" (CS6.1, p. 5). When Harry had started school, Ms Hurst said she "couldn't wait" because "he drove me nuts before he started", although her pleasure had been tainted with worry as she believed he was academically ready, but was "frightened for him to go because of the lack of confidence". With Heather, Ms Hurst felt she would worry less because Heather was more socially confident, but

being her last child, she was also reluctant to "give her up" (CS6.1, pp. 13-14). Ms Hurst felt that Heather's transition to school marked a watershed in her own life:

I have to face a lot of things once she has gone to school.... For a long time I have wanted another child and then I have come to the conclusion that's a dumb idea. Gone off that idea. I'd like a life of my own again. I haven't worked for nearly seven years and I would like to get back into the workforce and I am really looking forward to it but I won't do anything until next year when she is established and quite happy. (CS6.1, pp. 4-5)

The skills Ms Hurst believed were important for children starting school were, "To know the alphabet. To behave socially acceptably. To be able to fit in." (CS6.1, p. 9). Social skills included being able to "share nicely and to be friendly". Although she saw Heather as very sociable she wondered if her tendency to lash out (verbally) would prove problematic. As Heather's fifth birthday approached, Ms Hurst commented that "everyone in the family talks to her about school... I hope the build up's not too big". They had a story book about starting school and there had also been some segments on television programmes such as Play School related to starting school, but Ms Hurst didn't feel they had been involved in a lot of direct preparation.

Ms Hurst was actively involved with the kindergarten and expected that she would be involved in parent helping at school once Heather started. She had been a parent helper in Harry's class during his first year. "That was great... if nothing else you get to know the kids in the class which is good" (CS6.1, p. 5). Eventually Ms Hurst thought she would join the PTA and Mr Hurst was already a member of the Board of Trustees.

School visits

Heather had only one school visit, with a group from Azure Kindergarten, then Ms Hurst and Heather had attended the kindergarten lunch together. The Hursts had learned that Heather was going into Ms Keane's class a few days before the kindergarten lunch meeting, because when Ms Hurst was collecting Harry, Ms Keane had "yelled out with her thumbs up 'I've got your daughter!'" (CS6.2, p. 2). Ms Hurst had really hoped Heather would be with Ms Keane so was "thrilled" at the news.

Like a number of parents, Ms Hurst didn't know what day Heather would have her school visit but she was aware from Harry's experience that one would be coming up. The visit had proved useful because Heather saw who would be in her class and realised there were a number of people who she knew from kindergarten. She already knew Jenny would be there but had been pleased to find Child 21 was also in her class.

As the youngest of the case-study children, Heather's birthday fell at the end of the holidays so, as with Tessa and Anna, there were a few weeks between her school visit and actually starting school. Heather and Anna, who had known each other at kindergarten, both started in Ms Keane's class on the first day of the fourth term.

First weeks of school

Although Heather had been looking forward to starting school, on her first morning Ms Hurst said Heather had been "a wee bit nervous" and for the first two days she had been unable to eat any breakfast. However, by the third day "she was fine". Some time later Heather had admitted that "I didn't really want you to go Mum, at first" but Ms Hurst said you wouldn't have guessed from looking at her. It seemed that Heather had been excited and pleased to see herself as "a big school girl now" but found the reality a little more daunting than she had expected (CS6.2, p. 1). Ms Hurst said Heather had been pleased to have Harry there and that he had helped her a lot.

Three key points stood out in the observations of Heather's early experiences at school. Firstly, her enthusiasm for participating in group discussions, with her arm (and sometimes both arms) being almost constantly in the air, signaling her desire to be chosen. Secondly, the scaffolding provided by Jenny, Ms Keane and other children in the class, that helped Heather make sense of the classroom situation and the demands of the tasks she was involved in, and thirdly, her friendships with Jenny and others in the class.

Heather's eager participation at mat time was evident from the first observation, just days after she started school. When the children were working with a student teacher to write a sentence on the white board, Heather correctly identified that the word 'went' ended with a 't' (Observation 15/10). Two days later when the mat time discussion was about snails that one of the girls had brought to school Heather asked the first question (about why the box had a lid) and offered the first suggestion, 'slimy', when the student teacher asked what they could write about the snails. The teacher responded "that's a good word". After the girl giving the news had written her name to start the sentence, Heather was chosen to come to the front. She correctly wrote 'snail' as the next word in a sentence that eventually read '[Girl's] snail likes to eat fern and grass'. At shared reading that day Heather kept one or two hands in the air throughout, and was selected to answer two questions (Observation 17/10).

The following week, Heather was the only person with her hand up to answer the student teacher's question about what day it was (although in this instance Heather

incorrectly said "Monday" when it was Tuesday). This didn't deter her though and later in the morning during more than 26 minutes of teacher led discussion, about fish and then about calves, Heather had her hand in the air to contribute almost the whole time. Heather seemed to have naturally developed the exaggerated (up straight, legs crossed, eyes forward) posture that seems to signal 'pick me' that Ms North had wished Nicola would adopt. Her stance received a number of affirmations from both the student teacher and Ms Keane, who would often compliment a child like Heather for sitting nicely as a tactic for getting other children to follow suit.

Not only did Heather appear ready and willing to participate, she received a level of support that helped her quickly become established also as very able. The scaffolding Heather received from her friend Jenny and others provide a sharp contrast with Anna's experiences, even though the two children were largely engaged in the same activities, as the following examples in Figures 12 and 13 show.

During writing time the class are all finishing letters they started the day before (when Heather and Anna weren't there). A few new children are writing in their exercise books. Heather didn't have a letter to finish but directed by Jenny she got a piece of paper from the student teacher (who is in charge).

9.55 Heather lies on the mat beside Steve, copying the words from the whiteboard. However, having only one sheet of paper and working on the carpet means her writing has to be very faint as when she presses harder the pencil tears the paper.

Heather and Jenny move over to the pencil tin and look in the tin with Anna. Heather joins Steve and Child 12 and says Child 12 has the wrong pencil. Jenny states that Heather had a green pencil. Anna finds a green pencil, which she gives to Heather. Heather starts to sharpen it and then Anna does it for her. Heather returns to Jenny and Child 12 with the pencil. Child 12 asks why Heather is writing on a piece of paper and Anna says "She's allowed".

10.00 Jenny and Heather lie together on the mat. Jenny works slowly and has written 'Last Thurs'.

10.05 Heather rubs out everything she has written. She draws a picture at the top of the page. Jenny instructs Heather and Child 13 telling them "You are supposed to write that" pointing to the sentence on the whiteboard.

10.15 Heather moves to the lino, which provides a better base to work on. She has rubbed out everything she had written and drawn another picture.

10.20 Jenny and Heather move to a small desk and start writing in earnest, copying the sentence from the board.

10.25 Heather shows her work to the student teacher. The children all move to the mat. Heather sits on the mat, beside Jenny and invites Anna to sit on her other side. The student teacher compliments Heather on how well she is sitting. Anna and Heather are selected to lead the lines going out to play. The student teacher comments that Heather has been "so good".

(Summary of observations, 15/10).

Figure 12. Heather being supported by Jenny to write a letter

Later that morning when the children in Heather's maths group were to colour in repeating patterns on a printed worksheet, Jenny, who was in a different group, came over and suggested a pattern for Heather's next row. She also tried out the crayons (many of which appeared the same blackish colour) on the newspaper covering the table until she found the colour Heather wanted to use, telling Heather "Here are two purples". Only when Heather was established in the activity, did Jenny go and do what she was supposed to be doing.

A few days later (on a day when Anna was away) Heather received a lot of helpful scaffolding which enabled her to write the piece shown in Appendix S (*Calf report*). On this occasion Jenny was allocated to another group (who were writing about lambs) but Ms Keane and a number of other children both challenged and supported Heather, as the summary in Figure 13 illustrates.

10.05	Having discussed the attributes of calves and written many of the children's ideas on the whiteboard Ms Keane instructs the children to write a report "Which is true facts about a calf". She suggests they all start with "A calf is a baby cow" and says "Write 'The Calf' at the top." Ms Keane turns to the next blank page in Heather's book and dates it for her. Heather writes 'The' and then moves backwards and forwards between the board and her seat a number of times, looking at the words on the board.
Boy	Are you writing the calf one? It's 'The Calf'.
Heather	Don't tell us. We know what it is.
Boy	You writing 'The Calf'?
Heather	I'm writing 'The Calf'.
Child	You are not meant to. We do names. A girl taunts her because Heather has only written two words and the girl has written five. This leads to a discussion of number
Girl	That's your second (written word on the page).
Heather	Two.
Girl	Second. That's your second.
Heather	Two. One, two (counts words).
Girl	Second is two.
Heather	I know. Third is three. Isn't it?
Girl	Yes.
Heather	Fourth is four.
Girl	Yeah and fifth is five and sixth is six and seventh is seven, eighth is eight. At this point Heather was distracted by Child 12 playing with the date chart and asks if Child 12 is allowed to.
10.10	Heather then wandered around for five minutes looking for a rubber, asking four times if anyone had seen one. Eventually she was given a rubber by another child and returned to her seat and rubbed out what she had written.
10.15	Heather starts again. As she is writing the letter 'A' she sighs and says "Oops". The girl who was counting the words speaks to her again.
Girl	Trying to do a 't'?

Heather	No. I'm trying to do a 'a'.
Girl	But that is one.
Heather	It was a dumb one..... I'm gonna do an 'a' (Sighs). Heather rubs out what she has done again. She and Jenny talk about rubbers for a minute.
10.20	Ms Keane asks "A what? What are we writing about Heather"" and Heather replies "Calf". Heather writes 'A calf' and is about to start on the next line (perhaps following the initial instructions to write a title?) but is stopped by Ms Keane. Heather asks "What do I write now Ms Keane?"
Ms Keane	A calf... what? What is a calf?
Heather	A baby
Ms Keane	Baby what?
Heather	Cow. Heather writes the sentence, saying the letters as she writes them, and using her finger to space the words. She stands to look at the word 'baby' on the whiteboard before writing it. Then asks "What do I write now?"
10.25	Ms Keane reads what Heather has written.
Ms Keane	A calf is a baby... cow.
Heather	Cow. 'C'. Leave a space. 'C'. Heather checks the board for the spelling of 'cow'.
Heather	'W'. Cow. Done cow. I've done cow. I've done it! Heather stands holding the book out for Ms Keane to see.
Ms Keane	(Reads) is a baby cow. Full stop. That's the end of your first sentence. Now what else can you tell me about a calf? Heather what can you tell me about a calf? What does it say?
Heather	Moo, moo, moo. Is moo.
Ms Keane	It. (Ms Keane shows Heather how to write 'it'.)
Heather	Done 'it'.
Child	A line down and across (talking about Heather's 't' that is not crossed).
Heather	What?
Boy	That's not 't'.
Heather	It doesn't have to be 't' (but does cross it). Heather writes 'moo'.
Heather	There! Moo.
Ms Keane	It moos. Put an 's' on the end of it. Heather puts an 's' on the end of the word 'it' (following the instruction literally).
Ms Keane	No, on the end of moos. Heather puts an 's' on the end of moos.
(Summary of Observation, 23.10/2)	

Figure 13. Heather being scaffolded to write her calf report

While Anna's story indicated that Anna was apparently left to make sense of the school demands largely by herself, Heather, as has been shown in these examples, attracted support from a number of people. This was both spontaneously given and proactively requested. The scaffolding Heather received enabled her, despite a level of uncertainty, shown in her rubbing out and in her step-by-step questioning of Ms

Keane, to complete the tasks required of her. She was also able to offer support too, telling Jenny what to do during a physical education activity.

Heather seemed comfortable in her peer relations in the classroom. She was most frequently with Jenny but also interacted regularly with Child 21, Child 12 (both girls), and occasionally Anna. When Heather first started, Harry and Jenny's brother, Jack collected both Heather and Jenny from their classroom at lunchtimes and sat with them while they ate their lunch and played with them afterwards. This seemed helpful in easing Heather's initiation into the lunchtime culture, although later Ms Hurst mentioned that despite this Heather had been confused by the school bells:

She says 'We have one bell and I thought it was lunch time but it was too early' and I said, 'Well that would have been the morning tea bell wouldn't it?' And she says, 'Oh yeah, probably'. Sometimes she's come home and her lunch is only partially eaten and she said 'I didn't have time between bells'. I said, 'What were you doing?' 'I don't know but I didn't have time to eat all my lunch and the bell went and I had to go and play or something.' I said 'Yeah but you don't have to get up and play, it's just saying if you wanted to' (CS6.2, p. 11).

Another issue had been the unsupervised classroom in the mornings, especially when Ms Keane was on duty. Ms Hurst reflected "There's often no teacher in the classroom and it concerns me leaving her.... When it was her first few days I didn't want to leave her while there was no adult", especially when the other children were playing loud music and playing noisily (CS6.2, p. 13).

Since starting school, Ms Hurst felt that Heather had become more assertive and noted how "she stands her ground with me". She also noted that Heather's desire for learning seemed more satisfied. "At kindergarten she was bored. She was very ready for school and the school has satisfied her thirst for knowledge (CS6.2, p4). Heather herself had apparently commented "You don't learn much at kindergarten do you? All you do is painting and stuff" (CS6.2, p. 4). Although I had wondered how Heather would adapt to not having the resources for art activities that she had enjoyed at kindergarten, Ms Hurst didn't think Heather had missed these because Heather "draws and draws and colours [at home]... it's always available here for their art work" (CS6.2, p. 4).

Heather had not seemed to need the six weeks of 2 o'clock finishes and Ms Hurst commented that Heather used to get very cross with her for taking her away early.

They would often be sitting on the mat when it was time to pick her up at two... She didn't say anything in the classroom but the look! She used to

glare at me as if to say 'For goodness sake!' She didn't want to go at 2 o'clock, she wanted to finish the story. Unfortunately one day she was to get a certificate in front of the assembly and of course she had gone. She was really quite upset about that and rightly so. She deserved to get it in front of everyone (CS6.2, p. 14).

Ms Hurst felt the early finishes were disruptive, both to the rest of the class as the children collected their belongings and left, and to the children who missed what happened next. A "Keeping Ourselves Safe" programme had been running in the afternoons and Heather had missed a lot of it.

Although Heather had adapted well to school, Ms Hurst said her own feelings had been "really sad. It's my baby. I just felt it was the end of an era. I was pleased for her... and time-wise for myself, selfishly... but I couldn't believe how much I missed her because she's a real pal. I found it hard" (CS6.2, p. 5). However, Ms Hurst had little time to brood because two weeks after Heather started she was offered a job, which she accepted. The job was unexpected, as she had planned to "just take stock of my life and figure out what the heck I want to do next year", but the offer, coming when it did, had seemed like a good opportunity (CS6.2, p. 5). However, it left Ms Hurst with "absolutely no time to think of what to do for next year" and had prevented her from parent helping at school in the way that she had planned (CS6.2, p. 6).

The rest of the term

Two months after Heather started she was enjoying school but finding it tiring. Ms Hurst felt this was because she "puts a lot into her day" (CS6.2, p. 4). Heather had developed "two speeds, flat out or non stop" (CS6.2, p. 9). Overall, "she seems to like school in general and what it offers" (CS6.2, p. 5). Occasionally Heather complained "'So and so was nasty to me today'... but it doesn't happen very often" (CS6.2, p. 5). Ms Hurst encouraged both Heather and Harry to make light of such situations. For example, if a child had poked his or her tongue out at one of them, Ms Hurst would say "Did you laugh? What a hoot! What a funny thing to do!" (CS6.2, p. 5).

Having watched Harry do his homework in the evenings, Heather was delight to now have work of her own to do. Ms Hurst reflected "She loves that. Thinks it's wonderful. Homework to her is exciting" (CS6.2, p. 8). Harry and Heather also played schools quite a lot, with Harry always taking the role of the teacher. "Which is surprising because she's the bossy one" (CS6.2, p. 13).

Observations of Heather towards the end of her first term indicated that she was confident and assertive in the classroom. For example, as she made her way onto the

mat she greeted children and informed one that she didn't want to sit with them. In her news group (described in Steve's story) she was able to give news twice. During an activity that involved the children colouring Christmas cards, Heather and Jenny worked together. By now their relationship seemed more equal. Heather seemed very interested in commenting on other children's work and organising the resources (see Figure 14).

	The children are seated around a table, colouring printed Christmas cards using wax crayons.
Heather	(About one of the boys) I bet his is going to be dumb. Other boys will think [Child 14's] is gonna be dumb. The comparisons continued a little later.
Heather	Anna's is dumb eh?
Jenny	Anna's is not the dumbest but it is dumb. Two minutes later Ms Keane walks by and comments "Beautiful [Child 14]. You have taken a lot of care with that."
Heather	Look at mine. She [Ms Keane] likes mine.
Jenny	And mine.
Anna	And mine.
Heather	[To Anna] But I don't like yours.
Anna	And I don't like yours.
Heather	But I like [boy's].
Jenny	I like all those people's.
Anna	Even mine?
Jenny	Yeah.
Heather	I like yours, yours, yours, yours.
?	I like all of them.
Heather	I like you, you, you, you, you, you, you, you, you.
Ms Keane	They are all looking beautiful.
Heather	I like yours, yours, yours, yours, yours, yours. But I don't like [Child 12's] That's the only person that I don't like. [Child 12]. I don't like [Child 12's].
?	You like mine eh?
Heather	Yeah.
Jenny	Yours looks good and mine. Mine does too.
Heather	Yeah. After a brief discussion about what their brothers were doing the conversation continued.
Boy 1	We don't like yours [Boy 2].
Heather	Yeah we like his but we don't like Anna's eh?
?	Because you said that to [Boy 2].
?	I like [Boy 2].
Jenny	We hate [Boy 2's] eh?
Heather	No. We like [Boy 2's]. You made him burst into tears.
?	No.
Heather	Yeah. We don't like yours now.
Jenny	[Boy 2's] is the best.
Heather	Yeah. So's mine. So's hers.
?	All the boys' is cool and all the girls' is...

?	All the girls are dumb.
Heather	Do you like mines [to Boy 1]?
Jenny	Do you like mine [to Boy 1]?
Boy 1	I like your one.
	Heather asserted that Child 15 was not to have any of the crayons, told the boys off for taking the paper wrappers off the crayons and informed Ms Keane that this was happening
	Later there was a confrontation when the girls tried to secure more red crayons (a popular colour choice for the Christmas cards).
Heather	That hurt my arm so don't.
?	Then don't do it to me.
?	You are not allowed to pinch.
Heather	I didn't.
Jenny	I didn't pinch.
?	Me either.
Heather	Me either.
?	You pinched a red.
Jenny	No. I didn't pinch this red. It was in here. We only have one red and it's this red.
Heather	So we need two reds eh?
Jenny	Yeah.
Heather	Yeah. Okay, so we have to share that one. Can I have the red, I need it.
	Two minutes later Heather bends the now warm (from lots of handling) red crayon.
Heather	Cool! These can bend! These can bend! (Laughs.) As she straightens the crayon it breaks. Heather looks shocked.
Heather	Ooopsie. Only the red can bend. As Jenny start to also bend a crayon Heather tells her not to.
Heather	NO!!! You'll break them all.
(Summary of observation 11.12/2, p. 2)	

Figure 14. Heather's conversations while colouring in a Christmas card

Throughout the whole activity Heather's interest seems to have centred around the conversations more than the task. After about 27 minutes she took her card to show Ms Keane who told her she hadn't finished colouring it. Heather returned a minute later but was again told that she hadn't finished. This time the message was clarified and Ms Keane exclaimed, "Oh Heather. You didn't colour in the letters [the printed greeting]. You can't read it." Heather scribbled over all the letters rather than colouring them in individually, saying "Dumb letter!" On completion she addressed the card 'To Mum and Dad', but as on the earlier observations, spent a long time wandering around looking for a rubber to correct her writing.

Although in the earlier observations Anna had been more successful with the maths tasks than Heather, on this last observation Anna was in a lower group, doing a colour

by numbers worksheet, while Heather was one of a small group (that included Jenny) who were solving written addition problems (see Appendix S). Ms Keane demonstrated how to use blocks to solve the problems and Heather worked independently, forming sets, which she physically joined and then counted to get the total. Although she could name the totals for some of the teen words, like 13, she consulted a number chart to see how to write the numeral.

Looking back, Ms Hurst believed that Heather had been 'ready' for school, six months before she actually started and by age five was "extremely ready". Her assessment was largely based on her view that Heather had been bored at kindergarten:

She was very shirty. Always cross, especially after kindy. I really think she just felt like she was getting nowhere really. Very bored at kindergarten and wanted a lot of stimulation when she got home. She was exhausting. 'Let's do this. Let's do that. We're baking today.' Had me organised (CS6.2, p. 6).

Considering Heather's progress since she started school, Ms Hurst had observed Heather's improved writing skills. "She was writing long before she started school but it's certainly better. It's a lot clearer" (CS6.2, p. 5). (An example of her story writing from the end of the term is included in Appendix S.) She had also observed her improved reading and Heather had reported, with excitement, when she progressed to a higher reading group, although Ms Hurst worried that Heather was quite impatient and sometimes raced through books, getting words back to front.

After two months at school there had been no feedback from Ms Keane, except when Ms Hurst specifically asked. For example, she had asked how Heather's reading was going and had been told "Oh she's just breezing. She's doing very well". Ms Hurst felt that she was seen as "a paranoid parent" for periodically asking how things were going, because the response always seemed to be "Oh she's fine.... Obvious!" but reflected "I think I need it for my reassurance" (CS6.2, p. 8). Later she commented "I like to know how her progress is. How she's getting on. Mind you, knowing Ms Keane, she is so good, she'd let you know if there was a problem; but I like to know if things are going fine as well" (CS6.2, p. 9). Ms Hurst knew there wouldn't be any parent interviews until the following year, but thought that they would be a good idea so that you could discuss a child's written report with the teacher. Most of Ms Hurst's information therefore came from Heather. "She's a chatterbox!"

All in all Ms Hurst was delighted with how well Heather's and Harry's transitions had gone, but with her own unhappy memories of school in mind she noted "I'm always

frightened to get lulled into a false sense of security. You don't want to relax too much because it only takes someone to pick on them or bullying, or something going on, it can ruin them.... It's the fear of my life that something could go horribly wrong that way" (CS6.2, p. 13).

Looking back

When the Hursts were visited again, nearly two years after Heather started school, Ms Hurst commented that "We've had an up and down year this year really. When she [Heather] first went back to school this year after the Christmas holiday my brave little girl turned to mush... She hung onto my skirt, wouldn't let me go. It's so unlike Heather.... She went to jelly on me. Heather pretends to be a lot braver than she is. She's a sensitive wee poppet" (CS6.3, p. 1). She didn't know why this had happened:

I have no idea. Whether it was just something in herself, couldn't even blame the school, couldn't put my finger on it at all. She seemed to go through a hard time within herself. I have no idea why.... Very unsettled, very unhappy and I never got to the bottom of it.... Over a period of time she came right. And it worried me. I wondered if something awful had happened to her. You're trying to ask the right type of question. I mean, how do you know? But she's come right (CS6.3, p. 5).

Now this was resolved Ms Hurst said Heather was "very into school. She loves it. She loves learning, always has. She's still got a thirst for knowledge.... Her spelling's good. She loves maths. Mad on maths" (CS6.3, p. 1). "Her printing's *good*. She prints beautifully" (CS6.3, p. 3). Heather had apparently struggled with reading for some time but "all of a sudden it's just clicked and she's taken off". Ms Hurst had been helping Heather with her reading, applying her own "thumb rule", telling Heather "Stick your thumb over half [a word]. If it looks too big or too hard put your thumb over half'. I don't know where I picked that up but it worked with Harry and it has worked with her" (CS6.3, p. 2). Part of Heather's problem her mother felt had come from a fear of being wrong.

She's a bit shy to try something new, except food. Anything else she's shy in case she gets it wrong. I've said to her 'That's how you learn, to get things wrong and then you find out it was wrong. That's how you learn'. But she's got over that. Now she tries and she doesn't care if she gets it wrong. If you correct her she goes 'Oh, right'. Takes no offence at it at all; but before she was a bit scared to try. (CS6.3, p. 2)

Ms Hurst had also made a point of reading to Heather. "I got extra books from a library, or they have mountains of books in their rooms, so I get books out and then I would read one page and she would read one page, of a book not from school, and she

quite enjoyed that". Then one day, as they were driving home in the car Heather "picked up a book and she *read it out loud*. I nearly ran off the road. 'Goodness me your reading has picked up somewhat!' I think it was... kids they develop in their own time and it's an age and stage in their life" (CS6.3, p. 2).

All in all, Ms Hurst felt Heather was now doing well. She saw her "taking on responsibilities for her own life" and described how Heather now made her own school lunches. In the classroom Ms Hurst had noticed "she's bossy" but had observed that "all the girls in the class are exactly the same, they're all telling everyone what to do. Nobody's listening but they are all telling" (CS6.3, p3). Out of school Heather was now very keen to widen her scope of activities. She was already doing swimming and gymnastics but was hoping to take up either karate or marching.

Looking back over their experiences Ms Hurst said, "I love Kowhai School. I liked it the moment we started there. The staff are great. Friendly.... It's a neat school. They seem to be very caring, which is nice. It's a big school though. It has all the facilities... has everything they need". Mr Hurst had continued on the Board of Trustees and now that she was no longer working Ms Hurst was parent helping one day a week. She said, "I'm just fixtures and fittings now" (CS6.3, p. 4).

Although there had been little formal information on Heather's progress Ms Hurst said she learned a lot by being a parent helper. Heather's teacher would occasionally comment on something Heather had done and Ms Hurst was able to observe Heather in the classroom. "But I still suspect if I was not a Mother Help I would not be so up to date with her progress, and I'd like to be". She was aware that the teacher would contact her if there was a problem, "I guess if there was an area of concern, like the reading, it was not an area of concern for the teacher, but it was to me" (CS6.3, p. 4). However, Ms Hurst said it would be nice to know a little more of how her children were doing, both socially and academically. "I'd also like to hear if things are going well. It seems in life you always hear of something bad" (CS6.3, p. 1). Fortunately Heather continued to keep her informed about her progress "She tells me how well she's doing" (CS6.3, p. 4).

Ms Hurst's advice for other parents was to make sure children knew their alphabet before they started school, or to be able to write their name at least. "Definitely the alphabet and knowing colours and counting". She was surprised at how few children knew what she called "the basics".

Heather's final comments

When Heather was interviewed as an eight-year-old she appeared relaxed and confident and very much in control, greeting me as her guest. The interview took place in the living-room with Ms Hurst present and Harry wandering in from time to time. When Mr Hurst arrived home Heather introduced me to him saying "This is Sally and she is interviewing me". Heather drew two detailed pictures at the end of the interview, which provided a comfortable space for relaxed conversation to flow. Towards the end of the time, as the conversation became more informal, Heather admitted "I was a bit nervous when you just walked in the door" (Heather, p. 11). As she relaxed Heather not only introduced new topics, she also questioned me about my family, home and the project. The interview ended when Ms Hurst wanted to serve the evening meal, although Heather seemed quite happy to continue.

When asked about school Heather said that "my teacher at the moment is pretty nice and other teachers are nice" (Heather, p. 4). She also liked the colour of her (recently painted) classroom. Currently the thing she liked best about school was "that you get an hour long lunch 'cause you get to play more and I like the morning tea because you still get to play but not much time" (Heather, p. 2). There was nothing that she didn't like about school. Overall she thought school was "pretty neat" because "you get into more harder stuff and for maths... it gets harder because we are doing graphs" (Heather, p. 2). She initially said that there wasn't anything that could be done to make school a better place, but then reflected that "it could have more playgrounds 'cause once you've played on all of them it starts to get a bit boring". She thought "you could have a slide in the big kids' playground" (Heather, p. 3).

Like the other case study children, Heather was now a Year Three child in a Year Three and Four class. Ms Hurst said, "that was a bit of a shock... Going from the primers into the Standard One [Year Three] class because there were all these Standard Two [Year Four] kids as well and some of them don't respect the younger ones.... That came as a bit of a shock and I can remember Harry going through the same. All of a sudden they had left the comfortable classroom of a similar age and size and all of a sudden big kids!" (CS6 in Heather, p. 6). "It was a totally different environment and the class size was a lot larger and they have almost the same expectation of Standard Ones [Year Threes] that have just come from the primers as the Standard Twos [Year Fours] and for a while that threw her. 'Too hard I can't do that' but there was no one to help. There is only one teacher. At that stage and age and level, just coming in from the primers they needed a bit of help and it knocked their confidence" (CS6 in Heather, p. 11). Heather noted that when they moved to Year Three "They split my friends up, well me and my friends" (Heather, p. 7). Despite this Ms Hurst thought Heather had

"coped rather well" (CS6 in Heather, p. 7). Asked who she was friends with now Heather said "I could name all my friends but there is too much" (Heather, p. 6).

Ms Hurst had started a tertiary course and "we have all been doing homework together". The children would ask, "Have you got any homework Mum?" (CS6 in Heather, p. 5). Heather said that she got a lot of homework including "two weekers". Ms Hurst commented that the children were sick of school by the end of the day and it was sometimes a problem to get them to come in and sit down. They "just want to burst out and do something else". Ms Hurst thought there was perhaps too much homework.

Looking back to when she started school, Heather said that she remembered "doing one painting and that's really about it" (Heather, p. 1). She said she hadn't expected "that I would get tons of friends, make friends, more each day" (Heather, p. 2). Considering what she recalled of the differences between kindergarten and school, Heather said that at school "there is more harder work and half the years it gets harder and harder each time". Four-year-olds needed to know that "when you start school you have got to be concentrated and got to concentrate otherwise, if you don't concentrate you wouldn't learn much" (Heather, p. 2).

Heather said that four-year-olds should be told that "It's scary on the first day" and "as you get older you get harder worksheets". Also, "there is a big playground... it's really huge and it's got swings and see saws and it's really cool and there's one on the field and it's really neat", but that they got to play on these when they were older. The new entrants "get to swing" and climb on the small climbing frame (Heather, p. 1). Prompted by her mother Heather said new children also needed to know the school rules. "You are not allowed to run in the classrooms and you are not allowed to fight with anyone or punch and kick anyone and you are not allowed to throw balls in the classroom, that's some of the rules in my class" (Heather, p. 3). The other children at school could help new entrants by being "more nicer to them 'cause some of the children in my class they go up to the little children and go 'Go away you are in my playground' and they think that it's theirs". She thought that having older children look after the new entrants was a good idea but wasn't sure that it would work "'cause sometimes people get told off and they still do it" (Heather, p. 4).

Heather, like Tessa, was very enthusiastic about doing some illustrations for the research. Interestingly, Heather was in the same class as Tessa and Ms Hurst commented on the art work that they did in that class, saying "she often comes home with dye up her arm, or a stamp on her face... I think [teacher] is quite arty (CS6 in

Heather, p. 10). Heather's first drawing was of some classrooms, including hers, part of the playground and the fence separating the school from the gully. Heather explained that only the seniors were allowed down the gully and they had to get permission from the principal first. In her second picture Heather drew her teacher, herself and some friends. She took care to reproduce exactly what they had been wearing that day. As she was drawing, Ms Hurst commented on Heather's recent interest in clothes. Heather completed her picture by naming the figures, so I would know who they were. (See Appendix S for copies of Heather's drawings.)

Discussion: Reflections on the Heather and the Hurst family's story

Heather had the sort of transition that most parents and teachers hoped that children would have. She moved smoothly from a rich early childhood experience to a supportive and engaging school environment, and appeared to flourish in both settings. A happy, sociable child, Heather was relaxed and comfortable in her interactions with adults and peers. She also had the very eager 'pick me' stance during mat times. Hence, she seemed to have mastered instinctively some of the subtle behaviours that Hill et al. (1998) identified as an important part of learning the pupil role. Her enthusiastic participation helped to establish her as a competent member of the class and she rose to the academic challenges provided by her teacher. However, closer analysis suggests that Heather was more anxious that she appeared on the surface. In less supportive conditions, her transition might not have been so positive. This section reflects on Heather's experiences in order to identify factors that may support other children's transitions.

A rich early childhood experience

Parents tended to make generalisations about the programmes offered in the different kindergartens but the observations revealed that children's experiences could be very different even within the same centre. Heather attended the same kindergarten as Steve and Anna, but her observed experiences there included a lot more interactions with both teachers and peers, and more in-depth use of resources. She seemed to both attract and enjoy teacher attention, and therefore started school with positive experiences of using adults as a resource. She also used peers as resources and acted as a resource for others in an effective way, including using language to direct others. Her wide range of artwork showed experimentation, and in a number of activities she demonstrated task persistence. Hence, Heather showed evidence of nearly all the behaviours identified by Cullen (1988) as effective learning strategies for school.

At home Heather came from a family with the highest socio-economic status, based on the Elley-Irving scale (Irving, 1990). Their home offered many material resources,

parents who were interested and involved in their children's education, and a mother who had plenty of time to devote to her children. Ms Hurst had ensured that Heather had mastered what she called 'the basics' before she started school. These included letter recognition. Heather also enjoyed the company of her brother and her many friends, including a close, long-term relationship with Jenny. While Anna was quiet and entertained herself, Heather appeared to be almost the exact opposite. Less willing to entertain herself, she seemed to thrive on social interaction. With Jenny she seemed to have been exploring many aspects of friendship, including falling out and making up. As noted earlier, she seemed to have developed sophistication in what Carr (1997) describes as girl-friend-speak. In kindergarten, rather than accepting a rebuff, she was interested to know why a girl didn't want to play with her, rather than retreating. Overall, through her early experiences Heather had had many opportunities to develop the skills and attitudes which teachers said were beneficial in the school context (see Chapter Twelve). The family also had social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1993, 1997), and perhaps more importantly, because of both parents' involvement in school, this was evident to the teachers. Brooker (2002) found this was important in establishing a continuum of advantage such as Heather's.

Familiarity with school

Of the case study stories presented so far, Heather had the most contact with school before she started. She had been on friendly first-name terms with Ms Keane for more than a year, she had observed both Harry and Jenny's positive transitions to school and had considerable experience of being in the classroom with Harry. She was so comfortable in the school environment and with the school's layout that Ms Hurst had commented that Heather "seems to think she owns the place". Both Mr and Ms Hurst were involved in the school on a regular basis and the family was on friendly terms with a number of the teachers and the principal. The Hursts were well informed and therefore able to talk to Heather about school.

Heather's experience fits with Curtis's (1986) view that to ensure a positive transition to school, the change should be gradual, with people, places and things being to some extent familiar. Although the earlier case study stories showed that children can cope with considerable discontinuity when the supports are in place to scaffold them, Heather's early contact with school appeared to provide a good base for her eventual transition. With this level of familiarity, the one short kindergarten-organised school visit simply confirmed the class that Heather would be going into. Heather's transition followed the path that she expected it to take and she was allocated to Ms Keane's class. If she had gone into a different class with an unknown teacher her story may have been different.

A warm welcome

All of the Hurst family seemed comfortable at school and there appeared to be mutual pleasure in Heather's allocation to Ms Keane's class. As Harry had made a smooth transition and proved to be a very capable child, and Ms Keane was on friendly terms with both Heather and her parents, it seems likely that she had positive expectations of Heather being a 'good' child. When Heather arrived at school she not only had a teacher she knew well, she also had her close friend Jenny in her class as well as a number of other children she had been friendly with at kindergarten. She was able to quickly reestablish friendships (as opposed to simply being acquaintances) with a number of familiar children. Ladd and Kochenderfer (1996) proposed that such friendships provide important affective benefits for children in the early weeks of school by reducing the strangeness of the environment. This study suggests that they also assisted in reducing the strangeness of the tasks by providing scaffolding. In addition, her brother Harry and Jenny's brother Jack were happy to provide support for their younger sisters at lunch and break times. Therefore Heather joined a friendly and supportive environment, in direct contrast to a number of the other children, for whom the initial context was not so inviting. Not only were there strong mesosystem links between home and school (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986), the supportive school environment no doubt fostered a sense of well-being and belonging for Heather. Broström (2002) has identified the resulting sense of feeling "suitable" in school as crucial for children's learning and development, and this was clearly evident in Heather's story.

Ongoing support

Heather's familiarity with school, and sense of belonging within the class, no doubt made it easier for Heather to be courageous about finding an interest (Carr, 1998) and participating in class activities. The observations revealed the important role played by Jenny in facilitating Heather's involvement at times when a lack of resources or understanding seemed likely to impede her progress. In a familiar and supportive environment Heather was able to demonstrate her skills, which in turn were reinforced and extended by her teacher and others. When Heather did make mistakes, instead of coming to dominate, these were overlooked or scaffolding was provided to help her master what was required.

Although Heather seemed anxious in relation to her written work, evidenced by lots of rubbing out, overall with the ongoing support she received from teachers, peers and her family, it seems that the demands of school provided about the right level of challenge. Like other middle-class mothers (e.g. Lareau's 1989 study), Ms Hurst

played an important part in shaping Heather's school experiences and providing ongoing support. Ms Hurst described actively encouraging Heather to focus on learning, rather than performance goals (Smiley & Dweck, 1994). Heather enjoyed the sense of achievement and was motivated by pride in her own learning. In a less supportive environment it is possible that her anxiety may have come to dominate and impede her progress. Heather's later difficult transition to another class shows how influential the context had been to her smooth transition to school.

Ms Knight's class

Matthew, the final case study child, joined Ms Knight's class halfway through the third term. He was the only case study child to join this class, although nine of the other participant families were in this room and the observer had spent a lot of time observing in there during the early part of the study. Matthew had attended Azure Kindergarten.

7. Matthew and the Meade family

Background

Matthew lived with his parents Mr and Ms Meade and his two older siblings, Mark and Mary. Mr and Ms Meade both worked full time. At the time of the first interview Matthew was four years and ten months old and attended Azure Kindergarten in the mornings. He was collected from Azure by his caregiver and spent the afternoons in family day care with a number of other children. Ms Meade thought that was "a pain. I'd like to be here for him" (CS7.1, p. 2). She said "He seems quite happy there [at the caregiver's house] but I think if he could choose not to go to [caregiver] he would. He loves going there but he likes to be around me" (CS7.1, p. 3). Mark and Mary both attended Kowhai School.

Ms Meade was happy to take part in the study because she was interested in education. She believed there were children in Year Three and Four who had taken a long time to settle in, so were are not performing "at their maximum" now (CS7.1, p. 11). She had hoped that Mr Meade would also participate in the interviews but this didn't eventuate. Because of her work and other commitments Ms Meade preferred to meet at her place of work for the first two interviews, and later asked that Matthew be interviewed at school. This meant that I only visited the Meade's house once during the four years of the study.

The family lived fairly close to Kowhai School, having moved to the area from another city the year before the study started. Matthew had been at a kindergarten for a year in their previous city. Looking at the three children's early childhood experiences Ms Meade noted that Mark "couldn't give a toss. He didn't go to kindy every day... so I never forced it". However, Matthew and Mary "are very alike, and she just loved going as often as she could. And he's the same because he really enjoys it " (CS7.1, p. 4).

All three children were learning to play the piano, Mary also played the flute, the clarinet and the guitar and Mark also played the trumpet and the guitar. Ms Meade

believed there were a number of benefits to learning to play musical instruments, especially in relation to enhancing children's thinking and learning skills. Although Ms Meade put Matthew's ethnicity as European, the family had cultural links to Japan and Ms Meade could speak Japanese, which Mary had also learned. The Japanese culture was "still quite a strong thing with us that the kids hang on to" (CS7.1, p. 9).

As a young child Matthew had a passion for trains. "Almost an obsession". The family had been on several train rides, including steam trains, "And he almost gets so worked up he's beside himself" (CS7.1, p. 7). At his previous kindergarten all Matthew had wanted to do was set up the trains and train tracks. However, at Azure he hadn't been so involved. "He's making more relationships here... Now he's built his little friends, doing what they're doing rather than just his own thing" (CS7, 1, p. 8).

His mother described Matthew as having "a big smile so he can win people over quickly". At this stage she thought he was left handed but said "he can't decide sometimes if he is left or right". She also said:

He's got quite a strong determination. Not in a negative sense, like stubborn, but he seems to have things very clearly in his mind. He seems to have an idea of where he's heading, what he wants to do, and so he's always asking for help to get it; so he's probably got quite clear thinking (CS7.1, p. 8).

In the observations Matthew seemed interested in construction activities and vehicles, usually involving active, exploratory play but also played in many other areas such as the family corner, sandpit, bran trough and dough table. On one occasion he played a 'Memory' game with one other boy, turning over halves of cardboard fish to find ones with matching number patterns. He showed that he could match patterns of one, two and five without counting, and correctly matched sets of eight, having counted in order to check. He engaged in a number of painting, drawing, cutting and collage activities. For example, on one occasion a teacher had drawn around him as he lay on a large piece of paper and he cut out and painted his own body shape, decorating it with milk bottle top eyes and sticks and fluff. He returned a number of times to this activity over the course of a morning, sometimes encouraged by a teacher and sometimes of his own volition. On another day, at a parent helper's request, he drew a picture and wrote his name on it, and dictated a story, which the parent wrote below the picture.

Over the course of each session he often flowed from one activity to the next,

seemingly drawn by seeing groups of children (perhaps suggesting something was of interest), like at a hand painting activity and when some children were taking it in turns to close each other in a large cardboard box, described in the following two excerpts:

Matthew is working on his painted body shape. Heather is doing a hand print and shows her black inky hand to Anaru and some other boys who have gathered around. Matthew joins the group and does a green hand print, going straight to the toilets to wash afterwards.

Matthew runs outside after morning tea. Anaru and another boy are in a cardboard box yelling 'Let me out!' Matthew goes over and watches. The boys get out and a girl gets in the box. The boys close the flaps and hold them shouting 'Don't let her out of there!' Then they let her out and another boy gets in the box. The activity is repeated several times with different children being squashed into the closed box. Matthew watches several children have turns without participating, then he gets into the box. When he is in the box something happens and he starts to cry. The children immediately let him out of the box. One of the teachers comes over and tell Anaru to apologise to Matthew and she puts the box away (Summary of Observation, 25/6).

Matthew also initiated activities independently. On one occasion he found an illustration of an aeroplane in a book, constructed a plane from materials at the carpentry table, painted it red, played with it and then was asked to show it to the other children at the mat time where he explained that he had made "a fire blast off plane". This showed persistence with an idea but also the way in which he could carry an idea through into different contexts. Persistence was also shown when he played with the trains and blocks. Matthew created a long train track, with complex bridge systems and populated the surrounding area with toy animals and people. He put together a long train and pushed it around his track.

Matthew seemed to enjoy listening to stories, and on one occasion seemed torn between his desire to sit with Anaru, at the back of the mat, and his interest in the story, eventually moving to the back but kneeling to get a better view. On a day when the children were showing their teddy bears and talking about them Matthew appeared not to have brought his. During the mat time he seemed to be rehearsing what he would say as he gestured with his hands as if showing the size of an object, and repeated this gesture when it was his turn to show the size of his bear 'Burt'. Later, when looking for his drink bottle at morning teatime, he discovered his bear in his bag.

His relationship with the teachers appeared mature and friendly. He was independent but accepted their help and initiated contact by showing them things. When specifically directed to an activity by a teacher he complied, but he ignored more general requests. For example, he ignored several general directives to tidy up but when told firmly that it was not mat time and that he should pick up the dough, he obeyed.

Matthew had one particular friend, Anaru, that he spent a lot of time with, and was also part of a small group of boys that frequently played together. He appeared to avoid 'trouble' by physically removing himself from conflict or possibly unacceptable behaviour like throwing food (which happened one day at morning tea). This made Anaru an interesting choice of friend as Anaru was often at the hub of anything slightly risky (in terms of not meeting with teacher approval). However, they seemed to have a comfortable relationship. Ten minutes after the box incident (described above) Anaru apologised to Matthew again, this time privately and without being prompted. Matthew responded by saying "Don't do that thing again" and the two boys hugged. Matthew then took Anaru to show him his recently discovered teddy bear.

Ms Meade was pleased with Matthew's early childhood education, later commenting on Matthew's assessment profile that she received from kindergarten when he left, saying "I was really impressed with what came, just the kind of observations that were made and interesting sorts of things. That's professional stuff. It wasn't 'Oh well he played nicely with Johnny today'" (CS7 in Matthew, p. 6).

Matthew had spent a lot of time at school with his mother and siblings during his last year at kindergarten. His mother also knew a number of the school staff well. As Matthew's starting date approached, Ms Meade felt there was "just so much that he's aware of because he's around this environment, so I don't really make a special talk about it... We haven't really talked about any specifics [about starting school]" (CS7.1, p. 6). At the time of the first interview they had recently discovered that Matthew would be starting school in Ms Knight's class, the only one of the case study children to be allocated to this class.

Ms Meade said she was "quite happy with any of the teachers", but knew that Ms Knight had a lot to do with the kindergarten, so she felt Matthew being in her class would ease his transition. "I know the kindy's very structured. I quite like that myself, and so I think he will be going from known things and also Ms Ashby and Ms Knight know each other, and I think they seem to know each other's system and the way if

works. Ms Knight seems to know what they've done. Fortunately he is going into her class". The only difference she saw between kindergarten and school was, "I think for him it will just be that he is now into more structure. Less play, less free choice I guess" (CS7.1, p. 3).

At four years and ten months old, his mother felt Matthew was currently getting "his act together" and she had noticed that in the last two months "he started writing copiously, drawing pictures, writing his name" (CS7.1, p. 3). She felt "quite glad" about him starting school "because he will get more challenged. He will be enabled to do things that he wants to do" (CS7.1, p. 4). Matthew appeared to be looking forward to going to school. "He's asked how many sleeps it is every other day, so he is looking forward to it". However, he hadn't said very much to his mother about what he expected school to be like. "I think it's a bit of an unknown" (CS7.1, p. 3). "Because it's a bit unknown he also doesn't know what to be afraid of. I think he's more excited about being where the other two kids are" (CS7.1, p. 4).

For her self, Ms Meade had mixed feelings. "It's not the empty nest but it is my baby starting school. It's happening too fast and I have regrets in the sense that he's finally at this age when no longer will we have days at home playing". However, she noted that he hadn't actually been at home much recently in any case. "That changed because I was working" (CS7.1, p. 4). All in all, Matthew's transition to school signaled "a new phase in our lives". Many of the Meade's friends were just having their third babies, but Ms Meade said, "I'm saying 'no' nappies and 'no' all that sort of nonsense.... I haven't got any more babies younger, which I did when the others went to school " (CS7.1, p.10).

Considering what she felt were important skills for children starting school, Ms Meade reflected that her views had changed in the light of her own experiences.

Well! This being the third one, it's quite interesting how different the three of them have been. I would have thought to be able to be told to do something and be able to do it, as in sit down, come here, or whatever. To be able to listen and follow instructions. I suppose alphabet recognition... My middle son he refused! He's probably the brightest of the three. I said 'Come on dear, let's do some alphabet work.' 'Not going to do it'. 'Right let's do some writing.' 'No'. And he wouldn't do anything but as soon as he got to school he was away with no worries at all. So he did understand it. He knew it but he wouldn't let me teach him. I think to be able to recognise the alphabet is really useful for kids, because straight away you know they can actually start writing. So to be familiar with writing is useful. (CS7.1, p. 7)

Ms Meade also thought that "Being able to relate to other children as an individual" was important, and again noticed some changes. "With the first children, mothers mummy them so much. By the time you get the third it's 'Go on. See you later'". Other skills she saw as important were, 'Being able to be reasonably independent... The toilet thing, and the eating their lunch, and knowing what's their lunch and what's not, and what's play lunch... Being able not to eat all their lunch at playtime" (CS7.1, p. 7).

With her older children Ms Meade had not been working when they started school and was "available to get them settled". With Matthew she said, "I guess I am going to be severely limited in that. I think on their birthday you're supposed to go on mother help that day. Well there's just no way I can really do that. I might see if I can get an hour to go down there. That's the beauty of being a working mother" (CS7.1, p. 5). She said that "I go in and out of my other two kids' classes regularly and I speak to the teachers... to find out how I can help their job and my child's chances". She would like to be involved in parent helping "I think that's really useful, as a mother, to look at who your children's peers are, as well as because it's so beneficial for the teacher". However, her working hours meant "that's not possible in this situation". She expected that "basically I'll just keep in touch. I'll probably go to his classroom and say 'Show me this' or 'Show me that'" (CS7.1, p. 9).

School visits

When I first spoke to Ms Meade she thought that an orientation visit would be useful but didn't think that parents needed to be involved too much beyond that as they "can actually unsettle them [new entrants] more.... You need them to be independent as quickly as possible" (CS7.1, p. 6). With Mark and Mary already at Kowhai School, Matthew had spent a lot of time there and once he knew which class he was in he started to point to his classroom as they passed. His mother felt he was quite confident about where he was going and who his teacher would be. Matthew had one official school visit with a group from Azure Kindergarten. Like the other parents of children at Azure, Ms Meade was not part of it and was unsure whether he had one or two visits. She felt that too many pre-visits should be avoided "for the sake of the teacher" but that at least one was useful.

I think it's then that they own where they are going. This is *my* classroom and these are *my* friends. And also he was able to see who was in his room with him. So that was good because he felt quite happy with the fact that some of these children had gone from kindy and disappeared,

and suddenly they were here now. (CS7.2, p. 1)

First weeks of school

Ms Meade was at the school at lunchtime on Matthew's first day and he came to her in tears "because he didn't know where his lunch was. In fact he'd forgotten his lunch was down in his bag" (CS7.2, p. 1). She felt that was the only time he had been upset though and it seemed that he was pleased to join his siblings at school and to see himself as "a big boy now. It's like he felt he'd crossed the threshold so he was quite pleased" (CS7.1, p. 2).

However, crossing the threshold brought with it a number of challenges. During the observation on his second day Matthew was moved from one unfamiliar activity and context to the next as the children went from morning news, led by a parent helper, to a practice for a concert with the whole junior school in the hall, to story writing in his own classroom, followed by morning tea, then a trip to the library with Ms King and her class. When he was with Ms Knight she explained aspects of what they were doing to him, but he was only with her for part of the morning. (Ms King also suggested that Child 11 explain to him what to do at the library.) Overall there were a lot of changes to adapt to and the whole morning was filled with prescribed activities, unlike his flowing selections based largely on his own interests that he had been used to at kindergarten. Despite this he appeared to cope with everything that was asked of him. Figure 15 summarised his experiences at writing time, when he published his first story.

Matthew is with a group whose story from yesterday has been typed into the computer and printed, known as 'publishing'. The children now have A4 sheets with the printed text of their stories on them. His story is called *My Birthday Party* and reads 'Me and David played sword fights'. Matthew draws a clear, neat picture of two figures to illustrate it. He works carefully and quietly while the other children chat. Ms Knight tells one of the boys to look after him and show him what to do. The boy doesn't, so Matthew just sits there while the other children glue their printed stories into their exercise books. One boy drips glue over the pile of books. Matthew's is on the top so gets the most glue on it. The boy directed to look after him doesn't say anything but after watching the other children Matthew also glues his paper into his book. He sits at the table when he has finished, even through the other children leave.

The parent helper tells him he can play on the computer and he stands behind two boys from his group as they play. Matthew watches for a while and then gets out a matching game. The teacher calls to the children to stop and tells them to look at her. She tells them to put away their toys and come to the mat. Matthew hesitates then goes to the mat (leaving the game where it is). The teacher tells the children who published stories to come to the front of the mat and tells Matthew to ask the parent

helper for his book. The parent helper hands him his book without him having to ask. The children from his group take it in turns to read their stories to the rest of the class. Matthew is last in the line and yawns as he waits. Ms Knight reads his story to the class and says his picture looks like a sword fight happening. (Summary of observation, 13.8)

Figure 15. Matthew's first story-writing activity

Matthew started school at the same time as Josh, one of the other boys from Azure Kindergarten. Josh also went into Ms Knight's class and although they hadn't seemed particularly friendly at kindergarten, he and Matthew were often together, especially on the mat and when the class lined up. Both boys seemed to welcome the contact, as the excerpts in Figure 16 show.

8.55 Matthew gives a piece of his birthday cake to Ms Knight and settles on the mat with Josh, who has also just started school.
 9.05 Matthew and Josh sit close together on the mat. One of the girls has brought some books for news time and Josh asks, "How do you read them?"
 9.30 The children line up to go to the school hall to practice their seating arrangements for the concert. Matthew holds Josh's hand in the line, until they get to the hall where a teacher positions him at the end of his class's row, next to an unknown child from the another class.
 9.55 As the class line up to leave the hall Matthew grabs Josh as his partner in the line.
 10.30 Matthew holds Josh's hand when the class lines up at morning teatime. Then he takes Child 11's hand instead.
 10.55 Matthew sits with Josh on the mat. Ms Knight reads a 'mixed up story book' and Josh and Matthew laugh into each others faces.
 11.00 The children are getting ready to go to the library. Josh takes Matthew's hand and they line up.
 11.05 At the library Matthew sits on the mat with Josh and Child 23. Child 11 is told to explain to Matthew what to do.
 11.15 Ms King sends her class to choose their books. Josh and Matthew go too, even though they are supposed to wait until their class is told to go. Matthew takes one of the books off a table and seeing Josh is already in the queue he joins him to wait for their books to be checked out.
 11.20 The two boys talk while they wait. Once their books are checked they wander around with some other boys (although they should be on the mat with Ms King).
 (Summary of excerpts from observation, 13.8)

Figure 16. Matthew and Josh seek each other's company throughout the day

Once Matthew was at school his mother noticed his interest in drawing flourishing.

Because he couldn't write he would draw. So he drew these amazing pictures and he'd tell you the whole story. Even two hours later he could tell you exactly what was going on. So that was a good form of

communication for him.... He just intensely draws for ten minutes or five minutes and then he relaxes and there you are. It's amazing.... Certainly drawing has opened up a lot of avenues for him. (CS7.2, p. 3)

His caregiver collected him every day for the six weeks of two o'clock finishes. Ms Knight reported that he was quite tired in the classroom, but Matthew had played with the carer's little girl in the afternoons and didn't seem to be as tired as his mother expected. "I think perhaps he would have coped with staying on" (CS7.2, p. 2). Once the first six weeks were over, with all three children at school Ms Meade said she felt "relieved". "Finally I wasn't paying someone [for childcare] and they were all in one place. Also just the fact that he was growing up and suddenly on to the next stage" (CS7.2, p. 3)

The second term and beyond

Towards the end of his second term Matthew was observed briefly on three afternoons. On the first day Matthew tidied up a game and then joined the children on the mat. He sat quietly, sucking his thumb while good-byes were said to a child who was leaving. The following afternoon he was drawing and colouring in a large blank book. He and another boy continued with their pictures, even after being called to the mat. After two calls Ms Knight told them that it really was mat time and to put the book away. Matthew drew for another five minutes before joining them.

During the final observation he was in the library corner of the classroom with Child 11. They played a game involving placing shapes into the correct places on boards. Matthew then wandered away and Child 11 brushed the shapes off the board and suggested "Let's make a farm". Matthew got a handful of animals and Child 11 got a container of rods. They went to the mat and used the rods to make fences. A number of children joined them and they make fenced enclosures and put the toy animals inside.

As the end of the first term approached Ms Meade noticed "all of a sudden he [Matthew] discovered he can write. Now that he's learned his alphabet, finally, he just writes and writes and writes. 'How do you spell this?' And sometimes he'll say 'How do you draw an 'r'?'". She described how although Matthew had initially communicated through his drawings now "I think he's pleased now that he can make it more grown up by writing" (CS7.2, p. 3).

Looking at Matthew's transition Ms Meade believed he had been ready for school

because before he went "he was perhaps lacking a challenge. At kindy... there were quite a few younger ones had come in because so many had gone to school, I think he was finding that a bit tedious, he wanted to get to where the bigger kids were" (CS7.2, p. 3). She felt that Matthew was "quite happy with everything" and while there wasn't an aspect of school that he particularly enjoyed there was nothing that he appeared to dislike either. "I think he just takes everything as, 'this is what we do', not really a matter of choice" (CS7.2, p. 3). However, there hadn't been a lot of feedback from Matthew himself. Although he related occasional incidents to his parents, such as the challenging behaviour of one of the boys, overall "he just doesn't talk about it [school]. He doesn't really mention it at all" (CS7.2, p. 2).

Ms Meade had expected to receive a report after Matthew had been at school for six weeks but concluded, "maybe they don't do it here". However, she was friendly with Ms Knight and had found a number of opportunities to talk informally about Matthew's progress. Ms Knight often showed her some of the things that Matthew had been writing. She believed that Ms Knight was "very accessible. I think any parent would find that she'd be very free to give them information" (CS7.2, p. 6). "I can easily access things and ask. I only presume that everybody else feels free to ask" (CS7.2, p. 7). However, she did feel that an information evening, that would reach all new parents would also be useful, with information on "how we can support them... how can we support the teachers and keep the learning curve going" (CS7.2, p. 7).

It appeared to Ms Meade that Matthew's progress was "Excellent. It was a little bit slow initially, but then that was his resistance, because I tried to get him to learn the alphabet but he wasn't interested. Then I bought some alphabet letters, which now he says 'Oh, what letter is this?' So it kind of came from him. And suddenly the penny's dropped and now he's writing so I think I'm really pleased" (CS7.2, p. 6). "It's like he's starting to run now. He was just plodding to start with. Then he started walking and now he's really going for it" (CS7.2, p. 7). However, with the end of the year approaching Ms Meade wondered what the long break from school over the Christmas holiday would do to Matthew's progress so she planned "he will not be having a nice big holiday. We'll keep writing. I might even buy a book" (CS7.2, p. 6). She anticipated, "He's in the straight J1 [Year One] next year" (CS7.2, p. 7).

Looking back

When I revisited the Meade's two years after Matthew started school, Matthew was present for much of the interview, but unlike Nicola, did not wish to contribute. He was more interested in organising a snack for himself and then campaigning to get his

mother to allow him to take his pocket money and go and buy some sweets from a near-by shop.

Ms Meade explained that although at the time of the last interview Matthew seemed to be making headway after a slow start, the following year "he went into a phase where he didn't pick up reading very quickly. He really struggled. He got stuck on red [reading level], got to yellow over last year but really only worked on red and yellow last year. It worried me". For the first term the following year Matthew and one other boy returned daily to Ms Knight's new entrant class for reading. "Like they were the *big* boys then. It was quite good.... So she worked with them fairly intensively just for reading" (CS7.3, p. 1).

Matthew's writing had also caused some concern:

His writing really didn't, there was a lot of reversing, and it was a struggle, and I did get a bit worried about it, but he was drawing these amazing pictures, like he really, because he couldn't write he would draw, and he's left handed, so I just kind of had to relax a bit and let him do it that way. And now, it's all just suddenly, everything's fallen into place. He's raced ahead on reading. He's on, like, blue or purple I think, so he's really gone level, level, level. And his writing's legible, and he still occasionally reverses, but not very often. So it was like he had quite a latent period... (CS7.3, p. 1)

Although there had been some problems with reading and writing, Matthew still enjoyed drawing. "He puts so much detail in, and he's very clear in his mind what he wants to do. Like he'll draw it... very intense, like it might be 20 minutes of really intensive drawing. And he never says, "Oh is this okay?", it's "This is my picture" (CS7.3, p. 1). His mother also felt that he was very able physically, "like he's a great little soccer player, he's been the best player on his team. He's the one that gets the goal every week, or two, or three". She felt that Matthew had good hand-eye coordination, good spatial skills and was "pretty good" at maths. His piano playing (which he had been doing since he was four) had also improved.

Like, when reading happened, and writing happened, music happened and he can actually play with two hands. He refused. He could play right and he'd play left but the would *never* play the both and it would just stress me to the max.... And he would say 'Not doing it'.... Now he can do two [hands] without any trouble.... It's just like, suddenly; "I can do it! I can do it!" and he'll have a go. Whereas before he would just struggle away, 'Oh Mum help me. You do it.' And I would think 'What's the point of this?' (CS7.3, pp. 7-8).

Mark and Mary's progress at school had appeared to Ms Meade to be incremental, "they just did this normal little path where they build one after the other and everything just happened in a normal kind of way". Therefore she was puzzled by Matthew's plateaux followed by sudden leaps of progress and sought to explain them. "I don't know whether he had a period where he needed to take it all in, and not worry about putting out. I feel that's what it is with him.... With Matthew it was *nothing* and then *everything* all at once. I don't think it's any one factor. For him it's just developmental" (CS7.3, p. 8).

Ms Meade also wondered, "perhaps, I didn't put enough time in before he started school; reading to him and talking to him, 'cause I'm doing a reading paper now [at university], and all these things I should have known then" (CS7.3, p. 1). Although at the previous interview she said, "We do quite a bit of discussing and you get this high-powered talk coming back" (CS7.2, p. 5), Ms Meade now felt less sure that she had done enough. "I think I did a fair bit of work but I could still probably have put a lot more in when he was three or four" (CS7.3, p. 2). She blamed her working hours but also noted that Matthew, like his brother before him, hadn't been interested. "I think, probably, he missed out a bit on that because I was working so much, of that really lots of reading, lots of talking, lots of writing. He wasn't that interested, but I really didn't push it either. And I wonder if that had an effect on his slightly slower start. But now he's up at the top, like he's with his peers and above" (CS7.3, p. 1). In some respects she felt Matthew had also been disadvantaged socially because her working hours had prevented her from having the children's friends round to the house to play very often.

Ms Meade believed that parents needed a lot more information about what they could do to support their children. "How they can help them in the age three to four group.... I think a lot of them are ignorant, not because they don't want to help but because they just don't know where to start. Or they try and push them into the wrong things like trying to teach them to read, or teach them to write when they are not ready for that". She believed that schools needed "to start doing something to help parents pre-school. Whether schools do it alone or work with preschool, I don't know what's best" (CS7.3, p. 2). Later in the interview she reflected that perhaps the government should invest money in providing courses that informed parents. "That parents will want to come along and not feel threatened or ignorant but that they will be able to use, and actually take home and do things.... I think the benefits will be reaped by less need for enrichment... if they get it early maybe it cuts back on Reading Recovery, maybe it cuts back on all kids that have to struggle to finally get things together in

their heads. So, let's get more money out of the government" (CS7.3, p. 10).

Ms Meade felt that her friendships with the staff at Kowhai School had made her comfortable about asking for the information she wanted but was aware some parents could be more hesitant. Her advice was to "just keep asking. If there's anything that they don't know or understand, ask, ask, ask. And teachers never refuse if it is done in the right way..... If parents ask, no teacher would ever refuse". She also thought that it was important that teachers offered information so that parents could support children's learning. They also needed to know why the child was doing the work that was given. "I think parents need to know, to understand better about why they do it, why that activity has been given", because sometimes, when a child resisted, there could be a another way of achieving the same goal (CS7.3, p. 3).

Matthew's final comments

Matthew's interview proved to be the least satisfactory of the children's interviews. Due to the constraints of her working hours and the children's after-school activities, Ms Meade arranged that she and Matthew would meet me at Kowhai School one lunchtime. A small interview room was used but on reflection, both time and location were problematic. Matthew seemed happy to complete the interview but his answers were mostly brief and after completing one picture, he was keen to go and eat his lunch. In addition, the noise from the children playing outside meant that later, when the tape was being transcribed, there were a number of sections where Matthew's soft voice could not be heard. Ms Meade was present for the interview and occasionally answered for him or asked a new question, making it less relaxed than some of the other interviews.

As an eight-year-old Matthew seemed to be enjoying school saying, "I like school. I like the classroom I was in. I didn't really know what it was like when I was old [sic] but I do now" (Matthew, p. 3). The thing he liked best was "that we can play games sometimes". Another thing he liked was the fact that "you learn heaps of stuff and if you didn't go to school you wouldn't learn anything and by the time you grow old you actually know stuff and when you first start school you don't know much". Prompted by his mother he said he had learned "Algebra, measurement, times, plus, equals, divided by", and to tie his shoelaces (Matthew, p. 3). He thought there was "not really" anything that could be done to make school even better (Matthew, p. 4).

Matthew believed that school could be made easier for new entrants if their parents "could see what it's like, so they know what they are going to go to, so they could go

there after kindly and show them and they could go to the office and see what class they are going to be in" (Matthew, p. 3). Teachers could also help by making it "a little bit easier". His other suggestions were drowned by the background noise.

Looking back on his own transition to school, Matthew said:

When I started school it was quite hard to learn and I didn't know a lot of stuff when I first started school and I was really nervous when I first started school. It was really hard because heaps of big kids boss you around when you start school and you don't know how it's going to feel like. It's real hard when you start school because, the only one thing that's hard is trying to get everything right and (long pause) you don't know how it's going to feel like 'cause you've never been to school before.... On the first day it was real tough because you don't know how it's going to feel like and you don't know what's going to happen (Matthew, p. 1).

He said that that he hadn't expected to feel like that. Thinking back specifically to lunchtimes he noted, "You don't know how it's going to feel like. You don't know how much peoples there's going to be". The difference to kindergarten had been "It [school] was a bit longer. It was different 'cause you have to learn stuff and every time you have got something to do" (Matthew, p. 2).

Matthew listed several things that four-year-olds needed to know before they started school but these were inaudible on the tape recorder. He drew a picture showing two children and a teacher "on the field". One child was jumping and the other, "roly poly" down a slope (Matthew, p. 6).

Discussion: Reflections on Matthew and the Meade Family's story

As the third child in the family, Ms Meade anticipated a smooth transition for Matthew. The teachers also believed that the transition was easier for younger siblings. The details of Matthew's story help to show why his transition was not as easy as the adults expected.

A familiar place?

Matthew had lots of contact with Kowhai School through his siblings before he started but little specific information or preparation for his own transition. Mary started school before Matthew was born and Mark had started when Matthew was just a baby. They had both started at a school in their previous city. Hence, Matthew had no direct experiences of the new entrant classrooms or their teachers at Kowhai School. Unlike

Tessa and Heather, his visits to school had not included participating in his siblings' classes or sitting on the mat in the new entrant class. While he had some knowledge of the school grounds he knew nothing of his actual classroom until his one brief school visit. He seemed surprised by the nature of the activities at school, mentioning several times how tough it was "because you don't know how it's going to feel like and what's going to happen". Just as Anna's story revealed important differences between having friends and acquaintances, Matthew's showed there was an important distinction between global familiarity with school and specific knowledge of what happened at the new entrant level. Perhaps because Matthew was assumed to know about school through his contact via his siblings, his own preparation was overlooked a little.

A confusing start

Matthew's birth date meant that like Nicola he started school during the busy third term when class sizes were large. His rather bewildering second day at school illustrates some of the difficulties involved in being a new child in an active class, where the induction of new children has to be combined with teaching an established group. Whole-school activities, like preparation for the school concert, are likely to prove daunting to a new child who has just arrived from kindergarten and it is little wonder that Matthew reflected "You don't know how much peoples there's going to be". Even within the classroom, when the teacher directly requested that a peer tell him what to do, this support was not forthcoming. The challenges of being the only new child are a feature of the enrolment policy in Aotearoa/New Zealand, and hence a feature of the macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) that impacts on the experience of individuals. Matthew's story, perhaps even more than the others, illustrates that continuous enrolment may not have the pedagogical benefit of a more individual experience that writers like Neuman (2002) suggest.

Although Matthew's comments as an eight-year-old revealed that his initial school experiences had been quite challenging, he seemed to settle quickly into the classroom routines. There were some obvious similarities between Matthew's experiences in early childhood and at school, offering some aspects of continuity during the transition, although there were important aspects of discontinuity too.

Continuity and discontinuity between early childhood and school

Although his friend from kindergarten, Anaru, did not go Kowhai School, Matthew developed similar friendship patterns at school to those he had established in kindergarten. This involved being 'one of the boys' but with a close friend within the group. Although he had not seemed particularly friendly with Josh before they started

school, the fact that they were both new at the same time, and neither had other friends in the class, perhaps helped to establish their initial relationship.

Familiar activities from kindergarten such as matching games, drawing pictures and telling stories about them, and mat times, were found in the school programme. Matthew's interest in drawing developed rapidly at school. However, like Anna, Matthew took a little time to learn the letters of the alphabet, and from his mother's comments, problems with reading and writing dominated for a while, as they did for a number of other children. At the same time the focus on 'getting it right' may well inhibit children's early learning at school. As discussed earlier, Marshall's (1992) view that the nature of the classroom influences the type of learner children become is relevant to this study. Matthew revealed a clear orientation towards learning goals in his activities in early childhood, but his own comment that "the only one thing that's hard [at school] is trying to get everything right" indicates his awareness of a shift towards a performance orientation at school (Smiley and Dweck, 1994). This environmental influence illustrated the sociocultural, rather than psychological, nature of dispositions (Carr, 2001; Claxton & Carr, 2004).

Matthew's behaviour showed some similar patterns at kindergarten and at school. At kindergarten he appeared to be aware of behavioural expectations and tried to keep within these, although he also had strategies to passively resist some activities. These strategies were also utilised at school, to avoid some tidying up jobs and continue with his drawing instead of coming to the mat. Another similar behaviour was in forgetting what was in his bag. At kindergarten he didn't realise that he had his bear (which was required for the mat time discussion and only discovered later), and at school he was distressed because he thought he didn't have his lunch, which was also in his bag. One area of discontinuity was his strategy of using adults as a resource (Cullen, 1988), which did not carry through to school. He responded to teacher directions but did not initiate contact with his teacher or the other adults at school in the way that he had with his kindergarten teachers.

Utilising Carr's (2001) learning story framework, we can see that Matthew was interested in the activities at both school and kindergarten, and largely able to become involved in both contexts too. One noticeable difference was that the tasks at school were compulsory, rather than following Matthew's own interests, and the nature of the school day meant there were few opportunities for the sort of persistence that Matthew had shown at kindergarten. By the later observations, there were some elements of self selection at school, as Matthew and Child 11 initiated a game with some farm

animals in a break between activities, and when he and another boy continued to draw after requests to stop and come to the mat.

Mother blaming

Ms Meade's view of her own role in Matthew's development is also worthy of further consideration. Although at the start of the study Ms Meade described her children as having 'every opportunity', she later came to blame herself for Matthew's perceived difficulties in reading and writing. She commented that if she hadn't worked and had done more with him then he may have done better at school. While Ms Trent experienced guilt at balancing the demands of several children, Ms Meade experienced the more classic guilt that Daniel (1998) found many mothers experienced while balancing child care and work. The pervasiveness of the legacy of earlier beliefs about the role of devoted mothers (see Burman, 1997) can be seen in Ms Meade's view that her being at work had also been detrimental to the children's social development because it limited the times they could invite friends home to play. This overlooks the fact that Matthew spent his mornings at kindergarten and afternoons at family daycare so had almost constant opportunities for socialising with other children, in addition to the other benefits of early childhood education. In Aotearoa/New Zealand in the 21st century, children who are unable to attend early childhood education are seen as deprived (May, 2001) and yet Bowby's view that motherhood and a career are irreconcilable (Burman, 1997) is still evident in the views of educated professional women like Ms Meade, who are quick to blame themselves for any difficulties their children encounter. It also overlooks the potential role of the school in fostering children's social development.

Overall discussion of the case studies

The experiences of the seven case study children whose stories have been told in this chapter demonstrate the uniqueness of the experiences, and each story reflects on the key aspects revealed. Looked at together, they shed light on a number of general issues. Firstly, they highlight the difficulties in determining what time period constitutes 'transition'. The stories indicate that the transition to school could be thought of as happening on two levels. There is the physical and social transition as the child enters school on the first day, but taking up the pupil role actually occurs over an extended period of time. The first can be viewed as an ecological transition, when the child's positioning in the ecological environment is altered as a result of change of role and setting (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The second fits with the notion of a rite of passage that occurs over a prolonged period (James and Prout, 1997; Turner, 1977).

The model in Figure 2 illustrates the children's pathways over time. Looking at transition over this extended period, the findings are consistent with the well-documented evidence that transition can be difficult for some, but not all, New Zealand children (Ledger, 2000; Norris, 1999; Renwick, 1984). However, the timing of the difficulties varied, as did the measures suggesting children found it difficult. For example, Nicola's initial reaction was the most noticeable but Anna's quiet distress started later and extended over a much longer period of time. This challenged one of my earlier assumptions about trying to 'facilitating a smooth transition' because it became clear that what constituted a transition, and what could be classed as 'smooth' were both difficult to define. The fact that assessments of how well the transition had gone were influenced by the time and nature of the measures that were taken raises questions about research that attempts to correlate measures of transition with other variables. These ideas will be explored further in Chapter Thirteen, taking account of the 23 children's experiences.

The stories also indicated that the initial transition, whether considered in days or weeks, did not necessarily lead to a stable cycle of positive or negative experiences. Even when there were difficulties, the traumatic aspects of early school experiences might be forgotten later (as in Nicola's case). Thus, as an isolated event, starting school was highlighted as a time when new roles are taken up, but for children's resulting careers as pupils, their *ongoing* experiences appeared to be as, if not more, important than the nature of the initial contact with school. There were many, sometimes serendipitous, interventions that seemed to enhance an initial pathway. Likewise, a positive start did not mean a child was immune from later challenges. In

exploring these stories in detail there are insights into the many factors that affect the transition experience, and the transactional nature of their influence.

The stories showed that although several studies have found children experience differences between school and earlier settings as distressing (e.g. Cleave et al., 1982; Curtis, 1986; Ledger, 2000; Renwick, 1987), discontinuity was not necessarily problematic, and in fact some children experienced change positively. Hence rather than creating greater continuity between early childhood education and school (thus removing borders), supporting children to become successful 'border crossers' seems more appropriate. This is important because even with considerable continuity (as in Anna's case) there could be problems. For some children there was much to learn in the process of becoming a pupil, and where this was difficult, leaving children to flounder unhappily did not appear to have any benefits for their attitudes towards school or their learning.

The findings both support and challenge the view of writers such as Furedi (2001, 2002) who argue that adults have been socialized to be over protective of children. The stories suggest that adults need not fear exposing children to change, but for children to benefit from challenges, if they are beyond the level they can cope with independently, there is a role for more competent others to support and scaffold them. Vygotsky (1978a) described this as working in the child's zone of proximal development. Hence, moves to support children's transitions should consider who is positioned to assist the child. Clearly teachers play an important role but in a class of 20 to 30 children, one teacher cannot provide individual support to children all the time. Therefore parents/caregivers, siblings and peers all share the scaffolding role, but the stories showed that children have differing access to this form of support. Also, those placed in the potential tutoring role were shown to have different levels of access to the information that would prove helpful. For the parents, the effects of social capital, described by Bourdieu (1997) as the resources arising from group membership, were evident in the sources of information on which they could draw. Some, like Ms Samson, had few social networks from which to obtain information about school. Others, like Ms Arthur, had a number of sources and felt well informed. The findings support the view that providing parents with information is an important aspect of transition (Dowling, 1995; Fabian, 1998, 2000b, 2002), but they also show that this alone is not enough. The lived experience of transition was so complex that an informed parent was only one feature. The parent could advise and support outside school hours, and mediate between home and school for the child, but given that much of the school day was spent away from the parent, many other factors also combine to

affect the child's experiences. Also, where the child was supported in other ways, parental involvement was not essential (as Tessa's story showed). Nevertheless, information played another important role in providing reassurance and peace of mind for the parents.

At the same time, children's views about the value of their new role also appeared influential in the way they negotiated challenges. If transition is viewed as a rite of passage (Piddington, 1957) then it is reasonable to assume that where feats of endurance (Turner, 1968, cited in James & Prout, 1997, p. 247) are faced in taking up a new role, there will be motivation to tackle these if the resulting role is valued by the individual. For the case study children, it was clear that the role of pupil sometimes involved a loss of status. Hence, even though starting school is viewed as a vertical (Neuman, 2002), or lateral (Beach, in press) transition, involving a notion of progress, it may not be experienced as such by the children concerned.

The complexity of the issues was demonstrated further in the diversity that characterised the lived experience of transition, even for children who shared similar features in their backgrounds. Anna and Heather's stories showed the clearest example of this. Both were the youngest children in their families, with brothers who attended Kowhai School. The two girls had both attended playcentres prior to attending Azure Kindergarten from the age of four. Their parents were familiar with the school layout and routines and knew some of the staff personally. The children had visited the school and had observed classroom life, in addition to being told by their brothers about school. Their kindergarten teachers worked with the new entrant teachers at Kowhai School to ensure that there were similarities in the programme, rules, language, and behaviour management techniques in order to provide continuity between the two settings. Most of the children from Azure Kindergarten went on to attend Kowhai School so the girls already knew many of the children in their new entrant class.

The model in Figure 2 provides a useful framework for understanding how experiences can differ so widely, given a fairly similar starting point. The successive transactions between characteristics of both child and context create different cycles of experience. These are shaped by differences in image, reputation, positioning and support, which can be subtle but influential. As the stories showed, external influences, at the levels Bronfenbrenner (1997) referred to as the exo- and macro-systems also impact on these transactions. The model illustrates the importance of considering the child's overall experience. Even the level of support a child receives is

affected by the interweaving of other factors.

All the stories indicated that the process of becoming a pupil started before children even got to school, when reputations were established on all sides as children, parents and teachers assimilated what they already knew (or thought they knew) about the other participants in the transition process. Although many parents wanted their children to enter school as a 'blank slate' with no previous history to affect their teachers' views of them (see Chapter Eleven), the case studies suggest that even in the absence of 'official' information, stereotypes based on early childhood service attended, family composition and prior contact with families, help to shape the (sometimes erroneous) reputations children brought with them. Teachers appear to have had in mind some implicit views about the characteristics of a 'good' pupil, and children's initial reputation was formed as they were measured against these.

Formal and informal teacher assessment once children started could enhance or detract from initial reputations, but as this drew on a narrow range of objectives, it often provided a limited picture of the child. The findings support Ladd and Price's (1987) view that school entry is a time of opportunity and risk, as reputations are developed. When teachers have a particular image of the child as 'normal' or 'desirable', then pedagogy can become focused on preventing and correcting deviations from the norm (Dahlberg et al., 1999). This approach was shown to be detrimental because it overlooked the many strengths a child might have. The holistic, credit-based Learning Story model of assessment described by Carr (2001) provides a useful framework, both for establishing positive reputations and offering insights as to how a child might be supported. In contrast, skills-based assessment provided a base for curriculum planning, but did not pick up other potentially useful features such as the child's dispositions and the way in which the classroom context impacted on these.

The case study stories have highlighted some of the beliefs and practices that shaped these seven children's experiences. The following three chapters explore the issue of beliefs and practices in more depth, looking at the themes that arose in the data from all the participants.

Chapter Ten

Beliefs and practices: The beginning of the transition process

The previous chapter looked at the experiences of the seven case study children and their families over a four-year period. This chapter, and the three that follow, broaden the focus on the initial transition by exploring the data from the 23 participant families. Chapters Ten, Eleven and Twelve consider the beliefs and practices that shaped the participants' experiences of transition to Kowhai School. Chapter Thirteen focuses on the issues for children.

Some of the issues addressed in Chapters Ten to Twelve can be thought of as the large two-way arrows shown in Figure 2 (Chapter Two), which represent transactions between aspects of the environment, such as the information parents have about school, or school has about a family. Others relate directly to interactions between child and environment, such as a child's experience of school visits. This chapter focuses on the beginning of the transition process, including the selection of a school, pre entry visits and the other information families had about school, and parental thoughts and concerns. A key idea underpinning the themes in this chapter is the way families and schools were positioned in their early contact with one another, and the ways the beliefs and practices of the adults framed what happened for children.

Choosing a school

For the participant families, choosing a school was an important first step in the transition process, and for Kowhai School, parental selection was seen as crucial, and much effort was put into promoting itself as 'the school to attend' (P, p. 10). Hence, at the beginning of the parent-school relationship, power appeared to rest with parents, as they chose from the available options.

Factors that influenced the parents' choice of school

Kowhai School is situated in an urban area and the local kindergartens estimated that children fed into as many as 13 different primary schools. Therefore most parents had a range of schools to select from. Only the Samsons had chosen Kowhai School simply because they didn't really know what else was available. The other parents had actively considered a range of different options. Most parents listed more than one reason for their selection, all of which have been included in Table 4. More than half the parents mentioned the school's good reputation and/or its location as factors that influenced their decision. Mother 11's comment that "the neighbours go to Kowhai School and they said that it was good and they keep parents really informed" (p. 1) was typical of the 14 parents who based their decision on the school's reputation.

Sometimes a specific aspect had attracted parents, such as Mother 23 who had "heard from many parents that this is a very nice school and they support their [children with ESL] English" (p. 1). For three parents reputation was the only reason for their choice. Of the 13 families who mentioned location, 11 said Kowhai was their closest school or on a convenient bus route. As Ms Trent commented, to go to a more distant school "I would have set myself up for ten years of car pooling" (CS4.1, p. 2). Seven parents noted that perceived problems with other local schools led to their selection of Kowhai. Two parents had deliberately moved their older children to Kowhai from other schools.

Table 4. Parents' reasons for choosing Kowhai School

Reason	No. of parents
Good reputation	14
Location	13
Problems with other local schools	7
Prior connection	4
Followed on from Azure Kindergarten	3
Impressed by a visit	2
Friends go there	2
Didn't know what else was available	1

Parents' reasons for their selection provides important information for schools. Clearly reputation was one of the most influential factors, with many parents relying on the advice of friends, neighbours and work colleagues. Impressions gained from visits were also important. For example, "This was the first [school] we looked at, and she [oldest child] really liked it so we stayed" (M13, p. 1). "We started with Kowhai and we were really impressed so we decided we wouldn't look any further" (M22, p. 1).

The school's response: Remaining a popular choice

The Principal was well aware of the importance parents placed on first impressions and the school's reputation in the community, and although Kowhai School was popular and had to manage entry through an enrolment scheme (see Appendix D for details), he felt it was important to keep promoting the school and maintaining its reputation. Both the Principal and the Board of Trustees representative thought it was essential that the local parents/caregivers did not perceive Kowhai School to be too difficult to get into. Under a previous enrolment scheme, word had gone out that the school roll was 'closed'. Parents/caregivers had therefore stopped trying to enrol their children and had gone to other schools, leading to a drop in the school roll and eventually to a loss of teachers. Under the new enrolment scheme, all parents were

welcomed and all children's names added to a waiting list. Decisions about the allocation of places were made in the term before children were due to start.

The Principal was the key point of contact for parents/caregivers selecting a school, and he saw it as important for the school's image to make them feel welcome and let them look around the school, even if they were unlikely to be offered a place for their child. Although he acknowledged that the teachers in the other local schools worked just as hard, the principal felt that Kowhai School was generally perceived by parents/caregivers as the best school in the area, and most people who visited did send their children there if they were offered a place. He acknowledged that, "when they don't come it's a bit of a blow to the ego" (P, p. 8).

The school's desire to be responsive to the community was reflected in the establishment of a community liaison representative on the Board of Trustees. She described her role as keeping "the communication between home and school as open as possible" (BoT rep.1, p. 1). This included addressing parental concerns and queries, conducting surveys, and following up on families who left the school to find out their reasons for leaving. She was keen for parents to voice their concerns with the school "rather than niggle in the community" (BoT rep.2, p. 17).

A commitment to providing a high quality education was evident in a number of initiatives that were developed within the school during the course of the project. The desire to be a focus of the study was further evidence of the staff's interest in continued improvements, and feedback from the initial findings was acted on, with the aim of enhancing children's experiences and community attitudes.

Being offered a place

Having made their selection, the families who wanted their child to start at the new entrant level at Kowhai School completed an Application for Enrolment form. From this point on the power base seemed to shift to the school. The Enrolment Committee met once a term and considered the enrolments for the following term and it was therefore quite close to the child's fifth birthday before parents knew if their child would be offered a place at Kowhai School. In Nicola's story Ms North explained how unsettling it was for a family who was waiting for news of the school's decision. Mother 22, obviously unaware of the priority accorded to siblings, described the tension involved in waiting to find out if their daughter would be able to go to the same school as her brother.

We had applied for Child 22 to go to school and only found out two months before she started that she would be able to go to the same school as her brother. I think that's hard... I don't know what they are thinking... there are so many stresses on parents now and that's an added stress. 'Are we going to be running from one school to another?' Because we wouldn't have taken [Child 23's brother] out of Kowhai. We would have taken her to a different school until she could get in but that's not the ideal. I think that's hard... you might have to go way out of the way to take your kids to school and then juggle everything else as well. (M22.1, pp. 11-12)

Other families, who were familiar with the system, felt confident that their child would be accepted and were not unduly concerned.

Pre entry visits

Pre entry visits were seen by school staff, early childhood teachers and many of the parents as a key factor in helping children become familiar with the school context. However, the individual experiences and opinions in relation to such visits varied enormously. The principal said there was no official school policy regarding visits. The school's 'unofficial' policy, outlined by the teachers and the school secretary, allowed for one unaccompanied visit for each child. While the single unaccompanied visit was the norm, in practice the participant children had anything from no school visits, to four visits (two alone and two with a parent). Several factors were influential here, but the most important seemed to be the early childhood service the child attended. The findings are therefore presented in two sections, the first explores the experiences of children from Azure Kindergarten and the second considers the experiences of the children from other early childhood services.

Pre entry visits for children at Azure Kindergarten

The teachers' perspectives

Kowhai School's policy of one school visit had been developed in conjunction with Azure Kindergarten. The kindergarten teachers took turns in taking small groups of children for their school visits. The visits usually lasted an hour and a half and during that time the kindergarten teachers would sit with the visiting children in the class but also "leave for a wee while and come back" (Ms Keane, p. 6).

There were deliberate similarities in the programmes, rules, language and behaviour management techniques used at Azure Kindergarten and in the new entrant rooms that were intended to provide continuity between the two settings. The teachers therefore saw the single visit as adequate and said that its purpose was to familiarise children

with the school context. The teachers in both settings felt that this arrangement worked very well.

We have found that it works brilliantly and they just slot into school over there because they know so many people from kindergarten and it's just like another kindergarten. (Ms Ashby, p. 11)

The new entrant teachers were happy for the kindergarten teachers to stay for a while but discouraged parents from visiting with their children. "That's more useful than with mum" (Ms King.1, p. 15). There was concern amongst the new entrant teachers that a visiting child would cling to a parent and not join in with the class. Ms Knight said she was happy to have parents in the classroom but not until the child had been at school for at least a fortnight.

An observation of a visit

A summary of an observation of a visit by children from Azure kindergarten to Ms Knight's class is shown in Figure 17.

Ms Knight prepares the morning's materials before she goes on crossing duty. On her return to the classroom there is a new boy starting that day so Ms Knight talks to his mother and then settles the children on the mat. Child 11 (who has been a school for one week) cries when his mother leaves. After the roll the class moves to the hall for singing. When they return to the classroom one of the kindergarten teachers is there with a group of children from Azure kindergarten. Ms Knight calls out the names of the two children who will be coming to her class, and they are told to sit on the mat. The kindergarten teacher takes the other kindergarten children to their new entrant classrooms.

Ms Knight seats the visiting girl, Sarah, beside Child 8 and the visiting boy, David, beside Child 11. The kindergarten children sit quietly while today's news group give their news, and the teacher and some of the children write one child's news on the board. At the end of mat time Ms Knight asks for volunteers to look after the visitors and a number of children put their hands up. At this point the kindergarten teacher returns and greets the child who started that morning (who came from Azure), and the rest of the class.

The children move to the tables for writing. Ms Knight gives the visiting children paper and crayons but tells the other children that they are not to use crayons as "they are writing with pencils". David sits with Child 11. Both visiting children draw on their paper and talk to the children at their tables. The boy who started that day scribbles over his paper with purple crayon. Two new entrant children get him an alphabet card. They name the letters on the card and Ms Knight asks one of them to show him how to write using a pencil. Another boy is asked to come and point to letters on an alphabet card for the visiting kindergarten boy.

The kindergarten teacher brings the other kindergarten children back to the room and Ms Knight tells them to look at two of the established children's work "to see how well the children are writing". All the children are called to the mat. The principal arrives and the kindergarten children are told to stand and are introduced to him.

The visiting children are paired with children from Ms Knight's class to go to the toilet. Child 11 is told to take David, but perhaps unsure who David is, takes the wrong child. David is taken by one of the other boys. When they return, the kindergarten teacher takes the visiting children back to kindergarten.
(Summary of observations, 10.5).

Figure 17. Summary of a visit (children from Azure Kindergarten)

As this example observation showed, the teacher had to balance the requirements of an established class, with the needs of the visiting children, and on this day had a new child to settle. Her approach ensured that learning opportunities were provided for both the class members and the visitors, predominantly through peer scaffolding. Although the visit was very brief it provided a number of insights into school. The visiting children saw their classroom and the school toilets. They met their teacher, the principal and some of the other children in their class. Children experienced activities that were not too dissimilar to kindergarten, but there was also a clear demarcation evident between kindergarten children (who can draw or scribble with crayons) and school children, who write letters with a pencil, thus implying that the transition would be accompanied by some changes in status. The child who had just started demonstrated that this was a transitional process. The teacher also used the visit to affirm the more prestigious role of the school children. Child 11, who had been tearful at the start of the day, was given the responsibility of caring for a visitor. Overall, there was a sense of social inclusion, children visited with a group of others who would all be coming to this school around the same time as them, and they were paired with children who had previously attended Azure Kindergarten. The kindergarten teacher provided a link between the two settings. It is perhaps also important to note what the visit did not include; the rather tearful start to the day for some children, the visit to the hall for singing, or playtime or lunchtime; all things which later analysis revealed some new entrants were known to find difficult.

The parents' perspectives

Of the 23 families involved in the study 16 had children who attended Azure Kindergarten as their main early childhood service. Of these children, 13 had one visit with their kindergarten teachers, one was sick on the day of her scheduled kindergarten visit, so her mother took her for an unaccompanied visit on another day, and two

children had their first visit with the kindergarten group followed by a second visit with their mother because the first had proved problematic.

While the policy of kindergarten teachers taking groups of children for visits was valued by the teachers, it had the effect of excluding parents from the visiting process. Two of the 16 parents didn't mention the visits at all in response to a question about contact with the school before the child started. Six parents said they didn't know that their child had made a visit until after it took place and two had no idea how many visits their child had made. Lack of knowledge about the visits was a source of annoyance to a number of parents. While parents who had recently had older children go through Azure Kindergarten were aware that a school visit would be coming up, for others, the first they knew of it was when the child came home and said "I went to school today". Some parents, like Mother 17, whose son was distressed during his visit, were angry that they had not been informed because they would have liked the opportunity to prepare their children in advance. Ms Ashby thought that they did let the parents know about the visit but admitted "perhaps not as plain as we could" (p. 12) and decided that in future this information could be made more explicit.

Only 5 of the 16 parents expressed satisfaction with the policy of one unaccompanied visit. For example, Mother 11 said the visit "really got Child 11 going. Then he wanted to go [to school] because he saw friends in the class" (p. 5). Mother 21 felt the visit was useful and that her daughter was lucky because Ms Keane was nice and Child 21 "likes her too much" (p. 1). Ms Hurst said Heather had been pleased to discover children in her class from kindergarten. Ms Meade thought the visit allowed children to own where they were going. "This is *my* classroom and these are *my* friends" (CS7.2, p. 1).

In contrast, Mother 20 described how discouraged she had felt by the visiting policy compared to a series of half-day visits she had had with her older child at a Christchurch school:

[At the Christchurch school] they encouraged parents to come and spend one morning and one afternoon and one other period during the day at the school with your child for three hours so that the child knows what to expect, this is the morning routine and this is the afternoon routine and this is how things work. It was really good because it made me aware of what they were doing.

Here [Kowhai] I came and said to the secretary, 'Oh Child 20 will be starting next term, should I schedule these half day visits?' and she said 'Oh no, they just come with Azure Kindergarten one day'. I thought that was a little bit poor. I felt very uninformed with that, even though I have

a daughter here. And I wasn't there when they came with the kindy. They didn't let us know that that was the day they were coming to school, so I didn't get to see how she related in that.... I found that really hard here [Kowhai] because you know what little children are like, they don't volunteer a lot of information, to know what she's doing in the daytime... (M20, p. 5)

Five parents thought that it would be more useful if they were allowed to visit with their child. When only the child had visited they were left knowing very little about the school. As Mother 20 commented, "She [Child 20] didn't have the ability to tell me about what happened or what they did or anything. She couldn't even tell me who her teacher's name was.... she knew it was a lady" (p. 6). Mother 19 felt it was a big transition for the parent too. "I think the more contact you have the better" (p. 5). Having more informed parents was also seen as useful for the child:

I would have liked to have gone into the classroom and actually, physically, seen where it was, and who was in his classroom, just so I could key him up a bit more, because he was asking questions about the classroom and I had no idea.... I didn't have any idea of what he'd do with his bag or if they sat at desks or tables or anything. (CS3.2, p. 2)

Mother 20 believed that a visit would have allowed her to "comprehend what the routine was like during the day. Then you can discuss it with your child and explain the whys etc. behind certain activities" (p. 5). "You get a feel for what the teacher is aiming for and you can reinforce that" (pp. 6-7). She had eventually built up this knowledge through parent helping, but felt that it would have been very useful in the beginning and would have facilitated her child's transition.

Later, when Mother 12 was able to see what happened in the classroom she described how reassuring she found it. "I was really pleased to see they sat on the mat. I don't know why but I had this idea that they were all going to sit at tables and stay there all day and when they went in and sat on the mat I thought, 'Oh neat, it's just like kindy'. It wasn't such a big change for her" (p. 1). It would have been useful to have had this information before Child 12 started.

Apart from the issue of parents wanting to observe what happened in the classroom, one mother commented that the teacher refusing to allow her to stay with her child "was a failure to understand our way of parenting". Her older daughter "took us at our word completely, that if we said we would stay for a little while she knew that we would". When the mother was then forced to break that promise she felt the child's trust was then broken and "we had to get her over that thing of not trusting". All of which could have been avoided, she felt, because the reason she was not allowed to

stay was "the teachers were expecting her to play up and perform, and she wouldn't have done that" (M15, pp. 3-4).

Four parents commented that several visits would have been useful. Ms Arthur had expressed a desire for more visits but was told by the kindergarten teachers that only one visit was allowed. Her impression was "They don't seem to encourage visits" (CS3.1, p. 5). Similarly, Mother 20 was discouraged from requesting more visits by the school secretary. It seemed that for children from Azure Kindergarten a second visit was only offered to the children for whom the first one had been problematic. Child 17's visit had been a 'disaster' for a number of reasons and he had visited again with his mother. Another child had difficulty comprehending what was happening because she understood very little English. She and her mother had visited again so that her mother could explain things to her. Both of these parents found the second visit useful because they could talk to their child about what they had seen.

The lunchtime meeting at Azure Kindergarten

At Azure Kindergarten there was a lunchtime meeting where the teachers and other school staff came over to the kindergarten to talk about the school and to meet the parents/caregivers of children who were about to start. Ms King described this as an opportunity to "talk about what the routines are at school so parents know, and what we expect of the children, developing the independence thing. Those are the mums who get the message about not doing everything for them" (p. 12). Other practical details like where to park at school and what to do when a child was absent were also covered. The Assistant Principal saw it as an important step in developing "good liaison" with parents. "We meet them all before they come and give them this little talk" (AP, p. 9). However, the Principal reflected that a disadvantage was that after the presentations, "because you are sitting down you only talk to the people who are sitting next to you" (p. 12). Also, in its present form "we really only pass over the information that we want to tell them" (p. 12). He thought that in future it would be worth considering another format that would allow for more discussion.

Four parents had not been able to attend the meeting but those who went generally found it useful. As a recent immigrant Mother 21 said she learned, "so many things about the system and the timetable and it was very useful" (M21, p. 6). Mother 22 agreed:

They [mothers] get the run down on the rules and regulations and what is expected of them as well. What the teachers expect... I think it was good because you get to know the teachers a little better. You have said

hello to them and you have spoken at least once so it's not so hard when the first day comes to go in there and take your child. (M22, p. 5)

However, Mother 9 found the meeting very short. After the Principal and Assistant Principal had spoken to the group she only had fleeting contact with Ms Knight who was to be her child's teacher. "She just said '[Child 9] is in my class, you turn up'. I said, 'Where's the classroom?' She said 'By the Dental Clinic. See you then'" (p. 8). Ms Samson also found the meeting a little quick. "She [Ms Keane] said 'Oh well, I'll see you when you start school.' That was it really" (CS5.2, p. 2)

Pre entry visits for children from Blue, Cobalt and other early childhood services

The teachers' perspectives

The teachers at Azure, Blue and Cobalt kindergartens all felt that having early childhood teachers take children for a school visit was beneficial because it gave the child a familiar adult, with whom they were already comfortable, as a support in the new environment. It also helped to foster links between the early childhood and the school settings. However, in a busy urban environment these visits were proving increasingly difficult, due to the large number of schools each early childhood service fed into, and the large number of early childhood services that fed into each school. Hence, Azure was the only kindergarten in the study that currently visited a school. There were no direct links between Kowhai School and any of the other contributing early childhood services and the situation at both Blue and Cobalt kindergartens was summed up by Ms Bird, who acknowledged "the problem is we feed into so many schools. If you do it with one should you do it with all? Realistically that's not on" (p. 7).

Although not able to visit with children themselves, Ms Bird and Ms Clarke had strong views about different schools' transition policies.

From where I see it, it would be beneficial, especially for some children, to have anything up to four or more visits so that they are familiar with the classroom, the teacher and the layout (p. 6)... One or two [parents] are not happy with the current process and I generally grit my teeth and am not happy either... A couple of the local schools only allow one visit to maybe two or three and often it is only for an hour which I have a bit of a gripe about because I don't think an hour is particularly valid at all (p. 8)... Some of the feedback I get is that it has been quite traumatic for the child. Whether that has been the class environment or because the parent has been asked to leave, or the routine is quite different. (Ms Bird, p. 9)

Some are far more lenient than others and they [children] can go along five to six weeks beforehand. Some they are allowed only one session, they [the new entrant teachers] like the parent to disappear. They are

different. Often we get asked for our comments on that, and we just stay very, very, neutral.... Hopefully by the time the child is ready to start they will have done two to three visits. (Ms Clarke, pp. 9-10)

Teachers in these two kindergartens saw their role in terms of ensuring parents had selected a school for their child and encouraging the parents to be proactive in requesting school visits. As Ms Bird stated 'I really encourage them to ask not "Can I?" but "I am going to bring the child for a visit, what day is appropriate?"' (p. 8). She would then follow up with the parent to find out how the visit had gone. Ms Clarke supported parents in arranging school visits, and said "we can often lead them into questions they could ask as to why they can't stay" (p. 10).

The new entrant teachers viewed school visits as particularly important for children who had not attended Azure Kindergarten. Ms Keane described the Azure children as often joining a class "where their friends are, they know the other children", and felt "it's unfortunate for children who come from out of area". She described how she would encourage parents to bring these children for a visit and in some cases join the class on school trips before the child started. "It's just making sure these children are included" (p. 6). Ms King saw the visit as an opportunity to allay any fears. Talking about the proposed visit for the next child to start in her class she said:

She doesn't know anybody in the class so it is a chance for her to come along and see the classroom and see the children and not worry the night before she starts. Some children can't sleep the night before because they are so worried. We want them to be excited and want to come. (Ms King, p. 13)

Ms Knight believed that it "shows up" when children had not attended Azure Kindergarten because they may be less familiar with the routines of school, making a visit particularly important (p. 15).

In general the new entrant teachers expected parents of children who had not attended Azure Kindergarten to make the first contact to arrange visits. However, Ms Knight said that if it got to within a week of the child starting and he/she hadn't been for a visit then the teacher would take the initiative and try and contact the child's parents "to find out what's going on" (p. 17). The secretary said that when parents/caregivers telephoned to ask about visits she would take their number and pass it on, or if she knew what class they were going into she would tell them which teacher to contact. The Assistant Principal's comment that, "the ones from outside we encourage to make appointments so the children can come and visit with their parents and spend a morning" (AP, p. 10) implied that the visiting policy was more relaxed for children

who had not attended Azure Kindergarten. However, the visits were generally only of one and half hours' duration and like the parents from Azure, the new entrant teachers discouraged parents from staying during the child's visit "because the children who are clingy can't cling to mum if she is not there and they will actually fit in quicker" (Ms King, p. 13).

Observations of visits

A summary of the observation of one of Nicola's school visits is provided in Nicola's story. Child 14's visit (from Blue kindergarten) is described in Figure 18.

Child 14 arrives with his father at 9 o'clock. Ms Keane is talking to Mother 15, whose child started yesterday. Ms Keane gives Child 14's father some forms. She invites Child 14 to do a puzzle and talks to him for a little while. She explains what the other children are doing (as they put their books away). At mat time she introduces him to the other children and asks if anyone knows him from kindergarten. One girl says she does. The teacher tells Child 14 that Child 15 "just started yesterday". A group of boys sit near Child 14 at mat time. The roll is called, the weather chart completed, and Ms Keane organizes the children into their regular news groups. Child 14 goes with the girl who said she knew him, and his father leaves. Another teacher, Ms Knox and a parent helper stay with the class while Ms Keane takes some children for testing. The news groups report back and together the children and teacher write one news story on the whiteboard. The children's books have already been placed on the tables. Ms Knox reads the name on the book at each place and the children move to their appropriate seats until only Child 14 is left sitting on the mat. Ms Knox explains to the parent helper what she wants her to do. After a minute one of the boys notices Child 14 is still on the mat, says that he might like to play with some toy animals, and gets them out for him. Ms Knox notices and says he "is a kind boy".

Another boy returns from testing and as no one tells him what to do he joins Child 14 on the mat and they play with the animals together. A third boy joins them. The teacher tells them to go back to their stories. The third boy says he has finished, so she lets him stay. The other two (who have not written stories) say nothing. Child 14 plays with these boys and then joins some other boys who have also finished their writing and are telling the story of *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*, using a magnetic board and pieces. In all he spends 33 minutes engaged in activities that are similar to kindergarten, while the rest of the class gradually complete their writing for the day. Ms Knox then brings the children to the mat by saying "I am going to close my eyes tightly and open them and see who's here". Child 14 goes to the mat with the other children. Ms Knox compliments various children's behaviour and then gets a number of children to read the stories they have written out loud to the class.

Child 14's father arrives to collect him, and waits at the edge of the mat. Child 14 remains seated on the mat with the other children.

Ms Knox	Hello. You are wanting...?
Father 14	Child 14.
Ms Knox	Child 14! Yes sure.

The child who is currently reading her story continues and some conversation ensues. When she finishes the teacher turns to Child 14.

Ms Knox	Child 14, do you want to go with dad now? He's been a happy boy.
Father 14 offers	the teacher the forms he was given by Ms Keane.
Father 14	I've got this.
Ms Knox	Oh. Okay. I'm just filling in for Ms Keane who is doing some running records and testing on children just for an hour or so. I'll give that to her when she comes back at playtime. Bye-bye Child 14.
Some Chn.	Bye Child 14.
Child	See you in a couple of weeks.
Ms Knox	He's been happy.
Father 14	Okay. Was everything all right?
Ms Knox	Yes he was fine. The others looked after him and played with him. He was happy.
Child 14 and his father left.	
(Summary of Observations, 18.6)	

Figure 18. Summary of a visit (child from Blue Kindergarten)

While the visits of the children from Azure Kindergarten were planned at a suitable time, and used to convey messages about school to the visitor, the observations of Nicola's and Child 14's visits suggest that for children visiting from other early childhood services the arrangements were more ad hoc and the child simply spent some time in the class, whatever the class happened to doing. For Nicola the visits were useful in establishing contact with other children, but the nature of the visits themselves seemed to create, rather than relieve, anxiety. Child 14's visit appeared to be judged successful by Ms Knox as he had been happy, and certainly he was engaged in some positive peer interaction, but its usefulness in familiarising him with school is open to question. When Ms Keane was in the room it followed a similar pattern to the visit described for the children from Azure Kindergarten, but once Ms Keane left he did not have the opportunity to observe the writing activity the other new children like Child 15 were engaged in, and saw only the end products of the most capable children, being read aloud by them. It is perhaps no wonder that on his first day at school Ms Keane apparently reported to his mother "the absolute look of horror on his face" when she said they were going to read, "and again when they were going to do some writing.... He got really upset because he didn't know how to do it" (M14, p. 2). His mother said "He thought, when she said they were going to do reading, he thought he was going to have to, like he was supposed to know how to read, just like that, because he'd turned five he was supposed to know", and was only comforted "once he realized you have just go to learn" (M14, p. 2). As in Nicola's case, the nature of his visit may have created more fears than it allayed.

The parents' perspectives

Child 14, whose visit was described above, was from one of the four participant families who had children that attended Blue Kindergarten. The arrangements for school visits for these children seemed to depend very much on who their parents talked to at Kowhai School. Mother 18 already knew her child's teacher and popped into the classroom one day to organise the visits. She and her child had two visits together and she found them very useful:

You get to know the other kids in the class. You get to know the teacher. You get to know the routines, what to expect, and the child gets to know what to expect. It makes it easier.... helps us both feel comfortable where they are going and can talk about it afterwards. (p. 5)

Ms Chess experienced some confusion over who should organise the visits. One 'teacher' (who in fact was possibly the school secretary, given the practice described earlier) told her that someone would get back to her to arrange some school visits, but no one did. It got closer and closer to the date when her child, Carl, was due to start. She phoned again and this time was told "Oh no. You have to arrange them yourself" (CS2.2, p. 2). By then there was only time for two visits before Carl started school, but she believed that these had been adequate.

The other two children only had one visit each, even though their parents would have liked more. Child 14's mother felt:

He could probably have done with three or four visits just to familiarise himself a bit more. It would have made it a lot easier when he started I think.... They'll know their teacher's face a bit better; know what happens, rather than one short visit and next thing they are into it (M14, p. 5). One visit wasn't really enough.... they get one short visit and then they're supposed to know what goes on and the routines. It's too difficult. (M14, p. 12)

As Figure 18 showed, Child 14, who had Ms Knox providing cover for his teacher for all but a few minutes of his visit, hardly 'knew his teacher's face' at all. When Mother 14 had requested more visits she was told "That's all he was allowed to have... I asked for more and they said 'No, only one school visit'" (p. 5).

Ms Trent reflected that it would be useful if children had at least two visits, with parents being allowed to stay for the first:

Maybe if parents could stay for the first visit, the parents could learn a lot about school in that visit, they could *see* what children do, *see* that they

sit in groups... see how long the spend at something... I think that's good opportunity because you have got your own personal questions and you can ask them... Perhaps if you could stay there for morning tea you could introduce them to some other children, and see for yourself that there is a teacher on duty, I can feel safe about leaving my child here. (CS4.3, pp. 17-18)

Three children in the study attended kindergartens outside the immediate location. One of these, Nicola, attended Cobalt Kindergarten. Ms King telephoned to say that Nicola was going to be in her class and Nicola's mother, Ms North was able to organise four school visits. She was told not to stay "but for the first day I actually did because I thought it was pretty daunting for Nicola to go into a complete class of strangers" (CS1.2, p. 2). She also stayed on the last visit because Nicola didn't want to be left. After reading an early conference paper based on the data Ms North said she had been wondering:

How did I manage to get four? I think I just ignored the fact that they said only one. I just took no notice basically and I did it anyway.... She [Ms King] didn't say that I couldn't. She did say that they didn't like to have too many, but I thought 'blow it', that isn't enough. I want her [Nicola] to have some friends. I want her to at least know a few names. (CS1.3, pp. 3-4)

Of the remaining two children, one family's only contact with the school prior to the child starting was the letter confirming the child was being offered a place. The other child had one, unaccompanied visit.

Additional sources of information about school

The school visits and lunchtime meetings were key opportunities for children and families to find out about school, but 19 parents mentioned that they and their children also drew on a number of other sources. These are shown in Table 5.

Fourteen of the participant children had older siblings already at school, which provided a ready source of information. Of these, 12 children had some direct contact with Kowhai School prior to starting. This ranged from attending occasional school events such as sports days, to daily visits to bring and collect a sibling. Friends, family members (other than the children's older siblings) or neighbours had been sources of information about school for others. For example, Mother 23 said, "I had a friend who could speak [M23's first language] at the school.... She can give me many information about the school" (p. 5). Carl had heard about the school's soccer teams from an older boy in his street and Steve's cousins played schools with him.

Table 5. Additional sources of information about school for participant families

Source of information	No. of families
Older siblings	14
Friends/ family/ neighbours	9
Parent attended an information evening	8
Visits to the school grounds	5
Parental involvement in school (PTA, etc.)	4
Tour when selecting a school	4
Parent has been/ is a teacher	4
Family day care provider	2
Book / television programme	1
No additional sources of information	4

From time to time Kowhai School held information evenings for parents/caregivers, and 8 parents said they had been to at least one of these (4 of these were when an older child started). Overall, parents seemed to find this meeting interesting and useful, although Mother 12, who attended well before she even knew if Child 12 would be accepted at Kowhai, said she would have liked "something like that closer to her going. I was quite lost after she started" (p. 5), and Ms Arthur said they were more useful when they were run by your child's own teacher as each teacher had slightly different expectations and ways of doing things. The school staff, who had been wondering whether it was worth running information evenings, decided to continue with them, at least for the junior school, in response to the findings of the study. The format was extended to include more opportunities for parents to talk and ask questions.

While there were a number of potential sources of information about school, many parents felt there would be advantages for both parent and child if they had been better informed, especially when this was the first child in the family to start school. In many cases information had been easier to obtain once the children started. However, a lot of anxiety could have been prevented if this was available beforehand.

I wonder if they would be better off to have a session once a month for parents, for kids enrolling, a presentation on what to expect... a chance to ask questions... just a chance to ask questions and see where the classes are.... Some of the questions you get answered by talking to people you

know who've got kids at the school and no doubt sometimes you get the wrong answers. (CS/F2.2, pp. 19-20)

I never went into the classroom before he started. There was no contact. Nothing. (CS5.2, p. 2)

I was as green as grass [when first child started]. The last thing I had to do with schools was when I was there. (M15, p. 1)

I didn't know Ms Knight, how she taught, or the makeup of the class. (M16, p. 12)

In New Zealand we get all the information on the first day. At first I was really worried , 'I don't know anything' but maybe I don't need to know anything before. (M23.1, p. 5)

If we had a brochure with details of the school policy or education system it would be good... it is very important to understand the different system. (F23 in M23.2, p. 4)

Interestingly, despite the fact that the school produced a very comprehensive information booklet for parents/caregivers, only two parents appeared to be aware of its existence. These were Ms Trent, who knew of it but said she supposed she hadn't received one because Tessa was her second child to start school, and Ms Chess, who later heard of it through a friend, and requested one after Carl start school. It seemed unfortunate that parents were unaware that such a useful resource was available. According to the Principal these were given out with the enrolment forms, to assist in the selection of a school. If parents had received it then, perhaps it had been forgotten by the time the children started school. Teachers though assumed that the parents all had copies.

The fact that the school staff perhaps expected parents to be familiar with the contents of this book may help to explain the lack of time given to verbal explanations:

I think one problem, especially with Kowhai is I don't find their office staff very friendly, and that can be quite baffling when you go in for the first time. I suppose the lady that's in there has just done it for such a long time. She knows what she is doing, but for new parents it's all a bit overwhelming. You're not sure where you are going, or what you are doing, and she's going 'Blah, blah, blah' and you think 'Woo, hang on a minute'. (CS5.3, p. 4)

Overall, four families had no additional sources of information about school and for many others the information was scanty or not directly related to Kowhai School. This indicated how important the pre entry visits and other forms of contact were to the

transition process. It was clear that most parents were anxious to obtain as much information as possible, seeing this as an important factor in supporting their children's transition. It was suggested that this would also be helpful for the school. "I'm sure the receptionists probably get asked the same questions hundreds of times" (CS2/F.2, p. 19). As Chapter Eleven will show, the desire for information continued once children started school.

Parents' thoughts and concerns about their child starting school

The most common response to their children starting school, mentioned by nine parents, was a sense of relief because they felt that their children needed the stimulation that school could provide. Mother 22 was typical of these parents:

I can't wait! That sounds terrible. Most mothers get upset when their children start school but I find with both my kids that at this age they are ready for school and they are not easy to have around. (M22.1, p. 3)

For seven parents school would bring a new routine, which they were looking forward to. Mother 15 "was waiting for the day!" because she would no longer have to juggle childcare arrangements (p. 4). Ms Trent anticipated "I will have all this wonderful time to myself that I have never had" (CS4.1, p. 15). However, sometimes the anticipated spare time was not as much as expected, or it was not as enjoyable, "It was really quiet at home. It wasn't quite as I expected it, and yet I had been so looking forward to it" (M18, p. 11).

For 6 parents there was a sense of sadness mixed with pleasure:

I am ready for that step because of all the running around.... But sort of sad because she was my baby and it seems funny. (CS4.1, pp. 5-6)

[I felt] sad because my baby was starting school, but fine. I was very positive about it. Pleased that he was happy. (M19, p. 2)

I was happy for her to start school, because I knew she was looking forward to it. But I was really sad. Here's my baby going to school. (M20, pp. 2-3)

In 4 families where this was the youngest child it was talked about as the 'end of an era' or a watershed in the mother's own life. Ms Hurst talked about having to face decisions about what she was going to do next. Ms Meade said, "this is it, and we are off on a new phase of our lives" (CS71, p. 10). Mother 18 reflected somewhat wistfully, "We'd passed another milestone. Really, that was another stage in your life that was gone forever" (p. 1). On the other hand, Mother 13, for whom Child 13 was

the fifth of six children, was pleased to be approaching that milestone “[I felt] great! It meant I had only one more left.... I look at them and think ‘only one more left to go’” (M13, p. 2 & p. 10). Other feelings described by the parents included excitement, pleasure and a sense that this would be an interesting time.

Seven parents hoped that their child would make friends and would not be bullied. Five mentioned concerns about the child being able to use the toilets, eating enough, and not being too tired, or that the child would find everything he/she needed and would not be overwhelmed by the size of the school. Four parents worried whether their child would cope with the work and the structure. Ms Hurst also worried because “they are out of your control and you have no idea what they are learning” (CS6.1, p. 5).

Ms Keane said she empathised with parental concerns. “Well I’m a parent myself so been there, done that (laughs)” (p. 7). She thought parental concerns would depend very much on the personality of the child, with shy withdrawn children generating the most worry and outgoing children the least. In Ms Kent’s view, worried parents sometimes made the transition more difficult for the child. “When the parent is there the child is worried and upset and we have to wean the parent off and give the child a little bit of scope and independence.... The parent can be a bit more of a problem than the child” (p. 8).

Discussion of beliefs and practices at the beginning of the transition process

Early contact: How schools and families are positioned

The school’s reputation within the community was an important factor in determining its popularity and viability. There was a very delicate balance for the school in getting this right. At the earliest point of contact, parents were in a powerful position, as the school welcomed their interest and wanted to be selected. Having chosen the school, the enrolment policy meant that parents were then vulnerable because many feared rejection. If, as Mayall (1994) found, many teachers think of their schools as model environments, this belief is potentially strengthened when entry is limited due to demand. While the school remained welcoming, there was a definite shift in attitude once children were offered a place, and the school generally took the lead role in determining the nature of the ongoing relationship that developed.

The school’s dominant role was evident in the inflexibility many parents experienced in relation to visits, and in the way information was largely communicated to parents in the form of “what we expect” at school, and the information “we want to tell them”.

Opportunities for two-way sharing came later, but in the weeks prior to children starting school, many parents found their own expertise devalued, and the school staff positioned as the authority on the nature of the child's transition. Teachers' professional knowledge and experience naturally accords them some status in their interactions with families, but in this case their position overlooked the part parents could play. Further, the teachers' authority was experienced differentially. The influence of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1993, 1997) was evident within this initial relationship, in the families who were aware of the way the enrolment policy operated, and in those who were able to obtain more flexible visiting arrangements.

Inherent in the school practices, and the teachers' comments about these practices, was the notion of five-year-olds being initiated into the separate (from home) life of school and peers. There was an emphasis on the child's development of independence. Parents were told that children's independence was to be fostered, and visiting practices discouraged parental involvement, to avoid the possibility that a child would cling to the parent. Teachers believed that an unaccompanied child would "actually fit in quicker". In fact, one of the roles for teachers was to "wean the parent off" in order to give the child "a bit of scope". This was in sharp contrast to the experiences of much younger children starting child care, reported on by Dalli (1999), where parents were generally expected to make a series of visits with their children, in order to 'settle' them into the new context and role.

The nature and function of school visits

The belief that parents might be problematic in the child's transition underpinned the school's general policy of children's unaccompanied pre entry visits. However, the situation was an interesting mix of rigid policy with occasional flexibility. The range in the nature and number of visits was not due to individual teacher preferences, because in each class there were examples of children who had been allowed only one visit, and those who had had more than this. Although sometimes affected by how the child had responded to the first visit, second visits were not limited to those who were distressed during the first.

The teachers at Blue and Cobalt kindergartens played a key role in empowering parents to request visits, and to obtain modifications to the policy of one unaccompanied visit. Ms Clarke also encouraged parents to question why they weren't allowed to stay for the visits. In comparison, the close kindergarten-school relationship and the well-established routine of visits at Azure Kindergarten, while having a number of advantages, worked in most cases to exclude parents. It also discouraged parents who felt that one school visit was insufficient from trying to

obtain more, because the kindergarten teachers at Azure reinforced the message of 'only one school visit'.

The underpinning beliefs indicated the way in which ideas are socially constructed within a context. Ms Bird and Ms Clarke, who were not in contact with Kowhai School, encouraged parents to be assertive and involved in the visiting process, and to request a number of visits for their children, so that the children were informed and the nature of the transition was less distressing. In contrast, Azure Kindergarten and Kowhai school had a close relationship, and shared constructions regarding appropriate transition arrangements. Ms Ashby and the teachers at Azure supported the separation of child and family, and encouraged parents to defer to the school's preferred approach.

For the children from Azure Kindergarten, visiting with a kindergarten teacher provided a link between early childhood and school and there was often informal sharing of information by the kindergarten teachers that the new entrant teachers found useful. However, there were disadvantages in excluding parents/caregivers because children were unable to share and discuss the visit with their parents. It also alienated those parents who were angry to learn that their child had visited school without their knowledge, and disempowered parents who had no idea how many times their child had visited, or whether the visits had proved useful, and were unable to answer their child's questions. However, some of these issues could have been overcome by more explicit information being provided by the teachers at Azure Kindergarten. For children from all early childhood centres, when parent and child visited school together, it appeared to provide the basis of a connection between home and school. If home-school links provide an important mesosystem for children (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) it seems important that respectful, partnership relationships are established from the earliest contact. If a visiting policy is disempowering for parents/caregivers and creates discord in the family's first contact with school, this may work against the aim of the policy.

Overall, the transition to school created a very different role for parents. In early childhood parents had largely been acknowledged as the experts on their own children. In the move to school they were expected to hand their child over, to a context that some parents had very little understanding or knowledge of, and to accept the teachers' advice as to how this should be handled.

A 'rite of passage' for parents

The changing roles and relationships for parents meant that the children's transitions were also transitions for parents. Some aspects of the new role were welcomed. In their comments, the mothers showed the impact of Western views about devoted mothers being always available and attentive (see Burman, 1997; Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989) that left them exhausted, and keen for school share the responsibility for stimulating and occupying their children, thus freeing some of their own time. This will be evident again in Chapter 12, where notions of 'readiness' were frequently associated with how demanding children were of their parents' time and energy.

Nevertheless, it appeared a rather bitter-sweet time, as alongside the pleasure that this reduced level of involvement would mean, some parents anticipated missing their child's company, and experienced concerns and frustrations related to leaving their child in a place where they had very little control over what happened. In this respect little seemed to have changed from responses reported in earlier studies in the UK (Ghaye & Pascal, 1988) and New Zealand (Renwick, 1984).

The parents' comments supported the view that the induction of the first child is a rite of passage for parents to 'parent of a school child' (see Fabian, 1998). The present study showed that the transition of a *last* child could also be viewed as a rite of passage for some, when this marked a particular watershed in their own lives as they contemplated their own future role now that they had all their children at school.

Access to information

The focus on separating children from families at the time of school entry overlooked the potential support and scaffolding, which knowledgeable parents could provide. It left responsibility for informing children about school largely in the hands of teachers, which, given most children only made one 90 minute visit to a busy classroom, inevitably led to some confusion, uncertainty or misinformation.

Although the school took several steps to provide parents with information, this didn't answer some of the questions that the opportunity to observe in the classroom would afford. Also, although information was shared in a variety of ways, this did not reach all parents. The experiences showed that both the timing and nature of the information are important. A comprehensive information book is only helpful if parents actually receive and use it. Even if these *had* been given out at enrolment it is likely that something provided perhaps two years earlier had been forgotten. Similarly, the teachers put a lot of time into lunchtime visits at Azure Kindergarten, but these only reached the parents of children at one kindergarten, and even then not all were free to

attend. Parents saw information evenings as valuable, but again there will always be families whose other commitments meant that they cannot attend. Further, providing the right amount of information is likely to be complex. Fabian (1998) found that while too little information led to parents' "emotional disharmony" (as in the present study), too much could be overwhelming and provoke anxiety (p. 301).

Recommendations regarding initial home-school contact

The findings of this study reveal that organising a visiting policy that suits all the participants is more complex than might at first be imagined. There were clear differences in what participants believed to be an appropriate number of visits. Eight of the participant families felt that more visits were needed to assist their child's transition. This could have advantages in establishing familiarity with the school context, but if there are many visits over an extended period it has been suggested that children may miss out on many early childhood education experiences, and could be exposed to the formal school setting "much earlier than may be desirable" (Ledger, 2000, p. 206). Given the range of opinions on this topic it appears that flexibility in visiting policies would be advantageous.

Flexibility should also be considered with regard to whether parents/caregivers are allowed to visit with their children. Given that the new entrant teachers felt strongly that the visits were more beneficial for the child if the parent/caregiver wasn't there, and parents very much wanted access to the information a visit would provide, an alternative might be to allow parents/caregivers to visit on a different day to their child. Although two parents wanted to stay to support their child, most simply wanted to spend time observing in the classroom. The reasons for the policy could also be considered. Towards the end of the study Ms Meade reflected that the policy at Kowhai might need to be reviewed:

Like the visits being no parents allowed... the teachers had reasons for that but I think it was expecting a problem that didn't necessarily happen. It might have happened *once* and you get ten parents that wouldn't cause any difficulty... maybe some of the problems are no longer issues.
(CS7.3, p. 4)

The aim of the visits should also be considered. The teachers saw them as a means of familiarising children with school and thus facilitating transition. However, as Chapter Thirteen will show, the major source of distress during the initial transition was the one-hour lunchtime. The brief early morning visit did nothing to prepare children for this. If familiarization is a goal of the visits, it may be helpful to organise them to

cover some of the more daunting aspects of taking on the pupil role. Alternatively, more induction could be offered once children get to school.

Also with regard to familiarizing children with school, an important comparison can be drawn between the planned visits for children from Azure Kindergarten and those for other children. It was acknowledged by the teachers that children who had not attended Azure Kindergarten were disadvantaged in the transition process, as they did not have the benefit of the wide group of peers from Azure. It seems that the nature of these visits deserved the same, if not more, planning and attention as those from Azure.

The perspectives of the new entrant teachers need to be kept in mind in any recommendations. The Aotearoa/New Zealand practice of children starting school on their fifth birthday means that new entrant classes grow in size throughout the year and teachers have to balance the orientation of new children and their families with teaching an established group of children. At Kowhai School each of the three new entrant teachers oversaw the transition of about 30 children in the year of the study. With class sizes of up to 29, a large number of frequently visiting four-year-olds and their caregivers present more logistical difficulties than a single unaccompanied visit for each child, and may be more disruptive to the classroom process than they would be in a school where the overall class sizes were smaller, or new children started less frequently. If parents/caregivers and children are to be offered opportunities to have plenty of contact with schools prior to entry, it is important to look at ways of making this manageable for the new entrant teacher. Keeping class sizes small would be one way to assist in this, another might be to allocate certain days to visiting, so that all visits can be planned, rather than occurring ad hoc. Information about the arrangements for visiting could then be sent to parents/caregivers along with the letter offering a place at the school. This would have the further advantage of alerting parents/caregivers to the fact that visits were possible.

A further recommendation is that if schools have put effort into preparing information for parents it is important to also have in place systems for ensuring that this material is distributed. At Kowhai School it would have been beneficial to ensure all families had copies of the school's information booklet at the time of the child's first visit. Since the data were collected a range of general publications on starting school have been published in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Educational Review Office, 2000a; Renwick, 1997a, 1997b) and elsewhere (Dockett and Perry, 2001a; Fabian, 2002), and schools and early childhood centres could draw parents'/caregivers' attention to these,

although they are likely to support, rather than replace, specific information about a child's actual school.

Creating a space to initiate dialogue is also likely to be useful. If visits were clustered on given days, parents/caregivers could meet with others whose children were about to start, and the teacher also set aside some time (perhaps during the morning break) to answer any initial questions that a groups of parent/caregivers and children might have.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has explored some of the beliefs and practices that shaped the initial contact between families and school as children and their families began the transition process. An important first step was choosing the school, and then being allocated a place. Most adult participants saw school visits as an essential part of children's induction, but there were a range of views about the ideal nature and number of these. Many families were keen to obtain information about what happened at school, for their own peace of mind, and to support their children. Levels of access to support varied, and this created differential relationships between home and school even before children started. Parents expressed mixed emotions regarding their new role as 'school parent'.

Looking at the perspectives of all those involved helps to shed light on the issues and how they might be addressed. Data from a single source would give a very different picture. It also indicated how different ideas arose from different theoretical views about children and development. Chapters Two and Four highlighted the complexity of the current theoretical landscape, and this was evident in the adults' views about children's initial transition experiences. The school's focus on children's independence led to practices that were at odds with the parents' and some early childhood teachers' desire for frequent visits and family involvement, that sit with more sociocultural and ecological theoretical positions. In some respects the focus on independence was also at odds with the teachers' own goals for ensuring the children were familiar with school. As James (1998) noted, we are less sure today than in the past about what children 'need', but in developing transition practices it will be important to consider what the aims are, and how the inherent images of children articulate with the stated goals, and the impact of such policies on all the transition participants. Transition is an interactive process (Ghaye & Pascal, 1988), and decisions taken for one group necessarily affect others. These issues will also be apparent in the following chapter, which addresses the beliefs and practices that shaped children's experiences on entry to school.

Chapter Eleven

Beliefs and practices: On entry to school

This chapter continues the focus on beliefs and practices, and looks at how these continued to shape the participants' experiences once the children started school. The teachers and many of the parents saw building rapport and sharing information as vital aspects of the transition process, and yet this was not always easy to achieve. The sections in this chapter focus on the practices for gathering and sharing information, and responses to these practices. Parental involvement is also explored, as amongst its other functions this was a major source of information. A key idea underpinning the themes in this chapter is the importance of communication between those involved in supporting children as they take on the role of school pupils.

Finding out about school

Chapter Ten showed that parents had varying levels of information about school before their children started and for many their lack of information added to their own concerns and impacted on the nature of the support they could provide for their children. Once children started school, the staff at Kowhai School appeared to have in place a comprehensive system of sharing information about the school with parents. The new entrant teachers had prepared a detailed information sheet regarding homework, parental involvement, routines and so on (see Appendix O). Ms Knight and Ms Keane explained that these were essential because, although they went over those policies with parents at the start of the year, it was important that the parents coming through later had access to this information. Otherwise "you think 'Oh have I told that parent that? I can't remember'. That's why it's important that we have those sheets of paper for the parents otherwise you are never quite sure who you have told and who you didn't tell" (Ms Keane, p. 17). The whole school received regular newsletters. Overall, Ms Knight felt they did a lot of communication, much of it in written form. "I think because all three of us teachers are mothers as well, we are very aware of putting out expectations in writing" (p. 9).

About three times a year there was usually a new parents' morning tea, which parents were invited to attend (see Figure 19 for an example.)

The PTA have arranged a new parents morning tea. Name-tags are provided for the new parents. All stand and chat for a while and the Principal introduces the new parents to each other. The teachers arrive and the room becomes very crowded. Food and drinks (tea, coffee, etc) are provided and after some time for conversation the Principal asks each team leader to introduce his/her team of teachers. The Principal then introduces the general staff. He makes a speech, which covered the school and its

programme, and what makes it special. This included the children, the “raw material” that came into school “switched on to learning”, “especially those who came from Azure Kindergarten”; the parent support and expectations; the teachers, who were attracted to this school because of the nature of the children they were working with; and the classroom programmes that catered for the individual, so that all children, including those with special abilities, were catered for within the regular classroom.

The Board of Trustees representative then named the board members and explained her role as a liaison person, focusing on the positive comments parents made about the school. The morning tea concluded with the Principal offering to take parents on a tour of the school.

(Summary from Field notes 30.7)

Figure 19. Observation of a new parents’ morning tea

The Principal seemed unaware of how desperate many parents were for information, saying that when he offered to take parents on a tour “It always surprises me how many parents want to have a look [at the school]” (P, p. 15). After the child’s first month the Board of Trustees representative said she usually telephoned families to see if everything was going well and to answer any questions. The Principal said “because she’s got a background in education I think she can answer a lot of the questions” (p. 19).

Therefore the school appeared very well organized. However, talking to parents revealed that there appeared to be a gap between the planned communication and what happened in practice. As with the information booklets (see Chapter Ten), those parents who received the information sheet found it very useful, but busy teachers, with children starting throughout the term, sometimes omitted to give this sheet to the parents. Ms North reflected that in her case she had probably upset Ms King's routine by requesting Nicola's stationery list during a school visit, with the result that other forms and information followed in "drips and drabs" (CS1.2, p. 10). Ms Samson explained:

I was never given, but I think some of the other parents were, a sheet of what they do each day. Like Monday they go to assembly, Tuesday they go to the library... It was just through being told 'He was supposed to bring his library book back today because it's library today'.... I think maybe if there was a list of what he does it would help. (CS5.2, p. 8)

Mother 12 felt it would also be useful to have information about when the children would be swimming because Child 12’s health problems meant that her mother felt it was often too cold for her to swim. Mother 16 would have appreciated basic information, such as the fact that Ms Kent took Ms Knight’s class in the afternoons. “I

didn't know why Ms Knight wasn't doing that, for how long, or any of those things... It would have just been nice to know what the situation was" (p. 17). On the other hand, Ms Arthur had had a useful conversation with Ms Keane who not only explained the classroom routines but also shared with her, "what the plan of the day was, and what the plan of the whole term was, so you knew what themes they were doing and what things they were studying" (CS3.2, p. 6).

There was a mixed response to the morning tea. Ms North said it had been "quite good", especially as it included a tour of the school, but she felt that the principal "could have done more that day to include us and make us feel we were going to be part of it" (CS1.3, p. 6). Ms Samson also found it "quite good" but "quite quick" (CS5.3, p. 4). Mother 11 and Mother 23 both felt it would have more beneficial if this was held before their children started school:

It would have been nice to have gone beforehand. If you did that you would find out everything you needed to know... because you are sort of guessing to what it was like when you are a child, and it is just so different! (M11, p. 6)

If we could visit and meet the teacher and see around the school more it would be more helpful for us. They will show us around the school after my children enter the school but before they started school, to see the school, would be more helpful for us. (M23.2, p. 3)

As discussed earlier, Ms Trent didn't find it particularly useful when she went to a morning tea when Theresa, her eldest child, started, largely because no one spoke to her and she was distracted by her toddler. However, she had been disappointed not to be invited to one for Tessa as she felt she might get more out of it the second time round. She and Mother 20 both believed that all parents should be provided with the same information and opportunities as first time parents.

Five parents mentioned the regular newsletters as another source of information. Mother 19 treated it "like a Bible, because I find, especially when you are working and not having as much contact, that's informing you of what's happening and it's quite important" (p. 7). However, Ms Trent felt that more specific information was needed, like what resources children needed to take to school and what extra curricular activities were available to each age group. Only Ms Samson mentioned the call from the Board of Trustees representative. She had shared her concern about Steve's distress at lunchtime but gained the impression 'every child goes through it', so it wasn't very helpful at the time, (although 18 months later she reiterated the school's belief).

As will be seen later, for parents, one valuable way of finding out about school was through parent helping. This provided the opportunity to observe first hand what happened in the classroom, and meant they were more aware of other events and issues. Mother 20 summed up this view, saying parent helping "helps the child settle in and it also gives the parent a good idea what the class is doing. Sometimes, from what the children say you get quite a distorted view point of what's happening" (p. 11). In contrast, those parents who were unable to help expressed their frustration at having to rely on their children as the main source of information.

Finding out about children

Assessment in early childhood

At the time of the study all three kindergartens were engaged in extensive gathering of information on children. A file was created for each child, which included art work, photographs, and "anything collectable", along with observations of the child, which were recorded on "stickies" (Post it notes). IEPs [Individual Education Plans] were developed on a ten-week cycle from the information gathered, discussed with colleagues, and then integrated into the programme planning.

The kindergarten teachers saw the purpose of the children's assessments as informing their planning and practice in early childhood. The folder was presented to parents/caregivers when the child left, when it became the property of the family. As Ms Bird explained, "It's just a treasure to keep for years to come" (p. 14). It was not necessarily seen as something that should be shared with schools. In fact, Ms Bird thought "there's probably not a huge value from sending it on to school. I haven't heard any schools request it, although I believe some actually do" (p. 14). Ms Clarke agreed, "it's really only for use at kindergarten.... My own personal belief would be let the school start afresh. This is what happened at kindergarten... I don't see it as something to be handed to schools" (p. 7). Their views were consistent with the practice at Kowhai, where teachers were interested in the folders if shared by parents, but generally made very little use of information gathered in early childhood centres.

Ms Arthur was the only parent who shared the kindergarten profile with me. It indicated that Anna had had one close friendship (some months earlier) but also contained several recommendations from teachers that she would benefit from more interaction with peers, but no evidence to suggest that this had been facilitated. The folder had been shared with Ms Arthur on a regular basis, but she commented that she didn't find it terribly helpful because the kindergarten teachers would hand it to her in the morning and ask her to sign it. There was no opportunity to take it away and read

it, or to discuss it with the teachers. "So I raced through it, give it a sign and hand it back" (CS3.2, p. 24).

Information gathered by the school

The first information collected by the school was on the Application to Enrol form. This information was used to allocate places and was therefore very important. In addition, the new entrant teachers said they usually knew quite a lot about the children who had older siblings attending the school and many of these under fives had spent time in the new entrant rooms with their older brothers and sisters. All the new entrant teachers felt that they gleaned quite a lot of information about parents/caregivers and children during the pre-entry visits. Sometimes "a little bit" of information came from the kindergarten teachers and parents/caregivers occasionally shared the children's early childhood assessment folder.

Once children started school, parents/caregivers were asked to complete an information sheet (see Appendix T), which was designed to help the teacher get to know the child. All the teachers found the background information particularly helpful for prompting children's story writing, and knowing family members' names helped to understand the things children talked about, and also ensured correct spelling was used when names appeared in children's stories. Ms King said knowing what children were frightened of helped her to avoid potentially frightening things in her lessons. Ms Keane thought the health information was very important "because if they do have a hearing problem or a sight problem and you are aware of it you can do something about it.... As far as safety goes, if they do have an allergy or asthma, you do need to know those things" (p. 3).

New entrant assessments

During the child's first month at school the new entrant teachers carried out observations and interviews, which were used to complete a detailed formal assessment. This covered behaviour and personality attributes as well as oral language, written language, reading, alphabet knowledge, mathematics, physical skills, and attitudes towards learning (see Appendix U). While many of these were completed in the class, teachers found it helpful to have some one-on-one time with children for assessments like oral language. Teachers were provided with some release time and created additional time by one teacher taking two classes (e.g. to the library), freeing the other teacher to do some testing. Lunchtimes were also utilized.

All three teachers carried out the same assessments and the information was stored in the child's personal folder. According to Ms King the assessments that were carried

out told the teachers where to start in their planning for teaching. "That's the whole purpose of it, I feel" (p. 12). The folder was shared with the Principal, who would sometimes comment on individual children's ability to the teachers. New information was added as the child progressed through school. This first assessment was kept in the file until the school felt that it was no longer relevant.

Because the three teachers had devised the assessments themselves, and were continually updating them to meet their own needs, they felt happy with the level of information they had about children. Ms Keane's comments summed up all three teachers' reactions. "I think this is fairly precise and has got it all in a nutshell. I don't think we overdo it. It's just what we need to know" (p. 3). However, there was some personal information that could also be of use that was more difficult to obtain. For example, Ms Keane said that if she knew that a family was experiencing financial difficulties, or the parents/caregivers were splitting up; it would help her to understand and support the child. However, she felt that it would be inappropriate to expect parents/caregivers to disclose personal information on a form, and she did not like to ask people personal questions when she didn't know them very well. Hence, she felt there was probably little more that could be done in this respect than she was already doing, which was to get to know the parents/caregivers and hope that they would volunteer such information.

Ms King wished that they could get information from the child's early childhood teachers prior to the child starting school, particularly about which children worked well together and who should be separated. This was available for some children, but others arrived in the class "perfect strangers" (p. 11). On the whole, Ms Knight felt she had all the information she needed about the children. "I think we are forthright sort of people too because if we want something we will ask for it" (p. 4).

Information provided by parents

Parents were quite happy with the level of information they were asked to provide and there was an overwhelming view that it was not necessary for schools to request more information, and a strong reluctance to provide any more detail. A fresh start was specifically noted as desirable by six parents.

If you give them too much they might start making preconceived judgments about the child... It would be hard to know what they need other than name address phone number stuff. (CS1.1, p. 12)

She may go to school and turn out to be the top scholar and not be interested in being outside at lunchtime, she might want to be in the library, she might totally surprise me. (CS4.1, p. 13)

They [teachers] are best to find it [information] on their own without a whole lot of input. I don't like the idea of creating problems if there don't need to be any. I think I would err on not giving a whole lot to start with but would give it if I thought it was relevant to the child's progress or lack of it. (M15, p. 11)

I think the testing they do covers all that and I would rather have it found out by them than providing it myself because my idea of what Child 17 can do is often not the same as what they actually can do. You can sometimes think they can do heaps more than they can actually do, or vice versa. So I was quite happy with what we gave and if the testing programme is in place they can find out themselves. (M17, p. 7)

They didn't ask for the kindergarten observations... they weren't too worried to get that. It didn't matter. Sometimes it's good to have a fresh start. (M18, p. 8)

I feel that in some ways it's quite nice for the child to start off with a clean slate. Though there was nothing that had been done wrong and they were very good kids at kindy... I just had this feeling that they should start off fresh. I'm happy to provide information but I think the teachers should not have any sort of preconceived ideas... each child should just be assessed and taken on its merits. (M19, p. 10)

However, while parents were keen for teachers to formulate their own views of new entrant children, once the child had been at school for a while, most parents would have welcomed the opportunity to discuss the teacher's assessment, and if necessary offer further information at that point that might help the teacher's understanding of the child.

Sharing information about children's progress

The parents' desire for information extended over time so that in addition to wanting to know about the school routines, parents became interested to find out how their children were doing. Were they happy? Did they have friends? Were they being good for the teacher? What sort of progress were they making academically? As one parent put it "You always want to know. You probably want information the whole time" (M17, p. 7). This section outlines the reporting processes that were in place and then looks at the parents' responses to these.

Reporting processes at Kowhai School

At Kowhai School brief parent-teacher interviews were held at the start of each year, with more comprehensive reporting interviews being held mid-year. Written reports were given out on the last teaching day of the year, before the school broke up for the Christmas holidays. The school's information book indicated when parents could expect parent interviews and reports, and invited parents to discuss "concerns you may have for your child and his/her welfare within the school" with the child's teacher, providing they "consult the teacher concerned and arrange a suitable time for an interview". However, as noted earlier, only 2 of the 23 parents seemed aware of the information booklet and only one actually had a copy.

Between the reporting points teachers relied on informal conversations with parents. However, an accepted policy, endorsed by the Principal, was that teachers would approach a parent if they had any concerns about a child.

I think that if a child is struggling it's up to the teachers to jolly well let the parents know that the kid is struggling. There's nothing worse than saying 'Achieving satisfactory results', or something, and the child's not achieving satisfactory results. I think that's criminal. (P, p. 5)

The Principal thought there were inherent tensions in sharing information about children's progress with parents. While the school tried to focus on the progress of the individual child, he acknowledged "I recognize that parents want to know where their kids stand in relation to other children". Therefore he believed that parents should be given an indication of where their child was in relation to other children, "average, above average, or below average", but that the main information should focus on the child's own progress (p. 5).

Ms Keane's saw the 'before school' time as an important opportunity for parent contact, and a time when parents could look at their children's work, or talk to her informally about their child. Parent helping in the classroom was also an opportunity for sharing information as she could draw parents' attention to the things their children were doing, and the progress they were making. At the parent interviews at the start of the year she said she assured parents "If I am ever concerned about something I will let them know straight away. If they are concerned they know where I am. The door is always open" (p. 14). She acknowledged that she would specifically target parents if she was concerned that a child "didn't know his [sic] alphabet sounds yet" and would indicate ways that the parent could help with that. "They will be quite happy to do it. I haven't had any hassles with parents not wanting to. Really what you are there for is the interest of the child, and that's what the parents want" (pp. 14-15).

Ms Knight talked about how she would approach parents when they came to collect their children and perhaps share something amusing “because I like to get that rapport going” (p. 11). Then if she were concerned about a child (for any reason) she would invite them in “for a little talk”. Where she had academic concerns about a child’s progress she would bring parents in “and keep them informed about what’s happening. That’s only fair because they must be wondering why their child is not grasping whatever it might be” (p. 12). At that stage she would outline the various options, including “some ideas for parents to use at home, just to keep our programme in line with their programme (p. 13). If she didn’t see a parent at school she would telephone and either voice her concerns, or invite the parent to “pop in” and see her (p. 17). Like Ms Keane, Ms Knight said parent helping was an important opportunity for parents to see how their child fitted into the classroom programme. She hoped to develop rapport between herself and the children’s parents/careivers, and stated explicitly that this impacted on how she worked with a child. “If the rapport is between the teacher and the parent it transfers to the child.... If you come up against a parent who is quite difficult and doesn’t want to develop any sort of rapport with the teacher it is hard to get through to the child” (p. 16).

Parents seeking information about their children's progress

Although the view of the new entrant teachers was that 'the door is always open' and they welcomed informal contact with parents, the extent to which parents felt able to ask for, or give, information varied enormously. Some, like Ms Chess, had found the teachers to be very approachable "If you want to have a chat she'll take time out to chat" (CS/M2.2, p. 22). In all, 10 parents said that they had received information informally from their child's teacher, although 5 of these would have liked more information. In other cases, although theoretically the teachers were available before and after school, parents felt uncomfortable approaching them at these busy times. “You don’t want to be a nuisance and take up all their time” (CS3.3, p. 11). Ms Trent and Ms North found it almost impossible even if they wanted to because the teacher was always busy, or already talking to other parents.

She's always flat out. She's very, very busy and I found it really difficult to grasp five or ten minutes of her attention because a lot of other mothers want to (CS4.1, p. 18). The teacher often doesn’t come until the bell goes and all these other mothers have hung around. We have been waiting to talk but there’s no one there. (CS4.3, p. 4)

It was just so busy in the mornings, if you wanted to ask something there was just no way you would get near her [teacher]. (CS1.2, p. 11)

Parents found the teachers generally more accessible when the class sizes reduced in the fourth term.

Many parents also looked to other sources for information about their child. A key source, noted by 11 parents, was parent helping in the classroom. The parents agreed with the teachers that being able to observe in the classroom gave valuable insights into how their child was doing. An additional benefit of parent helping was that it often established a relationship with the teacher and provided more opportunities for informal conversations. Ms Hurst reflected, "I suspect if I was not a Mother Help I would not be nearly as up to date with her [Heather's] progress" (CS6.3, p. 4).

Another source of information for 12 parents was to look at their child's work, either in the classroom or the homework that they were given:

Not a lot [of feedback]. Only what he brings home from school.... I will go into the classroom every so often and find his books and have a look and see what he is actually doing. (CS5.2, p. 8)

I gauge how quickly he is doing things now to when he first started, so I think he's doing A OK. (M19, p. 12)

In the mornings I always spent ten to fifteen minutes with her just looking over her things and from how she started, progress in her reading and writing. (M21.2, p. 4)

However, information gained in this way was sometimes hard for a parent to interpret.

I'd just like to see what she was actually learning as far as writing. And even now I don't. You see the work that they've done in their books but you don't realize. (M12, p. 5)

You look at their home book and their spelling but you have still got to know where they are. (M16, p. 14)

It was also something that new parents might not realise they could do. In her third interview Ms Samson said:

When they first start you don't really know what to do so you don't go in and open up their books and look; but now I do, I just go in and pick up his books and read them, and ask him what he's doing and he shows me round his classroom and stuff like that more. (CS5.3, p. 6)

In four families children provided information about their own progress, especially as they got older. Generally this related to moves to a new group, or specific events that

had happened, like a high score on a maths test. Certificates and awards were also noted by four families as giving a sense of how well a child was doing.

The picture provided by these various sources of information was somewhat piecemeal and for some families did not address the things they were concerned about. Desperate for information, a few parents drew on the smallest clues. Mother 9 described how she had seen Child 9's name on the board one day "because he was naughty", and on another occasion noticed that when the class went on a trip he, and a boy who she knew "can be a bit of a handful" were in the car with Ms Knight. This made her wonder if Child 9 was classed as one of the "naughty ones" because she had heard that teachers "don't give the naughty ones to anybody [i.e. parent helpers]" (M9, pp. 1-2). Based on this evidence she worried "Is he alright? Does the teacher sit down and think 'That [Child 9] he's a pain!'" (M9, p. 1). She felt that if he was, she might be able to offer information that would help the teacher manage his behaviour.

When children's starting dates meant parents had an interview in their children's first year, the topics covered did not always address their concerns, or raised new concerns.

It [the interview] didn't really tell you a lot. It wasn't really to do with how they were behaving and how they were settling in. It was whether they knew their alphabet and how to write their name. (M9, p. 1)

They had a parent conference. I think it was about four weeks after she started. I know it was very close after she started and that's when she [Ms Keane] was worried about the alphabet... It concerned me and then I thought about it and thought 'Hey she's only been at school five minutes and we can't expect miracles'... I saw they were a little bit disappointed in the interview because I thought maybe they were expecting too much too soon. (M22.2, pp. 5-6)

However, others, like Mother 20, were quite happy with the information:

That was quite good because she showed us some baseline assessment she had done for [Child 20], where [Child 20] would be starting, that was really good. (M20, p. 13)

The parents of children who started after the mid-year parent-teacher interviews did not have an interview during their child's new entrant year. This was a source of disappointment and annoyance, especially to those parents who had been waiting patiently.

We started in August and we didn't get one [interview] and I felt really cheated about that. I was like 'Hold on!' (CS1.3, p. 9)

I'd like to know how her progress is. How she's getting on.... Just in the first few weeks to let you know that everything's fine, don't worry. (CS6.2, p. 9)

I thought there was a six-week one [reporting process], other schools have it. Maybe they don't do it here. (CS7.2, p. 6)

An interview with the teacher would also allow parents to share information about their children. As noted earlier, most parents were reluctant to provide too many details about their child prior to entry, as they were interested to find out what the teacher's view of their child was. However, once the child had been at school for a few weeks some parents would have welcomed the opportunity to provide information that they felt would help the teacher understand their child better. Parents felt that opportunities for discussion would also allow them to discover more about the nature of the school day and the curriculum, and help them to understand what was required in relation to the work children brought home, addressing not only their need for information about their child, but also their desire for information about school.

The written report was the only information some families received about their child's progress in his/her first year at school. This was sent home on the last day of the school year, and in some cases raised more questions than it answered.

With Ms King you just don't have that opportunity [to talk to her], and you go that whole year, until you get this pathetic report they give you... And all that does is raise more questions. I found the school report didn't answer anything, all it did was have me saying "Hold on! I want to talk about this, and this and this." It was pathetic.... The school report I just think is the most wishy-washy thing. (CS1.3, p. 9)

Ms North found the format of the report with pictures and brief statements which the teacher completed, such as "I can listen *well*" "*Always* attentive" was hard to interpret, or not particularly relevant.

'Follows directions *usually*'. What does usually mean? 'I bring topic resources *often* ' Well when she's that age it's me that's bringing things, not her.... I just think this is a cop out. I just think this tells me nothing and it annoys me. And this is all we get. '*Very conscientious* worker'. Well, '*very conscientious* worker', does that really go with '*usually* listens to stories' and '*often* brings resources'?.... 'Results of all subject areas are at a high standard'. Well I want more on that. Give me details. I want to know how she's going.... Maybe it's okay for some people but I want more than that. (CS1.3, p. 10)

The general feeling from parents was that they would like a lot more information throughout their child's first year. From the school's perspective a lack of information

indicated that everything was going well and most parents were aware of the teachers' policy of contacting a parent if there was a problem with the child. However, there was also a feeling that it would be nice to hear some positive comments on the children's progress. Ms Hurst said she got the feeling that teachers thought, "Why ask?" when things were fine. "Probably because I am a paranoid parent I periodically ask how it is going? And it is always 'Oh she's fine. Goodness me, why ask?' And I think I need it for *my* reassurance.... I'd also like to know if things are going well.... It just seems in life you always hear of something bad" (CS5.3, p. 7).

There was also a danger that informing parents only about perceived problems gave an unbalanced view of the child's progress. Anna's story illustrated how a well meaning comment from the teacher regarding the difficulties Anna was experiencing with letter recognition and writing came to dominate her early experience of school. As noted earlier, Mother 22's first parent-teacher interview focused on Child 22's problems with the alphabet. Mother 16 reflected angrily, that after 10 weeks at school, "No one has said anything positive about [Child 16]" and wondered, "Is that unusual?" (p. 9). All she had been told was that he was inattentive.

It could be difficult for parents when the only contact from the school was about a problem. At the time of the second interview Mother 22 had recently been telephoned by her older son's teacher and reflected:

That was really hard. I found it very hard, because that's the first time I had the school ringing me... I suppose it won't be the last... It was done very nicely and made it easier for me but I still feel funny about it. (M22.2, p. 9)

On the other hand, Mother 15 was fairly relaxed, even though her only feedback had been about difficulties. When Child 15 had been at school for six months she said:

I have spoken briefly to the teacher once and I think she pointed out the fact that he [Child 15] came to school knowing a lot less than the other children, or with fewer skills than some of the others... I felt puzzlement on her part as to why he was finding it hard to get his head around certain basic concepts so it indicated to me too that there may be something we need to look into more but I just wanted to give him a fair chance in case it was just settling in. I do want to talk to her before the end of the year and definitely the next time we hit parent interviews I will have a lot of questions to ask then about how he is doing. (M15, pp. 5-6)

Often the feedback parents were seeking was not just academic. Ms Hurst explained that she really wanted to know how Heather had fitted in socially. "To me that's just as important as learning the ABCs... and you have no idea at all (CS6.3, p. 4). Mother

9 was desperate for information about Child 9's behaviour. Mother 17 reflected that realistically a teacher probably couldn't supply all the information she would like but would have appreciated a little more information regarding Child 17's experiences at school.

Those parents who did receive a more detailed and holistic picture were generally happier.

I do talk quite often to Ms Keane because I like to know what's going on (CS/M2.2, p13). We make a point of allowing a bit of time when we pick him up to have a talk to Ms Keane.... When I was there doing mother help last week she came over and we stood and had quite a chat while I was doing things. (CS/M2.2, p. 22)

I think she [Ms Keane] finds it quite unusual to see both me and Claire [Ms Chess] go at times to pick him up. She does give us quite a lot of feedback on him. (CS/F2.2, p. 22)

I get a lot of feedback, probably more than most parents would, because we have long chats about all sorts of things. She's very accessible. I think that any parent would find that she'd be free to give them information. (CS7.2, p. 6)

I guess I must say to Ms Knight every now and then 'Oh how's the reading going? How's this? Is she doing all right here?' and she says 'Yes she is doing fine'. Often Ms Knight comes up to me and says she's doing really well. And Ms Kent said to me 'I must tell you what a pleasure she is to teach, and what a fabulous vocabulary'. It's nice that they come and give you a bit of feedback without feeling that you have to push for it... You think 'oh well, everything's good. (M8, p. 6)

If you want to ask Ms Knight she can always let you know. (M20, p. 10)

This contrasted with Mother 16, who had not experienced an 'open door'. Keen to discuss her concerns about Child 16, she requested an interview with Ms Knight at the start of the second term.

I rang at the beginning to this term to see if I could make an appointment and she said that we have got them [parent interviews] at the end of term but I thought that was a bit far away. I want to talk to you now! (M16, p. 14)

She wanted to find out more about what was happening at school, and to try and assist Ms Knight in understanding Child 16, with a view to enhancing his experiences, but felt there was a lack of information about what to do "if you are not happy with your

child in a classroom situation, or something arises”, which left her wondering how to proceed.

Parent involvement

Of the 23 families, only Ms Trent and Mother 13 were not involved in the school in some way. The mother was usually the parent who participated in school activities, but in seven interviews the father’s involvement was mentioned explicitly. Two mothers said they wished their partners took more interest in what happened at school.

The most common method of involvement was through parent helping in the classroom (15 parents), but parents also offered support with trips, were members of the PTA or the Board of Trustees, and/or assisted with fundraising. Of those who were involved, 15 felt constrained in the amount of help they were able to offer. The reasons why parents were unable to help, or could not help as much as they would like to, are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Reasons that prevented or constrained parental involvement

Factor	Prevents No. of parents	Constrains No. of parents	Total No. of parents
Work		7	7
Younger children	1	5	6
Study		4	4
Detrimental to child	1		1

Even though work and study commitments made involvement difficult for 11 families, many of these parents made great efforts to provide some assistance.

It’s pretty hard when you are working to have any involvement. I try to go to the occasional sports or the occasional trip, take time off and do that.... And sometimes it’s quite hard because given the choice you would do it, but I need the work now because I need to work. (M22.2, p. 7)

I got into parent helping ... I couldn’t do it all the time when I changed my job... but that was a really good way of seeing what was going on in the class. (CS1.3, p. 6)

I went in one day and said, ‘Look I have got free hour’ [when an appointment hadn’t turned up]... and Ms Keane’d find me a job... That was quite good. (CS3.2, p. 15)

Mother 22 felt working parents were an under-utilised resource that schools could make more effort to involve.

I said at the beginning when [older child] started that I didn't mind bringing home books to bind and things like that; and I got one lot and that was it sort of thing.... They could do a resource sheet and find out, because mothers that do work might be able to do that sort of thing, where they can't help on trips they don't mind doing those sorts of things. But teachers forget probably as they go along and they don't use the resources maybe as they could be used..... (M22.2, p. 7)

Ms North had been looking forward to joining the PTA but had been advised that most of what needed doing needed doing during the day. However, she was still hoping to join at some point. At the same time, parents were conscious of balancing all their commitments. As Mother 19 explained, "Personally I would like to have a lot more [contact with school] but with working six days it's hard" (p. 6). "I just want to be at home some time with the family. I work six days. There's only one day off" (pp. 12-13).

Having younger children to care for constrained the help that 5 parents felt able to provide, and prevented Ms Trent from helping. The school policy of not allowing younger children to accompany parent helpers was cited as the main factor here, especially as few parents had anyone who could baby-sit for them. "I would have been a mother help a bit more often but I can't do it. I can't take her [younger child] into the classroom" (M12, p. 6). As with other policies, it appeared that this was relaxed in some instances. Ms Chess and Mother 11 had both taken younger children with them when they helped in the classroom, and Mother 8 talked of her years of PTA work, taking Child 8 with her. The age of the younger child may have been a factor, especially in relation to helping in the classroom, as Ms Chess said Ms Keane had told her, "the only time I ever say 'No' is if people have got babies, because they're full time occupation and a distraction" (CS/M.2, p. 24).

The saddest reason for not helping was one mother who avoided the school, largely because she felt that her personal appearance would be detrimental to her children. This is explored further in the section on Language and Culture in Chapter Thirteen. It is important to note that despite not being involved at school herself, this mother's children's school success was of utmost importance to her.

I say to them, 'You go to school and make sure you become clever and then you can get a good job and then you have all the things you never had. Then you can give them to your children.' I never had that opportunity.

Reasons why parents help

It has been shown that parent helping in the classroom was an important source of information for parents, both about school and about their child's progress. Parents were aware that good relationships with teachers were often fostered through parental participation, and saw positive benefits for the child resulting from this.

I figure if you go on the PTA you get to see a bit of the way the place runs... I felt at kindergarten because I was on the committee and I knew the teachers I felt that they knew Nicola better and consequently took more notice of her and if I can get the same sort of thing by being on the PTA and knowing the routine and getting to know more teachers and getting to know parents, let's face it, school is a big part of the routine of daily life so you might as well get involved. (CS1.2, pp. 13-14)

There are times when it's reciprocated by the teachers, I sort of think, it's not done deliberately, but I think if someone's helping then the teachers are probably more likely to go that extra distance with your kids as well. (CS/F2.3, p. 14)

It [parent helping] was good for me and good for Steve too because Steve could associate me with school a little bit more. (CS5.3, p. 1)

I've had that continual PTA experience, and then getting on the board, so I guess I see the school from the running of it, to the fundraising for it... I figured the school is only going to offer what we help to put into it. (M8, p. 8)

Mother 20 noted how parent involvement "helps the child settle in", while also giving "the parent a good idea what the class is doing" (p. 11). Mother 15 and Ms Arthur agreed that teachers were too quick to dismiss the potential benefit to some children of a parent spending time in the classroom while a child was settling into school, and felt that there should be more flexibility in this. Thinking about Andrew's transition Ms Arthur said:

...because he'd still have something familiar there, but the teachers don't want you to do that... they want you to drop your child off and go; they don't want you to hang around until they settle in because they say that's more disruptive. And I don't know whether I agree or not because for some children that's fine... But Andrew just needed familiarity. (CS3.1, p. 13)

Parents enjoyed helping in the classroom, and this was another motivation for being involved:

It was good. Quite stimulating for me just to be able to use your brain a little bit. (CS/M2.2, p. 22)

I used to mother help in Andrew's class for a couple of years. It was great seeing the difference in some of those children. I would have liked to have gone in every day and done the same subject with those same children every day. (CS3.2, p. 15)

If nothing else you get to know the other kids in the class, which is good. (CS6.1, p. 5)

However, two parents believed that the experience would be improved if they were provided with clearer guidelines as to what was expected of them.

[Teacher] left me in the classroom with a group of them. I didn't know if it was my responsibility... I didn't know whether I was to tell the kids off. Like [boy] was playing up. I didn't mind [teacher] going out, she said where she was going and what she was doing. I realise that she has prime opportunities when there's someone else in the classroom to do that [take children out for testing]. But I just didn't know what boundaries... I resorted to saying '[boy] if you don't sit there and do this I'm going to tell Ms Knight when she gets back' and he looks at me as if to say 'I don't care'. (M 9, p. 13)

[During writing] it was enough for me to listen to one and then talk to the other; and by then the other had finished her letter and she was looking for more guidance. I would have liked to know what they were doing a bit more. (M12, pp. 5-6)

While there were a number of benefits for parents and children from parental involvement in school, there were obvious benefits for the teachers too. Teachers clearly appreciated the work of some of their parent helpers. A more hidden benefit was the respect and understanding parent helpers expressed for the role of the teachers. Most were very admiring of what they observed.

My appreciation of primary school teachers has changed since Carl started school. (CS/F2.2, p. 23)

They are so good. They know what they are doing. (CS5.3, p. 6)

I take my hat off to Ms Knight, I really do. She's just amazing for the time she puts in.... Amazing teachers. I couldn't be with all those kids. I'd go home and have a mental breakdown every night. (M9, p. 12)

It's certainly a job that I wouldn't like to do. It's very full on. I think they definitely need big pay cheques for what they do. (M19, p. 12)

The school's view about parental involvement

Ms Kent, said that the school liked to encourage parental involvement. Parent helpers in the classroom were often involved in reading, conferencing children with written work, and in making equipment and resources. She acknowledged that “some of the parents are wonderful helps” and that parent helping was good for parents “because it helps them to understand what is required with the children and how they can help”. However, she said she “would never force teachers” to have parent helpers in the classroom, and that the school tended to be “a little bit discerning about who we have” (p. 9).

Ms Keane said parents were essential when the class went on trips. She also enjoyed having parent helpers in her room, providing she had plenty for the adults to do. She was very aware of the way in which parent helping assisted parents' understanding of school, and the information that it provided about a child's progress.

They will see them as I see them during the day and it is so much easier to talk to the parents and say ‘Did you notice what he did today, and he has been doing that a lot lately’, and giving them a buzz too and saying ‘Look at the difference in what he can do now as to what he did a month ago’, and just having that, it's a warmer relationship too. (Ms Keane, p. 10)

Ms Knight agreed that parent helping was beneficial for parents and children, and helpful for teachers, but only once the child was already “secure in the classroom” (p. 10).

Parents who do not help

Three parents, two of whom were not constrained in the level of help they themselves were able to provide, expressed negative views of parents who do not help.

You see some parents, they drop their kids off at the gate and they are gone, and they pick them up at the gate. I think they think school is like, school's school and they don't get involved. Education is for the school to deal with, and I don't agree with that. I think it's a partnership between the school and the parents. (CS/F2.3, p. 13)

A lot of mums, they just roar up, drop them off, and they're gone, and they never go on to the class, or anything. I think that's awful really. (CS6.3, p. 5)

Some parents you never see other than they drop off and pick up and that's it. I guess that's their prerogative but I know I couldn't be like that, and most of my friends aren't either (M8, p. 8).

Mother 19 was a little more generous, saying, "some people are really into being on committees and doing things and others aren't... everyone's different. Some people just want to come and drop their children at school and don't have any other contact, and that's it" (p. 6).

Teachers were aware of the constraints on parents' ability to help. "Of course not all parents can do it, they have got preschoolers or they have got a job. We don't hold it against them at all. We certainly don't (Ms Knight, p. 10). However, a complete lack of contact was not viewed favourably. "It would be very few [parents] who we never see and they don't care (Ms Keane, p. 8).

Homework

Nineteen parents mentioned being involved in helping at home, supporting their children with their homework. The most common activities were reading and spelling, although learning the alphabet, writing activities, poems, practicing songs for the school show, worksheets, projects and researching information for 'news' were also noted by some parents.

The nature of the homework that was set appeared to be consistent between the three new entrant teachers, but the degree to which parents understood what was required varied. Both parents with children in Ms King's class said they were puzzled by what came home:

The first couple of weeks they were practicing for the school show so they had to practice the songs and stuff and every night we would do that, but then after that was over it was just like one poem for a week... we get it for a whole week and it's one poem and I am never quite sure what we are supposed to do with it (CS1.2, p. 13). We get spelling, which lasts a whole week. Four words, which we do repetitively, and then *I'm* supposed to invent other spelling projects for her to do. Well I'm not very good at imagining what to do. (CS1.3, p. 11)

Homework's a bugbear because they never really tell you what's expected.... Am I allowed to help? Am I meant to help? What's expected? (CS4.3, p. 6)

Two parents from Ms Knight's class would also have appreciated more information. Ms Keane may have been most explicit about homework requirements as none of the parents with children in her class complained about not knowing what to do, but the children appeared to be most polarised in their response to the homework they were given. Three children, who were already very capable in the classroom, loved getting homework. Ms Hurst said Heather viewed it as "almost a privilege" and would rush in

and "as soon as she comes home it's 'Homework Mum!' and she's so excited" (CS6.2, p. 4). In contrast, 3 children disliked homework, while the remainder of children from her class, and those from the other two classes, seemed neutral, or the issue was not discussed.

The children who disliked homework, and some children who were ambivalent towards it, were all ones who were struggling in some aspect of their school work. Learning the letters of the alphabet, or completing unfinished worksheets, were often additional task for these children. While the parents of capable children sometimes complained that there was too little homework, or it was not challenging enough, for children who were already struggling, some parents felt there was too much homework. For example, Ms Arthur's intense but unsuccessful efforts to help Anna learn letters of the alphabet have already been described in Anna's story. This was in addition to Anna's other homework.

They've got a poem book once a week... and you are supposed to read it a few times and send it back the next Tuesday. Then a spelling book, there's one letter every few days.... They have a capital letter and a small letter the same, and they have to find a picture that starts with the letter... You cut out letters, or they can draw them... they're supposed to do a tongue twister with those letters; a lot of help from parents. And a few other things. There was a whole list of things you could do to try and help them remember these letters. That's once every few days. And the reading book... That's quite a lot (CS3.2, pp. 21-22).

Child 22 also did reading and spelling each day and in addition:

they might give her a letter of the alphabet and she has got a week to do it and she's got to find pictures and look up words and write words in a book, and take it back. She does that. And occasionally she'll have a worksheet to do. But sometimes I find there's a lot to do. When it's just like spelling words to do and a reading book every night I think that's really good. But there might be another two worksheets during the week or something, I find that a bit much to get through.... It's good getting them to do homework, it's just sometimes you think look at all this to do! (M22.2, p. 6)

Ms Arthur felt this sometimes put undue pressure on new entrants who were already tired after their day at school. In Anna's case "she was too tired once she got home" (CS3.3, p. 7). This raised challenges for Ms Arthur, who was reluctant to force Anna into something she didn't want to do "but then you always think, 'Oh the teacher has sent this home, maybe I should make sure it's done'" (CS3.3, p. 6). Even for children who enjoyed homework, tiredness was a factor to be aware of. Ms Chess had initially thought homework would be best left until after tea but discovered "it was no good.

He just didn't want to know" (CS/M2.2, p. 9). Mother 8 agreed. By the evening "all she [Child 8] wanted to do was go to bed and the enthusiasm's gone" (p. 3)

Time was also an issue. Ms Trent, Mother 8 and Mother 22 all talked about being out several nights a week with after school activities, which they felt were also important for children. As one of three, Child 8 spent "her afternoons in the car going from A to B to C" as her mother ferried the girls to ballet, hockey, soccer or swimming (M8, p. 3). Similarly, Tessa was out "four nights a week, in after school activities" (CS4.3, p. 6). In other families, like the Norths and the Samsons, the demands of younger children made it hard to find one-on-one time. As Ms North explained:

I find it quite difficult to spend what I feel is enough time with her [Nicola] doing the reading and school-type stuff without Noah.... My kids are both fairly demanding on my time... and it's all left to me, which is a shame really. We do it [homework]. We read the book and that's sort of it. There's certainly nothing extra, which is a shame. (CS1.2, p. 6)

Discussion of beliefs and practices on entry to school

This chapter has shown that the desire for information that parents expressed in the pre-entry stage extended once the children were at school. Soon after the participant children started school, the Education Review Office (1997) suggested that "good" schools would have sufficient knowledge of children after one month to report to parents and parents should ask "when you will be told how your child is getting on" (p. 9). The findings of this study suggest that creating an interview time for this to happen would be beneficial. An 'open door' policy, while commendable, cannot be relied upon to achieve its intended goal. Unless teachers are proactive in making a time for parents to talk to them, only some parents will be able to access the information they require. Also, where feedback is left to casual contact this may not always be the best setting for establishing rapport. As Cleave et al. (1982) found, chance remarks that were made at the end of the day when "over-anxious mothers... confronted weary teachers" (p. 120) could sometimes be damaging to the formation of good parent-teacher relationships.

An interview time could also provide a forum for parents to share information about their child with the teacher. The parents indicated that they were reluctant to give too much information about their child before he/she started school, as they were interested to find out what the teacher's views were first, but after the child had been at school for several weeks they expressed an interest in sharing information which they felt would help the teacher to understand their child better.

In this study, some members of the school staff viewed parents as being overly concerned with academic progress, but this was by no means the overriding concern for the parents who were interviewed. Parents said they were able to gather much information for themselves by observing their children at home, and in some cases at school when they parent helped, looking at the work children brought home, and talking to their children about school. What teachers could provide was the ability to draw the isolated pieces of information together to create a whole picture of the children's experiences at school and the parents' role in supporting them. The broad nature of the information parents would have liked about their children indicates that the strands of the New Zealand Early Childhood Curriculum *Te Whaariki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) might prove a useful framework for discussing children's progress during the early weeks at school.

A holistic picture of the child might help to offset some of the negative reputations that developed as a result of assessment practices. Although the teachers largely followed the approach recommended by Meisels (1992), and focused on a child's "current skill accomplishments, knowledge, and life experiences, and then proceed in a differentiated way to extend a child's mastery to different and more complex levels" (p.169), the nature of the assessment and reporting processes meant that deficits came to dominate. Parents responded differently to this feedback. Some, like Ms Arthur, aimed to 'fill the gaps' in their child's knowledge. In contrast, Mother 15 was quite relaxed about being told Child 15 "came to school knowing a lot less than the other children" and was happy to "give him a fair chance in case he was just settling in". Others, like Mother 16, hoped to change the environmental factors, rather than the child. Having been told only negative things about Child 16's behaviour, Mother 16 felt that in a large class the teacher had not had the opportunity to get to know him. She believed that properly "nurtured" his behaviour could be quite different, saying that at his early childhood service he became "almost a leader" who behaved "in a caring way with other children", but at school she worried that his behavior was deteriorating. However, having the opportunity to share such a view took persistence on the mother's part. When she asked to speak with Child 16's teacher she was told there would be an opportunity at the end of the term, even though her concerns were urgent and she wanted to talk now. Without a clear policy for action when a parent had concerns she said, "it almost gives you the feeling that it doesn't happen or that you will know what to do, and that's a bit intimidating" (pp. 8-9).

Eventually this mother went to the Principal with her concerns and a meeting was arranged, but by then she was angry and it was probably not the ideal context for

developing rapport. Mother 16 concluded that talking with parents “might be an absolute pain in the neck to the teacher but I’d say that’s part of their job” (M16, p14). This was in sharp contrast to Ms Meade, whose interactions with the same teacher led her to conclude that Ms Knight was “very accessible. I think any parent would find she’d be very free to give them information” and “teachers never refuse if it is done in the right way”. Clearly knowing how to ask “in the right way” is an example of the implicitly communicated knowledge that Delpit (1997) mentioned is shared easily within a ‘culture’ (in this case the culture of being ‘good’ school parent) but difficult for outsiders to learn. Again, a scheduled interview time for two-way sharing of information would have gone a long way to addressing this issue.

Having separated child and family through the induction process, the role of parent then came to be influential when the child was at school, with Ms Knight saying that unless she could establish rapport with a parent it was “hard to get through to the child”. This being the case it was interesting that school policies made it difficult for working parents and parents with younger children to be actively involved. As with the visits see (see Chapter Ten) policies on parent helping appeared to be a mixture of rigidity (no younger children allowed), with occasional flexibility for parents like Mother 8 and Ms Chess. Ms Kent’s comment about teachers being “a little bit discerning” helps to explain this, and the fact that teachers were a little careful about who they encouraged to help was understandable. The observations revealed that the new entrant classrooms at Kowhai Schools were very public places. In addition to being “like Picadilly Circus” (Ms Knight, p. 8) in the mornings, when parents, children and siblings all came into the rooms, a number of teenagers and adults joined the classes at various times. These included student teachers on teaching practicum, high school students, students on a “community awareness” programme and parents. Busy teachers were therefore providing guidance to a series of classroom helpers, and it was easy to see why they did not encourage parents whose younger children were likely to prove disruptive, and perhaps looked for parents who would not require a great deal of time being invested in explanations about what to do.

However, given that parent helping did not simply provide assistance to the teacher, but was also a key source of information for parents, the “discernment” actively disadvantaged many families. This was exacerbated by the school’s practice of messages being passed through children, which was related to the aim of making children independent and responsible. For example, when a child forgot something required for the day (such as swimming things or library bag) the new entrant teachers were quick to point out that it was the child who forgot (not Mum, or another family member). However, for children whose parents were involved in the school, parents

knew what it was the children were supposed to be responsible for, and these parents were already informed about what was happening and what the child required. Hence they had the relevant background information, and could then support the child's developing responsibility. For the parents who were not privy to the ongoing information provided by teachers to participating parents (both directly and indirectly as they overheard the teachers telling children about events), this practice was very frustrating and disempowering. For these parents some direct communication from the teacher, perhaps in the form of a letter or information sheet, would have been welcome. For example, as Ms Trent explained, a sheet explaining what was on offer for each age group, and what day and time each activity took place would be more equitable, rather than children having to find out how to participate in something that they and their parents may not even have realised was available.

It appeared that it would be helpful for schools to establish opportunities for establishing rapport and partnerships with all parents, not just those who are available to help during the day. Epstein (1995) has provided useful guidelines for schools on this topic. Among other things she highlights the importance of not only creating systems for distributing information, as Kowhai School had, but also to monitor and review their effectiveness. She gave examples of the ways in which schools can be flexible in the opportunities for parents to be involved, and as Brooker (2002) has also noted, highlighted the invisible help that families provide through their support of children at home.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has explored some of the beliefs and practices surrounding the gathering and sharing of information once children started school. A common thread was the need for communication. The findings suggest that building rapport with parents would be facilitated by opportunities for information to be shared about school practices, and later about children's experiences. Although the teachers found the check-listing of skills was useful for their planning, feedback on these assessments, even when it was received, generally did not provide the sort of holistic information that parents were seeking. The nature of the feedback helped to create the children's reputations, and as Delpit (1997) has noted, some children appeared to be labeled as "needing remedial instruction from day one.... before he or she was ever taught" (p. 586). As Chapter Twelve shows, the reporting processes influenced parents' ideas about what was important, and hence the preparation they believed was necessary before children started school.

Chapter Twelve

Beliefs and practices regarding early learning

This chapter looks specifically at the parents' and teachers' ideas about early learning. It shows how ideas of about readiness were being constructed in this context, the range of views regarding the skills and attributes parents and teachers believed were helpful for children to have on entry to school, and the tensions and conflicts in the participants' beliefs about preparing children for school.

Constructing notions of readiness

Of the 23 parents, 18 strongly believed that their children had been 'ready' to start school. The others were less certain whether their children were 'ready'. For example, Mother 15 thought her son was "not ready in the academic sense but ready in other ways" (p. 3). Although readiness was widely discussed, ideas about what it meant to be ready were developed in different ways. The opinions of the 21 parents who discussed readiness are summarised in Table 7.

Table 7. Ideas underpinning parental views about readiness. (Some parents mentioned more than one idea.)

Idea underpinning notion of readiness	Number of times the idea was mentioned
Child bored with kindergarten	10
Child interested in learning	7
Child needs more stimulation	5
Child is difficult to manage/cross	3
Child needs structure and routine	3
Child is oldest at kindergarten	2
Child has necessary academic skills	2
Child has good social skills	2

The most frequent response was that children were perceived to be bored by kindergarten (10 responses) and associated with this, 5 parents said that their children needed more stimulation, 2 said their children needed more structure and routine and 3 said their children's difficult behaviour indicated readiness, (because they weren't being challenged sufficiently). In all, 12 different parents commented that they felt their child's readiness for school had been signaled by an increasing boredom with kindergarten and home, and a desire for more stimulation than parents felt able to give. Although the kindergarten observations of the case study children indicated the children were actively engaged throughout their kindergarten sessions, there was a

strong perception among parents that children outgrew the kindergarten programme.

The following comments were typical:

By the time they get to the end of kindy they are starting to have done everything and get a bit tired of just the painting and what have you.... I think she got to the stage where she felt she'd done it all and was looking for something more, new and exciting. (M8, p. 2)

She had taken things as far as she could at kindy. (M12, p. 2)

All of our children seem ready for school about a term before they finish kindy. They were really bored with kindy and ready to move on but we just had to wait it out. (M22, p. 2)

They seem ready to learn something more. They're bored with what they've got. There's no challenge in what they've got any more. It's like they just want to go on. (M22.2, p. 4)

I think that was part of his frustration with kindy, he was getting bored. They need to learn. (CS2.2, p 18)

He's quite bright. I just could not keep up with the stimulation that he needed. (M14, p. 3)

I find with my kids at this age they are ready for school and they are not easy to manage. They are ready to gain more knowledge.... They need extra discipline. They need set routines. [Child 22's brother] was diabolical before he started school and within six months he just changed. (M22.1, p 3)

Ms Ashby attributed children's behavioural problems as they approached school age to the children's concerns about facing "this huge unknown" (p. 13), rather than the kindergarten programme. Nevertheless, some parents felt the kindergartens could offer more challenge to the older children. Others believed that realistically there was little more that kindergarten teachers could do. Mother 8 described children's increasing boredom as an indication that the early childhood teachers had done their job well, giving the children the skills to outgrow the kindergarten programme.

You could tell she wasn't being challenged. Nothing detrimental in that... they're just ready to go on, move on to more exciting things. More challenging things.... The kindy having her ready to go, they've done their bit... Whereas if she was still happy to sit in the sandpit all day you'd realise she was not ready to move on. (M8, p. 5)

Seven parents described readiness in terms of their children's attitude towards learning. These included "she was showing an interest in wanting to learn" (M16, p4), "she likes stories and she wants more" (M21, p. 3), "he will be enabled to do more things that he

wants to do" (CS7.1). Two described the child having specific academic skills as a sign of readiness and a further two talked about readiness in relation to the child's social skills.

All of these ideas located the notion of readiness as a feature of the child. In contrast Ms Samson, who was less sure that Steve was ready, raised the view that readiness was to a degree socially determined. "I suppose he was [ready for school at age five] because that's what's expected and everybody just does it. But if they started school at five-and-a-half that's when they would be ready" (CS4.2, p. 7).

Ms Arthur expressed a similar view:

I think a lot of children aren't ready until they are six. They think they are ready because that's how we are programmed... they talk about going to school at five but if the legal age was six then they would just talk about it at six wouldn't they? (CS3.3, p. 3)

Only one mother suggested that readiness was, in part, a feature of the environment children were entering, noting that her older child had been intimidated by her new entrant teacher, which affected her approach to school. When she had a teacher that was more suited to her personality there was "no fear whatsoever and full cooperation, and there was no sign of not speaking up or anything else".

Flexible starting dates?

The Principal at Kowhai school felt that a more flexible system than the current practice of children starting at age five would be to have early childhood centres attached to schools, with children moving to the new entrant class when they were 'ready'.

I don't think that age five is the right time for every kid to start school. I think there are plenty of four-year-olds down at kindergarten who should be at school. Conversely there are kids at six who should still be at kindergarten. I think that's actually a flaw in our education system but there's not a lot that we can do about it unfortunately. (p. 15).

Ms Arthur looked back on her older child's experience of starting school she commented:

If I was as old as I am now, and understand things better I would have just kept him home until he was six. Maybe he wouldn't have hated school so much. (CS3, 2, p. 2)

Ms Meade wished there was more opportunity to discuss when was the right time for children to start school but wondered "how many parents would exercise that in a sense of what's best for the child and what's convenient? It's very tempting to be convenient..." (CS7.2, p. 4). Later, when Matthew was aged eight, Ms Meade commented further, saying that if there wasn't flexibility in starting dates then the nature of the new entrant programme needed to be looked at:

We can do that [hold children out of school] until they are six but we don't, simply because of social pressure but it's crazy because it is so prevalent with boys that they are simply not ready. If we are not going to do that then we need some other kind of nursery kindergarten programme [at school]. Teachers feel the need to have them reading as soon as possible and Reading Recovery, and yet they weren't ever ready in the first place. (Ms Meade, in Matthew, p. 5)

Ms Meade had recently been studying education at university and was interested in a new Perceptual Motor Programme, whose aim was to "increase children's readiness to learn and perform other formal learning tasks". She commented there were "so many senior boys in Reading Recovery" and wondering if having a physical activity programme at kindergarten and for new entrants, rather than a focus on early reading and writing, would be beneficial in the long term. "There are so many kids coming through just physically and mentally not ready. Just not ready" (Ms Meade, in Matthew, p. 5).

Useful skills and attributes on entry to school

Tables 8 and 9 show the skills and attributes that parents and teachers believed it was useful for children to have on entry to school. While there are similarities in the findings from the two groups, there are some interesting differences in the emphasis given to specific skills. This section firstly explores the views of parents, and then looks at the views of teachers. Later the implications of their views are considered in relation to the participants' ideas about preparation for school.

Skills and attributes parents saw as useful for children on entry to school

The 23 parents identified a wide range of skills and attributes that they felt were useful for children to have on entry to school. These have been summarized in Table 8. Alphabet knowledge was the most frequently mentioned individual skill overall, noted by 17 parents, with counting and number recognition, and to a lesser extent the ability to write one's name, also rating highly. Literacy and numeracy skills were often described by parents as 'the basics', that would allow children to slot easily into the classroom programme.

If he had gone in and didn't have those skills he would probably be on a back foot right from the word go and he would be struggling. (CS/F2.2, p. 19)

I feel Child 12 did quite well [in writing her name and a few letters of the alphabet]... if she hadn't of I think she would have struggled a bit. (M12, p. 6)

Table 8. Skills and attributes parents saw as useful for children on entry to school

Literacy and Numeracy	N	Personal and Social	N
Alphabet knowledge	17	General social skills	9
Counting & number recognition	11	Confidence in self/ with others	4
Write name	8	Secure in self/ be self	3
Familiar with books	5	Stand up for self	3
General writing skills	4	Share nicely	2
Good oral language	3	Play well	2
Hold pen/pencil correctly	3	Form friendships	2
Know colours	3	Not be afraid	1
Recognise basic words	1	Don't hit others	1
Use scissors, etc.	1		
Self Care	N	Manners/ Behaviour	N
Manage clothes, shoes, etc.	8	Be polite (please/thank you, etc.)	3
Independent toileting, etc.	7	Basic knowledge of right & wrong	3
Eat lunch, etc.	4	Reasonable behaviour	3
		Obedient to teacher	2
		Wait turn	2
Listening and Attention	N	Personal Safety	N
Listening skills/ sit and listen	8	Know address and phone number	2
Understand and follow instructions	4	Aware of stranger danger	1
Ask questions/ ask for help	2	Know what to do if lost	1
Look attentive	1	Know what to do in a crisis	1
Be attentive	1	Aware of safety issues	1
		Able to talk about concerns/ problems	1

Academic skills were also seen as helpful for the teacher. "If they don't know anything like that it is a huge job for the teacher. I guess if they have a reasonable basis to start with it must be helpful." (CS1.1, p. 10). However, Mother 8 felt it was important not to teach children too much. Her eldest child could read fluently on entry, and this had created some difficulties in fitting into the new entrant programme, so with her later children she had aimed at just alphabet knowledge and counting, in order to "let them fit into the system a bit better" (p. 2). Other parents found it difficult to actually teach

their children (something that will be explored later in this chapter). The parents who did not mention literacy and numeracy skills all focused on social/personal skills and attributes. For example, Mother 15 drew on her experiences with her older child, who had been academically capable but timid in social situations, and believed that Child 15's willingness to enter into relationships would be more useful in assisting his transition.

While 9 parents talked of social skills in general terms, others had specific attributes in mind such as confidence in oneself and with others, being secure in oneself and being able to stand up for oneself. Many of these parents worried about their children being exposed to a much wider social circle and hoped they would be safe and happy, particularly in the playground. However, instilling confidence was not always easy. As Mother 9 reflected, "I'm lucky that Child 9 is confident and bubbly and outgoing. How do you change a shy, introverted child?" (p. 9).

Self care skills such as managing one's own clothes, using the toilet independently, and listening and attention skills were also deemed to be important, (by 8, 7 and 8 parents respectively). Four parents noted skills associated with personal safety, such as an awareness of stranger danger and knowledge of what to do in a crisis, reflecting their concern regarding their children moving away from the close parental and teacher supervision they had experienced in early childhood.

The skills and attributes the teachers hoped children would have on entry to school

The skills and attributes the three new entrant teachers and the Assistant Principal, who taught in one of the new entrant classes in the afternoons, said they wanted children to have on entry to school are shown in Table 9. There was a strong feeling, expressed in different ways, that children should have developed independence, in personal and social skills.

They should take responsibility for their own learning and be able to work independently without being distracted. (Ms Keane, p. 9).

When you are taking a group you don't want to be interrupted. You want children to be able to carry on with a task. (Ms King, p. 7).

It was helpful when children could select suitable activities.

I am amazed at these children who come in and have only been at school a day or so, they have finished their task, and off they go and they find something to do quietly... they do a puzzle or look at the book corner or something like that. They are able to do that without being told 'You

must do this now'. So again it's initiative, developing that independence.
(Ms Keane, p. 12)

Table 9. Skills and attributes teachers saw as useful for children on entry to school

Literacy, Numeracy & other Academic Skills	N	Personal and Social	N
General oral language skills	3	Independent learning skills	3
Understand positional vocabulary	2	General social skills	2
Counting & number recognition	2	Select activities independently	2
Hold pen/pencil/scissors correctly	2	Outgrown habits like a "Cuddly"	1
Alphabet knowledge	1		
Write name & some letters	1		
Recognise name	1		
Understand sequence of time	1		
Colour using a variety of colours	1		
Draw a person with seven parts	1		
Know some colours	1		
Familiar with books, handles with care	1		
Self Care	N	Manners/ Behaviour	N
Responsible for own belongings	3	Wait turn	2
Manage clothes, shoes, etc.	2	Tidy up after self	2
Eat lunch, etc.	2	Speak politely	1
Independent toileting, etc.	1		
Listening and Attention	N	Personal Safety	N
Listening skills/ sit and listen	3	Know address and phone number	2
Understand and follow instructions	3	Aware of safety issues	2
Complete simple tasks	2		
Stay on task 5-10 mins	1		
Physical Skills	N		
Run, jump, hop, etc.	1		

Ms Kent and Ms King both lamented what they saw as a lack of independence in many children, with parents doing too much for them, perhaps because of parental time constraints. "I can understand if the parents are working that it's quicker to do things for your child than to take the time to wait for them" (Ms King, p. 16). Ms Kent believed "lack of independence" coupled with the degree of organised entertainment meant children did not "know how to make their own fun" (p. 5). As part of developing independence Ms Kent thought it was a good idea if children had experienced staying overnight with relatives or friends. "We get some children at school that won't even speak... very shy and won't communicate with us. If they have

had that sort of interaction with other people I think it really helps” (pp. 1-2). This also related to social skills, which they both mentioned as important. Ms King commented that “I rather expect on arrival that children can play with another child or a group of children” (p. 16) and Ms Kent said children should be “able to share and respect others’ rights and talk” (p. 2).

All four teachers talked about self-care skills and there was a clear sense that independence in self-care tasks was appropriate ‘five-year-old’ behaviour.

I had a child last year for Aqua Pass who wasn’t worried about going in the water but was totally, in absolute horror, at the thought of having to dress himself. The first day his mother came to help. The second day we got him into the pool, coming back, walking down to the dressing room he suddenly realized there was no mum there to dry him. He started screaming. Who was going to do it for him? This was a five-year-old. (Ms King, p. 6)

Three teachers said that children should be responsible for their own belongings and Ms Knight commented that after a few weeks they should also be responsible for remembering the things that they need to bring to school. “So often we have children who say ‘Mum forgot to put it in my bag’. I turn it verbally around ‘No you forgot’” (p. 8). It was felt that children should carry their own bags, and when they got to school each child should be responsible for opening his/her bag and dispersing all the materials to the appropriate places, and for putting things back into their bags throughout the day, “instead of just throwing them all over the floor” (Ms King, p. 16). Ms Knight and Ms King disapproved of parents who did all the jobs that they expected of the child, “because no learning is happening” (Ms Knight, p. 9).

In relation to literacy, numeracy, and other academic skills, although several skills were noted, there was considerable variation in the teachers’ beliefs. Other than Ms Knight saying oral language skills were helpful, only two teachers, Ms King and Ms Kent, contributed to this section. They agreed with Ms Knight that general oral language skills were important, in addition they had specific requirements regarding positional vocabulary; “in, out, off, on, in front of, behind, between, next... tall, short, long, longer, heavy, heavier, lighter, those sorts of words”.

Ms King listed a whole range of additional skills that she would like children to have. These included being able to write their name and to recognise their name so that they can find their belongings in the classroom, drawing a person with seven parts and

being able to colour in using a variety of colours (rather than just one colour), being able to name the alphabet and to at least try to write some letters.

We don't expect them to be able to write a lot but it is good if they can write some [letters] because you have something to go from. I've had lots of children who, it's just scribble, what I consider a two-year-old would do. (Ms King, p. 3)

I have one child ... he just drew little squiggles all over his page. I said to his mother that one way she could help him was to get him to practice writing his name. I said, 'he is obviously not very aware of his alphabet yet' and she said 'I was told not to push him', but I think there is a difference between encouraging and pushing.... I certainly don't want them pushed but just given opportunities so that when they come to school this isn't a whole strange activity, and it was for him. He has picked it up quite quickly but he was starting from way behind. (Ms King, p. 15)

On the other hand, Ms Kent said that while knowing numbers and recognising one's name was important, in general more formal academic skills were not necessary when children started. "That doesn't worry us particularly... we can help them with those things" (p. 7). In her experience, parents "have a fear that children should be more ahead academically than we expect" (p. 7), but her view was, "I don't think that's important, their academic achievements when they come to school, because we'll handle that" (p. 8).

Ms Knight was quite explicit in saying that she did not look for academic skills on entry to school. She said she would like early childhood education to focus on "the social, physical and emotional wellbeing of the child, that's the most crucial areas, particularly cooperativeness... the most academic thing that I really like them to be doing is stay on task. To be able to work five or ten minutes on a set task would be great" (p. 14). Similarly, Ms Keane saw life skills and a disposition to learn as the more important than academic skills. "If they take responsibility for their own learning and they are working independently it means they are not easily distracted so it's all being focused and therefore they will learn. That's the main thing" (p. 9). This message had apparently been shared with parents at an information evening. Mother 20 said it had been helpful to hear the teachers say, "Don't worry if they don't know their ABCs when they come. We evaluate them.... To let people know 'Hey there's a baseline and we work from that individually'. I think a lot of parents were reassured that night. I know I was" (M20.1, p. 7).

The teachers' concerns about different expectations

A major factor that motivated the school's involvement in the study was the feeling amongst some staff that "the parents' expectations were different to the teachers'" (P, p. 1). The Principal and Assistant Principal both thought parents/caregivers were pushing their children too hard. "That's a problem we have right through the school, unrealistic expectations of parents" (P, p. 3). Even Ms King, who had been very clear in the range of academic skills she felt were useful, said "A lot of parents in this area are aware of helping them [children] with the alphabet... I don't think they are aware of how important it is that they can look after their own belongings" (p. 16).

The Principal experienced pressure from parents who he felt had "unrealistic expectations of the kid, the teacher and the system" (P, p. 4). He described what he saw as two cultures of parents. Firstly parents who frighten children by telling them that school will "sort them out" and secondly parents who see their child as gifted and "immediately have an expectation that goes beyond what the school can provide" (P, p. 3). In the Principal's experience:

it's usually the academic progress that criticism comes in about. What's happening in the classroom programme, their reading and so on. It's not so much the behavioural or social, it's usually lack of performance academically. So they're not making the progress that they were expecting, they're on the wrong reading level and so on. (P, p. 4)

Ms Kent, the Assistant Principal, expressed a similar view regarding parent attitudes to children's progress:

I think we [teachers] have a fear that the children are pushed too fast, too hard [by their parents], and they are not allowed to develop at their own rate and there is terrific comparison of children. Right from the new entrant level parents are comparing and asking what that one's reading and what this one's reading. We are very accountable as teachers. (p. 7)
I think a lot of parents have very high expectations generally. (p. 8)

In contrast, Ms Knight thought that high academic expectations built as the child progressed through the school. "I don't think they have the expectations to start with. I think they think of them as babies" (Ms Knight, p. 18). Ms Keane found that only a few parents pushed their children, most were more interested in whether their child was settling in and whether they were happy. It appeared that the views of the Principal and Assistant Principal may have been shaped by the fact that they usually dealt with parents/caregivers who wanted to complain, while for the new entrant teachers, dealing with the full range of parents/caregivers, the issues seemed less salient.

Preparation for school and early learning

Parents' and teachers' views about the skills that they felt it was useful for children to have on entry to school relate to a major theme in the data, that of preparation for school and children's early learning.

Parents' perspectives on preparation for school

All the parents talked about things that they saw as useful preparation for school. As noted earlier, parents placed a strong emphasis on alphabet knowledge, counting, writing, and early reading skills, and many parents took steps to try and ensure that their children did develop these skills before their fifth birthday. In some cases parents concentrated on these skills at home.

Occasionally when we are reading stories, we'll sound out the odd words so she is starting to realise they don't sound like their name is. (CS1.1, p. 9)

Lately he has been wanting to read words so we have encouraged him to do that. (CS/M2.1, p. 5)

I have naturally taught my children the alphabet and how to write and hold a pen right and the numbers... and we sing songs and incorporate it and stuff like that. (CS6.1, p. 7)

I just do a lot of things at home with them as far as making sure they know their alphabet, play alphabet games, and counting. (M8, p. 2)

I always used to play games with the girls like getting them to write their name, knowing the alphabet. (M13, p. 5)

There were also opportunities to develop these skills within the state kindergarten programmes, although two parents paid for their children to attend additional sessions at a private centre. The parents concerned saw this as facilitating their children's transition.

I feel like I am giving her this stepping-stone to school. That's why I am doing it [sending her to the private centre for one afternoon a week]. (CS4.1, p. 19)

It is giving them preschool writing and counting. (M21, p. 2)

Children were therefore being encouraged to develop academic skills in a variety of ways. However, in some families children had resisted their parents' attempts to teach them some basic letter literacy skills prior to school entry.

My older child with no interest whatsoever in wanting to write a single thing. So you can't push them. Again, it's really hard, you just have to go with the flow with each child. (M19, p. 8)

My middle son he refused! He's probably the brightest of the three. I said 'Come on dear, let's do some alphabet work'. 'Not going to do it.' 'Right. Let's do some writing.' 'No.' And he wouldn't do anything, but as soon as he got to school he was away with no worries. So he did understand it. He knew it but he wouldn't let me teach him. (CS7.1, p. 6)

Where resistance was encountered, 10 parents said that it was better not to push a child at this early stage:

I don't want to rush it too much. It will happen as soon as it happens really. (CS1.1, p. 10)

When he hasn't wanted to [read] I haven't pushed him because I feel that could create problems where he doesn't want to do it anymore, so we just go with the flow sort of thing. (CS/M2.1, p. 5)

We are very interested in his progress but the other thing too is that we don't believe in push, push, push. Let kids be kids and learn at their pace but help them along the way. (CS/M2.1, p. 19)

Children haven't that security if you push, that will make her hate to learn more. Stop to learn any more. Wow! Terrible! I think it affects the future and makes her hate to study... I will let her learn more because she has good security. (M10, p. 6)

If you force it I think it can backfire. They will do it in their own time and probably they'll go ahead quite fast when they actually want to do it. (M15, p. 6)

So, parents sought to find a balance between encouraging the development of academic skills, without pushing children who were not interested. Largely they focused on things children enjoyed doing and endeavored to support them. For example, Anna had been filling copious notebooks with "scrawls" (CS3.1, p. 10) while Nicola had been copying greetings onto cards for friends. Most parents felt reasonably confident in assisting children's learning in this way but Ms Samson said she wondered how to extend Steve, as she was "not a teacher" (CS5.1, p. 4).

Even though they had said literacy skills were useful on entry to school, five parents were quite relaxed about early skill differences. Mother 20 explained:

Some [children] come in [to school] knowing nothing, they grasp it so fast, and others know everything, they slow down, so I think as a parent it all balances out. It's nice as a parent to know 'Yes my child already knew

their ABC when they came in' but I don't think it's necessary. They pick it up here... I think they'll pick that up when they are here [at school]. (p. 8)

Maturational explanations were given, often citing children whose early difficulties had been resolved in their second year of school.

I don't know if he had a period where he needed to take it all in without putting out... With Matthew it was nothing [slow progress in reading and writing], and then everything all at once. So I don't think there's any one factor, it's just for him developmental. (CS7.3, p. 8)

She struggled with reading for quite some time, and we worked on it and sounding out words and all of a sudden it's clicked and she has taken off. (CS6.3, p. 1)

When [C23's brother] started he couldn't care less about writing. He couldn't care less about drawing. He knew his alphabet to say it but he wouldn't write it down and he knew his numbers, but he wasn't interested in writing or anything like that and I was concerned about that when he started but he is top of the class in all his subjects, so I think you can't push them too far. They will do it in their own time. (M22, p. 6)

I don't think she was ready. I don't think it was the way she was being taught, I just think she wasn't quite ready. And I know my older son was like that too. He didn't do in the way of learning until he was six. All children are different. Some will pick it up but they've just got a different brain I guess.... Some can read and write before they go to school because they have just got that inclination to do it... but there must be something in the brain that's further forward to get them doing it because others just aren't capable. (CS3.3, p. 3)

Thirteen parents anticipated that children would experience more 'structure' at school than at kindergarten, and 8 parents expected that children would have less freedom of choice. However, while some parents talked about structure in terms of routines such as when to eat, set activities to complete, and mat times, for other parents it was simply a more explicit focus on cognitive development. This was evident in Ms Chess's description of Carl's younger sister Carol's exploration of the way the human body functions. Activities on this topic at Azure had led to demands for more knowledge from her parents, and Carol's enthusiastic collection of resources on the heart, lungs and circulation system to take to kindergarten and share with teachers and peers. Ms Chess compared this to Carl's rather desultory digging in the sandpit at Blue Kindergarten:

Carl was bored, just bored at kindy. Once he started school he was away 'cos there was some structure and he got his mind working. (CS/M2.3, p. 19)

Early childhood teachers' perspectives on preparation for school and early learning

Azure Kindergarten was the only early childhood service that had any direct contact with Kowhai School. Over the years the school and kindergarten teachers had developed a close, respectful relationship. Ms Ashby believed that they had “the same philosophy”. She enjoyed the school contact, having found “the school is very, very supportive of us, which is really neat. From the principal down they are all very supportive... so it works really, really well and we are lucky” (p. 11).

At Azure the teachers aimed to foster sets of dispositions or habitus (Carr, 2001), that both parties believed would allow children to participate effectively in the school environment. Ms Ashby's view was that early childhood education was a preparation for life, but she also felt that:

...school happens to be the next rung of the ladder of life and it is stupid to say that you are not preparing them for school because you are... Some of the things that we try to do particularly here is to develop their inquisitiveness and independence and self esteem.... They have also learnt to listen, to participate, to be part of a group and to respect people. They have got to learn to share... To build the child's self esteem and to teach them independence and to encourage their inquiring mind so that they want to learn, want to find out about things. (pp. 9-10)

There was also considerable emphasis on the mat time discussions so that “most of the children, by the time they leave, can speak in a large group” (p. 4). Ms Ashby concluded:

We find it works very well. And because we have instilled certain values in the children they know how to sit still. They know how to listen. They know how to contribute. They just fit in. (p. 11)

At Blue Kindergarten Ms Bird talked more about perceived differences, rather than continuity:

We operate within a child-centred approach, which is loosely free play, and that's the philosophy we work with, whereas when they go to school... it is very structured and there is a set time when you must eat your snack, whereas at kindergarten you can have it at a set place but at a time you chose. You can choose to do things when you want, within reasonable limits, whereas it's not quite like that at school. (p. 11)

Overall she felt “it seems like there are no links there really, from where I sit” (p. 13). One of her goals was to develop some communication with local schools. In the meantime Ms Bird saw the most important preparation for school as the support kindergarten teachers provided to help children and parents deal with the changes. She tried to “encourage the child and the parent to feel confident with leaving here and going there. Saying ‘Hey it will be all right’ and crossing your fingers that it will be for them” (p. 8). Ms Clarke also aimed to “reinforce it’s going to be a really good thing, heading off to school” (p. 10).

Ms Ashby and Ms Bird said that some parents believed that a more formal approach to teaching literacy and numeracy would provide useful preparation for school. Teachers at Azure were aware that many parents/caregiver were sending their children to private centres where a more formal programme was offered, either in addition to, or instead of, kindergarten. The attractive five-page brochure from one private centre, (that two of the participant children, and a number of other local children attended), claimed to provide four-year-olds with a programme that included writing their names, counting to ten, exploring the alphabet and print and following instructions “so their transition from Kindy to School will be as easy as possible”. While similar skills were also developed at the state kindergartens, the emphasis and approach to teaching was different. Ms Ashby acknowledged that she tried to explain their approach to parents but it was sometimes difficult to compete with the private centre's marketing.

Parental pressure for a more school-like level of formality was even more evident at Blue Kindergarten. Ms Bird said that quite a lot of parents/caregivers “would like to see ‘Okay you sit down and do this set activity’” (p. 11). She actively resisted this pressure, believing that discontinuity between the practices in the two settings did not have to be overcome by making the early childhood programme more formal. “That's just a fact of life that the rules are different for different times and places in your life. We try very hard to tell them [parents] that it's not how we work alongside children. That we are not all going to sit and cut a circle because you have to do it type of thing” (p. 11). Nevertheless, a new teacher coming into the kindergarten during the study did bring some of this formality to the programme. One involved children cutting out the numbers from one to twelve and gluing them in the right order onto a drawing of a clock face (see Carl's story). Organising a large group of four-year-olds to do this was challenging for the teacher but little meaningful learning appeared to be happening for most of the children.

In responding to parental pressure, Ms Ashby's close relationship with the new entrant teachers meant that she was able to explain confidently how she believed that Azure's

focus on certain dispositions would benefit children when they arrived at school. Azure had the reputation locally, demonstrated in the comments of the both parents and several school personnel, of providing a sound preparation for school. In contrast, Ms Bird, who had no direct contact with any schools, was less confident in her responses because she was unsure what actually happened in a new entrant classroom. “What’s happening now is different to when my children went” (p. 11). She believed it would be useful to establish contact with some of the local schools, including Kowhai, saying, “I am sure that they don’t know what we do here and we don’t know what they do there and it seems like there is this huge gap... I think we need to know what each other is doing”. She used to know that in some areas, like mathematics, what happened at school was similar to what they did in kindergarten, but now she felt “I don’t know that for a fact... there have been so many changes”. Therefore her hope was for schools and early childhood services to “come together, sharing what happens” (p. 12).

At Cobalt Kindergarten, which was some distance from the other two and only occasionally fed into Kowhai School, the teachers were not aware of any pressure from parents to introduce a more formal approach. “Very, very occasionally will a parent ever say, I would like Johnny to learn his letters or his alphabet”. Ms Clark’s perspective was that children should be prepared “for life” rather than for school, but she did try to foster the skills that she thought would “make the transition easier” (p. 9). These included:

Being able to identify their name, knowing how to look after their belongings and where they go. Self help skills would be the first ones... I’m not too worried about writing names... when children are ready they will do that... Knowing how to hold a pencil... Socialisation, knowing how to ask for help if you need it... I see it more a holistic, all round thing, getting the child ready for school. (Ms Clarke, p. 9)

As children reached the term before their fifth birthday Ms Clarke said she would “really start to hone in” and support them in the developing the skills noted above.

New entrant teachers' perspectives on preparation and early learning

Table 9 outlined the range of skills and attributes the new entrant teachers hoped children would have on entry to school. In their eyes useful preparation was for parents/caregivers to foster the development of these in their children. With regard to early childhood education, the new entrant teachers clearly valued its role in preparing children to be compliant, and to accept the regulation and set routines of school, such as mat time.

We have been lucky with Azure Kindergarten because they do have a fairly structured morning programme... generally the children from Azure know how to sit at mat time and how to listen. They have been taught those skills at kindergarten, which is good, so you haven't got to teach those. (Ms Keane, p. 12)

The Principal also talked about this:

I actually think that's one of the real strengths in the school... that's one of the real advantages that we've actually got in this school because the kids are coming from Azure Kindergarten, those structures were obviously in place there. (p. 2)

Children who had not attended Azure Kindergarten were perceived to be potentially more problematic in terms of their transition.

I've got a new child starting tomorrow who hasn't really had much preschool and hasn't been at our local preschool [Azure] either and that shows up. He is going to need a lot of help in understanding the routines that the children already know. (Ms Knight, p. 15)

I have one child... the kindergarten he went to they could [go outside when they felt like it]. They didn't have to sit. I actually think the kindergarten should say 'this is story time'. I know they do at Azure but if they go to crèche or a different kindy, and the children aren't ready they will say 'the children aren't ready for that yet' but they have got to... the last three months at least before school they have got to learn that when the teacher says 'sit down we are going to do our reading now' then they have to be part of the group too, or they will never progress. (Ms King, p. 17)

This had obviously been communicated to the Principal:

This is only my perception from what the teachers tell me, that there is actually a difference in the kids coming from different kindergartens. (P, p. 7)

The Board of Trustees representative acknowledged the role she felt both Azure and Blue Kindergartens played:

I know we usually notice a difference between the kids who come from playcentre and kindy. I think they get a lot less structured activity at playcentre. They may not have picked up a pair of scissors or done anything because they may not have been told to or encouraged to. They may have been able to play in the sandpit all the time if they want to. Which I suppose is their philosophy. Whereas at least at kindy they do have that structure; it's time to go on the mat or it's time to have a story, go and try this art activity, sort of thing. (BoT rep.1, pp. 9-10)

Consistent with the type of skills teachers said they valued on entry to school Ms Knight said:

[Azure Kindergarten teachers] are very aware of the way that we assess them when they come in so they know the sorts of things we are looking for, but they don't teach towards those things. I would like them to contribute more to the social and physical, emotional wellbeing of the child. (p. 14)

The Board of Trustee's representative also commented on the liaison with Azure Kindergarten, which ensured continuity with the requirements of school.

I mean they could teach them how to do their name over there all in capital letters and then of course they come here and they have to relearn so we may as well complement each other in the first place and the school needs to say to them this is our writing examples, if you are going to teach them how to write their name at least teach them to do it the right way. (BoT rep.1, p. 6)

Although the teachers valued conformity to routines, especially mat times, this didn't translate into requiring preparation for formal teaching situations, such as completing worksheets. Ms Knight said that she included this type of activity at school largely because she believed that that was what children expected. She said that children came to school expecting it to be "like a formal printing lesson, you sit in your chair and the teacher says pick up the pencil, and your feet are flat and your back straight, and you do this line and you do the next line" (pp. 12-13). She explained, "that's why they [children] like those formal lessons when the teacher claps her hands, blows the whistle, or whatever it is". Therefore, she said, "I do make sure we have quite a bit of formal stuff interjected throughout the day.... But of course most of the learning doesn't happen that way" (p. 12).

Discussion of influences on early learning

Not surprisingly, this chapter has revisited some of the themes that were evident in Chapters Ten and Eleven. The beliefs and practices with regard to children's early learning naturally underpinned other beliefs and practices surrounding transition. Alongside these themes, new issues were identified, in particular the social construction of desired pedagogical approaches, and the influence of the different participants in this construction. The complexity of the topic was confirmed in the conflicting messages about what was important.

Reflecting on readiness

In this setting, readiness was largely constructed by parents as a general attribute that was evident in a child, rather than a list of measurable skills. The dominant description identified readiness in terms of how demanding the child was, suggesting that the definition came as much from the *parents' readiness* to share the responsibility for challenging and active children beyond the kindergarten hours. As was discussed in Chapter Ten, this perhaps draws more from the way motherhood is constructed in today's society, than from ideas about children and schools.

An alternative construction of the children's behaviour is that, instead of being caused by boredom at kindergarten, they were engaged in learning activities during the morning, and stimulated to learn more during the afternoons. However, although the kindergarten observations of the case study children did not reveal the level of boredom parents suggested their children were experiencing, other New Zealand studies have also noted that four-year-olds appear bored and restless as their fifth birthday approaches (Carr, 1997; Norris, 1997). Carr (1997) found that that *being nearly five* was a discourse that was never far from the children's minds, and for some the last few months of kindergarten appeared to be interpreted as a time of "waiting for the 'real' world of five upwards, and school" (p. 240). If this period of boredom is occurring, it might be part of a preliminal disengagement from the role of kindergarten pupil. Fabian (1998, p. 23) notes that in van Genepp's description of a rite of passage, the first stage is of preliminal rites, in which "passagees are stripped of their previous social role". This fits with Ms Ashby's view that some behavioural problems (where they existed) were due to facing a new, as yet unknown role. The problem of disengagement is perhaps exacerbated because enrolment practices in Aotearoa/New Zealand mean that gradually many of a child's friends leave for school. A few children, might persistently make new friends, (like Tessa did), but others may start to drift, as their social network increasingly disappears.

Although, in theory, New Zealand parents have the option of delaying a child's school entry until age six, the parents' comments indicated a strong social convention to conform to the practice of children starting on their fifth birthday. There was some support (including from the school principal) for a more flexible approach, but this drew from an acceptance of the existing school practices that made transition difficult for some children. These comments appeared to draw on a maturational view of allowing more time, but as Graue (1998) has noted, this overlooks what actually happens for the child in the intervening period. Children may start later but still experience the same difficulties they would have at five. Also, drawing on the evidence provide by Graue's (1993b) research, delaying school entry for a large

number of children is likely to create new problems. Where large numbers of children are 'held out' of school until they were older, standards are likely to rise, making 'normal' five-year-olds appear 'at risk' when compared with their six-year-old peers. In catering to the demands of the older group, regular classes tend to go faster and faster, further escalating the problem. Graue proposed that age was the best marker for deciding on school entry, due to the difficulties in determining and assessing other criteria. The task for schools then becomes providing a responsive learning environment for all children. Graue's recommendation fits with the comments of two parents in the present study, who took an interactionist view of readiness (see Dockett & Perry, 2002). Instead of locating readiness as something within the child, these parents looked at the combined effects of features of the child and the nature of what was experienced at school, and suggested that aspects of the school context could be changed to promote readiness.

Differing views about useful skills on entry to school

The teachers' comments about useful skills and attributes indicated some of the developmental norms that underpinned beliefs and practices at school. While these had been evident in some of the issues arising in the case study stories (Chapter Nine), and in the reporting processes at school (Chapter Eleven), they were mentioned more explicitly here, where the expectations of a five-year-old were clearly defined. Independence, discussed in Chapter Ten in relation to the separation of child and family, arose again as a key feature of these norms. However, in this context independence was defined slightly differently, and related not just to separation, but to self care skills and being able to take responsibility for possessions, tasks, and one's own learning. This mirrored Brooker's (2002) description of independence as a disposition that includes selecting and sustaining a range of activities, managing one's own learning and being purposeful and committed. To view these as features of an individual child, which some of the teachers' comments implied, overlooks the interaction of child and context. In Brooker's (2002) view, an important prerequisite for displaying independence is for a child to feel secure and knowledgeable about his/her own ability and about classroom activities and expectations. The case study stories in Chapter Nine indicated the inhibiting effect a focus on performance goals (Smiley & Dweck, 1994) could have on a child's disposition to behave independently, suggesting that while these are understandably important attributes in the school setting, the influence of the context must be taken into account.

There were a number of similarities in the views of parents and teachers regarding the skills and attributes that they believed were useful for children on entry to school. The findings are broadly consistent with the findings of a much larger survey of Australian

teachers and parents (Perry, Dockett & Howard, 2000). However, there was a clear difference in relation to what teachers referred to as more formal academic skills. While teachers, other than Ms King, indicated that academic skills were not necessary on entry, because classroom programmes would be targeted to the child's individual level, these were the skills that were most frequently mentioned by parents.

The data help to show why such differences might occur. The new entrant teachers were providing somewhat mixed messages. Although they valued a fairly holistic approach to children's learning, and said that academic skills were not important, in practice it appeared that they had in mind an expected base line level of competence, especially in letter recognition, reading and writing, and, as Chapters Nine and Eleven showed, children who fell below this level were quickly noted and their parents informed. While sharing information about a child's deficits in relation to particular norms was well-meaning, and coupled with advice on ways of enhancing their skills in whatever area was seen as lacking, by targeting parents so early with the information that their child was having difficulties (usually within two to four weeks of the child starting school), teachers were giving a very clear message about what was deemed to be important. This message, and the praise for the children who were ahead, (e.g. "The teacher said to us how helpful it was when Theresa [Tessa's older sister] knew all the letters of the alphabet and how to write them and how to spell a few words" (CS4.1, p. 7) was at odds with the professed view that academic skills were not particularly important to have on entry to school.

The parents themselves are part of a community who share ideas and construct particular meanings (Graue, 1993b). Not surprisingly, some parents who had received information from people who already had children at school, or had had experiences with their older children that had made them aware of the emphasis that was placed on skills such as letter recognition, writing, and early reading skills, took steps to try and ensure that their children did develop these skills before their fifth birthday. Once at school, the emphasis the Principal and Assistant Principal found some parents placed on their children's performance in these areas can be understood in relation to the feedback parents received. The skills the teachers said they wanted children to have on entry to school such as independence, self-care and listening skills *were* very important in the school environment, where a large group of new entrant children spent the day with one adult, but it was evident that in this setting, if children did not have a certain level of achievement in relation to alphabet knowledge, reading and writing, this was identified as a problem, which in some cases was detrimental to later progress.

With the increasing focus on literacy and numeracy (Ministry of Education, 2001d) it will be important not to lose sight of the breadth of important skills that are developed in a child's early years. If schools want parents to see holistic development as important (and staff in this school did) classroom programmes should enable children who start school with few academic skills to build these skills during their early months at school, without it being labeled as a problem. Teachers could share ideas with parents regarding activities they could do at home as part of the normal 'homework' that is encouraged, instead of making parents feel under pressure to get their child up to an expected level as quickly as possible. Teachers could also provide positive feedback to the parents of the children who do have the skills they profess to see as more significant (such as independence, listening, etc.) to reinforce the importance of these. The curriculum changes proposed in Chapter Fourteen show how such skills could be given more status.

A further point that is worth considering in relation to the differences between the skills noted by teachers and those noted by parents is for whom the skills are useful. The skills the parents described are ones that in many cases are useful for the child, while those on the teachers' list are often skills that largely assist the teacher. This may help to explain why academic skills do not feature highly on the teachers' list. The teacher could cope with the range of academic skills presented by the children in the class, even though it generally proved detrimental *for the children* to be identified as below the expected baseline. This also helps to understand the other major difference between the two lists, which was the much greater emphasis that parents placed on personal and social skills. As will be shown in Chapter Thirteen, these were perhaps the most important skills for the children's transition experiences, but the children who lacked these skills were not necessarily problematic for the teacher.

Conflicting views regarding preparation for school

There was considerable conflict, both within and across the different groups, in the participants' views about preparing children for school. Not surprisingly the parents' and teachers' views related closely to the skills each group saw as important for entry to school. However, although parents saw academic skills as very useful on entry to school, there was a tension for some because they felt that these could not be hurried, and that pushing children into formal literacy activities was detrimental to learning. Only a few parents in this study seemed to illustrate the push for a more formal programme in early childhood that the teachers at Azure and Blue kindergarten were experiencing, and yet other studies have documented similar parental pressure (e.g. McLeod & Butler, 1999).

There are two important points that can be considered in relation to pressure for more formal approaches in early childhood. Firstly, there is considerable evidence to suggest that the push down of formal approaches to teaching in early childhood is detrimental to children's learning in the long term (Blakemore, 2000; Elkind, 1987, 1990; Hyson, 2003; Katz, 1993) and therefore it would be counter-productive to prepare children for school in this way. At the same time, early childhood teachers need to ensure that they are providing appropriate levels of challenge for children (Hyson, 2003), and that they can articulate the learning that is taking place. As Elkind (1987) pointed out, parents (and others) cannot be blamed for valuing a more formal approach if what is valued as appropriate learning in early childhood is not explained clearly. Carr's (1998b, 2001) learning story model of assessment, developed after the data in the present study were collected, which looks at children's learning dispositions, is likely to assist in both processes.

Secondly, from the teachers' comments (see Table 9) it appeared that parents who were pressing for a more formal approach in early childhood were perhaps, like the children Broström (2002) described, operating from an outdated view of schooling. The new entrant teachers talked about valuing independent learners, a view that sits comfortably with Yates's (2001) claim that schools aspire to develop independent thinkers and learners. Such an approach is consistent with early childhood philosophy (see Chapter Five) and negates the need for a push down of formal approaches, which seem to belong to an earlier period in time and do not reflect current views of learning (see Barker, 2001).

However, arguments against a formality in early childhood programmes may not convince parents if they see this in their child's new entrant classroom. Again, explanations are important. Parents in this study who were seeking more formal approaches in early childhood services, would have been interested in Ms Knight's comment that she deliberately ensured they had quite a lot of formal "stuff", such as worksheets, during the day *because the children seemed to enjoy this*. Worksheets also provided follow-up activities after the children had been engaged in an activity with the teacher, while the teacher moved on to work with another group. Hence, while formal activities may appear to carry status in the parents' eyes, the teacher may accord them a low priority.

Nevertheless, although the teachers did not see formal learning, in the form of worksheets and other structured activities, as valuable preparation for school, they did believe early childhood services had an important role in preparing children to conform to the restrictions and routines of the new entrant classroom. This

expectation was also evident in Robinson et al's (2000) research. The emphasis teachers place on compliance to routines can be understood in the context of their role, working with large classes of five-year-olds. However, where 'structure', such as sitting still and long mat times, is argued for solely on the grounds that it will prepare children for school, instead of conforming to pressure, early childhood teachers might argue that these traits are not necessarily connected to children's learning. Even if school programmes do require these skills, this is not a valid reason for spending the early years practicing for them. John Holt (1964) included the following statement in a journal entry dated 1961:

A mother said to me not long ago, "I think you are making a mistake in trying to make school work so interesting for the children. After all, they are going to have to spend most of their lives doing things they don't like, and they might as well get used to it now" (p. 160).

Almost forty years later, pushing down the things children find difficult about school into early childhood is using the same logic. The observations showed that children in this study quickly adapted to the routines of the classroom (such as knowing when to eat and not wandering outside to play when they felt like it) even if they hadn't experienced restrictions on these activities in early childhood settings. Further, focusing on such preparation could, be problematic. As his mother reported, Steve, didn't want to start school because:

He hates sitting still. He finds mat time [at kindergarten] boring; he's got to sit still.... 'Well when you go to school and are a big boy you're going to have to do those things.' He says, 'Well I don't want to go to school then'. (CS5.1, p. 3)

If long mat times prove difficult, new entrant teachers may want to evaluate the pedagogical benefits of making them shorter. Finally, it is important to note that Anna's attendance at Azure Kindergarten had left her well versed in the skills required to sit on the mat, and independent in her self care skills, but these did not ensure a positive experience when she got to school. In some respects being too compliant was detrimental for children because it could lead them to be overlooked. Again, reflecting on who skills are important for, highlights the differences between what useful for a teacher, and what is beneficial for a child. If early childhood teachers experience the sort of pressures to push down school curriculum and pedagogy into prior-to-school settings, as described by Corrie (1991) and Neuman (2002), it will be important question whose interests are being served by this.

Chapter Summary

The perspectives discussed in this chapter reveal some of the tensions and complexity for the participants in relation to their ideas about early learning. Ideas about readiness were constructed in different ways. Although there were some similarities between parents' and teachers' views regarding useful skills and attributes for children to have on entry to school, there was a marked difference in the priority accorded to academic skills, especially in literacy. Somewhat mixed messages from the school added to the parents' dilemmas, as they tried to ensure their children had the academic skills they (parents) felt were useful, whilst adhering to their belief that it was inappropriate to 'push' when children weren't interested. This perhaps explains why they were, in some cases, keen for kindergartens to take some of this responsibility. For early childhood teachers, much of the complexity seemed to come from competing views about appropriate early education, which could result in external pressure from parents and others. The respectful, informed relationship between teachers at Azure Kindergarten and Kowhai School was empowering for the kindergarten teachers, who were able to clearly articulate their programme's value to children's future at school, without encroaching on their practice. Their programme was accorded respect in the community because of this, but clearly some parents were attracted by the even stronger claims made by the private centre. Chapter Ten showed the importance of the school's reputation within the community. This appeared equally true for the kindergartens. Kindergarten teachers enhanced their service's reputation by being able to convince parents of the benefits of their programme, and they required information about school to be able to do this. An inability to articulate the benefit did not necessarily mean that the programme was less valuable, but it impacted on their reputation. For example, Ms Bird, at Blue Kindergarten, felt disempowered by her inability to promote the value of what they were doing. Perhaps because of this, a number of participants compared Blue less favourably with Azure, even though the focus on the development of social skills at this kindergarten appeared to be particularly useful to the children on entry to school (see Chapter Thirteen).

The new entrant teachers seemed to face less external pressure in relation to their pedagogy, but experienced internal tensions from the competing demands of their role, as they tried to balance espoused child-centred approaches to learning with the practicalities of helping children adapt to the rules and routines of the school environment. Further, assessment practices gave weight to particular skills, while according less status to others that were also important. Understanding this complexity is an important aspect in the development of any policies and practices that seek to enhance the experiences of children and their families during the transition to school. The chapter that follows explores the issues for children in the process of

becoming a pupil. The beliefs and practices discussed in the last three chapters were an important influence on this process.

Chapter Thirteen

Issues in the process of children becoming school pupils

This chapter continues the previous three chapters' broad focus and looks at the nature of the 23 children's experiences during their transition to school, and explores key issues in the process of becoming a pupil. This includes the regulation of time for work and rest, using the school toilets, curriculum and pedagogy and relationships with peers. Referring back to the model in Chapter Two (see Figure 2) these can be thought of as some of the small two-way arrows showing transactions between the child and features of the context. In selecting the issues to focus on I have chosen themes from that data that indicated particular challenges for a number of children, although in each case there were other children who were not challenged by this issue, and in some cases a challenge for one child could be another's favourite aspect of school. Hence the issues could contribute to positive, neutral, or negative cycles of experience. The final section in this chapter focuses on language and culture looks at specific issues for the children who did not share the predominantly European culture of the school.

The nature of the 23 children's transition experiences

From the case study stories in Chapter Nine it is evident that judging whether a child's transition to school had gone well is complex. Those children who reacted with tears and tantrums might overcome a difficult start to cope well in the school environment, while a child who was not so visibly distressed could be quietly unhappy for some time. In order to consider the nature of the children's transition experiences both their initial adjustment to the classroom, and their ongoing reactions have been considered.

All 23 children made a good start at the beginning of their first day: 14 were very happy and excited, 7 were a little unsure or nervous but not visibly distressed and 2 were upset, but not until later in the day (Matthew because he couldn't find his lunch and Child 14 when he faced the reading and writing activities). Thus the initial ecological transition went well. However, by the second or third day several children had started to express a dislike of school. For 8 children the first weeks were the most difficult time. Nicola's story provided some insights into her difficult transition. Ms Samson had "an uphill battle" to get Steve to school (CS5.2, p3). Child 9, Child 11, Child 12, Child 13 and Child 14 all became tearful.

He hated it. I think he spent the first week of school crying. Crying at home that he didn't want to go. It was a real battle to get him up in the morning to get him there and when he was at school Ms Keane said that quite often she'd see the tears welling up in his eyes. (M14, p. 2)

She hated it. She cried all the time. (M13, p. 1)

Child 12 is frequently in tears, saying she doesn't like the work or doesn't know what to do. She often says she doesn't feel well when faced with writing. After a month at school Child 12 cries and says she feels unwell just before morning tea time. Her teacher says that this often happens just before playtime. Even after three months at school she seems to need constant attention from the teacher. (Several Obs.)

Anna was also unhappy in her first weeks but her concerns were expressed verbally and she did not cry. However, Anna and Child 9 experienced some disturbed sleep patterns at the height of their concerns, Anna through occasional nightmares, and Child 9 "had really bad nights, like he couldn't go to sleep" (M9, p. 4).

A further 5 children had some concerns or reservations in their early weeks.

I don't think he is entirely happy at the moment but he is getting by. (M16, p. 11)

These days she is more comfortable than before but she is still unstable. Sometimes she doesn't want to stay by herself and cries when we leave. (M23.2, p. 1)

In the longer term the picture changed again. At the end of the first year of the study, the majority (19) appeared happy and settled, with only 4 children still expressing some reservations or occasionally appearing unhappy or unsure. However, because the children started at different points in the year, some of these, like Child 13, had only been at school for a few months, so had had a shorter adjustment period.

Another issue with trying to describe children's transition experiences was that different data sources sometimes provided conflicting information. For example, observations indicated that Child 15 had settled well, a view which his mother supported, and yet if asked he told people he 'hated' school. Child 11 was frequently observed in tears at school, but his mother gave a less distressed picture, saying, "we had tears one day and almost another morning" (M11, p. 1). The complexity both in determining the time period that can be viewed as constituting 'transition', and the data upon which an assessment should be made, raises some issues with regard to research that correlates children's transitions with other measures. Nevertheless it seems worth tentatively exploring some of the factors, such as school visits and the parents' notion of readiness, to see how these related to the children's experiences.

Did the visits help the children to 'settle'?

Given that the purpose of the visit was to familiarise the child with the classroom context and routines, the experiences of visiting have been compared to the child's initial behaviour with regard to 'settling' into the classroom. There was no clear pattern that related the nature and number of visits to the child's early experiences in the classroom (see Appendix V). Many children appeared to start happily after a single visit. However, only one of these was a first or only child, and she had previously attended early childhood services in both Hong Kong and Aotearoa/New Zealand, and had been relaxed about these earlier transitions. Her mother said "I don't worry about the new school because it is no problem for her. She is easy" (M10, p. 2). Of the other first or only children, Carl was the only one to settle apparently happily from the beginning. His family's involvement at school was quite different to that of other first or oldest children. Although his parents did not accompany him on his two visits, both were intensely involved in his transition and his mother in particular established a strong rapport with Ms Keane early on, and was able to access all the information about school that she felt she needed.

Parents and teachers were aware that the transition was generally easier for younger siblings who were already familiar with the school context. These findings suggest that perhaps this needs to be taken into account when determining the nature and number of school visits. Many parents who have had older children go through the new entrant classes may not feel the need to visit and observe for themselves, and the children may be satisfied with one brief visit. However, individual circumstances also need to be taken into consideration. Mother 20's older child had started at a different school and she knew nothing about the new entrant programme at Kowhai School. Matthew, who had been around the school a lot before he started but was not familiar with the new entrant rooms, described how difficult his first days were.

Only one child in the study did not have a visit prior to starting school. In this case not having a visit was associated with a difficult start, but there were many other factors influencing her situation, which will be explored in the final section of this chapter.

Parental perceptions of readiness and children's actual experience

Overall, parental perceptions of their children's readiness were not strongly related to the children's experiences of starting school. In all, 8 of the 18 children believed by their parents to be 'ready' and a similar proportion (2 out of 5) of the children whose parents were less sure they were 'ready', seemed to be happy from the start. The dominant parental definition of readiness, in terms of the children being seen as bored at kindergarten (10 children), or requiring more structure (2 children) was similarly

poorly matched to actual experience, with 6 of these 12 children experiencing problems or being described as "not overly excited about school", while an equal number apparently settled happily into school.

The fact that the nature of children's transition was difficult to predict from simplistic determinants like number of visits or parental perceptions of readiness, supports the approach taken in this thesis of exploring the children's experiences in depth. It is only by looking at the complex interactions of factors that an individual's cycle of experience can be understood. Nevertheless, there were some common themes arising in the data regarding important issues influencing these pathways. Before these are described and discussed, it is useful to consider the parents' and teachers' comments about children making a difficult start, as this provides insights into the ways that some of the children's issues were addressed by adults.

A difficult start

When children's transitions were unhappy, expressed by tears, clinging or tantrums, this was difficult for all concerned. Parents found it difficult to leave a crying child and were distressed and flustered by their child's unhappiness.

... It was awful! As a Mum I felt really awful, because he'd be crying in the morning and I'd be trying to get them ready [Child 14 and his younger siblings] as well and load all three in the car and get them down to school. It was a nightmare. (M14, p. 2)

Mother 12 explained that having had several days where she had to "pull [Child 12] off the bed", she then had to face Child 12's tears and anger when she tried to leave her at school. Mother 12 commented, "I thought of nothing else all week... We had some bad days at kindy but nothing like that" (M12, Obs. 17.10).

The parents' responses to children's distress could potentially lead to a transactional escalation of difficulties. This perhaps explains why the four teachers were unanimous in preferring a "clean break" from parents/caregivers. Ms Keane recommended saying "'See you' and wave and off they go" (p. 8). She supported parents in making that break. For example, when a boy was crying and clinging to his mother she asked if he would like to come for a little walk with her, or sit on the mat. He chose to sit on the mat, and his mother was able to leave (Obs. 17.10). Ms Knight said emotional problems had to be "handled sensitively", but not allowed to "take over" (p. 18). When a child was screaming and crying her view was that the best thing was to say, "Shoo, Go," to the parent/caregiver. "Often those children are downright naughty for

their parents, the moment that mum is gone they are as good as gold” (p. 18). She would like to offer more support for the parent/caregiver at that time:

...but because I am physically holding the child there is no way I can deal with it. I've got to hold on to the child, even though I know Mum is equally upset. That's hard. I know it's hard. (p. 19).

In these circumstances she would try to telephone the parent/caregiver at morning tea time to reassure them that all was well. Ms Kent thought that sometimes it was the behaviour of the parents that made the transition difficult for the child. “We have to wean the parent off and give the child a little bit of scope and independence and we find that when the parent goes, in most cases the child is fine” (p. 8).

Children's tearful starts were therefore a jointly owned problem, upsetting for parent and child and challenging for the teacher, who had to cope with a distressed child and manage the rest of the class. Where children were crying it could be unsettling for other class members and tears could be seen welling in other children's eyes. Teachers therefore aimed to contain the situation and start the day's activities as soon as possible. However, the observations showed that this did not prevent children from being unhappy. Some continued to be distressed when the parents left. A number of parents welcomed the clean break, but others felt that their parenting style was completely overlooked and believed that they could have been of assistance had they been allowed to stay.

It is also important to note that not all difficult starts were manifested by weeping and outward signs of distress. Where children were quietly unhappy this seemed to be a child-owned problem, rather than a jointly-owned one, and as such it received less attention. It was easier for teachers to overlook the children who were quietly unhappy because they were not disruptive, but this could be equally detrimental to the child as tears.

Overall, the focus for teachers, understandably, was on managing the children's behaviour so that tears and tantrums were reduced or prevented. Their approach to this was to ensure a clean break from caregivers/parents, and to discourage parental involvement in the classroom until the child was 'settled'. This solution managed the adults' problems, but not necessarily the children's. The following sections go beneath the overt behaviour to look at some of the issues for children. This sheds light on some of the reasons why children reacted as they did to their first experiences of school, and offers insights into ways of supporting children in the process of becoming a pupil.

Chapter Four described how the regulation of the school day involves a greater restriction and control than children have experienced previously. This is evident in the first three themes to be discussed, the regulation of activity and rest time that leads to unsupervised periods of 'play', the influence of such control on children's use of toilets, and issues relating to curriculum and pedagogy.

The regulation of time for work and rest

When the children first started school one of the most common causes of distress was the hour-long lunch break, and to a lesser extent, the morning playtime and the time before school started. These were features of the school environment brought about by the regulation of in-class time as 'work' with non-class time being opportunities for breaks, which tended to receive little adult supervision. During playtime and lunchtimes children were expected to 'play' with other children, but had few resources to play with.

In many cases distress caused by lunchtimes led to a dislike of school that persisted for some time. Eight of the 23 parents commented that their child really hated lunchtime because they had no one to play with. In many cases this led to otherwise happy children not wanting to go to school:

He said to me 'I like Mrs Knight and my classroom but I don't like lunchtimes'... He knew this boy from kindy... The boy would run off and leave him. One time the duty teacher found him crying and he said 'I want my mummy, when does lunchtime finish?' And that really tugs. And in the end he actually hated lunchtimes. (M9, p. 3)

He had one day when he didn't want to go to school and I asked him why and he said 'Because nobody plays with me at lunchtime'. (M11, p. 4)

I think she found lunchtimes at school really hard, and I think she still does [after several weeks]. I think her only concerns were the lunchtime thing, I think, just the playing. I think she handled everything in the classroom all right. (M12, pp. 3-4)

For those children who were not included in games with other children the lunchtime represented a long boring time with almost nothing to do, feeling "alone and out of place" (M14, p. 2), or "Lonely... Bored, 'cos you have got no idea what to do" (Steve, p. 2). Perhaps surprisingly, all but one of these children had attended Azure Kindergarten, so were acquainted with other children in their classes. Six were the oldest child in their family, so were unfamiliar with the school grounds and did not have older siblings to support them at lunchtimes. In addition to those who were very

concerned about lunchtimes, a number of other children occasionally complained of not having anyone to play with.

The teachers were aware of the problems many children experienced and usually made an effort to pair a new child up with a classmate who was supposed to play with them during the lunch break. Some children were very responsible in the care they provided for peers. However, the observations suggested that in practice these pairings seemed to work best if the children were already friends. For example, Child 12 confided to me that not only could she not find the 'friend' the teacher had paired her with, she didn't even know the child's name. The observations also raised questions as to what five-year-olds interpreted a caregiving role to mean. A brief summary of one lunchtime observation is given in Figure 20 to provide some of the 'flavour' of this aspect of the children's experiences.

Roy is a new boy. Yesterday Roy was very upset because he got lost at lunchtime. He came a little late to school today, complaining of a sore tummy. His mother talked to his teacher and Ms Keane has arranged for another boy, John, to be his "special friend just for today" and look after him. At morning break Ms Keane reminded the two boys that they are "not supposed to go into the new playground or come back inside" and that John is to stay with Roy. This arrangement is to continue at lunchtime.

12.28 The lesson prior to lunchtime has been PE. The children line up after putting away the PE equipment and Ms Keane sends them to the toilets (just ahead of the bell so that they get there before the older children). By the time they return to the classroom there is a crush of children outside as they try and get in to collect their lunches while children from other classes are walking past. Roy, the new boy, gets his lunch and moves outside to the benches where children eat their lunch. He sits between two other boys from his class. John is nowhere to be seen. A boy from a different class makes threatening gestures at Roy and says "Hey kid" before running off.

The bell that signals that children can go and play rings, and a number of older children run through the area. By now there are only a few children still eating. Roy steadily eats through the contents of his lunch box, leaving the sandwiches until last. As he eats he keeps glancing at the observer.

12.45 Ms Keane leaves the classroom, and noticing Roy, asks where John is. The teacher goes and finds John, who returns with her and speaks briefly to Roy before disappearing again. Roy moves to sit beside me.

Roy's older cousin arrives and asks "Do you want to play with me today?" Roy shakes his head. His cousin asks another boy if he wants to play but the boy responds "No". The cousin says "But I don't have anyone to play with" and tries to explain a game called 'invisible men' to Roy. Roy shakes his head.

John appears and tells Roy, "You can't play with your normal friends, you have to play with me just until tomorrow". The cousin protests but John states firmly he is looking after Roy and the cousin can come back tomorrow. John tells Roy "Call me if you need me. Call me when you have finished your lunch" and then disappears with his other friends again.

By 1.00 Roy was the only child left sitting in the lunch area. There was no sign of John.

(Summarised from observation notes 13.6)

Figure 20. A lunchtime observation

In this example Roy was not distressed but he may have been unwilling to risk getting lost again by leaving the immediate vicinity of the classroom. Although in some respects five-year-old John was a willing caregiver, he seemed to view his role as one of letting Roy play with him if Roy wished, rather than staying with Roy or negotiating what they would do together. John interpreted his role to mean that Roy was not allowed to play with anyone else. In contrast, older siblings often provided a high level of support for new entrant children, collecting them from the classroom, staying with them while they ate their lunch, and playing with them afterwards. For five children in the study, the care provided by siblings was specifically noted as something that eased their transition to the school playground. Tessa's and Heather's stories both provide illustrations of the role modeling, support and scaffolding older siblings could provide. Sibling support could not always be relied upon though. Anna's brother Andrew carefully avoided contact with his little sister, although it appeared that he did observe her actions, explaining that, "She doesn't care who she goes up to and says, 'Hello, would you like to play with me?' She just comes up and says it" (Andrew in CS3.2, p. 21).

Even when children did have some friends, they were sometimes deserted when their friends ran off and left them. Given the size of the school grounds, most new children found it impossible to locate the children they knew once they moved away from the lunch area. Child 12 apparently told her mother one day, "I couldn't find any of my friends so I sat under a tree and cried where no one could see me." On another day she told me that she was supposed to sit with a friend, but they eat "Quick, quick, quick, and they have gone" (Obs. 23.10). A number of children were too frightened to eat their lunch because they worried they would be left by themselves, and probably wouldn't be able to find their friends when they had finished. These comments were typical: "If I don't run off with them I am left sitting there all by myself" (Steve). "By the time I have eaten my lunch my friends have gone and I can't find them" (Child 12). Many found it unsettling to be in such a large, unruly environment with very little

adult supervision. Negative attention from other children sometimes contributed to the distress. Steve's story showed he was reluctant to come to school after being jabbed with a pencil. Carl was ambivalent about the rough and tumble play he participated in. Child 14 had his lunch stolen by an older boy on his first day, "so that wasn't a good start" (M14, p. 4). Even observing such behaviour could be stressful. Although generally happy about lunchtimes, Nicola said that "The big kids sometimes bully the little kids, and I thought it was going to happen to me.... And people throw other people's shoes down the gully" (Nicola in CS1.3, p. 1).

Anna's response to lunchtimes was more difficult to interpret. Her claim, after two months, that "I hate school. I only like the playing and the eating. I don't like the writing" (CS3.2, p. 1), implied that lunchtimes were not upsetting to her (although other comments indicated that her lack of a friend was). Ms Arthur attributed this to Anna's familiarity with the grounds:

You see some children just totally lost because they don't know the school, and they don't know where to go and play, and they're just standing there looking lost. But she knows exactly where to go and play, which she loves. Whereas it was different with Andrew [Anna's brother]. He didn't like the lunch hours because they were so long, and he didn't like playing on the playground. (CS3.2, p. 5)

Despite this, Anna's lunchtimes did not appear to be particularly enjoyable. Both her mother and I observed her wandering around alone. "Every time I've seen her in the playground she's always by herself. She says 'Oh no, so and so's playing with so and so'" (CS3.2, p. 17). This pattern continued and when, in her second year at school, her mother and brother investigated Anna's frequent complaint that she "didn't have time to play", they found that Anna spent much of the lunchtimes looking for someone to play with:

She had to walk around trying to find somebody so she could play, or whatever, and she had no time to play. This was a complaint *every* day for ages... Quite often, from what she said, she *had* been playing, but it wasn't *counted* as playing, 'cos you were still looking for somebody... She hadn't had time to play. (CS3.3, p. 10)

Perhaps for Anna, who had been self reliant at kindergarten, being alone in the playground was disappointing but not upsetting. This was reflected in her advice to others that if you don't have friends to play with "you can play in the playgrounds" (Anna, p. 3). Also, playing in the familiar playground may have been less problematic than the difficulties she faced within the classroom.

Another difficulty with lunchtimes was that some new children misunderstood the message of the school bells. When the first lunchtime bell rang children got their lunch boxes from their bags and made their way outside. They had to find a place to sit and eat their lunch. When the second bell rang, those who had finished eating were allowed to put their lunch boxes back in the classroom and go and play. Often the new children took much longer to find their lunches and then to find somewhere to sit in the crush of children (from a number of classes) that gathered in the area where lunch was eaten. When the second bell rang many of them had only just started to eat. Because the majority of the children ran off as soon as the second bell went, the new children often thought that this meant they had to finish eating at this point. However, even when parents or teachers explained that they didn't have to stop eating, most were too frightened to finish their lunches because, as noted above, they would be left by themselves, and probably wouldn't be able to find their friends when they had finished.

A number of factors therefore contributed to children not eating their lunches and coming home hungry. Carl consumed his uneaten lunches in the car coming home, and when Child 13 arrived home she was "starving and she'll eat the cupboards out" (M13, p. 8). Less common difficulties were associated with lunches being stolen or given away, and on his first day Matthew was distressed because he couldn't find his lunch (having forgotten it was in his bag). Adults seemed more willing/able to assist with these issues than children's lack of friends. When Child 14's lunch was stolen his mother reminded him to draw on what the teachers at Blue Kindergarten had taught him "about using his words just to yell at the boy to go away" (M14, p. 4). Ms Trent said that Ms King was effective in stopping children coercing the new ones into swapping or giving away parts of their lunches by telling children 'Your mother makes your lunch for you' (CS4.3, p. 10).

Although lunchtimes were very difficult for a number of children, for others the opportunity to play with friends made lunchtime the best part of the day. "That's why he goes to school really" (M17, p. 5). Most children eventually adapted to problems associated with the bells and eating their lunch, although not having anyone to play with continued to be an issue for some.

Although not quite so unpopular as lunchtime, the period between arriving at school and the bell going at 9 o'clock was also difficult for a number of children for similar reasons to lunchtime. The classes were often unsupervised at this time, especially if the teacher was on duty, and although many children were actively engaged, a few, especially those without friends, found they had little to do. Without a teacher the

classroom could be noisy, and the behaviour of some children more boisterous than when a teacher was there.

The eight-year-olds' reflections and comments on lunchtimes

When the eight-year-olds reflected on their own experiences as new entrants, their comments gave further insights into why lunchtimes initially proved so daunting. Matthew explained, "You don't know how much peoples there is going to be" (p. 2) and Anna recalled being surprised at the size of the grounds, "I thought there might be just one place" (p. 1). Steve, who had been particularly distressed by lunchtimes as a five-year-old, provided the explanation presented below.

Steve ...there was lots of big people there [at school] and the playgrounds were much bigger, and better, and there were no really small people there, except a few new people.

Researcher So how does that feel when there are no small people and lots of big people?

Steve Lonely.

Researcher Does it?

Steve And bored, 'cos you've no idea what to do or anything 'cos you have only just got there.

Later in the interview Steve was asked if there was anything about school that he didn't like.

Steve Getting bossed about by the big kids.... You're on the playing field and sometimes, when I wasn't as old as I am now, they come along and tell you to get away 'cos they want to play.
(Steve, pp. 2-3)

Heather also described how "some of the children in my class, they go up to the little children and go, 'Go away, you are in my playground'" (p. 4).

Tessa, like Anna, said she was surprised at the size of the grounds, but she, Nicola and Carl all had positive memories of lunchtimes (consistent with the data on their actual experiences at the time). Nicola remembered playing on the slide and Carl talked about playing 'tiggy' and 'octopus'. Tessa recalled liking "the playground the most" (p. 1).

As eight-year-olds the case study children generally viewed lunchtimes positively, and Nicola wanted more playtimes and lunchtimes as she felt she didn't get enough opportunity to talk to her friends during class time. However, Anna, Tessa and Steve all commented that there were still times when they didn't have anyone to play with. Tessa advised walking with the duty teacher when this happened. "Today [girl] wanted to play with [another girl] and they didn't want me to play so I walked around with the duty teacher" (Tessa, p. 8). Steve anticipated that when his younger brother started school, looking after him would provide Steve with something to do while his own friends played cricket.

Six of the case study children thought four-year-olds needed to know about the playgrounds before they started school, and aspects of the playground featured in five of these children's drawings. For example, Matthew's rather joyful illustration shows school children "rolly poly" down the grass bank, watched by a teacher. Nicola and Tessa both drew the playground equipment and Nicola talked about who could play on each playground.

Now they were older, Carl thought there needed to be more adventure playgrounds. Anna said school needed "more playgrounds, and make sure everyone has a friend" (p. 3) and Steve thought the junior playground needed to be changed; "Do something new on the playgrounds because they have been the same just ever since I started school" (p. 5). Heather agreed, "it could have more playgrounds 'cos once you play on them all term it starts to get boring a bit... We could have a slide in the big kids' playground" (p. 3). At that time the school was looking to develop the junior playground, and contemplating additions to the middle playground, which may have stimulated the children's thoughts on this topic.

Adults' views about lunchtimes

The new entrant teachers were aware that lunchtimes could be difficult, and endeavoured to organize a member of the class to care for a new child. At other times the whole class might be appealed to. For example, Ms King told her class that one of the new boys "was sad yesterday" and if they saw him looking sad "to play with him, or play with him so he doesn't get sad" (Obs. 18.10, p15). As noted earlier, the observations suggested these tactics were not always successful.

The Board of Trustees representative was also aware of the challenge lunchtimes presented:

That's when you usually find there are tears or they get lost or there is no one to play with and they are hanging round with the teacher, or they want to go back 'When is the bell going to go?' It is a long time for them. So being in the classroom is much more secure and safe and they know what is going on. Going out here and there is kids running in all directions and they get bowled over... (pp. 7-8)

However, while the difficulties were acknowledged, teachers did not like children playing with their siblings. Ms Kent noticed that new children often “tend to stick with their brothers and sisters”. She said, “What we try and do is encourage them to play with their own age groups. Brothers and sisters can be a bit protective and that can be a bit of a nuisance because it stops them from making their own friends” (pp. 10-11).

The kindergarten teachers at Azure Kindergarten were well aware of the difficulties that lunchtimes posed for children at Kohwai School. Ms Ashby hoped that parent/caregivers and grandparents would not contribute to children’s fears with frightening talk of the “big kids in the playground”.

The children find it hard enough to cope with that hour at lunchtime with no adult there like they have here, that they can turn to as support for them. I think that's the thing that children find the most difficult in the transition to school. It's that lunch hour. That is the feedback that we get from parents afterwards. That was the thing that they found most difficult. I think it's what the children fear the most when they go to school that they are going to have that, once they have been there for a day they have that hiatus of an hour where there is no parent figure who is there to rely on, to relate to and you have got all those big kids. (Ms Ashby, p. 15)

Both Ms Bird and Ms Clarke knew that lunchtimes could be difficult for new entrant children. However, their perceptions were not specifically related to Kowhai School. They thought the difficulties lay largely in terms of coping with the change of routine, given that children were used to going home from kindergarten at lunchtime.

Thirteen parents expressed some concern about their children’s lunchtime experiences. The most common concern was that children would not have friends. Even before he started Ms Samson worried whether Steve was going to be “sitting there all by himself eating his lunch and not knowing what to do” (CS5.1, p. 2). Parents were affected by their children’s distress over not having anyone to play with at lunchtimes. Mother 9 explained “It’s really heartbreaking when you see them (imitates child’s crying noise)” (p4). Some also recalled their own experiences. “It [lunchtime] would be frightening. I remember that awful feeling. I was one of those kids, terrified” (CS6.2, p. 12).

However, by the third interview, Ms Samson, who had been very concerned about Steve's lunchtime experiences, felt that he was now settled, and had in fact been very supportive of a new child who he had seen being punched. She now believed that while she felt sorry for the new entrants at lunchtime, "there's nothing you can do for them. They just have to learn on their own, learn themselves" (CS5.3, p. 3).

Parents also commented on the reduced level of supervision, compared with kindergarten:

Well it's really difficult, because when you think at kindy there are teachers there all the time.... and there's that security thing, and they know they can play anywhere they want to. All of a sudden they're at school and Mum's not there to tell them what to do. A teacher's not there to tell them what to do, and they're really left alone, the first time probably must be really scary when you think about it; 500 kids and I'm allowed to do what I want to do within the boundaries of the school. (M9, p. 4)

This also applied to leaving their children in a classroom without an adult before school started. Because of parental and child concerns regarding the period before school, a few parents found it was better to ignore the school's suggestion that children arrive early, so that they have plenty of time to get organised before the bell. Instead they decided to bring children to school just before the bell rang, to avoid this unsupervised time.

Discussion relating to the regulation of time for work and rest

The findings of this study were consistent with other research, which has identified lunchtimes as a difficult feature of the transition to school for many children (Cleave et al., 1982; Curtis, 1986; Lareau, 1997; Ledger, 2000; Mayall, 1994; Moore, 2001; N. Smith, 2002, 2003). To a lesser the unsupervised time before school offered similar challenges, but perhaps because of its shorter duration the impact was not as great. Given that lunchtimes are so widely acknowledged as problematic, it seems interesting that little is done to support children through this aspect of transition. In my study it was clear from the adults' comments that they were aware of how challenging many children found lunchtimes, and it was evident that the attempts to encourage children to look after one another were not always effective, and yet other measures were not taken to address this issue. In fact, one potentially valuable support, in terms of older siblings caring for the new entrants, was actively discouraged by this school.

If transition is seen as a rite of passage, perhaps this difficulty is viewed as inevitable, and part of the challenges that make up the 'feats of endurance' involved (see Turner,

1968 cited in James & Prout, 1997). Ms Samson's remark that "there's nothing you can do for them. They just have to learn on their own, learn themselves" (CS5.3, p3) alluded to this interpretation. Implicit teacher norms that identify five-year-olds as ideally being independent and sociable, also locate these abilities within the individual child, and deviations from the norm as deficits, rather than recognizing the influence of context on behaviour. These individualistic views of child development offer little scope for teachers to effect change (Burman, 1997). The fact that many children do cope well with, and even enjoy, lunchtimes, perhaps further serves to reinforce the notion that distress over this issue is a child-owned problem, and not a sufficient reason to change school practices. In addition, the dichotomy of work and play inherent in the school system (Scott, 1982), means that playtimes have long been constructed as recreational and pleasurable breaks from work, perhaps making it difficult for adults to take children's concerns seriously.

Given that this was the most common cause of distress I believe it is an issue that is worthy of more attention. Although writers like Furedi (2001, 2002) suggest that children today are overprotected, which implies that they perhaps should not be protected from potentially difficult situations such as lunchtimes, the unhappiness that it generated clearly impacted on children's learning in ways that I believe were not helpful. Sociocultural theories provide a useful framework for looking at children's experiences because they acknowledge that challenges can promote growth and development in positive ways, and recognize that there is an important role for others in helping children to tackle problems that they find difficult to manage alone (Vygotsky, 1978a).

It has also been argued that skills learned during unsupervised play such as lunchtimes are important for later life (Furedi, 2002; Pellegrini & Smith, 1993; Sluckin, 1987), and that because of reduced opportunities for peer interaction out of school, breaktimes in school have gained more significance (Blatchford, 1999; Evans & Pellegrini, 1997). Whilst this is used as a pro breaktime argument (see Chapter Three), it supports my suggestion of assisting children who find this difficult. If children have fewer opportunities than in the past for unsupervised play, it is reasonable to suppose that, when they get to school, they are less prepared than children in previous times to face the hour long lunch break with many mixed-age peers, and few resources. At a time when they are coping with negotiating the many discontinuities that are a feature of taking on the role of a pupil, for some this is one challenge too many and they simply withdraw into spending the time wandering around alone. Others are upset both before and during school at the prospect of facing lunchtimes. Leaving children to flounder unhappily seems counter-productive because not only are they not supported

to move beyond their existing skill level, but their distress or isolation means much potential learning time is wasted. For others, when fears of being separated from their friends means that lunches are not eaten, this must also impact on the quality of children's learning in the afternoons.

Teaching children skills to negotiate entry to play, as happened in Blue Kindergarten, seemed helpful, but even N. Smith's (2003) intensive programme to prepare children for interaction in the school playground, in a context where the cohort who experienced the programme moved to school together, was not enough to ensure that all children were able to cope happily, and for others there was a washout effect after a few weeks. This suggests that enjoyment or distress at lunchtimes cannot be viewed as being solely a product of children's individual skills. It may be helpful to look more widely at the issue. In the UK, Blatchford (1999) found that in some schools children had been involved in planning playgrounds, something that the comments of the eight-year-olds in my study suggested they would have welcomed. At the same time, Blatchford noted school-wide initiatives to improve personal relationships. These appear to be more promising than expecting children to be able to be 'inoculated' against problems by programmes in early childhood that do not receive ongoing support in the school environment.

Later in this chapter I argue for the inclusion of more resources for children to play with during breaks at the beginning school level, because this appeared beneficial in facilitating friendships. Resources have a further advantage in making the consequences of not having a friend less devastating. Children in early childhood could be happily engaged in solitary play, but at school, with nothing to play with, children without friends were bored. In their wandering behaviour, as they waited for the time to pass, I was reminded of adults waiting for a bus when one has just been missed. However, adults only occasionally find themselves in this situation, but for some children, day after day, they had an hour to spend with nothing to do and no one to talk to. The early childhood philosophy of learning through play would suggest that this time could be more profitably, and enjoyably, spent playing *with* something, thus enhancing children's experiences of school on several levels.

The experiences of children with older siblings who scaffolded their introduction to the lunchtime culture, indicated that older siblings and friends provided both role models and a degree of protection, in the same way as the older friends established at day-care did for the children in Griebel and Niesel's (1999) study. A number of parents believed that for children without an older sibling a buddy system would be useful, where an older child could sit with a new entrant child while he/she ate her

lunch and then help them to find some children to play with afterwards. By the time the case study children were aged eight, the school had introduced a buddy system for some class activities, but this did not extend to the playground. If this sort of care relationship were to be implemented it would need to be monitored. Steve considered it would be impossible to approach his buddy for help as "My buddy is quite mean" (p4).

Parent and child concerns about the period before school stemmed largely from the class being unsupervised at this time. When the teacher was there she usually fostered a welcoming climate; greeting families and keeping the tone of the classroom more serene than when children were without an adult. It appeared that parents preferred the *in loco parentis* nature of schools to be visible, so that they handing over their child to another adult rather than leaving a five-year-old in a class with other children.

Using the school toilets

Issues relating to using the school toilets represent only a small theme in the data. However, it was a significant cause of concern for a small number of children and is therefore important to consider. Teachers were aware of, and sympathised with, the children's distress over lunchtimes, but concern over the toilets was more unexpected. The new entrant children were sent to the toilet twice a day, before the morning tea break and again before lunchtime. At other times children had to ask their teachers if they wanted to leave the classroom to go to the toilet. The toilets were situated in reasonably close proximity to the three new entrant classrooms but their use was not restricted to new entrant children.

For some new entrant boys using the school toilets turned out to be quite traumatic. Child 15 disliked the toilets because he said they were "messy", something Mother 15 thought might be a reaction to her own reluctance to let her children use 'messy' public toilets. The major problem though seemed to be the behaviour of the other boys. Steve's story showed how new boys had been troubled by the comments of older boys such as "We can see your bottom" (CS5.2, p. 13). At least three of the boys in the study had been upset by this. Another aspect of the boys' concern about behaviour in the toilets was illustrated when a group of boys returned to the classroom quite agitated because someone had dropped a handkerchief and other boys had urinated on it. One mother commented that her son was so obsessed with what happened in the toilets that that was almost the only thing he told her about school. Perhaps not surprisingly a few boys had become reluctant to use the toilets, preferring to wait until they got home.

The fact that children had to ask if they could leave the room to go to the toilet during class time was a cause of concern for both boys and girls. This was very different to early childhood practice when children were free to use the toilets at any time, without having to ask. Child 11 discussed this with his mother:

He did have a couple of days when he held on and he reckoned he wasn't allowed to go, which is obviously not right. He probably didn't have his hand far enough up or something. (M11, p. 4)

The observations showed that teachers sometimes told children they were not allowed to go *now*. For example, if two children asked at once, one might be told to wait until the other one got back. On other occasions a child trying to ask for permission sometimes had to wait for a very long time before he/she attracted the teacher's attention. Often this was because the teacher was working with a group and had told the children that she did not want to be disturbed. At other times asking for the toilet was very public and could perhaps be embarrassing, as the examples shown in Figure 21 demonstrate.

All the children are seated on the mat. Ms Keane has been asking questions about calves, which the children have been responding to. Heather has been participating throughout, but after 11 minutes of discussion she starts to wriggle and calls out "Ms Keane...". The discussion continues and Heather again says "Ms Keane". When she gets no response Heather puts up her hand. The teacher asks another question and chooses Heather to respond to it. Heather doesn't say anything.

Ms Keane repeats the question.

Ms Keane What else can we say about a calf?

Heather puts up her hand again

Ms Keane Have you thought of it Heather?

Heather Can I go to the toilet?

Children (All laugh.)

Heather leaves the room.

(Observation 23/10, p. 6)

The children are gathered on the mat listening to children reading out the stories they have written. J (a child for whom English is a second language) wanders around the classroom instead of sitting with the others on the mat. She moves over to stand beside the teacher. When she isn't acknowledged she taps the teacher, who says, "Wait a minute". J whispers that she needs to go to the toilet. The teacher says she doesn't have to whisper and tells the rest of the class that J can speak beautifully (seeming to interpret the whisper as a reluctance to speak out loud in English, although it could be that J did not want to proclaim publicly that she needed to go to the toilet).

(Observation 13/5, p. 4)

Figure 21. Two children's experiences of asking to go to the toilet

Perhaps not surprisingly the issues relating to using the toilets sometimes resulted in toilet accidents, something that was usually distressing to the child concerned. Although no accidents occurred during the observations, the parents commented that some teachers handled this much more sensitively than others. One mother described how her older child's new entrant teacher didn't cope "particularly well" when her son had toileting accidents. She believed that if the teacher had responded differently "it mightn't have gone on for so long". The following year he had gone into Ms Keane's class and she reassured him that he could go to the toilet whenever he wanted and didn't make a fuss when accidents did happen. "Once he got an understanding with her that he could walk out at any stage it [the problem] seemed to go... I think the other teachers might have been a little bit stricter about him walking out so he would get a bit nervous and it was more of a problem". Ms Keane received further praise from another parent for her relaxed attitude to her son's toileting accidents. It may be helpful for parents/caregivers and teachers to be aware of some of the potential underlying causes when such accidents do occur, and for teachers to be aware of how their own response may escalate the problem or assist in its resolution. Their response to parents is important too:

She [Ms Keane] didn't shut him away as soon as an accident happened. She'd ring me and I would come straight away but he wasn't separated out of the class... It's hard for the parent too. I found it hard going to school when he had done it. She was much easier. She never made me feel bad. I never felt bad about it. (M22.1, pp. 9-10)

As with lunchtimes, most children did eventually adapt. Mother 15 concluded that while her son had been shy initially and disliked the behaviour of the other boys in the toilets, she suspected that after six months at school he might now be "one of the ring leaders of it. We have had quite a bit of showing off at home, which we hadn't seen, so I think it was just new territory for him" (p. 9).

Discussion relating to using the toilets

Worry about being allowed to use the toilets seemed to create an unnecessary concern for the children in this study. It is understandable that teachers would want to know when children leave the room, but it appeared that a hand signal, such as the 'T' sign used in some schools, would be useful. This would distinguish requests to go to the toilet from other interruptions or questions, and could be used with ease by all children, regardless of their first language.

The practice of sending the whole class to the toilet twice a day seemed to alleviate the problem noted by Robinson et al. (1999) of children not knowing the location of the toilets, but as in Robinson et al's study, some teachers still viewed toilet accidents as being due to the child, rather than understanding that aspects of the school context could create a problem. The findings suggest that teachers should consider their own role in creating the situation when toilet accidents occur it. A relaxed supportive attitude, such as Ms Keane's, could help to reduce the problem, while increasing tension for the child could make things worse.

The gendered nature of concern relating to toilets was also evident in Norris's (1999) study, where new entrant boys' adoption of the behaviour of older boys appeared to be one way in which masculinities were transformed during the transition to school. She felt that the physical geography of the school, such as boys' and girls' toilets reinforced gender differences, where toilets became the "inner-most sanctum" of a gender group (p134). In Dockett and Perry's (2003c) research, when children were photographing important aspects of school, children of both sexes often showed considerable interest in finding out about the "other" toilets (p. 15). In this study the toilets were not only a gendered space, it was also one area where children were largely free from adult gaze. However, for boys it was also a site of surveillance and comment from older boys. Although observations were not conducted in the toilets, it seemed that this was one place where boys were exploring masculinities and perhaps rebelling against some of the constraints of school authority.

Issues relating to curriculum and pedagogy

The kindergarten programmes the children had attended were broadly similar, although, as Chapter 12 showed, parents and teachers had clear perceptions that some were more 'structured' than others, and Azure Kindergarten had the most deliberate connections with Kowhai's new entrant programme. The observations indicated that regardless of which kindergarten they had attended, transition involved considerable discontinuity in the curriculum and pedagogy experienced by the children. Although there were elements of child-centered approaches and teacher-led activities in each of the settings, the move from kindergarten to school was characterised by a shift in the balance of these elements, from occasional teacher-led activities such as mat times at kindergarten, to a largely teacher-led programme at school.

At kindergarten children usually planned their own activities within a wide range on offer, whereas at school the teacher decided what children would do, and even free choice was usually from a narrow selection of activities. There could be choice within an activity, for example, children usually decided what they wanted to write about, but

there was a set way of doing it. Teachers also decided how long an activity would last, and what constituted its completion. Only very occasionally were school children observed negotiating with their teachers to deviate from the teacher's planned activity. For example, a girl persuaded Ms King to let her stay on the computer "and finish this bit" (Obs. 5.8, p. 2), one boy got out the Mobilo and when the other children reported this to Ms Keane she said, "That's okay". A group of boys immediately assembled on the mat to play with it (Obs. 29.5, p. 20). A very capable child was given some addition problems to solve and then allowed to create his own. He wrote and solved equations such as $131 + 22 = 153$ and $146 + 21 = 167$ (Obs. 9.5, p. 6).

Children responded differently to the changes. For example, Matthew moved from being engaged in a wide range of self-selected activities at kindergarten, that he was able to persist with over an extended period of time, to the school context, where his learning was more fragmented with the move from one discrete lesson to the next. Others, like Carl, who had restricted his activities to a very narrow selection at kindergarten, and was reportedly bored, enjoyed the teacher direction, which led him into a much wider range of learning opportunities at school.

One aspect of this difference that caused particular concern for some children was the changing nature of literacy activities. At kindergarten children were encouraged to recognize and write their names and teachers would sometimes write a dictated story on a child's picture. For children who were interested in writing this was encouraged, within the child's own agenda, as the following example (Figure 22) shows.

One boy informed the teacher that he did not like the *Hare and the Tortoise* story that had been read to him. He wanted to rewrite the story so that the hare would win. The teacher helped him to make a book by stapling sheets of paper together. Using the original book as a guide he copied the first part of the story and drew his own illustrations. He then asked the teacher to help him write the new part of the story. They looked at the original book together, and the child told his story, dictating what to say, while the teacher wrote. The child watched her carefully and turned the pages when he wanted the story to move to the next page in his constructed book. Ms Ashby noticed and came over and read what had been written so far. She asked what he was going to say next and he said, "They are breathing hard, you can see their breath" and the first teacher continued to write the story. (Azure Kindergarten, Obs. 1.8)

(Note: I had permission to observe this child because he would have been the 8th case study if he had been offered a place at Kowhai School).

Figure 22. Re-writing *The Hare and the Tortoise*

This contrasted strongly with writing in the new entrant room, where children were expected to write every day, and the focus often became oriented to process rather than purpose and meaning. There was a set way to do things, even in the way the page was laid out. Some children, like Heather, spent a lot of the available time looking for rubbers and rubbing out and correcting their efforts, others, like Anna, sometimes lacked sufficient guidance or resources to get involved.

Nevertheless, the predictability of the format did allow for peer scaffolding, as is illustrated in the example given in Figure 23. This is from Child 15's second day at school. Child 10, who had been at school for eight months, had been asked to help him at writing time. The episode lasted 17 minutes. It demonstrates how capable children could be in a scaffolding role, but raises questions about how meaningful the school writing tasks were for some children.

Child 10 (a girl) and Child 15 (a boy) have been placed by the teacher at a small table at the back of the room. Child 10 counts how many blank pages are left in her book.

Child 10 One, two, three. I'm going to get a new book.

Child 15 What do you do?

Child 10 You draw a picture and...

Another girl arrives and tries to move Child 15 out of his seat so she can sit with Child 10.

Girl Move out the way. This is not your chair.

Child 10 (To Child 15) Just sit here ok? Have you got a pencil? Can you just hold my seat.

Child 10 goes to get a pencil for Child 15. The girl brings another chair.

Child 10 Here you are. No crayons. You write on the lines. Ok? But you draw a picture on here (points to the space at the top of the page). Ok?

A boy tries to take Child 10's chair and then takes the other girl's chair, even though Child 10 tries to stop him.

Child 15 I can't write yet.

This comment is ignored as Child 10 and the boy that has just joined her have a lengthy discussion about how many pages until they have filled their books. The boy predicts that someone else in the class has 100 pages to go and Child 10 disagrees. "Can't be that much". The boy says he has only one page to go and Child 10 says she has the same. "If I do two pages I'll be nearly finished". None of them have actually made a start yet and a parent helper asks what Child 10 is drawing and where the crayons are. The parent brings some crayons.

Child 15 I can't write a story good.

Child 10 asks the parent to write the date for her.

Child 15 I don't know how to write a story. (Re-voicing his concern.)

Parent (To Child 10) What's his name? (To Child 15) Are you new?

The parent talks with Child 10 and establishes that the teacher allows them to copy a sentence. The parent writes 'Today it was very cold' on Child 15's book.

Parent (To Child 15) What you do Child 15, you copy it from here so pick up a pencil and you copy all those words underneath. Today...

Child 10 and Child 15 are left on their own. Child 15 makes a start at copying the sentence. Child 10 puts a line through an incorrect letter he has written.

Child 10 Ok. You've done a mistake. Today.. it. 'T', 't'.

Child 15 I can't do an 'i'.

Child 10 Two spaces and an 'i'.

Child 15 I can't do this work.

Parent (Walking past) You can do it. It's not your book Child 10. *You* do it Child 15. Just try. After here. Just try. *Very* Write that down here. Have a go. Here's a 'v' here (on an alphabet chart). Have a go. 'V'.

Child 15 hasn't kept the letters under the adult's writing so has to move to the next line to write 'very'.

Child 15 Is this an 'e' here? (Pointing.)

Child 10 Yep it's an 'e'.

Child 15 I've done that one.

Child 10 R. Rrrr. Can you write it? Copy that. (Unclear.)

Child 15 I can't do this.

Parent (In passing) Keep trying. That's good. Just have a go.

Child 15 I've done that one. Finished that one.

Child 10 and 15 are alone at the table. Child 10 checks Child 15's work. He has written 'Today it was very' (not very clearly). Child 10 points to the next word which is 'cold'. She points to the letters in the sentence written by the parent and to the corresponding letters on the alphabet chart.

Child 10 'C'. Here's 'c'. Here. That one.

Child 15 writes 'cold'. Child 10 reminds Child 15 to put a full stop at the end of his sentence, even though the parent hadn't put one on the sentence she wrote for him to copy.

Child 10 Do a full stop. Here. Just put your pencil here. Ok?

Child 15 closes his book. Child 10 tells him he has to draw a picture. She offers him the tub of wax crayons. Child 15 chooses one.

Child 10 You have to draw a picture. You draw pictures with these ok? Not the pencil.

Child 15 chooses a crayon and draws a house in the space at the top of his page. The final piece of work is show in Appendix W. Not surprisingly, Child 10 only managed to write 'Today is frosty' in her own book, so did not meet her original goal of a two page story.

(Summary of observation, 18.6)

Figure 23. Peer scaffolding during a writing task

In this example both Child 10, and the parent helper, reinforced the notion that there is one way to complete this activity. Child 15's complaints "I can't write yet.... I can't write a story good.... I can't do this work... I can't do this" (Obs. 18.6) signalled his concern. Nevertheless he persisted with the activity due to the ongoing support of Child 10. Without such support some children managed to avoid doing a task themselves, as the example in Figure 24 shows.

9.55 Child 12 reported to me "I am happy to be writing my story". She showed me her new exercise book saying, "I have all the books I need now".

10.00 Child 12 said she had forgotten what she was writing. "I hate writing. I hate doing this. I just hate proper writing".

10.05 Child 12 said (to no one in particular) "Do you know, I don't feel very well because I have a cold." She rubbed out something. Returned the rubber to the tin and looked at her page. "Gosh I need some help don't I? I haven't done much."

10.10 Child 12 copied the date from the date chart, and part of the story from the board. She found the student teacher and asked her to complete the sentence. Child 12 reported back to me that the student wrote her story, because "I told her I wasn't feeling very well". She appeared to feel better now that the writing task was complete and participated in the reading and mathematics that followed.

(Summary of Obs. 15.10).

Figure 24. Avoiding a task.

The classroom atmosphere in each class was generally productive and happy but occasionally there were other activities that children were involved in that may not have had meaning for them, or had a different meaning to the one intended by the teacher.

Child 12 wandered around with a worksheet, asking, "What am I supposed to write here?" I suggested she ask someone in her group but she said, "I don't know who is in my group". When directed to her group she asked one of the boys "What am I supposed to write here?" He replied, "Same as me" but she was still unsure what to do. (Obs. 23.10).

When asked to cut string to the size of an object a few children wandered around trying to find an object that was the same length as their string. (Obs.29.5)

It was often in the 'chat' as they worked, rather than in tackling the actual tasks they were engaged in, that children explored challenging ideas

The children are writing about a trip to a 'calf club' day at another school. A boy talks to Child 12 about being nearly six.

Boy 1 I went to school about fifty years ago.
 Boy 2 A hundred years ago. (Unclear) That's infinity isn't it?
 Boy 3 What's one plus infinity?
 Boy 2 That's two infinity.
 (Obs. 15.10)

Child 1 says she is going to address the Christmas card she is colouring to Baby Jesus.

Child 2 You can't
 Heather Yes you can.
 Child 2 No you can't. He's up in the sky. He died.
 Seven minutes later they return to the topic:
 Heather God. He was a baby.
 Child 3 Yes. He nearly died eh? He's a really special person eh?
 Heather Yeah. He's not a baby now. He's grown up now. He lives in the sky. He cries tears eh?
 (Obs. 11.12)

Later during the same session:

Child 15 I saw Santa and he asked me what I want for Christmas.
 Girl He just cuts it off when you are not even ready and goes back to making toys! [Presumably referring to when the shopping mall Santas put up a notice to say they are making toys, while on a break.]
 Boy Santa isn't real.
 Girl He is real..... He is real cos I have seen him before.
 (Obs. 11.12)

Shaping identities as learners and pupils

In Chapter Eleven it was evident that, although the new entrant teachers claimed that academic skills were not important on entry to school, in practice they appeared to have in mind a baseline level of competence. The children themselves frequently evaluated actions and products, and were quick to point out deficiencies.

A girl was typing on the computer and a boy went over and said, "You don't even know how to do this." (Obs. 13.6, p. 6)

The children called out, "Look at Boy 1!" Boy 1 had painted over the printed features of his bear template. Boy 2 said he could see "Thousands of white" on Boy 3's bear (not completely covered in paint). (Obs 29.5)

Boy 1 declared Boy 2 does "Yucky, yucky pictures", which Boy 2 denied. (Obs. 18.10)

A girl made an 'm' with playdough, but it was upside down so looked like a 'w'. One of the boys said, "Boring, boring. Look at her 'm', it's so boring". (Obs. 20.6)

There was also implicit comparisons in the way children were grouped for reading and maths. Although the groups had names, most children seem to be aware of the hierarchy. Moves to a higher group were acknowledge by the teachers as achievements.

A boy is told at mat time, "You are a Bee. Difficult books for you. Four books today". The boy puts his face in his hands and laughs. (Obs. 10.5)

A girl reads to the teacher and at the end is told, "You are a Dragon. Well done". (Obs. 29.5)

Aspects of explicit norms for five-year-olds were commented on by teachers as a way of guiding children's behaviour. There was a clear demarcation of status associated with being five, and being established (no longer new) in the school role.

The children are told, "If you are working with a new person they may not be able to read". (Obs. 13.5)

The teacher says, "[Boy] was doing it so well I thought he was an old boy" (Obs. 14.6)

Teacher How old are you?

Child Five.

Teacher What do five-year-olds do with their jerseys when they have taken them off?

Child takes the jersey to his school bag. (Obs. 20.6)

One boy was continually hitting other children. The teacher told the whole class, "He does silly things. He wants you to look at him and think it's cute. But we don't think it's five-year-old behaviour. Teach him to play carefully. Don't let him hit or poke you". (Obs. 13.8)

For some children their status became of interest to them.

When Child 14 had his school visit one of the new entrants asked, "How old is Child 14?" A child replied. "Child 14? He's still four" and one of the five-year-olds reflected, "I think I am". (Obs. 18.6)

Child 11, after about six weeks at school, introduced himself as an ‘art person’ and then said, “No. I’m an old person but not very old. Just a bit old”. (Obs.20.6)

There were explicit and public judgments of behaviour as good or bad. Noticing children doing the ‘right’ thing was frequently used to guide the behaviour of others. “Lovely straight backs.” “I love the way Heather is ready. Wonderful.” “I am coming around with a stamp now to put on the hands of the seven people who can write with their mouths shut. One of them is [girl]. Beautiful writing with your mouth shut”. One mat time the teacher just said, “I like the way...” and all the children sat up straight, before she could finish the sentence.

There were occasionally tangible rewards for appropriate behaviour in the school context. For example, the specialist music teacher always selected two children at the end of each lesson to receive a sticker, (for “Best manners every time I see you”, being “Very brave, just new, only just started and did such a good job at music”, etc.). In class, children were given stickers “for working quietly”, “remembering to bring your poem book” and tidying up. Children also received Principal’s Awards (which they went to the principal’s office to collect) and certificates, given out in assembly.

While there was a constant focus on, and praise for, ‘good’ behaviour, occasionally children were deemed to be ‘naughty’. A black pen was used to write the names of ‘naughty’ children on the whiteboard. Two crosses beside the name and the child would be sent to another room for time out. This proved an effective deterrent (and Anna was very pleased that she had never had her name on the board).

When the new curriculum proved challenging to children, it was writing activities, such as story writing and worksheets, and to a lesser extent reading, that seemed to pose the major problems. Nevertheless, reading and the associated activities of bringing books home and visiting the school library, featured strongly in the things that some children liked best about school. Children also talked positively of other curriculum activities, although the list of ‘likes’ was almost as numerous as the children themselves, rather than showing any clear trends. Overall, learning became more visible and measurable and for those children who met the challenges there was considerable satisfaction and pleasure in their own learning, which became one of the best things about school. In contrast, problems in this area could contribute to a negative cycle of experience.

The eight-year-olds' reflections on curriculum and pedagogy

When the eight-year-olds looked back they recalled that there was less freedom of choice at school, compared with their experiences at kindergarten.

At kindy you could usually always play most of the time and at school there is more work than playtime. I thought it was a bit weird when I first started. I thought 'Hmm! Not much playtime here'. (Nicola, p2)

Well it's different to kindergarten by not having all the time of being free and all the time being outside and having to do a lot more work and having to read books and lots of other things like that. (Carl, pp. 1-2)

Steve mentioned the compulsion, and routines that provide a set time for work and for play, regardless of what you feel like doing. "At kindy you could play and everything but at school you have to do what you had to do. At kindy you could really choose" (p. 3). He would have liked to "go out to play when I had to stay in and do work and everything. Sometimes when I was out to play I actually wanted to go in and do some work" (p. 2). The elements of compulsion were also noted by Matthew. "It [school] was different 'cos you have to learn stuff, and every time you have got something to do" (p. 2).

As an eight-year-old Matthew summed up his view of starting school, saying:

When I started school it was quite hard to learn and I didn't know a lot of stuff when I first started school and I was really nervous when I started school.... It's really hard when you start school because, the only one thing that's hard is trying to get everything right and (long pause) you don't know how it's going to feel like 'cos you've never been to school before. (Matthew, p. 2)

The challenge of trying to "get everything right" was evident in Matthew's written work. Matthew's story showed his mother's concern about his slow progress in reading and writing until his second year at school when he suddenly leapt ahead.

Reflecting on the experiences of children like her, who spend long periods of classroom time unsure of what they should be doing, Anna offered the advice that teachers should "tell them [children] again if they didn't hear" (p. 4). Even as a capable eight-year-old, Nicola found "some of the time I don't much like the work and when it comes to writing I can never think of anything to write. You start off writing but then you get stuck cos you don't know what to write" (p. 3). She preferred the challenges of SRA comprehension cards where she was progressing up the levels and "really hard" maths.

Discussion of issues relating to curriculum and pedagogy

Consideration of curriculum and pedagogy highlights some of the experiences for children that arose from the differences between early childhood and school, described in Chapter Five. It also showed that the increased regulation of time and activity, described in Chapter Three as a common feature of schooling, was evident at Kowhai. Children's learning became more teacher-led and prescribed as they moved from early childhood education to school. The fact that children's conversations sometimes revealed more challenging thinking than the actual work in which they were engaged, confirmed Ms Knight's opinion regarding the formal activities at school, noted in Chapter 12, that "most of the learning doesn't happen that way" (p. 12). Nevertheless, the formal teacher-led approach took up much of the day. The predictability may help to foster a sense of belonging (Gregory, 1997), and that could be why Ms Knight found that children enjoyed formality, given that they were coping with much that was new and challenging. This could also explain why the children in Dockett and Perry's (2002, 2003a, 2003c) studies placed so much emphasis on learning the rules. Perhaps knowing and complying with what is expected, fosters what Broström (2002, p. 52) calls feeling "suitable" in school.

The high level of prescription also allowed for peer scaffolding. Children can only scaffold what they know, so routine procedural tasks, which follow a set format, (such as the morning writing activity) are perhaps easier for a peer to scaffold than more creative and individual literacy activities. The teachers in this study found using peers as tutors was an important pedagogical tool when coping with up to 29 just turned five-year-olds. In this respect the teachers' approach contrasted with the findings of Ledger's (2000) research, where she observed little peer scaffolding in most of the schools her participant children entered. However, as will be discussed later, the children in my study with low status, and few or no friends, were often unable to access peer scaffolding.

Therefore, while there were some benefits in the more formal pedagogy and teacher-led curriculum at school, there were also negative consequences of this approach. Lack of flexibility and a focus on performance inhibited children's involvement. As Marshall (1992) has noted, extrinsic rewards, public comparative evaluation, ability grouping and an emphasis on visible products all contribute to performance goals becoming dominant in a setting. Overall, a large proportion of the tasks in the new entrant classrooms studied seemed to foster performance goals (Carr, 2001; Smiley & Dweck, 1994). Almost every activity had a 'right' way of doing it and although many children found these tasks appropriately challenging and enjoyed their subsequent mastery of them, for a few the focus on 'getting everything right' was disconcerting,

particularly as performance was often displayed in public and evaluated by others. It has been shown that children who focus on performance goals strive to gain favourable judgments or avoid negative judgments (Carr, 2001; Smiley & Dweck, 1994). This can mitigate against learning as children may simply give up rather than risk being wrong. The effects of this can be seen in Chapter Nine in relation to the case study stories. This section has shown that other children were also occasionally inhibited by an emphasis on performance.

The data also suggested potential confusion for some children over tasks, when the meaning was unclear to the child. This wasn't a dominant feature of the observed children's experiences, but is nevertheless something for teachers to be aware of. It is difficult to establish shared understandings with a large group, all the time (Nuthall, 2001), but it would be important to ensure that individual children are not experiencing confusion on a regular basis. Baroody and Ginsburg (1990) warn that if children conclude that mathematics is not supposed to make sense they are likely to stop monitoring their work thoughtfully. It seems reasonable to conclude that the same applies to other aspects of school. Certainly Brooker (2002) found that having a clear sense of the purpose of school motivated children.

Some of the confusion may occur because for many children the literacy activities in school are different to those experienced at home. This has been identified in a number of other studies (for example, Hill et al., 1998; Luke & Kale, 1997; Philips et al. 2002). Philips et al. (2002) indicated that it was important to take account of community literacy practices because where school practices are very different to these children may develop "idiosyncratic school-based expertise" but have little sense of the relevance of their knowledge (p. 85).

Explicit evaluations highlighted teacher norms. Children who complied with behavioural and academic expectations were able to gain status in the classroom. This was used to shape the behaviour of both newcomers and established members of a class. Being a new child was generally accorded a low status, at least until a child demonstrated his or her ability to meet the demands of the classroom. Therefore children were faced with the contradiction described by Fabian (1998) of having made the move to 'big' school pupil, but finding that in reality this carries a low status in the new context. In the process children can find themselves transformed from being viewed as competent learners, to incompetent novices at school, simply because of the different forms of assessments that are used (Dunlop, 2002). It seemed that children were quick to apply such assessments to each other, perhaps as a way of making sense of the rules in the new environment, and affirming their own position.

The change in pedagogy and assessment that the children experienced here is not an inevitable feature of the change in curriculum. Although the New Zealand school curriculum framework is more skill- and subject-based than the early childhood curriculum, there is nothing in the school curriculum documents to indicate that a more formal approach is required in meeting the curriculum objectives. In a textbook for Aotearoa/New Zealand teachers, Yates (2001) maintains that “schools today aspire to develop students who are independent thinkers and learners” (p. 145) and recent literature for primary schools describes a holistic, child-centred approach to children's learning (Fraser, 2001). However, the strongly developmental framework that underpins the school curriculum, and the pressure for teachers to assess against these levels, appears to have created a different approach to learning than the one fostered by the more holistic early childhood curriculum, which places more emphasis on children being confident and competent learners, than prescribing the details of what content they should be learning. Thus the external influences and social constructions of learning inherent in curriculum documents (described in Chapter Five) affected practice in the classroom, as did the mutually agreed assessment practices the teachers had developed. Other research has found that teachers' ideas are likely to be influenced by school philosophy and organisation (Smith & Shepherd, 1988), their own beliefs, and a range of contextual factors (Bennett, Wood & Rogers, 1997). Exploring the complexity of these issues is an important step in developing policies and practices that enhance the transition experiences of children and their families. Chapter Nine has outlined an alternative approach, using Learning Stories to look at the situated nature of children's learning.

Relationships with peers

The move to school involved considerable changes in the nature of children's relationships. From being the oldest in groups of around 45 four-year-olds at kindergarten, children became the youngest members of a school community of more than 500 pupils. Although their own classes had less than 30 children, they were frequently in much larger groupings, especially during playtimes and lunchtimes. Some children didn't know anyone when they first started school. Others were familiar with some children from their early childhood service but they were not necessarily placed in the same class, and, where familiar children had started school some time before them, these children had sometimes formed other friends in the meantime. The time of the year was influential in determining the size of class they entered. 'Observations and the participants' comments indicated that starting when the class size was large was more challenging than when it was smaller.

The less favourable ratio of adults to children than had been the case in early childhood settings created a situation where children had to assume more independence in some areas of their lives, particularly regarding self-care and emotional issues. At the same time, as the previous section showed, there was a loss of independence in other areas, as they experienced increased adult regulation and prescription regarding the way they spent their time.

The relationship with their teacher was an important issue for children, and most enjoyed positive interactions. The teachers in this study were experienced and dedicated. They put considerable effort into supporting children. Many children were deemed by their parents to 'love' their new entrant teacher. However, in a busy classroom a teacher cannot attend to each child all the time. During the difficult lunchtime periods there was usually no support from teachers. This meant that peer relationships were particularly important in children's experiences of school.

Peer scaffolding

Observations showed that children observed, copied, and were sometimes directly instructed by peers. Some five-year-olds showed themselves to be extremely thoughtful and capable teachers, as they assisted peers in meeting the requirements of the set tasks. The example given in Figure 23, in the section on *Curriculum and pedagogy*, where Child 10 helped Child 15 at writing time, illustrates how competent a five-year-old can be in supporting another's learning. Similarly, the careful scaffolding that Jenny, who had been at school for a few months, provided for her friend Heather when Heather arrived at school, has been described in Heather's story.

Peers also taught each other the required classroom procedures. In Steve's story there was an example of Steve persistently bringing the news discussion back on track. Below is an example of a child trying to ensure that the 'right' sorts of news questions are asked.

- Boy 1 gives his news to the group and ends with the routine "any questions?"
- Boy 2 What were you saying before?
- Boy 1 No. That's not a question. [Questions are usually specific to the news.]
- Boy 3 I know. Have you got a girlfriend? [This is nothing to do with the news topic.]
- Boy 1 No! I'm telling on you cos you...
- Boy 2 Do you take it to bed?
- Boy 1 NO!!!! Not a proper question.
- Boy 2 I didn't know.

Boy 3 Have you got a girlfriend?

The 'news' session continues for a few minutes but doesn't proceed in the 'required' manner.

Boy 1 I'm telling on you cos you asked a silly question.

Boy 1 goes to get the teacher.

Teacher Whose turn is it? Are you being sensible?

(Obs. 18.6, pp3-4)

Children reminded each other of the teacher's instructions:

The teacher shows the class a bear made out of painted cardboard. Its joints are attached with split pins so that they move. She tells the children they are going to paint the bears before they cut them out. The teacher farewells the children leaving at 2 o'clock and helps another child with his inhaler. Meanwhile the other children move to their tables and remind each other not to cut out the bears and not to use crayon. Despite the children's instructions a few children start to cut out their bears. One of the boys checks again with the teacher and reports back that they are "not to cut". (Obs. 24.5)

Peers also ensured that the classroom protocols were observed. For example, Child 12 played with the date and weather chart during writing time and Heather told her she was not allowed to do that. When Yuka (who didn't speak English) didn't sit in the required position, with legs crossed, for mat time Child 16 whispered to her what to do and then physically tried to move her legs into position for her (Obs. 15.5).

Children were not only scaffolded through conversations, they also observed and copied the actions of others. For example, one girl replicated what the children at her table were doing when she wasn't given a worksheet.

The importance of friendships

Friendships seemed to be an important factor in determining the quality and quantity of peer support a child received. All children were able to observe others, and sometimes received comments from others to guide their behaviour, but if they did not have a friend in the class they generally only received detailed scaffolding when a teacher specifically asked a child to show a new child what to do. Even then, the children's personalities played a part in its effectiveness.

Friends were also important in protecting one another from the negative evaluations of other children. Heather's story showed how there was much discussion of whose work was liked and whose was disliked. Children who were not supported by friends appeared to be more vulnerable to negative comments being made of their work. Friends, or friendly peers, therefore seemed to alter the emotional atmosphere of the

classroom, and foster a sense of well-being and belonging. Another example of this was the way a child with friends would be greeted at the start of the day and had things to look at or do, while a child without friends might stand around or cling to a parent. Friendly peers could provide comfort when a parent left:

The teacher takes a tearful Child 11 to the mat and three girls sit with him. One rubs his back and the others talk to him. He stops crying and starts to talk to them (Obs. 9.5).

During the day friends might seek each other out, as Matthew and Josh (Matthew's story) and Heather and Jenny (Heather's story) did. Having someone to turn to seemed to provide reassurance.

Simple organisational routines like asking children to line up in pairs, when repeated several times a day, seemed to highlight some children's isolation whilst confirming the popularity of others. While friends vied for each other's hands to hold, other children were rarely selected and sometimes actively rebuffed. Even fairly confident children, like Heather, seemed anxious to secure a partner:

Heather asks Jenny "Can you be my partner? Can you be my partner? Okay?" even before the teacher has outlined what they will be doing (Obs. 23.10).

To a lesser degree a similar process was also evident at mat times when children determined who would sit next to them. An example of this (whispered) negotiation is given below.

Teacher Ssssstop everybody please. I would like you now sitting on the mat ready to listen to the published stories.
 Boy 1 Child 11. Child 11. Sit with me. Okay? I sit by you. Have you published? Sit by me.
 Child 11 goes to the mat and sits with Boy 1.
 Boy 2 sits beside Child 11. Taps him on the shoulder.
 Boy 2 I was here. I sit with him.
 Child 11 Move up. Move up.
 Boy 2 Move up Boy 1.
 Child 11 Boy 1, move.
 Boy 1 I want to sit by him. (Obs. 20.6)

Earlier in this chapter it was shown that when the children first started school one of the most common causes of distress was the hour-long lunch break. Children were most distressed by lunchtime if they did not have anyone to play with. Conversely, pleasure in having friends was often an important motivation that got children to school, and the opportunity to play with friends made lunchtime one of the best parts

of the day. Therefore friends played important functions in shaping children's experiences both in and out of the classroom. The value of friends was recalled later in the eight-year-olds' reflections.

The eight-year-olds' reflections and comments on friends

Nicola remembered making two friends on her school visit and thought it would be very helpful for new entrants "if the ones that have been there a bit longer could try and make friends with them" (p. 5). Anna thought one of the most important things adults could do to make school a better place was to "make sure everyone's got a friend" (p. 3). Tessa reported feeling scared until she made "heaps of new friends" (p. 1) and would tell children about to start school "there's lots and lots of people who want to be your friend" (p. 3). Carl's excitement had been partly due to new friends, and he talked of the games they played, and Heather had not expected "That I would get tons of friends, make friends, more each day" (p. 2).

Nicola and Tessa talked explicitly about the role friends played in their learning. Friends and peers featured strongly in Nicola's view of herself as a learner. As an eight-year-old she measured her performance against two other capable children, like Mark, who "Is *so* brainy. The brainiest in the class" (Nicola, p. 7). Keeping up with, or doing better than, these slightly older children appeared to provide an important source of motivation for Nicola's learning.

Anna had made some friends but had been separated from them at the start of Year Three, leaving her once again without a close friend in her class. Steve and Matthew didn't mention friends, except for Steve saying that he planned to play with his little brother when his friends were playing cricket.

Given that friends appear to play such an important role, not just in the transition to school, but throughout children's school careers, it is helpful to look at some of the factors associated with making and keeping friends.

Making friends

When they talked about the transition to school, parents clearly viewed the sociable child as having an advantage:

I don't worry about the new school because it is no problem for her. She is easy to play with other children. No problem. (M10, p.2)

I didn't have any concerns because he gets on well with other children and he is a fairly pleasant sort of little chap. (M16, p.4)

He's quite social and that's a strength in that it will help him to get on in school. (M17, p.5)

She loves school. She is very sociable. She likes people. (M21.1, p. 2)

She likes people so that's probably why she would like school because it's social. (M22.2, p. 4)

On the other hand parents were concerned about more reserved children:

He mixes well with other children and he plays well but sometimes he can hang back a little and not move himself forward. I hope that's not going to be a disadvantage when he goes to school. (CS5.1, p. 3)

She hated it [school]. She cried all the time. She is a very shy person. (M13, p. 1)

A language barrier could create difficulties for even a normally sociable child:

In [previous country] she was socialised. She was more positive and she likes to play with friends.... [In New Zealand] we didn't realise that [Child 16] had a problem to contact people. She was very frightened. She realised English is very different from her language, and she was not able to communicate enough. (M23.1, p. 2)

However a parent's assessment of a child was not always predictive of how the child would experience friendships at school. Ms Arthur's description of Anna as an outgoing person who fitted into any situation was only partially borne out in the classroom, where Anna did 'fit in' but was unhappy that she did not have a special friend. Clearly the ability to make friends is not simply a characteristic that is located within individual children. As Pollard and Filer (1999) showed, it is also shaped and framed by the context.

Contact with other children in the class

The teachers saw children's attendance at Azure Kindergarten as providing an advantage when it came to establishing friendships at school. Ms Kent explained, "most of our kids come from the same kindy so they have actually formed friendships in kindergarten and it's a tie over to school" (p. 11). This was seen as creating extra challenges for the children who had not attended Azure Kindergarten.

Children from outside find it difficult to get into the inner circle... friendships have started to be formed [at kindergarten] and suddenly little kids come from outside and it is not easy for those children. (Ms Kent, p. 11)

In practice, as Anna's story showed, simply being acquainted with children through attending the same kindergarten did not automatically lead to friendship. Like Anna, Child 12, also from Azure, made a difficult transition and didn't have any friends at school. Her mother reflected:

I wish now, looking back, that perhaps I'd realised at kindy that she was a real loner. I didn't realise that until she got to school, and I thought, oh she hasn't mixed that much with other kids, and she's here in a great big playground all on her own. (M12, p. 2)

Some parents, like Mother 20 were able to facilitate friendships for their children once they got to school by inviting children home to play, but other children were too exhausted during the initial transition period to cope with a visitor in the afternoons, and parents wished they had addressed this earlier. With this in mind, a number of parents commented on how helpful it would be if early childhood centres could provide information about which children were going to which school so that they would know who was likely to be going to the same school as their child. "I look at all the girls in her class and I think 'Oh I wish she'd played a bit more with her at kindy [kindergarten] and got to know them a bit more'" (M12, p. 5). However, there was no guarantee that a child would be placed in the same class as children he/she knew from kindergarten. Child 11's best friend was placed in a different class, Child 18 arrived at the same time as others from her kindergarten but they were "spread around the three new entrant classes" (M18, p. 8).

Allowing parents to visit the school along with their children gave parents the chance to see who was in their child's class and to perhaps initiate some out-of-school contact with class members before the child started. Even though Nicola didn't know anyone at her school, her mother was able to arrange for a couple of children to play with Nicola in the weeks between her first school visit and her first day at school. These new friends proved useful during Nicola's transition. In this respect, the children from Azure were actually disadvantaged, because, by excluding the parents from the visits, the parents often did not know who would be in their child's class until he/she actually started school.

Ms Samson pointed out that another factor to be kept in mind was that the constraints of the playground culture at this school meant that cross-sex friendships developed out of school did not always carry forward into the more segregated in-school friendships. When Steve had been at school for a few weeks his mother asked him to sit with Child 12, a new girl, while she ate her lunch, because she was finding lunchtime very difficult, he refused because "She's a girl!" (CS5.3, p. 13).

Whilst establishing contact out of school appeared to be an important strategy, not all families were able to, or welcomed, having children round to play. It is therefore also important to consider ways in which friendships can be facilitated in school, and strategies for doing so will be considered in the discussion that follows.

Discussion of children's relationships with peers

The precise nature of the support friends can supply, both at lunchtimes and in the classroom, helps to explain the correlation identified in previous studies between having a friend and the nature of children's transition to school (Ladd, 1990; Ladd & Price, 1987; Margetts, 1997, 2000). For example, given the scaffolding and sense of well-being that friends could provide both in and out of the classroom, it is not surprising that Margetts (2000) found that "children who commenced school with a familiar playmate in the same class were rated as having more social skills, less problem behaviour and greater academic competence than children who commenced school without a familiar playmate in the same class" (p. 4). Although the nature of children's transition to school was complex, and influenced by many factors, the absence of a friend was found to be problematic for many children, while the presence of friendships appeared to go a long way towards establishing a positive experience of school.

The importance of friends highlighted in this study contrasts with previous New Zealand research by Ledger (2000), where friendships did not appear to be a significant influence in children's transitions to school. The different findings may be a feature of the different settings. For example, it was noted earlier that peer scaffolding was only encouraged in one of the schools Ledger studied. It may also be a feature of the research methods used. Ledger entered school as an adult friend of the child participants. She found peers did not approach or welcome a new child, even when they had known each other in kindergarten. It is possible that the researcher's presence inhibited the children's social interactions in the way that teacher aides have been found to do for children with special needs. Meyer and Bevan-Brown (2000) cited examples of other children viewing a child's relationship with a teacher aide as privileged and preferred by the student, so the adult-child relationship can get in the way of the development of friendships between children. It is possible that Ledger's researcher-child relationship acted in the same way.

In looking at the nature of children's relationships, Anna's story highlighted the difference between friendships and acquaintances, and showed that simply being familiar with other children was not sufficient to ensure that friendships would

develop. It appears that the relationships aspect of transition is worthy of more parental/caregiver and teacher attention. The ability to make friends does not rest within an individual child. It is affected by the classroom climate and the way children are positioned within it (Pollard & Filer, 1999). Therefore a key step is for teachers to consider the way that they position children within the class and the impact this has on their peer relationships.

This study shows how important it is to reflect on the nature of the classroom climate that children experience, and to consider ways in which friendships can be promoted, while also evaluating practices that draw attention to children who do not have friends. The participants recommended that early childhood services facilitate contact between children going to the same school. After hearing the findings during professional development workshops, a number of teachers decided to create notice boards where the names (and sometimes photographs) of local schools are shown. Parents can, if they wish, place their child's name (and photograph) below the school the child is going to. This provides a clear picture of who is going to which school, and parents can make contact with other families. It can also remind children of others who have already moved to a particular school. Teachers report that this is working well.

The earlier section on lunchtimes indicated that a focus on the development of social skills in early childhood programmes may be useful. However, it appears that these may require ongoing support in the school context. Although teachers and parents/caregivers cannot follow Anna's advice to "make sure everyone's got a friend", because friendship "is not something that can be directly taught" (MacArthur, 1999, p. 93) environments can be created in which friendships between children can be developed and nurtured. Katz and McClellan (1991) provided detailed suggestions for teachers seeking to assist children in establishing positive social interactions. Moore (2001) considers the value of teaching strategies to improve peer relationships within the first weeks of school. Some of Meyer and Bevan-Brown's (2000) ideas about how teachers might foster social inclusion for children with special needs could perhaps be useful for all children. These include direct teaching of social strategies, considering seating arrangements in the classroom, and the teacher modeling appropriate attitudes and behaviour, and affirming students regularly. Parents can also be involved in teaching social strategies. For example, when Ms North encouraged Nicola to invite a child who had stolen Nicola's chewing gum and thrown sand in her hair to join in and play with her and her friends, based on advice in a book on preventing bullying, she was pleased to find "it worked!" (CS1.3, p. 7). Fabian's (2000a) suggestions for providing children with opportunities to discuss and rehearse strategies for dealing

with situations that they might meet at school could also be used in home, early childhood and school contexts.

Although not possible for all children, out-of-school contacts with potential friends also seemed useful, perhaps because they provided contexts where resources could support the move from proximity to friendship. In the school playground the lack of resources seemed to influence the nature of the interactions that took place. For example, observations showed that some boys initiated play by punching or kicking another child, then running away, inviting the recipient to chase them. This was evident in Carl's story where Carl indicated ambivalence about this type of interaction, joining in frequently in the school setting but later complaining to his parents about the blows he had received. His mother advised him to avoid the boys who did this and was puzzled that he persisted in this type of play. However, it seems that perhaps for Carl the social contact this afforded was important. Rough and tumble play may serve social affiliation and social cognitive functions, including initiating and sustaining play (see E. Wood, 2000, p. 3). While Carl's experience may have been due to the personalities of particular boys, it also appeared to be a feature of the school context, where, during lunchtimes and playtimes when such behaviour occurred, there was ample outdoor space but few resources to play with. In the kindergarten setting, where there were many resources, boys appeared to initiate social contact through shared activity.

Including more resources to play with at school could also be particularly helpful in facilitating entry to social groups for children who do not share the dominant language of the school setting. When Yuka, who could speak almost no English at all when she started school, brought a doll from home, she became engaged in sustained family play with a number of other girls in her class over the lunchtime period. From then on she often took her dolls to school. Her mother noted, "Once she realised that she could bring her dolls and she could play with other children with dolls she was very happy". The way in which resources supported communication between children with different languages, and how in meaningful play contexts mime and gesture were used along with increasing vocabulary to develop shared understandings has also been noted by Long (1997). Without resources to provide a shared framework for play, entry for a child with a different first language seems more challenging. Indeed, even for children who share a common first language, materials can afford social strategies. In her study of four-year-olds at kindergarten Carr (1997) suggests that when "*being a friend*" was taken out of those contexts that supported it with plenty of physical affordance and mediation, many four-year-olds may have been at a loss as to how to play by the rules" (p. 231). The same seems equally true for the just turned five-year-olds in this study.

After the first phase of this study staff at Kowhai School painted some games onto the concrete playgrounds. Other schools have created outdoor play areas for new entrants that resemble those found in early childhood centres. As well as supporting children's social interaction, with appropriate resources, children's learning could be enhanced through their play, regardless of whether they were alone or with others, instead of those who had no one to play with spending an hour or more each day aimlessly wandering around.

Language and Culture

So far this chapter has considered the experiences of all the children and their families. However, they did not all share the dominant European/Pakeha culture of Kowhai School. Four of the participant families identified their ethnicity as Chinese, Tongan, Japanese or Arab and one as European/Indian. This section looks specifically at the experiences of these families and their new entrant children (who were all girls). The families have been coded as A, B, C, D and E respectively for this section, to protect the confidentiality of their other data. Table 10 summarises the demographic details for these five families.

Table 10. Demographic details for the five families who did not share the dominant European/Pakeha culture of Kowhai School.

Family	Ethnicity	1st lang.	2nd lang.	SES	Kindergarten	Prev. ECE
A	Chinese	Chinese	English	*	Other	Overseas
B	Tongan	English	Tongan	*	Other	-
C	Japanese	Japanese	English	1	Azure	Overseas
D	Arab	Arabic	English	1	Azure & Pvt	Overseas
E	Eur/Indian	English	-	1	Blue	-

* In Family A the father was a full time university student. In Family B the mother was parenting alone and received the Domestic Purposes Benefit. In all the families except E the mother was at home. Mother E's part time occupation was Level 2 on the Irving (1990) index.

Background

Although the roll at Kowhai School was predominantly made up of children classed as European/Pakeha, during the years of the study about 14 to 19% of the school population were classed as being from cultural groups other than European. A large proportion of these (11-13% of the total roll) were from Asian countries and most were fairly recent immigrants to New Zealand.

The school had a number of children from non-English speaking families. School-wide, four teachers had completed a two-year qualification to teach English as a second language. This included one of the new entrant teachers. Initially they decided to place all the new entrant children from non-English speaking families in her class. In practice the Principal felt “there are plusses and minuses. Seems to work well with some children but not so well with others”. When children were grouped with others who shared their language he felt there was less motivation for speaking English, so wondered if “you have to be cruel to be kind” and “if you isolate them they haven’t got much option” (p. 21). This perhaps explains why, during the course of the study, children who had English as a second language (including the participant children) were placed in two of the new entrant classes, with Ms Keane or Ms Knight. At reading time slightly older children, who were just learning to read in English, joined one of these classes, taught by the teacher who had the specialist training.

The Assistant Principal explained that when children from non-English speaking backgrounds started school, “what we try and do is increase their vocabulary, and we don't expect that they come to school with a lot. Well they can't. The parents haven't got the words either to say so it's over to us” (AP, p. 4). At the start of the study the Principal described a programme he had observed overseas where parents attended classes with their child so that parent and child were learning the new language together. By the following term a similar programme was operating in one of the new entrant rooms at Kowhai. Parents and children came at 8.30am to share in a lesson together, so that the parent could support the child’s learning at home.

With new immigrants, the teachers sometimes found themselves not only trying to support the child's transition to school, but also the family's transition to a new country. For example, on one of the observation days a mother came to school to ask the new entrant teacher how to access emergency medical care. As the mother spoke very little English and had no transport of her own, and the teacher was not sure she was able to follow the directions she was giving, the teacher organised for another parent (a PTA member) to take the family to an Accident and Emergency Clinic. The Principal was keen to “set up some kind of link” for new immigrant Asian families “so that they’ve actually got a support family, because some of them feel a bit isolated” (p. 19).

The school was therefore very focused in its efforts to support children’s progress in the English language, and provided informal support for new immigrant families. However, there was less explicit consideration of other cultural or religious issues. There was some disapproval expressed in terms of the child rearing practices they

witnessed. Ms Knight felt Asian children “are very much in control of their parent” and likely to be indulged (p10). Ms King said that she found it “quite amazing” the number of Asian children who did not seem to invite friends home to play” (p. 15). Although there were elements of Maori culture in the programme (greetings, songs, dances, artwork, stories and costumes) there were no observed examples of the other non European cultures, other than the topics that occasionally arose from the children themselves (for example Chinese New Year, and life in Taiwan were discussed at mat time on the day one of the pupils was leaving to return to Taiwan).

Parents’ views on language and cultural issues

Mother E had found a smaller country school to be "very cliquy and has favouritism to certain white/Pakeha people", and liked the “bigger range to kids for them to meet” at Kowhai School (p. 2). Other than this, cultural issues relating to transition were not raised by Mother E.

In the three families where children's home language was not English, parents were anxious that this would contribute to any transition difficulties that they might experience. The children's learning of English also raised a particular dilemma for parents. On one hand parents wanted their children to learn English as quickly as possible in order to facilitate their progress at an English speaking school, but as the children's English skills developed, along with a sense of pride, there was also distress that the children were not continuing to develop their first language. Unlike their parents and older siblings, who were able to maintain a strong grounding in their first language in addition to English, the five-year-olds were tending to use English in preference to their first language.

She came here so little she is starting in English more than Arabic. Now she can't speak Arabic. She understands it but she won't speak it. (D.1, p. 10)

We think Japanese is important for them but she is too small, she cannot read Japanese, she cannot speak Japanese fluently at the moment so we are worried about that. (C.1, p. 3)

The parents of the children concerned were attempting to teach their children to read and write in their first language but all three parents were finding it difficult, both because of the children's preference for English, and because they weren't really sure how to go about teaching these skills.

I will try and teach her at home. It's nice to know her language because she is forgetting all her Arabic. (D.1, p. 10)

Most of the new words are in English. For Child C it is really hard to combine with Japanese... Her thinking is changing and she is thinking in English these days so we don't know how we can teach them Japanese. It's hard. (C.2, p. 6)

Every Saturday I have taught her to write some Chinese words and reading. It's very difficult! English is very fast for her to learn.... Chinese words are difficult to write. It's difficult compared to English.... Only Chinese she hates. 'Mummy it is very difficult for me to write Chinese words'. (A, pp. 2-3)

These parents were generally impressed with the work that Kowhai School put into teaching English as a second language but they also believed that being bilingual and maintaining their culture would be beneficial to their children in the future. However, this was difficult to achieve without support. One mother said that in larger centres she had heard there were special classes at the weekend to develop first language skills but reflected that the size of the local population probably meant this was unlikely to happen in the city where they lived. The complex issues facing these families was probably not understood by the New Zealand parents, one of whom commented on how annoyed she felt when she heard overseas families speaking their own language, as she felt it was not facilitating their children's development of English.

Religious or cultural practices that differed from those of the teachers were also of concern to two parents. For, example, mixed swimming and boys and girls getting changed together in the classroom:

Deep inside me I am feeling that I have to be more careful because the surroundings are quite different from ours... In our religion, Muslims, it is quite different. It is all right for the girls up to nine years old to mix with boys but after this, no. And the swimming and the mixing it's quite different. We don't allow this. So this is the only concern with her starting school. (D.1, p. 4)

My girls have been brought up that you mustn't get changed in front of boys, it's rude.... I have tried to bring them up that your body is private, you don't show it to anyone else. Even at home they are not allowed to, especially when their [her younger daughters'] nephews come around they must go into their room to get changed. (B, p. 11)

An older girl from family B had asked if she could change in the toilets but said the teachers would not allow this. Her mother acknowledged that having the children changing together might be easier for the teacher, but reflected that "I don't think the teachers realise how damaging it is for the kids inside when you have been brought up

'you don't show your body to other people'. They don't understand, in our Island way it is a disgrace" (B, p. 11).

Carr (1998c) talks about the school child as (at least) tri-mondial, one that can operate in several worlds and figure out the rules and relationships associated with each. Where school rules and practices are in sharp contrast to cultural beliefs this may present particular challenges. Mother D described her efforts to help her daughter span the two cultures of home and school:

I have to always teach her to know the difference between our customs and here.... This may be normal for them but it is not normal for us, especially because she is a girl. (D.1, p. 4)

Mother C hoped that the teachers would try to understand her culture a little. She pointed out that her child's teacher seemed to be making an effort and she was really appreciative of this:

Ms Knight is very understanding to the different cultures and she tries to understand Asian cultures so her attitude is really appreciated... but we think it still takes time. We don't see any results yet but we want to try to talk about our culture and if we could share our culture with other people we are glad. (C.2, p. 4)

Language and cultural issues also affected parents' understanding of the school. Mother C explained that even when the school's request for parents/caregivers to sell pizzas as a fundraising activity was translated for her by Ms Meade (a fluent speaker of Japanese) the concept initially had no meaning for her because the idea of selling pizzas to raise money for school was something she had not encountered before.

Experiences of children from non European backgrounds

Clearly there were language and cultural issues for parents, but what was the transition like for the children? As with all children's transitions, the experiences were diverse, and language and culture varied in the degree of impact they appeared to have. For Child E, whose mother described her as "half Indian, half European" there appeared little to distinguish her from her European peers. In the school records she was classed as European. Her early transition was not observed but was reported by her mother as smooth.

Child A and Child C were members of the second largest cultural group in the school. Although there was great diversity of ethnicity, culture and language *within* this group, they joined a context where policies and practices were in place to support the transition of 'Asian' children, especially in regard to fostering their acquisition of

English. Child C's story is told in Figure 25 to illustrate the nature of the transition experiences for a child who did not share the language and culture of the school. She has been given the pseudonym Yuka.

Yuka's family had recently arrived in New Zealand from Japan. Her father's occupation put the family at level 1 of the Irving (1990) SES index and her mother had decided not to engage in paid work until Yuka and her older brother were both settled at school. Yuka had been to kindergarten in Japan, then spent three months at Azure Kindergarten before starting at Kowhai School. Yuka's mother explained that in Japan Yuka had been at kindergarten for more than six hours a day and the programme was very teacher directed, *"The teacher tells you precise directions. You have to do this or please draw a picture this way"* (C.1, p. 1). Yuka had found the New Zealand kindergarten very different. *"Besides the difficulty of language she has to overcome different culture"* (C.1, p. 1). The language they used at home was Japanese, although Yuka's mother spoke English and was trying to encourage the family to speak English at home as well. Her parents had found that Yuka had been outgoing in Japan but now found it difficult to talk to people and lacked confidence to use English. She wanted her mother to stay with her at kindergarten and *"translate everything"* (C.1, p. 2).

Yuka had two pre-entry visits, one with the kindergarten and one with her mother. Unlike most children she had had a visit that spanned over a lunchtime period so that her mother could explain lunchtime routines and where the toilets were. Both parents had attended the meeting with the school staff held at Azure Kindergarten. Her mother thought the visits were useful but would have liked a lot more information about the school and perhaps the opportunity to meet with Yuka's teacher beforehand. In Japan she said parents were given a lot of printed information about the school before the child started, but in New Zealand she had been told very little until Yuka's first day.

"At first I was really worried 'I don't know anything' but maybe I don't need to know anything before. Japanese people like everything well organised. I think we are getting used to New Zealand style" (C.1, p. 5).

"Because we are immigrants we don't have any information about what kind of school New Zealand primary school, how do they teach, how do they act to the children" (C.2, p. 3).

Her mother's hopes for Yuka as she started school were that she would find a friend and that the teacher would encourage her *"Please find something, her strengths and please encourage her"* (C.1, p. 7). Yuka's first day went smoothly. Ms Knight greeted Yuka and her mother and much of the information her mother had been hoping for was provided then. Yuka showed an interest in the resources around the classroom and did not appear distressed when her mother left. Although she didn't speak at all and appeared to have limited comprehension of English, she observed the other children and generally managed to do everything that was required. She was independent in her self-care skills, impressing the teacher that she was able to tie her own shoelaces *"On the very first day of school!"* (Observation, 13/5, p. 5). She managed the required tasks with relative ease and independence. During writing time, although she didn't write a story she copied words in a clear neat script into an exercise book she had brought from home. After drawing a picture she moved to the alphabet table where

she copied all the words from a book that was open on display, and then returned to her table where she copied all the letters from the alphabet cards into her book. Later, when she wasn't given a worksheet (a photocopy of four cakes to be coloured, cut out and glued in size order on another piece of paper) she looked at what other children at her table were doing, and drew her own picture of four cakes in size order. She correctly completed an activity that required her to match (English) words on cards to those on a board and participated in the physical activities (such as ball throwing) with ease. Two days later Yuka was observed extending a simple maths activity (where children were required to make two fields, put a different number of animals in each and label with the correct numeral) to correctly make and label five fields, with set sizes up to seven. A number of the children in her class remembered her name on the first day, and when the teacher inadvertently called Yuka by the wrong name during PE, they corrected her.

After one month at school Yuka was using English in the classroom, responding to her name on the roll with "Yes Ms Knight, I am here" and joining in with group singing. Yuka and her mother attended the early morning English classes run by Kowhai School but there were challenges associated with getting up in time for the 8.30 a.m. class:

"She is not good at waking up earlier! (Laughs.) Even when she went to bed earlier, sometimes she couldn't feel well in the mornings and especially, Yuka had special English classes early mornings, three days a week she must wake up earlier than before, so she was grumpy" (C.2, p. 5).

After three months Yuka was giving news at the morning talks and by the end of the year she was chatting confidently in English, initiating a conversation with me about the number of the classroom. Her mother commented that Yuka's English had improved tremendously, and she now teased her father regarding his pronunciation of English words, but it still wasn't enough to explain emotional things. Yuka was occasionally upset when she didn't have anyone to play with.

"In the classroom she doesn't have any problem to follow the lesson, it's just playing with friends" (C.2, p. 1).

"When she wants to say 'no' properly she couldn't say 'no' and sometimes 'no' is not enough to say to the boys or some teasing person so in that case she felt unhappy and doesn't know how except to say 'no'. How could she say she feels that they are annoying? That is the only thing that she doesn't feel happy about" (C.2, p. 6).

However, observations of Yuka indicated that for the most part she was relaxed and confident. Both parents noticed that she was happy when she *"can complete her goals day by day.... She told us every day what she has done and her face is really smiling and she is glad"* (C.2, p. 5).

Figure 25. Yuka's experiences (Child C)

Although for Yuka starting school involved learning a new language she seemed to cope well with the challenges she faced. Although there were some occasional

difficulties, her 'border crossing' between the cultures of home and school appeared well supported and successful. Child A also had a positive cycle of experience, as did Child D. Child D had been in New Zealand for nine months before she started school, but had started to learn English in Saudi Arabia, from the age of three, when she had attended a nursery school run by an English woman. This had continued to develop at Azure Kindergarten and a private kindergarten she attended two afternoons a week, and was supported at home, where her parents were bilingual. By the time she started school her mother felt Child D was more fluent in English than her first language of Arabic. She had clearly been popular at kindergarten and already had a number of friends in her class, and others who followed, like Heather, were pleased when they found she was at their school. The family had lived in many areas of the world and Mother D was happy to share aspects of her culture with others. Ms Ashby enthusiastically described their Ramadan celebrations at Azure Kindergarten, where Mother D had been in to cook and talk with the children. Although Mother D was worried about negotiating the differences in religious and cultural practices between home and school, she believed that at the new entrant level these were not as problematic as they would be when Child D was older. As a five-year-old, Child D was engaging, independent and confident. Her first piece of writing when she got to school was in English and included the letters of the alphabet from A to Z, and the numerals from 1 to 34 and the statement "I know lots of letters", providing a very clear introductory message to her teacher! Her later stories were all full of her friends and her activities at school. (See Appendix W.) At home she told her mother "everything" that happened during the day. "She is very happy. She is satisfied I think.... She like writing stories and she like playing as well" (D.2, p. 2). Her mother spent time in the classroom and observed Child D's work. After six months at school her mother concluded that Child D's progress had been "Very, very, very good. Me and my husband are very happy. Really happy" (D.2, p. 5).

Therefore, while there were linguistic and cultural challenges to be negotiated, and family sadness at the loss of first language that accompanied increasing fluency in English, Child A, Child C and Child D coped well with taking on the role of pupil in the largely Eurocentric context of Kowhai School. For Child B, who has been given the pseudonym Mele, starting school was more difficult. Her story, when compared to the other experiences in this section, helps to illustrate the complexity of the transition process, and indicates that language and culture have to be considered alongside other influential factors. Mele's story is told in Figure 26.

Mele had been brought up in New Zealand. She was the fifth child in a family of six children. She lived with her mother and four of her sisters, although her oldest sister

and her two children were also frequently resident with the family. Her mother had been parenting on her own for the last three years and their only income was the domestic purposes benefit. The family's first language was English but they also spoke Tongan. Mele had attended kindergarten in the area prior to starting school (but not Azure, Blue or Cobalt), and two of her sisters were at Kowhai School when she started. Her mother had moved the older girls to Kowhai because she felt there was less racism there than at their previous school, although even at Kowhai one of the girls had apparently been told by another child, *"My Mum said that you are not allowed to play with brown people"* (p. 3).

Mele had not particularly enjoyed kindergarten, which her mother thought was possibly due to people's attitudes. *"I think it's the culture up here. Where I was brought up and the three little ones were born, down there [further South] it didn't make a difference what colour you were, you were all classed as one, but since we moved here I have noticed that there are a lot of racist people around and I feel sorry for the kids because I find it hard to deal with because I wasn't brought up with it"* (p. 2).

However, Mele was bored at home and appeared to be looking forward to joining her sisters at school. Her mother felt she was 'ready', and Mele had been dragging a school bag around saying *"I want a turn at going to school"* (p. 4). She did not have a visit prior to starting and her mother had very little contact with the school, because she felt it was in her children's best interest that she stayed away.

"I don't like to get involved in the school much because of my size, because I know the kids would tease them about my size, so I try and stay away from school as much as I can. I would like to get more involved in the school but having so many children and being an only parent it is hard and I feel like I am not rich enough.... I find it easier to hide away and let them come to school and do their thing and then pick them up and that's it. I don't want them to feel any more embarrassed than what they have to because they know that they are not as well off as other kids at the school" (p. 9).

She explained how she searched for good quality second hand clothing so that the children were immaculately dressed when they came to Kowhai. She was in a sense creating a more affluent 'front' that she believed would advantage her children, and felt that her own appearance might give this away and affect her children's chances of acceptance. This extended to preventing other children from coming home to play.

"I made a rule. You can have friends at school but that's as far as it goes. They don't come home and you don't go to play with them because it just causes too many problems. With my older daughters we have had friends come and stay and a lot of them we had it 'Oh your place is not flash enough' and I thought 'I'm not going through that with the four little ones', so we made a rule that no friends are allowed to come to the house. I found it easier that way. When they [friends] are downing the whole family, the house, and everything, it gets a bit much for them to cope with" (p. 10).

This also extended to not accepting invitations to birthday parties, partly because of the economic demands of such events, and because they could not return the

invitations. This whole approach went against the family's traditional beliefs but she felt it was necessary.

"Being Islanders they want to be so friendly and they want to share everything but I try and explain to the girls that in this day and age people don't share things like the Island way. They were brought up to share. You don't get that any more. Nobody can trust anybody" (p. 11).

Mele therefore arrived at school on her first day in the company of her sisters, aged six and eight, who left her at her classroom. *"She didn't like that. She felt they were deserting her"* (B, p. 2). She knew no one at school, other than her sisters, as she was the only child from her kindergarten in the new entrant classes. Nevertheless her first days appeared to go well. She was observed on her third day sitting quietly on the mat as school began, and participating in writing news on the board. However, from the third day she was *"starting to back peddle"* and by the end of her first week *"she hated it. She cried all the time"* (B, p. 4 & p. 2). This was evident in the observations. She was tearful throughout the Monday of her second week. One of the boys said she was "a baby". On Thursday she held onto a student teacher at news time, and started to cry when the student tried to get her to join a group. Later, when it was time for writing, she sobbed and clung to the legs of the student teacher and I sat with Mele for a while until she calmed down. On this occasion, one week after she started school, she drew a picture of her mother and with my help wrote 'I love my mum' (see Appendix W). This was the first story in her exercise book. Later she seemed happier and participated in the discussion of a story and played a card game with Child 12 and Anna.

Mele's sisters collected her from the classroom at morning teatimes and lunchtimes. Her mother was aware that the school disapproved of older siblings playing with younger ones, but didn't see anything wrong with the sisters playing together, and encouraged them to do so. *"She [older daughter] said that the teacher said that I shouldn't play with my sisters. I said that I'd rather you did. I want you all to stay together. I don't see anything wrong with playing with your little sisters"* (M13, p. 2).

Mele's mother attributed Mele's distress during her transition to the fact that she had made her "soft" by cuddling her too much, that *"the whole lot of them are very clingy"* and because Mele disliked the behaviour of some of the boys, *"Which I could understand. I suppose it's a bit hard when you don't have boys in the house"* (Mele's nephews were both under two). Mele's transition also coincided with a difficult time for her older sister and her mother had been much involved in supporting her eldest daughter and acknowledged *"we are all unsettled so I haven't had time to just sit down and talk to her [Mele]"* about her experiences at school. In addition to her other reasons for staying away from school, Mother B was reluctant to come into the classroom because her younger child would want to *"touch everything"* and Mele might cling to her *"and not do what she's supposed to be doing"* (p. 12).

After two months at school her mother had heard nothing about Mele's progress, but didn't expect to as she felt it was too soon. Her main concern was, as noted in the previous section, the arrangements for changing for swimming. She worried about boys and girls getting changed together. *"...it is a disgrace. It is very rude"* (p. 11).

Mele was at this point more settled at school but “*every now and then she still has a grizzling match*” (p. 4).

Figure 26. Mele’s experiences (Child B)

Discussion of language and culture

This section draws attention to school practices in relation to language and culture and how these impact on transition. Kowhai School focused on supporting the development of English, particularly where this was not the child’s home language. Language differences are salient to the school, and perhaps for this reason received considerable attention. Kowhai School appeared to be effective in this area, and the participant children also had at least one parent who could also speak English, (although their fluency varied), which meant their English was also fostered at home. Hidden, but also important, were cultural and religious differences. These were not acknowledged or supported within the school and it was left to parents to help children negotiate between the rules and practices of home and school. Many factors influenced the parents’ ability to do this.

The experiences described in this section also indicate that while language and culture provide additional ‘layers’ or factors to consider when understanding children’s transitions, these cannot be viewed in isolation. Therefore, in understanding the experiences of the children from non-European backgrounds making the transition to a largely Eurocentric school context, it is useful to look wider than just their language and culture. Families C, D and E all received a rating of 1 (High SES) on the Elley-Irving index (Irving, 1990), and although Father A was not currently employed, he was studying at master’s level and Mother A was doing some part time study, suggesting that while they currently did not rate highly on the SES index, Family A had educational capital. Using Bourdieu’s (1997) idea of cultural and social capital, it can be argued that these four families had the knowledge, skills and ways of behaving, which confer status and privilege in society. Perhaps more importantly, this capital was in forms that were visible to the school (parental occupations, a degree of confidence in communicating with teachers, children’s accomplishment of skills the teachers valued). This visibility is important because, as Brooker (2002) argues, not all parental capital is effective in securing cultural and social capital for children.

In families A C, D and E there was considerable overlap between the sorts of knowledge taught at home, and in some cases in the early childhood services that the children had experienced, and the knowledge at school. Bernstein calls this ‘official’ knowledge, and suggests that children who learn it adapt smoothly to school, because

they meet the same expectations in both contexts as to what counts as learning (see Brooker, 2002). Therefore, while there were language differences between families A, C and D and school, all of the children started school with skills that were valued by their teachers. For example, Child C was independent in her self-care skills, selected activities without guidance, copied words in a clear neat script and was able to tie her own shoe laces. Child D demonstrated her knowledge of the English alphabet and numerals in her first piece of written work, and was mature, independent and popular with other children. All four girls were well behaved and biddable. In this respect Child A and Child C may have differed from Asian boys. Ms Knight's comment about Asian children being indulged appeared to be reflected more in the behaviour of boys, who presented a lot more challenges to teachers in the classroom. It could also be said that the family habitus of these four families showed a reasonable level of congruence with the secondary habitus required at school (Brooker, 2002). Therefore learning to be a pupil did not require a *very* different role for the children (Pye, 1988).

While there was no visible acknowledgement of the children's cultures in the materials and activities provided at Kowhai School, for Child A and Child C, being part of a cultural group that comprised around 11% of the school possibly provided mesosystem links (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) through the presence of peers and parent helpers with similar backgrounds. Child D was the only child at the school from her culture but had the advantage of friendships formed in early childhood continuing to school, and played with these friends at home as well. English language lessons may have fostered social relationships for other children, as they were withdrawn from the main classes to work in small groups, (although moving in and out of the regular classroom might have been disorientating).

Child B on the other hand, although raised in New Zealand and fluent in English, and therefore on the surface more culturally and linguistically similar to the dominant group at Kowhai School, was actually considerably disadvantaged when compared to the other four children. Mother B did not appear to have the type of social and cultural capital that is valuable at school, that was evident in the other families. In fact, Family B can perhaps be thought of as having what Brooker (2002) calls negative social capital, which "sometimes reduces families' effectiveness in supporting their children's learning, and reduces their standing in the eyes of teachers, as well as damaging parents' sense of their own efficacy in managing their lives" (p. 31). Mother B's domestic, financial and personal concerns impacted on the support she was able to provide for Child B.

Family B seemed to be trying to find a balance between their preferred practices (to be more sociable and sharing) and the practicalities of minimizing potential hurt, and attempting to maximise the children's opportunities in a different cultural environment (by avoiding contact). The experiences of Child B and her sisters illustrates very forcibly Pye's (1988) notion of just how different home and school 'versions' of the child can be. He proposed the school version is tailored to the individual's "particular in the particular predicament of being in school" (p. 37). In this case the 'school version' of Child B was noticeably shaped by Mother B's beliefs and attitudes, while Mother B's actions suggest that parents' behaviour is also shaped by 'the particular predicament' of being the parent of a school child.

The challenges facing Mother B illustrate the complexities that can be involved for parents in trying to 'do the best' for their children. In common with some parents in Brooker's (2002) study who had pressing social problems, Mother B paid careful attention to Child B's physical appearance. This probably required more effort and sacrifice on Mother B's part than in any other family, where, even when there was no paid employment, financial concerns did not appear to be quite so pressing. As a strategy, it probably assisted Child B's acceptance, but although Mother B was trying to meet what she believed to be the desired 'norms', in order to advantage her children educationally, some of her other approaches contrasted sharply with accepted practices at Kowhai School. For example, although siblings, especially older sisters, traditionally take a major role in caring for young children in Polynesian society (Ritchie & Ritchie, 1979), at Kowhai School for a child to arrive on the first day in the company of her six- and eight-year-old sisters was almost unprecedented. This mother's lack of involvement at school was a behaviour teachers attributed to not caring. "It would be very few [parents] who we never see and they don't care" (Ms Keane, p. 8). From the teachers' frame of reference it would be hard for them to view such an action as possibly stemming from a parent caring very much, and seeing this as helpful to her children. In addition, Mother B's refusal to allow the children to have friends home to play directly contravened one of the teachers' 'desirable' practices, as did Mother B's wish that the sisters play together at school. Again, as will be discussed later, cultural differences may be evident.

Mother B, with four older children having been through school, ensured that Child B had some of the 'official' knowledge that Bernstein talks about (cited in Brooker, 2002, p. 44). On entry to school she could write her name, knew the alphabet (to say, but she could not recognize individual letters) and they had been learning colours together. Her first piece of writing (see Appendix W) showed neatly formed letters, copied from an alphabet chart. However, unhappy and distressed at the transition,

Child B was not always able to demonstrate her capabilities. In addition, Mother B said Child B had been cuddled too much, which perhaps explained her tendency to cling to adults when distressed, a response that was viewed as inappropriate in the school context. Therefore for Child B, family and school habitus (Brooker, 2002) were somewhat different, and ways of behaving at home were not all valued at school.

With no parental involvement, no friends allowed home, and no friends from kindergarten at school, Child B's siblings provided the only links between home and school. While they did much to assist Child B, especially in supporting her at lunchtimes and playtimes, despite teacher disapproval, her siblings appeared to be less effective in negotiating cultural differences, for example, in regard to arrangements for changing for swimming. It is unlikely that a child could successfully negotiate a change in school practice at Kowhai without parental backing, especially as many parents, with their advantage of adult status, found this difficult.

Hence Child B and her family did not fit with school norms and were constructed as problematic from the start. Child B's difficulties were attributed to home background, an approach that offered few avenues for change. A more useful approach might have been to look at the lived reality of Child B's family life, along with questioning the basis on which implicit norms of appropriate behaviour are constructed. As Rogoff (1997) has suggested, to understand Mother B's actions one needs to view them in the light of past experiences, and what she hoped for in the future. Timperley and Robinson (2001) found that it was only when teachers overcame stereotypic assumptions that parents from low SES backgrounds did not want to participate, that they were able to develop programmes to successfully involve parents at school. Further, while not allowing the children to have friends home to play directly contravened one of the teachers' 'desirable' practices, as did this mother's wish that the sisters play together at school, these again highlight the cultural nature of the norms on which the views were based. With five siblings and two nephews at home, and two sisters at school, Child B had a number of people of different ages to play with, so did not lack company. The teachers' belief in the importance of inviting other children home to play may have developed with regard to smaller families typical of their school population. Podmore, Sauvao and Mapa (2003) noted that large family sizes are consistent with birth trends for Pacific women in New Zealand, and as Appendix B showed, children from the Pacific formed only a tiny proportion of the roll at Kowhai School. However, the teachers' concern also focused on Child B's lack of same-age friends. Rogoff (1990) has argued that segregation by age is unusual, except in Western institutions. Ritchie and Ritchie (1979) suggested that Western beliefs about child development lead to a view that "to mix ages may lead to conflict

or unworkable situations or reduce enjoyment”, in contrast to traditional Polynesian society, where groups of playing children generally included a wide range of ages (p. 68). Viewed from this perspective, the benefits of the sibling interaction, especially where this takes the form of tuakana/teina relationship, with the older child taking responsibility for teaching the younger, can be seen as positive. In Maori society this derives from the principles of whanaungatanga, which deals with:

... practices that bond and strengthen the kinship ties of a whanau. The commitment of ‘aroha’ is vital to whanaungatanga and the survival of what the group sees as important. Loyalty, obligation, commitment, an inbuilt support system made the whanau a strong stable unit... (Pere, 1994, cited in Royal-Tangaere, 1997, p. 89).

All of these aspects were very evident in Child B’s family, thus can be seen as strengths, rather than deficits, and provide a focus for working with Child B as a learner.

Blaiklock et al (2002) noted that the numbers of Maori, Pacific Island and Asian children in Aotearoa/New Zealand are predicted to increase, so that by 2010 half the children under five years will identify with an ethnic group other than European. This makes it imperative that schools consider ways of fostering supportive transitions for all students, looking for ways of acknowledging the strengths they bring with them from their primary habitus. This applies equally to children from families with low incomes. A recent report stated that three in ten young people in New Zealand live in poverty, and children from one-parent homes are more likely to be living in poverty than children from other family types (Action for Children and Youth Aotearoa, 2003).

This section has shed light on the ways in which the differential patterns of achievement identified in earlier studies, based on ethnicity (Alexander & Entwisle, 1988) or parental education and income (Wylie, et al., 2001) may arise. In doing so it offers insights into the ways in which change may be effected.

Chapter summary

This chapter has focused on some of the issues for children that were evident in the 23 children’s data. It can be seen that many of the issues that arose for the case study children were common themes for others in the study. Hence this, and the previous three chapters, helps to locate the case study stories within the wider framework of transitions to Kowhai School. For all children, assessment of the nature of their transitions depended on the time of assessment and the measures used to assess it, giving weight to argument that children’s experiences of transition are best understood

by looking closely at individual cycles of experience. A 'snap shot' assessment provides information about a single time point, but is likely to reveal little about ongoing patterns of experience. This is an important consideration when determining what the Ministry of Education (2002g) refer to as "effective" transition practices.

The data show that children's issues in the process of becoming a pupil reflect a dynamic and interactive process between all the participants, as suggested by Ghaye and Pascal (1988). When children were outwardly distressed this was particularly challenging for parents/caregivers and teachers, and teachers tried to contain the behaviour. However, this action generally did not address the *causes* of children's concern. In addition, other children who were less overt in their behaviour were also struggling with aspects of becoming a pupil, but this was more easily overlooked, and again, the causes were not always addressed.

The school day was more structured than children had experienced in earlier settings, and the increased regulation and control that distinguished in-class time from the periods before school and during breaks, created problems for a number of children. During out-of-class time children were generally free to organise their own activities, but there were few possibilities for doing this in the absence of resources. This meant that although adults generally saw these breaks as recreational, some children experienced them as boring and unpleasant. The marked contrast between the relative freedom of break-times, and the constraints imposed by the regulation of activity of the classroom, created other concerns. Although many children enjoyed the formality, the prescriptive nature of the tasks led some children to focus on performance, in ways that appeared detrimental to their progress.

The nature of the school toilets, and policies surrounding their use, was an issue that affected only a few children, but this was significant to those involved. One of the advantages of the interpretive methodology that was used is that it brings to light the significance of less obvious aspects like these (Erickson, 1985; D. Peters, 1993).

The experiences of children who were from cultures other than European/Pakeha, brought into focus the cultural assumptions framing many of the school practices, and illustrated that differences in social and cultural capital, as described by Bourdieu (1997) appeared more influential in shaping children's pathways than more immediately obvious differences such as first language.

Overall, this chapter demonstrated a complex interweaving of themes. A child's relationships, with peers, siblings, teachers and parent/caregivers was a particularly

important factor, influencing many of the issues in becoming a pupil. Friends played a vital role in children's experiences of learning to "do school" (Hill et al., 1998). They alleviated lunchtime distress, provided a warmer emotional climate, and offered scaffolding, not only to the role of the pupil, but in meeting curriculum requirements. Parents wished that they had been more aware of this issue so that they could have done more to foster children's friendships before they got to school.

The teachers in this study were experienced and competent. Over time they had developed practices that worked well for the majority of children. However, the focus on independence, that all the new entrant teachers said was an important trait in children starting school (see Chapter Twelve), seemed to work against those children who experienced difficulties. This chapter has shown that for many children the focus on independence overlooked the features of the school context that contributed to difficulties, and separated children from the potential scaffolding support of parents/caregivers and siblings. Overall, it appears that paying attention to the 'whole' child, rather than just children's academic learning, is important and could be enhanced by a sociocultural and ecological approach that considers the interaction of child and context. The following chapter discusses this idea further, and offers suggestions for its implementation.

Chapter 14

Conclusions and Implications

The findings of this study add new insights to the growing body of research on the transition to school. Its focus has been on understanding how children and their families experience this transition. Taking an ecological approach, the study has explored how the characteristics of individuals and their environment interact to create particular pathways of experience. It has looked at the influence of both the immediate and remote environments, including some of the beliefs and practices that shaped this process, and the issues that arose for the children. The findings have been presented and discussed in Chapters Nine to Thirteen. This final chapter provides a summary of the key findings and conclusions, and considers their implications for practice. It also includes a reflection on the research process, and the implications of the study for further research.

Key findings and conclusions

The teachers in this study skillfully inducted many children into their classrooms, and into the life of pupils at Kowhai School. They had a strong, respectful relationship with one of the local kindergartens, Azure Kindergarten, which led to similarities in some aspects of language and pedagogy used in the two settings. Parents/caregivers were provided with information from the school in a variety of forms, and teachers recommended that the children made a school visit before they started, so that they became familiar with the setting and some activities. In the classroom, teachers used assertive discipline, with a focus on publicly acknowledging positive behaviour, to guide children into expected aspects of the pupil role. Teaching was planned to build on a child's existing knowledge, and peer tutoring was used extensively.

In many respects, this situation appeared to be an example of the sort of effective transition practice advocated in the Ministry of Education's (2002g) strategic plan, and teachers at both Kowhai School and Azure Kindergarten were pleased with the arrangements. However, even within such an apparently positive context, challenges and issues arose for all three groups of participants: children, parents, and teachers. The study has illustrated 'pathways' or 'journeys' of the participant children as they took on the role of school pupil and the interconnected experiences of teachers and families in this process. It has traced some of the complex interactions of child and

environment that led to apparently positive, negative or neutral cycles of experience.

Although the number of children who appeared to experience problematic transitions was small, the difficulties encountered were often significant to those concerned. When difficulties did arise, an examination of how these contributed to the child's overall experience helped to uncover why for some children these were part of a negative cycle, while for others such experiences presented surmountable challenges. One of the strengths of the research methodology was exploring how these different outcomes eventuated. The theoretical approach for understanding children's experiences, described in Chapter Two and summarised in Figure 2 (which is reproduced here), provided a useful framework for this analysis. As Erickson (1985) has noted, social class or early childhood experiences do not 'cause' school achievement (or problems with school). Instead, "*people*" influence patterns of experience "in specific interactional occasions" (p. 129, emphasis in the original). These interactions vary as a function of the characteristics of both the individual person, and of the people, objects and symbols with which the person interacts (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1997). In exploring the nature of these influences, the present study reveals possible sites for altering the patterns.

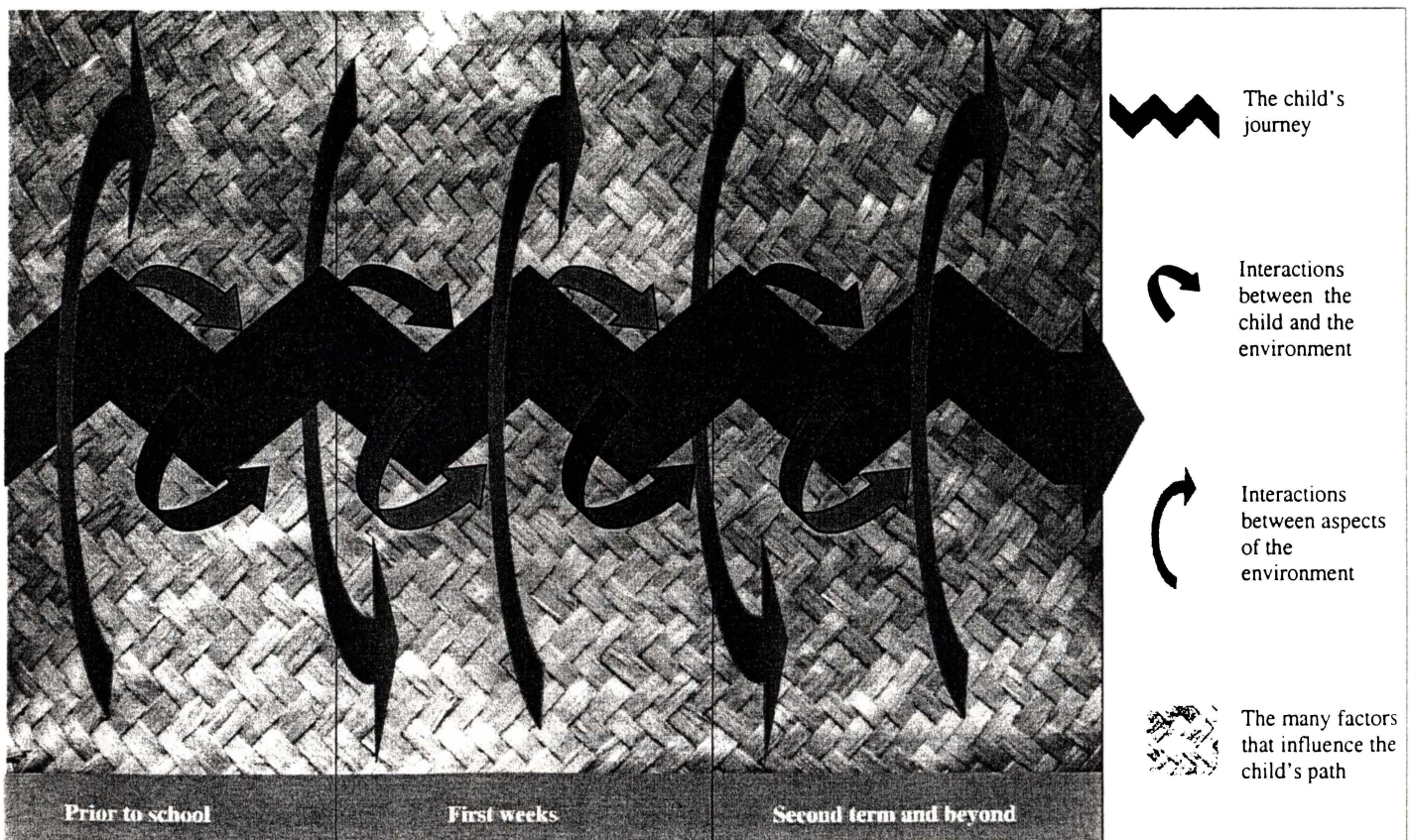


Figure 2. A theoretical framework for looking at children's experiences as they make the transition to school.

The sections that follow integrate material from the preceding chapters, to provide some synthesis with regard to key themes. However, these themes are by no means exhaustive of the possibilities offered by the richness of the data. This study has acknowledged the socially constructed nature of knowledge and understanding (see Dahlberg, et al. 1999), and the task has been one of meaning making, rather than seeking absolute truths. By providing sufficient information in the previous chapters, it is intended that the reader become a co-analyst in this meaning making (Erickson, 1985) and judge the validity of these final conclusions.

The children's pathways are complex

The findings showed that children's transition pathways could only be understood by looking at the transactional interactions of many attributes of both child and context, and between features of the context, such as the relationship between teachers and parents/caregivers, illustrated by the large and small arrows in Figure 2. Bronfenbrenner and Morris's (1997) model (incorporated into Figure 2), was useful in considering how the dispositions, resources and demand characteristics of the child interacted with features of the environment that appeared to inhibit, permit or invite engagement. External factors, from the levels Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986) referred to as the exosystem and macrosystem, also contributed to each individual's cycle of experience. Within the overall journey, the first day at school was a point at which many changes occurred, and hence was an "ecological transition", where the child's positioning in the ecological environment was altered as a result of the change in role and setting (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 26). Some of the strands of the background weaving in Figure 2, such as the curriculum documents and other aspects of practice (see Chapter Five), were quite separate on either side of the school entry point. Hence, the transition to school could be thought of as the border between different 'cultures', each with its own habitus (Mullholland & Wallace, 2000). There are many different ideas regarding the way in which crossing that border should be negotiated, and these views helped to shape the experiences of the individuals involved.

Although the complexity of the transition to school had been signaled in other research (Brooker, 2002; Ghaye & Pascal, 1988; Norris, 1999; Pollard, 1996; Pollard & Filer, 1999), and in the theoretical positions outlined in Chapter Two, the present study has provided new perspectives regarding the transactional nature of some of the influences, especially the ways in which quite different cycles of experience developed for individual children, who on the surface appeared to share many similarities. This indicated that the experience of starting school is a unique one. For example, parents

and teachers anticipated that children with siblings at the school would experience an easier transition than eldest/only children, because the people, places and things would be familiar. This fits with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) view that the mesosystem connections between home and school were already established for these children. However, the data showed that the precise nature of the overall experiences children had with school were more important than any single characteristic such as place in family. While many children had the opportunity to learn about school through their siblings, and had parents who were generally more informed and relaxed than parents whose first-born children were starting, others had very little knowledge of what the role of the pupil entailed, and seemed to have received less assistance with their transition because assumptions had been made by their parents and/or their teachers that they would be familiar with school and the pupil role. Also, reputations of other transition partners (children, families and teachers), formed during an eldest child's transition, could affect a sibling's experience even before he/she got to school. This sometimes had positive consequences, as in Tessa's story, where the teacher had established a positive view of Tessa's family, and Tessa anticipated benefits from attaining the role of school pupil, in other cases it worked against the younger child, as in Anna's case, where her siblings had made difficult transitions, so the teachers seemed to have viewed Anna as potentially problematic, and Anna expected that school was likely to be difficult. Hence, as the model in Figure 2 shows, it is important to consider the way in which developmental pathways vary as a function of the characteristics of the person, the contexts and the time periods in which the transactions take place (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1997), and not to make assumptions about how an experience will be based on isolated aspects of a complex reality.

Following the children's experiences over time raised questions about the length of time constituting 'transition', and about the data that are collected to reveal the nature of a child's transition (observations of behaviour, parent or teacher interviews, and the child's comments, in some cases, revealed different pictures of the same event). In addition, the initial experiences did not necessarily lead to stable cycles of experience. Starting school was a time when new roles were taken up, but the *ongoing* process of becoming a pupil appeared to be *as*, if not *more*, important than the initial contact with the school. These findings are particularly important at the present time, when a goal of the Ministry of Education's (2002g) strategic plan is to "distribute information about effective transition from ECE [early childhood education] to school practices" (p. 17). Deciding what constitutes an "effective transition" would need to be clarified before any meaningful assessment of effective transition practices could be made.

Establishing children as “capable learners” at school (Dockett & Perry, 2003b, p. 32) is one potential definition, but even this is open to a broad range of interpretation and debate about how it might be achieved. Teachers in this study, like those in Dockett and Perry’s (2001b, 2003b) research, *said* that children’s academic skills were not important on entry to school. However, what they *did* in response to a low score on initial assessments of academic skills such as alphabet knowledge indicated that academic skills did matter and the absence of such skills did seem to be detrimental for some children. Other potential definitions of “effective” transitions relate to children not showing visible signs of distress, either through tears or quiet withdrawn behaviour. However, tearful starts could be overcome, and sources of early trauma were sometimes forgotten (as in Nicola’s case), so that a negative experience initially was not always detrimental in the long term. Hence, claims about what is important have to be considered within the bigger picture of actual experiences. Further, any evaluation of what is “effective” should be considered over several terms of school as the child takes on the role of “a pupil”, and not just the initial transition over the first days.

Looking at the situation over a sustained period helped to distinguish those children for whom problems appeared to be ongoing. Although Furedi (2002) suggests that adults have been socialized to pathologise challenging events in ways that are unhelpful to children’s development, to simply ignore these children’s difficulties raises important equity issues. It appeared, as in Anna and Mele’s cases, that starting school may be particularly problematic for children whose families lack forms of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1993, 1997). Such children were positioned in ways that appeared unhelpful to their long-term progress as learners, unless the negative cycles of experience could be interrupted. This fits with McNaughton’s (2002) work in literacy, where schools were identified as “risky places” for children whose expertise from home did not fit with the expertise recognised by their school (p. 17). Thus, to do nothing when ongoing difficulties are identified is likely to disadvantage the children whose family habitus is least school-like (Brooker, 2002). This overlooks one of the goals of New Zealand education, which is to provide programmes that are “gender-inclusive, non-racist, and non-discriminatory, to help ensure that learning opportunities are not restricted” (Ministry of Education, 1993b, p. 7).

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that rather than eliminating challenge, transition practices should capitalise on the developmental possibilities of transitions by supporting children in the process of becoming a “pupil”, where difficulties appear

to be beyond those that they can negotiate alone. This fits with Vygotsky's (1978a) notion of working within the child's zone of proximal development to awaken or support developmental processes, which eventually become part of the child's independent achievement. Such support should look at the complex interaction of child and context, with the intention of ensuring that the experience is not so "challenging and disruptive that groups of individuals opt out of making the transition altogether, thus creating disadvantage" (Beach, in press, p. 36). For the children in this study, opting out of starting school was not a possibility, but where the challenges were too great, they appeared to opt out of aspects of the pupil role. This was sometimes because distress (either openly expressed, or manifest in quiet withdrawn behaviour), prevented their engagement with the learning opportunities of the classroom.

There are some common issues in the experience of transition

The issues for participants in this New Zealand study were similar to those found in studies from a range of other countries, which highlights some commonalities in the transition experience, despite the different contexts in which transition occurs. This study provided insights as to why that might be the case. For example, the data revealed what it is about lunchtimes that some children find upsetting. It also highlighted the adults' beliefs about children's independence, and the division of work and play at school. These helped to shape school practices, and hence children's experiences. The findings also suggested why, despite the attention that has been paid to transitions in the literature, in many respects little seems to have changed for New Zealand children and families since Renwick's (1984) study.

Lack of change can be explained, in part, by the fact that at the time when the children in this study were starting school, very little information was available to parents and teachers on this topic, compared to the flood of resources in recent years. However, the teachers were well aware of some of the challenges, such as lunchtimes. Many issues that were experienced as difficulties for some children, were aspects of school that were enjoyed by others. This perhaps leads to a view that problems, when they occur, are with the child, not the setting. It also means that efforts to eliminate what are difficult aspects of school for some children could raise new problems. For example, as Chapter Thirteen has shown, lunchtimes were frequently distressing, but for others this was the best part of the day. Similarly, teacher-led curriculum and pedagogy impacted negatively on some children, constraining their learning, while others blossomed in this context and were extended in new ways beyond what they

had achieved through their participation in more informal early childhood education environments. It was only when the contribution of these issues to the child's total experience was explored that their influence on an individual's transition was understood.

Further, much of the existing advice for supporting children's transitions has tended to focus on the individual child, on organizing familiarisation visits (Fabian, 2002; Renwick, 1997a), fostering friendships and developing social skills (Renwick, 1997a; N. Smith, 2002, 2003), ensuring the child has developed particular skills, such as using the toilet and dressing by themselves, looking after their own belongings, and having an awareness of colours, letters and numbers (Renwick, 1997a). While the findings of this study confirm that following such advice is potentially valuable, it will not ensure that all children have positive experiences, because the child is only one player in the complex weaving of different influences. This is perhaps why Crnic and Lamberty (1994) concluded from their review of literature on school readiness, that "we currently have no theory or credible empirical evidence" to identify specific skills required for school success (p. 96).

The value of identifying common issues is that they provide sites for looking at the interaction of individuals and contexts, and offer richer potential for effecting change than focusing only on the individual. The findings support an ecological approach to planning transitions, a view that is consistent with Dockett and Perry's (2001b, 2003b) guidelines for transition programmes. Such programmes should take a wide view of the influences on the process, including the reputations of children and their families that are created through particular practices and beliefs.

Reputations are gained and lost through assessment practices

Attention to assessment is imperative because both formal and informal assessment practices contribute to the reputations that are formed. Reputations are a key influence on transition experiences because they influence the learning opportunities to which a child is exposed (Ladd & Price, 1987; Timperley et al., 1999). Although the teachers spoke of adapting to children's individual differences, it was evident that, in practice, teachers had some implicit images of parents and children, which operated as norms against which both groups were judged. For the children who met these norms, this did not appear problematic. Those who exceeded expectations were acclaimed, and positive cycles of experience often resulted. Others, who fell below the teachers' judgments of appropriate 'five-year-old' behaviour and skills, were problematised

from the very beginning, which tended to overshadow their strengths, and positioned them in ways that could make initial reputations self-fulfilling, unless something happened to change the pattern. Similarly, families were positioned in particular ways, depending on how they conformed to expected norms for 'good' parenting.

The teacher-created new-entrant assessments used at Kowhai School were of the type that Carr (2001, p. 3) describes as a "folk model" of assessment, where children's achievements are checked against a list of skills. When deficits were revealed, such as the inability to name more than a few letters of the alphabet, this became a major focus for intervention that overshadowed much of the child's experience. This reflected the pattern Dahlberg et al. (1999) described, where theories of development (in this case contributing to ideas of what skills five-year-olds 'should' have) can start to function as if they were true models of reality, leading to the child becoming an object of normalization. Pedagogical practice then gets taken over by preventing and correcting deviations from the norm. Teachers at Kowhai were clearly not alone in this approach. Phillips et al. (2002) also described pressure "to achieve and to bridge gaps that exist on entry to school" as a feature of teaching to the clearly defined tasks to be learned in the primary school curriculum (p. 48).

Hence, although school curriculum documents do not prescribe what children of a certain age should know, assessment against particular achievement objectives did contribute to the reputations of individual children. As Chapter Five has noted, *Te Whaariki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) offers a very different approach to the New Zealand Curriculum Framework (Ministry of Education, 1993b), highlighting the socially constructed nature of curricula, and hence the images of children that they contribute to creating. This social construction is important to note because in several Western countries, early school education has become more prescribed, with demands for increased assessment of performance against narrowly defined goals and checklists (Fleer, 2002; Wood & Bennett, 1999, 2001). This reflects a particular approach to education, which aims to seek out and correct 'deficits', even though such assessment provides little guidance on *how* to improve performance (Fleer, 2002). It also overlooks the fact that the goals and related progressions that underpin the assessments are just one (of many possible) ways in which learning can be constructed.

In addition, focusing on children's deficits in relation to assessment tasks appears to lead teachers to overlook children's strengths in other areas. It certainly had the effect of highlighting areas of difficulty, rather than providing a holistic picture of a child's

abilities. The assessments that were used did not pick up other potentially useful information about the child as a learner. For example, in Anna's case the assessments did not identify her enthusiasm for writing, displayed as a four-year-old in her copious notebooks of scrawl, which could have provided an important foundation for literacy at school. Nor did it pick up on Anna's initial joy in bringing books home to read to a younger child. An alternative model of assessment, looking at the learner in action, could have provided a very different picture. As the example of the letter writing activity in Anna's story showed, in this instance Anna was inhibited by problems of finding the materials required, rather than the process of writing, but on other days when the task was clear and the resources were available, she was capable of meeting the requirements. Understanding the child's experience within the socio-cultural milieu of the classroom is likely to give a far better understanding of the child as a learner than knowledge of isolated skills identified on a test, (such as letter recognition), or an assessment of the work produced.

Although the curriculum seems to have been a major influence, other more implicit norms appear to have been operating in teachers' views of 'normal' or desired behaviour in areas such as independence and manners. The findings suggest that both the appropriateness of the norms that are constructed, and the nature of the assessments that are used, should be questioned, so that teachers are aware that different images of the same child can emerge from different forms of assessment (Carr, 2001).

Just as children established reputations in the school setting, so too did parents. For parents the assessment was subtler, but teachers clearly held implicit views of good parenting practice, and parents were deemed to reveal the extent to which they matched these norms by their actions and comments. Deficit views of parents appeared to offer little scope for building more positive relationships. In contrast, it appeared to be an advantage for parents (and their children), when the parents had social and cultural capital that was visible to the school. Again, different images of parents can emerge when different forms of assessment are used. This was demonstrated in Chapter Thirteen's discussion of Mele's mother, who was constructed as problematic, and seen as not caring, when measured against some of the teachers' norms. Viewed through different cultural lenses, one could see that the strength of kinship ties and love within this family, and the mother's desire for her children's school success, was far from uncaring. This provides teachers with a very different base from which to work.

There was an interesting tension evident in this study in the role teachers saw for parents. Although parents were expected to be involved and interested in their children's education, this belief existed alongside an emphasis on children's independence.

A focus on independence is not always helpful

The new entrant teachers' goal of independence as a developmental task for five-year-olds was evident in the skills that were valued, and in the practices designed to separate the child from the family. For example, visits were to be made by the child alone, and parents were discouraged from parent helping in the classroom until the child was 'settled'. Children were discouraged from playing with siblings at lunchtimes because "brothers and sisters can be a bit protective" (Ms Kent, p. 1). The benefits of peer tutoring were acknowledged, but generally only within same-age groups. This segregation by age is a very Western practice (Rogoff, 1990) and in some respects reflects a pedagogy of modeling, rather than more complex co-constructions of knowledge.

A focus on independence was evident in the maturational developmental theories reviewed in Chapter Two. Gesell and Ilg (1965) described it explicitly in their claim that at age five the child is ready to be somewhat independent from home and family. It is also implicit in other developmental theories, such as Piaget's, which often considered the interaction between the person and the environment, but tended to focus on the development of an individual child. The resulting child-centred approach to education valued self-reliance, self-improvement and independence as part of the autonomy believed necessary for a liberal society (Burman, 1997).

It is understandable that such views should be evident in the beliefs and practices of the teachers in my study. Their years of experience as teachers (between 18 to 30 years) mean that both the early childhood and school teachers would have trained when universal developmental theories dominated the theoretical landscape (Gregory, 1997; Fler, 1995, 2002). Knowledge of developmental theories can position schools as child-centred, model environments (Mayall, 1994), and can pathologise those who do not fit the norm, perhaps blaming either the child or family for perceived deficits (Burman, 1997). Although there has been a steady move to embrace a more sociocultural approach to learning (Fler, 2002; Jordan, 1999; Meade, 1998; Meade & Cubey, 1995; A. Smith, 1993, 1998), universal, decontextualised developmental

theories continue to contribute to our image of children. These create abstract maps of what children 'are' or 'should be' like. The classifications and categories in such theories provide descriptions of children that can "end up replacing the richness of children's lives and the inescapable complexity of concrete experiences" (Dahlberg, et al., 1999, p. 36). The strongly developmental nature of the curriculum documents for the essential learning areas of the NZCF (Ministry of Education, 1993b), compared with the more sociocultural and ecological focus of the early childhood curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1996) makes this influence more apparent at school.

Some aspects of independence (such as self care skills) are important in the school context. However, understanding the historical influences on ideas about children, and the fact that independence is a socially constructed goal, and not a universal requirement, opens up possibilities for changing some of the policies associated with this. The focus on the individual separates the child from many potential sources of support during the move to school. As the findings have shown, providing parents/caregivers with information allows them to play a role in scaffolding their child's experience. Contact with siblings allows for tuakana/teina relationships, where the older child takes responsibility for teaching the younger one (Royal-Tangaere, 1997). This extends the possibilities of the system observed in this study, where often the only people who were positioned to support a new child were the teacher, who had up to 28 other children to be responsible for, and the peers within the class.

Looking at the level of support a child receives opens up further possibilities with regard to assessment. As I noted earlier, focusing on the individual child overlooks the influence of context on functioning. In contrast, Carr (2001) has shown how the division between individual and environment becomes blurred when social and cultural purposes are attached to skills and knowledge. The challenge of developing sociocultural approaches to assessment has been discussed by Fler (2002) and others (e.g. Filer, 1993; Gipps, 1999). Fler supports Carr's Learning Story model, described in Chapter Four, as being on the "cutting edge" of work in this field, but suggests the focus of such stories has, to date, still been on the individual, with little scope for noting the mediation process or the cultural tools used in teaching-learning contexts (p. 112). Filer (1993) demonstrated that assessments did not simply reflect children's ability, but were a reflection of the teacher-created environment. Recent work, such as Carr and Claxton's (2004) descriptions of learning environments as prohibiting, affording, inviting, or potentiating, appear to provide a helpful framework for considering the relationship between individual and context. Possible new directions,

drawing on these ideas, will be discussed in the implications section.

Features of the Aotearoa/New Zealand context affect transitions

In Aotearoa/New Zealand, teachers are continually including new children into the class. The teachers in this study liked this because the established group of children could provide role models for the new children. However, with large classes and frequent enrolments, there were many instances in the busy life of a primary school where there was little support for a new child and family. For example, as Chapters Ten and Eleven have shown, although the school had put a lot of thought into developing ways of sharing information through information booklets and sheets, these were not always distributed. School visits for a number of children seemed ad hoc, and were not always at times that would have facilitated the child's understanding of school. New parents and children, instructed to arrive early, found it disconcerting to then have to wait for 20 minutes before anyone came to greet them, if the teacher was on crossing duty until 9 o'clock. Once children started school, it appeared that being the only new child meant children were absorbed into an active classroom, where sometimes little or no special arrangements were made to support them. Similarly, being the only very new child in the class could also lead to distress because he/she was not yet familiar with the language of the classroom, which as Curtis (1986) has pointed out, is a common source of discontinuity between early childhood and school. Other children were confused by the messages carried by the school bells.

Hence, although there may be pedagogical benefits in continuous entry because the event can be more individualized and personal for the child (Neuman, 2002; Renwick, 1984), the findings have demonstrated that this was not always the case. Similar experiences were identified in another New Zealand study, covering several different schools, with children often finding themselves involved in bewildering large group activities during their first days (Ledger, 2000). However, in a rural area, or other location where new children start less frequently, or where new entrant classes are smaller, there may be more time to provide scaffolding (Bruner, 1985; Sanchez & Thorpe, 1998; Wood et al., 1976) for new children when they start.

Another key finding was the apparent tensions new entrant teachers experienced from the competing demands of their role. Although they supported a child-centred approach to learning, they also had to assist children in adapting to the rules and routines of the school environment. As Yates (2001) has noted, even with a child-centred approach, the teacher has to provide a framework for behaviour and therefore

for learning. These rules and procedures would normally be established early in the school year, but when new children are continually joining the class, such frameworks have to be revisited time and time again, which may lead to a focus on these, rather than on learning. Tensions have also been identified between child-centred pedagogies and behaviourist curriculum achievement objectives. In her commissioned comment on the NZCF, Le Metais (2003) questioned whether a focus on short-term objectives might “diminish students’ enjoyment and success, and thus undermine their commitment to lifelong learning” (p. 12).

Two final points in relation to the Aotearoa/New Zealand context are, firstly, the increasingly multicultural population and the widening gap between rich and poor (Blaiklock et al., 2002), which are making the composition of school classes more diverse than they have ever been. Secondly, current enrolment patterns and the mobility of families are creating an increasingly complicated web of connections between early childhood services and schools. In this study these factors added to the challenges for early childhood and school teachers, as it impacted on their ability to make connections with all families and with the other sector. Understanding this complexity, and the challenges created by it, is an important aspect in the development of any policies and practices that seek to enhance the experiences of children and their families during the transition to school.

Implications for practice

There are two levels of implications arising from this study. The first accepts the current status quo in relation to the organization and structure of schooling, and looks at ways of managing and improving the transition experiences for the children, their families and their teachers. I have focused on this, as this is the area that is likely to have the most impact. However, it is relevant to note that the exploration of transitions leads to a second level of implications that questions what is required from schooling and what ‘counts’ as education at the early childhood and beginning school level. Many of the issues in relation to transition arise from school practices, which were developed in, and for, Western societies in earlier times. Therefore, while my focus has been about children learning to “do school,” what it means for children to be successful in this endeavour very much depends on the nature and purpose of education.

Keep the complexity in mind when planning for transitions

The transition to school is an important topic at the present time, and the findings of this study endorse the attention the Ministry of Education (2000g) and others are paying to the experiences of children as they make the move to school. However, although recommendations frequently include words like “effective” and “needs”, what is meant by these terms requires further definition. Woodhead (1997) has identified the problematic way statements about “needs” are used. These often draw on hidden assumptions, and despite there being various categories of need, the term is sometimes used indiscriminately in discourse and policy statements. It would be unfortunate if “effective transitions” were to be employed in the same way. The complexity of the experience, as described in this thesis, indicates that to be meaningful, any recommendation regarding effective transition practices first has to clarify what constitutes ‘effective’ in a particular context, for whom it is effective, and how effectiveness will be measured. As the data have shown, children, parents and teachers are all key participants in children’s transition to school, and what is effective for one group, might not be for another. Also, what appears effective on one measure may not be so on another.

Existing recommendations for collaborative approaches to planning transitions (Dockett & Perry, 2001b, Fabian, 2002, Margetts, 2002b) provide a forum for these definitions to be discussed and clarified within specific local contexts. A key aspect of such discussions should be to clarify whether the focus is on establishing children as capable and confident in their role as pupils (however this is defined in a particular context) and/or on establishing connections between children’s prior curriculum content knowledge, so that teachers can support children in building on this. Ideally, transition programmes will address both aspects. It is only when the *purpose* has been established that the steps to achieve it can be planned.

One of the challenges for a collaborative approach to planning is how to address the concerns of all involved. From the present study it appears that the voices of the families whose habitus is least like the school’s may be some of the most important, but also the most difficult ones to elicit. Power differentials between sectors can also mean that instead of collaboration, transition programmes become about instructing non-school participants in what the school wants, as in Robinson et al.’s (2000) study, rather than them actively contributing to the planning. In the past, children’s voices received very little attention, and although recent research has shown how their views regarding their transitions can be gathered (Dockett & Perry, 2003a, 2003c; Ledger,

2000), ensuring children's voices are heard and understood requires sensitivity from the adults involved. It is important to be aware that messages are conveyed, not just in children's words and pictures, but through their body language and behaviour (Blenkin, 1992), what they don't say (i.e. when they don't respond) (Fasoli, 2001), and when they choose to talk about something else (Ledger, 2000).

The next step is to explore how collaborative approaches work in practice. Dockett and Perry (2001b) and Margetts (2002b) have reported on some examples from Australia. A key aspect of these programmes appears to be flexibility to the requirements of specific contexts and participants. Those involved are likely to include members of the wider community. For example, in one area the proprietor of the bus company that transported children to school was part of the programme (Dockett, 2001). The present study revealed that even within one context, flexibility was important. The number of visits, nature of support and so on, very much depended on how these fitted into the total experience for each child and family. A further implication with regard to complexity is that what participants *say* is sometimes only part of the picture. Therefore, when assessing the impact of a transition programme, what is said should be considered alongside the participants' actual experiences.

The kindergartens in this study fed into many different schools, suggesting that extensive collaboration with the other settings may not always be possible. Also, collaborative planning requires time, resources, and skilled facilitators. Ideally such approaches will, in the future, be adequately funded. However, this study has highlighted a number of practical strategies that can be employed by any teacher or school. These involve some practical strategies, and wider implications for curriculum and assessment practices.

Some practical strategies

Although the emphasis of this study has been on the uniqueness and complexity of the transition experience, which indicated that it is more important to address individual concerns, rather than create rigid policies, there are some general recommendations that can be made.

Enhancing children's experiences of lunchtimes and other breaks

It is unfortunate that for many children the most common problems on entry to school are associated with the supposedly pleasurable break times. Similar findings have

been noted in many other studies (Cleave, et al., 1982; Curtis, 1986; Lareau, 1997; Ledger, 2000; Mayall, 1994; Moore, 2001; N. Smith, 2003). The regulation of work and rest in the school context creates opportunities for children to engage in largely unsupervised play during the breaks. With the increased supervision of children's lives outside of school (Furedi, 2001, 2002) it has been argued that these breaks provide children with their main opportunity to interact and develop friendships (Blatchford, 1999; Evans & Pellegrini, 1997). They also provide important opportunities for imaginative play, something Vygotsky (1978b) saw as crucial to children's intellectual development. However, such benefits only occur if children are actually engaged in play. Unhappy children, especially those without friends, appear to have spent this time simply waiting for school to resume.

It appears that children's attitudes to school and their learning would be enhanced by creating play spaces that afforded greater social interaction, whilst also making the consequences of not having anyone to play with less devastating. Kowhai School began to tackle the problem by painting outlines for games onto the concrete in the junior school area. However, it is important that children are not limited to organized games, but also encouraged to foster imaginative exploration through free play materials. Rather than bemoaning the fact that children cannot "make their own fun", schools could take responsibility for acknowledging the role the environment plays in prohibiting, affording or inviting, them to do so. Teachers could also focus on some of the essential skills in the New Zealand Curriculum Framework (Ministry of Education, 1993b), such as problem solving and social and cooperative skills. These would support children in their role, not just as pupils in the classroom, but also as 'school pupils' which includes being lunchtime players.

The current design of many schools makes it difficult, but not impossible, to create an area for the new entrants that is reserved for their use and offers interesting materials for play. Teachers could actively involve children in discussing how lunchtimes should be managed, and what to do when they are upset, or do not have anyone to play with. Children's concerns could be given respectful attention and treated as an opportunity for problem solving. The children could also be involved in determining if/when new entrants should play in the wider school playgrounds. In a smaller area children would be more able to locate their friends, and may experience less concern about being deserted. Others may wish to play in the 'big' playground, especially if they have older siblings. Any strategies should be monitored and evaluated at regular intervals, and if unsuccessful, children and teachers could develop alternatives.

Reducing concern over using the school toilets

Although only a small number of children were concerned about using the toilets, this issue was significant for those involved. As noted in Chapter Thirteen, a hand signal such as the 'T' sign would distinguish requests to go to the toilet from other interruptions or questions. School visits could include viewing the toilets and discussion of policies surrounding their use, which could be reiterated when the child started school. For boys this should include the use of urinals. For all children, the teacher's attitude is likely to be important. When a child is anxious about using the toilets, a relaxed supportive attitude, such as Ms Keane's, could reduce the problem, whereas increasing tension for the child could make things worse.

Fostering friendships

The present study, and others (Dockett & Perry, 1999a, 1999b; Fabian, 1999; Ladd, 1990; Ladd & Price, 1987; Margetts, 1997; Moore, 2001; Pellegrini & Smith, 1993) have shown the role of friendships to be important on entry to school. Given the impact the friendships had on many aspects of children's overall cycles of experience, there appears to be considerable evidence that a focus on relationships at the beginning school level is at least as important as the priority currently given to children's achievement in literacy and numeracy. As was discussed in Chapter Thirteen, teachers could incorporate activities to enhance social inclusion, and consider the impact of school and classroom practices on this. Early childhood services should be alert to the social aspects of transition, and support children and families in developing friendships between children who are moving to the same school. When children enter a school where they don't know anyone, new entrant teachers could take responsibility for introducing children and their families to others.

A particularly difficult aspect of transition for some of the families in this study was the two o'clock finish for new children. A number of families lived such a distance from the school there was barely time to get home before they had to go out again to collect older children at three. The alternative was to spend an hour walking the streets or looking at the shops near to the school, the appeal of which palled after six weeks. As with the visits, it appears that a more flexible approach could be helpful. In this case creating a 'space' where children and caregivers could congregate between 2 and 3 p.m. if they wished, would alleviate some of the difficulties for families and also provide another forum where friendships might be fostered.

Planning and evaluation of school visits

The adult participants universally acclaimed pre-entry visits for children as important, but, as Chapter Ten showed, it would be useful to identify what purpose different participants hope they will serve, and to determine whether policies on visiting are actually accomplishing their intended function. It appeared that it might be helpful to create specific days and times for visits, so that teachers can focus on the objectives of the visit. In a large school like Kowhai, having specific days and times for visits would mean that several children were likely to visit on the same day, thus fostering connections between new children. However, some flexibility may be required if families cannot make the allotted times. The role of parents/caregivers during visits should also be considered. Parents were very keen to visit and see what happened in the classroom. If teachers feel strongly that visiting alone advantages children, the visiting policies could be extended to allow parents/caregivers to visit without their children on a different day.

Home-school communication and relationships

Kowhai School had developed a number of methods for sharing information with families. These provide useful models for other schools. However, the fact that many parents did not actually receive the information shows that distribution polices need to be monitored. In this context it would have been helpful if the information book had been sent to families when children were offered a place at the school, along with a letter inviting visits, and a brief summary of the information that was shared at the lunchtime meeting at Azure Kindergarten. Once a child has started school, a checklist could be incorporated into the initial documentation, so that parents could indicate what written information they had received, and teachers could ensure that any missing items were distributed. Information events, such as the new parents morning tea, could be offered prior to a child starting, so that parents felt more relaxed about the new setting. Early childhood services could include many of the recent publications aimed at supporting and informing parents/caregivers at this time (examples of which include: Fabian, 2002, Educational Review Office, 2000a; Renwick, 1997a, 1997b).

It appears that a parent-teacher interview after the child had been at school for a few weeks could be an important practice for schools. Many parents indicated how much they would have appreciated an opportunity to talk to their child's teacher. Although teachers felt that they operated an 'open door' policy, not all parents experienced it as such, and it appeared that communication could be enhanced by creating 'official' time and space for this to happen with all parents/caregivers. The Education Review Office

(2000a) has suggested that “good schools” have sufficient information after about one month to report on a child’s “learning needs” (p. 8). An interview would provide an opportunity for parents/caregivers to contribute to the school’s assessment, and to voice any questions or concerns of their own. This could reduce some of the tension for parents who felt unable to access the information that they wanted, and might reduce some of the pressure on teachers (and others), as parents would know that such an opportunity would be coming up, and might refrain from attempting in-depth conversations before and after school. However, such a policy should not preclude other more casual forms of contact, as some parents may be reluctant to attend an ‘official’ interview.

In relation to ongoing communication between home and school, it is important to acknowledge the realities of parents’ lives. In this study it was an advantage for families when parents were involved in parent helping, (although school policy meant this could only be established after the child was ‘settled’), because these parents had access to more information about what happened at school. However, many parents were constrained in the involvement they could have. It appears that it could be useful for schools to take more steps to facilitate parental participation, while also reviewing practices to ensure that not being involved was not so detrimental. As Brooker (2002) has already pointed it out, it is also important that schools take account of the invisible, as well as the on site, support parents provide. Better home-school communication is likely to foster understanding on both sides and strengthen respectful relationships.

Changes to curriculum: Acknowledging the dual role for students

Overall, this study shows that during the first year of school, children are learning to become pupils *and* learning curriculum content. The two aspects are closely interrelated, and yet, although this has been increasingly recognised in the literature (Blenkin, 1992; Brooker, 2002; Fields, 1997; Hill et al., 1998; Jackson, 1987), it is not reflected in the curriculum documents that guide practice. In fact, the current move to focus on literacy and numeracy (Ministry of Education, 2001d) potentially overshadows the dual role for children by drawing more attention to their performance against a developmental curriculum, rather than how they are maintaining (or developing) identities as competent learners, in the process of becoming school pupils.

One way to address many of the issues that arose in this study could be to plan for children’s learning in the essential learning areas of the NZCF (Ministry of Education, 1993b) *within* the framework provided by *Te Whaariki* (Ministry of Education, 1996).

Taking the principles and strands of the early childhood curriculum *Te Whaariki* into the first year (at least) of school would foreground the principles of empowerment, holistic development, family and community, and relationships, and provide a framework to guide teachers in ensuring that children's well being and sense of belonging were established, and that they had opportunities to contribute, communicate and explore. Such an approach would legitimize some of the aspects of transition that the teachers in this study felt were important, but which were overshadowed because they were not part of the curriculum and hence not assessed or reported on. Consideration of the learning dispositions of courage and curiosity, trust and playfulness, perseverance, confidence and responsibility, that Carr (1998a, 1998b, 1998c, 2001) has associated with the strands of *Te Whaariki*, could draw attention to issues surrounding lunchtimes, toilets and friends that impact on children's well-being, and hence their learning. It could also alert teachers to aspects of classroom practice that are potentially detrimental to children's long term learning, such as a focus on performance goals, rather than learning goals (Smiley & Dweck, 1994) that can make children reluctant to persist with difficulty and challenge.

An additional recommendation is to prioritise the *Health and Physical Education* curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1999) at the beginning school level. Its achievement objectives in the *Relationships with other people* and *Healthy communities and environments* strands provide a framework for addressing many of children's concerns with respect to friendships, and creating culturally and socially "safe" environments (p. 15). Also, as one of the last curriculum documents to be published, it is more conceptually similar to the early childhood curriculum, having a strong socio-ecological perspective, a holistic approach to well-being and a focus on consultation with families and the community.

These suggestions are timely because, although the Ministry of Education in Aotearoa/New Zealand is proud of its early childhood curriculum, with the Secretary for Education having described it in recent months as "world class" (Fancy, 2003a, p. 2, 2003b, p. 2) and a "world leader" (Fancy, 2003d, p. 5), the potential of the framework for school appears, as yet, to have received little attention. Brief links to *Te Whaariki* in the mathematics and English assessment exemplars at Level One of the school curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2003) do not capitalize of the power of the framework for focusing attention on the children's learning dispositions. More promising connections were suggested in the *Curriculum Stocktake Report* (Ministry of Education, 2002a), which recommended: a) five groupings of essential skills in the

NZCF, in line with the five strands of *Te Whaariki*, b) that the skills should also include attitudes, and c) that “there should be three dimensions of these skills and attitudes – the capability to use skills, discernment in use, and willingness to use skills” (p. 63). Although not currently government policy, if the recommendations of the stocktake report were to be adopted, it could potentially go some way towards focusing on children’s dispositions as learners, depending on how these were addressed in practice. Adapting Learning Stories in the way I have suggested could provide a practical framework for teachers to evaluate the interaction of child and environment, and the way this impacts on the child’s learning dispositions. Hence, combining the early childhood and school curricula in the first year(s) of school could help focus attention on the child as ‘learner’, rather than the child as ‘conformer’, and thus reduce the attention paid to behaviours such as the child’s willingness to sit quietly on the mat, which this, and other studies (Timperley et al., 1999) have shown often features in ideas about children’s preparation for school.

Reframing assessment practices

The “learning needs” that the Education Review Office (2000a, p. 8) suggest will be identified in the first weeks of school reflect what Bird (2003) described as an expert-defined needs discourse, which were common in policy statements in the 1990s. It implies that the learning needs of children are obvious, and that “consensus on the types and priorities of needs is reasonably clear” (p. 46), when in fact they are culturally constructed and open to discussion (Woodhead, 1997). The findings of this study suggest that children’s learning should be identified and reported on in a holistic way (rather than focused on deficits and gaps to be filled), meaning that new approaches to assessment are required.

Using *Te Whaariki* at the beginning school level would reframe assessment practices away from check-listing skills, to focus on exploring the ways in which “the human relationships and the programme provide a learning environment, which is based on the goals of the curriculum” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 29). The principles of empowerment and holistic development preclude deficit models that overlook both the broader aspects of children’s experiences, and the way they are positioned as learners as a result of the assessment. In Chapter Nine, I showed how the Learning Story model of assessment provides useful insights into the interaction of child and context. Learning dispositions are foregrounded in this approach, but the learning stories can also include details of specific skills from the learning areas of the NZCF (Ministry of Education, 1993b). This applies equally to learning stories conducted in early

childhood. One approach to such documentation, where ‘lenses’ allow specific aspects of mathematics to be illustrated within authentic meaningful activities, was developed by the working group looking at *Te Whaariki and mathematics in early childhood education*. This provides a holistic and contextualised account of children’s learning, and potentially avoids the pressure for early formality highlighted in Chapter Twelve. It also provides a clear indication of prior learning upon which the school can build.

Greater knowledge of the early childhood curriculum could allow new entrant teachers to ‘read’ assessment portfolios from early childhood with greater meaning. This could provide a tangible link between settings and an opportunity for school to build on prior learning, even when direct collaboration is not possible. However, given that many of the parents in this study desired a ‘fresh start’ for their children, it may be something that parents choose to share at the first interview, rather than when children enter school.

Another important facet in reframing assessment is to acknowledge that views of children (and families and teachers) are socially constructed. The findings have shown that the beliefs and practices that shaped the experiences of children and others were often drawn from images and norms that were not fully articulated, let alone opened to debate and discussion. Norms are based on descriptions of particular cultural groups, and yet as Burman (2000) has noted, they can start to act as prescriptions. Acknowledging the social construction of such norms provides an important avenue for changing policies and practices that disadvantage particular groups or individuals. Rather than making assumptions about how children (or parents or teacher) ‘are’ or ‘should be’, it appears more profitable to consider their actual experiences, and identify the way deficit assessments arise in relation to particular views. Such an approach opens the possibility of acknowledging the alternative pictures that emerge when different ‘lenses’ are applied.

Acknowledging the special nature of the new entrant teacher’s role

This study has demonstrated the important dual task new entrant teachers have, not only in fostering learning in both the new and established members of the class, but also in supporting children's adaptation to the school environment. It appears that the difficulties for parents, teachers and families presented by the Aotearoa/New Zealand system could be better managed by acknowledging the special nature of the new entrant teacher’s role, by keeping new entrant class sizes small, and reducing new entrant teachers’ commitments to other school duties.

The findings have shown that it is more challenging for all concerned when the class size rises to the upper 20s. Even experienced and efficient teachers struggled to keep track of what information new children and families had been given, and to observe how children responded to the socio-cultural milieu of the classroom. Parents found busy teachers difficult to access, and this was exacerbated when the number of parents seeking attention increased. As noted earlier, large classes impacted on the possibilities for school visits. Hence, although researchers disagree about the influence of small class size in the early years of school on academic achievement (see Gilman & Kiger, 2003; Stecher, McCaffrey, & Bugliari, 2003), this does appear to be an area that is worthy of attention. On its own a small class does not guarantee high quality learning experiences, but it is likely to support teachers in getting to know children and enabling them to take a proactive role in scaffolding children's thinking. This is reflected in a number of studies reviewed by Mitchell and Cubey (2003), and in Phillips et al.'s (2002) research on literacy interventions at the beginning school level, where higher gains were made for children in smaller classes.

The present study suggests that teachers at the new entrant level have an important role in establishing a sense of well-being and belonging for children and families. This is enhanced by teachers being available at the start of the day to welcome children and parents to the classroom, and having time to ensure that children have found their lunch and a place to eat at lunchtime. Teachers at this level also have other liaison activities, such as contact with the local early childhood services. If collaboration were to be increased across sectors, this aspect would require more time for its implementation. Hence, freeing new entrant teachers from other school responsibilities, such as crossing and lunchtime duties, could be another way of supporting them in their role.

Implications for teacher education

The theoretical approach taken in this study could provide a useful framework for teachers to understand children's transition to school. The importance of an understanding of child development for teachers has been acknowledged for a long time (most famously perhaps in the 'Plowden Report', Department of Education and Science, 1967). In the past, it was recommended that teachers should be well versed in their understanding of the characteristics of different stages of development, and the implications of these for practice (e.g. Piaget, 1969/1970). Today, the understanding required has become more complex. Universal theories have been challenged, because

they tend to overlook the actual lives, experiences and feelings of children, and can position children and families in unhelpful, or detrimental ways (Dalhberg et al., 1999, p. 36). In acknowledging the complex realities of children's lives, we are less certain of what children "need" (James, 1998; Jenks, 1996; Woodhead, 1997). Hence, teachers today require greater understanding of many different theoretical approaches to children's development, and a more informed, critical perspective, than they did when they were simply required to see how individual children conformed to certain norms or developmental 'maps'. This suggests that human development arguably deserves more attention in teacher education programmes than in the past.

If such courses of study include consideration of the cultural construction of ideas about children, and how different constructions have different implications for the roles of parents and teachers, this could help to clarify some of the conflicting advice with which teachers are faced. It is important to identify the key role teachers have in creating environments that inhibit, afford or invite learners to engage in particular responses "more or less frequently, or skillfully, or appropriately" (Claxton & Carr, 2004, p. 88), and the broad ecological influences on this process. In this approach, curricula are recognized as culturally constructed documents. While the levels of learning suggested within them are helpful frameworks, often based on research that has identified particular progressions, other equally valid pathways for development may be possible. Similarly, implicit norms are also identified as cultural constructions. In both cases, the images of children could change if different cultural 'lenses' were applied. Hence, rather than deficit models of assessment, diversity can be acknowledged, and alternative strengths recognized.

Supported challenges, rather than seamless education

This study provides important insights regarding the transition to school that have implications for policy. In recent years there has been a focus on developing continuity between the early childhood education and school. In Aotearoa/New Zealand this has been conceptualized within a goal of "seamless" education (Ministry of Education, 1994b). Today, the aim is for "coherence" (Ministry of Education, 2002g). Under the strategy of coherence, the Ministry of Education appears to be seeking stronger "alignment" between the sectors (Fancy, 2003b, 2003c). To date, recommendations have focused on aligning the essential skills of the NZCF with the strands of *Te Whaariki* (Carr, 2003; Ministry of Education, 2002a). Although, as noted earlier, this idea appears to have merit, any policy which involves creating seamless, or aligned, educational provision must be treated with caution. Given the

systemic differences between early childhood and school, this is likely to be shaped by the demands of school, rather than drawing from the strengths of both sectors. Maintaining the integrity of early childhood aims and practices, and avoiding a push down from school was one of the motivations for developing the early childhood curriculum in the first place (Carr & May, 1993). The current recommendation is to align the school curriculum with the strands of the early childhood curriculum, but achieving the proposed goals, of the capability (to use the skills), discernment (in their use), and willingness (to use them) (Ministry of Education, 2002a), is likely to be assisted if the principles of *Te Whaariki* are also adopted. Otherwise the sociocultural framework may be lost and essential skills could simply become decontextualised and checklisted, which would not achieve the intended goals and could impact negatively on existing early childhood assessment practices. Further, New Zealand society is becoming more diverse, and even if early childhood services and schools were to be aligned, many children would still encounter differences between the habitus of home and school. Hence, while alignment of the skills and attitudes components of the two curricula would provide some consistency in the educational focus, it would not address all the issues children face on entry to school.

Although coherence implies logical and orderly progression, it also suggests being 'capable of intelligible speech'. The findings of this study support the latter definition as a promising policy direction. It appears that children do not require homogeneity, or protection from the potentially difficult situations that they encounter in the process of becoming school pupils. However, when the challenges are too great for them to negotiate alone, a focus on support that is empowering is important. This includes scaffolding them into their role as pupils and making connections with, and building on, their prior learning. Applying Mullholland and Wallace's (2000) analogy of 'border crossing,' the transition to school can be viewed as a journey. If participants are to have rights of access on this journey, one can try and remove all the potential hazards, a task that may prove impossible, and ultimately may give rise to new problems. Alternatively, as this study has indicated, a more beneficial approach might be to know what the hazards are *from the point of view of others*. Participants who understand the situation, not just from their own position, but also with empathy and understanding of other perspectives, are likely to be best placed to achieve coherence by talking in ways that are "intelligible" to the other parties involved.

Reflections on the research process

The relationship between the researcher and the participants is a key aspect in qualitative research, and reflections on this form a significant part of the study. Following Holliday's (2002) recommendations, I have addressed the way that I planned and managed the research, and my influence on the data that were gathered, in Chapter Eight: *Research Method*. In this final chapter I return to the research process to reflect on its overall significance for the study.

One of the strengths of the research method was the collection of rich data from multiple sources and by a variety of methods. This was a key aspect in understanding the complexity. The value of exploring different perspectives on the topic has already been shown in several studies (e.g. Dockett & Perry, 1999a, 1999b, 2001a, 2003b; Ghaye & Pascal, 1988), which have indicated that children sometimes have different issues from those of their parents and teachers. The present study also looked at different perspectives, but through a case study approach that has explored what was said, in the context of what happened in practice. The longitudinal aspect, provided by the stories of the case study children and their families, has allowed the picture to unfold over time, before, during, and after children started school. Pollard and Filer (1999) have provided an even more detailed picture over seven years, which has offered many insights into children's careers as pupils, but their study was not focused specifically on transitions, and was set in the UK. My study has particular relevance for the Aotearoa/New Zealand context, because it highlights the issues that arise as features of that context, which should be kept in mind when determining policy.

In any research, the data gathered will be influenced by the preoccupations and agendas of the participants, including the researcher (Holliday, 2002). The focus for this study arose from my own interest in aspects of the topic relating to the different concerns of those involved, prompted by the literature review, and initial conversations with teachers. This shaped the questions that were asked in the first interviews. Most parents seemed to welcome the opportunity to talk about their child's and their own experiences. When there had been challenges, having a sympathetic ear to share these with potentially emphasized this aspect of the data further. It is important to note that different data gathering methods might have revealed a very different picture, indicated by the fact that none of the parents in the study had taken the opportunity to voice their concerns in a written form through the school's suggestion box.

The principal had instigated the study's location in his school, providing a collegial base from which to start. However, while this had a number of advantages there were also some disadvantages. Firstly, I was constantly aware that my own progress in data analysis and writing was much slower than was expected by the school. The demands of balancing research with fulltime employment, and the fact that I had three jobs and moved cities twice during the write-up period meant that the final report was produced several years after the data collection began. I was able to provide the school with verbal feedback during the data collection phase, and copies of papers as they were written during the analysis period, but I was aware from the teachers' comments that they had perhaps expected a fairly instantaneous move from data collection to final report, and I felt uncomfortable about my inability to produce this. I wished that I could have provided a realistic time frame at the outset, but had been unaware myself of just how long the process would take.

Another issue, as noted in Chapter Eight, was the fact that because the school principal and several teachers wished to be involved in the study, it raised ethical considerations regarding the involvement of other teachers. Also, because the findings were shared with the participants, the teachers were likely to be concerned about the images of themselves and their practices that would be portrayed. It can be difficult to be observed, and to know that your actions might be talked about (Bogdan & Bicklen, 1982), and I was mindful of this when I spoke and wrote about the study. While children, their families and their teachers are all key players in the transition process, teachers hold the ultimate power in the classroom (M. Jackson, 1987). Therefore, the responsibility for many of the recommendations regarding ways in which transition can be enhanced inevitably rests with teachers. However, if research of this type positions teachers as deficient, it falls into the same trap of assessing against hidden norms that sometimes happens for children, an approach that has been challenged by the findings. My aim has been to "expand perception and enlarge understanding" (Eisner, 1991, cited in Mullholland & Wallace, 2000, p. 4) and in doing so I have tried to look at the potential hazards from the point of view of *all* the participants.

Combining the research with my position as a university lecturer placed constraints on the data collection because observations had to be fitted around my teaching commitments at the university. It was not always possible to observe every event that would have been of interest, such as each child's first days. Also, maintaining confidentiality for the children and families meant that I wasn't always able to gather data from the school about that might have been useful.

I found using the remote microphones during the observations of children was more difficult than in previous studies I had been involved in. It appears that the teacher's response may be an important factor in determining the how successful a researcher will be in obtaining cooperation from children in relation to wearing the microphones. In my earlier studies the use of microphones had been fully supported by teachers, who encouraged the children to wear them. In this study, the teachers were initially reserved about the use of microphones. It was interesting that once greater trust had been established with the teachers, the children were happier to wear the microphones.

During the years of the study there has been a marked shift in relation to gathering children's voices in research. The initial proposal included looking at the perspectives of the three participant groups, but although it proposed informal conversations with children, it did not include planned interviews. During the interpretive process described in Chapter Eight, it became clear that it would be useful to include this aspect in the longitudinal phase, which led to the inclusion of the interviews with the eight-year-olds. The drawing task was a particularly useful addition to the semi-structured interview in that it created a space for children to talk, without pressure to do so. However, it would have been interesting to gather more on the children's voices at the start. Since this study began a wide range of interview techniques have been developed that could assist in this process (Carr, 1997, 2000; Dockett & Perry, 1999b, 2003a, 2003c; Ghaye & Pascal, 1988; Gollop, 2000; Graue & Walsh, 1998; Ledger, 2000; MacGreggor et al., 1998; Moore, 2001), although these do not always guarantee that children will want to talk (see Carr, 2000; Dockett & Perry, 1999b).

Another consideration with regard to the data that were collected is that, although a recursive approach was followed, with data collection and analysis being ongoing, there was a further period of analysis that occurred after the fieldwork was complete. The boundedness (Holliday, 2002) of a case study also includes the dimension of time. Just as the data form only part of the *mélange* of social life, the recursive steps of analysis form only part of a potentially infinite process. As was discussed in Chapter Eight, sufficient data were gathered for the purposes of the study. However, inevitably new questions were raised by the analysis. For example, my own thinking changed considerably over the time, which highlighted the naivety of some of my original interview questions (such as those regarding children's 'readiness'), and it would have been interesting to revisit some of these topics. Also, it would have been useful to obtain the teachers' comments on the later themes that emerged with regard to norms,

but data collected at that point, several years after the original data were gathered, would not necessarily have captured the teachers' thoughts at the time of the study. This means that the final round of analysis, rather than leading to more data collection to explore these issues further in the present study, signals potential areas for more research.

Implications for further research

Interest in the transition to school has intensified, rather than abated, since this study began. In the current political context in Aotearoa/New Zealand, work is already progressing in relation to aligning the essential skills of the NZCF with the strands of *Te Whaariki*. It appears that exploratory work is urgently required to look at how this could work in practice. Further, ideas in a setting are socially constructed and draw on a long history. The differences that currently exist between early childhood and school will influence how curricula changes are viewed, understood and implemented. Therefore, if the curriculum change does go ahead, it will be important to explore how best to achieve shared understandings across sectors. This recommendation is endorsed in a recent review by Mitchell and Cubey (2003), which noted "professional development aimed at strengthening partnerships between primary and early childhood teachers, including ways to build primary teachers' understanding of *Te Whaariki* is an unexplored area of research, which warrants further investigation" (p. 101).

Sociocultural approaches to curriculum require changes in assessment practices. Therefore, the inclusion of members of the Education Review Office in opportunities to 'build understanding' is another important step, because sociocultural approaches to assessment will require reviewers to whom the data are intelligible. Otherwise, recommendations in their evaluation reports may draw from other theoretical positions. This was illustrated in an area of improvement suggested in one recent kindergarten review, which stated that the teachers' Learning Story evaluations of individual children should be linked to "the ages and stages of conceptual development as identified in *Te Whaariki*" (Education Review Office, 2003).

Work is currently underway to look at collaborative approaches to transitions. Amanda Jackson (Hei Ara Kokiri Tuwharetoa Education Initiative, personal communication, November 21, 2003), has explained that a pilot programme planned for 2004 aims to utilize Dockett and Perry's (2003a, 2003c) method of getting children

to take photographs of important areas of the school. The intention is to bring these together in a book that highlights the important issues for children, as one step in the process of establishing pedagogical links between early childhood education services and school. Having gathered children's views, it would be useful to involve them in planning transition programmes. As Thiessen (1997) has noted, despite an increased interest in children's views, few schools have created spaces for children to directly influence the policies and curricula that affect them. The proposed study also plans to gather the views of whanau and teachers. In any future research, such as this, it will be important to see how to overcome some of the systemic differences between sectors that might make collaboration difficult, and to explore ways to incorporate the voices of different families into the process.

It would also be useful to investigate how widely schools are required to alter existing practices. Given that a relatively small proportion of children appear to have ongoing difficulties, it may be possible that with slight adjustments, and increased understanding and empathy on the part of their teachers, their concerns can be addressed. For example, it would be helpful to expand on Nanette Smith's (2003) playground research to see how children's experiences of this aspect of school could be improved. The alternative approaches to curriculum and assessment I have proposed in this thesis could be explored in classroom settings to see if they did assist in developing positive cycles of experience for children. Providing time and space for teachers to get to know families, and actively challenging cultural constructions to avoid deficit judgments, as well as increased understanding across sectors, may well assist teachers built on existing good practice to ensure that more children become successful 'border crossers' as they take on the role of school pupils.

Appendix A

A descriptive summary of some of the key studies on starting school and other transitions

<i>Study</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Participants</i>	<i>Time frame</i>	<i>Research Methods</i>	<i>Issues/Themes</i>
Hughes, Pinkerton & Plewis (1979)	England 13 schools		4 school terms	Teacher ratings of 260 chn	Difficulties on starting school Ratings on entry & four terms later Impact of intake organisation
B. Jackson (1979)	England 1 school	6 chn, 4yrs	1 st term at school	Ethnographic	Children's experiences Culture
Cleave, Jowett & Bate (1982)	England	36 chn	Several months	Observations – 6weeks at home/pre school 6 weeks at school Interviews with parents, ece staff, head of infant sch. & school teachers Case studies of chn	Comparison of settings & activities Longitudinal study of chn's experiences Continuity/ discontinuity Role of parents Play & dinner time
Renwick (1984)	New Zealand	<i>Pilot study</i> (numbers not specified) 30 Parent diaries <i>Main study</i> 300 new entrant teachers 300 ece teachers & supervisors 300 parents		Talking to children Interviews with parents ece teachers and new entrant teachers Postal questionnaire	Children's transition experiences Parent and school School/early childhood contact Administrative issues Teachers' experiences
Alexander & Entwisle (1988)	US 20 schools	825 children (625 remaining year 2)	2 years	Parent questionnaire Student questionnaire Teacher questionnaire Report cards CAT scores School record data	Impact of home/school factors Race Achievement patterns
Ghaye & Pascal (1988)	England 1 school	2 classes	1 st term	Obs inc. video in 6 school situations Photographs to discuss 47 parent questionnaires 7 parent diaries Home visits	Collaborative research methods Four-year-olds in school Rites of passage Transitions Incorporations
Lareau (1989)	USA First grade classrooms in 2 schools	2 school communities	6 months obs Interviews with ps after chn's 1 st & 2nd Grade	Participant observation Interviews with parents, teachers, principals & other school staff	Comparison of relationships between home and school in a working & upper-middle-class areas Impact of family-sch relationships on chn's school experiences
Ku'ai (1990)	New Zealand 3 kohanga reo -> 3 schools	6 chn, 4.5-5 yrs		Observation in ece & sch	Move from kohanga reo to Bilingual & mainstream classes. Differences in instruction & impact of match/mismatch in ece & school

Epstein & Dauber (1991)	US 8 schools	171 teachers		Teacher questionnaire	Attitudes to parent involvement Sch's strengths and weaknesses Re different types of parent involvement.
Cullen (1992)	Australia	16 chn in two ec centres		Observation in ece Obs coded and analysed for chn's approaches to learning	Chn selected from teacher ratings of readiness. 4 high and 4 low readiness in each setting. Compared re approaches.
		10 of the original 16 chn		Obs in primary school Teacher ratings of Chn's achievement	Compare with earlier obs. Approaches to learning. Influence of context.
Graue (1993)	USA 3 schools	3 school communities		Ethnography	The social construction of readiness Influence of ideas about chn on educational practice
Pramling & Williams-Granelid (1993)	Sweden	12 ece teachers 25 chn, 7 yrs		Interviews	Preparation Children's experiences
Mayall (1994)	England 1 school	5-6 yr olds (Also 9-10 yr olds)	2 terms	Observation Conversations with chn Class discussions Teacher interviews	Socialisation at home and at school Contextual factors influencing learning and behaviour
Hill, Comber, Loudon, Rivalland & Reid (1998)	Australia	100 4-5 yr olds (20 case studies)	Last 3 mths of ece & first months of School	Literacy assessments before school and after starting sch Interviews, obs and documents for case studies	Literacy outcomes & development Current pedagogy and practice Social capital Connections & disconnections
Fabian (1998)	England 2 schools	50 chn in 1 st yr 24 of these were followed into Year One & Two	3ys 2mths	Interviews with chn, parents and teachers Observations Also a questionnaire sent to 26 schools	Preparation for school. Concerns. Induction programmes. Information for parents. Relationships.
Dalli (1999)	New Zealand 5 childcare centres	5 chn under 3yrs their mothers & ece teachers	1 st 6 weeks in ece	Observation & video in ece centres Parent & teacher interviews Parent & teacher journals	Induction of chn & mothers to child care. Discourses of mothering & teaching Relationships
Norris (1999)	New Zealand 1 kindergarten, 1 creche -> 4 schools	4 boys, their mothers & teachers	Last term in ece & 1 st term at school	Obs in ece and school Interviews with mothers before and after chn's transition Interviews with boys' ece & school teachers	Masculinity Transformations Power shifts
Pollard & Filer (1999)	England 1 school	4 chn	7 yrs	Ethnography	Identity & pupil career. Strategic biographies – influences, perspective, actions & consequences over time.
Dockett & Perry (2000)	Australia	50 chn 4-5ys 217 teachers 219 parents		Interviews in first weeks of school Questionnaires	Children's experiences & reactions. Thoughts about school. Parents' & teachers' concerns.

Ledger (2000)	New Zealand 1 kindergarten -> schools	16 chn, 4yrs 3 mths	16 months	3 home visits Observation in home, ece and school Interviews with chn Information from parents and teachers	Child's perspective Roles and activities Family involvement
Robinson, Timperley & Bullard (2000)	New Zealand	20 school project leaders 27 ECE managers, kaiako & head teachers		Interviews	Perceptions of responsibility for transition Expectations Relationships Sharing information
Moore (2001)	New Zealand	37 chn in one class with 2 teachers	8 weeks at start of year 4 weeks mid year	Classroom discussion about problems (author is one of the chn's teachers)	Playground problems Chn's strategies for problem solving Bullying Friendship
Broström (2002)	Denmark	249 ece, school & leisure-time teachers		Questionnaire	Attitudes towards transition activities Comparison with Pianta et al's (1999) American data
Brooker (2002)	England 1 school	16 chn, 4yrs (8 Anglo 8 Bangladeshi)	1 st yr of school	Ethnography	SES Capital Habitus Becoming a pupil/ parent of a pupil
Dunlop (2002)	Scotland	28 chn (Focus is on 4 chn in this paper)		Observation Researcher assessment of chn Interviews with parents, ece and school teachers Children group interviews Parent questionnaires	Continuity/discontinuity between ece and school. Perspectives on chn as learners.
Griebel & Niesel (2002)	Germany	133 teachers 20 parents 11 children 162 chn	End of last yr at kindergarten to 6mths after entry to school	Teacher questionnaire Parent interviews Interviews with chn in discussion gps Questionnaire info on chn from parents and teachers Interviews with 27 chn Interviews with parents	Children's experiences of transition Parent and teacher perspectives on children's transition Parents' strategies to support transition
N. Smith (2002, 2003)	England	6 reception chn 13 nursery chn		Action research Home visit Playground obs Intervention programme for Nursery chn	Playground experiences Effects of intervention programme designed to develop socio-emotional skills prior to starting school
Margetts (2002)	Australia 4 schools	212 chn	9 th week of sch	Teachers rated chn using SSRS (Social Skills Rating System) Parent questionnaire re background information	Factors influencing chn's adjustment to the first year of school. Influence of different types of early childhood child care.
Dockett & Perry (2003a)	Australia 4 schools	Chn 5 & 6 yrs	3 rd term	Classroom discussion Taking photos Creating books with chn's photos and text In 3 schs some chn participated In new chn's orientation session	Things that matter to chn, e.g. areas of the sch, rules.

Appendix B

Background information: Ethnicity

Table B1. The ethnicity of the New Zealand population

Ethnicity	2001	2001`
	Total population	Children
	%	%
Pakeha/European	80	75
Asian	6	7
Maori	14	24
Pacific peoples	6	11

The figures are from Blaiklock et al. (2002) and Statistics New Zealand (2002). The totals do not add to 100 because these sources reflect the fact that 18% of children and 6% of adults identify with more than one ethnic group

Table B2. The ethnicity of the students at Kowhai School, from Education Review Office reports*

Ethnicity	1997	2001
	%	%
Pakeha/European	86	81
Asian	11	13
Maori	3	3
Other	0	3

(*These reports have not been included in the reference list in order to maintain the confidentiality of the participants)

Table B3. The ethnicity of the total new entrant intake at Kowhai School (N=114) at the end of 1996, from the school records

Ethnicity	N	%
Pakeha/European	98	86
Asian	13	11
Maori	1	1
Other	2	2

Table B4. The ethnicity of 23 participant children, from information provided by their parents

Ethnicity	N	%
Pakeha/European	18	78
Asian	2	9
Tongan	1	4
Arabic	1	4
European/Indian	1	4

Table B5. The ethnicity of the students attending Azure, Blue and Cobalt Kindergartens, from Education Review Office reports*

Ethnicity	Azure		Blue		Cobalt	
	1991	2000	1991	2000	1991	2000
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Pakeha/European	91	86	91	88	67	54
Asian	5	12	#	7	2	10
Maori	4	0	3	1	28	26
Other	0	2	6	4	3	10

*These reports have not been included in the reference list in order to maintain the confidentiality of the participants)

In 1991 all children at Blue Kindergarten who were not Maori or European were classified as 'other ethnic groups' so Asian children are included within the category of 'Other'. The figures are from Education Review Office reports .

Appendix C

Background information: Socioeconomic status (SES)

Table C1. The SES of the total 1996 new entrant intake at Kowhai School, from school records

SES rating	Father's Occ.		Mother's Occ.	
	N	%	N	%
1 (High)	23	20	3	2
2	12	11	10	9
3	28	25	15	13
4	23	20	12	11
5	2	2	1	1
6 (low)	3	2	1	1
Not coded	7	6	5	4
Student	2	2	2	2
At home	0	0	61	53
No occupation listed	14	12	4	3

Table C1 provides a rough guide only, due to a lack of information in the records. For example, 13 fathers and 4 mothers were listed as 'managers'. Managers can be rated and 3 or 4, or less commonly as 1, depending on the exact nature of the position. The 'managers' have been coded as 3, but this may inflate the SES of some of the families, and reduce the rating for others. In several families there was insufficient information for any coding (for example, 'self employed' without stating the nature of the business), and these have been included in the table as 'Not coded'. Ideally, data for this type of coding would include sufficient detail for accurate coding (Buttle, 1980). However, the intention here is to provide an indication of the nature of the student population at Kowhai School and the SES levels are not used in the analysis of findings.

The index does not provide a code for unpaid occupations, as these do not satisfy the census definition of an occupation (Buttle, 1980). Students and 'At home' have therefore been included as separate categories.

In situations where 'no occupation' was listed, the school records did not indicate whether the parent concerned was living with the family.

Table C2. SES of participant families based on father's occupation, from information provided by the parents

SES rating	N	%
1 (High)	6	26
2	3	13
3	8	35
4	2	9
5	0	0
6 (Low)	1	4
Student	1	4
Not living with chn	2	9

During interactions with the families, it appeared that the income in the families where the father was not living with the children was lower than that for the other families. However, there was a considerable difference between these two families, with financial concerns being evidently pressing for one, and not the other.

Table C3. SES of participant families based on mother's occupation, from information provided by the parents

SES rating	Reported on form		Evident through interviews	
	N	%	N	%
1 (High)	1	4	1	4
2	5	22	3	13
3	3	13	3	13
4	2	9	1	4
5	0	0	0	0
6 (Low)	0	0	0	0
Student	1	4	1	4
At home	7	30	14	61
No occupation listed	4	17	0	0

For the mothers determining SES was more complex. Some mothers listed their occupation on the background information form, even though they were not currently employed outside the home. This was useful in providing an indication of education, but less so in terms of considering the current income of the participants. Others didn't list any occupation if they were at home full time. The mothers' reported occupations are shown in Table C3, alongside the picture developed through interview and other conversations. The category 'At home' has been used to be consistent with the school records but this included the mothers' self-reported occupations of mother, Domestic Purposes Benefit recipient and housewife.

Appendix D

The enrolment policy at Kowhai School

The 'ideal' new entrant class size stated in the school's information book was 26, and the Board of Trustees representative said in practice that they aimed for a maximum of 28 to 34 children in the junior classes. An enrolment policy had been developed, the purpose of which was "to keep our classes at a level we feel happy with" (BoT rep.2, p. 17). The Enrolment Committee at Kowhai School met once a term and considered enrolments for the following term. A list of criteria was used in the selection process and "if there are two children for one spot, which one meets the most?" (BoT Rep.2, p. 18). Priority was given first to the siblings of children already attending the school, then to children living within the geographical zone. However, "you don't automatically get in just because you are in zone" (BoT Rep.2, p. 18). Relevant sections of Kowhai School's enrolment policy, and the list of factors that were considered when places were allocated on a discretionary basis are listed below.

a) Geographical zone

Priority was given to the enrolment of new entrant pupils who had a residential address within the school's geographical zone (a map of which was include in the school's information booklet).

b) Out-of-zone enrolments

No new out-of-zone families were to be enrolled, except "at the discretion" of the Board of Trustees. "Priority will be given to the enrolment of siblings of current out-of-zone families as if they resided within the defined geographical zone."

c) Siblings

"Younger siblings have the right to be educated at the same school attended currently by older siblings regardless of the roll level or size of class at the time of entry."

d) Discretion of the Board of Trustees

"The Board of Trustees will at all times reserve the right to accept enrolments on a discretionary basis.... These children may or may not be given priority over children living within the geographical zone at the discretion of the Board."

Discretion may be accorded to children who:

- attend kindergarten/preschool
- reside inside or outside the geographical zone but for whom it would not be practicable to attend another school (e.g. where children would be caused hardship, could be subject to victimization, whose parents place of business is within the zone and the children return daily to a residence/facility within the zone for childcare purposes).
- who have returned to the area and have previously attended the school.
- can be enrolled in a class where the maximum class size has not been met.
- would contribute to the particular character of the school.
- whose parents/caregivers show a willingness to support the school.

Appendix E

Information sheet and letter: Case study families

Exploring children's ideas: Planning for teaching at the new entrant level

INFORMATION SHEET- Parents/caregivers of children about to start school

Researcher: Sally Peters
Department Education Studies,
University of Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton.
Phone: 07 856 2889 ex 8755
Email: speters@waikato.ac.nz

The study: The purpose of this study is to explore what happens when children first start school- what it is like for parents/caregivers, children, and their teachers. It will also look at how teachers find out what children already know, and how this influences their classroom programmes.

Your contribution: I hope to find out parents'/caregivers' thoughts and feelings about what happens in the first few months of school. If you are willing, I would like to talk to you from time to time about your own and your child's experiences, both before your child starts school and as he/she settles into school. These interviews will be arranged at times that are suitable for you. You will have the opportunity to read the transcripts of the interviews and delete any information which you do not want to be included. Other family members can be included in these interviews if you wish.

Your child's contribution: If you agree to allow your child to take part in the study, and he/she is willing, I may talk to him/her about his/her expectations of school. If your child attends a preschool centre, and I am able to obtain permission from the centre, I may observe your child at preschool.

When your child starts school he/she may be observed in the classroom on a number of occasions throughout his/her first six months at school. The purpose of the observations will be to find out what it is like for children as they settle into school, to see how teachers assess the skills that children bring to school, and how the results of this assessment influence the classroom programme.

If you give your permission for your child to be involved in this study, verbal agreement will be sought from your child before I collect any information. At all times your child will have the right to refuse to take part.

Outcome of the research: The interview data and the observations will form the basis for looking at what assessment occurs at the new entrant level, and how this is influenced by the transition process as children, teachers, and families adapt to one another. This information will be used as the basis for the second phase of the study, where a small group of teachers will consider what constitutes useful assessment at the new entrant level.

The findings of phases one and two will be used for my DPhil thesis, but will also be shared with others through articles, workshops, conference papers, etc. Given that the Ministry is likely to introduce some form of compulsory assessment at the new entrant level over the next few years, the findings of this study will be particularly important if teachers' and parents'/caregivers' concerns over such assessment are to be addressed.

Use of the information collected: Information will be securely stored throughout the project. Confidentiality of subjects will be respected at all times. The identity of the participants will not be revealed in any published documents. You will have the opportunity to view the information that you have provided, and the draft reports, and delete any information which you have provided which you do not want to be included. The information will only be used for the purposes of this study and when it is no longer required it will be destroyed.

Confidentiality: Participants will not be identified by name, or by descriptions which they consider identifies them. Where participants are referred to in observations or transcripts a single letter or a code name will be used. No information which could identify participants will be shown to others without the individual's consent. Off the record or private communication will be kept confidential. Personal information will not be revealed to others.

Declaration to the Participants:

If you take part in the study, you have the right to:

- * Refuse to answer any particular question, and to withdraw from the study at any time.
- * Ask any further questions about the study that occur to you during your participation.
- * Be given access to a summary of the findings from the study when it is concluded.

If at any stage you have concerns about the research please discuss these in the first instance with me, Sally Peters (contact address on the front of this form).

If you feel that I have breached the terms agreed in the consent form please contact project's supervisor Dr. J. M. Young-Loveridge, Education Studies Department, University of Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton.



The University of Waikato
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Department of Education Studies

Private Bag 3105, Hamilton, New Zealand
Fax (07) 838-4434 Telephone (07) 856-2889

1.5.96

Dear Parent/ Caregiver

I am currently involved in research looking at the experiences of children, parents/caregivers and teachers when children start school. I hope that when you have read the enclosed information sheet, you and your child will agree to take part in my study.

School are sending this letter to families on their enrolment list who have a child who is due to start school this year. (Please note, names and addresses have not been given to me, the researcher.) Even though you do not yet know whether your child will be offered at place at

School I would very much like to meet with you to discuss your thoughts and feelings before your child starts school, and to keep in contact with you during your child's first few months of school. (Please see the information sheet for further details).

If you are willing to talk to me please sign the attached consent forms. Keep the white copy for your own records, and return the blue copy to me in the envelope provided. Please include a phone number so that I can contact you to arrange a time to meet.

If you have any questions about the study please feel free to phone me (856 2889, ex 8755).

I look forward to hearing from you.
Many thanks

Sally Peters

THE UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Exploring children's ideas: Planning for teaching at the new
entrant level

CONSENT FORM

I have read the Information Sheet for this study and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I also understand that my child is free to withdraw from the study at any time, or to decline to answer any particular questions in the study. I agree to allow my child to provide information to the researcher under the conditions of confidentiality set out in the information sheet.

I wish my child to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the information sheet.

Child's name: _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Parent's/Caregiver's name: _____

If you would like to receive a summary of the findings of the study please provide a contact address.

THE UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Exploring children's ideas: Planning for teaching at the new
entrant level

CONSENT FORM

I have read the Information Sheet for this study And have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I also understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time, or to decline to answer any particular questions in the study. I agree to provide information to the researcher under the conditions of confidentiality set out in the information sheet.

I wish to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the information sheet.

Signed: _____

Name (Please print): _____

Date: _____

Contact Phone Number: _____

If you would like to receive a summary of the findings of the study please provide a contact address.

Exploring children's ideas: Planning for teaching at the new entrant level

INFORMATION SHEET- New entrant teachers

Researcher: Sally Peters
Department Education Studies,
University of Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton.
Phone: 07 856 2889 ex 8755
Email: speters@waikato.ac.nz

The study: The purpose of this study is to explore assessment at the new entrant level, within the broader framework of the transition to school. The aim of the first phase of the study is to look at what is happening in classrooms and to consider the experiences of the teachers, children and families involved in this process. A second phase (in 1997) will involve action research with teachers to examine the use of assessment to enhance mathematics education at the new entrant level. This information sheet and the attached consent form relate to the first phase of the study.

Your contribution: If you agree to take part in the study you will be interviewed to identify the nature of current assessment practices at the new entrant level, and your opinions about the usefulness of these practices. The interview should take less than an hour. You will have the opportunity to read the transcript of the interview and delete any information which you do not want to be included. If you wish to discuss any items further a second interview will be arranged.

After the interviews are completed I hope to work with 2-3 teachers in more depth. If you choose to do this, I will observe the experiences of a small sample of children in your classroom to look at the transition process as children settle into school. This is likely to involve the me spending approximately one day per week in your classroom each week for about six months of the school year. I have considerable experience of observing in classrooms and the disruption to your routines will be minimal. Throughout this time you will have the opportunity to share your thoughts and experiences through informal interviews, which will be conducted at times which are suitable for you. At all times you will be able to see the data that has been collected in your classroom, and delete anything which you do not want to be included in the final report.

Outcome of the research: The interview data and the observations will form the basis for looking at what assessment occurs at the new entrant level, and how this is influenced by the transition process as children, teachers, and families adapt to one another. These data will be used as the basis for the second phase of the study, where a small group of teachers will consider what constitutes useful assessment at the new entrant level. You may wish to be involved in the second phase, but agreement to participate now does not commit you to continue your involvement beyond 1996.

The findings of phases one and two will be used for my DPhil thesis, but will also be disseminated to the education community through articles, workshops, conference papers, etc. Given that the Ministry is likely to introduce some form of compulsory assessment at the new entrant level over the next few years, the

findings of this study will be particularly important if teachers' and parents' concerns over such assessment are to be addressed.

Use of the information collected: Information will be securely stored throughout the project. Confidentiality of subjects will be respected at all times. The identity of the participants will not be revealed in any published documents. You will have the opportunity to view the data that you have provided, and the draft analysis and reports, and delete any data which you have provided which you do not want to be included. Data will only be used for the purposes of this study. Data which are no longer required will be destroyed.

Confidentiality: Participants will not be identified by name, or by descriptions which they consider identifies them. Where participants are referred to in observations or transcripts a single letter or a code name will be used. No information which could identify participants will be shown to others without the individual's consent. Off the record or private communication will be kept confidential. Personal information will not be revealed to others.

Declaration to the Participants:

If you take part in the study, you have the right to:

- * Refuse to answer any particular question, and to withdraw from the study at any time.
- * Ask any further questions about the study that occur to you during your participation.
- * Be given access to a summary of the findings from the study when it is concluded.

If at any stage you have concerns about the research please discuss these in the first instance with me, Sally Peters (contact address on the front of this form).

If you feel that I have breached the terms agreed in the consent form please contact project's supervisor Dr. J. M. Young-Loveridge, Education Studies Department, University of Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton.

Exploring children's ideas: Planning for teaching at the new entrant level

INFORMATION SHEET- Parents/caregivers of new entrant children

Researcher: Sally Peters
 Department Education Studies,
 University of Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton.
 Phone: 07 856 2889 ex 8755
 Email: speters@waikato.ac.nz

The study: The purpose of this study is to explore what happens when children first start school- what it is like for parents/caregivers, children, and their teachers. It will also look at how teachers find out what children already know, and how this influences their classroom programmes.

Your child's contribution: If you agree to allow your child to take part in the study he/she may be observed in the classroom on a number of occasions throughout his/her first six months at school. The purpose of the observations will be to find out what it is like for children as they settle into school, to see how teachers assess the skills that children bring to school, and how the results of this assessment influence the classroom programme.

Sometimes your child may be asked to wear a small remote microphone. From time to time I may talk with your child to see how he/she feels about things I have observed. These conversations will be informal, and will be conducted at times arranged with the teacher so that school work is not interrupted.

If you give your permission for your child to be involved in this study, verbal agreement will be sought from your child before I collect any information. At all times your child will have the right to refuse to take part.

Your contribution: I also hope to find out parents'/caregivers' feelings about what happens in the first few months of school. If you are willing, I may talk to you from time to time about your own and your child's experiences. These interviews will be arranged at times that are suitable for you. You will have the opportunity to read the transcripts of the interviews and delete any information which you do not want to be included. Other family members can be included in these interviews if you wish.

If you agree to let your child take part in the study, you do not have to talk to me unless you want to.

Outcome of the research: The interview data and the observations will form the basis for looking at what assessment occurs at the new entrant level, and how this is influenced by the transition process as children, teachers, and families adapt to one another. This information will be used

as the basis for the second phase of the study, where a small group of teachers will consider what constitutes useful assessment at the new entrant level.

The findings of phases one and two will be used for my DPhil thesis, but will also be shared with others through articles, workshops, conference papers, etc. Given that the Ministry is likely to introduce some form of compulsory assessment at the new entrant level over the next few years, the findings of this study will be particularly important if teachers' and parents'/caregivers' concerns over such assessment are to be addressed.

Use of the information collected: Information will be securely stored throughout the project. Confidentiality of subjects will be respected at all times. The identity of the participants will not be revealed in any published documents. You will have the opportunity to view the information that you have provided, and the draft reports, and delete any information which you have provided which you do not want to be included. The information will only be used for the purposes of this study and when it is no longer required it will be destroyed.

Confidentiality: Participants will not be identified by name, or by descriptions which they consider identifies them. Where participants are referred to in observations or transcripts a single letter or a code name will be used. No information which could identify participants will be shown to others without the individual's consent. Off the record or private communication will be kept confidential. Personal information will not be revealed to others.

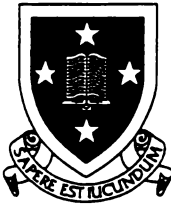
Declaration to the Participants:

If you take part in the study, you have the right to:

- * Refuse to answer any particular question, and to withdraw from the study at any time.
- * Ask any further questions about the study that occur to you during your participation.
- * Be given access to a summary of the findings from the study when it is concluded.

If at any stage you have concerns about the research please discuss these in the first instance with me, Sally Peters (contact address on the front of this form).

If you feel that I have breached the terms agreed in the consent form please contact project's supervisor Dr. J. M. Young-Loveridge, Education Studies Department, University of Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton.



The University of Waikato
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Department of Education Studies

Private Bag 3105, Hamilton, New Zealand
Fax (07) 838-4434 Telephone (07) 856-2889

29 March 1996

Dear Parent/Caregiver

I am currently involved in research at the new entrant level. I am looking forward to working in your child's school, and hope that when you have read the enclosed information sheet you will give your permission for your child to be included in my study.

I will be at the P.T.A. meeting, held at school on 3 April, to talk about the study and to answer any questions you have about the research. Alternatively please feel free to phone me (856 2889, ex 8755).

If you are happy for your child to take part, please sign both copies of the consent form. Keep one copy for your own records, and return the yellow copy to your child's teacher by 4 April. **Your child cannot be included in the study unless you return the consent form.**

Many thanks

Sally Peter

Sally Peters
Assistant Lecturer
Department Education Studies

Appendix I

Second letter to the parents of new entrant children



The University of Waikato
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Department of Education Studies

Private Bag 3105, Hamilton, New Zealand
Fax (07) 838-4434 Telephone (07) 856-2889

13.5.96

Dear Parent/ Caregiver

I am currently involved in research at _____ School looking at the experiences of children, parents/caregivers and teachers when children start school. You should already have received a letter about the study.

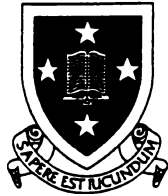
I have now started observing the experiences of children in Rm 11 and hope that you will give your permission for to be included in my study.

If, when you have read the information sheet, you are happy for your child to take part, please sign the attached consent forms. Keep the white copy for your own records, and return the yellow copy to your child's teacher. **Your child cannot be included in the study unless you return the consent form.**

If you have any questions about the study please come and talk to me on the days when I am at school. Alternatively, please feel free to phone me (856 2889, ex 8755).

Many thanks

Sally Peters

Appendix J**Letter to the parents of new entrant children with consent to participate**

The University of Waikato
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Department of Education Studies

Private Bag 3105, Hamilton, New Zealand
Fax (07) 838-4434 Telephone (07) 856-2889 ex 8755

27.11.96

Dear Parent/ Caregiver

Thank you for agreeing to allow
to take part in my study on starting school.

As the information sheet about the study explained, I am also hoping to talk to some parents/caregivers about their own, and their children's experiences when their children started school. If you are willing to talk to me please sign the attached consent forms. Keep the white copy for your own records, and return the green copy to your child's teacher as soon as possible. Please include a phone number so that I can contact you to arrange a time to meet.

If you have any questions about the study please feel free to phone me (856 2889, ex 8755).

Many thanks

Sally Peters

Appendix K

Example of interview plans for the semi-structured interviews

K1. Questions for the semi-structured interviews: Parents/Caregivers of New Entrant Children

Date child started school.

Other children in the family at this school?

What made you choose School X for your child?

Did your child attend a preschool?

Details-

How do you think your child felt about starting school?

Expectations vs reality

Please tell me how you felt about your child starting school.

-probe for advantages/disadvantages

If preschool attended:

What were the differences between school and preschool?

-similarities?

Did you feel your child was ready to start school?

-probe for reasons

Would you have changed anything, if so, what?

What concerned you most about your child starting school
for self?

for child?

What do you think your child was most concerned about?

What do you think teachers are most concerned about when children start school?

What steps were taken to overcome these concerns?

What contact did you have with the school before your child started?

How did you feel about this?

What activities were you and your child involved in relating to starting school?
(Formal and informal)

How useful were these?

What activities do you think would be useful?

Whose responsibility should it be to organise these activities?

The school sometimes runs an evening for parents/caregivers of children who will start school that year. They have found that these are not always well attended.

-What method of providing information to families do you think would be most useful?

Where else did you get information about school other those discussed above?

Do you think there are any particular skills that it helpful for children to have when they start school?

-probe for details

(If no skills seen as useful ask why)

If yes, Why do you think these skills are important?

What particular strengths do you feel your child has?

Do you feel that your child's teacher has identified these strengths?

If yes, How did she/he do this?

What skills do you think teachers like children to have when they come to school?

Were your expectations different from those of your child's first teacher?

What did you find different?

If different to parent's valued skills

-probe to find out why they think teachers value these skills and how they feel about the skills identified as important to teachers

What information has the school asked you to provide?

at enrolment

-informally through discussions with teacher

What information would you like to provide?

Now that your child has been at school _ months, what does he/she think about school?

Likes, dislikes, concerns?

What feedback have you been given about your child's progress?

How do you feel about your child's progress?

What involvement do you and other family members have with your child's school?

What involvement would you like to have?

If this is not the eldest child in the family:

Do you feel differently about _ starting school than you did when your older child/ren started school?

If yes, Why?

Is there anything that you would like to share with me that we have not already talked about?

**K2. Questions for the semi-structured interviews:
Case study parents, and new entrant parents who were interviewed twice**

Confirm date child starts school.

Other children in the family at this school?

What made you choose School X for your child?

Has your child attended a preschool?

Details-

If preschool attended

What do you think will be the main differences between school and preschool?

How do you think your child feels about starting school?

Observed, conversations, etc.

Please tell me how you feel about your child starting school.

-probe for advantages/disadvantages

What concerns you most about your child starting school?

What do you think concerns your child about starting school?

What do you think teachers are concerned about when children start school?

What steps could be taken to overcome these concerns?

What contact have you had with the school so far?

How did you feel about this?

What activities have you and your child been involved in relating to starting school?

(Formal and informal)

How useful were these?

What activities do you think would be useful?

The school sometimes runs an evening for parents of children who will start school that year. They have found that these are not always well attended.

-What method of providing information to parents do you think would be most useful?

Where else have you (and child) obtained information about school?

eg family, friends, books, tv

What do you think 5-yr-olds should be capable of doing academically when they start school?

What would be your ideal child behavioural and learning attitudes on beginning school? (eg listening skills)

What do you think a child should be able to do independently on entry? (eg tying shoe laces)

What do you consider important in a child's social development at 5 yrs?

(If no skills seen as useful ask why)

If yes, Why do you think these skills are important?

What skills do you think teachers like children to have when they come to school?

If different to parent's/caregiver's valued skills

-probe to find out why they think teachers value these skills and how they feel about the skills identified as important to teachers

What particular strengths do you feel your child has?

What information has the school asked you to provide?

-illness, disabilities

-behaviour, social

-academic

What information would you like to provide?

Have you met your child's teacher?

What were your impressions?

What involvement do you and your family hope to have with your child's school?

eg parent help

consultation

included in assessment

learning activities to do at home

If this is not the eldest child in the family:

Do you feel differently about Y starting school than you did when your older child/ren started school?

If yes, Why?

Is there anything that you would like to share with me that we have not already talked about?

Arrange second meeting for the week before the child starts school.

2nd interview (with 10 parents)

(Note: Indicates where I inserted relevant details taken from the previous interview)

Last time we talked was in...

At that point you had...

What contact did you have with the school between then and when _____ started?

How did you feel about the contact that you had?

If visits were made:

Were these useful?

Why?

Were you involved in any other activities related to starting school?
(Formal and informal)

How useful were these?

What activities do you think would be useful?

Whose responsibility should it be to organise these activities?

Can you tell me about what happened when _____ started school.

-First day

-First few weeks

Does _____ talk about things that happen at school?

What seems to be important for him/her?

How do you think _____ felt about starting school?

Expectations vs reality

Now that your child has been at school ___ weeks, what does he/she think about school?

Likes, dislikes, concerns?

Tell me how you felt about your child starting school.

-probe for advantages/disadvantages

Did you feel your child was ready to start school?

-probe for reasons

Would you have changed anything, if so, what?

What concerned you most about your child starting school

What do you think your child was most concerned about?

What do you think teachers are most concerned about when children start school?

What steps were taken to overcome these concerns?

Do you think there are any particular skills that it helpful for children to have when they start school?

- probe for details
 - academic
 - behaviour (eg listening skills)
 - social
 - personal (eg self care)

(If no skills seen as useful ask why)

If yes, Why do you think these skills are important?

Were your expectations different from those of your child's first teacher?
What did you find different?

When we last talked you had.....

What additional information has the school asked you to provide?
-formally
-informally through discussions with teacher

What information would you like to provide?
-illness, disability
-behaviour, social
-academic

What feedback have you been given about your child's progress?

How do you feel about your child's progress?

Is there any other information that you would like regarding what happens at school?

What involvement do you and other family members have with your child's school?
eg parent help
consultation
included in assessment
learning activities to do at home

What involvement would you like to have?

Is there anything that you would like to share with me that we have not already talked about?

K3. Questions for the semi-structured interviews: New Entrant Teachers

General background info.

- How long have you been teaching?
- How long have you been at this school?
- How long have you been teaching new entrants?

Assessment at the new entrant level

When a new entrant child starts school, what information do you collect about that child, during the child's first six months at school?

For each type of information collected:

- Who is it collected from?
- How is this information collected?
- When is it collected?
- How is this information used?

Does anyone else in the school collect information about the child?

For each type of information collected:

As far as you know

- Who collects this information?
- Who is it collected from?
- How is this information collected?
- When is it collected?
- How is this information used?

Of the information that is collected, what do you find the most useful?

Why?

Is there any information which you don't find particularly useful?

- Why?
- Why is this information collected?

Is there any information that you feel would be useful to have, which you do not currently have access to?

If so,

- What?
- Why do you think it would be useful?
- Why isn't it collected?

If not already covered by answers given above

How do you plan what you are going to teach?

Does the information gathered (described above) influence your teaching?

How?

Transition issues

Please tell me what normally happens when a child starts school at this school- from the parent's first contact with the school until the child actually starts.

What, if any, arrangements are there to help the child settle into school?

What do you think concerns children the most when they start school?

Why?

How are these concerns dealt with?

What do you think concerns parents the most when their child starts school?

Why?

How are these concerns dealt with?

What concerns you most when a child starts school in your class?

Why?

How do you deal with these concerns?

What do you think a) children, b) parents expect from school in general and from you in particular?

How do you feel about these expectations?

What do you expect from a) children, b) parents.

What do you think are the most important things that a) parents, b) preschool teachers, c) new entrant teachers can do to facilitate a child's transition to school?

What contact do you have with parents and family members?

What contact would you like to have?

To what extent are you able to gather information about the children's experiences and use these as contexts for teaching?

Do you think this is/would be useful?

Is there anything that we haven't talked about so far that you think I should know about?

Would you like to add anything to the information you have given me?

K4. Questions for the semi-structured interviews: Kindergarten Teachers

General background info.

How long have you been teaching?

How long have you been at this centre?

Assessment in early childhood

When information do you collect about children at this centre?

Who collects it?

How is it collected?

How is this information recorded?

How is it used?

Are there any set requirements (e.g. from the Association?).

How do you feel about the assessment you are involved in?

Of the information that is collected, what do you find the most useful?

Why?

Is there any information which you don't find particularly useful?

Why?

Why is this information collected?

Is there any information that you feel would be useful to have, which you do not currently have access to?

If so,

What?

Why do you think it would be useful?

Why isn't it collected?

If not already covered by answers given above:

How do you plan your programme?

Does the information gathered (described above) influence your teaching? How?

Transition issues

What (if any) role do you think early childhood centres should play in preparing children for school?

Please tell me what normally happens at this centre when a child is about to start school-

What, if any, arrangements are there for info to parents, school visits, etc?

What transition activities do you think are most useful?

Does the Association have an official policy on this?

What do you think concerns children the most when they start school?

Why?

What do you think concerns parents the most when their child starts school?
Why?

What do you think parents expect from school?

How does this differ from their expectations of early childhood centres?

What do you think are the most important things that

a) parents,

b) preschool teachers,

c) new entrant teachers

can do to facilitate a child's transition to school?

Is there anything that we haven't talked about so far that you think I should know about?

Would you like to add anything to the information you have given me?

Appendix L

Questions for the semi-structured interviews: Case study children

I am really interested in what happens at school. A long time ago when you were just starting school I came and watched what happened in your classroom. Now I am going to write two books about what happens when people start school. One book is going to be for children at kindergarten to tell them what school will be like. The other one is for parents and teachers to tell them what children think would make school a better place. You know more about what it is like to be at school than I do so I hope that you can help me decide what to put into the book.

First of all, if we wrote a story for little children at kindergarten to tell them about school, what do you think we should put in it?

For example:

What do you remember about when you first started school?

What sorts of things happened in Ms _____ class?

What did you do at playtime? And lunchtime?

How was it different to kindergarten?

How did you feel when you were at school?

What sorts of things do you need to know before you start school?

What were the things you liked best about school?

What were the things that you didn't like about school?

Was there anything that happened at school that you didn't expect? (Probe for details.)

What do you think about school now?

Is there anything else that I should think about?

Because this is a book for children it will have lots of pictures. Would you be willing to draw some pictures about school that might be able to go into the book?

Before we do that I would like your advice about the book for parents and teachers. I think that lots of things you have already told me would be important for adults to know too. Is it ok with you if I put some of them in the adult's book?

As adults I think we sometimes think that we know what is best for children but we don't always listen to children to find out what children really want.

What would you like to tell adults about what it is like at school?

What do you think parents could do to make it easier for children when they first start school?

What do you think teachers could do to help children when they first start school?

What do you think other children at the school could do?

As older children do you ever spend time with the new entrant children? What do you think about that?

How could we make school a better place?

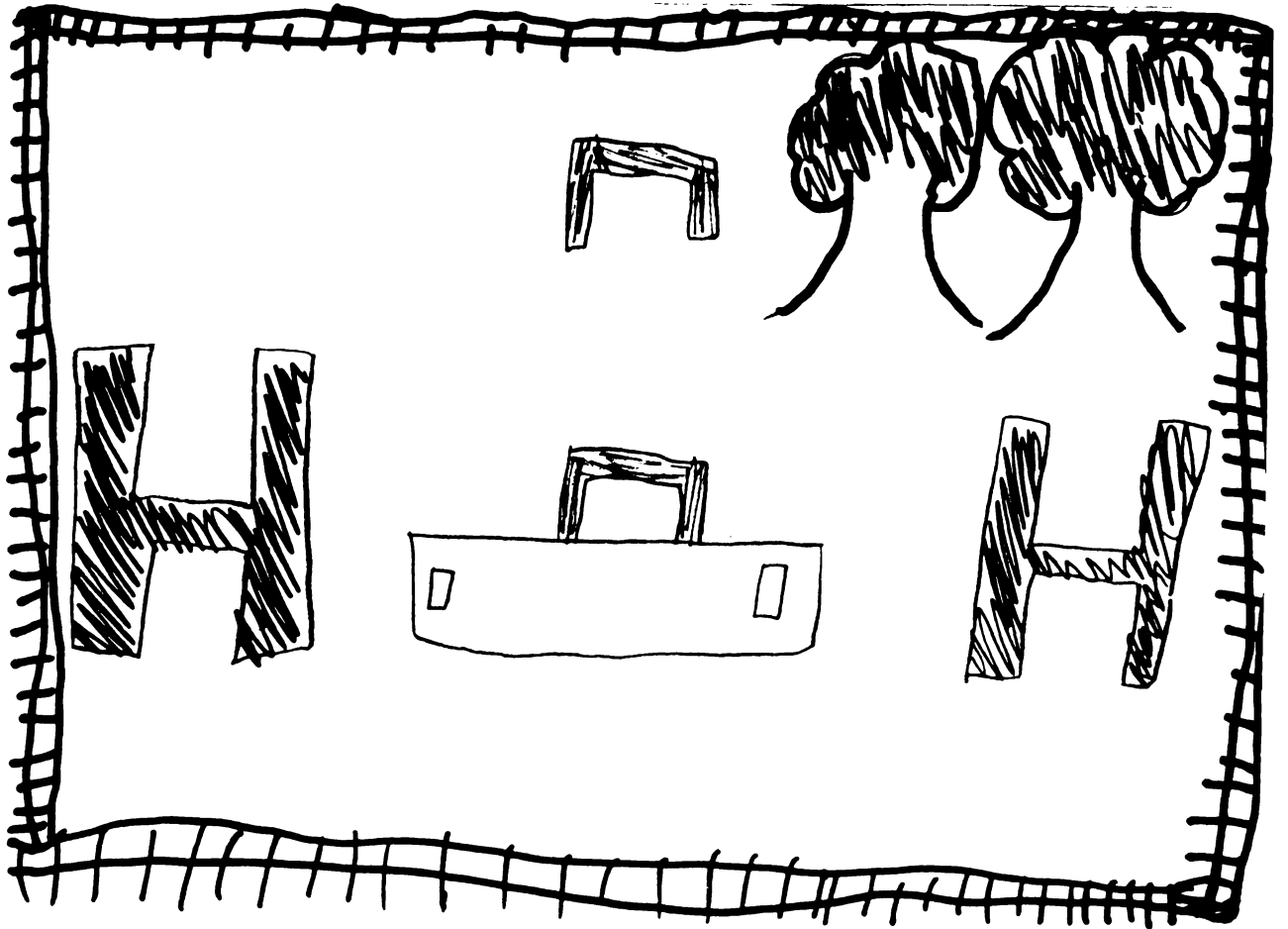
Is there anything else I should think about?

I have brought some paper and some pens. Would you like to draw some pictures that we could put in the book to show little children what to expect at school?

Do you think we need any pictures in the adults' book?

After the drawing(s) are completed: I'll leave some paper here and an envelope and if you feel like drawing some more pictures you could send them to me.

Appendix M
Two of Tessa's drawings



Appendix N
Examples of Steve's stories



CPMeronz dog won
abron=E Medal 00984

17/10



Meganz SAILIRP
toeatfermora
andirpves



Appendix O

The school's information letter for new entrant parents

Dear Parents

We look forward to working with you and your child this year. We welcome parent help at any time and encourage you to be involved with your child's learning. Our parent help list is on the classroom wall and once your child is settled you may choose to be involved on a regular or casual basis. If you have any concerns please do not hesitate to contact us.

Your child will bring home a reading book each night, in the journal cover. Sometimes it will be a book with which he/she is already familiar but has chosen to read again. These books should be returned the following day and put in the appropriate place.

Would you please replace the journal cover string with elastic to make it easier for your child to remove the book. We cannot allow books to go home if they are not in a journal cover.

From time to time your child will bring homework in his/her homebook. Sometimes a poem will be pasted into this book for you and your child to share. Please return the homebook on Monday.

If your child has a change from his/her home time routine would you please put this in writing for us and tape it to the board. This ensures that your arrangements will be carried out.

Things to remember to bring

Monday	Handtowel (it will come home on Friday to be washed)
	Homebook
Tuesday	Library Day
Tuesday	Banking
Everyday except Tuesday	Reading Journal

It would be appreciated if your child could bring an old colouring-in book for wet days.

While we do encourage your child to be responsible for notices for your attention or for telling you what is happening at school, children often forget and a surreptitious search of the school bag may be required. School newsletters are sent home weekly on Thursdays.

If any of you have any strengths or talents you would like to share with the children please let us know. Some of you may have talent in the following

Art	Collecting (anything)	Music	Signing for the Deaf
Cooking	A Hobby		

Often we go to specialist areas for lessons e.g. the library, music, videos, swimming, and on these occasions the children must remove their footwear. If your child is unable to handle shoe laces/buckles independently we request you consider alternative footwear.

The children have several in-class responsibilities to attend to before lessons start. Tasks include returning reading books, library books, homebooks, putting lunch orders in the basket and helping to set out the classroom. They also like to socialise with classmates, or show you some work, thus making a relaxed start to the day. Ideally the children should arrive at school at about 8.45 a.m. but not before 8.30 a.m. because this is teacher preparation time.

Several times during the year we try to have a class outing and we need help with supervision and transport. We can usually let you know well in advance. Please return the slip below if you are able to assist.

Regards

CLASS TEACHERS

jnintro.jet

Yes, I am able to provide transport for school trips. I have seatbelts for ____ passengers.

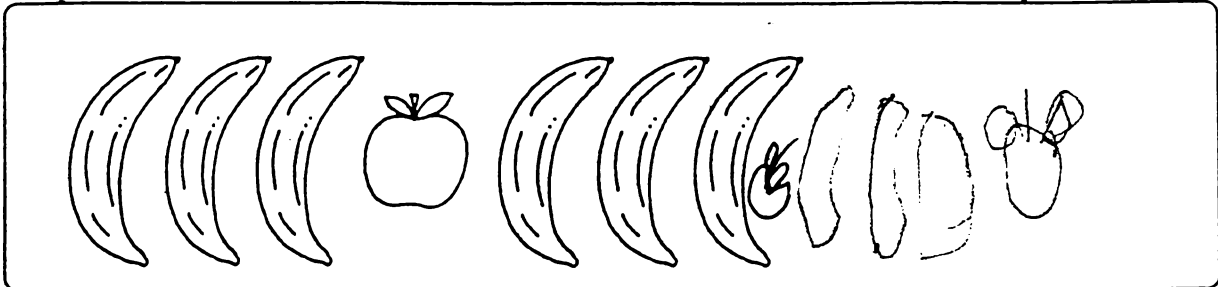
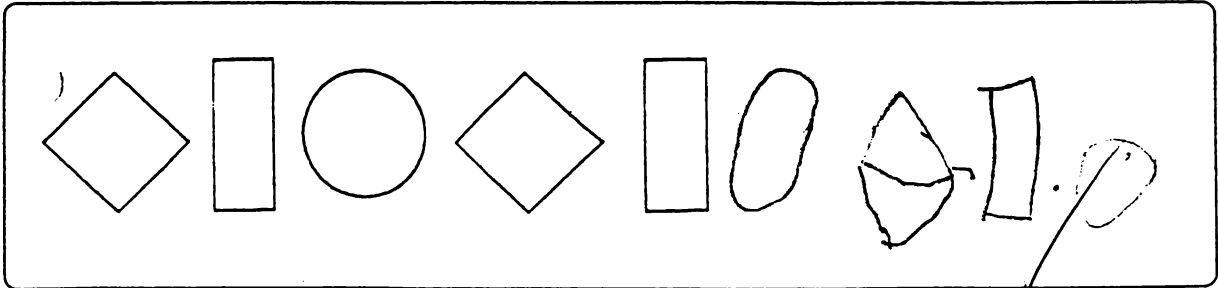
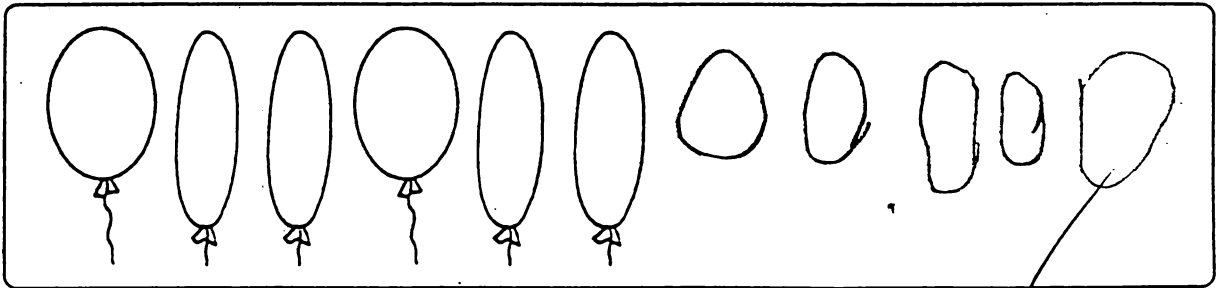
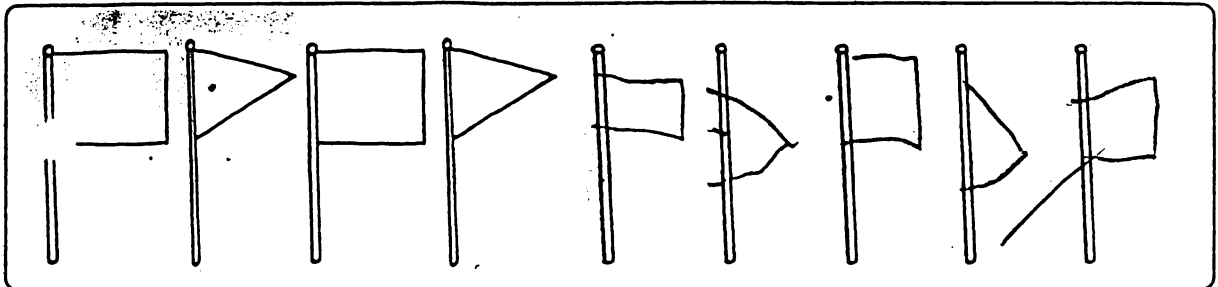
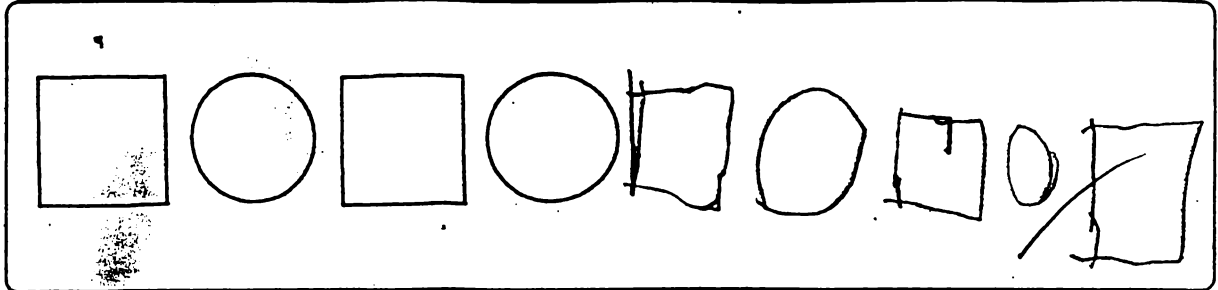
SIGNED: _____ Phone: _____

Appendix P

Examples of Carl's worksheets and stories

An early maths worksheet

1. Draw shapes to keep these patterns going.



2. Colour the shapes to show another pattern. -

Continue a repeating and sequential pattern.

Number Measurement Geometry Algebra Statistics

47

One of Carl's first stories (independent)



I like rainbows

//

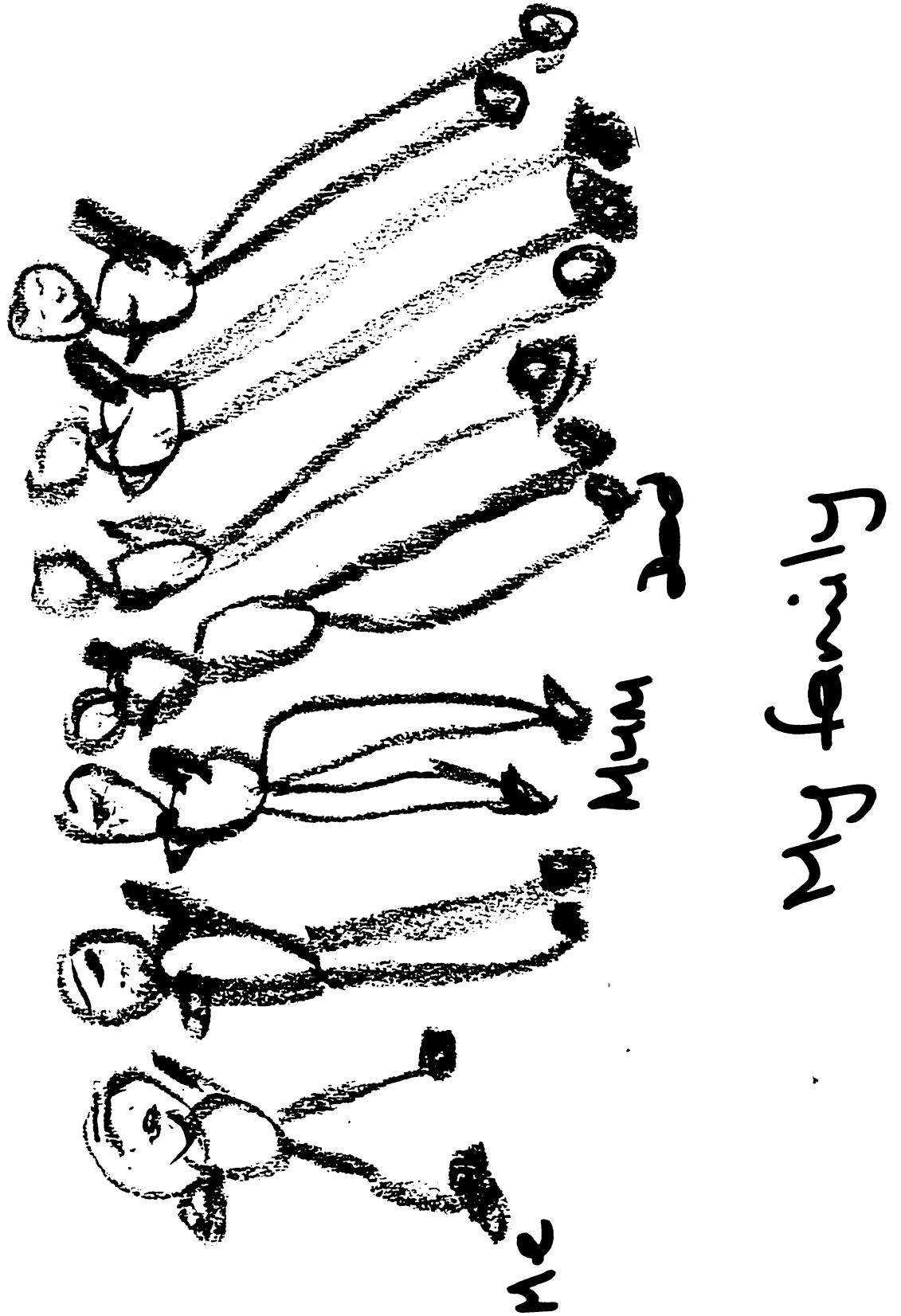


A story after Carl had been at school for two months (conferenced)

What am I?
I have a long
I am a
The sun. I am grey.
slowly.

Appendix Q

Anna's drawing of her family (from her kindergarten folder)



Appendix R

Anna's drawings and examples of her written work

• Anna's 'letter' (from the activity described in Figure 11)

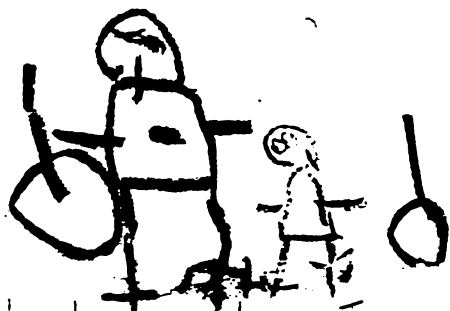
At the calf club I liked
 the cats the best. They
 were kittens. I saw Rabbit
 S TO M

One of Anna's early maths worksheets

(N10) NUMERATION 7 The number 10. JP

Objective: to read and write the numeral 10.
 Language: one to ten.
 Teacher: Ask the child to: • fill in the missing numerals.

One of Anna's first stories



Last week I was

sick and I went to

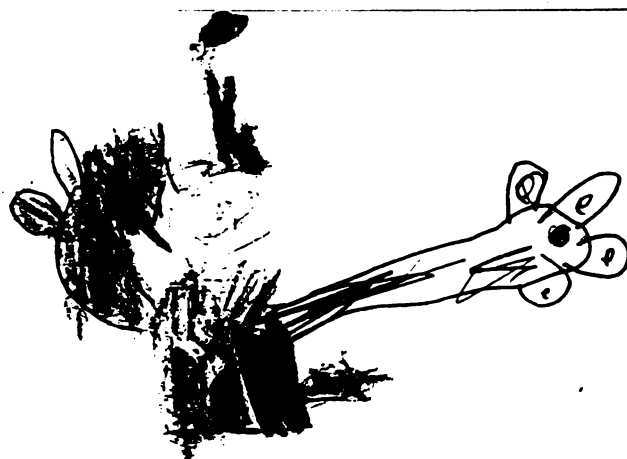
Nanny's

and I went

to Nanny's.

Anna's letter to Santa (towards the end of her first term)

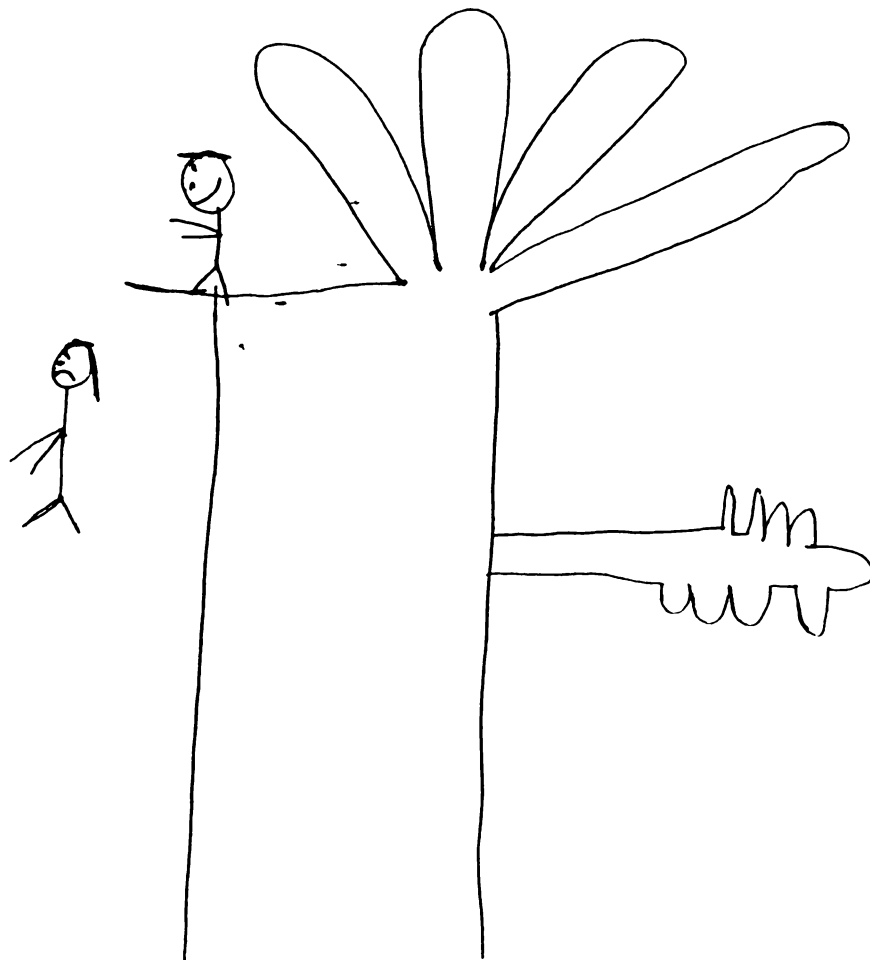
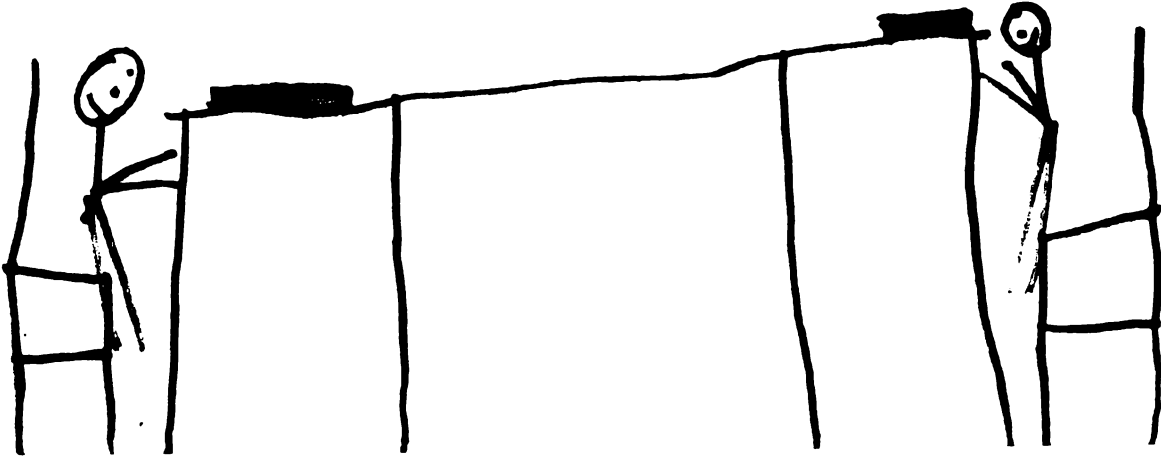
3/12



Dear Santa
 please can I have
 a make up set.
 Love

||

Examples of Anna's drawings to show four-year olds what it is like at school



Appendix S
Examples of Heather's writing, worksheets and drawings

Heather's Calf Report (from the activity described in Figure 13)

A CALF AS A baby COW
 IT MOOS and it has
 IN BIG BROWN EYES.
 THE IVES ON A FARM.

//

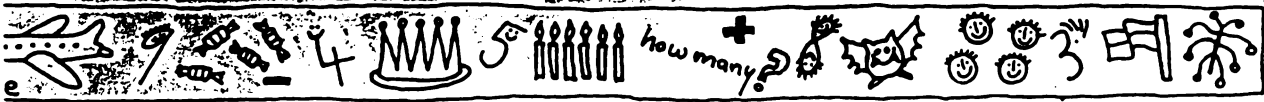
An example of Heather's story writing towards the end of her first term

9th



I am sun smart
 because I use
 sun screen

Heather's worksheet of maths problems



Add.

$\begin{array}{r} 6 \\ +7 \\ \hline \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{r} 2 \\ +3 \\ \hline \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{r} 5 \\ +3 \\ \hline \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{r} 4 \\ +3 \\ \hline \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{r} 6 \\ +8 \\ \hline \end{array}$
13 ✓	5 ✓	8 ✓	7 ✓	14 ✓

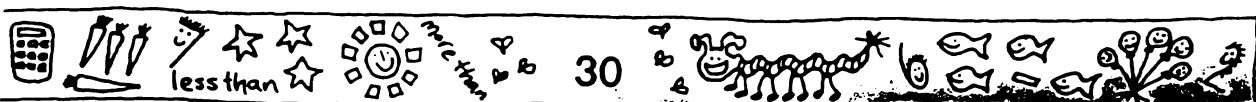
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16 ✓	12 ✓	11 ✓	6 ✓	13 ✓

$\begin{array}{r} 6 \\ +4 \\ \hline \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{r} 4 \\ +5 \\ \hline \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{r} 3 \\ +5 \\ \hline \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{r} 8 \\ +9 \\ \hline \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{r} 7 \\ +5 \\ \hline \end{array}$
10 ✓	9 ✓	8 ✓	17 ✓	12 ✓

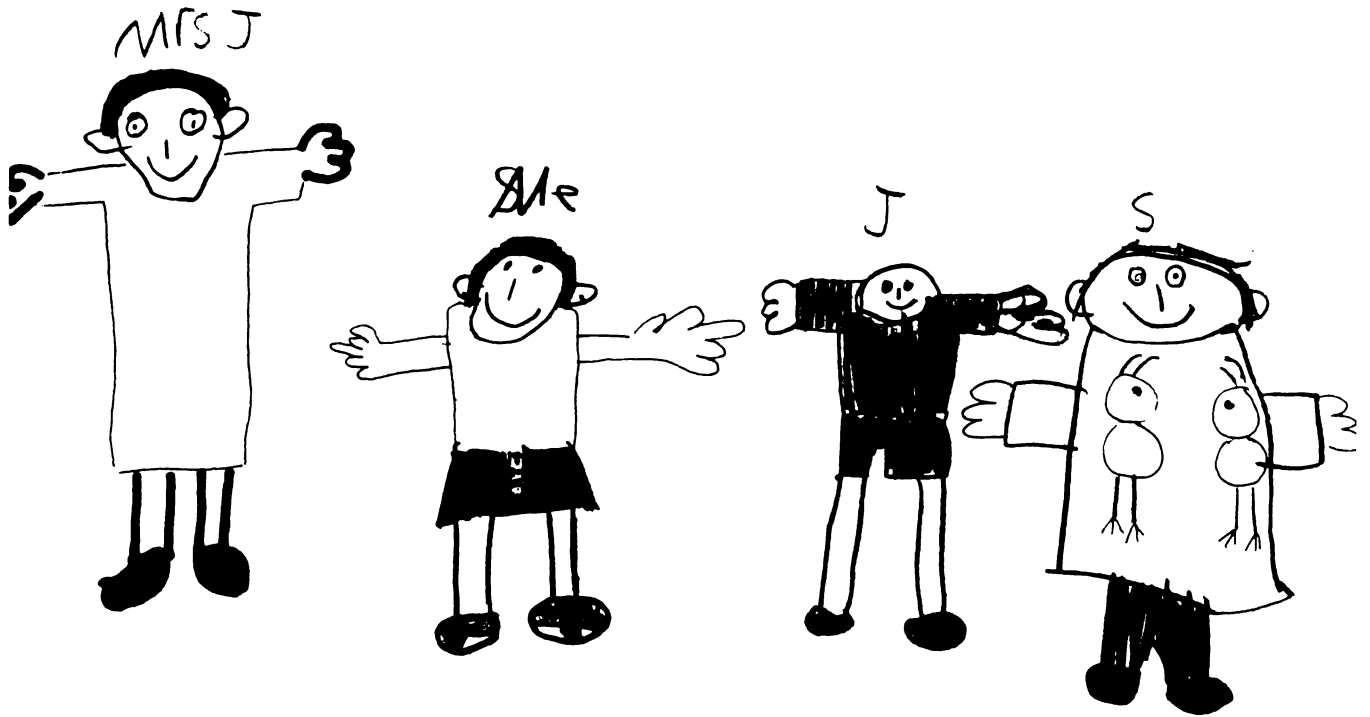
$\begin{array}{r} 2 \\ +4 \\ \hline \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{r} 8 \\ +6 \\ \hline \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{r} 5 \\ +6 \\ \hline \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{r} 3 \\ +4 \\ \hline \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{r} 5 \\ +4 \\ \hline \end{array}$
6 ✓	14 ✓	11 ✓	7 ✓	9 ✓

$\begin{array}{r} 7 \\ +9 \\ \hline \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{r} 5 \\ +7 \\ \hline \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{r} 4 \\ +6 \\ \hline \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{r} 6 \\ +5 \\ \hline \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{r} 7 \\ +8 \\ \hline \end{array}$
--	--	--	--	--

Fantastic!



Heather's drawings



Appendix T

The information form parents were asked to complete

Note: This is the sheet that was give to the parents of boys. It was printed on blue paper. Girls had the same sheet, on pink paper, but the questions asked about 'her' experiences.

Responses to this questionnaire will help us get an overall picture of your child and his experiences.

CHILD'S NAME: _____

Circle any health conditions we need to be aware of:

sight?	hearing?	speech?	broken bones?
allergies?	hospitalisation?	mumps?	measles?
chickenpox?	bladder/bowel control?	other	

Behaviour or emotional problems?

Position in family _____

Names of people who live in your house (so that I can spell their names correctly when writing stories!)

Names of others with whom he has regular contact

Does he play co-operatively with other children?

Grandparents: local or away from Hamilton?

Has he stayed away from parents on his own?

Holidays: tenting? bach? caravan? campervan?

Excursions: seaside? mountains? rural area? abroad?

Leisure time activities of your child? **Family interests?**

Does he show an interest in story and pictures books?

Has he any fears or concerns


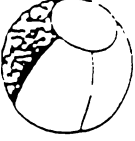






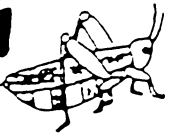


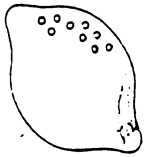
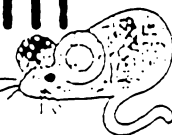









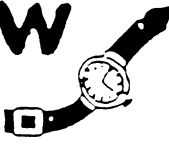
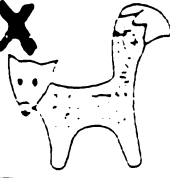
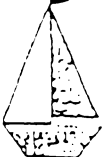

Is there any other information which would assist us to get to know your child more quickly?

Appendix U

Kowhai School's new entrant assessments

Note: An oral language assessment was also carried out

Name _____

a 	b 	c 	d 
e 	f 	g 	h 
i 	j 	k 	l 
m 	n 	o 	p 
q 	r 	s 	t 
u 	v 	w 	x 
y 	z 	A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z	

Date _____
 Number of letters
 recognised on entry

_____ capitals

_____ lower case

SCHOOL MATHEMATICS - CHECKPOINT

Name:	Today's Date
<u>Objectives</u>	<u>Child's Response</u>
<u>Geometry</u> 1. Name colours 2. Uses terms dark and light 3. Match the shapes - squares, circles, triangles, oblongs 4. Can name shapes 5. Identify by touch - the ball, the box, the tin 6. Describe at least one property of these closed surfaces - the ball, the box, the tin 7. Follow directions involving two ideas of position and movement	
<u>Statistics</u> 1. Sort objects according to: a) size b) colour c) shape 2. Sort, according to a self-chosen likeness, and explain why the objects have been put together. 3. Can explain why teacher's added selection does belong and does not belong.	
<u>Measurement</u> 1, 2 Discuss size relationships, using comparative vocabulary 3. Order by size 6 graded objects.	
<u>Algebra</u> 1. Can continue a two element pattern 2. Can create a two element pattern 3. Copy a simple symmetrical pattern 4. Can create a symmetrical pattern	
<u>Number</u> 1. Can count items in sets up to 9. 2. Can join 2 sets with a combined total of up to 9. 3. Can rote count to ____	

MATHCHEC.JUN

NAME: _____ d.o.b. _____ Date: _____

Entry observations

- (a) Circle appropriate descriptions of behaviour

quite, shy, settles quickly, tolerant, co-operative, aggressive, noisy, independent,
 confident, uncertain, reticent, boisterous, difficult, erratic, spontaneous, kind,
 thoughtful, self sufficient, easily upset,
 easily led, can choose, still clingy, participates in news, making friends, plays at
 interval, eats lunch readily.

can concentrate during class/group discussion, easily distracted

is responsible toward own belongings.

- (b) Achievements

i. WRITING

Can hold a pencil correctly
 Copies name from card
 Can write name
 Copies over writing
 Attempts to form letter shapes
 Can draw a person with seven details
 Left or right handed

ii. ORAL LANGUAGE

Can respond to questions, directions and requests

Communicates effectively with the teacher

Record of Oral Language

Level 1 / 14 Level 2 / 14 Level 3 / 14

Total = /42

iii. WRITTEN LANGUAGE

Language level:

Message quality:

Directional awareness:

iv. READING

Can recognise own name from a selection of names

Has L - R and return sweep

Has 1 to 1 finger point with printed words

Can identify some words in isolation. List them.

Takes an interest in illustrations and can identify with the characters in a story.

v. PHYSICAL CO-ORDINATION

Circle those she/he can perform easily.

jump hop skip run handle a big / small ball

skip with a rope

Can he/she use scissors effectively?

Can he/she use glue with accuracy?

Does he/she work conscientiously on creative tasks?

(c) Learning attitudes

Listens attentively

Conforms to class routines

Actively participates in

discussions, shared books, physed, singing, tidying up

Attendance:

CLASS TEACHER: _____

PRINCIPAL: _____

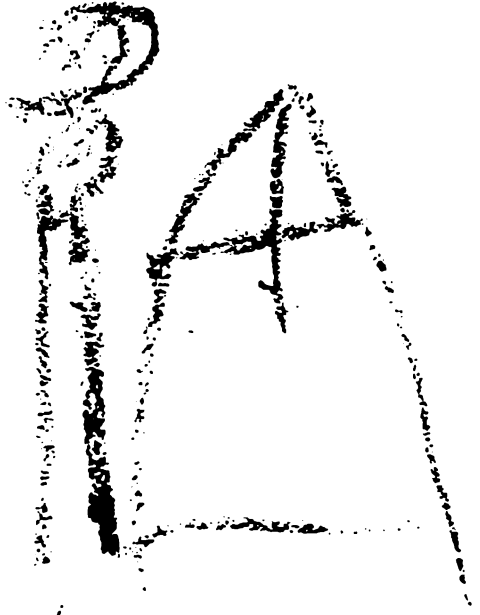
Appendix V
Children's early experiences of 'settling' and the
nature and number of their pre-entry visits.

1 visit with kindergarten Total N=13	1 visit alone N=4	2 visits alone N=1	1 or more visits with parent N=4
9 settled without tears. Of these 7 were ok or happy but 2 said they hated school (0/9)	2 settled without tears and appeared happy (1/2)	1 settled without tears and appeared happy (1/1)	3 settled without tears. Of these 1 reportedly took several weeks to feel comfortable (1/3)
2 were upset on the first day but settled soon after (1/2)			1 was distressed at first but then settled (1/1)
1 was happy on the first day but became distressed later (1/1)			
1 was distressed for some time (1/1)	2 were distressed for some time (2/2)		

The figure in brackets shows the number of first or only children in each category, as a fraction of the total in that category. E.g. in the top left hand box 0/9 means there were no first or only children amongst the nine children who settled without tears, after having had just one school visit that was organized by kindergarten.

Appendix W
Examples of children's first pieces of writing

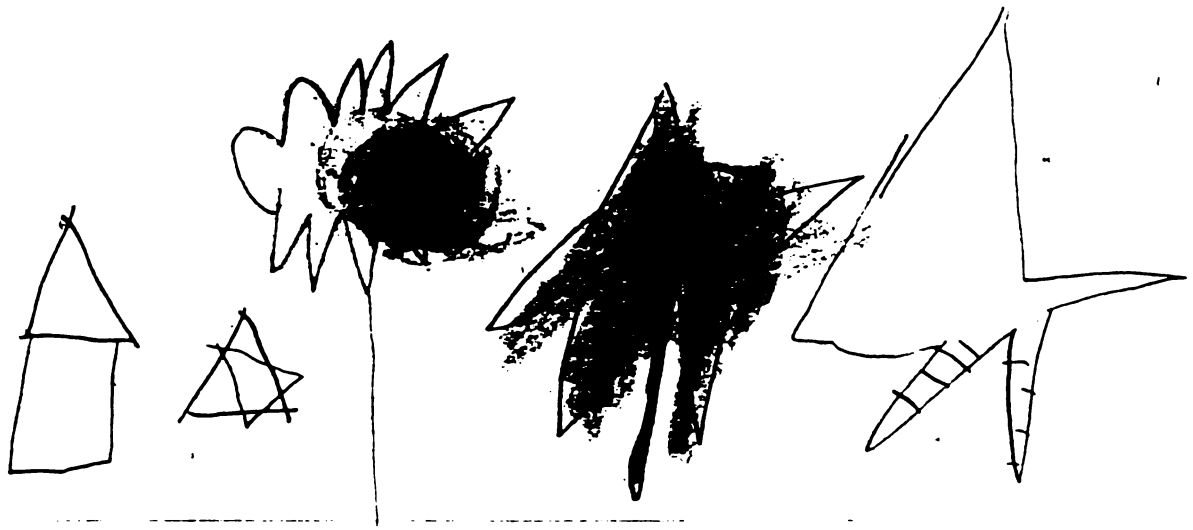
Child 15's first piece of writing



Today it was very cold
to see you it was
very cold
y
oio. ✓

Child D's first piece of writing

2/6



A B C D E = 2 H I T K L M N O P Q R S T

V W X Y Z

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14

15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25

26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34

H

M

LOT

205

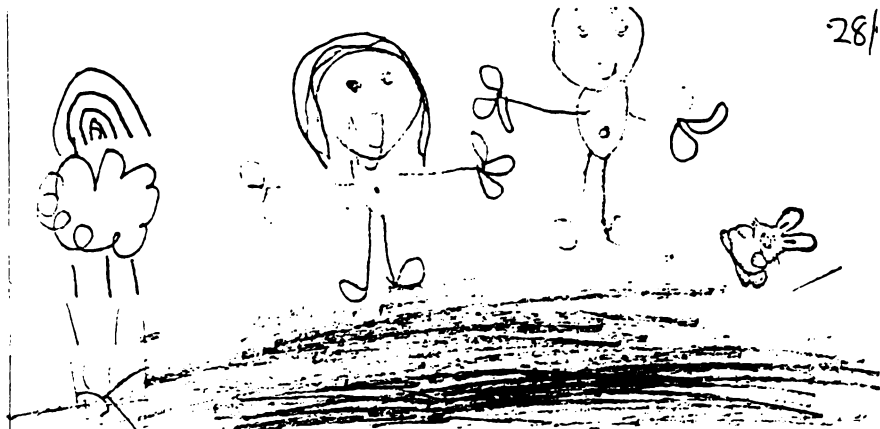
know



off L E t t e r s .

✓✓ clever !

One of Child D's later stories



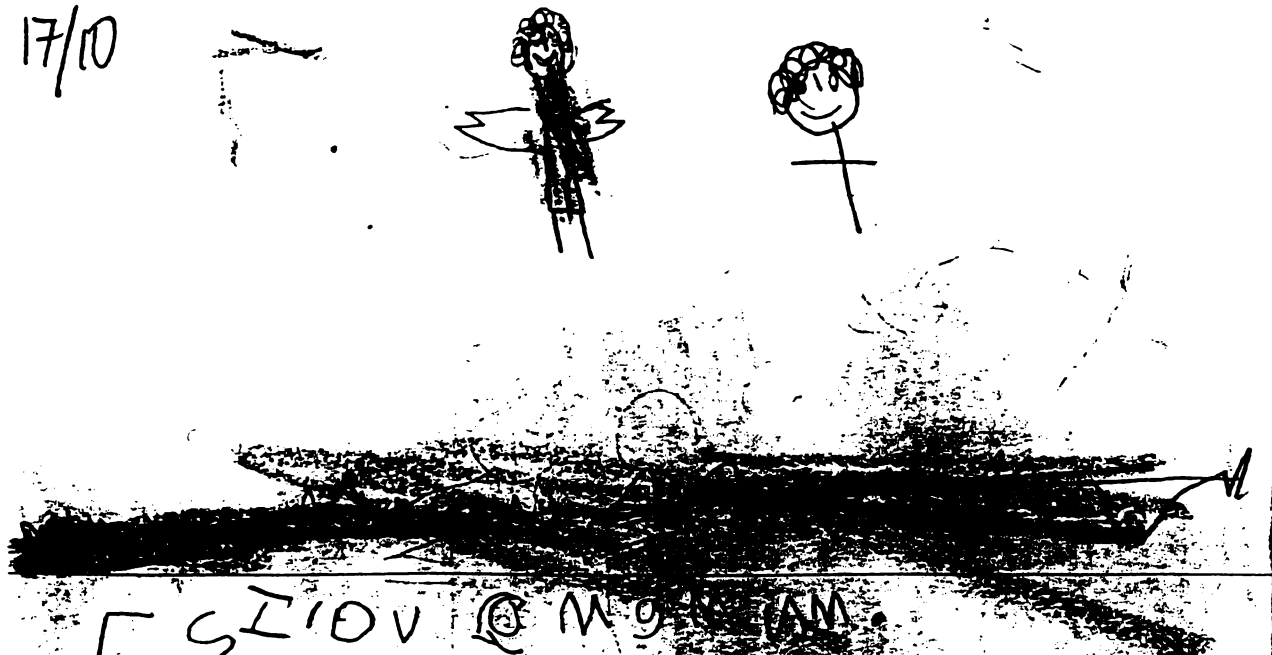
28/

I CAN count
 TO a 100
 I Have THREE
 BROTHERS and one
 MUM and one Dad
 and one SISTER and
 THAT'S me.

a
 my Dad TAKES UP +
 SCHOOL _{US}

Child B's (Mele's) first piece of writing

17/10



Γ ΣΙΟΥ @ M G M AM.

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