



Learning journeys from early childhood into school

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Introduction

This project is working with two early childhood services and two schools to investigate ways of enhancing children's learning journeys from early childhood education into school, and to explore the impact of transition practices over time. The research is located in two different communities: one where there is an established ECE/ school partnership and one where the relationships will be developed through the project.

Aims

This project aims to address some of the current gaps in understanding regarding the transition to school, and the impact of transition practices on children's learning. The study will explore a number of broad themes. These include:

- 1) Considering ways in which children's learning journeys might be enhanced as they move from early childhood education into school.
- 2) Working with Māori whānau to explore what a successful transition might look like for Māori children and their families, and to develop strategies to enhance the transition to school for Māori children.
- 3) Exploring the alignment between the ECE and school curricula, in particular looking at children's working theories, learning dispositions and key competencies, and the ways in which shared cross-sector understandings of these might support children's learning as they move from ECE to school.
- 4) Within the curriculum focus, also examining how key competencies in the New Zealand Curriculum are enacted in different communities, given their contextual nature and the influence of cultural norms.
- 5) Exploring ways in which reciprocal and respectful relationships between sectors can be established and maintained in order to build and strengthen a bridge between sectors so that children's learning is supported.
- 6) Taking a longitudinal approach to consider the possible longer-term implications for children of the transition practices undertaken in their early childhood and school settings.

Why is this research important?

An 'effective' or 'successful' transition to school is often claimed to be an important aspect of longer-term success as a learner. However, it is important to interrogate what is meant by success, how different transition partners view success, and how it might be measured. In addition, while a number of recent projects have developed strategies for developing cross-sector understandings and supporting children's transition to school, this project will provide new insights by exploring the impact on children's learning in the longer term.

What we plan to do

Data

The project will begin by mapping the current picture in each setting through a combination of interviews and observations. A survey of parents/ caregivers, teachers and community stakeholders will be used to evaluate the current transition practices and seek input into understanding transition issues and children's learning journeys. Interviews with selected participants (adults and children) will be used to expand on the survey and gather further detail.

Throughout the project there will be ongoing action research cycles exploring transition initiatives in each setting. Detailed case studies of children and their families will be undertaken to explore their experiences as they make the transition to school, and to consider the possible longer-term implications for children of the transition practices undertaken in their early childhood and school settings. The study will conclude with a final survey of parents/ caregivers, other teachers and stakeholders, and final interviews with key teachers.

Analysis

Views about 'successful' transitions, key learning, and the links between the ECE and school curricula will be analysed to investigate the patterns both within and across different ethnic groups, and within and across different groups of participants (parents, teachers, children and other stakeholders). This will include inductive and deductive approaches as we operate inductively from the data to explore emerging themes and new insights, but also interrogate data against existing theory.

Action research cycles will explore building 'bridges' between the sectors, the possible impact on the transition experiences and on children's learning over time.

Analysis of the case studies will focus both on understanding the individual cases and the patterns and themes across the cases. These data, gathered over time, will also be evaluated against the criteria for success developed through the earlier analysis. An ecological framework will be used to consider the learning journeys within the picture provided by the mapping features of each setting, and also take account of the broader policies which shape teachers' work.

Our partners:

Keryn Davis, CORE Education, Christchurch

Karin Shaw, Lynley Westerbeke and Jo Painter at Learning Links, Rototuna, Hamilton

Helen Rees, Julie Treweek, Carol Bird, Robyn O'Connor & Stephanie Spence at Rewi Street Kindergarten, Te Awamutu
Gareth Duncan and Maree Parkes at Te Awamutu Primary School, Te Awamutu

Brian Sheedy and Jennie Brook-Watt at Te Totara School, Hamilton

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